Unconventional Art:

The Emergence of New Photographic Art in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union

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In this paper, I'll explore photography as a new and unconventional art emerging in the Soviet Union after World War II. I'll be discussing the paradox that this art appears apolitical, seemingly socially passive, and escapist, but at the same time this passivity in some cases can be seen also as an active political position or at least a statement of a certain level of artistic freedom in the given political circumstances. Besides, I'll talk about some major difficulties of analysis and interpretation of this art from the perspective of western canon of history of photography.

Introduction

In the postwar Soviet Union, official art institutions – artists' unions, art academies, and art museums – excluded photography from their hierarchy of artistic media.[1] According to Susan Emily Reid, photography as medium was even understood as "the antithesis of art": "'Photographic,' a s a pejorative, (..) denoted the absence of painterly facture or trace of the brush (..). (..) In the fine-art discourse of de-Stalinization, "(..) 'photographic' signified the lack of those qualities which distinguished 'genuine realist art': the trace of the artist's unique poetic vision or authorial engagement with the subject, and the capacity to move and inspire the viewer."[2] Photography as a profession was limited largely to politicized journalism and its ideological and educational functions. However, during the Khrushchev Thaw (from after Stalin's death in 1953 into the mid-1960s), the term "photographic art" started to emerge in the official discourse.

The emergence of the term was related to the fact that the 1950s and early 1960s saw the establishment of numerous international photography competitions, exhibitions, trade shows, and biennales worldwide – for instance, the *World Press Photo* competition and the photography biennial *Interpress-Foto*, world photography exhibition *Bifota* in East Berlin (*Berliner*

Internationale Fotoausstellung) and photography exhibition and trade fair *Photokina* in Cologne. "Photographic art" became another Cold War battlefield in which the Soviet Union also had to take part.[3]

The term "photographic art" appeared in the Soviet press to describe photography that was exhibited, not printed in a newspaper or magazine. Thus exhibited photography obtained a different value, and was seemingly elevated closer to the field of visual art, if only metaphorically. "Photographic art" indicated a certain, albeit somewhat restricted, acknowledgement of the medium's autonomous aesthetic, poetic, or expressive potential, denied in the Stalinist years.

Nevertheless, photography was kept at a safe distance from official Soviet art. In the early 1960s, only one major avenue existed for young photographers and artists who wanted to pursue artistic goals in photography and exhibit their work publicly, apart from becoming professional photographers, i.e. photojournalists employed by the Soviet press. This avenue led to the field of amateur photography.[4]

The amateur label itself implied a level in the social hierarchy significantly lower than that of professional artists or photographers. It emphasized that artistic – i.e. non-propagandistic – photography could exist only as a workers' hobby, a dignified pastime for an enlightened and empowered proletarian.[5]

At the same time, a generation of young artists benefited from this marginalization of photography. Because camera club membership provided the sole basis for legally exhibiting photographs as autonomous, self-commissioned works of art, many young artists interested in the creative potential of the medium joined the ranks of camera clubs, becoming so-called "photo amateurs."

Their efforts, although formally censored by the Communist party officials,[6] were not subject to the severe control enforced by the highly institutionalized system of state commissions governing "high art" – painting, sculpture, and graphic arts. Thus the lowly, outsider status of photographic art in the Soviet Union in the 1960s opened up an unexpected territory for creative freedom.

Beginnings of New Art

Some of the most visible pioneers of the new, more emancipated photographic art emerged from the three Baltic republics – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These countries had retained their distinct European cultural identities even after World War II, when they were annexed by the Soviet Union, which imposed its cultural policies and infrastructure.[7] Thus their cultural milieus remained different from that of Russia and the rest of the U.S.S.R., and they became the "inner abroad" of the Soviet Union.[8]

The leading figures of this unconventional art developed distinctive styles or original national schools that became examples for the rest of the Soviet Union.[9] One of the most notable styles was the so-called Riga school, established by several young Latvian artists formally associated with the Riga Camera Club.[10] They borrowed heavily from the debris of modernist aesthetics still left from the rich cultural life of the interwar independence years, and found inspiration in the available sources on Central and Western European photography.[11] Their approach, closely related to the European tradition of previous decades, built a reputation for a certain artistic freedom in the Soviet Union.[12]

If seen from the perspective of the history of photography as it is understood in the western tradition,[13] the works created by members of the Riga Camera Club may at first appear confusing. In general, these artists revived pictorial paradigms established more than a half-

century earlier as a starting point of their creative explorations.[14] The subject matter and means of expression often strike present-day western viewers as quite opposite to the progressive development of photography in the free world.

Nevertheless, these works are significant in the context of their particular political and social circumstances. Insight into this lesser-known aspect of creativity under Soviet rule can add to the understanding of the complexity and plurality of processes and movements in European art after World War II.[15] I am considering this movement to be one of numerous alternative avenues of artistic expression and creativity.

Escapism and Activism

The major Soviet photography magazine *Sovetskoe Foto* actively promoted the ideological role of photography in the Cold War and each Soviet photographer's responsibility to fight the enemy also in this field.[16]

Yet, among the most important characteristics of photographs created by the artists of the Riga Camera Club in the 1960s is their strictly apolitical subject matter. According to Eduards Klavins, photographic art in this period was conceived as "an occupation with 'pure' art in contrast with the propagandistic photojournalism of the present day."[17] Even though this choice can be seen as a form of resistance, it can be argued that these artists did not perceive their artistic activities as a way to fight the Soviet regime openly or even to enter in any sort of dialogue with it. Rather, they chose to immerse themselves in "pure art," staying as far as possible from politicized everyday life.[18]

The creative explorations of the young artists from Riga provided visually enticing escape routes into private visions, dreams, and narratives.[19] Some notable works from the 1960s

explore psychology and relationships in manner resembling Italian *Neorealismo* in film (Gunars Binde, *The Wall*, 1964; *The Gate*,) or examine the subconscious remotely echoing Surrealist interest in the dreamscape (Zenta Dzividzinska, *Strawberry Field*, 1968); or turn to a sort of psychological portraiture far removed from the social reality of everyday life (Janis Kreicbergs, *Portrait / Zenija*, 1964; Sarmite Kviesite, *Girl on a Swing*, 1966; Gunars Janaitis, *Man and Woman (Couple)*, 1967).

These explorations were oriented in a direction quite opposite to the progressive trends of the same era in western photography. Many of the highly praised photographers of this period – such as Robert Frank, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, to a certain degree also Diane Arbus, and others – focused on their social environment, preferring the language of documentary photography. The immediacy, social involvement, and criticism inherent in their work express an active position toward contemporary life.

The work of artists from Riga, on the contrary, can appear politically and socially passive. Yet, this passivity can be seen also as an active position or a statement. In a time when open criticism was unthinkable and meaningless, when media and official art was saturated with politically active imagery, staying outside officialdom and escaping into private visions was one of the few ways to nurture creative subjectivity and individuality while staying within the limits of legitimacy.

Form and Idea

Next, a pronounced attention to form and technique clearly distinguished this new art from the surrounding and dominating Soviet photojournalism of the late 1950s and 1960s. Artists explored the technical and aesthetic capabilities of the medium, emphasizing the compositional

play of ornamental forms and patterns (Peteris Vanags, *Silence, or Peace of the Departing Winter*, 1964; Valters Ezerins, *Portrait with a Cigarette*, 1968).

Influence of German *Subjektive Fotografie* of the 1950s[20] can be traced in works by Egons Spuris (*Expression*, 1966; series *Vibrations*, 1967-72). On occasion, the border of pure abstraction could be reached and even crossed – unthinkable in the ideologically supervised field of painting at this time (for example, in such works as Valters Ezerins' *Crystallography* cycle, 1963-68).

While these artists were concerned about aesthetic possibilities, their contemporaries in the west were focusing on ideas.[21] New conceptual approaches to the medium in the 1960s argued explicitly against the aesthetic tradition of fine art photography.[22] Most radically, artists were interested in the ultimate "de-skilling" of photography.[23] They criticized objectification of art in general as well as highly polished commercial imagery, documentary and press photography, and bourgeois enjoyment of pure form in fine art photography. For instance, Robert Smithson parodied representational conventions in commercial and fine art photography by introducing the "monuments" of Passaic. Edward Ruscha questioned the role of authorship and emphasized mechanical and expressionless qualities, striving for a "non-statement with no-style."[24]

From the western point of view, artists' interest in the aesthetic possibilities of photography may have seemed anachronistic in the 1960s, but this interest delivered a different message in the Soviet context. Most important, there was no tradition of commercial or popular imagery to criticize, no "over-skilled" and sophisticated fine art photography to "de-skill." The dominating photographic language in the Soviet Union at this time was rather standardized and very functional.[25] With "realism" set as the framework by the communist party, other modes of

pictorial representation – namely "formalism," condemned by Khrushchev[26] – were disapproved as manifestations of the political enemy. For instance, in the didactic articles of *Sovetskoe Foto,* Surrealism was described as "formalistic perversion," and abstracting tendencies were declared to be extremely unwelcome in Soviet photographic art.[27] Thus the choice of complicated technological processes and darkroom manipulation could be seen as a means to itself, as a demonstration of "skill" and mastery in opposition to the generally bleak mass of realistic images in the print media.[28]

In addition, the emphasis on aesthetics is indirectly reminiscent of a variety of Pictorialism popular in Latvia before the Soviet occupation.[29] Attention to form and technique can be seen as echoing, for instance, the goals of the Arts and Crafts movement. Artists expressed a nostalgic and romantic longing for another, more dignified and cultured reality than the present one.

Woman and Comrade

Finally, the Riga Camera Club members were among the pioneers of Soviet nude photography in the 1960s, bringing back a subject generally outlawed by the regime. Although some of the works may look naïve or expressively decorative to a present-day viewer, they were considered to be rather daring under severe puritan censorship, when even a remote suggestion of eroticism was anathema to Soviet policy. Images that might have any erotic or sexual connotations were virtually nonexistent in the Soviet public sphere.[30] The photographs discussed in this paper paradoxically were considered sufficiently modest and artistic to pass the censors as achievements of amateur photographers' mastery.

Photographer Gunars Binde created numerous highly influential images (such as *Nude,* 1967) which were circulated in art magazines of the time. Technological devices preferred by

photographer Janis Gleizds refer directly to the era of the Pictorialists (*Nude*, 1968-69)."[31] In this context, Zenta Dzividzinska's photographs are among the most radical and innovative. Her individual style, informed by deep interest in and knowledge of art history, combined with her ultimate creative independence, produced such significant works as *Alone* (1967), the *Olympia* of the Soviet era.

A present-day critic is tempted to discuss these photographs in terms of feminism and psychoanalysis. Indeed, we can recognize the objectification of the female body. Indeed, the artists (with few exceptions) were men, who obviously projected their desires, fantasies, and fears onto their photographs. To some degree we can speak about a dominating male gaze directed at the "fetishistic representation of the female image," as Laura Mulvey has put it.[32] However, these photographs cannot be seen as constructing or supporting female roles in a dominating male worldview. These works embodied gender roles totally alien to the ones endorsed by the Soviet regime. Thus they did not construct or reaffirm a prevailing female image, but rather undermined it.

Gender equality, female emancipation, and women's rights – at least in theory – were among the basic principles of the Soviet society, proudly juxtaposed against those of capitalist countries, where a patriarchal model was dominating. The gender role models constructed by the Soviet regime took the form of the endless glorification of workers, equally emancipated and equally genderless comrades. The roles of femininity and masculinity as they were understood in the west were practically eliminated. In press photographs and film, masculinity (or at least asexuality) in women was praised, and their achievements in hard manual or technical labor were celebrated.[33]

Thus the image of an objectified, spectacularized nude female body was rather an exception, even an anomaly or transgression in Soviet art.[34] It suggested leisure and sensual pleasure associated with the imaginary "enemy of the class" – a non-working bourgeois woman.

Quite paradoxically, although the nude studies produced by the photographers of Riga Camera Club still expressed male chauvinism of some sort, they were also received as signs of certain artistic freedom – creative liberation and the relaxation of censorship.[35]

Conclusion

To conclude, although the formal devices and subject matter of the Soviet photographic art emerging from the Baltic republics in the 1960s can be seen as derived from European modernist works of earlier decades, their dialogue with a particular cultural context added a new and different meaning. The same elements that may seem anachronistic, nostalgic, bourgeois, naïve, reactionary, and conformist from the perspective of the western contemporaneous developments, often carried quite an opposite meaning in the Soviet context.

The new photographic art can be seen as an example of aesthetic resistance and escapism, arguing against the dominating photographic language, art institutions, media policy, and even the system of gender roles. It tested the limits of what was appropriate in terms of content and form, often risking accusation in what the official Soviet press called bourgeois formalism and meaningless aestheticism. Furthermore, the photographic art itself was an embodiment of a certain level of creative freedom – a movement started by enthusiasts and operating outside the official art institutions.

Endnotes

[1] See: Konstantin Akinsha, "Painting versus Photography. A Battle of Mediums in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture," in *Beyond memory: Soviet nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2004).[] Elena Barkhatova, "Soviet Policy on Photography," in *Beyond memory: Soviet nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2004), and Valerii Stigneev, *Vek fotografii. 1894 - 1994: Ocherki istorii otechestvennoi fotografii*, 2nd revised ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo LKI, 2007).

[2] Susan Emily Reid, "Photography in the Thaw," *Art Journal* 53, no. 2 (1994), 37. See also: Akinsha, "Painting versus Photography. A Battle of Mediums in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture," 39.

[3] For instance, in 1958 an all-union display of Soviet photographic art was launched in Moscow, followed by the staging of the highly influential show *The Family of Man* in Moscow in 1959 as a part of the legendary first American National Exhibition in the Soviet Union. The establishment of the *World Press Photo* competition in 1955 in the Netherlands was followed by the opening of the photography biennial *Interpress-Foto* in East Berlin in 1960, focusing on the Communist-bloc countries. In 1958, the first world photography exhibition that took place in East Berlin, *Bifota* (*Berliner Internationale Fotoausstellung*), can be interpreted as East Germany's response to the establishment of the annual photography exhibition and trade fair *Photokina* in Cologne in 1950. Furthermore, the International Federation of Photographic Art (*FIAP*) was founded in Berne, Switzerland, in 1950. This organization promoted the idea of amateur photography as a form of popular art worldwide, and was highly respected in the Soviet Union.

[4] See: Valerii Stigneev, "The force of the medium. The Soviet amateur photography movement," in *Beyond memory: Soviet nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[5] See Eduards Klavins, "The story of Inta Ruka and her photoportrait stories," in *Stories, Storytellers*, ed. Helena Demakova (Riga: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts - Riga, 1999), 13-16. Although the circumstances and content of the amateur photography movement in the Soviet Union after World War II was different from that of the early post-revolutionary years, it can be argued that generally the organizational principles of camera clubs revived the Soviet workers' and collective farmers' camera clubs that thrived briefly from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s before the movement diminished in the shadow of Stalinist regime. For a general overview, see Rosalind Sartori, "Photography and the state between the wars. The Soviet Union," in *A history of photography: social and cultural perspectives*, ed. Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 127-35. See also: Erika Wolf, "The Soviet Union: From Worker to Proletarian Photography," in *The worker photography movement (1926-1939): essays and documents*, ed. Jorge Ribalta (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arta Reina Sofia, 2011), 32-46. An interesting discussion on this period can be found in a section of Victor Burgin's essay dealing with the politicization of photographic aesthetics during this era, Victor Burgin, "Photography, phantasy, function," in *Thinking photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan, 1982), 177-86.

[6] Acts of censorship by a Communist party official before the opening of each exhibition of camera clubs in Latvia, although undocumented, are remembered by the participants of these exhibitions. The party official usually removed a couple of works that did not seem appropriate. Also self-censorship should be

taken in consideration. See: Alise Tifentale, *The Photograph as Art in Latvia. 1960-1969*, Studijas Biblioteka (Riga: Neputns, 2011).

[7] These countries had developed European cultural identities since the Middle Ages. During the interwar years, these states had enjoyed the freedoms and challenges of democratic nation-states. Cultural life was thriving; artists freely circulated among Baltic cities and Rome, Berlin, or Paris, and were participants in the era's European modernism.

[8] Russian art critic Iurii Gerchuk has observed that the three Baltic countries were often regarded as the "inner abroad" in the rest of the Soviet Union, and has acknowledged that "for us, the products of the Baltic bore the unmistakable stamp of the European culture we so desired." Iurii Gerchuk, "The aesthetics of everyday life in the Khrushchev Thaw in the USSR (1954-64)," in *Style and socialism : modernity and material culture in post-war Eastern Europe*, ed. Susan Emily Reid and David Crowley (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2000), 82.

[9] Stigneev, "The force of the medium. The Soviet amateur photography movement," 70. Elena Barkhatova has observed that "the creative impulses from the Baltic republics were influential in the country [the Soviet Union] as a whole in the late 1960s and early 1970s." Barkhatova, "Soviet Policy on Photography," 57.

[10] It should be noted that official affiliation with an amateur camera club was the only possible route for an individual not employed as a photojournalist to exhibit photographs publicly in the 1960s. The Riga Camera Club was established in 1962 by a group of young artists and photographers who were interested in exploring the aesthetic and artistic potential of photography. It can be seen as a sort of grassroots activity, quite the opposite to most other amateur clubs founded throughout the Soviet Union by representatives of the party or labor unions in each factory, plant, and kolkhoz.

[11] One of the most important legally available sources was magazine *Fotografie*, published in Czechoslovakia as a special edition in Russian for distribution within the Soviet Union. Contrary to the propaganda-oriented *Sovetskoe Foto*, *Fotografie* advocated a more liberal approach, at least as far as use of formal devices was concerned. The magazine championed an amalgamation of Pictorialism, Surrealism, Bauhaus, Czech Avant-garde, and German postwar *Subjektive Fotografie*. Although far from discussing issues relevant to current developments in the use of photography in western contemporary art, *Fotografie* nevertheless made historical works of the Pictorialists and interwar modernists available to Soviet audiences. Besides, the magazine abundantly reproduced nude photography and discussed it in terms ideologically acceptable for the Soviet regime. See, for instance, M. Kubesh, "Akt i sotsialisticheskii realizm (Nude Photography and Socialist Realism)," *Fotografie*, no. 1 (1963), 24-27 and M. Kubesh, "Fotografiya i abstraktnoe iskusstvo (Photography and Abstract Art)," *Fotografie*, no. 1 (1964), 5-7).

[12] Valerii Stigneev has noticed that "Latvian photography had an important influence on photography in other parts of the Soviet Union." Stigneev, "The force of the medium. The Soviet amateur photography movement," 70. However, it is worth noting that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, studies of the Soviet era tend to concentrate exclusively on Russian art and photography and to overlook the processes that developed in other former Soviet territories, with just a couple of notable exceptions. The exclusion of the Baltic states from Soviet art history was lately discussed in detail by Skaidra Trilupaityte, see: Skaidra Trilupaityte, "Totalitarianism and the problem of Soviet art evaluation: the Lithuanian case," *Studies in East European Thought* 59, no. 4 (2007). Two notable exceptions of recent scholarship on Soviet era art in which works created in the Baltic states are considered, are: Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, eds., *Art of the Baltics: The struggle for freedom of artistic expression under the Soviets, 1945-1991* (New Brunswick (N.J.); Rutgers (N.J.): Rutgers University Press; Jan Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, State University of New Jersey, 2002) and Diane Neumaier, ed. *Beyond memory: Soviet*

nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2004).

[13] For instance, see Michel Frizot, ed. *A new history of photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998), Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: a cultural history*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2011), and Liz Wells, ed. *Photography: a critical introduction*, 4th ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

[14] For instance, they embraced the perception of photographs as "precious objects, as products of extraordinary craftsmanship," like in the circle of *Camera Work*. On *Camera Work* see: Allan Sekula, "On the invention of photographic meaning," in *Thinking photography*, ed. Victor Burgin (London: Macmillan, 1982), 93.

[15] I'm taking as a starting point Piotr Piotrowski's important statement that each country of the former Communist bloc has a well-grounded right to its own and distinct history of art, even though it may be contradictory to the generally accepted smooth and single development line of western art history. Expanding on his idea, the same can be said about former Soviet Republics. See: Piotr Piotrowski, "How to Write a History of Central-East European Art?," *Third Text* 23, no. 1 (2009). See also: Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta: Art and the avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*, trans. Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion, 2009).

[16] See, for instance, A. Ber'ezin, "Esteticheskoe vospitaniye i fotografiya (Aesthetic Education and Photography)," *Sovetskoe Foto*, no. 12 (1964), 24-25; R. Babiichuk, "Fotoiskusstvo - vazhnoe sredstvo vospitaniya mass (Photographic art – an important instrument of education of the masses)," *Sovetskoe Foto*, no. 1 (1966), and Sergei Morozov, "Protiv ustarelovo ponimaniya khudozhestvennosti (Against an outdated understanding of artfulness)," *Sovetskoe Foto*, no. 4 (1967),15-27.

[17] Klavins, "The story of Inta Ruka and her photoportrait stories," 13.

[18] Several scholars have mentioned this tendency. For instance, Elena Barkhatova has indicated that photographers from the Baltic countries in the late 1960s preferred "poetic photographs and pictures of local landscapes that were far removed from ideological themes and remarkable for their aesthetic qualities." Barkhatova, "Soviet Policy on Photography," 57.

[19] Or, they preferred a romantic atmosphere, philosophical plane, and dynamism of inner life, as Valerii Stigneev has put it. Stigneev, "The force of the medium. The Soviet amateur photography movement,"70.

[20] See Jean-Claude Gautrand, "*Subjektive Fotografie*," in *A new history of photography*, ed. Michel Frizot (Köln: Könemann, 1998), 672. On the influence of László Moholy-Nagy, Man Ray, Herbert Bayer and others on Otto Steinert, the founder of *Subjektive Fotografie* movement, see Jean-Claude Lemagny, "The fifties: the founders of modernity," in *A history of photography: social and cultural perspectives*, ed. Jean-Claude Lemagny and André Rouillé (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). 190. Certain formal aspects of this style were later developed by several Czech photographers and the Polish *Fotografika* movement in the second half of the 1960s which were well-known to some of the photographers of the Riga Camera Club through books and magazines. For an overview of Czech photographic art of the decade, see: Antonin Dufek, "Photography as art in the 1960s," in *Photography as art in Czechoslovakia 1958-1968. From the photographic collection of the Moravian Gallery*, ed. Antonin Dufek (Brno: Moravska Galerie, 2001); a succinct but thorough overview is included in Jiri Patek, *Sweet Fixations. Staged Photography of the 1970s* (Brno: Moravska Galerie, 2009).

[21] For instance, see Liz Wells, "On and Beyond the White Walls," in *Photography: a critical introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 274.

[22] Steve Edwards, "Photography out of Conceptual Art," in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, ed. Gillian; Wood Perry, Paul (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2004), 142.

[23] Jeff Wall, "Marks of Indifference: Aspects of Photography in, or as, Conceptual Art," in *Veronica's revenge: Contemporary perspectives on photography*, ed. Elizabeth Janus (Zurich; New York: LAC; Scalo, 1998), 79.

[24] Edward Ruscha quoted after: Edwards, "Photography out of Conceptual Art," 144.

[25] See, for instance, Reid, "Photography in the Thaw."

[26] See, for instance, Susan Emily Reid, "In the Name of the People: The Manege Affair Revisited," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 4 (2005).

[27] Sergei Morozov, "V labirinte bessmyislitsyi (In the Labyrinth of Futility)," *Sovetskoe Foto*, no. 12 (1963), 9.

[28] Although surveys of photography history published in the west most often tend to overlook work created in the Soviet Union after World War II, and even more so in regards of non-Russian photography, a notable exception is Naomi Rosenblum's A World History of Photography that includes a brief note: "With few exceptions, photography as a personal means of artistic expression or as a foil for texts with messages other than those required by the press or by Communist ideology received little official support or exposure." Further on, Rosenblum mentions that photographers often preferred such formal devices as "the distortion of spatial perspective, the blurring of part of the visual field, and the incorporation of lens reflections." Besides Russian photographers Rosenblum mentions also a Lithuanian photographer Aleksandras Macijauskas. Naomi Rosenblum, *A world history of photography* (New York, London: Abbeville, 2007), 559-60.

[29] As Mark Allen Svede has observed, Pictorialist-inspired photography was "readily identified with the pre-Soviet period when it had flourished, nominally evolving from its nineteenth-century debut in the studios of Riga." Mark Allen Svede, "On the verge of snapping: Latvian nonconformist artists and photography," in *Beyond memory: Soviet nonconformist photography and photo-related works of art*, ed. Diane Neumaier (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University Press, 2004), 230. For a recent and comprehensive overview of Pictorialist photography in Europe and the characteristic pictorial devices of this movement, see Patrick Daum, F. Ribemont, and Phillip Prodger, eds., *Impressionist camera: pictorial photography in Europe, 1888-1918* (London; New York: Merrell; Saint Louis Art Museum, 2006).

[30] According to Laura Engelstein, ".it was precisely the ability to represent, elicit and satisfy desire in publicly available forms that the regime inhibited; it repressed sex as a cultural language and commercial practice." Laura Engelstein, "There is Sex in Russia - and Always Was: Some Recent Contributions to Russian Erotica," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 4 (1992), 786

[31] The artist developed a style described by Mark Allen Svede as "the most saccharine Soviet erotica." Svede, "On the verge of snapping: Latvian nonconformist artists and photography," 240.

[32] Although Laura Mulvey focused on film, her approach and preferred terminology is seminal to later writings on photography and art as well. Quoted after: Laura Mulvey, "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," in *Film theory and criticism: introductory readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 847.

[33] See, for instance, Olga Vainshtein, "Female Fashion, Soviet Style: Bodies of Ideology," in *Russia. Women. Culture*, ed. Helena Holmgren and Beth Goscilo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), or Susan Emily Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002). See also Lynne Attwood, *The new*

Soviet man and woman: sex-role socialization in the USSR (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[34] It seems significant that, for instance, Abigail Solomon-Godeau emphasizes the link between photographic depictions of an eroticized female body and capitalist commodity culture. As there was no capitalism and no commodity culture in the Soviet Union, a new and different reading may be necessary to interpret erotically suggestive images created there. “The spectacularization of the female body, a phenomenon that is as intimately linked to the rise of commodity culture as are the development and expansion of photography itself.” Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Reconsidering erotic photography: Notes for a project of historical salvage,” in *Photography at the dock: essays on photographic history, institutions, and practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). 222.

[34] I would completely agree with Katrin Kivimaa who has discussed this paradox in a recent essay, however I believe that further inquiry is possible that would lead to a revised methodology growing out of gender studies as well as visual culture studies and art history that would be applicable to the case in question. See: Katrin Kivimaa, "Private Bodies or Politicized Gestures? Female Nude Imagery in Soviet Art." In *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, edited by Bojana Pejic (Köln: Walther König, 2009).

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