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**“Nobody Understands What is Beautiful and What is Not:” Governing
Soviet Amateur Photography, Photography Clubs and the Journal
*Sovetskoe foto***

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“Nobody Understands What is Beautiful and What is Not:” Governing Soviet Amateur Photography, Photography Clubs and the Journal *Sovetskoe foto*

In January 1957, the Soviet Ministry of Culture resumed publication of the premiere photography journal of the Soviet Union, *Sovetskoe foto* (*The Soviet Photograph*) after a sixteen-year hiatus. At this time, the relative openness of the cultural Thaw fostered a “climate of enthusiasm” among amateur photographers, who were eager to learn from the professional photographers and editors of *Sovetskoe foto*. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, amateur and professional photographers alike sought to establish particular aesthetic standards in photography in an attempt to receive State funding and better educational opportunities. The question of who should regulate and censor amateur activities and aesthetics, however, remained ambiguous.

Keywords: Amateur Photography; Soviet Photography; Photojournalism; Photography Clubs

In 1928, Soviet artist and photographer Aleksandr Rodchenko voiced his frustration with the photographic community while attempting to explain the features and cultural role of photography: “Damn it, nobody knows what is beautiful and what is not” (Johnson 2004, 112). Rodchenko’s irritation with his colleagues and fellow photographers occurred as a result of modernist photographers’ differing opinions about photography’s documentary and aesthetic properties. Yet, by the late 1950s, as amateur photography and photography clubs became popular in the Soviet Union, these words could easily have been uttered by any number of photographers who were demanding the further regulation of amateur photography. For the first time since the revolution, the relative economic stability and focus on consumer products in the mid-1950s allowed for the production of more photography equipment than ever before, for a public that was increasingly interested in photography. This article investigates the phenomenon and growth of amateur photography and photography clubs in the era of the cultural Thaw, how they were regulated, and why photographers requested further attention from the State in the amateur sphere. I argue that in an effort to gain the trappings and benefits of unionized cultural workers, including education, technical training and consistent distribution of photographic materials, the editorial staff at the journal *Sovetskoe foto* (*The Soviet Photo*) and amateur photographers began petitioning for additional State involvement in amateur photography, including the creation of a worker’s union specifically devoted to the medium. I furthermore show that lack of State intervention in the censorship of photography led photography clubs, critics and the editors at *Sovetskoe foto* to develop their own means and methods of regulating amateur activities. This was in part an opportunistic attempt to improve the cultural status of amateur photography and photography in general. In the media hierarchy of the Soviet Union, photographers found themselves outside prestigious artistic circles. Calls for the professionalization and further regulation of amateur photography were part of a concerted effort to elevate the role of the photographer in Soviet culture. The importance of this article is to show how amateurism was managed during the Cultural Thaw of the Soviet 1950s and 1960s, and particularly how photography clubs and *Sovetskoe foto* contributed to the development of regulatory structures that both took advantage of the cultural liberties the period afforded them, while simultaneously trying to define and control the parameters of these freedoms.

The Cultural Thaw and Photography

The Khrushchev Thaw roughly refers to the period between 1953 and 1964 and, as the moniker suggests, was a period of government relaxation of repressive Stalinist policies. Khrushchev's Thaw (a term drawn from Ilya Erhenberg's 1954 novel *Ottepel'* or *The Thaw*) ushered in social, economic, and cultural reforms that had a profound impact on Soviet society. Violence as a means of repression ended, and the government pursued the selective rehabilitation of exiled political prisoners and excised cultural practices (including modernist photographic aesthetics from the 1920s and 1930s) (Werneke 2017, 264-291). As a result, the Thaw had a profound impact on Soviet culture: The government loosened censorship policies, which allowed for greater artistic freedom. Thus, the cultural Thaw provided an environment well-suited for the development of organized amateur activity. The growth of amateur photography and photography clubs in the 1950s and 1960s was partially the result of economic diversification and relaxation of media control, but also public interest.ⁱ At the time, many amateur photographers were involved and invested, or at least willingly participated, in the process of being productive, active citizens, as the Party and government desired. Amateur photographers were participating in the types of social engagement and cultural production supported by the Party's calls for productive leisure. Productive leisure in the 1950s and 1960s "was to contribute to the integration of the individual, to allow her full self-possession and realization of her human essence as well as restoring her for the next day's labor" (Crowley et al. 2010, 30).

The cultural Thaw corresponded with the reestablishment of the journal *Sovetskoe foto* in 1956. Originally established in 1926, it resumed publication in January 1957 after being shut down during World War II. *Sovetskoe foto* was a monthly Russian-language periodical, roughly forty-five to fifty pages in length, and included articles about photojournalism, artistic photography and exhibitions. It also contained pieces devoted to photography criticism and practical advice for amateurs about their images as well as camera models and technical equipment. In the 1950s the journal published only black-and-white images, though by the 1960s it also included glossy color covers and inserts. While exact circulation figures are difficult to establish in the 1950s and 1960s, circulation reached 240,000 issues per month in the 1970s (Ergaeva 2012, 332). Published by *Iskusstvo* (Art), one of the central publishing houses of the Ministry of Culture, *Sovetskoe foto* became the primary setting for photojournalists and amateur photographers to view and discuss each other's work. As the only print forum that was specifically devoted to photography, its contemporary cultural role in professional and

amateur communities cannot be underestimated. In addition to the featured advice for amateurs, as well as articles on photography criticism and theory that were generally accessible to the average (though informed) reader, it also advertised, promoted and coordinated amateur club events and exhibitions. As a historical source, it serves as a means of evaluating how critics, professionals and amateurs interacted, but also demonstrates how editors sought to influence and manage the amateur community. It also increasingly promoted a self-imposed hierarchical system of enforcing particular aesthetic standards, technical practices, and club activities.

In investigating the censorship of amateur activities, I utilize articles and correspondence letters published in *Sovetskoe foto*. While these are not unproblematic sources, they can be used to determine the tenor and narrative of amateurism that editors and critics at the journal wished to convey, and also what critics and photojournalists required of their amateur colleagues, both aesthetically and technically (Kozlov 2006, 557-597). While there were no complete statistics on amateur letters sent to the journal, as Kristen Bonker noted in her work on letters to Soviet television networks, “letters offer a variety of values and preferences well worth examining, because these values and preferences were mostly voiced by Soviet individuals” (Bonker 2015, 372). In sending letters to *Sovetskoe foto*, individuals (or in some cases specific photography clubs), were bridging the intermediate space between the private, or personal, and public spheres (381). Yes, there were certain formulaic structures that amateur letter-writers followed in their complaints and requests for guidance. Letters “functioned as a channel of ritualized criticism. Even if many of them pointed to consumer or other grievances they should not be interpreted as being in basic disagreement with the existing order” (397). In this way, amateur photographers who wrote to *Sovetskoe foto* about, for example, problems with the distribution of camera equipment, were not challenging Soviet economic and political order. Instead, it suggests that letter-writers believed these minor problems could be remedied. At the same time, they were also engaging in and contributing to a dialogue of sorts that brought the personal into the public sphere and vice versa. Furthermore, the format of the journal (multiple reoccurring sections devoted to amateur photographs and questions) invited and encouraged reader participation and feedback. In publishing the content of amateur letters, many of which were critical of the current state of affairs, the journal helped craft an account of perceived deficiencies in the way the Soviet government managed the needs and desires of professional and amateur photographers (shortages of camera equipment

and lack of education). Included in this narrative were calls for economic assistance for photography clubs, as one might expect, but alternatively they also requested aesthetic regulation, assistance in the expansion of higher education and vocational programs, and a union specifically devoted to photography.

In recent years, many scholars have assessed the cultural Thaw and productive leisure from the perspective of a variety of artistic media, including film, literature and architecture. Despite the uncertainty of the Khrushchev era, optimism and enthusiasm for cultural change underscored intellectual arguments for artistic and aesthetic innovation in all creative spheres (Zubok 2009, 22). The limited openness of the Thaw produced an atmosphere of optimism amongst the intelligentsia, of which photographers were an integral part. As Polly Jones has shown in her research, even the cultural elite whose work was subjected to the fits and starts of the Thaw expressed optimism about the future of Soviet culture in the 1950s and 1960s (Jones 2013, 253). Intellectuals “expressed a surprising confidence in the Thaw. It would win out over its ‘dogmatic’ and ‘ill-disposed’ opponents because those opponents were in the minority...liberalization was moving forward, buoyed by the support of the majority” (254). This positive outlook, was shared by professional and amateur photographers who, by the mid-1950s, began to reinvestigate the aesthetic and technical aspects of modernist photography and craft their own assertions about photography’s place in Soviet cultural institutions. There are many examples of professional and amateur photographer’s optimism in *Sovetskoe foto* in the late 1950s regarding the improvement of their status within the artistic community, and confidence in greater access to cameras and equipment, education, the formation of a Photographer’s Union which would consolidate production and the organization of amateur clubs. Many of these published articles and letters were critical of the contemporary state of photography, following the format of 1930s complaint and advice letters outlined by Shelia Fitzpatrick, but also voiced hope for the future (Fitzpatrick 1996, 86-9).ⁱⁱ

Unlike other media, where “pleas for...the elimination of bureaucratism” reigned among liberal cultural icons, photojournalists, theorists and the editorial collective at the journal *Sovetskoe foto* actually sought to increase the infrastructure and bureaucratic mechanisms that supported professional and amateur photographers (Kozlov et al. 2013, 50). Paradoxically, the very lack of strict official regulation meant that photographers were

allowed a greater measure of artistic and creative freedom, opportunities which were not necessarily afforded to unionized cultural workers. As a result, amateur photographers were able to experiment without much in the way of government intervention (Woll 2000, 59-60). In the absence of regulatory structures that covered the gamut of photography genres (scientific, artistic, documentary, photojournalism, amateurism), State censorship of photographs that were not widely circulated in the press was nearly non-existent. Yet, the history of amateur photography and professional photography in the 1950s and 1960s reveals a complex system of semi-official (dictated by professional photographers, *Sovetskoe foto* and enforced by local clubs) and unofficial censorship (imposed by individuals within the club hierarchy). In the post-Stalinist era, censorship and regulation of amateur photography was largely self-imposed either from professional photographers or in local clubs.ⁱⁱⁱ As I explain below, the reasoning behind the formation of these semi-official regulatory structures was to improve the overall cultural standing of photography. The State regarded photography purely as a source of visual documentary information, rather than an artistic pursuit, whereas photojournalists, critics and contributors to *Sovetskoe foto* believed that it performed a more creative and artistic social function.^{iv}

Archival sources indicate that, especially in the Soviet Republics, while the establishment of photography clubs was a direct result of the initiatives of the USSR Ministry of Culture (which, beginning in 1957, promoted local amateur photography exhibitions in each Republic as part of an attempt to diversify All-Union photography competitions), the subsequent growth of clubs was the result of individual interest.^v Despite this top-down initiative, many clubs were self-regulating and did not have strong ties to either central or local cultural authorities (Tifentale 2011, 2012). The sheer number of clubs, as well as the varying skill levels of club participants, geographical location, and the size of the club meant that access to education, a perpetual concern of critics and photojournalists, was uneven at best. Clubs also initially lacked clear creative direction as to what constituted “acceptable” or “successful” photographs. Despite the size of and number of Soviet bureaucratic organs, “there was no clear and consistent policy for photography for the whole of the Soviet Union, since there was no organization that was responsible for the coordination of photographic activity, and thus, the latter was scattered across newspapers’ and magazines’ editorial offices and amateur photography clubs” (Michelkevicius 2011, 101). The primary arbiter of photographic knowledge, *Sovetskoe foto*, could contain seemingly contradictory information, but did provide examples of

“good” and “bad” photographs, as well as lists of acceptable topics and criticism of individual amateur photographs.

Nevertheless, a number of letters selected for publication in *Sovetskoe foto* requested more official intervention: hundreds of letters to the editors of the journal reveal that amateurs who wrote to *Sovetskoe foto* wanted a Photography Union, similar to the defunct *Souizfoto* which was liquidated in 1938, that would cover all areas of camera production, education, dissemination of images and, by extension, further official involvement in amateur club activities.^{vi} Lacking the development of other supervisory structures, community censorship and regulation emerged in which photographers themselves were controlling and enforcing particular aesthetic styles through criticism, publication and circulation.^{vii} Amateurs who attended photography clubs found that gradually these clubs, which were initially informal groups for those who shared in their love of photography as a hobby, were becoming increasingly hierarchical not from State intervention, but at the initiative of club members.

A Brief History of Early Amateur Photography and *Sovetskoe foto*

Amateur photography, and the freedom afforded to amateur photographers in the mid-1950s and into the early 1960s, was an anomaly, even in the limitedly liberalized Khrushchev era. This was partially due to government and Party interest in promoting amateur photography as productive leisure but also due to the contrariness of official Soviet concepts about photography’s inability to lie, despite previous “false” depictions of Soviet life in the Stalinist period (Reid 1994, 33; Michelkevicius 2011, 117; Dickerman 2000, 143). Photographer’s Thaw era efforts at institution building and professionalization produced mixed results. Photographers, theorists and the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* were successfully able to reopen debates about modernist aesthetics, a topic that was forcibly removed from collective conversation in the 1930s. Yet, while they enjoyed this aspect of their freedom which was not available to unionized artists, they encouraged photography clubs to reproduce the stylistic and bureaucratic hegemony of official Soviet artistic unions, and continually appealed for their own Photographer’s Union (Rueschemeyer et al. 1985, 37). They also implored government authorities for further education for amateur and professional photographers.

As a part of Stalin's consolidation of visual and news media, by the late 1920's amateur photographers were brought into line with Party activities, which curbed amateur access to cameras, development chemicals, and film (Stigneev 2011, 16-17).^{viii} Photography as a leisurely activity was abolished in 1928, bringing the amateur movement under the supervision of the Party and government. Only amateurs whose photographs the Party deemed "socially useful in content and artistic quality" were allowed to continue photographing, publishing and participating in exhibitions (*Proletarskoe foto* 1931, 2). As a result, amateur photography activities all but ground to a halt for the next thirty years. Lack of access to photographic equipment and the abolition of hobby photography effectively quashed the amateur photography and club movement even before the 1932 Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik) decree on the restructuring of literary and art organizations, which abolished informal artistic groups and collectives including the Russian Photographic Society (RFO), *Oktiabr* (October), and the Russian Association of Proletarian Photographers (ROPF) (*O perestroike* 1932).^{ix}

After Stalin's death, amateur photography in the Soviet Union became popular due in part to the relaxation of censorship, the regime's new focus on amateur productive leisure, and technological advancements brought to the Soviet Union from abroad. Initially, the Red Army removed camera equipment and film from Germany as part of war reparations, and later back engineered, copied and expanded upon this technology to create cheap mass-produced and manageable cameras, film and photographic chemicals for home use. The *Krasnogorki Mekhanicheskii Zavod* (Krasnogorsk Mechanical Factory) released the first *Zorkii* camera model, based on the German Leica II, in 1948 and the *Zenit* in 1952, though it is unlikely they were widely available to the average consumer at the time (nor were they a priority in reconstructing the post-war economy). That being said, there were enough cameras available in 1953 for the establishment of the first post-war, then four-member, VDK Photography Club, named after their meeting place at Leningrad's *Vyborg Dvorets Kul'tury* (Vyborg Palace of Culture). It was only after Stalin's death that camera production was increased, and the cost sufficiently decreased, for the foundation of photography clubs across the Soviet Union.^x The general increase in the Soviet material standard of living which accompanied the Thaw meant that, for the first time in history, cameras became available to virtually every Soviet family (Degot 2004, 113).

By the early 1960s, amateur photographers in the Soviet Union had a number of formal and informal ways to become involved in the photographic community, through *Sovetskoe foto*, which invited amateur submissions for publication, and through local clubs.^{xi} Between meetings, seminars and photography competitions amateurs had many opportunities to discuss their images not only with one another, but with professionals, as the journal *Sovetskoe foto* was often involved in the organization or advertising of events on some level (*Sovetskoe foto* No. 1 1926, 1957). In accordance with one of the original goals of the journal from its establishment in 1926, each issue of *Sovetskoe foto* offered a number of articles about amateur photography including instructions on cropping images and technical aspects of various camera models. Each month there were also articles in which prominent photojournalists would critique photographs of amateur photographers sent to the editorial committee. Nearly every issue contained a selection of published letters from amateur photographers and photography clubs.

Especially in 1957 and 1958, *Sovetskoe foto* devoted special attention to amateur questions and letters to the editorial committee, which were featured in almost every issue of the journal. These letters ranged in subject, but many were devoted to calls for education, the organization of local clubs, and amateur rights to their photographs. While the letter writers did not necessarily receive a response, at the very least the journal offered a public forum in which to air amateur grievances. For instance, in August 1957, amateur photographer A. Korenevskii wrote about the recent liquidation of his local factory photography club. Much to his dismay, after a few meetings of the club, and after club members purchased or acquired cameras, the factory accountant shut the club down due to costs (Korenevskii 1957, 76). According to Korenevskii, it was the duty of the factory to facilitate (and pay for) the initial start-up costs of the club. Referring directly to productive leisure, he asked “Is it not necessary [for the factory] to care about satisfying the cultural demands of the working people?” (76). In another letter to *Sovetskoe foto* complaining about amateur’s rights, Yuri Vorob’ev wrote that in 1956, a local journal advertised a photography contest for amateurs who wished to publish their work. By the following year, not only had Vorob’ev’s photographs not been published, but the journal refused to return his prints (Vorob’ev 1957, 76).

Thus, the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto* came at a time when amateur photographers were beginning to conceptualize their new role in post-Stalinist Soviet society. While the

cultural and economic policies of the Thaw provided access to cameras, *Sovetskoe foto* editors stepped in to broaden the dialogue about amateur photography, and provided a forum for advice, complaints, and discussion.

Amateurism, Education and Complaint Letters

The fluidity of the categories “amateur” and “professional” in relationship to Soviet photography was one of the main reasons *Sovetskoe foto* editors were concerned about the regulation of amateurism. Amateurs were often hired as photojournalist-correspondents by provincial newspapers, but it was not uncommon for amateur images to find their way into publications with a wider readership. There are many examples of amateur photographers who went on to pursue their hobby as a career, including V. Iakobson who was hired a photojournalist at *Pravda*, G. Kuposov and L. Sherstennikov who worked for *Ogonek* (*Little Flame*), Vladimir Bogdanov who worked primarily for the *Literaturnaia Gazeta* (*Literary Newspaper*), but whose work was also published in numerous other journals, and Aleksandr Makarov who was hired by *Novosti Press* (*News Press*) (Stigineev 2011, 263). The editors at *Sovetskoe foto* were concerned about the circulation of poor images by inadequately trained and uneducated amateurs in the press, because it debased the profession of photojournalism (Volkov-Lannit 1962, 1; Friedland 1962, 32; Filipov 1964, 1). Thus, it was of utmost importance that amateurs create images that conformed to the same professional technical and aesthetic standards as photojournalists.

Lack of formal educational structures informed arguments about aesthetics and the role *Sovetskoe foto* and professional photographers played in the photographic community. Access to higher education, technical training, and again, the desire for the establishment of a Photographer’s Union that could adequately address the role of photography in Soviet cultural institutions, were ever present concerns for *Sovetskoe foto* editors and professional photographers. D. Sherbakov and B. Stechkin, along with a number of other academics and photographers, published “Photography Needs an Organization” in the December 1957 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*. Sherbakov and his co-authors highlighted the demands of photographers across the country who were in “desperate” need of “photo-technical and creative help” (Sherbakov 1957, 3). Drawing attention to the RFO, which was founded over seventy years earlier, Sherbakov appealed to the editors at *Sovetskoe foto* to discuss the possibility of a formal organization with the Ministry of Culture and

the Union of Journalists. This organization, once established, would encourage innovation both in the scientific and artistic capabilities of photography. It would also provide lectures, seminars and workshops for amateur photographers. Led by photojournalists, critics and theorists, the All-Union photography organization would unify all areas of photography, from professional and amateur photography to regulating and distributing development chemicals and photo paper.^{xii} While the Union of Journalists tended to the needs of photojournalists, providing jobs, equipment, and exhibition space, it neglected all other photographers and did not control the production of camera related materials.

Sherbakov's main concern was that amateur photographers did not know how to produce acceptable photographs for themselves. "It is no secret," Sherbakov wrote, "that because of the absence of staff and public control, amateur photos are sometimes slipshod portraits" which "impart bad artistic taste to the worker" (Sherbakov 1957, 3). Sherbakov argued that it was important to educate photography enthusiasts about technical skills and that journalists, theorists, and local clubs should become more involved in the regulation and dissemination of amateur photography. A comprehensive educational structure would not only improve amateur photographers' work, but also help create a more centralized and professional future generation of photographers. An All-Union institution for the advancement of photo-technical education would show professional and amateur photographers how to channel their creativity into more acceptable and ideologically sound photographs.

In response to Sherbakov's article, German Mikhailovich Mutovkin, chairman of the board of the VDK Photography Club, and his colleagues A Denisin and I. Mikhailovskii published "We are for an Organization for Photographers" in the January 1958 issue of *Sovetskoe foto*. Mutovkin, Denisin, and Mikhailovskii expressed similar concerns about the state of amateur technical education in the Soviet Union. The club members' response to Sherbakov noted that although the club worked together to confront theoretical questions about representation, photographic technology, techniques and composition, they wanted professional guidance (Mutovkin et al. 1958, 10). A formal organization including amateur and professional photographers could better address ideological, theoretical, aesthetic and technical questions. Their concerns about education were justifiable: even in higher education, amateurs keen on photography could only pursue

their interest by entering the Department of Journalism at their university or institute. The only course of study available was a two-term class on photojournalism. Students spent their first term covering the theoretical background of photography, and their second working with cameras. At the end of their second term, students received a grade based on a four-photograph portfolio: one 13x18 cm sample of architectural photography, one landscape photograph of the same size, and two 9x12 cm portraits (Sverdlovsk 1957, 14). Under these circumstances, the possibility for learning technical skills during these courses was minimal, as it was common for hundreds of students to share only a handful of cameras. This educational background was completely inadequate and left students “absolutely powerless” to produce acceptable photographs (14).

Other amateur letters complained about education and the quality of amateur images that found their way into local newspapers. I. Shiptsov, an amateur in the Stalingrad region, wrote that “We have many amateur photographers, and we take pictures from time to time. No one manages us. Therefore, our pictures cannot withstand any criticism in either technical or compositional terms” (Shiptsov 1958, 84). An anonymous letter-writer from Krasnodar complained that he wanted to learn how to photograph, but the instructions provided by *Sovetskoe foto* were not comprehensive and could not provide the full technical training necessary (*Obzor* 1960, 22). One contributor wrote that it should be a required component of primary education that children be trained in photography to solve the problem of amateur instruction, a tall order considering photographic training was not available to all interested adults (Piterskoi 1959, 35).

Another appealing aspect of Sherbakov’s calls for an All-Union photography organization was controlling the production and distribution of cameras, lenses and developing materials. From 1957 to 1962, *Sovetskoe foto* published no less than fifty-nine complaint letters specifically about the distribution of chemicals, paper and filters and the quality of goods available to amateurs. In most cases, the letter-writer or writers blamed the distribution organizations *Roskul’torg* (Russian Cultural Trade), *Posyltorg* (Mail Order Trade), *Soiuzkul’torg* (Union Cultural Trade) or the USSR Trade Ministry.^{xiii} One amateur complained that the required developing chemicals, specifically metol and hydroquinone, were not available for sale in their region (*Pis’ma* 1958, 85-6). Another explained that amateurs in Kislovodsk were delighted when a photo lab opened in the town, but were disappointed when they discovered the lab could not develop color

images. Yet, the only film available for purchase in the city was color film (*Pis'ma* 1959, 86). Two amateurs in Chelyabinsk wrote the journal stating that they wanted to learn how to photograph, so they bought a *Leningrad* camera model, only to discover there was no film for purchase in the entire city. When they acquired film, paper was no longer available, and once they obtained paper, there was no photographic fixer to be found (Mishin 1960, 42). In one remarkable instance, and one of the only letters about cameras rather than equipment, a legal representative of the Kiev *Ukroptkul'tsporttorg* (Ukrainian Cultural and Sports Wholesale Trade Organization) wrote to the journal because the Belarusian Economic Council, which was responsible for quality control of *Smena* cameras shipped to Ukraine, approved the delivery of 3,720 defective cameras to Kiev. Though the Council refunded the shipment, they continued to deliver defective cameras not only to Kiev, but Luhansk, L'viv and Kharkiv as well. As a result, *Ukroptkul'tsporttorg* was refusing to pay for the goods, but defective cameras continued to be shipped to their warehouses without further promises of reimbursement (*Pis'ma* 1962, 36). Based on letters written to *Sovetskoe foto*, amateur photographers and even distributors, desired further regulation across the board, from training to the acquisition of goods.

While *Sovetskoe foto* editors could not control the distribution of materials, they set about tackling the issue of education. Lacking university and State institutions to regulate amateur activity, photojournalists and theorists at *Sovetskoe foto* sought to guide the work of amateurs in order to control the content and spread of their images. In 1960, the Union of Journalists, collaborating with amateur photo clubs and *Sovetskoe foto*, set up a two-year correspondence course in photography and photojournalism (*Sovetskoe foto* No. 8 1959, 23, 79). Though the correspondence course hardly provided a comprehensive aesthetic or photographic education, many clubs and amateurs found it to be a step in the right direction.

Advice and Aesthetics

Amateurs also requested aesthetic and creative guidance, which editors and contributors to *Sovetskoe foto* were happy to provide, and comprised a large part of each publication. Clubs realized that the elevation of photography within the hierarchy of Soviet cultural pursuits meant better access to equipment, education and exhibition opportunities. Similarly, amateur photographers confronted many of the same aesthetic questions as

professional photojournalists. *Sovetskoe foto*, likewise, treated and critiqued amateur work in much the same fashion as professional photography as a means of demonstrating the necessity of photography to the development of socialist culture. Like all visual media in the Soviet Union, if photography was to be circulated beyond the private sphere, in other words, beyond personal and private albums, it needed to conform to the dominant aesthetic, thematic and ideological standards. There was growing pressure in the pages of *Sovetskoe foto* for amateur photographers to photograph like professional photographers, reinforced by plentiful articles and examples. There was also the expectation that even within the unofficial environment of the photography club, certain styles and topics were encouraged, while others were strictly taboo. Generally, acceptable photographs should be less radical replicas of 1920s and 1930s modernist photography, shot at an angle, perhaps with some play between shadow and light in the composition (Werneke 2015, 86-151). This style tended to favor documentary photography and chronicles of everyday life. The journal devoted several sections of each journal to showcasing and discussing amateur work, but remained a journal dedicated to photojournalism. As a result, editors and contributors who critiqued amateur work favored and promoted “amateur photojournalism” in the aforementioned style.

The influence of Russian modernist photography in the 1950s and 1960s is easily identifiable and cannot be underestimated. Photojournalists in the late 1950s and early 1960s adopted a hybrid of different Russian modernist styles drawing both from the *Oktiabr* and the ROPF for inspiration. Both critics and photojournalists encouraged de-framing techniques, unique angles, and experimentation with light. A steady stream of articles about Aleksandr Rodchenko and other modernist photographers appeared in *Sovetskoe foto* beginning in 1957 (Volkov-Lannit 1961, 20). The January 1959 issue of *Sovetskoe foto* even included an article demonstrating how one could achieve the desired cropping technique (Fig. 1).

E. Volkov. *Skiing* black-and-white photographs, 1959

Many amateur photographers who submitted their photographs to *Sovetskoe foto* for critique were curious about angles and cropping techniques. Photographers, both amateur and professional, were encouraged to crop their photographs extensively, and “unnecessary detail” in photographs was discouraged. Images were to be clear, concise, and easy to understand, hence the omission of superfluous detail. According to one article, it was important that the amateur photographer, when shooting an image, “be clear about the frame of the future picture and its composition...and cut out everything unnecessary” (Seleznev 1961, 42). Amateurs who did not have access to the same technical and printing equipment as professional photojournalists needed to be particularly careful, and have an idea of the frame and angle of the final product before shooting, as extensive cropping could damage the negative and lead to a substandard image. Photographer and *Sovetskoe foto* contributor I. Seleznev pointed out that amateurs needed to be more mindful than professionals, who can “rely on subsequent trimming before printing” (42). Amateurs who relied on more sophisticated camera and printing technology, however, did not necessarily produce better pictures: “cropping and framing should be used to finalize an image, not create it” (44). Thus, ideally, amateur photographers would rely on cropping only to enhance an image, and the photograph before cropping should be decent enough to withstand criticism on its own. Critics noted that amateurs had a tendency to either crop their images too closely, or not enough, damaging the overall composition (Romanov et al. 1959, 36; Gende-Rote 1959, 33-41). Amateurs themselves chimed in and added to these critiques in their letters, some of which were subsequently published in the journal. A single photograph that was published in the August 1958 issue of the journal prompted 202 response letters from readers in three months (*Razmyshlenie* 1959, 83-4).

The letters offered advice, but were overwhelmingly critical of the image, which, in their opinion, required further cropping. When republished in 1959 the image featured an example of the appropriate cropping technique (Fig. 2).

M. Lazera, black-and-white photograph, 1959

The section in *Sovetskoe foto* titled *Pogovorim o vashikh snimkakh* (Let's Talk about Your Pictures), also catered to amateurs. Each featured photograph included a title, the location of the photograph, the camera and lens make and model, the shooting speed, and any filters used. The photographs to be discussed were selected by the editorial committee, who generally chose both “positive” and “negative” examples of amateur work. E. Ilyan's 1961 photograph *Frosty Morning* was lauded by *Sovetskoe foto*'s editorial staff, which commented that the composition demonstrated that the author had “mastered the technique of photography” because the photograph was not “overloaded with unnecessary figures” (Fig. 3) (*Pogovorim* 1961, 44). In some issues of *Sovetskoe foto*, the section *Pogovorim o vashikh snimkakh* was devoted to a particular theme or “lesson,” for amateurs. A February 1962 article, for example, focused on the vantage

point of the photographer. The author of the piece, photographer A. Komovski, lamented that amateurs rarely know what angle from which to shoot their images and that beginners tended to shoot their photographs at eye level: “photographing with this so-called normal point of view is widespread. However, these pictures...are too mundane, too boring” (Komovski 1962, 42). These sections of the journal reinforced the style and techniques used by professional photojournalists and encouraged amateurs to conform to these standards if they wished to participate in a dialogue with the journal and its contributors.

E. Ilyan, *Frosty Morning*, black-and-white photograph, 1961

Echoing the requirements for Socialist Realism in other visual media, in the 1950s and 1960s, *Sovetskoe foto* editors insisted that photographs be uniform in form and content, one should not overpower the other. Photographers should crop their images, but not too radically. They should feature their subject, but not rely too heavily on the documentary features of the medium. Style and subject should complement one another (Morozov 1958, 5, 88, 280; Pubtsov 1959, 3-9; Anatol'ev et al. 1962, 31-33). For the most part, published reviews of amateur photographs tended to be positive, with only a few negative examples, which were used to blatantly demonstrate which images were satisfactory as opposed to unacceptable. Those photographers who were chastised were chosen by the editors and contributors because their images lacked technical skill, they had submitted photographs in which style overshadowed the subject(s) of the image, or the subject(s) overshadowed style. Intentionality was also an important factor from an ideological standpoint. Editors were aghast when an anonymous amateur photographer from Ufa sent

them a photograph of his dog with a cigarette in its mouth, along with a hastily written note about the type of camera he used and the following confession: “Put simply, I shot this image for no reason” (*Fotoliubitel’* 1957, 2). The editors, who unsurprisingly did not publish the image, used the submission as a means of directing attention towards the lack of amateur regulation, stating that “lack of good governance and public organizations and the lack of specific assistance from Trade Unions negatively impact our photographers...amateurs are left on the side-lines, which adversely affects their work” (2). As *Sovetskoe foto* editors elucidated, in the absence of an All-Union photography organization, “Trade Union organizations, Palaces of Culture, Houses of Folk Art, these cultural institutions need to help amateur photographers pursue socially useful tasks and help direct their energy to socially useful work” (2). This instance perfectly illustrates the editorial board’s interest in regulating amateur photography: They wanted amateur photographers to produce images that could be deemed socially valuable. In other words, they desired amateur participation in productive leisure and insisted that amateur photography was more than a meaningless hobby or task designed to fill free time.

Regulating Amateur Photography Clubs

Recognizing the deficiencies in regulation was one matter, but practicing this regulation without the Ministry of Culture’s approval for a Photography Union was another. It would appear, however, that the development of regulatory structures originated both from *Sovetskoe foto* and individual club initiative. From four members in 1953, by 1957 Leningrad’s VDK Photography Club had grown to over 300 members (growing to nearly 500 in the 1960s) and was independently organizing its own lectures, seminars and exhibitions. (Konichev 1957, 21). The January 1957 edition of *Sovetskoe foto*, the first issue of the reestablished journal, featured the VDK in its section on amateur photography. By far the largest photography club at the time, the VDK already maintained connections to photography clubs in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Canada (21). The article, entitled “*Klub Leningradskikh fotoliubitelei*” (“Leningrad’s Amateur Club”), essentially advertised the VDK’s organization, structure and club activities for *Sovetskoe foto* readers who may be considering founding clubs of their own. The organizational and regulatory structure of the club, however, had developed through individual and local amateur initiative, rather than State intervention, and occurred prior to the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto*. In publishing “*Klub Leningradskikh*

fotoliubitelei,” however, *Sovetskoe foto* tacitly supported the VDK’s structure, hierarchy, and general membership practices.

The VDK’s membership process necessitated that amateurs be dedicated and invested in developing their technical and aesthetic expertise. Amateurs who wished to join the club were required to attend a series of “novice” lectures given by photojournalists and their more experienced amateur colleagues (Konichev 1957, 22). Once the lecture series concluded, the next step was to formally apply for candidate membership and assemble a five-photograph portfolio. The portfolio would be evaluated by current candidate members, and if approved, would then be sent to a board of full members for review. If the applicant successfully satisfied the board, they would become a candidate member and create a small personal exhibition which would be shown to members and candidate members of the club (22). If the personal exhibition was met with approval, the applicant would be awarded full membership status in the club. This rigorous and lengthy application process encouraged amateurs to apply for candidate and full membership only after they had mastered the technical aspects of photography, but it also meant that their training and subsequent inclusion in club activities relied on conforming to the dominant club aesthetics of amateur photojournalism. The point of this selective membership, as explained above, was to help amateurs produce photographs that were publishable, and this education process allowed VDK amateurs to interact with photographers who regularly contributed to newspapers, local journals, the All-Union illustrated magazines *Sovetskii soiuz* (*Soviet Union*), *Ogonek*, and TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union) which was the central agency for the distribution of news and images to Soviet newspapers (22). As a result, the VDK had an impressive record of amateurs who published in Soviet journals and newspapers: Club members’ images were published in *Leningradskaia pravda* (*Leningrad Pravda*), *Smena* (*Change*), *Vechernii Leningrad* (*Evening Leningrad*), and *Neva* (this journal took its name from the Neva river in Leningrad), to name a few (22).

The VDK prided itself on being a group open to all levels of amateur expertise, so long as prospective members were interested in improving the ideological, technical and aesthetic quality of their images. The club recognized the deficiencies of Soviet cultural institutions when it came to photography. In a *Sovetskoe foto* feature article, VDK Club member Fedor Konichev wrote “Isn’t it time that the Department of Culture of the

Leningrad Executive Committee consider the Leningrad Amateur Club an independent organization?” (Konichev 1957, 23). Konichev also accepted that there was no current precedent for an official photography organization in the Soviet Union: the RFO and modernist groups that formed in the 1920s and 1930s were independent art collectives, rather than officially recognized unions. Yet, despite lack of official recognition and regulation, the case of the VDK Photography Club demonstrates that even in the early and mid-1950s, as membership in the VDK was growing, amateur photographers in the club desired structure, organization and some form of reinforcing the particular aesthetic they strove to instill in member’s images, that of amateur photojournalism. In the absence of outside institutional structures, members of the VDK Club created their own guidelines.

Sovetskoe foto continued to publish feature articles about particular photography clubs. The March 1962 issue of the journal contained a three-page article about the photography club Taganrog and its devotion to photographic aesthetics and education. Similar in structure to the VDK Club, Taganrog (named after the city in which it was founded) placed the utmost importance on aesthetic education and training. The club chairman, Mikhail Petrovich Gromov, held a Ph.D. in philological sciences and had participated in the prestigious All-Union Exhibition *The Seven Year Plan in Action 1961* where his photographs were met with positive reviews from critics and photojournalists. The Taganrog club emphasized amateur aesthetic education, and club lectures were “devoted to the most significant aesthetic problems [of] photography... ‘On the aesthetic possibilities of photography,’ ‘Socialist Realism - the method of Soviet photography,’ etc.” (Anatoleev et al. 1962, 31). When interviewed for the article, Gromov stated that the goals of the club were to elevate the aesthetic standards of amateur reportage and photography, very much in line with the goals shared by *Sovetskoe foto* and the VDK Photography Club. In evaluating the images of its members, the club “carefully weighed the artistic merits of pictures based on their social significance.” Initially, many novice amateurs who wished to join the club struggled to produce works of the expected quality. Through practice and participation in club lectures and meetings, Gromov assured readers that after a short time amateurs yielded “works which we can seriously talk about. This is the case with almost every new member of the club” (33).

To Gromov, the skills learned in lectures, seminars, and workshops greatly increased the technical expertise and aesthetic value of amateur images. For Taganrog members, “the provisions of the Marxist-Leninist aesthetics of partisanship in art, unity of form and content are related entirely to the art of photography. These aesthetic principles form the basis of theoretical studies...they guide amateurs in their practice. Each image becomes the object of reflection” (Anatoleev et. al 1962, 32). He and other senior club members encouraged newer members “not just to copy the world, but to seek and find the main characteristics of reality, so that each picture has a certain social value” (31). In focusing on the social value of images, Gromov draws attention to how he and other members conceived of the purpose of amateur photography, that of producing a socially meaningful object and performing productive tasks not only in one’s work, but in one’s leisure activities.

Another example of the developing regulatory structures in Soviet photography clubs at the time was the *Volga* amateur club in Gorky. To become a full member of the club, applicants needed to pass a general exam and create a portfolio, which they would submit to the club board. It was required that at least five of the photographs received positive feedback from the board. If the portfolio was approved, the photographer would be invited for an interview which “entailed an assessment of the individual photographer and the ‘freshness’ of their vision.” If the candidate submitted only five photographs in their initial application, they could become a trial candidate and were required to submit at least three new works of “exhibition quality” in the following months, after which the board would again review the portfolio. If the newly submitted photographs were received positively, the candidate would become a full member. Members were required to replenish their portfolios regularly as membership was renewed annually. In their annual review, it was obligatory that members submit a report of their work. If the photographer failed to submit a report, their membership was revoked. As a result, “the annual reports were taken as seriously as personal exhibitions” (Yu 1969, 25).

The Moscow based club *Novator* (*Innovator*), which took its name from the House of Culture where it held meetings, was founded in 1961 and rapidly expanded to include hundreds of members (Bodulin 2016, 5-27). In order to support this growth, the club created different organizational sections for different photography genres, each section named after the prominent photographers who led them: The Boris Ignatovich section

was for amateur photojournalists, while the Sergei Ivanov-Alliluev section was for amateur landscape photographers (Stigineev 1990, 37). The club's location played a large role in its member's education. Access to prominent photojournalists who worked at the centrally located press agencies and professors who taught at the prestigious Moscow State University meant that the club was able to form an educational lecture and seminar program that was unrivaled by any other in the USSR. The chairman of *Novator*, Aleksandr Khlebnikov, offered lectures about applied photography. Professor and photography critic A. Zis presented lectures about photographic aesthetics, while Professor of Art History Evsei Iofis regularly lectured on photographic techniques. By 1962, *Novator* had become "a kind of photographic University" in Moscow, conducting upwards of two dozen photography events per month (37).

Smaller clubs, however, struggled to maintain this level of organizational and regulatory order. In smaller cities, amateurs did not have access to the same educational opportunities and guidance from professional photojournalists. Instead, they relied on articles in *Sovetskoe foto* to fill the gap. The high turnover of interested individuals and members that could be supported by the resources of the VDK and *Novator* (which held lectures for novice applicants consistently throughout the year), could not be maintained in smaller clubs. V. Vaneev and A. Nadezhdin, members of the *Rusakov* club, named after the Rusakov Workers Club and located on the outskirts of Moscow, wrote to *Sovetskoe foto* about the problems faced by small clubs. They explained that while their club worked tirelessly to improve the skills of all its members, inconsistent membership meant that every year "classes begin with the same basics," and that for experienced amateurs who wished for more advanced instruction, these early lessons were simply "not interesting" (Vaneev et al. 1957, 33). This further contributed to the turnover rate and lapsed membership. Low membership in the fledgling club also meant that their club was of trivial importance to Trade Union organizations and worker's clubs, which viewed amateur photography "as a tertiary business," even though it was their responsibility to contribute to socially productive worker's activities (34). Worker's clubs prioritized only the basics, "about how to handle the camera, how to develop the film and to print it. This form of practice, is of course, necessary, but it is suitable only for beginners," and did not include the necessary aesthetic education (34). Though some worker's clubs provided dark rooms and meeting halls, the spaces provided and times offered were of the lowest priority, and often club meetings of twenty or thirty members were relegated to

storerooms and closets (34). For the editors at *Sovetskoe foto*, photography critics and photojournalists, the formation of an All-Union organization was particularly important for struggling amateurs, like those at the *Rusakov* club (Stigneev 1990, 42).^{xiv}

Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s most clubs had formed some regulatory and organizational structure, even if these structures were somewhat flawed in the eyes of individual amateurs. In most clubs, there was an elected board and a charter that defined the shape of club life and outlined the “rights” of the participants, the club’s membership policy, directions for club exhibitions, and rules for future election of board members. Clubs held periodic meetings, usually once weekly or twice monthly, in which members discussed images and participated in practical exercises. These meetings culminated in an annual or bi-annual exhibition. Many clubs defined their exhibitions as an “aesthetic education” for an uneducated audience, that would hopefully draw further interest from prospective amateur photographers (Stigneev 1990, 40). Not only was their socially constructive leisure a benefit to themselves, but it provided a source of productive entertainment for exhibition audiences. *Sovetskoe foto* supported these developments because they provided a set of standard practices for clubs which in turn would lead to greater leverage in arguments for the creation of a Photographer’s Union. Amateur clubs’ desires coincided with these aims, as a photography union would provide better access to equipment and education.

Regulating Unofficial Photography

Despite the best efforts of photojournalists, critics and the editorial staff at *Sovetskoe foto* to regulate amateur activity, some amateur photographers found themselves unable or unwilling to participate in photography club activities for practical or aesthetic reasons. Further regulation and membership requirements meant that amateurs who were not committed to following demanding membership policies or who disagreed with the club on aesthetic grounds simply continued to photograph on their own without guidance. This, however, became a source of anxiety for contributors to *Sovetskoe foto* and photography club members because it transferred photography from a collective and participatory activity to an entirely unregulated individual pursuit (Roth-Ey 2007). According to *Sovetskoe foto*, and by extension, organized clubs, part of what it meant to be an amateur photographer was to be involved in the process of collective criticism.

Those who were not members of clubs or who actively rejected the advice of *Sovetskoe foto*, were thus not participating in the “correct” type of amateur leisure.

In 1966, *Sovetskoe foto* began to publish articles about the dangers of unofficial photography or what the journal termed “unaffiliated” amateurs who were not club members. “Amateur photography by nature, is public, and is essentially collective,” wrote former Taganrog member Mikhail Gromov, who had relocated to Moscow and was, by then, a frequent contributor to *Sovetskoe foto* (Gromov 1966, 12). Amateur photographers should not and “cannot withdraw and photograph only ‘for oneself’ without showing works, without discussion or argument” (12). Nor were exhibition awards an acceptable motivation for pursuing amateur photography: “The reward is not the purpose of our work, the evaluation of a work and of its result” is the purpose of amateur photography (12). Any amateur that was “not prepared for the demanding and challenging role of a photojournalist...should have nothing to do with true photography (13). A layman with a camera no longer had a place in photography clubs.

The journal endeavored to target amateurs who were not associated with clubs and attempted to draw unaffiliated photographers back into the fold of amateur clubs. Of course, for amateurs like Aleksandr Shchemliaev, who chose to actively reject the journal and disengage with its discourse, this was hardly effective. Shchemliaev, who became a prominent art photographer after the collapse of the Soviet Union, unsubscribed from *Sovetskoe foto* during his days as an amateur “and never looked at the main photographic journal” again (Shchemliaev 2012). More importantly, however, the journal was attempting to warn amateurs away from entering the ranks of unaffiliated amateurs, as opposed to trying to “save” those who already dabbled in unofficial photography. In denigrating unaffiliated amateurs, *Sovetskoe foto* preferred to take a theoretical stance against their work. Critic Anatolii Vartanov wrote that, to the detriment of the genre, some unaffiliated photographers “had developed a style that combats the natural role of photography” (Vartanov 1970, 28). Unaffiliated amateurs were trying to “prove that photography is not a copy of reality” (28). Vartanov noted that this resulted in two phenomena, a focus on photographic aestheticism and the re-emergence of overtly staged photography, which was universally frowned upon by critics, clubs and professional photographers. “Both, after all, are a distortion of nature...done under the noble banner of greater expressiveness” (28). Vartanov concluded that these extremes plagued and

“persist in our photography everywhere, in the media, at exhibitions, and in the works of amateurs at every turn” (28). Rather than contributing to Soviet society, unaffiliated amateurs were a disease and their work contradicted the very nature of productive and socially motivated leisure.

Conclusion

Beginning in the 1950s, Thaw-era discussions about photography reveal that *Sovetskoe foto*, photography critics and photojournalists desired the further regulation of the medium. There is evidence that many amateurs agreed: Letters to the journal demonstrate that amateurs wanted and sought out professional guidance, they aimed to not only to improve their technical skills, but also appeared to support the aesthetic supervision they received from clubs and *Sovetskoe foto*. While the aims of *Sovetskoe foto* and professionals on the one hand, and amateur clubs on the other, were not necessarily the same, their general objectives did coincide: *Sovetskoe foto* and professional photographers wanted to elevate the status of photography within Soviet cultural institutions, while amateurs desired the resulting benefits of increased status in the form of access to photographic equipment and the even distribution of chemicals, lenses, and photo fixers.

While the letters published in *Sovetskoe foto* were only a fraction of those received, and were handpicked for publication, the spread of photography clubs across the Soviet Union, and the growing number of participants in these clubs, indicate that there was tremendous interest not only in amateur photography, but also the support that clubs provided. The grassroots regulatory structures developed by the VDK Photography Club, which subsequently spread to other clubs could only exist based on the interest of amateur photographers and their participation in club activities. *Sovetskoe foto* encouraged these means of governing amateur creative pursuits as a way of channeling an otherwise solitary interest into a socially productive use of time outside of one’s professional career. Rather than reveling in the freedom afforded photography due to the medium’s omission from organized artistic unions, photographers, amateur and professional alike actively sought out further State intervention from cultural authorities, particularly permission to form a photographer’s union that would regulate amateur and professional activity, aid in the distribution of photographic materials, and provide comprehensive aesthetic and technical training. This was an opportunistic effort: more regulation, more equal access

and distribution of goods as well as education would directly benefit those amateur who chose to participate in clubs. It would also promote photography from the status of “handicraft” or “hobby” to a more socially significant pursuit.

Despite repeated attempts to garner support from the Ministry of Culture, an All-Union photography organization never materialized, nor were photographers permitted to form independent, officially recognized photography organizations in any of the Union Republics. The one exception occurred in the Lithuanian SSR. In October 1969, the Ministry of Culture of the Lithuanian SSR granted photojournalists and amateur photographers permission to found the LSSR Society of Art Photography (FMD). Photojournalists remained members of the LSSR Union of Journalists, but were eligible for membership. Remarkably, the Union was extraordinarily effective at achieving the very goals and benefits that *Sovetskoe foto* had recognized and called for since 1957. The FMD became the only “institution in Soviet Lithuania that specialized in the production and distribution of photography, as well as photographic education,” and its “activity encompassed the creative work of professional and amateur photographers” (Michelkevicius 2011, 117). Professional members of the Society received benefits much like members of artistic unions, including a stipend that allowed them to independently fund their work without commissions or contracts. Each amateur photograph that was to be “made public” was first reviewed by the Art Council of the FMD before any further evaluation was considered by FMD censors, outside journal editors, or external sources.

Studying Soviet amateur photography reveals that the increasing centralization and policing of the amateur community emerged largely from local club members, professional photojournalists, and editors and contributors to *Sovetskoe foto*, rather than government censors. This occurred because of a confluence of simultaneous and related events; Khrushchev’s cultural policies that relaxed censorship and repression and promoted productive leisure; the economic stability that allowed for the production of user-friendly and affordable cameras; the reestablishment of *Sovetskoe foto* and the editors’ responses to mass-produced cameras; amateur enthusiasm about photography as a hobby and willingness to participate in photography clubs; and the reopening of discussions about photographic aesthetics in the mid-1950s. By the mid-1960s, this self-imposed regulation developed into an exclusionary attitude about amateurs who chose to remain unaffiliated with clubs. Clubs, critics, and professional photojournalists

disparaged even those amateurs who followed aesthetic guidelines, but abstained from pursuing club membership because their individual choice did not adhere to ideas about the necessity of collective discussion and criticism, or socially useful and productive leisure. They did so in an attempt to elevate the standards of photography, both amateur and professional, in order advance their status within the hierarchy of Soviet culture. Independent of State intervention and formal institutional enquiry, the Soviet photographic community had reached a decision regarding Aleksandr Rodchenko's 1928 question, and any individual who chose to disagree was ostracized, marginalized and excluded.

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ⁱ For example, in a decree of the USSR Council of Ministers, the price of the common camera models *FED*, *Zhenit*, *Zorkii* and *Moskva*, as well as photo paper decreased by 19 percent. In the same decree the price of *FED-2*, *Kiev-4*, *Kiev-4a*, *Leningrad*, and *Start* cameras was decreased by 11 percent. "O snizhenii gosudarstvennykh roznichnykh sen na nekotorye tovary narodnogo potrebleniia," 4 June 1959, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (GARF, f. 5546, op. 93, d. 1240, l. 180).

ⁱⁱ For example, "Fotoliubitel' – aktivnyi obshestvennik," *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 9 (1957): 1, V. Kulik and M. Borido, "Luchshe udovletvoriat' zaprosy fotoliubitelei," *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 6 (1957): 75, Semyon Friedland, "Zametki o fotoliubiteliakh," *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 12 (1961): 32, P. Krimerman, "Dom fotokinoliubitelia v Moskve," *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 10 (1961): 22. See also the section "Pis'ma redaktsiiu," in most issues of *Sovetskoe foto* from No. 6 1957 to No. 12 1959. See also "Photography in Russia Today," *Popular Photography*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (1956): 96.

ⁱⁱⁱ "O ser'eznykh nedostatkakh v sodержanii zhurnala *Ogonek*," 9 September 1958, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (RGANI, f. 11, op. 1, d. 20, l. 20).

^{iv} In the 1950s and 1960s *Sovetskoe foto* attempted to explain the social purpose of photography in a variety of ways, changing tactics once it became clear their arguments were falling on deaf ears. At first, in 1957, the journal took the bold stance that photography was art, possessed the same aesthetic qualities as literature or painting, for example, and as such, photographers deserved the trappings of this privileged position. The purpose of these claims was to change the attitudes of the leadership, primarily the USSR Ministry of Culture, and allow for better

education and for photographers to unionize not just as journalists, but across all genres and levels of expertise. This included amateurs because they were an essential conduit between the masses and official photography. Over the course of the early 1960s, when this reasoning failed to produce the desired results, the commentators and editors at *Sovetskoe foto* changed gears, instead arguing that photography possessed some artistic features, but was unique in that it was bound to the reality which it reproduced. It was for this reason photographers should receive a union and better education. While this tactic produced equally disappointing results, it meant that the leading photographic journal of the Soviet Union recognized that amateurs club members were participants in the same community as professional photojournalists and that photography possessed aesthetic and creative potential, beyond simple documentation.

^v Order No. 467 issued by the Minister of Culture of the Latvian SSR Jānis Ostrovs on 29 May 1957. The State Archives of Latvia, (LVA 678. f., 2. apr., 160. l., 1 lp).

^{vi} The one exception being the Lithuanian Society of Art Photography which was founded in 1969. *Souizfoto* was liquidated by the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of August 29, 1938 (Minutes No. 15, item 6): <http://lawru.info/dok/1938/11/27/n1194883.htm>

^{vii} Much of the archival documentation related to amateur photography and *Sovetskoe foto* was destroyed when the archive caught fire in 1997. Margarita Tupitsyn, "Die Geschichtsschreibung der sowjetischen Fotografie im In- und Ausland," *Fotogesichte* No. 63 (1997): 56. An extensive search of other State archives, including the State Archive of the Russian Federation, (GARF), the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), and the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) for records on State and Party regulation of photography has revealed only one instance in which the government intervened and confronted *Ogonek* editor Anatolii Sofronov regarding inconsistencies in the "aesthetic and educational value" of images published in the journal. "O ser'eznykh nedostatkakh v sodержanii zhurnala *Ogonek*," 9 September 1958 (RGANI f. 11, op. 1, d. 20, l. 2).

^{viii} The largest pre-revolutionary club was the Russian Photographic Society (RFO) founded in 1894. Membership policies were very lax compared to the clubs of the 1960s: Members were only required to pay dues and submit a letter demonstrating their desire to join the organization. Thus, in the early 1900s through its liquidation in the 1930s, the RFO operated more as an informal special interest group, rather than a club. V. T. Stigneev, *Vek Fotografii: Ocherki Istorii Otechestvennoi Fotografii 1894-1994*, (Moskva: Knizhni Dom LIBROKOM, 2011), 16-17.

^{ix} "O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii: postanovlenie TsK VKP(b) ot 23 apreliia 1932g.," *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 5 (1932): inside cover.

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- ^x It was a surplus in camera production that compelled the Council of Ministers of the USSR to lower the cost of cameras which in turn increased their availability to consumers. “O snizhenii gosudarstvennykh roznichnykh sen na nekotorye tovary narodnogo potrebleniia,” 1 April 1959, (GARF f. 5546, op. 93, d. 1240, l. 82).
- ^{xi} In 1967 *Sovetskoe foto* published a list of over 170 photography clubs across the Soviet Union. This list did not include the hundreds of clubs affiliated with various factories and worker’s organizations. “Adresa fotoklubov,” *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 1 (1967): 46-7.
- ^{xii} It was film and developing materials that were in short supply during this period, rather than cameras. This issue was addressed in nearly every issue of from 1958 though 1960. For example, in 1958 deficiencies in the distribution of materials were addressed in *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 1 (1958): 75-9, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 4 (1958): 84-6, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 5 (1958): 84-6, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 7 (1958): 84-6, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 8 (1958): 82-4, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 9 (1958): 82-5, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 10 (1958): 83-6, *Sovetskoe foto*, No. 11 (1958): 82-5.
- ^{xiii} These organizations distributed a variety of goods, not only cameras, chemicals and other equipment.
- ^{xiv} There were, however, some benefits to maintaining small clubs. Once members had completed their membership applications, smaller, more exclusive photography clubs could focus on exhibition-worthy photographs. For example, amateur photographers of the otherwise minor club *Nord*, based in Murmansk, participated in over 200 exhibitions in 35 countries between 1974 and 1979.