THE RISE OF PHOTOJOURNALISM
IN RUSSIA AND THE SOVIET UNION, 1900-1931

by

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This dissertation examines the origins and development of photojournalism in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union from 1900 to 1931. It analyzes the role of photo-reportage in the illustrated press and examines how publishers, editors, and photographers created a new visual language that shaped public opinion. Tracing the rise of press photography in the Tsarist era, this study argues that photo-reportage offered Russia’s burgeoning middle class an unprecedented venue for publicity; delineates the evolution of photojournalism from a means of public expression to an instrument of political scrutiny; and explores the visual world organized by editors on the magazine page, which reflected and reinforced public values and social norms. This dissertation then shows how, after the Revolution, the Bolsheviks transformed the production of photo-reportage, while still relying on pre-revolutionary models and personnel to create a new Soviet illustrated press. Though offering a wide variety of magazines, Soviet publishers presented a limited range of information and an ideologically uniform image of reality in line with the propaganda aims of the Communist party. This study concludes by demonstrating how Soviet press authorities elevated photo-reportage to an official visual aesthetic. As the country embarked on Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan, this photographic orthodoxy was used to marginalize competing approaches to photography and to invest a pre-revolutionary sense of journalistic authenticity into a staged picture of Soviet reality.

Readers: Jeffrey Brooks, Kenneth B. Moss, Daniel P. Todes, Michael David-Fox, Louis Galambos
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ВДНИ ВЕЛИКОЙ РЕВОЛЮЦИИ.

Бывшие министры в министерском павильоне Таврического дворца (Рядовой снимок).
Заметив, что я взял попытку запечатлеть на fotografической пластине, они-министры стараются скрыть лицо.
INTRODUCTION

One of the last photographs of Russia’s Old Regime appeared in the magazine Solntse Rossii in March 1917. It showed five Tsarist ministers working around a large table.¹ [FIGURE 1.] Three ministers, somewhat obscured by a double lamp, lean over a set of documents in the center of the picture. The other two sit alone on opposite sides of the frame, their heads resting in their hands. The image stands out for two reasons: first, it was the only photograph to acknowledge the old political order in an issue dedicated to the February uprising; and second, the editors make reference to the act of photo-reportage in the caption. It reads: “The ex-ministers hide their faces having noticed the photographer trying to capture them on a photographic plate.” The editors of Solntse Rossii thus told a story about members of the Old Regime avoiding the camera’s gaze. This was a story about political power resisting media scrutiny, and it reveals the existence of a visual language, based in a relationship between magazine readers, press photographers, and news events, which equated not posing for pictures with shame and social distancing. By deliberately refusing to be photographed, the ministers opted out of the community of opinion created in the illustrated press. These men were not just hiding from the photographer, they were also hiding from the reading public.

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¹ Solntse Rossii, no. 8 (366) (March 1917): 14.
This is a history of the origins and development of photojournalism in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. It begins in 1900 when photographs first appeared in magazines on a regular basis, and ends in 1931 when the Soviet state centralized the production of photo-reportage under the photo-agency Soiuzfoto. This history bridges the traditional divide in the scholarly literature between the Tsarist and Soviet regimes, and highlights the cultural and institutional continuities that link the two eras. At the same time, it draws attention to the transformation of photo-reportage, that is, the aesthetic discontinuities and the changing function of the illustrated press after the Revolution. Describing the exploits of photographers and editors, publishers and magazine readers, this is an analysis of the forces that created a new means of social and political communication on the magazine page, one that publicized the achievements of civil society in the Imperial era and reinforced the perspective of the state in the Soviet Union. It chronicles the birth of mass media in Russia, its changing political role in war and revolution, and its wholesale integration into the Soviet propaganda state. In examining these issues, this dissertation pursues three distinct analytical trajectories.

First, this dissertation is about the birth of the modern illustrated press in Russia. Around 1900, publishers integrated photography into weekly magazines. These two media developed during the 19th century in conjunction (and as a result of) the rise of the middle classes in Russia. Publishers belonging to this group invented the commercial

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2 The literature on Russia’s hard-to-define middle class is vast. I largely draw on Peter Stearns’s work that identifies the middle class not in political and economic structures, but in terms of “a shift in personality traits” and in self-definition, which was often expressed through leisure activities and in the media. Peter Stearns, “The Middle Class: Toward a Precise Definition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21, (July 1979): 395-96. See also, Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2003); Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow, and James L. West, eds. *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Harley D. Balzer, *Russia’s Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1996); James West and Iurii
periodical press in the 1860s in response to the program of industrialization initiated by
the Great Reforms. Urbanization and improved literacy rates gave rise to a news hungry
population, which was concentrated in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and publishers
satisfied this public’s increased demand for information and entertainment with daily
newspapers and weekly “thin” journals. These publications unseated the intelligentsia,
and their “thick” political journals, as the sole arbiters of politics and taste in the public
sphere. Fact-based daily newspapers, in contrast to didactic political journals, catered to a
broad segment of society and gave ordinary readers the opportunity to interpret the news
without an intermediary.\(^3\) The first weekly magazines, such as *Niva* (Cornfield) and
*Rodina* (Motherland), were modeled on “thick” publications, but offered a cheaper, more
accessible version of high culture. In essence, magazine publishers adopted the form of
the intelligentsia’s “thick” journal, but attempted to provide content in line with the
interests and tastes of the middle classes, which included, among other things,
illustrations of the news.

Photography came to Russia well before weekly magazines were invented. But its
arrival represented an equally radical coup of aristocratic culture by the middle classes.
Painted portraits had long afforded the very wealthy the means to publicize their social
status and economic power. Starting in 1839, daguerreotypy and photography
mechanized the production of portraits and, as technology improved, the process was
gradually democratized. Whereas popular journalism was decried by segments of the

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intelligentsia, photography was embraced widely in Russia as both a sign of industrialization and as a means of enlightenment. In the hands of commercial studio photographers, the medium retained its original social function, namely “to solemnize and to immortalize” the portrayed subject.\(^4\) The studio photograph was an index and a means of communicating one’s status; it indicated the sitter’s place in the social hierarchy both as a commodity object and as information. But more importantly, photography dominated the market for portraiture and democratized visual self-representation. It captured people from across the social spectrum and brought about a visual leveling, whereby the social benefits (and drawbacks) of this type of publicity was showered equally on kings, nobles, lawyers, merchants, and cobblers. Photography as a mechanized medium of self-representation pulled members of different social class onto the same visual level in the public sphere.\(^5\)

Photojournalism was born in Russia when photography began to appear in magazines on a weekly basis. This merger revolutionized the periodical press and the visual language of photography. Newspaper publishers, such as Ivan Sytin and Stanislav Propper, invented the modern news magazine when they created weekly supplements to their daily newspapers. At first, photography was a gimmick intended to draw readers to the magazine’s literary content, and in turn, to the publishers primary sales product, the daily paper. Photographs were novel and attractive, and they made Russian weeklies look


\(^5\) This draws on Erich Auerbach and his distinction between the “doctrine of the ancients regarding several levels of literary representation.” See his *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). According to this doctrine, stories about people of different social status could only be framed within strictly defined representational styles. Thus, authors expressed everyday reality in the low or intermediate style (i.e. comedy), while sublime subjects warranted the high or tragic style.
like modern publications of the West. But with photography, magazine editors also chronicled the news from around the world. Photographers, to some degree, visualized the news content of daily papers, and these images captured Russia’s urban middle classes, acting and interacting with each other, helping the less fortunate, protesting and politicking, and succeeding in business, science, and the arts. The photo-reportage in “thin” journals such as Ogonek (Little Flame), Iskry (Sparks), Solntse Rossii (Sun of Russia), Sinii zhurnal (Blue Journal), and Niva publicized Russia’s burgeoning civil society to itself. And by reading these periodicals, consumers were enacting a middle class identity and participating in a new culture of commodity goods. Russians who bought magazines were not only buying the news, they were also buying into an image of themselves as citizens and consumers.

Second, this dissertation is about the evolution of press photography from a medium of public self-representation to one of observation, scrutiny, and perhaps even surveillance. At first, editors relied on studio photographers for news images, and magazines mostly exhibited the types of pictures that studio professionals already produced. Portraits were the most common genre of press photography. These were idealized representations that allowed the subject to pose – to acknowledge the camera – and in turn, to collaborate with the photographer on a flattering image. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the frontal pose is a deeply-rooted cultural value linked to dignity and respectability: “the sitter addresses to the viewer an act of reverence, of courtesy, according to conventional rules, and demands that the viewer obey the same conventions and the same norms.” Outside the studio, technological limitations of cameras and film plates also forced photographers to capture highly stage pictures. Subjects of the news
stopped what they were doing (walking, working) and posed sternly for the camera. [FIGURE 2.] Here, the frontal pose ensured a well-exposed picture, in addition to a dignified presentation. In all cases, the conventions of the studio allowed the subject to regulate his or her own self-image and thus to control “the rules of one’s own perception.”  


Around the time of the Russo-Japanese War, press photographers started to move away from studio conventions. They began to identify professionally with journalism and adopted new visual methods that translated the journalistic ethos of objectivity to photo-reportage. Photographers accomplished this by taking pictures that looked like their subjects had been caught in medias res. In essence, they denied subjects the opportunity
to pose for the camera. This type of image appeared objective because it obviated the performative aspect of photography and seemed to eradicate all traces of the observer.  

By composing news images in which subjects failed to acknowledge the camera, photographers attempted to escape the “theatricalizing consequences of the beholder’s [i.e. the photographer’s] presence.” At the same time, these images seemed to eliminate the presence of the observer; no visibly-apparent performance implied the absence of an audience. The press photographer thus created the illusion of mechanical objectivity from the perspective of the magazine reader. Whereas posed portraits allowed sitters to control their self-image, the objective photographic report, like the objective prose style of newspapers, empowered spectators to interpret the news freely. This photojournalistic style created the sense that the visual message was unmediated and independent of personal bias, which, in turn, encouraged magazine readers to respond to news images not as manufactured products, but as the natural consequences of a mechanical process.

In the Soviet Union, photographers, editors, and press authorities enshrined this photojournalistic style as an official aesthetic. The Bolsheviks called for all public photography to cast off the pretense of studio portraiture, which, for them, epitomized the bourgeois fabrication of the Old Regime. Just as the Revolution had unmasked and invalidated the “conventions of self-presentation” of Imperial Russia, so too were

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photographers unveiling the truth with their cameras. The filmmaker Dziga Vertov referred to this as catching “life unawares.” The photo-correspondent had the power “to show people without masks” and “to catch them through the eye of the camera in a moment when they are not acting.” These statements articulated the photojournalistic style well, and editors pointed to Vertov as a model for all professional practice of photography. Editors preached objectivity and detachment, but in practice, they merely called on photo-reporters to evoke the visual trademarks of objective observation. In fact, no professional ethic of objectivity impelled the producers of photojournalism. Rather the objective mode naturalized a fabricated portrait of the Soviet Union. Complying with state directives, editors instructed photographers to capture a dynamic portrait of industry and society, much like sitters had demanded flattering representations in studios. However, this performance of Soviet life was to appear unrehearsed and unmediated by the individual.

Third, this dissertation is about the portrait of the world reflected on the magazine page. Photographers transported readers to faraway places and brought them face to face with strangers, each image establishing an intimate connection between the private lives of consumers and the public “world outside.” Publishers invoked the mirror to signify

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the fidelity of these reports. *Ogonek*, for example, was compared to a “mirror that reflects all the day’s events,” and the publisher Mikhail B. Gorodetskii even issued a magazine called *Zerkalo zhizni* (Life’s Mirror).\(^\text{14}\) In reality, editors along with photographers carefully organized photo-reportage into a convincing pseudo-environment, which reconfigured the complexity of social and political reality into a simpler, more manageable shape. This visual landscape thus reflected the perspectives of magazine producers, that is editors, photographers, and publishers, as well as other contributors. Technology and the structure of photo-reportage as an institution also impacted how the outside world looked. Photo-reporters, for example, were based primarily in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and thus news reports tended to reflect those two urban environments. Finally, magazine readers encouraged publishers to reflect a world that applied to their interests and tastes as consumers. Though aimed at a broad middle class, the illustrated press offered a range of perspectives in the Imperial era. In the Soviet Union, magazines were not consumer-oriented, and publishers catered to state agendas, whether the reading public liked it or not.

But editors did not just show the news with photography; they told the news with visual stories. The interaction of image and text on the page, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “turn all life’s relationships into literature.”\(^\text{15}\) Photojournalism was a narrative medium, and captions and headlines transformed the photographic fragments into stories of different length and scope. Photographers and editors collaborated on grand stories, which interwove multiple plot lines and spanned several issues or, in the case of war,

\(^{14}\) *Ogonek*, no. 50 (9 [22] December 1912): 2.

several years worth of photo-reportage. More compact was the basic photo-story, which was confined to a single issue. This was the most common narrative unit in magazines. Editors used between two and twelve pictures, along with captions, headlines, and short articles, to relate the news of a particular event from multiple angles, such as a rowdy demonstration, a funeral procession, or a sporting event. Finally, editors told stories with individual photos. These served symbolic functions, such as a portrait, or communicated like grand tableaux, with multiple subjects engaged in action simultaneously, such as Viktor Bulla’s famous “Shooting at the demonstrators.” [FIGURE 3.] The single photograph was framed by the photographer and editor, perhaps with some written context, but in the end, it was up to the reader to provide the narrative drive.16 Visual

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stories of this sort started in editorial meetings and finished in the imaginations of the reading public.

The rhetorical power of photojournalism derived from how photo-stories shaped public opinion and social norms. Benedict Anderson has written about how print capitalism made people “think about themselves, and relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.” 17 Drawing on Anderson and Jürgen Habermas, Charles Taylor has also discussed the media’s influence on the “social imaginary,” that is, the way that ordinary people imagine their social surroundings. 18 In both cases, photojournalism is subsumed under print and visual media more generally. But in the context of Tsarist and Soviet Russia, the illustrated press merits special attention. Given the absence of television and the waning influence of other types of illustrations, such as the popular lubok, press photography was the dominant form of visual mass media. It provided a seemingly objective reflection of the world, but it also activated tacit social knowledge and offered a performative guide for action and judgment. In particular, the subjects of the news provided models for civic life, valorizing some behaviors over others. Pictures of voluntary associations in the Imperial era, for example, validated charitable activities and sanctioned a certain type of sociability. Photographs of public protest in February 1917 legitimated anti-autocratic dissent. In the Soviet Union, editors offered fewer models, but what they lost in diversity they gained in ideological accord; they introduced the public to a uniform set of values, social rituals, and political practices (or lack


thereof), which the Bolsheviks wished to cultivate. In either case, photo-reportage interpolated a form of citizenship that could be imitated. 19

Of course, these photo-stories were contestable. Readers did not blindly accept the visual news message, nor the editors’ claims of perfect objectivity. They interpreted the projections of visual mass media and formed opinions on the basis of factors outside the world of photojournalism. Furthermore, readers were not compelled to conform to given models of citizenship, simply by virtue of being spectators of the news. Conformity was a choice, a consumer choice in the Imperial era, with certain advantages and disadvantages in terms of social status and self-respect. Rebellion was another potential response, but one with potentially dire consequences at different moments Soviet history. In the end, the diversity and quality of information in the public sphere guided the magazine reader’s ability to engage critically with photo-reportage. But in the absence of information, and in regards to events beyond the reader’s direct experience, the public was often at the mercy of the media. In these cases, how accurately news events were represented was less important than what those events were made to signify. After all, as William Ivins has pointed out, “the accepted report of an event is of greater importance than the event, for what we think about and act upon is the symbolic report and not the concrete event itself.” 20

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No history of Russian photojournalism has been written yet. Historians have studied Russian and Soviet newspaper publishing, and various types of scholars have devoted attention to Soviet avant-garde photography. But the intersection between photography and the periodical press has been largely ignored. The scholarship traditionally splits down disciplinary lines. Historians have gravitated to written texts (newspapers) and have traditionally used news images only as visual evidence. Art historians, by contrast, have felt more at home interpreting images, but tend to focus primarily on photographs as art objects. Beyond Russia, the histories of photojournalism have taken on international perspectives. Press photography is understood as a global phenomenon, rather than a set of national ones interacting in a global market. Michael L. Carlebach’s study of American photojournalism is a notable exception, but his work is anecdotal and sacrifices in-depth analysis for historical breath. The reader comes away from Carlebach’s narrative appreciating American history through the camera’s lens, but knowing little


about the people who created photojournalism or the reading public who consumed it on a regular basis.

The work of several Soviet historians has been hugely influential in demarcating the conversation about Russian photography. In particular, the histories of G. M. Boltianskii, S. A. Morozov, and L. F. Volkov-Lannit are widely referenced to this day. But these works are deeply flawed, and more importantly, these flaws have had a profound impact on limiting the scope of subsequent scholarship. Boltianskii, for example, has offered a comprehensive examination of photography before the Revolution, but dismissed the era’s photo-reportage as “drily descriptive” and “technologically primitive.” Morozov, the most prolific student of Russian photography, was equally disparaging, but disregarded the work of pre-revolutionary photo-reporters for aesthetic reasons. Photography, he presumed, was an art form, and on those grounds he judged the pictures of Tsarist-era press photographers to be “weak” and “without good taste.” Volkov-Lannit, by contrast, appreciated the contributions of pre-revolutionary press photographers, but only in the context of the Revolution and the Civil War. For him, the content of photography primarily determined the value of the picture and the photographer. In each case, these historians marginalized the photography of the late Imperial period and paid tribute to photographs in terms of their object-ness, either as evidence of creativity or as records of sacred content.

25 G. M. Boltianskii, Ocherki po istorii fotografii v SSSR (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1939), 83.
The scholarly legacies of Boltianskii, Morozov, and Volkov-Lannit are also deeply problematic in another way: these historians were actors in the story they were trying to tell. In the 1920s, they each contributed to *Sovetskoe foto* (Soviet Photo), the official organ of Soviet amateur photography and photo-reportage. In addition, Boltianski sat on the *Ogonek* editorial board, and from 1931 served on the board of directors at Soiuzfoto. Morozov was also connected to Souizfoto through the editorial section, and in the 1930s and 1940s he wrote textbooks on photographic composition and photo-reportage. Each of these historians, at some point in their careers, were allied with the photographic orthodoxy. In particular, during Stalin’s cultural revolution, they contributed to the purge of pre-revolutionary “bourgeois” elements in Soviet photography and to the elevation of photo-reportage as an art form. Thus, the values that informed the development of photography during the First Five-Year Plan also informed their respective historical work. This creates the unique and highly problematic situation where the architects of the official strand of Soviet photography also partake in its analysis, commemoration, and official remembrance.

Recent scholarship focuses primarily on Soviet art photography, which in turn marginalizes the work of the late Imperial era. For example, V. T. Stigneev’s brief survey of pre-revolutionary photography serves as a mere prelude to a more expansive discussion of the art and politics of the Soviet avant-garde. Moreover, his characterization of pre-revolutionary practices in terms of art justifies an equally narrow approach in the

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28 He also wrote guides for photographic workshops for workers: for example, G. Boltianskii, *Foto-kruzho za rabotoi* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1929).

Soviet era. Likewise, David Shneer’s recent examination of Soviet Jewish photo-reporters exemplifies the tendency among Soviet historians to stress disruption between Tsarist and Soviet Russia. He notes, for example, that Soviet *Ogonek* “looked nothing like its early version” and “rather than gazing at fabulously dressed upper class men and women, as the 1899 reader did, the 1923 reader of *Ogonek* would aspire to participate in the building of a new socialist society.” 30 Indeed, the two magazines were very different, which points to a fundamental different social and cultural context. However, 1923 *Ogonek* and the magazine in 1917 were, in fact, quite similar, which perhaps speaks to an institutional continuity. By selecting the more extreme examples, which stand in for their respective historical eras, Shneer justifies his focus on the Soviet period independent of what came before. This also serves to reinforce the central myth about the Soviet Union, namely that the Revolution represented a complete break with the past. Indeed, photo-reportage and the illustrated press was radically transformed by the Bolsheviks in many ways. But especially in the 1920s, the Soviet illustrated press had more in common with pre-revolutionary magazines than with the photo magazines of the 1930s.

Art historians, and other types of scholars, who have studied Soviet photo-reportage have focused primarily on its experimental branch. Constructivist artists and photographers, such as Aleksandr M. Rodchenko, Boris V. Ignatovich, Gustav G. Klutsis, and El Lissitzky, have received most of the scholarly attention. 31 And among these artists, Rodchenko has emerged as the quintessential Constructivist; he had bona fide


31 Soviet Pictorialism, by contrast, remains largely unstudied.
avant-garde credentials and willingly embraced “low, topical journalistic forms.”

However, Rodchenko’s career shift to photo-reportage has not inspired a corresponding methodological shift on the part of scholars. His journalistic work has been analyzed as art, and by extension, his conflicts with state authorities have been examined primarily in terms of competing aesthetic principles. This approach diverts attention away from the true political machinations at play, and plays into the official Soviet story of photography during the First Five-Year Plan, which equated experimentation with bourgeois aesthetic values. In fact, art and ideology was a smokescreen for more pragmatic reasons to purge experimental or non-orthodox branches of Soviet photography. In addition, Constructivist photo-reportage represented only a small body of work that rarely appeared in magazines intended for mass distribution. The focus on Constructivism thus marginalizes the most popular venues for photography in this period, namely Ogonek, Krasnaia niva (Red Cornfield), Krasnaia panorama (Red Panorama), and Prozhektor (Searchlight), and ignores questions of production and distribution of everyday photo-reportage.

Using archives, company papers, trade publications, pedagogical literature, and the illustrated press, my dissertation offers a counter-narrative to the official story about the history of Russian photojournalism. This project concentrates on the photo-reportage of the Imperial era and, by focusing on the practices of everyday press photographers, it recasts avant-garde photo-reportage in terms of its original function of capturing the news. After a brief survey of the 19th-century market for photography (Chapter 1), this


33 The work of Erika Wolf is a welcome exception to this trend. See her USSR in Construction: From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice.” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1999. Also see, Erika Wolf, “When Photographs Speak, To Whom Do They Talk? The Origins and Audience of SSSR na stroike (USSR in Construction),” Left History 6, no. 2 (1999): 53-82.
dissertation dives into the birth of the illustrated press in Chapter 2. This chapter surveys the most popular magazines, examines their content and distribution, and considers the reading practices of consumers. Chapter 3 looks at the careers and professional practices of the first generation of press photographers. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the development of press photography during two wars and two revolutions. First, I examine the politicization of photo-reportage during the Russo-Japanese War and the 1905 Revolution. Next, I explore the visual landscape of the First World War and the propagandistic tendencies of the illustrated press after February 1917. My final two chapters, 6 and 7, echo the basic structures of chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 6 considers the reinvention of the illustrated press under the Bolsheviks and shows how Soviet editors created a new portrait of society with photography. Finally, Chapter 7 examines how Stalin’s politics during the First Five-Year Plan forced Soviet press photographers to tow the party line and abandon experimentation or any pretense of independence from the state.

Transliterations in this dissertation follow the Library of Congress system, although more familiar proper names, such as Nicholas II and Trotsky, are spelled in their customary English forms. In discussing the pre-revolutionary period, dates conform to the “Old Style” or Julian calendar used in Russia until February 1918, which lagged 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar in the 20th century. I return to the international, Gregorian standard while discussing the Soviet era.

Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.
CHAPTER ONE

THE PRE-HISTORY OF PHOTOJOURNALISM IN RUSSIA

There was no photojournalism in Russia before 1900. That is, no photojournalism in the modern sense, which implied pictures of current events and international news in the periodical press. In the late 19th century, photographers took pictures all across the country and magazine publishers attracted a large readership, but these endeavors never coalesced into the uniquely modern form of mass communication associated with photojournalism. Photography and publishing converged in other forms. Prints, photo-albums, books with photographic inserts, and various types of news illustrations based on photographs, such as wood-block engravings and lithography, sated Russia’s burgeoning consumer class and profited photographers and publishers. These photographs sometimes captured local current events or noteworthy news from abroad, such as a coronation of a monarch or the aftermath of a natural disaster. Though informative, these images did not function as news, that is, as up-to-date information about the world. They were, among other things, luxury commodities, entertaining diversions, art objects, and exotic curiosities; they were important precursors, but not quite photo-reportage. In this period, Russians established the technological, cultural, and social preconditions for modern photo-reportage. As an object and a means of communication, photojournalism was the by-product of a century-long process, embarked on by the state and civil society, to modernize the Empire along Western lines.
Photography came to Russia from the West. During the 19th century, a succession of foreign photographers, merchants, and manufacturers travelled across Europe in search of untapped markets for this new technology. The daguerreotype process, which affixed a positive image to a chemically treated metallic plate, had been presented to the public in France in January 1839. Within a few months of this announcement, a Moscow newspaper declared that Karl A. Bekkers, a German-born tradesman, was accepting orders for the “daguerreotype apparatus,” which he shipped directly from Paris.\(^1\)**

Likewise, Fox Talbot’s photographic process, which produced positive paper prints from the original negative, reached a Russian audience soon after it was first described to the British Royal Society in early 1839. In particular, the English-language bookstore Dixon’s in St. Petersburg sold Talbot’s light-sensitive paper, as did a select number of warehouses carrying optical equipment.\(^2\)**

Even as entrepreneurs in Moscow and St. Petersburg started to manufacture daguerreotype and photographic equipment locally, the first Russian photography tradesman and practitioners remained largely dependent on Western innovation. Over the course of the 19th century, the wet-collodion process, dry-plate film, cartes de visite, anastigmatic lenses, and other technological advances all developed in the West and were

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later adopted by photographers in Russia. The advanced level of industrialization of countries such as France and Germany propelled technological innovation and created a manufacturing base that allowed companies to produce and export photographic equipment cheaply around the world. In the 1870s and 1880s, mostly German-born entrepreneurs set up businesses in Russia and used their international connections to supply the local market with the newest developments in lens and film technology. Most prominent were the stores of Ioakhim Steffan and Adolphe Reine. In photography shops in both Russian capitals, these merchants carried camera chassis built in Berlin and Paris; they sold fine lenses from world-renown manufacturers, such as Busch and Zeiss; and they stocked copious amounts of film stock manufactured by the American photographic juggernaut Eastman Kodak.

Though innovations tended to emerge in the West, many scientists and photographers in Russia contributed to the technological advancement of the medium. Having studied foreign examples of daguerreotypy and photography, these innovators improved on and adapted the available technology for the domestic market. In 1840, for example, Aleksei F. Grekov made adjustments that made the daguerreotype more portable. Also, by applying new combinations of chemicals to the light-sensitive metallic plates, he was able to shorten exposure time from 30 minutes to less than 5 minutes.\(^3\) Much later, Grekov adapted the electrotype process to daguerreotypy, which allowed the finished plates to be duplicated for relief printing.

Russian photographers also worked to improve the quality of photography. Especially at first, Talbot’s process produced darker and less distinct images than

Looking to brighten these images, Sergei L. Levitskii, perhaps the most celebrated Russian photographer of the 19th century, carried out some of the earliest experiments in taking pictures using artificial light. In addition, during the 1880s, several photographers were credited with improving shutter speed, which allowed cameras to take so-called “instantaneous” pictures, that is, images of motion that appeared frozen perfectly in time. Though impressive, many of these innovators failed to fully develop their inventions and improvements, and never made contact with an international market. This applied as well to Russia’s most prolific photographic innovator, Ivan V. Boldyrev, whose work was truly groundbreaking. A self-taught photographer from the Don region, Boldyrev’s reputation rested primarily on his experiments with optics and he was credited with perfecting a deep-focus lens, which produced a sharp image throughout the depth of field. His greatest invention, however, was made in 1881. Boldyrev developed a flexible negative film, capable of being rolled onto a spool, which he demonstrated at an exhibition in Moscow a year later. Remarkably, this invention, which garnered little public attention and no financial support, came several years before George Eastman invented a similar flexible film for his handheld model Kodak camera.

Over time, these innovations, whether developed in Russia or abroad, made photography more accessible to consumers. From 1840 to 1890, taking pictures went from being an elaborate feat, which required expensive equipment and advanced technical knowledge, to an easy operation that almost anyone could afford. Commercial accessibility accounted for the popularity of photography (as opposed daguerreotypy) in Russia. Daguerreotypes produced a superior image, but Fox Talbot’s photographic

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process won support because of its “convenience” and “low price,” in advance of praise for “its diverting, entertaining, and diverse results.” ⁵ Also, photographs were cheaper because they could be mass-produced; in principle, a single negative could produce hundreds of photographic prints. So-called visiting cards, or cartes de visite, accomplished this exactly. In the 1854, the photographer Desderi patented a process that mechanized the production of a series of small portraits on a single plate. He could then print and sell the portraits individually at a fraction of the original price. Thanks to this technical development, several Russian photographers, including Levitskii, Andrei I. Denier, Charles I. Bergamasco and Ivan F. Aleksandrovskii, enjoyed considerable success, reducing the cost of production and increasing the social range of their clientele. ⁶

With every subsequent innovation in film technology, such as wet-collodion, dry plates, and flexible negative film, photographers simplified and accelerated the rate of production, while retaining a high-quality image. Better lenses improved the sharpness of these pictures. In the 1890s, the Zeiss company invented the anastigmatic lens, which completely corrected for the visual distortions of previous optical systems. Eventually, cameras were simplified to a degree that specialized knowledge in chemistry and optics was no longer a prerequisite for taking pictures. Advertisements for cameras in Russian publications called attention to their portability and cheapness. By the end of the 19th century, Western European and American manufacturers began selling light, handheld models directly to middle class consumers. The Russian market, by contrast, was less

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advanced economically, and cameras were still primarily aimed at professionals. But this was no longer the case by the turn of the century. Though still a luxury, easy to use cameras placed the production of photography into the hands of a growing number of non-professionals and helped to create a market of everyday, amateur photographers.

**Popular Genres of Photography**

In the 19th century, the market for photography was primarily in portraiture. The increased demand for painted portraits in Western Europe started a trend towards the mechanization of the art. Painted miniatures, silhouettes, and the physionotrace were early attempt at mass production of portraiture, and photography represented the last stage of this trend. Photographic portraits were created in ateliers, often referred to as pavilions or art salons, which resembled a portrait painter’s studio with adaptations made to accommodate the bulky and light-sensitive equipment. Visitors first passed through an elegant drawing room, which was usually furnished with framed photographs of celebrated clients. Adjacent to the drawing rooms was the actual studio, where the sunlight passed through a glass ceiling, which illuminated the space, like floodlights in a theatre. After a lengthy consultation, the photographer arranged the scene, and placed clients, either sitting or standing, in front of a neutral or decorated backdrop. Other instructions followed: subjects were asked to move subtly right or left, to gaze directly at the camera or slightly off, and to sit still as the camera shutter opened and closed, at which point the entire ritual came to an end.

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This procedure was profoundly uncomfortable. Slow exposure times required subjects to sit unmoving in direct sunlight for long periods. But compared to the expense of a painted portrait, these inconvenience were worth the substantial discount. Portrait photographs were a means of performing one’s social identity, and in the mid-19th century, they legitimized the newly elevated status of Europe’s middle classes. Like the painted portrait it replaced, the photographic portrait was an idealized image that allowed the subject, in collaboration with the photographer, to craft a flattering self-representation. The conventions and rituals associated with portrait photography offered subjects control over how they were perceived; they were “a way of imposing the rules of one’s own perception.”8 Though cheaper than paintings, photographic portraits were still fairly expensive. They were thus meaningful both as markers of social status and as means of communicating this status to the world.

Group portraits were another common photographic genre. This type of image communicated the underlying social function of photography more directly than portraits of individuals. They commemorated social integration – one’s sense of belonging to a specific group – by transforming the represented subjects into an eternal ideal. Taken inside the studio, the group portrait was particularly theatrical. Subjects usually posed around pieces of furniture, such as large cushions, chairs, sofas, and tables. The studio photographer arranged the scene according to visual conventions, which conveyed the actual interrelations among the subjects; group portraits were construed and later read as “sociograms,” as representations of real social relationships.9 A family unit, for example,

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9 Ibid., 23.
expressed social cohesion by striking a uniformly stern poses. The patriarch and matriarch were placed at the center, usually sitting on adjacent chairs, which the younger members of the family gathered around. Family portraits expressed and reinforced the most basic, shared connections between people.

However, group portraits also visually affirmed non-genetic ties. For example, Levitskii’s famous portrait of Russian painters in Rome conveyed unity primarily along national lines. This image, taken in 1845, commemorated Russia’s creative elite abroad, in self-exile, and far from home, but nonetheless united in spirit and artistic endeavor. Group portraits could also be staged to capture a balance between the unity of the group and the individuality of the members. In Boldyrev’s photograph of the Russian Photographic Society, the ten founding members sat, stood, and leaned in different ways. Each subject was posed individually, but they were captured together within a greater association. [FIGURE 4.] Depending on the nature of the relations, the studio photographer balanced the fundamental sense of group integration – the “family function” of group photography – against the importance of maintaining an individual identity outside the group.

In addition to portraits, photographers in Russia also produced images of landscapes, cityscapes, architectural landmarks, monuments, historical occasions, and current events. These types of images were increasingly available in the 1860s when cameras became more portable and photographic systems were capable of functioning in different lighting conditions. Documentary photography, produced by explorers and
ethnographers on expeditions to the Caucasus and Central Asia, expressed the era’s scientific values and captured the vastness of Russia’s imperial reach. At the same time, the work of Maksim Dmitriev, who famously catalogued the Volga river, sought a “middle ground” between the traditions of landscape painting and “a kind of armchair tourism.”  

In the 1880s, portraits of city scenes in St. Petersburg commemorated the capital in the post-emancipation era, when social migration and industrialization brought immense change to the urban landscape.  

More than simply a product of the photographer’s intentions, these pictures expressed “a system of perception, thought and

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appreciation common to a whole group” – one that wished to preserve history in time and to commemorate a world that was vanishing or had already disappeared. 12 Outside the studio, photographers gradually moved away from the trademark theatrical style of the posed portrait. Some conventions, however, persisted. Although deeply ensconced in the pictorial traditions of the 19th century, these landscapes nonetheless anticipated the shifting genres in the photographic market, away from documentary photography and toward a modern photo-reportage.

The Market

At first, the market for daguerreotypes and photographs in Russia was small and exclusive. Despite widespread enthusiasm, few people could actually afford to pose for a portrait. Daguerreotypes were particularly expensive. Portraits ranged in cost from 25 to 75 rubles, depending on the requested size of the picture. 13 Early photographs were slightly more affordable. In 1849, the Moscow-based Swiss photographer, Iosif Verngartner, charged 10 rubles for a basic portrait. But the shabby quality of early photographs required the services of a professional retoucher to paint over technical imperfection, which usually cost considerably more. With retouching, for example, a Verngartner portrait cost 25 rubles. 14 A dash of colour added life and verisimilitude to the grey monotony of the photograph and bestowed upon the image some of the uniqueness,

12 Bourdieu, *Photography*, 6; James H. Bater writes how, despite the perception of imperial “grandeur and gentility,” migration, industrialization, and widespread poverty had rendered these images “anachronisms” (“Between Old and New,” 46).


craftsmanship, and artistry associated with portrait painting. In fact, many young Russian painters, including Ivan N. Kramskoi and Arkhip I. Kuindzhi, started their artistic careers as portrait retouchers in photography studios. Retouchers were an indispensable part of the process, especially in the 1840s and 1850s, and in many regards were considered more important than the photographer. 15

Photography became a true social phenomenon in the 1860s, when photographers began producing images en masse. Studios settled on several, standard formats that were easy to produce and affordable for a mass market. The most popular format was the visiting card. These small images, about 6 x 9 cm, revolutionized the production of pictures and the distribution and consumption of photography by everyday people. Using a special camera, photographers captured anywhere from four to ten images with a single exposure. The film plate was then developed and the images were printed onto paper, cut up, and sold individually or as full sets. Visiting cards represented the overwhelming bulk of a studio’s daily sales. In 1864, Levitskii’s studio in Paris produced over a thousand cards per day. 16 They typically featured portraits of celebrities, especially actors and actresses, and were available in studios, bookstores, and city kiosks. The low cost and small dimensions of visiting cards encouraged consumers to acquire collections, which were stored in special cases or albums. A full set of portraits was distributed among family and friends as cherished keepsakes. Unlike painted portraits or large format photos, visiting cards were portable and could be easily carried around in one’s pocket. They democratized photography, allowing more people to benefit from the social capital


16 Fotograf, no 3-4 (1864): 61.
associated with pictures, and they became a form of social currency. Visiting cards allowed the photographed subjects to distribute their self-image through various social networks, whether family or star-struck fans. At the same time, they allowed consumers to select or purchase only those images, which carried personal meaning or reflected some positive quality onto themselves.

Stereographs were also immensely popular. These photographs were composed of two identical images, each measuring about 7.5 x 8 cm, placed side by side on a rectangular cardboard matte. When looked at with the proper viewing equipment (a stereoscope), the stereograph created the illusion of depth.¹⁷ Like visiting cards, studio photographers produced stereographs in large quantities using a special camera, which allowed for one image to be captured twice at the same time. Stereoscopic pictures were primarily taken outdoors; typically they featured country landscapes, cityscapes, historical monuments, architecture, and exotic regions from abroad. [FIGURE 5.]

Towards the end of the 19th century, stereographs increasingly were used to illustrate current events and international news. These images were sold individually at bookstores and kiosks, but were also available in complete sets, which, for instance, surveyed an entire region of the Russian Empire or captured a sequence of views of a historical news event. The low price of stereographs, again, allowed consumers to build large collections, which they preserved in albums or intricately designed boxes.¹⁸ Among the middle classes, they were a popular form of entertainment, which could be enjoyed periodically, shown to visitors, and updated with new additions.

¹⁷ On the dimensions of photographic prints, including stereographs, see Shipova, Fotografy Moskvy, 24.
Larger portrait or landscape formats were available at higher prices. This included cabinet cards, promenade cards, boudoir cards, imperials, and panels. Of these, cabinet cards were the smallest, 10 x 13.5 cm, and most affordable, and panels were the largest, 16 x 30 cm. All photographs were mounted on a cardboard matte (*fotograficheskii blank*), which protected and framed the image. On the backside of the cardboard matte, the photographer printed an elaborate advertisement for the studio. The intricately designed graphics were the best way for studio photographers to attract new clients; the picture offered an example of the photographer’s craftsmanship and the *blank* provided information, such as the studio’s name and address, as well as a list of any medals won at competitions or honours bestowed by individuals or institutions.\(^{19}\) Other options for presentation were passe partouts, which were elegant cardboard mattes with cutouts that framed the image, and picture frames made of wood or metal. Family photographs were

\(^{19}\) On *fotograficheskie blanki*, see Shipova, *Fotografy Moskvy*, 22.
traditionally kept in albums. The often-luxurious bindings of albums, which included wood trim, leather, pearl, tortoise shell, and ivory, enriched the value of the photographic collection.\(^{20}\) Albums also provided a meaningful structure or chronology. The typical album featured one cabinet card per page and consumers arranged the pictures as they liked, usually according to a socially determined sense of narrative. They offered an elegant way to chronicle one’s family history. Flipping through an album evoked and communicated the memory of the past; they expressed “social memory” which explained and confirmed the family’s sense of unity in the present.\(^{21}\)

Capitalizing on the growing popularity of photography, publishers began selling pre-made photographic albums in the 1860s. Collections of historical portraits or a series of landscapes, which captured city views, architecture, and rural life from a region of the Empire, were bound in elegant volumes and sold in bookstores. Each page featured a different portrait or view and a short caption below offered basic information about the photograph’s subject. In more luxurious albums, the photographs were surrounded by elaborate borders, designs, and illustrations, which specifically complemented the images. For example, in the album \textit{Officers of the Mounted Grenadier Regiment of Guards}, portraits of officers are surrounded by detailed watercolours that commemorated the unit’s campaigns and daily routines. Painted on one page, among the five studio portraits, were representations of the regimental barracks and the cavalrymen tending to their horses on a riverbank.\(^{22}\) These illustrations added colour to the page, providing a

\(^{20}\) See \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti}, no. 86 (23 April 1863): 4; see also, Shipova, \textit{Fotografy Moskvy}, 21.


\(^{22}\) For a reproduction of this particular image, see Albert G. Yushkin, “The Unforgettable Shape of Russia: The Central State Archive for Russian Film and Photography, Krasnogorsk,” in \textit{A Portrait of Tsarist Russia}, 246.
lively contrast to the monochrome of the photographs, and embedded the portraits in specific set of narrative experiences. They conveyed the romance of galloping through the Russian countryside and evoked feelings of camaraderie and daring. Indeed, the hand-painted watercolours elevated the albums to a piece of luxury memorabilia, but for the depicted officers and their families, they also enriched the viewing experience and provided an emotional context for the individual portraits.

Books, monthly periodicals, and other types of publications provided new venues and, in turn, new markets for photographs at the end of the 19th century. The expansion of the reading public sparked a literary boom throughout the Empire, and publishers used photographs to illustrate text and, at a more basic level, to attract a larger readership. Books on art and science, in particular, benefited from the addition of detailed photographic reproductions of paintings, sculptures, maps, and animals. Unlike woodcut engravings, photographs could not yet be printed alongside text on the printing press. Photos were thus produced separately and then pasted by hand onto special high-quality sheets of paper, which were later bound with the pages containing text. Alternately, photographs were converted into lithographs, woodcuts, or other non-photographic means of illustration before printing.

The same production process applied to photographs featured in monthly periodicals. Rarely were photographs included in the intelligentsia’s monthly “thick” publications, such as Vestnik Evropy (Herald of Europe) and Russkoe bogatstvo (Russian Wealth). These were “serious” magazines for an educated audience; they offered readers sophisticated literature, both fiction and non-fiction, and generally eschewed
illustrations. Every so often, however, a high-quality reproduction of fine art appeared tucked away among the pages of small print. By contrast, the weekly “thin” publications, which catered to a wider audience, embraced illustration wholeheartedly. Popular magazines such as Niva, Rodina, and Priroda i liudi (Nature and People) regularly included sketches, drawings, cartoons, maps, technical schematics, as well as full-page reproductions of fine art. Although photographic prints could not be reproduced in periodicals regularly, photographers supplied magazine editors with images, which then were traced by pen-and-ink artists and transferred onto woodblocks for printing. As public demand for the news increased, publishers purchased more photographs of current events for these periodicals. The photographic origin of the image was acknowledged in the by-line; the caption described the illustration and made known that it was reproduced “from a photograph” or alternatively “from nature.” The authenticity of the picture, that is, its authority as an accurate representation of reality, was derived from the process of photography. Authorship of the image, however, remained in the hands of the engraver. Photographers were treated as mere handmaidens in a mechanical process, which captured nature as it already appeared in front of the camera.

Amateur Photographers

23 Brooks, When Russian Learn to Read, 111.


In the 19th century, photography in Russia was practiced by professionals and amateurs. The basic difference between these categories was that professionals made a living from photography and amateurs did not. This distinction was especially important to amateurs; they pursued photography purely for artistic and scientific reasons, not commercial ones.

In his review of Ivan Boldyrev’s latest optical innovations, the amateur photographer Viacheslav I. Sreznevskii invoked this distinction upon seeing an advertisement, clipped from a newspaper, included in the exhibit. This display of overt commercialism left Sreznevskii unimpressed: “For some reason or other he called himself an amateur,” he wrote indignantly, “an amateur works alone, as he wishes” and “does not use photography as a means of making a living.” 26 Amateurism expressed a certain social identity, tied to a set of values and activities, which were distinct from those cultivated by professional photographers. This included a rejection of the profit motive. In fact, amateurs often did make money from photography; they owned portrait studios or travelled abroad and sold pictures of their expeditions to publishers. However, by in large, these amateurs were not financially dependent on these activities. In principle and in practice, amateur photographers were driven by a sense of social responsibility that, in theory, was independent of market forces.

Amateur photographers in Russia were members of an exclusive technical intelligentsia. They were gentlemen-scholars who pursued photography out of pleasure and in the spirit of social advancement and industrial progress. The cost and esoteric knowledge associated with photography ensured that only wealthy individuals and large institutions, such as the Academy of Sciences, had access to photographic equipment. But

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scientists and other types of scholars remained influential in amateur circles even after technological advances obviated the need for specialized knowledge. Both Dmitrii I. Mendeleev and Kliment A. Timiriazev, for example, wrote about photography and were active members of Russia’s first photographic organization – the Fifth Section. By the end of the 19th century, artists became more involved in photography and amateurs began to take a greater interest in the creative potential of the medium. A prominent amateur like Andrei M. Lavrov, for example, studied at the Academy of Arts, where he fraternized with many of Russia’s best-known painters, and openly related to his photography as an artist. 27 Self-identified art photographers adopted aesthetic standards borrowed from classical painting to judge the quality of pictures. This academic approach to photography defined amateur practice even as photographers of more humble background entered their ranks. What mattered, and what defined amateurism in Russia, was that photographers pursue their work in the critical tradition of the intelligentsia. Acceptance of a rigorous scientific standard or a refined aesthetic sensibility ensured one’s amateur status and brought prestige to photographers, regardless of background.

Amateurs were strongly motivated by social concerns. Unlike their English counterparts, for whom photography was primarily a rational form of leisure, the Russian amateur saw the medium in terms of its potential to benefit society and spread enlightenment. 28 In an industrializing society, photography offered a relationship with technology, helped to disseminate knowledge, and nourished a “technical attitude to the


The Fifth Section was, in fact, organized under the auspices of the Russian Technical Society, whose overarching goal included the development of technology and industry. Founded in 1878, it gathered prominent scientists and photographers in the interest of developing and promoting photography as a useful tool – a “public technology” – that could aid the country’s overall development. Some members, such as Mendeleev, also wished to use photography for “artistic purposes,” that is, for the mass dissemination of photographic reproductions of Russian fine art. Paintings and sculptures provided creative enlightenment, and photography enabled their viewing by the masses.

The art community had also embraced photography as a useful tool for painters. Like sketches from nature, photographs could become templates for artistic works in other media. But photographs themselves, like the landscape paintings of the Itinerants, became increasingly valued as vehicles for social advocacy. For example, Maksim Dmitriev’s album *The Bad Harvest of 1891 and 1892 in the Nizhii Novgorod Province* depicted the horrific conditions in the countryside. This collection of documentary images stood alongside the work of other activists, including Lev Tolstoy and the Itinerant painters, who advanced the cause of the peasantry. Dmitriev even organized special exhibits that publicized the relief work of doctors, teachers, and local government officials.

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29 Bourdieu, *Photography*, 125.


(zemstvo) officials in the region. 33 When art photographers increasingly adopted the ‘decadent’ approaches of European photographers, amateurs continued to advocate for a utilitarian methodology. Photography was primarily a means of communication, they argued, which required photographers to quash their subjective vision in the interest of creating an accurate representation of the world. 34

Most amateurs were self-taught. Especially in the 1840s and 1850s, they worked by trial and error, applying scientific and artistic principles to the photographic process and taking note of the results. But as photography developed, amateurs created a number of venues where like-minded photographers could communicate with and learn from each other. Various printed material was published specifically for amateurs searching for basic information about the construction and operation of photographic systems. The first photographic journal Svetopis’ (Light Painting) appeared in 1858 and was soon in competition with another publication called Fotograf (Photographer). These periodicals allowed amateurs to review photographic equipment, share technical information, debate aesthetics, and stay up-to-date with the newest methods developed in the West. During his tenure in France, Levitskii wrote articles for Fotograf. He reported on European exhibitions and the on the success of Russian photographers abroad, as well as informing readers about his own activities as a portraitist in Paris. 35 Other publications devoted to photography found a growing audience, especially Lavrov’s highly influential Fotograf-liubitel’ (Amateur Photographer), founded in 1890. These periodicals also became venues


for international manufacturers and local merchants to promote their wares. In addition to reviews and articles, an issue of Fotograf-liubitel’ dedicated an entire section for advertising. Increasingly these journals became nexus points, where photography’s creative and technical intelligentsia converged with Russia’s emerging commercial sector.

Another popular venue for amateurs to develop as artists and technicians was the ‘photographic society.’ Established in the wake of the Great Reforms, these voluntary associations brought together various types of photographers, all dedicated to the art and science of photography. No two societies were exactly alike; they were usually local organizations that developed around the needs of the local membership. In general, they adopted the organizational structure established by the Fifth Section. To become a member of this society, prospective members needed five recommendations from current members and had to pay an annual fee of 10 rubles (or a lifetime fee of 100 rubles). For detailed descriptions of photographic societies in Russia, see A. P. Popov, Iz istorii Rossiiskoi fotografii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2010).

Full members had access to the Section’s library and photographic studio, and were authorized to take pictures throughout the Russian Empire, unless otherwise restricted by law. Most of these societies offered public lectures, arranged technical courses, and exhibited the best work of members. In the 1890s, photographic societies blossomed throughout Russia, appearing in Odessa, Kharkov, Riga, Warsaw, Baku, Kazan, and Saratov, as well as several smaller towns in more remote regions. A smaller society supported usually around 20 or 30 photographers. Russia’s largest photographic association, the Moscow-based Russian Photographic Society, boasted a national
representation of 850 members at the turn of the century. According to Fotograf-liubitel’, these photographic societies were responsible for the “great strides, both technically and artistically” made by Russian photographers at home and abroad. Indeed, many amateurs used the resources and contacts provided by membership to launch themselves to greater international success.

*Professional Photographers*

At first, the ranks of professional daguerreotypists and photographers working in Russia were composed primarily of foreigners. Photographers from France and Italy, as well as a large cohort of German photographers from Austria, Switzerland, Prussia, and Livonia, all settled down in St. Petersburg and Moscow, where the market for pictures was concentrated. Some foreigners ventured out and established studios in the outskirts of European Russia – in Samara, Orenburg, and beyond. A photographer’s European origins offered a marketing advantage. In fact, many studios bore Italian and French names, such as Grand Photographie Francaise, or adopted the Latin script for signage and advertising, even though the photographer was not foreigner. Indeed, in the 1840s and 1850s, these foreigners likely had an advantage over their Russian counterparts; they were more experienced in taking pictures, they possessed equipment of better quality, and had more business contacts in the West. However, it was not long before Russia produced virtuoso

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photographers, such as Sergei Levitskii. But into the 20th century, studios and even studio photographers continued to adopt foreign names, hoping to capitalize on the market’s admiration for Western commodities.

While the foreign cohort of professional photographers was largely middle class, the first Russian professionals tended to come from privileged backgrounds. In fact, despite working out of professional studios, photographers such as Levitskii and Aleksei Grekov practiced their trade more like amateurs. Levitskii performed experiments and entered international competitions. In 1849, he won the Gold Medal at the Paris World Exhibition, the first time such an award had been given for a photograph. His international fame propelled him into the most exclusive social circles, including the Russian imperial court.  

Around 1860, Russians from all spheres of life began applying for the right to open studios and take pictures professionally. In Moscow, the mayor’s office received applications from nobleman, merchants, and peasants. Well-educated professional, such as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, and retired military officers, abandoned their prior careers to pursue portrait photography. Many professionals were also trained artists who had studied classical painting and sculpture in Moscow or at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg. Though in theory photographic technology could be mastered by anyone, the ability to compose a flattering portrait was a skill honed initially by painters. Although good taste could be cultivated, photographers with classical training in painting had an advantage in the marketplace as consumers flocked to studios run not simply by photographers, but by true artists.

40 Popov, *Iz istorii rossiiskoi fotografii*, 159-162.

Professional photographers were generally trained in the studio after years of study as an apprentice. Under the guidance of an experienced photographer, the novice developed the technical skills, artistic sensibility, and the necessary business acumen required to run a successful studio. At the very least, this training offered apprentices a technical education and an urban trade, but it also exposed them to refined tastes and the world of high culture. The portraitist Moisei S. Nappel’baum fondly recalled the influence of his first teacher, a transplanted Pole named Boretti, who introduced him to great literature and classical music.42 Of course, such an idyllic environment was rare. Most novices experienced years of tedious work before they ever touched a camera. For example, the so-called father of Russian photo-reportage, Karl K. Bulla, started out running errands and assembling film plates for a photography supply firm in St. Petersburg. Bulla eventually graduated to the portrait studio next door where he worked tirelessly to perfect his craft and build a comfortable rapport with his clients.43 The apprenticeship and careful recruitment of photographers, often limited to family members, conferred exclusivity on the profession. But beyond the basic training, studio photography did not require professional or aesthetic qualifications. The studio photographer was something like a “master of ceremonies” who “specialized in the charismatic techniques designed to stage-manage the high points of solemnities and arrange gestures and fix smiles.”44 Technical expertise was a prerequisite for professional photography; refined taste and craftsmanship ensured a quality product, which garnered

42 M. S. Nappel’baum, Ot remesla k iskusstva: Iskusstvo fotoportreta (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Planeta, 1972), 8.


44 Bourdieu, Photography, 172.
praise from customers. But in the end, the photographer’s relationships with his clients and his ability to create an atmosphere of elegance and exclusivity was what propelled the professional to great success.

In the 19th century, all aspects of the profession, that is, owning a studio, taking pictures, and selling prints – were tightly controlled by the state. According to regulations established by the Ministry of the Interior, photographers wishing to open a studio had to obtain permission (for a small fee) from the local or provincial authority. The clandestine appearance of “immoral” pictures in the early 1860s inspired the Ministry to impose censorship on photographic production and distribution. Starting in 1865, the work of officially registered studio photographers was subordinated under the same set of regulations that governed typographers and lithographers. Each picture sold to the public had to be stamped with a seal, indicating the photographer’s name and address, and any “seductive” images or pictures of “political criminals” were strictly forbidden by law. According to a senior official, studios were inspected several times a year. In particular, inspectors examined a special logbook, which all photographers were legally required to fill out, listing all photographic transactions and including copies of all pictures taken on the premises. Regardless of these restrictions, photographers continued to produce illegal images, mostly of the salacious kind, risking hefty fines for the first three transgressions, and then closure. Given the immense number of portraits taken every

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45 In Moscow, permission was received from the governor general; in St. Peterburg, from the mayor; and in other cities and towns, from the local governor. For an in-depth discussion on the regulation of photography studio see Shipova, Fotografy Moskvy, 14-18; Popov, Istorii rossiiskoi fotografii, 17-22.

46 Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv goroda Moskvy (TsIAM) f. 16 (Office of the Governor-General of Moscow) o. 24, d. 1795, l. 16 (law about printing, 6 April 1865).

47 “Report by senior inspector F. A. Nikotin to Governor-General V. A. Dolgorukov,” no date (TsIAM f. 16, op. 25, d. 1622, l. 16).
year, it was unlikely that all photographs were catalogued diligently. Certainly the demand for pornography, or so-called ‘Parisian pictures,’ outweighed the potential risk and financial shortfall of breaking the law.

Not all professionals, however, worked in the studio environment. Some photographers travelled throughout the provinces, usually following the railroad from town to town, taking portraits in the countryside and in remote villages. Like stationary photographers, these itinerants were also required to carry papers, issued by local government officials, which authorized them to work outside the studio environment. All photographers, for example, needed special permission from the mayor’s office to take pictures in the streets of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other urban centers. Regulation regarding the work of itinerants, working in small villages and near train stations, was less clearly defined. These photographers were difficult to pin-down, and as long as they avoided the police, they could bypass the paperwork and hassle required of studio professionals. However, studio photographers also set out on excursions to the provinces and smaller communities in order to enlarge their market base. This was exactly what Grigorii Babianskii, a small town studio photographer from Trubchesk, had in mind when he wrote the governor of Orel for permission to work in the nearby towns of Sevsk, Dmitrovsk, Karachev, and Bolkov.

Well-known photographers were also sometimes commissioned to travel to remote regions on temporary assignments. Wealthy landlords or factory owners, for example, wishing to photograph their families or employees, paid for the photographer’s

48 Popov, Iz istorii rossiiskoi fotografii, 22.

49 See Saran, Istoriia professional’noi fotografii, 18.
travel arrangements, in addition to the cost of taking pictures. Karl Bulla and his co-
workers advertised specifically to attract such far flung clientele; the Bulla studio was 
“always prepared to travel and takes orders no matter where or what is needed.” 50 But as 
long as these photographers worked in a professional capacity, it remained their 
responsibility to obtain the proper work permits from the local authorities.

By the end of the 19th century, the distinction between amateur and professional 
photographers had undergone a significant transformation. In general, professionals 
continued to work in studios and the bulk of their business was still in portraiture. At the 
same time, amateur photography had become increasingly associated with art. Articles in 
photography journals, such as Fotograf-liubitel’, focused more on aesthetics and less on 
technical matters. Advances in photographic technology reached a point whereby almost 
anyone could afford to purchase a photograph. But not everyone could afford to take 
pictures on their own. Prints and albums were abundant; handheld cameras were not. The 
1890s represented the high watermark for studio portraitists in Russia. In the following 
decade, the number of professional establishments began to drop after a half century of 
steady growth. 51 The invention of easy to use, handheld cameras encouraged everyday 
Russians to take pictures of friends and family on their own. A new breed of everyday 
amateur photographers was born. Professionals, though still very much in demand, began 
to search for new markets and new opportunities for advancement. In the 19th century, 
studio photography had offered a profession, technical skills, and admission to reputable 
social circles. The eventual jump to professional photo-reportage simply brought many of

50 Advertisement reproduced in V. A. Nikitin, Rasskazy o fotografakh i fotografiiakh (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1991), 85.

51 See graph in Saran, Istoriia professional’noi fotografii, 75.
these photographers’ social and economic priorities in line with the cultural values of the next century.
Before magazine publishers in Russia had adopted the technology to print high-quality photographs in magazines, the illustrated press offered dramatic, hand-drawn reenactments of the news. Usually an artist-reporter, having witnessed the news event, produced a rough sketch on-site that later became the basis of a more fully realized tableau.¹ Other times the editor hired an artist to create an illustration based on one or more written accounts. Artists were also called on to produce illustrations based on photographs. In these cases, the editors informed the reader of the photographic source in the caption, thus preserving the news image’s photographic authority. One way or another, this process was highly collaborative. The editors assigned the news story to an artist, and together they worked to produce a detailed news illustration – a visual representation of the news based on various sources. The completed illustration was eventually handed over to a team of engravers, who transposed the image onto woodblocks in preparation for printing. The illustrated news was thus created by an “interpretive team;” the final image was a hybrid combination of eyewitness accounts,

¹ For a detailed account of news illustrations in the 19th century, see Paul Hogarth, *The Artist as Reporter* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1986).
photography, hand-made drawings, and woodblock engraving. Various creative forces worked at different stages in this process, and with every subsequent stage, the news image distanced itself from the reality the magazine claimed to portray.

The introduction of halftone technology transformed the way that images of the news were reproduced in magazines. Halftone allowed publishers to transfer black-and-white photographs directly onto the printing press. This process first appeared in America in 1880 when the *New York Daily Graphic* published a halftone image of a shantytown as a demonstration of the new technology. By the early 1890s, magazine editors on both sides of the Atlantic were including photography in weekly publications on a regular basis. In Russia, however, the process only became commercially viable around the turn of the century. Once adopted, halftone revolutionized the publishing of books, periodicals, posters, and other graphic media. Specifically, it integrated the reproduction of images with the printing of text and eliminated the need for wood block engravings. Initially, there was no financial benefit to the halftone process. The costs associated with retouching halftone plates and retrofitting the old printing presses were significant. Moreover, although the older methods were laborious, engravers were cheap to hire and easily replaceable. But publishers continued to invest in halftone technology because, from the perspective of the reading public, the process looked quicker and appeared to

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create a true facsimile of the original photo rather than a translation.\textsuperscript{5} Magazines acquired some of the value associated with actual photographic prints, which raised their status and placed them on par with European publications. The presence of photography thus made magazines doubly alluring, both as vehicles for pictures and as sophisticated commodities associated with the West.\textsuperscript{6}

The halftone process also changed the meaning of news illustrations. To quote Neil Harris, the process was “more than simply a technological innovation; it was an iconographical one as well.”\textsuperscript{7} Older methods of news illustration represented an ontologically different category of reporting the news. Armed with pen and sketchpads, artist-reporters were journalists, who provided intelligence about distant people and places, but they were also storytellers who produced a distinct visual interpretation of the facts. They gathered details in person, interviewed witnesses, and then created a composite illustration, which presented a visual narrative of the news. The final image was determined as much by the laws of composition and subjective experience as they were by the bare-bone facts. The news illustrations offered readers a “privileged subjectivity” based on reality, but in fact experienced by nobody.\textsuperscript{8} Hand-drawn reports translated the news into visual terms. These illustrations were fundamentally stories told

\textsuperscript{5} Beegan, \textit{The Mass Image}, 187.

\textsuperscript{6} Editors often compared their publications to foreign magazines, such as the French weekly \textit{L’Illustration} or London’s \textit{Daily Graphic}; see \textit{Ogonek}, no. 1 (6 [19] January 1908): 1; also \textit{Solntse Rossii}, no. 2 (42) (November 1910): 10.


by an author, who interpreted the events experienced first-hand, or via other sources, and offered a dramatic visualization of the news.

By contrast, in the popular imagination, photography stood for unmediated objectivity and realism. Halftone, which replicated the original picture exactly, ensured that readers related to news images as photographs. The authorship and journalistic authority of the news illustrator was replaced by the presumed objectivity of the camera. All the intermediary stages of production were hidden from readers. No creative agent appeared to interpret the news event or interrupt the flow of information. Artist-reporters were responsible for their vision of the world. Photo-reporters, by contrast, were mere “witnesses and bystanders to events ostensibly beyond their control.”

Photographs enhanced the sense of reality at the expense of story; they captured meaningful fragments rather than fully realized narrative constructions. They also allowed the reading public to draw on its own experiences and understanding of the medium, which remained linked to traditional photographic genres and their various social functions. Photographs seemed to present evidence and unmediated fact, but they were also a more personal form of social communication, which was inextricably linked to family, self-fashioning, and public expressions of status.

In late Imperial Russia, the transition to halftone reproduction in weekly magazines was accompanied by the transition to fact-based journalism in daily newspapers. Leading reporters, such as Vasilii Nemirovich-Danchenko offered factual information as opposed to interpretations of the news based in ideology. This style of reporting wrested the news from the educated elites and brought millions of ordinary

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9 Ibid., 78.
citizens into the public sphere. Objectivity in journalism had mass commercial appeal, but reporters like Nemirovich-Danchenko also believed in the writer’s duty to remain detached from the news and to report only the facts. When objective description replaced interpretation, readers were free to sort out the meaning of the news on their own, thus denying “intellectuals their long-held and supremely politicized function of interpreting events.”\(^{10}\) The inclusion of press photography in magazines was the visual corollary to this new professional ethos underlying newspaper journalism. Enterprising publishers recognized this shift in the culture, adopted the photomechanical printing technology, and in the process reinvented weekly publications to reflect a new regime of illustrated news, and photographs soon became the signature feature of the periodical press.

The Weekly Periodical Press

The most popular magazines in Tsarist Russia were, among others, *Niva, Iskry, Ogonek, Solntse Rossii*, and *Sinii zhurnal*. These periodicals had broad social appeal, focused on international news and current events, and featured page after page of press photography. As a group, they also were a representative sample of the variety of magazines available to everyday consumers and captured the gradual evolution of the illustrated press in the late Imperial era.

One of the first magazines to include photography was *Niva*. Founded in 1870 by publisher Adol’f F. Marks, *Niva* offered popular essays, serialized fiction, biography, and news reports on current events, alongside a variety of illustrations, reproductions of fine

art, and photography. This periodical belonged to a well-established category of weekly magazines known as “family journals” or “journals for self-improvement,” which flourished at the end of the 19th century.\(^1^1\) Other magazines in this category were *Vokrug sveta*, *Priroda i liudi*, and *Rodina*. They offered readers an illustrated and more accessible alternative to the intelligentsia’s ideologically charged publications, the so-called “thick” journals. Family magazines were available in cities and towns throughout the Empire, and were read by provincial gentry, merchants, schoolteachers, priests, and urban professionals. *Niva* was specifically singled out by educated society as a “useful vehicle for spreading enlightenment.”\(^1^2\) Some commentators, however, lamented the state of the family journal. According to one critic, they were a laudable publishing enterprise, which originally intended to encourage literacy and learning, but had been devalued by commercial interests. The vast majority of these publications, he explained, were shameful instruments for entrepreneurs to sell books and pictures offered as premiums with annual subscriptions. Amidst the mass proliferation of these publications, “the journals themselves ceased to exist completely, and the readers’ entire interest was riveted by collections of books,” “albums of beauties,” “kaleidoscopes,” and other flashy premiums.\(^1^3\)

*Niva*, by in large, remained the model weekly publication and its content reflected the literary pedigree of its publisher. Marks was a German immigrant who began his

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\(^{1^1}\) Other family magazine included *Rodina*, *Priroda i liudi*, and *Vokrug sveta*. For descriptions of the categories of the press, see P. E. Esperov, *Chto dolzhen trebovat’ chitatel’-intelligent ot organa pechati?* (St. Petersburg: Samopomoshch’, 1904).


\(^{1^3}\) Esperov, *Chto dolzhen trebovat’*, 10-11.
career in book publishing in St. Petersburg. His magazine was committed to contemporary Russian literature, in addition to offering subscribers complete collections of Anton Chekhov, Aleksei Tolstoi, and Nikolai Leskov. The works of foreign authors, such as Oscar Wilde, were also featured as premiums. Like the literary content, illustrated material reflected the Russian classics. This included the grand, historical canvases of Ilia Repin, the landscapes of Ivan Shishkin, and the spiritual tableaus of Mikhail Nesterov. The editors also printed images of various national types from the Empire and picturesque scenes of life in the provinces, such as holiday sleigh-rides and peasant girls working happily in fields of wheat. Bible stories and other spiritual subjects, such as angels and ghosts, appeared during religious holidays. In subscription advertisements, the editors underlined the Russian-ness of *Niva*, and when photography was introduced, pictures of the news from Russia outweighed the coverage from abroad. The title page of *Niva* captured the overall character of Marks’s publication. It depicted Mother Russia, a statue of Pushkin, three cherubs, tufts of wheat, a lyre, and a collection of classical vases. [FIGURE 6.] Within these pages, the illustrations seemed to say, readers could find a veritable cornucopia of Russian art, literature, history, and exotic information all packaged inside a sophisticated and wholesome weekly publication.
Marks’s magazine was immensely successful. At the turn of the century, the editors reported an annual circulation of 250,000, making it the most popular periodical of its kind.\textsuperscript{14} However, in this period, other publishers, who coveted Marks’s success, strived to emulate \textit{Niva} in form and content and to surpass the magazine in terms of circulation. When a new batch of periodicals emerged, which took advantage of new photomechanical printing techniques and focused primarily on the news, \textit{Niva} gradually lost its pre-eminent place among middle class readers.

Magazines such as \textit{Iskry} and \textit{Ogonek} were the most popular examples of this new wave in illustrated journalism. Both publications were illustrated weekly supplements to the “capital press,” that is, daily newspapers published in St. Petersburg and Moscow.\textsuperscript{15} Some publishers offered these supplements for free, hoping to attract readers to the daily publication. However, in general, magazines required an additional fee on top of the annual subscription price of the newspaper. From Monday to Friday, the daily papers reported the news and on the weekends the supplements provided photography, fine art, cartoons, short fiction, and other types of light reading. Some daily publications offered subscribers a choice of several different types of weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, and bi-monthly supplements, each focusing on a different set of topics. Publisher O. K. Notovich’s daily \textit{Novosti} (The News), for example, was accompanied by a series of publications that catered respectively to interests in popular medicine, technology, nature, agriculture, fashion, and sports, in addition to a weekly illustrated news supplement called \textit{Peterburgskaia zhizn’} (Petersburg Life). Many of these failed to attract a loyal


\textsuperscript{15} Esperov, \textit{Chto dolzhen trebovat’}, 18-20.
audience over the long term. Magazines that recapped the previous week’s news with photography generally proved more successful than other types of publications.

The publisher Ivan Sytin launched *Iskry* in 1901 to accompany his newspaper *Russkoe slovo*. When Sytin purchased this daily, it was an unremarkable publication with a poor reputation and a modest readership in Moscow. Sytin wanted to transform *Russkoe slovo* into a respected, national publication, and he believed that *Iskry*, originally conceived as a free Sunday premium, would boost the daily’s circulation. After a prolonged battle with censors, he managed to win approval for an illustrated weekly that readers could subscribe to alongside *Russkoe slovo* for an additional fee (3 rubles per year). *Iskry* was modelled on successful European magazines, such as the *Illustrated London News* and *L’Illustration* of Paris, but during the first few years the publication most resembled *Niva*. The original program emphasized literature, first and foremost, including serialized novels, short stories, folk tales, as well as drama and poetry. The basic layout was also reminiscent of Marks’s magazine, especially on the cover page, which typically featured a painting of a bucolic, Russian landscape. Unlike *Niva*, however, *Iskry* was larger in terms of its physical dimensions – the size of a daily newspaper spread out – and more varied in terms of content, including caricatures, political cartoons, notation to popular songs, and jokes. Sytin also embraced the public’s interest in photography and the news, and despite not mentioning photography by name.

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in the original program, he specified that “events in the social and political life of Russia and the world” would be “illustrated.”

Photography eventually established a dominant weekly presence in Iskry to the detriment of other types of illustration and written material. In 1903, just before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, the editors sacrificed text in favour of more pictures of the news. The magazine increasingly became a photo-album of the previous week’s major news stories. Over the next decade, the editors regularly toyed with the layout and content of Iskry, constantly adapting the magazine to the reading public’s demands and the requirements of the news. This commitment to the market defined Sytin’s publishing persona. Moreover, in advertisements, the editors described the magazine’s “strong ties” with readers who demanded a publication that “responded to daily events” and was rich in illustrated content.” Around 1910, they had settled into a winning formula. By then, the magazine was thinner, 8 pages rather than the original 18, and packed with as many as 50 photographs per issue. Headlines, captions, and short articles provided context and narrative direction for the photo-reportage. A typical issue from 1912 included a large cover image of Russia’s first female professor, a series of pictures on a delegation of French politicians in Moscow, variety of headshots of actors from the Moscow Art Theatre’s recent production of Hamlet, and an epic photo-story, featuring nine photos over two pages, of the funeral procession of Field Marshall D. A. Miliutin.

17 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury I iskusstva (GALI) f. 595 (Editorial Papers of Russkoe slovo), o. 1, ed. khr. 2, l. 2 (program of Iskry).

18 Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read, 99.

19 Iskry, no. 46 [17 November 1901]: subscription advertisement

20 Iskry, no. 7 (12 February 1912): 49-56.
Despite the promise of art, literature, and humour, *Iskry* became primarily a venue for photo-reportage that offered a glimpse into the halls of power, high society, and daily life in the city.

*Ogonek* was founded by the publisher and editor Stanislav M. Propper in 1899 as an illustrated supplement to his business daily *Birzhevye vedomosti* (The Stock Market Gazette). This magazine was one of several weekly periodicals published by Propper. He also edited a literary weekly, a popular scientific journal, and a popular medical journal; *Ogonek*, by contrast, was focused on “public life in Russia and abroad,” and it was the only publications to survive over the long term. Every week the magazine printed serialized fiction, a few portraits and photographs of current events, and a section of short articles rounding up the news. Issues of *Ogonek* were printed on low quality paper and

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21 Esperov, *Chto dolzhen trebovat’*, 18.
photographs published early on reveal signs of heavy retouching intended to clean up the poor transfers of the original prints. Ogonek was also smaller and cheaper than the competition, costing only 2 rubles per year, and lacked the creative design or wealth of illustration of magazines such as Niva and Iskry.

In 1908, Propper re-launched Ogonek with a new literary program, an updated design, and a greater emphasis on press photography. He also improved the overall quality of the publication; the paper was thicker and glossier, and the photographs were reproduced cleanly with no indication of retouching. Ogonek also adopted a more independent identity; it was no longer a mere supplement to Birzhevye vedomosti. The new Ogonek was a self-contained magazine with its own weekly agenda. In the first issue in 1908, Propper promised a completely new “foreign type of magazine, the first of its kind in Russia.”22 Topical news was a paramount concern and press photography, in particular, became the centrepiece of the publication. Subscription advertisements drew attention to the range and originality of the magazine’s illustrated material. The editors compared the magazine to a “mirror” that “reflected all the events of the day.”23 Short fiction replaced longer, serialized writing, which guaranteed a conclusion to the story in every issue, and short articles increasingly accompanied pictures of the news. These changes made Ogonek more attractive to readers who purchased single issues at bookstores and kiosks, rather than subscribing on an annual basis. Propper’s revamped weekly magazine became hugely successful with the reading public. Circulation in 1910

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climbed to around 100,000 and by the end of 1914 the editors reported a weekly readership of 700,000, making Ogonek the most popular periodical in Russia of any kind.  

The rich array of press photography in Ogonek, coupled with in-depth reporting, set a new standard in illustrated journalism. Ogonek was Russia’s first modern magazine. It resembled the popular illustrated publications of Western Europe and America. The editors even included both the Old Style (Julian) and New Style dates on the cover to reinforce Ogonek’s international profile. The typical issue featured a political cartoon or photograph on the cover.

[FIGURE 8.] The short story was a crime or adventure tale like “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes in Russia.” The news coverage included stories of high politics, art and culture, science and technology, sports, as well as more sensational items, such as a miraculous prison escape and grisly murders. Weekly profiles of politicians and artists gave readers a close look into the life and work of prominent Russians. Various political and civic institutions were likewise explored with images and text. In one story, a series

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24 Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read, 115. Brooks cites circulation figures provided by Ogonek in subscription advertisements. One such example can be found in Ogonek, no. 51 (21 December [3 January] 1914): 20.

25 Brooks, When Russia Learned to Read, 116.
of pictures guided readers through the St. Petersburg Institute for the Study of Alcoholism. The photos showed the inner workings of the Institute – the sparse rooms where patients slept and the various laboratories where they received innovative treatments. A simple portrait of a sick woman, described as a promising “artistic talent,” humanized the experience of patients. 26 The depth and emotional engagement of this report was typical of the human-interest stories that made up much of the content of Ogonek.

Solntse Rossii, by contrast, catered to readers with upscale tastes in fiction, theatre, and contemporary fine art. This magazine was published by Mikhail B. Gorodetskii who made his fortune selling the St. Petersburg tabloid Gazeta kopeika (Kopeck Newspaper), which was popular among the city’s working classes. However, Solntse Rossii was not an illustrated supplement to Gazeta kopeika (a function fulfilled by the weekly Vsemirnaia panorama) or any other newspaper. It was a sophisticated magazine filled with coloured illustrations and creative graphic designs, all of which projected an aura of luxury at a middle-class price point. Aesthetics were of paramount importance to the editors and presumably the magazine’s readership. Solntse Rossii regularly featured high-quality reproductions of fine art, dazzling visual layouts, and many dramatic and compositionally arresting photographs. The photo-reportage transcended mere news coverage and became a canvas for a new type of graphic design, valued for its formal properties as well as being a vehicle for cultural information.

Solntse Rossii was printed on thick, glossy paper and featured a combination of short fiction, reproductions of fine art, and photographs, often taken at operas or from

26 Ogonek, no. 22 (26 May [ 8 June] 1912): 12.
dramatic theatrical productions. Photos of everyday life and international politics also appeared, often cropped into unconventional geometric shapes or organized into dazzling collages. Written news reports were rare in Solntse Rossii; the photo-reportage and the captions underneath typically represented the entirety of the magazine’s news content. But long-form essays on art and culture, as well as biographies and thoughtful pieces on city life, often accompanied a related series of photographs. In one issue, portraits of actors were cut into rhombus-shaped images and arranged in strips that ascended across the page. [FIGURE 9.] Another two-page spread featured snapshots taken at a market in St. Petersburg and then arranged in a diagonal cross. Around both series of pictures, text filled in the gaps on the page. Although the individual photographs were simply headshots and outdoor scenes, their visual presentation transformed the images into
elements within a larger graphic design.  

Elegant and colourful, Solntse Rossii was more than just a means of communication; it was a luxury item that reflected the purchaser’s exclusive taste in highbrow culture. Among middle class consumers, this magazine was as much a status symbol as a source of information and entertainment. In Russia’s burgeoning consumer culture, this status was often expressed through commodities like Solntse Rossii and other publications of so-called “serious” culture.  

A distinctly unserious yet remarkably popular magazine was the weekly Sinii zhurnal. Though focused on international news and current events, this publication struck a fun and frivolous tone. Its publisher and editor M. G. Kornfel’d was also behind Russia’s most widely read (and notorious) satirical journal, Satirikon. In a sense, Sinii zhurnal was a more topical and popular outgrowth of this publication. Designed to appeal to a broad audience, Sinii zhurnal offered a weekly program of short fiction, serious news, and press photography, which was often presented alongside satirical content. One or two pages of political cartoons from home and abroad typically set an irreverent tone to each issue. Headlines and captions around photographs presented an ironic perspective on current events. Unique to Sinii zhurnal was a regular section called kunstkamera, which featured both photographs and short articles of various “curiosities and jokes, rare documents, pictures of customs, natural wonders, unique fashions, rare and wonderful inventions.” In one edition, this included stories about an eating contest in America, a female sumo wrestler, a goose the size of a small child, and a “miniature lady” living in

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27 Solntse Rossii, no. 44 (195) (October 1913): 10-11; Solntse Rossii, no. 43 (194) (October 1913): 10-11.


29 See subscription advertisement in Sinii zhurnal, no. 50 (2 December 1911).
England. \textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ogonek} and a number of other magazines also featured such curiosities, though in \textit{Sinii zhurnal} the tone was less of wonderment and more of light-hearted mockery, especially when the report came at the expense of foreigners. Perhaps the most eclectic magazines in this period, \textit{Sinii zhurnal} nonetheless successfully combined the range of illustrated material and broad appeal of \textit{Ogonek}, while also incorporating the humour of Russia’s many satirical publications.

Other popular magazines included \textit{Vsemirnaia panorama} (Universal Panorama), \textit{Zerkalo zhizni}, \textit{Russkaia illiustratsiia} (Russian Illustration), \textit{Stolitsa i usad’ba} (Capital and Country), and separate St. Petersburg and Moscow editions of \textit{Zhurnal-kopeika} (Kopeck Journal). Informative and entertaining, these weekly magazines made up about one-third of the periodical press in Russia. \textsuperscript{31} Although photography had been a fixture of the cultural landscape since the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, the illustrated press brought far more of these images to a larger audience at relatively affordable prices. More importantly, these publications diversified or perhaps even redefined the ordinary reader’s experience of photography and encouraged a new visual literacy. What had previously been so closely associated with the private sphere was now an indispensable means of exposing all aspects of public life.

\textit{Categories of Photo-reportage in Imperial Russia}

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  \item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{Sinii zhurnal}, no. 53 (23 December 1911): 8-9.
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\end{footnotesize}
The illustrated press in late Imperial Russia offered readers a wide variety of pictures of current events. In general, editors tended to curate the visual information according to the magazine’s profile. Photo-reportage overlapped from periodical to periodical, especially with major news stories. Certain national storylines, such as the Russo-Japanese War, dominated the photographic news coverage over long stretches. Editors also regularly dedicated a single issue to one story, capturing different aspects of a diplomatic affair or personality in a series of different photo-collages.

The royal family, namely the Tsar, his wife Aleksandra, their five children, and the extended family appeared regularly in weekly magazines. Formal portraits, taken by the court photographer, were especially prominent in more conservative publications, such as *Niva*. These images presented idealized images of the first family and evoked the grandeur and historical legacy of the Russian monarchy. Adorned in elaborate uniforms and antique cloaks, Nicholas presented a dignified image of Russia’s head of state, linked to traditional duties and institutions, and to Russia’s imperial legacy. Press photographer captured the Tsar engaged primarily in ceremonial duties, such as reviewing troops, unveiling monuments, meeting with foreign dignitaries, overseeing military war games, and commemorating important historical events. In 1913, for example, the press followed the Tsar closely as the imperial family marked the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty. Photos in magazines captured Nicholas and his family touring the Volga towns, including meeting peasants in Kostroma, the ancient Romanov patrimony.\(^\text{32}\) The official rhetoric about these ceremonies highlighted the union between the Tsar and his subjects, but the press photography revealed a theatrical event that only heightened the contrast between

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\(^{32}\) The coverage in *Iskry* was particularly detailed: *Iskry*, no. 20 (26 May 1913); *Iskry*, no. 21 (2 June 1913); also see, *Ogonek*, no. 3 (20 January [2 February] 1913).
the two worlds. Furthermore, Nicholas became visually lost among the crowds and dignitaries. Press photography always seemed to bring attention to the Tsar’s modest height. This was especially the case whenever he stood alongside the physically imposing Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, who towered over the Tsar.

Photographs of the Tsar and his family enjoying leisure time offered the public an informal and distinctly bourgeois image of Russia’s autocrat. Nicholas himself was an avid photographer and over the course of his reign he compiled a number of photo-albums of his family at play. Although these more personal pictures never surfaced in the press, other officially-approved images of the Tsar hunting, paddling a kayak, and enjoyed a camping expedition with his children gave his subject a glimpse into the private, if not somewhat staged, lives of the royals. Portraits of the Tsar and his sickly son Aleksei conveyed a great warmth and love between father and son. This sort of publicity was in line with the Imperial court’s attempt to create a more intimate, relatable image of Nicholas. It also intersected with a pan-European trend of presenting monarchs in terms of middle class domesticity.

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35 For example: *Iskry*, no. 6 (8 February 1909): 40; *Niva*, no. 22 (21 May 1909): 403.


Some critics, however, disapproved of the Tsar’s enhanced public presence across the media landscape, believing that disseminating Nicholas’s image through photography, film, print, as well as on stamps and coins, adulterated the sacred image of the Tsar. He was supposed to be the lofty embodiment of the Russian religion, state, and nation, not a man of the people.  

But Nicholas was proud of his supposed rapport with the common man, especially with the Iasnaia Poliana infantry regiment, which was comprised of peasants from the imperial estates. Several magazines circulated an image of Tsar Nicholas “in full marching regalia” of the lower ranks of the 16th Infantry Regiment.  

[FIGURE 10.] Two nearly identical pictures showed the Tsar standing at attention with a standard-issue rifle carried on his shoulder. The short article below also detailed Nicholas marching around with the troops in full gear – an event described in Ogonek as memorable for the regiment and for the entire Russian army.

National and local politics was perhaps the most important category of the news, if not only because in the illustrated press the actual locus of power in Russia (the monarch) received far less attention than civilian politicians. In a sense, magazine editors

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38 Wortman, Scenarios of Power, 483.

used photo-reportage to craft an aspirational portrait of Russian politics; an image of politics as it should be, rather than as it was. Autocracy was primarily represented by the Tsar, of course, and his various ministers, such as Sergei Iu. Witte and Petr A. Stolypin, who were featured in regular photographic profiles. However, deputies of the State Duma, as well as members of local city councils, and provincial zemstvo administrations, received far more, and more wide-ranging, publicity. Pictures of the Tauride Palace, the main debating chamber, the various Duma committees, and the prominent leaders dominated the photo-reportage before the Revolution. Group photos brought attention to the various social and professional categories within the Duma, which included peasants, merchants, soldiers, doctors, writers, and artists. Ethnic categories and religious denominations were also highlighted, with Polish, Jewish, and Muslim deputies receiving the most attention. Photographs emphasized the collective nature of the “national representatives,” both at home, travelling throughout Russia, inspecting factories and shipping yards, and abroad, on diplomatic missions to England, France, and other European nations. Press photographers also captured Duma deputies outside the halls of power. Almost every summer, magazine editors offered a variety of images of deputies on vacation, in their home towns, villages, provinces, or relaxing with friends and families on dachas outside St. Petersburg and Moscow.

In addition, images of voluntary associations, professional organizations, charitable societies, international congresses and conferences, and other types of groups brought immense publicity to civil society working for the social betterment of Russia
outside of government. Various conventions, congresses, and fund-raising banquets allowed these groups to commemorate anniversaries or special fund-raising events in the public eye. These events often presented a riveting spectacle for readers. In one issue of Ogonek, a series of photographs documented the International Fireman’s Congress in St. Petersburg, where spectators witnessed a parade of horse-pulled water tanks, a demonstration of firemen extinguishing an oil blaze, and a display of more than a dozen fire hoses, shooting streams of water into the sky. The work of charitable organizations was especially well covered in the illustrated press. During the Balkan war, for example, the activities of the Russian Red Cross were on display, as medical supplies were packaged and delivered to the Serbian front. Also, in April the national campaign against tuberculosis, known as the “Days of the White Flower,” went into full swing and magazines dedicated entire pages to images of women selling white flowers in the streets throughout the Empire. The workings of charitable institutions contrasted with pictures of victims, whether of war or disease, made a direct connection between vital social issues and the efforts of civil society to help those in need.

Coverage of international news gave readers the opportunity to explore foreign landscapes, to learn about exotic cultures, and to consider Russia’s national interests abroad. In general, international news functioned like a compass that located the Empire’s social and political development in relation to other nations. It also provided a visual survey of Russian imperial and diplomatic ‘conquests.’ For example, when in

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40 On the work of these organizations, see Joseph Bradley, Voluntary Associations in Tsarist Russia: Science, Patriotism, and Civil Society (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009).

41 Ogonek, no. 22 (26 May [8 June] 1912): 3; also Niva, no. 23 (9 June 1912): 460g.
1907, Russia secured an entente with England, magazines published an immense amount of photo-reportage about neighboring Persia, which as a result of the treaty fell into the Empire’s sphere of influence. 42 The constant stream of news from Serbia, Bosnia, and Turkey also reflected Russia’s historic stakes in those regions. News from the Far East, by contrast, expressed both the genuine curiosity and condescension of the tourist’s gaze. Photo-reportage from China, Korea, and Japan focused on native culture and custom, but also highlighted the brutality and backwardness of life in those countries. 43 News from Europe and America also brought unsavory trends to light and exposed readers to the hidden underbelly of capitalism. The “excesses of English suffragettes,” which featured unflattering portrayals of protestors coming up against the law, provided a negative foil to the great achievement of women in Russia. 44 The magazine Sinii zhurnal, in line with its satirical-journalistic profile, regularly mocked these demonstrators. 45 News from abroad bolstered and legitimized the achievements of Russian society, showing it to be modern, up-to-date, and in some cases, more advanced than the West. It encouraged readers to see their lives not only within a local or national context, but also as unfolding positively on the international stage.

Reporting on art and culture was, in many ways, the primary function of magazines. The traditional content of “art-literary” magazines, namely fiction and fine art, was translated into the language of photography. Portraits of great literary figures often adorned magazine covers, and readers also caught a glimpse of the working lives of

42 See the news coverage in the magazine Iskry, starting with Iskry, no. 24 (22 June 1908).
43 For example: Iskry, no. 44 (9 November 1908): 348-49.
45 Sinii zhurnal, no. 10 (2 March 1912): 6; Sinii zhurnal, no. 16 (13 April 1912): 5.
contemporary writers. Reproductions of paintings, usually selected from on-going exhibitions, were presented alongside photo-stories about an individual artist or art institution. Operas and theatrical dramas were regularly profiled on two-page spreads, which allowed for panoramic views of the stage production, mise-en-scène, and celebrity headshots of the performers. Other kinds of artists, such as comedians, dancers, musicians, and composers also used the illustrated press to publicize their work and further their national celebrity. Russia’s premier opera star, Fedor I. Shaliapin, thrived in this new photographic landscape. He was shown recording songs in studio, posing theatrically in costume, offering aid to charitable organizations, and socializing with other celebrities, such as the painter Ilia E. Repin. \(^{46}\) Other faces that appeared frequently included the actor Konstantin A. Varlamov, the writer Leonid N. Andreev, the dramaturge Konstantin S. Stanislavskii, and of course, Lev Tolstoy, whose national celebrity was truly unparalleled. The illustrated press allowed these artists to cultivate a personal relationship with the public. In addition to experiencing the arts vicariously, readers were invited to explore the creative process, the environments where artists worked, and the private vacations spots where celebrities relaxed during the summer months.

Sports and the sporting life added bright new stars to Russia’s celebrity constellations, which were defined increasingly by new means of individual achievement and expression. This included traditional, aristocratic pursuits, such as hunting and horseracing. Professional horseracing was especially popular, and high-stakes derbies made for particularly dazzling magazine displays, including images of the horses, their riders, and the immense crowds that packed the grandstands, in addition to the

\(^{46}\) Ogonek, no. 8 (23 February [8 March] 1914): cover, 1-3.
spectacular photographic stills of the race. [FIGURE 11.] Other sports like football (soccer) were relatively new to Russia. Nonetheless, these contests often received full-page coverage, even though the Russian teams, playing squads from England and Finland, often found themselves hopelessly outmatched. 47 In 1912, the Olympic games in Stockholm were a glorious visual spectacle despite, again, Russia’s failure to live up to expectations. Images of pole-vaulters flying through the air, wrestlers locked in battle, and parades of athletes marching around the Olympic stadium gave readers a front row seat to the competition. Individual magazines, true to their profile and target audience, focused on different aspects of the Olympics. The more popular Iskry and Ogonek, for example, reported primarily on the football matches and athletic competitions, while Niva highlighted the equestrian events. Marks’s magazines also recognized an opportunity to

47 On one occasion, the final score was Moscow 0 – Finland 4: Iskry, no. 19 (13 May 1912): 150.
educate their audience with a visual history of the Olympics and the artefacts associated with the event. 48

Science, industry, and technology also provided for captivating photo-reportage. In particular, editors offered extensive coverage of various technical and manufacturing exhibitions that linked advances in the fields of science and technology to commerce and the improvement of everyday life. In March 1902, for example, Niva featured a series on the All-Russian Artisanal-Industrial Exhibition. The photographs showed the exteriors of the various pavilions, the elaborate displays inside, and the various household items and luxury commodities on sale. 49 To a certain degree, photo-stories of these exhibitions doubled as a kind of window-shopping. Although intended to highlight the country’s burgeoning manufacturing sector, the photo-reportage linked the achievements of industry specifically to their application to everyday life. Among the commodities on sale, price labels were clearly visible, and though these items were perhaps beyond the finances of most Russians, the opportunity to browse the items allowed the reading public to indulge their imagination in the type of vicarious self-fashioning that accompanies the act of conspicuous consumption. 50

Perhaps the most fascinating by-product of this intersection between the growing culture of consumerism and technological progress was that it created new types of celebrities. In this period, aviators, dirigible pilots, automobile drivers, and motorcyclists

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48 Niva, no. 20 (19 May 1912): 397; Niva, no. 25 (23 June 1912): 501; Sinii zhurnal, no. 27 (29 June 1912): 6-7; Iskry, no. 27 (15 July 1912): 211.


were idolized for their exploits on land and in the air, and large magazine spreads celebrated these occasions with detailed visual accounts of death-defying stunts. [FIGURE 12.] Various aeronautical “firsts” were celebrated, such as the first flight from St. Petersburg to Moscow, and crowds of delirious spectators welcomed successful aerial maneuvers. The careers and achievements of aviators were profiled in detail. Many of them received nicknames, such as A.M. Gaber-Vlyskii who was widely known as “The Russian Devil,” and garnered international attention, travelling abroad to attend air shows and compete in races. 51 Car and motorcycle races from Paris or Berlin to Moscow added an international and a competitive dimension to this type of news coverage. Sporting life was closely connected to industrialization and modernity, and car races and aeronautics reinforced these links. Technology improved daily life with the promise of social

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mobility through consumption, but it also made life more enjoyable, more fun and exciting. The machine, whether an automobile, a carnival ride, or the cinematograph, was a sign of industrial progress and also an instrument of entertainment.

Many other categories of news coverage took advantage of the photograph’s ability to evoke strong emotional reactions from the audience and to produce sweeping visuals. Social documentary photography, in the tradition of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, found a venue in the illustrated press to expose the dark underbelly of Imperial society and to show the victims of disease, unemployment, poverty, and hunger.52 Natural man-made disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, and plagues were captured in panoramic images of cities and their inhabitants struggling to cope amidst the destruction. Grizzly stories of murder, such as the widely publicized trial of Mendel Beilis, offered readers a chance to visit the crime scene, examine evidence, and pass judgment from the comfort of home. Other sensational material of birth defects and mystical experiences found an eager public willing to consume information that sparked the imagination. Altogether, the illustrated press provided a rich visual landscape of information, which allowed ordinary people to construct a portrait of the ‘world outside’ according to their own dreams and experiences.

**Distribution of Magazines**

Consumers wishing to purchase weekly magazines could do so in a variety of ways. The traditional method of acquiring the illustrated press was to subscribe on an annual basis.

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Advertisements in magazines encouraged the public to purchase another year’s worth of issues, by extolling the virtues of the periodical and promising various premiums and extras. The price of an annual subscription varied according to the quality of the publication and the distance from the publishers’ central printing facilities. Home delivery was available for an extra fee. The weekly *Niva*, for example, cost 6.50 rubles in St. Petersburg and 7.50 with delivery within the city limits. In Moscow, the magazine was available at the offices of N. N. Pechovskii for 7.25 rubles or readers could have it delivered for 8 rubles, which was the price for delivery throughout the Empire. The editors also listed a dedicated distribution point in Odessa, namely the bookstore “Education.” *Niva* could also be shipped internationally for 12 rubles per year.\(^{53}\) This price distribution was common to most family journals, including *Rodina*, *Vokrug sveta*, and *Priroda i liudi*, most of which were based in St. Petersburg. Magazines such as *Ogonek* and *Iskry* were considerably cheaper; *Solntse Rossii* was more expensive. The offices of N. N. Pechkovskii, as well as various bookstores in Moscow, seemed to service all competing, out-of-town publications. Larger urban centers outside the two capitals also had dedicated distribution points, usually bookstores, where consumers could purchase magazine or arrange for home delivery.

The two capitals, St. Petersburg and Moscow, were the most important markets for weekly magazines. All the major publishing houses were based in these cities and publishers catered primarily to urban dwellers who resided there. Although publishers endeavored to create content that would appeal to a nation-wide audience, the photographic coverage tended to reflect the news of the city in which the magazine was

\(^{53}\) *Niva*, no. 26 (28 June 1908): 453.
based. *Ogonek*, for example, focused on current events in St. Petersburg, and Sytin’s *Iskry* had a noticeable Moscow bias. Some publishers offered two editions of an illustrated supplement in order to more precisely captured the interests and week’s news of the local population. Mikhail Gorodetskii, the publisher of the daily *Gazeta kopeika*, printed two editions of this newspaper, alongside two editions of the illustrated supplement, *Zhurnal-kopeika*. Based in St. Petersburg, Gorodetskii served as chief editor for all the St. Petersburg material and hired a local, Moscow-based staff to publish the Moscow editions. This ensured that *Zhurnal-kopeika* attracted readers in both cities and could claim to be a local brand.

In addition to being publishing centers, St. Petersburg and Moscow were also distribution hubs, accounting for the majority of Russia’s total bookstores, kiosks, newsstands, and street-peddlers. As magazines were increasingly sold as single issues, rather than by subscription, these distribution sources mushroomed throughout the Empire. In 1906, Moscow was home to 584 officially recognized kiosks. The market in St. Petersburg was comparatively smaller; in 1907 the city had 376 kiosks, plus another 237 additional shops and stalls where merchandise included some printed material.54 These figures presumably rose over the next ten years alongside the parallel expansion of the periodical press and the growing market for print material. At these locations, consumers paid the cover price, which ranged from 1 kopeck (*Zhurnal-kopeika*) to 30 kopecks per issue (*Niva*), instead of committing to an annual subscription. This gave readers more freedom to purchase magazines at their leisure, to sample a wider variety of

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54 Figure quoted in Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 110.
publications, and to tailor the illustrated press (among other media) to their individual reading habits.

In order to reach a national audience, publishers had to find ways to distribute magazines effectively outside the two capitals. In general, provincial cities and towns mirrored the distribution infrastructure of St. Petersburg and Moscow (bookstores, kiosks, newsstands, etc.), though on a much smaller scale. Securing these distribution sites and routes in the provinces was key to ensuring an affordable product and capturing a truly national readership. A. S. Suvorin, the publisher of the daily newspaper *Novoe vremia* (New Times), among other publications, was quite successful in this regard. He managed to acquire the right to sell books, newspapers, and other types of periodicals along Russia’s expanding network of railroads. Suvorin owned and operated nearly 600 kiosks located inside train stations, along 44 of the 60 working railway lines, as well as nearby marinas and health resorts. His was not the only network of kiosks in the provinces, but it was the largest. Mass distribution of this kind allowed magazines to become national brands and made them available throughout the Empire at virtually the same retail price as in St. Petersburg or Moscow.

Readers, Reading Habits, and Other Uses

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56 The editors of *Solntse Rossii* specifically listed two prices, one for city kiosks (10 kopeck, another for “railroad stations” (12 kopecks): *Solntse Rossii*, no. 23 (174) (June 1913), cover. Likewise in 1908, *Ogonek* featured two cover prices for single issues – one for St. Petersburg (5 kopecks), another for the provinces (7 kopecks). By 1910, however, the editors listed one cover price for all regions (5 kopecks).
The act of reading the illustrated press was closely associated with modern ideas about domesticity and leisure. Images of affluence and domestic comfort were used to attract readers. Every cover of *Niva*, for example, featured an illustration of an elegant gentleman reading an issue of the magazine to his wife and child in idyllic, bucolic surroundings. This image reinforced *Niva’s* family-oriented profile, but it also linked the periodical to an aristocratic image of leisure, which was intended for “self-actualization through the arts.”

*Ogonek*, which appealed to a broader swath of the Russian population, also evoked an image of the reader in terms of domestic comfort. In 1914, the editors imagined the typical reader enjoying their publication “after a cigarette, in the warmth and comfort of home.” The idea of reading the illustrated press was thus tied to the fashionable use of tobacco, which also conveyed a sense of freedom and modernity.

Publishers also showed the periodical press being read by various key demographics. During the First World War, for example, the editors included photo-reportage of soldiers reading *Iskry* and *Solntse Rossii*. Reading magazines was thus linked to important historical actors, and the status of partaking in public life or momentous events in Russian history was in turn transferred to the reading public at large.

Although primarily valued as a source of news information, magazines were also valued as consumer objects. These publications and their content were often intended to be used outside the context of the actual issue. Large photographs and other types of illustration in *Iskry* and *Niva*, sometimes printed in color, were made to be removed from

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the magazine’s binding and displayed at home. For example, in 1902, the editors of *Iskry* featured a series of 24 portraits of prominent Russian public figures. Each image, available every two weeks, was printed on high-quality paper and was surrounded by a thick border, which was conducive to framing. 60 The magazine *Niva* offered annual subscribers an intricately designed calendar, reproduced in color, which featured landscapes reflecting the four seasons and took note of Orthodox holidays and saints’ days. Other magazines such as *Solntse Rossii* were created as freestanding objects of art. This publication was a more popular version of art magazines such as *Mir iskusstva* (The World of Art), which was created as an example of the new era in the graphic arts in Russia. 61 Though readers were free to use this magazine as they wished, the premium price and creative designs suggested a publication that was more valuable in tact. Special editions of *Solntse Rossii*, such as the commemorative issue celebrating the tenth anniversary of the State Duma, were printed on high-quality paper, clearly intended for prolonged use, repeated viewings, and safe-keeping as a collector’s item.

The weekly magazine was, in a sense, a gateway into a virtual shopping gallery. A range of commodities accompanied magazines as premiums for annual subscribers. Publishers primarily offered a wide selection of reading material, including complete collections of Russian and world literature, albums of photographs and fine art, children’s books, and other periodicals published by the same company. Illustrated supplements relating to women’s and children’s fashion were especially popular. Family magazines, such as *Niva* and *Vokrug sveta*, both included a monthly eight-page fashion supplement

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60 In fact, the editors offered annual subscribers an “artfully constructed frame” at the end of the year: *Iskry*, no. 1 (5 January 1902): 16.

61 Makhonina, *Istoriia russkoi zhurnalisticiki*, 201.
along with a subscription to the main publication. In Niva, this periodical was called *Parizheskie mody* (Paris Fashions), which included detailed illustrations (lithographs and photographs) of women in long dresses and fancy hats, and written descriptions of seasonal outfits and European fashion trends. [FIGURE 13.] Editors also included sewing patterns with magazines, which were printed on tissue paper and tucked into the binding of the magazines, and contained tailoring instructions and suggestions for fabric and trim. In magazines such as Ogonek and Iskry, fashion trends were occasionally incorporated into the news coverage. Usually illustrations of men and women dressed in the latest fashions appeared in sections near the end of the issue. Sometimes photographs were used to illustrate hairdos, hats, and various other accessories.

Of course, commercial advertisements provided readers with direct access to the outside world of material consumption. Adverts were an essential source of revenue;
between 1908 and 1912, advertisers paid nearly half of Sytin’s expenses. But they were also an important part of the visual landscape of the illustrated press. In *Ogonek*, four or five pages at the back were reserved for commercial purposes: local retailers, manufacturers of toiletries and tobacco, listings for private doctors and clinics, patent medicines and health supplements, cameras and gramophones, public events, financial institutions, book publishers, and various correspondence courses. Full-page illustrations showed sophisticated gentlemen smoking a particular brand of cigarette or Russian peasants selling soap or other hygiene products. Despite the segregation of advertisements, the core content of magazines interacted with these commercial endeavors. A cartoon panel, for example, entitled “‘I was bald’ and the secrets of advertising” humorously exposed deceptive advertising practices. It showed a succession of photographs taken of a man while having his hair cut – full-growth, thin on top, and completely bald – and then the pictures were re-ordered to show how an unnamed elixir promoted growth from baldness to lush coiffure. The journalistic component of the magazine revealed the tricks of advertisers (as well as undermining the objective truth purported by photography), while often featuring ads of similar nature in the very same publication.

Often there was a direct link between the press photography and the commercial endeavors of the magazine. Photo-stories about celebrities, for example, offered topical information, but they also publicized bankable cultural figures. And in the pre-revolutionary period, no celebrity was more bankable or received more attention from

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62 From 1900 to 1914, the percentage of expenses paid by advertisers at the newspaper *Russkoe slovo* was between 24 and 48 per cent: West, *I Shop in Moscow*, 227.

press photographers than Lev Tolstoy. His image was seemingly ubiquitous. Every anniversary and career landmark was commemorated with extensive photographic coverage. In 1910, the writer’s death produced an immense amount of photo-reportage; pictures of Tolstoy’s past, his family and friends, and his life at Iasnaia Poliana appeared alongside more current news images of his funeral and of various commemorations throughout Russia. At the same time, this coverage presented publishers and advertisers the opportunity to capitalize on this exposure. *Solntse Rossii*, for example, pushed Tolstoy-related premiums, including his collected works and several art albums, such as “Lev Tolstoy as Illustrated by Russian Artists.” The advertising sections also revealed an array of Tolstoy-centered vendors and products. The Gramophone Company, for example, sold records and record players under the headline “save the immortal voice of Lev Tolstoy.” Another retailer hawked life-sized busts of the late writer. Photographic news about celebrities was an important component in a larger commercial enterprise meant to bring exposure to artists and their work, but it also helped merchants to sell commodities. Magazines captured a portrait of Russia – of people, places, lifestyles and fancy things – that encouraged ordinary readers to buy into this world ideologically and materially.

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64 *Solntse Rossii*, no. 2 (42) (November 1910): 10.

CHAPTER THREE

PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS

In 1901, an article in the journal Fotograficheskoe obozrenie introduced Russia to the newest profession in photography: the photo-reporter. According to the author, improvements in camera and print technology allowed these photographers to capture an “illustrated history of the day’s remarkable events” within 48 hours of their occurrence. Russian press photographers worked independently, free from the restrictions and benefits of collective organization, by contrast to France, where the profession was unionized. The article then painted a heroic portrait of the modern war photographer. Unlike newspaper writers, who stayed safely out of harm’s way, press photographers faced dangers alongside soldiers on the front lines. They thrust themselves into the battlefield, where they aimed “the peaceful camera lens” at the “devastating muzzles” of enemy rifles. These photo-correspondents, the writer concluded, displayed the “best qualities that can be attributed to man,” namely courage, independence, stamina, presence of mind, and a sense of duty.¹

But few photographers in Russia cultivated this heroic image of the photo-reporter at the turn of the century. In general, magazine editors relied on a network of prominent, and significantly less swashbuckling, studio photographers to produce the

¹ “Novye fotograficheskie professii: Reportery i naturshchiki,” Fotograficheskoe obozrenie, no. 6 (April 1901): 231-2.
weekly photo-reportage. Based primarily in St. Petersburg and Moscow, these studio professionals possessed the artistic taste and technical ability to take pictures; they owned the equipment to develop film plates and produce paper prints; and most importantly, they had the social connections to capture the sort of images of people and places that publishers wanted to feature in magazines. The studio was the hub of all photographic activity in this period, including production, distribution, and professional training.

Apprentices studied with master photographers, at first running errands, building film plates, and mixing chemical baths, before graduating to the portrait studio where they learned about the camera, lenses, lighting, and photographic staging. Due to the length and complexity of this training, photography tended to be a family affair. Fathers worked closely with sons. Eldest sons typically inherited the studio and shared the workload with a younger brother. Wives and daughters also participated in the business, usually running the finances. However, it was not uncommon for husbands and wives to work alongside each other.² Women also owned and operated studios on their own. Ustin’ia I. Ritter, for example, not only opened two studios, but also ventured out into the city and started to take pictures of the news for Ivan Sytin’s Iskry in its formative years.³

United by common training and technical knowledge, studio professionals developed specializations and contacts, which brought them distinction. The camera was a tool that allowed photographers the opportunity to “photograph valorised objects” and

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² In Moscow, for example, Vasili G. Chekhovskii and Evdokiia P. Chekhovskaia were the most prominent husband and wife team at the turn of the century.

The status of studio photographers was thus linked directly to their patrons. Having a famous clientele allowed them to attract customers who wished to participate, however symbolically, in a distinguished social milieu. Photographers even publicized these social connections on the cardboard backings (blanki) of portraits and other types of pictures. Karl Bulla, for example, made known his professional relationship with the king of Italy and the royal family of Persia. [FIGURE. 14.] He also listed galleries, museums, and other prestigious institutions, such as the Imperial Public Library and the Imperial Russian Fireman’s Society, which indicated his connection to specific valorised objects. These objects, in turn, informed photographers’ adopted professional identity. Expeditionary and military photographers, who travelled widely and took topographical pictures, saw themselves as explorers. Art photographers, who pursued photography as a creative medium, identified as artists. And the first generation of Russian press photographers, who took pictures of the local news, cultivated

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a specialization in journalism. As readers demanded more information on current events, pictures of the news became increasingly valorised, which in turn made journalism a profession of great prestige.

In addition, technological innovation in photography and publishing encouraged photographers to leave the studio and to start taking pictures of the news outside. The widespread adoption of halftone created an increased demand for photography in the periodical press, as well as with book, postcard, and stereograph publishers. At the same time, new camera and film-plate technology placed the production of photography into the hands of a growing number of ordinary, middle class Russians. Cameras became smaller, more durable, and easier to use. Improved lenses and faster film stock ensured a high-quality image at an affordable price. In 1902, for example, Kodak sold a folding camera with an anastigmatic lens and automatic shutter for 150 rubles. A few years later, however, similar cameras were available for much less, between 26 and 2.50 rubles, depending on the model. These improvements made it easier for press photographers to capture news images of city life inconspicuously. But more importantly, cheaper cameras encouraged ordinary people to take pictures for themselves rather than relying on the services of a studio-based professional. Thus, not only did a new market for photo-reportage emerge, but also studio photographers experienced a drop in business due to increased activity among everyday amateurs. After decades of steady growth, the number of studio professionals in provincial and urban areas began to decline.  

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7 Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 10 (October 1901).  
8 Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 1 (January 1905); Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 9 (September 1905).  
9 A. Iu. Saran, Istoriia professional’noi fotografii v Orlovskoi gubernii (1855-1928 gg.) (Orel: OrelGAU, 2007), 79.
Capital Press Photographers

One or two local photographers worked closely with the editorial staff of a given weekly magazine. Editors provided these correspondents with general instruction and specific assignments, as well as official press credentials, via local government, which allowed them to take pictures in the city and its surrounding regions. These photographers typically captured a series of news images, developed the negatives, and then printed several positive copies. The magazine then either purchased the negative, and thus the exclusive rights to the particular image, or the positive print, which allowed the photographer to sell the image to several other publications. Those photographers who operated a portrait studio were also free to sell news images directly to the public. In addition to drawing on local talent, editors also maintained working relationships with several photographers in other cities. For example, the editors of the Moscow-based Iskry relied on correspondents in St. Petersburg to provide the magazine with images, usually positive prints, from the imperial capital on request. Urban centres in the provinces had a smaller pool of professional photographers from which to draw on. Editors thus tended to rely on one, sometimes two local photographers for all the news from those more remote locations. For example, the studio photographer Maksim P. Dmitriev supplied most of the news images from his home base, Nizhnii Novgorod.

10 Rossiiskii gosudarstvenyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI) f. 595 (Editorial Papers of Russkoe slovo) op. 1, ed. khr. 22, l. 30 (letter to the Moscow Committee for Print, no later than 9 September 1917).
11 For example: Iskry, no. 43 (2 November 1903): 342-43.
The logistics of photo-correspondence meant that press photography from the two capitals was more likely to be up-to-date. Pictures taken outside of St. Petersburg and Moscow were either delivered in person or through the mail. Long delay was unavoidable. These images thus tended to be more generic, chronicling expeditions, exotic locations, and everyday life in remote regions of the Empire. They were general human-interest stories as opposed to current events, whose meaning and importance was largely tied to timely reporting. Pictures bought from photographers outside of Russia or through international photo-agencies were often out-of-date. During the Russo-Japanese War, images of front line activities from mid June appeared in *Iskry* in early September.\(^{12}\) The travel time by railroad between the Far East and the publishing houses in western Russia ensured a delay of two or three weeks at minimum. In this case, daily newspapers were more reliable sources for up-to-date facts; the illustrated press, by contrast, offered a spectacular visual album of the news after the fact. These images were less topical reports and more commemorative re-dramatizations of events, which already existed in the public’s historical imagination.

St. Petersburg was the centre of photography in pre-revolutionary Russia. At the turn of the century, the main stretch of Nevskii Prospekt, the central commercial artery, was home to twenty photography studios, which accounted for roughly one-fifth of the city’s total.\(^{13}\) Several of the studio photographers who set up shop along this boulevard, including Karl K. Bulla, Aleksandr O. Drankov, and Adol’f I. Denier also contributed to the illustrated press. More prolific, however, were the full-time photo-reporters who

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worked exclusively with magazine editors and publishers of postcards and stereographs. Based in Russia’s political and cultural heart, these press photographers supplied the illustrated press and the public with pictures of the imperial capital.

The photo-reportage of Petr A. Otsup was perhaps the most widely circulated in pre-revolutionary Russia. Otsup was born in St. Petersburg, but grew up in Pskov among relatives after the death of his mother. His two older brothers, Iosif and Aleksandr, had already started apprenticeships in photography, and at the age of nine, Petr would return to St. Petersburg and work under the well regarded studio photographer, Aleksandr A. Elkin. For five years Petr studied all aspects of the craft, everything from the preliminary cleaning of equipment to the final retouching of finished prints. Elkin’s name carried weight in the city and after completing his official training, Petr easily found work at a portrait studio, at which point he also began to pursue photo-reportage independently. In 1900, Otsup became the staff photographer for Stanislav Propper’s newly launched periodical *Ogonek*. During the Russo-Japanese War, he was also hired by the government periodical *Letopis’ voiny s Iaponiei* (Chronicle of the War with Japan). Upon his return from the war zone, Otsup settled into his role as staff photographer and successfully made photo-reportage his primary means of income. Both of Petr’s brothers contributed to the illustrated press as well, however they focused primarily on their fashionable portrait studio on Nevskii Prospekt. Like many pre-revolutionary press photographers,

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14 On St. Petersburg’s Jewish community, see Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), chap. 3.

they subsidized their reporting with studio work. Petr Otsup, by contrast, managed to stay financially afloat by photo-reportage alone.

Another prominent press photographer in St. Petersburg was Iakov V. Shteinberg. His career in photo-reportage also started around 1900, but his pictures only began to appear in magazines (credited officially to “Ia. V. Shteinberg”) after 1913. This roughly marked the date of his appointment as staff photographer to Solntse Rossii. Working in the city, and occasionally on assignment in the provinces, Shteinberg established his reputation during the First World War and the Revolution. In 1917, his pictures of soldiers, demonstrators, and acts of iconoclasm throughout the imperial capital captured the street-level perspective of the revolt in February. Many of these photographs became iconic images in the Soviet period. Shteinberg’s famous picture of soldiers posing alongside an automobile, for instance, was originally published in Ogonek, Niva, and
Iskry.\textsuperscript{16} It belonged to a series of images that chronicled the uprising, all of which were also widely available in postcard form. In the Soviet Union, these photographs were reproduced in history books, photographic exhibitions, and commemorations of 1917. They remain to this day some of the signature images of the February Revolution.\textsuperscript{17}

The city of Moscow had fewer photography studios and press photographers than St. Petersburg and also had a smaller market for photo-reportage. Initially, a handful of photographers worked part-time for Ivan Sytin at Iskry. This included Ustin’ia Ritter and Mikhail Gribov, both of whom covered Moscow in the years leading up to the Russo-Japanese War. The magazine eventually hired a regular staff photographer, namely Sergei G. Smirnov. Beyond his many contributions to the illustrated press before the First World War, little is known about the life and career of Smirnov. He took pictures for Iskry in the mid-1900s and continued to provide pictures for several publications until 1912. Around this time, however, he was replaced at Iskry by Aleksei I. Savel’ev who remained at the post until the magazine’s closure in December 1917.

Savel’ev was born in 1883 to poor peasants living just outside of Moscow. At the age of sixteen, he moved into the city proper where he managed to secure an apprenticeship at the Gribov studio (owned and operated by Iskry’s former photo-reporter Mikhail and his brother Iosif). Having half-completed his training, Savel’ev found work at Sytin’s publishing house, where he continued to study photography in his spare time,

\textsuperscript{16} Ogonek, no. 10 (19 March [1 April] 1917): 12; Niva, no. 12 (25 March 1917): 177; Iskry, no. 11 (19 March 1917): 82.

\textsuperscript{17} For example, see Rex A. Wade, The Russian Revolution, 1917, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 38, 41.
using all his earned income on cameras and various photographic accessories. An exceptional autodidact, Savel’ev mastered the technical aspects of his craft, learning about chemistry and new approaches to colour photography, and he even picked up both the English and German languages. In 1908, his pictures began to appear in Iskry, as well as other publications with national readerships. At the time, the older and more experienced Smirnov was the magazine’s preferred staff photographer, but the two worked together until Savel’ev inherited the role. Their pictures dominated the news coverage in Iskry during the publication’s lifespan. Smirnov and Savel’ev were also responsible for the vast majority of pictures of Moscow news events to appear in St. Petersburg publications. Together, they defined the photographic news coverage from Moscow in the late Imperial era.

The Bulla Dynasty

No name appeared more often below press photography in magazines than “K.K. Bulla.” Regarded widely as the father of photojournalism in Russia, Karl Bulla was the most prolific photo-reporter in the late Imperial era. He was also the founder of a dynasty of press photographers who worked long into the Soviet period. His two sons, Aleksandr and Viktor, followed in their father’s footsteps and established reputations, independent of Karl, as important contributors to photo-reportage in Tsarist and Soviet Russia.

Karl Bulla’s rise to prominence was, at once, exceptional and wholly typical of the era. Like many photographers in Russia, Bulla was a foreigner, originally born in

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Prussia. At the age of ten, he moved to St. Petersburg and found work as a laboratory assistant at the Duinant Company, which manufactured and sold a wide range of photographic equipment. The young Bulla ran errands, prepared film plates, and eventually apprenticed at the small portrait studio next door. Having completed his training, he opened a studio and built up a large clientele of middle class merchants and professionals. Though a skilled craftsmen, Bulla established a reputation for his easy-going relationship with his subjects. This emotional rapport translated to the portraits, which were admired for their naturalism. In the mid-1880s, Bulla ventured increasingly outside the studio and started to document historical events and everyday life in St.

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20 V. A. Nikitin, Rasskazy o fotografiakh i fotografiiakh (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1991), 74.
Petersburg with his camera. Sold as postcards and stereographs, these images of city squares, canals, cathedrals, and elegant palaces, and especially his panoramic photographs of Nevskii Prospekt bustling with commercial activity, were immensely popular. The “short and nimble man in a bowler hat” with an enormous camera “the size of a street-organ hanging around his neck” was seemingly ubiquitous, always present at important civic events in the Imperial capital. [FIGURE. 16.] The historian and writer Vladimir A. Nikitin estimates that at the end of the 19th century, Karl Bulla likely produced every second picture of St. Petersburg. 21

Around 1900, Bulla started to chronicle everyday life for magazine publishers. The first magazines to print photographs, such as Iskry, Ogonek, and Niva, offered the already prominent studio photographer an immense opportunity to expand his audience further. Bulla opened a new studio at 54 Nevskii Prospekt, right across from the Public Library and in the commercial heart of the city. Hundreds of customers were drawn to this location, largely because of Bulla’s association with the illustrated press. 22 He split his time between photo-reportage and portraiture, and operated his studios with the help of his two sons, Aleksandr and Viktor. Although the elder Bulla worked tirelessly in the streets, his sons and other assistants increasingly produced many of the pictures that were credited to “K.K. Bulla” on the magazine page. During the 1910s, Bulla also purchased news images from photographers not directly under his employ. In advertisements, he offered to buy pictures from all over the Empire. Photographers were asked to assign a price to a photograph and send the negative to his Nevskii studio for an initial inspection.

21 Ibid., 75, 84.
22 Ibid., 79.
If purchased, the photographer then agreed to give full ownership of the negative and subsequent prints to Bulla operation. Bulla had, in essence, created Russia’s first photographic agency. He produced photographs on his own, compiled the pictures taken by his sons and associates, and also gathered photographs from outside sources. He then offered this image archive to publishers of magazines, books, postcards, and anyone else who was interested.

The career of Aleksandr Bulla, Karl’s older son, was closely connected with his father’s studio work and photo-reportage. After a brief apprenticeship in the family studio, Aleksandr travelled to Germany where he received formal training in portrait photography. He gravitated particularly to the studio environment, and when he returned home Aleksandr chose to work in his father’s portrait studio. But in the 1910s, he also joined the ageing Karl on regular journalistic expeditions and eventually grew into an accomplished photo-reporter himself, publishing images of the news, most notably, for Solntse Rossii. In fact, during the First World War, Aleksandr, who ventured outside St. Petersburg extensively, often near the front lines, produced the majority of the photo-reportage in this magazine. Even in the chaos of war, his pictures retained the painterly qualities that were characteristic of extensive studio training; they were always carefully composed and emotionally compelling portraits. His deliberate artistry perfectly suited the elevated aesthetics of Solntse Rossii.

Viktor, by contrast, pursued photo-reportage from an early age. As a boy, he often accompanied his father on expeditions whenever possible. Viktor trained in his father’s studio, but he quickly abandoned “photography under the glass ceiling” in preference to

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23 Fotograficheskie novosti, no. 12 (December 1912): advertisement.
photo-reportage, which allowed him to capture “life and its various events.”\textsuperscript{24} Recognizing his son’s interest, Karl arranged for the 19 year-old Viktor to travel in 1904 to the Far East. There, stationed with a detachment of the Red Cross, he covered the Russo-Japanese War for the illustrated press. His images of the conflict appeared in magazines and books, as well as on postcards and stereographs, sold to benefit the work of the Red Cross. Two years later, Viktor returned home a hardened and experienced war photographer in the modern sense – equal parts photographer, journalist, and soldier. He worked at the family studio on Nevskii Prospekt, while also contributing photo-reportage to \textit{Ogonek} under his own name. This included a famous series of photographs taken of Lev Tolstoy, his family, and life at Iasnaia Poliana. The editors dedicated an entire issue to this series of iconic pictures, which appeared alongside an article about the writer and selected letters by Tolstoy, including a few reproductions of his handwriting.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1909, Viktor Bulla temporarily abandoned photo-reportage in order to pursue cinematography in France and England. Upon his return, he founded the Appolon film company and produced a series of newsreel films.\textsuperscript{26} At almost every level, the film industry in Russia was inextricably linked to photography. Early filmmakers read the same trade journals, purchased equipment from the same manufacturers, and often shared personnel. In fact, Viktor was one of many photographers who started out as photo-

\textsuperscript{24} V. Bulla, “Iz vospominanii starogo fotoreportera,” \textit{Sovetskoe foto}, no. 11 (October 1937): 11.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ogonek}, no. 33 (17 August [30 September] 1908).

\textsuperscript{26} For descriptions of Viktor Bulla’s newsreels, see V. N. Batalin, \textit{Kinokhronika v Rossii, 1896-1916: Opis’ kinos’emok, khraniashchikhsia v RGAKFD} (Moscow: Olma-press, 2002); also see S. Ginzberg, \textit{Kinematografiia dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii}. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), 52-53.
reporters and then became cameramen and filmmakers. The studio photographer Aleksandr O. Drankov, for example, owned and operated Russia’s first cinematographic factory and collaborated with Viktor Bulla on a number of newsreel projects. Another photographer-turned-cameraman was Petr Novitskii who maintained an active interest in both newsreel and photo-reportage throughout his career. Karl Bulla too was adapting to the shifting media environment. In addition to offering photographic services, he began to advertise “new products” for filmmaking in the cinematographic press. In the end, newsreel proved wholly unprofitable for Viktor and his production company was forced to merge with the much larger Prodafilm, known for making film adaptations of Russian classics. In 1914, Viktor returned to studio photography, applying for permission to open a pavilion on Nevskii Prospekt, which was promptly granted.

The Bulla family contributed widely to Russian magazines throughout the First World War and during the 1917 Revolution. In this period, Karl and his many assistants produced most of the visual news coverage from St. Petersburg, and Aleksandr was the primary correspondent for Solntse Rossii. Aleksandr’s work concentrated on the aftermath of the war in the countryside; he took pictures of refugees, damaged property, and burning villages, as well as the movements of the Russian army. With the editors of Solntse Rossii, he offered a particularly intimate portrait of the suffering of refugees on the road; this magazine, and Aleksandr’s photos, produced an emotionally compelling narrative of the casualties of war. The work of Viktor Bulla appeared infrequently in

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28 Kinemo, no. 10 (15 July 1909): 10.

magazine during the war. However, he took perhaps the most famous image of the Revolution. Taken from the roof of the Passazh department store, his photograph of the dispersal of demonstrators on Nevskii Prospekt became an icon of the July Days. [see FIGURE. 3.] Initially censored, the image eventually appeared (anonymously) in Solntse Rossii on a large two-page spread. It later reached the international press and the editors of Iskry used it in October to implicate the Bolsheviks in the July Days massacre. 30 Capturing the panic of the demonstrators, this picture exemplified what would become the photojournalistic norm, which aimed to create “highly dramatic, compositionally arresting, and instantly legible fragments of larger situations.” 31

Art Photographers, Specialist Photographers

Studio photographers working in other areas also contributed to the illustrated press. These photographers were not, strictly speaking, photo-reporters; they did not cover a large spectrum of subjects and topical news stories on a daily basis. Some of them, for example, identified as artists. They approached photography as a personal creative endeavour or as a visual art within the greater, Russian tradition of fine art.

Portraits in magazines were often the work of art photographers. The portraits of Moisei S. Nappel’baum, Nikolai I. Svishchev, and Miron A. Sherling represented the most prominent intersection between the world of photo-reportage and the world of Russian art photography. All three photographers were sympathetic to Pictorialist and

30 Solntse Rossii, no. 381-23 (1917): 8-9; also see Iskry, no. 41 (22 October 1917): 326.

impressionistic tendencies in photography, which challenged the prevailing documentary techniques in Russia. These “Alluzionists,” as they were known in Russia, worked to convey the individuality of the creative artist through their portraits. They used rough matte paper, bromoil printing techniques, and various methods of direct manipulation to create a dramatic and diffuse image, which was often criticized for being “muddy.” The work of Nappen’baum and Sherling best exemplified these methods. Throughout the pre-revolutionary era, editors published their portraits of prominent cultural figures, such as Leonid N. Andreev and Fedor I. Shaliapin. Actors posed theatrically in costume, and the dramatic visual style of these Alluzionist photographers augmented the emotional tenor conveyed by the performer. In 1917, the editors of Solntse Rossii published a series of portraits by both Nappel’baum and Sherling in honour of the main protagonists of the February Revolution. This included politicians, such as Aleksandr Kerenskii, but also less prominent figures like Timofei Kirichnikov, an infantryman who had been awarded the St. George cross. [FIGURE. 17.] Although portraits were common in the illustrated press,

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32 See Barkhatova, 56-59; on Sherling, see A. P. Popov, Iz istorii rossiiskoi fotografii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2010), 192-200.

33 S. Prokudin-Gorskii, editorial in Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 7 (1908): 204.
Nappelbaum’s portraits were reserved for the cultural and political elite. His pictures distinguished the subject from the crowd and thus signalled the special status of the person portrayed.

Art photographers usually displayed work at international competitions, local exhibitions, and in photography journals, such as Fotograf-liubitel’ and Vestnik fotografii. Once in a while, however, picturesque landscapes by artists complemented the photo-reportage and the magazine’s traditional art content. Early issues of Iskry, for example, published “original pictures” taken by Aleksei Mazurin, an amateur photographer and leading member of the Moscow Society of Artistic Photography. Much like the “original drawings” published regularly in magazines, these photographs focused on traditional compositions and subject matter, often capturing the “poetic moods of nature.”

[FIGURE. 18.] Country landscapes, snow-covered forests, and farmers ploughing fields – these were typical examples of art photography in the illustrated press. Although in basic

34 For a brief discussion on the traditional school of Russian photography, see Elena Barkhatova, “Pictorialism: Photography as Art,” in Photography in Russia, 1840-1940, ed. David Elliott (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 51-60.

visual terms, these pictures resembled the news images that featured in *Iskry* around the same time, Mazurin’s pictures were framed as art, with a title and artist credited below, rather than as photo-reportage. Often these works were referred to as “photo-etudes.” This label distinguished the photos with artistic intentions from the other types of pictures, taken in the photojournalistic mode. But over time, art photographers eschewed the bucolic subject matter and the traditional methods of Aleksei Mazurin and his contemporaries. In *Solntse Rossii*, photo-etudes started to reflect sporting events and city life; they increasingly resembled the artistic photo-reportage that defined the visual profile of this publication. In a sense, as the reporting became more artistic, the art photography embraced the stylistic trademarks of photo-reportage.

Editors also relied on specialists, that is, photographers with a specific technical specialty or with access to a particular social milieu. This included photographers with knowledge of microphotography, astrophotography, expeditionary photography, or colour photography, as well as photographers who specialised in photography of art or in publicity images for stage and screen. The Moscow studio photographer Karl A. Fisher, for example, contributed many pictures to the illustrated press, but only in relation to the Moscow dramatic stage.\(^{36}\) In fact, his official title was photographer to the Imperial Theatres, and during the pre-revolutionary era he provided almost all the coverage of the actors and performances at the Maly, Bolshoi, and Moscow Art Theatres.\(^{37}\) Although a fairly narrow specialization, in magazines his pictures appeared quite frequently. The editors of *Iskry* took advantage of the magazine’s width and dedicated two-page spreads

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\(^{36}\) For Karl Fisher’s studio career and artistic activities, see Shipova, *Fotografy Moskvy*, 236-246.

to recap a single theatrical or operatic production photographed by Fisher. This included close ups of actors and panoramic shots of the stage – a perspective that recreated the audience’s point of view. Fisher’s coverage of the Moscow Art Theatre’s production of Ostrovskii’s *Even a Wise Man Stumbles* was particularly grand, featuring a number of set changes, close-ups of dramatic encounters on stage, and captions that transcribed the accompanying dialogue from the play [FIGURE. 19.].

Several studio photographers enjoyed the patronage of the imperial family. Although press photographers regularly caught the Tsar in his official capacity, welcoming dignitaries and commemorating historic anniversaries, the official portraits and private lives of the royals, disseminated throughout the illustrated press, were taken

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by a select number of photographers in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and an even smaller
group of official court photographers. For example, on 8 May 1904 Mikhail Gribov
entertained Nicholas and Aleksandra, among other royals, at his studio. 39 In 1911, the
famous studio “Boissons and Eggler” produced a series of images that appeared in Niva,
in addition to being sold as cabinet cards for framing.40

The Romanovs also employed an official court photographer. Since the invention
of the medium, this title was bestowed on only five individuals. During the reign of
Nicholas II, the honour belonged to the photographic firm K. E. von Gan & Co., which
was based in Tsarskoe Selo, near the imperial summer residence. From 1897 the firm was
co-owned by Vanda I. Zael’ksaia and the photographer Aleksandr K. Iagel’skii. While
Zael’ksaia ran the business end of the operation, Iagel’skii was responsible for taking
pictures, and in 1911 he was named the “official photographer to His Imperial Highness.”
According to Iagel’skii, the court photographer was responsible for capturing “the most
important moments which happened to His Highness, wherever they occur, here or
abroad.” 41 Every year, he took between 1500 and 2000 pictures of the imperial family,
many of which were reproduced in popular magazines. But Iagel’skii was more than just
the official publicist of the imperial family; he was also the family’s personal
photographer, which encompassed duties beyond simply chronicling the life of the
Romanov family. He taught the imperial children how to take pictures, offered instruction
to the Tsar, and captured family photos intended only for private use. Iagel’skii was the

39 Popov, Iz istorii, 172.

40 Niva, no. 51 (17 December 1911): 957-9.

41 Quoted in Popov, Iz istorii, 165.
last official court photographer. After the fall of the Romanovs, the firm K.E. von Gan & Co continued to work out of Tsarskoe Selo, taking pictures of the new civilian-led regime.

*Everyday Amateur Photographers*

Ordinary middle class photographers received no technical or artistic training. Snapshot cameras, like Kodak’s “Brownie” models, required almost no special technical knowledge to operate. However, manufacturers and entrepreneurs provided a wide range of instruction manuals, correspondence course, and several periodicals for more committed amateur practitioners. This literature tutored the reader in the basics of camera operations, and also provided advise on composition and directed amateurs towards appropriate subject matter.

Firms that manufactured and sold camera equipment published monthly periodicals, which combined genuine pedagogical aims with an overtly commercial agenda. The magazine *Liubitel’ kodakist* (Kodak Amateur), for example, used photographs taken in exotic locations to persuade the reader of the quality and durability of Kodak’s merchandise. Local distributors adopted similar strategies. The entrepreneur Ioakhim Steffen, who owned a chain of photographic supply stores, published the

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42 Ibid., 166.

monthly *Fotograficheskie novosti*. This journal featured advice and short essays for amateurs, but also formulae, tables, and technical schematics for more advanced practitioners. Like Kodak, Steffen used photographs to promote particular brands of equipment, the captions underneath informing the reader what camera or lens was used to produce the image (“picture and reproduction with Zeiss lens”). Each issue also contained a large section for advertising that directed readers to Steffen’s warehouses and other locations where the featured items could be purchased.

Everyday middle class photography focused primarily on family, friends, and social activities, such as weddings and vacations. Camera manufacturers, well attuned to this social dimension of photography, tailored their advertising around these tendencies. Kodak, for example, reinforced the family function of photography with illustrations of husbands and wives, mothers and children, and grandchildren and grandparents. Women were specifically targeted in advertising, especially mothers who were anointed by Kodak as the official chroniclers of family life. Amateur photography was also associated with youth, adventure, and leisure time. The most common visual trope in advertisements was a young woman, standing by the seaside or in a wide-open field, with an elegant, handheld camera by her side.

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44 Many photography journals had similar profiles. For example, the firm F. Iokhim & Co. published *Fotograficheskii listok*, which directed consumers to Iokhim’s stores. Kodak also published *Professional-fotograf*, which despite its name catered to a popular audience. Also included in this category of periodical was *Visa Rossiia*, published by K. I. Frelandt, who owned a factory that produced photographic plates in Moscow.

45 *Fotograficheskie novosti*, no. 12 (December 1908), “free insert from issue 12 of *FN*.”

46 Bourdieu, *Photography*, 19, 94.

These types of consumers were urged to take pictures everywhere, especially on vacation where photos commemorated the experience of travel and its associations of wealth and worldliness. Tourism at home or abroad allowed the middle classes to form an identity around aristocratic values of leisure and refinement, and photography was the means to control, affix, and communicate this identity. 48 Even modest trips, such as bicycle tours through the countryside, were worth capturing on film. Special publications offered instruction on how to plan and equip such vacations and explained how photography would “preserve memories,” which could then be “sent to relatives, friends, and acquaintances.” 49 Whether in advertisements or in pedagogical literature, the message was always the same: with a click of the button, photographers could record their happy memories for friends to covet and future generations to admire.

Amateur practice also extended beyond the realm of the family to include whatever interested the photographer. As cameras became more commonplace, and photography more affordable, a wider selection of images was considered worth capturing on film (‘photographable’). Like press photographers, everyday amateurs took pictures of natural disasters, historic events, and everyday life in the city. They also took pictures of subjects valued for artistic reasons alone, such as flowers, cloud formations, and picturesque landscapes. 50 Cartoonists working for Ogonek satirized the public’s seemingly insatiable desire to photograph everything and anything. One sketch showed a


50 N. Ermilov gave precise instructions how to take pictures successfully of such objects for “artistic landscapes;” see N. Ermilov, Kak fotografirovat’ oblaka, vodu, volny, buriu, molniu, protiv solntsa, lunyye vidy (St. Petersburg: S. L. Knid, 1908).
group of Muscovites eagerly training their cameras up at the sky, hoping to capture a plane as it flew by. 51 Another featured tourists at the beach crowding around a bodybuilder with their cameras. The caption snidely remarked how every event, no matter how insignificant, required one to always “take a picture, and then another, and then another.” 52

Middle class amateurs, and professional photographers more generally, soon acquired a negative reputation in the popular media. Amateurs were portrayed as hunters who preyed rapaciously on their subjects. In one cartoon titled “The Ardent Lover of Photography,” a man elects to photograph a tiger mauling his friend rather than shoot the beast with a nearby rifle – “just hold still for one moment,” the photographer asks. 53

Writers in photography journals also voiced concerns about photographers encroaching on the privacy of everyday citizens. The popular Vsia Rossiia jokingly posited that due to the “dissemination of photography” lovers could no longer share in an intimate moment without instantly being surrounding by photographers. 54 Press photographers were also implicated in this regard. The editors of Ogonek took note of how celebrities, such as Lev Tolstoy or the stage actor Konstanin A. Varlamov were subjected to constant attention from photographers, who hounded them like modern-day paparazzi. 55

Although in this case the caricature was aimed primarily at professionals (Karl Bulla is

53 Vsia Rossiia, no. 2 (February 1905): 60.
54 Vsia Rossiia, no. 4 (April 1905): 112.
Летний отдых Л. Н. Толстого.
Оригинальные рисунки Пьеро для журнала "Огонек".

Вечером. Многие фотографы собрались на месте, но время подходило к концу. Л. Н. Николаевич, как всегда, продолжал работать с изображениями.

При отъезде к нам приехали, чтобы сфотографировать, как в доме Л. Н. Толстого. Они фотографировали, как курильщик, каковарь, как кухарка.

Увидев в комнате двух курильщиков, Л. Н. Николаевич сначала смеялся, а потом сказал:
— Подай табак, моя беда!

И, улыбаясь, ушел, смотря в сторону.

Лист вечером, когда все слушали рассказ, изображение Л. Н. Толстого неожиданно стало видимым. Л. Н. пропылал дым, смотря на свою печь, и, наконец, успокоившись, ушел, оставив печь и все вокруг в тишине.
distinctly represented), amateur photographers were also complicit in a culture that needed to document every moment with a camera.

Contributions made by everyday amateurs offered magazine editors an unprecedented volume and range of photo-reportage. Furthermore, many amateurs submitted news images for free, and like in the West, pictures supplied by amateurs provided editors a cheap way of filling magazines with pictures.\(^ {56}\) In truth, it is difficult to estimate what percentage of photo-reportage in, say, *Ogonek* was actually produced by amateurs, especially before the war when most pictures were explicitly credited to a professional. However, the editors of *Ogonek* printed advertisements on a regular basis that called on amateurs to send photos of “local scenes from everyday life,” including “holiday entertainment, festivals, and games” and “distinctive local customs of all nationalities residing in Russia.”\(^ {57}\) They were asked to send prints directly to the publication with the name and address of the photographer and a short description of the image, which would serve as the picture’s caption. During the war, editors continued to solicit the public for pictures relating to the war. The editors of *Ogonek*, for example, commemorated the “heroes and victims” of the war in a regular section made up of pictures submitted by the public.\(^ {58}\) Also, in this period, pictures of the war were regularly credited to “our special correspondent” rather to a named individual. Many of these were likely amateur contributions. Given publishers careless approach to authorship and


\(^{57}\) These advertisements appeared regularly, for example: *Ogonek*, no. 2 (9 [22] January 1910): 21; *Ogonek*, no. 10 (10 [23] March 1913): 2

copyright, it is difficult to determine the exact volume of pictures in the illustrated press produced by non-professionals.

Credit and Photographic Copyright

Photographers usually received credit in the by-line above or below the news image. Some photographs were published anonymously; they were printed without recognition or with reference to “our special correspondent.” Editors placed a high value on the magazine’s access to ‘their own’ network of photographers in the field. The impression of a wide professional network was repeated in subscription drives, especially during the First World War. However, using the photographer’s name brought prestige to a magazine. The fame of Karl Bulla, for example, reflected well on the publications, while, in turn, providing the photographer (and his studio) with nationwide exposure. But editors were not always vigilant about precise attributions, and often the same image was credited to a specific photographer in one magazine and to an anonymous “special” correspondent in another.

Editors’ failure to acknowledge press photographers in print stemmed from a long-standing debate about photographic copyright in Russia. In the 19th century, publishers had often used pictures with the permission of their creators. In the 1880s, Aleksei Mazurin, for example, accused Niva, of publishing a photo without credit or

59 Ogonek had “photo-correspondents in all the main world centres” and “on all fronts:” Ogonek, no. 51 (21 December [3 January] 1914): 20. Sinii zhurnal claimed to have correspondents in all “corners of Russia, as well as the major world centers,” Sinii zhurnal, no. 48 (25 November 1916): 16.
In another case, Maksim Dmitriev sued the publisher Ivan Sytin over an album of pictures reproduced and sold without the photographer’s permission. In court, Sytin claimed that Dmitriev had no artistic rights because “photography requires no particular talent” and “the only artist involved is the sun.” At the heart of the discussion regarding photographic copyright was the question of whether photography was a creative endeavor or merely a mechanical process.

This issue also divided Russia’s photographic community. Professional and amateur art photographers both desired to have legal protection over their creative property. But intellectual disagreements over the essential function and artistic status of photography, that is, regarding the nature of the medium, threatened to undermine those lobbying for copyright laws. Sergei M. Prokudin-Gorskii, the documentary photographer and editor of Fotograf-liubitel’, argued that the goal of photography was to create a seemingly unmediated representation of nature. This technique ostensibly masked or effaced the efforts of the creative individual, and thus seemed to support (visually) the position of photography as little more than a mechanical operation. By contrast, the Alluzionists, that is, art photographers such as Mazurin and Nappel’baum, promoted techniques that emphasized the active manipulations of the artist. According to so-called traditionalists like Prokudin-Gorskii, these special techniques and brushwork were egoistic (i.e. too focused on the individual) and a distortion of nature. But art photographers hoped to do exactly that – to make the creative input of the artist

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60 Popov, Iz istorii, 23.


stylistically obvious. In addition to being in line with broader, Western European trends in art, this approach bolstered the arguments for establishing a legal framework for their work, similar to writers, composers, and other visual artists.

Art photographers took the initiative in lobbying the government to pass legislation to protect the copyright of their work. Members of the Russian Photographic Society and the Fifth Section of the Russian Technical Society were especially instrumental in outlining the basic parameters of artistic copyright in regards to photography. At first they managed to get the Imperial Academy of Arts to recognize and register the authorship of photographs, but only if requested by the photographer. 63 However, this measure proved inadequate in protecting photographic rights more generally. In 1907, representatives from a coalition of photographic societies lobbied the newly formed State Duma and State Council to pass more expansive copyright laws. In tandem with these efforts, they organized an exhibition of new work at the Imperial Academy of Arts to “demonstrate the most recent artistic success of photography” for members of the Duma and Council. 64 Prominent studio and art photographers such as Friedrich O. Eggler, Lev L. Levitskii, Andrei I. Karelin, and Prokudin-Gorskii all contributed to the exhibition, which received extensive news coverage in trade papers and the popular illustrated press. 65

New copyright legislation protecting the authorship of photographers was finally passed by the State Duma on 15 March 1911. The law gave photographers the exclusive

63 G. M. Boltianskii, Ocherki po istorii fotografii v SSSR (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1939), 45.

64 “Chetyrekhdnevnaia vystavka proizvedenii khudohestvennoi fotografii v zalakh Imperatorskoi Akademii Khudozhhest,” Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 7 (July 1908): 205.

65 Karl Bulla provided the widely circulated image of the exhibition space in the Academy of Arts, see Ogonek, no 24 (15 (28) June 1908): 13.
right to reproduce, disseminate, and publish pictures, regardless of how they were
captured. To ensure this right, the photographer had to include a name (or company
name), along with place of origin and date of production on every print. Photographic
copyright was valid for ten years from the date of production or twenty-five years, if the
picture was published as a collection or series of images “of independent artistic, historic,
or scientific interest.”⁶⁶ This law did not apply to pictures taken or copied for personal
use, pictures included in a public exhibition, and pictures reproduced as part of a
scientific study or book intended solely for educational purposes. In addition, specially
commissioned photographs belonged legally to whoever placed the original order. That
is, studio portraits, for examples, were the property of the photographed subject rather
than the photographer. Photographic copyright remained in force until 1918 when all the
laws of Imperial Russia were rescinded by the new Soviet regime.

This legislation allowed press photographers to disseminate their pictures widely,
while still retaining control of the image. Russia’s most prolific photo-reporters regularly
sold the same pictures to several different publications. In general, magazine editors
purchased a print and permission to use the image, but they did not necessarily buy the
photographic negative, along with the attached copyright protections. Of course, these
transactions were also possible. In fact, in 1912, a year after the law on photographic
copyright had been passed, Karl Bulla advertised in Fotograficheskie novosti his
willingness to buy negatives from photographers, at which point the photograph, and any
future reproductions, became the full property of Karl Bulla.⁶⁷ That is, all prints

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⁶⁶ Novyi zakon ob avtorskom prave fotografa,” Vestnik fotografii, no. 4 (April 1911): 97-98.
⁶⁷ Popov, Iz istorii, 202.
produced from the original negative, to be used on postcards and in magazines, would be stamped with Bulla’s moniker as if he had created the image originally.

**Professional Organizations**

Contributors to photography journals often lamented the lack of collective legally binding representation for professional photographers. Articles described unions in France and Germany, detailing the various benefits offered by these organizations, and debated when and where similar unions might arise in Russia. 68 The October Manifesto, which ensured the freedom of association, inspired many of these discussions. Increasingly these calls for photography unions came as technology and amateur practice threatened the photographic profession. 69 Amateur contributions to magazines and the lack of photographic copyright laws added another level of insecurity to professional practitioners. In the past, the technical complexity and length of photographic training had conferred a level of exclusivity on the profession; it enabled photographers to control recruitment and thus “the hoi-polloi of amateurs and unqualified people were unable to join the profession.” 70 Stripped of the technical complexity, photography was open to those without specialized training. In theory, unions and the general professionalization of photography would protect the studio photographers and allow them to control who received entry into the profession.

68 “Professional’noe obrazovanie fotografov v Germanii,” *Visa Rossiia*, no. 9 (September 1904): 8-11.

69 “K professional’nomu ob”edineniiu i professional’nomu obrazovaniiu fotografov,” *Vsia Rossitiia*, no. 3 (March 1906): 17; “Novye fotograficheskie professii,” 232.

Russia’s network of photographic societies, to some degree, fulfilled the traditional functions of professional unions. Although these societies were composed largely of gentile amateur photographers, studio professionals often took up positions of leadership on executive committees. Entry into a photography society was exclusive and controlled by the membership. Applicants to the Fifth Section, for example, needed recommendations from five active members. The Russian Photographic Society, the country’s largest photographic organization, required a nomination from an active member and then a vote by secret ballot for final approval. Members paid annual dues and in return received various benefits, such as the right to take pictures throughout the Russian Empire. They could also take advantage of the society’s facilities and partake in specially organized lectures and exhibitions. More importantly, photography societies, especially those with large, nation-wide memberships, advocated publically for photography and photographers. The aristocratic membership of the Fifth Section was well connected to St. Petersburg artistic circles, including the critic Vladimir V. Stasov and other influential people in law and government. In fact, the original proposals on copyright, which were the basis of the final version of the law presented to the State Duma, were drafted by two of Russia’s most respected judicial minds in the 19th century, namely, Vladimir D. Spasovich and Aleksandr I. Urusov.

Studio photographers, nonetheless, called for the creation of proper workers’ unions, usually modeled on similar organizations in Western Europe. Professional unions were intended to provide many of the same benefits offered by photography societies,

71 Popov, Iz istorii, 35, 55.

72 Boltianskii, Ocherki, 45; for a succinct history of photography copyright in Russia see, V. Sreznevskii, “Avtorskoe pravo fotografa,” Fotograf-liubitel’ no. 3, (March 1908): 78-81.
however, they would also endeavor to improve the material conditions of photographers by offering a wide variety of social and financial assistance. For example, the draft charter of the Russian Professional Union of Photographic Employees, penned by members of the Fifth Section, included benefits for unemployed members, payment of medical expenses incurred on the job, legal aid, funeral expenses, disability insurance, and a wide variety of aid offered to the families of photographers, if they were suddenly deprived, as a result of injury or death, of their primary breadwinner. Entry into the union was again contingent on the recommendation of two full members and a general election, but the charter clearly stated that membership was open to an “unrestricted number of people of both sexes, without distinction of creed or nationality.” 73

A similar program of benefits, responsibilities, and restrictions was offered years later by a group of studio photographers who founded the First All-Russian Society of Professional Photographers in Moscow. 74 Among the authors of the charter were the portraitist Nikolai Svishchev and the studio photographers Mikhail Gribov and Georgii Turnov, both of whom, at one point in their careers, contributed photo-reportage to Iskry. Under the chairmanship of the Moscow-based studio photographer Aleksandr S. Vysokov, the All-Russian Society became the most successful photography union in the pre-revolutionary era. Although its membership was almost exclusively Moscow-based, the union leadership had ambitions of growing into a national organization. After the Revolution, the union was dissolved and then reconstituted in name only as the All-

73 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA) f. 90 (Russian Technical Society. Fifth Section) op. 1, d. 449, l. 31 (Draft of Charter for the Russian Professional Union of Photographic Employees, 1905).

74 See Ustav pervago vserossiiskago obshchestva fotografov-professionalov v Moskve (Moscow: P. P. Pavlov, 1915).
Russian Union of Photographers until 1923 when the NKVD approved a new Soviet charter. In 1927, it was once again renamed, this time as the All-Russian Society of Photographers. 75 This organization, however, no longer provided the broad-scale protections of its pre-revolutionary incarnation. Like the photography societies of the Imperial era, it had educational and artistic goals, and its members represented the more academic approach to photography of the Fifth Section. 76

In addition to unions, photographers wanted to create a venue for professional training outside the studio environment. Rather then the traditional apprenticeship, studio photographers would be trained in special schools, like technical colleges, which would offer comprehensive practical training, theoretical education in photo-chemistry, physics, and optics, lessons in drawing and visual composition, as well as classes in accounting, anticipating of the everyday responsibilities of running a photography business.

According to various advocates, professional schools like those which existed in Germany were necessary to bridge the gulf between the amateur community, engaging in new artistic techniques, and the ordinary studio photographer, who, by contrast, was increasingly looked down upon and remained “completely alien” of broader trends in the profession. 77 The professional school was the only way to keep the photographic community informed about the myriad of technical and aesthetic developments that had already reshaped photography in Russia at the turn of the century. Some commentators also advocated for a less formal education, that is, something modeled on the American

75 Popov, Iz istorii, 50.

76 V. I. Srevnevskii, one of the founding members of the Fifth Section was a member. Also, the official organ of the All-Russian Society of Photographers, Fotograf, was based on the Fifth Section’s periodical of the same name.

77 See “Professional’noe obrazovanie fotografov v Germanii,” Visa Rossiia, 8-11.
correspondence school, which seemed conducive to the technical nature of photography. 78

The insistent calls for schools went hand in hand with the general project to professionalize photography. In the words of one advocate, “there is not one profession that allows entry into its midst without formal schooling.” 79 Material benefits aside, schools would raise the public’s opinion of photographers as a whole and make the work of ordinary professionals technically and aesthetically current. Studio photographers pushed for professionalization because their work was increasingly defined on the basis of outmoded technical skills. By contrast, the generation of young press photographers found financial security in and identified with journalism. In fact, they left the traditional sphere of photography in part because the studio no longer guaranteed career stability over the long term, in addition to being interested in ‘life in all its diversity.’ These photographers adopted a specialization that provided the prestige and social mobility, which brought people to studio photography in the first place. Press photography simply offered the best opportunity for long-term professional advancement. In the words of Bourdieu, “the status of [photographic] specializations depends more on the professional group with which they bring one into contact than on the photography itself.” 80 The status of art photographers comes from the art world, scientific photography from science, theatre photography from the theatre, and court photography from the Tsar. Likewise, the press photographer’s status comes from journalism. Rather than waiting for actor and artists, politicians and kings, scholars and sportsmen to come to the studio,

78 “K professional’nomu ob’edineniiu,” 17.
79 Ibid., 18.
80 Bourdieu, Photography, 163.
press photographers sought out these figures, regardless of whether they wanted to be photographed or not.
Between the Russo-Japanese War and the Stolypin coup, press photographers and magazine editors set the visual and the political agenda of the illustrated press for the next decade. In the Far East, photographers embedded with the Russian army worked outside the conventions of studio photography; on the home front, editors constructed genuine visual narratives on the magazine page. After the war, they continued to offer the reading public “front line” photo-reportage of the 1905 Revolution and Russia’s subsequent constitutional experiment. Largely free of censorship, magazines such as *Iskry* and *Niva* used photography to tell the news, and used the news stories to evoke a specific political perspective. Publishers placed their magazines in the center of an evolving social and political discourse about Russia, which shaped the subject matter but also fundamentally redefined the function of their publications. Roughly from 1904 to 1907, photographers and editors created a new mode of political communication in the illustrated press – a visual analog to the articles of the daily papers – that did not merely supplement the written word. Rather they created an accessible and emotionally compelling argument about the news, while maintaining the illusion of objective detachment.

The Russo-Japanese War was a watershed event in the history of global photojournalism. The Japanese sneak attack on Port Arthur in January 1904 sparked the
interest of people around the world, and magazine editors immediately dispatched press photographers to cover the front lines. In America, the magazine *Collier’s Weekly* prepared well in advance. Anticipating the outbreak of hostilities, the editors sent a number of photo-correspondents, including the preeminent war photographer James H. Hare, to Japan a week before the attack was carried out.¹ They reported on naval engagements, front line activities, and civilian life in Manchuria for the duration of the conflict.² In Europe, British, French, and German publishers also supplied their respective reading publics with news images from the Far East, which included postcards with maps and caricatures of the warring nations.³ Though not the first war to be covered extensively by photographers, the Russo-Japanese War was, however, widely covered by nations with no direct political stake in the outcome. It was, in the words of one historian, “the first armed conflict to be treated as a pure spectacle for the entertainment of an uninvolved mass audience.”⁴

Of course, the war dominated news coverage in the Russian illustrated press. In 1904, the magazines *Iskry* and *Niva*, which had previously offered a mix of news and culture, focused exclusively on the unfolding military and diplomatic situation in the Far East. Ivan Sytin’s *Iskry* went through a particularly radical transformation. Beginning in late 1903, the editors eschewed all written content in favor of more illustrated material.


² The reportage was later compiled into a photographic album, which included maps and written dispatches: see *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1905).


Short stories, essays, and news articles were replaced with press photography, pen-and-ink drawings, maps, technical schematics, and political cartoons. The editors of *Niva*, by contrast, retained the magazine’s traditional balance of image and text. Fiction and poetry, unrelated to the war, continued to appear regularly, as did paintings of landscapes, classical nudes, and picturesque scenes of children and animals. However, in light of the political situation, press photography and written reports from war correspondents represented the vast majority of the coverage. Following the attack on Port Arthur, *Niva*, like *Iskry*, soon resembled a photographic album of current events from the Manchurian front lines, rather than the refined literary journal of its recent past. Less popular weekly magazines, such as *Ogonek*, or periodicals with less focus on the news, such as *Vokrug sveta* and *Priroda i luidi*, also shifted their photographic coverage towards the Far East.

The outbreak of hostilities also inspired a number of publishers to put out a weekly magazine dedicated solely to the war. The most popular one was called *Letopis’ voiny s Iaponiei*, which was edited by Dmitrii Dubenskii, a staff officer in the Russian military with extensive experience in publishing. Printed on thick, high-quality paper, this periodical included photos, pen-and-ink illustration of the news, detailed maps and schematics, and long-form articles and official reports from the front. *Letopis’ voiny* was relatively expensive, costing 3 rubles for three months or 30 kopecks per issue. The magazine was exquisitely designed in the Russian style. The cover featured an elaborate graphic of St. George slaying the Dragon, and inside each issue ornamental borders often framed the titles and portraits. The content was staunchly conservative and tied closely to the experience and perspectives of the upper echelons of the Russian military. Overall,

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this publication offered a patriotic and uplifting chronicle of the war. In the inaugural issue, Dubenskii stated that the magazine reflected a “calm, impartial” portrait of current events, but was nonetheless “imbued with fervent love of country.” In addition, he hoped the magazine would aid historians to “recreate for future generations the formidable era of conflict in all its grandeur and its impact on various aspects of national life.”

Other illustrated journals dedicated specifically to the war included *Vestnik Krasnogo Kresta na Dalnym Vostoke* and *Illiustrirovannaia letopis’ Russkogo Iaponskoi voiny.*

**Censorship in War and Revolution**

Censors regulated the production of photo-reportage on several levels. Military censors, first of all, restricted access to the front lines. All photo-correspondents had to obtain permission to cover the war from the head of the military censorship commission. Access was granted only to photographers who worked with a recognized press agency or publication. In addition, photographers had to obtain a police certificate that testified to one’s ‘political reliability.’ Once approved, photographers applied to work within a specific combat zone from the local military authorities. They were free to move about as they wished within this zone, however special permission was again necessary before departing the war theater. The military also issued a list of subjects that were prohibited from publication (*Perechen’ svedenii, ne podlezhashchikh propusku v pechat’*). This included the location and movements of military personnel, reports on railways and naval

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6 *Letopis voiny s Iaponiei*, no. 1 (1904): 5.

facilities, identification of casualties before the official announcement, and, rather vaguely, any “unverified information that might provoke unnecessary public anxiety.”

In general, war correspondents were instructed to report on the facts and to avoid editorializing, especially if such opinions were critical of the military.

Compared to the Japanese, Russian military censorship was quite lax. Foreign correspondents commented on the easygoing attitude of Russian censors and, by contrast, lamented the close scrutiny of their Japanese counterparts. The geography of the war, the fact that fighting took place mostly on neutral territory, and the large number of periodicals distributing the news, all hindered the military’s censorship apparatus. The Russian network was too decentralized to impose regulations consistently or uniformly. To service the local press, the military established censorship departments throughout the Empire, except for St. Petersburg where a special committee was tasked with sifting through front line news reports. Coordination between different censors was difficult, perhaps impossible, and led to different standards and interpretations of the official statute. The British correspondent Lord Brooke, for example, praised authorities that afforded him “carte blanche,” but also witnessed his reports on the Battle of She-ho torn up for being “too faithful.” In the case of photography, censors were asked to interpret what images were strategically unacceptable or likely to provoke ‘public anxiety.’

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8 Ibid., 26.


list of prohibited subjects offered little in terms of guidance and forced censors to make subjective determination, which ensured the procedure was even more arbitrary.

Alongside military censorship, the Ministry of the Imperial Court also reviewed all photographs of the royal family. Ministry officials established this policy specifically in response to the proliferation of photo-reportage at the turn of the century. In September 1900, they imposed regulations on “photographers who wished to produce pictures of Their Majesties in various situations.” In order to take pictures of imperial personages, photographers had to obtain permits, which were issued by various state, provincial, and civic authorities, depending on the location of the news event. For example, permission to photograph the Tsar in a military context (troop reviews, battlefield exercises, etc.) was issued by the district military head. Authorization to take pictures in city streets, on the other hand, was given by the mayor in St. Petersburg, the police chief in Moscow, or the provincial governor in other urban centers in Russia. No permanent permits were issued; each event attended by the Tsar or his family required the photographer to seek specific permission. Furthermore, censors at the Ministry of the Imperial Court reviewed all pictured before publication. If editors published an image without consent, the Ministry informed the Chief Administration of Press Affairs, which would then relate the transgression to the offending publication. This policy remained in force until the fall of autocracy in February 1917.

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13 Ibid., 220.

14 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA) f. 776 (Chief Administration of Press Affairs), op. 8, d. 1361, l. 28 (Letter from the Office of the Ministry of the Imperial Court, 13 October 1914).
The reign of Tsar Nicholas II marked the end of the administrative system of press censorship. The original statute, inaugurated in 1865, and the circulars, which periodically offered more specific instructions, dissatisfied both government officials and newspaper and magazine publishers, who increasingly ignored the press laws. Under the Chief Administration of Press Affairs, magazines were subject to bureaucratic controls, which approved magazine programs, issued warnings and fines, and threatened closure. In theory, periodicals were also subject to preliminary review, which required publishers to submit copies for censorship prior to sale. However, in practice, most reputable publishers, such as Ivan Sytin (Iskry) and Stanislav Propper (Ogonek), were unaffected by this policy. Monthly journals in St. Petersburg and Moscow, plus dailies and weeklies approved by the minister of the interior, were exempt. This allowed the censors to focus on publications of ‘dangerous orientation,’ such as newspapers run by Marxists and Social Democrats. The administrative system exerted pressure on publications and not individual editors and writers; once a publication was shut down, Marxist writers were free to publish articles elsewhere. The status quo thus satisfied neither the press, which lobbied for greater freedom, nor the government, which wanted to quash political radicalism at its core.

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Starting in 1903, the government began taking the initial steps to reform press censorship. Prominent ministers, including Prince Sviatopolk-Mirskii and Count Witte, planned to establish a legal framework around press regulations, to extend freedom of speech, and to eliminate the system of preliminary review. In 1905, the Kobeko conference, tasked with composing a new statute, drafted a series of proposals, which became the backbone of the new laws promulgated on 24 November 1905. This decree established the right to free expression and took the regulation of magazines out of the hands of bureaucrats and made the press responsible to the judicial system. Preliminary review and administrative punishments were discarded, and starting a publication no longer required official permission. These reforms, however, did not prevent the authorities from attacking the press through the courts. Offending publications were subject to prosecution, and in the months after the new press laws were instituted, more than sixty periodicals were charged with breaking criminal laws, typically charged with “incitement to riot or to strike.”18 Publishers adapted to the new system with legal evasions, including naming a ‘responsible’ editor (essentially a straw man) to go to jail in place of the actual editors. Nonetheless, the new press law represented undeniable progress, especially when compared to pre-constitutional conditions.19 At the very least, the press reforms demonstrated the power of public opinion in Russia to shape policy and to effect changes on the government.

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18 Quoted in McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, 220.

The Japanese attack on Port Arthur and the ensuing war cast a spotlight on press photographers in Russia like never before. For the first time, editors appealed to the reading public primarily on the basis of photographic war coverage, singling out the contributions of photo-correspondents covering the front lines in the Far East. In *Iskry*, advertisements called attention to “ten of their own photo-correspondents in the theater of war” as part of the sales pitch for annual subscriptions. Also, gone were the “fantastical drawing from foreign journals,” which had illustrated the news in the past. The magazine’s illustrated news coverage reflected a truly Russian perspective on current events, and photography was to be the primary means of showing the war. Through photo-reportage, publishers and editors offered the public an unprecedented glimpse into international affairs and an intimate portrait of the lives of ordinary soldiers fighting for Russia across the continent. At the same time, they elevated the press photographers, who covered the war alongside the infantry, from anonymous correspondents to heroic figures, equal parts artists, journalists, and soldiers.

No press photographer received more publicity in magazines than Viktor Bulla. At least two Russian publications, *Iskry* and *Niva*, claimed him as their own, and his pictures appeared in other publications, at home and abroad, including the *Illustrated London News* and *Collier’s Magazine*. At the age of 19, Bulla boarded a train for

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21 During the war, all the photographs of the Far East in the *London Illustrated News* were taken by Viktor, but credited to his father “C. O. Bulla,” that is, Carl Osvald Bulla: for example, *London Illustrated News*, no. 3416 (8 October 1904): 505. Also see *The Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1905).
Фотограф В. Н. Буля.
Manchuria, ready to embark on what seemed like a romantic adventure, which instead exposed him to “all the horrors” of war.²² But magazine editors focused on the romance of his expedition. In *Niva*, Bulla appeared in a large studio portrait, standing in a military tunic and bearskin Cossack hat with a number of cameras draped around his neck.²³

Other publications followed suit. The editors of *Letopis’ voiny s Iaponiei* published a picture showing the photographer sitting atop a white horse.²⁴ *Iskry* offered the most detailed photographic profile; the young photographer sits on a “rock,” in front of a snowy studio backdrop, with cameras on display at his heavily booted feet.²⁵ The caption read “V.K. Bulla, special photographer for the newspaper *Russkoe slovo* and the magazine *Iskry*, dispatched to the theater of war.” More significant than the image was the portrait’s placement in the magazine. The cover of that particular issue featured a large portrait of the newspaper journalist Vasilii Nemirovich-Danchenko. On page two, Bulla’s portrait appeared alongside another picture of Nemirovich-Danchenko, taken in 1877, when he made his name reporting on the Russo-Turkish War.²⁶ With the photos side-by-side, the editors acknowledged the photographers and the writer as colleagues working in different mediums. What Nemirovich-Danchenko meant to *Russkoe slovo*, Bulla was to *Iskry*, in which he chronicled the war with a camera rather than with a pen.


²³ *Niva*, no. 10 (13 March 1904): 194.

²⁴ *Letopis’ voiny s Iaponiei*, no. 27 (1904): 510.

²⁵ *Iskry*, no. 9 (29 February 1904): 66.

²⁶ The issue’s cover also featured a large contemporaneous portrait of Nemirovich-Danchenko.
The editors of *Iskry* reinforced this association by pairing reports of these two correspondents in parallel issues of *Iskry* and *Russkoe slovo*. Bulla’s photo-reportage on the weekend was a visual analog to Nemirovich-Danchenko’s written reports during the week. The photographs in *Iskry* even included numerical references directing the reader to specific issues of the daily. For example, around the same time that Nemirovich-Danchenko described the “monotonous landscapes” of the Trans-Siberian railroad in *Russkoe slovo*, the editors printed photographs of the same journey. The pictures were organized thematically over one- or two-page spreads. The photo-series “The Trans-Siberian Railroad” expanded on Nemirovich-Danchenko’s words and offered readers a more detailed impression of the stations, bridges, villages, and vast landscapes seen from the train – panoramic compositions bisected by iron train tracks. *Iskry* offered a visual travelogue, which followed the soldiers as they headed east, complementing the written accounts in the weekly’s sister publication. And as Bulla crossed the frozen continent toward the Empire’s easternmost territories, his photo-reportage brought his audience closer to the front lines of war.

Viktor Bulla was the most prominent member of an entire cohort of young, Russian photo-correspondents who travelled to the Far East. A young Petr Otsup also traversed the continent to Manchuria and photographed the war for Stanislav Propper’s *Ogonek*. Another prolific contributor of photo-reportage was Samson M. Chernov, who was only 17 years old when he volunteered to report on the Russian military. Like Bulla,

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28 Nemirovich-Danchenko’s reports are described in McReynolds, *The News under Russia’s Old Regime*, 186-87; see the sequential visual reports in *Iskry*, no. 13 (28 March 1904): 98-104.
he accompanied several infantry divisions and documented the everyday experiences of ordinary soldiers alongside the activities of the upper echelons of the Russian military. He later gained fame in Serbia and around the world for his pictures of the Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913. Chernov was among the ten photo-correspondents advertised by Sytin who covered the front lines for Iskry. Among the other photographers were A. Milovanov, V. R. Apukhtin, V. I. Klimkov, and F. T. Protasevich.

Another prominent correspondent was the artist, writer, and photographer Vladimir A. Taburin. Unlike Bulla, whose pictures appeared in several Russian publications, Taburin’s work was published exclusively in Adol’f Marks’s Niva. In his publicity portrait, published alongside that of Bulla, the caption described him as an “artist-correspondent.” And the magazine made full use of his range of talents. First, he contributed photo-reportage, usually 10 or 12 pictures per issue, which traded in Bulla’s studio-trained eye for an amateur’s interest in tourism and life among friends. His pictures resembled vacation photos, taken always from the same standing height, and combined photography’s “family function” with the medium’s traditional documentary role, surveying the people and places of faraway lands. These photos were usually accompanied by Taburin’s regular column titled “At War” (na voine), which described his experience in the Far East. The editors of Niva also featured his pen-and-ink news reports. Taburin drew vignettes of life in the trenches, which focused on both the Russian and Japanese experience of war, and often captured the horrors of the battlefield in

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30 Subscription advertisement in Iskry, no. 47 (28 November 1904): 375.

31 Niva, no. 10 (13 March 1904): 194.
На террасной площадке деревни, поднимая невысокий
взгляд, собирались батальоны, армии, и кончилось
и кончилось мышь впереди
Во дворах появился новый фигура патриотизм, который
нынешнее настроение населения было высокое, а
tакже, независимо от событий, происходящих в других

Во время войны многие деревни были оккупированы, а те-
ны были оккупированы

Начало вероломного

Благословение всех дружеских дорог, сильных дружеских
встреч, поездов из разных концов страны.
В последний приезд увезла

Во время войны многие деревни были оккупированы, а те-
ны были оккупированы

Начало вероломного

Благословение всех дружеских дорог, сильных дружеских
встреч, поездов из разных концов страны.

Один из способов моих переживаний.

В виде письма от специалиста В. Тагирова, дат. 1905.

На деревенской площади, поднимаясь от
вид, собирались батальоны, армии, и кончилось
и кончилось мышь впереди
Во дворах появился новый фигура патриотизм, который
нынешнее настроение населения было высокое, а те-
ны были оккупированы

При такой удавшейся мечте проходили вдоль.

На деревенской площади, поднимаясь от
вид, собирались батальоны, армии, и кончилось
и кончилось мышь впереди
Во дворах появился новый фигура патриотизм, который
нынешнее настроение населения было высокое, а те-
ны были оккупированы

При такой удавшейся мечте проходили вдоль.
dramatic full-page tableaux. Chaotic night-time battles; barracks, trenches, and war materiel in ruin; soldiers observing the enemy through field glasses; and Cossacks enjoying leisure time. These were among the subjects explored for *Niva* in Taburin’s always tasteful and picturesque news illustrations. 32

Taburin’s dispatches provided a more personal account of war than the detached and seemingly anonymous reports of other press photographers. His work resembled the approach adopted (and publicized) by Nemirovich-Danchenko, who wrote that his “job is to tell readers clearly and exactly what I saw and, as well as I am able, to let the facts speak for themselves.” 33 Taburin’s reports captured this dual characterization of modern war correspondence; he remained objective, while also drawing attention to the subjectivity of his reportage. Taburin wrote himself into the news he was describing. His column was composed in the first person, as were the captions to his photographs. “We stood having a snack,” he wrote under a photograph of soldiers eating on one occasion. Another caption read “I had to work under these conditions,” and the photograph showed Taburin sprawled on the ground, writing in his notebook. 34 [FIGURE 22.] His perspective as an author was connected directly to what the audience was seeing. The photographs gave credence to his writing, which conversely enhanced the newsworthy quality of his news images. Taburin’s multimedia chronicle of the war presented *Niva*’s readers with a journey through the Far East, where they encountered ordinary soldiers, local peoples, and celebrated personages, such as General Kuropatkin. He offered a full

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32 For examples, see *Niva*, no. 2 (8 January 1905): 37; *Niva*, no. 3 (22 January 1905): 49; *Niva*, no. 5 (5 February 1905): 89.

33 *Russkoe slovo*, no. 137 (23 May 1905).

spectrum of news information, both visual and textual, which interconnected and ultimately guided the audience through the war on a personal level.

*Genres of Press Photography and the Russian Front Lines*

War photographers reported primarily on the Russian military, and their photo-reportage aligned with the traditional genres of the studio, namely portraits, group portraits, and landscapes, also known as views (*vidy*). However, photographers, trudging through the mud and across the sunburnt hills of Manchuria, were also forced to improvise and innovate in the battlefield and started to capture war in a distinctly new way. They adapted the studio conventions to the realities of wartime press coverage, and created dramatic and visually arresting images of action and everyday life on the front lines. The war offered the likes of Viktor Bulla the chance to divorce themselves from the studio environment, not only physically but also stylistically.

Portraiture was a staple genre of war photography. This included studio-made portraits of Russian admirals, generals, and military administrators in the Far East, as well as members of the imperial family, ministers, and important civic and cultural figures. Almost all the covers of *Iskry* in 1904 featured photographs of this type. These were highly staged representations, which allowed subjects to craft an idealized and flattering self-image in collaboration with the photographer. Studio pavilions, devoid of clear markers of time or place, tended to transform sitters into symbolic versions of themselves. The dignified frontal or three-quarter pose, cut off at the torso like a classical
bust, captured a moment that appeared, as it were, “outside of time.”\footnote{Pierre Bourdieu, \textit{Photography: A Middle-brow Art}, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), 76.}  Smaller portraits of this type paid homage to soldiers killed or wounded in battle. Eight or ten pictures per page were laid out; the name and rank of the soldier, and sometimes the date and location of his death, appeared in the caption below.\footnote{For example: \textit{Letopis’ voiny s Iaponiei}, no. 28 (1904): 510; \textit{Iskry}, no. 2 (9 January 1905): 10-11.} In \textit{Niva}, these commemorations usually filled the entire page, composed of 20 portraits stacked in rows.\footnote{For example, \textit{Niva}, no. 1 (1 January 1905): 19; \textit{Niva}, no. 5 (5 February 1905): 92.} In general, portraiture was reserved for the officer corps in the Russian military; by virtue of their cost, accessibility, and formal qualities, they indicated a smaller, wealthier, or otherwise prominent social status. Members of the infantry, which represented a much wider swath of Russian society, were not memorialized in magazines in this manner.\footnote{On the social makeup of the Russian army, see Allan K. Wildman, \textit{The End of the Russian Imperial Army: The Old Army and the Soldiers’ Revolt (March-April 1917)} (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 19-31.}

Another common genre was the group portrait. Again, these pictures tended to capture officers in staged arrangements, usually grouped according to rank or military unit. Other subjects included doctors, nurses, prisoners of war, wounded soldiers, and various Manchurian locals. Studio convention dictated that subjects pose in formal regalia, around furniture or decorative props, and against a neutral backdrop. Although many group portraits were taken inside the studio – likely before the outbreak of war – press photographers also composed many impromptu grouping at the front. These pictures lacked the theatrical accouterments of the studio, but the basic compositional aesthetic remained unchanged. Sometimes, in the field, subjects were organized into three
rows, standing, sitting, and crouching, and looked straight at the camera. At other times, however, photographers simply gathered a group together and allowed them to place themselves and pose as they liked. These “studio” sessions resulted in portraits that both reflected and aped the conventional approach. 39 Shown in relaxed poses, these portraits captured and stressed the individual (and often idiosyncratic) personalities rather than the uniformity of the group. But the adherence to the basic conventions – for example, the frontal pose - still introduced the timeless quality to the pictures. The studio aesthetic dehistoricized the image; the group portrait was not simply a moment lifted out of the temporal stream, but a universal expression that transformed the represented camaraderie into an eternal ideal. Whether posing formally or against the grain (hamming it up), the fundamental act of self-control and commemoration remained in place. 40

Landscapes or views typically captured epic vistas of Siberia and the shifting front line expanses of Manchuria, and introduced the Russian reading public to the physical geography of the Empire’s easternmost territories. These pictures relied on the pictorial conventions of painted landscapes, but were framed in such a way as to “promote photography as an objective record of sight.” The landscape genre thus inscribed the imperial landscape, captured by the photographer, as a natural way of seeing. 41 In Iskry and Niva, the coverage of the Russo-Japanese War began with wide-angle views of Port Arthur. [FIGURE 23.] Taken from an elevated perspective, the

39 A good example of this: Iskry, no. 33 (22 August 1904): 264.

40 Bourdieu, Photography, 27.

41 James R. Ryan, Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1997), 47.
camera seemed to float above the naval outpost and the town below. 42 Likely standing on the surrounding hilltop, the photographer took care to “eliminate the contingencies of perspective, so that the subject appears to present itself without the agency or interference of an observer.” 43 The absence of an immediate foreground or the apparent presence of the photographer created a “vantage point of absolute visual comprehension – a natural view of nature.” 44 In addition, press photographers combined this standard landscape perspective with groups of soldiers posing in the foreground or infantrymen scaling

42 Niva, no. 9 (28 February 1904): 164-65.


44 Ryan, Picturing Empire, 58.
craggy hills like toy soldiers, which offered the spectator picturesque figurines, which served as useful indicators of scale.

Most of the photo-reportage, however, focused on capturing news event accurately and clearly, irrespective of genre conventions. Press photographers adopted techniques that translated the ethos of journalistic objectivity into visual terms. In particular, they took pictures where the subject appeared unaware of being photographed. This created the illusion of objectivity; from the perspective of the magazine reader, the news appeared genuinely observed rather than staged, and thus more believable as a true reflection of reality. To some degree, this documentary style resembled the so-called straight photography movement, which emerged in Western Europe and America. 45 In Russia, the underlying principle of straight photography overlapped with the methods promoted by “traditionalist” photographers, such as Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii. 46 Both groups of photographers emphasized function over form and positioned their work against that of pictorialist photographers, who advocated for artistic manipulations of the final print. Unlike Nemirovich-Danchenko, press photographers did not articulate their commitment to journalistic objectivity. However, the work of Viktor Bulla and the other photo-correspondents reflected these traditionalist approaches, which championed the “ability to capture the image so that it coincides with reality” and eschewed the conspicuous interference of the photographer. 47 Photo-reportage thus intimated an


47 S. Prokudin-Groskii, Fotograf-liubitel’, no. 5 (May 1906): 133.
unmediated window into reality, which, in turn, allowed the reading public to make independent determinations about the news.

Using captions and titles, editors placed images into a dramatic framework and created a simplified but nonetheless emotionally evocative story. The pictures of war could not speak for themselves; they required text to explain and animate the meaning of the images. Text provided the photo-reportage with meaning and narrative drive. The written material placed the images within a specific chronology that “stretched the time of the image” and conveyed the impression that events occurred before and after the captured moment. On the magazine page, current events on the front lines were reported as news but they were told like traditional stories, often structured around a clear beginning, middle, and end. The immense quantity of pictures arriving from the Far East even allowed the magazine editors to construct visual narratives that were based solely on photo-reportage with minimal supporting text. In these cases, a few words merely prompted the reading public to make the narrative leaps that the photographs themselves implied.

*Iskry*’s editors were among the first to incorporate a greater sense of narrative drive to the photographic coverage of the news. Having eschewed long-from writing, the magazine’s designers were free to experiment with the wide variety of news images on the page. The photo-reportage of Viktor Bulla produced some of the most striking examples of this new aesthetic of objectivity and visual storytelling. For example, while traveling with an infantry division on the island of Sakhalin, he produced a photo-series that chronicled the Battle of the Dolinsk Valley, which later appeared in *Iskry, Niva*, and

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 Whereas the editors of *Niva* and *Letopis voiny* selected only three or four images from this series, *Iskry* offered a wider range of pictures, spread out throughout the issue in three distinct sections. [FIGURE 24] The first introduced the participants; two photographs of officers from the Eastern Siberian battalion gathered around an artillery post, surveying the battlefield with field glasses. The second section was a two-page spread featuring ten photographs. The headline provided an overarching narrative framework: “Our Army in Battle: The Battle of the Dolinsk Valley on 14 June 1904.” Short captions underneath each photo identified the action and subjects within the frame. The photographs were organized into three columns and the images in each column were related thematically. When read left to right, these images plotted out a

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basic sequence of events – the army arrives in the valley, the soldiers wait for enemy, and the battle begins, with distant puffs of smoke indicating Japanese artillery on the horizon. This vignette was then brought to a sobering conclusion on the last page of the issue, the third section. Three images, illustrating the news “after the battle,” showed the causalities suffered on both sides: a Japanese corpse, a doctor and his staff aiding a heavily wounded soldier, and a memorial service held on the field of battle in honor of the recently fallen.

These visual narratives placed the audience in the role of the storyteller. They required the reading public to provide the interpretive thrust to propel the story forward. Press photographers and magazine editors provided the basic structure and point of view but ultimately allowed the audience to interpret and to relate emotionally to events as presented. Though pictures often appeared weeks after the original event, the photo-reportage held the news story together in the present – the battles seemed to unfold in front of the spectator’s eyes. A magazine such as Iskry restructured the conventional experience of the passage of time; it created a “new synthetic temporality,” which was “paced by reading and looking at the assembled sequence.”  

50 One person looked at a series of photographs, bemoaned the futility of war, and reflected on the fate of the soldiers; another saw the bravery of young Russians, felt pride at their dogged resistance, and grew staunchly opposed to Japanese aggression. In either case, photo-reportage offered the spectator a vessel in which to pour oneself emotionally and thus created a sense of personal involvement with events transpiring thousands of miles away.

The Natives and the Enemy

50 Campany, Photography and Cinema, 61.
War photographers introduced Russian magazine reader to the people and cultures of the Far East. This included the populations of Manchuria and Korea, as well as the military and culture of Japan. With limited access to the Japanese front, editors published ethnographic images of traditional architecture, dress, and custom, likely taken before the war. In general, photo-reportage of the Far East was linked closely to Western traditions of ethnographic or imperial photography; photographers projected a colonial gaze on the native populations in the war theater. However, as far as representations of the enemy were concerned, the photo-reportage did not generally live up to Stephen Norris’s characterization of the Russo-Japanese conflict as a “racial war.” Indeed, more conservative publications relied occasionally on cultural stereotypes to animate news illustrations. But overall, the work of press photographers reflected a sense of curiosity and respect for the Japanese. Whereas pen-and-ink drawings in Niva offered racially charged depictions of the Japanese, which highlighted the difference between the two warring nations, photo-reportage emphasized the possibility of cultural assimilation with Russia’s enemy.

Pictures of Manchuria focused on the exotic and spiritual dimension of the native population. The depicted monuments, rituals, and iconography of Buddhism stood in for Chinese culture more broadly. A profile of Mukden, the capital of Manchuria, showed

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religious sites, which included a shrine replete with ceramic idols of “the Chinese gods.” In another photo-series in *Niva*, similar figurines were captured reenacting the “ghostly tortures” exacted on sinners. These images offered evidence of the primitive faiths of the indigenous peoples of the Far East, which, according to *Niva*, were “at a very low level in religious terms.” Moreover, the religions practiced in Manchuria were also linked to the underdeveloped economy of the region. Pictures of muddy streets and rickety huts in Mukden, of merchants selling rags, tin cans, and knick-knacks, and of locals being pulled in rickshaws reinforced the pervasive impression of servitude, poverty, and all-around backwardness. The failures of Eastern religions were inextricably linked to the economic failures of the native population, and in the illustrated press images of poverty and religion, in the absence of competing visual narratives, stood in for the entire Chinese experience in Manchuria.

Photographers framed the Chinese population in a familiar ethnographic typology. The discourse of “types” was related closely to representations of race and ethnicity in the Russian iconographic tradition. In general, pictures of the native Chinese were organized under the headline “Manchurian Types.” These individual and group portraits captured the native subjects’ full body, standing straight, arms at both sides, and looking directly at the camera, in an pose intended for scientific study rather than reflecting dignified self-representation. In one such photographic survey, the

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53 *Iskry*, no. 32 (17 August 1903): 254-56; also see *Letopis' voiny s Iaponiei*, no. 3 (1904): 41.

54 *Niva*, no. 6 (12 February 1905): 112-13; also Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, chap. 9.


photographer captured different types of Manchurian men and women, dressed in traditional gowns and frocks. Each caption indicated where the subjects fell into the native social structure. The series singled out Manchurian merchants, intellectuals, aristocrats, workers, and peasants, as well as a “middle-class family,” featuring a small group, standing side-by-side, smiling awkwardly into the camera. Gender roles and gender specific clothing was also highlighted in these surveys. Photographic typologies were also created for the inhabitants of Korea, Harbin, and Japan.  

In the West, the discourse of photographic types embodied “what was perceived to be a homogenous set of characteristics.”

This photo-reportage of the native populations of the Far East thus served to stand in for all members of the specific community, nation, or race.

Although the Japanese were subjected to Russia’s colonial gaze, the photo-reportage did not reflect the same level of ethnic objectification as the Chinese or Korean population. An article in *Niva* distinguished Japan among the other nations of the Far East as a “civilized nation in the European sense.” The Japanese had rejected the primitive religions of their forefathers, which allowed them to prosper as a cultural and economic power. Magazine editors were especially respectful of the Japanese military. In *Iskry*, they published studio portraits of Japanese army and navy commanders, posing sternly alongside their Russian counterparts. Moreover, the photo-story titled “Japanese Types” in *Iskry* did not offer the standard survey of social and cultural types. In fact, the

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59 *Niva*, no. 6 (12 February 1905): 113; also see Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 235.
editors published two group portraits of Japanese officers sitting in full military regalia.\footnote{Iskry, no. 31 (8 August 1904): 246.} One showed a group of Japanese cavalry officers and the other commemorated Field Marshal Yamagata’s visit to Moscow in 1896. In both, Russians are pictured alongside the Japanese officers. Yamagata, for example, sat in the center of a group arrangement, staged in Georgii Trunov’s Moscow photography studio, flanked on either side by Russian military delegates and other Japanese dignitaries. These images placed the Japanese on equal terms with the Russians and broke away from the pattern of ‘foreign type’ representation. As stand-ins for the Japanese nation, these figures presented an admirable and worthy opponent, rather than an uncivilized race and a potential colonial subject.

To a limited degree, the editors of Iskry even welcomed the Japanese point of view in the news coverage. Russian readers were thus exposed to a glimpse of how the other side reported the war. Specifically, the magazine featured Japanese maps, caricatures, and news illustrations. This included a series of reports from the home front, which had been published originally in Japanese periodicals.\footnote{Iskry, no. 3 (18 January 1904): 19; Iskry, no. 12 (21 March 1904): 92-93.} Iskry’s editors also managed to acquire photo-reportage, including pictures taken by Japan’s two most prominent photo-correspondents, Ogura Kenji and Yoshida Ichitaro. Trained in the conventions of Western studio photography, both offered a portrait of the war that was indistinguishable formally from that of Russian photo-correspondents.\footnote{On Japanese photo-reportage, see Frederic A. Sharf, Anne Nishimura Morse, and Sebastian Dobson, A Much Recorded War: The Russo-Japanese War in History and Imagery (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 52-74; Iskry, no. 3 (20 January 1905): 21; Iskry, no. 31 (7 August 1905): 244-45.} The photo-stories called attention to the Japanese origins of the photo-reportage, but did not credit...
either Ogura or Yoshida by name. In the series “The Japanese Army in Battle,” the Russian public saw artillery in actions, infantry mobilization and movement, telegraph lines being installed, and soldiers honoring their fallen comrades. The only noteworthy difference between this photo-series and the typical two-page spread of photographs taken by a Russian photographer was that two images, displayed prominently at the top of the page, showed Japanese corpses in the battlefield. This included Ogura’s famous images of dead bodies lying on a hillside after a battle. The Russian dead, by contrast, never appeared in *Iskry* or in any other illustrated weekly during the war outside of funerals.

The journalist V. E. Kraevskii provided another perspective on the Japanese experience. In 1904, Kraevskii traveled throughout Japan incognito and later published his photographs of the country in *Iskry*. Posed portraits of the journalist, printed alongside his contributions, presented him in the classic image of the imperial observer. In one, for example, Kraevskii sat in a rickshaw, flanked by two Japanese carriers. Tourist images of Westerners sitting in rickshaws (or palanquins or carrying chairs) fell into a well-established tradition of imperial iconography. His photographic reports of Japan, however, captured a modern nation, far-removed from the images of spiritual exoticism featured in previous issues. In Tokyo, Kraevskii took pictures of the Russian embassy, the Russian Orthodox church, and the grand facades of the Japanese naval and war ministries. He also photographed the humanitarian treatment of Russian prisoners of war.

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63 Sharf et al., *A Much Recorded War*, 63.

64 *Iskry*, no. 2 (2 January 1905): 16.

65 Ryan, *Picturing Empire*, 11.
and jubilant crowds in the modern streets of Yokohama, celebrating the hard-fought
capture of Liaoyang. 66 Women dressed in sunhats and dresses and men in suits and straw hats; “electronic tramcars” with patriotic decorations; large flags, bearing the image of
the rising sun waving in the wind; and multi-story buildings, telephone poles and wire in
the background. Kraevskii showed the Iskry’s reading public an image of a robust,
“progressive” nation, engaged in familiar displays of patriotism, which justifiably
defeated the Russians in battle. 67

In the face of Russian defeat, magazine editors responded with increasingly
flattering portrayals of the Japanese. The photo-reportage and news illustrations also
highlighted the mutual experiences of suffering of Russian and Japanese soldiers on the
front lines. The pen-and-ink sketches of Vladimir Taburin showed Japanese soldiers
fighting fiercely and honorably, and they captured the horrors of war in general rather
than commenting on the specific comportment of soldiers. Sometimes these pictures
offered a misleading and overly optimistic portrayal of the Russian state of affairs, such
as a scene of Japanese officers flying the white flag of surrender, printed within one
month of General Stoessel’s widely reported defeat at Port Arthur. The editors of Iskry
also evoked the sense of brotherhood that the war had created between former foes.
While press photographer Sergei Smirnov was covering Japanese prisoners of war, he
reported on an officer who, according to the caption, had committed suicide (“hara-kiri”) due to his intense longing for his homeland. 68 The first panel showed the dead Japanese,


67 In an article for the San Francisco Bulletin, reprinted in Iskry, Kraevskii was quoted as praising
the “progressive Japanese.”

68 Iskry, no. 20 (22 May 1905): 160.
lying in bed, and the next two photographs captured both Russian and Japanese soldiers in uniform paying respects at the gravesite of their “comrade.” [FIGURE 25.] They prayed together, while listening to a Russian soldier give a eulogy, and then the Russians and Japanese posed together for a photograph to commemorate the solemn occasion.

The coverage of the Russo-Japanese war ultimately reflected a conflict between competing imperialist ambitions. Supported by Great Britain and America, Japan represented the Western model of imperialism, which threatened to oppress and exploit the native Chinese and Koreans in the region. The Russian Empire, by contrast, offered
the Far East a “benevolent” and “morally superior” version of imperialism. Indeed, patriotic fervor inspired artists and magazine editors to produce and publish racially tinged depictions of the Japanese. But, a magazine like Iskry, which was committed to photo-reportage, offered a more objective portrait of Japan, which likely reflected the broader sentiments of middle class readers. If anything, the photographic coverage publicized the idea of long-term cultural integration between Russia and Japan. Louise McReynolds has argued that war in the Far East encouraged Russians to re-evaluate what it meant to be Russian, and more significantly, to think of themselves as more Asian. Not only were the Japanese portrayed as essentially Western and civilized, but also as “comrades” who in the course of the war had shared in the horrors of battle. The photo-reportage during the conflict confirmed these ambitions. However, given the humiliating defeat, this realization, which has deep historical roots, did not fundamentally shake Russian national identity. The war was thus not a failure of national character or imperial ambition, but rather of the leadership’s inability to appropriately harness the nation’s resources to a greater purpose.

The Political Illustrated Press: The 1905 Revolution

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69 This “Asianist” ideology was never the main driving of Russian involvement in the Far East, however “it reflected certain perceptions at court and among the educated public about Russia’s place in the world:” David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2001), 60; also see McReynolds, The News under Russia’s Old Regime, 197.

70 Ibid., 194.

71 The early 19th century historian Nikolai Karamzin had written that “Russia owes its greatness to the Khans:” George Vernadsky, The Mongols and Russia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 133.
Bloody Sunday, the traditional demarcation of the start of the 1905 Revolution, was not reported in the illustrated press. Censors stopped magazines from publishing news about strikes and disorder, and later extended restrictions to reports on the workers’ question and violence between military and crowds. Editors continued to focus almost exclusively on the Russo-Japanese War. On occasion they published photographs that acknowledged, in the context of the news more generally, the political turmoil on the home front. However, only the signed peace with Japan marked a significant shift in photo-reportage, at which point coverage of the conflict in the Far East was eclipsed by news of social and political strife at home. In November 1905, the revolution finally made it to the pages of popular magazines with images of barricades in the streets of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and cities in the provinces. These events marked the beginning of an illustrated press that was engaged increasingly in the country’s internal politics. Press photographers were enlisted by editors to map out the new political landscape of Russia, one that reflected the democratic ambitions of civil society and established a new standard of political transparency.

During the Revolution, photographs visually reinforced the central role of the press in mediating Russian politics. Magazines reported on news stories about the press and publishing, such as the Kobeko conference on censorship, and publishers also wrote themselves, and their publications, into the grand narrative of the reform movement. The

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72 Ruud, *Fighting Words*, 213.

73 For example, both *Iskry* and *Niva* offered extensive photographic coverage of the assassination of Gran Duke Aleksandrovich by radical opponents to the regime. Portraits of prominent reforms and key members of government also were published, including a group portrait of the zemstvo leaders who met the Tsar on 6 June (Iskry, no. 24 [19 June 1905]: 192; Niva, no. 24 [18 June 1905]: 477). However, in general, such acknowledge of domestic politics required the magazine reader to be already familiar with the operating context from other news sources.
press reported the news and also was the news, and through photography, the press integrated themselves into the revolutionary moment. *Iskry*, for example, promoted *Russkoe slovo* and publicized Ivan Sytin’s publishing enterprises in general. The announcement of the Bulygin constitution, which first proposed an elected national assembly, was captured in a two-page series of photographs of people in Moscow reading newspapers. The headline read “6 August in Moscow” and the photographs showed fruit sellers, laborers, carriage drivers, janitors, and streetcar commuters all enraptured by the news. A full-page group portrait on the last page eliminated any doubt as to the brand of the newspapers: peasants gathered around a copy of *Russkoe slovo*, the title page conspicuously displayed for the camera.  

*Iskry* also reported on the fire that consumed Sytin’s book printing plant, which had become a locus of revolutionary activity, and published a series of photographs that chronicled the night shift at *Russkoe slovo* during the state imposed curfew. Among the pictures of printers and secretaries, sleeping in offices, was an image of a press photographer reading the newspaper after a hard day’s work.

Editors unleashed a deluge of photo-reportage illustrating the so-called Days of Liberty. For the first time, pictures of dead Russians appeared in *Iskry*, and the editors advertised the fact that censors had previously banned these images. The two capital publications, *Iskry* and *Niva*, focused on the armed uprising in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The first issue of *Iskry* in 1906 featured a full-page cover photo of a group of

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75 Ruud, *Russian Entrepreneur*, 82-83; *Niva*, no. 52 (31 December 1905): 996; *Iskry*, no. 1 (1 January 1906): 8; *Iskry*, no. 3 (15 January 1906): 4-5.

76 *Iskry*, no. 46 (4 December 1905): 368.
“vigilantes” standing on a snow-covered barricade. [FIGURE 26.] Inside, Moscow-based photographers, including Mikhail Gribov and Sergei Smirnov, contributed extensive visual reports of the physical damage done to the city. They also captured the human cost of the uprising in graphic detail: one photo-series included images of a dead man lying in the streets, a row of naked corpses on straw beds, and a horse-driven sled, riding “towards the cemetery with the bodies of the dead.” 77 The captions were short and succinct. Below the row of naked corpses, for example, the editors simply wrote “In the police waiting room,” presuming the audience recognized the subjects and offering a mere addendum to the visual evidence. The editors of Niva, by contrast, shielded their readers from the worst of violence – faithful to their “family magazine” profile – and the captions were less suggestive and more descriptive. 78

Using much of the same photo-reportage, the editors of Iskry and Niva covered the subsequent incidents of government repression in different ways. Although concentrated in the two capitals, the photographic coverage in both magazines revealed the national dimension of the revolutionary crisis.

77 Iskry, no. 1 (1 January 1906): 4-5.

78 Niva, no. 52 (31 December 1905): 993-96; Niva, no. 1 (7 January 1906): 10-11.
In particular, the editors dedicated extensive coverage to the Baltic provinces, where government forces, according to the historian Abraham Ascher, “unleashed an unspeakable reign of terror” against the local revolutionaries in retaliation for the uprising.  

In both magazines, all the news images of the uprising in the Baltics were credited to Karl Bulla. Some images appeared in one publication and not the other, but most of the photo-reportage overlapped. The captions, however, varied greatly, and spoke to the different manner in which the respective editors chose to frame the conflict in the Baltics.

*Niva* covered the uprising over five consecutive issues and the photo-reportage highlighted the violence committed against the local German nobility and the punitive actions of the Russian army. The editors of *Niva* portrayed the revolution in the Baltics as an uprising of Latvian peasants against the landed nobles. These victims received aid from the Russian army, who quickly restored order to the countryside, and the nobles were again free to enjoy the splendor of their estates. The coverage began with profiles of two German “castles,” which had been sacked during the rebellion. Bulla’s photographs of Castle Remersgof included interior views of destruction and a group portrait of the domestic servants (“all that remains of the castle”) posing morosely in front of the ruins. The visual story laid out by *Niva*’s editors in subsequent issues was one of crime and punishment. They focused on and followed the government’s security forces (*okhrannye voisk*) protecting the streets of Riga, searching rural homesteads, finding

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weapons cache, and arresting suspected rebels. A photograph of a burning hut (“after
being searched”) indicated its distance from Remersgof, thus tying the original crime to
the subsequent act of justice. 82 The captions personalized the Russian army (rather than
the rebels); they included the names and ranks of the officers in charge. The magazine
also commemorated the widely reported capture of two revolutionary leaders, Anna
Krostin and Petr Borovskii, with a small portrait. The full-page collage of photographs,
like a trophy case, showed the two rebels, guarded by armed soldiers, among other
images of the military’s successes and sacrifices, including images of injured soldiers and
a wounded dragoon horse. One of the last pictures showed Russian officers enjoying the
hospitality of presumably their noble host inside the Castle Jungfrauengof. 83

The editors of Iskry told a very different story of the Baltic uprising with many of
the same pictures. In this magazine, the press photographer (and by proxy, the public)
bore witness to the human and material costs of the government’s overzealous response,
while also acknowledging the damage the rebels had, in a sense, done to themselves.
First, they condensed the coverage of the Baltic uprising into one issue, featuring 14
photographs in total, accompanied by a short article on the rebellion and the military’s
response. 84 They also shifted the perspective of the photo-reportage from the nobles and
soldiers to the revolutionaries. The news coverage in Iskry did not profile or name the
German estates. By contrast, the editors referred to the burning village (“Glazman”) and
homesteads (“Vishual” and “Putin-Krasting”) by name. The captions also offered less

82 Niva, no. 6 (11 February 1906): 92. Of course, it was unclear whether, in fact, the rebels
punished in this picture were the same rebels who were responsible for the sacking of the castle.

83 Niva, no. 9 (4 March 1906): 141.

84 Iskry, no. 7 (12 February 1906): 21, 26-29, 32.
information about the content of the photo-reportage, allowing the public to read more into the images independent of editorial input. On the last page, the photographs showed rebels in police custody, a funeral of a revolutionary, and a tavern keeper standing among broken bottles and upturned tables, “utterly ruined by the rebels.”

One photo-story, in particular, highlighted the difference in Iskry’s coverage. Using what were, perhaps, in actuality unassociated photographs, the editors crafted a visual narrative about the swift and ruthless actions of the Russian military in the Baltic provinces. This two-page spread featured six photographs and was published a month after the original series about the Baltic uprising. At the top (the “first” picture), the editors printed a photograph of Anna Krastin and Petr Borovskii in military custody – the exact same picture that was featured in Niva. The other five photographs, however, only appeared in Iskry. The largest images, taking up nearly half the available space, showed two dead bodies lying in the snow behind a wooden fence; the caption read, “The executed rebels.” Next to this image was a photograph of a firing squad (“The rebels being executed”) and two images of soldiers searching a nearby forest and discovering a hidden cache of weapons. Although the article attached to this photo-story referred to Krastin as “being in the hands of the police, awaiting serious punishment,” the visual logic of the photo-reportage implied that she and Borovskii were executed on the spot.

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85 Iskry, no. 7 (12 February 1906): 32.
86 Iskry, no. 11 (12 March 1906): 88-89.
87 The article appears in Iskry, no. 11 (12 March 1906): 93.
those specific rebels, Iskry’s editors still managed to bring attention to other, similar events that resulted in summary executions.

The editors of Iskry and Niva also offered divergent perspectives on the pogroms that swept through Russia in 1905 and 1906. The first wave of violence began on the day after the Tsar issued the October Manifesto. Although principally directed toward Russia’s Jewish population, other ethnicities were also targeted. In Iskry, photographs from Rostov, Saratov, and other provincial centers surveyed the skeletal remains of Jewish homes and storefronts, as well as looted Armenian churches. Niva did not initially report on these incidents, however, in the following year, the editors published two photo-stories on the pogroms in Bialystok and Siedlce. In each case, a series of pictures was laid out on one page, alongside extensive captions, which together offered a basic,

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89 Niva, no. 25 (24 June 1906): 399; Niva, no. 38 (23 September 1906): 607.
albeit horrific visual account of the events. Both accounts mitigated the Jewish-centric nature of the violence by implying that Jews were not the only victims. According to eyewitness accounts, the pogrom in Bialystok broke out during a Christian procession. A photograph showed the building “from which a revolver shot out at the religious procession.” Who fired the gun was unclear, and the bullets destination implied that though tragic, the subsequent violence against the Jews was not wholly unprovoked. Likewise, the coverage of the pogroms in Siedlce paid homage to the non-Jewish victims of the pogrom. The first photograph, at the top of the page, showed a Catholic church, where local, presumably Christian “residents took shelter from the shots” being fired.

The coverage in Iskry, by contrast, presented an intimate and harrowing narrative of familial suffering. The photo-reportage cast no doubt as to who the victims were and also subtly implicated the Russian authorities in the violence. Iskry’s editors underlined the publication’s particular interest in the Bialystok story by specially dispatching Samson Chernov to report on the aftermath. 90 An entire issue was devoted to the story, which included 30 pictures of the physical damage done to Jewish homes and businesses, as well as graphic depictions of wounded victims. Captions below photographs of orphans, dead bodies, or family members, mourning lost relatives, personalized the victims and their families by including individual names. Whereas Niva underemphasized the gravity of the pogroms, the editors of Iskry, if anything, exaggerated the scope of the violence. Together, the numbers of dead mentioned in captions, plus a visual count of the pictured corpses, greatly inflate the actual estimate. 91 The photo-reportage even made

90 The coverage of the Bialystok pogrom ran throughout Iskry, no. 24 (18 June 1906).

91 There is some disagreement over the total number of Jews killed during the pogrom in Bialystok. Ascher cites contemporaneous news accounts that reported 82 dead and 700 injured: Ascher The
reference to bombs being launched at Jews in the streets from apartment buildings. The coverage of Siedlce subtly implied the complicity of the local authorities in the pogrom. The photo-reportage surveyed the streets where the violence took place; the caption below read, “The Jewish quarter, near the police station, where the shooting began.”92 The link between the police and the violence was subtle, but probably less so for a readership that was already primed to suspect government collusion.

The photo-reportage of pogroms offered a seemingly transparent glimpse into the human cost of the anti-Semitism of the autocratic regime. These incidents ignited furious debate in the newly elected State Duma, headlined by Prince S. D. Urusov, a former bureaucrat, who accused the government of fomenting the violence. His speech was met with widespread approval among the deputies. In addition to being an indictment of the state, the photographic coverage also presented an antidote to the political climate of violence and anti-Semitism. The coverage in Iskry showed two members of the Duma visiting with the victims in Bialystok. In the first, a Jewish deputy from Grodno province, V. R. Jacobson, interviewed a witness; in the second, a family posed with another deputy, Professor E. N. Shchepkin, while he examined their ransacked home.93 Indeed, the coverage of the pogroms indicted the political status quo, but also, by showing recently elected Duma members investigating the incidents, it offered evidence of the new civilian government’s interest in exacting justice. Through photo-reportage, magazines such as Iskry thus identified and publicized an alternative source of authority in Russia.


92 Iskry, no. 37 (17 September 1906): 504-5.

The First and Second State Dumas

The election and tenure of the first and second State Dumas dominated the news, and whereas the 1905 Revolution divided the illustrated press, the inaugural year of Russia’s national parliament seemed to inspire editorial accord. The daily *Russkie vedomosti* declared the Duma “the center of national life,” and the photo-reportage in *Iskry* and *Niva* certainly reflected this sentiment on the magazine page. Press photographers captured every aspect of the Duma. Prominent leaders, common deputies, various parties and factions, and places and spaces inhabited by these politicians came under intense scrutiny. Despite proving impotent as a legislative body, the Duma remained at the foreground of the national political landscape. By contrast, the Tsar and the imperial family were nowhere to be seen, and government ministers were caricatured far more than photographed in this period. Through photo-reportage, magazines publishers and editors defined the new visual landscape of Russian politics and validated the elected deputies in the Duma as legitimate representatives of the people.

Russia’s first national election was a historical moment worthy of in-depth coverage and commemoration. The editors of *Iskry* covered the weeks of balloting with a sense of responsibility to posterity. “We preserve in the illustrations,” the editors wrote, “a record of our actions during the first elections to the State Duma, for history, for our descendants.” In *Niva*, the elections were considered within a greater international

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95 *Iskry*, no. 8 (19 February 1906): 40-41, 45.
context. The Duma represented Russia’s entrance into an exclusive club of Western
states. The editors looked to the West for points of comparison; they laid out pictures of
the Tauride Palace, the official seat of the Duma, alongside similar images of
Westminster in London, the French chamber of deputies, and other European
parliaments. An article also compared the socio-economic makeup of the Duma to these
same parliaments, as well as the Congress of the United States.\(^{96}\) The first election
seemed to elevate Russia onto the international stage like never before, and *Iskry* and
*Niva* offered proof that the world was looking at Russia: a group portrait of foreign
correspondents attending the royal inauguration of the State Duma. This image,
prominently displayed in both magazines, reinforced the international significance of the
occasion, and illustrated Russia’s acceptance into the Western political fold.\(^{97}\)

Press photographers had an unprecedented amount of access to the work lives of
Duma deputies. This close scrutiny created a new standard of political transparency and
public access to government. Politicians were expected to make themselves available to
journalists and photographers on a regular basis. Pictures in *Iskry* reminded the public of
these daily interactions, showing Duma deputies answering questions and giving
interviews to members of the press. Journalists and politicians seemed to work alongside
each other. A photo-story about a Kadet party conference included, among images of
various politicians, a group of Russian and foreign correspondents around a table, writing
reports about the conference at the end of the day.\(^{98}\) This relationship between the press

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\(^{96}\) “Sostav pervoi gosdarstvennoi dumy,” in *Niva*, no. 28 (15 July 1906): 446-47.

\(^{97}\) *Niva*, no. 19 (13 May 1906): 304 ; *Iskry*, no. 20 (21 May 1906): 236.

\(^{98}\) *Niva*, no. 41, (14 October 1906): 655.
and the deputies was mutually beneficial. The press got privileged access to stories of widespread interest – in photographic terms, to valorized objects – and the deputies received a national audience for their issues and activities. \(^9^9\) Resistance, that is, not wanting to be photographed, turned politicians into subjects of ridicule and suspicion. In *Iskry*, for example, two pictures, published under the headline “Enemy of Photography,” showed Duma deputy N. F. Dobrotvorskii “hiding himself from the photographer” and then demanding the exposed film-plates. The deputy failed to escape the scrutiny of the camera; the photographer captured Dobrotvorskii’s image without the politicians consent. \(^1^0^0\) By not collaborating with the photographer, the politician was made to look silly. The press photographer, and by extension the editors and the magazine, asserted the Russian public’s right to these photographs, regardless of the politician’s personal scruples.

Most politicians, however, welcomed the publicity, and through photo-reportage magazine editors introduced the reading public to the central actors in the unfolding drama of Russia’s constitutional experiment. Portraits of prominent members of civil society and various leaders of political parties and factions filled the pages of *Iskry* and *Niva*. These were formal, studio-made portraits with captions that included name, profession, and sometimes home city or province. In *Iskry*, these portraits appeared on the cover in a series titled “Modern Public Figures,” which focused primarily on politicians from the two capitals. Wishing to appeal to a more provincial audience, the editors of *Niva* selected portraits of public figures from the provinces, such as governors, zemstvo


\(^1^0^0\) *Iskry*, no. 28 (16 July 1906): 363.
representatives, and local city heads. In addition, after each election, the editors published small portraits of every single deputy elected to serve in the Duma. Between April and December 1906, the editors of *Iskry* arranged 16 portraits per page and included the name, title, and constituency of each deputy below the image. *Niva* adopted a similar, albeit more efficient layout, which featured 28 portraits per page. These portraits visualized the democratic principles on which the State Duma was founded, at least in theory and in the public imagination.

Editors highlighted the diverse social makeup of the Duma. They published articles and graphics (statistical tables and pie-charts) that drew attention to the high portion of physical laborers in Russia’s parliament. Photo-reportage also demonstrated this point. Following the election, *Iskry* featured four portraits of the Duma deputies from Moscow on the cover. This included S. A. Muromtsev, F. F. Kokoshkin, M. Ia. Gertsenshtein, and I. F. Savel’ev, who alone was identified as “a typesetter” and a member of the workers’ party.101 [FIGURE 28.] Both *Iskry* and *Niva* later featured a more in-depth profile of this quartet, which again brought attention to Savel’ev’s working class status. Both magazines featured the

same arrangement of photographs. The first picture was a group portraits of the four Moscow deputies; they sat in chairs, dressed in fine suits, and posed for the camera at a banquet. In this portrait, Savel’ev was distinguished only by his lack of eye-glasses – a visual signature of the intellectual and professional classes. Below, the second photograph showed the typesetting room of the newspaper Russkie vedomosti, where Savel’ev was employed. In the picture, the “member of the State Duma” posed for the camera in front of his work station; only Savel’ev among the other typesetters in the room acknowledged the camera. He was singled out among his colleagues in both pictures. Savel’ev was a member of the urban working class, but also elevated above his station by virtue of his membership in the Duma. The group portrait and the four portraits on the cover of Iskry likewise distinguished him from the other deputies and at the same time visualized his integration into the Duma. He was an equal member alongside the more prominent public figures. Finally, his association with the press was certainly another point of pride, especially for two publications that used photo-reportage to publicize the members of the press and the press industry in the Duma.

More than just exposing the politicians to public scrutiny, photographers had immense access to the daily workings of the State Duma. They revealed the daily business of government and, perhaps more importantly, it was portrayed as work, as a set of activities and interactions between people – this, in contrast to the rather mysterious processes and machinations of autocracy. Though the medium of photography did not lend itself to the details of debate and legislation, editors offered the reading public a glimpse of the various people, places, and levels of government in action. A regular

102 Iskry, no. 16 (23 April 1906): 173; the editors of Niva used the same pictures and layout: Niva, no. 18 (6 May 1906): 280-81.
series in *Iskry* called “Around the Duma,” showed deputies coming and going, giving speeches, working in committee meetings, and conferring with each other in back room halls. One picture captured a barefooted “petitioner” from the countryside talking to a deputy from Vologda province who sat on a park bench, listening intently and taking notes.  

[FIGURE 29.] This was a populist portrait of democracy at work – the concerns of the common folk communicated to their representatives in St. Petersburg. Press photographers even revealed the work of the support staff in the Duma apparatus. In

103 *Iskry*, no. 26 (2 July 1906): 328.
Niva, for example, a series of photographs showed a small army of stenographers, mostly women, transcribing hand-written accounts of State Duma debates and meetings into typewritten form.\textsuperscript{104} Politics was work that required the skills and abilities of different types of people.

Magazines also used photo-reportage to explore the social, geographic, cultural, and religious divisions in the Russian Empire. The national parliament allowed these groups to make themselves heard, and photography helped to make them seen. This was especially true of two groups: peasants and visible minorities. The story of “peasant-deputies,” as they were referred to in magazines, was one of social dislocation. In Niva, for example, a photographer captured a small group of peasant members of the Duma in their St. Petersburg hostel.\textsuperscript{105} In two, highly staged photographs, they were shown socializing and enjoying breakfast together; a third picture showed a peasant reading the newspaper in his Spartan quarters. The peasants were well dressed in pressed white shirts and dark vests; their bushy mustaches and long, scruffy beards preserved a distinctly rural look. Most importantly, two illustrations in the margins, which framed the photo-story, underlined their rural origins and the sense of being isolated and away from home. One drawing showed a weather-beaten rural homestead; the other, a peasant on the road with his feet wrapped in cloth. Carrying a walking stick and backpack, he shielded his eyes, gazing out into the distance. Relying on popular tropes of peasant representation, the photo-reportage was both ennobling and condescending. In photographs, the peasant-deputies displayed a quiet dignity and simplicity, but were also shown as displaced in the

\textsuperscript{104}Niva, no. 23 (10 June 1906): 365.

\textsuperscript{105}Niva, no. 30 (29 July 1906): 476.
“big city” and as “sticking to their own kind;” they were ‘others’ among their urban-based colleagues. This was the story of the peasant journey to the big city, and given the rapidly changing demographics of Moscow and St. Petersburg, it likely resonated with many urban readers.

By contrast, the photo-reportage of non-Russian representatives in the Duma told a story of social uplift. Among non-Russians, Muslim deputies received a disproportionately large amount of publicity. Muslim deputies from Kazan, Orenburg, Central Asia, and the Caucasus offered an exoticism in dress and custom that, say, Polish deputies in general could not (despite the relative importance in Duma matters of the Polish question). This exoticism offered press photographers clear visual signifiers of otherness, and editors relied on the ethnographic discourse of types to frame the coverage of Muslim deputies. In Iskry, for example, photo-stories featuring the word “types” invariably featured Muslim deputies dressed in traditional robes and turbans, posing sternly for the camera.106 However, this publication also published a series photo-story that eschewed the ethnographic language and the colonial gaze. Eleven photographs under the headline “The Muslim Faction in the State Duma” showed Muslim deputies dressed in Western-style suits (with the occasional kufi) in the offices and surrounding grounds of the Tauride Palace. Although clearly posed, these portraits appeared to catch the deputies unawares; most of the subjects were shown reading newspapers or other types of documents.107 [FIGURE 30.] Having been integrated into the political culture of the Duma, these deputies represented themselves as Westernized politicians and appeared

106 Iskry, no. 14 (8 April 1907): 110; for another example, see Iskry, no. 16 (22 April 1907): 124-25.

not unlike their Russian counterparts in the regular “Around the Duma” series. On the surface, the elections, the Duma, and Russian “democracy” seemingly transformed the Muslim deputies upon their arrival to St. Petersburg.

Representations of cultural and ethnic subdivision increasingly gave way to images of political divisions (though often these overlapped) in the illustrated press. Parties and factions became key markers of political identity. In Iskry, the Constitutional Democratic Party (the Kadets) was featured most prominently. However, both Iskry and Niva also featured profiles of other parties, such as the Trudoviki, the Octoberists, the Polish Circle, and even radical right-wing factions, such as the Black Hundreds, were
also part of the visual landscape, especially in the coverage of the second elections and Duma. 108

The greater focus on party politics was accompanied by increased coverage of political and social issues, which often aligned with specific party platforms in the Duma. They published photo-stories that brought attention to, among other issues, the plight of political prisoners, the rights of Russian Jews, and the status of Poland and Finland within the realm. Press photographers reported on these stories in a dispassionate manner, however, by simply exposing the public to these images, editors were, to some degree, advocating on their behalf. Iskry, for example, devoted lots of copy to unemployment in Russia, brought on at the time by a recession and a labor market saturated by soldiers returning from the Far East. 109 On the cover of one issue, the editors featured a portrait of two unemployed men, who represented the educated and uneducated classes respectively. Inside, the editors focused on unemployed workers in Moscow who were engaged in public works programs. In this specific case, Iskry tied the fate of the unemployed to the non-governmental efforts to feed and provide other types of aid to affected families. 110 Much of the same photo-reportage appeared in Niva, which focused more on the efforts to help the unemployed in St. Petersburg. In particular, the editors showed crowds packed

108 The Black Hundreds were not an official political party, however the group did have many vocal sympathizers in the State Duma. For example, on the cover of Iskry, the editors published to photographs illustrated in the “political extremes,” one of which showed Duma “reactionaries” from Bessarabia, known as the Black Hundreds: Iskry, no. 15 (15 April 1907): 112.


tightly in front of the “points of direct aid” where, as the captions informed readers, the unemployed could get provisions, such as bread, meat, and potatoes. 111

Often the photo-reportage was less dispassionate and bordered on overt political advocacy. Editors took advantage of the potential emotional impact of photography to draw attention to urgent social issues. This was especially true of Iskry’s coverage of the ‘agrarian question.’ In 1906, press photographers traveled to the countryside and offered a glimpse of the desperation of farmers ravaged by poor harvest. The photo-reportage also touched on two related issues, namely, the punitive actions taken against striking peasants by local authorities and the attempts of civil society (and the State Duma) to bring relief to the countryside. The photographer Sergei Smirnov focused his camera specifically on women, children, and the elderly. In one issue, photographs of sick and starving children, watched over by grief-stricken mothers, pulled at the heartstrings of the magazine’s urban audience. 112 [FIGURE 31.] The captions were brief, no more than a few descriptive words, and in place of extensive commentary the editors included two lines from a poem by Nikolai Neskarov: “In this world, there is a king; this king is ruthless, / Hunger is his

111 Niva, no. 19 (12 May 1907): 310.
112 Iskry, no. 34 (27 August 1906): 449.
Another photo-story by Smirnov presented an intimate portrait of a family coping with the poor harvest. In one landscape image, the photographer captured a peasant woman and her three children working in a wheat field. The caption informed the reader that this family, belonging to an “arrested peasant,” was forced to collect the “paltry harvest,” which “can neither be cut nor reaped” with their bare hands. Two other photographs showed bread being distributed to peasants and the building of a public well, both relief projects organized by a group of zemstvo activists.

During the 1905 Revolution and the first two Duma elections, magazine editors transformed their publications into venues for a visual political discourse. Using photographs to illustrate social issues was new to Russia’s illustrated press. Though always a product made by and for Russia’s middle classes, popular weekly magazines such as Iskry and Niva established themselves in this period as active partners in the greater political goals of civil society. After the Stolypin coup, the coverage in magazines returned to the pre-war mix of art, culture, and current affairs. But editors continued to scrutinize the activities of the government and the Duma. Photo-reportage connected the world of high politics and the growing influence of civil society to the press social issues of late-Imperial Russia. Education, poverty, human health, as well as the continued advocacy for civil rights and the peasantry, were subjects that press photographers surveyed alongside lighter news about automobile races, sports, and the theatre. These issues were not unique to this period, however the means of their exposure through photography and magazines was. Employing the photography medium – which was

113 Ibid., 456-57.

increasingly being used to chronicle family life – to report on the news allowed photographers and editors to add an emotional arc to the facts.

The new level of political scrutiny, of relating to politicians on personal, perhaps even familial grounds, became increasingly the primary way of representing politics in Russia. Government ministers, such as Petr A. Stolypin, were also thrust into this new era of photographic access. Following the assassination attempt on the prime minister, magazines circulated images of Stolypin and his wife on a park bench – a portrait of family and intimate relations previously unseen in the illustrated press. Likewise the imperial family, which had remained largely absent in magazines during this period, also began to publicize their official duties and private lives more thoroughly. Thus, in addition to politicizing the illustrated news, the Revolution and the election also personalized the politics of Russia. As the handheld camera became the means of commemorating the middle class family in Russia, press photographers translated this popular aesthetic to the public sphere. This formal shift in the manner of political representation was, in a sense, also a political act. Politicians were expected to be familiar and ‘of the people,’ rather than distanced from the general population, which signalled an important change in the way that Russians thought about their leaders.
In the summer of 1914, Russia’s illustrated press celebrated the outbreak of the Great War. Press photographers captured the seemingly spontaneous displays of patriotism and pan-Slavic brotherhood in the streets of Moscow and Petrograd.¹ The crowds carried images of the Tsar and rallied around memorials and historical landmarks, which recalled the military glories of the Russian state. Editors echoed these displays in magazines with portraits of Nicholas and the imperial family, and visual news reports of their public appearances.² The Tsar and the people appeared united in purpose and spirit; the ritual function of photography, “to sanctify the union between two groups,” was evoked in the public’s demonstrations of affection for the royal family as they walked among their subjects.³ But these scenarios of patriotism and unity were short-lived. In the following months, photographers chronicled all aspects of the war, and editors relegated the Tsar from the starring role to a more supporting part in the weekly news. Magazines presented a wide-range of photo-reportage, and the Romanov’s vied for publicity with civilian

¹ In fact, these patriotic marches were usually organized by the police: Richard S. Wortman, Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarch, vol. 2 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 511.

² For example, Iskry, no. 29 (27 July 1914): 225; Ogonek, no. 30 (27 July [9 August] 1914): 1; Niva, no. 31 (2 August 1914): 609.

politicians and common soldiers. Photo-reportage during the war tapped into the experiences of ordinary people and made them feel engaged in the progress of history as citizens, soldiers, patriots, victims, and revolutionaries.

Photography was at the height of its popularity in Russia in the summer of 1914. At every level, the industry tied to the production and distribution of photography took advantage of personal and public interest in the Great War and made more pictures available to the Russian public than at any other time in the nation’s history. In the previous decade, camera and film-plate manufacturers had successfully marketed cheap and easy to use equipment to the middle classes. Advertisements in newspapers and magazines targeted young Russians and offered a wide variety of prices. These campaigns were modified after the declaration of war. Eastman Kodak started to tout the virtues of special cameras made for soldiers “to capture scenes experienced during the Great War.”⁴ Wives and mothers in particular were urged to send photographs of family to “calm the nerves” of loved ones stationed on the front lines.⁵ At the same time, publishers of magazines, books, postcards, albums, and stereographs produced and distributed news images about the war. The major weekly publications, namely Ogonek, Iskry, Solntse Rossi, Sinii zhurnal, and Niva, printed more pictures per issue than ever before. Ogonek became Russia’s most popular weekly periodical, attracting about 700,000 readers per week, and the editors estimated that each issue passed through ten sets of hands before being thrown away.⁶

⁴ Liubitel’ kodakist, no. 36, advertisement.
⁵ Liubitel’ kodakist, no. 37, advertisement.
Publishers also started to issue weekly periodicals that were dedicated to the war. The editors of *Priroda i liudi*, for example, offered an extra supplement called *Voina* (War), which featured articles, personal accounts of the front lines, and war photography. Other magazines allowed subscribers to purchase special war issues or photographic albums, which focused on specific subjects, such as Russia’s allies, or offered a broad “artistic” survey of the war. In *Vsemirnaia panorama*, these supplements included portraits military heroes and postcards of life in wartime. The publisher and editor D. N. Dubenskii launched the weekly *Letopis’ voiny 1914 goda* (Chronicle of the War of 1914). This periodical was modeled on *Letopis voiny s Iaponiei*, which he published ten years earlier during the Russo-Japanese War. The two publications shared a similar format, visual layout, and perspective on the war. Despite his claims of impartiality, Dubenskii openly acknowledged the deep sense of patriotism and faith in God and the Tsar that inspired and informed the content of *Letopis voiny 1914 goda*. The magazine was published on thick, high-quality paper and the cover featured a detailed illustration of the Imperial seal, which again reinforced the close iconographic link between the Tsar and the Great War. At 30 kopecks per issue (35 in Moscow and the provinces), it was also quite expensive. In contrast to popular magazines such as *Ogonek* or *Iskry*, Dubenskii catered exclusively to a patriotic, God-fearing elite, whose interests were entrenched in preserving the traditional political landscape in Russia.

During Russia’s Great War, magazine editors used photography to advance progressive politics and to publicize the patriotic contributions of civil society. They

7 See subscription advertisement for *Vsemirnaia panorama* in *Solntse Rossii*, no. 45 (351) (November 1916).

mobilized image and text to incite emotion, activate prejudices, lionize heroes, and
demonize villains. They told photo-stories about society and politics in order to shape the
reading public’s beliefs and actions. However, the commercial interests of publishers
counterbalanced these political agendas. On the one hand, editors strongly supported the
Duma and the continued prosecution of the war, especially when civilian politicians took
charge of foreign affairs in February 1917. On the other hand, magazines continued to
exhibit a broad range of pictures, hoping to attract a large and diverse audience regardless
of readers’ political views. The diversity diluted the politics of the illustrated press and
allowed readers to pick and choose among the pictures on the page – to craft their own
narrative of the news. But this changed after the February Revolution, when a popular
uprising overthrew the autocratic regime, and the politicians, alongside influential
members of civil society, seized control of the Russian state. Publishers continued to
champion these politicians. For over a decade, the illustrated press had been aligned with
progressive voices in Russian politics; to some degree, the content and perspective of
photo-reportage was defined by these allegiances, and this commitment to a democratic
(or alternatively, non-autocratic) Russia became a liability once the progressives took
power. Overnight, the illustrated press went from being a publicist of the political
opposition to a propagandist of the status quo.

Censorship in War and Revolution

Military censors regulated the activities of press photographers closely during the war. In
fact, the General Staff’s statute on war correspondence (‘‘Polozhenie o voennykh
korrespondentakh v voennoe vremia”), written in 1912, addressed the sanctioned uses of photography in great detail. \(^9\) Access to the front lines was issued to only twenty war correspondents (photographers or writers), and an additional three photographers, who had to be Russian nationals. All correspondents had to provide personal identification, proof of press affiliation, and a certificate of loyalty, issued by a military or diplomatic representative. Due to the proliferation of camera technology and its potential abuses, the military provided special rules that governed movement of press photographers and censorship procedures behind the lines. Special permission was required to enter and leave the war theater, and prior to publication, correspondents had to submit two copies of pictures for preliminary review, one of which remained permanently with the censor. In addition to approving the image, censors also had to approve the description of the picture written underneath the image. If correspondents failed to follow the statute, or if censors discovered unapproved photographs in weekly publications, the photographer was subjected to various fines, banishment from the front, or imprisonment, all of which were outlined in the statute.

Photographers were also subject to regulation regarding the content of visual reports. Written in July 1914, this document (“Perechen’ svedenii i izobrazhenii, ne podlezhashchikh oglusheniui i rasprostraneniiu”) listed the subjects prohibited from mass distribution. Among these were images of the size, location, and preparedness of land and naval forces, the construction of railways, the conditions of telegraph lines, and other information on weapons, fortifications, and strategy. Often these guidelines were quite

vague. For example, war correspondents were prohibited from reporting on “the intentions and actions of the army and navy, and military events of all kind, as well as to any rumors in regards to these.” This inspired the general staff officer Mikhail Lemke to suggest that exact observance of these regulations “would be tantamount to maintaining a perfect silence about the war.” Moreover, the statute offered nothing in terms of censorial direction with regard to photography. What exactly a photograph communicated was under the discretion of individual censors. The list was rewritten on a number of occasions, mostly to correct vague prohibitions, but according to Lemke, it “did not find complete application in practical life and work” and ultimately led to neglect or arbitrary interpretation.

Military censorship came under intense criticism during the first year of the war. In particular, the Ministry of Internal Affairs noted publishers’ complaints about the lack of co-ordination between military and civil censors, the difference between censorship in the theater of war and in the rest of the country, and the overall poor quality of individual censors. Indeed, regulations established by the Chief Administration of Press Affairs in 1905 interfered with the temporary military statutes. At the same time, military censorship was also not enforced uniformly across Russia. In the theater of war, which encompassed the areas were troops were stationed and the reserve zones behind the lines, censorship was imposed in full. But in the remainder of the country, censorship was only partially observed. In his memoir, Lemke reported that material strictly forbidden in

10 Ibid., 370.
11 Ibid., 370-71.
12 Ibid., 426.
Petrograd was being freely distributed in other regions. “For example, articles about the autonomy of Poland and Armenia, and for the need of full equality of Jews, were withdrawn by military censors from discussion by the Petrograd press, but freely printed in Moscow periodicals.” 13 Furthermore, systemic failures at the front and the regulations themselves, which allowed for a wide breath of interpretation, ensured that censors subjected photographers to arbitrary applications of regulations.

Editors protested the wartime statutes in print. They left “white spaces” intended to signify the censors hand in determining magazine content. In April 1915, for example, the editors of Ogonek printed a series of photographs on the German surrender of Przemyśl to Russian troops. 14 More than half of the designated space was left blank; only five photographs were published even though the editor had clearly reserved space for twelve pictures. It was unclear whether this layout was a specific objection to the censorship of images taken in Przemyśl or a general statement of disapproval. Either way, the editors’ protests was transmitted visually in a powerful way. By contrast, Sinii zhurnal approached the censorship of images humorously. The editors, for example, left blank spaces reserved for a bathing suit contest. In another case, they rationalized leaving a blank space intended for a portrait of a “beauty” by claiming that the camera could not accurately reproduce the “pink and blue tones,” thus denying the viewer the “forms of the blooming young body.” 15 The editor’s intentions were not clearly expressed. Were these sincere protests against censorial prudery or were the editors simply poking fun at

13 Ibid., 391.
censorship regulations by denying readers titillating images? Either way, these public signs of protest alarmed the authorities and eventually led to reforms, which enacted regulation more uniformly throughout the Empire.\textsuperscript{16}

But these reformed statutes often overstepped legal bounds. In a letter to the general staff, Prime Minister Ivan L. Goremykin stressed the need for censors to assess material “not only from a narrow military point of view, but also regarding more general political matters.”\textsuperscript{17} This assault on press freedoms was met with another round of white spaces in periodicals. In 1916, the editors of Sinii zhurnal made dramatic statements in two issues by leaving the respective covers and the first pages completely blank.\textsuperscript{18} They also found a creative way to protest government overreach with photography in regards to Pavel N. Miliukov’s censored speech in November 1916. Miliukov had famously criticized the government’s handling of the war on the floor of the Duma, where he asked whether the strategic failures were treasonous or merely indications of stupidity. The censors quickly prevented the speech from being reproduced in the press. In response, newspaper editors left blank spaces in news columns. Likewise, the editors of Sinii zhurnal – though unlikely to publish the speech in normal circumstances – printed a blank page. But to drive the point home, and perhaps to clarify what was being censored, they also included a portrait of Miliukov in the corner of the page.\textsuperscript{19} [FIGURE. 32.] The photograph thus substituted for the speech symbolically. This display presumed prior knowledge of the situation, whether from newspapers, which reported on censorship, or

\textsuperscript{16} Lemke, 250 dnei v tsarskoj stavke, 391, 403.

\textsuperscript{17} Quoted in G.V. Zhirkov, Istoriiia tsenzury v Rossii XIX-XX vv. (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2001), 196.

\textsuperscript{18} Sinii zhurnal, no. 40 (1 October 1916); Sinii zhurnal, no. 11 (12 March 1916): 1.

\textsuperscript{19} Sinii zhurnal, no. 48 (26 November 1916): 6.
from other non-press sources. Nonetheless, the simple use of a picture demonstrated the power of an image to circumvent official censorship, while still complying with the letter of the law.

Tsarist censorship came to an end abruptly in 1917. On 27 April the Provisional Government issued a directive that declared “the press and trade publications” free from administrative interference and sanctioned the dismantling of the Chief Administration of Press Affairs. 20 This declaration marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented press freedoms in Russia. Radical political parties were largely free to publish newspapers without fear of closure or police harassment. Some exceptions were made, of course, in the aftermath of the July Days, when Bolshevik papers, including Pravda, were shut down by Aleksandr F. Kerenskii. The end of autocracy meant that professional

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20 “Postanovlenie vremennogo pravitel’stva ‘o pechati’ (27 aprila 1917 g.)” in Vlast i pressa: K istorii pravovogo regulirovaniia otnoshenii 1700-1917: Khrestomatiiia (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo RAGS, 1999), 214.
photographers were free of the administrative system that regulated studios and the production of photographs in the city (with some exceptions made for image of “strategic value”). 21 Photographers in the provinces, however, continued to register studios and portraits with police representatives. 22 Also, the Ministry of the Imperial Court ceased to exist as an institution that regulated images of the Romanovs. Ironically, editors, now free to reproduce images of the imperial family without oversight, found few reasons to do so after the February Revolution. But these freedoms, enjoyed by photographers and publishers alike, were short-lived. The success of Lenin and the Bolsheviks brought about a new political order to Russia, as well as a new, more stringent system of censoring the illustrated press.

The Frontlines, East and West

Wartime photo-reportage focused primarily on the Russian front lines. In general, these pictures were credited to anonymous “special correspondents.” However, a number of prominent photographers such as A. K. Bulla, Z. M. Shubskii, V. A. Bystrov, and A. D. Dalmatov were also acknowledged in print. They supplied editors with images of soldiers in trenches, troop trains, weaponry and military equipment, and landscapes of the various theaters of war. In magazines, these pictures were typically organized into collages,


usually entitled “At the Front” or “Army in the Field.” The layouts featured a mix of forms and subject matter. They offered a wide range of compositional styles, from the picturesque to the documentary ideal, including impromptu group portraits of officers, pock-marked battlefields, and highly-staged action shots, which showed soldiers taking aim at the enemy in theatrical poses. In fact, actual frontline encounters between the opposing sides were almost impossible to capture on camera. According to P. A. Novitskii, machine gun fire and smoke from heavy artillery units prevented most photo-correspondents from ever getting a clear shot of no-man’s-land and the enemy trenches. These posed vignettes recreated some of the drama of the battlefield, with minimal risk to the participating soldiers and the photographer (though Novitskii still managed to get wounded on three occasions).

Press photographers on different fronts captured strikingly different portraits of the war. On the eastern front, where Russian soldiers fought against German and Austrian troops, editors presented a visual landscape mired in trench warfare, military bivouacs, and burning villages. By contrast, photographers on the southern (Caucasian) front luxuriated in the region’s exotic geography. *Niva*, more than the other magazines, presented the reading public with page after page of barren valleys and mountainous vistas, where Russian soldiers scaled hills and craggy rocks on foot and horseback.  

24 For a particularly theatrical example, see *Niva*, no. 11 (14 March 1915): 215.  
Editors also compiled ethnographic surveys of the region’s native peoples, many of whom were refugees caught in between Russian forces and the Ottoman Empire. War photography was inflected by the visual discourses of colonialism and Russia’s brand of benevolent imperialism. Three photographs in one photo-story showed a group of Persian women, Kurdish men, and a young Kurdish girl. In each case, the caption addressed these subjects as “types.” The choice of subject matter, mostly women and children, underscored the vulnerability of these refugees. The large group of adult men was also effectively made passive, described as “peaceful” types, which characterized them as victims of Ottoman aggression and perhaps welcoming of Russia’s military assistance and imperial presence.

Frontline photo-reportage also offered extensive updates from Russia’s allies in the West. These images were supplied by international news agencies and served to confirm and reinforce Russia’s status as an equal partner in combat and a close compatriot to Great Britain, France, and Belgium. Editors sometimes referred to the war as the Great European War, and the photo-reportage highlighted the pan-European scope of the conflict. Extensive profiles of Russia’s allies appeared throughout the illustrated press. The editors of Solntse Rossii dedicated entire issues to Great Britain and France, respectively, which featured photographs of historical and cultural landmarks of these nations.27 The sense of kinship publicized in these special reports was based as much in cultural matters as in military affairs. The layout of the photo-reportage from the West encouraged the viewer to see the Russian effort in European terms. Pictures of French

27 Starting with Solntse Rossii, no. 29-30 (232-233) (August 1914), the editors published a series of “war numbers,” which included entire issues dedicated to photographs about Russia’s allies in the West. Other magazines offered less extensive overviews of the West, typically featuring a series of portraits of politicians and royalty or landscapes of iconic national landmarks.
battlefields, for instance, appeared alongside similar scenes in Galicia. Moreover, stories of camaraderie among allies flattered Russia’s accomplishments in the eyes of the West. In 1916, a photo-story in Iskry underlined the “special warmth” of Parisians towards Russian troops, who marched down the Champs-Elysees. Like tourist photos, these pictures showed Russia’s representatives abroad, captured among the landmarks of the French capital, who, from the point of view of the reader, were welcomed symbolically into the Western European fold.

**Heroes and Victims**

Editors used photography to commemorate the heroism and sacrifice of Russians during the war. These pictures paid tribute to soldiers and nurses, who together symbolized the courage and determination of Russia. The Cossack lancer Kuz’ma Kriuchkov, who allegedly killed eleven Germans single-handedly, was the most famous war hero; his portrait appeared throughout the illustrated press, alongside articles that regaled readers with dramatic accounts of his heroic deeds. More affecting and personal were the regular photographic tributes that commemorated the sacrifices of ordinary Russian soldiers. Editors solicited portraits from readers, whose loved ones had been wounded or killed in battle, and then reprinted these images with captions, which usually included

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name, rank, and regiment. Certain portraits merited extensive biographies, such as the 11-year-old Vladimir who had joined his father on the frontlines, provided vital intelligence reports, escaped German captivity, and later received the order of St. George. The most striking tributes appeared in *Ogonek*. Every week, the editors compiled five or six pages of small portraits, usually 50 pictures per page, which were packed tightly into artfully designed collages. [FIGURE. 33.] Most readers never encountered their loved ones in this way, however they likely related to the individual

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faces as representatives of themselves, of courage and patriotic spirit, and of a broad middle class burdened by war.

The millions of war refugees offered photographers an emotionally compelling subject, which drew attention to the humanitarian disaster unfolding on the eastern front. News coverage focused on women, children and the elderly, typically huddled together in small groups in roadside camps. Editors highlighted the national dimension of this tragedy. Captions identified Latvian, Armenian, Polish, Roma, and Jewish refugees. Displaced Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Germans, however, were not singled out. Also, the cause of homelessness, that is, whether refugees suffered at the hands of the German military or as a result of deportations enacted by Russian troops, was also not revealed. The national dimension allowed editors to connect these images to the efforts of civil society to organize relief. In Iskry, two photographs of refugees were included in a story about an Armenian conference on coordinating relief on the front lines. The first picture showed famished children sitting on the ground in rags and the second, a “cemetery of Armenian refugees.” The largest images showed the conference participants posing for a picture in a stately hall in Petrograd. The editors also included a short article that provided context and statistics, which quantified the suffering of the Armenian diaspora in Russia. It noted the resolutions made at the conference, which included creating a medical detachment that would provide shelter for abandoned children, Armenian or

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33 Peter Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), chap. 1; also see, Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 96-106.

34 Iskry, no. 20 (22 May 1916): 160. The events of this congress are discussed in Gatrell, A Whole Empire Walking, 153-54.
otherwise. Though responding to a specific national tragedy, the conference participants extended their charitable work beyond their national group.

But many of the most dramatic photographs of refugees elided the national dimension altogether. Especially in Solntse Rossii, photographers captured heart-wrenching close-ups that editors captioned with text that universalized the experience of what it means to be hungry, uprooted, and alone. In the words of John Berger, these photographs spoke “through an idea.”35 In one case, a photograph showed three refugees, two women and an infant, wrapped tightly in winter clothes on a country road. The infant stood awkwardly, propped up against an overturned bucket; his mother (or grandmother) sat alongside on the ground, resting her head in apparent exhaustion. The caption read “Homeless (Refugees on the road),” and nothing more.36 [FIGURE. 34.] In a similar series of images, entitled “Refugees on the Road,” a baby-sitting under a makeshift tent was captioned “Left behind,” and below an image of children being fed, the editors wrote, “They are hungry.”37 Like much of the photo-reportage in Solntse Rossii, all these images were cropped in circular shapes, which reproduced the traditional framing of studio portraiture. The brief caption, usually no more than two or three words, offered the reading public an impression or an emotional cue rather than extensive information about the subjects or the precise historical circumstances. The photo-reportage generalized the

37 Solntse Rossii, no. 43 (298) (October 1915): 1-3.
plight of refugees. They became symbols of refugeedom and thus allowed spectators, irrespective of national allegiance, to feel more connected to the photographed subjects. 38

The Imperial Family

38 Other magazines were also unspecific about the national make-up of refugees: Iskry, no. 31 (9 August 1915): 244-245; Russkaia illiustratsiia, no. 18 (7 June 1915): cover.
Images of the Tsar appeared in magazines throughout the Great War. Especially in the
summer of 1914, these pictures presented a lofty representation of Nicholas, which
served to reinforce his status as the Empire’s supreme leader. They were highly staged
studio photographs of the Tsar standing sternly in his military uniform, which was
adorned in sashes and medals. In these portraits, Nicholas embodied the Russian nation;
they were symbols of the unity between the Tsar and the Russian people in the face of the
Hun invasion. 39 In Ogonek, the visual reports of the imperial family’s tour of Moscow
and Petrograd illustrated the process of this unification. A series of pictures headlined
“The Unification of the Tsar with the People” showed the imperial family addressing
“150,000 Russian citizens” from the balcony of the Winter Palace and then coming down
to join the masses on ground level. 40 Similar scenes were captured by photographers in
Moscow a few weeks later when the royals ‘met the people’ on Red Square. 41

Nicholas later abandoned this detached, symbolic self-representation and adopted
a humbler image, which diminished his perceived stature and undermined his authority.
In his attempt to show genuine solidarity with the common soldier, Nicholas and his
propagandists desacralized the traditional image of the Russian Tsar. During the war,
photographers captured him fulfilling ceremonial duties on the front lines or at the
imperial headquarters. In pictures, he reviewed troops, awarded medals, inspected
trenches, and studied strategic maps with his general staff. He always dressed in a simple
field uniform of the lower military ranks, so unlike the ceremonial vestments that adorned

39 B.I. Kolonitskii, “Tragicheskaia erotika”: obrazy imperatorskoi sem’i v gody pervoi mirovoi
voiny (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010), 73-98; also see Wortman, Scenarios of Power, 510-11.

40 Ogonek, no. 30 (27 July [9 August] 1914): 3-4; also Niva, no. 31 (2 August 1914): 617-19.

his royal person in the formal studio portraits. Starting in 1915, the Tsar was often joined by his sickly son Aleksei, who was also given an ordinary military uniform. Nicholas the father and the “imperial toiler,” who labored over reports and military tactics, sacrificed his symbolic role as the embodiment of Russia for an image of an ordinary man, who associated and related easily with everyday people. In Niva, an article even noted that during the Tsar’s tours of military hospitals the “simpler” the Russian man, “the freer he talks with the Tsar.” And when Nicholas appointed himself commander in chief of the Russian forces, he undermined his already weakened self-image by taking personal responsibility for a failed military endeavor.

The Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, by contrast, cultivated a wildly popular public persona. His image was consistent throughout the war and embodied the courage and leadership of the imperial family. When Russia declared war in August 1914, editors published a studio portrait of the Grand Duke sitting in a chair calmly, dressed in a field uniform and riding boots, with one leg crossed over the other. [FIGURE. 35.] This was the image of Russia’s commander in chief, and in Niva it appeared alongside the Grand Duke’s famous declarations, which boldly asserted Russia’s imperial mission as protector of the Polish people, including those living under the Germans and Austrians. Moreover, the image of the Grand Duke was bolstered by rumors of his hatred of Germans and his opposition to Rasputin – sentiments that likely inoculated him from suspicion of pro-German sympathies in the imperial court. In fact, these representations of the Grand Duke as the epitome of Russian patriotism, heroism, and determination


43 Niva, no. 33 (16 August 1914): 641.
Его Императорское Высочество Великий Князь Николай Николаевич, Верховный Главнокомандующий.
transcended the actual man, who in reality avoided the dangers of the front lines at all cost. 44

Photographers often captured the Grand Duke touring the theater of war alongside the Tsar, and the “success” of the Grand Duke’s image contributed to the “failure” of the presentation of the Tsar. In the photographs, he towered over the diminutive monarch; the Grand Duke seemed to possess the physical bearing to match his adopted persona. 45 The contrast between the Tsar and the Grand Duke was often stark. The commander in chief always appeared in charge, directing military affairs and even instructing Nikolai, who appeared to listen obediently, like a model student. In Letopis’ voiny 1914 goda, the government’s official publication, the editors cropped the Tsar out of a picture, which had originally featured both figures. 46 Taken by Karl Bulla in 1913, the original photograph had shown the Tsar and the Grand Duke standing together, surveying distant military maneuvers with field glasses. In the altered version, only the Grand Duke remained. Here, on the magazine page, as in the public consciousness, the Grand Duke had displaced the Tsar as the true leader of Russia’s war effort. 47

Nicholas’s wife, Aleksandra, also appeared prominently in the illustrated press. She cultivated an image of the “most august nurse” (avgusteishaia sestra miloserdiia), and photographers captured her mostly in military hospitals and Red Cross barracks. Official studio portraits showed Aleksandra dressed in a nurse’s uniform and, along with

44 Kolonitskii, “Tragicheskaia erotik,” 471.


46 Letopis’ voiny 1914 goda, no. 4 (13 September 1914): 57.

the princesses Olga and Tatiana, she was shown caring for wounded soldiers, usually in the officers’ hospital at Tsarskoe Selo. 48 Like the Tsar, Aleksandra sacrificed her elevated, royal stature to create an image that expressed solidarity with the women serving in the medical corps. Ironically, she played this prototypical female role just as magazines were publicizing the breakdown of traditional divisions of labor with photo-stories of female factory workers and fighting units. According to Boris Kolonitskii, this image of Aleksandra represented a grave publicity error. Reports from hospitals where the tsarina worked conveyed the shock and disappointment of injured soldiers to have their Empress perform the duties of a common nurse. 49 In addition, the image tied her to the increasingly eroticized representation of the nurse in Russian mass culture. The nurse became the “central figure of sexual fantasy,” often featured on postcards as the object of soldier’s desire. 50 These associations likely served to reinforce the rumors of Aleksandra’s extra-marital affairs and the general sense of moral depravity linked to the Romanov regime before the Revolution. 51

The State Duma and Civil Society

48 Ogonek, no. 43 (26 October 1914): 1; Letopis’ voiny 1914 goda, no. 8 (11 October 1914): 122; Iskry, no. 35 (11 September 1916): 273; on Aleksandra’s image as a nurse, see Kolonitskii, “Tragicheskaiia erotika,” 246-289.

49 Kolonitskii, “Tragicheskaiia erotika,” 326.

50 Ibid., 341.

The politicians in the State Duma represented a competing center of political authority in Russia. Even during the initial burst of patriotism, which focused on images of autocracy, the editors of *Iskry* ensured that the Duma remained in the public eye. In early August 1914, a two-page spread featured portraits of the Duma’s political elite, which included, among others, Mikhail V. Rodzianko, Aleksandr Kerenskii, and Pavel Miliukov. The attached article stated that the declaration of war was “a day of triumph for the people’s representatives.” In place of captions, the editors printed excerpts from speeches given in the main Duma debating chamber, which reaffirmed “the unity and indivisibility of the Russian state.” This photographic layout was flanked by traditional symbols of Russian imperialism, namely the double-headed eagle and a bogatyr knight. On the magazine page, the images of Russia’s democratic (or anti-autocratic) aspirations were associated closely with the traditional iconography of Russian patriotism.

Reports about the Duma increased as Russian society grew critical of the government’s handling of the war. This culminated in 1916 with a series of special tributes throughout the illustrated press in honor of the Duma’s ten-year anniversary. For magazine publishers, these commemorations were an opportunity to reassert the historical legacy and moral authority of the Duma. The editors of *Iskry* dedicated an entire issue to the anniversary. The cover featured a collage of ten-years worth of portraits of deputies below the headline, “The Best People” (luchshie liudi), and inside the editors arranged more portraits of prominent politicians giving speeches, debating,

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52 *Iskry*, no. 30 (3 August 1914): 236-237.

and interacting with the public. The most extensive and visually spectacular effort was made by *Solntse Rossii*, which published a special two-issue commemorative edition. Photographs of iconic people, places, and events of the past ten years were republished, alongside articles and “remembrances” of past iterations of the Duma. The centerpiece was a massive collage of Duma orators, composed of 67 individual photographs of deputies speaking at the lectern in the Duma’s main debating chamber. [FIGURE. 36.]

Other publications created similar visual layouts, which recognized prominent members of the Duma’s past and present. By drawing on a decade’s worth of photographic images,

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54 *Iskry*, no. 16 (24 April 1916): 121; also see *Niva*, no. 17 (13 April 1916); *Sinii zhurnal*, no. 18 (30 April 1916): 7.

55 *Solntse Rossii*, no. 18-19 (324-325) (April 1916).
and including them in these commemorations, magazine editors defined the iconic people
and moments of this institution’s history.

Editors also underlined the contributions of individual Duma deputies to the war,
on the front and behind the lines. These efforts were usually acknowledged subtly, in the
captions below the photograph, where deputies were identified among, for example, a
group of soldiers or medical specialists. But editors also composed photographic layouts
that presented a range of images detailing the activities of Duma deputies throughout the
Empire and abroad. One collage, entitled “War and the People’s Representatives,”
included 24 individual and group portraits of deputies serving as officers, scouts,
cavalrymen, sentries, doctors, and field medics, as well as patrons of military hospitals
and deputies on official assignment for the government.56 Each picture had a number that
corresponded to a set of captions, which included the names and locations of the various
deputies. Later in 1916, Iskry reported on a Duma delegation sent to France, Italy, and
Great Britain, where they met with members of foreign governments. The attached article
noted that the Russian parliamentarians were there by special invitation and had met with
many heads of state. Furthermore, the Duma deputies had provided the photos to the
editors specifically so that the Russian people could bare witness to “this historic trip.”57
At home and abroad, the ‘people’s representatives’ remained involved actively in the
prosecution of the war, both at the grassroots level – actually fighting the war in the
trenches – and at the level of high politics.

56 Iskry, no. 34 (30 August 1915): 268-69.
Through charitable organizations and professional institutions, various celebrities, academics, and businessmen coordinated aid for the soldiers on the front and the wounded in hospitals. Charity gave already-prominent cultural figures, as well as lesser-known members of civil society, the opportunity to help Russia’s cause, but also to build on one’s public profile around deeds performed in the interests of the public good. Artists such as actors and singers were particularly active in this capacity; photographers captured them visiting soldiers in trenches to boost morale and to deliver books and cigarettes. These figures were comfortable in the spotlight and adapted easily to the specific needs of wartime publicity. The opera star Fedor Shaliapin was especially adept at publicizing his philanthropic activities. The founding of two hospitals in his name was reported throughout the illustrated press. In Iskry, the charismatic singer was shown standing among smiling patients, who enjoyed his “humorous improvisations.” 58 The captions and article noted the close involvement of Shaliapin’s children and his wife, who served as a nurse in the Moscow hospital. The opera singer and his family thus offered a model of sacrifice and dedication to the war effort along similar lines as the royal family; everyone was expected to contribute. However, in addition to promoting Shaliapin the patron, this photo-story also promoted Shaliapin the world-famous opera star. The article recalled that on days when Shaliapin was absent from the hospital, the wounded patients took great pleasure in listening to his recordings on the gramophone. The writer then listed their favorite records by name, as if to remind readers of Shaliapin’s greatest hits, which, of course, could be purchased on disc as advertised in magazines. 59

58 Iskry, no. 2 (11 January 1915): 10; also see Sinii zhurnal, no. 5 (30 January 1916): 12.

59 Shaliapin had an “exclusive contract” to record songs for the Gramophone company. He also lent his photographic image to their advertisements. For example, Solntse Rossi, no. 26 (229) (1914).
Magazine publishers also used weekly publications to promote their own charitable activities. They wrote themselves into the news and established their patriotic credentials by showing the broad scope of their personal investment in the fate of the nation. In *Niva*, the publisher Adol’f Marks promoted the hospital named in his honor with pictures of the medical staff and patients.⁶⁰ Ivan Sytin used *Iskry* on a number of occasions to publicize both his philanthropic endeavors and his business ventures, especially where the two overlapped. Like Marks, Sytin founded a number of hospitals in the countryside for wounded soldiers to convalesce in peace and quiet. Another series of photographs described the publisher’s efforts to distribute books, magazines, and newspapers to recovering soldiers for free. In one case, Sytin worked with a local Moscow businessman who founded an instructional facility to teach new skills and professions to maimed soldiers. Sytin donated books, charts, drawings, and other printed material to aid in their education.⁶¹ Sytin also promoted his flagship newspaper, *Russkoe slovo*. A large photograph from the front, for example, showed a group of soldiers posing, while holding newspapers. A soldier in the center held his copy open to reveal the large block lettering of the newspaper’s name, “*Russkoe slovo*.” This photo-reportage reinforced the central role of publishing and the press in civil society behind the lines, and also ensured the Sytin’s flagship newspaper was associated with the soldiering classes.

*War, Revolution, and the Politics of the Illustrated Press*

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⁶⁰ *Niva*, no. 5 (31 January 1915): 84.

⁶¹ *Iskry*, no. 11 (15 March 1915): 86.
The politics of publishers in the late Imperial era were aligned closely with the progressive politicians in the Duma. Both were ambitious and wished to exert greater influence over public opinion, and both shared a common history rooted in Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and in the subsequent events of the 1905 Revolution.  

The State Duma was born in this period, and the commercial press, which had stoked revolutionary fervor, managed to secure greater freedom from censorship. War had been a catalyst for revolution, which translated into more influence in public affairs. To some degree, publishers and progressive politicians alike hoped that history would repeat itself. In the words of one Duma member, the war “will give us opportunity to defeat not only the external enemy, but will also open up joyful hopes for solving the problems of internal construction and reform.”

Russia’s illustrated press advocated consistently for the continued prosecution of the war. In the summer of 1914, their advocacy was especially pronounced. In general, magazine editors echoed the sentiments being expressed in the Duma. They argued for intervention in the Balkans on patriotic grounds. The Russian people, they claimed, had a historical responsibility to Serbia – reasoning that “created a climate of opinion wherein war against Germany and Austria appeared an acceptable and indeed necessary instrument of policy.” Photo-reportage encouraged readers to identify with the besieged Serbian population. Like pictures in a family album, the coverage reminded the Russian

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64 Ibid., 215.
public that they belonged to a community of Slavs. The story of Radko Dmitriev, which appeared throughout the illustrated press, presented a living symbol of pan-Slavism. In *Iskry*, the editors printed a full-page portrait of the Bulgarian general under the headline, “Slavic Hero.” The short article described how Dmitriev had joined the Russian army in protest of his government’s failure to condemn Austrian aggression. This tribute offered a heroic example of personal (and national) sacrifice, and served to flatter Russians, who could take pride in their nation’s leadership. However, the story also implied that failing to support the war meant betraying Dmitriev’s faith in Russia and rejecting his sacrifice made on behalf of Slavic brotherhood.

Photo-reportage also created a perception of national consensus about the war. Coverage of pro-war rallies, for example, universalized the enthusiasm for war, while masking the broader scope of people’s reactions, especially among the peasant population. In *Iskry*, the photo-story “Nation and War” reported on a series of pro-war Slavic marches in Moscow, but gave the impression of the entire Russian nation up in arms. [FIGURE. 37.] Seven photographs showed crowds at different stages of the demonstration – listening to speakers, standing at the Skobelev monument, gathering en masse on Red Square, and so on. Taken from elevated vantage points, the pictures emphasized the anonymous masses and encouraged the reader to view these marchers

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65 For example: *Niva*, no. 32 (9 August 1914): 640b; *Zhurnal-kopeika (SPb)*, no. 39 (297) (September 1914): 2.


collectively. This was reinforced by the headline and short article, both of which used collective terms such as “nation” (narod) and “Russian society” to describe the participants. Furthermore, the monuments of Minin and Pozharskii and General Skobelev placed the rally in the context of Russia’s past, defending Slavs and the homeland from foreign invaders. By foregrounding these symbols and obfuscating the Slavic character of the rally, the editors invited readers to immerse themselves in what appeared to be, at first glance, a spontaneous evocation of Russian patriotism. The arrangement of images and texts reframed the events, breathing symbolic meaning into the news and thus equated the specific concerns of Slavic demonstrators with the general feelings of the reading public.

Editors used atrocity photographs to shock and galvanize the embattled population. Atrocity as a category of photography was elastic and encompassed a wide range of acts committed by the enemy. In Russia’s illustrated press, images of dead
Немецкая зверства.

(Текст на русском языке, изображения черно-белые, повествуют о немецких зверствах во время войны. Изображения показывают жестокость и унижение.)

(Описание изображений: снимки с телами погибших, разрушенные города, снимки с ранеными и умирающими.)

(Текст продолжается, описывая события, произошедшие в ходе войны.)

(Заключение: обращение к читателям, призыв к миру.)
soldiers and civilians, wounded soldiers, orphaned children, damaged property and cultural artifacts, and homeless refugees were all evidence of German atrocities (узверства). The most horrific images were the graphic portraits of wounded soldiers in Iskry. These photographs claimed to offer visual evidence of the enemy’s diabolic weaponry, such as poison gas and flamethrowers, and the barbarity of German civilization more generally. With these images, the editors satisfied the public’s need to demonize the enemy, and perhaps also to stiffen the resolve of the civilian population and harden soldiers for the fight ahead. In several photo-series, the headline “German Atrocities” was printed above photographs of severed limbs, shattered skulls, burned skin, and dislodged jawbones. [FIGURE. 38.] The pictures were close-ups, which captured forensic details, like images taken at a crime scene. In addition, in each case, the article and captions placed these images in a narrative context. They described the circumstance under which the injuries occurred and the extent of the soldiers’ mistreatment. The prose reveled in gruesome detail. For example, the editors described how two Austrian officers restrained Private Aleksei Makukha, “opened his mouth with a dagger and, pulling out his tongue, cut it twice.” The private’s “mouth and nose gushed blood” before he eventually escaped captivity.69

The meaning of these visceral images, and of atrocity photography more generally, was deeply contested by the Russian public. Though intended to provoke Russians into fighting with greater determination, these images also served to discourage hostilities by sapping morale or providing evidence of the pointless brutality of war. In fact, the most shocking pictures were used by pacifists in hopes of inducing revulsion

rather than desire for revenge. This is precisely why censors in the West tended to exclude such images from the popular press.  

70 Pacifist propaganda was a real concern for the Russian military, and graphic depictions of wartime violence were a common means to express anti-war sentiment before and after the Revolution.  

71 Any intended narrative was easily undermined by an equally valid counter-narrative. Such conflicting reactions, however, may not have been unwelcome and perhaps even served the political aims of magazine publishers. By exposing German atrocities, these pictures also implicated the war’s Russian architects in a failed military strategy. The suffering of Russian soldiers was thus laid at the feet of autocracy, while at the same time demonstrating what everyone already believed about the innate barbarity of Germans. The only undeniably fact offered by the pictures was that Russian soldiers suffered greatly at the front. Otherwise readers were free to use the photographic evidence in support of any number of personal or patriotic agendas.

German atrocities were juxtaposed with evidence of Russian benevolence. Magazines featured stories about the generous and humane treatment of German prisoners of war. In prison camps, according to the photo-reportage, the Germans ate well, slept soundly, and walked about freely, often in the company of their Russian “compatriots” (soiuzniki).  

72 In one picture, two Russian officers stood among a large group of German prisoners, who posed for the photographer, standing, crouching, and

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71 On pacifism, see Joshua Sanborn, Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925 (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 186; on graphic representations of war, see Karen Petrone, The Great War in Russian Memory (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), chap. 4.

72 Iskry, no. 5 (31 January 1916): 40.
even laying on the ground, according to the genre conventions of group portraiture. The attached article drew attention to the photograph as proof of good relations between Russians and Germans in the context of German captivity. At the start of the war, the editors wrote, Germans rarely surrendered to the Russians, and when faced with a photographer they “turned away and did not allow themselves to be photographed.” 73 But now, “the Germans surrender willingly, and in large groups, and also willingly take pictures with our soldiers and escorts.” The enemy wanted to be taken prisoner because, as one report in Russkoe slovo suggested, they did not want to escape the good life. 74 Photographs offered evidence of the hospitable conditions in Russian camps, and the act of being photographed directly and knowingly, rather than surreptitiously, was proof of Germans succumbing to Russian benevolence.

Support of the war in magazines intensified after the February Revolution in 1917. Editors co-opted the iconography of the popular uprising in support of fighting the war to a “victorious conclusion.” In the illustrated press, support of the war was equated with support of the Revolution more generally. News coverage of the February Revolution was framed around portraits of prominent politicians, who served in the State Duma or the newly formed Petrograd Soviet. The editors of Niva and Ogonek hailed the “birth of Russia” with a photograph of Rodzianko, who had been appointed to the Temporary Committee, among a throng of soldiers and sailors in the Tauride Palace. [FIGURE. 39.] Iskry welcomed the Revolution with a portrait of Prince Georgii E. L’vov, a liberal nobleman, who was involved in various charitable organizations during the war.

73 Iskry, no. 38 (27 September 1915): 298.

and was appointed to the Provisional Government. Other prominent figures included Aleksandr Kerenskii, Pavel Miliukov, and Nikolai S. Chkheidze, the Menshevik and representative of the Soviet Workers’ Deputies. Along with various images of mass demonstrations in Petrograd and Moscow, these portraits, like the portraits of the imperial family in August 1914, established an official political iconography. These were familiar faces of politicians who, in some cases, had been in politics since 1905. But in the context of the February uprising, and their new positions in the Provisional Government, the photography affirmed their elevated status in the revolutionary and national leadership.

Although the Revolution was front-page news, magazine editors continued to prioritize the need to fight “to a victorious conclusion.” Pictures of refugees and other casualties underscored the stakes of defeat, but more prominent were images of soldiers publically expressing a desire to fight the Germans and win. This coverage appeared
almost in defiance of the February Revolution. In mid-March, when mass demonstrations in Petrograd and Moscow dominated headlines, the cover of *Iskry* featured a full-page photograph of soldiers sitting in an automobile, hoisting a banner that read “War to a Victorious End.” 75 Posing sternly and looking into the camera, the soldiers addressed readers directly with their petition. In *Niva*, photo-reportage of the April Crisis showed soldiers carrying signs in support of a victorious conclusion to the war. 76 Soldiers were ubiquitous in the illustrated press in 1917; they marched through the streets, occupied buildings, made speeches, listened to orators, and so on. But the photo-reportage, whether due to photographer inaction or editorial policy, rarely took note of their specific grievances and demands, unless they displayed eagerness to fight the war. Their support of the war offered an antidote to the defeatism of socialist movements, the waning enthusiasm of the public, and the reports of mass desertion on the front lines.

In an effort to combat desertion, magazines launched heavy-handed campaigns intended to shame those who voluntarily shirked their military obligations. At the time, exact data on desertion was difficult, if not impossible, to attain. Desertion was a relatively fluid concept and there was little consensus from unit to unit as to what constituted desertion as opposed to the common practice of overstaying legitimate leave. 77 However, press reports and rumors of unattached soldiers, roaming through the theater of war, were commonplace. Deserters were also widely blamed for crime and low morale in the ranks. The editors of *Iskry* contributed to these stories by decrying desertion

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75 *Iskry*, no. 11 (19 March 1917): 81.

76 *Niva*, no. 17 (29 April 1917): 254, 256; *Niva*, no. 18 (6 May 1917): 268.

in no uncertain terms. On the cover of one issue, the headline “Shame” appeared above a picture of “faithful soldiers” reading in a newspaper about the “escape of cowards from the front, who disgraced the Russian army.” 78 Another issue even printed a “leaflet of shame” (pozornyi list) – a slip that could be cut out of the magazine, filled out, and used to report deserters to military authorities. 79 Though typically framed in nationalistic terms, magazine editors implied that deserters also brought shame to their families. Ogonek, for example, featured a cover illustration of a deserter returning home, only to be turned away by his furious wife. 80 In fact, desertion was often inspired by concern for family, especially amidst stories of landowners burning villages and grabbing land in the absence of the conscripted, peasant men-folk. 81 By condemning anti-war sentiment, this type of coverage served to flatter patriotic sensibilities and quashed the possibility of nuanced debate in the public sphere.

The success of the Revolution was inextricably linked to the success of the war. The freedom wrought in February had to be defended on the eastern front and magazines tried to translate this idea with photo-reportage. A large photograph on the cover of Ogonek showed a Russian soldier looking at a large plume of smoke on the horizon. “Protecting a Free Russia,” read the caption below, and the editors also included an excerpt from a speech by Kerenskii: “The current battle at the front – it is the same as the revolutionary struggle.” 82 Under Kerenskii’s leadership, war and revolution had become

78 Iskry, no. 30 (6 August 1917): 233.
79 Iskry, no. 28 (23 July 1917): 223.
80 Ogonek, no. 23 (18 June [1 July] 1917).
81 Wildman, The End of the Russian Imperial Army, 235.
one epic struggle for the future of the Russian people. Conversely, opposition to the war was framed in terms of a broader opposition to the Revolution. This was especially true of the photo-reportage in the aftermath of the so-called July Days. The coverage focused specifically on the treachery of the First Machine Gun Regiment, which was implicated in the deaths of several Cossacks. The same series of photographs were reproduced throughout the illustrated press. A panoramic photograph of Palace Square showed where the “betrayers of the People and of Freedom” surrendered to government troops. Two other photographs showed the captured soldiers up close, standing in a group, and guarded closely. The attached article related the regiment’s crimes. According to eyewitnesses, they had carried a banner that had called for “a bullet for Kerenskii,” and one soldier was heard delivering a speech in which he stated “Germany is dearer to us than Russia.” Rather than fighting on the front, the regiment had brought shame to the Revolution by conspiring with the enemy to end the war.

*Photography and the Cult of Kerenskii*

The image of Aleksandr Kerenskii dominated the visual landscape in 1917. Photos of him were ubiquitous and important in establishing his leadership cult. Kerenskii was already a well-publicized politician before the Revolution. His portraits had been published regularly in the illustrated press alongside other members of the State Duma. However, his public image grew in stature after the February uprising when he joined the Temporary Committee and eventually the Provisional Government. Admired widely in

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83 *Iskry*, no. 28 (23 July 1917): 217; also see *Solntse Rossi*, no. 16 (374) (1917): 1.
politics, Kerenskii was equally venerated by the masses. He was beloved, and Kerenskii in turn embraced the public as well. He was considered a symbol of liberated Russia and was called the “prophet and hero of the Russian Revolution.” 84 He also possessed a media savvy, which was unique among his contemporaries. A former lawyer and gifted orator, Kerenskii played well to the masses. His speeches were eloquent and emotional, and full of dramatic gestures. More importantly, this theatricality and careful self-presentation translated well to the age of photography. 85 Throughout the illustrated press, photographers traced the rise of Kerenskii and chronicled his evolution from civilian minister to quasi-military leader.

Initially Kerenskii adopted a bourgeois persona. He dressed in a suit and tie, and sometimes accessorized with a dark wide-brim hat and cane. This version of Kerenskii greeted the Semenovskii guard regiment in a photo-series in Solntse Rossii. Recently appointed war and naval minister, Kerenskii embarked on a publicity campaign that highlighted his personal relationship with the Russian armed forces. Two photographs, in particular, visualized the effect that the minister had on an audience. Attributed to Karl Bulla, the first picture offered a panoramic view of Kerenskii addressing soldiers from a raised tribune. The soldiers surrounded him completely and appeared to be transfixed by his words. The sea of peaked caps filled the frame, converging in the center where Kerenskii stood, elevated slightly above the crowd, with one arm raised, like a priest offering benediction. 86 [FIGURE. 40.] The second image, by contrast, captured a scene

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great intimacy between Kerenskii and his audience. The soldiers cheered and saluted their leader, who was presented with “a bouquet of red roses.” When Kerenskii toured the front lines, soldiers embraced him in a similar manner. Public displays of affection were commonplace and an essential component of his public persona. He was the people’s politician, adored by the masses – sometimes carried off playfully by soldiers, other times accepting of a friendly kiss on the cheek.

After being appointed war and naval minister Kerenskii adapted his public persona to match his official political role. He abandoned the civilian garb and adopted a military tunic, peaked cap, and knee-high boots, because, according to Kerenskii, the

87 Ibid., 11.

Russian people would not accept a leader in a suit. In a series of iconic portraits, Kerenskii even struck a Napoleonic pose, with his right arm tucked against his chest.

Inhabiting this new martial persona, Kerenskii enacted various scenarios of power, which vacillated between images of military leadership, reminiscent of Russia’s past, and more modern and informal displays of the people’s politician. The photo-reportage often recalled the pomp and circumstance of the Imperial era. Two photographs in Niva, for example, recreated the pre-revolutionary image of the royal military review. However, instead of sitting on a horse, as Nicholas had done, Kerenskii stood in a large automobile. Both pictures were taken at the former imperial residence at Tsarskoe selo, including one by Aleksandr Iagel’skii (credited to K. E. fon Gan & Co), the last court photographer. By contrast, the photo-reportage of Kerenskii on the front lines offered a mix of modern “photo-ops.” These visual reports showed the war minister giving speeches to large crowds, glad-handing with soldiers, and conversing with various military personnel one-on-one. In one photo-series, Kerenskii sat among soldiers in a trench, embraced a regimental hero, and helped soldiers bury a comrade. He was presented as revolutionary leader, but also as a close friend and confident, who was

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89 Figes and Kolonitskii, Interpreting the Russian Revolution, 82.


91 This photograph was taken by the firm C.E. fon Gan & Co, which, for a time, enjoyed the status of official court photographers under Tsar Nicholas. Niva, no. 24 (17 June 1917): 371.

92 On Iagel’skii and the firm K.E. fon Gan & Co, see A.P. Popov, Iz istorii rossiiskoi fotografii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2010), 163-166.
willing to go through the trials and tribulations of front line combat alongside the common man.

The press photography of Kerenskii, especially in Solntse Rossii, captured a new style of political representation. In essence, Kerenskii had adopted the tsarist model of personal power, traditionally linked to the Russian army, and adapted it to a new age of photographic publicity. Kerenskii tailored his public persona carefully for the masses, and press photographers and magazine editors translated the spectacle of his public addresses for the reading public. But Kerenskii also embodied an incompatible fusion of representational models. He was, at once, the symbol of democracy and the representative of the Revolution, yet his transformation into a military strong man earned him autocratic monikers, such as “our supreme leader” and even the “new Tsar.” And when Kerenskii failed to deliver victory on the eastern front or democracy on the home front, he failed to live up to both aspects of his public persona. The success of the Kerenskii cult, which was disseminated widely through the illustrated press, blinded him to his failures as a strategist and prevented him from properly gauging troop morale, especially on the eve of the July offensive. The collapse of this strategy did not immediately bring about his downfall. In fact, in the short term, Kerenskii’s personal power increased. But his public image did not survive his political failures, and the euphoria of first love was displaced by cynicism and disillusionment.

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93 On tsarist display of personal power, see Wortman, Scenarios of Power, 9, 131.
95 Ibid, 90.
After the February Revolution, the Old Regime had virtually no photographic presence in magazines. The visual landscape of photo-reportage reflected the aspirations of the revolutionaries, and thus the Tsar, his family, and the former imperial government had been effectively purged from this world. Press photographers reported on the end of autocracy. They captured the revolutionaries taking part in public acts of iconoclasm—acts that were meaningful symbolically. This included fairly benign gestures, such as a revolutionary covering the royal signet, the double-headed eagle, on top of the gate at the Winter Palace with a red flag. A crowd outside the Anichkov Palace in Petrograd made a more inflammatory gesture. They set fire to the imperial coat of arms and watched as it burned in the street. The crowd parted for the photographer and many of the revolutionaries looked directly into the camera; they participated actively in the commemoration of this act of iconoclasm. Photographers also reported acts that were both actually destructive and symbolically significant. For example, *Solntse Rossi* and *Ogonek* both published the same series of pictures showing the blackened remains of the Litovskii prison, one of the detested symbols of Tsarist tyranny. The burned and broken remains of the police chief’s apartment similarly conveyed the literal and symbolic end of the old order.

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96 *Solntse Rossi*, no. 8 (366) (March 1917): 2.
Magazine editors also enacted an iconographic purge with regard to the imperial family and the tsarist government. No pictures of these individuals appeared in the illustrated press after the February Revolution. The Romanov dynasty, and autocracy more generally, was no longer news and thus unworthy of representation. In *Solntse Rossii*, the only images that referenced the Old Regime were a handful of photographs and political cartoons intended to defame the remnants of the imperial system. Only a month prior, illustrations such as the one of the Tsar slouched on his throne, sitting on top of a pile of skulls, or a ghastly-looking Goremykin, would surely have garnered fines from censors. Editors were free to visualize the desultory rumors that had plagued the Old Regime in its final days. In this spirit, *Solntse Rossii* also featured a series of photographs of Rasputin’s grave. On the opposite page, the editors published a portrait of Ann Vyrubova, the handmaiden to Aleksandra and a loyal follower of Rasputin, who was rumored to be the secret lover of the Tsar. Below, another photograph showed, according to the caption “the servants of Nikolai Romanov in the ministerial pavilion of the Tauride Palace.” Significantly, the editors used the former autocrats first and last name, rather than his official title (His Imperial Majesty the State Emperor). The issue of *Solntse Rossii* that included the above collection of images was the last to publish photographs of the Old Regime.

Also largely unseen in the illustrated press were the Bolsheviks. Of course, there were few photographs of Lenin and his compatriots available for publication in the first place. And the handful that made it to press served to demonize the Bolsheviks as criminals and traitors. The photo-reportage invoked the language of the internal enemy,

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of the hidden dark forces bent on destroying Russia, which originated in the pre-war era. The traditional image of this internal enemy was that of the Jew, who threatened to destroy the sacred union between the Tsar and his loyal subjects. The Jew conspired to overthrow Russia, was involved in secret international conspiracies, lived among Russians, but at the same time remained hidden – the Jew’s true motives were secret and unseen. During the war, the Germans replaced the Jews as the central threat to the nation. The German ancestry of the Romanov’s, generals with German sounding name, and German spy-mania fueled paranoid conspiracies and rumors throughout Russian society. After the February Revolution, especially in the summer of 1917, in the wake of the failed military offensive and the bloody July Days incidents, the illustrated press reported on the Bolsheviks in ways that recalled the language, the symbolism, and the visual representations of the historical ‘dark forces,’ which again threatened to undermine the Russian state.

The only pictures of Lenin and the Bolsheviks appeared in a photo-story in *Iskry* published in the wake of the July Days. Headlined “Lenin and Co.,” the story included an article, three photographs, and a hand-drawn illustration. In the center, the editors placed two-part mug shots – front view, side view – of Lenin and Zinoviev, who were described in the caption as the “hidden leaders of the Bolsheviks.” [FIGURE. 42] The caption used the family names of both, namely Ul’ianov and Afel’baum, which reinforced the sense that the Bolsheviks had something to hide. In Zinoviev’s case, that something was, perhaps, his Jewishness. The other images included a group portrait of the Soviet of

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Workers Deputies and a courtroom drawing of Trotsky, when he was put on trial in 1906. Again, Trotsky was identified by his Jewish family name, Bronshtein. His defense lawyer, Oskar O. Gruzenberg was also identified.\textsuperscript{102} These images were, in fact, reprinted from a 1906 edition of \textit{Iskry}, which reported on the trial of the Soviet Workers Deputies. In 1917, the images and the attached article confirmed the longtime criminal history of the Bolsheviks. The mug shots were especially effective; they were a photographic form that existed only in the context of police work. Mug shots were imposed onto the subject, that is, not taken voluntarily, which reinforced the notion of a ‘hidden’ persona, shying away from public view. The article informed the reading public about the 1906 trial and listed the names of the most prominent Bolsheviks, which included Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and also Aleksandra Kolontai. In purple prose, the writer related the Bolshevik’s grand historical vision for world Revolution and, of course, their opposition to the war.

\textsuperscript{102} Gruzenberg was known as a brilliant lawyer, who, among other, acquitted Mendel Beilis, the Jew accused of killing a Christian boy in 1911 by ritual process. For more, see Benjamin Nathans, \textit{Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 329, 341.
Despite their lack of publicity, the Bolsheviks were very much a part of the story of 1917 in the illustrated press. For example, the Bolsheviks were widely blamed for the violence of the July Days. With the exception of Viktor Bulla’s famous shot of Nevskii Prospekt, photographs of the actual July Days violence were not published in magazines. But news coverage of the funerals held for the victims allowed editors to impose a narrative about the so-called July Days ‘massacre.’ In the Petrograd edition of Zhurnal-kopeika, they published a series of images under the headline “The Bolshevik Uprising,” without elaboration as to the details of Lenin’s involvement. The editors of Iskry were more circumspect. They focused on the treachery of the First Machine Gun Regiment and did not explicitly tie their actions to the Bolsheviks. However, in a two-page layout, they published a photo-story about the army sacking the editorial offices of the Bolshevik newspaper, Pravda. This report, photographed by Iakov Shteinberg, described the army’s successful reprisals and revealed various Bolshevik artifacts. In one picture, soldiers posed in a marble vestibule “after the Bolsheviks retreated.” Another photograph purported to show a “Leninist oratory tribune.” But, again, Lenin and his co-conspirators were nowhere to be seen. The only damning image was a group portrait of Russian officers, who had apparently arrested four German spies. Here, the image of the four culprits seemed to present evidence of Bolshevik collusion with the enemy. But in the absence of hard proof, the implication of a Bolshevik conspiracy was likely more powerful than any photograph, because it allowed the editors to build on the narrative of nebulous ‘dark forces’ in the minds of readers.

Political cartoonists carried out visual representations of Bolsheviks or Bolshevism more broadly conceived. This medium allowed the editor and the illustrator
to shape a narrative about the enemy by imparting a ready-made pejorative message. The typical caricature of a Bolshevik was of an uncouth thug or criminal. In *Solntse Rossii*, this stereotype was deployed in a cartoon called “The Bolshevik Ideal,” in which a scowling thug posed as the Statue of Liberty. His right arm was held aloft, but without the symbolic torch of enlightenment. In his left hand, the thug held a copy of *Pravda* and inscribed on his classical robe was the word “Down [with]” (*doloi*), presumably a reference to Bolshevik anarchism.  

103 Sightings of such rough types were more frequent in October, when the Bolshevik threat was increasingly becoming a likely reality.  

In this period, cartoonists also drew representations of Lenin, which again relied heavily on the prescribed narrative about the Bolsheviks. The cover of *Sinii zhurnal* featured an illustration of Lenin welcoming two German military officers, who stepped out of an automobile. The headline read “Germans in Petrograd” and the caption added snidely “Christmas came early this year.”  

105 In *Iskry*, Lenin was depicted in his trademark cap and long coat. He ushered Red Guard soldiers into the home of “Miss Revolution,” while an old and sickly representation of Mother Russia stood watching outside. While the *Sinii zhurnal* cartoon offered a simple condemnation – Lenin conspired with Germans – the cartoon in *Iskry* was more ambiguous. But more importantly, in *Iskry*, Lenin stood with his back to the reader and his face remained unseen. Even when standing right before the reading public, Lenin, in a sense, remained hidden from view.

103 *Solntse Rossii*, no. 16 (374) (1917): 15.

104 *Iskry*, no. 42 (29 October 1917): 330; *Sinii zhurnal*, no. 43-44 (December 1917): 5.

105 *Sinii zhurnal*, no. 43-44 (December 1917): 3.
Photographic coverage of the October coup produced a series of images that played into the image of Lenin and the Bolsheviks as a secretive gang of thugs. These photographs were published in *Niva* and *Solntse Rossii* in series that referred to the Bolshevik takeover as the “October coup.” They included a wide-angle exterior of the Smolnyi Institute (the “Bolsheviks’ citadel,” according to *Solntse Rossii*), photographs of the entrance to Smolnyi, guarded by soldiers who manned large guns, and the famous image of two Red Guard soldiers standing outside of Lenin’s office. [FIGURE. 43.] The two sentries stood on either side of the large set of white doors. They stood at attention; one with his rifle at his side, the other gripped his weapon with two hands in front of him. They both wore soft, ascot-type caps, mustaches, and long dark overcoats. They were clearly not professional soldiers and, in many ways, their appearance aligned with the thuggish stereotype popularized by caricatures in the illustrated press. Furthermore, the fact that Lenin’s office remained closed for the picture also reinforced the narrative of the ‘hidden leader of the Bolsheviks.’ The photograph almost asked the reading public to

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106 *Niva*, no. 46-47 (18 November 1917): 720-21; *Solntse Rossii*, no. 27 (385) (1917); *Solntse Rossii*, no. 28 (386) (1917): 13.
speculate what schemes this criminal mastermind, who conspired with Jews and Germans, had in store for the Russian people.
CHAPTER SIX

HOW PHOTO-REPORTAGE BECAME SOVIET

Photo-reportage played a central role in the Soviet illustrated press. Faced with a large, ethnically diverse, and mostly illiterate population, the Bolsheviks embraced photography, alongside other visual media, in order to publicize the new regime. Portraits of Lenin and the other Bolsheviks, which appeared in magazines, albums, and on postcards, familiarized the citizens of the Soviet Union with the new political leadership. Photographic reports of the news also offered visual evidence of the country’s social and economic progress, and countered the lies propagated by Soviet Russia’s enemies. Moreover, photography was linked to the regime’s educational policies. The commissar of education, Anatolii V. Lunacharskii, wrote that in the Soviet Union “there will be universal literacy and also a photographic literacy in particular.” ¹ Although photography alone did not encourage reading, it drew potential readers to various types of publications. Photographs were still modern commodities, as well as attractive and engaging objects, which provided information otherwise available only through the written word. Like in pre-revolutionary times, the presence of photo-reportage indicated that Russia was the modern industrial state, which the Bolsheviks had promised to create out of the embers of autocracy.

¹ Vestnik fotografii i kinematografii, no. 1 (1923): 3; this point was repeated on many occasions, including “A. V. Lunacharskii i fotografia,” Fotograf, no. 3-4 (1926): 6.
After the Revolution, the weekly magazine remained the primary venue for photo-reportage. Although daily newspapers occasionally printed maps or political cartoons, photography was not a regular feature of Pravda or Izvestiia until the early 1930s. However, starting in 1923, publications such as Ogonek, Prozhektor, Krasnaia niva, and Krasnaia panorama were filled with portraits, panoramic views, and other types of news images from around the world. These magazines were part of larger, Moscow-based publishing houses, which also put out newspapers, monthly journals, and various types of albums, almanacs, manuals, and books. Attached to the Ogonek publishing company was the monthly journal Sovetskoe foto, which played a key role in the development of photo-reportage as a Soviet art form. The journal was also an important exhibition space for amateur photography and the work of professional press photographers. Also, the increased demand for photo-reportage after 1923 necessitated the creation of several photo-agencies, such as Press-klishe and Russ-foto, which could draw on photo-correspondents outside of Moscow, and around the world, and built a central photographic archive for Soviet publishing. In turn these pictures supplied not only the “capital press,” that is, magazines produced in Moscow, but also smaller, regional publications in the Soviet Union and various publications in the West.

Moscow was the new capital of the illustrated press in Russia. The editorial offices of Ogonek, Krasnaia niva, and Prozhektor were all Moscow-based, as were the photo-agencies Press-klishe and Russ-foto. Though photographers in Leningrad received more requests for photo-reportage than agents in other major centers, the former imperial capital became very much an appendage firmly under the control of Moscow. Among major weekly publications, only Krasnaia panorama was based in Leningrad, and its
peripheral geographic status and concomitant lack of strong links to the central authorities, likely hastened its demise in 1930. This Moscow shift was also reflected in the content of photo-reportage. Before the Revolution, Marks’s *Niva*, though based in St. Petersburg, catered to readers in the provinces; its profile was national, all-Russian, and its target audience was not limited to residents of the imperial capital. The same was not true of *Niva*’s Soviet namesake. *Krasnaia niva* luxuriated in the social and cultural life of Moscow, and the photographic content of *Ogonek* and *Prozhektor* was equally Moscow-centric. Not only did news from Moscow dominate coverage in magazines, but also all Soviet celebrations and “holidays” were framed against the urban background of the capital. The city stood in for the rest of the country; through press photography, Moscow became the Soviet Union’s symbolic center, in addition to being the locus of political power and administrative control.

In Moscow, editors of magazines and photo-agencies served as gatekeepers of the production and distribution of photo-reportage. To a certain degree, Soviet editors worked on a daily basis like their pre-revolutionary predecessors. They dispatched photo-correspondents on assignment, requested news images from agents in the field, and sifted through the weekly shipments of pictures taken by photographers at home and provided by photo-agencies abroad. However, working in key positions in the Soviet propaganda infrastructure, editors were also expected to follow the dictates of the press department of the Central Committee. Official political, social, and cultural agendas, set down by the central authorities in communiqués and publications such as *Krasnaia pechat’*, had to be translated visually onto the magazine page. Photo-reportage was used to convey priority propaganda campaigns, desirable news stories, and proper presentation for target
audiences.\textsuperscript{2} Circulars from the Chief Administration of Literary and Publishing Affairs (Glavlit) referred to specific photographs, which were or were not supposed to be printed.\textsuperscript{3} Failure to distribute photo-reportage was noticed at the highest level, and on certain occasions editors were called on to account for these omissions to Stalin himself.\textsuperscript{4} Finally, editors had to consider the formal properties of photo-reportage, the visual aesthetics, in addition to the mere content. Especially in the years of Stalin’s cultural revolution, how a photograph was taken was just as important as what the photograph showed.

Photo-reportage became a visual orthodoxy under the Soviets. In \textit{Ogonek} and \textit{Sovetskoe foto}, editors, critics, and photographers made the practice and formal style of photo-reportage the only legitimate approach to photography in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{5} In many ways, the Soviets championed the same values associated with photo-reportage in the West. There, the so-called “photojournalistic norm” implied values of authenticity, detachment, and self-effacement – that is, the attempt to translate the journalistic ethos of objectivity into visual terms.\textsuperscript{6} Photo-reportage was not the product of the individual; the


\textsuperscript{4} Gosdarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 4459 (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union [TASS]), op. 38, d. 20, l. 49 (Letter from Ia. Doletsskii, Executive Director of TASS, to Comrade Stalin, 28 December 1930).

\textsuperscript{5} P. R. “Kakoi fotosnimok nam nuzhen,” \textit{Sovetskoe foto}, no. 10 (June 1930): 291.

photo-reporter did not editorialize but simply documented what was in front of the camera. In the words of photographer and historian Tim Gidal, “photo-reportage is not an expression of projected inner vision, but a documentary report on reality.” However expressed or defined, the visual approach associated with press photography became the norm in the West in the 1920s. In the Soviet Union, by contrast, photographers adopted the modern, detached style of photo-reportage, but not the underlying ethos on which it was fundamentally based. Editors at magazines and photo-agencies encouraged their photo-correspondents to capture subjects candidly and in medias res, in order to create a dynamic picture of Soviet life and work. Rather than expressing the detached relationship between photographer and subject, photo-reportage produced an image of a dynamic, efficient, modern society, while at the same time capitalizing on the objective status of the camera.

Soviet weekly magazines under the New Economic Policy offered a large volume of photography, but a limited range of news stories, subjects, and perspectives. Every year, the editors cycled through a similar set of themes, refracted through the same ideological perspective. In essence, photo-reportage captured a series of rituals that made up the public performance of the annual news cycle. Domestic politics, for example, captured the public face of the Soviet government, without the actual politics. Coverage of party congresses, where the Bolsheviks addressed large crowds of delegates, offered a ritual of political legitimacy, wherein the gathered masses sanctioned the leadership with applause and adoring glances. But the actual work of government, especially the struggle

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for succession in the wake of Lenin’s death, was kept out of the public’s eye. Soviet “holidays,” such as May Day and commemorations of the Revolution, were equally ritualized. Staged grandly and photographed on Red Square, with the Soviet leadership gathered on Lenin’s tomb, these events not only reinforced the political status quo, but also made Moscow “the sacred center of the Russian Revolution” with Lenin as the “central charismatic figure.” Editors curated the photographic content of weekly publications in concert with this annual schedule of public ritual and festivals. Over the course of the year, the patterns of new information reflected and reinforced the new rituals of socialist life. Photo-reportage introduced the reading public to new holidays, new historical landmarks and anniversaries, and new significant personalities, all of which undergirded the new social existence in the Soviet Union.

Censorship, Press Directives, and State Control

After seizing political control in October 1917, Lenin nationalized the publishing industry. He closed down newspapers that opposed the “worker-peasant” government, and magazines such as Ogonek and Iskry also ceased to exist. The Bolsheviks planned to rebuild a new Soviet illustrated press on the foundations established by the likes of Stanislav Propper and Ivan Sytin. But Lenin was by no means an advocate for unchecked censorship.

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10 The even advised photographer to remain mindful of the annual calendar of events when considering subject matter for photo-reportage: “Shto cnimat?,” Sovetskoe foto, no. 2 (February 1928): 63.

11 “Dekret o pechati,” in O partiinoi i sovetskoi pechati: sbornik dokumentov (Moscow: Pravda, 154), 173.
press freedoms. He believed that capitalism and bourgeois publishers had attained ideological dominance by monopolizing the press before the Revolution, and the Bolshevik regime wished to achieve something similar in the Soviet Union. A monopoly over the press was necessary in order to preserve the Revolution and furthermore to prevent the publication of counter-revolutionary material.

Press censorship allowed the Bolsheviks to control the content of photo-reportage. The new regime approached censorship broadly, using legal institutions to punish offenders rather than listing specific prohibitions. Photography was not singled out in documents relating to these new statutes. In January 1918, a three-man Revolutionary Tribunal was charged with prosecuting publishers and editors of press crimes, such as presenting “false or distorted information about the phenomena of social life.” Depending on the gravity of the offense, the accused incurred fines, public censure, confiscation of property, imprisonment, exile, and deprivation of political rights. In addition, Trotsky reinstated the practice of wartime censorship, which required all printed matter of a military nature to be submitted for preliminary review. This statute was necessary to prevent the press from unwittingly revealing military secrets, which “could be used against [the Bolsheviks] by the enemy.” In practice, military censors interpreted this document broadly and used it to excise any news information that

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14 Ibid., 176.

threatened to undermine the “revolutionary spirit of the people.”\textsuperscript{16} Guilty parties were tried before a military tribunal. However, according to Arlen Blium, the lack of coordination between the Red Army, the Revolutionary Tribunal, the Cheka, and press commissars in Moscow and Petrograd prevented wartime censorship from being applied consistently until 1920.\textsuperscript{17} Much like in pre-revolutionary times, poor communication and overlapping jurisdiction in the censorship bureaucracy undermined the ability of censors to do their jobs efficiently.

In 1922, the Soviet government founded Glavlit, which replaced the tribunal system of the Civil War period. This institution censored newspapers, magazines, and books, as well as sheet music, posters, advertisements, and commercial design. Glavlit censors also issued circulars to editors regarding what photographs to publish and not to publish. During the celebrations of Stalin’s 50\textsuperscript{th} birthday, for example, editors received instruction to print only those portraits of the leader that were provided by the photo-agency Press-klishe. “Other portraits and pictures are not allowed to be published.”\textsuperscript{18} According to Jeffrey Brooks, Glavlit’s censorship bureau “entered every avenue of Soviet life” in the 1920s. It suppressed information on the personal lives of Central Committee members, circulated lists of forbidden topics, and banned the names of Stalin’s opponents in the press.\textsuperscript{19} It was, however, also a small institution; Glavlit employed only eighty-six censors in 1926, many of who were not even registered Communists, and it had limited

\textsuperscript{16} Quoted in Blium, Z\textsuperscript{a} kulisami, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 123.

\textsuperscript{19} Brooks, Thank you, Comrade Stalin, 4-5
power to shape the content of major periodicals.\(^{20}\) When the authorities reintroduced preliminary censorship in 1929, Glavlit representatives, installed throughout the press, focused primarily on ensuring that military secrets were not compromised. Moreover, at the *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* publishing houses, the censor was not the final authority. Editors had the power to override Glavlit directives, and even at smaller provincial, non-party newspapers, the censor was often unable to affect what went to press.\(^{21}\)

Directives issued by the Central Committee’s press department were also an effective means of controlling photo-reportage. This agenda-setting proceeded along a series of formal routes, including circulars, conferences, and the official organ of the press department, *Krasnaia pechat* (Red Press), all of which guided editors on content, layout, and the political line.\(^{22}\) In January 1925, for example, the news coverage in *Krasnaia niva* closely followed the guidelines set out by *Krasnaia pechat*. The press department suggested topics such as “One Year Without Lenin” and “Lenin and the Komsomol,” and the magazine’s editors obliged with an opening photo-story titled “A Year Without Lenin” and a series of portraits of young pioneers.\(^{23}\) Press department directives also guided the content of subscription packages of photo-reportage produced by *Ogonek*’s photo-agency, Biuro-klishe.\(^{24}\) The photo-agency offered five packages, delivered on a monthly basis, which were aimed at publishers of daily newspapers,


\(^{21}\) Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 19.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{23}\) *Krasnaia niva*, no. 2 (18 January 1925); also see Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses*, 18.

\(^{24}\) Gosdarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 391 (Russian Telegraph Agency [ROSTA]), op. 5, d. 19, l. 51 (Agreement regarding Biuro klishe’s Komsomol Subscription).
various provincial publications, and journals intended specifically for peasants and Komsomol members. According to Ogonek’s staff, these subscriptions offered a wide range of “original images” covering information pertaining to national and international politics, agriculture, manufacturing and the economy.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, magazines were subjected to informal agenda setting between editors and members of the Central Committee. These one-on-one interactions reinforced official directives and ensured that the message from the top trickled down to the production level. Both Prozhektor’s editor Nikolai I. Bukharin and Krasnaja niva’s Anatoli V. Lunacharskii, for example, had personal access to policy discussions at the highest level.

Finally, the Central Committee’s control of financing and material resources ensured that editors followed official directives. In addition to approving editorial appointments, the press department managed cash subsidies, allocated paper and ink supplies, and replaced and upgraded typographical equipment. After the Revolution, the periodical press was almost wholly dependent on the state for financing and material support. In 1922, the Central Committee experimented briefly with “self-financing,” but this precipitated a disastrous breakdown in communication and the near-collapse of the press, especially in the provinces. Subsidies were quickly restored and periodicals returned to operating at a net financial loss. During the NEP, Ogonek was one of the few magazines to report a small profit. In 1927, the magazine made nearly 3,463 rubles, and its parent company, with all its auxiliary publications, expected a windfall of 37,773

\textsuperscript{25} “Biuro klishe, izdatel’stva ‘Ogonek’,” no date, (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 19, l. 53).
rubles after the injection of state funds. Without these subsidies, most of the major periodicals in the Soviet Union would have collapsed financially, and the policy of “self-financing” remained a threatening possibility for editors who earned the disapproval of the authorities. In the words of Matthew Lenoe, “A financial umbilical cord linked them to the Central Committee, and party leaders held the scissors that could cut that cord.”

The Illustrated Press during the Civil War

New Soviet publications gradually replaced pre-revolutionary magazines on newsstands. Although Ogonek and Iskry ceased to exist after the October coup, both Niva and Sinii zhurnal continued to publish well into 1918. Widespread respect for Ivan Sytin, at least in early the stages of Lenin’s rule, likely ensured short-term stability at Niva. The publisher tried to make his publishing empire “useful in the affairs of the new order.” Until the end, the magazine published out of the same building in Petrograd and retained its editor I. M. Zhelenznov, who had been handpicked by Sytin when he purchased Niva in 1916. By contrast, the Bolsheviks moved the offices of Sinii zhurnal and installed a series of new editors, replacing the longstanding publisher and editor, S. G. Kornfel’d. Niva’s survival, however, was contingent on editorial concessions. Almost no


27 Lenoe, Closer to the Masses, 19.

28 The final issue of Niva appeared on 7 October 1918.

29 I.D. Sytin, Zhizn’ dlia knigi (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1962), 201; on Sytin’s relationship with Lenin and the Bolshevik regime, see Charles Ruud, Russian Entrepreneur: Publisher Ivan Sytin of Moscow 1851-1934 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 174-189.
photographs appeared in the 40 issues published in 1918. It was thinner, about 16 pages per issue, no longer reported on current events, and focused entirely on fiction and fine art. The few photographs to feature in Niva were printed in January. One photo-story was especially dissonant from a Bolshevik standpoint. It showed a funeral for military cadets, described as “casualties” of government resistance during the “October Revolution.”\textsuperscript{30} The reporting not only reversed the magazine’s original branding of the ‘October coup,’ but also linked the sacrifices made for the Revolution to faith, religion, and Russian Orthodoxy in particular.

In the spring of 1918, the Bolsheviks created two weekly magazines under the auspices of the People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). The first was Khronika, a short-lived publication based in Moscow that was dedicated to photo-reportage. In the first issue, the editor N. F. Preobrazhenskii wrote “we owe it to history to photograph everything we can” and “to preserve this for future generations.”\textsuperscript{31} He also articulated the dual goals of the early Soviet periodical press, namely to communicate the news to illiterates and to counteract the “printed lies” of anti-Bolshevik propaganda. Having inherited a state where only two out of every five adults could read, Soviet publishers relied on photography to present the Bolshevik version of current events during the Civil War.\textsuperscript{32} But amidst chronic paper shortages, distribution problems, and falling circulation, the magazine failed to reach a wide audience and soon ceased

\textsuperscript{30} Niva, no. 3 (20 January 1918): 47.

\textsuperscript{31} Quoted in Volkov-Lannit, Istoriia pishetsia ob”ektivom, (Moscow: Planeta, 1971), 51.

publication. The responsibility to enlighten the masses was thus left to the editors of
Plamia (Flame), the other Narkompros weekly magazine.

*Plamia* was the only magazine to publish on a weekly basis during the Civil War. Edited by Lunacharskii, the commissar of education, this publication reflected and advanced the politics of the newly installed Bolshevik regime, especially in the realm of art and culture. Available in Petrograd for 30 kopecks per issue (or 1.25 rubles for a monthly subscription), *Plamia* offered essays, short fiction, and poetry, as well as photo-reportage, fine art, and other illustrated material. The inaugural issue featured a photograph of Lenin, taken by Moisei Nappelbaum, on the cover. [FIGURE 44.]

The magazine’s name was inspired by Lenin’s pre-revolutionary underground paper *Iskra* (Spark), which had barred the famous slogan “from a spark, a flame [plamia] was ignited.” Lunacharskii’s introductory essay waxed poetic on the allegorical significance of the flame, but offered little in terms of a practical program. The flame was a “great allegory of revolution,” he wrote, and the magazine

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33 The price of Plamia fluctuated greatly during the Civil War. In 1919, for example, a single issue cost 1 ruble or 4 rubles for a monthly subscription.
Plamia would serve as a “formidable and shining emblem of strength, a cleansing, wild, lithe, mighty, benevolent, shining emblem of knowledge.” 34 These statements captured the utopian spirit that fueled much of the magazine’s written and illustrated content on a weekly basis.

Under Lunacharskii, Plamia was an instrument of education and a means of propagating an image of an enlightened society. The highbrow literary and visual material offered an elite readership great “culture” and reinforced the regime’s high valuation of art and literature, while the editors used photo-reportage to publicize the reformed Soviet educational system. The magazine showed a society that prioritized learning, in the classroom and at the workman’s bench, and in which Narkompros played a central role in bringing enlightenment to the masses. News reports focused on early childhood education, especially when connected to labor. In 1918, for example, a profile of a kindergarten for proletarian children showed boys and girls in workshops – the younger children working with clay and building toys, and the older children learning to become joiners. 35 Reports on adult education showed Soviet engineering courses and lectures at the “peasant university,” and the magazine also publicized various polytechnic conferences and meeting of the workers’ intelligentsia. 36 Throughout this coverage, the commissar of education was a seemingly ubiquitous presence. Lunacharskii was photographed lecturing, participating in conferences, unveiling monuments, chairing meetings, recording his voice for posterity, and posing with a string quartet named in his

36 Plamia, no. 5 (2 June 1918): 6; Plamia, no. 26 (27 October 1918): 5-6; Plamia, no. 43 (2 March 1919): 3-4.
honor. Lunacharskii and Narkompros thus appeared to be central to the culture and education of the Soviet Union, and Plamia’s photo-reportage served to promote and legitimize these activities, which, by extension, promoted and legitimized the Soviet regime overall.

*Ogonek and the Soviet Illustrated Press*

In 1923, the Bolsheviks created a multi-publication illustrated press in one fell swoop. The most prominent category of illustrated journals was the “art-literary” weekly, which focused on the news and included the magazines *Ogonek, Prozhektor, Krasnaia niva,* and *Krasnaia panorama.* [FIGURE 45] Other illustrated weeklies and monthlies included magazines about science and women’s issues, anti-religious periodicals, and a few satirical journals, such as *Krokodil.*37 Like in the pre-revolutionary era, the art-literary weekly magazine combined light reading with photo-reportage. The genre’s most prominent and widely read publication was *Ogonek,* which played a major role in the development of Soviet photo-reportage and shaped the illustrated press for decades to come.

*Ogonek* was a stand-alone magazine that became the flagship periodical in a small, publishing empire. It was founded in Moscow by the intellectual and former documentary filmmaker Mikhail Kol’tsov, alongside the writer and satirist Efim D. Zozulia, and Emmanuel G. Golomb, who had worked for Propper’s *Ogonek* before the

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37 For a full list Soviet periodical launched in 1923, see Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi sotsial’no-politicheskii arkhiv (RGASPI) f. 17 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Department of Agitation and Propaganda), op. 60, ed.khr. 852, l. 21 (Summary of Illustrated Monthly Journals).
Revolution. Kol’tsov and his colleagues took a highly successful model and adapted it to the new Soviet era. In fact, the Soviet version initially bore a close resemblance to its pre-revolutionary antecedent in terms of the illustrated and literary content, as well as the magazine’s basic design. Ogonek’s official motto was “no material without a photo or drawing.” A typical issue featured between thirty and fifty photographs of domestic and foreign news. Especially important was the cover photo. The editors recognized this picture for its “advertising function;” it needed to stand out among the other magazine in the salesman’s window and to “seduce, attract, evoke desire” from potential readers.

Inside each issue, the editors established a series of regular photographic features, such as “Window into the World,” which offered visual snippets from abroad with explanatory captions. Roughly halfway through an issue, the editors reserved space for a two-page photo-story or collage, which was usually a collaborative effort between a photographer and a writer on a special assignment. Sometimes, wishing to make a strong visual impression, they dedicated the two-page spread to one giant photo. In June 1928, for example, the editors printed a panoramic view of Red Square, which showed 30,000 participants of a physical-culture parade, taken from the peak of one of the Kremlin towers.


41 *Ogonek*, no. 26 (274) (24 June 1928).
Ogonek was also a rich source of literary and journalistic prose. Curated by Zozulia, the magazine’s deputy editor, about half of each issue was dedicated to historical essays, serialized fiction, short stories, poetry, and long-form journalism. Essays and reports on current events were typically paired with photos, while fiction was published with hand-drawn illustrations or cartoons. Among the Soviet writers to publish in Ogonek were Mikhail Zoshchenko, Maksim Gorkii, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Nikolai Aseev, and the satirists Il’f and Petrov. Luncharskii also contributed essays on art history and revolutionary art. Literature from outside the Soviet Union was less common. Non-Russian authors were, without exception, “fellow travelers” in both their politics and literature. For example, Ogonek published an autobiographical essay by the outspoken Mexican socialist Diego Rivera, which featured photographs of the artist and a few examples of his murals.42 The editors also serialized Upton Sinclair’s documentary novel Boston – a semi-journalistic indictment of the American system of justice in regard to the executions of the Italian anarchists Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco. Sinclair’s account dovetailed nicely with Ogonek’s equally critical photographic coverage of the trial. 43

In 1926, Kol’tsov and his collaborators founded a joint stock company called Ogonek, which expanded the scope of their publishing endeavors. In addition to the weekly magazine, the company started to publish monthlies dedicated to women’s issues (Zhenskii zhurnal [Women’s Journal]), automobiles (Za rulem [Behind the Wheel]), and photography (Sovetskoe foto). Annual subscribers were presented with bonuses, which

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42 “Moia zhizn’ i stranstviia,” in Ogonek, no. 43 (291) (21 October 1928).
43 Ogonek, no. 36 (232) (4 September 1927).
included the complete works of Russian writers, such as Lev Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov. Readers also had the option to subscribe to Biblioteka Ogonek (Library of Ogonek). Curated by Zozulia, this collection of “104 books…of the newest works by the best Russian and foreign writers” enjoyed the fastest growing circulation in the Ogonek catalogue of bonus offerings. 44 In addition to the literary material, the company also produced yearly almanacs, photographic albums, and picture postcards, featuring portraits of Soviet leaders and writers, reproductions of fine art, and cartoons. 45 As the publishing company expanded, Kol’tsov delegated more of the daily editorial responsibilities to his collaborators, especially Zozulia at Ogonek and Semen V. Evgenov, who took charge at Sovetskoe foto. Kolt’sov, however, remained the chairman of the board of the Ogonek company well into the 1930s.

The other popular weeklies, such as Prozhektor, Krasnaia niva, and Krasnaia panorama, were published as supplements to newspapers. Prozhektor, for example, was created by Nikolai Bukharin and A. K. Voronskii to supplement the elite daily newspaper Pravda. 46 At thirty-two pages per issue, Prozhektor was the thickest of the “thin” magazines and its large physical dimensions made it a particularly well suited for photo-reportage. In advertisements, the editors underscored the artistry of the photography and the international scope of the magazine’s coverage, which boasted a large “network of

44 “Protokol ob’edinennogo zasedania soveta i revizionnoi komissii akts.izd.o-va ‘Ogonek’,” from 12 January 1928 (GARF f. 299, op. 1, d. 2, l. 18).


46 Prozhektor published twice a month from 1923 to 1927, once a week from 1928 to 1929, every ten days from 1930 to 1931, (again) twice a month in 1932, and then sixteen, twelve, and ten issues in 1933, 1934, and 1935 respectively.
correspondents in all the major points of Western Europe, America, and Asia."  

Although Prozhektor fit squarely into the art-literary mold, the editors also sold the magazine as a satirical publication, where witty prose accompanied a wide range of humorous illustration and political cartoons. The drawings of outstanding Soviet caricaturists, such as Viktor N. Deni and Boris E. Efimov, appeared in Prozhektor on a regular basis. Efimov’s work was especially striking; the editors often reserved an entire page for one of his attacks on Western imperialism or NEP profiteering, which featured large swaths of color, reminiscent of ROSTA windows.  

FIGURE 46.] They stood out brilliantly among the monochrome text and photography. Prozhektor was the least

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47 Subscription advertisements, Prozhektor, no. 2 (48) (31 January 1925); Prozhektor, no. 2 (224) (15 January 1930).

popular among the major Soviet weeklies. At the start of 1926, the editors claimed a
circulation of 70,000 and then stopped disclosing these statistics in subsequent issues.
Though comparatively low, this number confirmed the elite distribution of *Prozhektor*
and reinforced its status as a luxury item.

*Krasnaia niva* had a similar profile to *Prozhektor*, albeit more focused on art and
culture. Edited by Lunacharskii and Iu. M. Steklov, the magazine was the weekly
illustrated supplement to the elite newspaper *Izvestiia*. According to the editor and writer
I. Kasatikin, *Krasnaia niva* was aimed at “attentive and assiduous” domestic readers, who
“stacked the journal, issue by issue, and kept it for the sake of the artistic images and in
case [he or she] wished to reread a favored story or essay.” 49 Under Lunacharskii, the
magazine endeavored to contribute to the cultural education of Soviet citizens, while also
promoting the regime’s educational policy. In 1928, the editors promised “3,200 photo-
pictures” over the course of the year. 50 These news images were laid out individually,
alongside essays and news articles or arranged in dazzling collages, which drew on the
visual conceits of modernist photo-collage. A typical issue from 1926 featured news
images of the 14th Congress of the Russian Communist Party, presented a vocational
photo-story on bakers and bread-making, published film stills from Eisenstein’s
*Battleship Potemkin*, and offered a visual survey of the workers’ theatre in Berlin and an
archeological exhibition at the Hermitage. 51 In addition, photo-reportage brought
attention to elementary schools, institutions of higher education, and anti-illiteracy

50 Advertisement in *Krasnaia niva*, no. 48 (27 November 1927).
51 *Krasnaia niva*, no. 1 (3 January 1926).
campaigns for adults. *Krasnaia niva* was also a venue for highbrow fiction. Isaak Babel, Konstantin Fedin, and Aleksei Tolstoi published stories in the magazine, and the likes of Sergei Esenin, Boris Pasternak, and Vladimir Maiakovskii contributed poetry.

Finally, *Krasnaia panorama* was attached to the Leningrad daily, *Krasnaia gazeta*. Founded by I. P. Flerovskii, this magazine started out as a visually inventive periodical, which focused primarily on Leningrad. The editor’s goal was to offer a “full picture of the social and industrial-manufacturing life of the country” and the photographs sought to illustrate the country’s exceptional “industrial progress.” Avant-garde design elements and photo-collages dominated the content, and most issue ended with a photographic profile, usually of a manufacturing plant, which blurred the lines between photo-reportage and commercial advertising. [FIGURE 47.] Usually, five or six photos surveyed the factory floor and a short article trumpeted the quality of, say, paper products or Svetlana electric lamps. After Flerovskii left in 1925, *Krasnaia panorama* underwent a radical transformation. It became more traditional and generic; photo-reportage and visually dynamic graphics gave way to picturesque drawings, and

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52 Advertisement in *Krasnaia panorama*, no. 8 (26 July 1923).

53 *Krasnaia panorama*, no. 5 (31 January 1925); *Krasnaia panorama*, no. 2 (31 January 1924).
socio-political news was replaced by basic reports about art, the theatre, and Soviet culture more generally. But under new management, the magazine also increased its circulation; from 60,000 in 1926 the magazine peaked three years later (1929) at 110,000. *Krasnaia panorama* was, in many regards, peripheral. Based in Leningrad, and focused on Leningrad news, the magazine also lacked a strong, influential editor with connections to the Central Committee. These factors ensured that *Krasnaia panorama* was the first weekly to end when the Soviet authorities curbed magazine publishing between 1929 and 1931.

*Sovetskoe foto*

In April 1926, the editors at *Ogonek* launched a monthly periodical called *Sovetskoe foto* dedicated to amateur photography and photo-reportage. Kol’tsov served as the journal’s chief editor, but the managing editor, Viktor P. Mikulin, oversaw most of the daily operations. The circulation of *Sovetskoe foto* increased rapidly and it soon became the central organ for several photographic organizations, attracting input from a larger circle of editors and critics. This staff was commemorated in a group photograph in 1929. [FIGURE 48] In addition to Kol’tsov and Mikulin, the picture showed the editor Semen Evgenov, the historian G. M. Boltianskii, the photographer N. D. Petrov, and the writer and critic D. Z. Bunimovich.54 This editorial core shaped the program of *Sovetskoe foto*

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54 *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 7 (April 1929): 197.
and, to some degree, the future of photo-reportage in the Soviet Union for decades after.

The central goal of *Sovetskoe foto* was to develop a distinctly Soviet approach to photography. The journal catered primarily to amateurs; it was a venue where a novice photographer could find a wide variety of practical, technical, and aesthetic coaching from professional photo-reporters. Most of the magazine’s content had a clearly stated pedagogical purpose. Every year, the editors published a series of essays on the theory and practice of photo-reportage by different authors who represented different perspectives within the journalistic profession. For example, writing on behalf of magazine editors, Mikulin wrote the first series in 1926 called “How to Photograph for Journals and Newspapers.”55 The journal also featured a regular column, “Critical Notes,” in which the magazine’s staff analyzed amateur submissions in terms of subject

matter and technical execution. Aesthetics were also discussed, usually in reference to traditional art forms. The editors sought to legitimize amateur photography as a worthwhile artistic and social pursuit, on par with already recognized fine arts, such as painting and sculpture.  

Comparing the formal properties of a painted picture to a photograph offered readers a “rational method by which to examine the photographic picture.” Writing on composition and lighting, for example, the editors applied the aesthetic discourse on painting and sculpture to photography. In another essay, readers were encouraged to study sculptures of sportsmen and then try to recreate the same dynamic quality of represented motion on camera.

More importantly, the editors of Sovetskoe foto endeavored to legitimize photo-reportage as a socialist art form. The journal thus served as an exhibition space where the work of press photographers received praise and constructive criticism. The editors primarily drew on pictures taken by Ogonek’s staff photo-reporters. These images sometimes appeared in both Ogonek and Sovetskoe foto, and the manner of their display captured the different functions of these two publications. In Ogonek, for example, Arkadii Shaikhet’s picture of the globe above the Central Telegraph in Moscow was published on the cover with an extended news caption. [FIGURE 49.] In Sovetskoe foto, by contrast, the editors transformed this image into an emblematic work of art. They exhibited the image on a separate page with only an assigned title that read: “In

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59 Ogonek, no. 41 (289) (7 October 1928).
Construction.” In another section, the editors credited Shaikhet and analyzed his work in terms of its formal properties. The photograph was “shot against the light, which gives it a unique effect reminiscent of certain graphic techniques” and the “round frame, which captured the cylindrical construction of the site…further reinforces the impression of this photograph.” Shaikhet’s photo-reportage became a teaching tool, an opportunity to highlight the picture’s aesthetic strengths and, more broadly, to demonstrate the proper way to discuss a photograph’s formal features. To some degree, these critiques also articulated and signaled a photographic orthodoxy based in photo-reportage for all press professionals to emulate and internalize.

Subscribers to Sovetskoe foto also had the option to receive a supplementary “library” of photography books. These included various beginners’ guides, technical manuals, correspondence courses, and treatises on the aesthetics of photography, including Laszlo Moholy-Nagy’s avant-garde Painting Photography Film. Most of the books were written by the Sovetskoe foto staff, namely Mikulin, Boltianskii, Petrov, Bunimovich, and several other regular contributors. The editors also published picture albums and starting in 1928 an annual photographic almanac, which, again, included essays by the staff of Sovetskoe foto. Through these

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60 Sovetskoe foto, no. 11 (November 1928): 491, 522-23.

61 The Soviet edition advertised in the Sovetskoe foto’s 1929 Photographic Almanac was titled Painting and Photography.
publications, in addition to the monthly journal, a small group of photographers, editors, and critics shaped the theory and practice of photo-reportage in the Soviet Union.

*Soviet Photo-agencies*

Photo-agencies were both outlets and suppliers of press photography in the Soviet Union. These institutions collected pictures of the news from their domestic and international networks of photo-correspondents, and then sold them to various periodical publications. In 1923, the Central Committee’s department of Agitation and Propaganda (Agitprop) established Pressbiuro in order to support the new illustrated press. The agency sent out regular shipments of photography to various periodicals, at which point the editors were free to purchase those images they wished to publish. A year later, the magazine *Ogonek* created its own photo-agency called Biuro klishe under the auspices of Mospoligraf. The chief editor of Biuro klishe was Leonid P. Mezhericher, but daily management was handled by I. L. Pinchuk, who also sat on the *Ogonek* editorial board and oversaw the magazine’s technical section. The focus of this agency was on political information, specifically portraits of important Soviet leaders, as well as caricatures about international affairs and the social and economic life in the Soviet Union. However, in order to “concentrate press distribution of literary information and illustration in one place,” the Central Committee soon resolved to join Pressbiuro and Biuro klishe together

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62 “Letter to Newspaper Editors from the editor-in-chief of Pressbiuro,” from 10 June 1923 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 55, l. 1).

63 “Circular from the editor of Biuro klishe, L. P. Mezhericher,” from 12 October 1924 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 19, l. 71).
under the administrative control of the newly formed Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS). The networked merged and all the accounts of subscribers, that is, magazines and newspaper publishers, were transferred to this new, united photo-agency, which in 1925 was christened Press-klishe.

Press-klishe supplied domestic photo-reportage to magazines in the NEP era. Under the editorship of Mezhericher, who continued in the post after the merger, this photo-agency cultivated a large network of local agents throughout the Soviet Union, mostly along existing lines of communication. Press-klishe tapped into regional news and media services, such as the Russian Telegraph Agency (ROSTA), the Transcaucasian Telegraph Agency (ZAGTAG), and the film studio Uzbekkino in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Mezhericher and his staff invested heavily in local agents; they provided material support, including cameras, lenses, and photographic paper, and also subsidized the cost of film processing. The photo-agency wanted to secure a network of competent, reliable, and loyal servants, especially in distant provincial centers, and the editors were even willing to train these contacts remotely. Writing from Moscow, Mezhericher and his managing editor G. Salomonovich, often provided detailed instructions on subject matter and visual approach. High levels of investment in human and material resources were accompanied by onerous bureaucratic oversight. Press-klishe editors expected local agents to provide reports on local press organs, in addition to producing photo-reportage. These reports detailed the use and placement of Press-klishe’s photographs in local publications. Furthermore, given that TASS also dealt in written news reports, agents also had to write short articles alongside the visual reports. Editors paid for photo-reportage

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64 “Letter to all editors of newspapers from the Central Committee’s department of Press Affairs,” no date (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 19, l. 38).
and written material on a per picture (positive or negative) and per line of text basis, respectively.

The other major photo-agency was Russ-foto, which primarily supplied pictures of international news. Founded in 1924, this agency was attached to the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS). The chairman of VOKS, Olga D. Kameneva, described Russ-foto’s mission in terms of a desire to correct the public image of the Soviet Union among foreigners. She believed photography had an important role “to acquaint the international press with our economic situation and our developments in science, technology, and art, as well as our lives more generally.” To this end, the photo-agency’s managing editor, S. Ia. Nironov cultivated contacts in Western Europe, America, as well as in more remote regions, such as Australia, South Africa, Argentina, and Japan, while also coordinating a network of agents in the Soviet Union. Twice a month, Nironov sifted through shipments from both international and domestic sources and then negotiated an exchange of pictures on an exclusive basis. Ostensibly this gave Nironov and Russ-foto full control of the photography entering and exiting the country. Unlike Press-klishe, Russ-foto invested very little into individual contacts. The agency simply dealt in photographs and made little effort to repair broken relationships or to improve the quality of photo-reportage. That is, when foreign contacts failed to place Soviet photo-reportage in the press on a regular basis, Nironov severed relations and

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65 Gosdarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 5283 (All-Union Society for Cultural Links with Foreign Countries [VOKS]), op. 1, d. 74, l. 288 (letter from O. D. Kameneva, Chairman of VOKS, 1 July 1926).

66 “Form letter (in English) from S. Nironoff to various agents,” from 7 August 1926 (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 74, l. 363).
sought out another, more preferable contact in the country. This also applied to agents working within the Soviet Union.

In 1931, the Central Committee merged Press-klishe and Russ-foto into a single institution called Soiuzfoto. This merger was orchestrated in large part by the head of TASS, Iakov G. Doletsskii, who had proposed the creation of a unified photo-agency originally in May 1927. At the time, Doletsskii cited the need to eliminate the “indecent competition” between Press-klishe and Russ-foto, but in the end, this argument made little impression on the Central Committee. The second time around, Doletsskii proved more convincing. In 1930, in the shadow of the First Five-Year Plan, he argued that a new photo-agency was required to, again, stop unhealthy competition between existing agencies, but also to streamline spending and to ensure correct political leadership in photo-reportage. Although veiled in ideological buzzwords, Doletsskii made his case fundamentally on economic grounds. Competition was again cited, however, this time Doletsskii framed his argument in terms of the wasteful distribution of material resources between the two agencies. “Within the Soviet Union, both organizations waste a lot of resources and effort,” Doletsskii continued, “sending people to the same places to compete for duplicate pictures; they spend resources in parallel, they spend money on costly cameras and chemicals and so on.” In a letter to Stalin, he again emphasized the

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67 Doletsskii cited a report from Berlin regarding the supposed acrimonious relations between agents of Press-klishe and Russ-foto in Germany: see “Letter from the Soviet Embassy in Berlin to Comrade Dorents, Department of Internal Affairs, Central European Division (SECRET),” from 9 May 1927 (GARF f. 4459, op. 38, d. 20, l. 16). After a year, the Central Committee decided against Doletsskii’s plan, suggesting that the two agencies simply learn to “delimit their functions and areas of specialization in the foreign market:” see “Transcript of Protokol 277, meeting minutes of the Council of the People’s Commissariat (SECRET),” from 17 September 1928 (GARF f. 4459 op. 38, d. 20, l. 14).

68 “Letter from Ia. Doletsskii, Executive Director of TASS to Ia. E. Rudzutak, Deputy Chairman of the Council of the People’s Commissariat USSR,” from 1 August 1930 (GARF f. 4459, op. 38, d. 20, l. 68).
need to merge Press-klishe and Russ-foto into one agency “properly conducted according to the political line of the party and government and organized on a sound economic basis.”  

This time politics colored an argument that was again primarily about wasted money and material resources.

Indeed, from an economic and political standpoint, Russ-foto was a liability during the First Five-Year Plan and the concomitant war waged by Stalin against the remnants of bourgeois elements in Soviet institutions. Large state subsidies funded the work of this photo-agency, and during the 1920s, Nironov was unable to sell enough photographs domestically or abroad to break even. In 1926, the Russ-foto accountant reported a financial loss of nearly 500 rubles per month and two years later, Kameneva openly admitted the agency was operating at a net loss. At the same time, Russ-foto’s parent body VOKS had suffered a substantial purge of its staff, including Kameneva. She was succeeded by Fedor N. Petrov who refocused the Society on stamping out bourgeois culture domestically. Politically, Russ-foto lost its most vocal advocate, and thus in 1929 the Central Committee transferred administrative control of the photo-agency to Ogonek. Under Kol’tsov, Russ-foto was renamed Union-foto, and several Ogonek board members and employees strategized on how to integrate the photo-agency into the

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69 “Letter from Ia. Doletskii, Executive Director of TASS, to Comrade Stalin,” from 28 December 1930 (GARF f. 4459, op. 38, d. 20, l. 49).


71 “Bukhgaltera Russ-foto, dokladaia zapiska,” from 30 September 1926 (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 75, l.159); GARF f. 5283, op. 1a, d. 118, l. 42.

72 On the purge at VOKS, see Michael David-Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 188-89.
existing company infrastructure.\textsuperscript{73} Doletsskii’s attacks against Russ-foto in 1930 were thus empty; the photo-agency no longer existed in the form that Doletsskii had originally objected too. More likely, he wished to leverage the photo-agency’s past failures in order to bolster his argument for the creation of a new agency on the “ideological base” of TASS’s Press-klishe.\textsuperscript{74}

The new photo-agency Soiuzfoto united not only Press-klishe and Union-foto, but also the photography sections of the State Publishing House (OGIZ), the All-Russian Film and Photo Union (Soiuzkino), and the Izvestiia publishing company. The Central Committee invested one million rubles into Souizfoto, of which 40 percent was assigned to TASS, 30 percent to OGIZ, and 10 percent to the three remaining organizations. The Souizfoto board was drawn from across the incorporated sections, however the strongest presence was among personnel associated with the Ogonek family of publications and institutions. Kol’tsov sat on the executive board with Grigorii Boltianskii, Semen Evgenov, and Saul A. Ianskii, who was the editor of Sovetskoe foto at the time.\textsuperscript{75} Evgenov was also the manager of Souizfoto’s editorial sector. There, he oversaw the work of Ogonek’s staff photographer Semen Fridliand, who was placed in charge of Moscow photo-reportage, and several other photographers associated with the weekly. The former head of Press-klishe, Mezhericher, became the head of the foreign section

\textsuperscript{73} “Protokol 37. Zasedaniia pravleniia Akts. Izdat. O-va. ‘Ogonek’,” from 21 August 1929 (GARF f. 299, op. 1, d. 7, l. 21).

\textsuperscript{74} “Sekretno – Dokladnaia zapiska,” no date (GARF f. 4459 o. 38, d. 20, l. 6).

\textsuperscript{75} “Protokol 1. Organizatsionnogo sobraniia uchreditelei foto-illuistratsionnogo obschestva ‘Soiuzfoto’,” from 18 May 1931 (GARF f. 4459 op. 11, d. 443, l. 1obo).
and Viktor Mikulin was hired as his primary consultant.\textsuperscript{76} In terms of personnel, Soiuzfoto was largely derived from Press-klishe and Ogonek, which in turn was derived originally from Ogonek’s Biuro klishe. This new agency thus represented a victory of institutional continuity tied primarily to Ogonek. These key individuals continued to shape the politics and visual aesthetics of Soviet photo-reportage in the 1930s and, in some cases, for decades after.

\textit{Subject Matter, Technical Quality, Visual Aesthetics}

In \textit{Sovetskoe foto}, editors of magazines and photo-agencies offered photographers basic guidelines for the content of photo-reportage. Overall, these prescriptions offered little in terms of actual guidance regarding subject matter and resorted to vague, clichéd statements about the camera’s ability to capture reality truthfully. Efim Zozulia, for example, advised photographers to show “workers and peasants as they really are, without tinsel, without embellishment.” Mezhericher claimed that magazine editors looked for “authenticity” and “truthfulness” above all else.\textsuperscript{78} Underlying these theoretical discussions about ‘what to photograph’ was the idea that photo-reportage should be easily discernable and socially valuable. The subject matter should be captured in “completely concrete and intelligible forms” and, more importantly, should serve a utilitarian purpose.

\textsuperscript{76} Gosdarstvennyi arkhiv rossiisskoi federatsii (GARF) f. 406 (People’s Commissariat of Worker-Peasant Inspection RSFSR), op. 12, d. 2340, l. 51-61 (list of Soiuzfoto employees).


\textsuperscript{78} L. Mezhericher, “Chego trebuiut ot snimka redaktsii?,” \textit{Sovetskoe foto}, no. 7 (July 1928): 296-305.
rather than an artistic or personal one. 79 Framed as uniquely relevant to the new socialist reality, these claims, in fact, echoed those made by commentators in the ‘bourgeois’ West, practically since the invention of the medium. 80 Moreover, the invocation of social utility recalled the similarly utopian aspirations of many amateur photographers working in the context of 19th-century photography societies.

In practice, editors made specific requests for photo-reportage and selected subject matter on a case-by-case basis. Usually editors provided a detailed list of peoples, places, and events in the agent’s region of operation. A typical request, for example, was made of Leningrad photographer N. N. Ol’shanskii. He was dispatched to catalogue the work of a local “geographical observatory,” to photograph a zoological exhibition, and also to Murmansk, to report on port traffic during the autumn months. 81 Photographers were also expected to show initiative and capture news stories without specific instruction. To this end, editors provided local agents with broad categories of possible subjects, such as “the development of local economic life,” “the growth of culture,” “the Sovietization of life,” “scientific discoveries,” “technical innovations,” and “the work of clubs.” 82 Editors then sifted through these submissions and provided critical feedback. Subjects were deemed “good,” “interesting,” “bad,” or “weak,” usually without extensive analysis. In one case, Mezhericher articulated his disappointment in more detail. He

79 A. Shaikhet, “Sorevnovanie foto-reporterov razvertyvaetsia,” Soverskoe foto, no. 23 (December 1929): 713.


81 “T. Lebedenko, Leningradskoe biuro ROSTA,” from 19 August 1926 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 248).

82 “Letter from L. Mezhericher, Managing Editor in Chief, Press-klishe to Comrade Amurskii, Editor of Amurskaia Pravda,” from 13 September 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 33, l. 7).
complained that a photo of a schoolhouse, which “we very much need,” could not be accepted “because the photograph was of an empty school.” “If you gave us a lesson,” he continued, then “that picture would be valuable to us.” Over the long term, photographers acquired a sense of what the market for news images was and adjusted their shipments to meet editorial demand.

Russ-foto’s foreign agents also received specific instructions about what was appropriate subject matter for the Soviet illustrated press. The agency’s managing editor Nironov requested photo-reportage on behalf of a domestic market in its ‘revolutionary development,’ that is, pictures that captured the outside world as seen through the lens of Soviet ideology. For example, from his Australian contact, Nironov asked for “local views, types, customs of the people, life of wirkers [sic] and farmers, portraits of political leaders, demonstrations, [and] processes of labour.” Though always different, these sorts of requests invariably focused on images of the working classes, industry, agriculture, and local social dissent. At the same time, Nironov was quick to reject images of celebrities, Western commodities, and any displays of consumerism. He informed his counterpart at World Wide Photos in London that Russ-foto “can not place pictures illustrating society fashion” and would only accept images showing “simple

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83 “Letter from L. Mezhericher, Managing Editor in Chief, Press-klishe to Comrade Suetin, Editor of Volna,” from September 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 32, l. 27).

84 The statement “in its revolutionary development” refers, of course, to the official definition of the official state aesthetic of Socialist Realism. Although not defined by subject matter alone, Socialist Realism, and in this case press photography, was certainly shaped by “a tendentious interpretation of events form a Bolshevik viewpoint,” as well as an “obligatory optimism.” Matthew Cullerne Bown, Art under Stalin (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1991), 89-95.

85 “Letter from E. T. Savotianoff, General Secretary of the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, to Mr. Louis Brodsky,” from 5 June 1926 (GARF f. 5283 op. 1, d. 74, l. 154).
fashion,” that is, “the everyday style worn by women in everyday life.” Nironov claimed that the world of high fashion, celebrity culture, and other examples of “sensational” news were topics that the Soviet public had no interest in seeing. Of course, even if received, these types of images would be rejected immediately by the editors as they filtered through the regular, bi-monthly shipments.

Editors also paid close attention to the technical quality of photo-reportage. Photographers were expected to produce “well-executed” photography, that is, pictures with a broad monochromatic spectrum, printed on matte, semi-matte, or glossy paper, and showing no evidence of retouching, painting, or other types of tonal adjustments. Only such technically proficient images were marketable domestically and abroad. By contrast, technically “unsuccessful” (neudachnyi) images, that is, photographs that were out of focus, dimly lit, uniformly grey, retouched, or otherwise manipulated, transferred poorly onto halftone plates and lowered the value of the final product. More importantly, images of poor quality undermined the propaganda aims of the illustrated press and hurt the country’s international reputation. For this reason, Mezhericher pointed out that photo-reportage intended specifically for the foreign market “must be technically immaculate.” How could the Bolsheviks dispel rumors of a stagnant economy and an outdated industrial base if the means by which they promoted the Soviet Union testified to the opposite? The material quality of photos thus had a basic technical dimension – editors could only use pictures of reproducible quality – but also a political dimension,

86 “Letter from S. Y. Nironoff to Mr. Frank I. Gilloon,” no date (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 75, l. 19).
88 “Letter from L. Mezhericher to Comrade Lebedenko, Leningrad ROSTA Office,” from 19 August 1926 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 248).
which implied that a technically proficient society produced technically proficient photography.

Two factors affected the technical quality of photo-reportage. The first was the photographer’s lack of expertise or experience. In Moscow and Leningrad, editors relied on several qualified staff photographers who were selected from a large pool of skilled and field-tested candidates. By contrast, editors at Press-klishe and Russ-foto worked with agents who were scattered throughout the Soviet Union and did not necessarily have access to the experienced craftsman required to produce, develop, and print high-quality photographs. Easily correctable issues, such as an out of focus image, were recurring problems, especially in pictures sent by agents based in remote cities and towns, like Tiflis, Arkhangel’sk, and Novo-Nikolaevsk. 89

The second factor was a general shortage of material resources. Old, overused, and out-of-date cameras stopped photographers from producing quality photo-reportage without delay. Even the most accomplished photographers were affected by material shortages. In 1927, for example, the editors of Press-klishe wrote that a selection of photographs “made by Bulla, who is considered one of the best photographers in Leningrad, were nonetheless of poor workmanship.” Unwilling to blame the Bullas, they speculated that perhaps the photographic paper was poor, given that the negative was “not bad.” 90 Likewise, pictures taken by the veteran Ol’shanskii were written off as failures due to circumstantial, technical reasons, rather than lack of ability on the part of

89 For example, see “Letter from L. Mezhericher to Comrade Soloveichik, Tiflis,” from 20 December 1926 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 40, l. 211); also see “Letter from L. Mezhericher to Comrade Suetin, Editor of Volna, Arkhangel’sk,” from 5 August 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 32, l. 36).

90 “Letter from G. Salomonovich, Manager of the photo-bureau, to Comrade Lebedenko, Leningrad ROSTA office,” from 10 February 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 85).
the photographer.91 Writing about an exhibition of Ogonek press photographers, Kol’tsov declared that deficiency in the quality of the magazine’s pictures was “anyone’s fault, but not our photo-workers, our photojournalists.” He then offered a thinly veiled attack on the quality of the printing press, which “undermines” (umaliaet) and blurs the photographic originals.92 Moreover, the Soviet Union’s communication network prevented photo-reportage from being efficiently transported. The editors of Russ-foto often pleaded for patience, and in one case asked their contact at The New York Times “to bear in mind the many technical difficulties” that must be “overcome” in order to fulfill specific requests from abroad.93

Editors also discussed visual aesthetics with agents and photographers in the field. To some degree, they drew on a critical language established in Sovetskoe foto, which stressed the importance of dynamic compositions. Press photographers should use “dynamism” to “make [their] pictures come to life” and to “accentuate” the social significance of the subject matter.94 In practice, dynamism meant capturing the news in a moment of un-posed, unrehearsed action. For example, Petr Novitskii’s portrait of Lenin was considered dynamic because “Il’ich” was captured speaking in “live unmediated motion.”95

91 “Letter from G. Salomonovich, Manager of the photo-bureau, to Comrade Lebedenko, Leningrad ROSTA office,” from 22 December 1926 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 115).
92 “Vystavka rabot fotoreporterov ‘Ogonek’,” Sovetskoe foto, no. 4 (February 1930): 100-1.
93 “Letter from N. D. Beloff, Manager of Russ-foto, to Mr. Solomon, The NY Times Wide Word Photos,” from 2 June 1926 (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 74, l. 135).
95 Ibid., 292.
camera. The dynamic composition eschewed the theatricality of studio photography, which implied a staged and inauthentic performance on the part of the subject. Dynamism also had a strong political inflection. According to P. I. Grokhovskii, the modern photographic frame “should be dynamic, just like the times in which it was born.”

The dynamic picture was suited perfectly to capture the “dynamism of labor” and the “dynamism of our great construction.” Press photographers should try to capture movement and action in order to reflect the constant activity of the Soviet economy and industrial sector. The visual aesthetics of photo-reportage thus corresponded to the propaganda goals of the Soviet Union, especially in the years of rapid industrial expansion during the First Five-Year Plan.

However, editors at photo-agencies often struggled to communicate the nature of the dynamic photo-frame. In general, they encouraged agents to select “living” and “dynamic” pictures of the news, and advised photographers to infuse “life” into their pictures. These vague instructions, however, failed to produce the desired results, so another tactic was employed. Editors discouraged the types of images that typically evoked a sense of lifelessness and inactivity. That is, they rejected pictures that imitated the formal, posed aesthetic associated with the 

97 P. R., “Kakoi fotosnimok nam nuzhen,” 293.
98 “V biuro literaturno-illiustratsionnogo obsluzhivaniia pechati,” no date (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 33, l. 76).
traditional photography studio, including portraits of individuals and groups, and landscapes devoid of human activity. A photograph of a conference, for example, should not be a group portrait. News images where the subject strikes a “picturesque pose,” and where groups were arranged with the “first row sitting on the floor, the second, on chairs, and the third standing behind, all staring at the camera,” were all strictly forbidden. Instead, press photographers should take pictures when the conference participants were talking amongst themselves or writing something down, “so that they are all in casual poses and NOT LOOKING AT THE CAMERA.” For editors, the frontal pose was rejected as unnatural, which, of course, was the very point of it. Its intention was demonstrated in the concern for self-presentation and the “refusal to be surprised in an ordinary attitude.” Pictures where subjects posed in this manner were dismissed summarily by Soviet magazine and photo-agency editors as static or “dead.”

Photographers were directed to deliver dynamic compositions especially in the context of industrial production or manufacturing. In fact, articles in Sovetskoe foto addressed photography of industrial production (proizvodstvennye snimki) as an independent genre with specific technical and aesthetic requirements. Above all, these pictures had to convey activity and labor, and the photographer’s ability to create a dynamic composition ensured that representations of work would appear convincing and natural. This point was reinforced by Viktor Mikulin who wrote that “production should

99 “Letter from L. Mezhericher to Comrade Suetin, Editor of Volna, Arkhangel’sk,” from 21 June 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 32, l. 52).

100 Bourdieu, Photography, 80.

101 For example: “Letter from Flerovskii, Editor in Chief Press Klishe to Comrade Statuev,” from 7 September 1928 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 34, l. 10); “Letter from L. Mezhericher to Comrade Suetin, Arkhangel’sk,” from 18 December 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 32, l. 4).
be shown on the go, workers must be in natural poses and engaged in their work, and not looking at the camera with their arms at their sides.” ¹⁰² In an accompanying photograph, Mikulin reinforced the importance of showing work. The image, subtitled “How not to take a picture,” showed several women at a construction site, standing and posing sternly for the camera. [FIGURE 51.] “Although this picture is called ‘Construction work on the Kashira Power Plant’,” Mikulin wrote in the caption, “all the subjects stand erect, looking directly at the camera, and no one appears to be working.” ¹⁰³ The desire to capture a


¹⁰³ My emphasis.
dynamic and lively image – one in line with the modern photojournalistic style –
dovetailed with the political imperative to show an industrious, Soviet workforce. In the
case of the production picture, photo-reportage, as an aesthetic approach, enhanced and
naturalized the industrial health of the nation.

In the field, photo-correspondents received similar directives from editors.
Instructions to a Press-klishe agent in Briansk, for example, laid out step by step the
process of taking a production picture. The goal, in this case, was to capture as flattering
a representation of industrial production and factory workers as possible. The editor
directed the agent to select a “good section of the factory, where the workers are in order,
[and where there is] little rubbish and so on.” Here, the photographer can “take a general
shot of the factory,” which should include workers engaged actively with the machinery.
Any details that potentially compromised the flattering image of the factory were to be
avoided. Where the working conditions are bad, “it is easy to set up in such a way that
there are no unnecessary people and disturbing objects in the frame.” Simply, “take
close-up pictures” of the industrial components or the work activities of factory personnel
and avoid capturing clutter and disorder. 104 Editors were quite up front about the
propagandistic function of this type of photo-reportage; these “pictures of the production
process should not appear primitive, backward, dirty.” This also applied to close-ups of
factory workers, which, if taken, should be “expressive and attractive faces.” 105 The
photographer could thus create a dynamic and living composition that animated the

391, op. 5, d. 34, l. 13).

105 Fotografirovanie dlja pressy,” Sovetskoe foto, no. 9 (September 1928): 414.
image of the Soviet economy, regardless of the reality. In the end, a good picture for the illustrated press was one that visually captured a modern, industrially advanced image of the Soviet Union and technically resembled an object produced in exactly this sort of environment.

*The Soviet Illustrated Press as News Information*

Photography in magazines introduced the reading public to the performance of Soviet politics. Portraits established the key figures in government, while photo-reportage of congresses showed the Bolshevik leadership engaged with ordinary Soviet citizens. Posed portraits usually signaled a new appointment or anniversary of a prominent Bolshevik. These images appeared on the first page of an issue and were often taken by well-known studio portraitists, such as Mosiei Nappel’baum, who had photographed the political and cultural elite in Russia since the imperial era. Portraits of Lenin, on the other hand, often served a symbolic function. Rather than reporting the news, these images stood in for an idea embodied by the dead leader. In *Prozhektor*, for example, the editors created a collage entitled “The Face [лики] of the Russian Communist Party.”¹⁰⁶ They placed Nappel’baum’s portrait of Lenin in the center of a two-page spread and surrounded the image with portraits of factory workers (identified collectively in the caption). Though unnamed, the workers were not anonymous; each portrait, carefully executed, brought out the resolute personality of each individual worker. But in the context of the collage, these subjects represented [also *lik*] the Communist party, which.

¹⁰⁶ *Prozhektor*, no. 8 (30) (30 April 1924): 16-17.
Да здравствует вождь пролетариата и трудящегося крестьянства СССР — великая, победоносная большевистская партия!

На снимке — делегаты Вотской области на XV партийный съезд.
according to the caption included 126,000 workers in 1924. With Lenin in the center of the page, the editors imbued the assembled portraits with collective meaning. The portrait of Lenin, displayed alone, showed the man; alongside the workers, his visage came to symbolize Leninism.

Photographic reports of the semi-regular cycle of party congresses and meetings captured the public performance of Communist politics. The images publicized the Soviet hierarchy, while demonstrating the direct involvement of the proletariat and peasantry in the socialist system. Photographers captured the likes of Stalin, Bukharin, and Rykov giving speeches to assembled delegations, alongside more candid shots of Soviet leaders conversing pleasantly with the audience. 107 In Ogonek, the editors reported on the 15th party congress from the viewpoint of peasant delegates traveling to Moscow from the countryside. 108 The magazine’s editors dramatized their experiences in the capital – the “big city” – and juxtaposed the humble peasants with image of Soviet leaders. The cover, for example, showed the arrival of three burly travellers, suitcases in hand, reading a notice, which welcomed delegates to the congress. [FIGURE 52.] Inside, the editors presented a collage of “presenters,” which included, among others, Stalin in a Napoleonic pose, followed by a two-page spread showing peasant delegates enjoying leisure time, engaging in political discussions, and writing letters to loved ones in the village. These vignettes lent a picturesque quality to the photo-reportage and enlivened the visual chronicle of the otherwise unreported proceedings.

107 For example: Krasnaia niva, no. 24 (15 June 1924): 562-563.
108 Ogonek, no. 50 (246) (11 December 1927).
Lenin was, of course, the central, political, cultural, and spiritual figure of the new Soviet regime. Following his death in 1924, editors cultivated a canon of iconic images of Lenin, which were reproduced in magazines on a regular basis and became the models for future monuments, sculptures, and other works of art. Although the Bolshevik leader enjoyed elevated status in his underground before the Revolution, it was not until his death that something resembling a cult emerged around him. Editors used photography to explore every aspect of his life. Images of his infancy and adolescence, which described the young Lenin as domineering, athletic, and intellectually accomplished, contributed to his cult biography. The physical spaces he inhabited as an underground revolutionary and as the leader of the Soviet Union also became objects of intense study. In particular, magazine editors published the same series of photographs of his Spartan quarters in Leningrad, which underlined the simple, humble, and austere nature of his day-to-day existence. Photo-reportage in Krasnaia niva even presented a scientific exploration of his brain. Entitled “The Study of Lenin’s Brain,” the photo-story showed scientists in lab coats, measuring, weighing, and studying slices of brain matter under a microscope, all in an effort to understand the physiological basis of Lenin’s “genius” and to preserve it for “further scientific study.”

Lenin’s death was commemorated in magazines on an annual basis. In 1924, all the major weekly publications dedicated several issues to Lenin, to the solemn funeral procession, which carried the dead leader from Gorkii to Moscow, and finally to his

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110 Ogonek, no. 47 (243) (20 November 1927).

111 Krasnaia niva, no. 4 (22 January 1928): 4-5.
body’s entombment on Red Square. In subsequent years, these commemorations adopted an increasingly religious tone. Started in 1925, special editions of *Prozhektor*, *Krasnaia niva*, and *Krasnaia panorama* dedicated to his life and work were issued on what was known as “All-Russian Sunday.” In particular, Lenin’s mausoleum played a central role in the photographic coverage. It was a place of pilgrimage, which attracted the masses from all across the Soviet Union. In *Krasnaia niva*, below an illustration of the mausoleum, the magazine’s editors evoked the theme of resurrection with the bold slogan, “Lenin died, Leninism lives.” 112 Over the years, pictures of his study, his desk, his chair, and his other personal affects took on a relic-like status; they were valued because of their symbolic worth and their close material proximity to Lenin. 113 Perhaps most interesting, and uniquely Russian, was the photographic reports of so-called “Lenin corners.” In one case, eight photographs captured how different factories and clubs honored Lenin with photographs, posters, illustrations, magazine cutouts, and other visual media in their workspaces. 114 Here, the Orthodox practice of placing a Christian icon in the corner of the room was adapted to the Soviet era; the followers of Lenin replaced the medieval icon with a modern photographic one. To a certain degree, Soviet magazines became portable Lenin corners every January; they presented a sacred memorial of images dedicated to the founder and now spiritual leader of the Soviet Union.

112 *Krasnaia niva*, no. 3 (18 January 1925); also see *Krasnaia panorama*, no. 5 (47) (31 January 1925); *Prozhektor*, no. 1 (47) (15 January 1925).


Other Soviet “holidays” were also observed throughout the year. Editors commemorated historic events, such as the 1905 Revolution, the July Days, and the Paris Commune on a regular basis. For these holidays, they deployed iconic images of the past, while the May Day celebrations, International Women’s Day, and International Youth Day were covered by contemporary reports of parades, speeches, and other public celebrations. Of course, compared to all other occasions, the February and October Revolution were high holidays, which allowed the editors to tell and re-tell the history of the events of 1917 through archival photography. In 1927, however, the October celebrations were far more extensive and focused more on a decade’s worth of Soviet achievement. The editors of Ogonek spread out the festivities over several issues. 115 The coverage included a few images of Lenin, but focused mostly on contemporary celebrations, and in lieu of historical images of the Revolution, the editors published several dramatic stills from Sergei Eisenstein’s film October. The centerpiece was a two-page collage called “Ten Years Building Socialism in the Soviet Union.” It featured pictures of workers, factory floors, power stations, villages, cooperatives, pioneer camps, schools, daycares, and literacy campaigns. [FIGURE 53.] The captions attached to each image offered statistics of industrial progress, financial investment, and membership in Soviet professional and social organizations. A similarly expansive collage showed the celebrations of the anniversary on Red Square, which centered as usual on Lenin’s mausoleum and the Soviet leaders who observed the demonstrations.

Soviet magazines offered a limited range of foreign photo-reportage. In general, editors curated international news to readers’ presumed interest in the ideological

115 Ogonek, no. 42 (238) (16 October 1927); Ogonek, no. 43 (239) (23 October 1927); Ogonek, no. 45 (241) (6 November 1927); Ogonek, no. 47 (243) (20 November 1927).
distinctions between Soviet Russia and the capitalist world outside. Simply, pictures from abroad revealed not what was different or interesting about other countries, but what made the Soviet Union a better place to live in and work. Of the major weekly publications, Prozhektor offered the most photographic coverage of foreign affairs. This magazine’s editors drew attention to socialist movements, to strikes and police crackdowns, to workers’ demonstrations, and to the imperialistic adventures of bourgeois governments. One photo-series, for example, exposed the brutality of French imperialism in Syria; another revealed the squalid living conditions of the English miner.\textsuperscript{116} A common theme in Prozhektor was that foreigners were kept ignorant of life in the Soviet Union. The caption to a photo-story about demonstrations of unemployed workers in Berlin underlined the protestors’ desire to “know the truth about Soviet Russia.”\textsuperscript{117} And when foreign tourists and workers found a way to visit Moscow, they were invariably impressed. Photo-reportage showed foreign delegations smiling for the camera; they had suffered through “conflicts with their own governments” to get to Russia, where they were now welcomed warmly.\textsuperscript{118} In one case, a workers’ delegation was “truly convinced of the success of our economic nation-building.”\textsuperscript{119} These stories affirmed the Soviet Union as a member of the international community. Moreover, the approbation of foreigners seemed to legitimize the country’s achievements abroad.

One way that editors advertised the advanced status of Soviet society was to promote the increasingly diverse roles undertaken by women in everyday life. In fact, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Prozhektor, no 3 (73) (15 February 1926): 6; Prozhektor, no. 14 (84) (31 July 1926): 9-10.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Prozhektor, no. 24 (70) (31 December 1925):17.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Prozhektor, no. 3 (73) (15 February 1926): 1.
\item \textsuperscript{119} Prozhektor, no. 17 (63) (15 September 1925): 25.
\end{itemize}
emancipation of women was widely celebrated in the press as one of the most important achievements of the Revolution. Editors regularly juxtaposed news images of the achievements of Soviet women in science, industry, and education with unflattering reports of Western suffragettes. Photo-reportage surveyed the immense participation of women in society and captions offered quantitative reinforcement ("3 million women in cooperatives," "167,063 women Party members," and so on). Women were shown challenging traditional gender roles; they were industrial workers, tractor drivers, factory managers, and technicians. They participated equally in ‘socialist construction,’ and even competed alongside men. This competition was implied in pictures of Soviet athletics, where, for example, Ogonek featured a young man and woman lacing up their shoes together in anticipation of the summer sports season. Magazines also offered a new vision of the family – one that liberated women from the responsibilities of motherhood. A cover image in Ogonek showed a mother happily handing over her infant to a kindergarten teacher; the headline read “From the Old Family to Communist Society.”

State doctors and nannies took care of babies, while women were free to work. According to one magazine writer, state-subsidized childcare was key to improving childhood mortality. In the Soviet Union, he argued, women had been instrumental in ensuring special nurseries in factories that greatly improved the welfare of their children despite spending less time at home.

Often photography was used in magazines to communicate important messages about, say, personal hygiene or alcoholism. The illustrated press thus served as a venue for public service announcements, which advised the public how to behave for the good

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120 Ogonek, no. 10 (206) (6 March 1926).
of society. One week, for example, the cover of *Ogonek* featured a rather sweet image of two women kissing. “Do not kiss,” urged the caption, as such contact encourages “the rampant spread of the flu.” 121 Inside, the editors instructed readers on how to protect themselves from contagion with images of people opening windows (to create a draft), avoiding hand-to-hand contact, washing the floor, and gargling boiled water with an antiseptic agent. Likewise, weeklies encouraged readers to visit teahouses rather than drink alcohol, to pursue the sporting life, and, perhaps most importantly, to read and educate oneself and one’s children. To a certain degree, the illustrated press emerged out of the regime’s effort to promote literacy; it also served to publicize the state’s efforts in this regard. Pictures of children reading, of children in state-run schools, and of adult-learning centers were peppered throughout. In one photo-story, the campaign to eliminate illiteracy dovetailed with the broader cultural campaign of the Komsomol to fight drunkenness, hooliganism and poor hygiene in the home.122 The photo-reportage showed the young men collecting data on illiteracy in factories and teaching a “domestic worker” how to read. Drunks “untouched by the cultural campaign were exposed” and juxtaposed against the teahouse customers, who socialized pleasantly and read newspapers.

In line with an overall commitment to literacy and literature, Russian writers received a disproportionately large amount of publicity in magazines. In some cases, photographs of novelists and poets served to promote the magazine’s supplementary material. In 1927 and 1928, pictures of Anton Chekhov and Lev Tolstoy were especially common in *Ogonek*, which, at the time, was offering their complete works as subscription

121 *Ogonek*, no. 6 (202) (6 February 1927).

122 *Ogonek*, no. 43 (291) (21 October 1928).
bonuses. But in the case of Maksim Gorkii, editors presented the reading public with a portrait of the Soviet writer par excellence. Disillusioned by the Revolution, Gorkii had left Russia in 1921. But after Lenin’s death, he began to orchestrate a reconciliation with Stalin’s regime. In 1928, the writer made his triumphant return from abroad; “Gorkii had arrived” was the common refrain on magazine covers, which showed the writer embraced by uproarious crowds in Moscow. Over the next few weeks, photographers followed him from event to event, where he met with readers, writers, Red army soldiers, and factory workers. Such was the enthusiasm for Gorkii that a picture of him on the cover of Ogonek was instantly declared by the editors “one of the most precious artistic remembrances in the history of Soviet literary and cultural life.” [FIGURE 54.] The photograph showed Gorkii reminiscing about his life as a writer to a group of worker-correspondents, who stared adoringly at the literary giant. The headline read “Two Generations, One Class;” Gorkii was a connection to Russia’s past, but he also belonged in the present, in the workers’ state. In the

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123 Ogonek, no. 24 (272) (10 June 1928); Krasnaia niva, no. 24 (10 June 1928).

124 Ogonek, no. 25 (273) (17 June 1928).
caption, the editors noted that the photograph of Gorkii’s lecture would be made quickly available to young writers as keepsakes.

Although editors looked down on celebrity culture, artists who worked in line with the principle of partiinost were celebrated in the illustrated press. This meant that much of the art publicized in magazines reflected the history and personalities of the new Soviet era.125 Photo-reportage profiled artists, usually painters and sculptors, who produced artwork inspired directly by Lenin and the Revolution. A photo-essay about Soviet sculpture in Krasnaia niva, for example, exhibited busts of historical socialists and revolutionaries, such as Aleksandr Hertsen and Stenka Razin, as well as monuments of contemporary figures, such as Voroshilov, Frunze, and, Lenin.126

In 1927, artists produced a deluge of artwork for the 10th anniversary of the Revolution. Sergei Eisenstein’s October was, perhaps, the most widely publicized art product of this type. Magazines carried advertisements for film screenings and published photographic stills of the actors in costume, especially N. Popov and the “unemployed worker from the Urals” Nikandrov, who played Kerenskii and Lenin respectively.127 Despite being the film’s two principle stars, these actors were barely mentioned by name in illustrated press materials. Instead, profiles focused entirely on Eisenstein and the process of recreating the Revolution. At the time, the transformation of the Revolution into an art object was, in a sense, of greater interest as news than the film itself, which,

127 Ogonek, no. 26 (222) (26 July 1927).
due to party censorship, would not be officially released until 1928. 128 Without drawing too much attention to the performances, the films stills, in place of actual photographs of the Revolution, allowed the editors to “control the potentially ambivalent or mutable meanings of historical photo-documents in the public sphere.” 129 These pictures offered a substitute representation, one officially sanctioned by Soviet political and press authorities.

From 1923 to 1932, the illustrated press increasingly focused on photo-reportage of socialist construction. Around 1929, as magazines were mobilized to propagate the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan, editors eschewed news images of everyday life, leisure, culture, and international politics and filled magazines with photographic reports about construction sites, heavy industry, manufacturing, and agricultural collectivization. The expression “socialist construction” was used more broadly in magazines in the years leading up to the First Five-Year Plan. In Krasnaia niva, and Ogonek, for example, photo-stories about the emancipation of women, the electrification of the countryside, or the participation of peasants in party congresses were all deployed as examples of socialist construction. 130

But around 1929, headlines and captions became increasingly martial. Pictures showed workers “on the front of socialist construction” and urged the reading public “not

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128 James Goodwin, Eisenstein, Cinema, and History (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 81


130 Krasnaia niva, no. 42 (16 October 1927): 16; Ogonek, no. 50 (246) (11 December 1927); Ogonek, no. 10 (258) (4 March 1928).
to slacken the pace of battle” for the plan. The editors of *Prozhektor* transformed the magazine into a visual chronicle of industrialization. They published a special double-issue called “Before the Third Year,” which was divided into two parts, “Built” and “Under Construction (*postroeno, stroitsia*).” The first section surveyed the many achievements of the Five-Year Plan in industry, agriculture, and on the “cultural front.” In the second section, the pictures showed various building projects in progress; factories, dams, bridges, silos, oil derricks, and hydro-electric plants – all half-completed and surrounded by wooden platforms, ramps, excavations sites, and cranes. [FIGURE 55.] Each collection of images was accompanied by extensive captions that described the various projects and provided statistics and other details about the specific achievements.

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131 *Krasnaia niva*, no. 45 (3 November 1929): 3; *Krasnaia niva*, no. 6 (25 February 1930): 10-11.

in socialist construction. Especially in the middle years of the First Five-Year Plan, Stalin’s push towards industrialization dominated the news coverage in the popular illustrated press.
After the Revolution, press photographers became Soviet because they had no other option. Between 1918 and 1931, photography in the Soviet Union was redefined around the practices and aesthetics of photo-reportage. The press authorities, alongside a tightly knit group of editors, photographers, and critics, who were associated with Ogonek, transformed the pre-revolutionary model of photo-reportage into a modern profession and visual practice. Studio professionals, art photographers, and amateur practitioners, all of whom co-existed with press photographers in the Imperial era, conformed or were cast aside. Among these different types of photography, photo-reportage was declared the most “socially-useful,” especially in the context of proletarian revolution. Moreover, the Ogonek faction elevated photo-reportage to the status of socialist art. Photo-reportage, which was utilitarian and unadulterated by formalist techniques, reflected socialist and materialistic values, in contrast to the individualistic perspective of bourgeois art photography in the West. In the Soviet Union, during Stalin’s Cultural Revolution, press photographers became Soviet by shedding the detached journalistic perspective of the individual and, in turn, adopting the state’s perspective for the common good.

1 G. Boltianskii, “Fotografiia v epokhu revoliutsii,” Sovetskoe foto, no. 3 (June 1926): 72.
The careers of Tsarist-era press photographers did not end in October 1917. Many of them continued to work in the illustrated press and at the highest levels of the Soviet propaganda infrastructure during the Civil War and the New Economic Policy (NEP). After the Revolution, some photographers took refuge in the traditional studio pavilion. In 1918, the Bolsheviks initially nationalized private studios and camera equipment, but a year later this policy was reversed. Petitions from studio photographers convinced the commissar of education, Anatolii Lunacharskii to recognize photography as a fine art and in January 1919 he granted studio-based professionals “all the privileges established by law and binding regulation for artists.”

2 Published in Izvestiia, this decree freed photographers from state service and exempted studios and photography equipment from state requisition. 3 For some, this order arrived a year too late; many studios had been decimated beyond recovery in 1918. However, for those photographers who founded new businesses, studio photography proved a stable profession and lucrative endeavor, especially in the years of the NEP. But more importantly, during the Civil War, the photography studio remained the primary training ground for the next generation of Soviet photo-reporters.

Art photographers continued to work in the Soviet Union under the auspices of several photography societies. After a brief hiatus during the Civil War, the Russian Photographic Society (RFS), the All-Russian Society of Photographers (VSF), and several provincial groups revived under new leadership. Iurii P. Eremin and Petr V. Klepikov became the new spokesmen of Pictorialism in the Soviet Union. In 1926, the


monthly journal *Fotograf* became the movement’s official organ, which continued to champion the impressionistic techniques of the past. At the same time, the Western avant-garde inspired a new generation of Soviet artists to renounce abstract painting and to adopt photography as an experimental, artistic medium. At first, artists such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, Gustav Klutsis, and El’ Lissitzky worked with photos clipped from magazines rather than producing actual pictures; they created advertisements, posters, photo-montages, and other graphic arts in the tradition of the German Dadaists.  

But eventually, in the 1920s, the Constructivists began taking pictures on their own and they invented an experimental type of photo-reportage, which, in the words of Rodchenko, intended to “change the familiar appearances of those ordinary objects which surround us.”  

For these modernist photographers, photo-reportage offered artists the opportunity to revolutionize how people perceived the world in the same way that the Bolsheviks revolutionized the politics, economy, and culture of Russia.

Photographers who worked for weekly magazines were less experimental. They shared Rodchenko’s enthusiasm for the new Communist state, but captured the news with a straightforward realism. Most of the photo-reportage in *Ogonek*, *Prozhektor*, *Krasnaia niva*, and *Krasnaia panorama* was supplied by the magazine’s staff photographers. Like the “capital” photographers of the pre-revolutionary era, these photo-reporters were full-time employees of the magazine, though based primarily in Moscow. They enjoyed fixed salaries, regular assignments, editorial input, and in-house laboratory facilities. This

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group represented the younger generation of photo-reporters who trained in the pre-revolutionary studio, but came of age in the Soviet Union. To supplement the work of staff photographers, editors also hired freelance photographers who were usually based outside of Moscow and worked from contract to contract or on a per picture basis. Art photographers and the older generation of Leningrad-based photo-reporters, such as Iakov Shteinberg and Petr Otsup, made up the ranks of the freelancers. In subscription advertisements, staff and freelance workers were listed together, which created the sense of a vast web of correspondents taking pictures throughout the country. However, in actuality, the staff photographers produced the lion’s share of the photo-reportage, which partially accounted for the immense bias towards Moscow-based news. With the exception of the news in Krasnaia panorama, all the most prolific press photographers in the Soviet Union covered the same Moscow city beat.

Innovations in camera technology allowed photographers to work more freely. Smaller, more durable cameras that used rolls of 35 mm film, rather than film-plates, gave photo-correspondents the ability to take pictures in a variety of difficult situations. In Russia, the German-made Leica, which is often tied to the invention of modern photojournalism, was especially coveted by Soviet photo-reporters. Introduced in 1925, the handheld Leica was exceptionally versatile, but largely unavailable in the Soviet Union. Rodchenko, for example, failed to acquire a Leica until the 1930s. In the mean time, he used other Western models, such as Tenax and Berito, which were equally

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6 For example: Krasnaia niva, no. 47 (21 November 1926); Prozhektor, no. 2 (48) (31 January 1925).

portable, but still used individual plates. These new models, which did not require tripods to steady the image, made the user inconspicuous. Hidden from view, photographers captured city life in secret and thus more naturally or “truthfully.” Dziga Vertov called this ‘catching life unawares.’ His “cinema-eye” (kino-glaz) movement was influenced by journalism and in turn shaped the development of Soviet photojournalism. Vertov compared his documentary techniques to the observational strategies of the secret police (GPU), who “separate out and bring to light a particular issue, a particular affair.” The camera, and by extension the press photographer, was a political tool that captured the world as it really was, when the layers of external pretension and performance had been stripped away.

Despite striving for anonymity, photo-reporters were public figures who cultivated a heroic image about their profession. In several biographical accounts, press photographers promoted themselves as energetic, tenacious figures who were committed to the Soviet project of socialist construction. They underlined the obstacles faced by photo-correspondents, and the physical daring and quick-witted solutions required to


12 In 1926 and 1927, the editors of Sovetskoe foto published a number of short essays in a series called “A Photojournalist About His Profession.” The contributors included, in order of publication, P. I. Grokhovskii, V. I. Savel’ev, A. Shaikhet, M. V. Al’pert, R. Karmen, and S. Kravtsov-Kryga. The “village photo-correspondent” Anton Zorskii also wrote “about his work” in an essays related, but not official part of this series.
capture the news with a camera. In addition, the Soviet photo-reporter needed to be politically conscious, a master of technology, and should strive to cultivate artistic taste. Photographers often debated the difference between art and craft in Sovetskoe foto, attempting to reconcile reporting the news and creating an attractive visual image. It was not enough to capture the news. In the words of Vasilii I. Savel’ev: “The dry, factual picture of the news does not satisfy the reader. A different approach is required to transmit reality...an artistic photo-reportage is required.” Images of photo-correspondents plying their trade appeared in Sovetskoe foto on a regular basis; they

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evoked an image of an athletic and daring super-hero, who surveyed the city from above and below. [FIGURE. 56.] Dressed in caps and long overcoats, they bravely scaled rooftops and construction cranes, and traversed the railings of towering bridges like tightrope walkers. The dramatic photos in Ogonek and other magazines, often taken from extreme vantage points, offered evidence of the great risks that these photographers took just to get the right shot.

Soviet press photographers were “Soviet” in part because they defined the profession in terms of the content of pictures. They chronicled the political, social, and cultural life of the Soviet Union; by contrast, pre-revolutionary and Western photo-reporters did not. In 1928, the historian Georgii Boltianskii claimed that all Tsarist-era news images “had a bureaucratic, official character and were obliged to reflect the stability of ‘Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality’.” In Germany, on the other hand, press photographers took pictures of sensational stories, of celebrities and scandals, as well as propagandizing the country’s manufacturing sector. In each case, Boltianskii dismissed the photographers on the basis of their historical context. Foreign photographers, according to Arkadii Shaikhet, “envy their Soviet counterparts.” Why? Because the “Soviet system radically transformed life and the everyday way of living (byt) in the country, and opened for us the possibility of a wide range of activities.”

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14 For example, Sovetskoe foto, no. 4 (July 1926): 109; Sovetskoe foto, no. 7 (1927 July 1927): 210.


17 A. Shaikhet, “Foto-zhurnalista o svoei professii,” Sovetskoe foto, no. 3 (June 1926): 91.
value of the profession was thus tied to the subject matter, that is, specifically to the opportunity to capture the new Soviet reality. In other words, the “nobility of the object photographed” informed the status of the photographic activity. 18 But press photographers did not unveil the world for the magazine reader. This was accomplished in 1917 when the Bolsheviks “unmasked” the false “conventions of self-presentation” to reveal the truth and the socialist world that lay beneath. 19 Soviet press photographers thus only needed to record this world with the camera to see it as it really was.

Around 1926, a group of influential photographers, editors, and critics began to advocate for photo-reportage to become the model for all Soviet photography. This was followed by a series of polemical attacks launched at art photographers. At first, practical reasons seemed to govern this rejection; Arkadii Shaikhet, for example, claimed that Constructivist approaches were incompatible with the needs of photojournalism. Editors, he argued, were confused by oblique camera angles and extreme close-ups, and approved only those “photographs in which the events are laid in completely concrete and intelligible forms for the reader.” 20 Eventually critics offered more pointed ideological attacks. But the marginalization of art photography, in fact, reflected a broader realignment in the Soviet economy and politics. Funds allocated to cultural pursuits were cut off as the national economy focused on the goals of the first Five-Year Plan. At the same time, Stalin’s cultural revolution took aim at “bourgeois elements” and “the


remnants and survivals of the influence, traditions, and customs of the old society” that supported them. The Ogonek faction spearheaded this crusade against bourgeois deviations in photography, which provided rhetorical cover for the Central Committee’s plan to unify all photographic production behind the policies of industrialization and collectivization. Soviet photographers were to become state propagandists, and the Ogonek faction quickly took the lead in this capacity. In the end, becoming a Soviet photographer was not just a matter of conforming to an aesthetic approach; Rodchenko continued to take pictures in the modernist idiom well into the 1930s. More than anything, being a Soviet photographer was simply acknowledging the primacy of Soviet power.

Studio Professionals

Photography studios in the Soviet Union were owned and operated by the state, by cooperatives, and by private citizens. State-run studios were usually attached to a government institution or state-funded organization, which, for various reasons, needed regular access to a photography department. In the 1920s, this included, among others, the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), the film studio “Proletkino,” and the labor section of IZO – the art department at Narkompros. These studios were relatively large operations, which were managed by a master photographer and staffed by a dozen or more employees. For example, in 1927, the studio of the Supreme Soviet for the People’s

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Economy (VSNKh) employed thirty-five photographers, laboratory technicians, apprentices, and other workers. 22 Depending on the institution, this staff produced photographs for various in-house uses or worked on a more commercial scale, manufacturing portraits, postcards, and other types of pictures for public sale.

The most prominent and longstanding state-run studio was attached to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (VTsIK). It was founded in 1919 by the portrait photographer Mosiei Nappel’baum when the Soviet government moved to Moscow. Nappel’baum was originally approached by Iakov M. Sverdlov to set up an elegant pavilion in the Metropole Hotel. 23 There, the studio shared quarters with the bureaucracy of the new Bolshevik regime, before eventually finding a more permanent address on Tverskaia, the new capital’s main boulevard. During the Civil War, the VTsIK studio became a hub for photographic propaganda. Nappel’baum and his collaborators took pictures of Red Army commanders and the leaders of the Revolution, which were produced on site for mass distribution. Another photographer associated with the VTsIK studio was Petr Otsup, who became the official portraitist of the Central Committee in the 1920s. All the highest-ranking officials in the Soviet government sat for him, and many of these images were distributed in the illustrated press. His portrait of Lenin became the model for the stamped silhouette on the Order of Lenin – a prize Otsup was later awarded for his long years of state service. 24

22 Shipova, Fotografy Moskvy, 331.

23 M. S. Nappel’baum, Ot remesla k iskusstvu: iskusstvo fotoportreta (Moscow: Planeta, 1972), 84-85.

However, Otsup’s work for the state was not tied exclusively to the VTsIK studio. The pavilion on Tverskaia served primarily as his central base of operations, while he traveled around the country taking pictures. In fact, when Otsup was appointed head of the Central Committee’s photography department in 1918, it was with the expectation that he would continue to work as a press photographer. Thus, in addition to taking studio portraits, he also organized photographic exhibitions, managed propaganda kiosks (agitpunkty), and participated in the work of the most important agitational train, the October Revolution. After the Civil War, Otsup became the government’s official photo-reporter; he attended and produced photo-reportage of party congresses and meetings, which later showed up in magazines. By the mid-1920s, Otsup had taken on the role of the elder statesmen of Soviet photography. In 1926, the Association of Moscow Photo-reporters organized a celebration in honor of Otsup’s 25th year “working in photo-journalism.” The journal Sovetskoe foto commemorated the event with a picture, which depicted the old photographer being regarded adoringly by his younger colleagues. [FIGURE. 57.] The caption noted that he had received congratulatory messages from magazine editors and representatives of the Red Army, as well as a special telegram from the Central Committee. For his life’s work, and especially for his contributions to the Soviet state, Otsup had approbation from the highest authorities.

Cooperative photography studios resembled and operated like state-run studios, but on a much smaller scale. A senior photographer managed between six and twelve technicians and apprentices. These “producers’ collectives” invited workers to develop

26 Sovetskoe foto, no. 7 (October 1926): 205.
skills and work in photography, while offering the public studio services at a discounted price. The cooperative enjoyed certain economic advantage over the private operation. They were tax exempt and, as part of the socialist sector, they had greater access to material resources (film, photographic paper, chemicals, etc.), credit, and other products from the state.  

27 In the 1920s, the most successful cooperative studio in Moscow was “Fotoartel’,” which was managed by the photographer Mikhail A. Sakharov and in 1928 had a staff of fourteen employees.  

28 Other cooperative studios included the Collective of the Unemployed No. 5, the 32nd Artel’ of the Invalides, and the studio “Russ-foto,” which

27 Alan M. Ball, Russia’s Last Capitalists: The Nepmen, 1921-1929 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 141.

28 Vsia Moskva: adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga na 1928 god (Moscow: Moskovskogo kommunal’nogo khoziaistva,1928), 199, 369, 638.
was attached, of course, to the photo-agency Russ-foto and the All-Union Society for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS).

Private photography studios functioned much like they did before the Revolution. A master photographer owned the studio, took formal portraits, and managed a small staff of apprentices and laboratory technicians. These pavilions bore the names of the master photographer or carried a company name, such as “Paola,” “Rembrandt,” or “Sfinks,” which, like in the pre-revolutionary era, carried associations of foreignness, exoticism, and artistry. 29 Several prominent pre-revolutionary photographers re-established and continued to work out of private studios after the Revolution.

Moisei Nappel’baum, for example, owned and operated two photography studios, one in Leningrad until 1925 and another in Moscow, which he managed well into the 1930s. At both locations, Nappel’baum hosted the Soviet cultural and political elites throughout the NEP period. His craftsmanship and artistry attracted, among others, the likes of Anatolii Lunacharskii, Klement Voroshilov, Mikhail Kalinin, Aleksandr Blok, and Sergei Esenin. In addition, actors of stage and screen posed for Nappel’baum in his studio on Nevskii Prospekt. 30 He was also one of the few studio professionals whose work appeared in the illustrated press. The cover of the inaugural issue of Plamia, for example, featured his portrait of Lenin, which was later reproduced in Prozhektor, among other publications, and became the model for illustrated representations of the Bolshevik leader long after his death. 31 He also produced a portrait of Stalin, published originally in

29 Shipova, Fotografy Moskvy, 324-337.
31 Prozhektor, no. 3 (25) (15 February 1924): 8-9; Prozhektor, no. 1 (47) (15 January 1925); Krasnaia panorama, no. 45 (4 November 1927): 4.
1924, which, on the occasion of the leader’s 60th birthday, was retouched heavily to reverse the aging process photographically. In addition to being published in magazines, books, and albums, these images were distributed as postcards and framed prints.

After the Revolution, the photography studio also provided sanctuary for Aleksandr and Viktor Bulla. Following Karl Bulla’s retirement and emigration in 1917, his two sons took over the family studio at 54 Nevskii Prospekt and re-opened for business under the name Bulla Brothers. But like Otsup, the Bullas split their time between studio photography and photo-reportage. The studio was a home base in Leningrad, from which they corresponded for the illustrated press; they preserved their father’s pre-revolutionary model of photo-reportage during the NEP period. In magazines, pictures taken by Aleksandr and Viktor were credited to “Br. Bulla” or just “Bulla.” In Leningrad, far from the center of the publishing industry, their Soviet achievements paled in comparison to Karl’s prolific output in the Tsarist era. Nonetheless, they were respected and widely considered among the best photographers in Russia, and were even recruited to work for the photo-agency Russ-foto on a regular salary. In 1928, the brothers participated in the landmark exhibition Ten Years of Soviet Photography, where they were awarded honorary diplomas for the technical


34 “Letter from N. D. Belov, managing editor of Russ-foto, to Z. Blek, Leningrad,” from June 2, 1927 (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 74, l. 134).
quality, breadth, and “truthfulness” of their photo-reportage. This was, perhaps, their last, great achievement in the Soviet Union. In the 1930s, the Bullas found progressively fewer venues for exhibition. They were eclipsed quickly by a younger generation of press photographers who had come of age in the Soviet era and worked exclusively in photo-reportage.

Magazine Staff Photographers

More than anything else, press photographers and their weekly supply of photo-reportage distinguished one magazine from another in the 1920s. Editors at Ogonek, Krasnaia niva, Prozhektor, and, to a lesser degree, Krasnaia panorama drew on a common pool of Soviet writers and graphic artists for non-photographic content. But at each magazine, only one or two staff photographers produced the vast majority of weekly photo-reportage and remained associated closely with a single publication for most of their careers during the NEP.

The production of photo-reportage was built into the broader infrastructure of the Soviet illustrated press. Editorial departments had dedicated photo-bureaus, which managed the activities of photographers, and developed, printed, and edited photo-reportage on a weekly basis. These departments were composed typically of a senior administrator, one or two staff photographers, a laboratory assistant, and a junior apprentice. The editors of Ogonek claimed that the photo-bureau operation, from the delivery of exposed film plates to the laboratory finishing off the dry print, was a highly

35 “Spisok eksponentov poluchivshikh nagrady na vystavke sovetskoi fotografii za 10 let,” in Sovetskoe foto, no. 6 (June 1928).
mechanized process, which took on a “factory-like character” and was emulated by foreign presses.  

In reality, the operation at Ogonek was more craftsman-like. The photography department was small and staff photographers developed and printed their own work with the aid of a laboratory assistant. Their participation and personal touch ensured a level of quality control. This hands-on approach also meant that photo-reporters had input in the final selection and arrangement of photo-reportage. Large publishing houses, such as Ogonek, also stored a large backlog of news images. Editors used this library regularly, especially for pictures purchased from international photo-agencies, and staff photographers constantly refreshed this archive. In 1929, the Ogonek photo-archive numbered around 35,000 different images from the Soviet Union and around the world.

The staff photographer for Plamia was Iakov Shteinberg. He alone provided almost all the photo-reportage for the magazine in its first two years of publication. His coverage was seemingly ubiquitous; he took pictures of court proceedings, party congresses, schools and kindergartens, theatrical performances, May Day celebrations, and the much publicized funerals of the Bolshevik revolutionaries V. Voldarskii and Moisei S. Uritskii. Shteinberg even travelled outside of Petrograd to photograph the mobilization and movements of the Red Army on the front lines of the Civil War. After Plamia ceased to exist, the photographer worked with several photographic societies in Petrograd, and eventually joined the Leningrad Society for Artistic and Technical Photography. Shteinberg, along with several other members, self-described

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37 Ibid.
“professionals of the older generation,” endeavored to preserve the photographic record of the Revolution and encouraged the masses to take up photography in the interests of historical preservation. At the same time, he continued to correspond for new magazines during the 1920s on a freelance basis. Both the editors of Prozhektor and Krasnaia niva listed him among their regular contributors.

Based primarily in Leningrad, Shteinberg’s generation of professional press photographers supplied almost all the photo-reportage for the Soviet illustrated press when it launched en masse in 1923. The editors of Krasnaia panorama, for example, hired the Bulla brothers and N. N. Ol’shanskii to serve as the magazine’s main photographic staff. Other contributors included Petr Otsup, K. A. Kuznetsov, and S. A. Magaziner. In general, for Krasnaia panorama, the Bullas covered the high-profile news, including government congresses and meetings, while Ol’shanskii’s pictures focused on the more day-to-day current events. Ol’shanskii also took the pictures of the industrial factories and manufacturing plants, which were placed at the end of each issue of the magazine. Other magazines, such as Ogonek, Krasnaia niva, and Prozhektor were also solely dependent on this old guard until eventually a new generation of Soviet-bred photographers replaced them.

The two staff photographers at Ogonek were Arkadii Shaikhet and Semen Fridliand. They were perhaps the two most prominent representatives of the generation of photo-reporters whose education and formative experiences in the profession came after the Revolution. Shaikhet came to photography relatively late in life. Born in 1898, he

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38 Volkov-Lannit, Istoriia pishetsia, 152; on the Leningrad Society for Artistic and Technical Photography, see A. P. Popov, Iz istorii rossiiskoi fotografii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 2010), 61-62.
moved to Moscow from the countryside in 1918 and a few years later got a job in a portrait studio as a retoucher. Soon after learning the basics of picture taking, he was hired as a photo-correspondent for Rabochaia gazeta, a widely read Moscow daily. His work eventually caught the attention of Mikhail Kol’tsov who offered the young photographer a staff position at Ogonek in 1925. Around this time, Kol’tsov also hired his cousin Semen Fridliand who had just arrived from Kiev. 39 Over the next several years, Shaikhet and Fridliand supplied the magazine with photo-reportage, with occasional contributions made by a series of freelance photographers, such as E. S. Mikulina, the wife of Viktor Mikulin. Fridliand eventually left Ogonek and joined the photo-agency Soiuzfoto. Shaikhet was promoted to “senior photo-correspondent” in June 1931 and became head of Ogonek’s photo-bureau. 40 This promotion came with a substantial increase in salary. At 400 rubles a month, Shaikhet made as much as Ogonek’s long-standing editor Efim Zozulia and considerably more than Mikulina (promoted to staff photographer) who made 300 rubles per month. 41 In addition, Shaikhet had opportunities to make some money on the side working freelance contracts for other publications.

Vasilii Savel’ev was the first staff photographer at Prozhektor. He started his professional career in Moscow at Narkompros under the guidance of his older brother, the pre-revolutionary press photographer Aleksei Savel’ev. 42 In 1924, Vasilii was hired

39 Kol’tsov’s birth name was Mikhail Efimovich Fridliand.

40 “Prikaz 25 po aktsonernomu izdatel’skomu obshchestvu ‘Ogonek’,” from 6 June 1931 (GARF f. 299, op. 1, d. 13, l. 39).

41 “Spisok lichnogo sostava,” from 20 September 1932 (GARF f. 299, op. 1, d. 18, l. 1-11).

42 In 1918, Aleksei was appointed the head of the photography and newsreel section at Narkompros, where he oversaw the work of several photographers, including K. A. Kuznetsov, V. A. Bystrov, and P. K. Novitskii, and several newsreel filmmakers, including Dziga Vertov and Eduard K.
by the *Pravda* publishing house and was appointed to a staff position at *Prozhektor*,
where he worked until 1928. It was around this time that Maks V. Al’pert joined the staff
at *Pravda*. Al’pert had strong links to the pre-revolutionary studio tradition, having
started out as an apprentice in Odessa in 1914. After the Revolution, he joined the Red
Army and later moved to Moscow where he was hired to correspond for *Rabochaia
gazeta* just as the periodical’s former employee, Arkadii Shaikhet, left the publication for
*Ogonek*. Incidentally, Al’pert was a great admirer of Shaikhet and credited the
photographer’s work in *Ogonek* for his own transition to photo-reportage.\(^{43}\) Given the
high proportion of international news in *Prozhektor*, neither Al’pert nor Savel’ev
dominated news coverage in the same way that Shaikhet and Fridliand did at *Ogonek*. In
1929, like most of their contemporaries, Savel’ev and Al’pert were accorded plaudits at
the Ten Years of Soviet Photography exhibition. However, their second tier “honorable
mentions” stood in contrast to the more prestigious “honorable diplomas” given to
*Ogonek*’s staff photographers, which perhaps reflected the predominant place that
*Ogonek* and its personnel held in the world of Soviet photography.

At *Krasnaia niva*, the staff photographer was Nikolai M. Petrov. He was born in
1892, the son of a peasant from the village of Korsako, and eventually moved to
Moscow where he apprenticed at the photographic firm and studio, Scherer, Nabgol’ts,
and Co. Petrov’s education in photography was supervised by Al’bert G. Mei who had
trained many talented photographers of the late Imperial period and transformed the firm

into a center of postcard production in Russia. During the First World War, Petrov served in the Russian army and then joined the Red Army after the Revolution. He took up photography again under the tutelage of Aleksei Savel’ev and K. A. Kuznetov at Narkompros, and later was assigned to one of the agitational trains. From 1924, he was employed by the Izvestiia publishing company, where he supplied photo-reportage primarily for the newspaper’s illustrated supplement, Krasnaia Niva. After the magazine shut down in 1931, Petrov remained with Izvestiia and continued to take pictures for the newspaper for the remainder of his working life. Awarded various honors and prizes during his career, including the Order of the Red Banner, Petrov’s photo-reportage was closely linked to the city of Moscow; his photographs dominated the coverage in Krasnaia niva and Moscow served as his main inspiration.

A rotation of freelance photographers complemented the photo-reportage of a magazine’s staff photo-correspondents. Magazine editors listed these contract workers as regular contributors, but in reality they worked on and off throughout the year, usually paid on a per photograph basis. Included among them were A. Samsonov, V. Lobody, and S. A. Krasinskii, as well as the already mentioned Petr Otsup, K. A. Kuzentsov, and S. A. Magaziner. Several avant-garde photographers, such as Boris Ignatovich, Arkadii Shishkin, and Aleksandr Rodchenko joined these ranks of freelance photographers during the first Five-Year Plan.

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44 T. N. Shipov, Fotografi Moskvy (1839-1930): biograficheskii slovar’-spravochnik (Moscow: Sovnadenie, 2006), 143-144.

45 Morozov et al., Soviet Photography, 50; see also G. M. Boltianskii, Ocherki po istorii fotografii v SSSR (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1939), 154.
Photo-agencies worked with an eclectic group of amateur, semi-professional, and professional photographers. In Moscow, the editors of Press-klishe and Russ-foto managed a smaller network of local press photographers, not unlike the illustrated press. These photographers were all experienced and highly skilled professionals. At the highest level, the photo-agencies employed one or two staff photographers who worked on a fixed wage and provided a monthly quota of images. In 1928, for example, Press-klishe reported having two salaried staff photographers, plus an additional five or six regular freelancers. Compared to Ogonek the monthly wage for staff photographers was low, around 75 rubles per month; freelance correspondents were remunerated on a per picture basis. In part, this accounts for the high turnover rate at Press-klishe and Russ-foto.

During the 1920s several photographers at Press-klishe, including A. Tartakovskii, A. A. Grinberg, and N. I. Vladimirtsev, served as regular staff members. Russ-foto, by contrast, ensured that staff photographers were not only skilled professionals, but also artist with established international reputations. Pictures dispatched abroad were to reflect the Soviet Union positively, but also should be “artistically accentuated.” The editors thus hired the likes of Abram P. Shterenberg and Solomon I. Tules – both widely acknowledged as artists. The work of Tules, for example, was not only commended at the Ten Year of

46 “Letter to Comrade Kotikov, Leningrad office of Press-klishe,” from 26 June 1928 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 88, l. 21).
47 P. R., “Kakoi fotosnimok nam nuzhen,” 293.
48 “Press Accreditation [udostoverenie],” June 1926 (GARF f. 5283 op. 1, d. 74, l. 247); “Letter from E. Z. Meerovich, secretary of Russ-foto, to Comrade Bankman,” from 1 October 1926 (GARF f. 5283, op. 1, d. 75, l. 161).
Soviet Photography exhibition, but also toured Europe in a traveling exhibition of Soviet photography in 1928. 49

Editors at photo-agencies hired freelance photographers in Moscow and Leningrad to fulfill specific, short-term assignments in the city and beyond. These photographers included studio professionals, experienced amateurs, camera club members, and aspiring photojournalists, all hungry for regular work. In Leningrad, for example, the ROSTA contact for Press-klishe relied heavily on the veteran photographer, N. N. Ol’shanskii. 50 Both agencies also worked on and off with Viktor and Aleksandr Bulla. 51 Such talent was rare outside the two capitals, and editors mostly relied on studio professionals to take pictures regionally or to travel throughout the provinces. For example, Press-klishe dispatched A. Ia. Ozerskii to the southern regions of the USSR, which, according to his official certification, included stops in Novorossiisk, Tuapse, Sukhumi, Batumi, Tiflis, Baku, Dagestan, Groznyi, and several others towns and villages. 52 Often these local photographers had very little experience, and after several poor reviews the local agents had to ask, on behalf of the photographer, for detailed instructions on what to photograph and how to photograph. Especially with Press-klishe,

49 “Spisok avtorov figurirovavshikh na vystavkah zagranitsei v 1928-1928,” no date (GARF f. 406, op. 12, d. 2339, l. 44).

50 “Letter from the editors of Press-klishe to Comrade Lebedenko, ROSTA Leningrad Office,” from 4 January 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 29-30).

51 “Letter from the editors of Press-klishe to Comrade Lebedenko, ROSTA Leningrad Office,” 10 February 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 87, l. 85); “Letter from S. Nironov to the Bullas,” from 31 July 1926 (GARF f. 5283, o. 1, d. 74, l. 356).

52 “Udostoverenie,” from August 1927 (GARF f. 4459, op. 10, d. 15, l. 83).
these exchanges were tense and often supplicatory as agents on the rim feared losing the financial and material support of the center.  

Local agents who corresponded with photo-agency editors in Moscow were typically not professional photographers. They served primarily as managers; they were middlemen who administered the production of photo-reportage locally and then provided the photo-agency with regular shipments of news images. In remote regions, such as Briansk or Arkhangel’sk, these agents relied on a small pool of local technicians to take pictures. However, when these contacts fell through, the agents themselves were forced to head out on assignment. Given that these agents were, at best, ordinary amateurs, the results of these expeditions were often disastrous. For example, following one such assignment, the Press-klishe agent in Tiflis, Comrade Soloveichik, received a long and blunt review of twelve photographs, none of which were considered adequate.”  

In some cases, local agents attempted to pass as professionals. Rather than pay for an experienced photographer, they asked for press certification for themselves, hoping to take a larger cut of the final payment. On several occasions, the Press-klishe’s editor Mezhericher issued certification for the “photo-reporter and correspondent” K. T. Barsov, who was one of the agency’s local contacts in Leningrad. However, after a month’s worth of negative feedback, Barsov was forced to admit that he was not, in fact, a professional. In the same letter, he also exposed another Leningrad agent, one Comrade

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53 For example: “Letter from K. Barsov to Comrade Mezhericher,” from 11 January 1928 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 138, l. 70).

54 “Letter to Comrade Soloveichik,” from 6 April 1927 (GARF f. 391, op. 5, d. 40, 173).

55 “Udostoverenie,” from 29 March 1927 (GARF f. 4459, op. 10, d. 15, l. 52).
Brodskii, as only a “kind of a professional.” Barsov then asked for an advance of 50 rubles, so that he could pay his regular photographer, plus expenses.56

*Art Photographers: Pictorialists & Constructivist*

After a brief hiatus, the pre-revolutionary Pictorialists revived their artistic activities in the Soviet Union. In 1923, they formed the All-Russian Society of Photographers (VOF) and started to exhibit impressionist photographs in exhibitions at home and abroad. The core membership of the VOF consisted of the remnants of the Russian Photographic Society, which included Nappel’baum, Nikolai I. Svishchev, Nikolai P. Andreev, and Aleksandr D. Grinberg. The “Soviet” Pictorialists also welcomed new blood into their ranks, most notably the portrait photographer Abram Shterenberg. As a teenager, Shterenberg had apprenticed in a photography studio, however his training was cut short by the start of the First World War. After the Revolution, he briefly opened a studio in Tashkent before returning to Moscow in 1919. In the capital, Shterenberg’s work in portraiture brought him to the attention of Nappel’baum and the other members of the VOF. During the 1920s, he also pursued a career in photo-reportage, working with magazines and photo-agencies, but he remained associated primarily with traditional, Pictorialist approaches. In 1928, he exhibited at the Ten Years of Soviet Photography show and was presented an honorary diploma for “artistic photography.” Although the Pictorialist showings at this exhibition were attacked for their lack of innovation, Shterenberg’s portraits managed to evade the worst of the criticism. The author of a

56 “Letter from K. Barsov to L. Merzhericher,” from 11 January 1928 (GARF f. 391, op. 1, d. 138, l. 70).
review in *Krasnaia niva*, for example, pilloried Pictorialists such as Grinberg and Andreev, but deemed Shterenberg’s work to be “interesting” and “experimental,” and went on to praise his lighting techniques as reminiscent of “Flemish paintings.”

The work of modernist photographers, by contrast, appeared in weekly magazines and in *Sovetskoe foto*. These painters-turned-photographers drew inspiration from the Western avant-garde, in particular, the photography of Man Ray and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. These Constructivists, as they were called, were sympathetic to the various social functions of photography, that is, to photo-reportage, but they believed that a new society required an equally new approach. Constructivism offered a meeting point between press photographers advocating for “artistic photo-reportage” and modernist artists who embraced “low, topical journalistic forms.”

The editors of *Prozhektor* were especially welcoming to modernist visual approaches; they regularly published pictures by prominent Constructivists, such as Boris Ignatovich, his two sisters Olga and Elizabeta, Dmitrii Debatov, and Aleksandr Rodchenko. In addition, from 1926 to 1929, the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* published photos by Rodchenko and Ignatovich, often on the cover, and included the writings of Constructivist theorists, such as Osip Brik. The Constructivists’ even influenced the work of some “pure” photo-reporters like Semen Fridliand. His contributions to *Sovetskoe foto* often imitated the dynamic style and subject matter of Rodchenko’s work – a fact that the latter photographer recognized and pointed out publically in 1927 to the great displeasure of Fridliand and the journal’s editors.

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59 *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (December 1927): 377.
Rodchenko was the leading figure in Constructivist photography. He was trained as a painter and started to take pictures in 1924 after a few years involved in so-called “production art.” He designed dishes, work clothes, textiles, furniture, and interior layouts of rooms. Some of his most enduring work was in the realm of commercial design and advertising; he made posters for films, art exhibitions, department stores, and various consumer products, like watches, beer, cookies, cigarettes, and pacifiers.

Rodchenko incorporated photography into these advertisements. His famous poster for the Leningrad section of the state publishing house (Lengiz) featured a photograph of Lili Brik. Rodchenko then integrated this image into a design with the word “Knigi [Books]” appearing to issue forth out of her mouth. [FIGURE. 58] In this period, he also collaborated closely with Vladimir Maiakovsskii on Pro eto (About this) – the poets
“personal exegesis” that featured Rodchenko’s modernist photo-collages, which served to illustrate the text. Rodchenko brought a new inflection to the experimental “photomontages” of Western European artists, such as Max Ernst and Raoul Hausmann, and they, in turn, were inspired by the work of Soviet modernists. Rodchenko also collaborated with Maiakovskyi on the short-lived avant-garde journals LEF and Novyi LEF. Maiakovskyi edited the publication and Rodchenko served as the chief designer, providing photography, photo-collages, cover designs, and advertisements, which appeared alongside Constructivist art, literature, and criticism. While working for these publications, Rodchenko developed fully into a Constructivist art photographer. His worked exemplified the formalist values embraced by LEF and the modernist visual tendencies they espoused.

Rodchenko was also the main creative force behind the photo section of the October Association. This group, which included other modernists like Ignatovich, Debatov, Shterenberg, and Eleazar M. Langman, was committed to photo-reportage and specifically to the subjects of the First Five Year Plan. Members worked in the mass media and, in the spirit of “strengthening ties with the masses,” they also supervised amateur photographic workshops at factories and collective farms. Unlike the Pictorialists, the October group embraced the ideological requirements of socialist content, but also maintained a radical approach to form. Rodchenko described their

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60 On Rodchenko’s collaboration with Maiakovskyi on Pro eto, Lef, and Novyi Lef, see Gail Harrison, “Graphic Comment,” in Rodchenko and the Arts of Revolutionary Russia, ed. David Elliott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 83.


program as “abstract ‘left’ photography,” which was nonetheless a “revolutionary photography, materialist, socially grounded, and technical well equipped, one that sets itself the aim of promulgating and agitating for a socialist way of life and a Communist culture…” Moreover, they established a firm stance against the traditional arts, especially easel painting and naturalistic realism – the picturesque photography of the “old bourgeois type” – and also Western formalist photography, which contrasted ideologically with their own uses of formalist visual devices, such as diagonal compositions, extreme close-ups, fragmentation, bird’s-eye view, and so on. In the words of Matthew Cullerne Bown, the Octoberists represented “the last surge of the avant-garde.” Based in theoretical Marxism, offering a sweeping condemnation of pre-revolutionary culture, and also actively supporting the goals of the First Five-Year Plan, this group had established a program that, in all essential ways, seemed to toe the official party line.

Ogonek and the Triumph of Photo-reportage

By the late 1920s, the editors and photographers at Ogonek occupied the most prominent positions in Soviet photography. The magazine was the country’s most widely distributed weekly periodical, which offered Shaikhet, Fridliand, and, to a lesser degree Mikulina, a massive venue for public exhibition. Moreover, through Sovetskoe foto, the Ogonek faction steered the conversation regarding the proper role of photography in the Soviet

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Union. In addition to being prolific photo-reporters, Shaikhet and Fridliand were also vociferous polemicists, and with the backing of bullish critics, such as Mezhericher, they asserted the central importance of photo-reportage to the exclusion of all other photographic pursuits. Using the language of ‘proletarian revolution,’ they forwarded an officially sanctioned approach to all photography, not just photo-reportage, and, at the same time, launched ideological attacks at competing schools of thought. Soviet photography, whether amateur, scientific, or art, was to be shaped by utilitarian values of press photography, and specifically the “pure” type of photo-reportage produced by the likes of Shaikhet and Fridliand.

The first salvo of this campaign of persecution was launched by the critic and editor, Leonid Mezhericher. Having spent the Civil War organizing military courses for the Red Army, Mezhericher started his career in the press in 1922 after he was demobilized. He wrote articles, satires, poems; worked briefly on the editorial board at Krasnaia niva and Krokodil’; helped to found the Moscow “House of the Press;” and managed Ogonek’s photo-agency Buiro klishe. Started in 1926, Mezhericher established himself as a forceful critic of photography. He sat on the editorial board of Sovetskoe foto, and contributed essays on aesthetics and on ‘how to take pictures’ to the journal. It was in this capacity that he reviewed the Ten Years in Photography exhibition for Krasnaia Niva, in which he pitted the photo-reportage of Shaikhet, Fridliand, Petrov, and Al’pert against the traditional, impressionistic tableaus of the Pictorialists. Photo-reportage, according to Mezhericher, had “drowned out the ‘artists’ as the train whistle does the Eolian harp.”65 Art photography, he declared, was anemic and individualistic; it

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lacked innovation and had failed to adapt to the new social reality of Communism. His conclusion was simple: all photography – art photography, portraiture, and amateur photography – should emulate or align itself with the methods of the photo-reporter and the formal properties of photo-reportage.

A few sympathizers of traditional art photography anticipated this critical onslaught. In an article published in Fotograf, the official organ of the VOF, Nikolai Vesen’ev asked whether the Pictorialists’ commitment to impressionism – to “sunsets and sunrises” – was stopping them from engaging more with “themes from Soviet life.”

The next round of criticism made exactly this point. In Sovetskoe foto’s second almanac (1929), Mezhericher wrote and extended and ideologically pointed denunciation of so-called “rightist” influences in Soviet photography. Rather than simply condemning the Pictorialists’ lack of innovation, he attacked the subject matter and formal properties of their work in political language typically reserved for enemies of the state. In particular, he took issue with the “bourgeois” nudes and etudes of Iurii Eremin, Petr Klepikov, and a number of other photographers. Like the critics of Pictorialism before the Revolution, Mezhericher accused them of imitating impressionist painters. Uniquely Soviet were his added claims that their photography was “parasitic” and “antisocial.” Moreover, he underlined the fundamental basis for the interpretation of photography: social utility.

Rather than “organizing” the image according to personal taste, all pictures intended for public display – all “social” photography – which included photo-reportage, portraiture,

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and art photography, should be organized in the interest of promoting “the consumer utility of the picture.” 68 Photographers should not impose their individual perspective on their pictures; they should adopt a perspective aimed at bettering the greater social good.

This acrimonious rhetoric brought about real-world consequences. At the end of 1929, a few months after Mezhericher’s essay was published, the journal Fotograf, was shut down “for reasons outside the editors jurisdiction.” 69 Vesen’ev’s warnings about the future of Pictorialism appeared to have come too late. However, the fate of Fotograf and the VOF had already been sealed by the time Mezhericher published his denunciation. A year earlier, in August 1928, the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs proposed a re-organization of the VOF not for aesthetic or ideological reasons, but ostensibly for financial ones. On 18 June 1928, a few months after the Politburo approved measures to cut off paper supplies to certain magazines, a new decree took effect that required “societies of artisans and craftsmen” to turn a profit in order to collect government subsidies. The failure of the VOF to make money was deemed a violation of this decree and, unless rectified, would entail the “immediate cessation of all the function of the Society” by the NKVD. 70

In response to this memo, the chairman of the VOF wrote a personal plea to Lunacharskii to intervene on the Society’s behalf. In line with Russia’s longstanding tradition of intelligentsia amateurism, he wrote that transforming the work of VOF to a

68 Ibid., 233-34; also see V. T. Stigneev, Vek fotografii 1894-1994: ocherki istorii otechestvennoi fotografii (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo LKI, 2007), 39.


70 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi sotsial’no-politicheskii arkhiv (RGASPI) f. 142 (Personal papers of A. V. Lunacharskii), op. 1, d. 492, l. 3 (letter from the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, 14 August 1928).
profit-making endeavor was strictly contrary to the Society’s charter as a non-profit organization. However, without state support, the important cultural and educational work undertaken by the Society’s 740 members would no longer be possible.  

Lunacharskii was sympathetic to this argument and requested that funds remain available to the VOF “for cultural work.” But this intervention, in the end, proved fruitless. The Society was linked institutionally to a long line of bourgeois photographic societies, and thus found itself on the wrong side of Stalin’s cultural revolution. The VOF and Fotograf attempted to adapt the new “proletarian line,” called for by Sovetskoe foto, which required photographers to “established ties to the masses.” They lectured and taught courses in photography specifically aimed at the working classes, but the decision to liquidate the organizational base of Pictorialism had already been made, and in 1930 the VOF and Fotograf no longer existed. The polemics of Mezhericher thus offered an aesthetic and ideological justification for what was essentially an economic and political decision.

Rodchenko and the Constructivists experienced a similar pattern of criticism and public denunciation. At first, Rodchenko was accused of imitating Western bourgeois photography. In 1928, the editors of Sovetskoe foto published a letter and a series of images, submitted anonymously, which implied that Rodchenko had plagiarized the work of foreign art photographers. Images attributed to Ira Martin, Albert Renger-Patzsch,
and Moholy-Nagy were juxtaposed with three similar photographs taken by Rodchenko. [FIGURE. 59.] The dates printed alongside the first two seemed to demonstrate that Rodchenko had taken his pictures after and in imitation of the foreign artists. In the third set, no date was given for the production of Moholy-Nagy’s image. This discrepancy was pointed out by Rodchenko when he composed a letter to the editors of Sovetskoe foto in response to this thinly veiled attack. “The dates of these works speak in my favor,” he wrote, “and for that reason he didn’t give the date of Moholy-Nagy’s photo.” Rodchenko also undercut the larger accusation of plagiarism by showing how easy it was to find two images that appeared stylistically similar. He compared two pictures taken by Arkadii Shaikhet and Semen Fridliand respectively to his own photography: “If we are talking in the language of Sovetskoe foto,” he wrote, then “Fridliand’s and Shaikhet’s plagiarism is much more demonstrative than mine.” The editors did not publish Rodchenko’s letter as he requested, forcing him to publish it in Novyi LEF instead.

More direct attacks against modernist photographers were launched in subsequent years. The flashpoint for the most sustained period of denunciation came in May 1931,

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when the members of the October Association exhibited work alongside the newly formed Russian Society of Proletarian Photographers (ROPF). This group represented the less experimental branch of Soviet photography and was made up primarily of photo-reporters with close ties to Ogonek and Sovetskoe foto. The founding members of ROPF were the three Ogonek staff photographers, namely Shaikhet, Fridliand, and Mikulina, plus Maks Al’pert, Roman Karmen, S. K. Blokhin, N. F. Maksimov, and M. A. Ozerskii. In their founding document, published in Proletarskoe foto (that is, Sovetskoe foto renamed after 1930), they declared a two front war. The ROPF groups fought against “right deviation,” which now included all “photo-portraitists” and studio photographers, as well as against “leftist tendencies in photography, that is, the October Association, which represented “nascent petty bourgeois aestheticism, hiding behind leftist language.”76 Given the dissolution of the VOF and other ‘rightist’ groups, such as the Russian Society of Photographers, in 1930, the war against ‘right deviation’ had been more or less won before it had been officially declared. However, in attacking ‘leftist’ photographers, such as Rodchenko, Ignatovich, and Langman, the ROPF group was fighting a new battle against a competing representational model of photo-reportage.

In 1931, Shaikhet and Al’pert collaborated on a photo-story, which defined the documentary aesthetic of the ROPF group and became the official model for the proletarization of Soviet photography. Edited by Mezhericher, the photo-story was called A Day in the Life of a Moscow Working-Class Family and was intended to demonstrate the life of an ordinary worker in the Soviet Union to a European audience. It was exhibited in Vienna and first published in the German illustrated journal, Arbeiter-

76 “Deklaratsiia initsiativnoi gruppy ROPF (Rossiiskogo ob’edineniia proletarskikh fotografov),” Proletarskoe foto, no. 2 (October 1931): 14.
"Illustrierte-Zeitung (AIZ). The series was consisted of more than forty images, which introduced the Filippov family and guided the audience through a visual record of the family’s typical day. Shaikhet and Al’pert captured father and son travelling to work on a streetcar, working diligently in a factory, and enjoying leisure time. At the same time, they also followed the mother on her shopping route, paying for eggs in a cooperative grocery store, and also showed the Filippov’s daughter working as a salesgirl and studying geometry. 77 [FIGURE. 60.] In essence, it captured an ordinary, but exemplary working class hero that the audience could easily identify with and strives to imitate in the hectic push to realize the First Five-Year Plan. This chronicle of a “typical family” caused the photo-story genre to have a huge impact in the Soviet Union and abroad, and

77 “Den’ iz zhizni moskovskoi rabochei sem’i,” Proletarskoe foto, no. 4 (December 1931).
inspired other photographers to produce similar portraits of “the typical” in Soviet society. The photo-story also received support from the Central Committee of Proletarian Cinematographers and Photographers, which stated that it presented “bright realist documentary representation of the class truth of our reality [plus] the ability to expose the class essence of the events.”

The October Association’s exhibition in May 1931 brought ROPF model of photo-reportage into direct conflict with the modernist model, and the discussions that followed brought Soviet avant-garde photography to an end. The exhibition was called “The Five-Year Plan in Four Years” and featured many of the standout examples of Constructivist photography. Unlike the Pictorialists, the October Association photographers devoted their work to the new Soviet reality. Planks of wood, metal bars, sawmill workers, collective farms, factory smoke stacks, trade unions, proletarian workers, educational institutions – all these subjects dominated the work of the October group. Nonetheless, they were savaged in the press. Writing in *Proletarskoe foto*, Mezhericher stated that the modernists pictures revealed a “strong formalist tendency which is due to insufficient political sensitivity.” Langman’s photograph, *Lacemaker*, was declared the “apogee of formalism,” and Fridliand described Ignatovich’s *Old Leningrad-New Leningrad* as “all the same partyless treatment of Soviet reality – all the same formalism that removes one from the profound dialectic discourse of the social

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78 Morozov et al., *Soviet Photography*, 124.
ИЗ ЛАГЕРЯ ТРЕТЬЕГО РЕШАЮЩЕГО
essence of the phenomena into the realm of fruitless abstraction…”

Perhaps the most famous denunciation was of Rodchenko’s *Pioneer with a Horn*. Friidliland rebuked this image, which showed a young bugler from an extreme angle below, for manifesting “formalist tendencies” and providing a “counterrevolutionary distortions of Soviet reality.” Another article objected to the pioneer’s “bestial knot of muscle and clumsy shape of the face,” in which “one cannot surely recognize the lively, happy face of the younger generation of communists.”

After the exhibition, the October photo-section disintegrated and Rodchenko was accused of being a class enemy. However, unlike the Pictorialists, many modernist photographers continued to play a part in the production of Soviet photography. As Constructivists, Rodchenko, Ignatovich, and the others no longer received state support, but as reformed Soviet photo-reporters their artistic approaches served to propagate the Soviet Union, and its industrial achievements, abroad. In the 1930s, Rodchenko worked extensively with *SSSR na stroike* (USSR in Construction) – a magazine aimed at the Soviet elite and potential foreign investors. Although modernist photography was deemed incompatible of the need of photo-reportage domestically, for the foreign market it was important that Soviet subject matter be “accentuated artistically,” because, in the words of one writer for *Sovetskoe foto*, “only the work of art draws the attention of foreign visitors to photographic exhibitions. The editors of *Sovetskoe foto* clearly distinguished between a domestic and foreign audience for photo-

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reportage. “Abroad we must send displays of ebullient pace – the dynamics of labor, the dynamics of our great construction projects.” In the 1930s, the magazine *SSSR na stroike*, which became the key tool in the Soviet information campaign abroad, aimed to do exactly this: “The magazine *SSSR na stroike* puts before itself precisely the task of the systematic representation of the dynamics of our construction by means of drawing with light [svetopis’].” The spirit of avant-garde photography was dead, but its aesthetics lived on as Rodchenko, among others, sold an idealized image of Soviet Union to elite audiences at home and abroad.

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84 P. R., “Kakoi fotosnimok nam nuzhen,” 293.

85 *Svetopis’* was a common and longstanding synonym for photography; editor’s introduction to the inaugural issue of *SSSR na stroike* quoted at length in Erika Wolf, “When Photographs Speak, To Whom Do They Talk? The Origins and Audience of *SSSR na stroike* (USSR in Construction),” *Left History* 6, no. 2 (2000): 61.
By 1932, the Soviet illustrated press of the NEP era had mostly ceased to exist. *Krasnaia panorama* and *Krasnaia niva* had stopped publishing in 1930 and 1931 respectively, and most of the supplements associated *Ogonek*, *Pravda*, and *Izvestiia* had also been liquidated. *Prozhektor* continued to publish on a reduced schedule before eventually closing in 1935. Of the original magazines designated as ‘art-literary’ publications, only *Ogonek* remained. ¹ In the 1930s, it was accompanied by a few periodicals created during the First Five-Year Plan, such as *SSSR na stroike*, which were intended for an international audience and the most elite in Soviet society.

To some degree, this “end” of the Soviet illustrated press represented the final blow to the pre-revolutionary tradition of magazine publishing. On the surface, the range of weeklies made available in 1923 resembled the diversity before the Revolution. These multi-colored magazines, stacked in bookstores and hung out with clothes pins in city kiosks, vied for the attention of Soviet passersby. Every magazine seemed to offer something different in terms of content and layout, when in fact, they only gave the impression of diversity. Across the Soviet illustrated press, the basic perspective of photo-reportage and written content was the same. In the pre-revolutionary era, publishers had tapped into various markets of consumers and produced an equally

¹ Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi sotsial’no-politicheskii arkhiv (RGASPI) f. 17 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Department of Agitation and Propaganda), op. 60, ed.khr. 852, l. 21 (Summary of Illustrated Monthly Journals).
variety of weekly periodicals. But in the Soviet Union, editors were only responsible to the press directives of the Central Committee. This body was, in a sense, the only consumer of the illustrated press; the Central Committee paid for and set the agenda for the news. The centralization of information produced one message, which made a diversity of magazines unnecessary. Why spend resources on multiple publications if they all communicate the same thing?

Professional photographers were the natural handmaidens of the Soviet state. Since the 19th century the professional class had produced whatever type of image their employers had demanded. Studio photographers, for example, worked to compose flattering representations of their clients. When they started to pursue the news for magazines, they gained some autonomy by virtue of their association with journalism. But in the end, publishers set the weekly agendas, and photo-reportage was malleable; with captions and headlines, editors could easily tell very different stories about the same image. After the Revolution, press photographers became employees of the state, especially with the invention of Soiuzfoto. Ironically, at this time, the editors of Sovetskoe foto widely promoted an image of the photo-reporter as an independent author. Likewise, the elevation of photo-reportage to the level of art in the 1930s seemed to take advantage of the popular understanding of what it meant to be an artist in order to bestow upon press photographers a nominal sense of authorship. Only art photographers, such as the Pictorialists and the Constructivists, and various types of amateur practitioners worked independently. They produced images that reflected a creative endeavor or a personal interest in the medium, rather than the state-sanctioned perspective. But, again, in a world of one type of message, the state required only one type of photographer, and
art collectives and photographic societies – deemed to be a drain on the state’s resources – ceased to exist.

Yet certain art photographers, such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, continued to receive prestigious commissions well into the 1930s. In fact, between 1933 and 1941, Rodchenko and his wife, the artist Varvara Stepanova, designed more than a dozen issues of *SSSR na stroike*. Moreover, Rodchenko continued to work in the formalist idioms of the 1920s; his pictures reflected all the visual hallmarks of Constructivist photography, namely diagonal compositions, fragmentation, extreme close-ups, and bird’s-eye and worm’s-eye views. Rather than distancing himself from the experimental techniques that led to his expulsion from the October Association in 1931, Rodchenko reinvested in formalist approaches of his earlier visionary work. According to Erika Wolf, his photo-reportage of the infamous construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal was not only “in accordance with the vanguard principles” of the 1920s, but also revealed “the constructivist underpinning of Stalinist visual culture.”

In 1936, Rodchenko described the great enthusiasm with which his work was received: “My pictures [of the White Sea-Baltic Canal] were in all the press…I was published everywhere.” Given the party line in regards to “leftist tendencies” during the Cultural Revolution, Rodchenko’s rehabilitation seems like a radical reversal of state policy.

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3 Aleksandr Rodchenko, “Perestroika khudozhnika,” *Sovetskoe foto*, nos. 5-6 (May-June 1936): 19.

However, Soviet policy regarding the production of photo-reportage remained basically unchanged. Ultimately, the authorities were not interested in the formal properties of Rodchenko’s work. In the 1920s, the magazine and photo-agency editors demanded flattering portraits of Soviet industry and society above all else. Photo-reportage as a visual approach was only significant as far as it produced dynamic and lively compositions of Soviet subject matter; it was not a professional ethos linked to institutional values about personal detachment. Likewise, during the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Canal, Rodchenko’s Constructivism presumably did not interfere with the editorial objectives regarding the representation of Soviet penal policy. His images in *SSSR na stroike* celebrated the Gulag system of labor camps as a transformative experience. Through physical labor, “anti-social elements” were reformed into productive, skilled, contributing members of society. Previous criticism of Rodchenko’s work, though aimed ostensibly at his visual aesthetics, was directed at the utopianism that underlay the avant-garde more generally. He had envisioned a documentary approach as a tool for making utopia a reality – to improve on the world as it was. His utopian aspirations were philosophically at odds with the official party line. After all, how could the camera – in the words of Dziga Vertov – “serve to reveal and show the truth” if Lenin and the Revolution had already done so in 1917?

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CURRICULUM VITA

Christopher Stolarski: b. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; 11/08/80

Christopher Stolarski’s dissertation, “The Rise of Photojournalism in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-1931,” examines the origins and development of photo-reportage in the context of the illustrated press. Stolarski completed an undergraduate degree in philosophy at the University of Toronto in 2002 and a Master’s degree in history, also at Toronto, in 2004 on utopian themes in the films of Dziga Vertov. As a doctoral candidate at The Johns Hopkins University, Stolarski delivered a paper to the history faculty in 2007 entitled “Picturing the Russian Old Regime: The Rise of Photojournalism and the Aestheticization of Politics, 1904-1917,” which informs chapter 4 and 5 of this dissertation. In December 2012, he was invited to speak about Russian and Soviet photography at the University of Basel. He has also delivered several conference papers, including “From Press-klishe to Soiuzfoto: Photographic Agencies and Visual Aesthetics in the Soviet Illustrated Press, 1924-1931,” at the Annual Convention of the ASEEES in New Orleans, LA, in November 2012. Stolarski has one published and one forthcoming research article, including “Press Photography in Russia’s Great War and Revolution,” based on chapter 5 of this dissertation, which will be published in Russia’s Great War and Revolution, 1914-1922, eds. Murray Frame et al. While a doctoral candidate at Johns Hopkins University, Stolarski was awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council doctoral fellowship (Canada) for 2009-2010 and Doris G. Quinn Fellowship for 2012-2013. In the Fall of 2013, he will take up a two-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto.