

The Great Utopia

*The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde,
1915–1932*

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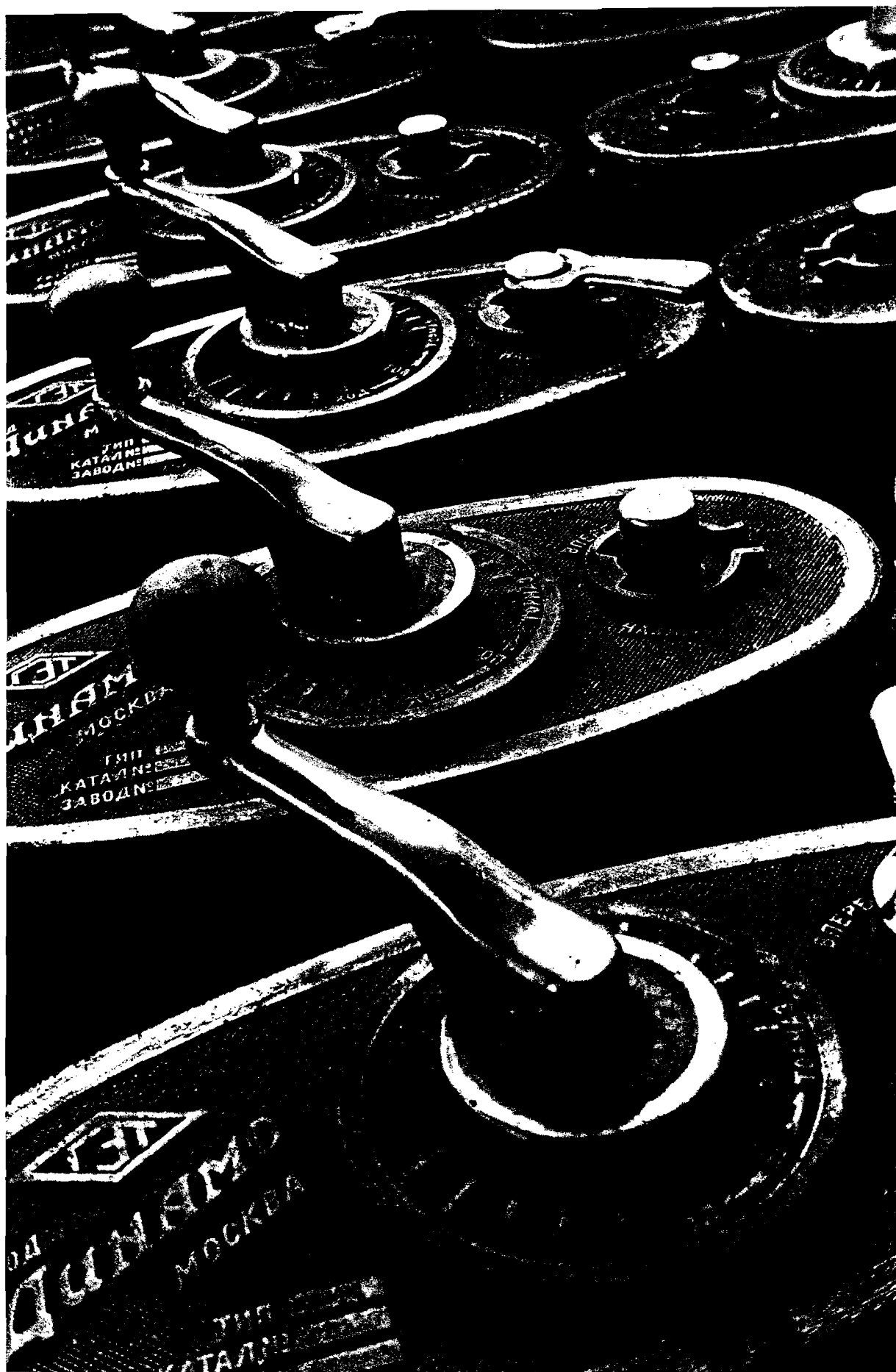
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Fragmentation versus Totality: The Politics of (De)framing

Margarita Tupitsyn

Il y a du cadre, mais le cadre n'existe pas.

—Jacques Derrida

Let us start by comparing two photographs which were produced in the era of the First Five-Year Plan for publication in a periodical and which deal with the identical theme of paving a street. Arkadii Shaikhet's *Katki* (*Steamrollers*, 1931, fig. no. 3) functions through its insistence on an intelligible presentation of labor captured in expanded space and from a conventional viewpoint. Aleksandr Rodchenko's photograph of the same subject, a fragment from the series *Stroitel'stvo mostovykh. Leningradskoe shosse* (*Paving Streets: Leningradskoe Highway*, 1929, fig. no. 2), opposes Shaikhet's image with its suppressed horizon and its severe reduction of the machine's body. Unlike Shaikhet, whose interpretation of the paving process grasps its totality in one snapshot, Rodchenko reveals this productive operation through a set of fragments, each of which can be recognized, in compliance with the spirit of the time, as an "interior monologue" of the productive forces regarding the means of production.

Shaikhet's criticism of Rodchenko's type of press photography is voiced in his article "Sorevnovanie foto-reporterov razvertyvaetsia" ("The Competition of the Photojournalists Unfolds"), published in *Sovetskoe foto* (*Soviet Photo*) in 1929. There he writes: "Many photojournalists who submit vivid snapshots [to magazines] experience complete disappointment when the editors do not grasp their 'points of view.' Often they [editors] simply do not understand how a photograph can be tilted or, simply said, 'fall,' or how one can publish a photograph with a close-up, for example, of the details of machines, the movements of hands, etc. . . . Above all, editors approve of photographs in which all the events are fitted into absolutely concrete and intelligible forms for the reader."

Expressing his opposition to just such a viewpoint on press photography, Rodchenko states in a lecture presented at the October group's meeting in 1930 that his goal is "to photograph not a factory but the work itself from the most effective point of view" and that "in order to show the grandness of a machine, one should photograph not all of it but give a series of snapshots." In the same lecture Rodchenko divides all press photography into what he himself defends and terms *foto-kadry* (photo stills) and what he criticizes and labels as *foto-kartiny* (photo pictures). The latter, according to him, are based on an "organic" representation of various everyday scenes and on an attempt "to photograph the scene in its entirety." He concludes that "the issue now is not to take 'photo pictures' but [to produce] 'photo stills.'" Rodchenko expresses no interest in photography separated from a functional framework such as a periodical, and points out that it is in the periodicals that one finds the best examples of his and his colleagues' photography. This last statement is especially important to bear in mind when one encounters photographs from the era of the First Five-Year Plan as isolated images, that is, apart from their original framework comprised by the mass-media function of a periodical. This problem of decontextualization is especially apparent when one deals with images which were produced as elements in a series and which aimed not only to have a significant political impact on the magazines' readers but also to defend specific formal strategies—such as, for example, Rodchenko's adherence to the device of seriality. But before turning to Rodchenko's and other photographers' series published in such magazines as *Daesh'* (*Let's Produce!*), I would like to reconstruct the sources for Rodchenko's views on photography as they are articulated in his 1930 lecture.

In the early 1930s, the schism between the concepts of "photo picture" and "photo still" constituted the basis for various debates between the members of the photographic section of the October group, led by Rodchenko, and those

fig. 1
Boris Ignatovich
Dynamo, 1929.
Photograph, printed from original negative, 24.2 x 16 cm.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

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fig. 2

Aleksandr Rodchenko

From the series Paving Streets: Leningradskoe Highway, 1929.

Photograph, printed from original negative, 19.1 x 28.6 cm.

Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

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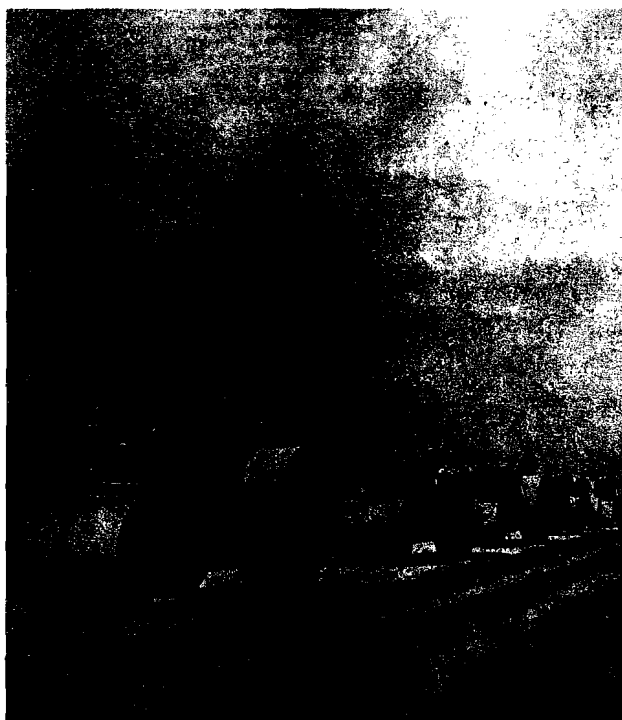


fig. 3
Arkadii Shaikhet
Steamrollers, 1931.
Photograph.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

photographers, Shaikhet among them, who belonged to ROPF (the Revolutionary Society of Proletarian Photographers). Because ROPF's "photo pictures" so closely embodied the structural principle defended in the late 1920s and early 1930s by Realist painters, the nature of the October–ROPF controversy is rooted in the discussions on photography initiated by the Productivist critics in *Novyi Lef* (*New Lef*). Among other issues, these critical exchanges involved questioning of the painting as an object able to perform adequately in a culture requiring a constant turnout of multipliable images, and the promotion of the photographic image as the only valid substitute for the painting. Specifically, the arguments were against a transferral of various structural techniques from painting to photography. Believing that photography and photomontage provided the only viable language to record the process of industrialization, the Productivist critics and artists concentrated on formulating a new photographic discourse.

In 1928, the first year of the First Five-Year Plan, clarification of the position of photography in a socialist society was especially urgent, since at that moment the activities of various Realist painters—including the most conservative group, AKhRR (the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia)—were on the rise. In the same year, AKhRR's production received the ultimate stamp of official approval when the entire Politburo made a visit to one of the group's exhibitions. AKhRR's artists traveled to factories and collective farms and painted what they saw with the "bad immediacy" of a photographic naturalism" (to use Fredric Jameson's phrase). By duplicating a process which photography performed faster and more effectively, AKhRR's production mounted a "Thermidor" against not only experimental photography but also photography as a medium in general. Recognizing this ongoing competition for the title of a true revolutionary art, *New Lef*'s critic Osip Brik quickly assessed that AKhRR painters were trying "to regain lost positions and [to turn to a] reproduction of reality in line with photography."⁴

Brik's essay "Foto-kadr protiv kartiny" ("The Photo Still versus the Picture"), from which this last quotation comes, was one of the first discussions of the issue of photography versus painting. In 1926, when the article was published in *Soviet Photo*, Brik already represented a new phase of the Russian Formalist school, which, unlike the earlier one with its emphasis on a "set of techniques," demonstrated a growing interest in "sociologism," a tendency to "reach beyond 'pure' Formalism toward a position more inclusive and more congruent with the 'social demands' of the time."⁵ In "The Photo Still versus the Picture," Brik still avoids criticizing painting as a technique (that would mean a rejection of abstract production as well) and instead attacks painting for the "idea of reproducing nature." This explains why in the title he chose the word *kartina* rather than *zhivopis'*: the latter specifically implies painting as a technique, whereas the former suggests painting as an iconic sign, besides carrying an additional meaning conveying a sense of the "picturesque." By relying on this subtle play of meanings, Brik conveys his disillusionment with the artificial quality of Realist painting. Similarly, the conventional translation of *foto-kadr* in Brik's title as simply "photograph" is inaccurate,⁶ because *kadr* (still) was no doubt borrowed by Brik from the language of cinema in order to suggest that the kind of photography he promotes has more to do with the filming process than with that of painting. From this more careful reading of the title of Brik's article, it becomes apparent that the critic is urging everyone to stop judging photography from the viewpoint of aesthetics and to begin seeing it not as a supplement to the fine arts but as a "child of technical . . . traditions." Brik asserts that "The

photographer must show that it is not just life ordered according to aesthetic laws which is impressive, but also vivid, everyday life itself as it is transfixed in a technically perfect [photo still]."⁷

In 1928, Brik published another essay on the same subject, in which he specifically criticized Rodchenko's photography for its detachment from the "social demands" of the time and for attempting to resolve purely painterly goals by means of photo language.⁸ Alluding most likely to Rodchenko's series *Dom na Miasnitskoi* (*House on Miasnitskaia Street*, 1925) and *Sosny. Pushkino* (*Pine Trees in Pushkino*, 1927), Brik wrote that "one should not depict an isolated building or a tree which may be very beautiful but which will be . . . painting, will be aesthetics."⁹ In other words, the critic suggests that Rodchenko, at least in these specific photographs, continues to keep photography within the domain of "easel art." Rodchenko's own articles published in *New Lef* in 1928 indicate that, for him at that time, the issue of "how" to photograph was turning from a mere continuation of his Formalist interests developed in painting and his early photographs into a means of finding a "new (have no fear) aesthetics, impulse, and pathos for expressing our new socialist facts through photography."¹⁰ Rodchenko understood that in order to reveal the "everyday life of modern man" it would not be enough simply to record its facts by "using the same photographic approach that was employed under the old regime or under the influence of Western art."¹¹ Instead, he saw the formal devices of photographing objects from above or below as the "points of contemporaneity" whose practice, together with the "what" to be represented, would result in the victory of true Realism. The arguments which Rodchenko had with Brik and other critics, such as Boris Kushner, were based on the latter's assumption that for Rodchenko the "how" of photography was still a longing for Formalism, which by that time they automatically associated with similar trends in Western art. In reality, Rodchenko's notion of the "how" was shifting away from Viktor Shklovskii's concept of *ostranenie* (making strange) or Roman Jakobson's idea of the "laying bare of the device." Instead, the "how" was becoming a way for the artist to separate himself from visions of reality based on a perception of the world as a continuous organic entity and practiced by Realist painters and photographers like Shaikhbet. Unlike this model of reality, which is associated with Lukácsian Realism, Rodchenko's model echoed Brechtian aesthetics, which claimed that "The spirit of realism designates an active, curious, experimental, subversive . . . attitude toward . . . the material world; and the 'realistic' work of art is therefore one that encourages and disseminates this attitude, yet not merely in a flat or mimetic way or along the lines of imitation alone."¹²

Another essay, written by Sergei Tret'iakov in response to Rodchenko and Kushner and published in *New Lef* in 1928, should be mentioned because it seems that Rodchenko's production in 1929 for mass-circulation periodicals such as *Let's Produce!* and the arguments stressed in his 1930 lecture specifically reflect the influence of Tret'iakov's position on photo discourse. In fact, it seems that Tret'iakov helped Rodchenko to assure himself that his "how" acquired a functional rather than a formal base. In his response to Rodchenko and Kushner, Tret'iakov begins by saying, "the question cannot be resolved by cheap recourse to the 'primacy of content,' by asserting that the 'what' is more important than the 'how,'" and then explains how formal elements may satisfy the practical need to expose certain important fragments (contents) in each given subject. One of Tret'iakov's comments is especially relevant to Rodchenko's photograph from *Paving Streets: Leningradskoe Highway* discussed above. He writes:

"When a machine is photographed its essential detail is singled out, while its other less important parts are obscured and made lighter."¹³ Thus, for Tret'iakov, formal devices could no longer be judged apart from the nature of their appropriation.

As mentioned earlier, the impact on Rodchenko of Brik's and Tret'iakov's positions on photography surfaces in his lecture on the social meaning of photography given in 1930 at the October group's conference in Moscow. The influence of Brik's terminology in "The Photo Still versus the Picture" is detectable in Rodchenko's division of press photography into "photo pictures" and "photo stills," and like Brik, Rodchenko criticizes painting for its lack of documentary qualities. In his lecture Rodchenko addresses this issue: "Eighty to ninety percent of any magazine is built on factual material, and neither painting nor drawing can give the sensation of today, the actuality of events and their documentary nature; and thus we put our trust in photography, since it shows what happened at a place and factually convinces us of it."¹⁴

As Rodchenko tells us in his lecture, the best examples of his and his colleagues' photography were those published in popular magazines. To trace that production one must turn to periodicals like *Let's Produce!*, which throughout 1929 systematically printed the "photo stills" of Rodchenko, Boris Ignatovich, Roman Karmen, Dmitrii Debabov, and others. This production was directly inspired by the themes of the First Five-Year Plan, during which, according to Ignatovich, "the dynamism of public life became one of the biggest influences on Soviet photography."¹⁵ As a rule, the subject matter of these photographs was not chosen by the photographers; it was selected for them by the various factories and plants who commissioned their work. Sometimes the photographers would receive a whole list of industrial sights which they would then have to photograph. Both Rodchenko and Ignatovich chose not to record specific sights or scenes in a single photograph (photo picture) but rather to cover a page or two of a magazine with a series of photo stills, capturing fragments of an industrial sight, a place of everyday activities, or simply the process of work itself. The resulting series of photo stills, based on a severe fragmentation of imagery and condensation of space, presented the spectator with a multileveled vision of the work area and treated labor itself not as a routine but as a truly dynamic and unpredictable process. Each photo still in such a series is centered on the device which Ignatovich calls "packing," that is, "maximum condensation of a photo still."¹⁶ This, in turn, served as one of the strongest ways of resisting the expanded space promoted by ROPF photographers and eventually adopted by Socialist Realists.

A recent attempt to characterize these two treatments of postrevolutionary themes was made by Yve-Alain Bois, who, in a discussion of the two periods in El Lissitzky's work, uses the labels "'Brechtian' Lissitzky" and "'Stalinist' Lissitzky." The first refers to the artist's production reflecting the Brechtian belief that "one must present the spectator with a riddle, give him or her the theoretical means with which to solve it, and leave it at that. It is up to the audience to find the solution, to wake to a political consciousness."¹⁷ The second refers to Lissitzky's late production, which, according to Bois, conveys "a revolutionary content by means of the cathartic illusionism upon which the traditional [art] was based."¹⁸ As is evident from the October-ROPF controversy, the schism between these two positions, historically known as the "Brecht-Lukács debate," vastly transcends Lissitzky's case and touches a much wider community of artists who relied on the photographic image during the period of the First Five-Year Plan.¹⁹

In his comparison of Lissitzky's two periods (Brechtian [Suprematist] and Stalinist), Bois turns to Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of Lissitzky's Suprematist poster *Klinom*



fig. 4
 Boris Ignatovich
 Still Life, 1928
 Photograph, printed from original negative, 16.8 x 23.2 cm.
 Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

krasnym ber belykh (*Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, 1920, plate no. 138), saying that unlike this work, which "physically disorients the spectator, and forces him or her into a relationship with the image that is no longer passive, the proto-socialist-realist image . . . drawn in perspective, depicts [imagery of workers and labor] with which the spectator is supposed to identify."²⁰ In the case of October versus ROPF, this difference between the two models of "social" spaces can be observed not on the level of a non-objective work vis-à-vis a Realist one, but rather on the level of two different modes of representational art. As far as Rodchenko's and Shaikhet's versions of steamrollers are concerned, for example, one can see that in Shaikhet's photograph the spectator is offered the space of labor as the model "for the investment of desire"; the photograph "is used to incite [the spectator] to a behavior that reproduces this experience."²¹ This representation of social reality leaves no space for reflectivity; nothing in it can any longer be "surprising," that is, distance-creating and leaving room for doubts or critique. These images are supposed to be endlessly repeated, subjected to mimetic acts, to identification with the space of desire which such a representation proposes. By contrast, Rodchenko's decision to represent a steamroller is based on the Brechtian alienation effect, which is focused on the agenda of revolutionary art where both the artist and the spectator are assumed to be active participants in the shift of reality. In Rodchenko's words, "a photographer employs fragmentation for a sharper and conflictual perception of content."²² Brecht's model also relies on shock, which brings us back to Tret'iakov, who "saw shock as a key to changing the mode of reception of art and to disrupting the dismal and catastrophic continuity of everyday life."²³ For him, "this disruption [was] a prerequisite for any revolutionary reorganization of everyday life."²⁴

In this sense, the series by Rodchenko, Ignatovich, and others published in *Let's Produce!* functioned to disrupt the continuity of everyday life and to concentrate on and expose the elements (contents) which certified the presence of a new reality. Contrary to that, the highly publicized photo story by Maks Al'pert and Shaikhet called *24 chasa iz zhizni rabochei sem'i Filippovykh* (*Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of the Working-Class Filippov Family*, 1931, fig. nos. 7–9) insists (as the title itself suggests) on continuity and the presence of a narrative foundation underlying this representation. Each snapshot in this photo story presents a clear and complete "photo picture" of a certain event in the life of the family, and in every case, the snapshot is explained by an unambiguous descriptive caption telling the viewer exactly what is going on and thus leaving him without what Brecht calls a "riddle." *Twenty-Four Hours*, along with most of ROPF's production, may be placed in the context of Lukácsian Realism, which "implies the ultimate possibility of some full and nonproblematical 'representation of reality.'"²⁵

The aforementioned debates on photography in *New Lef* and the photographic practices of Rodchenko and Ignatovich in periodicals such as *Let's Produce!* provided a theoretical base for the October group's photography section, which was formed in 1930, two years after October issued its first general declaration of purpose. The photography section included Viktor Gruntal', Boris Ignatovich, B. Zhemchuzhnii, Karmen, Abram Shterenberg, Ol'ga Ignatovich, Elizaveta Ignatovich, Moriakin, Elizar Langman, and Dmitrii Debabov.²⁶ In addition, the heads of various *fotokruzhki* (photo workshops) were accepted into the October group (many photojournalists of the 1930s came out of such *fotokruzhki*). What connected the members of the October photography section was their interest not in art photography but in photojournalism, which was supposed to agitate the masses in favor of the *novyi byt* (new way of life). It was also an



fig. 5
Elizar Langman
Old and New Semenovka, 1931.
Photograph, 28.6 x 17.4 cm.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

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obligation on the part of all responsible photojournalists to be affiliated with newspapers and magazines in addition to the *fotokruzhki* at the factories and collective farms. In the photography section's program, a special emphasis was given to distinguishing the October members' methods from those practiced in "left photography like Man Ray's, Moholy-Nagy's, etc."²⁷ This indicates once again that Rodchenko and his colleagues no longer defended the use of formal devices apart from the necessity of emphasizing crucial aspects of a productive process. All the ideas endorsed on the pages of *New Lef* in 1928 are summarized in one of the passages of the October photography program:

We are for a revolutionary photography aesthetically unconnected with either the traditions of autonomous painting or the non-objectivity of "left photography." We are for a revolutionary photography, materialist, socially grounded, and technically well equipped, one that sets itself the aim of promulgating and agitating for a socialist way of life and a Communist culture. We are against "Akhrovshchina" ("AKhRRism") . . . flag-waving patriotism in the form of spewing smokestacks and identical workers with hammers and sickles . . . We are against picturesque (emphasis added) photography and pathos of an old, bourgeois type."²⁸

There were two major public showings of photography produced by the October group members. The first, in 1930, was part of a general October group exhibition at Gor'kii Park. The photography section included the periodical *Radioslushatel'* (*Radio Listener*), with photographic illustrations by Rodchenko, Ignatovich, and Gruntal', as well as Rodchenko's photographs of the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii, Moscow buildings, and a series of an automobile factory entitled *AMO*. The second exhibition opened at the House of Publishing in May of 1931 and was entirely dedicated to photography, presenting the photography section not as a subdivision of the October association but as a separate entity. It was during this second event that a conflict between the October photography section and ROPF, whose members also participated in the exhibition, began. A declaration by ROPF was published in *Proletarskoe foto* (*Proletarian Photo*) in 1931 and signed by the photographers Semen Fridliand, Shaikhet, Al'pert, Iakov Khalip, and others. Although in that text they assert that they "are not against unusual angles of observation and shifted positions of the camera during photographing,"²⁹ they nonetheless accuse Rodchenko and other "left" photographers of following the path of Western photo-practitioners such as Moholy-Nagy, and thus confine the problematics of the October photographers within the context of Formalist issues, rather than realizing that the true argument concerned a conflict between two different visions of "social being."

Thus, although Rodchenko and other October members insisted on their notion of the "how" as a functional rather than aesthetic element, their critics continued to associate their goals with Formalist photographic discourse as it presented itself in the West. As a result, ROPF's members and a number of critics refused to accept the October production as press photography. In response to the October-ROPF exhibition, the critic L. Mezhericher, for one, claimed that the photographs exhibited by October were not press photography but an aestheticized production, and that since Rodchenko negated the importance of content, he negated photojournalism to its core. In a specific discussion of works such as Langman's *Kruzhevitsa* (*Lacemaker*, 1931, fig. no. 6), which Mezhericher calls the "apogee of Formalism," he expresses his appreciation of its technical mastery yet labels it a "typical aesthetic snapshot, an example of a senseless adoration of a fragment of reality plucked from its surroundings without reason."³⁰ Both



fig. 6
Elizar Langman
Lacemaker, 1931.
Photograph, 22.2 x 29.2 cm.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.





figs. 7, 8, 9

Maks Al'pert and Arkadii Shaikhet

*From the series, Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of the
Working-Class Filippov Family, 1931.*

Photographs, printed from original negatives, 22.1 x 28.5 cm each (left),

29 x 22.3 cm (above).

Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

Mezhericher and the authors of the ROPF declaration, in their criticism of October's production, adopt a stance of "confidence in the possibility of deducing political and ideological positions from a protocol of purely formal properties of a work of art."¹⁷ In the 1930s this "criterion," which Jameson, among other authors, attributes to Lukács, was rapidly becoming a vital weapon against anyone who continued to diverge from conventional methods of representation.

By raising a question about the "substance of form" in regard to the press photograph, Mezhericher brings us to Roland Barthes's later analysis of the same issue, and specifically to Barthes's assessment that the press photograph embodies the "co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the 'art,' or the treatment, or the 'writing,' or the rhetoric, of the photograph)."¹⁸ It was precisely the presence of the second "message" that set October's photography apart from ROPF's.

Mezhericher's critique of Langman's *Lacemaker* as a "fragment of reality plucked from its surroundings" brings us to the larger context of the Marxist crusade against fragmentation. Mezhericher, like all other critics, photographers, and painters who fit into the Lukácsian model of Realism, believed that they were realizing Marx's project of emancipation, whose most fundamental characteristic was "to make the world whole, to connect the disconnected." By trying to organize the world into a single "photo picture," the ROPF photographers mistook this artificial unity for Marx's holistic drive to overcome fragmentation and alienation. As far as the "whole" is concerned, its "reunification" in ROPF's oeuvre is chiefly iconic, whereas October's choice is usually an indexical representation of a supposedly similar (but detached) referent via its fragment, a part which in turn premises a context-establishing totality. October's photography, as fragmented as it looked, pointed to the life beyond the frame and thus aimed at a much more global model of "reunification."¹⁹

In a strict sense, fragmentation is not a purely artistic device; it was initially hypothesized as the state of reality caused by the "nonorganic" phenomena of capitalism. From Marx's utopian standpoint, the course of reality is characterized by its departure from fragmentation toward unity. Such a paradigm of dialectical change was (in Marx's opinion) identifiable with progress, for as Hegel had said, "the truth is the whole." In the early 1930s, the Soviet mythmaking apparatus claimed that the limits of progress had been reached, such that reality ceased to be fragmented. The State required that artists implement this ideological claim via closing up (i.e., framing) the representational system. As a result, photographers were forced more and more to include images which would identify referents for the masses' aspirations other than those based solely on the desire for production. If before photographers aimed at avoiding identifying political personalities and instead concentrated on the representation of the anonymous masses and the process of voting, coal mining, or constructing itself, now they were required to include the portraits of Stalin and/or Lenin as those people in whose name all the activities were performed. To see this difference, one may compare Gustav Klutsis's poster *Vypolnim plan velikikh rabot* (*Let Us Fulfill the Plan of Great Projects*, 1930), in which the artist reduces representation to just voting hands, with Arkadii Shishkin's photograph *My za kolkhoz!* (*Voting Unanimously for the Kolkhoz*, 1929). In the latter, not only are the workers and peasants themselves shown but a portrait of Stalin, cropped yet ever present, is included. This photograph aims at not allowing the viewer to equate Stalin, the authority, with what Kant (following Plato) called *parergon* (supplement).

In addition to Langman's *Lacemaker*, a number of other



fig. 10
Elizar Langman
Gymnastics on Radio, 1931.
Photograph, 29.2 x 21.9 cm.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

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photographs exhibited at the House of Publishing met harsh criticism in the press precisely because they continued to refrain from the politics of framing. Rodchenko's *Pioner-trubach* (*Young Pioneer with a Horn*, 1930, fig. no. 12), Langman's *Gimnastika po radio* (*Gymnastics on Radio*, 1931, fig. no. 10), and Ignatovich's *Novaia Moskva* (*New Moscow*, 1931, fig. no. 11) were all cited as bad examples of press photography. *Young Pioneer with a Horn* is photographed from a worm's-eye view; both horn and Young Pioneer are severely fragmented. Langman's gymnasts are photographed in extreme close-up and are set within very complex spatial relationships, allowing the photographer to blur the distinction between the top and the bottom of the image. Similarly, Ignatovich's representation of Moscow is focused on the clash of old values, symbolized by the image of a cathedral, and the new revolutionary aspirations, expressed through political banners whose messages are broken up into syllables.

All three photographs are based on the structural concept of "deframing" (*décadrage*), which, according to Gilles Deleuze, is not "programmatically justified" and which designates abnormal points of view but is not the same as an oblique perspective or a paradoxical angle (precisely what was meant earlier as a change in the function of the "how").⁴ These points of view refer to another dimension of an image which resides beyond all narrative or, more generally, pragmatic justification, perhaps tending to confirm that the visual image has a legible function beyond its visible function. Deframing refers to an "absolute aspect by which the closed system opens onto a duration which is imminent to the whole universe, which is no longer a set, and does not belong to the order of the visible."⁵ In this sense, the comment made by the critic I. Bokhonov about Rodchenko's photograph *Pionerka* (*Young Pioneer Girl*, 1930, fig. no. 13)—"Why is [she] looking upward? [The Young Pioneer Girl has no right to look upward,] that has no ideological content. Pioneer Girls and Komsomol Girls should look forward"—is not, as John Bowlt believes, an "absurd criticism."⁶ Rather, it exposes the conflict between the politics of "framing," identified here as "forward," and the politics of "deframing," which is "upward." For Soviet ideologues, "forward"—that is, the horizontal or diachronic (read Lukácsian)—fitted into the domain of the visible future; whereas "upward"—that is, the vertical or synchronic (read Brechtian)—was synonymous with the unknown, unseen, and unpredictable.

The increasing criticism of the October group's photography, the exclusion of Rodchenko from the association in 1932, and the disbanding of the photographic section itself coincide with a general persecution of avant-garde art in the early 1930s. In his discussion of the Brecht-Lukács debate, Peter Burger identifies nonorganic works of art with the avant-garde and positions organic work as a defender of the illusion of a world that is whole.⁷ Such an analysis explains why the Soviet establishment was becoming increasingly supportive of the organic work of art and suppressing the nonorganic. Political pressures demanded the reign of illusion and a simulation of collective unity rather than the reflection of what even Lukács calls the "alienated inner lives of individuals" unable "to transcend the atomistic and fragmented worlds."⁸ Beginning in 1932, the politics of deframing employed by the avant-garde photographers was being suppressed by the ideological enterprise of incarnating the "whole," which soon after crystallized into the huge metalinguistic system known as Socialist Realism.⁹

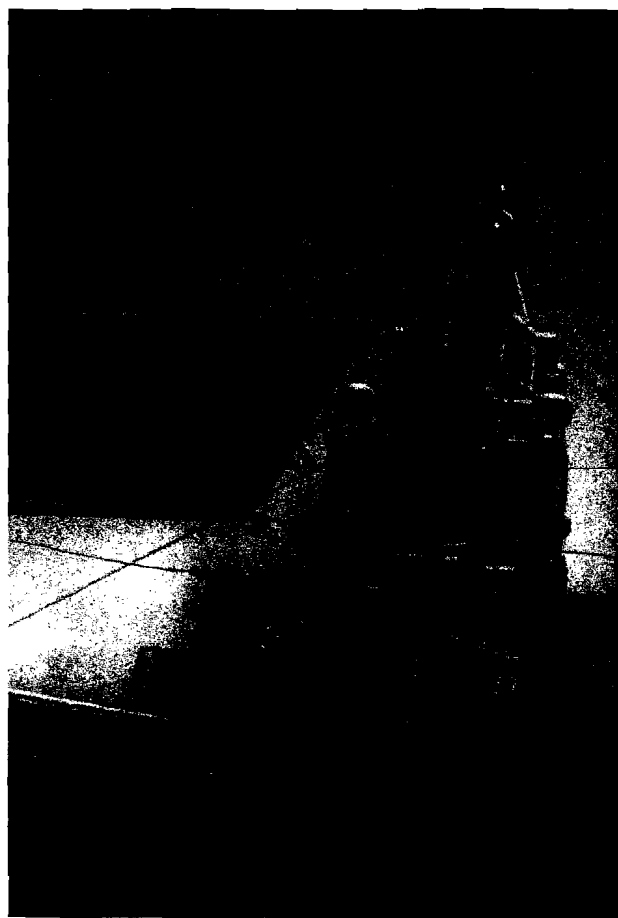


fig. 11
Boris Ignatovich
New Moscow, 1931.
Photograph, printed from original negative, 28.6 x 19.6 cm.
Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.



fig. 12
Aleksandr Rodchenko
 Young Pioneer with a Horn, 1930.
 Photograph, printed from original negative, 27 x 23.1 cm.
 Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.

fig. 13
Aleksandr Rodchenko
 Young Pioneer Girl, 1930.
 Photograph, printed from original negative, 29.3 x 20.6 cm.
 Courtesy Margarita Tupitsyn.



Notes

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1. A. Shaikhet, "Sorevnovanie foto-reporterov razvertyvaetsia," *Sovetskoe foto* 23 (December 1929), p. 713.
2. Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Doklad Rodchenko o sotsial'nom znachenii fotografii," 1930, A. Rodchenko and V. Stepanova Archive, Moscow.
3. Ibid.
4. Osip Brik, "Foto-kadr protiv kartiny," *Sovetskoe foto* 2 (1926), p. 41, as translated in David Elliott, ed., *Alexander Rodchenko*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), p. 90.
5. Victor Ehrlich, *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine*, 2d rev. ed. (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1965), p. 120.
6. See, for example, Ossip Brik, "The Photograph versus the Painting," trans. John E. Bowlt, in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989), pp. 213–18.
7. Brik, "Foto-kadr protiv kartiny," p. 42, as translated in Elliott, *Alexander Rodchenko*, p. 91.
8. Osip Brik, "Ot kartiny k foto," *Novyi Lef* 3 (1928), pp. 29–33.
9. Ibid., p. 33.
10. Aleksandr Rodchenko, "Predosterezhenie," *Novyi Lef* 11 (1928), p. 37.
11. Alexander Rodchenko, "A Caution," trans. John E. Bowlt, in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, p. 265.
12. Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), vol. 2, p. 141.
13. Sergei Tretyakov, "From the Editor," trans. John E. Bowlt, in Phillips, *Photography in the Modern Era*, p. 272.
14. Rodchenko, "Doklad Rodchenko o sotsial'nom znachenii fotografii," 1930. Rodchenko is most likely referring here to the drawings by Aleksandr Deineka which were published in *Let's Produce!* along with his and Ignatovich's photographs.
15. Boris Ignatovich, notebook, Collection of the Ignatovich Family, Moscow.
16. Ibid.
17. Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America*, April 1988, p. 167.
18. Ibid.
19. The legacy of the Lukács–Brecht debate is crucial for understanding how revolutionary art of the 1920s and early 1930s degenerated into Stalinist mythos. Neither name was unfamiliar to Soviet contemporaries—artists, critics, and photographers—since both Georg Lukács and Bertolt Brecht actively discussed their cultural views in such Moscow publications as the journal *Das Wort* (*The Word*). Lukács lived in Moscow and together with the philosopher Mikhail Livshits was instrumental in shaping the basic principles of Socialist Realism. Contrary to Lukácsian "messianic Marxism" with its philosophy of the "totality," Brecht's cultural strategy was in some ways akin to Mikhail Bakunin's "critical Marxism"—which adds one more link between Russia and Brecht.
20. Bois, "El Lissitzky," p. 169.
21. Ibid.
22. Aleksandr Lavrent'ev, "Kadriuet Aleksandr Rodchenko," *Sovetskoe foto* 1 (1978), p. 34.
23. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 14.
24. Ibid.
25. Jameson, *Ideologies of Theory*, vol. 2, p. 139.
26. The October group was the first to admit women as photojournalists.
27. *Izofront. Klassovaia bor'ba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv. Sbornik statei ob'edineniia Oktiabr'* (Leningrad and Moscow: Izofront, 1931), p. 150.
28. Ibid., pp. 149–50.
29. Semen Fridliand et al., "Prodolzhaem tvorchestvu diskussiiu," *Proletarskoe foto* 2 (1931), p. 14.
30. L. Mezhericher, "Segodniashnii den' sovetskogo reportazha," *Proletarskoe foto* 1 (1931), p. 10.
31. Jameson, *Ideologies of Theory*, vol. 2, pp. 136–37.
32. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Image," in *Image–Music–Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 19. "Substance of form" is an ironic term coined by Barthes to ridicule Zhdanovism. See Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in his *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 112.
33. See Alvin W. Gouldner, *Against Fragmentation: The Origins of Marxism and the Sociology of Intellectuals* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).
34. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
35. Ibid., p. 17.
36. See John Bowlt, "Alexander Rodchenko as Photographer," in *The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910–30: New Perspectives*, catalogue for exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980), p. 57. Bokhonov made this comment at a meeting of the selection committee for the *Moskovskie masters fotoiskusstva* (*Moscow Masters of Photo Art*) exhibition in March 1935.
37. Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 86.
38. Raman Selden, *Contemporary Literary Theory* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), p. 34.
39. Ironically, the story of the October–ROPF controversy, interpreted here within the framework of the Lukács–Brecht debate, came to a close in 1936, after a series of articles connected with another debate between Formalism and Naturalism were reported in the press under the rubric "Perestroika [Restructuring] of an Artist." These debates and discussions continued to echo in the postwar period. See Margarita Tupitsyn, "Veil on Photo: Metamorphoses of Supplementarity in Soviet Art," *Arts Magazine*, November 1989, pp. 79–84.