Victorious Laughter: Satirical Photomontage in Brigade KGK's Photo Series *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*

Samuel Johnson

In 1934, Soviet artists Viktor Koretsky, Vera Gitsevich, and Boris Knoblok created a series of photomontages under their working name, Brigade KGK, to illustrate a major political speech by Joseph Stalin. Of the three artists, the best known today is Koretsky, a Kyiv-born graphic artist twice awarded the Stalin Prize for posters he designed during World War II. After completing his education in 1929 at the Moscow State College of Visual Arts in Memory of the 1905 Uprising, Koretsky worked intermittently with Gitsevich (his wife) and Knoblok, creating stage designs for the realist theater of Nikolai Okhlopkov and producing graphic design for the State Fine Arts Publishing House, Izogiz.[1] Brigade KGK achieved its greatest success in the field of poster art, but *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, finds them working in a new format. A sheaf of silver bromide prints showcasing seventy-five photomontages captioned and numbered sequentially was published by the agency Soiuzfoto in an edition of five thousand, with an embossed red portfolio available for separate purchase. The series represents a novel type of Soviet print culture; part album, part filmstrip, the mass-produced photo series could also function as a portable exhibition in libraries, workers' clubs, and other public places, as book artist and curator Mikhail Karasik explains.[2] The editioned photo series therefore exemplifies an emerging type of publication oriented toward informal public exhibition, which photography historian Olivier Lugon first identified in the postwar period.[3]

Among the most notable qualities of Brigade KGK's *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* is its comic mood. Fifteen of the photomontages in the series—one fifth of its contents—are satirical. The sheer frequency of Koretsky, Gitsevich, and Knoblok's attempts at humor allows us to position their work within a cluster of debates in the 1930s: on the nature and direction of photomontage, the aims and possibilities of satire in an era devoted to socialist realism, and the enjoyment of consumer goods in the Soviet Union. Serguei Oushakine, one of the leading voices in recent critical discussions of Soviet

Getty Research Journal, no. 20 (2025): 30–51 © 2025 Samuel Johnson

laughter, has stressed the importance of visual representation to the comic milieu.[4] Scholars of film, literature, and drama have recently expanded our understanding of Soviet humor, but art historical studies of official humor are still too rare.[5] In this respect, *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* serves as a valuable case study.

The surprising range of photographic techniques exploited by Brigade KGK also testifies to the persistence of a rich photographic culture in the Stalin era. Surrounded by experiments, Soviet critics of the mid-1930s complained that "there is still no theory of photomontage," even as they saw the basis of a future theory with new clarity.[6] Their dissatisfaction arose from the capacious and free use of the term itself. *Photomontage* referred not only to the serial, multipage layouts of illustrated magazines, which preserved an individual photograph's autonomy and documentary value, but also to the satirical compositions that German photomonteur John Heartfield created for the *Arbeiter Illustreirte Zeitung* (*AIZ;* Workers' illustrated news), which subordinated photographs to a simple slogan-like message. As a result, Soviet critics maintained that "one of the first tasks on the way to creating a theory of photomontage is to clarify the genres, establish their fundamental differences, sphere of application, etc."[7]

The novel format and multifarious techniques of *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* underscore the currency of these concerns about genre. Brigade KGK freely used photographs in statistical data visualizations, monumentalizing socialist realist tableaux, and satirical photomontages. In each of these genres, their work reveals a new plasticity in the photograph. Nowhere is this quality more striking than in their satirical montages, which rely on an experimental technique to create distorted images. This essay examines how this technique made photomontage intelligible in relation to the other arts that contemporary critics regarded as its models in the mid-1930s: drawing, painting, and stage—or, more precisely, film—direction. It demonstrates that concerns often understood in terms of medium alone were, for artists and critics of the 1930s, ineluctably bound up with questions of genre.

Imminent Victory

From the 16th to the 17th Congress is a little-known intertext of a well-known speech: Stalin's "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.)."[8] This long address, delivered at the so-called Congress of the Victors on 26 January 1934 and published two days later in the organ of the party's Central Committee, *Pravda*, celebrated the Bolsheviks' triumph over internal dissent from its left and right flanks as well as the continuing stability of the USSR's planned socialist economy against the backdrop of the ongoing depression in the capitalist West. In the photo series by Brigade KGK, the text of Stalin's address maintains a position of primary importance. The lengthy captions beneath the photographs are taken directly from the published *Pravda* transcript, and any deletions are duly marked by ellipses. The illustrations also closely shadow Stalin's text, giving special emphasis to no single passage of the speech. Even the visual humor in the montages receives textual

legitimation in a form recently analyzed by literary historian Natalia Skradol: several captions contain the *Pravda* transcript's editorial interpolations of laughter and applause from Stalin's audience.[9]

Stalin would not utter his famous verdict that "life has become better, life has become happier" until the final months of 1935, but the jubilation it expressed originated in the events of 1934. In his "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," he sought to clarify a widespread misconception about the goals of economic planning. During the first five-year plan (1928–32), massive industrial investment and poor resource allocation had created runaway inflation, which required food rations to be introduced for the first time since the civil war. For some observers, the reappearance of the centralized command economy and the disappearance of money presaged an immediate transition to the producer-oriented society of full communism. In his report of 1934, however, Stalin announced that the second five-year plan would eliminate rations, reminding those who had praised the ration system for obviating money that "in the last analysis goods are produced not for the sake of producing them, but for consumption."[10]

When he delivered his report, Stalin still hoped to end rations in 1938, at the conclusion of the second plan period, but by the end of 1934 he would abruptly change course. Determined to tame the inflation that rations held at bay, the Soviet State Bank advised a slackening of price controls on some commodities, which would allow the state to absorb as revenue the excess demand that bubbled up in underground markets.[11] The strategy was immediately successful, and by October Stalin decided to eliminate rations before the year's end. In November he told the Central Committee that these reforms were meant "to expand Soviet commerce, to strengthen the cash economy." He promised that "the value of the ruble will become more stable, undoubtedly, and strengthening the ruble means strengthening all of our planning and financial accountability."[12] Rather than reflecting a turn to liberal laissez-faire, the reintroduction of money as the central instrument of the economy was part of a seismic shift toward a planned mass-consumption sector.

The triumphant mood of the report was therefore anticipatory, and Stalin continued to emphasize the need for vigilance against the enemies of socialism. In both Stalin's report and the satirical photomontages of Brigade KGK, those who stood in the way of the planned commercial-trade sector were subject to merciless mockery. Stalin criticized two closely related attitudes. On the one hand, he highlighted a widespread "indifference to the demand for a greater range of goods and to the requirements of consumers" among functionaries who dreamed of direct, moneyless exchange.[13] On the other, he reminded his audience that "there is still among a certain section of Communists a supercilious, disdainful attitude towards trade," which is not the perspective of true Bolsheviks but "impoverished aristocrats who are full of ambition."[14]

In the photo series, these internal political obstacles to state trade are represented in a pair of montages. In montage number fifty-seven, Brigade KGK portrays a helpless Soviet consumer overwhelmed by toothbrushes that cascade from a comically oversize document containing the orders of a myopic, self-satisfied bureaucrat (fig. 1). The party's

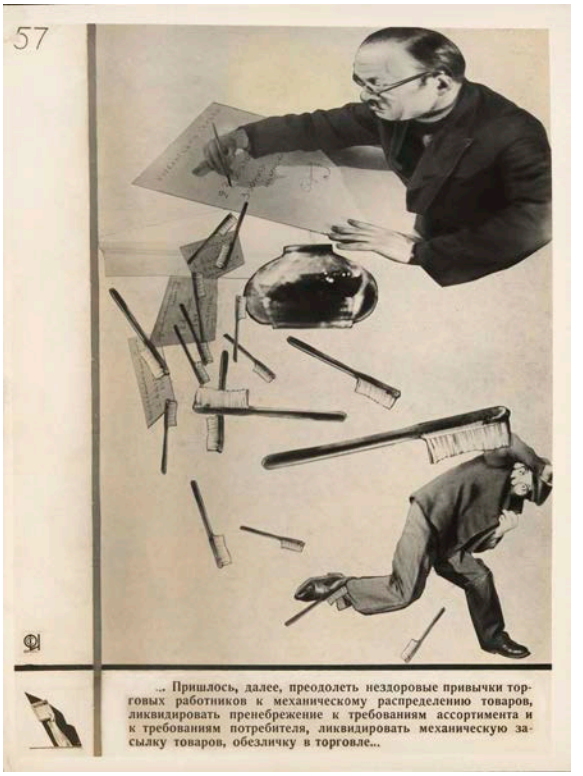


FIG. 1. — Brigade KGK (Viktor Koretsky [1909–98], Vera Gitsevich [1897–1976], and Boris Knoblok [1903–84]). "We had to overcome among the people in charge of trade the unhealthy habit of distributing goods mechanically; we had to put a stop to their indifference to the demand for a greater range of goods and to the requirements of the consumers." *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, 1934, no. 57, gelatin silver print, 22.7 × 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2014.R.25.

own arrogance toward trade is lampooned in montage fifty-six, which shows a young man turning his nose up at—and turning his back on—the stream of goods awaiting future Soviet consumers: tea kettles, alarm clocks, reams of fabric, leather shoes, sausage links, bread, and canned goods (fig. 2). Amid this bounty, a can of tomatoes clipped from the foreign press—a sign of the relative abundance enjoyed abroad—gives indirect testimony of the continuing straits of the Soviet consumer.

The chaotic proliferation of consumer goods in these compositions shows how Brigade KGK borrowed its models from the previous generation of avant-garde artists and subtly transformed them to meet new ideological demands. Of particular relevance are the photomontages that the constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko created in 1923 to illustrate Vladimir Mayakovsky's new poem "Pro eto" (About this).[15] Art historian Chistina Kiaer has situated "Pro eto" in the context of left-opposition leader Lev (Leon) Trotsky's campaign for a new way of life in the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP), when the private enterprises of so-called nepmen were permitted to compete with nationalized concerns.[16] For the lovelorn poet who is the protagonist of Mayakovsky's poem, the persistence of the old *byt*, or way of life, under NEP stands

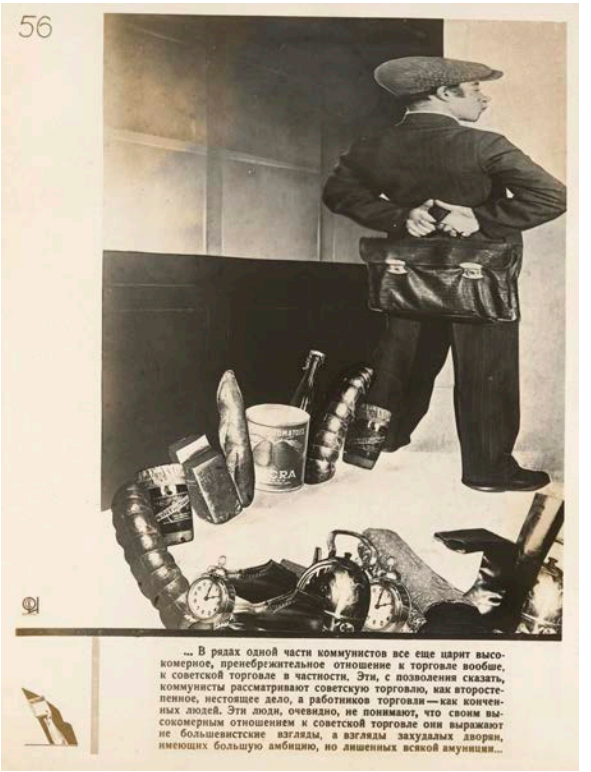


FIG. 2. — Brigade KGK (Viktor Koretsky [1909–98], Vera Gitsevich [1897–1976], and Boris Knoblok [1903–84]). "There is still among a section of Communists a supercilious, disdainful attitude toward trade in general, and toward Soviet trade in particular. These Communists, so-called, look upon Soviet trade as a matter of secondary importance, not worth bothering about." *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, 1934, no. 56, gelatin silver print, 22.7 × 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2014.R.25.

in the way of a new, higher form of communist existence (*bytie*). One of Rodchenko's illustrations for the poem derides the paraphernalia of tea drinking as a primitive fetish of the old, feminine-coded *byt* (fig. 3). It shows two photographs of the poet hemmed in on all sides by precious silver, backed by a corpulent nepman. For the NEP-era photomonteur, the overwhelming accumulation of domestic goods represented an obstacle to communist mobilization. A decade later, Brigade KGK used the same compositional and stylistic principles to a different end. Where the nepman represented an external threat, foreign to the Soviet way of life, the traders targeted by Brigade KGK's montage were within the party—Communists, but in name only, as Stalin stated.

The distance between these two eras can be gauged with a passage from the popular satirical novel by Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *Dvenadtsat' stul'ev* (1928; *The Twelve Chairs*). The novel follows the irrepressible Ostap Bender, a conman, master of the new Bolshevik argot, and all around "smooth operator," as he seeks his fortune: a set of jewels that the mother of a provincial noble sewed into the cushion of a dining chair as the revolution unfolded around her. When Bender visits a poet friend who sleeps on the floor of a communal apartment in Moscow, the authors draw a stark contrast between the new

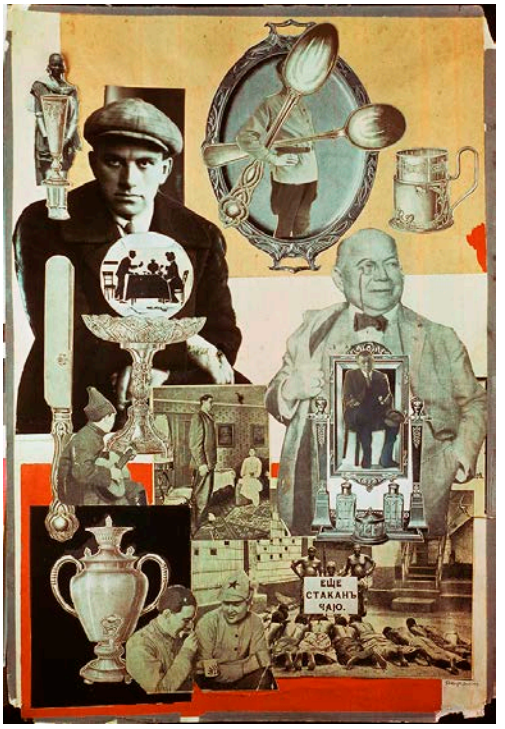


FIG. 3. — Aleksandr Rodchenko (Russian, 1890–1956). Draft illustration for Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem "Pro eto," accompanied by the lines "And the century stands / Unwhipped / the mare of *byt* won't budge," 1923, cut-and-pasted printed papers and gelatin silver photographs, 42.5 × 32.5 cm. Moscow, State Mayakovsky Museum. Art © 2024 Estate of Alexander Rodchenko / UPRAVIS, Moscow / ARS, NY. Photo: Art Resource.

ethical existence pursued by young Communists and the familiar comforts of the old way of life. In witheringly ironic indirect discourse, Ilf and Petrov skewer the attitude of vigilance against domestic comfort that motivates the protagonist of Mayakovsky's "Pro eto":

> A mattress is insatiable. . . . It needs a bookcase. It needs a table with thick stupid legs. Creaking its springs, it demands drapes, a door curtain, and pots and pans for the kitchen. It shoves people and says to them:
>
> "Go on! Buy a washboard and a rolling pin!"
>
> "I'm ashamed of you, man. You haven't yet got a carpet."
>
> A mattress remembers and does everything in its own way.
>
> Not even a poet can escape the common lot. Here he comes, carrying one from the market, hugging it to his soft belly with horror.
>
> "I'll break down your resistance, poet," says the mattress.[17]

As Kiaer has argued, this kind of spontaneous "thing theory" led Mayakovsky to repurpose the commodity fetish in his advertisements for Bolshevik-made "comradely objects" during Trotsky's campaign for a new *byt*. The poet in *The Twelve Chairs* is portrayed somewhat less sympathetically than Mayakovsky's poet; the former is an idealist, a lover of Leo Tolstoy, and a vegetarian. Both types, however, were targeted in the Stalinist campaign against the left-wing ideology and Trotskyism. And, as Mikhail Odesskii and David Feldman show in their critical introduction to the text, this campaign underpinned Ilf and Petrov's 1927 commission for a serialized novel from the monthly literary journal *30 dnei* (30 days).[18] For this reason, literary scholar Maya Vinokur argues that Ilf and Petrov's novels mark the transition from a traditional form of Russian satire exemplified by Gogol's "laughter through tears" to a new kind of Stalinist "laughter without tears."[19] This new type of laughter, which rippled through the auditorium as Stalin delivered his report, is what Brigade KGK wanted their photomontages to provoke from the viewer.

Satire, a Realist Genre

Recently, a number of scholars have demonstrated that the famously slippery definition of socialist realism did not exclude satire. As art historian Annie Gérin argues, the former commissar of education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, was instrumental in reconciling these apparently distinct modes. Speaking to the Union of Soviet Writers shortly before his death in 1933, Lunacharsky explained that "in his struggle with negative phenomena, the Socialist Realist may of course resort to all sorts of hyperbole, caricature, and utterly improbable comparisons—not to conceal reality but, through stylization, to reveal it."[20] In 1934, when the founding editor of the satirical journal *Krokodil*, Mikhail Koltsov, addressed the First Congress of Soviet Writers, he stressed that satire was an indispensable weapon in the struggle against the remnants of capitalism. In contemporary examples of Soviet humor, Koltsov perceived "strength and power, along with notes of severe anger and superiority over the enemy."[21] But he also echoed Stalin's criticisms of antitrade attitudes within the party, asking, "Isn't it possible that in ourselves, in those who sincerely consider themselves new people, devout Bolsheviks . . . that some old, petit bourgeois poison remains?"[22] This volatile mixture of triumphant ire and introspective critique distinguishes the satirical sensibility of 1934 from later developments in Soviet humor. As Oushakine points out, in subsequent years the negative aspects of Soviet life would be portrayed from the standpoint of positive comic heroes who exuded an attitude of joy, calm, and confidence against the backdrop of a stable socialist environment.[23]

These statements are exactly contemporaneous with publication of *From the 16th to the 17th Congress*, but the discussions of satire that most strongly shaped it began several years earlier, when the first five-year plan was drawing to a close. After a debate in 1929 about the purpose of satire under socialism unfolded in the organ of the Federation of Soviet Writers, *Literaturnaia gazeta* (Literary gazette), Lunacharsky

created a Commission for the Study of Satirical Genres at the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which would examine traditions in Russia, Europe, and Latin America. In a notice published in March 1931 in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, he highlighted the need for a study collection and solicited contributions from collectors of journals such as *Punch*, *Simplicissimus*, *Le charivari*, *L'assiette au beurre* (The butter plate), *Kladderdatsch*, and *L'asino* (The donkey).[24] For working artists, the living embodiment of this tradition was Heartfield, the former dadaist who had contributed stinging satirical photomontages to the Comintern-financed workers' newspaper *AIZ* since 1929. Heartfield even visited the USSR in preparation for an exhibition of his work in 1931 in Moscow, giving lectures and lessons in his photomontage technique to an admiring public.

Heartfield's impact in Moscow was as immediate as Moscow's impact on Heartfield. As art historians Hubertus Gassner and Maria Gough have shown, the potent negativity characterizing Heartfield's anti-capitalist photomontages abated when he was enlisted in the project of positively representing the Soviet planned economy; at the same time, Soviet critics used his work for *AIZ* to attack Soviet photomonteurs, especially Gustav Klutsis, who responded by transforming the field of poster art with a greatly simplified style.[25] More recently, art historian Sabine Kriebel has reinterpreted Heartfield's humor in relation to the satire debates in *Literaturnaia gazeta*, and literary historian Devin Fore has linked Heartfield's practice to socialist realism via caricature. Yet both scholars treat Heartfield's work in a strictly German frame of reference: for Kriebel, the German tradition of satirical magazines, or *Witzblätter*, serves as a "buffer zone" shielding Heartfield from the heroic optimism of official socialist realism, while in Fore's view, the highly developed media ecosystem of German capitalism makes Heartfield a prototypical postmodern realist who mainly used photographs as "reproductions stolen from other sources."[26] This literature reveals a complex and influential artist, but it pays surprisingly little attention to the warm reception that Soviet artists gave to Heartfield's signature trait: his satirical negativity.

In this respect, it is instructive to consider the example of one of Heartfield's most gifted Soviet followers, Boris Petrushansky, who worked under the pen name Boris Klinch. An experienced caricaturist frequently published in *Krokodil*, Klinch embraced photomontage in the rush of excitement surrounding Heartfield's visit to Moscow and employed a method very similar to Heartfield's, if not directly modeled on it.[27] In 1932, Klinch complained that satire is "one of the strongest weapons in the struggle for socialist construction," yet "photo-satire is almost totally absent" from the arsenal of the Soviet artist.[28] To Klinch, Heartfield was primarily a master of comic genres. Indeed, Klinch used the term *fotomontazh* interchangeably with *fotosatira*, *fotokarikatura*, and *fotosharzh*, a term adapted from the French *portrait charge* (itself a translation from the Italian *ritratti carichi*, or "loaded portrait").

The *fotosharzhi* that Klinch published in the Soiuzfoto organ *Proletarskoe foto* (Proletarian photo) in late 1932 testify to his belief that Heartfield had "essentially laid the foundations of a great school of this genre."[29] For the fifteenth anniversary celebration of the October Revolution, Klinch created *fotosharzhi* of the British and

German conservatives Stanley Baldwin, Winston Churchill, Gustav Noske, and Adolf Hitler. Klinch's portrayal of Noske, the conservative Social Democrat who forcefully suppressed the Spartacist uprising in 1919, is particularly reminiscent of the combination of animal physiognomy and verbo-visual puns that Heartfield perfected in his photomontages of the late 1920s and early 1930s (fig. 4). Motivated by the nickname "Bluthund" that Noske earned through his taste for martial order, Klinch paired Noske's heavy-lidded eyes with the jowls of a dog. In Russian, the verbal epithet maintains its organic connection to the image through a rather literal transcription; Noske is revealed to be a *krovavaia sobaka* (a bloody dog) rather than an *ishcheika* (a bloodhound, or more literally, a tracker). The vagaries of the translation are evident in the visage of Klinch's *fotosharzh*, which more closely resembles a bulldog than a bloodhound. As Klinch's penetrating interpretation of Noske's cold, indifferent gaze suggests, this verbal image provides the montage with its visual logic.

By emphasizing its natural affinity with the family of comic genres, Klinch convincingly argued that photomontage could be reconciled with the other major arts in the realist tradition. He maintained that photomontage ought to be seen as "a theoretical and practical solution to the problem of the image" encountered by artists in all fields, even if its material properties "make montage more akin to cinema than to the other types of spatial art."[30] In Klinch's view, photomontage and film shared the ability to create an artistic image from mechanical impressions of the external world. But he thought that these new arts were also united with literature and painting by a problem of general relevance: "'Assembling' ['montiruia'] reality in his own way, solving the problems of creative comparison, combining individual uncoordinated photo-touches

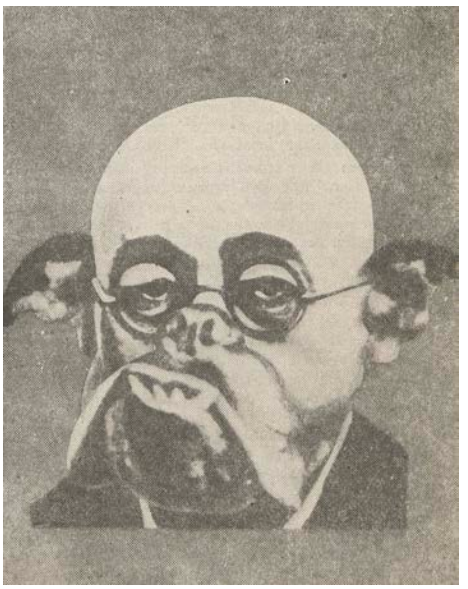


FIG. 4. — Boris Klinch (Russian, 1892–1946). *"Krovovaia sobaka," Noske* ("The bloody dog," Noske), photomontage, 1932. From *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 11 (1932): 29. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 85-S956.

[foto-mazki] step by step according to a plan previously drawn by consciousness, in other words, 'directing' the unorganized 'elements' of the montage, the artist-monteur solves the problem of the image analogously to the easel painter or the satirist."[31]

The linchpin of Klinch's exposition is the artist's conscious plan, which organizes the disparate materials gathered by the monteur into a meaningful order. The presence of this mental image or idea gives the work artistic significance and transforms the monteur into an "artist-monteur." It is regrettable, Klinch concludes, that this process is called montage at all, for the term's unavoidable connotation of mechanical assembly tends to conceal the deep connection between the artistic image assembled by the monteur and the reality it discloses to the viewer.

A renewed assertion of artistic will was necessary, according to Klinch, because artists and critics had come to treat photography as "naked 'factography,'" and in the process forgot that "representation as a directly transcribed [protokol'noe] reproduction of reality is only raw material for the artist."[32] The model of "factography," against which Klinch argues, was popularized in the mid-1920s by the circle of artists and writers associated with the journals *Lef* and *Novyi lef* (New lef), who combined an interest in photomontage with the range of genres they called the literature of fact—diaries, letters, sketches, and minor news reports. As painters picked up the camera, avant-garde writers reinvented themselves as professional journalists issuing communiqués from the field of class struggle. In this milieu, according to art historian Kristin Romberg, the term *moving picture* could be used to criticize a documentary film because it implied (however subtly) that the film subordinated photography to posed or staged actions, like those encountered in painting and theater.[33] Klinch simply reversed this charge by stressing that photomontage is, in fact, a kind of picture making.

The automatic snapshot had been especially appealing to photomonteurs seeking to replace traditional artistic skills with new, rationalized procedures. Latvian artist Klutsis, who claimed to have invented political photomontage independently of Heartfield, articulated a strong defense of this position. Klutsis maintained that "by replacing a drawing with a photograph, the artist represents a particular moment more truthfully, more vitally, more comprehensibly to the masses. The meaning of this substitution," he explained, "lies in the fact that the photograph is not a sketch of a visual fact, but its precise fixation."[34] As Gassner has shown, Klutsis's valorization of these mechanical processes was relentlessly criticized as a form of petty-bourgeois formalism by members of the Russian Association of Proletarian Photographers and the Russian Association of Proletarian Artists (ROPF and RAPKh), who considered his fragmented, repetitive compositions inferior to the powerful simplicity of Heartfield's work.[35] But members of both camps saw promise in the mechanical aspect of photomontage, ambivalent though they were. As one of Klinch's supporters pointed out, the assembly of readymade clippings had a distinct advantage over traditional methods of artistic representation because "it frees artists from the need to make drawings," something many artists already did with the aid of photographs, he admitted.[36]

Klinch regretted the way critics portrayed photomontage as an approach marooned "somewhere on the border between the drawing and the photograph," but this view has great explanatory power.[37] Heartfield's method exploited both the credibility of the photograph as an index of reality and the traditional artistic skills that it was often said to replace. Photographer János Reismann recalled taking custom photographs for Heartfield "based on exact pencil sketches," which then became the subject of long critical discussions with the monteur, who "insisted on nuances that I was no longer capable of seeing."[38] The primacy of Heartfield's artistic vision over the mechanically produced photograph served as a powerful model for Soviet artists. "Having determined the idea and theme," Klinch too prepared "a graphic sketch according to which he selects photographic material," which he then "enlarged or reduced in the appointed sizes" and assembled.[39] Even without the special photo shoots that Heartfield relied on, this method required that the artist "know in advance—definitely in advance, even if in general outline—what kind of basic photographic material he will have at his disposal."[40] As in Klinch's remarks about the primacy of the image in artistic creation, this outline is both a plan of action and a drawing in the traditional sense of *disegno*.

This refashioning of the mechanical aspects of photomontage into a more traditional guise soon became common in Soviet criticism. In an entry for the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* written in 1934, a chastened Klutsis admits that "photomontage as artistic creation should be distinguished from photomontage in which several photographs, or cut-outs of them, are mechanically combined . . . which is not really art."[41] The first monograph devoted to Heartfield's work, published in 1936 by Soviet writer Sergei Tretiakov, de-emphasizes the mechanical side of photomontage in order to highlight the genres that make its effects intelligible. In addition to the "photomontage-*sharzh*," Heartfield is presented in the monograph as a creator of "photomontage-feuilletons" and "photo-epigrams."[42] Tretiakov states that these exercises "do not demand from the photomonteur the specialized knowledges of the artist or draftsman—these are replaced by scissors—but in exchange grant full freedom to the combinatory ability, taste and wit."[43] Scissors too are expendible, a mere implement. Tretiakov also sees Heartfield's combinatory wit in his staged photographs, where "the moment of montage precedes the snapshot."[44] In the end, Tretiakov admits that the very skills the photomonteur sets aside justify the new practice. He concludes his text by stressing that "the feuilletonist is brought up on photomontage," and that "additions to the photograph are educating the future draftsman or painter."[45] Evidently, photography and montage would not put an end to traditional skills and genres, as some corners of the avant-garde had loudly proclaimed, but would transform and renew them.

A Truthful Distortion of the Facts

Closer attention to genre categories can help to elucidate the technical and material aspects of Brigade KGK's series *From the 16th to the 17th Congress*. Consider the distinction

between *sharzh* and caricature. The boundary between these genres is fluid, but it occasionally emerges in sharp relief. Where *sharzh* concentrates on individual physiognomy, caricature adds mise-en-scène, often developing into complex multifigure compositions that rely on situational humor. The former captures the quirks of public personalities, while the latter extends its reach to impersonal, abstract ideas. When Stalin's report distinguishes between the defeated nationalist foe and its lingering ideological effects, for example, Brigade KGK uses caricature to show how the party, represented by a membership card, must still be purged of alien ideas that cling to it like homunculi (fig. 5). Indeed, owing to the dry, policy-forward framing of Stalin's report, pure *sharzhi* (like that of Klinch's portrait of Noske; [see fig. 4]) are rare in the series. In caricatures where *sharzh* does appear, Brigade KGK takes an approach not seen in the work of Heartfield or Klinch. They use an old darkroom trick to distort the faces of its subjects into ridiculous, grimacing masks.

Many of the most striking montages in the series exploit a fun-house effect that can be achieved by using a curved mirror, bending the photosensitive paper beneath the enlarger or otherwise manipulating the photograph's emulsion.[46] In montage number

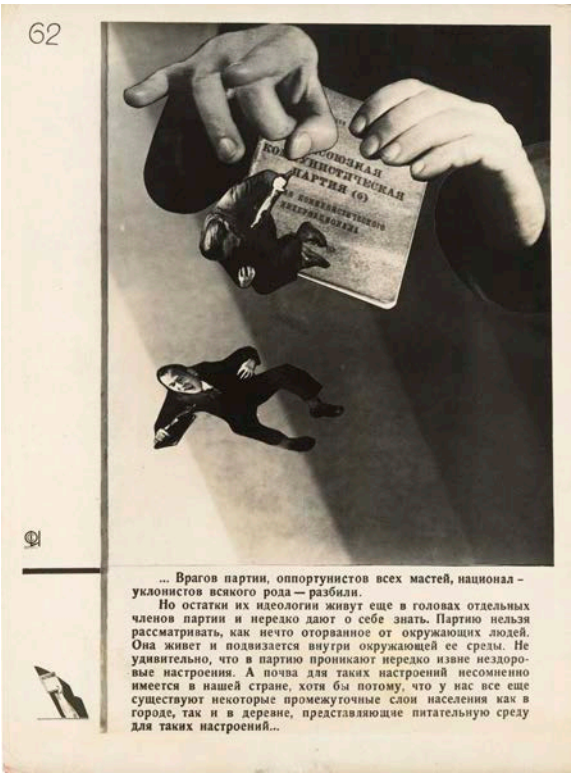


FIG. 5. — Brigade KGK (Viktor Koretsky [1909–98], Vera Gitsevich [1897–1976], and Boris Knoblok [1903–84]). "We have smashed the enemies of the Party, the opportunists of all shades, the nationalist deviators of all kinds. But remnants of their ideology still live in the minds of individual members of the Party, and not infrequently they find expression." *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, 1934, no. 62, gelatin silver print, 22.7 × 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2014.R.25.

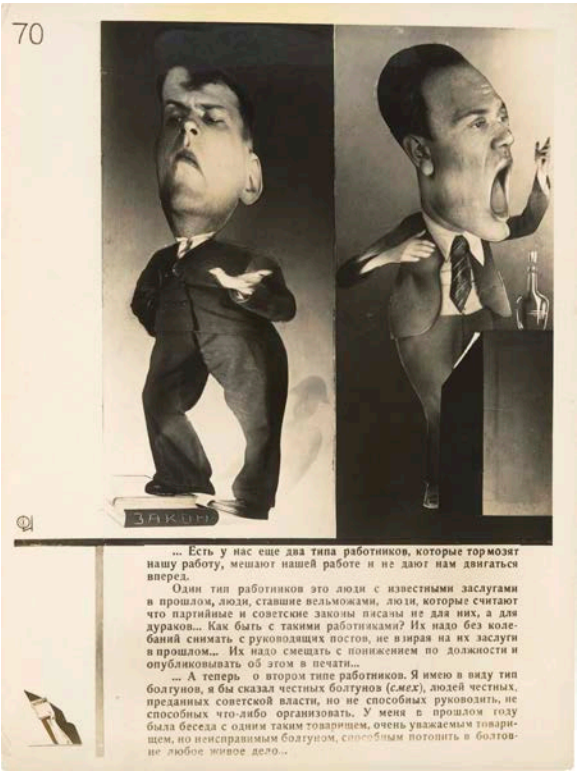


FIG. 6. — Brigade KGK (Viktor Koretsky [1909–98], Vera Gitsevich [1897–1976], and Boris Knoblok [1903–84]). "There are two other types of executive who retard our work, hinder our work, and hold up our advance. . . . People who have become bigwigs, who consider that Party decisions and Soviet laws are not written for them, but for fools. . . . And . . . honest windbags (*laughter*), people who are honest and loyal to Soviet power, but who are incapable of leadership, incapable of organizing anything." *From the 16th to the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)*, 1934, no. 70, gelatin silver print, 22.7 × 17 cm. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2014.R.25.

fifty-six (see fig. 2), the young man's face has been subtly stretched to emphasize his self-important expression. In montage number seventy (fig. 6), this distortion is used to even greater effect in the depiction of two contemporary Soviet types highlighted in Stalin's address: the "bigwigs" who think they are above the law because of the services they have performed for the party; and the "people who are honest and loyal to Soviet power, but who are incapable of leadership," whom Stalin calls "honest windbags."[47] In the caption of this image, the matter-of-fact parenthetical inserted by editors at *Pravda* testifies to the spontaneous laughter (*smekh*) that this remark provoked at the congress. This spontaneous delight is neither a sign of Stalin's talent as a humorist nor of his audience's sycophancy. Instead, the laughter alerts us to the generic quality of the mediocre joke, a mainstay of political speeches.

The "honest windbag" is a type expertly drawn in Ilf and Petrov's novel of 1931, *Zolotoi telenok* (*The Golden Calf*), which finds Ostap Bender pursuing another secret fortune—this time, concealed by a minor bureaucrat. The countless ineffectual officials Bender encounters in his quest are typified by one Yegor Skumbrievich, who, like his

coworkers, turned his zeal for social work into a "universal mutual fraud" that kept him out of the office at all times.[48] After finally locating Skumbrievich at the beach, Bender subjects him to an interrogation at sea, which transforms the "exemplary activist" into "a shapeless sack full of mustard and horseradish."[49] The comedic effect of this image lies in its unexpected verbo-visual illumination: the slippery fish Skumbrievich—his name derives from the Russian word *skumbriia* (Scomber, or mackerel)—is caught at sea and turned into a tasty snack. As literary scholar Mark Lipovetsky has shown, the methods that Bender uses to net his elusive prey are borrowed from the Soviet secret police.[50]

Unlike the *fotosharzhi* by Klinch, which reveal the true character concealed beneath appearances, these examples from Brigade KGK and Ilf and Petrov rely on a different trope: an endlessly changeable form that will readily adapt itself to any content. The target of the humor here is appearance itself, and our pleasure arises from the manipulation of this empty, pliable, and ultimately insignificant material by a superior force. For a visual equivalent to these jokes about windbags, Brigade KGK turned to an unsigned *fotosharzh* published in 1932 that portrays Berlin's chief of police, German Social Democrat Albert Grzesinski (fig. 7). While serving as minister of the interior from 1926 to 1930, Grzesinski oversaw the suppression of Communist rallies and the banning of the Rotfrontkämpferbund (Alliance of Red-Front-Fighters), a paramilitary organization affiliated with the German Communist Party. In the *fotosharzh* of Grzesinski, the stretched face is less a means of amplifying a suspicious sidelong glance than a visual equivalent of the police violence exercised on German Communists, turned against their political foe. When Brigade KGK adopts this device, stretching and distorting the faces of windbags and bigwigs, the same kind of visual violence is inflicted upon the shiftless Soviet bureaucrat, a figure so insignificant that the force required to reshape him amounts to nothing.

This unsigned *sharzh* of Grzesinski can be linked in turn to an earlier use of the same device in the Sovkino film *Kain i Artem* (*Cain and Artem*) of 1929, directed by Pavel Petrov-Bytov. Petrov-Bytov's free adaptation of story by Maxim Gorky follows Cain, a Jewish tradesman and underground leftist living on the margins of a provincial market town, as he experiences, first, persecution by, and then comradely solidarity from the brawny Artem. After finding Artem unconscious following an attempted murder by some petty toughs (hired by an envious kulak), Cain nurses him back to health and teaches him of the workers' plight. Later, when those same villains drunkenly force Cain to dance until he loses consciousness, the enlightened Artem reemerges to exact a satisfying vengeance. As the exhausted Cain falls to the floor, he sees the faces of his tormenters contorted—by his own failing senses and by their disbelief—into dreadful masks (figs. 8a–c.). To the villains, Artem has risen from the dead.

Although Petrov-Bytov's film was almost overshadowed by the ultraleft polemic he incited in the Leningrad journal *Zhizn' iskusstva* (The life of art) against the pioneers of montage in Soviet film, Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, for making pictures that appealed to the intelligentsia more than the masses, it was quickly pointed out

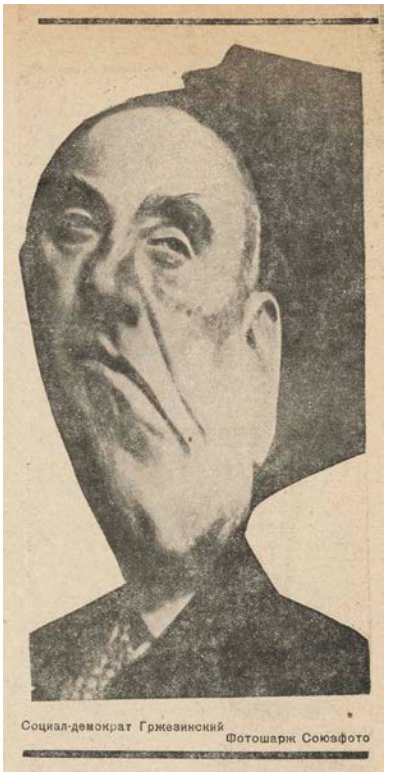
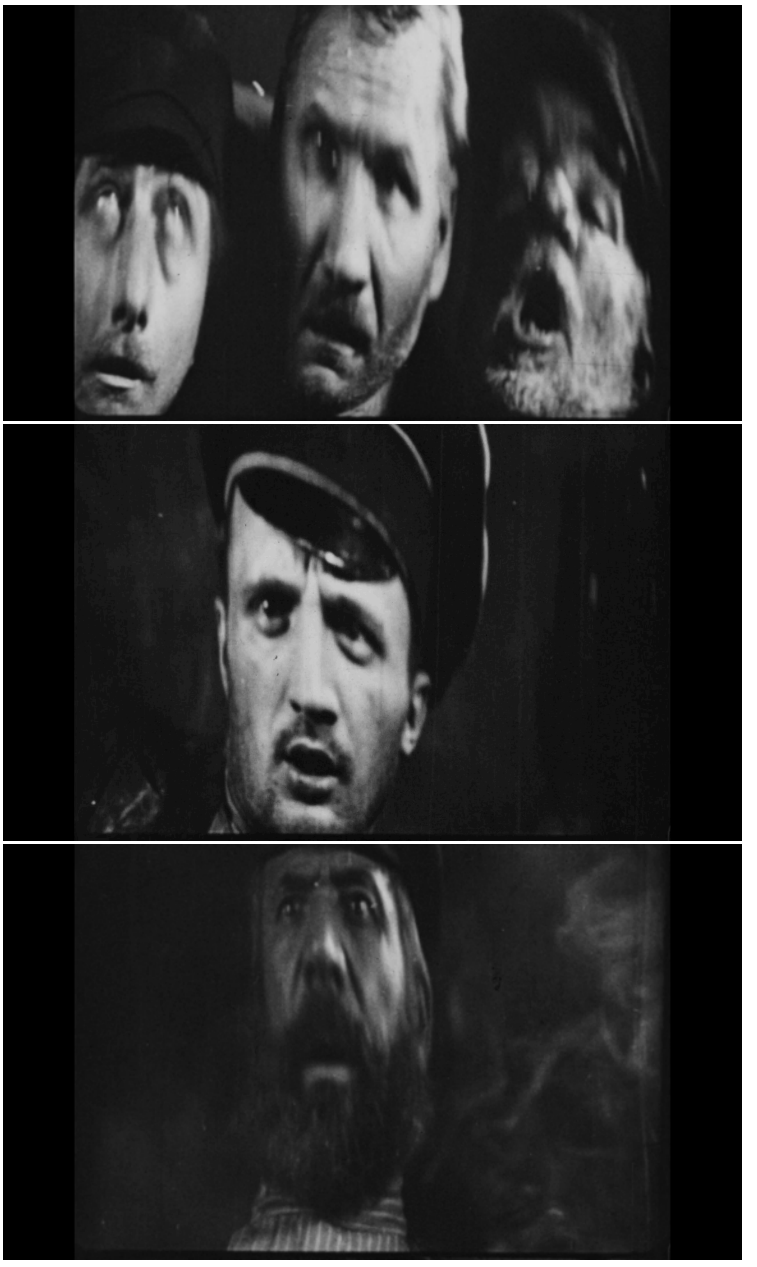


FIG. 7. — Artist unknown. "The Social Democrat Grzesinski," from *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 3 (1932): 7. Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 85-S956.

that his own films made brilliant use of the very formalism he decried.[51] In a review of *Cain and Artem* published in the daily newspaper *Izvestiia*, Lunacharsky remarks that "deformations of objects and human faces have nowhere been used so masterfully, it seems to me. The drunk, brutal people trying to torture Cain lose their human appearance. . . . Here the unbelievably elongated, fantastically distorted faces are full of a mortal fear, which cannot but infect the viewer."[52] While he admits that the film takes too many liberties with Gorky, Lunacharsky concludes that it "holds to the framework of that realism, brought to an absolutely captivating illusion, which made our best films so famous abroad."[53] In 1932, Petrov-Bytov's film was kept in the public eye throughout Soviet celebrations of Gorky's fortieth year as a writer and through the synchronized-sound version of the film prepared in France by film director Abel Gance.[54] Although Soviet critics were unanimously opposed to the French version of *Cain and Artem*, its existence nonetheless testified to an admiration first expressed by Lunacharsky: "The collective that made this picture—first of all, probably, the cameraman—genuinely knows how to make the photograph speak."[55]

Their claim to realism notwithstanding, the distorted projections that we encounter in *Cain and Artem* and *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* have a decidedly mechanical quality. Indeed, it is possible that these images were created with a new device that mechanized the photographer's know-how. In 1927, English photographer



FIGS. 8A–C. — Pavel Petrov-Bytov (Russian, 1895–1960), director. Screen captures from the film *Cain and Artem*, 1929. Images courtesy University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive Library.

Herbert George Ponting patented a device "for photographing in caricature" that he called the "variable controllable distortograph."[56] Using an irregular surface directly affixed to the lens of a still or motion-picture camera, Ponting's device made it possible to create distortions of every conceivable variety, from the amusing to the grotesque (fig. 9).

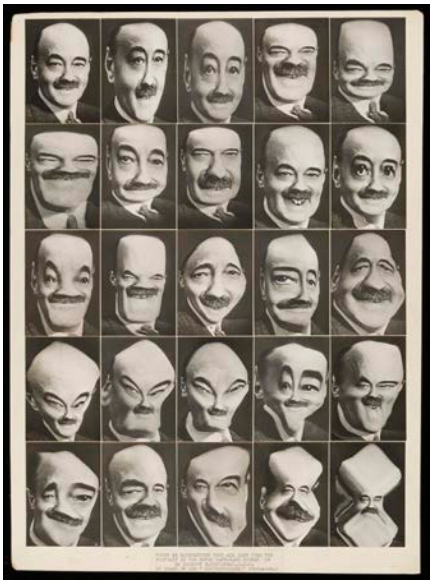


FIG. 9. — Herbert George Ponting (English, 1870–1935). *Camera Caricature*, ca. 1927, gelatin silver prints mounted on card, 49.5 × 35.6 cm (grid). London, Victoria and Albert Museum, RPS.3336–2018. Image © Royal Photographic Society Collection / Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Ponting's invention was available to Petrov-Bytov's camera operator in 1929, just as it was available to Soiuzfoto in spring 1931, when the agency energetically pursued a policy of full mechanization for its printing facilities. In keeping with the goals of increased production under the first five-year plan, the agency replaced its "old-fashioned equipment" with new photographic enlargers and a range of machines that automated the processes of printing, washing, drying, trimming, and sorting.[57] This new, rationalized production process was what allowed Soiuzfoto to efficiently produce editioned series such as *From the 16th to the 17th Congress*. The agency's first attempt at this format, brought out in October 1930 in an edition of 1500, became so popular in workers' clubs, schools, and factory committees across the USSR that the problem of assembling the prints into series "was sorted out literally on the fly."[58] The *fotosharzhi* published in *Proletarskoe foto* and *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* were produced and distributed by Soiuzfoto—first anonymously, and then, after a protest from Klinch, with artist credits—only after its new facilities had begun operating.[59] Looking closely at the multiple vectors of distortion in the bodies of the bigwigs and windbags in Brigade KGK's photomontage number seventy (see fig. 6), it is easy to conclude that something more than a convex mirror is in play.

Distorted images like those we encounter in the series *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* continued to appear in the years after the publication of the portfolio, even as they hewed more closely to Heartfield's example. By way of conclusion, I will highlight the next phase in the history of the device in photomonteur Aleksandr Zhitomirsky's work for *Front-Illustrierte* (Front illustrated). This newspaper was a Soviet propaganda leaflet published by the chief political directorate of the Red Army during World War

II; it was distributed behind enemy lines and aimed to undermine German morale. In many of Zhitomirsky's montages, Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels is depicted as a subhuman creature spewing racial ressentiment. But in pivotal works, the distorted image is transformed from an instrument of visual violence to a supplementary means of characterization (fig. 10). In a front-page montage for an April 1943 issue of *Front-Illustrierte*, captioned "There are lucky devils and unlucky ones," Goebbels's distended face appears as a documentary fact atop the hand-drawn body of a chimpanzee. This distorted mechanical likeness still possesses its iconoclastic power, but it also plays a supporting role as the weight of characterization shifts to the larger composition—from *sharzh* to caricature. In this instance, Goebbels is characterized less by his face than by his bodily attributes, which connect him to the surrounding elements of the montage. Dressed in a suit, he balances on a forelimb, rather than his feet, and holds forth on the mysterious nature of luck before a photograph of a tuxedoed Hermann Goering—the titular "lucky devil"—seated beside his wife. Against the human attributes of culture and speech, Zhitomirsky juxtaposes the racist's bestial truth: behind his back, Goebbels's prehensile tail holds a pen that records the fate of the "unlucky ones"—the German soldiers who must die in the mud like animals.

This image of Goebbels as a chattering ape soon became widespread in Soviet anti-Nazi propaganda, but the combination of mechanical and manual techniques in "There are lucky devils and unlucky ones" occurs in just a few of Zhitomirsky's montages. In subsequent examples, the anamorphic photograph of Goebbels is replaced by a hand-drawn image of a chimpanzee's face, returning the caricature to the realm of traditional manual skill. Indeed, as photography historian Erika Wolf has shown, the art of drawing was central to Zhitomirsky's self-presentation throughout his career.[60] Even so, his artistic development from the fragmented cut-and-paste montage to neotraditional Heartfieldian caricature was mediated by technical manipulations like the distortions discussed in this essay.

From the 16th to the 17th Congress offers a striking exhibit of novel technical experiments, repurposed avant-garde tropes, and even some polished examples of heroic socialist realism. The variety of approaches used in the series evinces a robust period of photographic experimentation within the prolonged gestation of socialist realism. Still, over the course of the 1930s the photograph faced increasingly urgent demands to serve the interests of the worker. While painting, drawing, and cinema were celebrated for their narrative capabilities, photomontage was portrayed as an imperfect and increasingly inadequate means to express the proletariat's mastery over modern technology. The montage constructions in Brigade KGK's series show that they accepted many of the arguments against the mechanical qualities of photomontage even as they continued to explore technical effects unique to photography.

When *From the 16th to the 17th Congress* appeared, however, their position was in retreat. A large body of recent scholarship has presented convincing arguments that Soviet attitudes toward montage were transformed by Heartfield's subordination of the photographic medium to the singular political purpose of his compositions. By

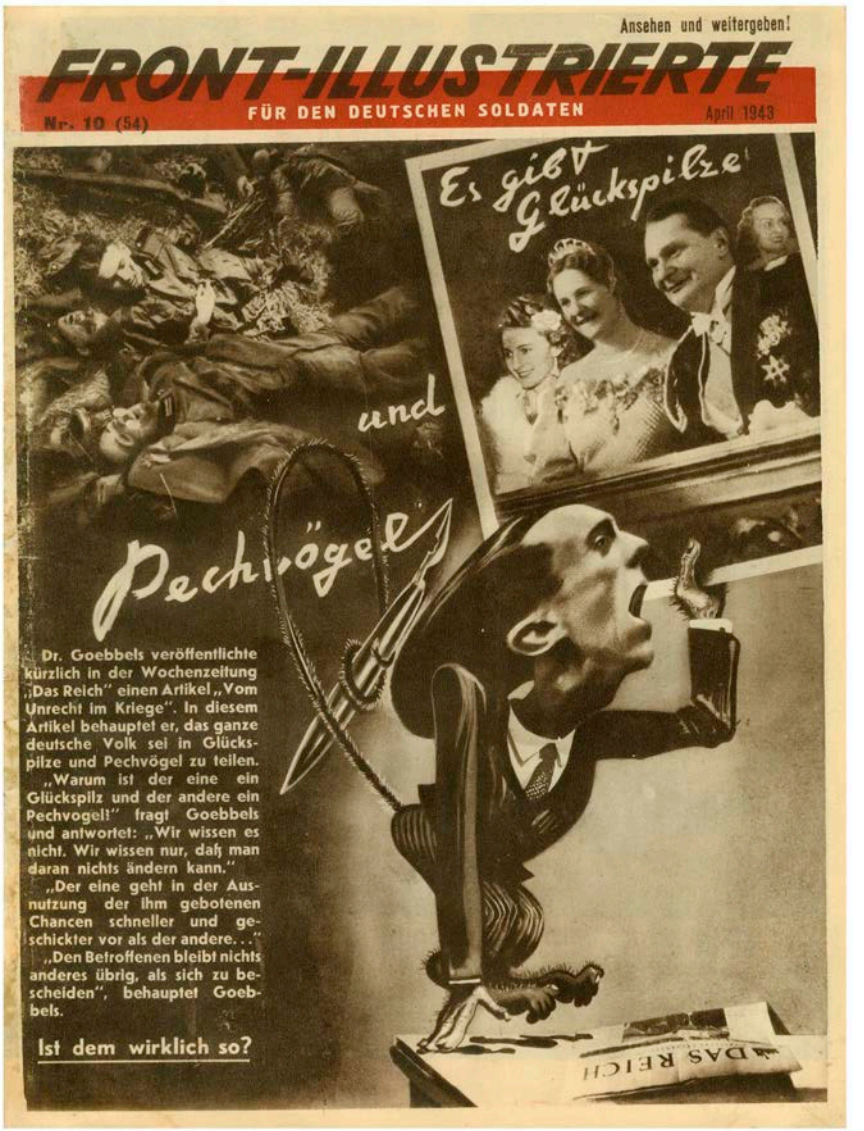


FIG. 10. — Aleksandr Zhitomirsky (Russian, 1907–93). "There are lucky devils and unlucky ones," cover of *Front-Illustrierte*, no. 10, April 1943. Prague, Ne Boltai! Collection. Art © Vladimir Zhitomirsky.

1936, when Tretiakov argued that it was "Heartfield alone, as the pioneer of Bolshevik photomontage," who "pounded into the heads of academics and art lovers that photomontage is a member of equal rights in the order of the visual arts,"[61] this opinion was widely accepted. Younger artists coming of age in the 1930s, such as Koretsky and Zhitomirsky, saw Heartfield as the official embodiment of committed Communist art and quickly assimilated the principles of his method. In his subsequent work as a poster designer, Koretsky professed that "it is impossible to be satisfied with readymade photographs."[62] *From the 16th to the 17th Congress*, however, demonstrates that the Soviet reception of Heartfield as the master of satirical photomontage was far from

straightforward, and that his example was played against other anonymous and half-forgotten figures who forced the photograph to speak in ways that Heartfield never explored.

To a certain degree, art history has been the willing inheritor of the conservative Soviet impulse to canonize Heartfield as the paterfamilias of political photomontage. But in many respects, a focus on comic genres rather than on individual style grants a more accurate view of the photomontage tradition. In his late writings, Lunacharsky affirmed that "laughter is a tool—and a very serious tool—for the social self-discipline of a class, or for [the exertion of] pressure from one class onto other classes."[63] For him, satire was especially complex because it testified as much to the insignificance of its target (always something laughable, after all) as to the serious threat that the target represents. Reflecting on the example of the European bourgeoisie, Lunacharsky concluded that laughter is supremely important in the infancy of a class, when both self-discipline and merciless mockery of the class enemy are paramount. When Brigade KGK created *From the 16th to the 17th Congress*, the final victory of the working class appeared imminent, but only in the territories of the USSR, where the Bolsheviks' enemies were increasingly spectral and ideological. The effect of the pure photographic distortion—at once captivatingly elusive and utterly dehumanizing, as Lunacharsky pointed out[64]—suited the political needs of the moment. In subsequent years, when internal threats had been eliminated, the techniques devised to represent them were refashioned for use in the international sphere, where the battle lines were still very clearly drawn.

Samuel Johnson is associate professor of art history in the Department of Art & Music Histories at Syracuse University, New York.

Notes

This paper benefited enormously from an exchange with Jindřich Toman at a panel for the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) Annual Convention in 2017, where I delivered a very early draft. Since then, many conversations with Maggie Innes have deepened my understanding of the issues addressed here. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of quoted material from the Russian are mine and use the Library of Congress system to romanize Cyrillic letters. In the case of proper names, I have followed the simplified transliterations introduced by previous authors, eliminating soft signs and substituting "y" for "i" when it occurs in the terminal position.

1. "Sezon teatra Krasnoi presni," *Vecherniaia Moskva*, 22 August 1934, 3. For a brief overview of Koretsky's career, see Erika Wolf, *Koretsky: The Soviet Photo Poster: 1930–1984* (New York: The New Press, 2012). Knoblok began a long and successful career in the theater after the breakup of Brigade KGK, while Gitsevich continued to design posters under her own name into the late 1940s.

2. Mikhail Karasik, *The Soviet Photobook, 1920–1941*, ed. Manfred Heiting (Göttingen: Steidl, 2015), 30–31, 552–53.

3. Olivier Lugon, "The Ubiquitous Exhibition: Magazines, Museums, and Reproducible Exhibitions after World War II," in *The "Public" Life of Photographs*, ed. Thierry Gervais (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 123–24.

4. Serguei Oushakine, "Laughter under Socialism: Exposing the Ocular in Soviet Jocularity," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (2011): 247–55.

5. For a comprehensive survey focused on the Stalin period, see Evgenii Dobrenko and Natal'ia Dzhonsson-Skradol', *Gossmekh: Stalinizm i komicheskoe* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe

Obozrenie, 2022). For an excellent art historical treatment of visual satire in the 1920s, see Annie Gérin, *Devastation and Laughter: Satire, Power, and Culture in the Early Soviet State, 1920s–1930s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

6. Viktor Afanas'ef, "Foto i fotomontazh," *Sovetskoe foto,* no. 11 (1935): 19.

7. Afanas'ef, "Foto i fotomontazh," 18.

8. I. V. Stalin, "Otchetnyi doklad XVII s'ezdu partii o rabote TsK VKP(b)," in *Sochinenie,* vol. 13 (Moscow: Gos. Izd. politicheskoi literatury, 1952), 282–379. English translation published as J. V. Stalin, "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.)," in *Works,* vol. 13 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1955), 288–388.

9. Natalia Skradol, "Laughing with Comrade Stalin: An Analysis of Laughter in a Soviet Newspaper Report," *The Russian Review* 68, no. 1 (2009): 26–48.

10. Stalin, "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," 347.

11. Oleg Khlevniuk and R. W. Davies, "The End of Rationing in the Soviet Union, 1934–35," *Europe and Asia Studies* 51, no. 4 (June 1999): 563–64.

12. Joseph Stalin speaking at the November 1934 Central Committee Plenum, quoted in Oleg Khlevniuk, *Master of the House: Stalin and His Inner Circle*, trans. Nora Seligman Fvorov (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 115–16.

13. Stalin, "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," 348.

14. Stalin, "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," 348.

15. See the illustrated translation: Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Pro Eto – That's What*, trans. Larisa Gureyeva and George Hyde (Tormorden, UK: Arc, 2009).

16. Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 146–58.

17. Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, trans. John H. C. Richarson (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 155.

18. Mikhail Odesskii and David Feldman, "Legenda o velikom kombinatore, ili Pochemu v Shankhae nichego n sluchilos'," in Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov, *Zolotoi telenok: Pervyi polnyi variant romana* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 6–16.

19. Maya Vinokour, "Books of Laughter and Forgetting: Satire and Trauma in the Novels of Il'f and Petrov," *Slavic Review* 74, no. 2 (2017): 347.

20. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Synopsis of a Report on the Tasks of Dramaturgy (Extract)" (1933) in *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents, 1896–1939*, ed. and trans. Richard Taylor (London: Routledge, 1994), 327. For a discussion, see Gérin, *Devastation and Laughter*, 184.

21. Mikhail Koltsov, "Address to the First Congress of Soviet Writers," quoted in Gérin, *Devastation and Laughter*, 186.

22. Koltsov, "Address to the First Congress of Soviet Writers," in Gérin, *Devastation and Laughter*, 186.

23. Serguei Oushakine, "Red Laughter: On Refined Weapons of Soviet Jesters," *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (2012): 207–9.

24. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Pismo v redaktsiiu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 6 March 1931, 4.

25. Hubertus Gassner, "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship, 1931–1932," in *John Heartfield*, ed. Peter Pachnicke and Klaus Honnef (New York: Abrams, 1992), 256–90; and Maria Gough, "Back in the USSR: John Heartfield, Gustav Klutsis, and the Medium of Soviet Propaganda," *New German Critique,* no. 107 (2009): 133–83.

26. Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 202; and Devin Fore, *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 295, 246.

27. For a brief discussion of Klinch's work, see Jindřich Toman, "The Real Reality: Notes on Boris Klinč and Photomontage in the USSR," in *Realisms of the Avant-Garde*, ed. Moritz Bassler et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 299–310; and Toman, "From Carnival to Satire: Photomontage as a Commentary on Photography," *History of Photography* 43, no. 2 (2019): 144–55.

28. Boris Klinch, "Fotosatiru v arsenal agit-massovoi raboty," *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 6 (1932): 24–25.

29. Boris Klinch, "Fotomontazh—peredovoi uchastok iskusstva," *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 2 (1933): 26.

30. Klinch, "Fotomontazh—peredovoi uchastok iskusstva," 27.

31. Klinch, "Fotomontazh—peredovoi uchastok iskusstva," 26.

32. Klinch, "Fotomontazh—peredovoi uchastok iskusstva," 26.

33. Kristin Romberg, "Labor Demonstrations: Aleksei Gan's *Island of the Young Pioneers,* Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Eye,* and the Rationalization of Artistic Labor," *October,* no. 145 (Summer 2013): 51.

34. Gustav Klutsis, "Fotomontazh kak novyi vid agitatsionnogo iskusstvo," in *Izofront: Klassovaia bor'ba na fronte prostranstvennykh iskusstv*, ed. P. I. Novitskii (Moscow: Izogiz, 1931), 120.

35. Gassner, "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship," 266–70.

36. S. Evgenov, "Za bol'shevistskii fotopokaz," *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 6 (1932): 5

37. Klinch, "Fotosatiru v arsenal agit-massovoi raboty," 25.

38. János Reismann (Wolf Reiss), "Als ich mit John Heartfield zusammenarbeite," *Internationale Literatur,* no. 5 (1934): 189–90, quoted in Gassner, "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship," 261.

39. Evgenov, "Za bol'shevistskii fotopokaz," 4.

40. Klinch, "Fotomontazh—peredovoi uchastok iskusstva," 27.

41. Gustav Klutsis, "Fotomontazh," in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 58 (Moscow: Ogiz RSFSR, 1936), 322–3. English translation in Iveta Derkusova, ed., *Gustavs Klucis: Complete Catalogue of Works in the Latvian National Museum of Art* (Riga: Latvian National Museum of Art, 2014), 1:176.

42. Sergei Tret'iakov, *Dzhon Khartfil'd. Monografiia* (Moscow: Ogiz, 1936), 68, 71.

43. Tret'iakov, *Dzhon Khartfil'd*, 79.

44. Tret'iakov, *Dzhon Khartfil'd*, 69.

45. Tret'iakov, *Dzhon Khartfil'd*, 79.

46. See the brief discussion of photographic caricature techniques in Nikolai Tarabukin, "The Art of the Day" (1925), trans. Rosamund Bartlett, *October*, no. 93 (2000): 72. Tarabukin prefers that photographers and filmmakers use an anamorphic lens, a possibility I discuss below.

47. Stalin, "Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress," 378.

48. Ilya Ilf and Evgeny Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, trans. Konstantin Gurevich and Helen Anderson (Rochester, NY: Open Letter, 2009), 171.

49. Ilf and Petrov, *The Golden Calf*, 178. Gurevich and Anderson translate the name Skumbrievich as "Sardinevich." I have maintained the authors' original name here.

50. Mark Lipovetsky, *The Charms of Cynical Reason: The Trickster's Transformation in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2011), 102.

51. Pavel Petrov-Bytov, "We Have No Soviet Cinema" [April 1929]; and Adrian Piotrovsky, "Petrov-Bytov's Platform and Soviet Cinema" [May 1929], in Taylor, *The Film Factory*, 259–63.

52. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "Kain i Artem," *Izvestiia*, 20 November 1929, 5.

53. Lunacharsky, "Kain i Artem," 5.

54. "K 40-letiiu literaturnoi deistvitel'nosti M. Gorkogo," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 11 September 1932, 1. Critic K. Iukov complains that Petrov-Bytov rewrites Gorky's story according to the logic of cinema in K. Iukov, "Tvorchestvo Gorkovo na ekran," *Proletarskoe kino*, nos. 17–18 (1932): 7–16.

55. Lunacharsky, "Kain i Artem," 5. For critical comments on the sound version of *Cain and Artem*, see G. Levkoev, "Opyt ozvuchaniia nemoi fil'my," *Sovetskoe kino,* no. 7 (1933): 57.

56. Mia Fineman, *Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012), 105.

57. "Khronika Soiuzfoto," *Proletarskoe foto,* no. 4 (1931): 50–51. The mechanization began with the purchase of a German Bromograph machine said to expose, fix, and wash prints, and a machine from the firm Marcelina that could handle both drying and rolling. With the Bromograph alone, it was reported that the work of twelve men could be completed by just three.

58. "Khronika Soiuzfoto," 50–51.

59. Evgenov, "Za bol'shevistskii fotopokaz," 5.

60. Erika Wolf, "Drawing as the Foundation of Zhitomirsky's Photomontage," in her *Aleksandr Zhitomirsky: Photomontage as a Weapon of World War II and the Cold War* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2016), 92–95.

61. Tret'iakov, *Dzhon Khartfil'd*, 78.

62. Viktor Koretsky, *Tovarishch plakat: Opyt, razmyshleniia* (1978), 16, quoted in Wolf, *Koretsky*, 4.

63. Anatoly Lunacharsky, "O smekhe" (1931), in Anatoly Lunacharsky, *Sobranie sochinenii,* vol. 8 (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1967), 533. Bracketed interpolation by the author.

64. Lunacharsky, "Kain i Artem," 5.