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Working Faces, Facing Work: Portraying Workers at Work and the Search for the Soviet Individual

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Abstract

Images of workers were ubiquitous in Soviet visual culture. Other than in capitalist countries, the Soviet visual regime was inextricably linked to the faces of working people; workers were elevated to the 'status of icons' in newspapers, journals and movies alike. According to Soviet ideology, every worker contributed to socialism, which is why everyone was worthy of portrayal. The article traces the discussion among professionals and readers in Soviet journals about how to portray working people both in their professions and their everyday lives. In the 1960s, Soviet photographers actively propagated a shift from portraying the profession to portraying the individual. A close reading of photographs published mostly in *Sovetskoe foto* details how Soviet photographers aimed at capturing individuality in the first place, how photography helped establish typical and un-typical notions of individuality and work, and to which extent the a-typical became the new typical.

Keywords

In 1972, the amateur photojournalist and *kolkhoznik* Gennadii Filatov from Kirovogradskaia oblast' in the Ukrainian Soviet Republic wrote a long letter to the editors of the photography journal *Sovetskoe foto*. Filatov was troubled with the monotony of agricultural photography, not only in this journal but in the Soviet press in general.

I am seriously concerned about the quality of photographs on agricultural topics that are published in newspapers. […] Let's take for instance a pig farm. A pig handler with a piglet? We have seen this already. A pig handler among her piglets during feeding or the run-out. A big portrait with a smile? Oh yes, we have seen them all … [В общем, все уже было, было, было …]. You get the same problems when you portray a milkmaid, a chauffeur or a tractor driver. The pictures resemble each other, like the stamp on official documents. […] It seems as if photography about agricultural topics freezes into dead moments. [замрет на какой-то определенной «мертвой» точке].[1]

Filatov's examples all came from portrait photography. Repeated poses, backgrounds and details could not convey the reality of agricultural life and work in the late Soviet Union and Filatov seemed genuinely offended by the "dead" pictures that the Soviet press did publish. The *kolkhoznik* wanted lively portraits that would adequately convey the varied work and lives of pig handlers, milkmaids and car and tractor drivers. He emphatically called for livelier portraits of *jobs* and *professions*, not *individuals*, and thus remained within the boundaries of socialist realism.

In his response to Filatov in the same issue of *Sovetskoe foto*, Vasilii Borodin, the photo correspondent for *Sel'skaia zhizn'*, evaded Filatov's criticism about stereotypical portraits of milkmaids and did not really reply to his call for livelier portrayals. Instead, he proposed three ideas for portraying agricultural workers, none of which would necessarily affect the composition or content of photographs; the milkmaid would still be portrayed "among her cows and the tractor driver standing next to his tractor".[2] First, he mentioned the profoundly changing conditions of Soviet agriculture. Mechanization had created new occupations (in his example, the traditional pig handler had became a modern machine operator) and thus new challenges for photography. Borodin claimed that since agricultural life and work was changing, agricultural photography was about to change, too. It did not occur to him that portraits of new kinds of machine operators could be just as monotonous as those of the old pig handlers. Second, Borodin suggested that captions could provide more context, e.g., when the portrait was taken, what happened before and after, etc. That is, he thought that emphasizing the circumstances of the individual subject would make portraits less stereotypical. And, third, he proposed expanding the scope of portraits of working people. Rather than just photographing

[1] "Gorizonty sel'skoi temy," *Sovetskoe foto* 1 (1972): 38–39.
[2] "Gorizonty sel'skoi temy," 40.

milkmaids among their livestock, he suggested shooting them on their evenings out in the rural club. In his words:

> During the day, we took pictures of a young milkmaid at her collective farm. And in the evening, we meet her in the rural club and are happy to see that she is not only capable of working nicely but also knows how to dress well. She even managed to get a new haircut. She is cheerful and pretty. Imagine how pleasant it will be for her if right here she hears the camera click [если именно здесь щелкнет затбор камеры].[3]

Leaving its stereotypical gender notions aside, this quote is relevant to my interest in photographing workers and their work for what it reveals about Borodin's conception of portraiture. Filatov, the amateur, was interested in properly portraying Soviet agricultural *occupations*, but Borodin, the professional, dismissed his interest as merely one of many possibilities in portraying life in the Soviet Union.[4] His suggestion to change the scope of Soviet portrait photography was a suggestion to change the canon of current socialist realism. Borodin's portrait of the young milkmaid in the club acknowledges her as a person beyond work ("imagine how pleasant it will be for her") and one worth photographing not only in her economic role as a worker but also as somebody who makes an effort in her private life. That is, Borodin argued for portraying the *individual*, whose work was only one aspect, albeit an important one, of Soviet life.[5]

According to Christine Evans, the "Soviet 'way of life' […] was understood primarily as something best captured through the portrayal of Soviet people".[6] Indeed, portraiture was *the* mode of photography in Soviet print media.

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[3] "Gorizonty sel'skoi temy," 40.

[4] On the "thin line between official culture and unofficial amateurism" in Soviet photography, see Jessica Werneke's unpublished PhD manuscript, which she generously shared with me. Jessica Werneke, *The Boundaries of Art: Soviet Photography from 1956 to 1970*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Texas, Austin 2015), 207.

[5] All over the socialist bloc, there has been a trend to capture work AND leisure time in photography since the 1960s. See Paul Kaiser, "Die Aura der Schmelzer: Arbeiter- und Brigadebilder in der DDR – ein Bildmuster im Wandel," in *Abschied von Ikarus: Bildwelten in der DDR – neu gesehen*, eds. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Wolfgang Holler, Paul Kaiser, (Cologne: König, 2013): 167–173, here 171. As the photo historian Helena Holzberger observed in generously commenting on this article, the 24-hour portrayal of working lives is not an invention of the 1970s but goes back to the photo reportages of the 1930s, e.g., *SSSR na stroike*. However, my claim here is that in the 1930s the individual worker was always related to his or her work. As this article demonstrates, this changes in the 1970s.

[6] Christine Evans, "The 'Soviet Way of Life' as a Way of Feeling: Emotion and Influence on Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev Era," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 56, no. 2–3 (2015): 543–569, here: 553.

Workers were supposed to manifest the Soviet way of life – they were its most accurate expression – and images of workers, especially men engaged in hard manual labour in the steel and oil industries, were ubiquitous in Soviet visual culture.[7] The ideal of the workers' state, the notion that work was the ultimate force for creating an utopian society, was deeply embedded in the Soviet everyday: biographically, in the working lives of Soviet citizens; physically, in their working bodies, and visually, in the images of workers at work omnipresent in public spaces and the media. The fact that every worker contributed to socialism made each worthy of portrayal. The Soviet visual regime was inextricably linked to the faces of working people and workers were elevated to the "status of icons".[8]

But, despite the ubiquitous worker's face, we know little about the portraying of work and workers, particularly in the later Soviet period.[9] This article analyses how working people were portrayed in the Soviet press in the 1960s and 1970s.[10] The conversation between Filatov and Borodin summarizes my questions: How did amateur and professional photographers portray and interpret

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[7] Victoria Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov, eds., *Vizual'naia antropologiia: Rezhimy vidimosti pri sotsialisme* (Moscow: Varian, 2009).

[8] David Shneer, *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes: Photography, War and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 44. On photographing socialist work, see Emily Joyce Evans, *Soviet Photo and the Search for Proletarian Photography* (unpublished PhD manuscript, University of Urbana-Champaign, 2014); Rosalinda Sartorti, *Pressefotografie und Industrialisierung in der Sowjetunion: Die Pravda 1925–1933* (Berlin/Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1981); Isabel de Keghel, "Helden im Ausnahmezustand. DDR-Pressefotos von Arbeit in Extremsituationen", in *Helden am Ende. Erschöpfungszustände in der Kunst des Sozialismus*, eds. Alexandra Monica Rüthers and Alexandra Köhring (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2014); Agneta Jilek, "Arbeit im Bild: Die Repräsentation von Arbeit in der künstlerischen Auftragsfotografie der 1970er- und 1980er- Jahre in der DDR," in *Omnia vincit labor? Narrative der Arbeit und der Arbeitskulturen in medialer Reflexion*, eds. Torsten Erdbrügger, Ilse Nagelschmidt and Inga Probst (Berlin: Frank&Timme, 2013), 375–394; Agneta Maria Jilek, "'Laßt uns pflügen, laßt uns bauen': Brigadebilder und Typenporträts in der DDR-Fotografie der frühen fünfziger Jahre," in *Aus einem Land vor unserer Zeit. Eine Lesereise durch die DDR-Geschichte*, eds. Anja Hertel, Franziska Kuschel and Marcus Böick (Berlin: Metropol, 2012), 145–154; Monica Rüthers and Alexandra Köhring, eds., *Helden am Ende: Erschöpfungszustände in der Kunst des Sozialismus* (Frankfurt, New York: CAMPUS, 2014).

[9] See, for instance, Anja Burghardt, "Fabrikkathedralen und heilige Arbeiter. Synkretismus in der Zeitschrift Sovetskoe foto in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren," *WerkstattGeschichte* 72 (2016): 47–64. Bojana Pejić, *Gender Check: Feminity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: König, 2010); Rüthers and Köhring, *Helden am Ende*.

[10] By "worker", I do not express a class-based notion, for that would not make sense in the Soviet Union. A factory director was also a worker, for he, like everybody else in the Soviet Union, had the duty to work. Thus, I use "worker" and "working people" interchangeably.

their portraits of working people? Who and what was it that they portrayed? Portraits are usually thought to convey "the individuality of the portrayed", to be "an interpretation of a human character".[11] Unsurprisingly, then, Filatov's complaint echoed a recurring demand on and central aim of Soviet portrait photography, namely, to avoid monotony and stereotypes. Both, contemporaries and historians blame socialist realism for its monotony, and the repetitiveness of Soviet portrait photography was certainly a case in point. However, as Borodin's response indicates, socialist realism was in flux in late socialism. Diversity and individuality became markers of what was now considered good Soviet photography.[12] On the basis of discussions like the one between Filatov and Borodin, I ask: How was individuality supposed to be captured? What is the relationship between work and individuality? How could workers display their individuality in their portraits? And, finally, can individuality be captured in a portrait at all?

For this article, I will use material from the illustrated literary magazine *Ogonek* and the photography journal *Sovetskoe foto* from the 1960s and 1970s. *Ogonek* was a weekly illustrated magazine, which was published in the Soviet Union since 1923. Running feature stories, news, and cartoons, it had a circulation of about 2 million, one of the largest in the Soviet Union in 1974. Jessica Werneke characterized *Ogonek* as an "illustrated catalogue of the world both inside and outside the Soviet Union".[13] Its illustrations and advertisements featured everyday, but certainly not typical, activities outside of work, such as sailing.[14]

Sovetskoe foto, which appeared from 1926 until 1942 and again after 1957, came out monthly and had a circulation of about 85,000.[15] *Sovetskoe foto* was

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[11] Klaus Fischer, *Porträtfotografie* (Leipzig: Fotokinoverlag, 1980), 10.

[12] On diversification and individualization in late socialist photography, see also Beáta Hock, "The female worker in words and pictures: historical narratives and visual representations," *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 28, no. 1 (2017): 33–50.

[13] Werneke, *The Boundaries of Art*, p. 156/7.

[14] According to Jessica Werneke, *Ogonek* was the Soviet version of *Life* magazine; see her "Photography in the Late Soviet period: Ogonek, the SSOD, and official photo exchanges," *Vestnik: The* Journal *of Russian and Asian Studies* 18 (2015): no pages, https://sras.org/photography_late_soviet_period; Alexey Golubev, "Desirable Things of Ogonek: The Material Face of a Soviet Illustrated Magazine from Stalin to Brezhnev," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 43, no. 2 (2016): 152–181.

[15] On *Sovetskoe foto*, see Jessica Werneke, "Sovetskoe Foto and Photography Clubs in the Late Soviet Period," *Studia Culturae* 29, no. 3 (2016): 65–72. For the 1920s and 30s, see Emily Joyce Evans, "Hinwendung und Abkehr vom Arbeiterporträt: Brüche und Kontinuitäten in der Entwicklung des 'sowjetischen' Porträts 1926–1937," *Fotogeschichte* 136 (2015): 33–42, here 35; Evans, "Soviet Photo"; Erika Wolf, "The Soviet Union: From worker to proletarian photography," in *The worker photography movement [1926–1939]: Essays and document,*

the photography journal for both professionals and amateurs. It was decidedly oriented towards teaching its readers how to photograph artistically, thus helping shape the visual literacy of its readers.[16] Its articles, which focused on cameras, photographic techniques and exhibitions, discussed conventions and styles of the visual which sometimes elicited responses and thus culminated in debates stretching over several issues. *Sovetskoe foto* also organized regular photo competitions and reported extensively on their results. Amateur photographers could submit their photos to the journal, which, if published, were certain to be discussed and analysed. *Sovetskoe foto* captured Soviet progress through images mostly of work. Its four to eight page-long photo essays covered, for instance, the Bratskaia GEZ, oil in Tiumen and the Baikal-Amur Mainline, and usually made a hero of someone for the story.[17] *Sovetskoe foto* had at least one photograph on each of its approximately 50 pages and rarely covered anything other than work, nature, politics and World War II.[18]

1   The History of Portraits in Soviet Photography

While Soviet photography shared its fondness for portraits with photography in the capitalist West, the omnipresence of portraits of workers was unique to Soviet media. In this way, the visual regime of the Soviet Union in the late 1960s and 1970s differed markedly from that of the West.[19] By 'visual regime', I understand people's everyday encounter with visual representations in magazines and newspapers, advertisements, posters and movies. Contrary to the

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eds. J. Ribalta and E. Witschey (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia and TF Editores, 2011), 32–46. On *Sovetskoe foto* in general, see Valerii T. Stigneev, *Vek fotografii: Ocherki istorii otechestvennoi fotografii, 3rd edidtion*, (Moscow: Librokom, 2007).

[16] On acquiring visual literacy in the early Soviet Union see Bonnell, *Iconography of Power:* Serguei Oushakine, "Translating Communism for Children: Fables and Posters of the Revolution", in *boundary 2* 43, no. 3 (2016): 159–219.

[17] On the BAM see Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev's Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009); Johannes Grützmacher, *Die Baikal-Amur-Magistrale. Vom stalinistischen Lager zum Mobilisierungsprojekt unter Brežnev* (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012).

[18] See Golubev, Desirable Things of Ogonek.

[19] The concept of a 'visual regime' is often used in post-colonial theory. See Rachel Bailey Jones, *Postcolonial Representations of Women: Critical Issues for Education* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 101–115; Terry Smith, "Visual Regimes of Colonialism: Aboriginal seeing and European vision in Australia," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. N. Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 1998), 483–494; W.J.T. Mitchell, "Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 165–181. Sometimes what I mean by "visual regime" is called "scopic regime". See Steffen Siegel's contribution in *Fotografien werden Bilder. Die Becher-Klasse*, ed. Martin Engler (München: Hirmer Verlag, 2017).

Western visual regime, representations of consumer products were rare in *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*.[20] Whereas in capitalist societies the stress is on the product, the consumption item, in socialist countries the work process is crucial. Strikingly for Western observers, the overwhelming majority of portraits published in the Soviet press were of workers, gigantic construction and industrial sites.[21] In the West, photography on labour and workers was often intended as social realism, that is, as criticism of the exploitative nature of capitalism.[22] Social*ist* realism had another tradition, the glorification of workers and the heralding of a regime that allegedly put their needs first. Whereas the covers of Western magazines were decorated with leading political or cultural figures and a fair number of women wearing more or fewer clothes, the common trope of Soviet magazine covers was working people. Being a worker sufficed for becoming a celebrity.[23] Even at the height of the Brezhnev cult, if there really was one, portraits of the general secretary were surprisingly rare in *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*.[24]

When the socialist project started in 1917, portrait photography was reserved for the new (and sometimes old) elites. Classical portraits of outstanding political and cultural figures were prominent. In his memoirs, the eminent photographer Moisei Solomonovich Nappelbaum (1869–1958) fondly recalled photographing

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[20] See Rolf Sachsse, "Ostkreuz versus Bilderberg: Ost- und westdeutscher Bildjournalismus im Vergleich," in *Die DDR im Bild: Zum Gebrauch der Fotografie im anderen deutschen Staat*, eds. Karin Hartewig and Alf Lüdtke (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004), 214. Although there seems to have been a small spike in the production of consumer goods in the early 1950s, the general impression about Soviet news photography is that it was mostly portraits. On the spike in the early 1950s, see Golubev, "Desirable Things". On consumerism and *Ogonek*, see also Isabel de Keghel, "Konsum im Blick. Visualisierungsstrategien in sowjetischen und ostdeutschen Printmedien (1953–1964)," in *Konsum und politische Kommunikation*, eds. Kirsten Bönker and Vera Caroline Simon (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2011 (Comparativ 21, 3 [2011]), 79–96.

[21] This not to say that there was no factory photography in the West. However, the role of the worker in visual depictions was different. According to Beáta Hock, reaching out to the working class was programmatic for the radical artistic avant-garde throughout the world, but it remained the privilege of socialist realism to have succeeded. See her article "*The female worker*".

[22] See, for example, the photographs of Lewis Hine, which were also well known in the Soviet Union.

[23] P.N. Lukashenko, a combine driver from Tomskaia oblast' for instance, mentioned in a letter to *Sel'skaja zhizn'* in 1967 that a photo correspondent came by several times to portray him while he was working. RGASPI f. 591, op. 1, d. 33, l. 131.

[24] On Brezhnev and his cult, see Susanne Schattenberg, *Leonid Breschnew, Staatsmann und Schauspieler im Schatten Stalins. Eine Biographie* (Wien: Böhlau, 2017); Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Brezhnev Reconsidered* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

people like Lenin and Lunacharsky.[25] His portraits of celebrated men identified their subjects by name in the captions. But he did not name the subjects in his few portraits of working people (mostly *kolkhoz* chairmen) and, in effect, reduced them as subjects to examples of their occupations.

The end of the Golden Twenties saw an increasing number of attacks on portrait photography as a genre. As Emily Evans has argued, portraits were ideologically problematic because of their "overtly individual character", which was considered bourgeois.[26] But this criticism was short-lived. As Emily Evans argues, the introduction in the 1930s of a new favourite subject, the worker, rehabilitated the genre.[27] Similarly, Rosalinde Sartorti links the rise of individual workers' faces in Soviet newspapers to the first five-year plan's stress on individual achievement and the introduction of socialist competition in the early 1930s.[28] This photographic focus on the worker soon became the pinnacle of the Soviet visual regime. It was accompanied by numerous articles in the newly founded *Sovetskoe foto*.

Nevertheless, the enterprise of portraying workers was precarious because of what it required. "In order to make use of portraiture without reverting to pre-revolutionary models, workers and amateur photographers should be taught how to 'capture characteristic features of their subject'", writes Emily Evans.[29] Those 'characteristic features' were pretty broad in the 1930s. Portraits of workers, preferably miners or steel workers, not working but gazing into the distance in a pose of concentration were typical in the heyday of socialist realism. They did not represent the worker as an individual with his own 'characteristic features' but as an example of a certain type. The individual's features retreated into the background in such repetitive photographs. According to Sartorti's analysis of the monotony of portrait photographs in the Soviet press in the 1920s and 1930s, portraying an individual worker as such would have smelled too much of individualism. Furthermore, Soviet portrait photography never tried to depict the worker as an individual because such a stress

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[25] M.S. Nappelbaum, *Otremeslakiskusstvu:Iskusstvofotoportreta* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Iskusstvo, 1958).

[26] Evans, "*Soviet Photo*," 64. On the bourgeois character of portrait photography in the Soviet Union, see Igor Narskij, *Fotokartochka na pamiat': Semeinye istorii, fotograficheskie poslaniia i sovetskoe detstvo* (Cheliabinsk: Entsiklopediia, 2008). Afascinating study of bourgeois sentiments and portrait photography in the Ottoman Empire is Stephen Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*: *A Social History of Portrait Photography 1860–1910* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[27] Evans, "*Soviet Photo*," 63. See also her article "*Hinwendung und Abkehr*," here 35.

[28] Sartorti, *Pressefotografie*, 102.

[29] Evans, "*Soviet Photo*," 63. In this quote, Evans is citing S. Evgenov, "Uroki nashego konkursa: Foto v pechatnykh nizovykh gazetakh," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 7 (1930): 205. See also Evans, "*Hinwendung und Abkehr*," 35. This argument was made in *Sovetskoe foto* in 1930.

on individualism in workers' portraits would have contradicted the idea of the working class as a collective.[30] She explains their monotony by explicitly pointing at Soviet ideology and the socialist realist style. Soviet photography would simply not have been able to dissolve the contradiction between portraying 'characteristic features', on the one hand, and following the canons of the socialist realist style, on the other. Soviet portrait photography was bound to fail to depict individuals because it was Soviet.

This sort of explanation of the failures of socialist art in terms of what are presumed to have been its limited abilities to portray individuals is fairly common.[31] I will not dispute about the rigid boundaries of socialist realism and their consequences for the portrayal of workers as types. However, I do argue that an explanation of the monotonousness of Soviet portraiture has to go beyond the ideological constraints that socialist realism imposed on it. Photographing the 'characteristic features' of the individual is challenging in and of itself. This classical conception of portraiture, which reaches back to the Renaissance, has a tumultuous modern history. In the 19th century, Hegel for instance, considered a portrait to be bad art if it did not capture its subject's inner spirit; the notion that portraiture can capture someone's essence has been disputed since the 1920s. In the West, one recurring criticism of that notion since the introduction of mass media has been that the sheer number of portraits produced somehow diminishes the 'characteristic features' of their subjects and results in nothing more than a monotony of masks.[32] Interestingly, however, the omnipresence of portrayed faces was typical for the Soviet visual regime, which strove to depict the Soviet Union and the 'characteristic features' of its citizens accurately. Since every worker contributed to building socialism, he or she deserved to be portrayed.

2   Re-inventing Soviet Portrait Photography

The renewed interest under Khrushchev in individualistic portrait photography in general and in individualistic portraits of workers in particular was a result of two major developments. First, *Sovetskoe foto* re-entered publication in 1957 and engaged in theoretical discussions about portrait photography. Second, the Communist Party's focus on the individual in its 1961 party

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[30] Sartorti, *Pressefotografie*, 159–160.
[31] See also Hock's remarks in "The female worker".
[32] See, for instance, Valentin Groebner, *Ich-Plakate. Eine Geschichte des Gesichts als Aufmerksamkeitsmaschine* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2015); Hans Belting, *Faces: Eine Geschichte des Gesichts* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013).

program fuelled debates about the role of the individual in building communism. As Aleksandr Bikbov has demonstrated, notions of individuality and the personal had dominated Soviet political discourse at least since the mid1950s.[33] This new focus on individuality and the renunciation of the Stalinist idea of collectivism, became a new ideological guideline that quickly entered the realm of portrait photography.

The portrait photographer had to do nothing less than "to show somebody's soul" wrote Nappelbaum in his memoirs in 1958.[34] His sentiments were echoed by the historian of photography Leonid F. Volkov-Lannit (1905–1983) who published a series of articles in *Sovetskoe foto* about how to portray socialist individuals in the new decade.[35] Volkov-Lannit had participated in the avantgarde journal *Novyi LEF* in the 1920s and been close to people like Vladimir Maiakovskii and Aleksandr Rodchenko, figures who were rediscovered during the Thaw; so, his articles could hardly be ignored. Besides offering advice on portraiture, Volkov-Lannit gave a brief and fairly critical introduction to the history of portrait photography in the Soviet Union:

> In fact, the majority of pre-war [Second World War: A.O.] portraits were of individual figures. The living person was imagined, however, only as embodying [аккумулятор] societal events. Even in more intimate settings, the living person was not much individualized [слабо персонифицирован]. […] Men should not be depicted only as a type but as a concrete individual figure [образ].[36]

Volkov-Lannit was careful about portrait photography in the 1930s, which he deemed lifeless and repetitive. He emphasized that socialist realism was still the only valid style in art, but that art needed to change with the times.[37] Photographers in the 1930s had portrayed the construction of a new society, its industries as well as the people who built them, but it was no longer enough

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[33] Aleksandr Bikbov, *Grammatika poriadka: Istoricheskaia sotsiologiia poniatii, kotorye meniaiut nashu real'nost'* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Vysshei shkoly Ėkonomiki, 2014).

[34] Nappelbaum, *Ot remesla*, 96.

[35] Leonid F. Volkov-Lannit, "Iskusstvo fotoportreta," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 9 (1960): 2021 (I) and *Sovetskoe foto* no. 10 (1960): 35–37 (II). These articles were incorporated into chapters of his book; see L. Volkov-Lannit, *Iskusstvo fotoportreta* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1967) (III). His book was one of only a few books published in the Soviet Union about portrait photography. Thus, his critique of standard portrait photography and his ideas about how to portray subjects might have gained a very large audience.

[36] Volkov-Lannit, "Iskusstvo fotoportreta," I, 21.

[37] In his monograph three years earlier, Nappelbaum made a similar observation when he wrote that people were largely absent in the photography of the 1930s. Nappelbaum, *Ot remesla*, 91.

simply to show workers performing their work. Photographers now had to represent them as individuals, which involved more than just showing them at work. The photographer had to reveal the subject's inner self. Volkov-Lannit thus embraced the spirit of the early 1960s and its focus on the individual.[38]

Yet, what did it mean to portray a person as a "concrete individual figure"?[39] Because communism could be built only through labour, the portrait photographer Grigorii Vail' (1905–1983) stated the obvious when he said, "the subject of the portrait cannot be removed from the environment of his work activity".[40] In addition to this guiding principle of Soviet portrait photography, successful professionals writing in *Sovetskoe foto* usually discussed matters of technique and tended to ignore content. One professional simply advised, "Try to avoid stereotypes [шаблоны] already from the start!"[41] Nor were Volkov-Lannit's recommendations about lighting and background exactly path-breaking. On the subject of content, he believed that the "outer appearance" of subjects almost automatically "reflects age, profession and character".[42] Yet, he acknowledged that Soviet portrait photography many times failed to capture such reflections of character. In his articles in *Sovetskoe foto* and in his monograph, he talked a lot about techniques of portrait photography and that they could be mastered, but what made portraits successful in terms of content remained blurry. According to Volkov-Lannit, if a portrait did not manage to convey an individual's 'characteristic features', it was the photographer's fault.

> … if we see on a magazine's pages ten pale and blank faces, we can be sure that those are not the faces of ten uninteresting people but ten bad photographs.[43]

Volkov-Lannit insisted that anyone could be accurately portrayed as the individual she or he was if the photographer was properly invested in his or her subject; such was the laconic demand made of portrait photographers for depicting individuals as individuals. However, most photographers failed to meet it.

One important premise of Soviet portrait photography was that everybody deserved a portrait as long as he or she was genuinely Soviet. However, being Soviet was quite demanding:

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[38] *Sovetskoe foto* subsequently published numerous discussions on portraiture.

[39] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta*," I, 21.

[40] Grigorii Vail', "Portret sovremennika," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 6 (1960): 4.

[41] "Pogovorim o vashikh snimkakh," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 8 (1960): 20.

[42] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta*," III, 84.

[43] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta*," III, 70.

> The portrait [портретный образ] of a Soviet person – this is the image of somebody who is able to generate marvellous things, who transforms fantasy into reality.[44]

So was portraying a subject as Soviet, for the photographer had to show a real person who could make the impossible possible, a person who was a hero and a magician. It is no surprise, then, that Volkov-Lannit (and the majority of his colleagues) considered portraiture to be the "most difficult genre" of photography.[45] Professionals' standard recommendations for getting to the essence of a subject's character was to take one's time and have intimate knowledge of him or her. Interestingly, amateurs were thought to be privileged in the latter. Because they knew their co-workers intimately, they could in principle take better portraits of them than could a professional who worked with them for only a couple of days. But though intimate knowledge of the subject was supposed to be crucial, how exactly it contributed to better portraits was not explained.

3 Portraying "Work"

In this section, I analyse how photographers usually depicted workers and work in the 1960s and 1970s. I examine professional portraits of workers that appeared in *Sovetskoe foto* and *Ogonek*, but they were typical of those in any other Soviet newspaper or magazine of the time. I first identify certain typical modes of depiction and their changes over time before I elaborate on how various photographers tried to portray their subjects' individuality.

PHOTOGRAPH 1
"Rabochii" (*Worker*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 1 (1961): 11

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[44] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta,*" I, 21.
[45] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta,*" III, 70.

The first portrait is probably of a steelworker, one of the most prominent motifs in Soviet photography, but the viewer can only speculate on the subject's job by considering the details portrayed.[46] He wears thick gloves, a wide-brimmed hat and he holds onto the handle of a big metallic tool. The title provides no information other than that he is a 'worker'. His name, where he works and whether he is skilled or unskilled seem to have been of no importance. This photograph portrays nothing more than an example of a type of 'worker'.[47] As a subject he is replaceable by any other 'worker'. In addition to the generalized portrayal of a worker, a second tribute that the photographer pays to socialist realism is his subject's direct gaze, which equalizes viewer and subject. A third is the perspective: The viewer looks up to the worker, which emphasizes the symbolism of the worker as hero.[48]

PHOTOGRAPH 2
B. Khasianov, "Udarnik kommunisticheskogo truda frezerovshchik I. Ostapchuk"
(*The communist shock worker and moulding cutter I. Ostapchuk*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 4 (1972): 3

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[46] Erika Wolf, *SSSR na stroike: From avant-garde to Socialist Realist Practice*, (Published PhD manuscript, University of Michigan, 1999).

[47] This portrait by V.I. Kapustin (1909–1973) was among a sample of photographs in an article about the missing impact of Leningrad photo correspondents working for the TASS. On photographing types see Agneta Jilek, Arbeit im Bild: Die Repräsentation von Arbeit in der staatlich geförderten Autorenfotografie der 1980er Jahre in der DDR (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag 2020), 52–57.

[48] On the direct gaze as one of five features of the Soviet New (Wo)Man, see Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*: 259–260.

In the second photo, the caption immediately informs the viewer that the subject is not just any moulding cutter but a communist shock worker. He is also more than just a type. His name is I. Ostapchuk. As opposed to the 'worker' in photograph 1, photograph 2 depicts Ostapchuk as an individual by simply adding his name to the caption. Like photograph 1, he is shot in half-figure, his clothes indicate that he is at work, the background is out of focus and the picture was taken when the subject was not actually working. Ostapchuk is wiping his hands; he might be on his way to lunch or home. The subject of photograph 1 at least holds a tool; Ostapchuk's hands are not engaged in 'productive labour' but in what comes afterwards. Both workers smile; both portraits suggest the joyfulness of work, not its laboriousness or stress. In fact, in neither picture is work or physical labour portrayed. Rather, both capture a moment of rest. In photograph 1, the moment is contemplative; in photograph 2, it is even delightful. Both photographs are typical of *Ogonek* and *Sovetskoe foto*, but, although the portrayal of work was supposed to be crucial to capturing the Soviet person, work as such is absent from both, and the work environment is almost entirely omitted.[49]

PHOTOGRAPH 3
"Rabochii" (*Worker*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 4 (1961): 8–9

[49] This is not to say that there were no depictions of people actually working in the Soviet magazines and newspapers I looked at. However, portraits in which people were NOT working seem to be in the majority. See also Claire E. McCallum, *The Fate of the New Man: Representing and Reconstructing Masculinity in Soviet Visual Culture, 1945–1965* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2018), 180.

In photograph 3, we once more see the now familiar trope of a worker at a moment when he is not working. In the accompanying text, the photographer, Ivan Skuratov, the photo correspondent for the daily newspaper *Izvestiia*, explained his picture:[50]

> Nikolai Simonov, a brigade worker and metallurgist [бригадир прокатчиков] finished his work. […] Today, his brigade worked splendidly: 250 per cent of the daily quota! This man is content […] it seems to me that I captured the moment of the brigadier's creative satisfaction [*творческую удовлетворённость*].[51]

As Skuratov here explains, he wanted to catch a moment of work satisfaction; however, he chose a moment *after* the day's work, when Simonov, still at his workstation, enjoys a cigarette, supposedly cherishing his brigade's success.

Skuratov further explained to readers that his assignment was to portray satisfied people for the anniversary of the October Revolution. After considering where to shoot – in factories, in people's homes or in nature – he decided on the workplace as "labour is the foundation of our life". However, he, like many of his colleagues, did not photograph a moment of work but one after it. Nevertheless, a few months later, the art historian L. Dyko applauded Skuratov's portrait as a masterpiece of portrait photography because he thought it showed the dynamism of work.[52] Thus, we are confronted with a paradox: The picture portrays no work, but viewers seem to perceive it, even dynamically depicted, in the portrait. The worker in work clothes and at his workplace was enough to evoke an image of work. And there is another paradox. The satisfaction portrayed through Ostapchuk's grin and Simonov's relaxed posture is a feeling that comes when the workday is over; the work itself is missing and, thus, is not actually depicted as satisfying. The results of the work are also missing. What these workers produce is conspicuously absent in all three of the portraits. The photographs do not link the joy of work to producing needed things but to a transcendent activity, which seems to deliver satisfaction only after it is over.

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50 On the role of Soviet press and newspapers in particular, see Simon Huxtable, "Making News Soviet: Rethinking Journalistic Professionalism after Stalin, 1953–1970," *Contemporary European History* 27, no. 1 (2018): 59–84.

51 Iurii Skuratov, "Chelovek dovolen," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 4 (1961): 9.

52 L. Dyko, "Chelovek semiletki," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 9 (1961): 7–8.

4   Physical Labour

In photographs 1–3, the physical aspect of work has disappeared from its portrayal. In the 1920s and 1930s, the depiction of work in Western and Eastern Europe included the worker's labouring body and especially workingmen's muscles. After 1945, the working body was less frequently depicted.[53] Two explanations for this change in the West are common. One is that the discourse about work that connected its physicality with masculinity and, especially in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, with nationalism and militarism was no longer popular after 1945.[54] The other is that the mechanization and computerization of industry that began in the 1950s eliminated much of the need for physical labour.[55]

In the post-war Soviet Union, too, mechanization was cited as a cause of the gradual disappearance of manual labour from workers' portraits. In 1961, Iurii Abramochkin, a photo correspondent for the Sovinformbiuro, complained about the photographic consequences of the mechanization of Soviet industry:

> To show somebody working with new technology is not that easy. Here is why. Machines and benches, production processes and operations are very similar in all the new enterprises: mechanization, automation, standard constructions. […] You have barely detected a good perspective, have found a promising composition, and you remember that you've already seen something similar somewhere else … And yet every time you want to show something new, you do not want to repeat.[56]

Abramochkin wanted to capture the "individual man" (*показывать человека*) in new ways. He claimed that technological progress, although it presumably made the lives of workers easier, impeded the portrait photographer's progress that goal. He and his colleagues (in both the East and the West) assumed

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[53] Klaus Türk, *Bilder der Arbeit* (Wiesbaden: Westdt. Verl., 2000); Rüthers and Köhring, *Helden am Ende*.

[54] See Christoph Nonn, 'Produktive Arbeit' und 'verschwenderischer Konsum': Annäherungen an ein Gegensatzpaar des politischen Diskurses in Deutschland," in *Geschichte – Unternehmen – Archiv*, eds. Wilfried Feldenkirchen, Susanne Hilger and Kornelia Rennert (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2008), 125–144.

[55] There was still a lot of physically exhausting work, but its depiction was no longer monumentalizing. Rather, it was a means of social criticism, as, for instance, in the work of Lewis Hine. See also Reinhard Matz, *Industriefotografie* (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1987); Wolfgang Hesse, Claudia Schindler and Manfred Seifert, eds., *Produktion und Reproduktion – Arbeit und Fotografie: Tagung im Westsächsischen Textilmuseum Crimmitschau, 24. und 25. April 2009* (Dresden: Thelem, 2010).

[56] Iurii Abramochkin, "Semiletka v deistvii. Bol'shoi kapron," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 2 (1961): 4.

that the more physical labour was mechanized, the fewer were the possibilities to portray individuality. Machines homogenized different labour and production processes, they thus universalized and effectively unified human labour. Apparently, Abramochkin was unaware that his assumption implied a contradiction with the aims of socialist realism, for if human labour had been unified and was thus no longer particular, then workers' portraits could not depict their subjects' 'characteristic features'.

Secondly, my analysis has established that workers were not necessarily depicted at work, doing their job. Instead they were often portrayed during breaks. In most cases the work environment was not at all visible. There certainly was no shortage of physical and manual labour in the Soviet economy. Although every five-year plan included the goal of decreasing the need for manual labour, mechanization and computerization were much slower than in the West. Particularly in agriculture, most of the work continued to be manual. Nevertheless, portraits of agricultural workers were monotonous, just as Filatov complained.[57] So, Abramochkin's lament about mechanization seems to have been more a pretence than a real problem in portraying individual labourers in action.

Depicting actual physical labour was usually reserved for covering the capitalist West. Tense muscles, strained faces and dirty bodies symbolized exploitation, which supposedly did not occur in the late Soviet Union. As soon as labour was depicted in a socialist context, the plight of labourers disappeared. What remained were smiling faces, work breaks, heroism and, occasionally, a glimpse of actual work. Workers in Soviet portraits of the 1960s and 1970s were usually clean, as were their surroundings.[58] Some portraits in *Sovetskoe foto* and *Ogonek* did portray work as strenuous and exhausting, but they were in the minority.

Many of the labourers were not the kinds of workers that Soviet portrait photographers wanted to depict. Looking at the portraits published in Soviet media, one sees that photographers had clear preferences for certain professions: steelworkers, miners, tractor drivers, ballerinas and *kolkhoz* chairmen were much more popular than janitors, street cleaners or lorry drivers.[59] The preponderance of some jobs and the absence of others is striking. The visual

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[57] Liubov Denisova, *Rural women in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[58] On the absence of dirt, see Katerina Gadjeva, "Between Tradition and Modernisation: Representations of Women in Photographic Illustrations in Bulgarian and Soviet Popular Magazines (1948–1956)," *L'Homme: Zeitschrift für feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 26, no. 2 (2015): 33–48, here 37.

[59] Soviet economic theory deemed the last three unproductive. The ballerina was also considered unproductive, but she was a cultural and national (Russian, not Soviet) symbol.

PHOTOGRAPH 4
"Tochny i chutki ruki Alevtiny Smirnovoi"
OGONEK NO. 5 (1976): 7

regime of the portrait photographers established a hierarchy of jobs that contradicted the Soviet notion that each person participated in the economy according to his or her ability and thereby contributed to the general welfare.

When actual work was depicted, curiously, women were the subjects more often than men. The representation of work in *Sovetskoe foto* and *Ogonek* was as gendered as the division of labour in the Soviet economy. Male subjects were usually in heavy industry, female subjects in textiles and agriculture.

The portrait of the textile worker Alevtina Smirnova (photograph 4) invites the viewer to switch back and forth between two focal points: her hands and her face.[60] Smirnova fills the entire frame. Her concentration and the position of her hands indicate that she is engaged in a task that demands meticulous attention to detail. Unlike the previous portraits of men, she is shown actually working, threading the yarn back into the shuttle. The caption reads "Alevtina Smirnova's precise and sensitive hands", which suggests that her hands are separate from her mind. Indeed, the loom's beater does separate them. Furthermore, she has to position herself around the machine, leaning forward in what seems to be an uncomfortable posture, while holding her hands out in front of her. Thus, her portrait depicts the physical strain of her work.

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[60] The far left side is cut off due to the fold in the magazine.

According to Abramochkin's criticism of mechanization, it should have been easy for the photographer to portray her individuality. Yet, the question remains: What do we actually know about Alevtina Smirnova other than she is a textile worker focused on the task before her? How does this portrait display her inner soul? And how could it do so at all in the first place?

5   Portraying Individuality?

The Soviet visual regime contradicted Abramochkin's and Borodin's notion that portraits of manual labourers could somehow capture their subjects' individuality better than those of people performing mechanized jobs. Moreover, it deprived most workers of the chance to have their individuality displayed simply because their jobs were not among those that photographers preferred to portray. As many of these jobs still involved manual labour, mechanization does not explain why photographers failed to portray individuals. Finally, those, like steel and agricultural workers, who were deemed worthy of portrayal had to make do with a kind of limited individuality, whose portrayal tended toward monotony rather than displaying 'characteristic features'.

This is exactly the monotony that Filatov, and many others, bemoaned. His letter to the editors of *Sovetskoe foto* (with which I began) prompted a series of articles and readers' responses to them. Though none of the published responses wholeheartedly embraced Filatov's criticism, many agreed in part. For instance, N. Liashenko from Irkutsk wrote, "simply the word 'traktorist' or 'doiarka' automatically evokes in your mind a certain style of photography".[61] The discussion in *Sovetskoe foto* of how to portray individuality was never ending, and both amateurs and professionals contributed. Not one participant challenged the assumption that photography could, and should, portray individuality. On the contrary, each maintained that every person has his or her unique characteristics that photography, as an art form and as the documentation of reality, should strive to represent and that photographers could best do that by portraying subjects at their work.

In his contribution to the discussion in 1975, the Latvian photographer V. Vasilevskis proposed incorporating the particularities of a subject's job in order to create an adequate portrait:

> We all know very well that to take a photo of a steelworker, for instance, is different than taking a photo of a geologist. However, another axiom is often forgotten. Not only is it different from taking a photo of a geologist,

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[61] *Sovetskoe foto* no. 2 (1972): 18.

but at the same time it is also different from taking a photo of other steelworkers. One reason for unsuccessful portraits and photo-reportages […] is the stereotypical approach of photographing a representative of a certain occupation. […] Nobody is individually or personally depicted in these photographs [Индивидуально, личностно никто в таких сним-ках не выделяется.]. This leads to portraits of jobs but not to portraits of individual people with their particularities, which belong only to them, with their individual [неповторыми] characters […].**62**

According to Vasilevskis, technical progress and the subsequent mechanization did not make it more difficult to capture a subject's individuality. The problem was photographers' neglect of their art, for one could not possibly depict a subject's individuality with a stereotypical approach. As we have seen, portrait photographers had produced too many portraits that just depicted people as representatives of their occupations by repeating certain accouterments, like the steelworker's goggles and the milkmaid's pail. Because steelworkers were always portrayed with their goggles, work clothes and a furnace in the background, their faces were becoming meaningless. Yet, Vasilevskis (and many others) insisted that occupation and individuality were linked. The portrayal of a geologist had to be different from that of a steelworker if each was to capture its subject's individuality because occupations shape individuals. Therefore, knowing a subject's occupation is tantamount to knowing the individual person.

   Cheishvili's extraordinary portrait "Steelmaker" is not at all stereotypical. It is a striking deviation from the canon of workers' portraits in the late Soviet Union that follows Vasilevskis's agenda closely. His steelmaker displays the effects of the exertion that his work involves. That is, Cheishvili not only captured the physical dimension of work; he pushed it to the forefront. The man's blackened face, which fills the frame and is the only thing that can be seen, displays the strenuousness of his work and his exasperated look upwards and half-open mouth, as if he is about to take a deep breath, portrays his exhaustion. He shows no sign of a smile. The background, like his face, is black, and because of the shadow on the left he almost melts into it. There is no clear demarcation between him and his environment, the contours of his body are blurred. He is entirely involved in his work, which the photograph's reigning blackness symbolizes. Lastly, the perspective is peculiar. We look down on the subject, which stresses his fatigue. Here work is not depicted as joyful but as tiring.

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62 V. Vasilevskis, "Chelovek i ego professiia," *Sovetskoe foto* no. 9 (1973): 30.
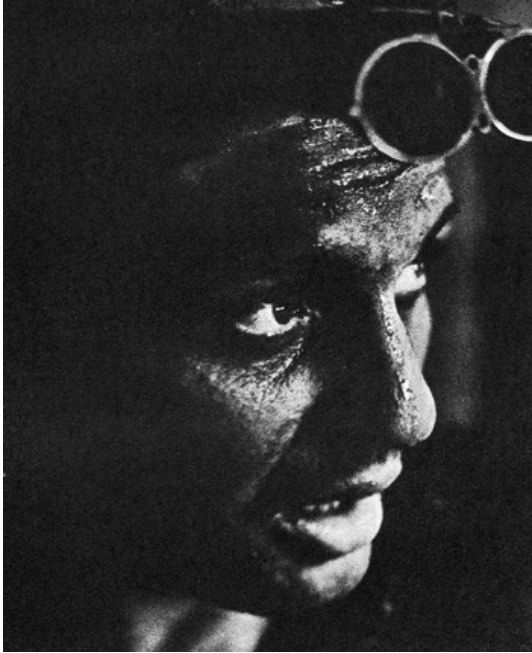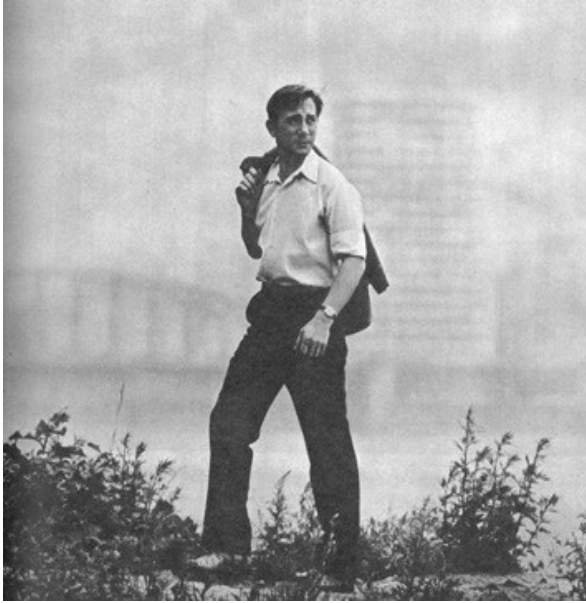
PHOTOGRAPH 5
V. Cheishvili, "Stalevar" (*Steelmaker*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 11 (1970): 8

This portrait is exceptional, yet, how is it supposed to deliver any more information about the individual portrayed than do the other portraits we have seen? Although photographers, critics and commentators time and again claimed that photography had to capture the individual and to deliver its 'characteristic features', my contention is that this goal was bound to fail. What does this extraordinary portrait tell us about this particular worker other than he is exhausted?

A different way in which photographers experimented with capturing individuality was to photograph subjects away from their work, as Borodin recommended in his reply to Filatov in 1972. However, this also had its limitations.

In "Leningrad worker N. Ivanov", we see a certain Ivanov on a stroll, presumably along the bank of the Neva River on the outskirts of the city. His clothes do not indicate anything particular about him, but the way that he has tossed his jacket over his shoulder suggests a relaxed demeanour. Since this picture was published in the late 1970s, his wristwatch was not a status symbol anymore, but a sign of his culturedness. Why such a portrait should depict more of its subject's individuality simply because he was not shown at work is puzzling. In contrast to the previous portraits, the viewer cannot even guess Ivanov's occupation. He could be a bus driver, engineer, mechanic or teacher. However, the fact that it was published in *Sovetskoe foto* meant that this photograph was thought to portray this "Leningrad worker N. Ivanov" and, thus, a

PHOTOGRAPH 6
A. Steshanov, "Leningradskii rabochii N.
Ivanov" (*Leningrad worker N. Ivanov*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 7 (1977): 17

'Soviet person' appropriately.[63] Still, it had to provide the information that Ivanov was a worker. Had it been entitled only "N. Ivanov", it would probably not have been published. In the Soviet context, the fact that Ivanov was a worker was crucial, yet, at the same time, it was superfluous because almost everybody was a worker. The inclusion of 'worker' in the caption seems to provide a 'characteristic feature', but he shares this feature with 150 million other Soviets who are also workers.

Once it was accepted to photograph workers in their leisure time, photo essays about workers became common. Such essays portrayed workers surrounded by their families at their dinner tables, relaxing in their living rooms and strolling along the broad avenues of Soviet cities. However, each new theme (the family dinner, relaxing at home, the evening stroll) eventually became monotonous, and the unfamiliar faces of one working family were hard to distinguish from the unfamiliar faces of any other. These new patterns of repetition once more illustrate the almost impossible task of Soviet portrait photography as it was conceived in the 1960s and 1970s.[64]

The portraits that manage to portray individuality are those that somehow capture something unusual, which disrupts the viewer's expectations. This is exemplified in the last picture. Here we see the oil worker A. Khaibulin, who, not surprisingly, is relaxing from work. Behind him an oil rig is visible. In his work clothes and helmet, he stretches out on his stomach in a meadow and holds some wildflowers. He seems to have just picked the flowers and is now carefully stroking one with his first two fingers. Khaibulin's job confronts him

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[63] Volkov-Lannit, "*Iskusstvo fotoportreta*," I, 21.
[64] Think of photographs of children on their first school day or wedding pictures in the West.

PHOTOGRAPH 7
B. Khasianov, "Udarnik" (*Shock worker*)
SOVETSKOE FOTO NO. 6 (1972): 9

with heavy physical labour, dirt and toxins. Nevertheless, he cherishes nature, enjoys flowers and is affectionate. Though it cannot depict all of it, the portrait does let the viewer see some of Khaibulin's multi-faceted personality by breaking with conventions. We know that Khaibulin was very productive, since the caption tells us that he was an *udarnik*, and we see that he loves nature. The portrait depicts Khaibulin as an individual because it disrupts assumed stereotypes.

6   Conclusion

In both the East and the West, it was the proclaimed aim of portrait photography, and the desire of photographers, to represent their subjects in ways that revealed their individual characteristics. The Soviet discourse on portrait photography held that one's work expressed one's individuality. For this reason, Soviet photographers shot their subjects in the workplace and dressed for the job. Theoretically, every working person earned a portrait of his/her own. Consequently, the visual regime of the Soviet Union (and the other socialist countries) was quite distinct from those of the West. Simply contributing to the Soviet experiment through work made a Soviet citizen worthy of a portrait. Many Soviet workers shared in the privilege of having their lives described and illustrated with photographs in magazines and newspapers with nation-wide distribution. Thus, Soviet portrait photography democratized the genre by making workers the standard portrait subject, even though the workers who were actually the subjects of published portraits were probably not simply rank-and-file laborers but devoted activists.

As I have shown in this article, portraits rarely depicted actual work. The typified Stalinist working heroes' muscles and sweat made way for rather contemplative moments in which the balance of depicting work or depicting the working person considerably shifted towards the latter. Furthermore, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, this individualizing trend was reinforced when newspapers and magazines began albeit cautiously, to publish portraits whose subjects were not portrayed at work, in their work gear or among colleagues at all. Instead an increasing number of images appeared of people at home, in a club or taking a stroll. Like in "Leningrad worker N. Ivanov's" case from 1977, these portraits' captions still indicated that their subjects were workers.[65] Being a worker remained a decisive piece of information about the person portrayed, yet at the same time work gradually retreated into the background. In Ivanov's portrait, work was essentially reduced to a piece of information in the caption.

Late Soviet portrait photography succeeded in disrupting the visual monotony of Stalinism and considerably broadened the visual regime. The process of substantially enlarging the scope of how, when and where to portray working faces implied that the traditional socialist realist mode of portrayal had failed to capture individuals' characteristics and essence. The worker at his work space and in his work gear remained the face of late socialism, but he or she had too many faces for any one portrait to convey. The more Soviet portrait photographers discussed the multi-faceted character of Soviet individuals, the more difficult their job became in capturing them adequately. This precariousness of portraits is by no means particular to Soviet portrait photography; it is inherent to the portrait genre itself. Maybe individuality is too big a subject to fit into one portrait.

Acknowledgement

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[65] See also e.g. the female engineer in *Sovetskoe foto*, no. 12 (1973), p. 14.