Winning New Freedom.

Intersections of Text and Image in the Arts of Kurt Schwitters

by

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Abstract

This dissertation brings together the theoretical essays of German avant-garde writer, artist and designer, Kurt Schwitters (1887- 1948), with his fine and applied art, in order to examine three sites where text and image converge - typography, graphic design, and collage arts. As such, it is positioned within an important, but limited body of scholarship that approaches Schwitters' work in an interdisciplinary manner.

I consider artwork that is central to Schwitters' oeuvre - his collage arts, for example - for which he is best known. In addition, however, I examine aspects of his work that have received little scholarly attention, such as his graphic design work, typographical designs for a new script, and an exhibition that he co-curated with László Moholy-Nagy. I therefore bring Schwitters' work into dialogue with other contemporary artists and theorists of typography, including Walter Porstmann; Bauhaus professors Josef Albers, Herbert Bayer, and Moholy-Nagy; members of avant-garde groups, *De Stijl*, Theo van Doesburg, and Dada, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch; and proponents of New Typography, Jan Tschichold, Paul Renner, and Max Burchartz. In doing so, I position Schwitters within the networks of the broader European avant-garde.

I make three main arguments in the course of this dissertation. Firstly, I claim that in addition to working indiscriminately across media, Schwitters did not see his work as media or art form specific. I show that, on the contrary, the artist purposely challenged and shifted perceived borders, such as those between text and image, as well as fine and applied arts. I suggest, therefore, that approaching Schwitters' work from just one of these angles significantly limits our understanding of it. Secondly, by examining Schwitters' working practice and collaboration with other artists of the European avant-gardes, I counter the often commonly held notion that Schwitters was as an outsider to such circles. Instead, I posit him as an active and important

figure within them. Finally, I show that much of Schwitters' montage work is deeply rooted in self-citationality through the incorporation of material he originally created for other purposes - be it literary work or that from the applied arts. While this could be seen as purely egoistic, I argue that Schwitters used self-referentiality as a means to challenge the boundaries between these different art forms. As a result, he both equates the applied arts with the fine arts, and reveals his commissioned graphic design work to be a core part of his oeuvre.

Chapter I

Introduction

"Mein Ziel war damals, wie heute, und wie immer, Kunstwerke zu gestalten."[1] So writes Kurt Schwitters - writer, poet, playwright, composer, theorist, visual artist, sculptor, curator, typographer, graphic designer - in 1938. For Schwitters, whose creativity spanned, and even challenged the boundaries of various art forms, a holistic approach was central to his artwork. "Kunstarten gibt es nicht," he writes in 1923, "sie sind künstlich voneinander getrennt worden. Es gibt nur die Kunst."[2] Central, then, to Schwitters' idea of art production was the singularity of art, despite the multiple forms it could take, and the different media it could avail of. As I will show in this dissertation, Schwitters used his theoretical essays as a platform to underline this point, and his artwork as a means of challenging the common perceptions of boundaries between media within the arts.

Yet, the image of Schwitters working first and foremost *against* such boundaries, is generally not the one we see reflected in scholarship. For the most part, his work has instead been primarily approached as two different and distinct corpus - one literary and the other visual. Rather than examining Schwitters' work from the intermedial spirit in which it was conceived, scholarship has imposed its own restrictions on it, by considering it from the disciplinary perspectives of literature and art history, each with their own particular focus.[3] The premise of this dissertation

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1. Kurt Schwitters, "Das Ziel meiner Merzkunst," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 362.
2. Kurt Schwitters, "Die Bedeutung des Mergzgedankens in der Welt," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 134.
3. As I have already indicated, Schwitters' work encompasses much more than just literature and visual art, yet Schwitters' scholarship has to date commonly been reduced to these two disciplines.

is that we gain new insights by exploring Schwitters' work in a more comprehensive way.

In taking such an interdisciplinary approach, I consider works that are central to Schwitters' oeuvre - his Merz collage arts, for example, for which he is perhaps best known. In addition, however, I examine aspects of Schwitters' work that have received little scholarly attention, such as his typographical designs for a new script, and an exhibition that he co-curated with László Moholy-Nagy. In doing so, I move Schwitters' typographical work to the foreground, bringing it into dialogue with that of other contemporary artists and theorists of typography, including Bauhaus professors, members of *De Stijl*, and proponents of New Typography.

"Winning New Freedom"

The title of this dissertation, "Winning New Freedom," is taken and adapted from a CV of Schwitters' life, written in English with "quotations from the artist, and comments and explanations by Ernst Schwitters," - Schwitters' son - as indicated in pencil at the top of an edited draft.[4] The typewritten lines of the first draft have been crossed out, annotations scribbled in, and arrows crisscross the page, pointing to the ways in which the text is to be reorganized. What emerges is a picture of how the artist's son posthumously defines and delineates his father's creative work.[5] Writing on Schwitters' incorporation of text into visual art, Ernst Schwitters sums up his father's mission to erase the boundaries between these different art forms when he states, "An entirely new approach, extending the scope of graphic art towards the sphere of litterature [sic]. Fusing both forms of art, he wins new freedom, approaches new and different problems."[6] I position my

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4. Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, obj ID 45723, Ernst Schwitters, Kurt MERZ Schwitters: A curriculumvitae with..., nach 1948.

5. The CV is not dated, but the Schwitters Archive gauges it to have been written after 1948, and therefore after Schwitters' death.

6. Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, obj ID 45723, Ernst Schwitters, Kurt MERZ Schwitters: A curriculumvitae with..., nach 1948.

dissertation within an important, but limited, body of scholarship that approaches Schwitters' work in an interdisciplinary manner and in the course of the subsequent three chapters I examine the fusion of art forms he creates. While there are other elements, such as sound (Chapter III) and space (Chapter IV) that play a role in the individual chapters, I focus primarily on the intersection of text and image in Schwitters' work. In particular, I consider three areas that do not fall neatly under the scope of either literary or art historical study - montage, graphic design, and typography - and do so paying attention to how Schwitters negotiates the spectra of fine and applied arts, text and image, and his work as an individual and collaborator.

There are three main arguments I make in this dissertation. Firstly, I assert that Schwitters did not see his work as medium specific and that, on the contrary, he actively worked against this notion, purposely challenging and shifting the borders between fine art and graphic design, as well as text and image. As a result, approaching Schwitters' art from the angle of just one of these media or disciplines significantly limits our understanding of his work. Secondly, through examining Schwitters' working practice and active collaboration with other artists of the European avant-gardes, I take up Rudolf Fuchs' discontentment with the notion of Schwitters as a "curious outsider," and instead posit him as an active and important figure within these circles.[7] Finally, contrary to Schwitters' claim that, for his work, "Das Material ist so unwesentlich, wie ich selbst," I show that much of Schwitters' collage arts are, in fact, deeply rooted in self-citationality.[8] This manifests itself in the incorporation of material Schwitters originally created for other purposes - his poetry, or graphic design projects, for example - into his fine art work, therefore at once citing himself, as well as challenging the boundaries between these different art forms.

In this introduction, I start out by providing an overview of Schwitters' life and his lifelong

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7. Rudolf Herman Fuchs, *Kurt Schwitters, I is Style* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 2000), 11.

8. Kurt Schwitters, "Merz," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 76-77.

art project, *Merz*. With this in mind, I then turn to the question of text and image and consider some of the different levels on which this relationship manifests itself and operates in Schwitters' oeuvre, before contextualizing Schwitters within the networks of the interwar European avant-gardes. In the subsequent section I consider the publication history of Schwitters' work, which, I argue, allows us to understand some of the reasons why a separation between literary and art historical scholarship has come about. I close with a chapter outline of the dissertation.

"My Art and My Life"

Reflecting back on his life and life's work, Schwitters composed a short text in English between 1940 and 1946, that was never published during his lifetime. Entitled "My Art and My Life," he opens the essay in the following way:

> When I was born 20.6.87, I was influenced by Picasso to cry. When I could walk and speak I still stood under Picasso's influence and said to my mother: 'Tom' or 'Happening', meaning the entrances of the canal under the street. My lyrical time was when I lived in the Violet Street. I never saw a violet. That was my influence by Matisse because when he painted rose I did not paint violet. As a boy of ten I stood under Mondrian's influence and built little houses with little bricks. Afterwards I stood under the influence of the Surrealists. I never stood under the influence of Dadaism because whereas the Dadaist created Spiegel-dadaismus (Mirror-Dada) on the Zurich Lake, I created MERZ on the Leine-river, under the influence of Rembrandt. Time went on, and when Hans Arp made concrete Art, I stayed Abstract. Now I do concrete Art, and Marcel Duchamp went over to the Surrealist [sic].[9]

After opening in a very matter of fact manner with his date of birth, Schwitters continues with a

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9. Kurt Schwitters, "My Art and My Life," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 386.
This text was written in English, as was much of Schwitters' correspondence and other writing that composed during his time in exile in England. Throughout this dissertation, all quotations from Schwitters are cited in the original language in which they were written, unless otherwise noted.

string of playfully ironic metaphors, in which he entangles the public image of renowned artists with his private childhood. Furthermore, in the course of this excerpt his growth and development as a human becomes inextricable with that of his development as an artist. By formulating the text in this way Schwitters achieves several things. Firstly, and perhaps most obviously, he positions himself firmly within the European avant-gardes of the early twentieth century.[10] In the first half of this passage, the word *influence* is repeatedly employed, until Schwitters states that which *did not* influence him - Dadaism. Here, we see a switch in the text, as though Schwitters comes of age at this moment, and instead of being *influenced*, he *creates*. For the remainder of the text, Schwitters portrays himself as on a par with Hans Arp and Marcel Duchamp, thereby equating himself with these recognized artists and positioning himself an important figure. Secondly, I suggest that Schwitters subtly draws attention to the inseparability of his personal development from his work as an artist - an idea that is already foreshadowed in the title, "My Art and My life." Thirdly, he alludes to the influence others had in shaping his development - an aspect of his career that becomes more pronounced through his collaborative projects with other artists and designers. Lastly, we can also detect Schwitters' self-ironic relationship to himself - a characteristic that we will also see in his series of montaged postcards in Chapter Two.

As we read in the text, Schwitters was born in 1887 in Hanover, where he lived and worked until forced into exile in 1937. After completing his secondary education, Schwitters spent a year at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of Applied Arts) in his home town. Right from an early stage, he developed his literary skills parallel to those in the visual arts: it was during his time at the *Hochschule für bildende Künste* (Academy of Fine Arts) in Dresden, between 1909 and 1915 that Schwitters started to pen his first poems. World War I interrupted his trajectory, and although unfit for military service due to epilepsy, Schwitters served as a draftsman at the Wülfel

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10. Rembrandt being an obvious exception to this, of course.

Ironworks in Hanover from 1917 until the end of the war. He resigned from this post at the end of November 1918, shortly following the armistice, and just days after his son Ernst was born, in order to "go wholeheartedly in for his [art] work."[11]

It was gearboxes and cogs that were produced at the Wülfel Ironworks, which Michael White claims had an influence on his artistic work, since Schwitters' service there coincided with the creation of his first abstract works. White argues, that "there [are] plenty of iconographical resonances between the Stampdrawing and the kind of drawings he would have made day in day out of sprockets and hubs."[12] Similarly, while in this position, Schwitters developed an increased interest in architecture, which led to him enrolling in architectural courses at the *Technische Hochschule* (Technical College) in Hanover from 1917-1918. As we will see in the following section, in which I discuss Schwitters' *Merz* project, this architectural training would have a strong influence on his artwork, and in particular the various incarnations of his Merzbau.

In addition to being the year Schwitters started out as a full-time artist, 1918 was also a significant one: the Kestner Museum, Hanover bought a total of eighteen of his paintings - the first museum to purchase his work; he exhibited at the *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin for the first time; and started working on his first collages. Not least, however, Schwitters made the acquaintance of several artists who would become close friends and have a significant influence on his development as an artist - Käte Steinitz, Hans Arp, Raoul Hausmann, and Hannah Höch.[13] It is

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11. Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museums, obj ID 45723, Ernst Schwitters, Kurt MERZ Schwitters / A curriculum vitae with ...,nach 1948.
Schwitters served for a short time in the military between March and June 1917 before being dismissed.
Ernst was the second son of Kurt and Helma Schwitters. Gerd Schwitters, born in September 1916, died just a few days after his birth.

12. Michael White, "Merzzeichnung: Typology and Typography," *Tate Papers*, 2010, accessed February 6, 2017, http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/merzzeichnung-typology-and-typography.

13. Käte (later Kate) Steinitz (1889-1975) was an artist, art historian, and lifelong friend of Schwitters. They collaborated on several projects including a typographically illustrated children's book, *Die Scheuche Märchen*, together with *De Stijl* artist, Theo van Doesburg, an opera, the *Festival of Technology*, and the *Cinnabar Festival* in 1928. After his death, Steinitz wrote a personal account of Schwitters' life that is at once biography and memoir (see Kate Trauman Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1968)). In 1994 the

rather astounding that in such a short period of time after becoming a full-time artist Schwitters was recognized enough to have a museum purchase numerous pieces of his artwork, as well as managing to insert himself into important art circles - facts that speak to both his determination and his relentless self-promotion. It was at this point, and within the context of these new networks, that Schwitters embarked upon a new project that encompassed a wide array of media and would become his life's aim - Merz.

Merz

Merz was the name Schwitters gave to all aspects of his artwork and became a way of life for him. In the introduction to a catalog of his work, compiled by the artist himself and printed as No. 20 of his journal *Merz* in 1927, Schwitters explains the origins of the term, Merz. "Das ist die 2te Silbe von Kommerz. Es entstand beim Merzbilde, einem Bilde, auf dem unter abstrakten Formen das Wort MERZ, aufgeklebt und ausgeschnitten aus einer Anzeige der KOMMERZ UND PRIVATBANK, zu lesen war."[14] Schwitters goes on to explain to the reader that he subsequently named all his *Bilder*, *Merzbilder*, as well as calling his poetry and other creative output, Merz, revealing it to be an all encompassing art form. In a typically provocative fashion, Schwitters finishes by stating, "Jetzt nenne ich mich selbst MERZ,"[15] showing that his project has become

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National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. held an exhibition entitled "Collaborative Works by Kate Steinitz and Kurt Schwitters from the Schwitters-Steinitz Collection," that was the first to draw attention to this collaborative relationship.

Hans Arp (1886-1966) was a German-French artist and designer, as well as founding member of both Zurich and Cologne Dada. It was Arp who first introduced Schwitters to the idea of collage, and in the years that followed they collaborated on many projects together, including Dada evenings and a novel.

Hannah Höch (1889-1978) was a Berlin Dada artist, and the only female whose work was exhibited at the 1920 Dada-Messe. Schwitters and Höch were close friends, often visiting one another and holiday with each other, as well as collaborators. Höch, for example, hosted various Merz evenings at her home just outside of Berlin.

14. Kurt Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters gibt uns wieder...," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 252.

15. Ibid.

not only a way of life, but also an inextricable part of his identity. With Merz, then, Schwitters crosses over the art/life boundary that was one of the aims of the wider avant-gardes.

This anecdote of how the term Merz came about is well known and often cited. One dimension that is often ignored, however, is the part that follows. Schwitters continues, "Dieses Wort MERZ war durch Abstimmen gegen die anderen Bildteile selbst Bildteil geworden, und so mußte es dort stehen. Sie können es verstehen, daß ich ein Bild mit dem Wort MERZ das MERZbild nannte, wie ich ein Bild mit 'und' das *und-Bild* und ein Bild mit 'Arbeiter' das *Arbeiterbild* nannte."[16] By bringing a *word* together with *Bild* in the title, text *becomes* an image - both in the title and in the image itself. As a result, the titles of Schwitters' collages and montages assume an important role vis-à-vis the work of art, since they mirror the play with media that takes place in the image itself.

Schwitters' collage arts are filled with examples of snippets of text, newspaper cuttings, and used tickets, that are incorporated into the images. Bringing text into the context of a fine art image, which traditionally had no textual markers, results, I argue, in the blurring of boundaries between the two media. Once the textual elements become subsumed into an image, they refer back to themselves as text, while also gesturing beyond their purely semiotic meaning and pointing to the formal characterstics of the text. It is in this way, then, that Schwitters problematizes the perceived boundaries beyond text and image. For Schwitters, the interplay between text and image - and the idea of challenging the boundaries of the two - was central to his conception of Merz. This particular aspect of Schwitters' work is one of the main focuses of Chapter Two, in which I further explore the way the artist brings together various media in his collage arts.

It is perhaps for this blurring boundaries of text and image that Merz first became known through his collage arts. Indeed, Schwitters initially named all of his montages and collages *Merz*

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16. Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters gibt uns wieder...," 252-253.
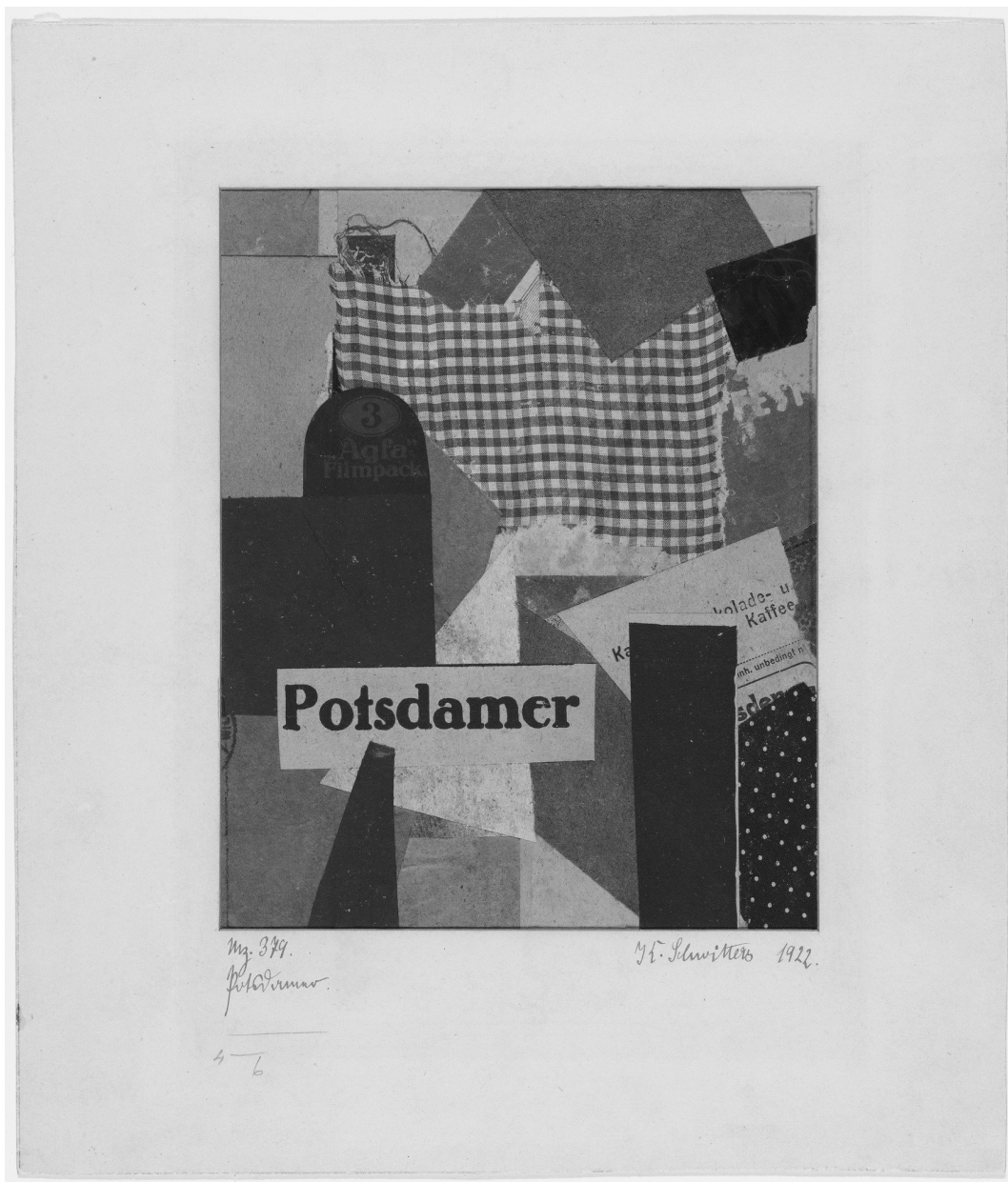
Figure I.1: Kurt Schwitters, *Mz 379. Potsdamer*, 1922.

(or *Mz* for short), followed by a number that he assigned in chronological order. This system of numbering is largely adhered to for the impressively vast corpus of over four thousand Merz montages that he would go on to produce in his lifetime. Often an additional one-word title, taken from the montaged text incorporated into the artwork followed the numbered Merz title as a subtitle.[17] A prime example of this is 1922 montage, *Mz 379. Potsdamer* (see Figure I.1), that is number 379, and takes the title *Potsdamer*, which is also the most striking element of text within the image.

Although the initial emphasis of Merz may have been on montage, over the years, it evolved into more than just bring words and images together, but incorporated *all* forms of Schwitters' artistic expression, regardless of media. This also included, therefore, his literary work. While Schwitters is primarily known today as an artist, in the course of his lifetime, he produced a large array of literary work that encompassed prose, sound poetry, visual poetry, drama, opera, and essays. Much of this literature was first published in European literary and avant-garde journals, such as *De Stijl*, *Der Zweemann: Monatsblätter für Dichtung und Kunst*, *Frühlicht*, *Der Sturm*, and *Zirkel: Magazin für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Technik*, among others. Collected together by Friedhelm Lach in the 1970s and early 1980s, Schwitters' literary work fills five volumes.[18] In addition, the artist founded and edited his own journal, *Merz* in 1923, that published a total of twenty-one issues over a nine-year period.

One of the main focuses of Schwitters' Merz project was his Merzbau (see Figure I.4). Also entitled, *Die Kathedrale des erotischen Elends*, Schwitters began work on the Merzbau sometime between 1919 and 1923 and continued to design it until he went into exile and in 1937.[19] As a

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17. Some exceptions to this numbering system exist, for example artwork that was given a dedication In such cases, the title became the dedication. For examples of this, see, for example, *für Jan Tschichold*, 1930, or *für Anton Räderscheid und Martha Hegemann*, 1927.

18. See F. Lach, *Das Literarische Werk*, vol. 1-5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981).

19. For more information on the change of names, as well as the origins of the project, see Elizabeth Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 87-88.

Figure I.2: Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbau*, 1933
Photographer: Wilhelm Redemann
This photo of Schwitters' Merzbau was taken in his Hanover apartment.

large structure, constructed in space, the Merzbau was primarily an architectural project. In this way, we see Schwitters' background in architecture influencing his artistic work, and at the same time broadening his Merz project to include forms of art beyond just that of the fine arts.

The Merzbau was an evolving project that grew over time, and although it started as just one room in his apartment, in the subsequent years, it expanded, eventually taking up several rooms as well as the balcony. It incorporated sculptures and columns, and in addition, included grottoes dedicated to individuals that contained objects connected to them. Hans Richter recalls:[20]

> He cut off a lock of my hair, and put it in my hole. A thick pencil, filched from Mies van der Rohe's drawing board, lay in his cavity. In others, there was a piece of shoelace, a half-smoked cigarette, a nail paring, a piece of tie (Doesburg), a broken pen. There were also some odd (and more than odd) things such as a dental bridge with several teeth on it, and even a little bottle of urine bearing the donor's name. All these were placed in the separate holes reserved for the individual entries.[21]

We see, therefore, that the Merzbau was a very personal and intimate structure, containing body parts and belongings of those the artist was close to. Leah Dickerman notes that the contents of these grottoes rendered the Merzbau "rife with damaged bodies,"[22] arguing that a commentary on the experience of war emerges from it.[23] It is tragic, therefore, that the Merzbau would itself become a victim of war, being destroyed in the Allied bombing of Hanover in 1943. While nothing remains of the original, a reconstruction, originally commissioned by Harold Szeemann for his 1983 exhibition, "Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk," can now be viewed at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover.[24]

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20. Hans Richter (1888-1976) was an avant-garde artist, graphic designer and experimental film producer, most well known for his abstract film, *Rhythmus 21*, and as editor of the journal, *G. Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*.

21. Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames / Hudson, 1965), 152.

22. Leah Dickerman, "Merz and Memory: On Kurt Schwitters," in *The Dada Seminars*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 114.

23. Ibid., 114-115.

24. Elizabeth Burns Gamard has noted that in contrast to Schwitters' strong self-promotion of his other work, the Merzbau was in fact kept a much more private project. Most obviously, as it was built within Schwitters apartment, but also as Schwitters actively restricted access to it. As a result, it is making it difficult to reconstruct, since few

Merz and Graphic Design

In his writing on Merz, Schwitters' work in the fields of applied arts of graphic design and typography is conspicuously absent - not once does he mention it with regards to his larger art project. This is surprising, given the fact that Schwitters dedicated a significant amount of his time to the applied arts, and during the 1920s and early 1930s was a prominent designer in Hanover. In addition to winning contracts with the ink firm, *Pelikan*, and the biscuit producer, *Bahlsen* (see, for example, Figure I.3), among other local firms, Schwitters became the official typographer for the city of Hanover, for which he designed several thousand documents, as well as posters for public transport and the opera and other printed matter.[25] Moreover, in 1928 Schwitters formally announced the founding of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* - a group that I will explore further in Chapter Four, that brought together eight other graphic designers, working in the style of New Typography, of which Schwitters was the chair. As an organization, these designers gave lectures and exhibited their work across the country.[26]

For Schwitters, graphic design contracts were not just considered work to pay the bills, rather these commissions formed an important part of his oeuvre, which he exhibited from 1927 onwards.[27] Furthermore, in his graphic design, we see elements that are present in other areas of his work. In Figure I.3, for example, Schwitters' humor comes through in a piece he designed

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people saw it. (See Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, 8. See also Dickerman, "Merz and Memory: On Kurt Schwitters," 115.)

For more information on the reconstruction of the Merzbau for Szeemann's exhibition, see Karin Orchard, "Kurt Schwitters: Reconstructions of the Merzbau," *Tate Papers*, 2010, accessed April 17, 2017, http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/08/kurt-schwitters-reconstructions-of-the-merzbau.

25. In addition, Schwitters also produced documents for Karlsruhe city council.

26. In the subsequent couple of years, several members were added to the nine founding members, and often guests were invited to exhibit with them.

27. A collection of Schwitters' documents, for example, was exhibited in 1932 by Hanover council at the "Ausstellung für neuzeitliche Werbung und Bürotechnik in Stuttgart." (Werner Heine, "'Futura' without a Future: Kurt Schwitters' Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929-1934," trans. Annette Haxton, *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 135.)

Figure I.3: Kurt Schwitters, Advert for *Bahlsen*, ca. 1929.

for *Bahlsen.* In this text-heavy advertisement almost twenty reasons are given as to why "Keks ist das Universal-Nahrungsmittel." Answers such as "Sie sind abgespannt und brauchen aromatische Nährungsmittel: Nervenspeise," or "Sie haben einen Bridge-Abend," are put forth, causing the reader to smile.[28] Underneath, a repeated slogan - "Keks ist Fortschritt" - printed in all caps frames another paragraph to the top and bottom, points to Schwitters' inclination towards nonsense over sense.[29] While we cannot know for certain that it was Schwitters himself who wrote this text, or whether he just graphically designed it, it bears the mark of his provocative humor that is present in much of his writing. I would therefore suggest that Schwitters likely composed this advertisement in its entirety, and that through this example, we see how his graphic design work is connected to his larger *Merz* project.

There are, of course, significant differences between Schwitters' graphic design work and Merz. Firstly, his design work, whether for office stationery or advertisements, was commissioned and therefore had to be produced within certain contractual limits and ultimately had to please someone else. Secondly, these works were often considered to be more closely linked to commerce.[30] Finally, in contrast to Schwitters' individual works of fine art, his graphic design was mass produced.

Despite a lack of reference to his graphic design and typographical work in his theoretical

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28. Text-heavy advertisements were not uncommon at this time. Roland Marchand notes that it was not until the 1930s that images that were designed to convince the consumer became more common than an argumentative text (Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American dream: Making way for modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 154.). Different, however, to the text-based advertisements of the time, here Schwitters employs text in such a way that it is visually striking, creating an image of sorts out of the text.

29. In his 1920 essay on *Merz* Schwitters writes, "Ich werte Sinn gegen Unsinn. Den Unsinn bevorzuge ich, aber das ist eine rein persönliche Angelegenheit. Mir tut der Unsinn leid, daß er bislang so selten künstlerisch geformt wurde, deshalb liebe ich den Unsinn." (Schwitters, "Merz," 77.)

30. This is, of course, a misconception, particularly for full-time artists like Schwitters, who make their livelihood from their art, and one that unfairly devalues the cost of the artist's labor in producing it. Schwitters did sell his artwork commercially, both to individuals and to galleries and museums. Before going into exile Schwitters sold multiple pieces to the Kestner-Museum, Hanover, the Stadtmuseum Dresden, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example.

writing on Merz, there are several factors that point to the fact that Schwitters regarded it a core part of Merz. In 1924, for example, he founded his advertising firm, *Merz-Werbezentrale*, that deliberately took the same name as his art project, and in the same year, his journal *Merz* featured an issue dedicated to the graphic design of advertising, that was co-edited together with the Russian artist, designer, and avant-gardist, El Lissitzky.[31] Furthermore, a little booklet Schwitters produced on graphic design, entitled *Werbe-Gestaltung* was packaged in an envelope, bearing the title *Merz-Werbe: Drucksache*. Finally, as we will see throughout the course of this dissertation, Schwitters repeatedly incorporated elements of graphic design and typography - often his own - into his fine art. In the chapters that follow, I show that, for Schwitters, there was little distinction between the fine and applied arts, and therefore argue, that while not mentioned in his writing on Merz, the artist likely considered his graphic design work an integral part of his Merz project.

Merzgesamtkunstwerk

Latent in Schwitters' aim to erase the boundaries between the different art forms is, I contend, the notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Many scholars have already drawn parallels between Schwitters' idea of Merz as an all encompassing art form, and that of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Elizabeth Gamard, for example, argues that Schwitters' term *Merzkunstwerk* is a deliberate reference to the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, while Megan Luke reads the wide array of media the artist worked in as an attempt at a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[32] She continues, however, that this remained just an attempt, since Schwitters did, in fact, order his work by medium, rendering his work medium specific.

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31. See Kurt Schwitters and El Lisstizky, "Typoreklame," ed. Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky, *Merz* 11 (1924).
32. Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, 14.
Megan R Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 189.

The artist himself often made explicit reference to the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*. In 1923, for example, he penned a manifesto, together with *De Stijl* artist, Theo van Doesburg, founding members of Dada, Hans Arp and Tristan Tzara, and art critic, Christoph Spengemann, in which they conclude, "Das, was wir hingegen vorbereiten, ist das Gesamtkunstwerk, welches erhaben ist über alle Plakate, ob sie für Sekt, Dada oder Kommunistische Diktatur gemacht sind."[33] Here, Schwitters and his contemporaries use the term to convey a desire for the arts to come together, and be representative for all people - not just those of a particular class. Although the reference to posters advertising sparkling wine, Dada and Communism is ironic, the implication that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* comes in the form of an advertising poster is indicative of the avant-gardists' inclusion of applied arts into their broader oeuvre.

At other times, Schwitters employed the idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* to specifically describe Merz. In some respects Schwitters' work conforms to the Wagnerian use of the term in which different media - namely drama, opera, and text - were brought together to form an intermedial work. Schwitters' collage arts are, for example, also hybrids, combining text and image, his sound poetry brings together text with elements of drama and sound, and his constructions were part architectural, part visual, and part textual. Where Schwitters diverges from a Wagnerian understanding of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, however, is in his aim for non-political art. Krisztina Lajosi has argued that "Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk can be regarded as a theory on mass media - or rather public media - and therefore it cannot be separated from his social and political ideas."[34] While Wagner's use of the term is therefore deeply rooted in his politics, Schwitters, on the other hand, repeatedly claimed that his art was apolitical.[35]

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33. Kurt Schwitters, "Manifest Proletkunst," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 143.

34. Krisztina Lajosi, "Wagner and the (Re) mediation of Art. Gesamtkunstwerk and Nineteenth-Century Theories of Media," *Frame* 23 (2010): 43.

35. In response to a text by Huelsenbeck on Dadaismus, Schwitters wrote, for example, in 1920, "Also der Hülsendadaismus ist politisch orientiert, gegen Kunst und gegen Kultur. Ich bin tolerant und lasse jedem seine

Despite these differences, Schwitters often referred to his work as a *Merzgesamtkunstwerk*, and thereby implicating the Wagnerian term directly into his art project. He writes in 1921, for example:

> Der Grund (für die Beschäftigung mit den verschiedenen Kunstarten) war nicht etwa der Trieb nach Erweiterung des Gebiets meiner Tätigkeit, sondern das Streben, nicht Spezialist einer Kunstart, sondern Künstler zu sein. Mein Ziel ist das Merzgesamtkunstwerk, das alle Kunstarten zusammenfaßt zur künstlerischen Einheit.[36]

Here, Schwitters goes so far as to name the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* as the very goal for his work, and by placing the two terms alongside one another, the artist equates the *Gesamtkusntwerk* with Merz. Inherent in this passage, then, is the idea of the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* as an art form that evades classification - a notion that we have already seen is latent in much of Schwitters' texts.

This understanding of the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* is, however, not entirely stable across his corpus of written work. While attempting to remove boundaries between different art forms by means of reference to the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk*, at the same time, Schwitters also reinforces them by elevating two particular art forms, claiming that they are particularly suitable for it - the *Merzbühne* and architecture. Both of these mark a departure from the visual arts to the spatial arts, and neither were projects that fully realized.

Right from an early stage in Schwitters' Merz project, the artist wrote theoretical texts on his vision of theater, which he named, the *Merzbühne* - a project that was never realized.[37] In 1919

Weltanschauung, aber ich muß erwähnen, daß derartige Anschauungen Merz fremd sind. Merz erstrebt aus Prinzip nur die Kunst, weil kein Mensch zween Herren dienen kann." (Schwitters, "Merz," 78.)

36. Ibid., 79.

37. Schwitters did, however, compose an opera, as well as a drama-like text, that details a conversation between the public and Schwitters, on the Merzbühne. As such, Meghan Luke notes that this text is "the closest we can come to understanding what the *Merzbühne* would have looked and sounded like." (Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 85.)

he composed a text in which he outlined the differences between the *Merzbühne* and theater and opera, stating, "[die] sämtliche Teile der Merzbühnenwerkes [sind] untrennbar mit einander verbunden; es kann nicht geschrieben, gelesen oder gehört, es kann nur im Theater erlebt werden. [...] Die Merzbühne kennt nur die Verschmelzung aller Faktoren zum Gesamtkunstwerk"[38] Much like theater at the Bauhaus, what Schwitters describes here conforms to an abstracted version of a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[39] As we will see in Chapter Two, this statement is very similar to Schwitters' understanding of his collage arts, in which a number of *Einzelteile* - used transport tickets, photographs, pieces of text - come together to create the *Gesamtheit* of the image. Yet here, the emphasis is on the experience of the viewer, as we see from the use of the verb *erleben*. The viewer, therefore, becomes a central part of the process of creating this new art form.

Similarly, Schwitters singles out the medium of architecture as particularly well suited to Merz. His vision of this form of Merz, however, is beyond his relatively small-scale Merzbau, writing of the potential of architecture to turn the city itself into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[40] While the scale of the Schwitters' proposed *Gesamtkunstwerk* is radically different, and much more provocative, to any of his realized Merz work, it does share some of the same qualities - in par-

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38. Kurt Schwitters, "Die Merzbühne," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 42.

39. Juliet Koss has already drawn parallels between the Bauhaus theater and Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. See Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010). Melissa Trimingham counters this, however, by suggesting instead that the fusion of arts practiced at th Bauhaus is better understood as *Gestaltung*. See Melissa Trimingham, "Gesamtkunstwerk, Gestaltung, and the Bauhaus Stage," in *The Total Work of Art: Foundations, Articulations, Inspirations*, ed. David Imhoof and Margaret Eleanor Menninger (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 100.

40. Schwitters writes in 1922, "Die Architektur ist an sich auf den Merzgedanken am meisten von allen Kunstgattungen eingestellt. [...] Der Architektur blieb infolge der Schwerfälligkeit des Materials, mit dem man Häuser baut, nichts anderes übrig als stets wieder das Alte zu verwenden und einzubeziehen in den neuen Entwurf. Dadurch sind unendlich reiche und schöne Bauwerke entstanden, indem für den Architekten nicht der Stil des alten Teiles maßgebend war, sondern die Idee des neuen Gesamtkunstwerkes. [...] Schon durch ganz Anstreichen ganz Berlins nach dem Plane eines Merzarchitekten, der in großzügiger Weise ganze Stadtviertel wegestreichen und einige wichtige Zentren, die selbstverständlich mit den Verkehrszentren nicht zusammenfallen, durch Licht und Farbe hervorheben würde, wäre der Wille zu dokumentieren, selbst aus der Großstadt ein Merzkunst zu machen." (Kurt Schwitters, "Schloß und Kathedrale mit Hofbrunnen," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 96.)

ticular, the notion that Merz allows for the creation of new work from old material. He writes, for example, "Merz bedeutet bekanntlich die Verwendung von gegebenem Alten als Material für das neue Kunstwerk."[41] As we will see in Chapter Two, this is a core element of his collage arts, in which he takes used, discarded, and found printed matter in his artwork - the only difference here, is that the found material is buildings, and other structures that make up the urban environment. Like the Merzbühne, then, this form of *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* would be experienced - not as a viewer, but as a city dweller.

While this dissertation is primarily concerned with Schwitters' collage arts and typographic and design work, we see from the examples of both the *Merzbühne* and architecture that throughout Schwitters' oeuvre he strives first and foremost for the erasure of media boundaries. Furthermore, for Schwitters, this principle of Merz is transferable across multiple art forms. Yet, at the same time, a tension exists between Schwitters' goal of erasing these boundaries and the fact that he *reinforces* them by privileging architecture and the *Merzbühne* over other media. What these examples - and many of those I draw on in the rest of this dissertation - show, is that a complete erasure of boundaries between media is not possible. What takes place instead is a problematization of perceived medial boundaries. Nevertheless, it is this goal of pure intermediality and wholeness, that I argue is central to Schwitters' concept of Merz as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

Merz and Dada

In the early years, Schwitters conceived of Merz as a response to Dada - or perhaps more specifically, as a reaction to his rejection from the Berlin Dada group. In 1919, the artist applied to join the ranks of the Dadaists. His request, however, was denied by founder of the Berlin Dada group, Richard Hulsenbeck, for Schwitters' association with the Berlin *Der Sturm* gallery, where

41. Schwitters, "Schloß und Kathedrale mit Hofbrunnen," 96.

he had exhibited his work on numerous occasions, and of which Huelsenbeck disapproved, given its overt links to Expressionism.[42] Despite not being officially linked to the Berlin Dada group, Schwitters worked closely with many of its core members, and remained a close collaborator with Hannah Höch until his exile in 1937 and with Roaul Hausmann right to the end of his life.[43] Huelsenbeck's rejection, however, did lead to something productive - it became the impetus that prompted Schwitters to create Merz.

In his essay, "Durch Gegensätzlichkeit verwandt: Mentalitätsunterschiede von Dada und Merz," Ralf Burmeister teases out the complex relationship between Dada and Merz.[44] The first part of the title of Burmeister's article, "durch Gegensätzlichkeit verwandt," is a quotation from Schwitters himself and lends some insight into the way the artist viewed Merz in relation to Dada.[45] Burmeister asserts that the exact nature of this relationship of Dada and Merz is somewhat perplexing - partly because, at times, Schwitters aligns himself with Dada, by dedicating the first issue of his journal *Merz* to Dutch Dada, for example. At other times, however, he sets

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42. Taylor Brandon notes that *Der Sturm* "was the object of explicit attack in Huelsenbeck's 'First Dada Manifesto' of April 1918," and that the contention between the two lay with Expressionism focusing on "inwardness," while Dadaism looked out towards the culture surrounding the artists." (Brandon Taylor, *Collage: The Making of Modern Art* (London: Thames / Hudson Ltd, 2004), 45.)
For a more detailed account of this dispute, see Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimes (New York: Viking Press, 1996), 240-241. and for more on the relationship between Dada and Expressionism, see Dorothée Brill, *Shock and the Senseless in Dada and Fluxus* (Hanover, NH: UPNE, 2010), 62-69.

43. Hausmann and Schwitters had worked together closely in the early 1920s, and made an "anti-dada" tour to Prague in 1921 with Hannah Höch and Schwitters' wife, Helma. From Schwitters' correspondence we see that Hausmann took up contact with Schwitters in the summer of 1946. What follows is an intimate and frequent letter exchange that first of all details their lives in the intervening years since Schwitters' exile to Norway in 1937, and then moves swiftly to their plans for creative collaboration. The correspondence continues for a year - just six months before Schwitters' death in early 1948 - and out of it comes photographs, poetry, and plans for a journal called *PIN*. Although never realized during Schwitters' lifetime, it was published in English in 1962. See Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann, *PIN* (London: Gabberbocchus Press, 1962) Schwitters' and Hausmann's existing correspondence can be found in Kurt Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nündel (Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 199-278.

44. See Ralf Burmeister, "Durch Gegensätzlichkeit verwandt: Mentalitätsunterschiede von Dada und Merz," in *Kurt Schwitters: MERZ - ein Gesamtweltbild* (Basel: Museum Tinguely, 2004), 140–149.

45. Schwitters writes, "Auch im Krieg sollst Du nie einen Menschen töten, besonders nicht Deinen Feind. Dada und Merz sind einander durch Gegensätzlichkeit verwandt." (Kurt Schwitters, "Merz 2: Nummer i," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 142.)

himself in opposition to it. Indeed, both differentiating himself *from*, and aligning himself *with*, Dada is a frequent subject of Schwitters' writing, and one that is never fully resolved. In 1923, for example, he writes:

> Dem Dadaismus in veredelter Form stellte ich Merz gegenüber und kam zu dem Resultat: während Dadaismus Gegensätze nur zeigt, gleicht Merz Gegensätze durch Wertung innerhalb eines Kunstwerks aus. Der reine Merz ist Kunst, der reine Dadaismus Nichtkunst, beides mit Bewußtsein.[46]

In this passage we see Schwitters define Merz in relation to Dada. In doing so, the artist highlights ways in which the two movements overlap, while also showing how these similarities work towards opposite ends. Schwitters notes that different to Dada, that showed contrasts, Merz "balances" these contrasts on the page. Here, Schwitters refers to his own particular theory of *Gestaltung*, which was based on his understanding of the term *rhythm* - a fundamental aspect of both his fine and applied art work that I will explore further in Chapter Two. It is this element that leads Schwitters to conclude that Merz is art and Dada anti-art. This is, of course, a provocative statement, and a difficult argument to uphold if we were to consider, for example, the montages of Hannah Höch (see, for example, Figure II.2), which always have a solid composition, and use contrasts in a more nuanced way than Schwitters suggests here.

Having considered the origins and form of Merz during the prewar years, let us now turn to the later years of Merz and Schwitters' life.

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46. Schwitters, "Merz 2: Nummer i," 148.

Merz: The Later Years

Deemed a degenerate artist by the Nazis, Schwitters was forced into exile in January 1937, following his son, Ernst Schwitters, who had fled a couple of weeks earlier to Norway.[47] Schwitters and his family had made annual trips there since 1929, spending their summers in Lysaker, just outside of Oslo, and it was to there that Schwitters escaped, and would stay until the German invasion of Norway in 1940.[48] Throughout this time Schwitters continued working, exhibiting in London, Switzerland, and Norway, as well as writing and publishing. No longer able to work on the Merzbau in his Hanover apartment, once in Lysaker, Schwitters started work on a new structure, which he called *Haus am Bakken*, and that Megan Luke argues can be considered a Lysaker Merzbau.[49]

In June 1940, Schwitters left German-occupied Norway, sailing to Scotland, where he spent several weeks in internment camps, before being placed at the Hutchinson Camp on the Isle of Man for almost a year and a half. As in Norway, Schwitters quickly set up a studio, painting portraits of other internees and was actively involved in the cultural life of the camp, giving recitals and publishing in the journal, *The Camp*. Once released in December 1941, Schwitters moved to London, where he would spend the rest of the war, before moving to Ambleside in the Lake District in June 1945. It was there that Schwitters created the third and final Merzbau - a small structure in a stone shelter, situated on a farm just outside Ambleside that he named *Merzbarn*.[50] Partially funded by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Schwitters was unable

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47. Megan Luke notes that Schwitters was summoned to testify at a trial against his friends Christoph and Luise Spengemann. His wife Helma was arrested when Kurt Schwitters failed to show up. She was only released after agreeing to make sure Schwitters would return to Germany. See Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 139.

48. Schwitters' wife, Helma, stayed in Hanover to care for their parents. She visited Schwitters several times during his time in Norway, and died before the end of the war in October 1944.

49. Luke comments, "Although he never called the cottage on Hjertøya a *Merzbau*, it too has shared the ruinous fate of the Hanover and Lysaker spaces." (Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 90.)

50. One wall of the original Merzbarn is now on display at Newcastle University's Hatton Gallery.

to complete the Merzbarn, as his health started to fail. Only one wall of the barn was under progress when he died on January 8 1948 - one day after being granted British citizenship.[51]

Having considered Schwitters' life, and his life's art project, Merz, I would now like to detail the main aspects of his work that I examine in this dissertation, starting with text and image.

Imagetext - Image-Text - Image/Text

Text and image are present alongside one another in almost all of Schwitters' work, whether from the interwar years, his time in Exile, or the postwar period - it appears in his montages, his graphic design, and his different Merzbaus. Furthermore, much of his essayistic writing focuses on either the role or the placement of text and image in his work, and elements of both are also found in his literary oeuvre. I contend it is one of the most important aspects of Schwitters' work, while also being one of the least studied. Each of the chapters in this dissertation focuses on one particular way in which Schwitters combined text and image, be it montage, a new script, or the display of *New Typography* and graphic design in a museum setting.

One of the various projects that Schwitters and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* pursued was an exhibition displayed in Stuttgart in 1930, "Gefesselter Blick." This exhibition was accompanied by the publication, *Gefesselter Blick: 25 kurze Monographien und Beiträge über neue Werbegestaltung*, that was edited by the architect brothers, Heinz and Bodo Rasch, and sponsored by the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*. It features the work of twenty-six graphic designers and artists, including all members of the *Ring*, alongside a short manifesto-like text on New Typography by each contributor. The opening to the introduction, written by the editors, directly engages the relationship between text and image:

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51. Schwitters received a grant of $1000 towards the project from the Museum of Modern Art.

> Die Mittel, um über das Sehorgan der Menschen etwas mitzuteilen, sind Bild und Schrift. Die prinzipiellen Unterschiede zwischen beiden hat Lessing vor 150 Jahren in seinem "Laokoon" eindeutig abgehandelt. Das Bild ist immer ein Querschnitt und gibt infolgedessen einen Zustand wieder. Die Schrift bzw. das Wort schildert hingegen Vorgänge. Es handelt sich hierbei also um eine Art Verteilung von Zeit und Raum.[52]

Here the Rasch brothers recapitulate and adopt Lessing's understanding of the relationship between text and image, as set out in the 1766 essay *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, in which the writer examines the limits of both literature and painting. In the course of the essay, Lessing develops the argument that literature is a temporal art form, that unfolds linearly, while painting and sculpture are experienced spatially.[53] The Rasch brothers underline this in the opening passage and in doing so they reaffirm the boundaries between *Bild* and *Schrift* that Lessing underscores in his essay. Indeed, they go on to further emphasize the differences between the two media by stating "Bilder werden durch Texte unterstützt, Texte werden durch Bilder unterstützt. Diese Vermischung von Bild und Wort ist das Haupttätigkeitsgebiet der Werbegestaltung."[54] As a result, text is seen to play a specific role, while image plays another, both working complimentarily for one other.

A tension exists, however, between contemporary texts such as the introduction to *Gefesselter Blick*, and Schwitters' limited writing on the subject. At times, Schwitters also reinforces the boundaries between text and image. He writes in 1920, for example, "Man kann nicht den Aus-

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52. Heinz Rasch and Bodo Rasch, *Gefesselter Blick* (Stuttgart, 1930), 4.

53. W.J.T. Mitchell notes that for Lessing, "Reading occurs in time, the signs which are read are uttered or inscribed in a temporal sequence, and the events represented or narrated occur in time. There is thus a kind of homology, or what Lessing calls a 'convenient relation' (*bequemes Verhältnis*) between medium, message, and the mental process of decoding. A similar homology operates in accounts of visual art: the medium consists of forms displayed in space, and the perception of both medium and message is instantaneous, taking no appreciable time." (W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, text, ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 98-99.)
For more on *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, see for example W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Politics of Genre: Space and Time in Lessing's Laocoon," *Representations*, no. 6 (1984): 98–115.

54. Rasch and Rasch, *Gefesselter Blick*, 6.

druck eines Bildes in Worte fassen, wie man den Ausdruck eines Wortes, etwa des Wortes 'und,' nicht malen kann."[55] Here, Schwitters points to the limits of the two modes of expression. Yet in the same essay, just a few paragraphs later, when writing on his practice of collage, he rather provocatively declares, "Das Material ist so unwesentlich, wie ich selbst. Wesentlich ist das Formen."[56] For Schwitters, then, once placed in the new context of montage - that is, the context of an image - the text loses all essence of textuality, communicating nothing more than its form. In the second chapter, I challenge this idea, adopting Patrizia McBride's notion of the "double talk of montage" - the way in which elements of montage can point beyond the artwork - and apply it to the idea of text within a montage.[57] I argue instead, that the reader of the image does in fact read this as text, and may therefore make associations between it and other elements within the image. From these two examples, we see that how Schwitters understands the relationship between text and image to operate in his work differs at times to how the reader of the image experiences it.

Both of these examples, therefore, highlight the shifting and often murky relationship between text and image in Schwitters' work, and the projects he was closely involved with. They also draw attention to the fact that there are different types of text and image relations at play. In his montage work, for example, text is subsumed *into* an image, prompting the reader to read it first and foremost - but not exclusively - as an image. Schwitters' graphic design, on the other hand, consists of text and image placed alongside each other, co-existing in a somewhat interdependent way, while his designs for a new script, as we will see in Chapter Three, can be considered images, that when read, produce linguistic meaning.

The Dadaist moment in which Schwitters started out working, was, as Jacques Rancière

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55. Schwitters, "Merz," 76.

56. Ibid.

57. Patrizia C McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 158.

points out, a pivotal one of change with regard to the relations between text and image. In *The Future of the Image* he writes:

> When the thread of history - that is, the common measurement that governs the distance between the art of some and that of others - is undone, it is not simply the forms that become analogous, the materialities are immediately mixed.
>
> The mixing of materialities is conceptual before it is real. Doubtless we had to wait until the Cubist and Dadaist age for the appearance of words from newspapers, poems or bus tickets on the canvases of painters, the age of Nam Jun Paik for the transformation into sculptures of loudspeakers given over to broadcasting sounds and screens intended for the reproduction of images, the age of Wodiczko or Pipilloti Rist for the projection of moving images on to statues of the Founding Fathers or the arms of chairs, and that of Godard for the invention of reverse angle shots in a painting by Goya. But as early as 1830 Balzac could populate his novels with Dutch paintings and Hugo could transform a book into a cathedral or a cathedral into a book.[58]

While noting that much groundwork had been laid in the years that preceded it, in this passage Rancière pinpoints the "Dadaist age" as one of significant change for the relations between different media in the arts. It is for this reason, that examining the relationship between text and image in Schwitters' work is important, since it gives us insight into this pivotal moment of change.

In order to approach this issue in Schwitters' oeuvre I draw upon the theory of text and image, as developed by W.J.T. Mitchell. Mitchell outlines three different issues that the intersection of text and image raises:

> On the one hand, there are what we might call "literal" manifestations of the imagetext: graphic narratives and comics, photo texts, poetic experiments with voice and picture, collage composition, and typography itself. On the other hand, there are the figurative, displaced versions of the image-text: the formal divisions of narrative and description , the relations of vision and language in memory, the nesting of images (metaphors, symbols, concrete objects) inside discourse, and

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58. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Verso London, 2009), 42.

the obverse, the murmur of discourse and languages in graphic and visual media. And then there is a third thing, the traumatic gap of the unrepresentable space between words and images.[59]

All three relations are present in Schwitters' broad and extensive oeuvre. In the course of this dissertation, however, I focus primarily on the *Imagetext*, which, as we will see, manifests itself in the montage and typographical work of Schwitters, as well as that of the various other artists and designers with whom he collaborated. Investigation into the *Imagetext*, also leads, however, to the question of the third relation Mitchell lays out - the *Image/Text*. Mitchell adopts the slash (/) as means of representing the "gap or rupture" between text and image that he brings to the fore.[60] We see this rupture when Schwitters talks of the "Entformung der Materialien" which, in the context of text, he understands to mean the loss of all textuality.[61]

Yet, there are many instances in which Schwitters draws attention to the relationship between text and image in a way that challenges our often clean-cut separation of the media, and that also does not fit cleanly into Mitchell's distinction between *Imagetext*, *Image-Text*, and *Image/Text*. In Chapter Two, I read Schwitters' montages alongside his graphic design theory, and posit that at times Schwitters views text and image as interchangeable. Schwitters therefore moves beyond the notion of *Imagetext* by equating the two media, and at the same time jumps over the "rupture" represented by *Image/Text*. This is not to say, however, that the relationship between text and image is resolved in Schwitters' work. On the contrary it raises different questions, for while text and image may be portrayed as equals that are interchangeable, the text still remains text within Schwitters' images, in a way that is almost certainly impossible for the reader to ignore. Perhaps the question then becomes, how do we read text differently when it is in the context of

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59. W.J.T. Mitchell, "Image X Text," in *The Future of Text and Image: Collected Essays on Literary and Visual Conjunctures*, ed. Ofra Amihay and Lauren Walsh (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 1.

60. Ibid., 2.

61. Kurt Schwitters, "Die Merzmalerei," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 37.

an image.

At this point, I would like to turn to the second underlying line of inquiry in this dissertation - Schwitters as both individual artist and collaborator, and his position within the networks of the European avant-gardes.

Schwitters and the Networks of the Avant-gardes

One of the most prominent red threads running through this dissertation is Schwitters' collaboration with others. As we will see, collaboration was central to his artistic production and more than that, Schwitters was incredibly well connected with important contemporary artists and designers, as well as groups such as Dada, De Stijl, and the Bauhaus. Yet Rudolf Fuchs draws our attention to the fact this is not the image presented of Schwitters in scholarship. He claims, "in the ongoing discussion about the central themes in modern art, [Schwitters] has thus far been either relatively absent or been present as a curious outsider."[62] Fuchs, on the other hand, asserts that Schwitters "is much more important than that."[63]

I agree with Fuchs and argue that, far from being an outsider, working on the periphery, Schwitters was a prominent figure within the networks of the interwar European avant-garde, despite not being affiliated with any of the major movements or schools, such as the Bauhaus or Dada.[64] An ardent letter writer and great self-promoter - two qualities that no doubt stood him

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62. Fuchs, *Kurt Schwitters, I is Style*, 11.

63. ibid.
Michael White has also pointed to the fact Schwitters was long seen as an outsider. He claims that it was Hans Richter's account of Dadaism in his 1965 book *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (see Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*) that "transformed Schwitters from an outsider to someone in the thick of the action and a key figure in the dissemination of Dada in Europe." (Michael White, "Dada Migrations: Definition, Dispersal, and the Case of Schwitters," in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 54.)

64. The term *avant-garde* is of course an evolving one. Peter Bürger's seminal text, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, first published in 1974, was for many years the main point of reference for our understanding of the term. Since the turn of the century, however, it has come under significant criticism for its narrow focus on Dada and Surrealism,

in very good stead in building and maintaining networks - within an impressively short space of time after embarking on Merz as a full-time pursuit, Schwitters had developed a very large and broad network of fellow artists and designers. During the first two years, he had already, among others, made the acquaintance of George Grosz, Max Ernst, Theo van Doesburg, Walter Dexel and Hannah Höch, been published in various different journals, and exhibited at the *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin, the Kestner-Gesellschaft in Hanover, as well as part of the Société Anonyme at an exhibition in New York.[65] By 1923 he was very good friends with El Lisstizky and shared a studio in Berlin with László Moholy-Nagy.

Indeed, Schwitters soon became a point of reference for others within avant-garde circles. In a letter to Professor Hildebrandt, Schwitters writes, "Sie baten mich um höllandische Adressen von Künstlern. Ich lass sie folgen:" before listing over twenty artists. In conclusion, he adds, "Ich hoffe Ihnen hiermit nützen zu können und bitte, sich bei Verwendung der Adressen immer auf mich zu berufen und mir neue wichtige Adressen aus Holland sowie Adressenänderungen mitzuteilen."[66] Here, we see not just the extent to which Schwitters is connected with other mem-

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and in particular it's omission to include earlier groups, such as Cubism or Expressionism (see, for example, Richard John Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and the preface to Selena Daly and Monica Insinga, eds., *The European Avant-garde: Text and Image* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2000).). Since then, our understanding of avant-garde has become both broader and more nuanced, with exploration of the European avant-gardes extending beyond Western European to Central Europe (see, for example, Dubravka Djurić, *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918-1991* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), and Timothy O Benson, Éva Forgács, et al., eds., *Between Worlds a Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2002)), and Eurasia (see Harsha Ram, "Modernism on the Periphery: Literary Life in Postrevolutionary Tbilisi," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 2 (2004): 367–382). As a result we now understand the avant-garde not as homogeneous, but rather as a plurality of groups, rendering the term *avant-gardes* more appropriate.

65. The Société Anonyme was founded in 1920 by artists Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Katherine Dreier who would go on to become a patron to Schwitters.

66. Kurt Schwitters to Hans Hildebrand, Eppstein i. Taunus, 27 July 1928, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Dokumentensammlung Hans Hildebrandt, Mappe: Korrespondenz mit Kurt Schwitters.
Hans Hildebrandt (1878-1957) was an art historian, who was in touch with many of the artists of the European avant-garde, including Walter Gropius, Max Ernst, Willi Baumeister, Paul Klee, and Josef Albers, among many others.

bers of the avant-gardes, and that he is in fact someone who is able to connect others, but also the investment he has in maintaining and expanding these networks.[67]

Given Schwitters' broad networks, it is somewhat perplexing, then that Schwitters should often be considered an outsider. Perhaps the answer lies, in part, in the fact that the networks of the avant-gardes have until recently often been thought of in terms of schools or movements, rather than individuals. We might, for example, think of the front cover to the catalog of the 1936 Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York exhibition, "Cubism and Abstract Art" (see Figure I.4), in which just a handful of names are featured, with the focus instead on other more general terms, such as "Machine Esthetic" or "Modern Architecture." With a timeline running vertically down each side, this diagram is arranged temporally, in terms of movements and their duration, as well as their geographical centers, mentioned almost as a side note. While Schwitters worked together with some of these movements, giving readings, for example, at the Bauhaus, and publishing work in the *De Stijl* journal, Schwitters was not officially affiliated with any avant-garde group (with the exception of those he created). And so to conceive of the avant-gardes in this way risks leaving significant figures, such as Schwitters, entirely out of the picture.

This perception of the avant-gardes is, however, starting to change, giving way to a more nuanced reading of it. Almost eighty years after MoMA's "Cubism and Abstract Art" exhibition, for which it printed the network diagram on the cover of the catalog, it produced a new diagram for its 2012-2013 exhibition, "Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925." This diagram (see Figure I.5) was displayed at the entrance to the exhibition space, and became a frame of reference for the exhibition that followed. In contrast to the 1936 digram, this one omits all reference to movements

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67. This letter follows a similar letter to Hans Hildebrand sent in 1927 in which he writes, "Sehr gern nenne ich Ihnen die Adressen der bedeutenden schöpferischen Frauen, die ich kenne," and listing 13 female artists, including Petro van Doesburg, Ella Bermann Michel, Lucia Moholy-Nagy, Hannah Höch, and Sophie Täuber-Arp. (Kurt Schwitters to Hans Hildebrand, Eppstein i. Taunus, 6 July 1927, Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, Dokumentensammlung Hans Hildebrandt, Mappe: Korrespondenz mit Kurt Schwitters.)
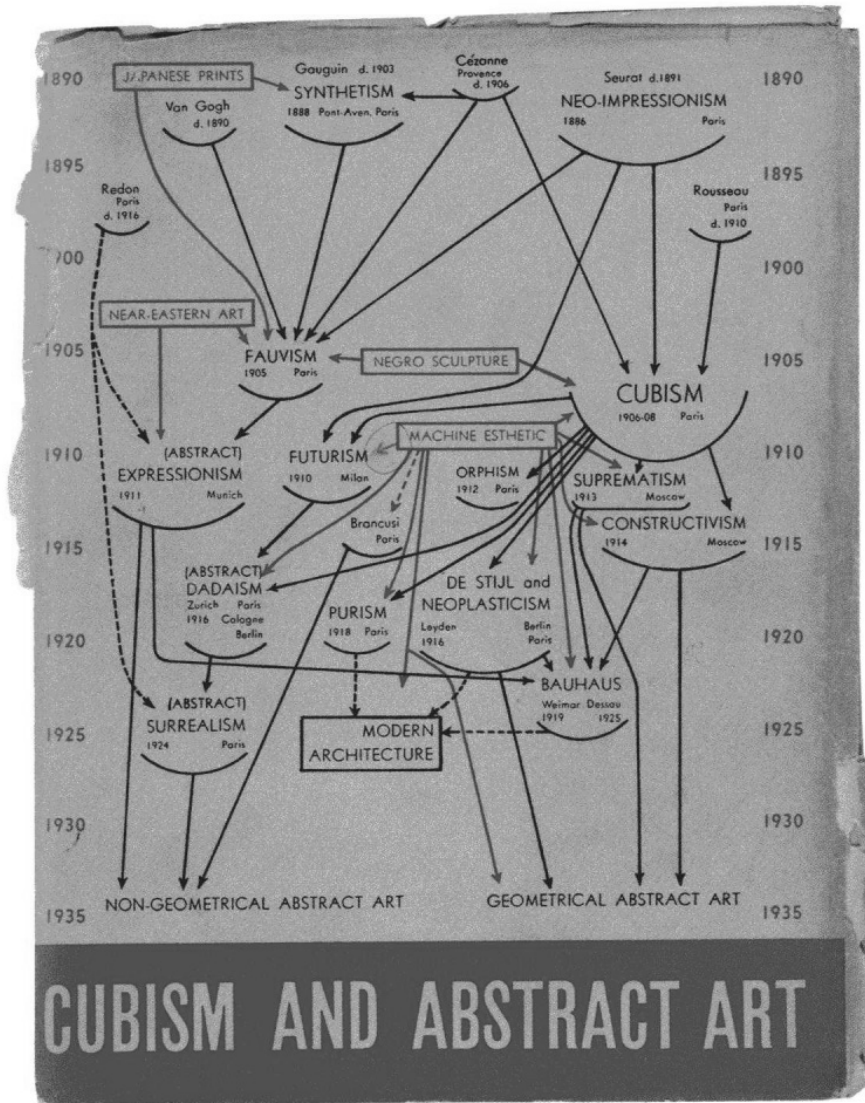
Figure I.4: Cover to Alfred Barr's exhibition, textitCubism and Abstract Art jacket, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1936.
Via null - https://monoskop.org/File:Barr_Alfred_H_Cubism_and_Abstract_Art_jacket_1936.jpg
mediaviewer/File:Barr_Alfred_H_Cubism_and_Abstract_Art_jacket_1936.jpg

and schools, instead consisting solely of names, positioned more or less geographically on the page.[68]

In the last two decades we have also witnessed a move to reconsider the traditional perception of the avant-gardes, with a growing body of scholarship that is reassessing who and what is central and/or peripheral to these networks.[69] This prompts us to expand our definition from avant-garde to avant-gardes, with multiple, and sometimes opposing, avant-gardes, each with their own different so-called centers and peripheries, all operating at once. This idea is made clear on the MoMA's "Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1935" website, in an interactive version of the networks diagram. Here, visitors are invited to click on any artist within the network, and the website generates a new diagram that places that artist at the center, and indicates the connections with other artists in their network (see Figure I.6 for an example of Schwitters' network). This interactive element, which can generate an individual network for every artist featured in the exhibition, highlights both the multiplicity of networks as well as their shifting nature, when the focus is changed.

As we have seen, our understanding of the avant-gardes has become much more complex since Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, and it is continuing to broaden. In the course of this dissertation I show collaboration to be central to both Schwitters' individual and joint projects, and therefore seek to shift the focus away from Schwitters' lack of affiliation with contemporary movements and groups, and rather to his continued collaboration with them that resulted in reciprocal influence. I show that, although Schwitters worked by himself, and Merz

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68. While this was the case for the diagram, references to organizations, movements, and schools were certainly made in the exhibition itself.

69. See, for example, Per Bäckström and Benedikt Hjartarson, *Decentring the Avant-garde* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014); Sascha Bru, Jan Baetens, and et al., eds., in *Europa! Europa?: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); Ram, "Modernism on the Periphery: Literary Life in Postrevolutionary Tbilisi"; and Meghan Forbes, "In the Middle of it All: Prague, Bruno, and the Avant-Garde Networks of Interwar Europe" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2016).
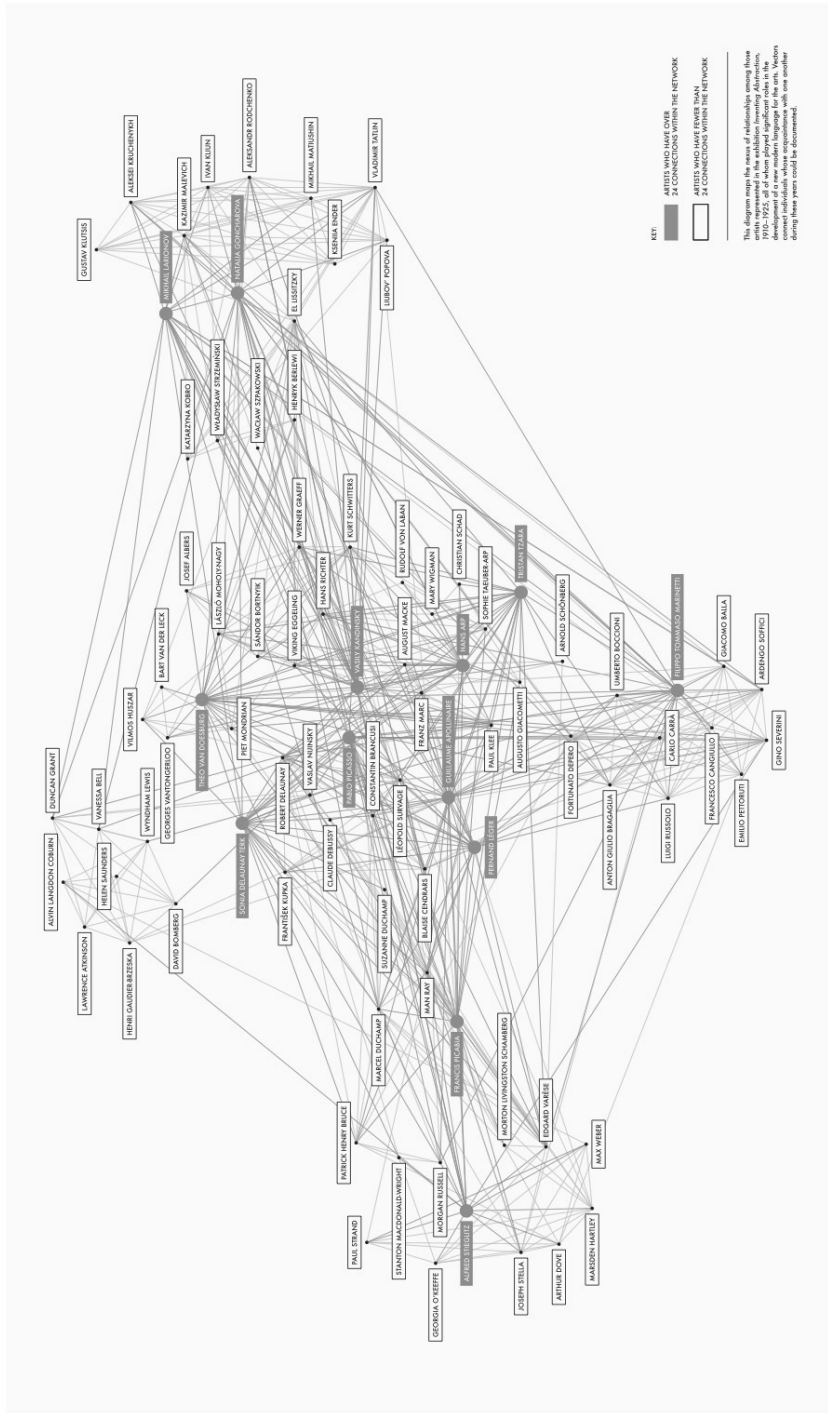
Figure I.5: *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925.*
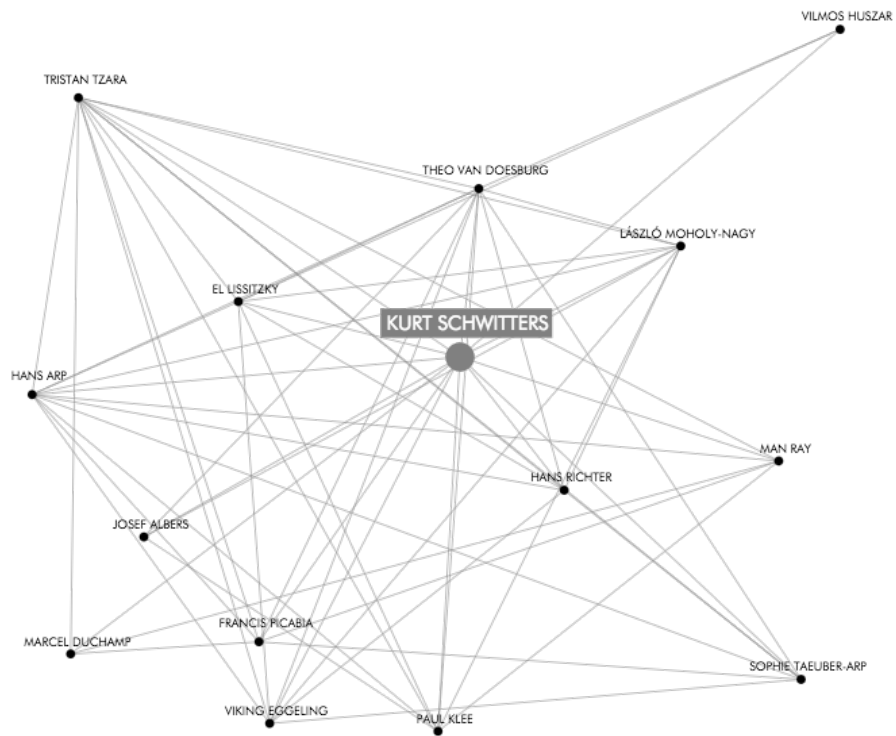
Figure I.6: Diagram of Schwitters' networks with other artists exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, New York's exhibition, *Inventing Abstraction, 1910-1925*.

was, in contrast to Dada or the Bauhaus, for example, very much a one-man project, he also actively worked to found and lead organizations that would bring like-minded artists together. Mirroring the breadth of Schwitters' interests, these groups included both the fine and applied arts. *die abstrakten hannover* was founded in 1927, and consisted of five artists based in Hanover - Carl Buchheister, Rudolf Jahns, Hans Nitzschke and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, with César Domela joining the ranks later that year. This stands in contrast to the *Ring 'neue Werbegestalter'*, which was a group of graphic designers and typographers working in the applied arts. With organizations focused on fine art on the one hand and the applied arts on the other, we see that Schwitters was intent on collaborating in both aspects of his art production.[70]

Having situated Schwitters as an artist and typographer in contact and collaboration with many figures across the interwar European avant-gardes, I would now like to consider the way Schwitters has been approached in scholarship.

Schwitters in Scholarship

There are perhaps two main ways in which we can approach and categorize different aspects of Schwitters' work - either temporally, or by medium. In his own writing, it is not surprising that Schwitters chooses the former, since, as we will see throughout this dissertation, most of his visual work engages with erasing boundaries between media. In a 1939 letter Schwitters wrote to his wife during his exile in Norway, he reflects on his career to date, and posits that there are four distinct phases of his art project, Merz. He writes:

> When I am dead, they will be able to distinguish clearly 4 periods in my *Merz*-work: the Sturm und Drang of the first (revolutionary works in the sphere of art, as it were); then the dry, more scientific research into the possibilities and laws

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70. Similarly, Schwitters collaborated on numerous different literary projects. He co-wrote several children's books with Käte Steinitz, for example, as well as working on a novel with Hans Arp.

of compositions and materials; then the brilliant play with the abilities I gained (my most recent period); and finally the use of the powers I attained to deepen expression. I will reach that in about 10 years.[71]

The reflective tone of this letter is different from the ironically reflective tone of his text "My Art and My Life." This is in part to do with the context: instead of for a public audience, this was an intimate letter, written over Christmas to his wife, from whom he was separated in exile. Given this audience, and the context of the rest of the letter, we can assume that the observations Schwitters makes here by distancing himself from his work, are to be taken earnestly. There are two striking aspects to this passage. Firstly, it affirms that, for Schwitters, Merz was a life-long project - one that grew and evolved, but nevertheless remained Merz. In fact, Schwitters prefaces this excerpt by stating, "It's still *Merz*, as in 1918, but more refined, lighter, and paler, perhaps a little sweet but less dry."[72] Secondly, we see Schwitters set out the trajectory of his Merz project, in much the same shape as a *Bildungsroman*, or perhaps more specifically, a *Künstlerroman*, in which he maps out his development as an artist.[73]

Megan Luke in her recent monograph, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* has noted that "the 'four periods' of his career that Schwitters described [...] correspond roughly to how art historians have indeed come to organize this incredibly diverse activity in the wake of his death."[74] By using the word "organize," Luke points to the fact that scholarship constructs an image of a person and their work, in some senses by sorting through and categorizing it. And yet, there are various factors that affect how such work is "organized," such as access to material and current trends in scholarship. At this point, I would like to consider how access to Schwitters' literary and

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71. Quoted in Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 2. (translation from the original German by Megan Luke)
72. Quoted in ibid., 2 (translation from the original German by Megan Luke).
73. Megan Luke reads this passage as "an artist surveying his own career like an art historian: he divides his practice into discrete chronological periods defined by style and formal change, even going so far as to anticipate with a cool, analytic tone the characteristics of his as-yet-unrealized late work or, more specifically, his *Altersstil* (old-age style)." (ibid., 2.)
74. Ibid., 4.

visual oeuvre may have had an impact on Schwitters' scholarship and the fact it has developed along two separate lines of inquiry - literary and art historical.

It was a 1956 retrospective of Schwitters' work at the Kestner Gesellschaft in his hometown of Hanover, and subsequently in Amsterdam, Bern, and Brussels, that shone significant attention on the artist for the first time since his death in 1948.[75] In the years that followed the Hanover exhibition, a number of international exhibitions in Japan, Brazil, Italy, USA, Switzerland, England and the Netherlands contributed to Schwitters' growing reputation as an important figure for Modernism. But it was not until the publication of a selection of Schwitters' letters in 1974, and Schwitters' collected literary work between 1973 and 1981, that Schwitters became a more frequent subject of scholarship within the field of literary studies.[76] As popular and critical interest in Schwitters' work has increased, so too have translations of it - primarily into English, but also into French and Finnish, among other languages - making it accessible to a broader audience.[77]

In much the same way, it is only since the publication of Schwitters' collected art work across three volumes, in the *Catalogue Raisonné* published between 2000 and 2006, that art historians have had easy access to consider the sheer breadth of his visual work.[78] This was pivotal, for many reasons, but not least since it also includes images of numerous works of art that are

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75. See Kurt Schwitters, Susanne Meyer-Büser, and Karin Orchard, *Merz: In the Beginning Was Merz: From Kurt Schwitters to the Present Day* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 252 and 258.

76. For Schwitters' letters, see See Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*.
For Schwitters' collected literary work, see Kurt Schwitters, *Das literarische Werk*, ed. Friedhelm Lach (Cologne: Du Mont Schauberg, 1974).

77. For a small sample of recent translations, see Kurt Schwitters, *Lucky Hans and Other Merz Fairy Tales*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Kurt Schwitters, *August Bolte*, trans. Catherine Wermester (Paris: Allia, 2013); Kurt Schwitters, *Three Stories*, ed. Jasia Reichardt (London: Tate, 2010); Kurt Schwitters, *Poems, Performance Pieces, Proses [sic], Plays, Poetics*, trans. Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris (New York: Exact Change, 2002).
In addition, a biography of Schwitters' life was released in the form of a graphic novel in 2013. See Lars Fiske, *Kurt Schwitters: Jetzt nenne ich mich selbst Merz. Herr Merz* (Berlin: avant-verlag, 2013).

78. See Kurt Schwitters, *Catalogue Raisonné: Kurt Schwitters: 1905-1922*, ed. Isabel Schulz, vol. 1 (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2000), Kurt Schwitters, *Catalogue Raisonné: Kurt Schwitters: 1923-1936*, ed. Isabel Schulz, vol. 2 (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2000), Kurt Schwitters, *Catalogue Raisonné: Kurt Schwitters: 1937-1948*, ed. Isabel Schulz, vol. 3 (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2000).

in private ownership and rarely on display. Until that point, short of visiting archives and a vast array of museums around the world, access to Schwitters' work was restricted to images replicated in museum catalogs, featuring, of course, much overlap.

Unsurprisingly, exhibitions have had a significant impact on the way in which Schwitters and his work have been viewed. In the years that followed the 1956 exhibition in Hanover, most of Schwitters' solo exhibitions focused on his collages and it was not until the late 1980s that curators started to explore more specific parts of his work - his work in exile, and his later work, for example. With the advent of the 1990s an increasing number of exhibitions started not just highlighting certain sections of his work, but also lesser known parts of his oeuvre. In 1990, for example, an exhibition first shown at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, "Typografie kann unter Umständen Kunst sein" played an important role in making Schwitters' typographical and design work better known. Similarly, an 1999 exhibition, "No Socks. Kurt Schwitters and the Merzbarn" drew attention to his work on the Merzbau in the English Lake District, while the 2013 exhibition at the Tate, "Schwitters in Britain," was the first major exhibition to highlight the artist's work in England from 1940 until his death in 1948.[79]

Furthermore, the exhibition catalogs that accompanied these exhibitions, each with their different emphases, have played a significant role in shaping our view of him. Not only did they provide access to reproductions of the artist's work, until the 1990s, they were also the main publishing venue for Schwitters' scholarship. This has had two significant ramifications Firstly, Schwitters' scholarship has certainly privileged his visual work - a point that has not gone unnoticed, and has almost certainly contributed to the fact that Schwitters' scholarship has evolved along two different disciplinary paths. Secondly, some of the strongest voices within Schwit-

79. This exhibition at the Tate was not the first to focus on Schwitters' work in England - the Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal, England hosted an exhibition entitled "Kurt Schwitters in England" in 1982 - the Tate exhibition was, however, the first one to do so on an international stage.

ters' scholarship are those of curators and archivists - John Elderfield (MoMA, New York), Leah Dickerman (MoMA, New York), Isabel Schulz (Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, Hanover), Karin Orchard (Sprengel Museum, Hanover), and Ralf Burmeister (Berlinische Galerie, Berlin), for example, who have each made significant contributions to Schwitters' research.

Scholarship on Schwitters' literary oeuvre first began appearing in the 1970s, which has been attributed to Schwitters' being seen as influential to concrete poetry and other forms of experimental literature that were becoming prominent at that time.[80] However, despite Schwitters' expansive and multifaceted literary output, critical reception of it is limited and has generally focused on his *Ursonate*, *Anna Blume* poem, and his narrative style, rendering it a relatively narrow field of study.[81] With these particular focuses, literary criticism of Schwitters' work has remained largely discipline specific.

In an article published in 1990, E. S. Shaffer opens by drawing attention to exactly this imbalance of critical attention given to Schwitters' visual art and his literature. By drawing parallels between Schwitters' literary and visual work, Shaffer goes on to consider both aspects of Schwitters' work, highlighting his ekphrastic poetry, shaped poems, illustrated narrative, sound poems and drama. He argues that approaching Schwitters' visual art and literary work in a synthetic way can only be done due to the unique nature of his oeuvre. For "unlike artists such as Victor Hugo, whose literary and visual productions were only loosely linked," Shaffer asserts that, "Schwitters produced a core of work which can be read in both ways and whose distinctive note

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80. See McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, 212. McBride also credits this to the publication of Bernd Scheffer's monograph on Schwitters' literary work in 1978. See Bernd Scheffer, *Anfänge experimenteller Literatur: das literararische Werk von Kurt Schwitters* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1978).

81. See, for example, Malte Harms, *Kurt Schwitters "Ursonate:" Laute zwischen Sprache und Musik* (Oldenburg: Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, 2012); Helmut Heissenbüttel, *Versuch über die Lautsonate von Kurt Schwitters* (Mainz: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1983); Armin Arnold, "Kurt Schwitters' Gedicht "An Anna Blume": Sinn oder Unsinn?," *Text und Kritik* 35 (1972): 13; Philip Thomson, "A Case of Dadaistic Ambivalence: Kurt Schwitter's Stramm-Imitations and 'an Anna Blume'," *The German Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (1972): 47–56; Judith Winkelmann, *Abstraktion als stilbildendes Prinzip in der Lyrik von Hans Arp und Kurt Schwitters* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1995).

is the demand for a mode of reading which combines the two." For Shaffer, considering text and image alongside one another "offers the most illuminating insight into them both."[82]

Within the body of secondary literature pertaining to Schwitters' work, Shaffer's article is the first to synthetically address both text and image. While his study makes a productive start into producing a reading that considers both the literary and visual aspects of Schwitters' work, Shaffer concludes by stating, "we need a new reading of the full verbal and visual core of his work, which is more extensive and more significant for all his work than has been understood hitherto."[83] Yet despite Shaffer's call, the only scholar who has since approached Schwitters' work in such a synthetic way, is Patrizia McBride. McBride's work, while still primarily focused on literature, examines the practice of montage in Schwitters' poetry and prose, with close reference to techniques employed in his visual montage work.[84]

While scholars may not be directly responding to Shaffer's call, what we have seen in recent years, is an expansion of the elements of Schwitters' work that are being studied, and often in a more holistic way. In the discipline of architecture, for example, Elizabeth Burns Gamard has provided us with a detailed reading of Schwitter's Merzbau, reconstructing it for us, and therefore pulling it out of the private sphere in which it was created. She argues, that "Schwitters' artwork was never about the object itself, but the dynamic of relations that appeared in the course of its making."[85] She is perhaps the closest to approach the intersection of text and image in Schwitters' work, noting that considering his literature alongside his sculptures offers new insight.[86] Within art history, Megan Luke has broadened the scope of art historical inquiry

82. E.S. Shaffer, "Kurt Schwitters, Merzküstler: Art and Word-art," *Word & Image* 6 (1990): 101.

83. Ibid., 118.

84. See Patrizia C McBride, "The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters' Merz," *Modernism/modernity* 14, no. 2 (2007): 249–272, and McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*.

85. Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, 5.

86. Gamard writes, that for Schwitters smaller works of sculpture, "interpretation depends on the short prose and poetry as much as the prose and poetry is illuminated by the sculptures." (ibid., 46.)

by considering Schwitters' use of space across media, including text, photography, and sculpture, and paying particular attention to contextualizing it within his shifting understanding of Merz.[87] She argues that doing so allows us to "productively reassess the history of modernism and account for the emerging strategies and forms of contemporary art."[88] In addition, Sébastian Conard has recently applied comics theory to one of Schwitters' children's books, *Die Scheuche: Märchen*, and, as mentioned above, McBride has reevaluated Schwitters' narrative in terms of montage.[89]

Some of the many gaps in Schwitters' scholarship are thus starting to be filled, and are being approached in a way that is, in some respects, less media specific, and therefore mirroring more closely the spirit in which Schwitters conceived his work - as work that evades classification. My dissertation is positioned within this still very limited, but growing body of literature that is both broadening the scope of Schwitters' research, and approaching it in an intermedial and interdisciplinary manner.

At this point, I would now like to turn to the structure of this dissertation and provide a chapter outline.

Chapter Outline

Montage is the focus of Chapter Two. In it, I start out by situating Schwitters and Merz within the context of Dada, and tease out some of the particularities of montage in Schwitters' work, reading his images against those of Dadaists, John Heartfield and Hannah Höch. I then focus on Schwitters' montages, approaching them through the lens of *Rhythmus*, and in doing so,

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87. See Megan R Luke, "Sculpture for the Hand: Herbert Read in the Studio of Kurt Schwitters," *Art History* 35 (2012): 234–251, and Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile.*

88. Ibid., 33.

89. See Sébastien Conard, "Lively Letters and the Graphic Narrative. Revisiting Comics Theory on Word and Image Through the Lens of Two Avant-garde Children's Books," *Image & Narrative* 17, no. 2 (2016): 74–85.

attempt to understand better Schwitters' use of the term. By reading several of his montages in conjunction with his writings, I show how Schwitters uses the medium of montage in order to realize his goal of erasing the boundaries between different art forms. At the same time, I adopt McBride's notion of the "double talk of montage" to challenge Schwitters' assertion that all links to the original context of material incorporated into his work are lost. Instead, I show that paying attention to the text, *as text*, within his montages can rather offer us a commentary on the boundaries of the media in his oeuvre.

The second part of Chapter Two focuses on a particular type of montage that Schwitters develops for personal correspondence in the early 1920s - the montaged postcard. Letters and postcards, sent to friends, colleagues, and collaborators were frequently montaged in a way that I argue can be viewed as mail art. Here, I examine a series of postcards sent to his close friend and Dada artist, Hannah Höch, over a number of years, in which not just text is exchanged, but also images. This forms, I argue, a visual conversation that is parallel to the textual one. By reading these postcards alongside the montages in the first part of this chapter, I show that in each instance, Schwitters montages refer back to himself. As a result, I argue that Schwitters' montage work is deeply rooted in self-referentiality.

In Chapter Three I turn to the converse form of Imagetext, in which the pictorial becomes read as though it were text. In 1927 Schwitters engaged intensely with the idea of a new script - one that was suitable for the modern day and speed of the city, rather than one that had been inherited from the middle ages. I contextualize Schwitters' script, which he names *Systemschrift*, firstly within the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and secondly within a broader move towards rationalization on the one hand, and universalism on the other. In doing so, I read Schwitters' theory of the script against that of various contemporary typographers, including Paul Renner, Jan Tschichold, Josef Albers, and Herbert Bayer. In the

second half of the chapter I concentrate on the *Systemschrift* itself and consider the tension between Schwitters' vision of it as a series of symbols easily read at speed, and the reality of its unreadability, which I argue, ultimately led to its failure. In the final part of the chapter I look at the legacy of Schwitters' *Systemschrift* examining several concrete examples of it in use today.

The final chapter, Chapter Four, considers an Imagetext in which text and image often coexist alongside one another, in supportive roles. It centers on an exhibition organized by the *Ring 'neue Werbegestalter'* in conjunction with László Moholy-Nagy, *neue Typografie.* After contextualizing the exhibition held in Berlin in 1929 within the broader exhibition landscape of the late 1920s, I reconstruct the opening room of the exhibition, designed by Schwitters' colleague, Moholy-Nagy. By paying attention to many of the particularities of this exhibition, I argue that "neue Typografie" can be considered a sister-exhibition of the better known, *Internationale Ausstellung des deutschen Werkbunds: Film und Foto*, more commonly referred to as *Fifo*, which was also displayed in 1929. Approaching Moholy-Nagy's room as an exhibition within an exhibition, in which he outlines his vision of New Typography, I use it as a point of comparison to consider the nuanced differences between his understanding of the term, and that of Schwitters. I show, that while Moholy-Nagy is particularly concerned with the medium through which typography is used, Schwitters is far more interested in its reception, prompting me to argue that New Typography would be better understood as a plurality of approaches.

In the conclusion, I assert, that by examining montage, Schwitters *Systemschrift*, and the 1929 *neue Typografie* exhibition, this dissertation draws attention to both the richness of Schwitters' play with text and image, and the shifting relations between the two media. This underlines the importance of addressing Schwitters' work in a more synthetic way, better reflecting the spirit in which it was conceived. Secondly, by highlighting some of the many collaborative projects Schwitters either initiated or was involved in, I show Schwitters to be an artist who actively

brought others together, rather than remaining on the periphery of the networks of the avant-gardes.

Chapter II

Schwitters' Collage Arts: Self-Referentiality, Rhythm, and the Question of Genre

Schwitters' collage arts - his montages, collages, and assemblages - are displayed in museums and galleries across the world, and the works for which the artist is best known. In this chapter, I examine the practice of collage arts that Schwitters develops, with reference to the relationships between the fine and applied arts, and text and image, which are the main emphases of this dissertation. This chapter is divided into two main parts - in the first part I look at Schwitters' fine art montages, and in the second I turn to a series of montaged postcards that he wrote.

I open the first part of the chapter by first of all situating Schwitters' collage arts, within a broader context. In order to do so, I offer a reading of montages by John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, and Schwitters. This allows me to tease out some of the ways in which Schwitters' Merz montages diverge from those of Dada artists, who were also working in the medium at the same time. In particular, I have chosen the work of Heartfield and Höch as their montage work is formally contrasting. Furthermore, I show that, when read alongside Schwitters' montages, the work of these three artists forms a spectrum. On the one hand, this spectrum runs from relative cohesiveness (Heartfield) to abstraction (Schwitters), and on the other from accessibility and ease of reading (Heartfield), to requiring the viewer to form their own connections within the image in order to produce meaning (Schwitters). In each of these cases, Höch falls somewhere in the

middle, highlighting the fact that while montage artists used similar techniques, their creative output was incredibly varied.

In the following part of the chapter I concentrate primarily on Schwitters' work. Here I turn to two of his montages and view them through the lens of his term, *rhythm*. In doing so, I show some of the ways in which Schwitters attempts to break down the boundaries between so-called high-art and advertising produced for the masses. While I have chosen these particular montages as exemplary of this move towards an erasure of these boundaries, this is not something that applies only to these two artworks; rather the vast majority of Schwitters four thousand montages could, I argue, be read in a similar way. The montages I include are therefore both exemplary and representative.

In the second part of the chapter I turn to the montaged postcards Schwitters sent to artist, Hannah Höch, and art critic and writer, Christoph Spengemann. Here we see Schwitters, the prolific letter writer, in action as he maintains his networks with those in avant-gardes circles. By examining these postcards, I make two main arguments. Firstly, I suggest that they can be considered a form of mail art and show how such an exchange produces both a textual and a visual conversation. Secondly, by looking at these postcards alongside the montages explored in the first part of the chapter, I contend that Schwitters' montage work is rooted in self-referentiality.

Dadaist montages: Heartfield and Höch

Montage is an instance of what W.J.T. Mitchell calls an *Imagetext*, and is often considered first and foremost a Dadaist practice. Given the complex relationship Schwitters had to Dada, that I outlined in the introduction, it is useful to consider Dadaist montages alongside his, in order to position his work. While Schwitters clearly drew upon Dadaist aesthetics and practices for

his work, certain characteristics of his montages set themselves apart from those within the Dada group. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the general absence of overt political content in his work. Indeed, one of the aspects of Berlin Dada that Schwitters criticized the most was this politicization of art, and which he time and again insisted had no place in his own work. In a 1920 article entitled "Dada," pitting himself against the political art of the group's founder, Richard Huelsenbeck, he writes, "Also der Hülsenbeckdadaismus ist politisch orientiert, gegen Kunst und gegen Kultur. Ich bin tolerant und lasse jedem seine Weltanschauung, aber ich muß erwähnen, daß derartige Anschauungen Merz fremd sind. Merz erstrebt aus Prinzip nur die Kunst, weil kein Mensch zween [sic] Herren dienen kann."[1] Here, Schwitters underlines two of the main differences between Merz and Dada - firstly, that in contrast to Dada, Merz has no political aims, and secondly, that while Dada is anti-art, Merz positions itself as pure art.

A prime example of the political nature of the Dadaists' work are the photomontages of John Heartfield, which were frequently published in the highly political journals, *Die Rote Fahne* and *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*AIZ*), pointing to the unambivalent nature of his work. Sabine Kriebel notes that the medium lends itself particularly well for political ends. She writes, "photomontage was considered the ideal form of Marxist critique, because a juxtaposition of material imprints of 'the real' enabled the viewer to understand the relations between things - social relations, political relations, commodity relations," leading to what she calls "dialectical montage."[2] Kriebel stresses that viwers are "enabled" to read the message of a photomontage - an aspect that is evident in Heartfield's work. Aimed at a mass audience, Heartfield's photomontages are accessible: the intent of the artist is clear and while there are often multiple possible readings of the image itself, they are rarely, if ever, contradictory.

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1. Schwitters, "Merz," 78.
2. Sabine Kriebel, *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 7.

The front cover of the *AIZ* on August 10 1933 (see Figure II.1), is one such example of this clarity. It features a photomontage by Heartfield, depicting Hitler as a puppet of Fritz Thyssen - a leading German business man and financial backer of the Nazi party. The play with proportions, that montage particularly lends itself to, is here used to draw attention to the power dynamic at play in the relationship between these two men, while the two-dimensional cut out of the body in Nazi uniform, with a proportionally large head attached, satirizes Hitler and his leadership. By employing images that are loaded with cultural meaning, Heartfield uses simple photomontage techniques to create a strong and political message that is accessible to the masses reading them in the papers.[3]

Hannah Höch, the only female member of Berlin Dada, produced a vast array of photomontages that, like Heartfields', are distinctly political in nature, offering critical commentaries on contemporary society, and in particular, questions of gender and gender relations. Different to Heartfield, however, they require more from the reader; they invite the reader to make connections and draw their own conclusions, harnessing the open-endedness of the medium - a strategy that scholars, both contemporary to Dada and present day, have commented on.[4] Despite this difference, both Heartfield and Höch harness the narrative potential of montage - an aspect that Andreas Huyssen draws out in the work of Höch, in which he describes the artist as "developing

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3. In her recent book, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, Patrizia McBride refers to the "allegorical compositions" constructed by Dadaists and other practitioners of montage. Specific to Heartfield, she notes, that, for him, "montage displays an awareness of the world as a semiotic tapestry in which objects double-task as signs." See McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, 18.

4. Elizabeth Otto, for example, notes that the "meaning" of "Höch's work is "never fixed and ever unfolding." (Elizabeth Otto, "Review: Hannah Höch," *Women's Art Journal* 36 (2014): 62.)
Similarly, Andreas Huyssen offers two opposing readings of Höch's montage *Da Dandy* vis-á-vis the independence of the female dandy. Huyssen concludes by stating, "I suggest that the work hovers between these two readings. Both make valid points, but they are juxtaposed [...] without one yielding entirely to the other." He continues by calling this a "kind of double exposure" - an attribute of the open-ended nature of montage, that he sees Höch adopting. (Andreas Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 167.)
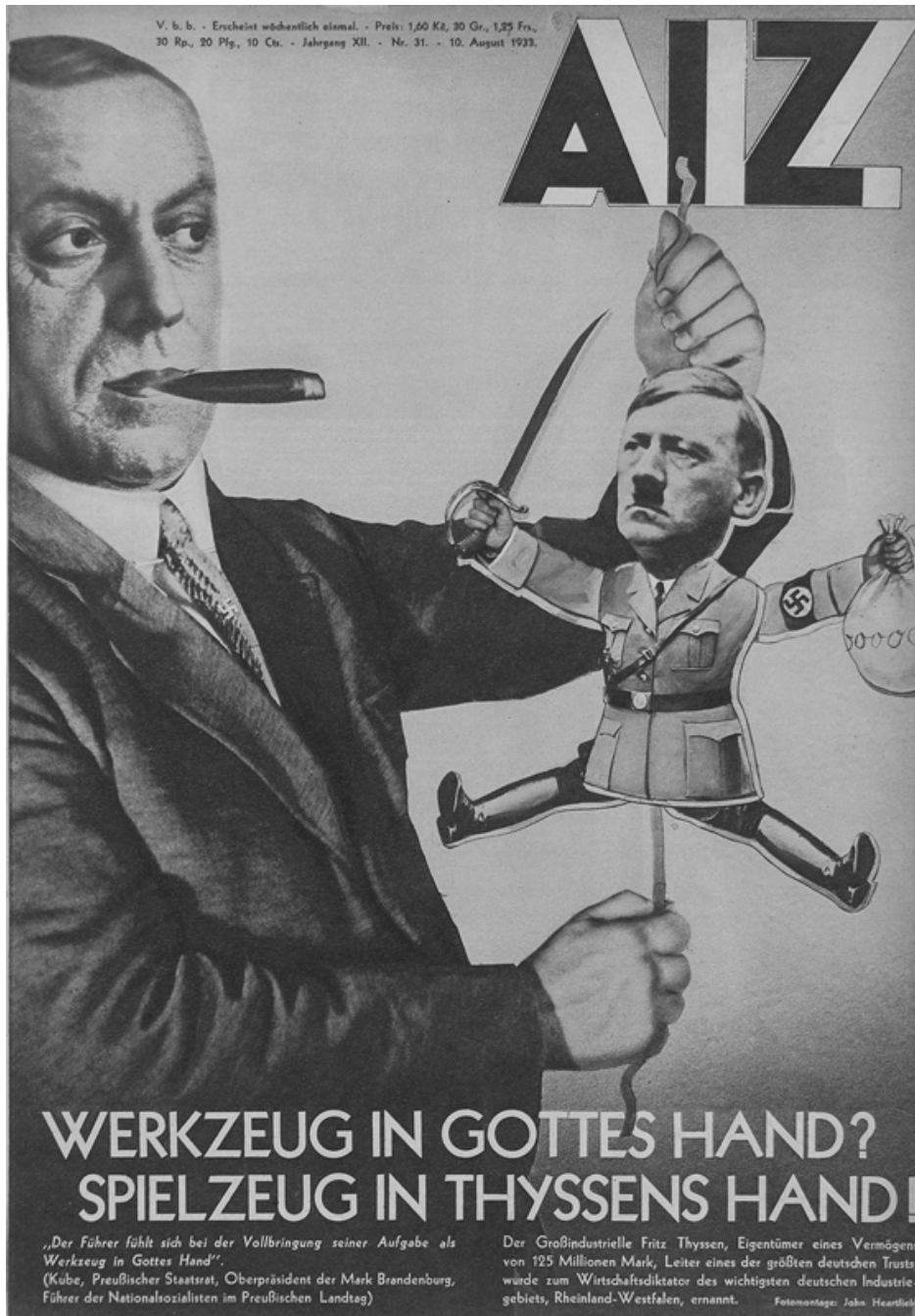
Figure II.1: John Heartfield, *AIZ* Vol. 12, No. 31, August 10, 1933, page 529.

complex visual and narrative strategies of representation."[5]

While Huyssen focuses on the narrative potential from the point of the view of the artists, film director and theorist, Sergei Eisenstein, does so from the point of view of the viewer, claiming that it is this open-ended quality of montage that makes the artwork dynamic. He writes:

> A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. It is this that constitutes the peculiarity of a truly vital work of art and distinguishes it from a lifeless one, in which the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of creation, instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs.[6]

For Eisenstein, the dynamic aspect of montage is a strength of the medium in "that it includes in the creative process the emotions and mind of the spectator."[7] The spectator is thus pivotal to meaning production, and he argues that the spectator is required to follow the same creative path that the artist took in producing the image, stating that, "the spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image, just as it was experienced by the author."[8] When Eisenstein writes of the dynamic aspect of montage, he is specifically talking about the process of meaning production, in that the spectator undergoes the same process as the artist. The conclusion each spectator comes to, however, will be different, since each individual brings with them their own personal emotions and experiences, rendering the work itself dynamic.

Similarly, Aleksander Bošković highlights the creative and dynamic process of the viewer. In laying the foundation for his concept of "montage thinking," Bošković writes, it is "the viewer who puts the static images of photomontage into the motion, who makes the motionless picture

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5. Huyssen, *Miniature Metropolis*, 163.
6. Sergei Eisenstein, "Word and image," in *The Film Sense* (New York: Meridian Books, 1942), 17.
7. Ibid., 32.
8. Ibid.

move."[9] He claims that this is only possible, however, because the viewer "has been invited to do so by the photomontage's structure."[10] In this way, he draws attention back to the artist, with whom he states the control still lies.

Both Eisenstein and Bošković hone in on the dynamic qualities of montage - a characteristic that Patrizia McBride studies in depth, and refers to it as *simultaneity*. She writes, "simultaneity was a rhetorical strategy of composition that promised to yield boundless semantic permutations by allowing for multiple and crisscrossing paths of reception," continuing that, "this strategy could both confound readers and place them in an omniscient position of control, all the while downplaying the fact that the elements of the composition were visually and semantically calibrated to direct attention in calculated ways."[11] Here, McBride brings together multiple aspects of reading of the montage that Huyssen, Eisenstein, and Bošković pinpoint - the potential confusion of the viewer, the control the viewer has in the creative and dynamic role they play, while also acknowledging that the montage has been carefully constructed by the artist in such a way as to shape the way in which the viewer will play out the creative process of producing meaning. I therefore find this a useful framework to keep in mind, while approaching montages of both the Dadaists and Schwitters.

Simultaneity is certainly at play in the work of Hannah Höch, who removes images by cuts or tears from their original context and creates a new one for them. Comprised of many discrete and dislocated parts, initially, there is the potential for confusion. Yet, this confusion is limited in Höch's work by the fact that the end product almost always appears to the reader as something recognizable - more often than not, a human, or human-like creature. The proportions may be incongruous with our perception of reality, making the image jarring, and at times, perhaps

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9. Aleksandar Bošković, "Photopoetry and the Bioscopic Book: Russian and Czech Avant-Garde Experiments of the 1920s" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013), 21.
10. Ibid.
11. McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, 22.

even shocking, but in almost all of her montages, a human form is recognizable to some extent.[12] Matthew Biro has referred to such figures in Höch's work, and those in other photomontages created during the Weimar Republic, as "cyborgs" - a term that was not coined until decades after these montages were created, and defined by Biro as "figures that embody various forms of hybrid identity."[13] Biro argues that the cyborg figures present in Höch's work suggest the artist viewed them as "fundamentally interconnected with a rapidly transforming technology-driven society."[14] For Biro, the cyborg is a "contradictory figure" that represents opposing parts of the Weimar Republic, and in particular, the increasing modernization it experienced.[15] The cyborg therefore lent itself to the practice of photomontage, which brought together images from different and opposing contexts.

Many of the elements that Biro identifies at play in Höch's work - technology, modernization, hybrid identities - are prominent in an untitled montage from 1920 (see Figure II.2).[16] For the viewer, there may be some initial confusion as they identify the individual parts of the montage - the first process in the dynamic process of creating meaning. Here, more than in Heartfield's work, we see what Rancière calls, "the mixing of materialities," with photographs, drawings and printed matter, all encompassed into the image.[17] The form of a woman is, however, instantly recognizable, as too is the man to her left-hand side. The woman's head and body, exaggeratedly out of proportion with one another, are set atop a gramophone, rendering this relatively new sound medium at once symbolic of technological advance and an extension of the female

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12. There are a few exceptions to this, particularly among Höch's earlier work: see, for example, Hannah Höch, *Dada-Ernst*, 1918; Hannah Höch, *Weiße Form*, 1919; Hannah Höch, *Schneider Blume*, 1920; Hannah Höch, *Rohrfeder Collage*, 1922.

13. Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 215.

14. Ibid., 71.

15. Ibid., 83.

16. Although untitled, this montage is marked *Klebebild X* in the bottom left hand corner by the artist.

17. Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 42.
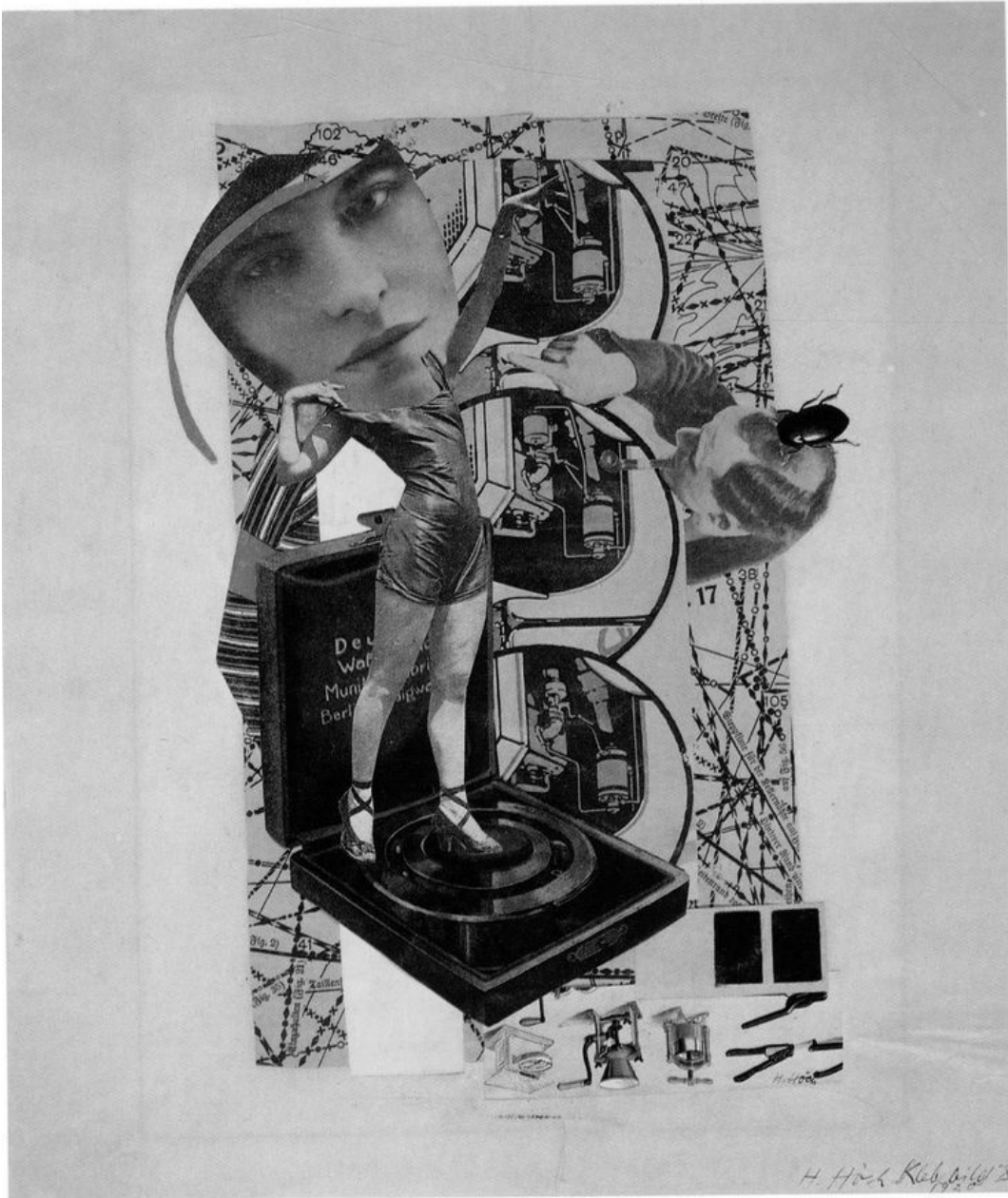
Figure II.2: Hannah Höch, *Klebebild X*, 1920.

body. Decontextualized from anything that resembles a realist landscape, the figure is instead set against a collaged group of diverse backgrounds - sewing patterns, diagrams of car engines, and kitchen utensils. In doing so, the viewer could make a connection to gender roles and identities - themes that are very prominent in Höch's work - reinforced by the fact that this whole scene falls under the scrutiny of the bourgeois male, smoking a pipe, and pointing towards the armpit of the female figure.[18]

As we have seen, both artists employ strategies of simultaniety to different extents in their work. Höch's early montages contain many individual parts; as a result, the reader is required to engage with the image in order to form a reading of it - much more so than in the work of Heartfield, whose intent can often be gleaned within a few seconds.[19] Furthermore, in the work of both artists we see highly political - and in the work of Heartfielld, satirical - messages unfold.

With this characteristics in mind, let us now turn to the montage work of Schwitters.

Schwitters' *Merz* montages

While Schwitters also employs the technique of *simultaneity* in his work, allowing for a dynamic production of meaning on the part of the reader that is subtly guided by his composition, his work differentiates itself from Heartfield's and Höch's in several ways. Firstly, while Schwitters often incorporates photographs into his images, they are just one element of it, rendering his work *montage* not *photomontage*.[20] Secondly, unlike Heartfield's, and to a slightly lesser extent,

18. For a more detailed reading of this montage, see Katharina Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 1997), 116-119.

19. The technique adopted by Höch conforms very much to that of Moholy-Nagy (who came to the medium much later in the 1920s than the Dada artists), whose idea of photomontage which, as Patrizia McBride notes, "construes seeing as an act of forging a path through the visible that entails choosing among multiple options and accounts." (McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, 95.)

20. As we see in Höch's montage, she incorporates elements of non-photographic material, however for the most part the central images in her work are comprised of photographs.

Höch's work, Schwitters' montages are highly abstracted. Heartfield chooses the medium of photomontage exactly for its potential to be loaded with a political message; his work is both accessible and easily absorbed - even at just a short glance. Höch creates and recreates figures - or to use Biro's term, cyborgs - in her montages, which, although joltingly distorted, are recognizable to the viewer. By contrast, some of the individual elements that Schwitters incorporates into his montages - tickets, stamps, newspaper cuttings, for example - may be recognizable, but the work of forming a *whole* is left, for the most part, up to the viewer.

Schwitters' 1937 montage, *Ohne Titel [Mit frühem Porträt von Kurt Schwitters]*, is a good example of this difference (see Figure II.3). In looking at the image, its abstracted form causes the viewer to first of all search for something recognizable to grasp on to - something to make it accessible. One of the elements that stands out most is a head, at the top-center of the image - a portrait of Schwitters, ripped from its context of the rest of the photo. While the eyes look out, the nose fades into a newspaper cutting. No other human elements are obviously visible here, nor is a human form created within the montage, rendering the photo isolated and decontextualized. In this particular montage, the individual parts of the image are relatively easy to identify - scraps of paper, tissue paper, parcel paper, newspaper cuttings, in addition to the photograph, with some of these elements painted over. When observing the *whole* montage, other than the snippet of face visible, there are no other recognizable objects. This is not to say, however, that other aspects of the *whole* are not accessible to the viewer. Its dynamic form, created through the use of converging diagonal lines that together produce a V-shaped focal point towards the bottom-center, indicate to the viewer that this montage is not the act of randomness, but rather a carefully crafted image, with attention paid to form, color, and texture. With his montages, Schwitters takes the open-endedness potential - the *simultaneity* - of the medium we see in Höch's work to a more intense level, requiring the reader to produce their own reading of

the image and to draw their own conclusions, that may be different than those arrived at by the artist.

Schwitters describes exactly this process and the ways in which he understands the roles of the artist and that of the viewer in a 1938 essay, "Das Ziel meiner Merzkunst." He writes:

> Die Tätigkeit des Künstlers ist es, die optisch erkennbaren Bildteile so zusammen-zusetzen, daß sie eine möglichst günstige, möglichst starke Komposition in ihrer Gesamtheit ergeben, die die von ihm beabsichtigten Gefühlswerte eindeutig ver-mittelt. Die Tätigkeit des Beschauers ist nun der Versuch, durch Abtasten der von dem Künstler im Bilde vereinigten optischen Einzelteile mit den Augen und durch Vergleichen und Addieren der so wahrgenommenen Einzelteile im Geiste die Kom-position zu erkennen, die der Künstler aufgebaut hat. Das Erkennen der Kompo-sition aber genügt nicht zum vollkommenen Verständnis eines Kunstwerks, son-dern man hat es erst dann verstanden, wenn es einem gelungen ist, mittels der erkannten Komposition in das Land der Phantasie des Künstlers mitzufahren.[21]

As is characteristic of Schwitters' writing, here he makes bold-sounding statements that on sec-ond glance are much more vague and elusive than his confidence would have one first believe. In this passage he makes a clear distinction between the role of the artist and the viewer, both of whom have a part to play. First and foremost, Schwitters requires the viewer to observe, compare, and build on what is seen in the image, underlining that it must be done in the "spirit" of the composition. Indeed, he promises a full understanding of the work of art, only when the viewer has successfully entered the fantasy land of the artist. Schwitters does not, however, fully elab-orating on exactly what he means by this. From the preceding lines, it is clear that he considers the viewer as having a very active role in both the act of reading the image and in the production of meaning. Furthermore, he does not regard this as an easy or straightforward process, as his use of the words *Versuch*, and *Abtasten* suggest.

I contend, that what Schwitters expresses here - the process of scanning the image, making

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21. Schwitters, "Das Ziel meiner Merzkunst," 363-364.
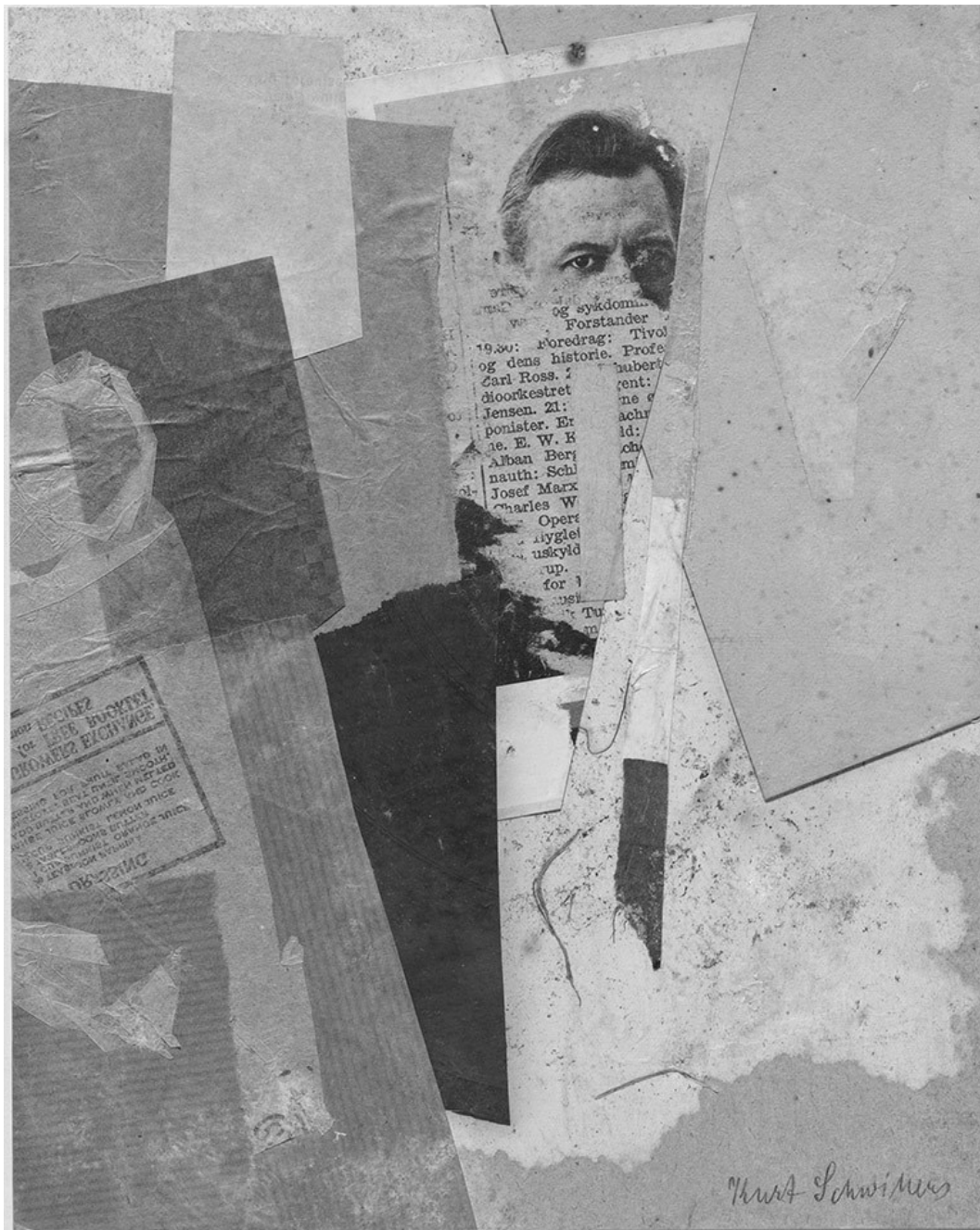
Figure II.3: Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Mit frühem Porträt von Kurt Schwitters]*, 1937.

comparisons and drawing conclusions - is very close to McBride's understanding of *simultaneity*, and which, by extension, allows for multiple, intersecting readings of an image. Within this context, I suggest that Schwitters' expectation of the reader to venture into the fantastical land of the artist, is, in fact, a part of the *simultaneity*. Or perhaps more than McBride's notion of *simultaneity*, it more closely resembles Eisenstein's reading of montage, in which he claims that the viewer experiences the dynamic process similarly to that of the artist in creating it.

In this passage we also see that Schwitters, like McBride, makes a distinction between the individual elements that make up the image - the *Einzelteile* or *Bildteile* - and the *Gesamtheit* of the artwork. One of the questions this idea raises, is what brings together the *Einzelteile* to produce a whole? For McBride, it is the process of making connections between the constituent parts. Schwitters, on the other hand, has a slightly different response, but one which, as I will show, relates very much to the idea of these connections. In a 1922 article, written as a response to an art critic's criticism of his work, Schwitters writes "Der künstlerische Wille schafft aus diesen Mitteln durch rhythmische Wertung das Kunstwerk. Die Beziehungen sämtlicher sinnlich erkennbaren Teile des Werkes untereinander sind der Rhythmus."[22] In this next part of the chapter, I would like to take up Schwitters' idea of *Rhythmus* and consider how it was being used during the Weimar Republic and how he in particular understood it.

Rhythm

Throughout many of his essays and short texts, Schwitters draws attention to the notion of rhythm, declaring it essential to his concept of art. In the above quote, we see that Schwitters considers it the force that binds his montages into a singular *Gesamtheit*. Brigitte Franzen notes

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22. Kurt Schwitters, "Tragödie Tran No. 22," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 99.

that this is an aspect of Schwitters' work that is evident across the different media he works in, citing typography and architecture as two such examples.[23] While Schwitters' use of the term rhythm is therefore not exclusive to montage, in this chapter, I concentrate on it, solely as it pertains to Schwitters' visual art and graphic design work.[24]

Schwitters uses the term rhythm liberally in his written work, yet often in different contexts, with different nuances, and not infrequently, in a very vague manner. His first use of the term is in 1910 - almost a whole decade before he embarked on Merz - and unsurprisingly, in this preliminary usage, it is firmly rooted in music. Gathering reflections on "Das Problem der abstrakten Kunst," Schwitters draws parallels between music and painting, noting that "Die abstrakte Malerei ist eben eine Musik für das Auge, sie hat den gleichen Zweck, Gefühle zu erzeugen, und die gleichen Gesetze."[25] Throughout the text, Schwitters draws on various musical features such as key signature, melody, motifs, and tempo. On the question of rhythm, he writes, "Womit wäre wohl der Rhythmus in der Musik zu vergleichen? Der Rhythmus ist Symmetrie."[26]

With the exception of this instance, Schwitters does not mention music in relation to rhythm

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23. Franzen writes, "Schwitters Begriff vom Rhythmus ist als verbindendes Element seiner unterschiedlichen Arbeitsgebiete anzusehen: er spielt eine ebensogroße Rolle für die Dichtung wie für die Typographie oder die freien künstlerischen Arbeiten und deren Kompositionsstrukturen, als auch für seine Architekturkritik." Brigitte Franzen, "Die Großstadt - ein gewaltiges Merzkunstwerk?," in *Neues Bauen der 20er Jahre: Gropius, Haesler, Schwitters und die Dammerstocksiedlung in Karlsruhe 1929*, ed. Brigitte Franzen and Peter Schmitt (Karlsruhe: Museum für Moderne Angewandte Kunst, 1997), 130.

24. For other analyses of the term *Rhythmus* in other aspects of Schwitters' work, see Franzen's book chapter for its relation to architecture (ibid.). Similarly, Petra Kunzelmann has explored this term in relation to Schwitters' socalled "Tran" texts (see Petra Kunzelmann, "Text und Rhythmus," in *Transgression und Intermedialität*, ed. Walter Delabar, Ursula Kocher, and Isabel Schulz (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2016), 207–226), and has obeserved certain connections between these texts and his collage work. She writes, for example, "In den 'Tran'-Texten setzt [Schwitters] ihn als sprachlich-formales oder als architektonisch-kompositionelles Stilelement ein und gebraucht konventionelle metrisch gebundene wie auch moderne, durch die Schnitttechnik der Collage erzielte Rhythmen." (ibid., 209.)

25. Kurt Schwitters, "Das Problem der abstrakten Kunst," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 31.
Written in several notebooks, "Das Problem der abstrakten Kunst" formed the first draft of a text that Schwitters worked on during the summer of 1910, producing at least three different drafts of it.

26. Ibid., 30.

in his writings again, in the timeframe in which I am working.[27] Indeed, as the years go on,

Schwitters becomes less and less specific as to what he understands by rhythm, often declaring

it to be central to his work, or to art in general, without any further elucidation on what he means

by it. In 1926, for example, he writes, "Was Kunst ist, wissen Sie ebensogut wie ich, es ist nichts

weiteres als Rhythmus."[28] In this short statement, Schwitters provocatively declares rhythm fun-

damental to art, but without directing the reader to what he means by the term. Indeed, rather

than offering a definition, Schwitters deflects the question, simply offering a metonym.

   Occasionally, however, we do glimpse some insight into at least some facets of Schwitters' un-

derstanding and use of the term. In 1922, for example, he writes, "Die künstlerische Wille schafft

aus diesen Mitteln durch rhythmische Wertung des Kunstwerk. Die Beziehungen sämtlicher

sinnlich erkennbaren Teile des Werkes untereinander sind der Rhythmus."[29] Here, we see that

for Schwitters, rhythm can denote the relations between objects, or parts of an artwork. Simi-

larly, in 1926, he states, "Das Wichtige beim Bilde ist der Rhythmus, in Linien, Flächen, Hell und

Dunkel, und Farben; kurz der Rhythmus der Teile des Kunstwerks des Materials," concluding

that "Am klarsten wird der Rhythmus im abstrakten Kunstwerk."[30] Given the dynamic aspect of

Schwitters' understanding of rhythm, it is not surprising that it is most prevalent in abstract art,

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27. Interestingly, Schwitters does not make any nod to rhythm in one of his lengthier texts "Elementarkenntnisse in der Malerei: *Vergleich mit der Musik.*" Instead, he draws on the comparisons between musical tone and color tones. See Kurt Schwitters, "Elementarkenntnisse in der Malerei: *Vergleich mit der Musik,*" in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 259–266.
Schwitters does in fact compare his use of rhythm to that of music in a short text written between 1940 and 1946, entitled "Abstract Art." He writes: "MERZ pictures, sculptures or poems represent rhythm. There is the possibility for every spectator to find in them a guide for his thinking of feeling. But there is no difference in the kind of guidance in an abstract picture or a sonata of Beethoven, except that people usually don't read sonatas. But when a hundred men hear the same sonata, they hear it in a hundred different ways." (Kurt Schwitters, "Abstract Art," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 385.)

28. Kurt Schwitters, "Was Kunst ist, wissen Sie," in *Führer ndurch die Ausstellung der Abstrakten: Große Berliner Ausstellung*, ed. Gustav Eugen Diehl (Berlin: Kunstarchiv, 1926), 245.

29. Schwitters, "Tragödie Tran No. 22," 99.

30. Kurt Schwitters, "Der Rhythmus im Kunstwerk," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 245.

since it is this form that offers the most potential for forming relations between parts of the image. What is interesting about this text, is that it was published in the *Hannoversches Tageblatt* - a local newspaper. This was, therefore, not a text written for other artists who would understand rhythm as a technical term, but an article aimed at the broader public. With bold statements that underline rhythm as one of the fundamental forces at play in his art work, and that of many of his contemporaries, printed in this forum, Schwitters contributes to a broader conversation on rhythm that was taking place in the historical moment in which he was artistically active.

In recent years, film scholar Michael Cowan and literary scholar Christine Lubkoll have drawn our attention to the frequent use and fetishization of the term rhythm during the early twentieth century in Germany. In their studies, they show that this term had become increasingly prominent in the preceding decades.[31] What both scholars show is that the preoccupation with rhythm can be considered a way of coming to terms with industrialization, rationalization, and modernity; rhythm pointed away from the increasingly industrialized present, towards a more "natural," pre-industrial state. And yet, if we consider the precise, repetitive motions of the mechanized machine, and the choreography of the assembly line, we see that industrialization brings with it its own rhythms, revealing, perhaps, a tension between the "natural," pre-industrial rhythms, with the mechanized and industrial ones. Aspects of this broader use of the term rhythm are, at times, implicitly present in Schwitters' use of it.[32] For the most part, how-

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31. In the introduction to *Technolgy's Pulse: Essays on Rhythm in German Modernism*, Cowan makes a point to walk his reader through pre-Weimar discourses on rhythm. By doing so, he shows the ways in which the Weimar discourses "took up and sharpened debates already begun in earlier decades." (Michael Cowan, *Technology's Pulse: Essays on Rhythm in German Modernism* (London: Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies, University of London, 2012), 19.) Cowan makes the case that the discourse of rhythm was present across the entire cultural spectrum, claiming that, "notions of rhythm stood at the center of a broad anthropological effort, in modern culture, to understand the human [...], an endeavor encompassing fields as diverse as philosophy, economics, sociology, history, biology, psychology, art history, anthropology and the 'science of work'." (ibid., 18-19.)

32. In "Merzbuch 2," for example, Schwitters writes in 1926, "Bitte beachten Sie den gleichen Rhythmus, das gleiche Gefühl in diesem Aquarell und meinen letzten Merzarbeiten." He continues, however, by placing the rhythm *not* with the image itself, but rather with its viewer, indicating a broader understanding of the term, not restricted to the image or its creator. He writes, "Dieses ist eine persönlcihe Angelegenheit, *jeder Mensch hat seinen ihm eigenen*

ever, the notion of rhythm he develops in his essays is far more insular, and pertains primarily to his own work and the aesthetic systems at play within it.

Despite the ubiquitous nature of the term in his theoretical work, Schwitters' concept of rhythm has been a largely overlooked area in scholarship, with only McBride and Franzen delving into the often elusive idea he had of the term. In essence, McBride defines Schwitters' concept of rhythm as "denot[ing] relationships that are not random or coincidental, but rather express a properly aesthetic logic."[33] Indeed, Schwitters tightly aligns rhythm with the way aesthetics operates in his work. When he asserts, for example, the most important aspect of an image is the rhythm in the lines and colors, Schwitters draws a direct connection between rhythm and the different formal aspects of an image.[34] Here, we see that for Schwitters rhythm straddles the different formal components of the artwork, and in so doing, binds the image together, moving it from a collection of *Einzelteile*, to a singular *Gesamtheit*. Yet, I argue that Schwitters' notion of rhythm moves beyond the purely aesthetic and visual realm of the image, and can rather be seen as a unifying device in a much broader sense - that through rhythm, Schwitters attempts to break down the apparent barriers between the literary and visual.

In "Merz," an essay, that serves as a kind of manifesto for his concept of art, written in 1920 and published the following year, Schwitters states: "Ich habe Gedichte aus Worten und Sätzen so zusammengeklebt, daß die Anordnung rhythmisch eine Zeichnung ergibt. Ich habe umgekehrt Bilder und Zeichnungen geklebt, auf denen Sätze gelesen werden sollen. Ich habe Bilder so genagelt, daß neben der malerischen Bildwirkung eine plastische Reliefwirkung entsteht." In this

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Rhythmus, seinen persönlichen Rhythmus; der Künstler will den Rhythmus des Werkes kultivieren, der allgemein ist, nicht seine persönlichen Eigentümlichkeiten." (Kurt Schwitters, "Merzbuch 2," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 249. Emphasis mine.) Here Schwitters makes a clear distinction between an intrinsic, personal rhythm, and one that is constructed by the artist for the artwork.

33. McBride, "The Game of Meaning: Collage, Montage, and Parody in Kurt Schwitters' Merz," 251.

34. He writes, "Das Wichtige beim Bilde ist der Rhythmus, in Linien, Flächen, Hell und Dunkel, und Farben; kurz der Rhythmus der Teile des Kunstwerks des Materials,"Schwitters, "Der Rhythmus im Kunstwerk," 245.

excerpt we see Schwitters' play with the boundaries of different media and art forms, drawing attention to their fluidity, depending on their form and context. He brings together words and drawings, sketches and collage, images and structures, and if this slippage between the visual and literary is not clear enough here, he continues: "Dieses geschah, um die Grenzen der Kunstarten zu verwischen."[35] From the first sentence in this passage, we see that for Schwitters, one of the principle ways he sought to break down these barriers between different art forms, was via rhythm.

To summarize, Schwitters employs the term rhythm, as McBride has already asserted, to refer to the process of making connections between the *Einzelteile* of the montage image, in a way that produces meaning for the *Gesamtheit*. I contend, however, that for Schwitters, rhythm is a device that while forging these connections within the image, also serves to break down the barriers between the different media incorporated into each montage, in a way that provides a commentary on the status of these different art forms beyond the image. In the next part of the chapter I show that Schwitters directly addresses this idea in several of his montages, and that a reading of them can deepen our understanding of what Schwitters means when he claims, "Kunstarten gibt es nicht. Es gibt nur die Kunst."[36]

Between Art Forms

Schwitters' assemblage *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]* is a prime example of exactly this (see Figure II.4). Composed in 1929, the piece brings together various elements that repeatedly recur in Schwitters' montages, collages and assemblages: used tram tickets, a theater ticket, a museum ticket, packaging from a film carton, some scrap paper, and some more incongruous

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35. Schwitters, "Merz," 79.
36. Schwitters, "Die Bedeutung des Mergzgedankens in der Welt," 134.
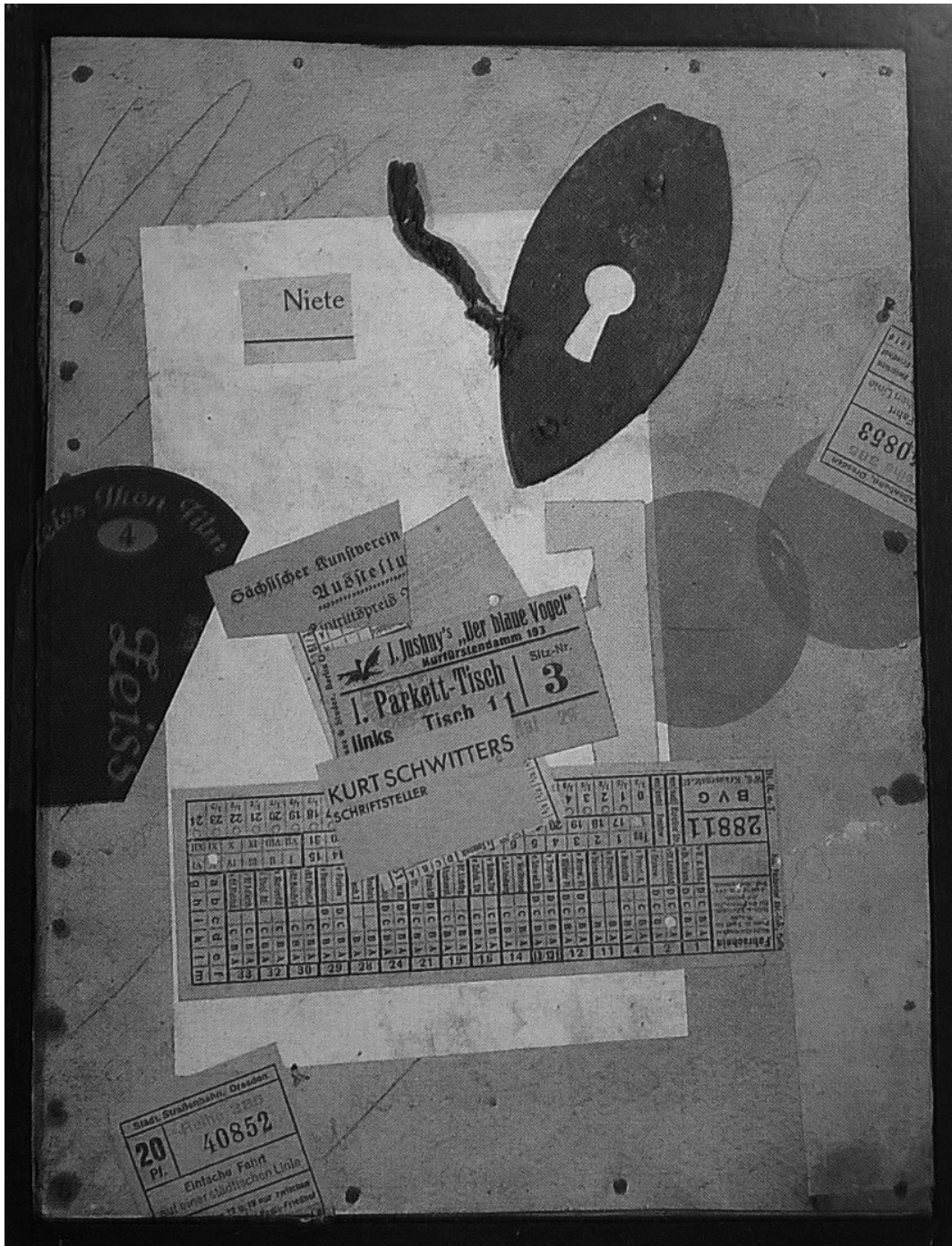
Figure II.4: Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]*, 1929.

objects, such as an escutcheon and piece of cord. These items can be broadly divided into two types. Those, like the escutcheon and rope, which have been discarded as they are either old, no longer required, or have been superseded. Yet, they still retain their original use value. Were they to be removed from the assemblage, they have the potential to be used for the purpose for which they were originally made. The second type of objects are those that are used as a form of currency, such as ticket stubs - once used, they are void and no longer retain any of their original use value. Anke te Heesen refers to this type of scrap paper in Schwitters' work as "*paper in motion*: newspapers, transit passes, letters envelopes, theater and cinema tickets - in other words, paper that circulates."[37] In this case, however, the object itself, has an afterlife - the paper is still paper, and the print still legible - only the presence of a small hole indicates the lack of value for its original purpose. It is this afterlife that Schwitters seizes upon, using the opportunity to create a new context for it.

In his writing on montage, Schwitters contends that the *Einzelteile* are stripped of their external value as soon as they are re-contextualized within his artwork. The artist writes, "[Die Gegenstände] verlieren durch Wertung gegeneinander ihren individuellen Charakter, ihr Eigengift, werden entmaterialisiert und sind Material für das Bild."[38] If we take Schwitters' line of argument here, all possibility for the objects to point to something beyond the work of art is thereby removed. Yet, in considering this assemblage, it is hard to imagine that Schwitters could stand by this claim, himself. McBride has argued that Schwitters' goal of suppressing what she calls "the double talk of montage" - the ability of the image to relate to something beyond the artwork - is "untenable."[39] Similarly, te Heesen argues that these *Einzelteile* "fluctuate between the world of their origin and the world into which they have been introduced, oscillating between material

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37. Anke te Heesen, *The Newspaper Clipping. A Modern Paper Object* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 173.
38. Schwitters, "Die Bedeutung des Mergzgedankens in der Welt," 134.
39. McBride, *The Chatter of the Visible: Montage and Narrative in Weimar Germany*, 158.

significance and pure form," concluding that they could perhaps best be described as "mobile units."[40] I agree with both McBride and te Heesen, and find it necessary to move away from Schwitters' notion of *Entmaterialisierung* in order to allow for a full reading of the assemblage.

In rejecting a direct relationship with the context from which the *Einzelteile* are removed, Schwitters rather shifts the focus to the form of the image. He explains:

> "Das Material ist so unwesentlich, wie ich selbst. Wesentlich ist das Formen. Weil das Material unwesentlich ist, nehme ich jedes beliebige Material, wenn es das Bild verlangt. Indem ich verschiedenartige Materialen gegeneinander abstimme, habe ich gegenüber der nur Ölmalerei ein Plus, da ich außer Farbe gegen Farbe, Linie gegen Linie, Form gegen Form usw. noch Material gegen Material, etwa Holz gegen Sackleinen werte."[41]

If we compare this quote to the excerpt from the *Hannoversches Tageblatt*, in which Schwitters wrote, "Das Wichtige beim Bilde ist der Rhythmus, in Linien, Flächen, Hell und Dunkel, und Farben; kurz der Rhythmus der Teile des Kunstwerks des Materials," we see a significant over-lap.[42] Like *Rhythmus*, then, form straddles all of these other aspects. By means of the material Schwitters incorporates into his work - both ready-made and altered - lines, shapes and colors are introduced, and fashioned into form. And it is the rhythm of that form, that enables the viewer to make the connections, in part guided by the artist. While Schwitters is an ardent proponent of a formalist approach to his work, I have already shown in my discussion of McBride's notion of *simultaneity*, that Schwitters' Merz work can be read in numerous ways. Not surprisingly, some of these readings rest on the recognition that viewers will approach the image with knowledge of a world *beyond* the artwork, and will therefore, in an act of *simultaneity*, apply that knowledge to the image. It is this approach that I take in exploring Schwitters' montage work.

In *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]*, Schwitters uses the escutcheon to lead the ob-

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40. Heesen, *The Newspaper Clipping. A Modern Paper Object*, 163.
41. Schwitters, "Merz," 76-77.
42. Schwitters, "Der Rhythmus im Kunstwerk," 245.

server's eye downward, towards the focal point of the assemblage. Here, starting with a ticket for the *BVG* (Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe) piece after piece of what te Heesen calls "paper in motion" is superimposed on top of each other in such a way as to create a spiral, and thus imbuing this part of the assemblage with the impression of movement. Furthermore, te Heesen directly links Schwitters' incorporation of transport tickets in his work with the notion of movement. Writing specifically on these used tickets in his montages, she claims, "Schwitters deformalized the material to remove its connection to the outer world, but the composition achieves a reformalization or reformulation that, by suggesting movement, reinvests the material with the meaning it had previously lost."[43] In the case of this particular montage, this is compounded by the sense of movement that the tickets formally create, by means of the spiral. Indeed, the movement inherent in the spiral draws the viewer's eye to the center it creates, where the words "Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller" are prominently displayed. In approaching the image formally, I contend that the physical text of these words becomes the focal point of the image.

In rendering *text* the central element of this assemblage, Schwitters challenges the traditional place of words and text - or lack thereof - in visual art. In his essays, Schwitters explicitly states that he prizes form above the material content of the individual parts that make up his montages. I suggest, however, that it is not a coincidence that Schwitters positions this particular piece of text at the center, and that the content *does*, in fact, contribute to the *Gesamtheit* of the image. By positioning this text at the center, Schwitters accentuates his identity as a writer of text - a *Schriftsteller* - and signals that this facet of his creative output is not dislocated from his visual art. Furthermore, the term *Schriftsteller* - a composite of *Schrift*, which can be translated as writing, handwriting, font, type, and indeed as a signifier for all forms of written text, and the verb *stellen*, to place - is a literal description of exactly what Schwitters does in this, and many of his other

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43. Heesen, *The Newspaper Clipping. A Modern Paper Object*, 174.

artworks, in which he incorporates text. The term *Schriftsteller*, therefore, becomes disconnected with literature and can instead be seen to be an accurate description, indeed an integral part, of his work as a visual artist. In this way, the text "Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller" can be read as the artist's signature on the work of art, closely resembling how political artist and Dadaist, John Heartfield, considered his role in creating montage as that of *monteur*.[44] R. L. Rutsky notes, that, referring to his work as *monteur*, Heartfield drew a direct connection between his artistic output and the spheres of technology, engineering and industrial production.[45] In much the same way here, we see Schwitters drawing a connection between his visual and literary output.

The reference, then, to *Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller* also draws our attention to one tension between how Schwitters writes about his work, and how we as readers and viewers perceive it. In the earlier quoted passage on *form*, Schwitters states that, "Das Material ist so unwesentlich, wie ich selbst."[46] And yet here, as in much of the rest of his work, Schwitters directly references himself, and in this instance, places himself at the very center of the image.[47]

At the same time, in assuming this particular identity within the context of visual art, Schwitters draws our attention to the other elements of, and allusions to text within the montage. One of the most prominent pieces of text in the image is found towards the top left hand corner: *Niete*. The text, set in modern typeface is so clear and free from distraction that the eye is naturally drawn to it. Placed on top of a blank piece of paper, the positioning of the word *Niete* renders it

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44. Schwitters signed his work with many different names. In Gerhard Schaub, ed., *Kurt Schwitters:'Bürger und Idiot': Beiträge zu Werk und Wirkung eines Gesamtkünstlers, mit unveröffentlichten Briefen an Walter Gropius* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1993), the editor notes 41 different ways in which the artist signed his correspondence - most of which are also to be found as signatures on art work. The majority were some variant of Kurt MERZ Schwitters, KuWitter, Grosser MERZ, or Anna Blume.

45. See Randolph L Rutsky, *High Technē: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1999), 91.

46. Schwitters, "Merz," 76-77.

47. The list of examples of Schwitters' self-referentiality - of his name, that of his creation, Anna Blume, or of his commissioned graphic design work - is very long indeed. For a representative selection, see *Ohne Titel [Mit frühem Porträt von Kurt Schwitters]*, 1937; *Mz 26, 45 Sch*, 1925; *Mz 245, Mal Kah*, 1921; *Karlsruhe*, 1929, *Ohne Title[Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, 1931.

very similar to headed letter paper, reinforcing the notion of writing in this image.[48] As a result, this has interesting implications for the piece of paper's significance within the larger image. To consider it at the most basic of levels, a piece of paper - linked to writing - is placed on top of the canvas - linked to painting. In a move, then, that seems to re-contextualize both the canvas and the sheet of paper, Schwitters, by placing the writing paper on top of the canvas, uses the canvas to write on, while the piece of paper becomes a backdrop for the collage, thereby switching the norms for media on which to compose text and visual art.

One of the main consequences of introducing text into the image is that it allows - and perhaps even encourages - the observer to form new associations within the image. Regardless of the original context from which *Niete* was cut out, the word in this context brings forth several different ideas: etymologically derived from the Dutch negator *niet*, *Niete* can also refer to something or someone as useless - a dud lottery ticket, for example, or as in the expression, *eine Niete ziehen*, to draw a blank. Alternatively, a *Niete* can also be a rivet; something that holds other things together - something we see reflected in the image itself by the nails that hold the canvas in place on the wooden frame. Within the context of this image, we therefore see a potential commentary emerging on the re-appropriation of material in assemblages, collages, and montages. Something that is useless in its original context - such as used tram and theater tickets, for example, or the reference to something being useless by means of *Niete* - becomes an integral part of the artwork. The otherwise blank piece of paper bearing the word *Niete* becomes an opportunity for a new system of connections to be made - an aspect that is also encapsulated in the alternative meaning of *Niete* - thus rendering trash and other found material valuable.

This forging of new connections in a work of art, such as those in *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]*, is at the heart of Schwitters' idea of rhythm. From the example of the *Kurt*

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48. In addition to the positioning of the word, both the typography and the line underscoring the text, bear a striking similarity to many of the letterheads Schwitters, and other proponents of the *New Typography* designed.

Schwitters, Schriftsteller, and *Niete* we see that rhythm is not limited to just lines, colors, and shades, but can also incorporate text. These words allow the viewer to make connections across media with other material included in the montage. As such, rhythm becomes a binding force that equates *Einzelteile* from all media to form the *Gesamtheit* of the image, and therefore works towards Schwitters' goal of erasing the boundaries between the art forms.

The fact that text can equally be a part of rhythm, alongside the other characteristics Schwitters outlines, is, I argue, part of a broader conflation of text and image, written and visual communication, literature and art, that is at play in this assemblage. If we take a closer look at the spiraling superimposition of scraps of paper, and the other pieces found on the peripheries - also examples of *paper in motion* - we see a further dimension of this unfold. In addition to several used tram tickets from both Dresden and Berlin, Schwitters places a cutout segment from a Zeiss Ikon film carton at the edge of the assemblage; the spiral is comprised of more transportation tickets, a ticket from *Der Blaue Vogel* (a theater on the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin), as well as a ticket to an exhibition of the Sächsischer Kunstverein in Dresden. It appears, therefore, that the material Schwitters has included all relates to different art forms - photography, theater, visual art - and that it isn't a coincidence that central to these is the cutout reading "Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller," and thus referring to literature. In signing a piece of visual art as a *Schriftsteller*, Schwitters achieves here the affect he aims for in his essay Merz, in which he aims to create visual art with words in a way which evades media classification. Schwitters writes as an artist and paints as a writer - he brings together the different art forms in a way that questions the validity, and indeed even the very existence, of such boundaries.

At this stage, I would like to turn our attention towards a different type of boundary that I show Schwitters also attempts to erase in his montage work - the fine and applied arts. This perceived boundary has less to do with the formal differences between text and image, or the

different forms of art, and more to do with the use for which they are created. As I indiciated in the introduction, Schwitters, like many of his contemporaries, worked as both a fine and applied artist, and rather as seeing them as two distinct facets of his work, I argue that Schwitters brings these together in his montage work.

Between Fine and Applied Arts

Schwitters was very invested in the applied arts, as the founding of both his own graphic design and advertising firm, *Merz Werbezentrale*, and the association of designers, *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* show us. Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s he produced a mutlitude of advertisements and documents for companies such as *Pelikan* and *Bahlsen*, as well as Karslruhe and Hanover city councils, and Walter Gropius' Dammerstock-Siedlung, with some of this material becoming part of the *Einzelteile* in his montages. One such example is *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* (see Figure II.5).[49]

Composed in 1931, *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* includes segments from three documents that Schwitters designed for Hanover council, that have been cut out and recontextualized within the montage. At the top, we see a letterhead that bears both the text "Magistrat der Hauptstadt Hannover," as well as the city emblem that Schwitters redesigned, simplifying it to fit better with the Futura typeface he employed for the stationery.[50] Directly underneath, is another snippet of text, this time with the words "Magistrat der Stadt," and lastly, in smaller font, "Portopflichtige Dienstsache." Interspersed between these segments of text are three pho-

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49. For a small sampling of other montages that incorporate his own design work, see Kurt Schwitters, *Karlsruhe*, 1929; Kurt Schwitters, *Pelikan*, 1925; Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Speckgummi]*, 1925; Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Schnurruhr von Hans Arp]*, 1928.

50. For Schwitters' own thoughts on the typeface used and the redesign of the city eblem, see Kurt Schwitters, "Über einheitliche Gestaltung von Drucksachen," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 325–334.

Figure II.5: Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, 1931.

tos - one a flowing river, another of what appears to perhaps be a wooden door, and the last, of rocks.

Right from the first glance, it is clear that the aesthetic of this collage is very different to that of *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]*, and many other of Schwitters' montages. Rather than an overwhelming number of *Einzelteile*, this one is formally sparser and simpler, consisting of just three pieces of text and three photo cuttings. This more minimalist aesthetic is accentuated by the (relatively) neat way in which Schwitters has cut the *Einzelteile* from their original contexts. Complete words are intact, with perhaps the exception of "Magistrat der Stadt," in which the final "t" has been cut somewhat short. Furthermore, the lines have been cut with scissors, and although not completely straight, they are not torn (as is the case in much of Schwitters' work) and display at very least a nod towards exactitude.

In contrast to the text included in the assemblage, which was designed for much smaller pieces of paper than the canvas on which it was placed, the text in *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* is both unobscured by other parts of the montage, and recontextualized in a format and size, similar to that from which it was extracted. Additionally, although the text and photos are incongruous in their positioning side by side, a kind of internal consistency exists between the respective pieces of text, all of which refer to Hanover council, as well as between the three photos, each of which depicts a natural element - sea, wood, rocks. And, while not strictly symmetrical, a bold order prevails in the collage, creating a sense of balance - and a counterpart to allusions of the city in the text - and thus adding to its apparent simplicity and clarity.

While this aesthetic is somewhat unusual in Schwitters' montages, it certainly appears in other areas of his oeuvre. The way in which he organizes the texts and photos in clean-cut, horizontal and vertical blocks in *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, very much resembles his graphic design work in the late 1920s. In an advert for *Edler & Krische Hannover: Geschäfts-*

Figure II.6: Kurt Schwitters, from *Das Lose Blatt Buch*, 1927-1928.

Figure II.7: Kurt Schwitters, from *Hahn Werbedruck*, ca. 1929.

bücherfabrik (see Figure II.6), designed in 1927-28, Schwitters incorporates horizontally set blocks of text - all in a sans serif typeface - alongside both horizontal and vertical blocks of color, which has the effect of cordoning off sections of the image. Similarly, in Schwitters' advertisement for *Hahn Werbedruck* in 1929 (see Figure II.7), we see horizontal blocks of text, as well as horizontal and vertical blocks of color that frame both the text and photographic illustrations. While *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* contains no blocks of color, as the advertisements do, I suggest that the natural photographs Schwitters incorporates in his montage operate in the same way the color blocks do. Indeed, similar to *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, the advertisement for *Hahn Werbedruck* also employs a photomontage on the right hand side that functions in exactly the same way the "natural photographs" do. In both cases, these blocks of photograph, photomontage, and color break up the page, leading the eye in certain directions, serving to accentuate parts of the complete image, while also ascribing to the aesthetics of New Typography.[51]

In 1928, Schwitters produced and published a small booklet entitled *Werbe-Gestaltung* - a short, illustrated, manifesto-like text on graphic design (see Figure II.9), that was published as an issue of his journal *Merz*. In it, we have one of the most concise and incisive expositions of Schwitters' approach to different aspects of graphic design. At the outset, he sets up two different models - "Prinzip der Orientierung" and "Prinzip der Werbung." Although there is a certain degree of fluidity between the two, Schwitters goes on to show that the former is graphic design that is primarily employed for documents, while the latter is more for advertisements. In the course of the booklet, Schwitters puts forth theses on subjects, such as "Beziehungen in

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51. This arrangement of color blocks and text was common to many of the New Typographers. See for example the work of Walter Dexel - a friend and colleague of Schwitters - who often incorporated such horizontal and vertical blocks in his work. Similar elements can be found in the work of Max Burchartz, Herbert Bayer, and Johannes Molzahn, among others. In Chapter Two I will go into much more detail about New Typography and New Typograhers.

der Text-Form," "Beziehungen in der Bild-Form," and "Gesetze der Bild-Form," with regards to the two principles. Schwitters underlines the fluidity between the principles of orientation and advertising by providing the reader with a table that visually illustrates where he places certain documents on the *Prinzip der Orientierung/Prinizip der Werbung* spectrum (see Figure II.8). From this table we see that few documents fall neatly under one principle or the other, but rather take attributes from both.

While Schwitters uses this booklet to draw out the distinctions between his ideas of *Orientierung* graphic design and that of advertising, we also see some of the ways in which these different forms of design overlap, with rhythm being a notable point of convergence. Right at the beginning of the text, Schwitters states that *Gestaltung* is an essential element of graphic design and delineates it in the following way: "Gestaltung ist Einheit aus Vielheit, durch Auswahl, Begrenzung, Gliederung, Rhythmus." More specifically, he cites "rhythmische Gliederung" as essential to both models. Furthermore, as the blocks move back and forth across the first page, positioning different documents on the *Orientierung-Werbung* scale, they create both a sense of motion, as well as visual rhythm. From this, we see that Schwitters' notion of rhythm and its importance to his work extends beyond his fine art work, to the applied arts - even to the design of bureaucratic documents.

Towards the end of the booklet Schwitters explores what he calls "Gesetze der Bild-Form." Across a double page, he lays out, in text and image, how he sees these laws pertaining to the principles of *Orientierung* and *Werbung*. The text is comprised entirely of key words such as *passiv*, and *objektiv*, *bewegend*, and is accompanied by an illustration for each of the principles (see Figure II.9). Using just red, black, and white blocks that could represent either text or image, Schwitters creates two examples of different layouts. Under *Orientierung* each of the blocks - always square or rectangular - is aligned with both the vertical and horizontal edges of the paper,

Figure II.8: Kurt Schwitters, from *Werbe-Gestaltung*, 1928.
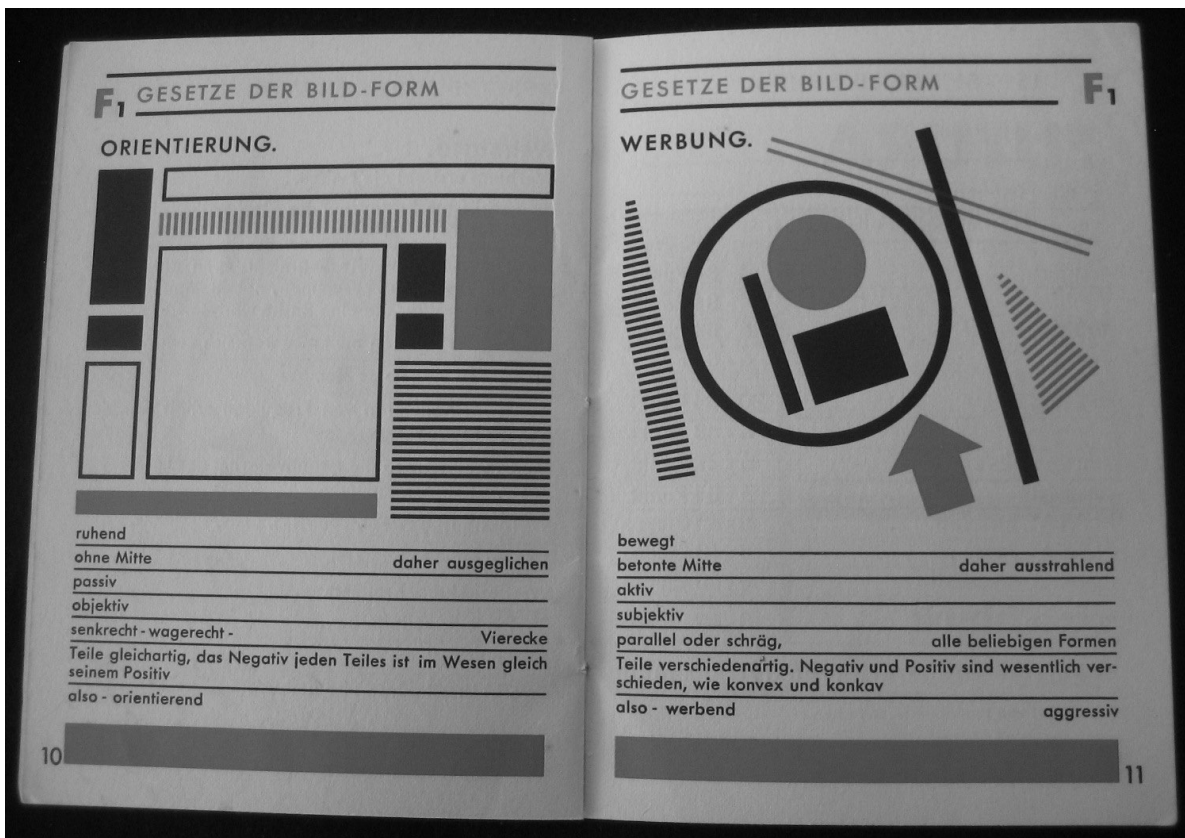
Figure II.9: Kurt Schwitters, from *Werbe-Gestaltung*, 1928.

and the other blocks that surround it.[52] Unlike many of Schwitters' typographical colleagues, Tschichold was in fact a trained typographer, and yet, as Ellen Lupton points out, Futurism, Constructivism, and De Stijl served as major influences on his work. She writes, "whereas Futurism and Dada had aggressively attacked convention, Tschichold advocated design as means of discipline and order, and he began to theorize the grid as a modular system based on standard measures." She continues, that with "the expansion of space in all directions, the modern grid slipped past the classical frame of the page. [...] The protective frame became a continuous field."[53] Here we see Schwitters - an artist whose work shared many characteristics with Dada - also straddle this divide between disorder, order, and the modernist application of Dadaist and Modernist tendencies within the realms of standardization.

In contrast to *Orientierung*, the *Werbung* illustration introduces different shapes - a circle, arrow, and triangle - and the lines are placed diagonally, at points converging, to create a focal point for the eye. The documents Schwitters designed for Hanover Council certainly conform to Schwitters' illustration of *Gesetze der Bild-form* under *Orientierung*. Text and thick lines are organized in ways that emulate the blocks we see in *Gesetze der Bild-Form* and so we can see that this was more than a thesis on graphic design - it was a principle that Schwitters employed in his commercial work.

If we return to the montage *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* and compare it with the *Orientierung* illustration of *Gesetze der Bild-Form*, what we find is that they bear a striking similarity in layout and form. The three blocks of text set horizontally intersect at right angles

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52. The diagram Schwitters produces is not dissimilar to one that Jan Tschichold includes in his book *Die neue Typographie*, published in the same year. In it, Tschichold provides a "beautiful" and an "ugly" example of how to arrange "blocks" in magazines. He writes "Like article headings, captions beneath illustrations (as in this book) must no longer be centered but must range left. [...] As regards the blocks themselves, they must not be surrounded with unsightly rules. Blocks trimmed flush look better." (Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. Ruari McLean (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 211.)

53. Ellen Lupton, *Thinking With Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, and Students* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2014), 163.

with the photographs in much the same way the blocks in Schwitters' booklet do. In this way, in *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* we see Schwitters bring together his practice of montage - of taking objects out of their original context and recontextualizing them within an artwork - with that of graphic design. In doing so, the new material he has created for his design work becomes material for his montages. In this particular montage, this is reinforced by the fact that all of the text that Schwitters includes is taken from his own graphic design work, making this image essentially self-referential - something we have already seen in *Ohne Titel [Mit frühem Porträt von Kurt Schwitters], 1937, and Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller], 1931.* In recontextualizing it within his montage he draws attention to the ways in which these two different spheres of his oeuvre overlap, and thus blurs the boundaries that are generally perceived to exist between visual art and the world of graphic design.

It is easy to imagine then, that through the process of *simultaneity* that McBride describes, the textual content of *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]* could lead the reader to make connections to a letterhead, or other official document. In addition, the form itself corresponds to that of *Orientierung* graphic design, reinforcing this link. Typically, in such a document or newspaper, blocks of smaller, more densely set text follow the titles and subtitles. Here, however, in *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, Schwitters replaces the areas designated for text in *Gesetze der Bild-Form* with images of rocks, water, and wood instead. I contend, therefore, that Schwitters' montage also obscures boundaries between text and image, by conflating text and image.

To conclude the first part of the chapter: by examining various examples of his collage arts, I have shown how Schwitters uses, what he terms rhythm, to bring together the *Einzeilteile* within his montages to form a *Gesamtheit.* Contrary to Schwitters' assertion that all elements of the montage are *entmaterialisiert* once placed within the new context, I argue that words play a

pivotal role for the viewer in meaning production. Furthermore, I contend, that through the inclusion of both image *and* text, rhythm allows Schwitters to work towards his goal in erasing the boundaries between the different art forms, since it brings *both* together in the connections that form the *Gesmatheit* of the image. In doing so, Schwitters causes us to rethink the relationship between the different media. Finally, I suggest that in addition to the boundaries between the art forms, Schwitters also blurs the lines between the fine and applied arts, as seen in the example of *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, in which we see Schwitters take the form of his *Orientierung* model for graphic design as the basis for his montage.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to a different form of collage art that Schwitters created - montaged postcards. Much more utilitarian in purpose than those we have just examined, I show that these postcards are clearly related to his fine art montages, in that Schwitters uses them to address many of the same themes.

Montage as Mail Art

In her dissertation "In the Middle of it All: Prague, Bruno, and the Avant-Garde Networks of Interwar Europe," Meghan Forbes draws attention to the integral role correspondence played in creating and developing ideas among members of the avant-garde. "Letters move ideas: between people, across borders," she writes, and shows that in the letters between Karel Teige, a leading figure in the Czech avant-garde and member of *Devětsil*, and Artuš Černik, also a member of *Devětsil*, both were concerned with their exchange leading to tangible results, such as journals and exhibitions.[54] Drawing on Elizabeth MacArthur's scholarship on the epistolary form within literature, Forbes claims that "the process of letter writing *is integral to the result*, and with the backward gaze of history, offers a uniquely unfiltered medium by which to observe the avant-

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54. Forbes, "In the Middle of it All: Prague, Bruno, and the Avant-Garde Networks of Interwar Europe," 58.

garde process.[55] The letter, then, becomes in and of itself a 'result,' and a legitimate source of literary interpretation."[56] I take this idea of the letter being a "result" in itself of artistic collaboration, and apply it to a letter exchange between Schwitters and Hannah Höch. Rather than approaching the letter as a source of *literary* interpretation, as MacArthur urges us to do - and Forbes does - I instead focus on the montage dialogue that emerges in the course of this letter exchange, and consider it a source for *visual* analysis.

Like for Teige and Černik, and many other figures of the avant-gardes, letters were for Schwitters a site of collaboration. Schwitters was well connected to the European avant-gardes and had substantial contact with his colleagues, both in Germany and further afield. In the introduction to a published selection of Schwitters' letters, Ernst Nündel writes "Seine Briefe zeigen, mit wie vielen und mit wie verschiedenen Zeitgenossen Schwitters in Verbindung gestanden hat. So wie andere Briefmarken, Trophäen oder Kunstwerke sammeln, so hat Schwitters Menschen gesammelt."[57] Out of these letters came many tangible results, some of which are the focus of this dissertation - exhibitions (as with Lázsló Moholy-Nagy and the "Die Neue Typografie" exhibition in Chapter Four), journals (as with Raoul Hausmann and their *PIN* project, mentioned in the Introduction), and ideas (as with Walter Borgius and their exchange on Schwitters' a writing reform in Chapter Three).[58] Just as Forbes shows with Teige and Černik, I contend that many of the letters Schwitters penned are also "results" themselves. Referring to Schwitters' published letters, Nündel argues, "es ist freilich ein in dieser Hinsicht vertracktes Material, weil Schwitters Briefe weniger Erklärungen seiner künstlerische Tätigkeit sind als vielmehr die Fortsetzung

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55. See Elizabeth Jane MacArthur, *Extravagant Narratives: Closure and Dynamics in the Epistolary Form* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

56. Forbes, "In the Middle of it All: Prague, Bruno, and the Avant-Garde Networks of Interwar Europe," 59.

57. Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 10.

58. It is, of course, important to note, that some of these "results" may not have come about entirely as a result of the correspondence itself. Liz Stanley reminds us that "correspondences also typically exist in parallel with, rather than being an extension or echo of, a face-to-face relationship." (Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/biography* 12, no. 3 (2004): 210.)

dieser Tätigkeit mit anderen Mitteln - mit den Mitteln der Korrespondenz: Briefe."[59] Nündel, too, considers Schwitters' letters as a form of theoretical "result" - a working through many of the theories and approaches has to the various disciplines he was creatively engaged in. I, on the other hand, view them as a tangible, creative "result" - mail art.

In his selection of letters, Nündel prioritizes texts in which Schwitters reflects on the theory of his artistic practice. The vast majority of Schwitters' letters, many of which have not been published, however, was much more perfunctory and informative in nature, rather than focused on an intense exchange of ideas. His letters to Katherine Drier, an American patron of the arts and co-founder of the *Société Anonyme* are, for example, filled with news of his progress on various projects, and complaints of just managing to scrape by on his pithy earnings as an artist. Similarly, his letters to friends and colleagues Walter Dexel and Theo van Doesburg often include logistical information, such as where to send materials for exhibition. As such most of his letters related to necessary communication for the artist's everyday life.

In her introduction to *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers*, Rebecca Earle writes that "There continues to be little agreement on precisely what a letter is."[60] Partly as a result of this amorphous understanding of the letter, she notes that "letters may merge imperceptibly into other forms of written expression," which is exactly what we see happening with some of Schwitters' letters and postcards. I show, however, that in Schwitters' case, these letters move beyond just a different form of written communication, towards a more holistic one that combines the

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59. Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 11.
60. Rebecca Earle, "Introduction: Letters, Writers and the Historian," in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (London: Routledge, 2016), 8.
David Barton and Nigel Hall also pick up in this in their introduction to *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, by stating that "Letter writing occurs in many forms, letters, postcards, memos, electronic mail, dialogue journals, fax, etc., and while most people have an intuitive idea of what counts as letter writing, it is in fact a particularly difficult text object to define; after all, almost anything can be put in the form of letter." (David Barton and Nigel Hall, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, vol. 9 (John Benjamins Publishing, 2000), 1.)

textual and the visual.[61] While his texts may be practical, short, and even mundane, Schwitters punctuates much of his correspondence with illustrations. Even more commonly, he includes items such as newspaper clippings, cut out photographs, scraps of paper - elements that appear as *Einzelteile* in his montages. In this way Schwitters renders much of his correspondence not just a textual exchange, but also a visual one, turning it into a form of montaged "mail art." Through this medium, text and image come together in such a way that it is in and of itself a creative form, and therefore a "result."

The term "mail art" is, of course, typically associated with a period long after the last letters in question here were sent, emerging in the mid-century from the *Fluxus* movement.[62] A 2013 exhibition at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, "ARTE POSTALE: Bilderbriefe, Künstlerpostkarten, Mail Art," however, presented a lineage of mail art that started with letters from poet Else Lasker-Schüler, and Expressionists, George Grosz and Max Pechstein, as well as other members of the avant-garde in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Schwitters was not represented in the exhibition. His epistolary oeuvre, however, very much falls in line with letters on display in the exhibition. In the introduction to the catalog, the exhibition curators described the corpus of work on display in the following way: "Breit ist das stilistische Spektrum der gemalten, gezeichneten oder collagierten Botschaften und der Schriftbilder; vielfältig sind die Intentionen und Inhalte. Ein gemeinsamer Nenner ist gewiss, dass es den Brief- und Kartenschreibern ein Bedürfnis war, eine persönlich an die Adressaten gerichtete Mitteilung nicht nur in Worte zu fassen, sondern visuell anschaulich zu machen."[63] Similarly, in relation to the Dada *Künstlerpostkarten*, Sabine Blumen-

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61. Earle, "Introduction: Letters, Writers and the Historian," 8.

62. With its beginnings in the 1950s, and becoming established and better known in the 1960s, *Fluxus* was a group of experimental, interdisciplinary, multi-generational artists that is often said to have Dada roots.
For more on the relationship between Dada and *Fluxus*, see Brill, *Shock and the Senseless in Dada and Fluxus*.

63. Rosa von der Schulenburg, Klaus Staeck, Wolfgang Trautwein, "Vorwort zum Katalog *ARTE POSTALE: Bilderbriefe, Künstlerpostkarten, Mail Art*," accessed November 7 2016, http://www.adk.de/de/projekte/2013/artepostale/Arte_Postale_Vorwort_Katalog.htm

röder writes, "Indem Künstlerpostkarten zunehmend zur Illustration herangezogen werden, wird stillschweigend anerkannt, daß ihre Verbindung von Korrespondenz und künstlerische Gestaltung so eng ist, daß hier von einer Fortsetzung der künstlerischen Tätigkeit mit anderen Mitteln gesprochen werden kann."[64] In the examples of postcards that I use in the remainder of this chapter, I show the curators' and Blumenröder's assertions to be true also for Schwitters' montaged correspondence, in which it is not just words that are exchanged, but also a visual conversation.

While Schwitters sent montaged letters and postcards to a large number of his correspondents, they appear with most frequency, however, in correspondence with two of his closest colleagues, collaborators, and friends - Berlin Dada artist, Hannah Höch and fellow Hanoverian writer, publicist, critic, and editor, Christoph Spengemann. Throughout his exchange with both of these colleagues (and others with whom he corresponds) the form of the montaged correspondence varies, but in each case, there is an important visual aspect to the letter or postcard.

Schwitters to Spengemann: The Dimensions of Montage

On August 17 1920, Schwitters penned a note to Christoph Spengemann. The short handwritten text spans both sides of the postcard and concerns practical details about an exhibition, as well as a possible meeting between Schwitters and Spengemann. It reads as follows:

> Lieber Christof.
>
> Eben fällt mir ein, daß Herr Dr. Stadelmann, Dresden A, Nürnbergerstr. 55 gewillt ist, über die Ausstellung Schlemmer, Baumeister und Kuwitter, event. auch die Lennenstraßenausstellung für den Zweemann kurz zu berichten.[65] Willst

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64. Sabine Blumenröder, ""DADA ruht nie - DADA vermehrt sich:" Die Künstlerpostkarten der Dadisten," in *Die Künstlerpostkarte: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Bärbel Hedinger and Sabine Blumenröder (Munich: Prestel, 1992), 24-25.

65. Kuwitter was one of the many nicknames Schwitters gave himself.
Together with Hans Schiebelhuth, Spengemann was an editor of the journal *Der Zweeman: Monatsblätter für Dichtung und Kunst*

Du vielleicht Nachricht geben, *ob*, wann und wie lang. Vielleicht komme ich Sonnabend nach Hannover. Würde ich Dich abends antreffen? Ich telefoniere, wenn ich komme. Gruß an Luise.

Mit den besten Grüßen auch von Helma und Mari.

Dein *Kurt*.[66]

The textual content is in itself rather banal, other than the fact it shows yet another instance of Schwitters' proactivity in connecting people and promoting his exhibitions and work. The picture side of the postcard, on the other hand, deserves more attention. On it, we see an image which has been collaged, or *MERZ-ed*, as Schwitters would have it (see Figure II.10).

In her theory of letters and correspondences, Liz Stanley reminds us that "letter writing is located *in* actual things: letters written will include messages passed on by third parties; they are written at a desk or a table in a room [...] Letters are also, perhaps not prototypically, about actual things as well."[67] As we can see with Schwitters, both are true, and often very visible to the reader (both intended, and unintended). While the content is *about* things - in the case of the letter to Spengemann, an exhibition, an article, and a meeting - it is located *in* things in that it is sent on a montaged postcard. Now, let us turn to the montage itself.

This picture side of the postcard, in fact, bears two images by Schwitters. The first is a photograph of one of Schwitters' *Merzplastik* sculptures - *Der Lustgalgen*. Schwitters had a series of postcards made of his own work, ranging from collages, such as a traditional still life from 1909, "Stillleben mit Abendmahlskelch," the 1919 montage *Das Unbild*, a *Merzbild* assemblage, *Das Kreisen*, and a photographic portrait, among others. These postcards were presumably used by Schwitters to advertise his work, and they appear with frequency in his surviving letters.[68]

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66. Kurt Schwitters to Christoph Spengemann, August 17 1920, in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 30.

67. Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," 212.

68. Schwitters was not alone in this practice. From correspondence between Höch and Schwitters, for example, we know that Höch also had postcards made of her work.

Figure II.10: Kurt Schwitters to Christoph Spengemann, August 17 1920.
Image used with permission from the Stadtbibliothek Hannover, Schwitters-Archiv.

Secondly, there is the montage that Schwitters creates by adding new *Einzelteile* to it.

The photographic image on this particular postcard to Spengemann is of *Der Lustgalgen* - a *Merzplastik* sculpture commissioned by the Berlin gallery *Der Sturm* and completed by Schwitters around 1919. By bringing together incongruous objects and materials - wood, metal, cables, cardboard, and scraps of paper - Schwitters mirrors in three-dimensional sculpture, the techniques he employs in his two-dimensional montages and collages.[69] Brigitte Franzen attributes Schwitters' move into these *Merzplastik* models in 1919 to his two semesters of architectural study.[70] As *Der Lustgalgen* shows, Schwitters' sculptures were often very "architectural" in nature, more resemblant of architectural structures than human or other forms. However, the timing of his move into three-dimensional art also coincides with his first experimentation of montage and collage, and there are a lot of similarities between the way Schwitters approaches both of these practices. Indeed, I suggest that by taking a photograph of this collaged sculpture, Schwitters *flattens Der Lustgalgen* into a two-dimensional image, in a move that equates the two practices.

In his own writing, Schwitters also draws a direct line between his creative work in two and three dimensions. He writes in 1920:

> Solange ich male, modelliere ich auch. Jetzt mache ich Merzplastiken: Lustgalgen und Kultpumpe. Die Merzplastiken sind wie die Merzbilder aus verschiedenen Materialien zusammengesetzt. Sie sind als Rundplastik gedacht und haben beliebig viele Ansichten.[71]

In the first sentence, here, Schwitters connects his practice of painting - something that for Schwitters includes the practice of montage - and his *Merzplastik* sculptures. While these two modes are connected, the different media, however, lend themselves to different creative op-

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69. It should be noted that much of Schwitters montages are not strictly two-dimensional, but in contrast to his *Merzplastik* sculptures, which can be viewed from different angles, are generally designed to be viewed as two-dimensional images.

70. Franzen, "Die Großstadt - ein gewaltiges Merzkunstwerk?," 124.

71. Schwitters, "Merz," 79.

portunities and viewing perspectives - an aspect that Schwitters draws attention to, when he describes his sculptures as *Rundplastik.* John Elderfield contends that this has implications for their relation to the context out of which the *Einzelteile* of the sculptures were pulled. He writes, "Once transferred from a two- to a three-dimensional space, the materials Schwitters used were inevitably far more difficult to form. [...] In consequence, the materials of the sculpture keep their individuality, their *Eigengift* far more."[72] Elizabeth Gamard has also noted the connection between Schwitters' montage practice and his sculptures. Contrary to what I have argued earlier in this chapter (in particular with respect to *Ohne Title[Kurt Schwitters, Schriftsteller]*), Gamard claims that the latter "differ somewhat from the *Merzbilder* since the discrete components and materials almost always retain their original identity," continuing that "Though it is true that the *Entformung* is overshadowed by the *Formung* of the [sculptures], the individual pieces do not lose their identity as much as they do in the collages."[73]

If we accept Elderfield and Gamard's line of argument, that the sculptures possess more of the individuality of each of the *Einzelteile*, then the act of turning *Der Lustgalgen* into a photograph seems to consolidate it as a whole - it is no longer only viewed as a collection of individual parts. Once a photo, it becomes an entity in its own right - an idea that is only further accentuated, when it becomes just one *Einzelteil* in the *Gesamtheit* of the collaged postcard. Furthermore, the remaining *Eigengift* of the *Einzelteile* in *Der Lustgalgen* is completely lost in the photograph, in that it is no longer made out of wood, metal, paper, but is, instead, a two-dimensional photographic reproduction, printed on paper. What we are left with, are the formal elements of the sculpture - the lines it creates, the colors and shades it produces - all seen from one static perspective, of course, and therefore also losing its *Rundplastik* qualities.

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72. John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters* (London: Thames / Hudson, 1985), 113.
73. Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, 66.
ibid., 67.

Writing on Schwitters' re-appropriation of his material for new works, Dorothea Dietrich asserts, "Using his own earlier work as the basis of [collages], Schwitters ultimately declares himself the maker and transformer of images."[74] And indeed *Der Lustgalgen* has been transformed by collaging on this postcard. In this way, Schwitters' art work is an evolving practice of creating and transformation. Similarly, Gamard notes that, "Much as the sowing of seeds in the wind, these postcard *Merzbilder* entertain a new context for creative play, where the artist's action signifies the fact that, at all stages and in all forms, the work of art constitutes a form of life, a condition that sets in motion processes attendant to regeneration."[75] I argue that it is this creative vitality that Schwitters harnesses in the visual conversation that emerges from his montaged correspondence. For in addition to communicating with the recipient, Schwitters also enters into dialogue with himself through the transformation of his own work. As a result, his work can be seen to be self-referential.

Let us now consider this new context that the 1920 postcard to Christoph Spengemann offers. Taking *Der Lustgalgen* as a backdrop, Schwitters glues on neatly cutout pieces of paper with text on them. Much like *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, this collage features complete numbers, words and phrases that can be read in their entirety: *Englisch*; *Zweikampf*; *Nur 1 Tag*; *Anna Blume*; *mit gut gewähltem Schülerprogramm*; *4,00*. The openendedness of montage, however, doesn't give the reader any indication of if, and how the words are connected, or where to start, therefore allowing for - even encouraging - any number of possible readings.

I suggest that in this collage, the elements Schwitters adds to the postcard mirror the *Merz-plastik Der Lustgalgen* in both form and content. If we consider the form, for example, we see that the textual clippings are clustered in the top right hand corner of the postcard - the emptiest

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74. Dorothea Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters: Tradition and Innovation* (Newcastle: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 152.

75. Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, 68.

space within the image. Forming an L-shape, of sorts, these pieced-together words mimic the L-shape created by the sculpture in the bottom left hand corner of the postcard. Similarly, the triangle that we see supporting the vertical post of *Der Lustgalgen* is replicated in the formation of *Englisch* and *Zweikampf*, and the number *20* in the inner apex of the sculpture is reflected in the *4,00* that sits in the inner apex created by the collaged pieces.

Echoes, too, of the themes that the sculpture draws attention to are also found in the words that Schwitters includes. The immediacy and finality, for example, expressed in *Nur 1 Tag!* is not far removed from that which the *Galgen*, or gallows, represent. In the same way, the inclusion of *Zweikampf*, or dual, adds both to the notion of death present in the title of the sculpture, but could also perhaps be read as pointing to the tension between text and image, or sculpture and painting. There is, of course, a reference to Schwitters' literary work by means of *Anna Blume* - a character that Schwitters carries across both genres and media of his creative work.[76] In this context, however, it could be read as a reference to the professional working relationship between Spengemann as art critic, and Schwitters as artist and the subject of his criticism. For in 1920 the former published a short booklet entitled *Die Wahrheit über Anna Blume: Kritik der Kunst, Kritik der Kritik, Kritik der Zeit.*[77]

By montaging his own work, Schwitters equates sculpture and painting, while also trans-

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76. *Anna Blume* is the title of a poem written in 1919 by Schwitters.
For a small sampling of Schwitters' inclusion of Anna Blume across a range of media, see for example Schwitters' watercolor, *Anna Blume und ich*, 1919; his stamp drawing, *Ohne Titel [Anna Blume hat ein Vogel]*, 1919; *Ohne Titel [Anna Blume]*, 1919; another postcard, *Ohne Titel [Collagierte Porträtspostkarte Kurt Schwitters an Oskar Schlemmer]*, 1922; his Guestbook for an exhibition, *Ohne Titel [Collagierter Einband vom Gästebuch für die Merzausstellung]*, 1922; an entry in Käte Steinitz's guestbook, *Ohne Titel [Ueberall zu haben. Noch ist es nicht zu spät, aus: Gästebuch der Familie Käte Steinitz, Blatt 28 recto]*; and a *Merzzeichnung, für Glasermerz*, 1921.

77. In this text, Spengemann reports very favorably on Schwitters work, calling it "Dokumente unserer Zeit," (Christof Spengemann, *Die Wahrheit über Anna Blume* (Hanover: Der Zweemann, 1920), 18.) and drawing comparisons between it and Dadaism. Spengemann's provocative statements include the proclamtion:
"Merz ist eine Arznei, die heilen und zugleich kräftigen kann," and "Schwitters ist nicht Dadaist.
Mögen seine Arbeiten "dadaistisch" anmuten, so sind sie es doch nicht.
Es gibt überhaupt keine dadaistische Arbeit.
Wie ich gezeigt habe, ist Dadaismus eine Taktik, kein Kunstschaffen." (ibid., 11.)

forming, developing, and pushing the boundaries of both media. In doing so, I contend that Schwitters uses these collaged postcards to blur the boundaries between these two media in a way that is similar to his blurring of the boundaries between literature and visual art in *Ohne Titel [Kurt Schwitters Schriftsteller]*, and fine art and graphic design in *Ohne Titel [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*. Furthermore, with these postcards Schwitters also crosses the perceived divide between art and life. Matthew Witovsky writes in the introduction to *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life* that "The slogan 'art into life' is principally associated with the Soviet Union, a revolutionary state in which the artist became an engineer, the easel picture dissolved into an agitational film, and the erection of sculptures or monuments was superseded by the construction of habitable buildings."[78] He continues that while items displayed in an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago on this theme included, what he calls "minor items," such as a calendar and advertisements, they all "shared space in the everyday realm of the urban street, with its billboards, kiosks, theater marquees, and merchandise displays."[79] With these collaged postcards, Schwitters does not engage in art in everyday life for the masses, but does so on an a much more intimate level. In contrast to his design work, these cards do not share the space of the urban street, but are instead intended for the private space of the house, to which they are sent, to be read by one individual - in this case, a colleague, who is also an artist.

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78. Matthew S. Witkovsky and Jared Ash, *Avant-Garde Art in Everyday Life: Early Twentieth-Century European Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 15.
79. Ibid., 16.

The Schwitters-Höch exchange:

"Mitteilungen und Kunstwerke in einem"

One of the most complete collections we have of Schwitters' montaged correspondence is held

at the Berlinische Galerie in Hannah Höch's archive. Referring to the Schwitters folder within it

as a "Wundertüte voller Mini-Kunstwerke," Eberhard Roters comments:[80]

> Den Kern des Schwitters-Konvoluts bildet die Korrespondenz, bestehend vor allem
> aus einer Folge von Merz-Bildpostkarten mit Schwitters-Motiven, die von frühen
> Gemälden wie etwa dem *Stilleben mit Abendmahlskelch* von 1909 bis zu *Franz
> Mülers Drahtfrühling*, dem verschollenen Ur-*Merzbild* von 1919 oder zu dem *Merz-
> bild Konstruktion für edle Frauen* von 1919 reichen - Karten, die, von Schwitters
> meist beidseitig über beschreiben und zuweilen, teils unter Verwendung der Brief-
> marken, vermerzt, ihren Wert nicht nur in der nachrichtlichen und sprachlichen,
> sondern auch in der künstlerischen Originalität haben; es sind Mitteilungen und
> Kunstwerke in einem.[81]

Roters therefore highlights the visual aspect of these postcards as one worthy of research, yet to

do date, no scholar has heeded Roters' call.

The two artists first met in Berlin in 1918 and grew quickly to be not just colleagues, but also

good friends. Peter Krieger paints an intimate picture of their friendship. He writes,

> Daß beider Welt- und Kunstauffassung mit ihrer Offenheit, Experimentierlust,
> ihrem Hang zu dekuvrierendem Witz und einem universalen Humor sich so sehr
> entsprachen, daß für sie - im Gegensatz zu den meisten Berliner Dadaisten - die
> reine Kunst allein Maßstab war, bildete die Basis für eine rasch aufblühende Fre-
> undschaft, in die auch Schwitters Frau Helma einbezogen wurde.[82]

They often made the journey between Hannover and Berlin to visit one another, and planned

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80. Eberhard Roters, in *Hannah Höch: Eine Lebenscollage 1921-1945*, ed. Hannah Höch et al., vol. 2 (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1995), 116.

81. Ibid., 118.

82. Peter Krieger, "Freundschaft mit der Avantgarde: Schwitters - Arp - van Doesburg - Moholy-Nagy," in *Hannah Höch: Ihr Werk, Ihr Leben, Ihre Freunde*, ed. Berlinische Galerie e.V. (Berlin: Aragon Verlag, 1989), 27.

many trips to Rügen together. In September 1921, together with Raoul Hausmann, and Schwitters' wife Helma, they traveled to Prague where they held an Anti-Dada-Merz evening.[83]

Starting in September 1921 with a postcard Schwitters *gave* rather than *sent* to Höch (see Figure II.11), that is thought to have been given as a memento of their Anti-Dada-Merz tour in Prague, the two artists kept in regular contact throughout the 1920s.[84] The collaged correspondence often takes the form of short postcards that mostly feature reproductions of Schwitters' own work and lasts until at least 1931. These postcards ranged from Schwitters' pencil drawings, still life paintings, portraits, to his montages and assemblages, but his communication with her also includes postcards of Höch's work, as well as letters penned or typed on different letterheads of Schwitters' own design. As with much of the correspondence to Christoph Spengemann, the textual content on these postcards to Höch is perfunctory and mostly concerns the organization of trips to Berlin and Hanover, holidays on Rügen and the practical details of exhibitions, as well as Schwitters' work.

The ways in which Schwitters adapts the picture side of the postcards is varied: sometimes they are collaged with newspaper clippings, with cutout images, with scraps of paper, or with stamps pasted on top of the original images. On a postcard dated February 22, 1924 (see Figure II.12), Schwitters takes a postcard of a still life he painted in 1909 and attaches an abstract, constructivist style collage to the bottom lefthand corner of the image. In doing so, I contend, that much like that in the postcard to Spengemann, that equates sculpture and painting/montage,

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83. For an entertaining account of the Anti-Dada-Merz tour, and other journeys Schwitters and Höch undertook together, see Jed Rasula, *Destruction Was My Beatrice: Dada and the Unmaking of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 103-105.

For more on Schwitters relationship to Prague, see František Šmejkal and Marta Filipová, "Kurt Schwitters and Prague," *Art In Translation* 3, no. 1 (2011): 53–68.

84. The postcard bears neither a stamp, nor a postmark.

The inscription, *Cišléwènskǎ*, on the postcard likely refers to the Prague trip, and the postcard itself is the first known piece of correspondence between Schwitters and Höch. See Schwitters, *Catalogue Raisonné: Kurt Schwitters: 1905-1922*, 428.
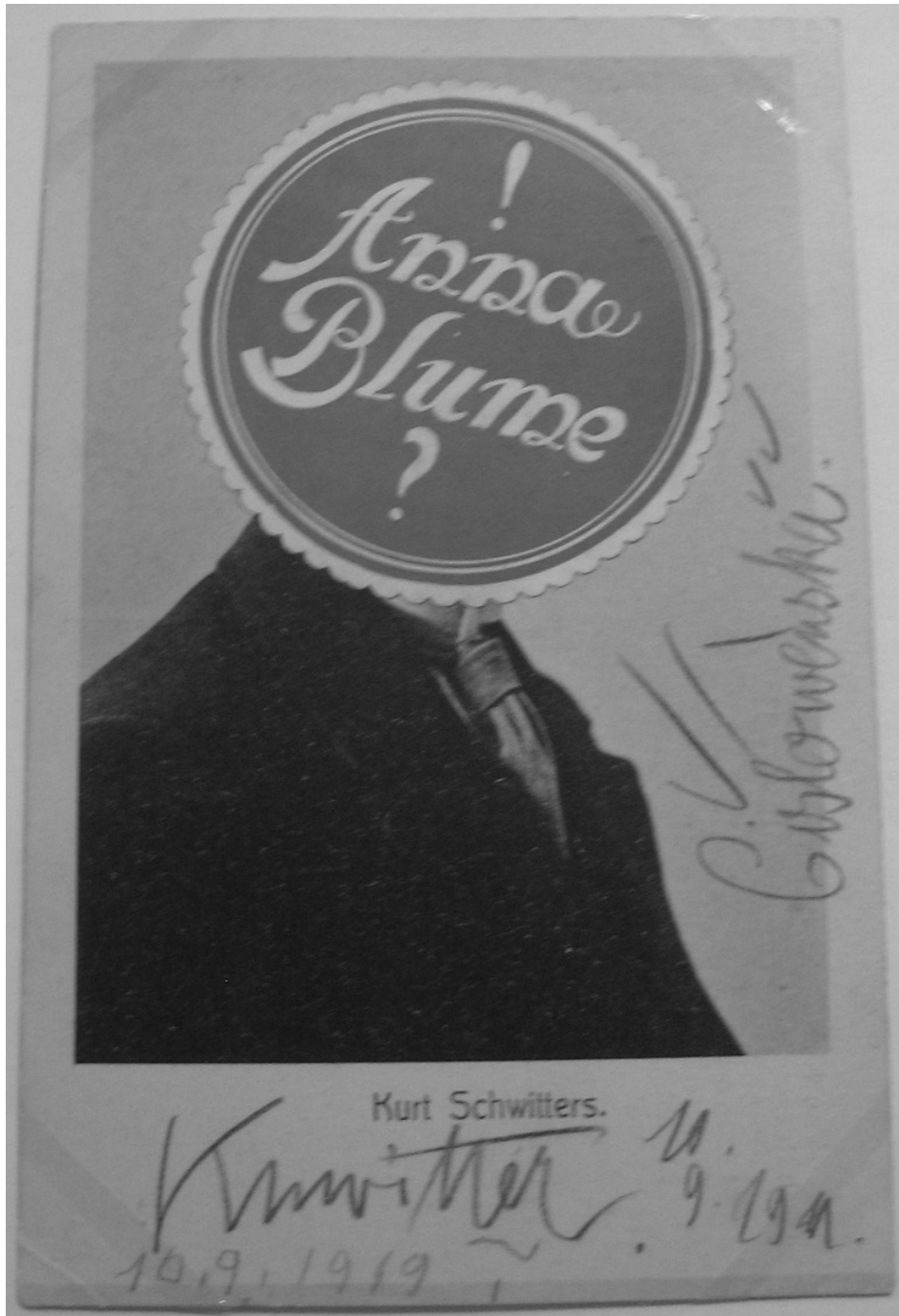
Figure II.11: Kurt Schwitters to Hannah Höch, September 10, 1921.
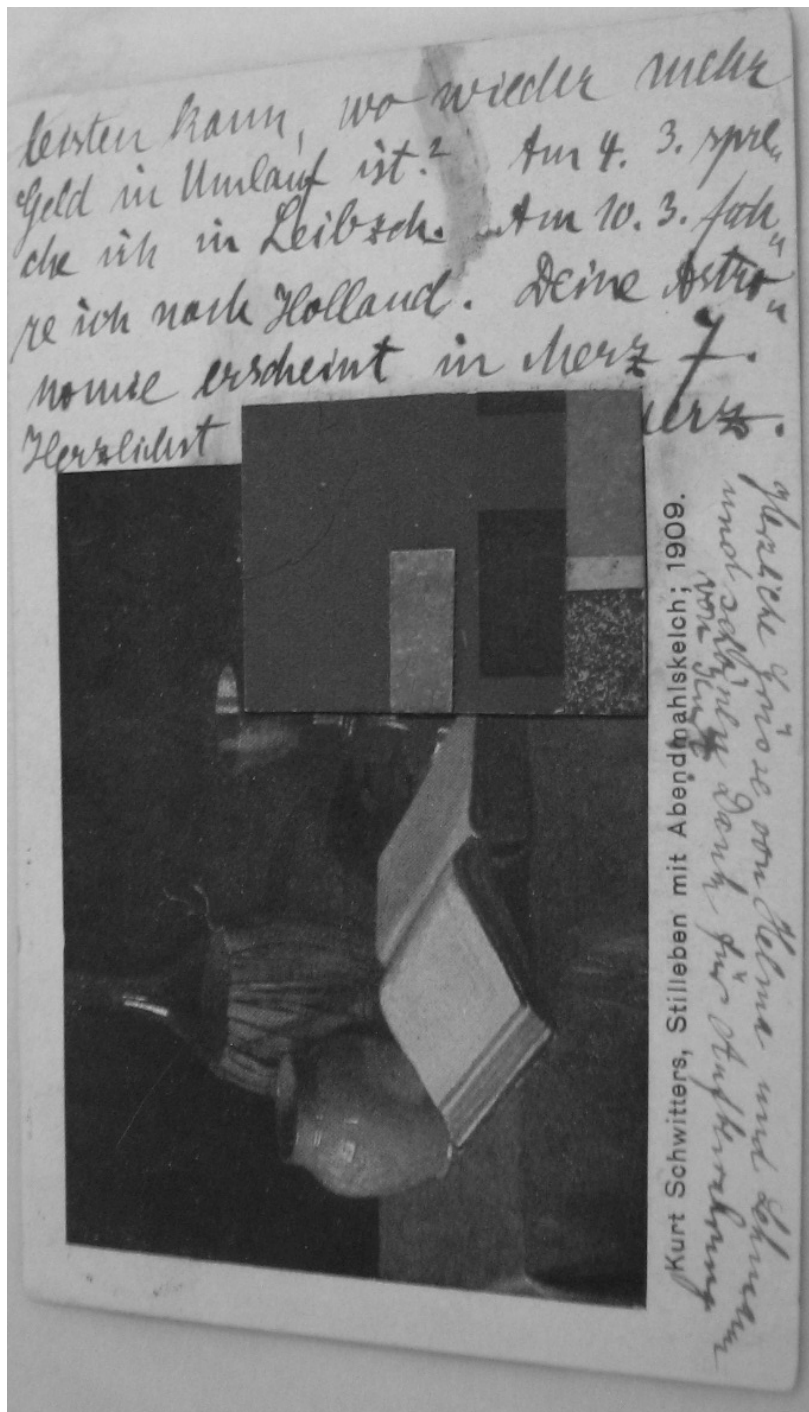
Figure II.12: Kurt Schwitters to Hannah Höch, February 22, 1924.

this postcard to Höch equates the still life painting with abstraction. By bringing these two forms of expression together, Schwitters highlights the arbitrariness of their differentiation in an effort to erase these boundaries.

In considering the function of these postcards, I would like to return, for a moment, to Roters' comments. As my reading of several of Schwitters' postcards in this chapter shows, I certainly agree with him, that they should be considered *Kunstwerke* in their own right. Indeed, I show that in breaking down the barriers between different media and art forms, they do much the same work as the fine art montages I examined the first part of this chapter. However, when Roters claims that they are "Mitteilungen und Kunstwerke in einem" I contend that the *Mitteilung* of the postcards ought not to be limited to a textual *Mitteilung*, as Roters implies, and suggest that in addition there is also a visual aspect to *Mitteilung*. I claim that the conversation that takes place is communicated as much on a visual level as it as on a textual one. To be sure, there are many ways this visual conversation could be read. In the remainder of this chapter I would like to explore one such way by stepping back and reading three of Schwitters' montaged postcards together, as though part of a series - or a visual conversation that plays out over time.

The Schwitters-Höch Exchange: A Visual Conversation

There are different series that can be identified within Schwitters' exchange with Höch. Perhaps most obviously, we can approach it as a temporal series that takes the postcards in chronological order. There is however, a second way in which we can consider this correspondence a series. Using picture postcards he had made of his work, Schwitters often employed the same image again and again as the backdrop for these montages, rendering them motifs upon which he plays an artistic game of theme and variation. As such, these postcards can be seen as a visual series

that highlights similarities and differences in the images he creates.

In the remainder of this chapter I follow one such series that takes for its foundation a photographic portrait of Schwitters that was produced as a postcard in 1920 as publicity for his Merz-Lithographienmappe, *Die Kathedrale*. This image appears repeatedly in Schwitters' surviving correspondence and is *Merz-ed* in different ways in each occurrence.[85] In the first instance, Schwitters covers his face with a round "Anna Blume" sticker (see Figure II.11).[86] In another postcard, sent two years later on December 8, 1923, Schwitters places a diamond-shaped piece of scrap paper over his face. And finally, on a postcard sent from Helma Schwitters to Raoul Hausmann (but held in Höch's *Nachlass*), Schwitters' face is covered by four newspaper cuttings, that together read, "Nicht nur / gegen bar / sondern auch / Musikalisch-deklamatorische Darbietungen unter / Mitwirkung erster hiesiger Bühnenkünstler," with the words "Ich bin rasiert" assuming the shape of Schwitters' neck directly beneath. Together, these three postcards form just one example of many recurrent images that Schwitters uses as the basis of his collaged mail, yet they highlight one of the key elements of the visual conversation that I contend takes place in his mail art - the presentation and enactment of the almost limitless possibilities for new connections and networks that montage offers.

Roters claims that in the first two examples - that of the Anna Blume sticker and the diamond-shaped piece of paper covering Schwitters' face, "Das Alltagsgesicht ist damit versteckt, dafür aber das wahre Gesicht des Künstlers hervorgekehrt, nämlich das poetische."[87] In this way, these three postcards become a conversation centered on the self-expression of Schwitters' identity, with each image revealing a different aspect of the artist's character. As Reinhard Döhl has

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85. It is not just in his exchange with Hannah Höch that this image appears as the basis of collaged postcards, but also with Raoul Hausmann, Walter Dexel, Theo van Doesburg, and Oskar Schlemmer.

86. Anna Blume is a character of Schwitters own invention, who first appeared in a poem *An Anna Blume*, written in 1919, but who was incorporated into much of Schwitters' creative work across media.

87. Roters, 113.

already argued, throughout his career, Schwitters identified strongly with the persona of Anna Blume.[88] This can be attested to by the first postcard I examine here, in which Schwitters' face is replaced with the words, or rather, name of Anna Blume, thereby conflating the artist and his fictional character.

In his article "Kurt Schwitters: An Anna Blume oder von der Muse des Experiments" Döhl successfully argues that while the character of Anna Blume is better known as a literary character - and therefore more commonly associated with text - it is often assumed that it was in this medium that she first appeared. Döhl goes on to show, however, that it was in fact as an image, shortly before the release of the poetry collection, that Anna Blume was originally created.[89] Right from the beginning, then, there has been a fluidity of representation of Anna Blume as both text and image - a characteristic that continued throughout Schwitters' work. In his collages, for example, Anna Blume is *not* referenced pictorially, but rather textually, through the inclusion of her name. By using text to describe the character he had first envisaged visually, and subsequently placing her name in the context of an image, Anna Blume can be seen to represent a tension between text and image.[90] In the particular example of this collaged postcard, however, Schwitters goes one step further, for the text *Anna Blume* becomes once again an image, assuming the shape of the artist's face.

The second postcard in this series, in which Schwitters' face is replaced with a diamond-shaped piece of paper, can be read in multiple ways; I suggest that the most obvious of which is

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88. In fact, Döhl also shows that Franz Müller - another of Schwitters' fictional character - together with Anna Blume can be triangulated with Schwitters. See Reinhard Döhl, "Kurt Schwitters: An Anna Blume oder von der Muse des Experiments," 1988, accessed July 6, 2017, http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/schwitters2.htm.

89. Ibid.

90. Döhl also goes on to highlight the way in which Schwitters used the character as a kind of advertising, and notes that in addition to physical posters placed in Hanover, the stickers were part of this advertising campaign. (ibid.) The idea that Anna Blume was synonymous with advertising only further strengthens the tension between and image in her character, since it is a discipline that brings together the two media, often blurring the distinctions between them.

with the scrap of paper as representative of the practice of montage. In fusing his face with one of the *Einzelteile* of montage, I read this as symbolic of the ways in which Schwitters injects the personal into his montages - both as the *Gestalter* of his montages, but also in self-referentially incorporating *Einzelteile* that are particular to Schwitters. For example, Schwitters does not just use found objects, but also reuses tickets from his *own* journeys, thus reconstructing almost autobiographical accounts of his travels and everyday life in his montages.[91] Similarly, as we have seen with *Ohne Title [Portopflichtige Dienstsache]*, Schwitters brings his own work from other disciplines into his montages. In this way, the image on this postcard could also be read as highlighting the parallels between his life and identity with montage. Here, I argue that we see Schwitters operating as a *Merzgesamtkünstler* - as an artist who aims for the *Merzgesamtkunstwerk* by bringing together different artistic media into his work, as well as conflating art and life.

The words and phrases that replace Schwitters' face in the last example make this montage arguably more accessible, and at the same time, perhaps more open to interpretation. There are two aspects that make this montage uncharacteristic of Schwitters' work. Firstly, the *Einzelteile* are comprised primarily of words, and secondly, they can be read together in a way that makes some semblance of sense. "Nicht nur / gegen bar / sondern auch / Musikalisch-deklamatorische Darbietungen unter / Mitwirkung erster hiesiger Bühnenkünstler." Within this montaged sentence we see a focus on the importance of art - not for the sake of money, indicated by "Nicht nur gegen bar," but, as we see from what follows, for the sake of art. In this postcard, Schwitters brings together notions of rhetoric, music, drama, and performance through the medium of montage. By representing these various art forms within an *image*, I argue that Schwitters high-

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91. see for example *Ohne Titel [Hannover und Hildesheim]*, 1928 that incorporates a weekly transportation ticket between Hanover and Hildesheim, or *Merzzeichnung Bloomfield [ehemals: Ohne Titel [Tivoli-Variété Hannover]]*, 1923, that uses an envelope bearing Schwitters name and address as the basis for the collage.

lights their interconnectedness in a way that problematizes any perceived boundaries between them. Instead, Schwitters presents the viewer with a visual example of his *Merzgesamtkunstwerk*, in which he claims all art forms are brought together into an artistic unity.[92] Furthermore, he draws attention to their value by equating to them a form of currency. The jarring juxtaposition of the commentary on the arts with "Ich bin rasiert" brings the reader back to the idea of montage, whereby words and phrases are taken out of their original context to form novel relations within a new one. Furthermore, just as in the first example, here we also see an image -Schwitters' neck - being replaced with text, in a move that equates these two media.

Conclusion

Different to the postcard sent to Christoph Spengemann, this series of postcards to Höch uses a portrait of Schwitters as the basis of the montage. In doing so, I suggest that, firstly, Schwitters becomes the embodiment of montage, which in his work, as we have seen, represents a blurring of boundaries between different media and forms of art. His identify as an artist can therefore be equated with the challenging of these boundaries. Secondly, I contend that using his portrait accentuates the self-referentiality we see at play across the spectrum of his montage work. In every montage we have examined in this chapter Schwitters has been present - either by means of his photograph, the inclusion of his name, or reference to his own work. While Schwitters uses a compositional approach, he always finds a way to include himself. In each of these three postcards, however, Schwitters does not just incorporate his own *work* into the montage, as with the reference to Anna Blume, for example, but rather places *himself* as central.

As the above examples show, the montages on each individual postcard of this series can

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92. Schwitters writes, "Mein Ziel ist das Merzgesamtkunstwerk, das alle Kunstarten zusammenfaßt zur künstlerischen Einheit."Schwitters, "Merz," 79.

be read in a number of different ways. However, I suggest that in the same way in which we approach correspondence as an exchange that takes place across a period of time (rather than the moments of time represented by each individual letter, postcard, or note), we can also approach the visual element of Schwitters' correspondence to Höch in the same manner. Doing so enables us to explore aspects of the *visual conversation* that takes place. I contend that, viewed together, this exchange highlights the limitless possibilities for referential combinations and connections that the medium of montage and collage offers, that we have already seen in Schwitters' fine art montages. By using the same background for each of these postcard montages, we see just three examples of the ways in which Schwitters *could* have configured these images, and three examples of the virtually limitless number of connections Schwitters *could* have drawn, using his portrait as the basis.

These three postcards are not the only example of Schwitters' correspondence that can be read in this way. As we have seen with his postcard to Christoph Spengemann, Schwitters regularly used reproductions of his own work in his montaged correspondence and repeatedly used the same postcard as the basis. In the introduction to the catalog of the "ARTE POSTALE: Bilderbriefe, Künstlerpostkarten, Mail Art" exhibition, the editors write, "Mail Art ist keine museale Kunst per Post, sondern eine ästhetische Kommunikationsform."[93] I suggest that we can insert Schwitters into the lineage of Mail Art - not simply because of the incorporation of images into his correspondence, but precisely because he utilizes the medium as an "ästhetische Kommunikationsform," in which we see visual communication take place. Furthermore, this visual communication can be approached either on a postcard by postcard basis, or viewed as a series, from which a visual conversation emerges.

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93. Rosa von der Schulenburg, Klaus Staeck, Wolfgang Trautwein "Vorwort zum Katalog *ARTE POSTALE: Bilderbriefe, Künstlerpostkarten, Mail Art*," accessed November 7 2016, http://www.adk.de/de/projekte/2013/artepostale/Arte_Postale_Vorwort_Katalog.htm

Figure II.13: Kurt Schwitters, *Ohne Titel [Mitteilung, collagierte Bildpostkarte 'Der Lustgalgen']*, 1923/1926.

Perhaps the most emblematic of Schwitters' postcards as an "ästhetische Kommunikations-form," is a collaged postcard that he never sent (see Figure II.13). *Der Lustgalgen*, which forms the backdrop of the postcard is barely visible, with the various images that Schwitters superimposes - part of a portrait of the biologist, August Weissmann; scrap paper cut into a rectangle, semi-circle, and triangle; a photograph that shows a man's hand; a newspaper cutting; a piece of paper with handwritten numbers on it that appears like a cheat sheet. Seizing the focal point of the image is one word that demands the reader's attention - *Mitteilung*. Here, Schwitters places the word *Mitteilung*, not on the side of the postcard, typically reserved for text, but right in the middle of the montaged image.

From the inclusion and positioning of the word *Mitteilung* we can, I argue, deduce two things. Firstly, I contend that Schwitters develops a commentary on communication, underscoring the fact that it is a visual process, as much as it is a textual or verbal one, and therefore also takes place on the image side of the postcard. Secondly, I suggest that in this example, and as we have seen in the montages *throughout* the chapter, Schwitters moves beyond W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of the *Imagetext* by equating the text and image. Furthermore, in doing so, time jumps over the "rupture" that Mitchell outlines in his idea of the *Image/Text*. As a result, I argue that Schwitters' montages challenge and complicate our understanding of the relationship between text and image to date.

Chapter III

New Typography and Schwitters' *Systemschrift*

As we have seen in Chapter Two, text - both words and individual letters - was central to Schwitters' visual art. In this chapter I consider the form these words and letters take - typography - and study a new type of script designed by Schwitters in 1927, which he calls the *Systemschrift*. The *Systemschrift* is the main focus of this chapter, in which I first of all discuss Schwitters' designs for a new script within the context of the historical move from Fraktur to sans-serif typefaces. Secondly, I consider a broader move to a mechanization of script, as well as experimental scripts by other avant-garde artists and New Typographers. I then examine Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, by reading it against his own theoretical writing on the subject. By drawing out the similarities and tensions between the *Systemschrift* and other experimental scripts, I contend that Schwitters' theory and designs are more radical than those of other New Typographers. Finally, I consider the legacy of the *Systemschrift*.

Throughout Schwitters' oeuvre, we see various elements of typography playing important roles, in his literary, visual art, and graphic design work. Indeed, typographical experimentation was one of the hallmarks of his journal, *Merz*, in which Schwitters plays with the size, position and orientation of the text.[1] We also see different types of experimentation in his visual poetry, *Gesetztes Bildgedicht*, a poem comprised of a square with one A, two Bs, four Js, five Os, and one Z, some of which are bold, positioned in a grid-like fashion, from which no word can be read. As a result, the reader's attention is focused on the individual letters and their form. Schwitters'

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1. See Kurt Schwitters, "Merz 1: Holland," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 124–132.
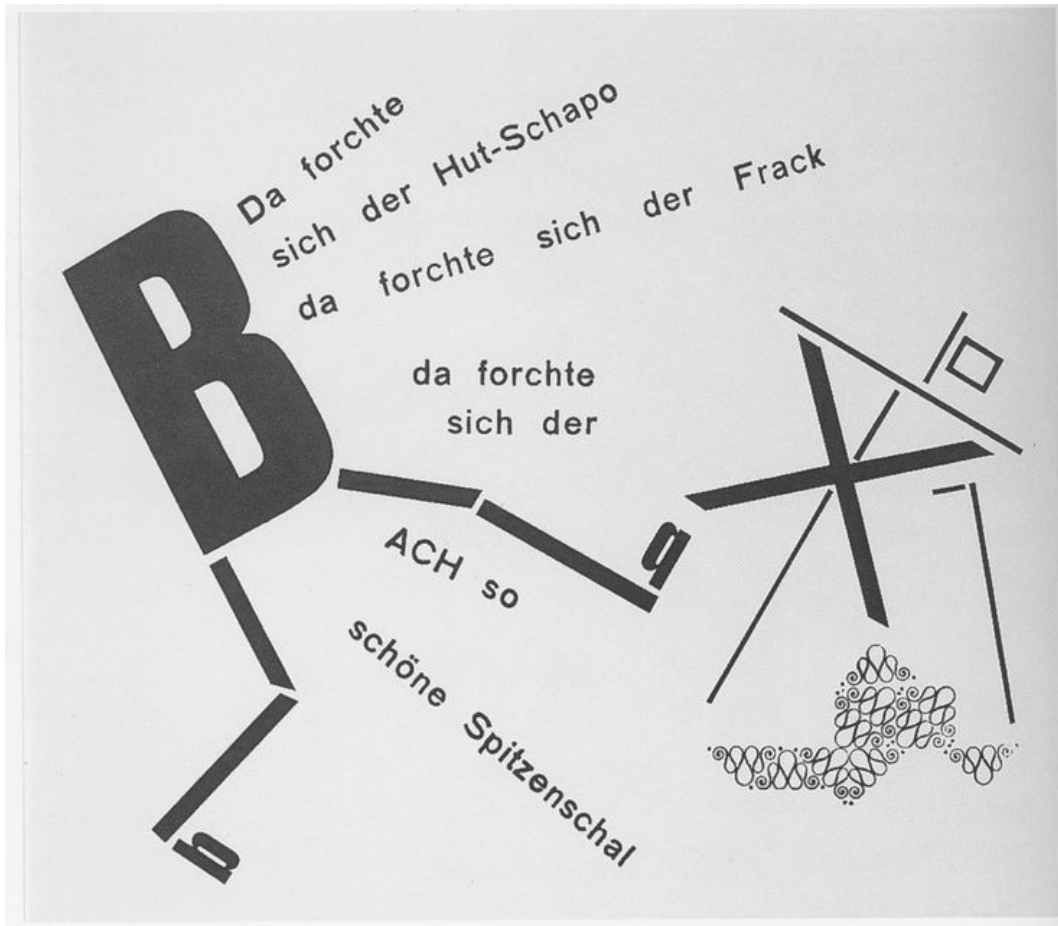
Figure III.1: Kurt Schwitters, Käte Steinitz, Theo van Doesburg, *Die Scheuche Märchen*, (Hannover: Aposs Verlag, 1925).

graphically designed posters for the Hanover Opera are another obvious example of Schwitters'

innovative typographical design. Perhaps the most typographically playful of all of Schwitters'

projects is a children's book, written together with Theo van Doesburg and Käte Steinitz, *Die*

Scheuche: Märchen[2] in which the illustrations (see Figure III.1) are composed entirely of letters,

or other typographically elements - lines, punctuation, etc.[3] In each of these cases Schwitters

purposely draws attention to the typographical elements, and in doing so, produces what W.J.T.

Mitchell refers to as the *Imagetext*.

Yet typography appears in *all* of Schwitters' work that includes text - which is most of it - be

it literary, visual, or graphic design, rendering text perhaps one of the most important parts of

his oeuvre. Schwitters was cognizant of the power of typography, and considered it an important

part of his sound poetry - a work that is primarily non-visual. In a letter to his American patron,

Katherine S. Drier, he writes of his desire to have his *Ursonate* typographically designed: "Ich bin

der Ansicht, dass die Sonate nun gedruckt werden muss, denn sie ist etwas ganz Ungewöhnliches

geworden, dabei aber allgemein verständlich. Es ist nur wichitg, dass der Druck vorbildlich wird,

dass er sehr durchdacht und gut wird."[4] This sound poem, which was composed over a ten-

year period, between 1922 and 1932, was first released as a record for issue 13 of his journal

Merz in 1925, before being typographically designed by Jan Tschichold, to become issue 24 of

Schwitters' journal *Merz* (see Figure III.2).[5] Tschichold's version of the *Ursonate* relies heavily

on the aesthetics of New Typography, as can be seen from the vertical bars running down the

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2. Kurt Schwitters, Käte Steinitz, and Theo Van Doesburg, *Die Scheuche x: Märchen* (Hanover: Aposs Verlag, 1925).
3. Ibid.
4. Kurt Schwitters to Katherine S. Drier, Retelsdorf, September 16, 1926, reproduced in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 107.
5. In addition, the poem subsequently translated into musical notation in 1927.
For more on *Ursonate*, see Eduard Mutschelknauss, "Zwischen literarischem Ferment und formal gebundener Klangstruktur: Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*," in *À la Croisée des Langages: Texte et Arts dans les Pays de Langue Alle-mande* (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2006), 189–196.
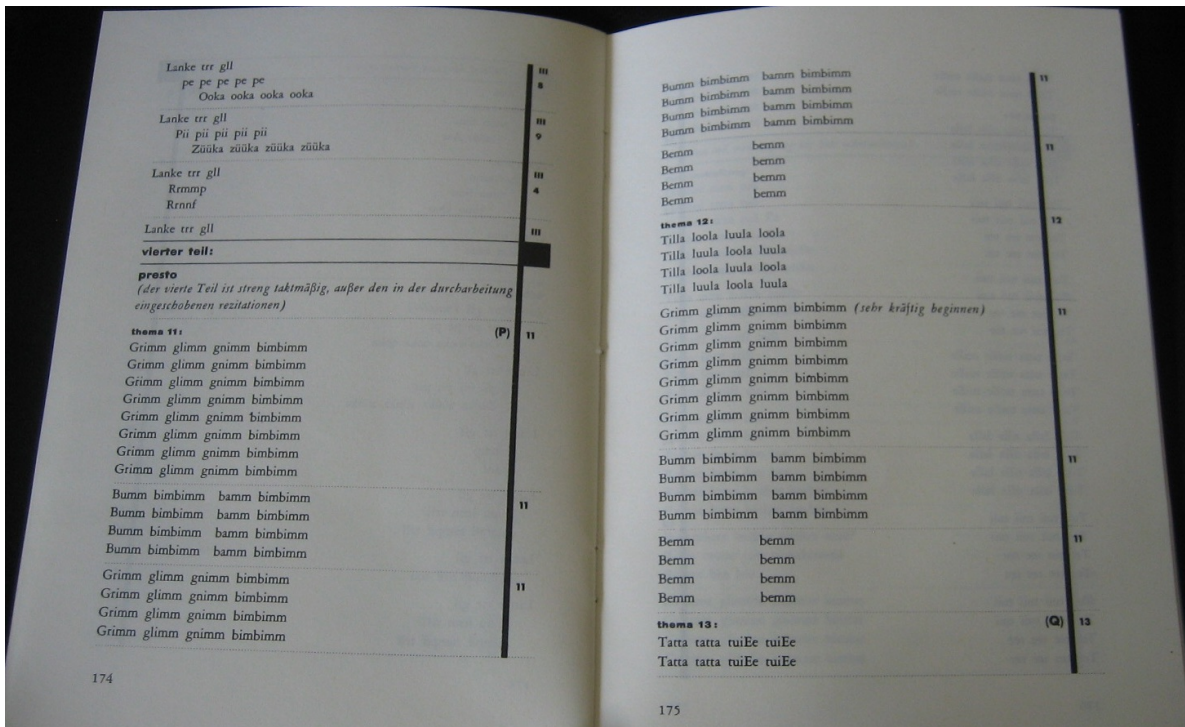
Figure III.2: Kurt Schwitters, *Ursonate*, 1932.

left hand side of the text, as well as the use of bold Futura in the section headers.[6] In contrast to the way in which Schwitters plays with text and image in the *Die Scheuche; Märchen*, by creating forms recognizable to the reader as particular objects, in the *Ursonate* the text appears both abstract - in content and form - and geometric. Nonetheless, the repetition in the text and Tschichold's grid-like formatting of it, renders this textual version of the sound poem, strikingly visual. As a result, Schwitters brings together these different media in a way that makes them codependent for the *Gesamtheit* of the work, and in which typography plays a pivotal role.

In addition to this practical engagement with typographical experimentation, in the course of

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6. According to his letter to Katherine Dreier, Schwitters approached El Lissitzky to design the typography for his *Ursonate*, at the suggestion of Sophie Küppers. He writes, however, of Lissitzky's reluctance to commit to the project. Indeed, Lissitzky never did work on Schwitters' *Ursonate*, instead it was Jan Tschichold who typographically designed the score which was published in 1932. (Kurt Schwitters to Katherine S. Drier, Retelsdorf, September 16, 1926, reproduced in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 107.)

the 1920s, Schwitters wrote a number of theoretical treatises on typography, appearing in several journals (including his own, *Merz*). Most importantly, his work was included as an example in the seminal issue of *Typographische Mitteilung* - "elementare Typographie" - edited by Jan Tschichold and published in 1925.[7] Included in this issue was the work of prominent avant-garde artists and designers, Herbert Bayer, El Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy, and Max Burchartz, among others. This issue has since been referred to as a "Wendepunkt in der Entwicklung der Neue Typographie," by Julia Meer.[8]

Throughout the 1920s, Schwitters was therefore continually incorporating typography into his work across all the various media he worked in and actively engaging with it in a theoretical way. It is likely a result of this practical and theoretical work that led Schwitters to become involved in the typographical design of a new experimental script - the *Systemschrift*. In a letter to his wife dated August 1927, Schwitters opens with news of this new experimental project. Displaying an almost childlike eagerness, he wastes no time with pleasantries, instead jumping straight to news of his new script in the opening line:

> Meine Liebste!
>
> Ich arbeite an einer Schrift. Durch den Besuch der Bauerschen Schriftgießerei[9] habe ich viel gelernt, z.B. daß man für die schwierigeren Buchstaben einen gefäl- ligen Ersatz haben muß. [...] Mein Grund-alphabet ist nun eckig. Vokale und Konsonanten. Dann habe ich für die Vokale noch eine runde Serie beigegeben. Das ist ein opto-phonetisches Moment.[10]

The script Schwitters describes in his letter to his wife is the *Systemschrift* (see III.3) - a series of opto-phonetic scripts, each based on a complex system, that was borne out of a drive towards rationalization and a desire for a modern and efficient way of writing. And so after years studying

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7. Ivan Tschichold, ed., "sonderheft: elementare typographie," *Typographische Mitteilungen*, 1925,
8. Julia Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015), 208.
9. This is the same type foundry that produced Paul Renner's *Futura* typeface, which was released also in 1927.
10. Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 127.

the most effective placement of text on the page, the ways in which we read text, as well as the different senses that are involved in the process of reception for several years, Schwitters took this one step further by designing a new way of writing, in the *Systemschrift.*

As we will see, Schwitters was not the only artist working on new scripts and new ways of writing at this time, rather he was part of a broader group of unaffiliated artists and designers, who came to be known as the New Typographers. Considered a New Typographer himself, Schwitters was well connected with other artists working in this field, sharing several collaborative projects, and in written correspondence about it with them.[11] In certain respects, however, what Schwitters was doing was unique among his colleagues - while much of their work stopped at the designing of new rationalized typefaces that negotiated the machine and the human, Schwitters, on the other hand, also moved into the fields of linguistics and philosophy of language, in order to create an entirely new means of rationalized written communication, that he felt was fit for the modern age.

The *Antiqua-Fraktur* Debate

While Schwitters was working on his *Systemschrift* the typographical world was shifting in very marked ways. Since the nineteenth century the *Antiqua-Fraktur Debatte* had been an ongoing discussion in Germany. At the heart of this debate lay the question of which typeface was the most suitable for publishing German books and newspapers. At one pole end of the debate was *Fraktur* (also known as Gothic), a Blackletter script that had been Germany's primary typeface since the mid-sixteenth century; at the other was *Antiqua* - a family of Roman scripts that dates

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11. One example of these projects is, of course, the *neue Typografie* exhibition, organized by Schwitters and László Moholy-Nagy, that is the subject of Chapter Four. Other collaborations include Schwitters work with El Lissitzky, with whom he co-edited issue 11 of his journal *Merz*, dedicated to graphic design and typography and entitled "Typo-Reklame." The two artists also each produced several advertisements for the Hanoverian ink firm *Pelikan.*

Figure III.3: Kurt Schwitters, *Systemschrift*, 1927.

back to the late fifteenth century and still in common use today (Times New Roman, etc.), that replicate handwriting more closely than the ornamental Fraktur.[12] While *Fraktur* had evolved into a German script, it shared roots with various Blackletter typefaces that had been common throughout Europe since the twelfth century. In the following centuries, however, they fell out of favor in other western and northern European countries. Great Britain ceased to use it at the beginning of the seventennth century, in Sweden they changed to Roman script in the eighteenth century, and France followed suit at the beginning of the 19th century.[13]

The arguments that governed the *Antiqua-Fraktur Debatte* fell into two main categories. Firstly, a political and ideological debate that centered on notions of nationalism versus internationalism, and secondly, the importance of functionality for a script. With regards to the political and ideological debate, the arguments of those in favor of *Fraktur* propagated ideas of nationalism - its supporters claimed that as a German script it was the most suitable for publishing German books and newspapers. Meanwhile, proponents of *Antiqua* saw the international readability of the script as one of its most important advantages.

Jeremy Aynsley highlights the fact that this debate was not just played out on the local stage, but drew interest from outside too, and claims that the 1928 "Pressa" exhibition in Cologne played an important role in displaying Germany's current position on the issue.[14] He writes, "For a visiting international audience, *Pressa* would have been of interest as an indicator of how

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12. See Christopher Burke, "German Hybrid Typefaces 1900–1914," in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (New York: Cooper Union, 1998), 22.

13. See Christopher Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 79-80.

14. "Pressa" is the abbreviated title of "The International Press Exhibition," held in Cologne in 1928. It is cited today in the context of El Lissitzky's experimental and now widely celebrated exhibition design of the Soviet pavilion at the exhibition. Yet there are many reasons why this exhibition was important - stretching 3 kilometers in length, Aynsley notes that it "offered an opportunity for modernist and traditional designers to present work alongside each other," continuing that "this exhibition cut across the apparent polarities of modernist or traditionalist design to present a wide range of production." (see Jeremy Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," *Design Issues* 10, no. 3 (1994): 53.)

Germans were responding to the 'Gothic or Roman question' in design," continuing that the "historical convention of printing in *Fraktur* was undergoing constant review and challenge."[15]

The times at which the *Fraktur-Antiqua Debatte* intensified were not coincidental, but rather aligned with times of marked nationalism. Christopher Burke notes that such ideas of nationalism permeated the discussion, stating that the "letterform-style became a symptom of the continuing search for a German cultural voice, which had run throughout the nineteenth century in the writings of Nietzsche and De Lagarde, among others."[16] He goes on to suggest, then, that "Gothic letterforms [were] promoted as inherently German at those times in history when the German national identity was under threat."[17] One such example of overt nationalism can be seen in Adolph Reinecke's *Die deutsche Buchstabenschrift: ihre Entstehung und Entwicklung, ihre Zweckmäßigkeit und völkische Bedeutung.* Published in 1910, it sets forth (in Gothic script, of course) the case for the retention of *Fraktur* with great vitriol against the use of all other scripts for German texts. Reinecke writes,

> Die deutsche Schrift ist ein Unterscheidungsmerkmal für das Deutschtum gegen die übrigen Völker, ein Ausdrucksmittel für deutsche Art und Wesenheit, das auf das Auge, den mächtigsten aller Sinne, wirkt. Sie ist daher eine unserer berechtigten Eigentümlichkeiten.[18]

In this passage we see a stark sense of nationalism, in which Reinecke singles out Germany as particular and therefore in need of a script to reflect this singularity in a striking way. As such, we see the way in which typography was considered a powerful tool that was integral to expressing the identity of a nation.

On the other side of the fence, proponents of *Antiqua* argued exactly the opposite, highlight-

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15. Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," 65.

16. Burke, "German Hybrid Typefaces 1900–1914," 26.

17. Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 79.

18. Adolf Reinecke, *Die deutsche Buchstabenschrift: ihre Entstehung und Entwickelung, ihre Zweckmässigkeit und völkische Bedeutung* (Leipzig: A. Hasert uC, 1910), 3-4.

ing instead that use of *Antiqua* would align Germany with other European countries. It is at this point that we see the political and ideological debate intersect with that of functionality. For integral to the idea of internationalism was the fact that *Antiqua* would be more easily accessible to people from other countries, not accustomed to *Fraktur*. The functionality debate, however, was not restricted to the accessibility of a script to foreign readers only. Contemporaneous to the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate were several studies within Germany, that attempted to research the readability of script - its core functionality placed on ease and speed of reading.[19]

Throughout the Weimar Republic, and also in the preceding years, there was a marked shift towards *Antiqua* in Germany. Indeed, there was a more general aesthetic move away from the ornate to the functional taking place across many disciplines at the time, including architecture, graphic design, and the fine arts. This emphasis on functionality was the result of increased modernization, Americanization, and rationalization, and was an idea that various designers latched onto. Paul Renner, for example, the creator of the sans-serif typeface, *Futura*, that would go on to become synonymous with this typographic revolution, felt that a move away from *Fraktur* was necessary, since it had no basis in *function*, deeming *Fraktur* decadent and out of place in the everyday.[20] Indeed, this notion of typography's place as functional in the everyday goes hand in hand with Aynsely's assertion that during this period, the importance of typography moved beyond the interests of high-end, "bibliophile" publishing. He writes that "among designers in-

19. See, for example, August Kirschmann, *Antiqua oder Fraktur?: (Lateinische oder deutsche Schrift)*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Verlag des Deutschen Buchgewerbevereins, 1907), and Émil Javal, *Physiologie de la lecture et de l'écriture* (Paris: Alcon, 1905).

20. See Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 82.
The term "sans serif" is a general one that refers to all typefaces that do not have serifs - the strokes that protrude at the ends of letters. Sans-serif typefaces first emerged during the nineteenth century, but did not become commonplace until the 1920s, when *New Typography* typographers paved the way for more widespread use. Furthermore, it was not until the 1950s that these typefaces became well established beyond more experimental use (see Gavin Ambrose and Paul Harris, *The Fundamentals of Typography* (Lausanne: Ava Publishing, 2006), 24.). Tova Rabinowitz notes that sans-serif typefaces can be broken down into three different "families" - Grotesque sans serif, Geometric sans serif, and Humanist sans serif. For a more detailed analysis of these types of sans-serif typefaces, and their histories, see Tova Rabinowitz, *Exploring Typography* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015), 117.

terested in leftist cultural activities, it also was felt that good typography served an important service in non-elite publishing," continuing that in the utilitarian *Gebrauchsbuch*, "arguments were made for legibility as a central strategy for democracy."[21] As a result, the functionality debate, as well as the nationalism vs internationalism one, became politically charged.

In the midst of this heated debate stood a number of artists, and designers - *not* typographers - who turned to typography as proponents of both internationalism and functionality and began working on typographic reformation. In the next section, I look at two of these artists - Peter Behrens and Theo van Doesburg.

New Typography's Predecessors:

Peter Behrens and Theo van Doesburg

Against the backdrop of the *Fraktur-Antiqua Debatte*, the first German book to be set in sans-serif type, *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst*, was published in 1900.[22] Apart from the fact that this marked a departure from *Fraktur*, it is important to note that this book was written and designed by Peter Behrens - an artist, who later became first and foremost an architect.[23] As such, the publication can be seen as a turning point for two reasons - firstly, as the first sans-serif book in German, and secondly that it was typographically designed by an artist and architect, rather than a typographer. Paving the way for others, Behrens became the first in a string of artist-turned-typographers who would go on to make a large impact on typography, pointing to the fact that typographical change at the turn of the twentieth century came from outside the profession.

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21. Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," 67.

22. Rabinowitz, *Exploring Typography*, 23.

23. Peter Behrens (1868-1940), trained first as an artist, but later became an architect known for his industrial designs, and for integrating art into life. For more on Behrens, see Stanford Anderson, *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

Shortly following the publication of *Feste des Lebens und der Kunst*, Behrens released the typeface *Behrens-Schrift*, and in the following decades designed three more - *Behrens-Kursiv* (1907), *Behrens-Antiqua* (1908), and *Behrens-Mediäval* (1914). With each new typeface, Behrens' style became increasingly less ornate, loosing the calligraphic brushstroke effect of the *Behrens-Schrift*, but still retaining a prominent serif.[24] In this way, Behrens' work can be seen to be a bridge between the more ornate scripts that were popular at the turn of the twentieth century, and that of the New Typographers - the name given to a group of avant-garde artists and designers who, like Behrens, turned their hand to typography in the 1920s and early 1930s.

Following in Behrens' footsteps was Theo van Doesburg - artist and founder of the Dutch avant-garde movement De Stijl - who not just designed typefaces but also worked in the field of graphic design. As early as 1916 he was designing letterheads and logos for companies and in 1919 he created an experimental new typeface (see Figure III.4). Used both in the publication of his journal *De Stijl*, and for commercial commissions, such as for the Amsterdam firm Hagemeijer, van Doesburg's typeface was based on a geometric grid. The artist started with a square and divided it up into five rows by five rows in order to create letters from this grid. Stephen Eskilson has argued that this script became the basis for many of the typefaces that would be designed by other avant-garde artists in the following decade.[25] Bauhaus practitioners Herbert Bayer and Josef Albers, for example, designed typefaces that, although significantly different to those of the Dutch artist, were also geometrically based. While Bayer's emphasis in his *Universal Script* was on regularity of angles and width of lines, Albers took ten shapes based on the form of rectangles and circles (see top line of Figure III.5) and pieced them together to create a modular typeface.

In each of these cases, a grid forms the basis of the script, rendering it highly ordered. Fur-

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24. For a comprehensive overview of Behrens' typefaces see Chris Burke, "Peter Behrens and the German Letter: Type Design and Architectural Lettering," *Journal of Design History* 5, no. 1 (1992): 19–37.
25. S. Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History, Second Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 180.
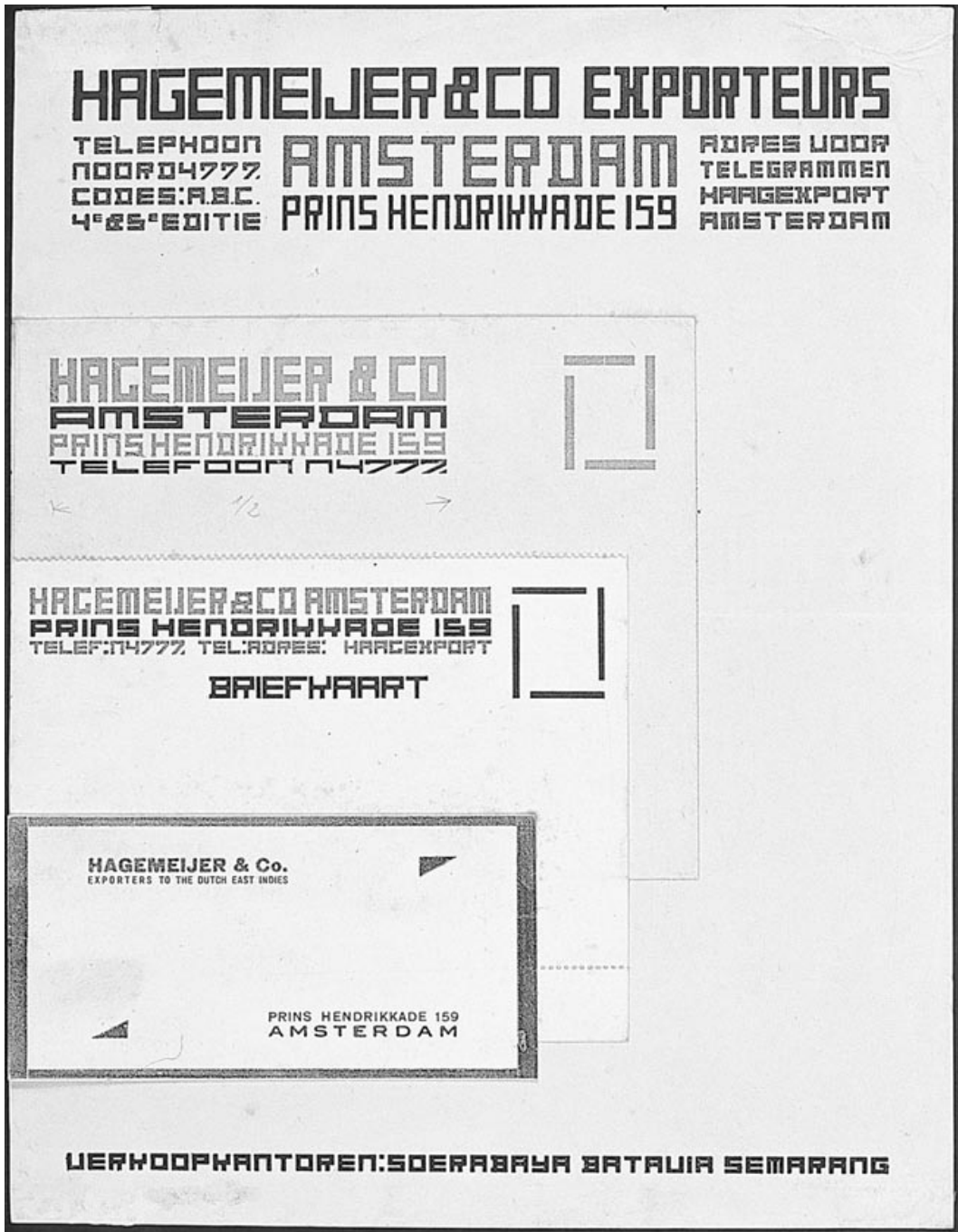
Figure III.4: Stationery design for Hagemeijer by Theo van Doesburg, 1919.

thermore, the use of lowercase only in Bayer's script, and the reduction of script to just ten shapes in Albers', they also signal a move towards rationalization. Bruce Willen and Nolen Strals have pointed out that the drive towards a rationalization of the alphabet is not a new development, but that rather artists, designers, and typographers have been attempting to address this issue time and time again since the Renaissance.[26] What is interesting, however, is the way in which such rationalization plays into the larger project of the avant-gardes. In writing of its importance, Krzysztof Ziarek notes:

> As the avant-garde negotiates and describes the impact of technology on modern experience, it also begins, I argue, to figure the progressive (con)fusion of the everyday and the technological. It comes to understand itself through its continued engagement with everyday practice, specifically through considering the extent of the rationalization of the ordinary.[27]

If the art of the avant-gardes is a response to rationalization and the increasing role technology plays in everyday, then the design of typefaces and scripts by avant-garde artists is a direct engagement with, and embracing of it. This engagement can be seen in the work of many of van Doesburg's, Bayer's and Albers' contemporaries, colleagues, and friends, who were also a part of the broader European avant-garde networks began moving in a similar direction. Together these practitioners came to be known as the New Typographers.

New Typography and the New Typographers

The New Typographers were made up of a number of individuals, mostly working independently, but who together made perhaps the most important contribution to the shift from *Fraktur* to

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26. Bruce Willen and Nolen Strals, *Lettering & Type: Creating Letters and Designing Typefaces* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 21.
27. Krzysztof Ziarek, *The Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde, and the Event* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 89.
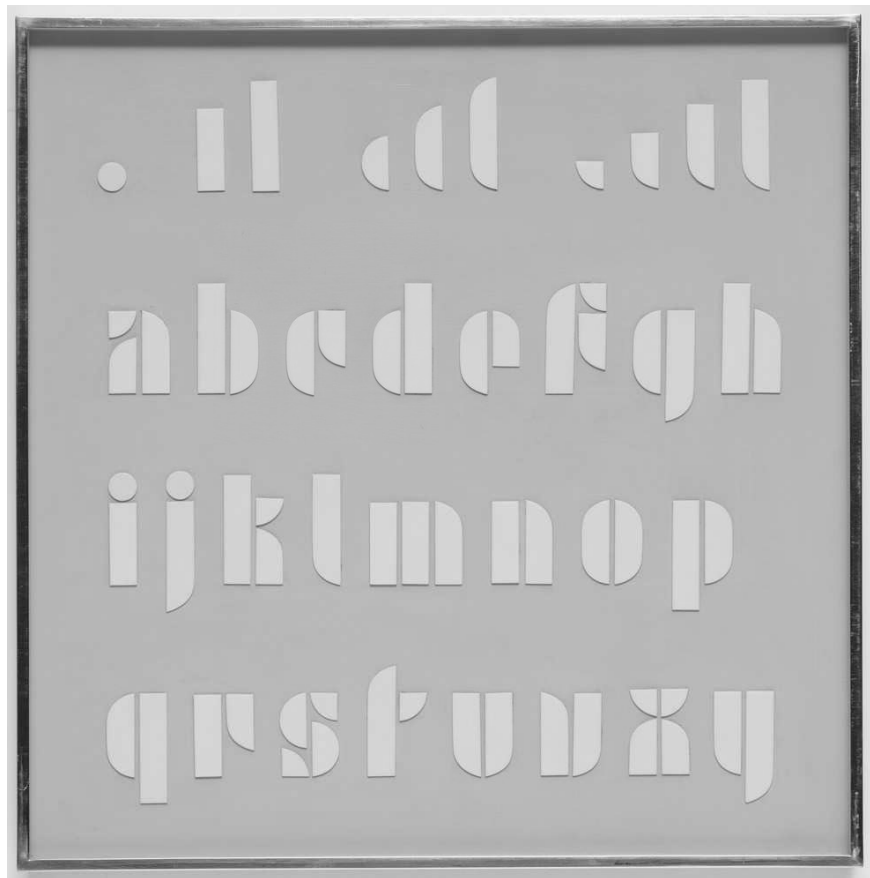
Figure III.5: Josef Albers, Glass stencil of his *Kombinationsschrift*, 1926.

Antiqua, as well as the popularization of sans-serif scripts. Although a formal group was never formed, many of these artists equated their work with the term *New Typography* (*die neue Typographie*), thus creating by association an unofficial movement. In her recent book, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre*, Julia Meer defines the New Typographers as a group of around twenty avant-garde artists, who, in addition to designing new typefaces, also contributed to a body of theoretical texts on the subject, the most important formal characteristics of which are dynamism, stark contrasts, asymmetry, the grouping of information, use of bold lines and geometric forms, as well as notions of economy, functionality, modern perception, advertising psychology, standardization, and technology.[28] Among its practitioners were Josef Albers, Willi Baumeister,[29] Herbert Bayer, Max Burchartz, Walter Dexel, Theo van Doesburg, Vilmos Huszar, Lajos Kassák, El Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy, Johannes Molzahn, Oskar Nerlinger, Alexander Rodtschekno, Warwar Stepanowa, Joost Schmidt, Jan Tschichold, and, of course, Kurt Schwitters.[30]

Meer cautions us from understanding the adjective *New* as denoting a complete break from what came before. Instead, she explores why these changes came about and identifies their roots, thereby placing New Typography within a wider historical frame. While the aesthetic form may be very different, many of the motivations that drove *New Typography* forward, are, Meer claims, the same that prompted the "English Reform Movement" - a phase that she defines as starting with the Arts and Crafts Movement and stretching to 1910. She concludes, "dass es abseits der Avantgarde zahlreiche und zum Teil bereits mehrere Dekaden früher beginnende

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28. See Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre*, 28-29.

29. Willi Baumeister (1889-1955) was an artist and stage designer, who, in the 1920s, moved into typographic design, designing the materials for the 1927 Werkbund exhibition, "Die Wohnung." In 1919, Schwitters and Baumeister exhibited together as part of the "Herbstschau Neuer Kunst" exhibition, at the Berlin *Der Sturm* Gallery. This was the first of many times in which they would exhibit together.

30. Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre*, 27.

Tendenzen zur Modernisierung der Reklamegestaltung und Typographie gab."[31] To be sure, one of these influences were Behrens' typefaces. For the New Typographers, Behrens' work was not just influential, but the foundation from which they developed their own theories and treatises on typography, as well as new typefaces.

This was certainly the case for Paul Renner, the creator of the *Futura* typeface.[32] Like Behrens and van Doesburg before him, and many of the other New Typographers, Renner moved tangentially into the field of typography, with his professional background and training in the field of book design. In 1917 he published a book on typographic rules, that, according to Burke, was a "serious attempt to suggest standard approaches to the details of book design that tended to be overlooked by printers."[33] The rule book was followed in 1922 by the much more well known *Typografie als Kunst*, which became contentious within the typography trade, as Renner was seen to be overstepping his mark as an outsider and therefore threatened the established trade.[34] The title alone, however, signals a shift from thinking about typography as a technical trade to an art form.

While Behrens' typefaces were derived from the writing strokes of the hand, Renner, by contrast, focused on creating a machine-like typeface. Throughout Renner's writings on script, we see similes and metaphors that express both *Futura* and an ideal script as being borne of technology, the machine, and the engineer, which Burke notes was "a desire to rid type of any

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31. Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre*, 273.
32. Paul Renner, (1878-1956) was a contemporary of Schwitters' who, as a book designer, was greatly influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement. After publication of two monographs on typography in 1917 and 1922, he taught a introductory course on typography at the *Frankfurter Kunstschule* in 1925, before being appointed director of the *Meisterschule für Deutschlands Buchdrucker, Schule der Stadt München und des Deutschen Buchdrucker-Vereins* in 1927. During this time Renner had been working on the *Futura* typeface which was released in 1928. For more information on Paul Renner's work and influence see Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*. There is no evidence that Schwitters and Renner ever met or corresponded, but both were close friends with Tschichold and so it is likely they were familiar with one another's work.
33. Ibid., 41.
34. For more information on this controversy, see ibid., 41.

handwritten dynamic."[35] Renner writes in "Die Schrift unserer Zeit," for example:

> Eine Schrift, die diesem Zeitgefühl entspricht, müßte also exakt, präzis und unpersönlich sein. Sie müßte sich sinnvoll und ohne Umschweife als das darstellen, was sie ist. Ist sie Drucktype, so darf sie keine Schreibschrift nachahmen wollen. Unsere Druckschrift ist der maschinelle Abdruck maschinell hergestellter Metalletern, die mehr Lesezeichen sind als Schrift.[36]

In this passage Renner highlights the precision that such a machine-derived script offers; it can and should be produced without any trace of the human hand. Indeed, for Renner, even the word *Schrift* carries with it the connotation of handwriting, and so despite the title "Die Schrift unserer Zeit," he stresses instead the notion of signs - *Lesezeichen* - rather than script. At the heart of this changed emphasis is a move away from subjectivity, towards objectivity, as epitomized by the machine and the process of mechanization.

By 1927 - the same year Schwitters was working on the *Systemschrift* - Renner's most well known typeface, *Futura*, had been fully realized and was in production at the *Bauer Type Foundry* in Frankfurt am Main. Clear, geometric, and sans serif, Futura marked a typographical watershed. Based on primary geometric shapes, it incorporated the "timeless" aspects of modern design, as Renner understood them.[37] The geometric nature of the typeface signals exactly the move from the manual to the machine he expresses in "Die Schrift unserer Zeit." In a letter to the *Bauer Type Foundry* Renner writes, "I consciously suppressed and eradicated all those small qualities that creep in to the design [*Formgebung*] of their own accord when the form is developed from writing - that is, handwriting; this resulted in a ɑ instead of a or a: ɡ instead of g: l

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35. Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 111.

36. Paul Renner, "Die Schrift unserer Zeit," *Die Form: Zeitschrift für gestaltende Arbeit*, no. 2 (1927): 110.

37. Burke notes that "Renner felt that the essence of modern design lay in what he called the 'timeless' aspects of design. [...] In his view the 'time-bound' aspect of design was the response to the material and functional demands of any situation. The 'timeless' rules, then, were an underlying adherence to primary geometric shapes."Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 68-69

instead of l: † instead of t: ∪ instead of u or u." [38][39] In addition he provides a whole row of a's

ranging from the "griechisches Alfa" to a Grotesk a, ending with ɑ, which he describes as the

"exakteste Form."[40] In removing the serifs, Renner also removes the last traces of the human hand

in his new typeface.

And yet this geometric, technologically based script that attempts to hide the human origin

of its design, was not considered to have effaced all character. On the contrary, in his booklet *Die*

neue Gestaltung in der Typographie, Schwitters includes a section entitled "Die geeignete Schrift,"

in which he features *Futura*, citing its merits as "bewegt charaktervoll" as well as "geistreich, trotz

des sauberen Stils der Maschine."[41] For Schwitters, the machine aesthetic of the script thereby

prompts intellectual stimulation - an entirely human response - which therefore reinserts the

human in the reception of *Futura*.

Andreas Huyssen has argued that "technology played a crucial, if not *the* crucial, role in the

avant-garde's attempt to overcome the art/life dichotomy and make art productive in the trans-

formation of everyday life," which is evidenced by the work of the New Typographers, as they

attempted to negotiate the tension between the machine and traces of the human.[42] Typogra-

phy gave these artists and designers a very practical forum in which to work these issues out,

while it may also help to explain the move that so many artists independently of one another

made from the fine to the applied arts at this time. This move was, however, just one facet of the

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38. Letter to the Bauer Type Foundry, 14 March 1940, cited in Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 97.

39. This visual comparison between Futura, a sans serif and a serif typeface is also employed by Herbert Bayer in his essay "Versuch einer neuen Schrift." In it he includes an illustration of a u in *Fraktur* and his *Universal* script, about which he writes, "Im Gegensatz zu dem geschriebenen *U*, welches vollständig aus der Technik heraus (Federschrift) entstanden ist und mit klarer geometrischer Form nicht mehr zu tun hat, entspricht das exakte U auch Muskelbildung und Fonetik."Herbert Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 25.

40. Ibid., 26.

41. Kurt Schwitters, *Werbe-Gestaltung* (Hanover: Merz, 1928), 13.

42. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 9.

typographical changes that these typographers were propelling forward. For others, including Schwitters, the emphasis lay also on other aspects, including the relationship between *Sprache* and *Schrift* that culminated in the challenge of developing a script that could be read by everyone - a so-called *Weltschrift*. In order to understand the motivations of the *Weltschrift*, let us first turn to Walter Porstmann's influential text, *Sprache und Schrift* that sets the scene for such an international script.

Porstmann's *Sprache und Schrift*

If not the sole catalyst for the New Typographers' fascination with the relationship between spoken language and written script, Porstmann's 1920 monograph *Sprache und Schrift* became one of the most influential texts for them.[43] In his seminal monograph *Die Neue Typographie*, for example, Tschichold highlights Porstmann's *Sprache und Schrift* as an inspiration and recommends the title for further study.[44] Similarly, Bayer draws attention to *Sprache und Schrift* in his short piece "Versuch einer neuen Schrift" and is the only text he refers to.[45] In his book-length study, Porstmann provides a comprehensive overview of language and script, systematically working through both, looking at languages in the first half, while focusing on scripts in the second. In the course of the text, Porstmann identifies different types of languages and scripts that are in use, exploring their origins and developments. These range from pictorial languages, languages that are specific to certain disciplines and professions (for example, chemical notation), to foreign languages, dead languages, and the languages of new technologies, such as photography

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43. In his seminal monograph, *Die Neue Typographie*, for example, Tschichold highlights Porstmann's *Sprache und Schrift* as an inspiration and recommends the title for further study. (See Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, 229.) Similarly, Bayer draws attention to *Sprache und Schrift* in his short piece "Versuch einer neuen Schrift" and is the only text he refers to. (See Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," 26.)

44. Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, 229.

45. Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," 26.

and film.

It is in this latter section that Porstmann places emphasis on the temporal aspect of script and calls for a new script for this new age. He first identifies two different epochs of handwriting, which he names *Holzzeit*, (Age of Wood) and *Stahlzeit* (Age of Steel). In defining these two epochs, Porstmann locates them both spatially as well as temporally. For him, the *Holzzeit* originated in, and is therefore spatially located within, medieval monasteries, with the copying of sacred texts. The script itself is identified by use of pencil and quill.[46] By contrast, Porstmann locates the *Stahlzeit* of script in the office and business worlds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and therefore governed by new, mechanized technologies, such as the typewriter and the instantaneous speed of communication that is offered by the telephone.

For Porstmann, the fundamental need for a new script suited to the contemporary age lies in the conflicting uses of script within the setting of the twentieth-century office and the limits of the technology needed to reproduce them. He argues:

> um im kaufmännischen büro die leichteste schreibarbeit zu erledigen, ist der besuch der handelsschule nötig / die geistige arbeit des dikt(ier)ens bedarf gründlicher ausbildung in der praxis des geschäfts, die weitere behandlung des diktats aber ist mechanisierte arbeit - und hierfür ist besondere schulbildung notwendig / da sitzt der widerspruch / diese arbeit ist tatsächlich zu mechan(isier)en, das ist die aufgabe / arbeiten, für die die holzzeit der technik beliebig viel menschenkraft und beliebig viel zeit verbrauchte, mechan(isier)t die stahlzeit der technik allenthaben, das ist das wesen dieser zeit / die schrift und die buchführung dazu haben den übergang in das neue zeitalter der neuen technik noch nicht vollbracht / kostspielige heere von beamten und angestellten sind notwendig, um die schriftlichen arbeiten zu erledigen.[47]

Once Porstmann has identified this clash, he goes on to declare, "es ist verkehrt, wenn wir mit

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46. He writes, "die holzzeit der schrift ist jene grosse fase, die durch die oben angeführte werkzeugreihe: messer griffel, stift, feder (auch stahlfeder) gekennzeichnet ist /" (Walter Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, ed. Richard R. Hinz (Berlin: Verlag des Vereins Deutscher Ingenieure, 1920), 68.)

47. Ibid., 68.

stahlzeitmitteln holzzeitlichen verfahren nachlaufen / die zeit ist reif, um stahlzeitliche schrift zu gebären /."[48] Implicit here, then, in the mechanization of script, is the removal of the subject - the subject here being, of course, the costly army of workers that Porstmann points out are required for the status quo of using a *holzzeitliche Schrift* in the *Stahlzeit*. At the center of the *Stahlzeit*, is, of course, the machine - itself also made of steel. Parallels can therefore be drawn between Porstmann's drive towards an eradication of the subject and Renner's eradication of traces of the human hand in his typefaces. There is, however, one key difference in the ways in which Renner and Porstmann consider this removal of the subject. While Renner writes in the first person, indicating his own agency, Porstmann, on the other hand, avoids the first person, using instead phrases such as "das ist das wesen dieser zeit" as though to signal that time is driving this change, not the subject.

The economy of script

At the core of such a *stahlzeitliche schrift* is economy - economy of time, skills, and resources. We see this embrace of economy in the extended quote above: Porstmann is concerned with both the time involved in using traditional script in the modern workplace, as well as the training and number of workers required to undertake written tasks, all of which take time. This is not surprising giving the broader drive towards rationalization that was taking place in Germany at this time. David Meskill has, for example, noted that "rationalization was the subject of a broad public discussion throughout the 1920s."[49] 1921 saw the founding of the Reichskuratorium für Wirtschaftlichkeit in Industrie und Handwerk (RKW), which, according to Nolan "established

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48. Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, 69.
Throughout this part of the text Porstmann uses the / symbol to indicate the end of a sentence, rather than a period.
49. David Meskill, *Optimizing the German Workforce: Labor Administration From Bismarck to the Economic Miracle* (New York: Berghahn books, 2010), 122.

over two hundred subcommittees to study specific aspects of rationalization."[50] The result of this effort was a large restructuring of industry within Germany.[51] It is therefore not surprising that, as we have already seen with the New Typographers, elements of rationalization also came to the fore in debates surrounding typography and script at this time.

The focus on economy is also very evident in *Sprache und Schrift* when Portsmann broaches a topic that became of particular importance to the New Typographers - *Groß- und Kleinschreibung* - the use of lower and uppercase letters. He writes:

> zählen wir einen deutschen text ab, so finden wir innerhalb hundert staben etwa fünf "grosse buchstaben." also um fünf prozent unseres schreibens belasten wir die gesamte schreibwirtschaft vom erlernen bis zur anwendung mit der doppelten menge von zeichen für die lautelemente: gross und kleine staben. [...] wegen fünf prozent der staben leisten wir uns hundert prozent vermehrung an staben-zeichen.[52]

Portsmann thus takes a very rational approach to the issue of capitalization, making the case based on the frequency with which uppercase letters are used, which, although not stated here, has implications for economy of space and production costs. Schwitters draws on the same economic aspect of *Kleinschreibung* when he writes seven years later "die art alles nur klein setzen zu lassen hat 2 wichtige gründe: 1) weil es richtiger ist als die übliche art der verbindung von minuskeln und majuskeln, und 2) weil es wirtschaftlicher ist."[53] While he vaguely states that writing in lowercase is "more correct," Schwitters continues by drawing out multiple ways in which using writing in such a way is economical, and thereby emphasizing this aspect. He writes:

50. Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135.

51. See ibid., 133.

52. Portsmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, 70.

53. Kurt Schwitters, "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 269.

wenn man die kleinschrift allgemein einführte, würde das kind nur die hälfte der buchstaben zu lernen brauchen, würde der setzer schneller arbeiten können, würde der drucker nur die hälfte der schrift zu kaufen brauchen, würde man auf der schreibmaschine erheblich schneller tippen können, würden die schreibmaschinen einfacher gebaut werden können usw.[54]

Like Porstmann, who locates the *Stahlzeit* of script within the office and incorporates the whole process of training and labor into the economy of script, Schwitters also refers to this aspect. Schwitters, however, presents the economic aspect as touching several spheres of life, beyond the office, starting with a child learning letters for the very first time. Furthermore, Schwitters directly applies the economy of letters to the mechanized processes for its reproduction - the letterpress and typewriter.

It is not surprising that Schwitters is concerned with the rationalization of the typewriter, since the typewriter was an invention that played a pivotal role in driving the rationalization of script. Will Hill notes that the typewriter diminished the distance between writing in daily life and the printing press. He writes, "For the first time, everyday 'writing' took typographic form, using standardized letters and mechanically determined letter spacing and line structure."[55] As the typewriter became more widely available, offices, and even households, could produce text that was rationalized, and for the most part, the typeface used on typewriters was a form of *Antiqua*.[56]

Rationalization was not a concern particular to just Porstmann and Schwitters, Bauhaus practitioners also drew on the idea of economy in their typographical experiments. Bayer, for example, states it rather simply when he includes the following epigram on Bauhaus stationery: "wir schreiben alles klein, denn wir sparen damit zeit."[57] In his article "Versuch einer neuen Schrift" he

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54. Schwitters, "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift," 269.
55. Will Hill, "Typography and the Printed English Text," in *The Routledge Handbook of the English Writing System*, ed. Vivian Cook, Des Ryan, et al. (London: Routledge, 2016), 444.
56. *Fraktur* typewriters do exist, but they were not as common as their *Antiqua* counterparts.
57. For an example, see a sheet of headed notepaper reproduced in Gerd Fleischmann, ed., *Bauhaus: Drucksachen,*

is a little more explicit when he argues, "Es ist nicht nötig, für *einen* Laut ein großes und ein kleines Zeichen zu haben. [...] Es sei darauf hingewiesen, daß Beschränkung auf ein Alfabet große Zeit- und Materialersparnis bedeutet (man denke an die Schreibmaschine)."[58] Similarly, Albers, in his pointedly named article "Zur Ökonomie der Schriftform" writes "Zeit ist Geld: das Geschehen ist ökonomisch bestimmt," continuing, "Wir müssen schnell lesen, wie knapp sprechen. [...] Damit kann die fließende Schrift nicht mehr dominieren."[59]

Such an economic approach leads, not surprisingly, to a call for simplification and standardization. Albers conludes by stating, "Ökonomie und damit Technik und Verkehr reagieren, also wird strenge Normung gefordert. Alles drängt zur Knappheit."[60] Porstmann too notes, "die schrift der stahlzeit muss auch das zeichen selbst besser gestalten, wenn es den stahlzeitlichen forderungen entsprechen soll. gleichzeitig haben wir einen wink, in welcher richtung wir die zeichen zu entwickeln haben: vereinfachung der zeichen."[61] With a simplification of signs [*Zeichen*], Porstmann alludes to an economy of time on the part of the reader - the simpler the sign, the quicker it is to read.

There were therefore three key issues to resolve: a desire for an increasing mechanization of the creation of script in order to speed up the process, the speed of reading script, and the creation of a universal language that would be accessible to all. The ways in which the New Typographers attempted to address these issues fell into two categories - either by changing the medium in which script is presented, or by revolutionizing script itself. Many of the artists and designers, already well acquainted with other media, choose the former and turned to photography.

Typografie, Reklame (Düsseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 117.

58. Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," 26.

59. Josef Albers, "Zur Ökonomie der Schriftform," in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 23.

60. Ibid., 24.

61. Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, 82-83.

The medium of typography: Photography

In his 1928 essay, "Stop Reading! Look!" Johannes Molzahn, also employs many of the tropes that Porstmann uses, drawing particular attention to the speed of reading, and the swift creation of script through mechanization.[62] He starts out his essay, for example, with a similar image to that used by Porstmann to portray the production of script: "A piece of paper, in the hand a pencil, and on the table the object - the looking eye; otherwise, a wrist and the tedious work of many, many hours."[63] Contrasting this with the quick click of button to activate the shutter needed to produce a photograph, he continues, "One-hundredth of a second through the highly sensitive eye of your camera and the picture of the object there on the table is captured on the thin coating of emulsion on the film."[64] Molzahn praises the immediacy of photography - both its creation and perception - and calls it "the pacesetter for the tempo of time and development."[65] Molzahn's essay is shot through with joyous cries of "Complete mechanization!" and an emphasis on the "economy of contemporary production," echoing the sentiments of Porstmann and practitioners of the Bauhaus.[66]

Moholy-Nagy also saw photography as an answer to the issues of universality, economy, and mechanization. Indeed, he saw this visual medium as something that would not just complement typography, but that could also be combined with it, as with his notion of the "Typofoto" - a medium in which photography and typography are combined.[67] Furthermore, Moholy-Nagy

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62. Johannes Molzahn (1892-1965) was an artist and colleague of several of Schwitters' good friends, including Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, as well as many of the Bauhaus practitioners. Like his colleagues he branched out into graphic design and 1923 became the head of graphic design at the *Kunstgewerbe- und Handwerkschule Magdeburg*.

63. Johannes Molzahn, "Stop Reading! Look!," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 648.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. In his essay, "Typofoto," Moholy-Nagy writes,

pointed to the fact that photography could even supersede typography, with his claim that it would become the new alphabet of the future.[68] Moholy-Nagy dedicated a lot of his creative energies to thinking about the relationship between photography and typography, the culmination of which can be see in his film script (which can certainly also be read as a photo-essay), "Dynamik der Großstadt," first published in his volume of the Bauhausbücher, *Malerei Photographie Film.*

Just as Moholy-Nagy's film script acts as a visual representation of the relationship between typography and photography, El Lissitzky's 1924 self-portrait (see Figure III.6), I contend, appears to be a photographic commentary on the entwining of the textual and the visual. The image contains a double exposure of a headshot of Lissitzky, superimposed onto a graphic draft on graph paper, with letters, geometric shapes, on which a human hand is placed, holding a compass. Here, we see both the artist and the work he creates, with no trace of mechanization in the image - instead, we see the hand, and the only piece of technology, a simple compass. Indeed, this image almost echoes the opening lines of Molzahn's essay that draw attention to the human hand, linking it to the many hours needed to create a script by means of a non-mechanized process. And yet, this image is a photograph, and therefore brings together the act of typographical work, as depicted in the image, with the mechanized - and much faster - process of photogra-

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"Was ist Typofoto?
Typografie ist in Druck gestaltete Mitteilung.
Fotografie ist visuelle Darstellung des optischen Faßbaren.
Das Typofoto ist die visuell exaktest dargestellte Mitteilung."
(Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, "Typofoto," in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 37.)
Molzahn also draws on a similar idea when he imagines a "phototype machine," of which he writes, "Only once "phototype" has matured into a reliable instrument can the whole of book printing be integrated into the economy of contemporary production." Its operator will "shoot type and image through the objective of his phototype machine and with a simple adjustment of the dimension lever obtain whatever variation he needs." (Molzahn, "Stop Reading! Look!," 648.)
    68. He writes, "Nicht der Schrift-, sondern der Photographieunkundige wird der Alphabet der Zukunft sein." (Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, "Die Photographie in der Reklame," 63, no. 9 (1927): 259.)
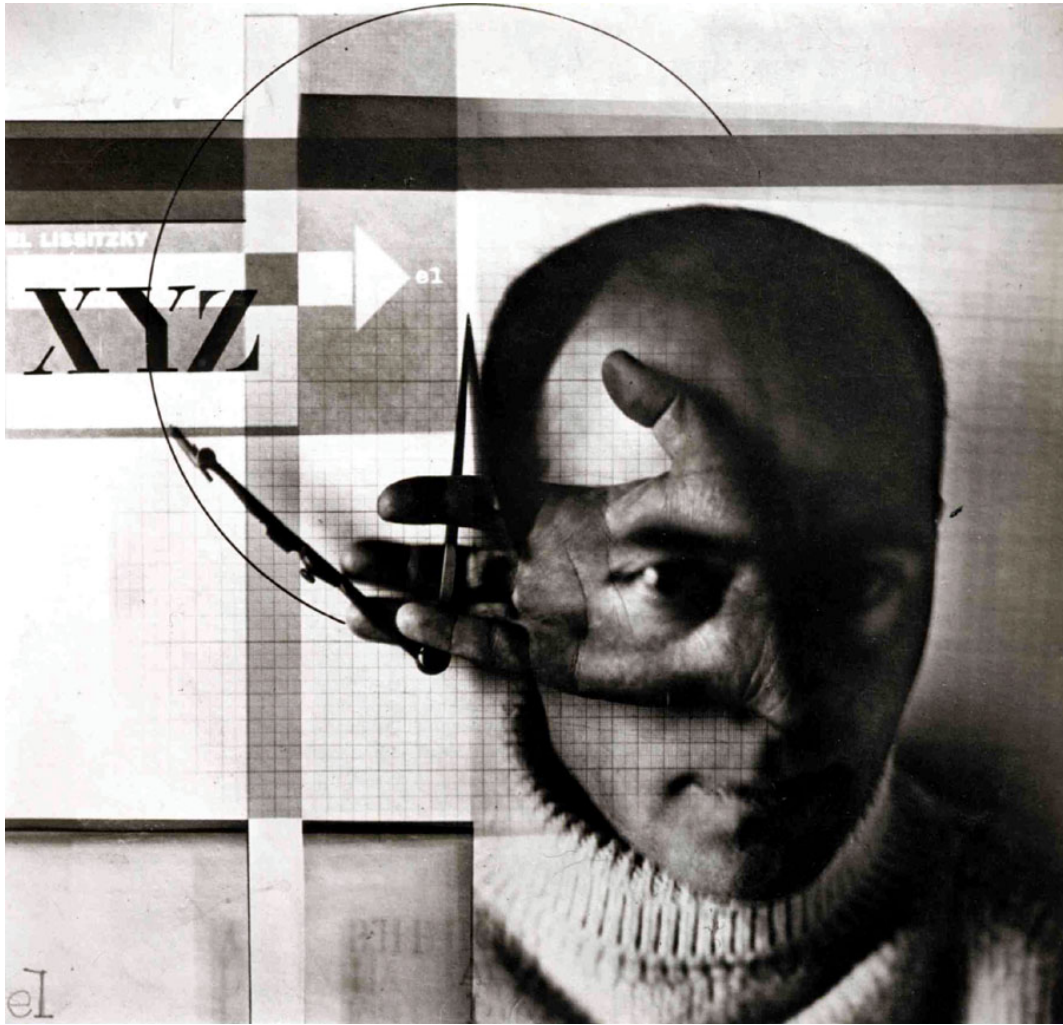
Figure III.6: El Lissitzky, *Self-Portrait*, 1925.

phy, thereby fulfilling the aims of mechanizing and increasing the speed of production as well as speeding up the process of reading. In doing so, Lissitzky highlights the tension between the hand and complete mechanization, which we see in the writing of Renner, Porstmann, Molzahn, Moholy-Nagy, and many other of the *New Typographers*, and injects the human hand back into the mechanized process of photography. Here too, in Lissitzky's double exposure photomontage, we see a simplification of the signs, with no words (other than the artists' signature) included. And yet a narrative emerges, in which we see the artist, set against the backdrop of his work, and overlaid with the instruments he uses - a narrative that is accessible regardless of language, and can be grasped much quicker than reading text.

In contrast to Molzahn and Moholy-Nagy, Porstmann, and others, including Schwitters, choose to focus less on the medium through which typography was communicated, and focused their energies instead on revolutionizing script itself, aiming to address its simplification and issues of economy in that way.

Revolutionizing typography: *Weltschrift*

For Porstmann, such a simplification of script leads to the possibility of a *Weltschrift*. He notes that in many respects, Latin script has already become a sort of de facto *Weltschrift*, but that it must undergo further simplification. He writes, "neue zeichen gewinnen wir durch vereinfachung und sistemung [...] der vorhandenen. wenn grundsätzlich die lateinische stabenschrift einer vereinfachung unterzogern wird (die grossstaben müssen ja sowieso schon fallen), so ist ein guter schritt zur weltschrift der stahlzeit getan."[69] What is interesting is that, while Porstmann's monography is titled *Sprache und Schrift*, it is to this point that the whole text leads - the creation of a *stahlzeitliche Schrift* that is, in effect, the starting point for a *Weltschrift*. He argues that

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69. Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, 83.

many of the required components for such an international script already exist, but that more still need to be developed. These include *welt-laute*, *welt-staben*, *welt-alfabet*, *welt-stabenschrift*, *welt-kurzschrift*, culminating in a *welt-sprache*, that Porstmann sets out very clearly in a diagram (see Figure III.7).

Porstmann's diagram is divided into two parts - *wir haben* (we have) and *wir brauchen* (we need). If we turn our attention more closely to this binary system, we see, in fact, that the former group refers almost exclusively to individual disciplines - chemistry, music, and maths, for example, while the latter part is much more general, and not directly related to one particular discipline or area of life.[70] By means of the *wir brauchen* section, Porstmann thus calls for a broadening of the scope and generalization of the ways in which different international means of notation are already developing. Furthermore, within this diagram, we see a hierarchy emerge, in which Porstmann starts with the smallest part of language - sound, before moving to letters, alphabet, writing, shorthand, and arriving ultimately at the end goal - *Weltsprache.*

Throughout the text it is clear that Porstmann is concerned with the *theory* of a *Weltsprache* and *Weltschrift*, but not with the creative production of one. While considered neither a *Weltsprache* nor a *Weltschrift*, several already existing global languages are explored by Porstmann in *Sprache und Schrift*, including Esperanto and Ido. Both of these languages are termed a *Hilfssprache* - an auxiliary language - and neither addresses Porstmann's preoccupation with a *Weltschrift*.[71] Meanwhile in Vienna, political economist and philosopher, Otto Neurath, was also working simultaneously on ideas of rationalization and internationalization. He writes, "the desire for an international languages is an old one, and it is more than ever in men's minds at this

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70. It is, of course, important to challenge Porstmann on his occidental notion that a *welt-zeichenschatz* already exists in the form of Latin letters.

71. The term *Hilfssprache* is not specific to Porstmann but the generally accepted term by which these languages are known.

wir haben: *welt-zeichenschatz* (lateinische staben)
              welt-begriffschriften für
              quantitative wirtschaft (ziffern)
              chemi
              matematik
              kunst
              musik
              technik (zeichnungen)
              welt-bilderschriften u. a. foto und film
              welt-wortwurzelschatz

wir brauchen: *welt-laute*
              welt-staben
              welt-alfabet
              welt-stabenschrift
              welt-kurzschrift
              welt-sprache

Figure III.7: Walter Porstmann, *Weltsprache*, 1920, from Walter Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, ed. Richard R. Hinz (Berlin: Verlag des Vereins Deutscher Ingenieure, 1920), 81.

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time of international connections in business and science."[72] In contrast to Porstmann, Neurath does set out to design an international language of sorts, the result of which is the ISOTYPE - an International System of Typographic Picture Education.[73]

Both the concepts of a *Weltschrift* and systemization of script resonated strongly with Schwitters. A newspaper clipping, cut out and pasted into one of his many working notebooks from the mid-1920s, is taken from a short article entitled "Neben Weltsprache Weltschrift" by Heinrich Preus. The excerpt bears the pencil marks of careful underlining by Schwitters, which throws light onto Schwitters' interest in script: "Wir brauchen eine Weltschrift, wir müssen es dahin bringen, daß für jeden einzelnen Sprachlaut, den man auf der Erde spricht, überall dasselbe Schriftzeichen geschrieben wird."[74] Both this underlined sentence and the title of the article highlight the interconnected nature of language and script, and while it was hardly a novel concept, it was key to the thinking of many typographers in the 1920s. As the newspaper clipping indicates, Schwitters was reading material on the subject, and carefully archiving it, too.

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72. Otto Neurath, *International Picture Language; the First Rules of Isotype with Isotype Pictures* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Company, 1936), 16.
Otto Neurath (1882-1945) was a political economist, philosopher of science, and member of the Vienna Circle. Throughout his career Neurath was interested in how to effectively disseminate information to the public, and was director of the *Deutsches Kriegswritschaftsmuseum*, before founding the *Siedlungsmuseum*, and later the *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum*. For more on Otto Neurath, see Nancy Cartwright et al., *Otto Neurath: Philosophy Between Science and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

73. ISOTYPE has no element of script in it, and is instead made up of simple, repeatable symbols, that are often used to convey information regarding numbers. Ellen Lupton notes that each of the individual characters that make up ISOTYPE is "similar to a scientific formula, it is a reduced and conventionalized scheme of direct experience. [...] An Isotype character forumlates the undifferentiated, nonhierarchical details of the photograph into a concise, repeatable, generalized scheme." (Ellen Lupton, "Reading Isotype," in *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Victor Margolin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 146.) This language was subsequently employed by Neurath in the *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum*, and although ISOTYPE itself had no words, in the museum it appeared alongside text composed in Renner's *Futura*, perhaps as a result of Jan Tschichold's time there (see Christopher Burke, *Active Literature: Jan Tschichold and New Typography* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 119.). For more information on ISOTYPE see Christopher Burke, Eric Kindel, Sue Walker, et al., *Isotype: design and contexts 1925–1971* (London: Hyphen Press, 2013), Christopher Burke, "Isotype: Representing Social Facts Pictorially," *Information Design Journal* 17, no. 3, 211–223, and Lupton, "Reading Isotype."

74. Heinrich Preus, "Neben eine Weltsprache," in Kurt Schwitters Papers, Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, Hanover.

Yet, while Porstmann offered a broad theorization of language and script, Schwitters chose instead to focus on one particular part of the problem - script.[75] In doing so, Schwitters offered both theoretical considerations in the form of a published article and a letter exchange with another typographer working on similar issues, as well as concrete designs for a new kind of script that was much more radical in its strive towards rationalization.

Having considered the typographical landscape in which Schwitters was working, for the rest of the chapter I turn to Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, examining it from three main angles. In the first part, I read the *Systemschrift* against Schwitters' theorization on it. In the second part, I offer a more critical distance and look at examples of Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, realized in two different posters, and assess the problems and potential of his new script. Finally, I consider the legacy of the *Systemschrift* with reference to three recent uses of the script.

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75. It was not that Schwitters did not recognize that the systemization of language and script were related. We can see that he did in fact make the same connection from the opening lines of his article, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," reads, "Eigentlich ist eine Systemschrift nur ein Teilproblem innerhalb eines grossen Komplexes, der unter anderem Systemsprache und systematisches Denken umfasst." (Kurt Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 274.)

From Schwitters' writing we see that he started working on the idea of simplifying language earlier than his designs for the *Systemschrift*. He writes (in shorthand) in November 1925, "Der Sinn und Zweck einer neuen Sprache wird erst dann gut, wenn sie bei Klarheit und Verständlichkeit auch kurz ist. Wichtig ist grösste Vereinfachung und Zusammenlegung." (Kurt Schwitters, "Sprache," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 231.)

Schwitters goes on to demonstrate the extent to which he believes language can be simplified, by combining the verbs *sein* and *haben*, that are denoted by a single letter, and becomes conjugated with the addition of another.

"ich bin oder ich habe ——– ba
du bist oder du hast ——– da
er ist oder er hat ——– ma
sie ist oder sie hat ——– na
es ist oder es hat ——– ga
wir sind oder wir haben ——– pa
ihr seid oder ihr habt ——– ta
sie sind oder sie haben ——– ka"
ibid., 232.

Schwitters on the *Systemschrift*:

Questions of Temporality and Rationalization

In approaching the aims and motivations Schwitters had for the *Systemschrift*, we have two main sources to turn to. Firstly, a short article entitled "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift" - the only published text he wrote on this topic, which was spread across five pages in the *International Revue i10* in 1927, and gives a theoretical overview of the script, as well as providing several illustrations (see Figures III.3, III.8, III.9, III.11, and III.12).[76] The second source is a series of six letters that date between June and August 1927. While this almost certainly represents just a small fraction of Schwitters' correspondence during these months, it constitutes the most concentrated period of his prewar correspondence to which we have access.[77] It is notable, therefore, that each of these letters deals with the creation of a new script, indicating that it held a position of importance for Schwitters at this time.[78] These letters become, then, a valuable source

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76. An abridged, one-page version of this article appeared a year later in *Der Sturm*.

77. Although a prolific and incredibly methodical letter writer (it is estimated that Schwitters wrote between 12,000 and 16,000 letters in the course of his life. See Kurt Schwitters, "Kommentar," in *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nündel (Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 303.), the destruction of Schwitters' apartment on Waldhausstraße during the 1943 Allied air bombings of Hanover means that very little of Schwitters' correspondence from the 1920s and early 1930s remains.

78. Out of these six letters, three were written to Walter Borgius, a Berlin-based typographer, and one each to his American patron, Katherine Dreier, his wife Helma (quoted at the beginning of this chapter), and to his colleagues Theo and Nelly van Doesburg. The most of informative part of this correspondent is a series of three letters, written in quick succession over the course of 15 days, to Walter Borgius. Borgius, a Berlin typographer and writer of books on anarchism and education, first contacted Schwitters in order to learn more about Schwitters' *Systemschrift*. (Roger Cardinal, Gwendolen Webster, and Agnes Cardinal, *Kurt Schwitters* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 130.) In the course of these letters, Schwitters lays out the fundamental aims of his *Systemschrift*, and is the sole reason for correspondence. As we have already seen in the introduction to this chapter, the letter to his wife tells of his visit to a type foundry and his excitement surrounding his work on a new type of script. His letter to the van Doesburg's is more practical and lists five different requests, numbered in the letter, the last of which refers to his *Systemschrift*. Here, Schwitters includes a photograph of 6 "Schriftsystemen," as well as two tables that refer to version 'f' of these scripts - most likely the same six scripts and accompanying tables published in his text "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift." (Kurt Schwitters to Theo and Nelly van Doesburg, Eppstein i. Taunus, 27 June 1927, reproduced in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 115.) Written the same day and similar in tone, the letter to Katherine Dreier, centers on Schwitters' request for publication of the *Systemschrift* in America.

Figure III.8: Kurt Schwitters, *Systemschrift*, 1927.

Figure III.9: Kurt Schwitters, *Systemschrift*, 1927.

for attempting to better understand Schwitters' concept of the *Systemschrift*.

In three of these letters, Schwitters includes three photographs - almost certainly the same ones that make up the first three (of five) illustrations included in his article, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift" (see III.3, III.8, and III.9). In the first of these, entitled "Neue Plastische Systemschrift" (see III.3), Schwitters presents the reader with six different versions of his script, differentiated by the letters a-f and lines functioning as brackets, that appear on the right hand side of the page. For each of these six versions, Schwitters provides a practical example of the script - either by printing his name and address, or by transcribing the alphabet. Version 'a' very closely resembles other sans-serif typefaces that would have been familiar to the contemporary reader, and in that sense was not particularly revolutionary. This changes, however, as the reader's eye moves further down the page: not only do the scripts become increasingly unfamiliar, but we start to see the inclusion of new letters, as in versions 'c' and 'd,' as well as emphasis of vowels, seen already in script 'b', but becoming particularly pronounced in script 'e.' The culmination is version 'f' which renders both the alphabet and Schwitters' name and address incomprehensible to the reader.

Of this table, he writes to Katherine Dreier, "Zur Orientierung, es sind unter a bis f 6 verschiedene Alphabete. Das letzte ist international und sehr präcise, aber nicht ohne Weiteres zu lesen, man muss es einführen und lernen. c, d, e kämen für den Gebrauch schon in Betracht."[79] From both the text and the illustration, then, we learn that when Schwitters writes of the *Systemschrift* he does not allude to one typeface or script, as the singular form of the word would have us believe, but rather he refers to an ideal of a script. This ideal existed not just as one, but rather a spectrum of scripts, ranging from the easily recognizable 'a' to the indecipherable 'f.'

(See Kurt Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, 27 June 1927, reproduced in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 118-119.)
   79. Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, 27 June 1927, ibid.

We also see this notion of an ideal in the text of his article, in which Schwitters does not present a polished, fully-developed concept. Instead, what he provides his readers with is a sketch of the concepts he is working on. Use of the word *Anregungen* in the title alludes to this, and in the first paragraph, Schwitters further underlines this point when he writes, "ich möchte eine Anregung geben, wie man sie erlangen kann, und wie sie ungefähr aussehen müsste."[80] This is a work in progress, as far as Schwitters is concerned, and he frames the whole article in this way, concluding, "die Schrift f soll eine Anregung sein, soll einen Weg zeigen, auf dem man zu einer Systemschrift kommen könnte."[81] In the course of the article, Schwitters' motivation for the creation of such a script starts to emerge, as well as some clear themes that are expressed through motifs: time, speed, optics, phonetics, clarity, rationalization.

Like Porstmann, Schwitters situates the necessity of a new script within the larger context of a need to systemize language. The opening lines of "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift" read, "Eigentlich ist eine Systemschrift nur ein Teilproblem innerhalb eines grossen Komplexes, der unter anderem Systemsprache und systematisches Denken umfasst."[82] In starting out the article in this way, Schwitters positions the *Systemschrift* within the much larger context of a *Systemsprache*, of which Schwitters conceives the *Systemschrift* to be just one part. We see this inherent link between *Sprache* and *Schrift* in Schwitters' first letter to Walter Borgius, in which he writes, for example, "Es muss heissen opto-phonetisch, weil die phonetische Sprache durch gleichwertige optische Schrift bezeichnet werden muss."[83] Indeed, it is a thorough analysis of language, and the structure of its sounds, that leads Schwitters to create the script he does.

Ich habe da ein Instrument erfunden, auf dem die Sprache nach 3 Polen geord-

80. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.
81. Ibid., 278.
82. Ibid., 274.
83. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Bad Ems, 2 July 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 120.

net werden kann. Es handelt sich also für unsere Zusammenarbeit um eine Neuordnung. Die Laute werden dann ebenfalls nach 3 Polen geordnet und die entstandene begriffliche Ordnung durch die lautliche benannt.[84]

The "instrument" to which Schwitters refers, is the tables he produces, in which he identifies the type and length of each sound in the German language, as well as where in the mouth that sound is created. We see, therefore, that for Schwitters, script is not arbitrary, but inextricably linked to the phonetics of the language.

That Schwitters should consider *Sprache* and *Schrift* inherently linked is hardly surprising. This is not, however, the only way that Schwitters writes about language in his correspondence. Right in his opening letter to Borgius he picks up on something that Borgius had mentioned. He notes, "Sehr interessieren würde ich mich für Ihr logisches System der Begriffe, und ich glaube, dass sich bei gemeinschaftlicher Revision eines solchen Systems eine Basis schaffen liesse für Weiterarbeit. Wie die Schrift opto phonetisch sein muss, muss die Sprache begrifflich phonetisch werden."[85] Exactly what Schwitters means by a "begrifflich phonetisch" language remains opaque in this context, however, he returns to the idea in his third letter to Borgius:

> Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen der Ein- oder Vieldeutigkeit der Sprache oder Schrift. Wenn Sie die Zeichen von Touissant-Langenscheidt betrachten, so ergibt sich eine endlose Menge für viele Nuancen. So können Sie in der Sprache auch eine Reihe von Nuancen, von Gefühlsschwingungen feststellen. Aber wie es mein Bestreben war, nur die grossen Unterschiede in den Buchstaben klar festzulegen und zu unterscheiden, so möchte ich in der Sprache auch ein System der Hauptbegriffe schaffen, ohne die persönliche Einstellung, ohne Nuancen, ohne Gefühls- und Unterschwingungen. Aber es soll für alle Unterschwingungen eine Möglichkeit des Ausdrucks durch Zusammensetzung gegeben werden.[86]

In this passage Schwitters reflects upon a rationalization of language, paring it down to a min-

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84. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Bad Ems, 2 July 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 121.
85. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Bad Ems, 2 July 1927, ibid., 120.
86. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Eppstein i. Taunus, 17 July 1927, ibid., 125.

imum number of expressions. Such a notion mirrors in language, the approach he and other proponents of the New Typography took to the rationalization of script and typography. I contend that Schwitters' suggestion to remove the *Nuancen* of language is equivalent to eliminating the ornament in typography, and similarly the removal of *persönliche Einstellung* and *Gefühlsschwingungen* can be likened to Renner's effacement of the human subject in typography. For Schwitters, therefore, the *Systemschrift* is one part of a much wider move towards rationalization that also needs to be reflected in the way in which language is produced.

If we stop for moment, however, to compare the way in which this relationship between *Sprache* and *Schrift* is conceived by Schwitters' contemporaries, we see a difference in focus. For others, the emphasis is on a *Weltsprache* and a *Weltschrift* and thus the idea of internationalism. This is a concern of Schwitters' too, as we have seen from his letter to Katherine Dreier, in which he describes script 'f' as "international und sehr präcise."[87] For Schwitters, however, this is not the main driving force behind Schwitters' script, in contrast to Preus, whose article, for example, conjures up vivid images of the power of a new language to overcome geographical barriers and vast distances; "Auch mit Sprache und Schrift überfliegen wir Länder und Meere" he writes, for example. In this way, Preus' motivations can perhaps be viewed as coming from a similar place as Ludwik Zaemnhof's universally intended, constructed language, Esperanto.[88] Bayer, too, in his article, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," which was first printed in the Bauhaus journal *Offset*

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87. Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, 27 June 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 118-119.

88. Esperanto is a planned language that was designed by Ludwik Zaemnhof in the 1880s in order to help overcome communication issues resulting from the multilingualism of an international world. For more information on Esperanto, its implications and importance, see Pierre Janton and Humphrey Tonkin, *Esperanto: Language, Literature, and Community* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).
It is important to note that Esperanto was not the only international language at this time. Around the same time Zaemnhof was working on Esperanto, the German Roman Catholic priest, Johann Martin Schleyer, was creating *Volapük.* Schleyer claimed that God had spoken to him in a dream and asked him to create an international language. For more information on *Volapük* see Andrew Drummond, *A Handbook of Volapük* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2006).

in 1926, places an emphasis on the spatial, international aspect. Regarding the creation of a new script, he writes:

> um den heutigen und zukünftigen Anforderungen zu entsprechen, müsste ein formal objektives Resultat gezeitigt werden. Folgende Richtlinie können als Anhaltspunkte gelten:
>
> I. Internationale Verständigung durch *eine* Art Schriftzeichen (=Weltschrift).[89]

The emphasis for these theorists and practitioners is therefore on the international potential of the script.[90] Furthermore, in Bayer's text, like Porstmann's - and as we will see, Schwitters' - this idea of a new script is linked to notions of time. Bayer situates the necessity of a new script in *today* and the *future*, with the time an inherent part of the verb Bayer uses, *zeitigen*.

Indeed, while much of the discourse on a new script (or new language) at this time centers around the idea of a *Weltschrift*, and therefore internationalism, temporal elements are also evident. In Schwitters' theorization on a new script, it is this temporal aspect that comes to the fore. For him, the emphasis is less a spatial one, trying to unite people across distances by means of internationalization, but is rather posited as a temporal one. As we will see, Schwitters seeks to speed up the reading process of the individual in order to meet the demands of the increasing pace of life in the early twentieth century. Entangled in this temporal concern are therefore also notions of rationalization, that we have already seen were prominent at this time.

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89. Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," 25.

90. Bayer, like Porstmann, is quick to note that there is already a typeface that is being used in an international way - the *Grotesk* script (see ibid., 26.) - one of the three main families of script, together with *Antiqua* and *Fraktur* (see Frank Koschembar, *Grafik für Nicht-Grafiker: ein Rezeptbuch für den sicheren Umgang mit Gestaltung; ein Plädoyer für besseres Design* (Frankfurt am Main: Westend-Verlag, 2005), 18.). *Grotesk* is more modern version of *Antiqua*, having been first introduced in the 19th century, and is sans serif. Yet also like Porstmann, Bayer points out the limits of the script, stating "Sie wird auch international verwendet, doch ist sie noch unvollkommen und unkompliziert, weil willkürlich entwickelt." (Bayer, "Versuch einer neuen Schrift," 26.)

Schwitters and the Temporality of Script

Time (*Zeit*) is central to Schwitters' concept of the *Systemschrift* and is deeply embedded in "An-regungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift." In the opening paragraphs of the article, Schwitters starts to parse out what the *System* part of *Systemschrift* represents for him, setting it in firm opposition with the past. He writes, "Denn unsere heutigen Schriften sind durchweg von der römis-chen Antiqua oder der gotischen Fraktur oder von beiden abgeleitet. Sie sind wesentlich *his-torisch*, statt wesentlich *systematisch* zu sein."[91] We see here, that Schwitters creates a dichotomy between a historical script and a systematic, rationalized one, thereby positioning his justifica-tion for the *Systemschrift* within a temporal framework. Of particular importance in this passage is the reference to *Antiqua* and *Fraktur*, alluding, of course, to the *Antiqua-Fraktur Debatte.*

We have already seen the ways in which the New Typographers responded to this debate. While Renner envisaged his *Futura* typeface as being a direct response to it, falling definitively on the side of *Antiqua*, we see here that Schwitters was not interested in entering into the debate at all.[92] Instead, he advocated breaking with *both* forms altogether and moving in an entirely new direction. Schwitters makes the reader aware that both *Antiqua* and *Fraktur* belong in the past and that by contrast the rationalized *Systemschrift* is the way forward for the future.

Schwitters continues to build upon this idea in the course of his article, employing vivid images to illustrate the fundamental role he sees temporality playing in the development of the *Systemschrift*. Towards the end of the introductory paragraphs, he writes,

> Bestimmt ist aber in einer Zeit, die sich gezwungen sieht, alles zu normalisieren und in ein System zu bringen, die von dem System allgemein eine grössere Prä-

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91. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274. Emphasis mine.

92. See Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography*, 84.
Renner writes in "Die Schrift unserer Zeit," "Diesen Forderungen unseres heutigen Formgefühles entspricht am ehesten das Bild der Groteskschriften." (Renner, "Die Schrift unserer Zeit.")

cision und Bewusstheit in der Lebensführung erwartet und erreicht, eine Schrift, die nur ornamental gestaltet ist, ein Rest aus dem Mittelalter, der organisch nicht mehr in die Zeit passt.[93]

Here, Schwitters positions script temporally by making the comparison between it and a relic from medieval times, with a further contrast being drawn with the fact that this relic no longer fits neatly into the present. Through such temporal motifs we see Schwitters participating in a larger discussion surrounding the temporality of typography and script. For example, in a short article, Bauhaus typography professor, Joost Schmidt, explores the consistencies and multiple temporalities that affect thought processes, language, and script. Published a year later than Schwitters' article, Schmidt writes:

> jetzt wird auch die notwendige einheit gedanke - sprache erst hergestellt werden, die unsere zeit nicht zu bringen vermochte, für deren vorwärts drängende gedanken immer noch die reste verwester gedankenwelten herhalten müssen. anstatt mit diesen vergangenheitsresten aufzuräumen, pflegt man sie noch liebevoll, als ob sich totes dadurch lebendig machen ließe.[94]

Similar to Schwitters, Schmidt draws on the notion of "vergangenheitsresten," and highlights the tension it creates within the contemporary culture. He does so through the juxtaposition of living and dead, in his text, as well as imagery of decomposition contrasted with forward-moving progress. We also see the same urgency that is evident in Schwitters' article - a present that is desperately trying to move forward with momentum, while processes of the past weigh it down and hold society back. In Schwitters' text, the urgency of the *Systemschrift* is underscored by his phrasing, "die sich gezwungen sieht." It is, however, the closing idea that is most convincing in suggesting that the time is ripe for a new form of script - that it is ultimately irrelevant whether one falls on the side of *Antiqua* or *Fraktur*, since both are outdated and remnants of medieval

93. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.
94. Joost Schmidt, "schrift?," *bauhaus: zeitschrift für gestaltung* (Dessau), nos. 2-3 (1928): 18.

times. Instead, there is a genuine need for something new that fits with the *Zeitgeist* of the present - rationalization, and all that is bound up with that - economy of time, economy of materials, economy of labor.

Systemschrift and Rationalization

The way in which temporality served as a foundation for Schwitters' *Systemschrift* was, of course, not entirely original to him. Josef Albers, professor at the Bauhaus in Dessau, for example, was working from a similar premise when he drew parallels between new forms of notation and the perceived increasing pace of life. He writes, "Wir leben schnell und bewegen uns so. Wir gebrauchen Stenogramm und Telegramm und Code. Sie sind nicht Ausnahme, sondern wesentlich."[95] This prompted Albers to call for a new form and approach to typography, "Der Typograf muß, wie die ersten Buchdrucker, unsere Form neu erfinden."[96] Furthermore, the title of the treatise in which these passages appear - "Zur Ökonomie der Schriftform" - would seem to indicate that for Albers, as with Schwitters, this new, envisaged form of writing is linked to an absence, or at very least, a reduction in ornamentation. Time must be saved, for both the acts of reading and composing text, and one of the key ways to do this is by omitting any superfluous details, stripping the letters to the bare minimum. Schwitters goes one step further, however, by drawing particular attention to the way in which many other aspects of writing, printing, and textual communication had become systematically normalized, while script itself had remained essentially the same for centuries. Linotype machines had, for example, mechanized the process of typesetting since the end of the nineteenth century, and typewriters were mechanizing the production of text that would have otherwise been handwritten. Perhaps the most notable

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95. Albers, "Zur Ökonomie der Schriftform," 23.
96. Ibid., 24.

example of this for Schwitters, however, was the rationalization of paper size according to the *Deutsche Industrie Normenauschuß* in 1922.

In many respects the rationalization of paper size through the DIN standards can be seen as a parallel endeavor to the rationalization of language and script. Indeed, the attempt to universalize paper size is a successor of sorts to *Die Brücke - Internationales Institut zur Organisierung der geistigen Arbeit*'s *Weltformat*.[97] The emphasis on *Welt* in the title echoes that of *Weltsprache* and *Weltschrift*.[98] And with Porstmann as assistant to *die Brücke's* chairperson during this period, we see how this lineage of rationalization was passed down to the New Typographers. The standardization of paper sizing according to *DIN*, and with it, that of envelopes, envelope windows, paper margins, business cards, postcards, logos, and placards, bring together notions of *Welt*, universality, as well as rationalization. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the New Typographers were early adopters of this format.[99]

It is this ideal of rationalization that Schwitters latches onto when he writes "Wir haben eine Fülle von Schriften, aber alle sind historisch, keine ist systematisch."[100] For Schwitters this is not just a matter of creating something new for the sake of experimentation or novelty. Rather, he is determined to address, what he considers to be a glaring instance of inconsistent logic, in which two temporalities collide - the rationalized, modern temporality of the 1920s and the antiquated temporality of the script. In case the dichotomy he sets up between *historisch* and *systematisch*

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97. *Die Brücke - Internationales Institut zur Organisierung der geistigen Arbeit* was founded in 1911 in Munich and attempted to make research widely available, through the creation of an archive, as well as the distribution of printed materials.

98. Julia Meer also points out that even the *Weltformat* was not an entirely new idea, but preceded in 1796 by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg's call to rationalize paper size. See Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre*, 43.

99. The Bauhaus, for example, used DIN formatting in their publicity materials, and syllabus, and the school's desks, designed by Vera Meyer-Waldeck, included a drawer sized for A4 paper. (See Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919-1933* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 194.) Jan Tschichold includes a whole section on DIN formatting in his text Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*. Furthermore, as we will see in Chapter Four, much of the material on display at the "neue Typografie" exhibition in Berlin was in DIN format size.

100. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.

does not make the point clearly enough, Schwitters employs a vivid metaphor to call attention to this inconsistency: "Es ist fast unerklärlich," he writes, "dass dieselben Menschen, die heute schon nicht mehr in der elegantesten Pferdedroschke fahren mögen, eine Schrift benutzen, die aus dem Mittelalter oder dem Altertum stammt."[101] With this image, Schwitters highlights the absurdity of clinging on to a medieval script in a society that increasingly privileges speed and functionality over ornamentation. And in doing so, he also points to the fragmented and often uneven process of modernization.

Central to Schwitters' concern with developing a modern script for the modern age are the implications that modernity and technology has had on the reading process. Later in the letter to his wife, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Schwitters poses the question: "Wie soll ich sie nun nennen? Ein guter Name ist wichtiger als alles Andere. 3 Schlagworte halten einander die Waage: 'optophonetisch, Verkehrsschrift, dynamisch.' Vielleicht findest Du zufällig den passenden Ausdruck."[102] After working on the script intensively, Schwitters is able to distill the *Systemschrift* down to these three key aspects. Although the term *Verkehrsschrift* does not appear a single time in the text he published on the *Systemschrift*, it lends us an interesting insight into Schwitters' concept. There are two ways in which *Verkehr* here could be could be understood - both in the sense of traffic, and therefore referring to transportation in modern urban life, and also in terms of communicating with another person. Later in his letter, Schwitters points to the first use of the term, when he goes into more depth about the script he is designing. He writes, "sie wird in den Versalien so unkompliziert, dass man sie schnell lesen kann, was im Hasten des Verkehrs unbedingt nötig ist."[103] From this, we can deduce that the *Systemschrift* is designed for use within the space of the modern city - or at very least, it is in the city, that one reaps its

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101. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.
102. Schwitters to Helma Schwitters, Bad Ems, 14 August 1927 in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 127.
103. Schwitters to Helma Schwitters, Bad Ems, 14 August 1927 in ibid.

benefits most. Indeed, with this statement, we see a clear line between Schwitters' idea of the *Verkehrsschrift* and the motif of the "elegante Pferdedroschke" that appears in his article, as well as significant overlap with the term *dynamisch*. This was therefore a script that was intended to be read on the go, and was conceived of with movement and speed in mind.

Later in this chapter I will return to the third term Schwitters considers - *optophonetisch*. But first, having considered the conceptual foundations of Schwitters' rationalization of script, let us now turn to its practical implications, in order to better understand how Schwitters envisages the *Systemschrift* and how it operates.

Rationalizing Script

Pivotal to Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, is the idea that this is *not* like other recent attempts to alter, refine, or develop the script that was already in common usage. Schwitters is clear that his *Systemschrift* is a new way of writing - an entirely different script to that of the past, and one based purely on systematization and rationalization. In creating it, he clarifies what he understands *Schrift* to fundamentally be. Defining it as "das niedergeschriebene Bild der Sprache, das Bild eines Klanges,"[104] Schwitters thus sets up the two categories that will delineate the way in which he orders the *Systemschrift - Bild* and *Klang*. He continues, "Systemschrift verlangt, dass das ganze Bild der Schrift dem ganzen Klang der Sprache entspricht."[105] By identifying first the differences between letters, primarily between consonants and vowels, and thereafter by where in the mouth the sound is created, Schwitters organizes letters into tables, based on those attributes (see Figures III.8 and III.9.). Doing so allows him to create a system of symbols that is intended to provide an "optische Erklärung des Klanges."[106] For example, he writes, "ich [habe] in c, d, e

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104. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.
105. Ibid., 275.
106. Ibid.

alle Konsonanten mager und eckig, aber alle Vokale fett und rund geschrieben."[107] The openness of the vowel sounds is thus depicted in the round and bold letters, contrasting with the angular, sharp shapes that portray the consonants.

Central to Schwitters' rationalization of script is the strive towards "eine grössere Präcision."[108] In this way, it conforms, in many respects, to Renner's idea of a machine-built script. Yet Schwitters goes beyond this by not only rationalizing the *process* with which text is produced, but by rationalizing the way in which language is *transcribed.* At the core of Schwitters' theory of the *Systemschrift* is an analysis into the way in which words are created, which is subsequently incorporated into Schwitters' designs. As a result, his script contains new letters that Schwitters deemed had been, to date, insufficiently transcribed in a rational way with the Latin alphabet. Similarly, the way in which Schwitters rationalizes transcription could account for sounds not (yet) included in the German, or other languages.[109] While Schwitters too holds onto the term *Schrift* in both his letters and article, as well as the title of the *Systemschrift* itself, like Renner, he refers to the individual letters he creates as "Zeichen," thus moving away from the idea of a written, to a pictorial script.

The primary way in which Schwitters writes about his *Systemschrift* is by positioning it in contrast to the Latin script employed in early twentieth-century Germany. Throughout the series of letters to Borgius, Schwitters describes the commonly used script as one that has a deficit.

> Ein neues Alphabeth muss schon deshalb geschaffen werden, weil das alte übliche mangelhaft ist. Es fehlen die Zeichen für ng, sch, ch, es gibt keine unterschiedlichen Zeichen für Gaumen r und Zungen r, für ch in noch und ch in mich, für j in jeder und j in jamais, für th weich und th hart (englisch), für s hart und s weich. Dafür sind doppelte Zeichen für gleiche Laute vorhanden. Und es

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107. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 275.

108. Ibid., 274.

109. Schwitters only composes the notation of letters/symbols for the language (see the heading to the illustration on Figure III.8) but his system accounts for all sounds in any potential. In this way we see the international potential of the *Systemschrift*, about which Schwitters wrote to Katherine Dreier.

gibt noch viele Mängel. Von der Rechtschreibung garnicht zu reden.[110]

Words such as *mangelhaft* and *fehlen* punctuate this passage, appearing alongside numerous examples that illustrate his point. Through the repetition of these words, Schwitters underlines the ways in which language - and in particular, here, the German language - does not map on neatly to the script used to transcribe it.[111] More specifically, Schwitters attributes this disconnect to the sounds of the language, and the script's lack of ways to duplicate them in written form. Focusing on consonants, Schwitters systematically establishes the sounds found in the German language for which there is no discrete written or letter form. Identifying several, he notes that these are just a handful of such examples, and that many more exist.

In the following letter, Schwitters returns to this idea, this time also paying attention to the variations in length of German vowel sounds. He writes:

> Von dem bestehenden Alphabeth auszugehen ist deshalb sehr unzureichend, weil wir ein sehr mangelhaftes Alphabeth haben. [...] Ich habe festgestellt, dass wir im Deutschen 41 verschiedene Laute haben, wenn man bei den Vokalen lang und kurz verschieden nennt, dagegen haben wir nur 20 verschiedene Zeichen, wenn man die 6 zusammengesetzten oder doppelten abrechnet. Es ist ein trauriges Bild, dass wir mehr als die Hälfte der Zeichen umschreiben, oder raten müssen, oder dass durch Regeln der Rechtschreibung der fehlende einfache Laut ersetzt wird. Das ist grosse Konfusion.
>
> Mit dem neuen Alphabeth müsste die Rechtschreibung durchgesehen werden, und es müssten für die fehlenden 21 Laute zunächst Zeichen eingeführt werden.[112]

Here, too, Schwitters employs and repeats the words *mangelhaft* and *fehlend*, further emphasizing the deficits he observes in the German script, which he identifies in the preceding letter.

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110. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Bad Ems, 2 July 1927,Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 120.

111. While Schwitters' focus is on German, the examples of *jamais* (French) and the English *th* indicate that he started to think beyond his mother tongue.

112. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Eppstein i. Taunus, 13 July 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 122.

And yet, while Schwitters claims the system of writing is "grosse Konfusion," this is, of course, an exaggeration, since both the language and the way in which it is written down was used (and continues to be used) on a daily basis. In each of the examples of the deficits Schwitters identifies, sound is the determining factor, and as such, the root of the deficit. And so it is by means of this fundamental relation to sound that Schwitters derives one of the key terms he associates with his new script - *opto-phonetisch*.

For Schwitters, however, it is a fine balance of a specific type of phonetic quality that he strives for. He critiques, for example, the script Borgius is working on for being weighted too much in favor of sound over image, as well as for paying too much attention to particular aspects of sound. He writes, "Sie betonen die phonetische Schreibweise, die Sie in Ihrem Schriftstudium verwendet haben. Aber die Schreibweise muss natürlich optisch sein, und das Bild der Schrift, nicht der einzelnen Laute, muss parallel dem Klang der Sprache, nicht dem einzelnen Laute, sein. Das nenne ich opto-phonetisch."[113] Here we see a tension between what Schwitters strives to do - create a "Bild der Schrift" that encompasses something much more beyond the individual sounds of letters, syllables, and words, instead graphically illustrating language as a whole - and his practice, in which he concentrates intensively on the individual sounds. Later in this letter, for example, he returns to the individual sounds he denounces in the opening paragraph and criticizes Borgius for neglecting certain ones in his script designs. He writes:

> Sie unterscheiden zwischen Labiallauten, Gaumenlauten und Dentallauten. Da ist ein Fehler und ein Mangel. Der Fehler ist der, dass Sie das h nicht unterbringen können, welches ein Halslaut ist, und der Mangel, dass Sie zwischen den 3 wichtigen Stellen der Lautbildung im Gaumen nicht unterscheiden, hinten, mitten, vorn. Betrachten Sie bitte in Tabelle 2 die erste Liste, und Sie werden sehen, dass nebeneinander im Gaumen ch (noch), ch (mich) und sch liegen. Ich habe deshalb alle Mitlaute in ein Doppelsystem von Beziehungen gebracht, einmal wie

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113. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Eppstein i. Taunus, 13 July 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 122.

Sie nach dem Orte der Entstehung, und dann nach dem Klang: Knacklaute, Zischlaute, Nasenlaute, Schwinglaute."[114]

We see from this passage the depth to which Schwitters has analyzed and accounted for individual sounds in his script, and a textual description of the tables he produced for the *Systemschrift* (see Figures III.8 and III.9). At the same time, such an analytical description seems to go against his aim of creating a "Bild der Sprache," which would communicate a broader sense of language, moving beyond the individual sounds of letters and syllables.

From his article and his letters to colleagues, we see that Schwitters' *Systemschrift* was an attempt to conceptualize script in way a that responded to the *Antiqua-Fraktur Debatte* by rejecting both sides, and paving a new way forward. Schwitters positioned himself in contemporary conversations surrounding *Sprache und Schrift*, internationalism, and rationalization, but did so in a way that was different to many of his contemporaries. Let us now approach the *Systemschrift* with more critical distance, by reading two examples of it in use.

Reading the *Systemschrift*

As we have already seen, Schwitters' theory of the *Systemschrift* relies heavily on the notion of rationalization, and in particular, a speeding up of the process of the production and reading of text. Even when writing more generally on typography, Schwitters stresses the importance of a lack of ornamentation, simplicity, and objectivity in typography. In a short text entitled, "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift," for example, he writes,

in der entwicklung unserer zeit gehen viele dinge parallel: die forderung des neuen zeitwillens drückt sich auf den verschiedenen gebieten gleich aus. einfache

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114. Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Eppstein i. Taunus, 13 July 1927, Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 123.

Figure III.10: Kurt Schwitters, *Systemschrift*, 1927.

sachlichkeit, klare ruhe, übersichtlichkeit, daher zusammenfassen von teilen zum ganzen, daher das zweckdienliche material, daher *system* in allen dingen.

[...]

hier herrscht nicht willkür, sondern strengstes gesetz und logische fol-gerichtigkeit.[115]

Here, Schwitters draws attention to the fact that systemization and rationalization is not perti-nent in the contemporary moment to script, but across many different spheres, thereby placing it within a broader shift towards rationalization. Yet, I argue that the rationalized ideal, of which Schwitters writes here and is the basis for his *Systemschrift*, seems to lead him in two opposing directions. On the one hand, it prompts him to create a very complex system of writing that takes into account *every* sound used in the German language. As a result, Schwitters signifi-cantly increases the number of signs used to transcribe language, and through them conveys information so detailed as to indicate where in the mouth the sound is created. On the other hand, the whole premise of his short article "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift," as we have already read, is that systemization calls for the use of small letters in an effort to *reduce* the number of letters in the alphabet.[116]

There is a distinct tension, therefore, between Schwitters' approach to the systemization of the existing script and the creation of a new one. While he argues for the simplification and reduction of letters for the existing one, he is intent on designing an exhaustive set of signs for his *Systemschrift*. He writes, for example, in "plastische schreibung" (a short article composed semi-phonetically): "dii spraache unterscheidet deutlicht tswischen langen und kurzen silben,

115. Schwitters, "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift," 268. Emphasis mine.

116. He writes, "wenn man die kleinschrift allgemein einführte, würde das kind nur die hälfte der buchstaben zu lernen brauchen, würde der setzer schneller arbeiten können, würde der drucker nur die hälfte der schrift zu kaufen brauchen, würde man auf der schreibmaschine erheblich schneller tippen können, würden die schreibmaschinen einfacher gebaut werden können usw.

warum halten wir an dem alten zopf der groß- und kleinschrift denn noch fest?" (ibid., 269.)

eebensoo sol es die schreibung mache und tswaar oone jede einschränkung,"[117] thus highlight-ing the lack of limits he sees for the number of signs. Willen and Strals contend that "creating lettering or type is a tug-of-war between the ideal and the practical - the system's concept ver-sus its functionality."[118] We certainly see this tension at work in Schwitters' designs and theory, since all the arguments he makes against the retention of capital letters in "typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift" could be wrought against the exhaustiveness of the complex drafts he sketched for his *Systemschrift*.

We see this tension played out in two examples of the *Systemschrift* that were used in graphic design work, for which Schwitters was commissioned. The first is a poster for the Fitelberg Music Festival (see Figure III.11), that took place in Frankfurt, and the second for Opel-Tag (see Figure III.12), a day-long celebration of the auto company, Opel. Both posters were produced in 1927, and bear not only Schwitters' name as signature, but also the label *Systemschrift*.[119] In addition, these primarily text-based posters were included as examples of *Systemschrift* in Schwitters' article "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift."

Although both of these posters use the *Systemschrift*, at first glance it is clear that Schwitters uses a different version of the script for each one. The Opel-Tag poster uses version 'b' from table 1 (see Figure III.3) and therefore does not immediately hit the viewer as something entirely novel. By contrast, the Fitelberg poster uses something closer to version 'e.' Here, Schwitters stresses the vowels, not only through their bolder, rounder form, but also with lines above longer vowel sounds. As such, it is immediately clear to the reader that this is a new, experimental typeface, rather than an entirely new mode of writing.

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117. Kurt Schwitters, "plastische schreibung," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 269.

118. Willen and Strals, *Lettering & Type: Creating Letters and Designing Typefaces*, 21-22.

119. Both Schwitters' name and the label *Systemschrift* are found in very small type in the left hand corner of Figure III.11 and to the right of center at the bottom in Figure III.12.
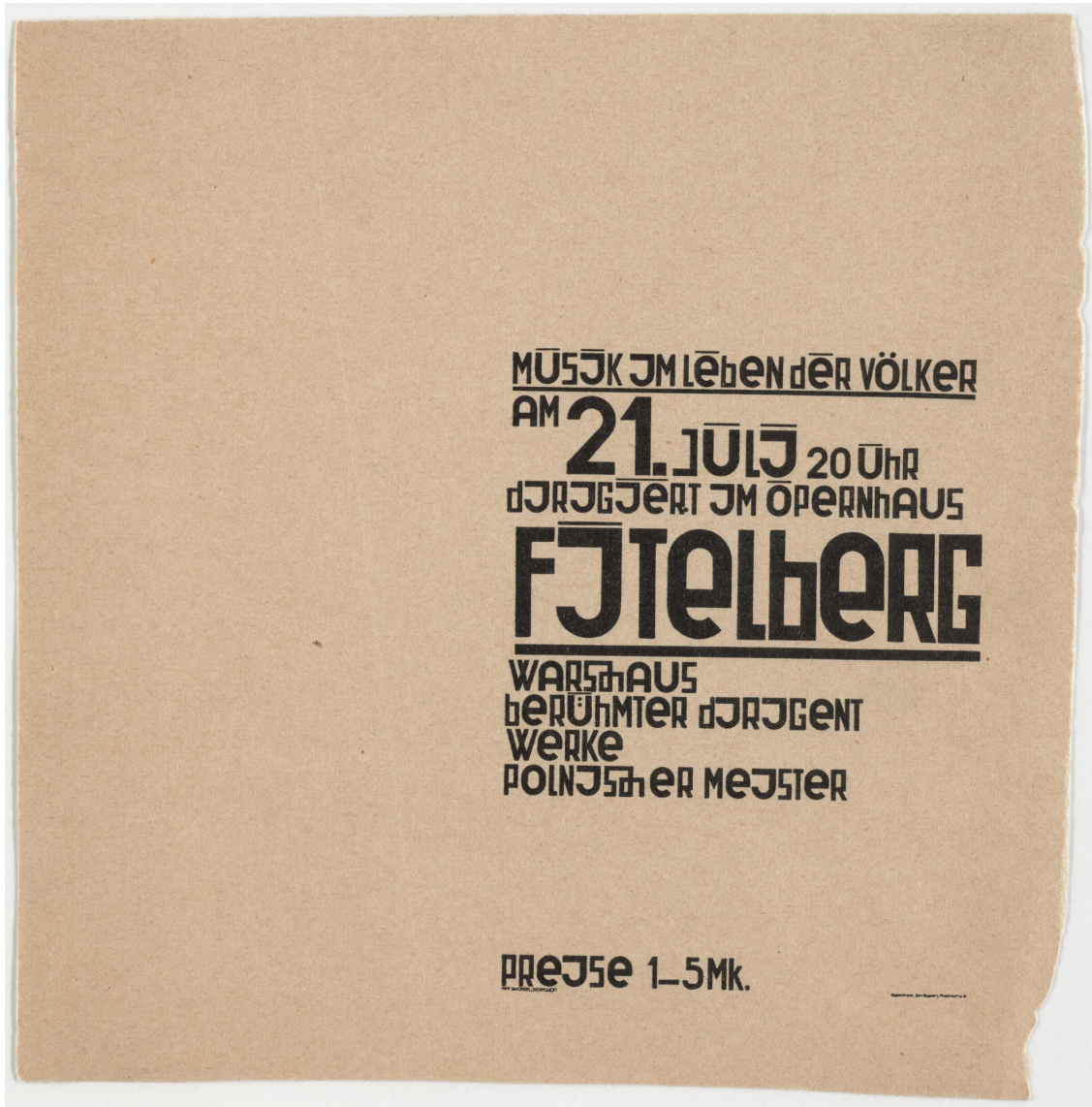
Figure III.11: Kurt Schwitters, poster for *Fitelberg* festival, Frankfurt, 1927.

Figure III.12: Kurt Schwitters, poster for *Opel Tag*, Frankfurt, 1927.

Yet contrary to Schwitters' intention of the *Systemschrift* being a *Verkehrsschrift* - a script that facilitates reading at speed in the modern city - the Fitelberg poster in particular causes the reader to slow down. The changes in letter form, albeit minor, and the inconsistent thickness of lines break up not just the assumed homogeneity of the text, but also the reader's flow. I suggest that these changes create the effect of ornamentation - the very thing Schwitters is trying to work against.

As official typographer for the city of Hanover, it was Schwitters who introduced *Futura* on to all of the city's stationery.[120] Writing about his aims for this project, he states, "Eine logische Gestaltung der Vordrucke erfordert zunächst die gedankliche Durcharbeitung des Textes auf Knappheit, Schärfe und Eindeutigkeit."[121] Clarity was therefore of utmost importance, as well as ease of reading, and it was for this reason that *Futura* was chosen. He continues, "Unter Fraktur-, Antiqua- und Grotesk-Schriften, die ich in verschiedenen Schnitten dem Bauamt vorlegte, suchte das Bauamt die Grotesk als die einfachste und klarste Schrift aus, und von den verschiedenen Groteskschriften wählte es die Rennersche 'Futura.'"[122] First made available in 1927 - the same year as these posters were designed, and the same year Schwitters was working on his *Systemschrift* - Paul Renner's *Futura* is a typeface completely stripped of all ornamentation and serifs, and bearing a consistent thickness of all letter strokes. This raises the question, why Schwitters did not seize the opportunity to bring his *Systemschrift* into common use, by introducing it onto the city stationery.

I argue, that this is in part, due to the fact that the *Systemschrift* was not an entirely successful project. Willen and Strals note that "modernist typefaces such as Futura, Helvetica, and

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120. For more on Schwitters' typographical and design work for Hanover, see Heine, "'Futura' without a Future: Kurt Schwitters' Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929-1934."
121. Schwitters, "Über einheitliche Gestaltung von Drucksachen," 324.
122. Heine, "'Futura' without a Future: Kurt Schwitters' Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929-1934," 325-326.

Figure III.13: Kurt Schwitters, cover design for *Bauordnung*, (Hanover: Göhmannsche Buchdruck-erei, 1930.

Univers, [...] successfully infuse[d] the hand-driven forms of the roman alphabet with rationalized qualities," continuing that "most type designers and letterers take this pragmatic approach, balancing their ideal system with the requirements of legibility, utility, and context."[123] As we see from the table, depicting versions a-f of the *Systemschrift*, we see that Schwitters too was flexible, and not opposed to compromising his ideal system for the sake of legibility. The problem, however, is that in comparison to these "compromised" scripts, there were already other scripts that were achieving his other goals in a more refined way. When the *Systemschrift* is placed alongside *Futura* both the more intricate letter shape, as well as the variation in line thickness in rendering Schwitters' script decidedly ornamental by comparison. Indeed, contrary to his criticism of ornamentation in "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," the tables he sketches as prototypes, reveal 6 different scripts which appear to become progressively more ornamental and thus working against the very rationalization Schwitters strives for. Schwitters' *Systemschrift* posters are striking, but not for their ease of reading - it is the new form that catches the eye, while simultaneously slowing down the process of comprehension.

Legacy of the *Systemschrift*

As we have seen, 1927 was a year in which Schwitters intensively engaged with typography, and in particular his *Systemschrift*. It was during this time that he hired an assistant to aide him in his work, visited a type foundry to further investigate the practicalities of creating a new script, had a letter exchange with Borgius on the topic, published an article on the *Systemschrift*, produced two posters that used it, as well as trying to drum up interest in it in both the Netherlands and America.[124] It is interesting, therefore, that despite this period of intense activity, we do not see

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123. Willen and Strals, *Lettering & Type: Creating Letters and Designing Typefaces*, 21-22.
124. In a letter to Katherine Dreier in June 1927, Schwitters writes: "Ich habe [...] jetzt mir eine Hilfe genommen, die mir beim Zeichnen hilft, und die ich roh und gefühllos, wie ich bin, Zeichenknecht nenne. Ich habe mit der

the *Systemschrift* mentioned again in Schwitters' essays and articles, nor do we find examples of it in his graphic design or typographical work. This is particularly surprising given that Schwitters was working so much with typography in the subsequent years as the official graphic designer for Hanover council, where he chose to use Renner's Futura. This prompts two questions: firstly, to what extent did Schwitters continue to work on the *Systemschrift* after 1927, and secondly, what has its legacy been.

From the sources we have already seen, it is unclear whether Schwitters further developed the *Systemschrift* after 1927. The only later reference to it is found in a letter composed by Helma Schwitters to Bodo Rasch in April 1933, in which she replies to the architect's request for samples of the script. She writes,

> Lieber Herr Rasch.
> Ich würde und hätte schon lange Ihnen Ihren Wunsch bezüglich Fotos von der Systemschrift zu senden, erfüllt, aber es geht nicht anders, wir müssen, das heisst die fortschrittlichen Arbeiten meines Mannes müssen bei der augenblicklichen Zeit im Verborgenen blühen. Sie werden es verstehen, dass ich daher Ihren Wunsch nicht erfüllen kann. Seien Sie uns deshalb nicht böse. Wir stellen auch nur noch naturalistische Bilder aus.
> Mit herzlichem Gruss unbekannterweise auch an Ihre Frau.
> Ihre Helma Schwitters[125]

From this letter, penned just a few months after the Nazis came into power, we know that any work done on the *Systemschrift* after 1933 would have been done in secret. Indeed, not only was

Dame eine neue Schrift ausgearbeitet und sende Ihnen eine kleine Foto[grafie] zu Ihrer Orienterung." This is the only time Schwitters mentions an assistant (aside, of course, from the fact that it is often Helma Schwitters, his wife, who writes on Schwitters' behalf). Given the numerous responsibilities and positions Schwitters held - founder of *Merz-Werbezentrale*, the *Ring: neue Werbegestalter*, *die abstrakten hannover*, and the *Aposs-Verlag*, to name but a few, in addition to his different projects, commissions, and more informal collaborations with other members of the avant-garde - the fact Schwitters chooses to hire an assistant for *this particular project* reveals the importance that he placed on it. (Kurt Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, 27 June 1927, reproduced in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, 118.)

125. Helma Schwitters to Bodo Rasch, 5 April 1933. Bodo Rasch Papers, D2179, ADK 10-21/82, Werkbund Archiv, Berlin.

Schwitters obligated to retreat from publicly engaging with his work on his experimental script, but he was also forced to change his designs for Hanover council to *Fraktur* when a memorandum on 14 June 1933 called for the end of Futura on all offical documents, and stated instead that blackletter would be more suitable.[126] This was the fate of the work of many of the New Typographers - as a marker of Weimar modernity, it was deemed "un-German" by the Nazis, with *Fraktur*, once again being considered at the governmental level the most "fitting" typeface for German texts.

In order to answer the second question, regarding the legacy of Schwitters' *Systemscrhift*, it is perhaps useful to first contextualize it within that of the New Typographers in general. With several of its practitioners, including Paul Renner and Jan Tschichold, being forced into exile in Switzerland, the seat of European typography shifted from Germany to the neighboring country from the mid-1930s onward. As a result of this influence, the *International Typographic Style*, now more commonly know as *Swiss Style*, emerged from Switzerland during the 1940s and 1950s. In many respects, this new typographic movement can be seen to be a direct continuation of New Typography. Founded by Théo Ballmer and Max Bill - two former Bauhaus students - Agnès Laube and Michael Widrig note, that "their aim was to take Swiss graphic design to a higher and above all international level."[127] In practice, the Swiss Style typefaces, like those of the New Typographers, were sans serif and based on geometric grids, and asymmetry.[128]

Since the 1950s, such scripts have become commonplace. But what about Schwitters' aim for an entirely new, rationalized way of writing? As late as 1980 Bodo Rasch and Herbert Bayer were still working with concepts of a new form of written communication. In a letter to Rasch,

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126. See Heine, "'Futura' without a Future: Kurt Schwitters' Typography for Hanover Town Council, 1929-1934," 136.

127. Agnès Laube and Michael Widrig, *Archigraphy: Lettering on Buildings* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2016), 16.

128. See Richard Poulin, *Graphic Design and Architecture, A 20th Century History: A Guide to Type, Image, Symbol, and Visual Storytelling in the Modern World* (Beverly, MA: Rockport Publishers, 2012), 133.

Bayer writes,

> I thank you for sending your lengthy manuscript on your thoughts about writing, and the new alphabet. I am much impressed by the thoroughness with which you have approached this complex problem, and I am indeed happy that you have taken up the idea of an improved writing method. as to my disappointment, nothing of any value has come from the side of the graphic designers. they are all interested only in the improvement of writing as a tool.
>
> [...]
>
> I had hoped that the computer would lead to taking a new approach to writing, but so far nothing really has happened. the lettering which computers are using is not very legible, and has nothing to do with the idea of the opto-phonetic alphabet. I do believe that the visual perception of the design of a new alphabet will be one of the key necessities, and I do think that it will not be the harmony of design, but the visual difference or distinction of one letter from the other that will be an important factor.
>
> I have never really known kurt schwitters' ideas about an opto-phonetic alphabet, but I am convinced that it would be worthwhile to consider some of his thoughts.[129]

In the course of this letter, Bayer expresses his frustration that in the half century that has passed since the 1930s, no progress has been made in the drive towards a new mode of writing. As a result, Bayer directs Rasch back to Schwitters, as a point of reference for considering a new type of script. From this letter we glean several things. Firstly, Schwitters' *Systemschrift* was widely known in avant-garde circles, and not forgotten over fifty years after its creation. Secondly, while practitioners of the Swiss Style continued the geometric, sans-serif typefaces first introduced by the New Typographers, no one has taken up again Schwitters' project of creating a new, rationalized opto-phonetic script. Thirdly, Bayer's reference to computers and their potential for changing how text is written, shows the desire for new technologies to have an impact on the way we approach writing.

129. Herbert Bayer to Bodo Rasch, 19 November 1980, Bodo Rasch Papers, D2179, ADK 10-21/82, Werkbund Archiv, Berlin.

Figure III.14: Logo on the International Dada Archive website:
http://search.lib.uiowa.edu/primo_library/
libweb/action/search.do?vid=01IOWADADA

Much like Schwitters' call for a new, systematized way of writing that would meet the de-
mands of the increased tempo of modern urban life, as well as Moholy-Nagy and Molzahn's call
for the merging of typography and photography in the Typofoto, Bayer indicates that with the
invention of the computer came a similar opportunity. And yet, as Bayer points out, that chance
has not been grasped. Indeed, if we consider how we produce text on a modern-day computer,
we see a parallel with Schwitters' disgruntlements regarding the production of Latin script. Just
as the Latin script was designed in an age that offered far fewer technologies than were available
in the 1920s, it has remained - and continues to remain - a relic that is used in contemporary
culture. The QWERTY keyboard, for example, was designed with the typewriter in mind, and
to slow the writer down to avoid jamming keys - a problem no longer valid with the computer
keyboard. Despite the fact that much more efficient keyboard designs have been available since
the early twentieth century, the vast majority of typists in Europe and the Americas default
to QWERTY.[130] Little progress has therefore been built on Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, nor on its
sentiment, in the intervening years.

While the rationalized ideal of the *Systemschrift* - version 'f' in the table - has lain dormant

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130. An example of alternative keyboard design is the Dvorak keyboard. Everett Rogers notes, "Only 32 percent
of typing is done on the home row with the QWERTY system, compared to 70 percent with the Dvorak keyboard.
The newer arrangement requires less jumping back and forth from row to row." (Everett M Rogers, *Diffusion of
innovations* (New York City: Simon / Schuster, 2010), 10.)

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since 1927, other versions of Schwitters' script have not completely disappeared from view. On the contrary, there have been three recent examples of its use. The first of these appeared in 1997 - exactly seventy years after Schwitters made preliminary sketches of it - when *The Foundry* typographers, David Quay and Freda Sack, released the typeface *Architype Schwitters*.[131] This typeface is a very faithful to versions 'c' to 'e' of Schwitters' *Systemschrift*, and, as a result, is now available to a wide audience. The second example can be found by logging on to the International Online Bibliography of Dada at the University of Iowa. A banner across the top reads "International Dada Archive," written in a rendering of Schwitters' *Systemschrift* (see Figure III.14). This is not the same typeface as that created by *The Foundry* and instead is much closer to the version Schwitters' used for the Fitelberg poster (see III.11), with stresses above certain vowels. In using Schwitters' script in this way, it not only provides the reader with textual information, but also comes to pictorially represent the archive.[132]

The final example is not strictly one of *Systemschrift*, but another typeface designed by Schwitters that shares many of characteristics of versions 'a' - 'e.' In 1929 Schwitters won the contract to create the accompanying stationery and advertisements for the Dammerstocksied-lung and the exhibition that would mark its opening. Set in the outskirts of Karlsruhe, the Dammerstocksiedlung was designed by a handful of invited architects working in the style of *Neues Bauen*, and headed up by Walter Gropius.[133] In addition to letterheaded paper and invitations, Schwitters' main responsibility was to design the exhibition catalog and poster (see Figure III.15). Both of these contain the same logo - a black block in the shape of an aerial view

131. *Architype Schwitters* is part of a series of typefaces based on those created by experimental typographers and New Typographers during in the interwar period. The collection also includes *Architype Albers*, based on his Kombinationsschrift (see III.5), *Architype van Doesburg, Architype Bayer, Architype Tschichold*, and *Architype Renner*.
132. It is ironic that a typeface by Schwitters, who throughout his life positioned *Merz* in opposition to the work of the Dadaists, should be chosen to visually represent the International Dada Archive.
133. For more information on the Dammerstocksiedlung see Peter Schmitt Brigitte Franzen, *Neues Bauen der 20er Jahre: Gropius, Haesler, Schwitters und die Dammerstocksiedlung in Karlsruhe 1929* (Karlsruhe: Museum für Moderne Angewandte Kunst, 1997).
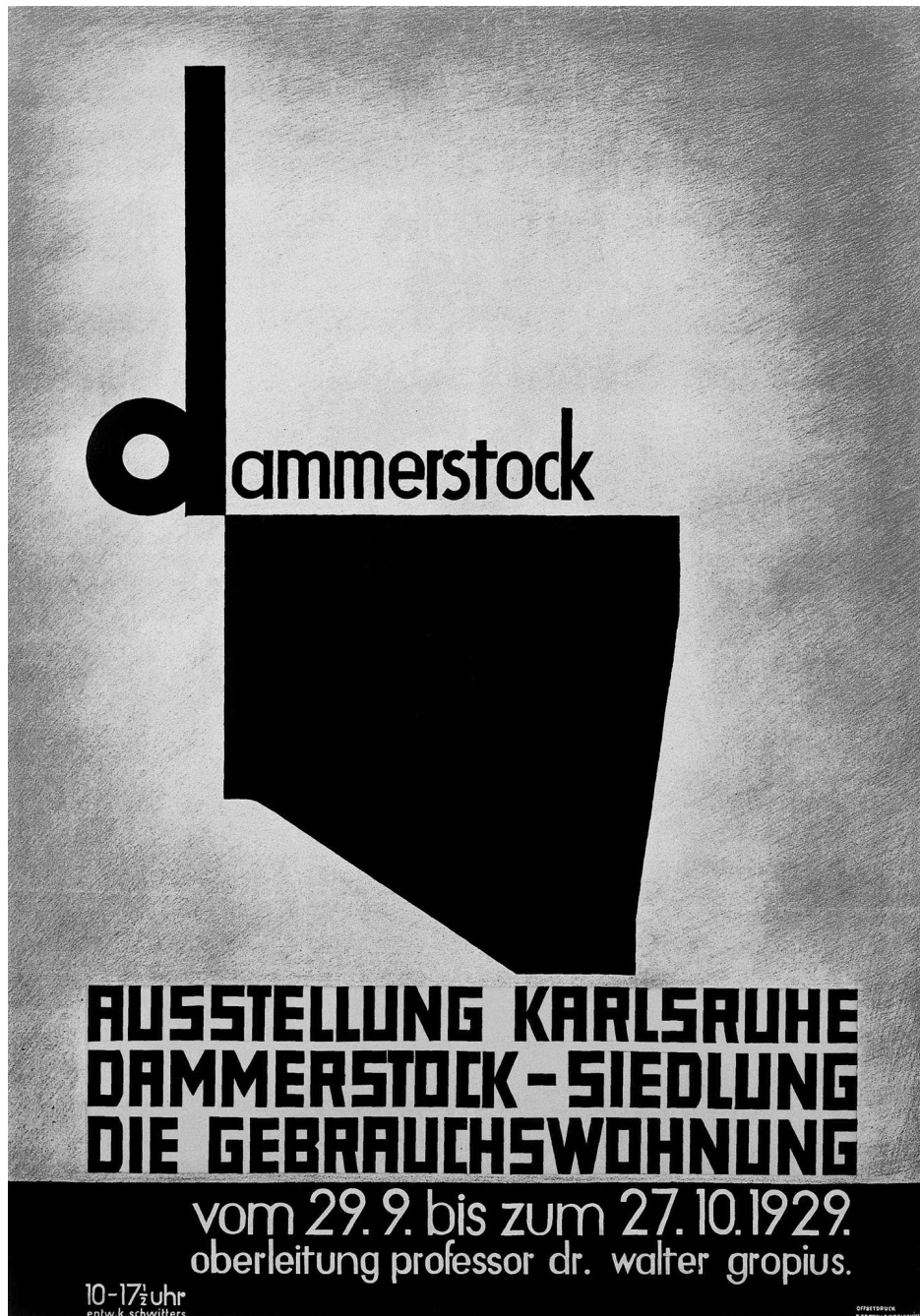
Figure III.15: Kurt Schwitters, Dammerstock-Siedlung Poster, 1929.

of the housing development, with a large, lowercase 'd' emerging from it, forming the first letter of Dammerstock. Underneath this on the poster, and to the left-hand side on the catalog, a textblock announces "Ausstellung Karlsruhe Dammerstock-Siedlung die Gebrauchswohnung," all in uppercase.

Schwitters uses Renner's *Futura* for the text inside the DIN formatted A4 catalog, all in lowercase, with the following note appearing on the bottom right of the title page: "auf wunsch von professor dr. w. gropius, berlin, dem künstlerischen oberleiter der dammerstock-siedlung, wurde der katalog in kleinen buchstaben gesetzt."[134] The subheading on the poster and catalog are, however, set in a typeface designed by Schwitters. Although not exactly the same as any version on his table depicting the *Systemschrift*, the consonants strongly resemble those of version 'd' with only the squareness of the vowels distinguishing this script from Schwitters' 1927 prototypes. It is not just the similarity between these two scripts that causes me to suggest that the Dammerstock script is related to the *Systemschrift* - the formatting size of the catalog, as well as the fact the type is set in a lowercase, sans-serif typeface, all point towards an ideal of rationalization. I contend, therefore, that even if this is not considered by Schwitters as a later version of his *Systemschrift*, his designs for the Dammerstock project not only borrow aesthetically from his earlier work, but also are ideologically aligned, rendering them related. If 1927 marked a high point for Schwitters' focus on a rationalized opto-phonetic script, the Dammerstock script marks a retreat back from this radical ideal with a version that would have been easily legible to the contemporary reader. Indeed, this move might suggest that Schwitters subsequently distanced himself from his overarching ideal, therefore explaining why he never mentions it after 1927, choosing instead to focus on adapting it to the Latin script, as with his versions 'a' to 'e.'

Just as Schwitters conceived of the *Systemschrift* as a script for the city, the Dammerstock

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134. Walter Gropius, *Dammerstock Katalog: Ausstellung Karlsruhe Dammerstock-Siedlung: Die Gebrauchswohnung* (Karlsruhe: Stadt Karlsruhe, 1929), 1.

Figure III.16: Photograph: Dammerstock-Siedlung Exhibition, 1929.
A sign points towards the Dammerstock-Siedlung exhibition featuring a typeface created by Schwitters for the project, as seen from Karlsruhe train station. To the right, a poster advertising the exhibition, designed by Schwitters is also visible.
Photo by Adolf Supper, 1929. "Eröffnung der Dammerstocksiedlung - Hinweisschild 'Ausstellung Dammerstock-Siedlung, Die Gebrauchswohnung.'" Stadtarchiv Karlsruhe, 8/Alben 398 / 2.
Photo courtesy of Stadtarchiv Karlsruhe.

script became one that not only represented an area of the city, but was seen throughout Karlsruhe in 1929. A photograph from that time depicts the scene outside the train station: a free standing sign with the title of the exhibition, inscribed in the same typeface as that used on the poster and catalog, points in the direction of the housing development (see Figure III.16). To the right, the exhibition poster is positioned half way up, with the word *Omnibus* printed in the Dammerstock script. Unlike the other signs visible in the photograph, the text on the exhibition sign is printed onto glass, allowing the viewer to see through so that Schwitters' text is superimposed directly onto the street beyond it, melding his script with the city. However, just like the temporary nature of the exhibition, the script on the sign and posters across the city soon disappeared from the streets.

In 2006 that all changed with the refurbishment and return of one of two original ticket counters used for the 1929 exhibition.[135] This ticket counter now sits to the southeast entrance to the housing development, beside a new structure that serves as an "Infopavillon", with a roof straddling the two (see Figure III.17). The information pavillion, like the 1929 sign, is made out of glass, and bears the text, "Dammerstock Muster-Siedlung des neuen Bauens" in Schwitters' script, with the logo positioned behind it. The same script also makes an appearance on the original ticket counter, that bears the text, "Eintritt 50 Pfennig." As a result, Schwitters' script has been reinscribed onto the city, and serves two functions. Firstly, the characteristic form of the script has come to represent the Dammerstock-Siedlung as a symbol. Secondly, however, it is also used in the way in which Schwitters' always intended it - as a means of conveying information in a fast-paced, modern urban environment. Indeed, directly in front of the ticket counter and information pavillion today, just a small strip of grass separates it from the S-Bahn

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135. The other ticket counter was dismantled after the exhibition. The refurbished one was used at an outdoor swimming pool in Rappenwört, just outside of Karlsruhe, until its discovery in 2004. Subsequently, the architect firm, Rossmann+Partner, whose offices have been in the main *Waschhaus*, situated at the entrance of the Dammerstock, since 1974, refurbished it.

Figure III.17: Infopavillon at the entrance to the Dammerstock-Siedlung, 2017.

tracks, with the pavilion located exactly between two stops, and beyond that, lies a busy dual carriage way. Schwitters' text is therefore now passed each day, glanced at by car and train passengers, as they travel past.

Conclusion

The legacy of Schwitters' *Systemschrift* is far from large and is most likely restricted to the three examples discussed above. These examples use versions 'a' to 'e' of Schwitters' script and closely resemble the existing Latin script. As such, they remain estranged from his ideal of an entirely new, rationalized opto-phonetic way of writing - an idea, it would appear, that has not evolved

since the drafts he created in 1927. In many respects the *Systemschrift* was therefore a failed project that remained at the experimental stages. I argue that this was due to the fact that Schwitters' ideal of creating a truly opto-phonetic script - a script that would enable the reader to be able to pronounce it, regardless of whether they spoke the language or not - was incompatible with his desire for a rationalized script that could also be read at speed. As his work on the Dammerstock script perhaps indicates, Schwitters was aware of this problem himself, and reverted back towards adaptations of Latin script.

In discussing the need for a new way of writing over fifty years later, it was to Schwitters that Bayer recommended Rasch to turn - no doubt, since it was Schwitters who took such experiments to their most extreme among his colleagues. What this, together with the three examples, tells us, however, is that although Schwitters' experiment was not altogether successful, it was significant. In the cases of the International Dada Archive, and the Dammerstock information pavilion, in addition to carrying textual information, we see Schwitters' script come to be pictorially representative - chosen for its ability to evoke both a time period, and a particular aspect of art and architectural history.

Chapter IV

Schwitters, Moholy-Nagy, and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* on Display

In a circular letter to the members of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* (Ring of New Advertisers), Schwitters writes in early 1929 of an exciting opportunity for the group to organize an exhibition in Berlin. Hosted by the former Museum of Applied Arts (*Kunstgewerbe Museum*) in conjunction with the State Art Library (*Staatliche Kunstbibliothek*), this would be the group's first exhibition in the capital. Two sets of exhibition materials containing members' graphic design and typographical work had been touring Germany and bordering countries since the group's formation in 1927. Plans were also already in place for further exhibitions in Munich, Frankfurt, and Stettin, when this invitation came in.[1] Schwitters swiftly accepted and wasted no time in soliciting ideas and suggestions from other members, in order to set the exhibition design into motion.

For Schwitters, this incarnation of the *neue Typografie* exhibition was of particular importance, since it would be the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*'s most comprehensive representation to date. Furthermore, being in the capital, it would offer the potential for a larger audience, including other international designers, and thus generate awareness of the group.[2] In recog-

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1. See circular letter from Kurt Schwitters to members of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*. "Mittelung 24, 15.2.29" reproduced in "Rundbriefe des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter' aus dem NachlaßPiet Zwarts," (Volker Rattemeyer and Dietrich Helms, eds., *Ring'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931* (Wiesbaden: Museum Wiesbaden, 1990), 121.)

2. Schwitters writes to the members, "Es ist sozusagen unsere erste grosse Repräsentation in Deutschland und unser erstes Zusammentreffen mit ausländischen Reklamegestaltern gleicher Gesinnung."
Circular letter from Kurt Schwitters to members of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*. "Mitteilung 24, 15.2.29" re-

nition of this, the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* took the opportunity to invite other high profile designers and typographers, such as Herbert Bayer, Theo van Doesburg, John Heartfield, and Karel Teige to exhibit alongside them as featured guests. Furthermore, an additional room was added to the standard exhibition that had been touring until that point. Entitled "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" and curated by Schwitters' frequent collaborator and good friend, László Moholy-Nagy, this was the opening room and intended to provide a context for the work of the *Ring 'neue Werbegestalter'* and New Typography more generally.[3]

The *Ring*'s 1929 Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition is the focus of this chapter, which I use as a case study to gain insight into Schwitters' understanding of New Typography. As an exhibition of typography and graphic design, *neue Typografie* brings together the main focuses of this dissertation - namely, the shifting nature of the relationships between the fine and applied arts and text and image. Moreover, since this was a collaborative exhibition between Schwitters, as leader of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*, and his colleague, Moholy-Nagy, examining the exhibition allows us to consider how Schwitters collaborated with other members of the avant-gardes. I contend that reading various aspects of the exhibition reveals nuanced differences between the two artists, and therefore sharpens our understanding of how Schwitters approached New Typography.

In this chapter, I start out by introducing the *Ring 'neue Werbegestalter'* and contextualizing the *neue Typografie* exhibition within the broader exhibition culture of the late 1920s. I then start

produced in "Rundbriefe des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter' aus dem NachlaßPiet Zwarts, Rattemeyer and Helms, *Ring'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931*, 122.

3. In keeping with the ideals of *neue Typografie* both the title and the whole text was written in lowercase, and will be transcribed in lowercase throughout the chapter.
Although this was the first instance of Moholy-Nagy's room, a brochure for the exhibition "Neue Typographie: Ring neue Werbegestalter," held at *Am Adolf-Mittag-See* in Magdeburg from 3-19 August 1929 indicates that it was also included in at least this exhibition.
See Getty Research Institute Special Collections, Box III, F11, *Bauhaus Typography Exhibition Announcements* 346-347, 850513, 355.

to reconstruct the exhibition, by first of all addressing some of the challenges involved in working with an incomplete archive, before considering the physical space in which the exhibition was displayed. I argue that the atrium of the *Kunstgewerbe Museum* is a liminal space, which brings together the museum and the street, as well as the trade fair and exhibition. Having done so, I start to piece together Moholy-Nagy's opening room, "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" As a distinct and separate space, "wohin geht die typograpfische entwicklung?" functions as an exhibition within an exhibition, and as such, serves as a point of comparison with the larger exhibition of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter.'* Here, I draw on Charlotte Klonk's work on exhibition practices during the Weimar Republic and show that Moholy-Nagy's room can be considered a *discursive space.* Using this framework, I highlight one of the primary differences in modes of display between him and Schwitters.

In the next part of the chapter I examine the section of the exhibition curated by Schwitters and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter.'* In particular, I draw on theories of space from Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, that allow me to consider the temporality within the particular space of the museum, in contrast to the city beyond its walls. I argue that the slower temporality of the museum changes both the function of the typographical work on display, as well as the way in which it is viewed. In the final part of the chapter, I offer a reading of theoretical essays on typography by both artists, and argue that, despite a core overlap in their conceptual frameworks, there is one fundamental distinction: while Moholy-Nagy focuses on the medium through which typography should be employed, Schwitters is more concerned with its reception. In doing so, I demonstrate that New Typography would be better understood as a plurality of approaches, rather than a single, uniting one.

Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'

A month after contributing typographical work to an exhibition organized by the Jena Kunstverein in May 1927 - the first such time Schwitters had exhibited typographical work in a gallery - Schwitters held a meeting that instigated the formation of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*. Tucked away in the Taunus mountains in Hessen, Schwitters was visiting fellow artists, Robert Michel and Ella Bergmann-Michel in the Schmelzmühle - the Michels' home-studio that served as meeting place for avant-garde artists in the 1920s - when the idea was conceived. It was not, however, until May 1928 that the organization was formally announced to the public in the journal *Das Kunstblatt*, together with the names of its founding members. The announcement reads: "Unter dem Namen: Ring, neue Werbegestalter haben sich unter dem Vorsitz von Kurt Schwitters neun als Reklamefachleute tätige Künstler zusammengeschlossen. Der Vereinigung gehören an Baumeister, Burchartz, Dexel, Domela, Michel, Schwitters, Trump, Tschichold, Vordemberge-Gildewart."[4] Although just a brief and very factual announcement, the description of the members as "Reklamefachleute tätige Künstler" draws our attention to the particular amalgam of expertise in advertising *and* artistry that their work represented. Indeed, with the exception of Tschichold, each of members of the *Ring* was a self-taught typographer, coming to the fields of typography, graphic design, and photography obliquely via fine art and photography. This phenomenon marked a significant break with the established tradition of typographers as skilled and trained laborers that came before, and is seen across all fields of graphic design during the 1920s, with artists infiltrating other professions, such as design and advertising.

One of the main aims of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter,'* Megan Luke notes, was "to promote and popularize modern graphic design" - a priority that was clear from the very beginning. By

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4. Kurt Schwitters, "Chronik," *Das Kunstblatt*, 1928, 156.

December 1927, for example, well in advance of the group's official announcement of formation, the *Ring* had already had submissions accepted to two journals, and an impressive five exhibitions were in the works.[5] The fact that such concrete progress was made in a short period of time was no doubt helped by the fact that all the members - not least Schwitters - were already actively publishing in journals and well connected across the various avant-garde networks. The promotion and popularization of modern graphic design remained an important goal of the *Ring* until the dissolution of the group in the early 1930s, with three major ways in which this was enacted: public lectures, journal publications, and exhibitions.[6]

Schwitters, and other members of the group, started out their ambitious enterprise by holding regular lectures on typography across Germany. To aid in this, Schwitters had a set of slides made specifically for this purpose, that showcased members' exemplary typographical and design work.[7] In terms of publishing, in addition to several one-off pieces that appeared in various journals, both *Das neue Frankfurt* and *Die Form* (published by the Werkbund) had an agreement with the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* to regularly feature articles by its members.[8] It seems, however, that the focus of the group lay in exhibiting its work. Organized by various members of the *Ring* - although most often by Schwitters - these exhibitions were varied in both content and

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5. Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 38.
In a letter to Piet Zwart dated 12.12.1927, Schwitters writes: "Wir haben schon 2 Zeitschriften und 5 Ausstellungen. Das ist viel für den Anfang." (Quoted in Kees Boos, "Das kurze, aber heftige Leben des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter,'" in *"Typographie kann unter Umständen Kunst sein:" Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart: Typographie und Werbegestaltung*, ed. Volker Rattemeyer and Dietrich Helms (Wiesbaden: Landesmuseum Wiesbaden, 1990), 7.)

6. The group was dissolved in 1933 when the National Socialists came into power. In a letter to Bodo Rasch dated August 9, 1933, Schwitters' wife Helma writes, "Mit Tschichold habe ich über Ihre Idee geschrieben, den Zirkel zum offiziellen Organ des Ringes zu machen. Er meinte, eigentlich existiere der "Ring" doch garnicht [sic] mehr, da hat er nicht Unrecht." (Helma Schwitters to Bodo Rasch, 9 August 1933. Bodo Rasch Papers, D2179, ADK 10-21/82, Werkbund Archiv, Berlin.)

7. Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile*, 38.

8. In a circular letter from Kurt Schwitters to members of the Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter,' dated 24.6.1928, Schwitters writes, "Dexel und Michel haben beim Neuen Frankfurt erreicht, dass es unser Publikationsorgan werden will und Berichte, Rundschreiben und Ringnachrichten aufnimmt." (Quoted in Rattemeyer and Helms, *Ring'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931*, 114.)

constellation. From exhibitions that displayed only work by its members, to those that featured it within in a larger and more general exhibition, the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* exhibited in Cologne, Wiesbaden, Hanover, Bremen, Hamburg, Dresden, Basel, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam, among other cities, between 1928 and 1931. It was likely due to the success of these touring collections, or perhaps as a result of Schwitters' persistent knocking on doors, and encouragement to other members to do likewise, that the *Ring* received the invitation to organize and curate the typography exhibition in Berlin in 1929.

Before looking more closely at the exhibition, I would like to take a step back and consider the greater exhibition landscape at the time, first by looking at the fluid relationship between the trade fair and exhibition in the interwar period, that stemmed, in part, from the rise in the applied arts.

Exhibition Culture

Writing in 1926, Hannes Meyer, who would go on to become the second director of the Bauhaus, stated that "*Every epoch demands its own form*."[9] Elaborating on this point, he continued by claiming that "The nervous perplexity of the applied arts is proverbial. Freed of the ballast of classical airs, artistic conceptual confusion, or the need for a decorative wrapping, the witnesses of a new epoch rise in their place: trade fair, grain silo, music hall, airport, office chair, standard ware."[10] Here, Meyer draws acute attention to the rise and expanse of the applied arts in modern society, highlighting the broad range of objects that this includes. He goes on to write "All of these things are products of the formula, function times economy."[11] It is perhaps this economic aspect that

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9. Hannes Meyer, "The New World," in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 447.
Hannes Meyer (1889-1954) was a Swiss architect and director of the Bauhaus from 1928-1930.
10. Ibid., 447.
11. Ibid.

most notably sets the applied arts apart from, what Meyer terms, the classical arts. Yet Meyer is quick to point out that the two ought not to be in competition with one another. He warns, "The unrestrained affirmation of the Modern leads to a reckless denial of the past. The institutions of our elders become obsolete, the gymnasia and academies. City theaters and museums lose their audiences." And so while the differences between the classical and applied arts are made clear, Meyer shows that they are not binaries working against one another, but rather coexisting alongside one another, with a certain degree of fluidity between them.

One area in which we see this fluidity is in the trade fair in post World War I Germany.[12] Meyer calls upon the example of trade fair as symbol of both the modern epoch, and of the applied arts. In the years preceding this text, there had been a move towards smaller trade fairs.[13] This was certainly the case for the fields of book design, graphic design, and advertising - the three main types disciplines represented in the *Ring*'s touring *neue Typografie* exhibitions - in which the material was at once commercial, and as Schwitters alluded in the *Ring*'s announcement in *Das Kunstblatt*, also *künstlich*.[14] In this way, the exhibition follows in the tradition of

12. There is a long tradition of fluidity between the trade fair, the museum, exhibition, and exposition, which Robert Rydell traces back to the "Great Exhibition" of London in 1851, and the popularity of World Fairs it was the catalyst for (see Robert W. Rydell, "World Fairs and Museums," in *A companion to museum studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 135.). He writes that such fairs were "remarkably complex events that served multiple functions as architectural laboratories, anthropological field research stations, proto-theme parks, engines of consumerism, exercises in nationalism, and sites for constructing seemingly utopian and imperial dream cities of tomorrow." (ibid., 136.) Similarly, this mix of commercial and educational interests can be seen in "Die Internationale Hygiene-Ausstellung" that was held in Dresden in 1911, and organized by Karl August Lingner - founder of the dental hygiene firm, *Odol*. With the founding of the *Deutsches Hygiene-Museum* in Dresden a year later - a direct result of the success of the hygiene exhibition - we can see a direct link between the trade fair exhibition and the museum.

13. Thomas Elsaesser, for example, has noted that there was a "general trend, which favoured small-scale specialized trade-fairs to replace the unwieldy and pompous world-fairs, and of glossy, well-designed and well-illustrated occasional publications and catalogs, to replace handbooks and encyclopedia." (Thomas Elsaesser, "Domestic Modernity," in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld and Carmel Finnan (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 27–49.) Despite this more general trend, larger trade fairs, such as the "Große Ausstellung Düsseldorf 1926 für Gesundheitspflege, soziale Fürsorge und Leibesübungen," more commonly refered to as the "GeSoLei", attracted over 7.5 million visitors (see Carol Poore, *Disability in Twentieth-Century German Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 4.) over a period of five months.

14. A small sample of such exhibitions and trade fairs in these fields include "Münchener Buchkunst," exhibited at

Werkbund exhibitions, which, from 1914 onwards, brought together the aesthetic and functional, and borrowed from the trade fair.

An example of this fluidity between exhibition and trade fair can be seen in *Pressa - Internationale Presse-Ausstellung*, that was held in Cologne in 1928. In many respects this well known exhibition evades classification - in part, because of its scale, but mostly due to its almost exhaustively varied content. Jeremy Aynsley notes, that it "cut across the apparent polarities of modernist or traditionalist design to present a wide range of production, organized by commercial rather than artistic, stylistic, or idealogical categories."[15] By being organized according to commercial categories, *Pressa* very much conforms to the model of trade fair. Yet, at the same time, it is perhaps best known for its experimental exhibition design, with El Lissitzky's Soviet Pavilion often being cited as exemplary in its innovation.[16] And so while the spatial organization placed emphasis on the commercial aspect, the content of many pavilions drew attention to more creative and formal aspects.

Aynsley's observation of the juxtapositions of the spatial layout at *Pressa* only serve to heighten the sense of fluidity between trade fair and exhibition. He draws our attention, for example, to The House of Nations, which both displayed a history of women in the publishing industry and posed questions to the visitor about their future in the profession. This informative, educational exhibition was located right beside stands from the main commercial newspapers and printing technology firms that were there to attract business.[17] These examples show us

the Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim from December 16, 1917 to January 2, 1918; "Graphische Werbekunst: Internationale Schau zeitgemässer Reklame" in Mannheim in 1927; Leipzig's "Internationale Buchkunst-Ausstellung (IBA)" in 1927; "Reklameschau" in Berlin in 1929; "Ausstellung Neue Graphik" at the Staatliche Akademie für Graphische Künste, Berlin in 1931.

15. Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," 54.

16. For a more detailed reading of Lissitzky's design of the Soviet Pavilion, see ibid.; Jorge Ribalta, *Public Photographic Spaces: Exhibitions of Propaganda, from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928-55* (Barcelona: Museu De Arte Contemporaneo De Barcelona, 2008); Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

17. Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," 63-64.

that there was a number of motivations behind the various pavilions and sections at *Pressa*, including the education of the visitor, commercial and retail interests, and even leisure activities, such as restaurants for the visitors.[18] As a result we see the cross over between trade fair and exhibition in this space.

Not surprisingly, *Pressa* was not alone in this type of hybrid exhibition-trade fair. Aynsley places it within the tradition of number of exhibitions that focused on graphic design, book design, and advertising during the 1920s, naming the Berlin *Reklameschau* in 1925, and Leipzig's *BUGRA Buch und Gewerbeausstellung* in 1927 as important predecessors. Having significant influence on future exhibitions, *Pressa* was followed by *Film und Foto* and the *Berlin Internationale Reklame Messe*, both of which were on display in 1929, as well as the *Die Neue Werbung* in 1931.[19] There are several other notable exhibitions that could be added to this list, including Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub's "Graphische Werbekunst" in Mannheim in 1927, and in 1930, "Gefesselter Blick" in Stuttagart - a collaborative exhibition between the architect brothers Heinz and Bodo Rasch and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter.'*[20] And last but not least, I contend that the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition belongs in this context too, as a small and specialized exhibition that blurred the boundaries between trade fair and exhibition. Indeed, many of the members of the *Ring*, as well as their invited guest artists, had exhibited in several of these aforementioned exhibitions, with "Graphische Werbekunst," "Film und Foto," and "Gefesselter Blick" being notable examples.

In the next part of this chapter, I turn to the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition. Before reconstructing the exhibition, I first of all consider the process and challenges involved in reconstruct-

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18. See Aynsley, "Pressa Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period," 64.

19. Ibid., 55.

20. Art historian Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub (1884-1963) became director of the Kunsthalle Mannheim in 1923 and was curator of the influential 1925 exhibition "Die Neue Sachlichkeit. Deutsche Malerei seit dem Expressionismus," from which the term *Neue Sachlichkeit* was coined.

ing an exhibition by means of an incomplete archive. I then study the physical setting of the exhibition as well as the spatial layout of the individual rooms of "neue Typografie," with reference to the general exhibition context at the time. In doing so, I show the ways in which the main tenets of New Typography are applied to the exhibition space and displays, before examining the effect the temporality of the museum has on the material on display.

"neue Typografie:"
Reconstructing an Exhibition

Although there is only one photograph of the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition and no detailed floor plans of how the space was organized exists, we do have access to certain documents that enable us to reconstruct it. The exhibition can be divided into two main parts - the first of which is the opening room "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" designed by Moholy-Nagy, with the second being comprised of the remaining series of rooms curated by Schwitters and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter.'* The fact that these were two separate parts of the exhibition is reflected in the material that we have available to us today in the archive. The complete contents of Moholy-Nagy's room are archived at the *Kunstbibliothek* in Berlin.[21] A note in the first of these archival boxes states that the material was given as a gift by Moholy-Nagy at the end of exhibition, and kindly asks that it be kept in the order in which it is currently stored. Taking for granted that this note has been observed by researchers over the years, we can reconstruct a large part of Moholy-Nagy's room, piece by piece.[22] While this part has been scrupulously archived, much

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21. In addition, a typewritten draft of Moholy-Nagy's text is held in the Special Collections at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles.

22. Given that the narrative is still in order and it corresponds to the pieces that come before and after it, we can be fairly certain that it remains in the original order.

of the second part of the exhibition was either not retained, or has been grouped together with other work that falls under the category of New Typography.[23]

The project of reconstructing this exhibition therefore poses many challenges. The main one being, of course, working with an incomplete archive - an archive which is, in fact, incomplete on varying levels. Even the best archived materials do not necessarily tell us much about the space or how it was organized. Indeed, space, as I show later in this chapter, is integral to how the visitor experiences the exhibition. Since the effect of space was of particular interest to Moholy-Nagy, I argue that careful attention to the organization of space and the materials with in it, would have been paid by Moholy-Nagy in curating "wohin geht die typografishe entwicklung?" The question is, therefore, how should we compensate for critical gaps such as these in the archive?

In this chapter, I reconstruct Moholy-Nagy's room by bringing together several sources. The first of these is the archived text panels and exhibition materials from "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" that give us insight into the content of the first part of the exhibition. The second source is a series of three letters, *Mitteilungen* 24, 25, 26, sent by Schwitters to members of the *Ring* that deal specifically with the organization and aims of this exhibition. Finally, there is a single review of the exhibition, published in a newspaper that provides the only known photograph of the exhibition.[24] These are but fragments that do not make up a complete picture of this very underdocumented exhibition. However, from what we can reconstruct with these

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23. The *Kunstbibliothek* has several boxes containing New Typography, but some of the material dates to after the exhibition, making it difficult to determine exactly what was retained from the *neue Typografie* exhibition. Perditta Lottner has noted that "Erhalten geblieben sind insgesamt 70 Kartonplatten, die Ankaufsdatum 1929 tragen, zuzügleich neun Kartons von Baumeister, die schon 1926 in die Kunstbibliothek gelangt waren, sicherlich aber in diese Ausstellung integriert wurden." (Perdita Lottner, "Neue Typografie Ausstellung Berlin 1929: Forderungen der elementaren Gestaltung," in *"Typographie kann unter Umständen Kunst sein: Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart: Typographie und Werbegestaltung*, ed. Volker Rattemeyer and Dietrich Helms (Wiesbaden: Landesmuseum Wiesbaden, 1990), 13-14.)

24. The *Mitteilungen* that Schwitters sent is a one-sided letter exchange, since these letters are housed as part of Piet Zwart's archive at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles and any replies Schwitters would have received and kept would have been lost when his apartment was destroyed in the aerial bombing of Hanover.

fragments, I go on to argue that there is a compelling case to consider *neue Typografie* a sister exhibition to *Film und Foto.* Examining *Film und Foto* therefore allows us to fill in some of the remaining gaps we find in *neue Typografie*, providing us with a more rounded image of it.

The disadvantages of such a reconstruction are clear - on some points we cannot be completely sure from the limited information and material we have. Piecing together the exhibition in this way, however, also lends some advantages, since it causes us to pay attention to certain aspects that would more easily get lost if such an exhibition were documented in photographs. Reconstructing the space through the series of letters, for example, tells us about Schwitters' thought processes in creating the exhibition and his emphases within it, as well as the way in which he collaborated with others. This, in turn, I suggest, gives us insight into how Schwitters conceived of New Typography. In a similar vein, reading *neue Typografie* against *Film und Foto* - and finding much common ground between the two - helps us situate the exhibition within the broader culture of exhibitions at the time.

With these challenges, advantages, and disadvantages in mind, let us know turn to reconstructing the exhibition.

What's in a Title?

The Berlin exhibition took the same title as almost all the other exhibitions organized by the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* since the group was founded - "neue Typografie."[25] While *neue Typografie* is of course a direct reference to the content of the exhibition, it was not a formulation original to the *Ring.* Indeed the term was being used more broadly, adding to a growing number of popular terms that were prefaced with the word "neu" - *neue Frau, neue Sachlichkeit, neues Bauen, neues*

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25. Some of the exhibitions organized by the *Ring* were absorbed into larger ones, such as the *Ring*'s participation in the 1931 exhibition in Amsterdam, "Fotomontages en reclameontwerpen."
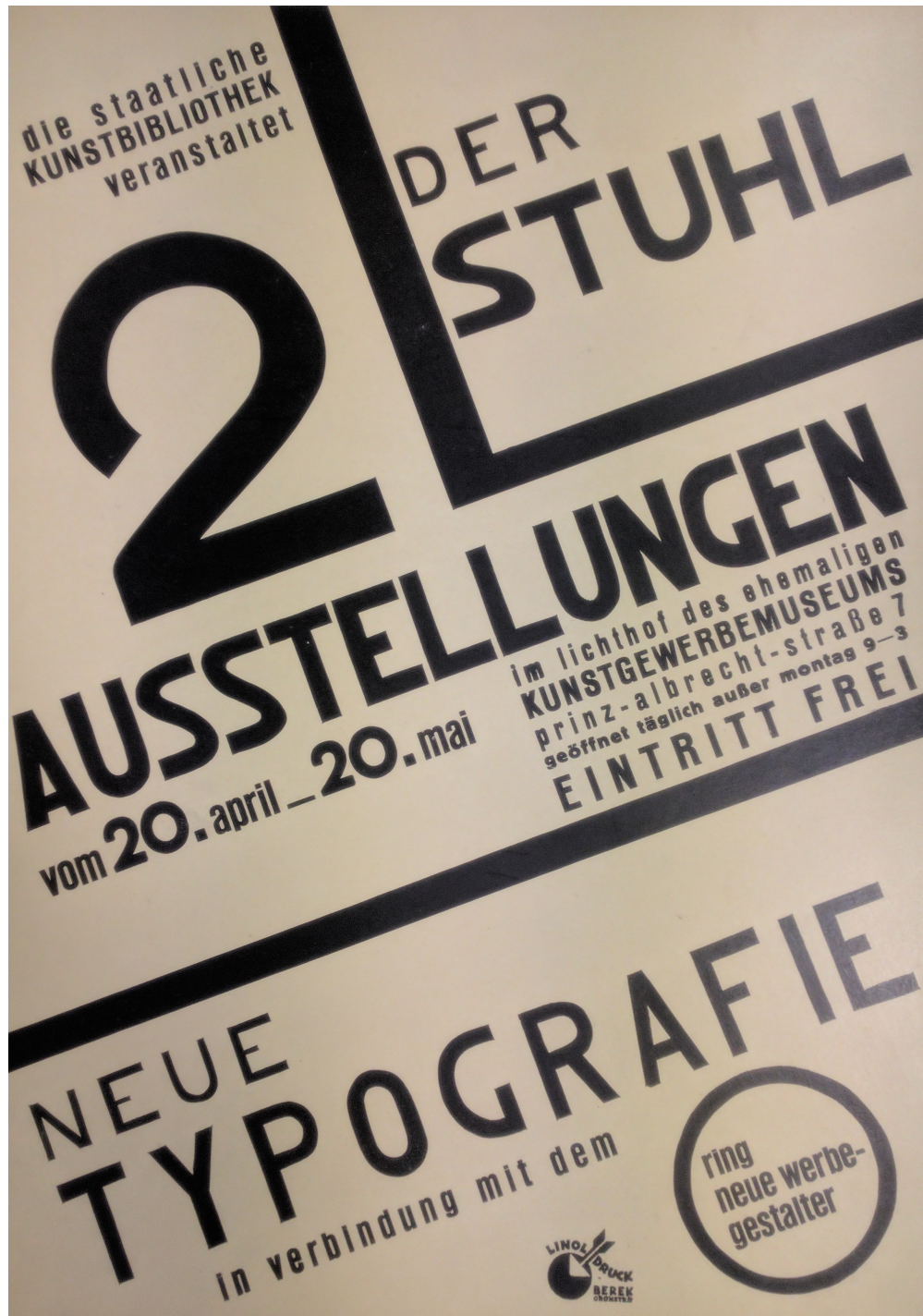
Figure IV.1: Poster for the *neue Typografie* exhibition, Berlin, 192.

Sehen, *neues Frankfurt*, to name just a few. First used by Moholy-Nagy in the catalog for the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition, and later adopted by Jan Tschichold as the title of his seminal book, the term *neue Typografie* indicates a new kind of functionalism that breaks with the more decorative forms of calligraphy and typography that came before it.

As I outlined in Chapter Two, New Typography was neither an organized movement nor an official group, but rather a group of individual practitioners who were working with similar concepts at the same time. As a result, there is no definitive "neue Typografie," since, as Ruari McLean states, "it meant different things to different people."[26] From the inclusion of Moholy-Nagy and Tschichold as central figures in the Berlin exhibition, however, it is clear that by means of the title, the *Ring* aligned itself with the tenets of both of these proponents of New Typography. Furthermore, as I will show later in the chapter, the structure of the *Ring's* Berlin exhibition highlights some of the differences McLean refers to, and points to the plurality of New Typography.

Exhibition Setting

From the exhibition poster (see Figure IV.1) we can see that, although hosted by the *Kunstbibliothek*, the Berlin exhibition was displayed in the atrium of the former *Kunstgewerebe Museum* (now known as the Martin-Gropius-Bau). We also see that, sharing space on the poster is another exhibition that was displayed alongside *neue Typografie* - the second incarnation of a successful Werkbund exhibition that had premiered in Stuttgart the previous year, *Der Stuhl*. While remaining two separate exhibitions, both *neue Typografie* and *Der Stuhl* complimented one another, as different disciplines from the applied arts. By extension, this poster makes us aware of the common ground between the *Ring 'neue Werbegstalter'* and the Werkbund - both of which brought

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26. Ruari McLean, *Jan Tschichold: Typographer* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1975), 13.

Figure IV.2: Atrium at the Martin-Gropius-Bau, formerly the Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin.

together the applied arts and artists.[27]

The atrium (see Figure IV.2) is the central space in the building, with all other rooms surrounding it. It is a spacious setting for an exhibition, offering 600m^2 of floor space, and replicates two distinct spaces. Firstly, the arcade-like galleries on the first and second floors, that surround the inner square, are perhaps more evocative of an exhibition hall than a museum. Secondly, the spaciousness, combined with natural light let in by the glass ceiling, and the gallery's arcade-like structure, all contribute to the feeling of being outside, and therefore unconfined by the museum walls. In this way, the atrium becomes a liminal space that bridges the exhibition hall and museum, and is caught between the museum and the urban street beyond it. This renders the setting for the "New Typography" exhibition very fitting for one that focuses on graphic design, advertising, and typography - all of which is found on the street.

In *Spaces of Experience*, Charlotte Klonk writes of two related phenomena in the 1920s that I argue are applicable to the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition. The first is what she calls "a general shift towards exteriority," that she traces back to Siegfried Kracauer's writings.[28] The second is a direct connection between the shop window and exhibition practices. Providing examples of this focus on exteriority, Klonk notes the ways in which display windows were being stretched out onto the street. As a result, any clear boundary between these two spaces is diminished, rendering the street a liminal space, at once public, yet entangled with the commercial. For Klonk the relationship between the shop window and exhibition practices is a symbiotic one, in which the shop window borrows from exhibition design with the display of factual information, functional relationships, and an aesthetic rationality.[29]

This is, I suggest, in part what we see at play in the atrium. With the physical space of the

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27. Schwitters was a member of the Werkbund and had a close relationship with the organization, exhibiting in some of their exhibitions.
28. Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, 105.
29. Ibid., 107.

exhibition replicating the street, it creates the kind of collective viewing experience that is experienced on the street outside. Furthermore, the reciprocal influence of window and exhibition practices upon each other is mirrored in the fact that much of the material on display in *neue Typografie* is advertising, and therefore fundamentally commercial. Yet displaying it in a museum setting, codifies it also as an artwork. In the context of this exhibition, the atrium of the *Kunstgewerbe Museum* therefore becomes a space in which the visitor constantly negotiates the commercial and exhibition values of the work on display.

The tangible result of the relationship between shop window and exhibition practices can be seen, according to Klonk, in the development of two types of exhibitions that "abandoned the previous generations' preoccupation with interiority and intimacy in favour of a public and collective viewing experience."[30] Klonk develops two terms to describe these new exhibition practices and the kind of spaces they induce - *discursive space* and *collaborative space*. For her, a *collaborative space* is one that incorporated interactive potential into its design, and in which visitors were often made aware of one another's presence. El Lissitzky was one of the main proponents of this type of space, as can be seen by a strong emphasis on interactive components that comes out in his writing on exhibition design. Describing a room he was commissioned to design for the directorate of the *International Art Exhibition* in Dresden in 1926, Lissitzky states, "with every movement of the spectator in the room the impression of the walls changes - what was white becomes black and vice versa. Thus an optical dynamic is generated as a consequence of the human stride. This makes the spectator active."[31] The exhibition visitor, therefore plays a pivotal role in the *collaborative space*, and both the space and works on display are designed with the visitor, and his or her interactions, in mind.

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30. Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, 109.
31. El Lissitzky, *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. Sophie Lissitzky-Küppers (London: Thames & Hudson, 1968), 366.

By contrast, the emphasis in Klonk's *discursive space* is on the ways in which the visitor can be led by the curator and is a concept I pick up later in this chapter and apply to Moholy-Nagy's "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" room. The main hallmark of the *discursive space*, Klonk states, is that "visitors [are] invited to follow certain lines of thought, yet free overall to negotiate the space by themselves," with the main aim being "to move the viewer physically through a rational argument."[32] She notes that this kind of exhibition space was pioneered by Bauhaus professors Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, and Herbert Bayer, when they started designing temporary exhibitions in 1928. At the same time, Lilly Reich was also developing a similar concept in her designs for exhibitions, which were organized in such a way as to direct visitors along a path laid out before them.[33]

A *discursive space* is therefore one in which the visitor *feels* free, but can only arrive at one of two conclusions - agreement or disagreement with the overall thesis of the exhibition. Such a discursive element can be wrought by various different methods and media. Writing in the 1930s, Bayer asserts "the great possibilities of exhibition design rest on the *universal* application of all known means of design: diagram, lettering, the word, photography, architecture, painting, sculpture, tone, light film. [...] all the elements suited to the purpose of communicating the idea are included in it, such as enlightenment, advertising, education, etc."[34] He continues, explicitly stating "the theme should not retain its distance from the spectator, it should be brought close to him, penetrate and leave an impression on him, should explain, demonstrate, and even persuade

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32. Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, 100.

33. Lilly Reich (1885-1947) was an interior designer, first female member of the board of directors at the Werkbund, and later Bauhaus professor. In addition, she designed several exhibition spaces, including the Werkbund exhibition, *"Die Wohnung,"* in Stuttgart in 1927, and the "Deutschen Bauausstellung" of 1931 in Berlin.
Michael Cowan notes that this idea of leading spectators is also evident in film advertisements of the time, which, he writes, "sought above all to showcase the power of film [...] to steer the bodies of circulating consumers toward productive ends." (Michael Cowan, "From the Astonished Spectator to the Spectator in Movement: Exhibition Advertisements in 1920s Germany and Austria," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 16.)

34. Herbert Bayer, "Fundamentals of Exhibition Design," *PM (Production Manager)* 6, no. 2 (1939): 17.

and lead him to a planned and direct reaction. therefore we may say that exhibition design runs parallel with the psychology of advertising."[35] At the heart, then, of a *discursive space*, if we read Bayer's statement as indicative of such a space, is the power of design - the very thing that is on display in the *neue Typografie* exhibition.

In the next part of this chapter, I continue to piece together Moholy-Nagy's room. From this reconstruction, we are able to recreate the narrative that he weaves throughout the room, as well as the relationships he creates between the text panels and the illustrative examples. The result is, as I will show, a *discursive space*, which helps us see one of the main differences between Moholy-Nagy and Schwitters' curatorial approach.

Moholy-Nagy, the *Ring*, and "Fifo:"

"wohin geht die typografische/fotografische entwicklung?"

Nestled within the archived *neue Typografie* material at the Kunstbibliothek Berlin is a leaflet produced in 1929 about the exhibition (see Figure IV.3). Its concise text, printed in all capitals, draws attention to the role Moholy-Nagy played in the show. Alongside the names and addresses of the contributors, and the most cursory of overviews of the exhibition, a short statement reads: "Den ersten Raum, der einen Überblick über die Entwickelung [sic] und die Ziele der neuen Typografie gibt, richtet Prof. L. Moholy-Nagy ein."[36] Given the fact this room was intended to provide an overview of how New Typography came into being, as well as set out its goals, we see both its importance in relation to the rest of the exhibition, as well as its explicit didactic nature.

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35. Bayer, "Fundamentals of Exhibition Design," 17.
In the original, Bayer writes in lowercase.
36. Faltblatt der Ausst. *neue Typografie*, Egon Juda, GS-Kasten 4830.1a, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek.

Der Plan, in einer größeren Ausstellung die neuzeitliche, hauptsächlich auf dem Gebiete des Werbewesens tätigen Typografie vorzuführen, wurde wesentlich erleichtert durch die Bereitwilligkeit des »Ring Neuer Werbegestalter«, sich geschlossen an der Ausstellung zu beteiligen. Erweitert wurde der Kreis durch Heranziehung der anderen bedeutenden schöpferischen Typografen. Die Absicht, in einem kurzen Überblick auch die neue russische Typografie zu zeigen, konnte leider nicht ausgeführt werden

DEN ERSTEN RAUM, DER EINEN ÜBERBLICK ÜBER DIE ENTWICKELUNG UND DIE ZIELE DER NEUEN TYPOGRAFIE GIBT, RICHTETE PROF. L. MOHOLY-NAGY EIN

MITGLIEDER DES »RING NEUER WERBEGESTALTER«

NAMEN UND ADRESSEN DER KÜNSTLER:

Prof. Willi Baumeister, Frankfurt a. M., Kunstgewerbeschule
Prof. Max Burchartz, Essen-Bredeney, Brachtstraße 34
Dr. W. Dexel, Jena, Fuchsturmweg 15
Cesare Domela-Nieuwenhuis, Berlin-Charlottenbg., Roscherstr. 16
Hans Leistikow, Frankfurt-Ginnheim, Fuchshohl 55
Baurat'Meyer, Frankfurt a.M. (Ehrenmitglied des »Ring«)
Architekt Robert Michel, Frankfurt a. M., Kronprinzenstraße 8
Paul Schuitema, Rotterdam, Mauritsweg 42a
Kurt Schwitters, Hannover, Waldhausenstraße 5
Prof. Jan Tschichold, München, Voitstraße 8
Prof. Georg Trump, Bielefeld, Kunstgewerbeschule
Friedel Vordemberge-Gildewart, Hannover, Königstraße 8
Architekt Piet Zwart, Wassenaar den Haag, Rijksstraatweg 290

Otto Baumberger, Zürich
Herbert Bayer, Berlin-Charlottenburg, Hardenbergstraße 4
A. M. Cassandre, Paris
Walter Cyliax, Zürich

Figure IV.3: Brochure for the *neue Typografie* exhibition, 1929. Inside pages.

By being the first space visitors enter, it becomes the lens through which the rest of the exhibition is viewed and therefore has the potential to lead the visitor in certain directions. Furthermore, Moholy-Nagy's title of *Professor* adds further weight to this idea of imparting knowledge. Indeed, a review of the exhibition, published in the journal *Der Cicerone*, reads "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" in exactly this way. Referring to Moholy-Nagy's display as a "didaktischer Raum," the author hints at the ways in which it serves as a framework for approaching the rest of the exhibition.[37]

Despite playing such a prominent role in the exhibition, Moholy-Nagy was not a member

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37. Wolfradt, "Berliner Ausstellungen," *Der Cicerone* 8 (1929): 268.

of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*, but rather one of the invited guest artists, having accepted the *Ring*'s invitation immediately.[38] Moholy-Nagy had become increasingly active in designing, and rethinking the nature and curation of temporary exhibitions from 1928 onwards, and it was most likely for this reason that he was asked to work on the opening room. One such experimental exhibition designed by Moholy-Nagy, opened in Stuttgart, just two days before the close of the *neue Typografie* exhibition in Berlin - the *Internationale Ausstellung des Deutschen Werkbunds: Film und Foto*. *Film und Foto*, or *Fifo*, as it popularly became known, went on to be considered one of the most important photography exhibitions of the twentieth century and was featured in the 1988 exhibition at the Berlinische Galerie, *Stationen der Moderne. Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland*.[39]

Although from the titles it may seem that there was little overlap in content between *Fifo* and *neue Typografie*, Olivier Lugon has suggested that the former had less of a focus on "pure" film and photography than the title would have us believe, and that much more weight was, in fact, placed on applied photography and design.[40] Indeed, ten out of the twenty-five graphic designers and typographers who exhibited in *neue Typografie* also had work displayed in *Fifo*.

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38. In his correspondence with the members, Schwitters is very clear about the organizational logistics and hierarchical structure of the exhibition. On 15 February 1929 he writes, "Die Ausstellung ist gedacht unter der Führung des Ringes in der Weise, dass wir die Einladungen an die Gäste versenden." (Kurt Schwitters, "Mitteilung 24, 15.2.1929," reproduced in "Rundbriefe des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter' aus dem Nachlaß Piet Zwarts," Rattemeyer and Helms, *Ring 'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931*, 122.)

Just under a month after sending out the invitations, Schwitters informed the group that Herbert Bayer, László Moholy-Nagy, Karel Teige, Caballero, Theo van Doesburg, and Johannes Molzahn had all already accepted their invitation. (Kurt Schwitters, "Mitteilung 26, 13.3.1929," reproduced in "Rundbriefe des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter' aus dem Nachlaß Piet Zwarts," ibid., 125.)

39. For more on the *Stationen der Moderne* exhibition, see Eberhard Roters, ed., *Stationen der Moderne: die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland;[25. September 1988-8. Januar 1989; eine Ausstellung der Berlinischen Galerie, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur im Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin]* (Berlin: Nicolai, 1988).

40. Lugon writes, "Die ersten Dokumente, die im Frühjahr 1928 über das Stuttgarter Projekt in Umlauf gebracht wurden, vermittelten in der Tat den Eindruck, dass die Ausstellung nicht von Fotografen, sondern stark von Fotomonteuren und grafischen Gestaltern geprägt werden sollte." (Olivier Lugon, ""Neues Sehen, Neue Geschichte: László Moholy-Nagy, Sigfried Giedion und die Ausstellung *Film und Foto*," in *Sigfried Giedion und die Fotografie: Bildinszenierungen der Moderne*, ed. Werner Oechslin and Gregor Harbusch (Zürich: gta-Verlag, 2010), 91.)

Furthermore *Ring* member, Jan Tschichold, was on its selection committee.[41]

There is another significant overlap between these two exhibitions: the first, and by far the largest room in *Fifo* was curated by Moholy-Nagy and familiarly entitled "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" (see Figure IV.4). Lugon notes that it was this room that became the most important, most discussed, and therefore most well known part of *Fifo*[42] Not surprisingly, Moholy-Nagy's space at *Fifo* was also regarded as a lens through which the rest of the exhibition was to be viewed.[43] Michael Bollé makes this idea explicit in the catalog for the *Stationen der Moderne* exhibition, stating, "In den folgenden zwölf Räumen wurde das Programm des ersten Raumes durch die zeitgenössische Photographie erweitert."[44] Here, Bollé's use of the word *Programm* to describe the opening room at *Fifo*, seems to echo the sentiment of the *Der Cicerone* reviewer, who posited Moholy-Nagy's room in the *neue Typografie* exhibition as "didaktisch."

Given the timing and the striking resemblance between the titles of Moholy-Nagy's two curated rooms, it can hardly be a coincidence - rather, I argue that these exhibitions can be viewed as sister-exhibitions, sharing similarities and borrowing from each other. Nor too, is it a coincidence that the venue for *Film und Foto*, when it traveled to Berlin in October of that year, was the atrium of the former Applied Arts Museum - the very same space that the *neue*

41. Quentin Bajac, "The Age of Distraction:Photography and Film," in *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs, The Thomas Walther Collection, 1909–1949*, ed. Mitra Abbaspour, Lee Ann Daffner, and Maria Morris Hambourg (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 5, accessed February 6, 2017, https://www.moma.org/interactives/objectphoto/assets/essays/Bajac.pdf.

42. Lugon, ""Neues Sehen, Neue Geschichte: László Moholy-Nagy, Sigfried Giedion und die Ausstellung *Film und Foto*," 91.

43. In his book chapter, "Neues Sehen, Neue Geschichte," Olivier Lugon has documented Moholy-Nagy's involvement in *Film und Foto* and detailed how this room came about in the Werkbund exhibition. He notes that this room was conceived of relatively late in the planning of the exhibition, and came at the suggestion of Sigfried Giedion, who envisaged a room called "Schulung der neuen Optik." Initially dismissed by the exhibition organizers, Moholy-Nagy was able to convince them of the value of such an opening room.
For more information on Moholy-Nagy and Giedion's involvement in *Film und Foto* and the conception of "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" see ibid.

44. Roters, *Stationen der Moderne: die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland;[25. September 1988-8. Januar 1989; eine Ausstellung der Berlinischen Galerie, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur im Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin]*, 239.
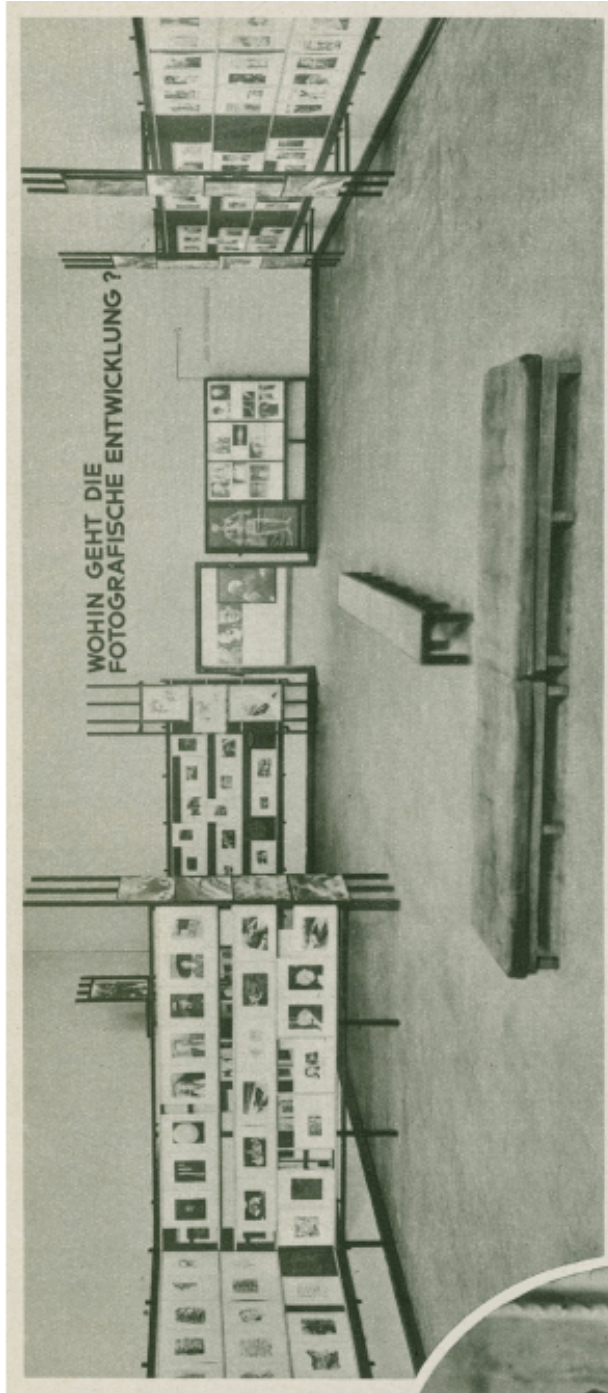
Figure IV.4: Photograph of László Moholy-Nagy's room at the *Fifo* exhibition, 1929.
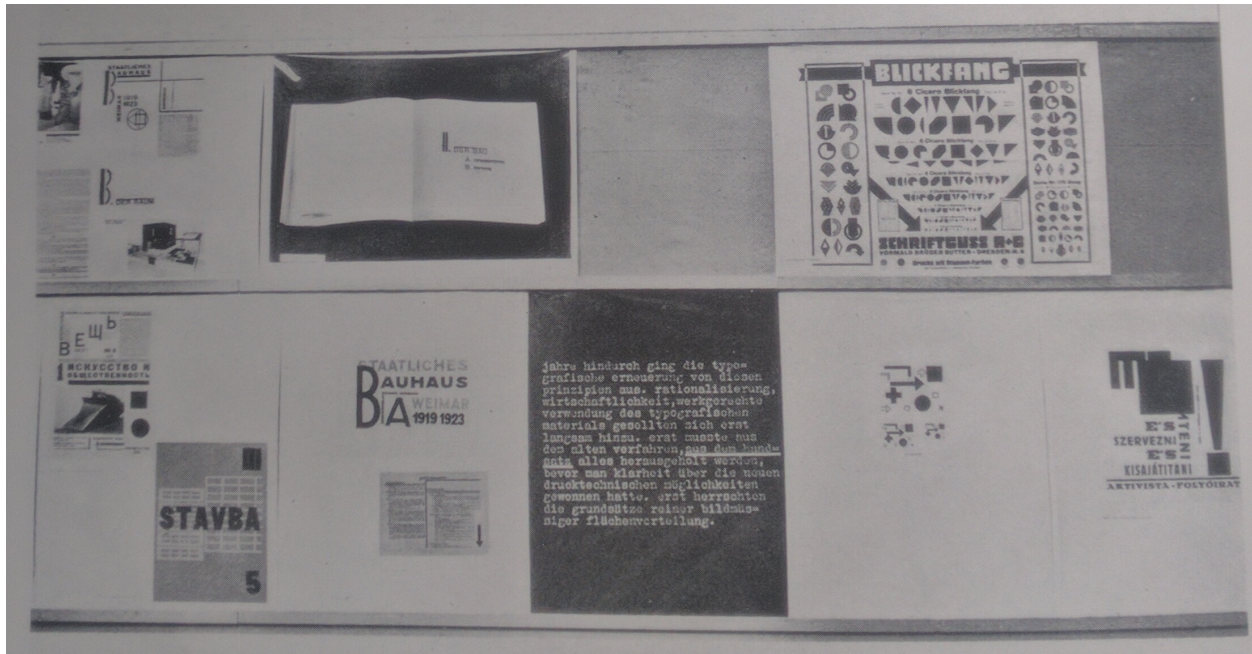
Figure IV.5: Photograph of "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" at the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition reproduced in[46]

Typografie exhibition had occupied a few months earlier.[45]

"wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?"

From the archived material of "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" we know that Moholy-Nagy's room was made up of a combination of large text panels (65cm x 49.4cm) and illustrative examples that were mounted on card, the same size as the text boards. There is only one known photograph of the *neue Typografie* exhibition, which was published as part of

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45. *Film und Foto* was exhibited at the former Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin from October 19, 1929 to November 17, 1929.

Ellen Lupton and Elaine Lustig Cohen note that "Members of the *ring* helped organize and promote several important exhibitions, including the German Werkbund's *film und foto*" and use an example of headed notepaper for *fifo*, designed by *Ring* member, Jan Tschichold, as an example of this. (Ellen Lupton and Elaine Lustig Cohen, *Letters From the Avant-Garde: Modern Graphic Design* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 60.)

Figure IV.6: Photograph of "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" at the Berlin *Film und Foto* exhibition.

a review in the journal *Das neue Berlin* (see Figure IV.5). In it, we see that, in both "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" (see Figures IV.4 and IV.6) and "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Moholy-Nagy employs the same text panels, with white, typewritten text, set against a black background. Similarly, the images that are interspersed between the narrative panels are placed on multiple levels, indicating a slightly more nuanced, non-linear progression than the narrative suggests - an aesthetic that Andrés Mario Zervigón describes as "modernist salon style meets the printed page."[47]

If we consider the one photo we do have of "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" (see Figure IV.5), we can see that Zervigón's description of the *Fifo* room is also true of that of the *neue Typografie* exhibition. Text is interspersed with images, and there is significant use of negative space - in both panels that include multiple images, as well as in the layout of text and image panels - rendering the composition similar to that of a printed page. As a result, Moholy-Nagy does not just reference the printed page of the New Typographers in the narrative text and the examples he incorporates, he *replicates* its form in the display. If we compare this photograph of the *neue Typografie* exhibition to a page from Moholy-Nagy's 1927 *Dynamik der Großstadt* (see Figure IV.7), we see a striking similarity between the use of space on the printed page and that on the partition walls in the museum atrium. In *Dynamik der Großstadt*, negative space gives way to text and image, positioned on different levels, allowing the reader to navigate their way through the page. Similarly, on the walls of the exhibition, the visitor's eye is invited to wander through the material, moving from left to right, as well as top to bottom. Simultaneity is integral to this process, in which text is read, both as image *and* text, having the potential to draw the visitor's attention to the fluid relationship between text and image in New Typography.

Writing on the affective nature of space, Moholy-Nagy notes "raumerlebnis ist kein privileg

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47. Andrés Mario Zervigón, "The Peripatetic Viewer at Heartfield's Film und Foto Exhibition Room," *October* 150 (2014): 27.
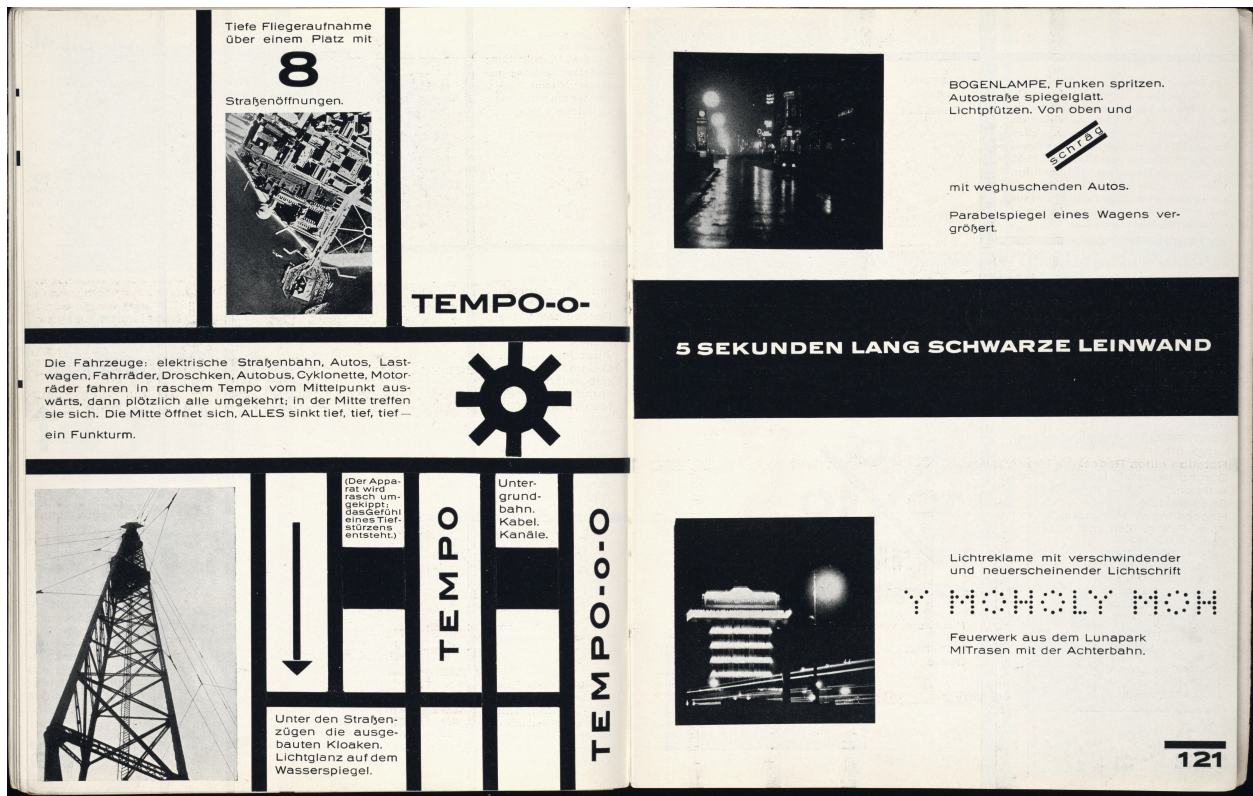
Figure IV.7: László Moholy-Nagy, *Dynamik der Großstadt.*, 1927.

begabter menschen, sondern biologische funktion [...] grundsätzlich aber ist das raumerlebnis einem jeden zugänglich, selbst in seiner reichen, komplizierten form."[48] We know, therefore, that for Moholy-Nagy, the organization of space, and the effect it would have on the visitor was of great importance.

At this time, research was starting to be made into how museumgoers act in a museum. In 1928, for example, Edward Stevens Robinson published his monograph, *The Behavior of the Museum Visitor*.[49] This was the result of a two-year study that attempted to answer the questions: "What do people do when they come to this exhibit? How long do they stay? Is there any easy and natural manner for prolonging their stay? What do they look at? What do they pass by? What is the exact power of location, of size, of mere vividness of color to control the visitor's behavior?"[50] This research was continued by Arthur Melton, who published a monograph in 1935 and an article in 1936 based on studies conducted in an art and a science and industry museum respectively.[51] Melton and Robinson's studies were, according to Steven Yalowitz and Kerry Bronnenkant, the first to systematically track and observe museum visitors' beahvior.[52] In particular they highlighted a right-turn bias in visitors, as well as the idea of "museum fatigue."[53] How people move through the space of the museum was therefore an emerging field of study, and one that Moholy-Nagy, and his contemporaries Gropius, Bayer, and Reich, were at the forefront

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48. Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, *Von Material zu Architektur* (Passau: Passavia Druckerei, 1929), 196. Quoted in Kai-Uwe Hemken, "'Guillotine der Dichter' oder Ausstellungsdesign am Bauhaus," in *"Das" A und O des Bauhauses: Bauhauswerbung: Schriftbilder, Drucksachen, Ausstellungsdesign*, ed. U. Brüning, J. Fiedler, and B. Buschfeld (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv, 1995), 229.

49. Edward Stevens Robinson et al., *The Behavior of the Museum Visitor.* (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 1928).

50. Ibid., 10.

51. Arthur W Melton, *Problems of Installation in Museums of Art.* (Washington DC: American Association of Museums, 1935) and Arthur W Melton, "Distribution of Attention in Galleries in a Museum of Science and Industry," *Museum News* 14, no. 3 (1936): 6–8.

52. Steven S Yalowitz and Kerry Bronnenkant, "Timing and Tracking: Unlocking Visitor Behavior," *Visitor Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 47.

53. For more information on right-turn bias, see See Melton, *Problems of Installation in Museums of Art.* For more information on museum fatigue, see Robinson et al., *The Behavior of the Museum Visitor.*, 31-42.

of. This was a major consideration of theirs and each of them took it into account in their curation of exhibitions.

Figures IV.6 and IV.4 show the way in which the space was configured for "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" Partition walls are set up at regular intervals, perpendicular to the walls of the atrium, creating a series of open rooms, through which the visitor can freely move.[54] While we cannot know for certain, given the other parallels between Moholy-Nagy's two rooms - the same text panels, similar display practices, almost identical titles, and the same display space - I contend that it is very likely that the space at "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" was arranged in a similar way to that of "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?"

In the next part of this chapter, I would like to return to Klonk's idea of the *discursive space* and consider the ways in which Moholy-Nagy's room conforms to it.

A Discursive Space?

Writing about her term, *discursive space*, Klonk cites the way in which Herbert Bayer "forced the viewer to confront exhibits from above and below, all the time taking up different viewpoints." We can certainly see elements of this approach present in Bayer's colleague, Moholy-Nagy's display of the material in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" In positioning the images in a non-linear way, with images and text presented on different levels (as in Figure IV.6), Moholy-Nagy encourages the visitor to build relations between the text and the examples he includes, while also, as we will see, guiding the visitor through a rational argument, put forth in the narrative text. In this way, I suggest that Moholy-Nagy's room very much conforms to Klonk's notion

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54. Kai-Uwe Hemken notes that the organization of space via movable, partition walls comes from trade fairs, and notes "Das System der Exponatenträger diente nicht allein dem Vorzeigen der Stücke, sondern gleichermaßen der Strukturierung des Raumes sowie dem Anzeigen von Laufrichtungen, und stellt gleichzeitig das erste variable und mobile Ausstellungsdesign dar," continuing that such a design was in line with the ideals of "neues Bauen." (Hemken, "'Guillotine der Dichter' oder Ausstellungsdesign am Bauhaus," 119.)

of a *discursive space* in which "visitors were invited to follow certain lines of thought, yet were free overall to negotiate the space by themselves."[55]

Indeed, while the title of Moholy-Nagy's room at the *neue Typografie* exhibition poses a question, and therefore appears to invite the visitor into an open dialog on the topic, the text itself authoritatively sets forth a clear response.[56] In order to do this, Moholy-Nagy sets up a number of dichotomies in the course of the narrative. In the first panel (see Figure IV.8), for instance, he starts out by stating: "das wesentliche des typografischen fortschritts ist nicht eine formale, sondern eine organisatorische errungenschaft," continuing "die heutige typografie ist keine setzarbeit mehr, sie ist zu einer drucktechnik geworden." Moholy-Nagy maintains this didactic tone throughout the narrative, drawing as much attention to what typography is not, as to what it is. Repeatedly, he employs conjunctions such as "nicht...sondern" and "statt" that allow him to delineate these dichotomies with impact.[57] Furthermore, by underlining these parts of the sentence, Moholy-Nagy highlights them as the most important parts of his text. With such clear and binary parameters outlined by Moholy-Nagy, the answer to the question "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" is thus delivered to the visitor.

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55. Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000*, 110.
Both Helen Rees Leahy, and Dimitra Christidou and Sophia Diamantopoulou have recently argued that performativity plays a strong role in museum spectatorship. The latter write, "The shifting from one exhibit to another, the on-going selection of resources and loci of attention, along with the regulation of movement allow museum encounters to be treated as an 'on-going choreography' [...] during which visitors are both the choreographers and the performers." (Sophia Diamantopoulou Dimitra Christidou, "Seeing and Being Seen: The Multimodality of Museum Spectatorship," *Museum and Society* 14 (2016): 14.)
See also Helen Rees Leahy, *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (London: Routledge, 2016).

56. Writing on the "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" room of the *Film und Foto* exhibition, Olivier Lugon draws a connection between the original suggestion of a room entitled "Schulung der neuen Optik," with the board on which the narrative text appears, which he describes as like "kleine Schultafeln." (Lugon, ""Neues Sehen, Neue Geschichte: László Moholy-Nagy, Sigfried Giedion und die Ausstellung *Film und Foto*," 92.) The draft copy of Moholy-Nagy's text reveals that the original title for the "neue Typographie" exhibition was "leitsätze der typograifschen arbeit."

57. On the fourth panel Moholy-Nagy writes, for example: "unter dem einfluss konstruktivistischer bilder traten die exakten geometrischen lösungen in den vordergrund. statt der traditionellen stil-zierleisten kam die mode der 'blickfang-serien' auf."

das wesentliche des typo=
grafischen fortschritts
ist nicht eine formale,
sondern eine organisato=
rische errungenschaft:
die heutige typografie
ist keine setzarbeit
mehr,sie ist zu einer
drucktechnik geworden,in
der die montage als "mo=
dellarbeit" - mit anderen
mitteln als das setzen -
ausserhalb des druckbetriebes
durchgeführt werden kann.

Figure IV.8: Text panel from László Moholy-Nagy's room at the *neue Typografie* exhibition, 1929.

I would now like to turn to the remaining part of the "neue Typografie," designed by Schwitters and the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*. In this next section, I examine the temporal aspect of museum spectatorship and consider the effect this has on the visitor's reading of the exhibition material.

The *Ring* and *neue Typografie*

Displayed in the rooms that followed "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" were examples of members of the *Ring*'s work, as well as that of their invited guests. There are no known photos of this space that show us how it was set up. However, we do know from the review in *Der Cicerone* that the space was set up very differently to Moholy-Nagy's opening room. The reviewer praises the *Ring*'s part of the exhibition for presenting just the "evidence," rather than a clearcut argument, as was found in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Wolfradt writes, "Besser als Moholy-Nagys didaktischer Raum unterrichtet die Evidenz zielbewußter Einmütigkeit über die Bestrebungen des neuen Setzstils."[58] In contrast to the didactic nature of Moholy-Nagy's room, then, the nature of the *Ring*'s display allowed, even required, visitors to draw their own conclusions.

Here we see one of the key ways in which Schwitters' curation differs from that of Moholy-Nagy. Rather than providing text panels that lead the visitor through an argument expressed in words, Schwitters displays typographical material by themselves, without any explanation. This has two main implications. Firstly, I contend that this part of the exhibition more closely resembles an exhibition of fine, rather than applied arts. Secondly, and by extension, the typographical examples are approached and read *as* images, rather than text. In this way, I argue that Schwitters pushes the boundary between the applied and fine arts, and text and image, much

58. Wolfradt, "Berliner Ausstellungen," 268.

further than Moholy-Nagy.

As I have already mentioned, it is difficult to be exactly sure which work was displayed by members of the *Ring* in their part of the exhibition. From material housed at several archives of museums to which the exhibition subsequently traveled, however, we can piece together many of the typographical examples that were included. In particular, the final exhibition in which the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* took part is well documented in the final volume of the 1990 Sprengel exhibition catalog, "Typographie kann unter Umstände Kunst sein," *'Ring' neue Werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931.*[59] Held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam in 1931, this exhibition was entitled "Fotomontages en reclameontwerpen," and was organized by the Dutch architect group, *De Acht en Opbouw.*[60] No contemporary catalog of this exhibition was published, but we know from the material housed at the Stedelijk Museum, and published in the *Ring 'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931* catalog, that much of the work included by the *Ring* likely fell roughly into two categories: advertisements (brochures, posters, book covers) and stationery (letterheads, logos, forms).

The material on display was therefore designed for a very specific purpose, rendering it first and foremost functional, and for use within a particular context. I argue that each of these contexts has its own temporality - the temporality of the street and the temporality of the modern office. Borrowing from Henri Lefebvre's mapping of time onto space, Mike Crang writes that "waves of motion and activity can be traced as an overlay of space. The institutions and temporal parameters they create form specific time-space locales for types of activities. These, then, are the envelopes of space-time through which people must pass in order to accomplish their

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59. Rattemeyer and Helms, *Ring 'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931.*

60. *De Acht en Opbouw* was formed from two groups of modernist Dutch architects that came together in 1927 - *de 8* from Amsterdam, and *Opbouw* from Rotterdam. Together, they published a modernist journal on architecture from 1932 onwards, which van Dijk notes was "the most important mouthpiece of Dutch functionalism." (Hans Van Dijk, *Twentieth-century Architecture in the Netherlands* (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 1999), 78.)

daily business."[61] Both the street and the office are two of these envelopes of urban space-time that are experienced by city dwellers on a daily basis - both of which, I contend, have a fast-paced temporality.

Temporality: New Typography in the city

On the urban street, there are cars, buses, trams, all of which are traveling faster than the human by his or her own power. Moving at this increased pace means that the city-dweller can only take in fleeting impressions of his or her surroundings, before the objects or people disappear out of sight. Even for the leisurely pedestrian, strolling through the city, there is such an abundance of stimuli and things vying for their attention - signs, posters, window displays - that each object receives just a moment's look. Georg Simmel writes of "the rapid telescoping of changing images, pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance, and the unexpectedness of violent stimuli," that the city-dweller experiences on a day-to-day basis.[62] This ultimately, Simmel argues, causes them, in an act of self-preservation, to become *blasé*, resulting in an extreme decrease in the attention that they give to their surroundings.

Similarly, the workplace of early twentieth-century Germany was becoming increasingly fast-paced and governed by time. Vanessa Ogle notes that "the regularity of work rhythms and the temporal supervision of workers in factories and firms did intensify in the late nineteenth century."[63] Furthermore, in 1918 the eight-hour work day became a legal requirement in Germany for the first time, rendering the workplace, a place governed by the clock.[64] This shift to a

61. Mike Crang, "Rhythms of the City: Temporalised Space and Motion," in *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality*, ed. J. May and N. Thrift (London: Routledge, 2001), 192.
62. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 103.
63. Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time: 1870-1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 71.
64. For more information on the eight-hour day, see Emil Frankel, "The Eight-Hour Day in Germany," *Journal of*

temporal focus in the office lead to widespread standardization as well as striving towards more efficient economy of time.

We see this standardization play out in a number of ways, firstly through the use of new technologies, such as the telephone and typewriter. The latter allowed for the measure of productivity and time with the counting of words per minute typed, as well as for economy of time with the ease of duplication by means of carbon paper. Secondly, it prompted the standardization of office paper sizes that led to the DIN (Deutsches Industitut für Normung) format. Jacqueline Vischer brings these two aspects together in her study on the design of office space at the turn of the twentieth century. She writes that new office spaces were "created partly in response to new office technology, such as the typewriter and the phone," continuing that it was Le Corbusier who pointed out that it was the typewriter that led to the standardization of paper size, and thus also led to the standardization of printing and office storage.[65] Vischer also, draws attention to Taylor's "scientific approach," noting that it had a great impact on the "planning and design of work environments [..] in the form of standardizing office space for reasons of speed, efficiency and easy distribution of one worker for another."[66]

In his narrative in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Moholy-Nagy notes that the new regulations governing paper, envelope, and logo size came to be significant for many typographers. This was clearly an important moment in the evolution of New Typography for him, since he dedicates a full text panel to it, writing:

> in diesem augenblick war man reif, das optische organisationsprinzip auch mit dem wirtschaftlichen zu durchdringen. die vorschläge und bestimmungen des deutschen industrie-normenaussschusses (DIN) wurden bei der gestaltung von drucksachen, besonders in geschäftesformularen, reklameschriften für viele typografen massgebend. aus gründen der rationalisierung wurden papierformat

Political Economy 32, no. 3 (1924): 315–334.

65. Jacqueline Vischer, *Space Meets Status: Designing Workplace Performance* (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.

66. Ibid., 12-13.

(plakat, geschäftspapier, briefhülle, postkarte, besuchskarte, buch) satzbild (satzspiegel), klischeegrösse geregelt.[67]

Moholy-Nagy makes the link between DIN format and its implications for typography explicit by including examples of DIN regulations in the display (see FigureIV.9). This was then further reinforced by the inclusion of many examples of DIN formatted letters, envelopes, and other documents in the subsequent rooms of the *neue Typografie* exhibition.

Typographers and designers were acutely aware of this increased temporality, both in the office, and on the street, and endeavored to create typefaces that were accessible and readable in an age of speed. As such, these typographers, and artists-turned-typographers, became proponents of the drive towards rationalization that we have already seen in Chapter Three. Josef Albers, for example, writes "Wir müssen schnell lesen, wie knapp sprechen. [...] Es wird die akzentuierte, betonte, unterstrichene, abgekürzte, bebilderte Schrift herrschen. [...] Das Plakat muß erfaßbar sein, wenn wir in der Elektrischen und im Auto vorbeifahren."[68] Here, Albers makes a direct connection between the speed of the city, and the need for typography that can be read and absorbed at such a speed, leading him to advocate for simple form, without any unnecessary ornamentation.[69] Or, as American typographer Douglas C. McMurtrie put it in 1930, "Every element must be functional, purposeful, to a unitary effect. This is because, in the new typography, the eye is not expected to linger in contemplation of details but rather to move, in the most

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67. L. Moholy-Nagy, Ausst. Text "in diesem augenblick...," GS-Kasten 4830.2, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek.

68. Albers, "Zur Ökonomie der Schriftform," 23.

69. This was not just a phenomenon of the European avant-garde - writing in 1930, American typographer Douglas C. McMurtrie writes "detached observers of our modern life are able to report, with considerable unanimity, that the spirit of our modern age is expressed essentially in activity, in a vastly heightened tempo of movement," continuing, "An age of speed and directness speaks to its contemporaries in a typography that is both clear and lively. [...] Clarity is outspoken directness, that gets the sense of the printed words by the most direct route from the printed page through the eyes to the reader's mind. [...] All that does not contribute to clarity and motion the new typography wholly renounces as useless, functionless, unnecessary." (Douglas C. McMurtrie, *Structure in the New Typography* (Chicago: Eyncourt Press, 1930), 6.)
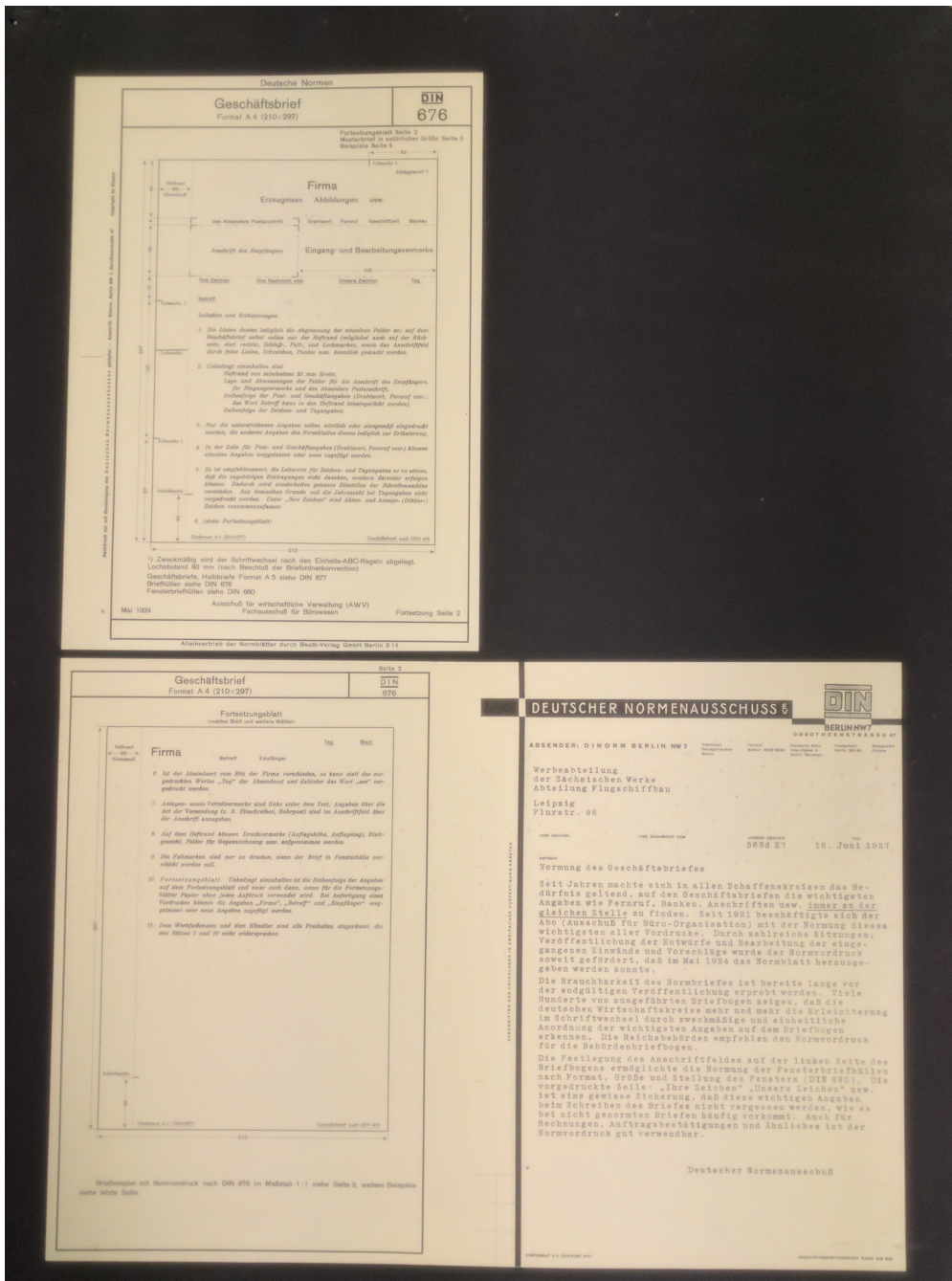
Figure IV.9: Text panel from László Moholy-Nagy's room, *neue Typografie* Exhibition, 1929. László Moholy-Nagy, Ausst. Text "in diesem augenblick...," GS-Kasten 4830.2, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek.

open and direct course possible, through the printed message to its conclusion."[70] Typography must therefore lead the reader to the conclusion as quickly as possible, before the modern eye is distracted by other stimuli.

Let us now turn to the temporality of the museum, which is, I argue, much slower.

Temporality: New Typography in the Museum

In "Walking in the City," Michael de Certeau reads the city as a text - one that is authored by the inhabitants as they move through the urban space. One of the opening images he employs - that of being "lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center" - is a vivid one, in which he experiences the city space anew. He writes:

> it is to be lifted out of the city's grasp. One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law, nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. [...] It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was "possessed" into a text before one's eyes. It allows one to read it.[71]

What de Certeau describes here, is a performative act of reflection, and the power of space to bring that about. I posit, that removing the everyday examples of New Typography from the context of the street and the office and placing them in an exhibition has a very similar effect to that which de Certeau describes from atop the World Trade Center.[72] The experience of viewing

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70. McMurtrie, *Structure in the New Typography*, 11.

71. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 92.

72. The museum has, in fact, a long tradition of creating a space for performative acts of reflection. James Sheehan has written of Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin that the rotunda served as a "place of preparation where the visitor can free himself from the cares of the everyday world and get ready to approach what Schiller would have called the third realm, the realm of play, beauty, and freedom." (James J Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 76-77.) He continues that in order to create such a space, "the rotunda must be set apart from the outside world." (ibid.,

typographic material, in the museum setting allows - even encourages - for the observation of these objects anew, freed from the distraction and hectic, fast-paced temporality of the street and office contexts. As a result, the visitor is invited to let their eye "linger in contemplation," to take in the typographical details in all their *Sachlichkeit* - letters that lack any sense of ornamentation, standardized paper-size, and image-like text.

In the introduction to a special issue of the journal *October* on exhibition design, Claire Grace and Kevin Lotery draw our attention to the place of temporality within the exhibition space. They claim, "often discussed as a spatial form, exhibition design may be better understood as a time-based practice."[73] They base this assertion, that "exhibition design, like sculpture, installation, and other spatial forms, hinges on the embodied temporality of the subject's trajectory through architectural space. The movement from one display to the next, the lowering of the head to peer into an optical device."[74] I agree with Grace and Lotery, and pose the question, what sort of temporality does an exhibition create, and contend that, by comparison with the street and the office, the temporality of the museum is certainly different, and, I argue, much slower.

Of course, there cannot be just one museum or exhibition temporality - much depends on the type of museum, the space, how many other visitors there are, and one's company. Even within

77.) And yet this space that is set apart, at the same time, constantly relates to the walls of the museum beyond it. Sheehan points to the fact the Altes Museum is "firmly rooted in its urban environment," (Sheehan, *Museums in the German Art World: From the End of the Old Regime to the Rise of Modernism*, 73.) and John E. Toews has noted that the staircase to the second floor balcony "articulates the duality of the porch as a boundary area and walkway linking the public activity of the city and the interior space of the Temple of Art." (John E. Toews, *Building Historical and Cultural Identities in a Modernist Frame: Karl Freidrich Schinkel's Bauakedemie in Context*, ed. Mark S Micale, Robert L Dietle, and Peter Gay (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 180.) In many respects, the atrium of the former *Kunstgewerbe Museum* functions in a similar way to the stairs leading up to the balcony of the Altes Museum, in that it represents a space between the street and the museum, in which the material on display can be performatively reflected upon, while retaining the street as a frame of reference.

Thinking of the museum in this way also calls forth Michel Foucault's concept of the *heterotopia* - a space possessing "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect." (Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.)

73. Claire Grace and Kevin Lotery, "Artists Design Exhibitions: Introduction," *October* 150 (2014): 6.

74. Ibid.

the same exhibition at any given time, there are likely to be several temporalities playing out. For the most part, however, visitors move through the space of the exhibition at a slower pace than they would on the street. Zervigón has already highlighted the difference of temporality between a museum visitor and an urban pedestrian. Yet, in drawing this distinction, he labels the "visitor who linger[s] over pictures to gather the aesthetic or use-value they dispens[e]," as "passive," in contrast to the "peripatetic viewer who [takes] a quick gaze as she or he scurri[es] past in the daily shuffle."[75] While I agree with the different temporalities Zervigón draws attention to here, I argue that the term "passive" misrepresents the active way in which visitors can engage with the material.

I suggest, that rather than the *blasé* attitude with which pedestrians fleetingly engage with posters and adverts on the street, or skim over the letterhead to read the content of a letter received in the office, the museum encourages engagement. Free from (most) distracting stimuli, the context and temporality of the exhibition transforms these everyday objects by allowing the visitor to concentrate attentively on that, which they would in other contexts filter out. This allows the visitor to consider the material, not for its informative content - information about a product on an advertising poster, or the address of a firm on a letterhead - but to approach it for formally, paying attention to each of the individual components - form, image, negative space, typography. Furthermore, I contend that it is the temporal difference between the street and the museum that enables the visitor to engage with the material in this way. This slower temporality of the museum, I suggest, prompts the visitor to spend time with each of the images, perhaps encouraging them to ask questions, such as, How was the poster composed? How does it communicate a message? What is it that makes it effective?

When functional letterheads and envelopes are displayed in an exhibition, they are done so as

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75. Zervigón, "The Peripatetic Viewer at Heartfield's Film und Foto Exhibition Room," 30.

images. This causes the function of typography, I argue, to change. Just as the designer considers these as images in their production - Schwitters claims, "Der Werbegestalter wertet wie der Künstler wertet, will er dieses betonen, muß er jenes vernachlässigen" - here, the viewer approaches them as an image.[76] Rather than being a medium through which a message is communicated, and therefore referring to something beyond itself, in the museum setting, the emphasis is placed *not* on the letters, but on their form. As a result, they become at once text *and* image, and are approached as such by the viewer. In this way, the typography refers back to itself - the letters carry additional information to the purely linguistic information it communicates. Why has the artist or graphic designer chosen this particular font? What does it add to the image? What information does that give the viewer who is reading it at speed? Here we see one of the most significant differences in curatorial approach between Moholy-Nagy and that of the *Ring*, under the guidance of Schwitters. In contrast to the discursive space the former creates, the *Ring*'s section of the exhibition relies on active interpretation on the part of the visitor.

Having considered the two types of space created by Moholy-Nagy and Schwitters, in this final part of the chapter, I would now like to turn to both artists' treatises of New Typography. In order to do so, I first of all examine Moholy-Nagy's narrative text in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" By reading it against Schwitters' writing on typography, I bring out some of the nuanced differences between the two artists' approach to New Typography.

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76. Kurt Schwitters, "Gestlatende Typographie," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 313.

"wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?"

A Mission Statement

For Moholy-Nagy the text he displays in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" is more than just a series of exhibition panels that constitute a didactic argument - it became, I argue, a mission statement for how he understood New Typography. Appearing just a year after the *neue Typografie* exhibition, Moholy-Nagy published an abridged version of the text, by taking the first, seventh, and eighth panels verbatim, for his contribution to Heinz and Bodo Rasch's *Gefesselter Blick*.[77] The narrative text in the exhibition therefore becomes a treatise particular to Moholy-Nagy, sharing many similarities with his other writings on typography.[78] While Moholy-Nagy claims this text as his own, it is probable that Schwitters collaborated with him to a certain extent on it. In one of his first circular letters regarding the exhibition, Schwitters includes the

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77. Rasch and Rasch, *Gefesselter Blick*.

This publication, edited by architect brothers Heinz and Bodo Rasch, was sponsored by the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'* and accompanied an exhibition by the same name in Stuttgart in 1930. The book featured 26 different artists and designers, with each designer providing a short biography, as well as a statement on New Typography, that was placed alongside examples of their work. Detlef Martins and Michael W. Jennings refer to it as "the group's most important contribution," (Detlef Mertins and Michael William Jennings, *G: An Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010), 18.) and Patrick Rössler calls it "the seminal manifesto of applied 'new typography'." (Patrick Rössler, "Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Dessau: 'neue typographie' - The New Face of a New World: *das neue frankfurt* (1926-33) and *die neue linie* (1929-43)," in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines. Volume III*, ed. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 977.)

While Moholy-Nagy lifted entire panels from the "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" narrative for his statement in *Gefesselter Blick*, there is, of course, clear overlap with much of his writing from this period. In his text "Zeitgemäße Typographie. Ziele, Praxis, Kritik," for example, he cites a key phrase that appears in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?": "Klarheit, Knappheit, Präzision." (László Moholy-Nagy, "Zeitgemäße Typographie. Ziele, Praxis, Kritik," in *bauhaus: drucksachen, typografie, reklame*, ed. Gert Fleischmann (Stuttgart: Oktagon, 1995), 17.)

For Moholy-Nagy's contribution in *Gefesselter Blick*, see Rasch and Rasch, *Gefesselter Blick*.

78. See, for example, Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, "Die neue Typographie," in *Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar 1919-1923*, ed. Karl Nierendorf (München: Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, 1980), 141; Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, "Klarheit, Knappheit, Präzision," in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984); Moholy-Nagy, "Typofoto"; Lázsló Moholy-Nagy, "Zeitgemäße Typographie: Ziele, Praxis, Kritik," in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 17.

following call for suggestions. From it, we can see some of Schwitters' preliminary ideas for how he envisions the exhibition taking shape. He writes to the members:

> Sie werden nun gebeten, irgend welche Ideen zu unserer Ausstellung, mir mitzuteilen, etwa solche, die speziell auf Ihre Arbeiten passen. Es sollen in besonderen Abteilungen der Ausstellung gezeigt werden u.a. Beispiele und Gegenbeispiele, oder etwa alte Vorlage neben der neuen Gestaltung, oder schlechte Typographie mit äußerlich nachempfundenen modernen Mitteln neben guter neuzeitlicher Gestaltung, oder ungenormte und ungestaltete, oder genormte, aber ungestaltete oder genormte und gestaltete Typographie.[79]

Here, Schwitters suggests incorporating and highlighting broad dichotomies, such as *good* and *bad*, *old* and *new*, several of which are in turn taken up by Moholy-Nagy in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Indeed, these dichotomies are, as we have seen, one of the key elements that render Moholy-Nagy's space didactic.[80]

These didactic parameters, read together with Schwitters' circular letters to members of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter,'* indicate a degree of collaboration and certainly point to a common foundation between Schwitters and Moholy-Nagy. A close reading of Moholy-Nagy's text, however, also draws attention to some fundamental differences between his and Schwitters' notions of what New Typography is, as well as the directions its productive potential points to. In this next section, I draw these out, paying particular attention to the terms *Optik* and *Gestaltung*, as well as *medium* and *reception*.

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79. Circular letter from Kurt Schwitters to members of the *Ring: 'neue Werbegestalter'*, "Mittelung 24, 15.2.29" reproduced in "Rundbriefe des Rings 'neue Werbegestalter' aus dem Nachlaß Piet Zwarts," Rattemeyer and Helms, *Ring'neue werbegestalter: die Amsterdamer Ausstellung 1931*, 123.

80. It is also important to note that these didactic components were present in Moholy-Nagy's *Fifo* room, "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" and were perhaps as much a product of Giedion's influence, with his plans for a room entitled "Schulung der Optik," as they were Schwitters'.

Neue Typografie: Optik vs. Gestaltung,

Medium vs. Reception

On the second text panel displayed in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Moholy-Nagy outlines the lineage of New Typography, as he sees it. Starting with a clear point of departure, he writes:

> der erste vorstoss ist von dem französischen dichter guillaume apollinaire und von dem futuristischen führer f.t.marinetti ausgegangen. sie sprengten die alte übereinkunft: grade zeilen, gleiche typen, von links nach rechts gehende schriftrichtung. sie verkündeten die expressive optische wirksamkeit des satzbildes.[81]

It is here that Moholy-Nagy first makes mention of an adjective that recurs frequently throughout the rest of the narrative: *optisch*. On a later text panel, for example, when discussing the typographic organization of text, Moholy-Nagy refers to "das optische organisationsprinzip."[82] And likewise, in the closing text panel he makes the claim that: "diese zukunftstypografie erlaubt eine vollkommene auflockerung des ganzen optischen bildes."[83] Similar to the way in which Moholy-Nagy underlines key words in the narrative, and thereby visibly drawing the reader's attention to them, the repetition of the word *optisch* creates a comparable effect, rendering it one of the key terms in this text.

With such a strong emphasis on *Optik*, we see the way in which further elements of Moholy-Nagy's work on the *Film und Foto* exhibition, for which he discussed the notion of "Schulung der

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81. L. Moholy-Nagy, Ausst. Text "der erste Vorstoß...," GS-Kasten 4830.2, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek.

82. L. Moholy-Nagy, Ausst. Text "in diesem augenblick war man reif," GS-Kasten 4831.7, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek.

83. L. Moholy-Nagy, Ausst. Text "zweifellos werden in der zukunft...," GS-Kasten 4833.2, Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Kunstbibliothek."

Optik" with Sigfried Giedion, weave their way into the *neue Typografie* exhibition. Yet, this notion of *Optik/optisch* was neither a new one to Moholy-Nagy, nor is it unique to "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" Rather it emerges from Moholy-Nagy's various writings on typography and graphic design from as early as 1923. In a short treatise entitled "Die neue Typografie" published in one of the *Bauhausbücher*, for instance, Moholy-Nagy writes of the "optische und psychische Gesetze untergeordnete Gestaltung."[84] In other texts he links an understanding of typography more directly to the idea of *Optik/optisch*, making reference to "typographisch-optisch-synoptisch Form."[85]

These are but a few examples of the many times the adjective (and sometimes noun) appears and reappears in Moholy-Nagy's commentaries on typography. In each case, they point us to one very particular and fundamental aspect of New Typography: technology. This is perhaps most evident in Moholy-Nagy's 1925 text, "Zeitgemäße Typographie: Ziele, Praxis, Kritik," in which he writes:

> Neuerungen, wie die Verbreitung der Fotografie, des Films, der zinkografischen, galvanoplastischen Techniken, haben eine neue, sich ständig weiterentwickelnde Schaffensbasis auch für die Typografie hervorgebracht. Die Erfindung des Lichtdrucks, sein Weiterausbau, die fotografische Setzmaschine, das Erfassen der Lichtreklame, das Erlebnis der optischen Kontinuität im Film, die simultane (gleichzeitige) Auswirkung sinnlich wahrnehmbaren Ereignisse (Großstadt) ermöglichen und fordern ein durchaus neues Nivo auch auf optisch-typografischen Gebiete.[86]

Here, after listing a long line of new technological advances that have had an impact on typography, Moholy-Nagy claims that such inventions have moved typography in a new direction, bringing it together with the idea of *Optik*, rendering it in and of itself, *optisch*. For Moholy-Nagy, then, the idea of typography becomes inextricabaly linked with the optical, as indicated

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84. Moholy-Nagy, "Die neue Typographie," 141.
85. Moholy-Nagy, "Zeitgemäße Typographie: Ziele, Praxis, Kritik," 17.
86. Ibid.

by the linked adjective "optisch-typografisch."

To be sure, it is not just Moholy-Nagy who is using the word *optisch* in this way. While its etymology might lie in the Greek *optikós* - most literally meaning sight or vision - by the 1920s its related noun, *Optik*, came to have several definitions and uses in German. In addition to meaning "optics," it was also used to refer to a lens; the term was thus appropriated in a way that signified sight *through* technology - either that of photography or film. One such example of this usage appears in a 1929 review of *Film und Foto* exhibition published in *Die Schwäbische Tagwacht*. The writer notes:

> Das Weltbild einer neuen Sehmöglichkeit (Optik) liegt hier in seinen Anfängen vor uns, ein Weltbild, das sich grundsätzlich von dem malerischen und impressionistischen unterscheidet, das auf der Grundlage technischer Reproduktionsfähigkeit die umgebende Stoffwelt, die Farbigkeit der Natur zu bezwingen versucht.[87]

Here, *Optik* is perceived as offering a new mode of seeing - one for which the possibilities afforded by photography are central. With these wider uses of the term *Optik*, Moholy-Nagy therefore subtly renders technology pivotal to his vision of New Typography.

Furthermore, this connection between New Typography and technology is made manifest in Moholy-Nagy's "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" room, not just in the narrative, but also in the mode of its display (see Figure IV.10). The medium of the text panels is listed in the archive catalog as *Foto*. As such, Moholy-Nagy presents the exhibition visitor not just with text, but with a *pictorial representation of text* - first of all by establishing a link between text and image within the parameters of New Typography, and secondly, by doing so through the lens of a camera, drawing attention to the role photography plays in his vision of effective typography. This is, of course, no coincidence: four years earlier in 1925, Moholy-Nagy published a short essay

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87. "Eröffnung der Werkbundausstellung 'Film und Foto' "Schwäbische Tagwacht, May 18, 1929, reproduced in *Film und Foto der zwanziger Jahre: eine Betrachtung der Internationalen Werkbundausstellung Film und Foto 1929*, ed. Ute Eskildsen and Jan-Christoph Horak (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1979), 169.

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in dieser weise hergestellt,
sondern auch bücher. diese
entwicklung hängt allein von
der zukünftigen preisentwick=
lung der "druckplatte" ab,die
wahrscheinlich durch die aus=
schaltung der teuren zinkogra=
fischen techniken die lösung
bringt. diese zukunftstypogra=
fie erlaubt eine vollkommene
auflockerung des ganzen op=
tischen bildes. die horizon=
tal-vertikale werkgerechtig=
keit des handsatzes wird da=
mit aufgehoben. den neuen
typografen,"typografischen
modellhersteller" wird in der
zukunft nur das gesetz leiten,
das der typografischen aufgabe
innewohnt.

Figure IV.10: Text panel from Moholy-Nagy's room at the *neue Typografie* exhibition, 1929.

entitled "Typofoto" in two different venues. In it, he claims that bringing together photography and typography creates "die visuell exaktest dargestellte Mitteilung," in which *Optik* plays an integral role.[88] He writes:

> Die typografischen Materialen selbst enthalten starke optische Faßbarkeiten und vermögen durch den Inhalt der Mitteilung auch unmittelbar visuell - nicht nur mittelbar intellektuell - darzustellen. Die Fotografie als typografisches Material verwendet, ist von größter Wirksamkeit. Sie kann als Illustration neben und zu den Worten erscheinen, oder als "Fototext" an Stelle der Worte als präzise Darstellungsform, die in ihrer Objektivität keine individuelle Deutung zuläßt.[89]

In "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" we have a literal example of a "Fototext" in the form of Moholy-Nagy's creative text panels.[90] Furthermore, as Perdita Lottner has pointed out, "Die Texttafeln sind über eine photographische Negativwiedergabe von Geschriebenem in Schreibmaschinentype reproduziert."[91] I contend that by choosing to display the narrative in *negative form*, Moholy-Nagy further emphasizes the connection he envisages between his subject matter - New Typography - and photography, by drawing attention to the photographic process in the panels. Secondly, the use of the typewriter links New Typography to one of the new technologies with which Moholy-Nagy considers it to be closely bound.[92]

This, I argue, is where the distinction between Moholy-Nagy's and Schwitters' concept of New Typography is most apparent. For Moholy-Nagy, new technology, and in particular the increasing availability and affordability of photography as a medium, is fundamental to his vision of the text-image relationship that New Typography engenders. Both his narrative and its mode

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88. Moholy-Nagy, "Typofoto," 21.

89. Ibid., 22.

90. Olivier Lugon has noted that the panels in "wohin geht die fotografische entwicklung?" that were created in exactly the same way, were referred to by exhibition critics at the time as "Textbilder." (Lugon, ""Neues Sehen, Neue Geschichte: László Moholy-Nagy, Sigfried Giedion und die Ausstellung *Film und Foto*," 93.)

91. Lottner, "Neue Typografie Ausstellung Berlin 1929: Forderungen der elementaren Gestaltung," 15.

92. For more on the connection between the typewriter and New Typography, see Chapter Two, in which I consider the strive for a machine produced script to replace that of the hand.

of display in "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" propagate this. To be clear, Schwitters is neither dismissive of coupling photography and typography, nor does he stand in opposition to Moholy-Nagy's vision, but rather his writing on the subject reveals a different emphasis with regards to the direction of New Typography [93] Whereas *Optik* becomes a key term for Moholy-Nagy, *Gestaltung* becomes a recurring motif in Schwitters' writings on typography.

In his "Thesen über Typographie," for example, Schwitters states: "Mein Hauptgrundsatz bei der typographischen Gestaltung ist der, jedesmal das zum Ausdruck zu bringen, was ich im einzelnen Falle ausdrücken wollte. Genauer anzugeben, was z.B. Ziel typographischer Gestaltung sein kann, würde sehr weit führen."[94] Written in 1925, this is one of the first instances of what Schwitters refers to as "typographische Gestaltung" - a phrase which he reiterates in the short, manifesto-like text on graphic design he published in 1928, entitled *Werbe-Gestaltung*.[95] Schwitters foregrounds the booklet with a short introductory text, "Die neue Gestaltung in der Typographie," in which he stresses *Gestaltung* as an essential element of typography, delineating it in the following way: "Gestaltung ist Einheit aus Vielheit, durch Auswahl, Begrenzung, Gliederung, Rhythmus."[96] What is most striking about this text, is not so much the text itself - the meaning of which can be, at times, quite elusive - but rather the composition of it (see Figure IV.11).

In a mimetic move, Schwitters incorporates his understanding of both New Typography and *Gestaltung* into his design of the booklet. Using futura - Renner's clear, sans-serif typeface - Schwitters uses key words, and short phrases, rather than extended, lengthy prose. The opening

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93. In his "Thesen über Typographie" Schwitters extols the advantages that photography lends typography, noting, "Die photographische Abbildung ist klarer und deshalb besser als die gezeichnete." (Kurt Schwitters, "Thesen über Typographie," ed. Kurt Schwitters and El Lissitzky, *Merz* 11 (1925): 192.)

94. Kurt Schwitters, "Geboren," in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918-1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 335.

95. This is the same text that I use in Chapter Two to read Schwitters' montages against his theory of graphic design.

96. Schwitters, *Werbe-Gestaltung*, 3.

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F₁ DIE NEUE GESTALTUNG . . . .

a	orientierende ——	Drucksachen
b	werbende ——	Drucksachen

das ist:

Zweck ——	Mittel
literarisch logisch ——	optisch logisch

und ist berechnet für:

Verstand ——	Auge

das ergibt:

Text-Form ——	Bild-Form
Symbol ——	Zeichen

INHALT:

[1930]

2

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. . . IN DER TYPOGRAPHIE   **F₁**

Die neue Typographie erfaßt alles durch

GESTALTUNG

Logische, bewußte Gliederung in Text-Form und Bild-Form, sowie das Schaffen deutlicher Beziehungen in Text und Bild überzeugen durch Qualität, sind übersichtlich und mindern skeptisch-kritische Einstellung.

GESTALTUNG

ist Einheit aus Vielheit,
durch Auswahl, Begrenzung, Gliederung, Rhythmus,
durch ruhendes oder gerichtet bewegtes Gleichgewicht,
durch System

GLEICHGEWICHT oder   SYSTEM?

Auswägen ——	Ordnen
ästhetisch	praktisch

Wichtig ist beides, aber das System ist dem Gleichgewicht überzuordnen.
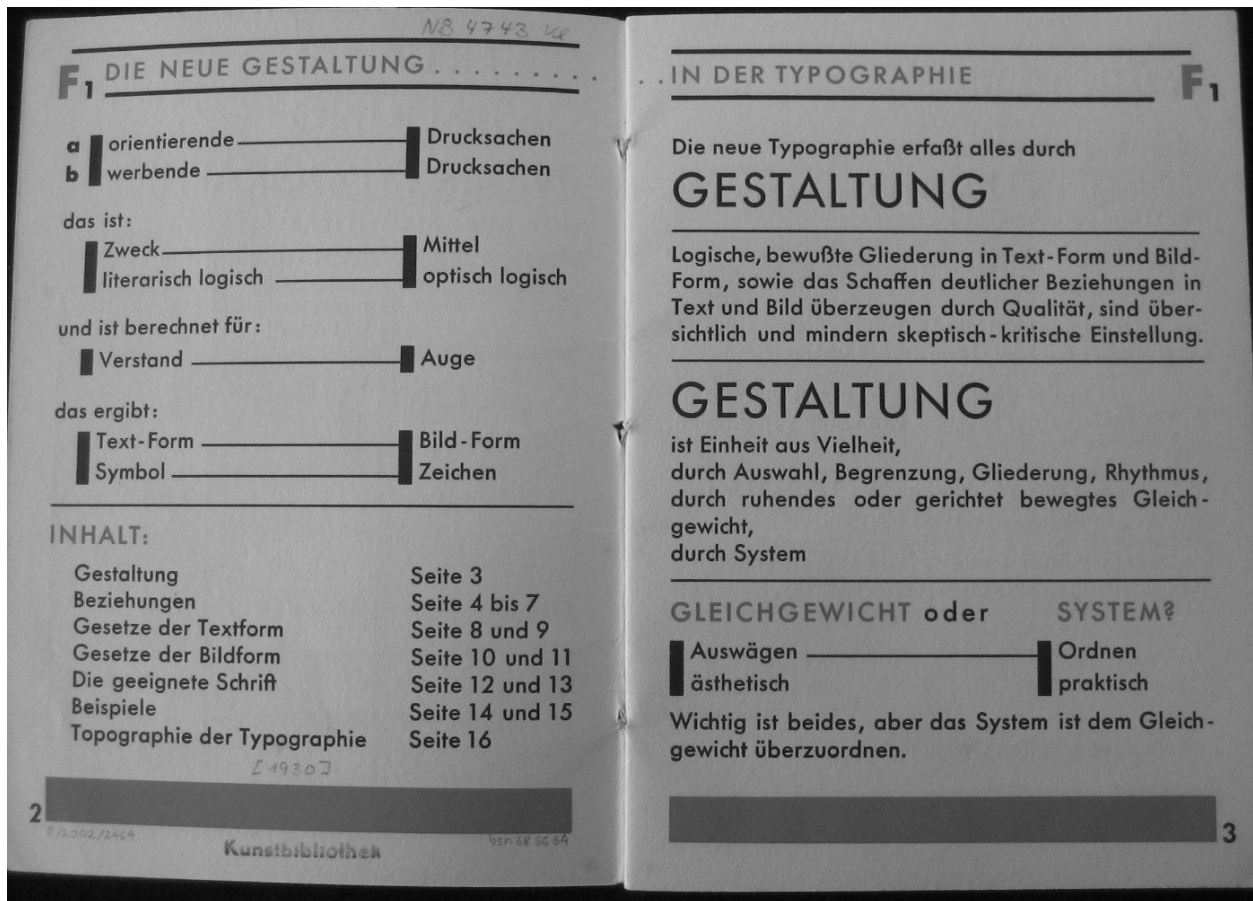
3

Figure IV.11: Excerpt from Schwitters' *Werbesache* booklet, 1928.

double-spread page of the booklet sets out a diagram on one side, and a short text on the other, and immediately on first glance, the reader is hit by the word *Gestaltung*. This word stands out for several reasons: firstly, the whole word appears in uppercase; secondly, it is much larger than the rest of the text; thirdly, Schwitters repeats this word, which has the effect of both emphasis, while also producing an internal balance to the page.[97] Indeed, the reader needs to do little more than to glance at the page to understand that *Gestaltung* is at the heart of Schwitters' notion of New Typography. In this way, Schwitters employs the ideals of New Typography, in which the message is communicated to the reader as quickly as possible, using the form of typography, and the page layout to do so.

It is, however, perhaps an overview of Schwitters' work written in 1930 that provides the most useful insight into what exactly he alludes to when he uses the term *Gestaltung* in conjunction with typography. For Schwitters, *Gestaltung* and typography belong together, so that both become adjectives to describe the other: phrases such as "typographische Gestaltung" and "gestaltende Typographie" are commonplace in his writing, reveling the strong underlying foundation he believes the two terms share. *Gestaltung* was, of course, a widely employed term by avant-garde designers and typographers at this time: the journal *G: Material zur elementaren Gestaltung*, for which Schwitters was a contributor, foregrounds the importance of this term for the field, and is but one example of many uses of it within avant-garde circles. Yet Schwitters does not use this term unreflexively, or only because it is fashionable: in "Gestaltende Typographie," a text composed in 1928, Schwitters outlines his use of the term and its importance to his understanding of New Typography. He writes:

> Die meisten Werbesachen unserer Zeit fehlt am dringendsten gestaltende Typographie, trotzdem bewertet der Bund deutscher Gebrauchsgraphiker in seinen

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97. Creating a balanced page is one of the points that Schwitters labors in Werbe-Gestaltung. He writes, for example, "Gleichgewicht muß erreicht werden." (Schwitters, *Werbe-Gestaltung*, 7.)

Mindestsätzen die sogenannte typographische Anordnung, wie er das nennt, sehr gering im Vergleich zu gezeichneter Schrift. Das Wort 'typographische Anordnung' ist sehr plausibel, wenn man ihm den Begriff 'typographische Gestaltung' gegenüberstellt. Man sieht dann deutlich den grundlegenden Unterschied; gemeint ist mit Anordnung das übliche verständliche Ordnen, das dem Werbefachmann eigentümlich ist, und wodurch er mit Sicherheit die typographische Ordnung der Glieder einer Werbesache die notwendige Voraussetzung, jedoch als Ziel ist sie verkehrt, denn sie ist für die Wirkung auf die Sinne des Betrachters belanglos und verfehlt ihren Zweck, weil zum Schluß alle Menschen doch nur mit den Sinnen und nicht mit dem Verstand etwas wahrnehmen können. Die Wirkung auf die Sinne aber erstrebt und erreicht die typographische Gestaltung durch Zusammenfassen der einzelnen Reize zu einer Komposition, die mit dem Auge und nicht mit dem Verstand betrachtet werden soll.[98]

While Moholy-Nagy emphasizes the medium through which typography should be employed - "Das Wichtigste für die heutige Typographie ist die Verwendung der zinkographischen Techniken, die mechanische Herstellung von photographischen Reproduktionen allen Formaten" - we see from this passage, that Schwitters is most concerned with its reception.[99]

Drawing attention to the sensorial aspect, Schwitters underlines the importance of the reader for the New Typography, since the senses play a pivotal role in its reception. By placing more emphasis on the senses - particularly that of sight - over *Verstand*, Schwitters moves typography from the textual realm into a more visual one, thus complicating the relationship between text and image. Indeed, this is supported by his claim that typography is "das niedergeschriebene Bild der Sprache," as well as by his work on the *Systemschrift*, that focuses less on the word itself, and more on its optophentic qualities.[100] For at the core of the Systemschrift lies an emphasis on the sound ascribed to any given word.[101]

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98. Schwitters, "Gestlatende Typographie," 331.
99. Moholy-Nagy, "Die neue Typographie," 141.
100. Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," 274.
101. He writes of his vision of such a script: "Man liest jetzt besser und vor allen Dingen plastischer, weil man die klanglosen matt. Das Bild der Schrift ähnelt schon viel mehr dem Klang." (ibid., 274.)

It is not surprising, therefore, that later in "Die gestaltende Typographie" Schwitters draws parallels between a practitioner of New Typography and an artist.[102] He goes on to conclude that *Gestaltung*, and thus the visual aspect of typography, is the most essential element of New Typography. He writes:

> Klare Schrifttypen, einfache und klare übersichtliche Verteilung, Wertung aller Teile gegeneinander zum Zwecke der Hervorhebung einer Einzelheit, auf die besonders aufmerksam gemacht werden soll, das ist das Wesen neuer Typographie, das ist gestaltende Typographie oder typographische Gestaltung."[103]

Of course this too lends itself to the adjective *Optisch*, but with Schwitters its emphasis lies on the sensorial act of seeing, rather than Moholy-Nagy's use of the term, that points to the potential of new technologies.

In the rooms that follow Moholy-Nagy's "wohin geht die typografische entwicklung?" at the *neue Typografie* exhibition, Schwitters appeals to the visitors' *Sinne* rather than *Verstand*. Instead of relying on text to put across, or even supplement, his vision of New Typography, as his colleague and collaborator Moholy-Nagy does, Schwitters simply uses the members' and invited guests' examples of graphic design and typography to illustrate his concept of it.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Berlin *neue Typografie* exhibition brings together the three main focuses of this dissertation - the relationships between the fine and applied arts, text and image, and Schwitters as both an individual artist and collaborator. In this public forum, we see Schwitters

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102. Schwitters writes "Die Tätigkeit des Werbegestalters beim Schaffen ist verwandt der Tätigkeit des Künstlers, wenn er gestaltet; bloß ist ihm ein bestimmtes Ziel gegeben, während der Künstler frei und ohne Ziel schafft. Der Werbegestalter wertet wie der Künstler wertet; will er dieses betonen, muß er jenes vernachlässigen." (Schwitters, "Gestlatende Typographie," 313.)
103. Ibid., 314.

place typographical material from the applied arts, in the museum, and, in contrast to Moholy-Nagy's didactic text and *discursive space*, display it as fine art. In doing so, I contend that Schwitters pushes the boundaries between the applied and fine arts much further than his colleague and collaborator, Moholy-Nagy. By considering the temporality of museum, in comparison to that of both the workplace and street, we see how the relationship between text and image changes. In this temporal context, the function of the material on display changes, with the result that the exhibition visitor is, I argue, much more likely to view typography as an image. Finally, at the core of this exhibition is a collaboration primarily between two artists. Reading their curatorial approaches and text on New Typography against one another helps us see some of the nuanced differences between the two artists' understanding of it. Although they share a common foundation, I have shown that Moholy-Nagy is more focused on the medium, while Schwitters is concerned with the reception.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In 1929 Schwitters composed the image *Karlsruhe* (see Figure V.1). Ten years after creating his first montages, 1929 was also the year Schwitters organized the *Ring: 'neue Werbegetalter'*s *neue Typografie* exhibition in Berlin, and in which he worked on the typographic material for the Dammerstock-Siedlung. Unsurprisingly, we see elements of both of these projects appear in the image, and as such, it embodies many of the primary issues that I address in this dissertation. I would therefore like to use this montage as a springboard for drawing together some of the main arguments I have set out in the preceding chapters.

Consistent with many of Schwitters' montages from the late 1920s, *Karlsruhe* is comprised of relatively few *Einzelteile*. The main background displays architectural plans of two apartment blocks alongside circles with arrows that point to the center of the bottom of the page. While at first glance, the apartments and circles appear as though they could be two separate *Einzelteile*, this is, in fact, a single page that has been taken from the exhibition catalog that Schwitters designed for the Dammerstock-Siedlung. Rather than abstract forms, the circles and arrows show the direction the future apartments will face.[1] Placed on top of this background are a transportation ticket for the city of Karlsruhe, a cut-out of the Dammerstock-Siedlung logo, a text cutting, and a cut-up decorative border, each arranged in an orderly manner with all of the *Einzelteile* aligned to the sides of the board.

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1. While this is the main background for the montage, careful attention to the top and top right-hand side of the image shows that this page has been glued on top of another piece of printed matter, which was, perhaps, sturdier than the thin paper sheets in the Dammerstock-Siedlung exhibition catalog. The snippet of text at the bottom of the right-hand side of the image, reading "TZ MEYER & CO. A.G." most likely also belongs to this piece of the page.
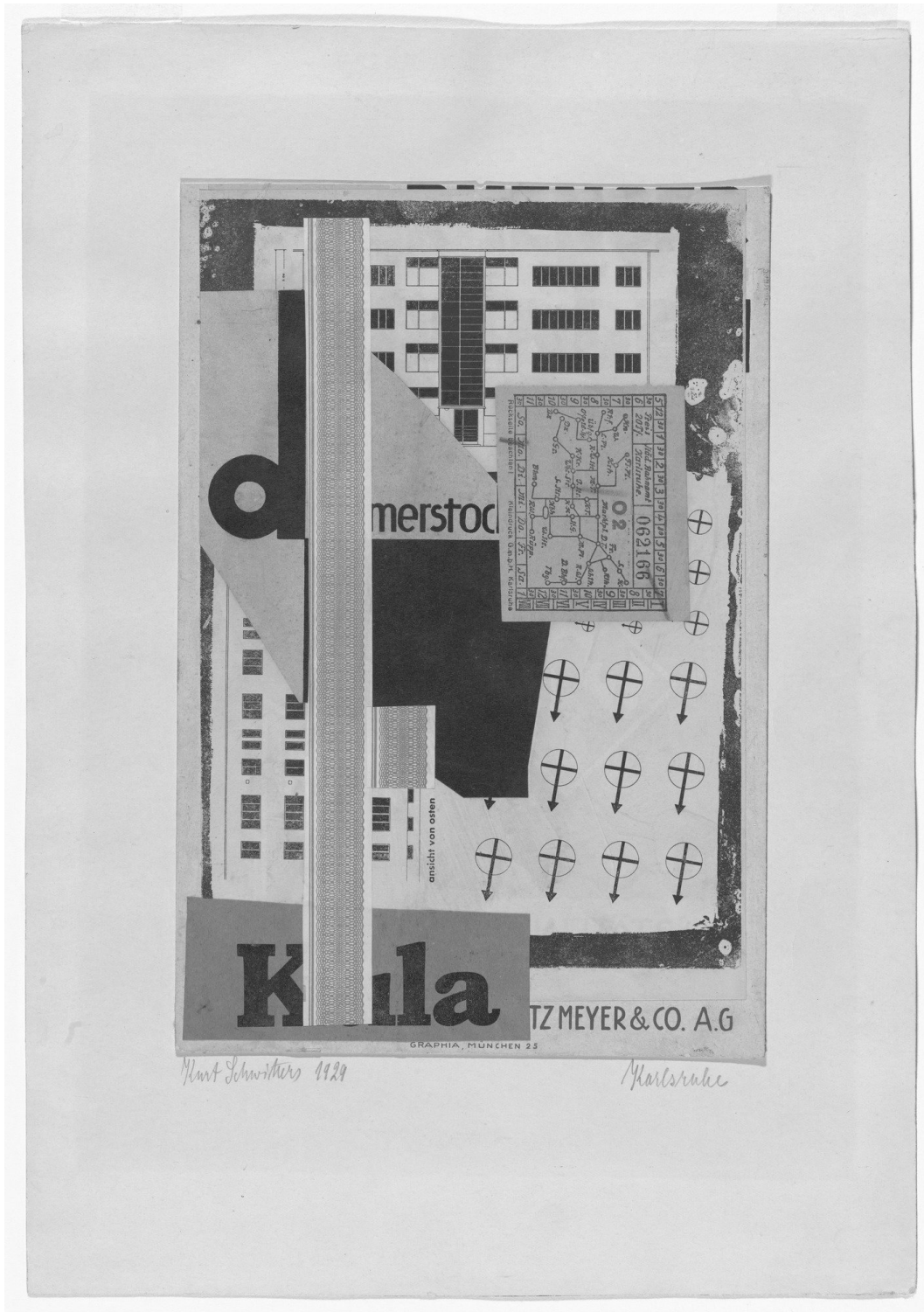
Figure V.1: Kurt Schwitters, *Karslruhe*, 1929.

In *Karlsruhe*, we see very clearly some of the different text-image relations that are at play in Schwitters' work. In this instance, as is often the case, it is letters that are some of the aesthetically strongest parts of the image, drawing the viewer's eye towards them. On the most fundamental of levels, Schwitters underlines the importance of text to the *Gesamtheit* of the image by making letters such a prominent part of the montage. On closer inspection, however, we see that their form mirrors the other non-textual components in a way that I suggest equates the text with the image. The 'd' that forms the first letter of *Dammerstock*, for example, reflects the windows that run down the center of the apartment block at the top of the page, while the smaller letters that follow resemble the windows that run horizontally. Conversely, Schwitters forms a letter by piecing together two parts of the cut-out border to produce a 't' and thus creating text from an image.

By incorporating text into *Karlsruhe*, and his other montages, Schwitters creates an *Imagetext*, to use W.J.T. Mitchell's term, in that it is a "'literal' manifestation of image and text coming together.[2] Yet, the reading I provided in Chapter Two, of Schwitters' writing on his theory of Merz, shows that the artist considered all elements - and therefore also textual elements - of the image *entmaterialisiert* and purely formal, once they have been integrated into the new context of the image. Approaching the *Imagetext* in this way, however, causes us to jump over the rupture that Mitchell asserts is present between the two media, which he terms *Image/Text*. According to Schwitters, the text has transgressed the boundary - the '/' - that separates text and image, and therefore complicates Mitchell's model.

As I have argued in Chapter Two, however, the way Schwitters approaches the montage is not the primary way in which the viewer does so. Instead, I contend that the viewer recognizes these textual elements, not just as form, but also as text. Furthermore, the highly abstracted of many

2. Mitchell, "Image X Text," 1.

of Schwitters' montages means that it is exactly these *Einzelteile* that the viewer latches on to as a point of entry into the abstract montage. As a result, the linguistic meaning produced by the text also contributes to the viewer's production of meaning for the *Gesamtheit* of the montage. This is particularly evident in the case of *Karlsruhe*, in which the word "Dammerstock" directly relates to the images incorporated into the montage, and therefore adds weight to the fact that it is doubtable that even Schwitters himself believed a complete *Entmaterialisierung* could take place.

Furthermore, I suggest that the 'K' in the bottom left-hand side of *Karlsruhe*, together with the large 't' that follows, can be read as Schwitters' signature - a notion that it is reinforced by the fact it appears just above his own signature on the card onto which the montage is affixed Such a reading of the text also points us towards my argument in Chapter Two that Schwitters' collage arts are deeply rooted in self-referentiality. Reading 'Kt' as a signature, we see how the oversized 't' extends from the bottom of the page, often reserved for signatures, right the way up into the heart of the montage. This is symbolic, I contend, for the way in which Schwitters inserts himself into his work through self-referentiality. Indeed, this notion is evidenced in the rest of *Karlsruhe*, in which we see Schwitters use his own graphic design work as the very foundation of the montage.

The use of the *Dammerstock* material has, I claim, an additional function within this montage. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Schwitters saw no distinction between the fine and the applied arts and worked in both areas simultaneously. Here, we see evidence of this, as Schwitters brings in elements of his applied arts design work into the context of his fine artwork. By incorporating his own typographical designs into a montage, I posit that Schwitters equates the two, much as he does when he places typography and graphic design in the museum setting. As a result, I contend that Schwitters uses his collage arts as a medium for his goal of erasing

the boundaries between the fine and applied arts.

In *Karlsruhe*, we see that two out of the three main pieces of text are connected with the city. The word *Dammerstock* refers to the housing estate, the transportation ticket is for Karlsruhe, and of course, the architectural designs that form the backdrop also allude to an urban space. I therefore contend that in Schwitters' work we can draw a line between typographical design and the city. Indeed, I suggest this idea is reflected in the fact that the large 't' that runs through two pieces of text to the left-hand side, mirrors the way in which objects block out parts of text, just as buildings do as we pass by on city streets, particularly, while moving at speed. I therefore posit that the composition carries similar undertones as Schwitters' essay on the *Systemschrift* in which he writes of the need for a new script that can be read at speed. And while that was primarily a failed project, as I have shown, we see here another instance of Schwitters' typographical work for the Dammerstock-Siedlung preserved, albeit in the sphere of fine, rather than applied arts.

Lastly, while Schwitters may have been the composer of this montage, the focus on Dammerstock points to his collaboration with Walter Gropius. Throughout this dissertation I have shown Schwitters to be a collaborator with members from various different avant-garde circles, movements and schools. His mail art shows exchanges with a Dada artist and an art critic (with numerous recipients of his montaged postcards who could also be added to this list), he worked on typographical issues with other avant-garde artists, an experimental typographer, and a type foundry, as well as organizing an exhibition with a former Bauhaus professor that included work of many of the most important figures of the interwar European avant-gardes. Schwitters was far from an outsider, or solitary artists. On the contrary, his work relied on the collaboration of others.

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