The Poetics of Eye and Lens

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This study arose from the observation of a selection of pictures in the Thomas Walther Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, mainly dating from the 1920s, which give a central role to the human eye gazing at the viewer. The prevalence of this theme in the Walther Collection emphasizes the conceptual allegiance between this collection and the New Vision. An idea, typical of the New Vision, emerges from these pictures—a concept of the new medium of photography and its relationship to the eye and the hand. In this concept, the photographic recording process fully replaces the hand's gesture, and the eye's optical role is transferred to the lens. This model-the analogy of the eye and lens-dates back to the seventeenth century, when it arose in relation to the camera obscura. It is an analogy between the structure of the eye, as observed by dissection, and that of the camera obscura, which was designed in imitation of the eye (with the chamber's lens equivalent to the lens of the eye).¹ In the early days of photography, when the camera obscura was adapted from its role as an aid to drawing to instead directly record an image on a photosensitive surface, the analogy became even more relevant, and it was broadly explored by commentators on the new medium. It reappeared in the context of the 1920s avant-garde in a more theoretical and technological form, as an eye-lens analogy and a new eye-photograph combination: one of the artistic developments of modernity.

The challenge relates to the articulation of the technical (photographic) aspect and artistic creation: these works tell us clearly that the camera is an artistic medium, the equal of previous methods and perhaps even more modern and efficient, as László Moholy-Nagy suggested in 1925 in Malerei, Fotografie, Film (Painting, Photography, Film). In the early twentieth century, transition to the use of portable devices, or "hand" cameras - which became widespread in the 1920s with the invention of the Ermanox, Leica, and Rolleiflex — implied an effective, creative, almost causal relationship between the eye and the viewfinder, and therefore between the eye and the lens. The photographer now composed the shot with an eyepiece viewfinder, putting the eye physically very close to the lens, and it was the eye that decided, by its proximity, what the lens would "collect." The lens was thus considered a second eye whose technical efficiency translated into modern, new, unexpected images: photography, the result of this second eye's action, thus became an art whose faculties fit the needs and concepts of the pictorial, graphic, and architectural avant-gardes.



fig. 1 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). *Self-Portrait (The Constructor).* 1924. Gelatin silver print, 5 ½ × 3 ½" (13.9 × 8.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA <u>1764.2001</u>). © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

The human eye was the pivot of this qualitative leap and of the new power of vision: we could see with our eyes in the form of a photograph, which was "seen" and recorded by a camera, that which could not be seen directly by the human eye in situ. *Seeing* was the watchword of modernity around 1930, symbolized by the creation of the magazine <u>Vu</u> ("seen") in 1928 in Paris. But in these photographs we see the world (discover it) through the photo—that is to say, through the photographic lens-eye. There is a complementarity between

the human eye and technical eye, one supporting the other and one surpassing the other. This was the conceptual basis of the new art, addressing different forms of competition, substitution, and meaning between the two.

We have selected a set of photographs from the Walther Collection that are clearly symptomatic of the eyephotography relationship, because they put the focus in an innovative way on the eye within the face or on the eye-lens analogy. Proceeding by association with other images from the Walther Collection and with documents from the same historical and artistic environment, we will show how this representation of the eye arose in different contexts and what meanings its use implied, depending on the medium and the intended status of the work. And through these works we will try to define the development of some major aesthetic issues that stimulated the 1920s avant-garde.

PORTRAITURE: THE EYE, THE GAZE

The motif of the eye as axis is the *raison d'être* of two major works from this period, both highly representative of the New Vision: El Lissitzky's *Self-Portrait (The Constructor)*, of 1924, and <u>Max Burchartz's Lotte (Eye) (Lotte [Auge]</u>), of 1928. These two famous works, far from being simply portraits, are true aesthetic propositions—in a sense, manifestos in the form of photographs—which stipulate the supremacy of the human eye combined with the photographic process.

Lissitzky's complex work (fig. 1) is a photomontage in which we see the artist's face, front view, superimposed over a hand holding a compass, so that his right eye (the only one visible) appears in the center of the palm of the hand-the graphic visualization of two traditional "mediums" of artistic creation, the eye and the hand. But The Constructor is primarily photographic, made by a very creative multimedia artist at a time when he (like his colleague Aleksandr Rodchenko) had turned to photography, working to make it the most modern medium in a context of pictorial modernism, Constructivism, and the Soviet avant-garde.² A manifesto piece, it glorifies human vision - showing an eye in close-up—in a sort of rivalry with the camera and with the photographic process, which are implied by the use of photography and photomontage. The complex creation of the work can be reconstructed; the basic elements of the final montage allow us to better understand the challenges of the work.³ There is the artist's self-portrait, with highcontrast lighting, which leaves half of the face in shadow and thus brings out his right eye, marked by light at the edge of the shadows,⁴ and the hand and compass on graph paper, an element that is also very deliberately designed to be a kind of self-portrait. An intermediate print shows that only two negatives were superimposed (fig. 2). In 1927 Lissitzky reused the hand-and-compass motif on the cover of Arkhitektura: raboty arkhitekturnogo fakul'teta VKhUTEMASa, 1920-1927 (Architecture: Work from the architectural faculty of VKhUTEMAS, 1920-1927) but, most importantly, he used it, as a drawing, for a poster for Pelikan ink in 1924,

the same year he made *The Constructor*: on the poster the little bottle of ink (used for the compass line, one imagines) is placed in the center of the palm, like the eye in *The Constructor*.⁵ This emphatic detail makes it clear that the location of the eye in the Walther Collection work is not accidental; it was chosen, and it is the central, determining motif of this image-construction, well before the formulation of the photo-eye concept. In 1924, photography was still fairly separate from painting, architecture, and design; at most, it was considered to be on the fringes of these major avant-garde art forms.

One of the keys to The Constructor is the Soviet pictorial and theoretical environment that was emerging from Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism and Vladimir Tatlin's Constructivism (to which Lissitzky had close ties). The basic idea was that the artist would construct a new world, and photography would be one of the new tools used to build it. The other key to the work is the context of Germany and Western Europe, particularly the Bauhaus movement. Lissitzky, a Russian, was educated in Germany; he had ties to the Bauhaus, to Moholy-Nagy, to Theo van Doesburg's de Stijl group, and, especially, to Kurt Schwitters. In the 1920s he made many trips to Germany, took part in activities in Hannover, and organized Soviet representation in several German exhibitions — such as Die Pressa, in Cologne in 1928 (which included his own photographic fresco), and Film und Foto, in Stuttgart in 1929.

The Constructor can be compared to another selfportrait by Lissitzky, this one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 3). This work is an important counterpart to *The Constructor* because it was produced at the same time, during Lissitzky's stay in Switzerland; the print was made using a photogram technique from the negative of a self-portrait in which the artist wears a headband or cap. The

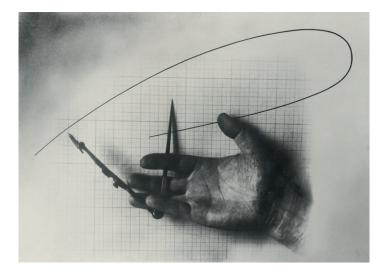


fig. 2 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). Untitled (Hand with a Compass). 1924. Gelatin silver print, 5 $\% \times 8 \%$ " (14.6 \times 20.5 cm). Collection Ann and Jürgen Wilde, Zülpich. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn





fig. 4 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). Vladimir Tatlin Working on the Monument to the Third International. From Il'ia Erenburg. Shest' povestei o legkikh kontsakh (Six tales with easy endings). 1922. Private collection. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 3 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). *Self-Portrait*. 1924-25. Gelatin silver print, 6¹³/₁₆ × 4³/₄" (17.3 × 12.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Gilman Collection. Purchase, Denise and Andrew Saul Gift. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Digital image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY

most important thing is the presence of the compass, the one seen in *The Constructor*, appearing here in negative. In *The Constructor* the hand holds a compass and the artist's eye is combined with the hand. The Metropolitan Museum selfportrait features another combination of the face-gaze and the compass, in which the compass surrounds the face, creating a triangle—possibly a reference to the visual angle illustrated by perspectivists since the seventeenth century. This angle delineates ocular perception and also, owing to the straight path of light, the eye's ability to capture the linear relationship between objects in space at various distances.

A reference to the visual angle (or, in three dimensions, the visual cone) is found most explicitly in Lissitzky's picture of Tatlin working on his Monument to the Third International, published in 1922 (fig. 4). Tatlin appears in a stance based on a photograph: the head of the compass (an architect's angular instrument) is placed on Tatlin's eye, at the center of a circle around his face, which could represent an eyeball from which the compass is emerging. It is also a metaphor for the visual angle and the visually constructive power of the artist. Lissitzky was fascinated by perspective, the pictorial



fig. 5 Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold. Foto-Auge: 76 Fotos der Zeit (Photo-eye: 76 photos of the time). Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



fig. 6 Max Burchartz. Lotte (Eye) (Lotte [Auge]). 1928. Gelatin silver print, 1928-29, 11 $\% \times 15\%$ " (30.2 × 40 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Acquired through the generosity of Peter Norton (MoMA <u>1646.2001</u>). © 2014 Max Burchartz/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Germany

This photograph was shown in *Fifo* (first on the list of thirteen photographs by Burchartz in the catalogue), and it was reproduced in *Photographie*, the first special edition of the journal *Arts et métiers graphiques*, in 1930. It was better known at the time for being shown as a giant enlargement at the entrance of the exhibition *Das Lichtbild* (Photography), in 1930–31 (at the Munich and Essen installations, especially; fig. 8). *Das Lichtbild*, which was organized by Burchartz, was a public celebration of the New Vision, and *Lotte (Eye)* was a manifesto for the cause. We know that Burchartz's interest in the eye is not unique to this work, as another photograph shown at *Fifo* is similar: listed in the catalogue, as number 150, is *Grete W. (Augen)*, alongside *Grete (Kopf)*(Grete [Head]), also by Burchartz.

The Constructor and *Lotte (Eye)* were both symbols of the New Vision in 1929, though *The Constructor*, made four years prior to the other, was more evocative of Soviet film and art. The *Foto-Auge* book, whose cover reproduces *The Constructor*, also contains *Lotte (Eye)* (as plate 31). The photographs were also used in two prospectuses for *Foto-Auge* designed in 1929 by Jan Tschichold—as if there had been

representation of spaces, and architectural perspective drawing, which were the basis of his *Proun* pictorial and social theory, a term he used as a title for many paintings and projects.

But *The Constructor* is most famous for appearing on the cover of *Foto-Auge*: 76 *Fotos der Zeit* (Photo-eye: 76 photos of the time) (fig. 5). This book, by <u>Franz Roh</u> and Jan Tschichold, was published in 1929 at the time of *Film und Foto*, which was mounted by the Deutscher Werkbund. Lissitzky's work is credited as "El Lissitzky, Picture of Himself." The book did a lot more for the international exposure of the exhibition, known as *Fifo*, and of avant-garde ideas than the official exhibition catalogue, which was sparsely illustrated and not widely distributed. The title of the book (symptomatically, presented on the cover in German, French, and English) was both the program for the "New Vision" celebrated in the exhibition and the caption for Lissitzky's work presented above it.

Burchartz's *Lotte (Eye)* (fig. 6), is directly linked to the photo-eye concept, of which it is the second emblem after *The Constructor*. This image of the left side of a little girl's face (that of the photographer's daughter) highlights the eye, which is looking directly toward the camera lens. But *Lotte* (*Eye*) is not a photographic close-up, but a cropped version of a negative by Burchartz (fig. 7). Burchartz was a photographer, of course, but his photographer, graphic designer, and poster designer; in 1928, when he made this picture, he was a professor at the Folkwang Hochschule, in Essen, and ran an advertising agency in Bochum.



fig. 7 Max Burchartz. Porträt (Portrait). From Jörg Stürzebecher. "Max ist endlich auf dem richtigen Weg": Max Burchartz, 1887-1961. Frankfurt: Deutscher Werkbund, 1993. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014 Max Burchartz/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Germany



fig. 8 Das Lichtbild Essen (Photography Essen). 1931. Installation view. Exhibition design by Max Burchartz

some hesitation between which of these two pictures best signified the new aesthetic. Both works are also reproduced in the *Fifo* exhibition catalogue.

In 1924, Lissitzky made a portrait of Schwitters (fig. 9), at a time when the two artists were extremely close; Lissitzky was then the artistic director of the Kestner Society in Hannover. The print, on printing-out paper, was made by superimposing at least two negatives, one a portrait of Schwitters in front of a Merz poster, the other a portrait of Schwitters with his mouth open (probably taken on the same day, as he is wearing the same shirt and his tie is askew), with elements taken from the cover of a Merz magazine and a Pelikan ad by Lissitzky.⁶ The order of the successive and/ or simultaneous inclusion of those elements is difficult to trace because of the technique used, which is closer to a photogram than a classic print; it was built in stages, like The Constructor.⁷ The result is a very precisely calculated work, rigorously constructed: as in The Constructor, the placement of the eyes is carefully planned. The right eye of one face takes the place of the left eye of the other, so that we see a full face complemented by a larger eye, combined with an open mouth. This single wide-open eye contrasts with the half-closed eyes of the other face; it cannot be without import, as the image is carefully composed of a set of signs that each have their own meaning. The result is a sort of hybrid face, a synthesis of two faces, with three eyes, a formula to which Lissitzky would return in a famous poster



fig. 9 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). *Kurt Schwitters*. 1924. Gelatin silver print, $4\frac{14}{3} \times 3\frac{7}{6}$ " (10.8 × 9.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA <u>1763.2001</u>). © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

in 1929 (fig. 10): the conjunction of the eyes is symbolic, a "shared vision" between a young man and a young woman.

In the portrait of Schwitters, the overlapping of the eyes creates the effect of two gazes, as well as isolating one eye—larger and open wider—which is like the one in *The Constructor*. It can be compared to the "simultaneous portrait" of Hannah Höch that Moholy-Nagy, who was always aware of the impact of new processes, offered in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (fig. 11). Presented as an "original" portrait of the photomontage artist and classified as an "Amateur snapshot," the portrait actually shows very calculated coincidences (eye in profile over an eye facing forward), which are geometrically as intentional and calculated as Lissitzky's. Höch herself had produced this type of image combination, in a photomontage dating from 1919.

On the other hand, the Expressionist *Warriorlike Face* (*Kriegerisches Antlitz*), of 1926–27, by <u>Umbo</u> (Otto Umbehr) (fig. 12), leads us into strictly personal and avant-garde

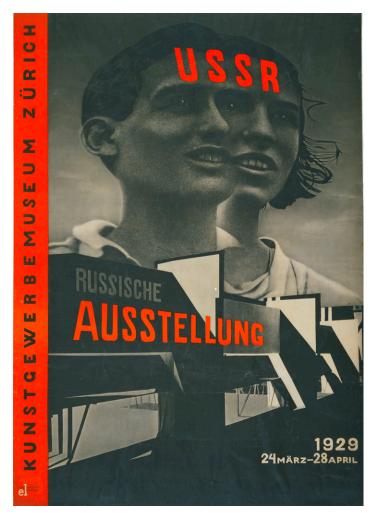


fig. 10 El Lissitzky (Lazar Markovich Lissitzky). USSR russische Ausstellung, Zurich (USSR Russian exhibition, Zurich). 1929. Gravure, 49 × 35 ¹/₄" (124.5 × 89.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Jan Tschichold Collection. Gift of Philip Johnson. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



fig. 11 Unknown photographer. Hannah Höch: Anfangsform des simultanen Porträts (Hannah Höch: Initial form of a simultaneous portrait). In László Moholy-Nagy. Malerei, Fotografie, Film (Painting, Photography, Film). Munich: Albert Langen Verlag, 1925. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

experimentation with portraiture.⁸ The photograph shows the artist <u>Paul Citroen</u>, his face half-painted and lit from below; according to Herbert Molderings, Umbo was the first to photograph faces in close-up, and he did so in the avant-garde educational context of the Bauhaus. Umbo, a student at the Weimar Bauhaus from 1921–23, was destined for a career as an artist, illustrator, and painter, but in December 1926 he suffered a serious bout of depression due to a lack of direction; it was then that his friend Citroen, witnessing the tough time he was having, suggested he opt for photography and use the 13 by 18 centimeter (5 ½ by 7 ½ inch) camera his father had given him (a rudimentary device without a shutter or aperture).⁹

In a series of photographic experiments in December 1926, Citroen and Umbo photographed each other and their friends; ¹⁰ some of the pictures taken of Umbo by Citroen were considered by Umbo to be self-portraits, made according to his own framing instructions. Umbo's first attempts were certainly two close-ups of Citroen's face. Umbo was a film assistant and actor, which explains his choice of contrasting lighting and close-up framing in *Warriorlike Face*: these features are those of the silent films of the time, in which expressions were exaggerated and magnified to





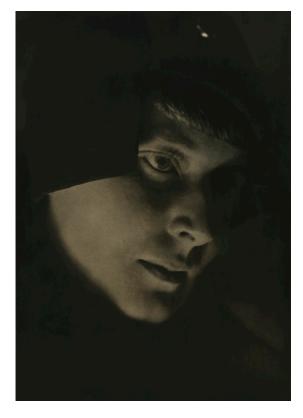




fig. 12 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). *Warriorlike Face (Kriegerisches Antlitz)*. 1926–27. Gelatin silver print, 6¹³/₁₆ × 4¹³/₁₆" (17.3 × 12.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1886.2001</u>). © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 13 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). *Ruth Landshoff (The Hand) (Ruth Landshoff [Die Hand]).* 1927. Gelatin silver print, 6 ³/₄ × 4¹³/₁₆" (17.2 × 12.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA <u>1885,2001</u>). © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn fig. 14 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). *Die Bauhaus-Schülerin Immeke Schwollmann* (The Bauhaus student Immeke Schwollmann). 1927. Gelatin silver print, 7 × 5" (18 × 13 cm). Bauhaus-Archiv, Berlin. © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 15 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Ruth mit Maske (Ruth with mask). 1927. Gelatin silver print, $7 \times 5^{4}/a^{\circ}$ (17.8 × 12.9 cm). Galerie Kicken, Cologne. © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn





fig. 16 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). *Ruth Landshoff. Der Hut* (Ruth Landshoff. The hat). 1927. Gelatin silver print, 7 × 5" (18 × 12.9 cm). Galerie Kicken, Cologne. © 2014 Umbo/ Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 17 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Erinnerung an Lores Augen (Remembering Lore's eyes). 1926. Gelatin silver print, 7 × 5" (17.9 × 12.9 cm). Galerie Kicken, Cologne. © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



fig. 18 Umbo (Otto Umbehr). Photographs. In "Photographiere in Raten." *Die Grüne Post*, no. 11 (July 19, 1927). © 2014 Umbo/Gallery Kicken Berlin/Phyllis Umbehr/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

make the emotions easier to read. Here we have a clear influence from the cinema, both technically and expressively.

Umbo's portrait Ruth Landshoff (The Hand) (Ruth Landshoff [Die Hand]) (fig. 13) was made a little later, in 1927, and so is less experimental; Landshoff was a silent film actress (she appeared in Nosferatu in 1922). This photograph is overexposed, like all the negatives in the series it is part of. The face and hands are very white, and only the eyes and mouth appear in contrast, with the same intensity as the hair and clothing.¹¹ Umbo considered this photograph most successful, combining the impression given by the gaze and by the relaxed hand—showing both determination and alertness, relaxation and softness. Other portraits by Umbo from 1926-27 show the same pattern of framing and dramatic lighting, highlighting the subject's gaze, whose direction and luminous intensity are critical elements of the work. Dividing the face through the use of lighting (fig. 14), a mask (fig. 15), or the shadow of a hat over the eyes (fig. 16) was uncommon at the time. In his experimentation in late 1926 and 1927, Umbo was unique in framing only the face and in showing a partial face filling the entire space. As Molderings has noted, "The drastic cropping of the image draws the viewer's attention entirely to the subject's sensory organs, and to the expression in the eyes in particular."¹² We can describe

Umbo's portraits at this time as experiments in different ways of highlighting the gaze: in *Erinnerung an Lores Augen* (Remembering Lore's eyes), of 1926 (fig. 17), he crops to the eyes, which are in the middle of the image, divided into two dark and light areas by the hair.¹³ In *Ruth Landshoff. Der Hut* (Ruth Landshoff. The hat), the shadow enhances the eye rather than hiding it. Umbo's portraits found an audience as early as 1927, printed in two art publications—*Der Querschnitt*, in April, and *Die Grüne Post* (fig. 18)—making them influential modernist benchmarks. *Ruth Landshoff (The Hand)* was included in Werner Gräff's book <u>Es kommt der</u> <u>neue Fotograf!</u> (Here comes the new photographer!), commissioned to accompany *Fifo* in 1929.

Two portraits by Kertész, both from 1926, follow a modernist particularism that is unique to Kertész at that time (figs. 19, 20). Kertész's radical style emphasizes the gaze, the absolute symmetry of the two eyes, the act of witnessing—almost confronting—that is elicited from the viewer, on whom the subject's eyes are riveted. Existing Kertész negatives show that *Mondrian* was printed from a full glass plate from a 9 by 12 centimeter ($3^{9}/_{16}$ by $4^{3}/_{4}$ inch) camera, and thus was shot as a close-up view of the face; two other negatives feature alternate views: a mid-range shot shows Mondrian from the waist up, holding his pipe, and a wide shot shows almost his entire body.¹⁴

Kertész created frontal portraits from his early days (fig. 21), and we cannot forget that in 1933 he made a selfportrait with his wife Elisabeth in which she stares at the camera, a portrait Kertész would crop repeatedly (fig. 22). Further, it was probably Kertész who, at the request of *Vu* magazine, took eight photographs of Miss France 1930, large facing and profile shots and six close-ups of her face, both head-on and in profile—from which the art director at *Vu* (presumably Irene Lidova) extracted details to create a photomontage (fig. 23).¹⁵ In this striking graphic construction, we come back to the twofold perspective of the eye-gaze and eye-vision we saw with Lissitzky's *The Constructor* and Burchartz's *Lotte (Auge)*.

Lucia Moholy became a professional photographer in 1923, and it is likely that she led her husband, László Moholy-Nagy, to work with photography after a period of collaboration. She photographed the new Bauhaus buildings in Dessau, and in 1928, after moving to Berlin, she became a theater photographer. In 1927, when she took a portrait of Florence Henri, a student at the Bauhaus (fig. 24), Moholy was an avant-garde photographer (she would participate in Fifo in 1929). The portrait reflects the New Vision by dint of its very tight framing (obtained with the original shot, then through cropping when printing). In addition, the work is a large-scale enlargement, which was rare at the time and required great technical skill. The contrast accentuated by the print favors the opposition of very dark areas (hair, eyes, mouth, and earring). As Van Deren Coke has written, Moholy "usually placed her camera as close as possible to the face of her subject and recorded a nose, mouth, eyes





fig. 19 André Kertész. *Mondrian*. 1926. Gelatin silver print, c. 1928, 4^{5} /₁₆ × 3^{1} /₆" (10.9 × 7.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1720.2001</u>). © Estate of André Kertész

fig. 20 André Kertész. *Mlle Jaffée*. 1926. Gelatin silver print, 1926-35, 6¹/₄ × 5¹¹/₁₆" (15.8 × 14.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Grace M. Mayer Fund (MoMA <u>1719.2001</u>). © Estate of André Kertész





fig. 21 André Kertész. *My Mother, Ernesztin Kertész.* 1919. Gelatin silver print, 7 ¼ × 5 ½" (18.7 × 13.8 cm). Courtesy Estate of André Kertész. © Robert Gurbo and Sarah Morthland, Archive Consulting and Management Services LLC, New York. © Estate of André Kertész

fig. 22 André Kertész. *Elizabeth and I.* 1933. Gelatin silver print, 1960, 10 × 6 %" (25.3 × 17.5 cm). Collection Sarah Morthland, New York. © Robert Gurbo and Sarah Morthland, Archive Consulting and Management Services LLC, New York. © Estate of André Kertész



fig. 23 André Kertész. Photographs. In E. W. *"Le Triomphe de la femme"* (The triumph of woman). *Vu*, no. 104 (March 12, 1930). © Estate of André Kertész

on the plate, as though they were geometric shapes whose unique combination characterized said subject, allowing the subject to be identified and recognized."¹⁶ In her 1939 book *A Hundred Years of Photography*, Moholy noted that this type of portrait was influenced in the 1920s by Russian films (first and foremost Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*) and added: "To the general public in Western Europe this style appears strange and exotic. They find it interesting and worth discussing, but few of them wish to have their portraits taken in the same way."¹⁷

Edmund Kesting was also an apostle of portraits around 1930 and above all of the face seen in close-up. Born in 1892, and also a painter, he created an art school in Dresden, Der Weg. In 1926-27 he began using multiple exposures in his photography. He met Lissitzky, probably in Dresden in 1926, and remained associated with him. *Glance to the Sun* (1928; fig. 25), a photograph of his son Konstantin, is a greatly enlarged detail from a negative, connecting the child's eye and hand. The eye, head-on or in profile (sometimes combined), is a frequent presence in Kesting's work, as is the



fig. 24 Lucia Moholy. Florence Henri. 1927. Gelatin silver print, 1927-35, 14 $\% \times 11^{\circ}$ (37.2 \times 27.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA<u>1790.2001</u>). © 2014 Lucia Moholy Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

hand, another means of bodily, physiological expression: see, for example, Die Tänzer Dean Goodelle II (The dancer Dean Goodelle II) (1930; fig. 26), which can be compared to a 1929 self-portrait (fig. 27). The latter is a surface with complex and hard-to-read forms—the hand on one side, the gaze (two eyes that appear clearly) on the other, occupying a very small portion of the image but presenting a very specific detail. The emphasis on the eyes is also evident in Kesting's Ruth Poelzig (1928; fig. 28), and Familienporträit Müller (Müller family portrait) (1927-28; fig 29). Eyes and hands are more closely associated in Schattenspiel der Masken (Shadow play of the masks) (c. 1930; fig. 30) (with negativity, shadows, masks as false faces, and black eyeholes), and in Marianne Vogelsang (1934; fig. 31). There is also a variant of Glance to the Sun, in which a very similar hand heightens the expressiveness of the single visible eye (fig. 32).

Lotte Jacobi introduces us to another register for the expression of the gaze — that is, actors' expressions — with *Franz Lederer* (c. 1929; fig. 33), a portrait of a theater and film actor. Jacobi began working in her father's portrait studio in Berlin, then got involved with journalism in 1927. She eventually specialized in theater artists, taking advantage of the huge demand from the press: "[In Berlin, 1927-35], part of

the family business was the supply of pictures to many of those newspapers of celebrities and events, not only from the realm of theater or art."18 Jacobi did not have a single style but rather varied her compositions. She often said, "My style is the style of the people I photograph." The framing, the most striking aspect of this portrait, accentuates Lederer's downcast gaze, the distinctive sign of the actor's personality; Peter Lorre's gaze, in a completely different graphical composition, of 1932, is critical to the image and also a distinctive sign of the actor. Ilse Langner, of c. 1930 (fig. 34), also demonstrates Jacobi's interest in the human face. These portraits are based on an analysis of the expression of her sitters' eyes, but Jacobi adapted to her models' acting styles, also creating portrait studies resembling excerpts from a staging or from a film. But the eyes and hands always take the lead role: see, for example, Arnold Zweig, Writer, Berlin, c. 1930; Sokoloff (?), Actor, Berlin, c. 1930; Harold Kreutzberg, Dancer, Berlin, c. 1930; and Erich Karow, Comedian, Berlin, c. 1930.19

Am I Beautiful? (*Suis-je belle?*), by <u>Maurice Tabard</u> (1929; fig. 35), is a masterly example of the use of overlapping negatives and a systematic interest in the motif of the eye—with a touch of Man Ray-style Surrealist ambiguity. The work is based on a portrait of a woman in a hat, certainly a fashion photograph like the ones Tabard was taking as part of his work for Parisian department stores. The print is a multiple exposure, featuring the original negative and a portion of the same negative (the eye) magnified about twofold in the enlarger. The fact that it is the subject's "real"



fig. 25 Edmund Kesting. Glance to the Sun (Blick zur Sonne). 1928. Gelatin silver print, 1934–39, 13¹/₁₆ × 14¹/₂" (33.2 × 36.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1736.2001</u>). © 2014/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



fig. 26 Edmund Kesting. *Die Tänzer Dean Goodelle II* (The dancer Dean Goodelle II). 1930. From Klaus Werner. *Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert* (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 27 Edmund Kesting. *Selbstporträit mit Pinsel und Maltafel* (Self-portrait with brush and palette). 1929. From Klaus Werner. *Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert* (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 28 Edmund Kesting. *Ruth Poelzig.* 1928. From Klaus Werner. *Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert* (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn













fig. 29 Edmund Kesting. Familienporträit Müller (Müller family portrait). 1927-28. From Klaus Werner. Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 30 Edmund Kesting. *Schattenspiel der Masken* (Shadow play of the masks). c. 1930. From Klaus Werner. *Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert* (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn fig. 31 Edmund Kesting. Marianne Vogelsang. 1934. From Klaus Werner. Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 32 Edmund Kesting. *Konstantin*. 1928–29. From Klaus Werner. *Edmund Kesting: Ein Mahler fotografiert* (Edmund Kesting: A painter photographs). Leipzig: VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1987. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York. © 2014/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



fig. 33 Lotte Jacobi. Franz Lederer. c. 1929. Gelatin silver print, c. 1929-40, 8 % × 6 ½" (21.3 × 15.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Grace M. Mayer Fund (MoMA 1708.2001). © Lotte Jacobi Collection, University of New Hampshire



fig. 34 Lotte Jacobi. *Ilse Langner.* c. 1930. Gelatin silver print, 1932–33, 87% × 6 ½" (22.5 × 16.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1709.2001</u>). © Lotte Jacobi Collection, University of New Hampshire

eye and in its normal location, but disproportionate in size, gives the image its strangeness. The other parts of the bust, protected from light by masking, are underexposed, and thus help to showcase the eye.²⁰ This work exemplifies one of Tabard's favorite themes: the eye and gaze, sometimes with the hand, put into perspective in apparently fictitious spaces by the layering of several negatives or the negativizing of the print. Tabard could have seen double impressions in *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*, in several 1929 publications (including *Foto-Auge*), and at the *Fifo* exhibition, to which he contributed seven photos.²¹ The eye and the gaze, mainly female, are the unifying elements of Tabard's personal work in the years 1928–40. In a <u>solarized</u> portrait of 1936 (fig. 36), almost the only graphic elements that remain are the eye and mouth on a neutral surface.

Study (*Étude*), a portrait by <u>Germaine Krull</u> (1931; fig. 37), is an illustration for *La Folle d'Itteville* (The madwoman of Itteville), a 1931 crime photo-novel by Georges Simenon. This photograph shows the novel's heroine, a strange and fascinating woman at the center of a police mystery. It is one of two portraits used on successive pages of the book (fig. 38); the other picture is linked in the novel to a remark that

stresses the fascination of the female gaze and the power of the subject's eyes: "Light eyes, as though washed with tears, looking at us, feverless. The enchantment began."²² The two photographs use the same principle: a close-up of a face, in which the eyes, through the direction of the gaze, the intensity of the pupils, and the reflected light on the tears, are the expressive element.

THE LENS IS AN EYE

So far we have considered the theme of the human eye in relation to portraiture and to the gaze, with the concept of the lens as a "mechanical eye" somewhat in the background. Other works in the Walther Collection make a very explicit connection between the eye and the camera lens.

Untitled (*Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy*), by Moholy and Moholy-Nagy (1925; fig. 39), is in the avant-garde Bauhaus vein, made at a time when the two artists were very active and inventive in their use of photography. Incorporating an unusual pose and a possibly spontaneous gesture, the photograph combines a direct gaze in the background with a hand in the foreground that seems to block part of the shot—that is, it seems to hamper the







fig. 35 Maurice Tabard. Am I Beautiful? (Suis-je belle?). 1929. Gelatin silver print, 1929-55, 9 $\frac{5}{16} \times 6^{\frac{15}{16}}$, '(23.6 × 17.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA <u>1875.2001</u>)

fig. 37 Germaine Krull. Study (Étude). 1931. Gelatin silver print, 1931-60, 8 7 /16 × 6 1 /16" (21.5 × 15.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1754.2001</u>). © Estate Germaine Krull, Museum Folkwang, Essen





fig. 36 Maurice Tabard. Untitled. 1936. Gelatin silver print, 1936–55, 11 $\%\times$ 9%'' (29.2 × 23.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Shirley C. Burden, by exchange (MoMA <u>1881.2001</u>)

fig. 38 Spreads from Georges Simenon. *La Folle d'Itteville*. Paris: Éditions Jacques Haumont, 1931

lens's "vision." Moholy-Nagy used a similar motif in a photomontage that he reused for a famous 1927 poster (fig. 40), an important graphic and typographic work. The portrait seems to be a private joke or at least a reference to the earlier work, even if the gesture should be interpreted in the private circumstances of a photo shoot. Moholy-Nagy also used the hand as the basis for a 1925-27 photogram that he adapted to make a poster for the magazine *Qualität* in 1931. As that issue of the journal was devoted to photography, the artist added a camera, with its lens positioned in the palm of the hand; the composition recalls Lissitzky's *The Constructor* and his 1924 Pelikan ink advertisement, both of which Moholy-Nagy was well acquainted with.

Three 1929 photographs by <u>Aenne Biermann</u>—*Nose* and Mouth (Nase und Mund) (MoMA <u>1619.2001</u>); Nose (Nase) (MoMA <u>1618.2001</u>); and Right Eye (Rechtes Auge) (fig. 41)—are all greatly enlarged details from the same negative, a print of which was reproduced in the 1930 book Aenne Biermann: 60 Fotos (fig. 42, right). The details are adjusted to give the impression of a front view, although the angle is slightly oblique. Right Eye, in its use of detail, glorifies the eye as a sort of "photographic body," the biological organ situated behind the camera viewfinder, which directs, controls, and combines with the camera lens or movie camera.

Biermann took part in Fifo; she was supported by Roh, a theorist and practitioner of the New Vision and co-author of Foto-Auge, who published an article on her in 1928 and then Aenne Biermann: 60 Fotos. Highly active in avant-garde photographic circles, Biermann participated in the exhibitions *Fotografie der Gegenwart* (Photography of the present), Essen, 1929; Das Lichtbild, Munich, 1930, and Essen, 1931; Die neue Fotografie, Basel, 1931; the Brussels Photography Fair, 1932; and the Royal Photography Society London's exhibition The Modern Spirit in Photography, 1933, the year she died. Many portraits by Biermann, starting with those of her children in this period, are close-ups in which the human face takes up all the space, therefore emphasizing the expressive nature of the eyes. See, for example, the portrait of Roh, published in 60 Fotos, with his glasses and the reflections in their lenses.²³ The presence of glasses (or, in Germany, a monocle) was tolerated in photographs in the 1920s, whereas it had been previously avoided: the lens, including personal optics, became a sign of modernity. 60 Fotos also includes two plates of the same eye, open and closed (fig. 43).24

<u>Raoul Hausmann's</u> untitled photograph of February 1931 (fig. 44), although made late in the period under consideration, is particularly interesting because it moves away from portraits and toward a closer relationship between the eye and the lens. Particularly in 1930–31, Hausmann seemed very interested in close-ups highlighting the eyes. This untitled photograph circumvents that practice somewhat through the use of an optical tool — a magnifying shaving mirror. (It should be noted that there are many examples of the use of glass balls and distorting mirrors in French





fig. 39 László Moholy-Nagy and Lucia Moholy. Untitled (*Portrait of László Moholy-Nagy*). 1925. Gelatin silver print, $3^{11/_{16}} \times 2^{1/_{21}}$ (9.3 × 6.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. The Family of Man Fund (MoMA 1701.2001). © 2014 Lucia Moholy Estate/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 40 László Moholy-Nagy. Poster for Schocken Department Store (Variation of *The Law of the Series*). 1927. Rephotographed photomontage with letters printed in red ink, 8½ × 6½" (21.8 × 16.6 cm). The J. Paul Getty Museum. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



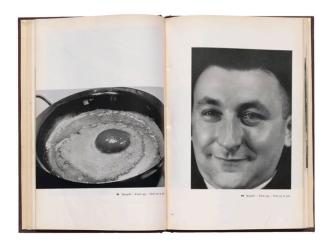
fig. 41 Aenne Biermann. *Right Eye (Rechtes Auge)*. 1929. Gelatin silver print, 1929-33, $7 \times 9^{9/16''}$ (17.8 × 23.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Mrs. Flora S. Straus, by exchange (MoMA <u>1620.2001</u>)

skillfully combine the gaze and the camera lens, which functions either as a third eye or a replacement for the eye: Citroen has his eyes very close to the lens, Klutsis shows himself focusing, with his eye surrounded by the frame of the viewfinder. A portrait of <u>Erich Salomon</u> at home, by <u>Lore Feininger</u> (1929; fig. 49), only serves to extend this impression: the lens of his Ermanox, as big as the camera body (an indication of the camera's quality), appears like a large eye on his stomach, much more powerful than the eyes of the photographer, rimmed by glasses; the analogy of the camera lens and glasses is also striking here.

The conjunction of the photographer's eye and his camera culminates in a double portrait by Maurice Tabard of himself with Roger Parry, his friend and colleague at the Deberny et Peignot studio (fig. 50): in front of a mirror, Tabard focuses what appears to be a Leica attached to an upright stand, pressing the shutter release. Instead of Tabard's eyes, we see two lenses, which are disproportionate relative to one another: the lens taking the shot (which seems big for the size of the camera, like that of Salomon's

and German photography around the late 1920s, such as several Kertész works of 1930-33, including his nude Distortions). The work features a close-up of one eye seen in a mirror, which makes it a distorted detail. On the other hand, the mirror itself is circular, it is in the shape of a pupil or eyeball, and it has the appearance of a photographic lens (and is a lens, in fact). Hausmann used this image in a photomontage (fig. 45), which was reproduced in the journal A bis Z and in the catalogue for *Fotomontage*, an exhibition organized by César Domela-Nieuwenhuis and mounted in 1931 at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin. In the montage he juxtaposed three pictures of a single eye, two pictures cropped to show both eyes, and a detail of a mouth. Another untitled photograph, of 1931, presents a kind of inverted counterpoint - showing a woman's face with eyes closed (fig. 46); this picture was also included in a published photomontage.²⁵

After the close-up portraits focusing on the eyes, Hausmann's untitled image combining the eye and magnifying lens leads us to consider several self-portraits of photographers. The self-portrait, in photography, requires a special relationship to the camera, the movie camera, and often the mirror, since mirrors generally aid in shooting oneself *in the process* of activating the mechanism. Selfportraits with a movie camera, a genre born in the late '20s—see <u>Gustav Klutsis</u>, Untitled (*Self-Portrait*) (1926; fig. 47) and Citroen, *Self-Portrait* (*Selbstporträt*) (1930; fig. 48)—are highly characteristic of modernism and the avant-garde, because they focus on the innovative role of the photographic tool by having it appear in the picture: the artist is shown with the tool that enables the representation. In the self-portraits we note that the photographers





figs. 42, 43 Spreads from Aenne Biermann and Franz Roh. *Aenne Biermann: 60 Fotos.* Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1930. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York



fig. 44 Raoul Hausmann. Untitled. February 1931. Gelatin silver print, 1931-33, 5 % × 4 7_{16}° (13.7 × 11.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1687,2001</u>). © 2014 Raoul Hausmann/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris





fig. 45 Raoul Hausmann. Illustration in *"Fotomontage." A bis Z*, no. 16 (May 1931). The City University of New York. The Graduate Center Library. © 2014 Raoul Hausmann/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

fig. 46 Raoul Hausmann. Untitled. 1931. Gelatin silver print, 1932–33, 6 ³/₄ × 9 ⁵/₁₆" (17.2 × 23.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Horace W. Goldsmith Fund through Robert B. Menschel (MoMA <u>1688,2001</u>). © 2014 Raoul Hausmann/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris





fig. 47 Gustav Klutsis. Untitled (*Self-Portrait*). 1926. Gelatin silver print, 1926–35, 3 $\frac{1}{2} \times 2 \frac{9}{16}$ " (8.9 × 6.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Abbott-Levy Collection funds, by exchange (MoMA <u>1741.2001</u>). © 2014/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

fig. 48 Paul Citroen. *Self-Portrait* (*Selbstporträt*). 1930. Gelatin silver print, 1930-35, 9^{5} /16 × 7 14 /s" (23.6 × 17.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1653.2001</u>). © Paul Citroën/Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York/Pictoright, Amsterdam





fig. 49 Lore Feininger. Erich Salomon. 1929. Gelatin silver print, 1933-44, 9 $\% \times 6 \frac{1}{2}$ " (23.2 × 16.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1668.2001</u>)

fig. 50 Maurice Tabard. Untitled (*Self-Portrait with Roger Parry*). 1928–39. Gelatin silver print, 9 ¼ × 6 ¼" (23.5 × 16.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA <u>1879.2001</u>)



fig. 51 Tina Modotti. *Edward Weston.* February 1924. Gelatin silver print, 1924-26, 7 % $\times 8$ %" (18.7 \times 22.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Abbott-Levy Collection funds, by exchange (MoMA <u>1908.2001</u>)

Ermanox) and the circular viewfinder. Parry stands in the background looking at the camera, his eyes echoing Tabard's mechanical eyes. (We should also note the presence of the hand, another favorite theme of Tabard's).

We find the same gaze-lens relationship in four other portraits of photographers in the Walther Collection — <u>Tina</u> <u>Modotti's Edward Weston</u> (1924; fig. 51), <u>Otto Lindig's Self-</u> *Portrait in Mirror (Selbstporträt im Spiegel)* (1925-30; fig. 52), <u>Werner Rohde's</u> Untitled (*Self-Portrait*) (September 1929; fig. 53), and <u>George Hoyningen-Huene's Henri Cartier-Bresson</u> (1935; fig. 54) — which all focus on the functionality of the lens, the way it functions as an "eye" combined with the photographer's eye, despite the wide range of instruments used. Weston makes sure to look in the same direction as his lens, and Cartier-Bresson, using a Leica, shows the close physical association between the viewfinder (which is also equipped with a lens) and his eye, which he theorized in his introduction to *The Decisive Moment* in 1952.

In addition to introducing the evocative power of the gaze and the eye, Lissitzky's *The Constructor* and *Kurt Schwitters* feature multiple exposures, overlaid images created by combining negatives when printing. These techniques were developed after 1918 in the Dada and then the Constructivist milieus—that is, by protest artists, or artists who used the graphic arts as propaganda (such as Lissitzky between 1925 and 1929). However, they were also very much alive in "experimental" film—art film—such as



fig. 52 Otto Lindig. Self-Portrait in Mirror (Selbstporträt im Spiegel). 1925–30. Gelatin silver print, 5 11 /₁₆ × 3 34 " (14.4 × 9.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Acquired through the generosity of Peter Norton (MoMA 1767.2001)

fig. 53 Werner Rohde. Untitled (*Self-Portrait*). September 1929. Gelatin silver print, 3^{13} /16 × 3^{14} " (9.7 × 8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Gift of Thomas Walther (MoMA 1839.2001). © 2014 Werner Rohde/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

fig. 54 George Hoyningen-Huene. *Henri Cartier-Bresson*. 1935. Gelatin silver print, $9^{11}_{16} \times 7^{11}_{16}$ " (24.6 × 19.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Thomas Walther Collection. Abbott-Levy Collection funds, by exchange (MoMA 1707.2001)



fig. 55 Fernand Léger. Still from *Ballet mécanique* (Mechanical ballet). 1924. 35mm film, black and white, silent, 12 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



fig. 56 Man Ray (Emmanuel Radnitzky). Still from *Emak Bakia*. 1926. 35mm film, black and white, silent, 15 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired from the artist and Rubenstein, Progress Films. © 2015 Man Ray Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Abel Gance's La Roue (The wheel), of 1922; Man Ray's 1923 Le Retour à la raison (Return to reason), which is made up of photograms; and Fernand Léger and Dudley Murphy's Ballet mécanique (Mechanical ballet), of 1924 (fig. 55). And it turns out that these films, and even some passages with overlays, show different types of gazes and eyes in constantly changing configurations. Here the gaze has a visual value not unlike the Cubist deconstruction of the image of the body, through attention to detail: "Some years ago, we only looked at a figure, a body; now we are interested in the eye of the figure, and examine it attentively," Léger declared.²⁶ Man Ray's Emak Bakia (Leave me alone), of 1926, includes several face-gaze shots that incite empathy and emotion. One (fig. 56) features an interesting synthesis between the eye-gaze and the eye-lens, including a movie camera and an eye that is meant to be that of the operator.

Returning to El Lissitzky's The Constructor, it is of note that the work has close ties with the Soviet artistic movements to which Lissitzky belonged, as though in symmetry with his German schooling. A highlighting of the human eye first appears in his photomontages, made alongside Dada and the Bauhaus, in 1922-24. In Rodchenko's photomontage for Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem Pro eto (About this), of 1923, the face of Lily Brik, the poet's muse, appears in a front view close-up, wide-eyed and staring at the viewer from the book's cover. We find that tight framing and direct gaze into the camera in Rodchenko's 1924 portrait of Mayakovsky (fig. 57) and Rodchenko's self-portrait from the same period (fig. 58), as well as his more composed portrait of Osip Brik (fig. 59), made for the cover of the journal Lef in 1924, with the journal's logo painted over one lens of Brik's spectacles. (Brik was the journal's co-editor with Mayakovsky).

More decisive still, the eye is the main motif of the kino-glaz (cine-eye) concept developed by Dziga Vertov in 1919, when he created the Kino-Oki (the Cine-eyes groups, or Kinoki), responsible for spreading his cinematic vision and his use of camera-vérité for revolution and social reform. He gave the cinema groups this statement in 1926: "Our eyes see very little and very badly - so people dreamed up the microscope to let them see invisible phenomena; they invented the telescope.... Now they have perfected the cinecamera to penetrate more deeply into the visible world, to explore and record visual phenomena so that what is happening now, which will have to be taken account of in the future, is not forgotten." Here we see a theory, that of the supremacy of the camera lens in substituting for the human eye—and in making it stronger and more effective precisely because the mechanical eye is activated by the biological eye. The kino-eye apprehends and organizes the world, compensating for the shortcomings of the human eye: "I am kino-eye, I create a man more perfect than Adam. ... I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it."27

In 1924 Rodchenko designed two posters for Vertov's film *Kino-Glaz* in which we see a huge eye in close-up. In one of them, the eye looks as though it is supported by two film cameras whose lenses are directed downward toward the eye of the characters looking up (fig. 60). It's a very clear graphic expression of the performance of the eye in film, magnifying both the mechanical eye and the biological eye. Vertov's theory of the *kino-eye* (which he elaborated in 1926) culminates with his famous 1929 film *The Man with a Movie Camera*. Repeatedly we see dissolves and double impressions in which the human eye appears, opening and closing, in the center of the camera lens, which is itself presented

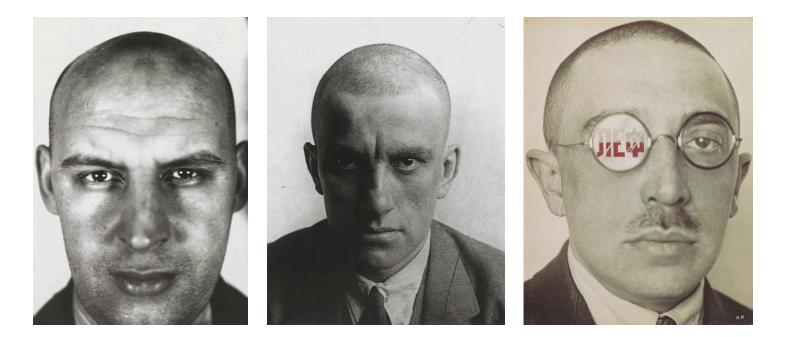


fig. 57 Aleksandr Rodchenko. Vladimir Mayakovsky. 1924. Gelatin silver print, 11 $\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ " (29.5 × 16.3 cm). Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova Archive, Moscow

fig. 58 Aleksandr Rodchenko. Self-Portrait. 1924. Glass negative, 3 $^{15}\!/_{16} \times 5^{15}\!/_{16}''$ (10 \times 15 cm)

fig. 59 Aleksandr Rodchenko. *Portrait of Osip Brik.* Unpublished illustration for the cover of the magazine *Lef.* 1924. Gouache on gelatin silver print, $9.4 \times 7.4^{\circ}$ " (23.6 × 18 cm). The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Department of Private Collections, Moscow

at the start of the film with its iris shutter (imitating the eye's iris) opening and closing. A short sequence shows the movie camera on a tripod dancing as if it had three legs. The metaphor could not be clearer: the lens is a super-eye, the movie camera on a tripod is a new being whose capabilities are superior to those of humans. The new man who has come with the revolution will take on a new relationship with the world by becoming a *kino-eye*. The final shots show the motif of the human eye embedded in the camera lens, seen in close-up, full screen (fig. 61). In 1929 the motif of the eye became central in the spheres of both photography and film—represented in *Fifo* for example, by a graphic photomontage by Vertov published in *Foto-Auge* (fig. 62) and an advertising label for the photo studio Ohler Stuttgart published in the *Fifo* catalogue (fig. 63).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the human eye is a vehicle of knowledge, whether it is used to contemplate the world as things happen or, instead, to look at photographs. The likening of the lens to the eye implies that the lens has a capacity for vision. That is, it endows it with a human property that is physiological, optical, mental, and psychological all at once: *vision* includes not only the act of *seeing* but a mental, imaginary representation of what is seen that borders on the fantastical. When *Arts et métiers graphiques* published its first special issue, *Photographie*, in 1930 (praising modernist photography by providing a French echo to *Fifo*), the long essay by journalist



fig. 60 Aleksandr Rodchenko. *Kino-Glaz.* 1924. Lithograph, $36\frac{1}{2} \times 27\frac{1}{2}$ " (92.7 × 69.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously

Waldemar George was printed opposite a full-page photo of a photographic lens. The purpose of the text, which is essentially a historical and journalistic overview of the capabilities of the new photography and the "acuity of the 'photographic eye," can be summed up in this sentence: "The shot reveals to man his own vision."²⁸

A key element in the definition of the New Vision, the poster for *Fifo* (fig. 64), which combines a photograph by Willi Ruge with modernist typography, is quite revealing of this conjunction between vision-lens/eye-gaze: one sees a photographer, photographed by another photographer from below (an angle characteristic of the New Vision), and the photographer directs his camera down, while looking in the same direction himself. We can see both his eyes, wearing glasses. The camera lens, shaped like a large eye, is directed toward the viewer. The typography doubles the active presence of the eyes, with the two O's in *FOTO* presented like two eyes or a pair of glasses.

A significant number of works in the Walther Collection are very representative of the concern we have outlined. The representation of the eye and the lens might at first glance seem marginal to the other themes characterizing the New Vision: the viewfinder turned in all directions (high-angle, low-angle, etc.), close-ups, movement, motion blur, the destabilization of the horizontal view, and the use of innovative techniques such as the photogram/rayogram. Our intention here was to show that the New Vision does not belie its name: it is indeed concerned with vision-that is, a human, ocular faculty linked to the capacities of the human eye. And if engaging in the New Vision did include an apologetics of the photographic lens, no one would forget that the handling of the camera or movie camera is governed or directed by the sensations that reach the eye of the photographer. The supremacy given to the lens led to a celebration of the eye. The human eye became a photographic motif because it is the engine of human vision and photography's "vision."

But the eye also transmits feelings, emotions, and deep sensations, and it transmits them to others — what we call the *gaze*, the way an individual captures the reciprocal directionality of the eyeballs (two eyes look at two eyes). The media's coopting of photography through the reproduction of photographic images was a key factor in the modernity of the 1920s, and the ability to transmit and communicate things through the gaze quickly became a privileged motif, drawing on expressive innovations from the cinema: closeup shots of the face and gaze, then the camera-gaze — that is, the gaze into the lens that is received by the viewer. That type of expression would grow between 1925 and 1930 as one of photography's modernist elements, though the innovation was not really stressed as such.

Another, perhaps unexpected, dimension also stands out: the impact of the silent films of the 1920s on the most advanced photographic work. The convergence of photography and cinema was in evidence in *Fifo* in 1929, but in

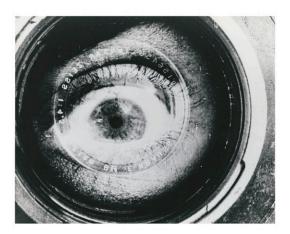






fig. 61 Final frame from Dziga Vertov. *The Man with a Movie Camera*. 1929. 35mm, black and white, silent, 65 min. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gosfilmofond, by exchange

fig. 62 Dziga Vertov. Photomontage. In Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold. *Foto-Auge*: 76 *Fotos der Zeit* (Photo-eye: 76 photos of the time). Stuttgart: F. Wedekind, 1929. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York

fig. 63 Advertising label for the Ohler photography studio. In Gustaf Stotz, et al. Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds Film und Foto (International exhibition of the Deutscher Werkbund Film und Foto). Stuttgart: Deutscher Werkbund, 1929. The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York many cases it remained theoretical and is difficult to spot in the photographic images themselves. The interest in the eye, the camera, the lens, and the expressive potential of the gaze is no stranger to the cinema; film is, most likely, one of the key sources of photographic motivation in these works. Here we have had some opportunity to highlight these relationships and influences, but it is a topic that requires further investigation.

Translated from the French by Sharon Bowman



fig. 64 Poster for the exhibition *Film und Foto*, Stuttgart. 1929. Offset lithograph, 33 × 23 ½" (84 × 58.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of The Lauder Foundation, Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Fund

NOTES

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1. See Michel Frizot, "El ojo humano y la camara oscura: El modelo biologico y el imperativo tecnico," *El Imaginario fotografico* (Mexico City: Serieve, 2009), pp. 95–108.

2. In 1924 El Lissitzky went to Switzerland to recover from tuberculosis, after working in Hannover. He returned to Moscow in 1925. He later traveled to Europe for the installation of exhibitions in which Soviet participation was much noted (in Dresden, Cologne, and Stuttgart). 3. See <u>Klaus Pollmeier, "El</u> <u>Lissitzky's Multilayer Photo-</u> <u>graphs: A Technical Analysis,"</u> <u>on this website.</u> A version of that study was published in Margarita Tupitsyn, *El Lissitzky: Jenseits der Abstraktion*, exh. cat. (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel; Hannover: Sprengel Museum), 1999. See also Leah Dickerman, "El Lissitzky's Camera Corpus," in Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed, eds., *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003).

4. See Tupitsyn, El Lissitzky, p. 78.

5. For the self-portrait, see ibid. For the intermediate print and the hand-and-compass motif, see ibid, pp. 77 and 79; see also Pollmeier, "El Lissitzky's Multilayer Photographs: A Technical Analysis." For the motif's reuse for *Arkhitektura*, see Tupitsyn, p. 97. For the Pelikan poster, see Tupitsyn, p. 96.

6. The two negatives are known from prints at the Sprengel Museum Hannover; see Tupitsyn, El Lissitzky, p. 86. The second is itself derived from a collage/ double impression of geometric and circular elements, indicating that the Walther Collection photogram is the result of several preparatory works and not of two negatives of faces and other elements put together in a single overlay. For more information on the construction of this print, see Pollmeier, "El Lissitzky's Multilayer Photographs: A Technical Analysis."

7. See Simon Beiling, "El Lissitzky," in Anne Umland, Adrian Sudhalter, and Scott Gerson, eds., *Dada in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), pp. 205-08.

8. Herbert Molderings uses the title "Paul Citroen with Warlike Countenance" in his *Umbo: Otto Umbehr 1902-1980* (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), plate 10.

9. For more on Citroen's early career, see Herbert Molderings, "Paul Citroen and Photography: The Beginnings in Berlin," in Ingeborg Leijerzapf, Herbert Molderings, and Flip Bool, eds., *Paul Citroen 1896-1983* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij, 1998). 10. "For a whole fortnight, they photographed each other." Molderings, "Paul Citroen and Photography," p. 12.

11. The contrast could have been produced by the poorly mastered use of X-ray film, with its different technical specifications. See Herbert Molderings, Otto Umbehr — Umbo, 1902–1980 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995), p. 59: "Dadurch dass et das Gesicht frontal beleuchtete und die Grautöne durch überstrahlung ausschaltete, gelang es ihm, die Physiognomonie des Modells auf ihre graphischen Ausdrucksformen zu reduzieren: die Proportionen, die Unrisslinien, die dominierenden Hell-Dunkel-Massen. Zu demselben Zweck benuzte er gelegentlich Röntgen-Fime als extrahartes Negativmaterial." Note 37: "Der Vater eines Freundes besass eine Fabrik, die Kartonnagen fur Agfa-Röntgenfilme herstellte. Von ihm habe ich eine Packung mit 50 Röntgenfilme 13x18 erhalten. So entstanden meine Porträts." See also Umbo im Gesprach mit Heinrich Riebesehl (Hannover: Tonbandkassete, 1973).

12. Molderings, "Paul Citroen and Photography," p. 14.

13. "What does link Citroen's portraits with those produced by Umbo during their fortnight of joint experimentation in December 1926 is the directness and spontaneity with which the models look at us out of the picture." Ibid., p. 20.

14. These pictures are in the André Kertész Archives, Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Ministère de la Culture, Paris. 15. The negatives are in the André Kertész Archives.

16. Van Deren Coke, Avantgarde Fotografie in Deutschland (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 1982).

17. Lucia Moholy, A Hundred Years of Photography, 1839–1939 (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1939), p. 166.

18. Kelly Wise, ed., *Lotte Jacobi* (Danbury, N.H.: Addison House, 1978).

19. For these pictures, see ibid.

20. This photograph is reproduced, inverted left to right, on the cover of Agnès de Gouvion Saint-Cyr, *Maurice Tabard*, Photo Poche no. 93 (Paris: Nathan, 2002).

21. Tabard was probably selected late for *Fifo*, since he is listed in the first supplement to the catalogue (*Nachtrag*), unlike Kertész, for example.

22. The second portrait (teary eyed) is now in the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris. It was published in M. Houlette and M. Ponsa, Paris, capitale photographique 1920–1940: Collection Christian Bouqueret, exh. cat. (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2009), p. 116.

23. Aenne Biermann and Franz Roh, *Aenne Biermann: 60 Fotos* (Berlin: Klinkhardt & Biermann), 1930.

24. In general, details of the face (eye, nose, mouth, and ear), designating the four senses (possibly rounded out by the hand, for touch), were prevalent in photography around 1930. See, for example, "Das Gesicht als Landschaft" (The face as landscape), *UHU* 5, no. 5 (February 1929): 42-43, which includes four detail photographs by P. E. Hahn (forehead, nose, eyebrows, and mouth).

25. "Formdialektik der fotografie," *A bis Z*, no. 2 (1931).

26. "Il y a quelques années, on ne considérait qu'une figure, qu'un corps, désormais on s'intéresse et on examine curieusement l'oeil de cette figure." Fernand Léger, quoted in Laurent Le Bon, ed., *Chefs-d'oeuvre*? (Paris: Centre Pompidou Metz, 2010), p. 312.

27. Dziga Vertov, quoted in Yuri Tsivian, ed., *Lines of Resistance: Dziga Vertov and the Twenties*, trans. Julian Graffy (Gemona, Udine: Le Giornate del Cinema Muro, 2004); repr. in Michael Levenson, "Art, Politics and the Kino-Eye: Vertov's *The Man with the Movie Camera*," *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 5, no. 1 (May 2010): 47–64.

28. Waldemar George, "Photographie: Vision du monde," *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 16 (1930).

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