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At the origins of the Visual Culture: Film und Foto

The photo [is] a pacemaker of both time and progress; the endless series of optical sensations forces the continuous assimilation of the eye and psyche...No longer reading, but seeing! This will be the credo of the daily newspaper ...We need the determined visual producers, men of the second, flexible and always ready to take action.¹

Johannes Molzahn

In Germany, the interwar period, the idea that new means of reproduction and communication were profoundly changing modern man's perception was at the heart of intellectual debates and in the press.² The late 1920s saw a series of international exhibitions committed to New Vision photography, which is associated first and foremost with László Moholy-Nagy, the artist, photographer, and teacher affiliated with the Bauhaus.³ The most significant of these exhibitions was *Film und Foto: Internationale Ausstellung des Deutscher Werkbunds* (FIG. 1) ('Film and Photography: International Exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund'), which held initially in Stuttgart, Germany, in May–July 1929, then reprised in eight other cities in Germany and abroad until 1931.⁴ It was promoted and organised by the Deutscher Werkbund (German Industrial Confederation), an association whose aim was encouraging the cooperation between art, technology and industry.⁵ The head of the executive committee was Gustaf Stotz, the young director of the Württemberg branch

¹ Eskildsen Ute, *Willi Ruge and Fotoaktuell: Adventures for the Press*, in Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., *OBJECT: PHOTO. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909-1949*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2014, p. 356

² Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., *OBJECT: PHOTO. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909-1949*, p. 376

³ Karen Beckman and Liliane Weissberg, ed., *On Writing with Photography*, Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013, p. 97

⁴ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 367

⁵ Alessandra Mauro, ed., *Photoshow: Landmark Exhibitions that Defined the History of Photography*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2014, p. 133

of the Deutscher Werkbund, who invited three colleagues to join him: the art historian Hans Hildebrandt and two graphic designers, Bernhard Pankok and Jan Tschichold, the latter specialized in book design and theorist of *Die neue Typographie* ('The New Typography').⁶ Their task was establishing guidelines for the exhibition and the way of arranging it, whereas they left the responsibility of filling the exhibition with images to a selected group of specialists.⁷



FIG. 1 Poster for *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart (1929). Offset lithograph, 84x 58.5 cm. Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/exhibitions/5.html>

Fifo, as it was soon called, was the first major international exhibition which explored the photography as a whole devoid of any reference to hierarchies of use or function. Here the photographic images were considered as fundamental tools of communication in contemporary society, independently of their scientific value or artistic qualities.⁸ Indeed, according the New Vision's Moholy-Nagy, the photography should facilitate new sensory relationship with the world, the image

⁶ Alessandra Mauro, ed., *Photoshow: Landmark Exhibitions that Defined the History of Photography*, p. 133

⁷ Alessandra Mauro, ed., *Ibidem*, p. 133

⁸ *Ibidem*

should construct reality instead of just represent it mimetically. Against the aesthetic of mimesis, Moholy-Nagy argued that photography should allow to see what previously was invisible and that the modern photographic forms were exemplary tools to revolutionise the way of seeing and, eventually, the society and politics.⁹ The project was the work of professional users of photography, who brought their habits of editing and montage to the practices of the photographic exhibition as a combination of eclectic images, arranged at the discretion of curators.¹⁰ However, many photographer would perceive this attitude as the advent of a visual bric-a-brac and the abdication of any standards of quality, an example of this was the caustic remarks of Albert Renger-Patzsch, who called *Film und Foto* in Stuttgart “a random heap of photos with only one common denominator, their mediocrity.”¹¹

The exhibition, already perceived as an apotheosis, monopolised the most part of the commentary on New Photography and popularised both techniques as extreme close-up, unconventional shooting angles or precision of the New Objectivity, and experiments characteristic of that time, as photograms, negative print, photomontage, cropping, etc. It showcased around 1,000 pictures, most part from Europe, Soviet Union and United States, accredited to more than 180 different authors.¹² As its title declared, the event was enriched by the inclusion of a full cinematic programme, organized by Hans Richter. From 13 and 16 June, it was possible to view some of the most significant films produced over the earlier decade all through the world, with a particular emphasis on Germany and the Soviet Union. The programme included both the most popular films, as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920), *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1928), and numerous experimental works, such as *Entr'acte* (1924) by René Clair, *Symphonie Diagonale* (1924) by Viking Eggeling, *L'Étoile de mer* (1928) by Man Ray, *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* (1927) by Walter Ruttmann and Joris Ivens' works. The films highlighted the strong relationship between photograph and cinema in the 1920s, as linguistic and formal dodges,

⁹ Karen Beckman and Liliane Weissberg, ed., *On Writing with Photography*, p. 98

¹⁰ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 368

¹¹ Christopher Phillips, ed., *The Photography in the Modern Era. European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913-1940*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Aperture, 1989, p. 141

¹² Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 134

developed in one practice and absorbed by the other. These media together provided a new vision of the world filtered through the lens.¹³ It appears, thus, a multimedia event that went well beyond gallery walls and its paradoxical status is that: despite its name and program are among the most famous in the history of photography, its content remains largely unknown; the great majority of its rooms are undocumented.¹⁴ Moreover, the quasi-legendary status of the Stuttgart exhibition tended to overshadow other similar shows, prior or contemporaneous, that in Weimar Germany abounded.¹⁵ Indeed *Fifo*, despite its fame, should not be considered an isolated event but one of the branches in a dense network of exhibitions that were intimately intertwined, where one could find the same photographer and also the same images, in particular, one commentator complained about the sameness of the French contributions.¹⁶ The success of *Fifo* was, though, enormous and immediate, almost 10,000 visitors took part at the exhibition between 18 May and mid-June in 1929.¹⁷

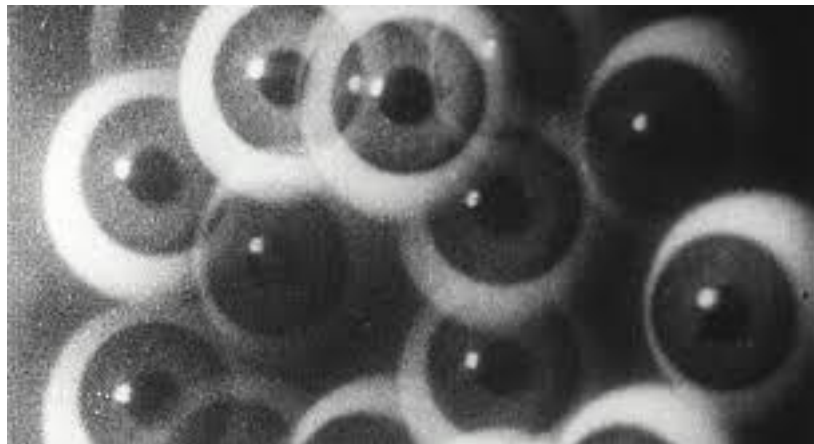


FIG. 2 Hans Richter, Untitled still from *FilmStudy* (1927). Available from <https://expcinema.org/site/en/events/screening-room-hans-richter>

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 143

¹⁴ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 367

¹⁵ *Ibidem*

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 367-368

¹⁷ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 146

The show started with an introductory space, then a series of thirteen rooms arranged in linear way so to create a double 'L' plan (FIG. 3). Each room was dedicated to a specific theme, as the work of an individual artist, a technical process, a photographic genre or the work of a specific country.¹⁸ The first room offered a broad introduction to the history and language of photography, some of the others were devoted to photomontage, photographic propaganda, advertising and scientific photography.¹⁹ There was a solo show by László Moholy-Nagy in the fifth room which examined his work as a photographer from the early experiments with light-sensitive paper to the latest photos whose viewpoints challenged the photographic convention, choosing unusual perspectives.²⁰ The small second room exhibited images by the couple Sasha and Cami Stone. It united their images –close-up of objects and urban impressions- in a great wooden checkboard with neither mats nor space between the prints, as if there assorted fragments refused any isolated vision.²¹

Sections for individual countries were entrusted to artists or academics, and, in some cases, were the result of a collaborative effort. The figures explicitly named were László Moholy-Nagy (Germany), Edward Weston and Edward Steichen (United States), El Lissitzky (Soviet Union), Piet Zwart (Netherlands), and Friedrich Traugott Gubler and Sigfried Gideon (Switzerland). Man Ray and Christian Zervos were unofficial curators for the French gallery; Great Britain, Austria and Czechoslovakia participated in a minor role. Except for Edward Steichen and Edward Weston for United States, the foreign consultants responsible for the national selections at *Fifo* would also include no professional photographers.²²

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 133

¹⁹ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 134

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 137

²¹ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 370

²² *Ibidem*, p. 368



FIG. 3 Cover of *Film und Foto: Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbundes*, Gustaf Stotz (1929). Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Lugon.pdf>



FIG. 4 Cover of *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (Here comes the new photographer!), Werner Gräff (1929). Available from https://www.1stdibs.com/furniture/more-furniture-collectibles/collectibles-curiosities/books/werner-graff-here-comes-new-photographer/id-f_537494/

The introductory section, the famous room 1 (FIG. 6-7) assigned to Moholy-Nagy, offered a synthesis of the history of photography, its contemporary state, and its many possibilities and occupied the largest gallery in the exhibition. Even though there is no surviving list of what this section exactly included, it was here that the photography started to be considered as an autonomous means of expression.²³ There were examples of different supports used during the history, as daguerreotype, salted papers, ferrotypes to albumen, but the progression was not displayed in an evolutionary sense.²⁴ Moholy-Nagy illustrated the New Vision's principles by means of a highly effective display that emphasised the intermediate position of the photographic medium between art and science.²⁵ To structure this very eclectic ensemble, which mixed nineteenth-century studio portraits, crime photos, mug shots, botanical close-ups, aerial views, reportage, ads, and medical X-ray, he organized

²³ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 134

²⁴ *Ibidem*

²⁵ *Ibidem*

the room in a series of chapters, each introduced by a vertical strip of enlarged motifs.²⁶ As in the opening page of a magazine, these images had the dual function of reeling in and summing up. This almost ad-like effect was also reinforced by detaching the enlargements from the wall and, in the case of the giant illuminated X-ray in the middle of the room, backlighting.²⁷ The use of enlargement alluded to different function, for example in the Soviet room to the power of film, while in John Heartfield's room to political space (FIG. 5), so introducing the language of advertising to the traditional space of contemplation.²⁸ One critic took issue with placing in an exhibition space a dual system of attention, a single image in its enlarged version, as in Room 1, to catch the eye quickly, then to call for meditative contemplation in its reduced form.²⁹



FIG. 5 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart (1929). Installation view of Room 3, the John Heartfield room. Exhibition design by John Heartfield. Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Lugon.pdf>

²⁶ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 372

²⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 372-373

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 373

Photographs of various genre – astronomical, aerial, medical, botanical, zoological, industrial, journalistic – were showed in rows, on purpose-built structures and hung on the wall.³⁰ Except for some enlargement positioned at the edges of the partition walls, that acted as graphic elements emphasizing the articulation of the space, all the prints in this section were of the same small size and unframed, set up on simple white card, devoid of the photographers' names alongside.³¹ The pictures were hung in three parallel rows, with his standardized and geometrical arrangement, the overall effect was of a typical 17th-century picture gallery. Lacking any hierarchy of images, the hanging encouraged the formation of hitherto unimagined connections and proving the vital and unanimous essence of photography.³²

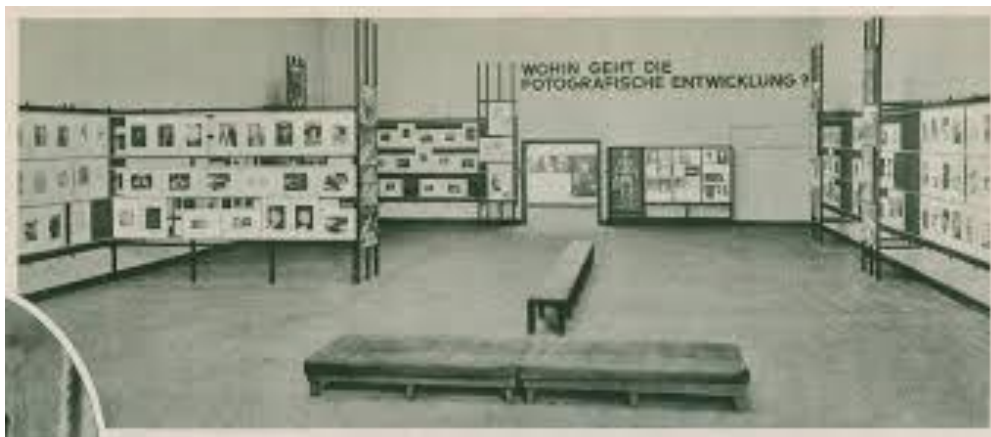


FIG. 6 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart, 1929. Installation view of Room 1. Exhibition design by László Moholy-Nagy. Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/exhibitions/5.html>

The great presence of text was a point of controversy. Traditionally kept to guides or catalogues, it now invaded the walls, blending aesthetic pleasure and didactic explanation. Though the almost systematic use of titling, as in a magazine, the section headings were placed at the top to structure the contents and provide immediate orientation among the various themes.³³ In addition to this were slogans, catchphrases, interpellations to visitors, and long explanatory notes. For example, in the introductory room the strips of images were punctuated by large black panels

³⁰ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 135

³¹ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 136

³² *Ibidem*

³³ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 373

that commented on the presentation in a long-winded way, according to certain critics.³⁴ For some it was intrinsically contradictory that an artistic exhibition be so strongly invaded by the lessons and commentary. Even as the immediacy of the new visual language of photography was being vaunted, the viewer was always guided in front of the images. In Room 1, the blurring between image and commentary was all the greater given that the explanatory panels were photographs themselves, namely were “enlargement of photographic negatives of typewritten texts”.³⁵ A photographic form of writing, in which the two modes of communication now blended with one another to bring closer the works and their explanation, vision and cognition. The overtly didactic dimension of this show was reflected in the organization of material, both systematic and pedagogical³⁶ because with photography, a medium of dissemination, exhibition and expression, any use is a form of re-creation.³⁷



FIG. 7 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart, 1929. Detail of installation view of Room 1. Exhibition design by László Moholy-Nagy. Available from <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/484137028673252439/?lp=true>

Often the works were hung edge-to-edge to form a continuous strip or grid, and this unity was underscored by the use of wooden rods to contain the images within a homogenous geometric structure.³⁸ Here “running all around the clear, smooth partitions is a wide, light red strip, itself divided by silver strips, making an

³⁴ *Ibidem*

³⁵ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 373

³⁶ *Ibidem*

³⁷ *Ibidem*

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 370

impressive backdrop for the objects in the exhibition.”³⁹ The blank wall now met the images at their level to form a dynamic graphic unit, following the principles of New Typography, for which the white of the page was considered an active element, interacting with images and text in the same way.⁴⁰ Photography exhibition design left the interior design –which dominated it at the time- to submit to the primacy of the printed page, for which most of the pictures being exhibited had originally been produced. It was graphic designers and typographers who took over this task, indeed, the general set-up of Stuttgart was largely entrusted to the typographer Ernst Schneider.⁴¹ All imported to the organization of display the codes of the printed page and the principle of modularity specific to the typographic grid, it asserted the absolute equality of the parts, and transferred to the exhibition wall the strength of the inked reproduction, that is its power of unification.⁴² Whatever the quality and format of the images, the prints smoothed over them, so that they appeared dynamic variations of an always equivalent object. Although *Fifo* aimed to celebrate the photographic medium’s conquest of autonomy, supposedly freed from the painting, this emancipation plays out under the influence of a new dominant order, that of printed communication.⁴³ Even on the wall the photography was marked by the laws of publishing, graphic design, and montage –fields with which the exhibition ended: a collection of posters and printed advertising.⁴⁴

Among the various sections which represented individual nations, those dedicated to Germany and the Soviet Union were the most important. The section on photomontage in the German galley was dominated by numerous collage of Sasha and Cami Stone and John Heartfield, but also included works of Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, Gerooge Grosz and others.⁴⁵ The middle of the room exhibited cases containing various publications which reproduced these photomontages, underling the effectiveness of this technique into mass communication.⁴⁶ Photomontage was

³⁹ *Ibidem*

⁴⁰ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 371

⁴¹ *Ibidem*

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 372

⁴³ *Ibidem*

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*

⁴⁵ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 137

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*

the preferred medium for political poster, advertising and pamphlets, it was used to grab the viewer eye through an acute and aggressive language. An example of this was the slogan *Benütze Foto als Waffe* ('Use photography as a weapon') sets in block letters above the entrance to the room (FIG. 8), or the large poster nearby designed by Heartfield to support the German Communist Party in the 1928 elections which shown an open hand and the words "The Hand Has 5 Fingers, With 5 You Grab the Enemy!".⁴⁷



FIG. 8 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart (1929). Installation view of Room 3. Exhibition design by John Heartfield. Available from <https://www.johnheartfield.com/John-Heartfield-Exhibition/helmut-herzfeld-john-heartfield/politics-dada-photos/heartfield-archive-photos-1920> [Accessed 2dn July 2018]

El Lissitzky and Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers arranged the images of the Soviet Union section within a modular structure in light-coloured wood that allowed the prints to be hung at different levels, from floor to ceiling.⁴⁸ This arrangement underlined the originality of certain perspectives, producing an overall effect that recalls the geometric Suprematist structures and immersing the viewer in a total avant-garde context.⁴⁹ The gallery was completed by the provision of ingenious devices that allowed to watch film clips, which were designed by Sergei Eisenstein. The section was thus transformed into a great apparatus that celebrated post-

⁴⁷ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 137

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 140

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*

revolutionary Soviet culture⁵⁰ and began cinema's migration into the traditional exhibition space.⁵¹ (FIG. 9-10)



FIG. 9 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart (1929). The Soviet room. Exhibition design by El Lissitzky. Available from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/484137028673252388/>



FIG. 10 *Film und Foto* exhibition, Stuttgart (1929). Installation view of Room 4, The Soviet room. Exhibition design by El Lissitzky. Available from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/484137028673252376/>

⁵⁰ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 140

⁵¹ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 383

The exhibition's official catalogue, *Film und Foto* (FIG. 3), was a small booklet edited by Stotz and contains six short essays on photography and film, a list of exhibited works and twenty-one illustrations. That three of these deal with the Soviet Union underscores the heavy influence of the Russian avant-garde,⁵² and especially of Russian film, in 1920s Germany, while Stotz's introductory essay reveals the effect of Moholy-Nagy's *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* in its medium-specific address.⁵³ Innovation through material and technical experiment was the doctrine of *Fifo*. Among the catalogue's plates, Max Burchartz's *Lotte (Eye)* 1928 (FIG. 11), illustrates the graphic strength of photography, its ability to transform a portrait into a composition of planes of layered tones, through sharp focus, high contrast, and a cropping frame.⁵⁴ The catalogue's most significant text was a brief summary by Gustaf Stotz on the plan behind *Fifo*'s creation. He asserts a radical stance, inasmuch as he declares that the debate surrounding the medium's artistic value was no longer current and photography's worth was now taken for granted. Besides, excluding any Pictorialist work from the exhibition Stotz founded *Fifo* on a precise theoretical and aesthetic programme that corresponded to the precepts of the New Vision.⁵⁵

⁵² Gustaf Stoltz, ed., *Film und Foto: Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbundes*, Stuttgart: Deutscher Werkbund, 1929, reprinted ed., Arno Press Inc., 1979, p. 17-24

⁵³ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 78

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 79

⁵⁵ Alessandra Mauro, ed., p. 144



FIG. 11 Spread from *Film und Foto: Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbundes* (1929). Left: Max Burchartz. *Lotte Auge*. Right: Aenne Biermann. *Tüte mit Nüssen*. Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/objects/83691.html>

Apart from this, three books with extended photo-essays were commissioned in conjunction with *Fifo* to celebrate the debut of New Vision: the two programmatic books *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (*Here comes the new photographer!*) addressed photography by Werner Gräff and *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* (*Enemy of film today – Friend of film tomorrow*), covered avant-garde film, co-written by Werner Gräff and Hans Richter; and the album *Foto-Auge* by Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold considered both mediums.

Es Kommt der neue fotograf! (FIG. 4) by Werner Gräff shows sequences of photographs that emphasizes photographic process, for example technique, equipment, materials. He provides a tutorial on becoming the titular “new photographer,” using photographs themselves to broaden the reader’s visual vocabulary and so to contribute to the development of visual literacy.⁵⁶ “The purpose of this book is to break down barriers, not create them. Useful though manuals of photography are so long as they describe the technique of the negative and positive process, they are positively harmful when they set limits based on aesthetic or artistic rules.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 79

⁵⁷ Werner Gräff, *Es Kommt der neue Fotograf!*. Berlin: Verlag Hermann Reckendorf, 1929, in Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography 1927-33*, p. 25; Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 79

The book comprises a sequence of photographs interspersed with short written statements that guide through the diverse approaches to picture-making in the photography of the time. The images are not the full-page plates of *Fifo* catalogue, they are arranged in relationship to their context. The interdependence of picture and prose is typical of Gräff's approaches, and as he rejects pictorial limitations, he also succinctly dictates a set of materials-based guidelines.



FIG. 12 Spread from *Es kommt der neue Fotograf!* (1929). Two photographs by Umbo. Right: *Ruth Landshoff (The Hand)* (1927). Available from <http://www.manhattanrarebooks-art.com/ART-PICS/1500sPHOTOBOOKS/Gräff-Intl.jpg>

The essential Gräff's approach to photography was exemplified to some photos portrait which were a demonstration of the creative possibilities of photographic vision on a form traditional to the medium and familiar to the readers (FIG. 12). The text suggests a method, without setting any technical or aesthetic parameters, that focus the modulating effects of light and composition to manipulate natural vision, underlining that the new photographer knows how to manipulate negative and print, choose paper qualities and use all techniques considered hitherto mistakes.⁵⁸

Filmagegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen (FIG. 14) has a similar organization, but limited by the need to put in the static form of the book the moving medium of film (FIG. 2). The contact-printed filmstrips illustrate how photographic techniques, for example cropping and multiple exposure, can be applied to film stills so transforming the medium.⁵⁹ (FIG.13) These companion photo essays select and order a various selection of contemporary photographs in a didactic sequence which, as the *Fifo* installation did, intersects processes,

⁵⁸ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 80

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 81

perspectives, techniques and subjects.⁶⁰ Given that Stotz's catalogue was scarcely illustrated with small examples of photographs' exhibition, *Es Kommt der neue fotograf!*, *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen* and *Foto-Auge* became the publications that preserved and best spread the ideas of *Fifo*.⁶¹



FIG. 13 Hans Richter, Untitled still from *Film Study* (1927).
Available from <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/84052>



FIG. 14 Cover of *Filmgegner von heute – Filmfreunde von morgen*
(Enemy of film today – Friend of film tomorrow), Hans Richter (1929).
Available from <https://www.foldvaribooks.com/pages/books/390/hans-richter/filmgegner-von-heute-filmfreunde-von-morgen-film-foe-of-today-film-friend-of-tomorrow>

⁶⁰ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 81

⁶¹ *Ibidem*

Foto-Auge (FIG. 16) is a more academic book and the product of Franz Roh's formal education in art history. The volume is written in trilingual, German, French and English, and its approach was perfectly suited to the new photographic language of the New Vision given through interrelationships of pictures.⁶² The work of Roh and Tschichold on *Foto-Auge* shows the sophistication of this art historian and graphic designer couple. For example, they put in relation Eugene Atget's *Corsets, Boulevard de Strasbourg* and a New York Times photograph titled *The Plunge*, a shot of a diving woman when she reaches the water (FIG. 15). This approach which pairs a photography by a known photographer with one by an unknown one, is typical in all *Foto-Auge* and here suggests a metaphorical dialogue on the visual relationship between the two pictures.⁶³ The old-world sensuality of the corseted torsos in the Atget's photo is emphasised by the curve of the modern and athletic diver's body. The sense of mystery, and that the viewer is a voyeur, is underlined by the absence of faces, other figures or exterior context.⁶⁴ The photos here recall the reader's attention introducing the idea of visual relation and variation among the photos, which is the unifying principle of Roh's book.

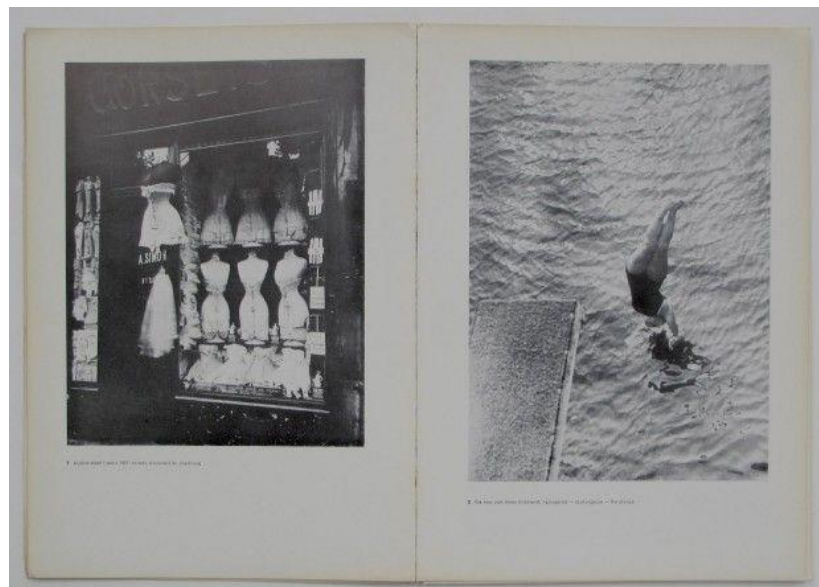


FIG. 15 Spread from *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit*. Left: Egène Aget. *Corset, Boulevard de Strasbourg* (1912). Right: unidentified New York Times image service photographer. *The Plunge*. Available from <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/74520568812348610/?lp=true>

⁶² Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 81

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 83

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*

Roh's introductory essay in *Foto-Auge* "Mechanism and Expression" relates photography to strategies of representation and underline as "the act of selecting an in every way fruitful fragment of [...] reality"⁶⁵ is the major "principle of organization" in photography. "The importance to the history of mankind of development of instruments such as the camera, lies in obtaining increasingly complex results while the handling of the apparatus becomes more and more simple." He suggests that "if [...] we understand art as an end in itself, called forth by man and filled with 'expression,' good photographs are included [...] we can establish a new category without diminishing the aesthetic value of these forms,"⁶⁶ so securing the acknowledgment of photography as a medium in its own right with communicative value.

The image on the cover is one of the most iconic photomontages of the epoch, El Lissitzky's *Self-Portrait (The Constructor)* 1924 (FIG.16), it embodies the kind of assembling of photographic vision which will be emphasised in the book. The other images point to the various approaches and different contests that *Fifo* equally embraced as New Vision's experiments.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *PHOTO-EYE: 76 Photos of the Period*, Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929, reprinted ed., Arno Press Inc., 1973, p. 16

⁶⁶ Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold, *PHOTO-EYE: 76 Photos of the Period*, p. 15

⁶⁷ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 84

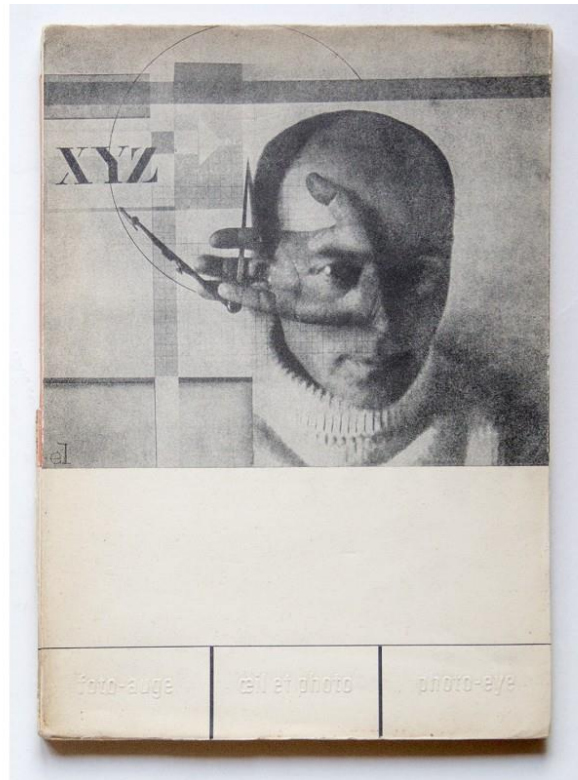


FIG. 16 Cover of *Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit* (1929), El Lissitzky, *Self-Portrait (The Constructor)* (1924). Available from <https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/publications/767.html>

Although Roh and Gräff were diverse in their methodology, both worked to train the reader's visual acuity by engaging pictures in dialogue with one another. These books treated each photograph as a visual image, so the photos – press, studio, sporting, artistic, commercial – are presented as manifestations of modern vision, a version more elegant and concise of many words⁶⁸ inasmuch that “an image is more easily comprehended everywhere than a text”.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg, ed., p. 84

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 73

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