

Photomontage for the Masses: The Soviet Periodical Press of the 1930s

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Introduction

Cultural transformations taking place today in post-Soviet society consistently (re)turn scholarly attention to the 1930s—the historical period marked by the Soviet government’s intention to bring “culture” closer to the barely literate majority of the Soviet population (mainly workers and peasants), with the goal of strengthening the political consciousness of the “masses.”¹ However, the ways in which Soviet society interacted with the prescribed culture remain unclear. For a majority of the Soviet people, especially in the country’s provinces, the periodical press (namely, newspapers, and magazines) was the main and, in some cases, the only agent of cultural information. Although intended for the ordinary Soviet population, mass periodicals reflected the diversity of artistic and cultural trends, and functioned not only as sources of information but also as visual media that transmitted, as well as created, the cultural norms of society.

The study of the periodical press remains a marginalized subject in art history, continually overlooked as aesthetically insubstantial to merit sustained attention.² Researchers focus mostly on the productions of major artists—caricaturists (Kukriniksi,³ Konstantin Rotov, etc.); photographers (Maks Alpert, Alexander Rodchenko, Ivan Shagin, etc.), and poster designers (Gustav Klutsis)—and rarely address the sources through which their works and the works of other artists reached the population. Such disassociation misconstrues the contextual role of the images, since it implies an autonomous existence of the artwork. In reality, the majority of the images were consumed by the masses from the pages of the illustrated periodicals.⁴

At the same time, little attention has been given to the various practical issues involved in the production of the periodical press, namely the operation of the editorial office. Although the main feature of Soviet society was the single discourse defined by the government’s official line, the final product derived, to a large extent, from the editorial staff’s spontaneous interpretations of this line.⁵ As Jeffrey Brooks put it, the mass media was the work of people struggling to “make the world around them intelligible within the officially given limits.”⁶

1 In the 1930s, the term “culture” included personal hygiene, table manners, and propriety of language; as well as familiarity with art works and literature. See Vadim Volkov, “The Concept of ‘Kul’turnost’: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, (London/New York: Routledge, 2000).

- 2 The period of the 1930s in Soviet culture traditionally has been regarded as oppressive and incapable of producing anything innovative or aesthetically valuable. Since the 1980s, revisionist historians have attempted to elucidate the complexity of the Stalinism challenging the previous, yet still powerful, conception of the period as ideologically charged and aesthetically impotent. See *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928–1931*, Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). Existing studies of the Soviet periodical press deal predominantly with the literary or sociological aspects. See Jeffrey Brooks, “Socialist Realism in Pravda: Read All about It!” *Slavic Review* 53:4 (Winter 1994); Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* 95, Russian Research Center Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Tatyana Dashkova, “Ideologia v litsah: formirovanie vizual’nogo kanona v sovetских zhurnalkah 1920–1930x godov” (“Ideology in Faces: Formation of the Visual Canon in Soviet magazines 1920s–1930s”) in *Vizual’naya Anthropologia (Visual Anthropology)* (Saratov: 2007). When considering mass periodicals, art historians have been predominantly attracted to the issues of the magazine *USSR in Construction*, designed by renowned artists Alexander Rodchenko and El. Lissitsky. See Erika Wolf, “USSR in Construction: From Avant-Garde to Socialist Realist Practice” (PhD Thesis, University of Michigan, 1999) and Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitsky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917–1946* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
- 3 This is a collective name derived from the combined names of three caricaturists: Mikhail Kupriyanov, Porfirii Krylov, and Nikolai Sokolov. They started drawing caricatures under the joint signature in 1924.
- 4 This also was pointed out by Sally Stein in “The Composite Photographic Image and the Composition of Consumer Ideology,” *Art Journal* 41:1 (Spring 1981): 39 and note 2.
- 5 Brooks, “Socialist Realism in Pravda: Read All about It!,” 75.

Accordingly, the Soviet periodical press featured a great diversity of visual information. The quality, content, and media of the illustrations were extensively discussed in the professional literature of that time. While editorial theoretical and artistic preferences, and the ability to attract professional designers and artists, defined the visual character of the magazines, the quality of design and the illustrational content of these publications were equally subject to available technical equipment and financial budget. Analysis of the archival materials and published sources (literature for editors, illustrators, photo-reporters, and printing houses) indicate that, in addition to aesthetic concerns, editors also had to deal with pragmatic issues such as the printing capacity of available printing presses; the availability and quality of the visual material; reproduction permissions; censorship (and self-censorship); time constraints; and financial issues (from subscription rates to artists’ fees).

This paper considers some of the practical issues affecting the visual content and design of Soviet periodicals published in the 1930s. Various types of illustrations that appeared in the press are reviewed in an attempt to explain why photomontage was the dominant graphic design element of the period. While the discussion concerns mass periodicals in general, the popular illustrated magazines *Rabotnitsa* (female-worker) and *Krestianka* (female-peasant) serve as case studies. Published beginning in the early 1920s, these two were the only women’s periodicals that were continually published by the Party during the 1930s.⁷

Intended for general consumption, these publications provided representative examples of the period’s graphic design conventions. At the same time, these magazines served explicitly defined segments of society—working and peasant women, respectively—thus offering a unique opportunity to witness the process of shaping a specific cultural paradigm.

Illustrated Magazines for Women

When the Soviet regime came to power, mass media became essential in its role of constructing the desires and values of the masses. It was one of the major channels through which the party influenced the people.⁸ Historically, women were the most resistant to “sovietization,” and were important targets of Soviet political and cultural propaganda since they were responsible for childcare and for creating the prescribed Soviet domestic environment. Their cooperation was necessary for the future of Soviet society and, thus, the women’s press attracted special attention from Soviet officials. *Rabotnitsa* was the earliest magazine directed to working-class women. The first issue, which was composed entirely of text, appeared in 1914. The publication ceased to exist during the Civil War (1918–1921) and, in 1922, it reappeared as a popular political and cultural supplement to the *Rabochaia gazeta* (worker newspaper).⁹ In 1922, *Krestianskaia*

6 Ibid., 60.

7 After 1928, almost all other women's publications ceased to exist for political and economical reasons. Before that time, at least eighteen journals for women were published along with *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka*. Most of these periodicals were short-lived. Antony Buzek attributes this to the poor quality and a lack of clearly defined purpose of these magazines. (Antony Buzek, *How the Communist Press Works* (New York/London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964). For example, *Zhenskii zhurnal* (*Women's Magazine*), published by the independent publishing association *Ogonyok* (Little Flame), struggled to compete with *Rabotnitsa*, which was financed by the State and distributed through the central party newspaper *Pravda* agencies. In spite of its popularity, the publication of *Zhenskii zhurnal* did not receive state support. Moreover, in 1929, the circulation of the magazine was restricted to 115,000 copies in spite of the *Ogonyok's* claim that the demand was much higher. At the end of 1928, *Pravda's* publishing house denied the use of its provincial branches for distribution of any periodicals except its own, thus preventing the proper distribution of competing publications. GARF. Fond 299, *Ogonyok* op. 1, ed. Khr. 2, list 34.

8 For the history of the Soviet mass media, see Mark Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union* (New York: Pegasus, 1970). For recent research on Soviet cultural life, see V. Manin, *Iskusstvo v rezervazii: khudozhestvennaya zhizn Rossii 1917–1941* (*Art in Reservation: Artistic Life in Russia 1917–1941*) (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1999).

9 From 1930s *Rabotnitsa* was published by *Pravda*. For more information on the early years of *Rabotnitsa*, see Natalia Tolstikova, "Reading *Rabotnitsa*: Ideas, Aspirations, and Consumption Choices for Soviet Women, 1914–1964" (PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2001).

10 See V. Vavilina, *Vsegda s vami: sbornik posvyashchennykh piatidisyatiletiyu zhurnal "Rabotnitsa"* (*Always with You: A Rabotnitsa's 50th Anniversary Collection*) (Moscow: Pravda, 1964).

gazeta (peasant newspaper) also started to publish the illustrated supplement *Krestianka*, defined as a magazine for peasant women that was created to counterbalance *Rabotnitsa's* appeal to women-workers. It should be noted that, although they were defined as women's magazines, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* were not exclusive in their readership. As one can judge from letters to the editors, they also served male members of the society, since husbands and brothers also were interested in topics covered by the magazines.¹⁰

As a means of mass persuasion, the periodical press was considered less important than newspapers. The Party devoted more funds to newspapers as the tool they considered to be more efficient in transmitting political information.¹¹ However, the magazines, published less frequently and in a "lighter" tone than the newspapers, were intended for the slower reading style of the "new readers," the majority of whom were national minorities peasants and women.¹² As a result, these publications acquired an especially important role in the cultural and political education of their readers. The significance of the women's press was emphasized by the 1927 party decree on press services for women that deliberated on the necessity to diversify the content of women's magazines according to the needs of the various groups. It specifically advised the women's press to "liven up its content and *design*" (my emphasis).¹³

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

The proliferation of illustrations in the Soviet press should not be taken for granted. After the Civil War, the technical capacity of the Soviet printed media was practically destroyed, thus, in addition to the general cost and labor involved in the photomechanical process of reproduction, regaining the very ability to reproduce images required significant efforts.¹⁴ By the late 1920s, the situation improved, yet 65 percent of the periodicals existed as daughter-companies of the main daily newspapers that provided them with technical means such as printing presses and polygraphic supplies.¹⁵ In this way, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* depended on *Rabochaia gazeta* and *Krestianskaia gazeta*, the largest non-party daily newspapers in circulation.

Old printing machines, old-fashioned technology, and the lack of skilled workers were among the major reasons responsible for the poor visual quality of the periodical press.¹⁶ Rotogravure and offset printing were the only technologically advanced processes enabling the print production of the huge number of copies required for mass circulation. *Pravda* and *Krestianskaia gazeta* had the most powerful printing capacities, and were among the few newspapers printed on offset machines.¹⁷ *Pravda* was in possession of the only available rotogravure machine, and published the largest number of periodical supplements (a total of fourteen). Around 1929, it "swallowed" the printing plant earlier belonging to *Rabochaia gazeta*, and became the mother-company of *Rabotnitsa*. Yet, even *Pravda's* publishing house

- 11 Following the consolidation of power in Stalin's hands in 1927, the press was extensively subsidized as the main mobilizer of the masses, and the number of the newspapers published grew dramatically. Simultaneously, many magazines and journals ceased to exist, yet the remaining publications, among them *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka*, saw an increase in circulation. Hopkins, *Mass Media in the Soviet Union*, 94.
- 12 See V. R. Kugel, *Ocherki izdatel'skogo dela (Essays on the Publishing Business)* (Moscow, Leningrad: Gos-Sots-Ekonomicheskoe iz-vo, 1931), 23. It should be noted, however, that although not published on a daily basis like the major newspapers, *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka*, on average, appeared two to three times a month. At some point, *Rabotnitsa* was published as a weekly. While anniversary issues typically were planned in advance, magazines also had to incorporate real-time material in a manner that often denied thoughtful and well-conceived design.
- 13 "Ozhivit' oformlenie (To Enliven the Design)," TSK KPSS, *Sovetskaia pechat v dokumentakh (Soviet Press in Documents)* (Moscow: Gos. iz-vo polit. lit-ry, 1961), 239–40.
- 14 Incorporating photomechanical reproduction within a text involved considerable cost and labor. For the fine quality of the illustrations, the images had to be printed through the process of the halftone reproduction technique on expensive, coated stock; separately from the conventional rough stock used for the letterpress printing of the text. For illustrations to appear beside the relevant text, images had to be cut separately, set in, and glued to the binding edges of the adjacent pages. See Stein, "The Composite Photographic Image and the Composition of Consumer Ideology," 43.
- 15 V. R. Kugel, *Ocherki izdatel'skogo dela (Essays on the Publishing Business)*, 23.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 30–33.
- 17 *Rabotnitsa* was printed by rotogravure machines, yet Kugel criticized the quality of *Rabotnitsa's* reproductions, claiming that, for this magazine, offset printing would be as good, while for *Ogonyok*, which at that time was printed in offset, rotogravure was better. *Ibid.*, 152, 154.

had difficulties in satisfying the demand to produce its newspapers and magazines in a timely manner. A similar situation existed at *Krestianskaia gazeta*.¹⁸ The quality of the reproduced illustrations depended on paper quality as well as paper and ink supplies that often were inadequate in relation to the technical requirements. Printers complained that printing supplies were not standardized, resulting in a discrepancy between expectations and results. Later in the decade, the situation improved with the purchase of new machines, yet tension continued to exist between editorial demands and printing press capacity.¹⁹

In spite of all the technical difficulties, the Soviet Union made significant efforts to develop its illustrated press. Soviet officials, among them Nadezhda Krupskaiia, one of the founders of the Soviet system of public education, emphasized the importance of images in cultural education.

For the present and for the near future, a peasant can learn to increase production only if he is taught by visual example. And, in general, the peasants, just like masses of workers, think much more in terms of images than in abstract formulas: thus visual illustration, even when a high level of literacy is reached, will always play a major role for the peasant.²⁰

The progress of the Western illustrated press was noted and carefully followed. German, British, and American illustrated periodicals were discussed as valuable sources for appropriation, with proper ideological updates.²¹ In their manual for newspaper professionals, Boris Vyazemskiy and Mikhail Urlaub discussed illustrations as the essential element of design and, while rejecting Western design theories, recycled most of the layout techniques used in various Western periodicals.²² V. R. Kugel placed enormous importance on the press illustration, seeing in it an effective way to attract and educate the "new readers." For him, "it was impossible to deny an indisputable truth that a way of thought; the way of word to the millions of the new readers lays; in most cases, through the mass picture reproduced by modern advanced rotation printing."²³

At the same time, Kugel lamented the reproduction quality of what was appearing in Soviet periodicals at that time, claiming that "only a poet would risk calling it an illustration."²⁴ In spite of the unflattering comments, the illustrations that were appearing in the magazines constituted the essential source of visual information for the Soviet people, and are an invaluable tool for researchers of 1930s visual culture.

Art for the Masses

Rabotnitsa and *Krestianka* featured a great variety of illustrative material. Reproductions of drawings, watercolors, lithographs, paintings, and many other types of images were constantly included in the

- 18 Government's organs *Izvestiia* and *Gudok* had similar printing capacities. *Ibid.*, 34.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 146. Editorial archives and discussions held in *Zhurnal'ist* (*Journalist*), *Polygraphicheskoe delo* (*Polygraphy Business*), *Sovetskaia pechat* (*Soviet Press*), etc. reveal a continuous exchange between editors and printing houses, blaming each other for the poor quality of the publications.
- 20 Cited in Victoria E. Bonnell, "Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin" 27, *Studies on the History of Society and Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 4. A prominent member of the Communist party, Nadezhda Krupskaiia, is known as Vladimir Lenin's wife and co-worker. She held several positions in the Department of Education, and was a leading pioneer of early Soviet cultural transformation. See Christopher Read, "Krupskaiia, Proletkul't and the Origins of Soviet Cultural Policy," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (November 2006): 12, 3, 245–255.
- 21 Kugel; S. N. Sredninskiy, *Razbor nekotorykh teorii po oformleniyu gazety, knigi* (*Discussion of Some Theories of a Newspaper and Book Design*), *Izvestiia pedfaka* (Baku: Azerbadzhan State University, 1929).
- 22 B. A. Vyazemskiy and M. K. Urlaub, *Tekhnicheskoe oformleniie gazety* (*Technical Design of a Newspaper*), ed. Communist Institute of Journalism in the name of V. V. Vorovsky (Moscow/Leningrad: Gos. izdatelstvo legkoy promyshlennosti, 1933).
- 23 "нельзя отрицать непреложной истины, что путь мысли путь слова к многомиллионному новому читателю лежит, в большинстве случаев через массовую картинку, воспроизводимую современной усовершенствованной ротацией." V. R. Kugel, *Ocherki izdatel'skogo dela* (*Essays on the Publishing Business*), 143 (my translation).
- 24 *Ibid.*, 144.

magazines. After the restoration of photomechanical reproduction capacities in 1923, not a single issue of *Rabotnitsa* and *Krestianka* was published without photographs.

In most cases, images appeared as illustrations to the text; yet artwork also was published independently with separate captions. Special efforts were made to include color reproductions. Occasionally, magazines featured exhibition reviews and articles about museums and artists. Professional artists were often invited to submit illustrations and caricatures, fashion patterns, and embroidery designs.²⁵ Graphic illustrations and reproductions of paintings were important elements of the publications and, in most cases, artists' names were carefully acknowledged. In contrast, magazine designers were practically never mentioned.

As in Western countries, publication of artistic works in the Soviet Union required reproduction permission from the artist or the institution possessing the copyright. When a magazine wished to commission an illustration, it was required to pay about fifty rubles for a small drawing to be used within the text, and three hundred rubles for a front cover illustration (established artists, or the so-called the IIIrd category, were paid four times more for the same work).²⁶ As a result, graphic images usually were restricted to the illustration of serial novels and short stories. Editors also used secondary sources and recycled images appearing in history books or the central newspapers. This was a typical practice for illustrations of historical subjects, for example the history of the Paris Commune or of the Civil War.

No Painter Is Able to Depict on Canvas What the Camera Sees

Compared to the difficulties involved in the publication of works of fine art, photographs were easier and less expensive to acquire. Photographers' rates were much lower than those of painters, ranging from ten to fifteen rubles for specially commissioned images and even less for stock photography. Large periodicals hired their own photo-reporters on a full-time salary.²⁷ *Soyuz-photo* (Union-Photo) agency and the amateur photographer movement supplied a wide range of images on every possible theme.²⁸ Several courses and guidebooks advised the local photo-correspondents on a variety of topics, from composition and selection of the theme to submission guidelines.

The most popular subjects, especially portraits of Party leaders and famous people (prominent shock-workers, aviation heroes, scientists, stakhanovits, etc.), were even sold in the form of *clichés* (a printing plate cast), ready for printing.²⁹ The price ranged from four to twelve rubles per image, depending on size and quality.³⁰ In 1937, for example, the Press-Cliché agency planned the publication of the thematically arranged collections of images covering "subjects of the All-Union significance, foreign chronicle,

- 25 Zinaida Rakitina, an artist-sculptor and probably the never-credited staff designer of *Rabotnitsa*, introduced color into design and invited contributions from famous artists. At some point, Boris Ioganson, Juliy Ganf, and Konstantine Rotov provided caricatures for both magazines. This information appeared in the collection of the memoirs of the *Rabotnitsa* staff workers that were published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the magazine. Vavilina, *Vsegda s vami: sbornik posvyashheny piatidisyatiletiiu zhurnala "Rabotnitsa,"* 224.
- 26 RGALI, Komitet po delam iskusstv (Art Committee), Fond 962, Stenogramma soveshchaniya po ustanovke tarifov na izo-raboty (A transcript of the meeting for establishing payment tariffs for visual-works), (1937); ed. khr.6, opis 193, list 2–8. Such prices put these artists out of the price range for most publications.
- 27 In 1936, *Ogonyok's* photo-reporter received 400 rub (with the norm of 100 original photos per month; plus commissions for special orders (10–20 rub. Fifty percent for urgency); salary of the assistant – 300 rub (300 reproductions) and salary of the designer – 500 rub. For example, a worker in a printing house received 150–250 rub; GARF, *Sovesshanie v upr avlenii Tresta Polygraphii* (Meeting at the executive office of the Polygraphy Trust). 10/26/1936, ed. Khr. p-4851, opis 5, list 19.
- 28 *Soyuz-Photo* was an All-Union photographic agency responsible for centralized production of photographic materials for newspapers, periodical press, publishing houses and other consumers of photographic images. It was also engaged in organizing the photo-amateurs into the photo-correspondent movement.
- 29 A cliché or “a stereotype” is a term historically used in printing for a printing plate cast from movable type or a combination of images and type.

and caricature.”³¹ In short, the affordability and availability of the photographs and ready-made *clichés* for reproduction purposes buttressed the editorial preference for photography as a main visual medium.

A preference for photography also was dictated by the period’s theoretical discussions. During the 1930s, Soviet periodicals were at the center of the dispute between illustrators and photographers over the superiority of their respective media in Soviet art. In the 1930s Soviet photographers were still burdened with an inferiority complex vis-à-vis painting.³² The ability of graphic artists to capture the essence of a moment with just a few lines contrasted with photographers’ dependence on the mechanical indifference of the camera, which slavishly captured everything in view without regard to the importance of details.³³ Nevertheless, photography has been seen historically as a medium of truth and accuracy, and has been accepted as a universal means of communication. In the 1930s, photography’s ability to illustrate/document immediate reality was unquestionable; while Lenin’s statement that “no painter is able to depict on canvas what the camera sees” ultimately legitimized the photographer’s claim to dominance.³⁴

With this observation it should be noted that, throughout the 1930s, professional literature for editors continued to stress the importance of photography and graphics, and reiterated the meaninglessness of the media competition in graphic design since photographer and artist performed complementary though different tasks.³⁵ In addition to theoretical and aesthetic considerations, there were technical reasons for such a union. Ironically, the publication of photographs required the work of an artist-retoucher. In the end, the visual quality of the reproduced images often merged both media—photography and graphics—into an indivisible alliance. Often a photograph would be used as a foundation for an illustration that would look like a line-drawing (*shtrikhovoy risunok*). This usually would occur when the quality of the photographs intended for reproduction or the quality of the paper was extremely poor.³⁶ The result was a hybrid image simultaneously bearing the imprint of the artist’s hand and the mechanical eye.

A Way to Combine a Number of Photographs

In the midst of the rivalry between painting and photography, photomontage offered a means for the ultimate manifestation of the “photo-graphic” unity, since it incorporated both the documentary power of photography and the illusionism of painting and drawing. When the call for truthful, direct, and comprehensible imagery initiated by more traditional artists was enthusiastically supported by the masses and promoted by the government, photomontage provided avant-garde artists with a way of showing reality without returning to painterly realism.³⁷

The history of Soviet photomontage dates to the early 1920s. Gustav Klutsis is traditionally regarded as the emissary of the political use of photomontage; while Alexander Rodchenko's illustrations for Vladimir Mayakovskiy's poem *Pro Eto (About This)* (1923) exemplify the earliest use of photomontage in book design. In 1922, *Kino-Fot* magazine initiated public discussion of photomontage.³⁸ In the early stages, the discussion addressed the formal aspects of the method and, while acknowledging Dada's photomontages as a precedent, dwelled on the differences in approach.³⁹ In 1924, *LEF* magazine published an anonymous text entitled "Photomontage" that underscored the documentary and agitational function of the method.⁴⁰ In the early 1920s, during the New Economic Policy (NEP), photomontage was used predominantly for book and advertisement design. Yet in the late 1920s and early 1930s, an extended debate concerning photomontage's potential as "a good weapon of propaganda and agitation" was revived.⁴¹ With growing attacks on formal experimentation, former "constructivists" had to find proper justification for their formalist ideas and prove the relevancy of photomontage to Soviet society. Eventually, the privileging of social content over formal experimentation prevailed, corresponding to the general shift of preferences in Soviet visual arts.

In contemporary scholarship, this change was interpreted as an abandonment of avant-garde principals under the pressure of Stalin's regime, leading to the disregard of the continuous use of photomontage in the 1930s.⁴² Scholars who discuss the late Soviet photomontage focus mostly on the production of major artists such as Gustav Klutsis, Alexander Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky. All these artists contributed to the periodical press, yet the publication context in which their works often appeared is rarely addressed.⁴³

The continuous use of photomontage in the periodical press of the 1930s cannot be explained by looking at the avant-garde alone. It is well known that photomontage as a method of arranging images has been used since the invention of photography in the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, Soviet and Western artists were directly stimulated by advertisements and film.⁴⁴ While the avant-garde artists' were interested in formulating the theoretical implications of photomontage, for editors and graphic designers photomontage itself was primarily a way "to combine on the same visual surface a number of various photographs unified by the same content and specific compositional arrangement."⁴⁵ It was also a way to compensate for poor technical resources and the lack of professional designers. In other words, photomontage was an indispensable technical tool that enabled the organization of the visual content of magazines in a dynamic, yet also concise and economic manner. Many authors of that time acknowledged the usefulness of this method in spite of the technical difficulties and extensive labor it often involved.

- 30 For a one-column line-drawing – 4 rubles; tonal – 6 rubles; for a two-column line-drawing – 8 rubles, tonal – twelve rubles. For orders of more than 10 clichés – free shipping. Processing took fifteen days from the day the order was received. Agency Press-Cliché Soyuz-photo, *Obraztsy klishe-portretov vypushchennykh press-cliché Soyuz-photo dlya rayonykh polit-otdelov i fabrichno-zavodskikh gazet* (Samples of cliché-portraits produced by Press-Cliché for the regional political departments and newspapers on the factories and plants) (Moscow: Press-Cliché Soyuz-photo, 1937).
- 31 Ibid. *i* criticized the periodical press for not employing this option and, as a result, publishing poor quality portraits. It was known that Press Cliché often supplied poor quality illustrations to the provincial newspapers. ("Prodolzhenie diskussii po pismu Izgoeva.") ("Continuing the Discussion Regarding Izgoev's letter"), *Zhurnalist* 7 (1929). This supports the conclusion that the central press reproduced images in the best available quality.
- 32 See KomAkademii, *Voprosy razvitiia proletarskogo iskusstva: materialy diskussii (Issues in the Development of the Proletarian Art: Materials of the Discussion)* (Moscow: Izd-vo Kommunisticheskoi akademii, 1931), 13–31.
- 33 B. M. Kisin, *Grafika v oformlenii knigi (Graphic Arts in Book Design)* (Moscow: Gizlprom, 1938), 206.
- 34 Cited in Sergei Morozov and Valerie Lloyd, *Soviet Photography: An Age of Realism* (New York: Greenwich House, 1984), 8.
- 35 B. M. Kisin, *Grafika v oformlenii knigi (Graphic Arts in Book Design)*, 203–6.
- 36 D. B., "Fotografiia na sluzhbe u grafiki" ("Photography on Service of the Graphic Arts"), *Sovetskoe foto (Soviet Photo)* 5 (1935): 38.



Figure 1
 "Long live to the world October. 19 years of
 October," *Krestianka*, 20, 1929, pp. 8–9



Figure 2
 "Women's Equality," *Krestianka*, 34–35,
 1932, p. 8

Analysis of the photomontages appearing in mass periodicals clearly indicates the prioritization of this method for its capacity to condense time and space. Among the topics most often entrusted to photomontagists were the themes of: the transformation from past to present (*tak bylo-tak est'*); the juxtaposition of the Soviet way of living with the capitalist experience (*u nas-u nili*); and the presentation of events taking place simultaneously in different parts of the country (*po strane*). These were extremely important subjects in Soviet iconography. General themes glorifying the advantages of Soviet life (industrialization, motherhood, childhood, etc.) featured construction sites, the conquest of the North Pole, parades, state festivals, even congresses and political meetings often were treated in terms of such juxtapositions.

In contemporary discourse, montage method is typically associated with photography or a combination of "photo" and "graphic" elements. It should be noted that in the 1930s, the montage produced by drawing alone also was acceptable and welcomed by the authors of some graphic design manuals as an efficient method of illustration (Figure 1).⁴⁶ Indeed, occasionally periodicals featured drawings that looked like montage. Even without the documentary quality provided by photography, montage-drawing preserved the capacity to present various aspects of the same event in a condensed yet digestible manner.

The simplest photomontage presented the arrangement of a number of images unified by one subject and combined in one cliché. For example, "Speech of an orator and general view of the meeting"⁴⁷ (Figure 2). The same method was used to combine parts from separate images into one image "when the quality of some areas of a photographed material appeared better in different photographs taken from the same point,"⁴⁸ or when some details were undesirable. Complex photomontage involved the meticulous gluing of parts, although the joining lines had to be hidden to avoid their appearance in the published image.⁴⁹ More demanding instructions required the use of photographs with identical qualities. For example, the combination of black-and-white with sepia photographs was unacceptable, as was the use of photo-prints together with clips from magazines or books (although the use of such secondary sources was encouraged).⁵⁰ Yet, it is clear that magazine creators often had no choice but to use a variety of sources. Very often, images appearing in special publications would be republished in the mass-market magazines. Images from the luxurious photo-illustrated magazine (*USSR in Construction*), for instance, occasionally reappear in *Krestianka* and *Rabotnitsa*. When such recycling occurs, the original source often is acknowledged, but credit information is not consistently supplied.

The montage method frequently was applied to groups of portraits. It was most helpful in the presentation of numerous everyday heroes—Stakhanovites, delegates, pilots, and so forth.



Figure 3
 "Growing stakhanovites movement,"
Krestianka, 26, 1936, pp. 8–9



Figure 4
Krestianka, 15, 1933, Cover

Consideration of space rather than aesthetic concerns, often conditioned the placing of the portraits “shoulder to shoulder.”⁵¹ Such arrangements of portraits were welcomed, since it allowed the inclusion of multiple visual facts without sacrificing much space in the issue. (One of the manuals explained that each portrait may take 25–30 lines in a page layout; while two portraits combined in montage would only take up 30–50 lines.⁵²) Combined portraits were glued together and sent to production as one image.⁵³ It was a space-saving as well as visually appealing and dynamic way to deal with otherwise repetitive and often boring images. Throughout the decade, the assembly of portraits often took quite elaborate forms, as in the montage “Growing *stakhanovites* movement,” in which each prominent *stakhanovite* is shown next to his field of work (Figure 3). Similarly complex is the frequent cover montage with multiple portraits of the political or new working-class elite (Figure 4).

Complex montages often combined graphic and photographic media. Such photomontages required specific artistic training, and often were the product of both artist and photographer.⁵⁴ It was important that the proportions of the individual portraits and their lighting corresponded: contemporaries noted that, when the portraits were photographed under different lighting conditions, the resulting montage had an unnatural appearance; looking “motley” and “artificial.”⁵⁵ Still, no one expected to see reproductions of ideal photomontages in mass periodicals. Most crudely visually assembled montages could be smoothed out by an experienced retoucher. It is interesting to note that periodicals occasionally would mention the name of the photomontage artist. In most cases, however, if any credit line was provided, it would be the photographer’s or illustrator’s, thus underscoring the difference between high (painting, drawing, and certain types of photography) and low (graphic design) art forms.

Serving the Masses

The huge educational and ideological potential of the illustration was clearly realized by Soviet press professionals as well as by the government. The magazines’ choice of visual media and methods of design was crucial for the interpretation of the new Soviet culture, and contributed to the process of shaping Soviet mass consciousness. While magazine design relied on all forms of illustration, photography possessed a number of advantages as a cheap and relatively easily reproduced medium. The poor quality and technical limitations of photographic images were compensated for by the skills of the artist-retoucher, by the addition of text, and by the photomontage. Parallel to, and often independently from, the avant-garde employment of the medium, photomontage was an important technical tool in the graphic design of the periodical press. Following the Socialist Realist doctrine’s insistence on highlighting a celebratory mood in every aspect of socialist construction, editors consis-

tently relied on the photomontage artist's ability to condense and heighten the emotional impact of images. Throughout the 1930s, magazines published different forms of photo spreads, from very simple combinations of images to compositionally and conceptually complex montages. Based on the analysis of the photomontages appearing in Soviet periodicals in the 1930s and from the literature of that time, it can be concluded that; while photomontage was affected by changes in the social environment, censorship, and the development of Socialist Realism; the medium was equally subjected to many, often pragmatic, editorial concerns. One way or another, throughout the 1930s, photomontage was truly utilized in the service of the masses.

37 By 1923, realism and easel painting recovered its position as a dominant visual style. Avant-garde artists moved into graphic design in the early 1920s. Before that, they were preoccupied with formal experiments in objectless representation. This move was prompted by the changes in state politics concerning the arts, and was paralleled by changes in the art world itself. Among the reasons for the artists' move into graphic design was their desire to stay connected with mass culture, and to contribute to the new society in which they strongly believed. It would be wrong to see politics as the only factor for such change. Many artists felt limited by the avant-garde emphasis on nonrepresentational form, and looked for a wider form of expression. Constructivist artists favored the technical aspect of the new technique and the fact that the photograph was used by the artist as an event itself, caught in its true essence and not as a reproduction of the event. Leonid Volkov-Lannit, *Aleksandr Rodchenko risuet, fotografiruet, sporit* (Alexander Rodchenko draws, photographs, argues) (Moskva, Iskusstvo, 1969), 55.

38 For a discussion of *Kino-Fot*, see Christina Lodder, "Promoting Constructivism: *Kino-Fot* and Rodchenko's Move into Photography," *History of Photography* 24:4 (Winter 2000). Also see Kristin Romberg, "From Veshch to SA: Journal as Object" in *Architecture in Print: Design and Debate in the Soviet Union 1919–1935* (New York: Columbia University, 2005).

39 Dada started photomontage experiments in 1919.

40 "Photomontage," *Lef* 4 (1924). The text most likely was written by Osip Brik. For a discussion of the authorship, see Natasha Kurchanova, "Against Utopia: Osip Brik and Genesis of Productivism" (PhD Thesis, City University of New York, 2005).

41 Cited in Margarita Tupitsyn, "From Politics of Montage to the Montage of Politics: Soviet Practice 1919 through 1937" in *Montage and Modern Life* (1992), 91–92. Also see F. Kononov and Y. Tsirrelson, "Vystavka Oktyabrya" ("Exhibition of October"), *Iskusstvo v massy* (*Art into Masses*) 7:15 (July 1930).

42 Because of the prevailing assessment of the 1930s period as artistically the most unproductive and barren in Soviet cultural history, art historians rarely look beyond 1934, when all independent cultural organizations were dissolved and the attacks on formalism discouraged any formal experimentation. Benjamin Buchloh established the photomontage's move from "faktura" to "faktography" that took place around 1934. See Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," (October 30, 1984). Yet, unlike "faktura" montage, factographic photomontage is still an understudied subject in general, and in art history specifically.

43 This also was noted by Erika Wolf in her article, "When Photographs Speak, to Whom Do They Talk? The Origins and Audience of *SSSR na stroike* (USSR in Construction)," *Left History* 6:2 (2000): 53–82. For an example of the situation when such de-contextualization leads to partial and even incorrect interpretation, see Margarita Tupitsyn, *The Soviet Photograph, 1924–1937* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), note 35.

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- 44 After 1917, the illustrated magazines in Russia were practically extinct but, by 1920, at the end of blockade of the Civil War, the foreign journals *Die Dame*, *Junge Welt*, *Moderne Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, and *Die Woche* were sold in Moscow or brought by travelers from abroad. Alexander Lavrentiev, "About This Book" in V. Mayakovski, *Pro Eto* (1923) (Berlin: Ars Nicolai, 1994), 7.
- 45 Vyazemskiy and Urlaub, *Tekhnicheskoe oformleniie gazety*, 174. Also see B. M. Kisin, *Grafika v oformlenii knigi* (*Graphic Arts in Book Design*), 206.
- 46 Ibid., 174–77.
- 47 Ibid., 174.
- 48 Sergey Morozov, *Fotoillustratsiia v gazete. V pomoshch redaktsionnym rabotnikam* (*Photo-illustration in Newspaper: Helping Publishers*) (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1939), 106.
- 49 Ibid., 105.
- 50 B. M. Kisin, *Grafika v oformlenii knigi* (*Graphic Arts in Book Design*), 207.
- 51 Sergey Morozov, *Fotoillustratsiia v gazete. V pomoshch redaktsionnym rabotnikam*, 108.
- 52 Vyazemskiy and Urlaub, *Tekhnicheskoe oformleniie gazety*, 174.
- 53 Zincography, the process of engraving zinc printing plates, was the most typical process of image reproduction.
- 54 Sergey Morozov, *Fotoillustratsiia v gazete. V pomoshch redaktsionnym rabotnikam*, 108.
- 55 Ibid.