

8 Everyday printed matter

Kurt Schwitters's experimental typography¹

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In the late 1920s, the aesthetics of the printed page were undergoing radical and rapid changes in Germany. The early years of the twentieth century had brought with them an increased interest in both the typography and layout of all types of publications, from text-based books to invitation cards and advertising posters. Yet this change came not from within the profession, but rather from the outside, with many avant-garde artists creating innovative new typefaces and experimenting with design, based on a new understanding of modern perception. The result was an aesthetic that we now recognize as “New Typography,” which sparked a fundamental rethinking of how everyday printed matter could be used as a means of visual communication. One of the leading figures in this change was Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) – a German avant-garde artist, writer, and graphic designer. Schwitters, however, was not content to just design experimental new typefaces – although he also did that – instead, he focused on the creation of an entirely new way of writing. What Schwitters envisaged was a rationalized script that would be compatible with twentieth-century life, and in particular, the speed of the modern city. By first of all examining Schwitters's *Systemschrift* [systematic script] and contextualizing it within broader typographical changes at the time, this chapter examines a range of everyday printed matter designed by Schwitters that used the *Systemschrift* and other related scripts. In doing so, it addresses questions of temporality and rationalization in relation to typography and highlights how Schwitters leveraged his commercial commissions to fulfill the avant-garde aim of bringing art into everyday life.

New Typography and the poster

Since the end of the nineteenth century, theorists and typographers had been battling over which kind of script – the ornate *Fraktur* (Gothic) or the simpler *Antiqua* (Latin) – was most suitable for texts published in German.² While the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate continued to be a heated discussion in Germany throughout the 1920s, the years of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) saw a marked shift towards *Antiqua*. This change was part of a broader aesthetic move from ornamentation to functionalism that can be seen across many disciplines at the time, with artists and designers alike rejecting the intricate designs of the Arts and Crafts and

Art Nouveau movements in favor of a more minimalist approach. In avant-garde circles this was propagated by the Bauhaus, whose professors and students – most notably Herbert Bayer, László Moholy-Nagy, and Josef Albers – made major contributions to typographic experimentation.³

It is in this context that the concept of New Typography was born. The New Typographers comprised a number of individuals, mostly working independently, who together had perhaps the greatest influence on the widespread shift from *Fraktur* to *Antiqua* and the popularization of sans-serif scripts in Germany.⁴ Although a formal group was never founded, many of these artists equated their work with the term New Typography, thereby creating an unofficial movement.⁵ Julia Meer defines them 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. Dynamism, stark contrasts, asymmetry, and the use of bold lines and geometric forms were the most important formal characteristics of this new aesthetic, she notes, stemming from notions of economy, functionality, modern perception, the psychology of advertising, standardization, and technology.⁶

The aesthetic shifts that were taking place in typography also had an impact beyond the letterforms, seeping into the design of the printed page itself. Instead of the elaborately decorated posters of the early twentieth century, the emphases of the New Typographers prompted them to create bold, striking images that contained the minimum of information to facilitate reading at high speed.⁷ Perhaps one of the reasons that the New Typographers had such a significant influence on poster design was that its practitioners were not trained typographers, but rather prominent avant-garde artists from across Europe, including Albers, Bayer, Moholy-Nagy, Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Alexander Rodchenko. Indeed, with the sole exception of Jan Tschichold, each of the New Typographers was self-taught, coming to the fields of typography and graphic design from the fine arts.

The transformations that were taking place in the typographical world were therefore deeply rooted in those happening in the fine arts, and strengthened by the networks that existed within them. For while each of the New Typographers was working independently, they were in no way isolated, since they were already connected through the strong networks of the European avant-gardes. Indeed, many of the New Typographers were working together on creative, typographic projects, such as van Doesburg and Schwitters's children's book, *Die Scheuche: Märchen*, written together with Käthe Steinitz, which was illustrated with images composed entirely of letters and other typographical forms (lines, punctuation, etc.).⁸ Similarly, Schwitters's commercial collaboration with El Lissitzky on advertisements for Pelikan, an international ink firm based in Hannover, led to striking posters that highlighted the innovative ways typography could be used on the page. In a different vein, Tschichold included many different examples of the work of New Typographers in his seminal book *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, thus creating a direct line between his own practice and that of his colleagues.⁹ In each of these instances – and there are many others besides – the posters and books themselves become the publishing platform by

which collaboration played out, and through which networks were established and strengthened.

In particular, the poster became a site of multiple levels of communication, taking on a similar role for the New Typographers that the little magazines and avant-garde journals held for networks of the avant-gardes. On the most fundamental level, New Typographers' posters conveyed information about the product or event they are advertising, yet on another, they are a space in which – as with the journals – conversations about typography were carried out and displayed. An important difference between these two examples, however, is that the everyday nature of these posters meant that they had a far broader reach. Displayed in public spaces, free for all passersby to see, rather than restricted to the pages of subscription-only journals, posters offered New Typographers the opportunity to magnify the impact that many of them had previously had in these more elite publishing venues.

An illustrative example of this utilization of posters can be found in the work of the *Ring: "neue Werbegestalter"* [Ring of New Advertisers] – a loose association of typographers and designers, founded by Schwitters in 1927. It sought to “to promote and popularize modern graphic design” by touring exhibitions on typography across Germany and in neighboring countries.¹⁰ While some of the individual works on view varied from venue to venue, the concept of the *neue Typografie* [New Typography] exhibition remained the same: to showcase the typographical work of the Ring of New Advertisers' members – all of whom were prominent New Typographers.¹¹ This exhibition displayed posters alongside other everyday printed matter, such as business stationery, brochures, and invitations, and, much like the public display of posters, it allowed the material to be circulated in an accessible way that brought the artists' work beyond the confines of avant-garde journals. At the same time, its positioning within museums and other gallery spaces implied the artistic value of everyday printed matter to visitors, opening up a platform for dialogue on its function, as well as broader debates surrounding experimental typography and design.

Kurt Schwitters's typographical work

Schwitters might be best known today for his montages, love/hate relationship with the Dadaists, and the one-man, transdisciplinary art movement he founded, *Merz*, yet the artist worked across many disciplines, including sculpture, painting, poetry, prose, opera, typography, and graphic design. Indeed, Schwitters's creativity spanned, and even challenged, the boundaries of various art forms. Letters, letterforms, and typography are no exception to this, the aesthetics of text being one of the most important parts of his oeuvre. In his montages, Schwitters often includes words that become focal points, in part, due to their striking typography. Indeed, typographical experimentation was one of the hallmarks of his avant-garde journal, *Merz*, in which he played with the size, position, and orientation of the text.¹² In this sense, his later posters can be seen to be an evolution of this practice, and a direct application of the numerous theoretical treatises he wrote on

the subject in the 1920s, almost all of which were also published in avant-garde journals.¹³

It is most certainly this practical and theoretical work that led Schwitters to design his most experimental script, the *Systemschrift* [systematic script]. In a letter to his wife dated August 1927, Schwitters opens with news of this project, still in its preliminary phase. Displaying an almost childlike eagerness, he wastes no time with pleasantries, instead jumping straight to the new script in the opening line:

My dearest!

I am working on a script. I learnt a lot by visiting the Bauer Type Foundry, e.g. that one must have a pleasant substitute for the difficult letters.¹⁴ [. . .] My basic alphabet is square. Vowels and consonants. Then, for the vowels I also have added a round series. That is an opto-phonetic moment.¹⁵

The script Schwitters describes is the *Systemschrift* – 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.¹⁶ And so, after years of experimenting with typography across many disciplines, Schwitters turned his thoughts to what is at the very foundation of typography: the alphabet.

At first glance, it may seem that Schwitters was in tune with the work of his colleagues who were also developing new rationalized typefaces, and in part, that was the case. Yet what he was proposing with the *Systemschrift* was not just a new *typeface*, but a new *way of writing*, and was therefore radically different to his design work as a New Typographer. Moving into the fields of linguistics and the philosophy of language, Schwitters aimed to create an entirely new means of rationalized written communication that he felt best suited for the modern age. With this typographical and linguistic project, Schwitters was in fact engaging with much broader questions of internationalism, rationalization, and modes of perception – all of which were circulating at the time, and were starting to have a visible impact on the printed page. A reading of Schwitters's script, and in particular its use in everyday printed matter, therefore provides a useful case study for identifying and exploring these more general trends, as well as drawing attention to the broader implications his work had for the aims of the avant-garde.

Never produced as a typeface, Schwitters's *Systemschrift* remained a theoretical exercise, with the exception of the few published examples examined in this chapter. Apart from a short letter exchange with the Berlin typographer Walter Borgius, the primary source that provides insight into Schwitters's intentions is the article "Ideas for the Adoption of a Systematic Script," and was the only text Schwitters published on his script. Spread across five pages in the avant-garde journal *International Revue i10* in 1927, the article provides a theoretical overview alongside several illustrations.¹⁷ The first of these illustrations presents the reader with six different versions of Schwitters's script under the title "New Plastic Systematic Script" (see Figure 8.1). Differentiated by the letters a–f, lines function as brackets, running down the right-hand side of the page to separate the different

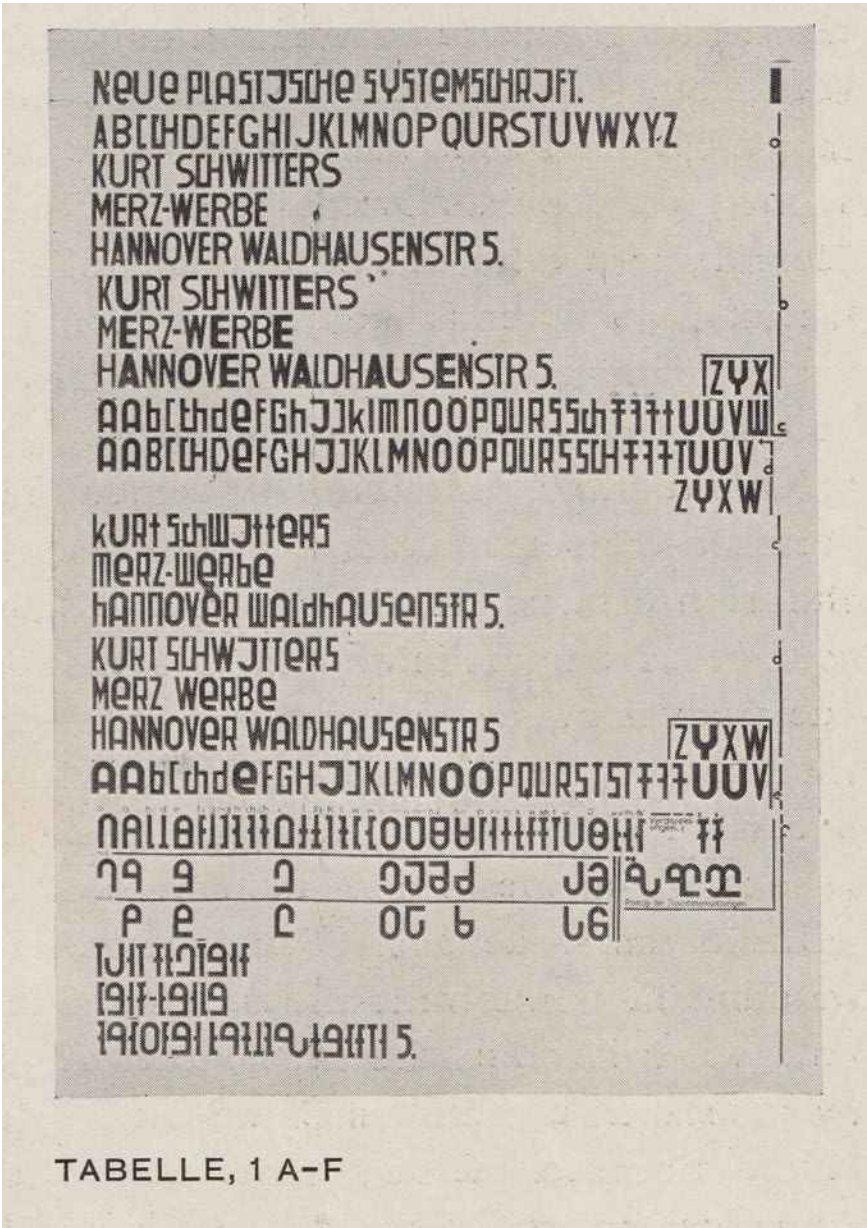


Figure 8.1 Kurt Schwitters, "Tabelle 1, a-f."
 Reproduced in Kurt Schwitters, "Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift," in *Internationale Revue i 10*, Volume 8/9 (1927), 312.
 Source: Photo courtesy of Sprengel Museum Hannover, Herling/Herling/Werner.

prototypes. Alongside each of the lettered 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. As the reader’s eye moves further down the page, however, not only do the scripts become increasingly unfamiliar, but they also start to include new letters (as in versions “c” and “d”), as well as emphasize vowels (noticeable in script “b,” but particularly pronounced by script “e”). The culmination is version “f” which renders both the alphabet and Schwitters’s name and address illegible.

“For the purposes of orientation, under a–f are 6 different alphabets,” Schwitters writes in a personal letter to his patron Katherine Dreier.¹⁸ “The last [alphabet] is international and very precise, but before being able to read it, it must first be introduced and learnt. c, d, e could already be considered for use.”¹⁹ 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 radically indecipherable “f.”

In explaining the method behind his design of the *Systemschrift*, Schwitters writes, “I have invented an instrument, by means of which, the language can be sorted into three categories. [. . .] The sounds are then ordered according to these categories.”²⁰ The “instrument” to which Schwitters here refers, is a set of tables divided into three columns. After identifying the type and length of each sound in the spoken language, as well as the exact position of the tongue within the mouth, the sound is entered into the table and attributed a corresponding sign. The result is a script that can be used to notate any language (a sincere goal of Schwitters, to be discussed in more detail below), containing so much information, that, once learned, could enable someone who has never before spoken the language to master the pronunciation just by reading the script.

Schwitters produced two posters that use the *Systemschrift*. Both were commissioned pieces of graphic design – the first for the Fitelberg Music Festival (Figure 8.2), and the second for Opel-Tag (Figure 8.3), a day-long celebration of the car manufacturer, Opel. There is much that links these works: both are primarily text based, were produced in 1927, bear not only Schwitters’s name as signature, but also the label *Systemschrift*. In addition, both posters were included as illustrations in “Ideas for the Adoption of a Systematic Script.”²¹

Although Schwitters indicates that both of these posters use the *Systemschrift*, at first glance the typefaces do not appear to be the same. A closer look reveals that Schwitters uses a different version of the script for each one. The Opel-Tag poster features the less abstracted version “b,” which is relatively simple to read and therefore does not immediately strike the viewer as something entirely novel. As the eye moves down the page, differences to the conventional Latin script start to emerge – the bold middle section draws attention to the “J”-like form of the “i” in the text “Prämierung der am schönsten dekorierten Wagen,” [award for the best decorated car] as well as in “Eintritt” [entry], found at the bottom

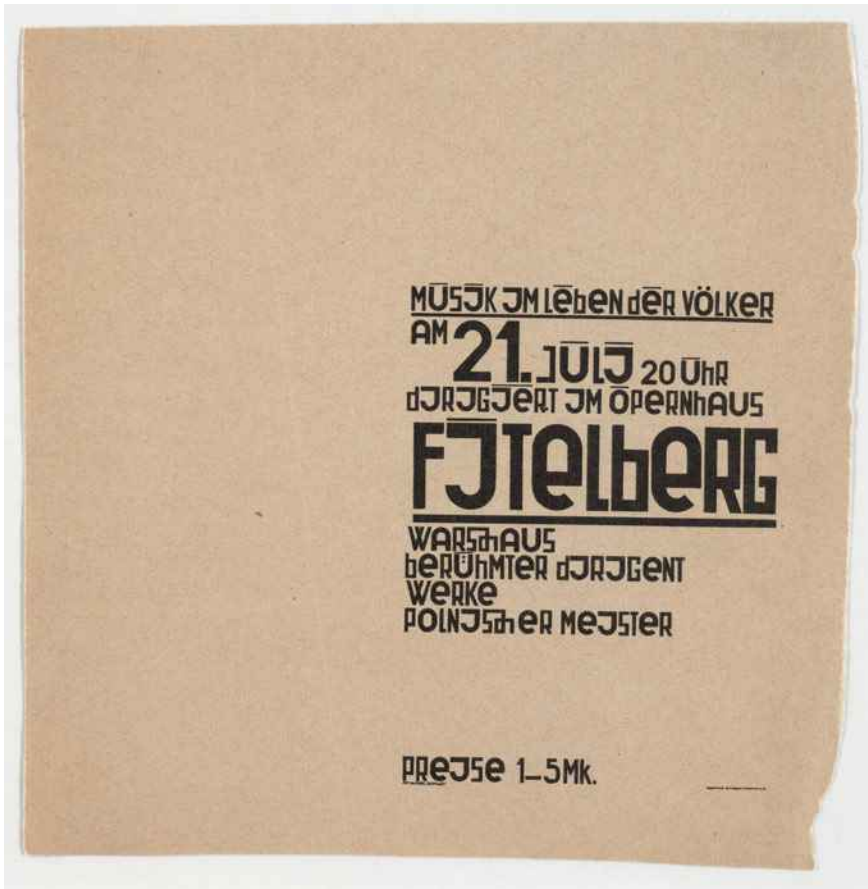


Figure 8.2 Kurt Schwitters: Fitelberg, 1927. Letterpress, 5 7/16 × 5 1/2' (13.8 × 14 cm), Jan Tschichold Collection, Gift of Philip Johnson.

Source: © 2018. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

of the page. By contrast, the Fitelberg poster uses something closer to version “e” of the *Systemschrift*, which is furthest down the scale of readability before the essentially illegible “f.” Here, the vowels are stressed, not only through their bolder, rounder form, but also by the lines that are placed above longer vowel sounds. As such, it is immediately clear to the reader that this is a new, experimental typeface.

In addition to the typography, there are other significant aesthetic differences between the two designs. The poster advertising the Opel-Tag draws heavily on

OPPEL-TAG 24 JULI

GROSSER AUTO BLUMEN CORSO

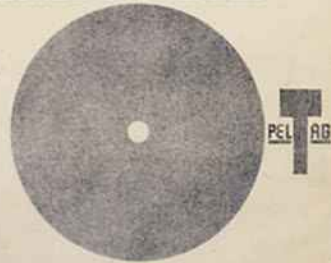
ABFAHRT 10UHR VON DEN OPEL WERKSTÄTTEN, MAINZER LANDSTRASSE
ÜBER BAHNHOF, KAJSERSTR., ZEIL, ANLAGE, BOCKENH., IDSTR., VIKTORJA-
ALLEE ZUM AUSSTELLUNGSBELÄNDE.

ANKUNFT 1130UHR.

PRÄMIERUNG DER AM SCHÖNSTEN DEKORJERTEN WAGEN.

AB 16UHR FESTKONZERT DER OPEL-KAPELLE.
UM 23UHR VERLOSUNG VON EINEM OPEL-WAGEN UND
20 OPEL-FAHRRÄDERN.
KONZERT DES
AUSSTELLUNGS-ORCHESTERS.

HOFFMEIER & SUTTKAMP



EINTRITT 1M.

MIT JEDER EINTRITTSKARTE WIRD EIN FREILOS AUSGEBEBEN

WOLFF & LANGENBACH

STADTDRUCK K. SCHWITERS, F.

Figure 8.3 Kurt Schwitters, poster for Opel-Tag, Frankfurt (1927). Lithograph, 33 1/2 × 23 3/4 inches

Source: Photo courtesy of the Merrill C. Berman Collection.

many New Typography motifs: bold black text, geometric shapes, lines, vertical text, and the stylized arrangement of unused “negative” space. While this remains very much a text-based poster, it acquires an almost geometric form through its composition. The Fitelberg poster, on the other hand, relies much less on any markers of New Typography (although some of these are present), and instead the form is dominated by the unique composition of the individual letters. While the Opel-Tag poster highlights the *Systemschrift*’s common foundation with New Typography, the closer the script becomes to Schwitters’s ideal version “f,” the more it starts to move towards a different aesthetic, which, rather than emphasizing the composition of the page, instead draws attention to the letters.

There is little information on how either of these commissions came about, what the exact nature of the circulation of these posters was, or indeed how they were received; the events they advertise, however, offer perhaps a few clues. Both the Fitelberg music festival and the Opel-Tag took place in Frankfurt just three days apart and so it is probable that these posters were circulated within the city at the same time. Furthermore, given that the Opel-Tag poster was commissioned by a large, modern company to advertise a display of cars parading through the city, it is likely that this poster in particular would have had a large distribution and be seen on billboards throughout the streets of Frankfurt in the weeks leading up to the event. Both these posters were therefore not only modern in design, but also created for use within the contemporary city, the modern urban subject their imagined audience.

***Systemschrift* as a modern script**

“We have a wealth of typefaces, but all of them are historical, none is systematic,” writes Schwitters in “Ideas for the Adoption of a Systematic Script.”²² For Schwitters, the *Systemschrift* was not just a matter of creating something new for the sake of experimentation or novelty. Rather, he was determined to move away from a “historical” script and address what he considered a glaringly inconsistent logic between the rationalized, modern temporality of the 1920s and the antiquated temporality of commonly used inherited scripts. In order to underscore the paradox that he perceived between the conditions of modern life, and the proliferation of text in antiquated fonts, Schwitters employs a vivid image: “It is almost inexplicable,” he writes, “that the same people, who today no longer want to ride in the most elegant horse-drawn carriages, use a script that originates in the Middle Ages or antiquity.”²³ Here, Schwitters highlights two things simultaneously: the absurdity of clinging on to a medieval script in a society that increasingly privileges speed and functionality over ornamentation and the fragmented and often uneven process of modernization. Although Schwitters in fact rarely employs the word “modern” himself, what he ultimately aims for is a *modern* script, in the sense that the word is associated with the times; that is, in pursuit of ideals of internationalism, rationalization, and the ability to be read at speed.

Principles of internationalism were gaining traction across the field of typography at the time. Herbert Bayer, for example, placed emphasis on the international

potential of a new typeface in his 1926 article “Toward a New Alphabet,” concluding that international communication could be furthered through the introduction of a *Weltschrift* [world script].²⁴ While there is no evidence that Bayer ever worked on developing such a *Weltschrift*, in contrast to the traditional German *Fraktur* script, he aimed for his typographic designs to be as clear as possible, facilitating comprehension for non-German readers. Indeed, the name of his best-known typeface, *Universal* – a geometric sans-serif typeface designed in 1925 and composed of lowercase letters only – gestures towards this idea.²⁵ Meanwhile in Vienna, political economist and philosopher Otto Neurath was also working towards internationalizing language. He writes, “the desire for an international language is an old one, and it is more than ever in men’s minds at this time of international connections in business and science.”²⁶ In contrast to Bayer’s simplification of the Latin alphabet, Neurath designed a pictorial one, the ISOTYPE (International System of Typographic Picture Education). ISOTYPE has no element of script in it, and is instead made up of simple, repeatable symbols that were used to convey statistics and other numerical information.²⁷

A newspaper clipping, cut out and pasted into one of Schwitters’s many working notebooks from the mid-1920s, shows the artist’s clear interest in internationalism. Taken from a short article by Heinrich Preus entitled “Alongside a World Language, A World Script,” the excerpt bears Schwitters’s careful pencil marks that underline the following: “We need a world script, we must develop it in such a way, so that each individual sound in any language spoken on earth, is transcribed everywhere in the same way.”²⁸ In contrast to the more pan-European approach to internationalism that Bayer and other New Typographers took, by working primarily on modifying the Latin script, Preus points towards a more inclusive internationalism that takes all languages into account. It is this understanding of concept that Schwitters was striving for with his *Systemschrift*. While he only worked on German sounds, Schwitters saw his work as a single contribution towards a much larger process – an aspect he draws attention to in the opening lines of his article on the script: “A systematic script is only one part of a larger complex problem, which includes a systematic language and systematic thinking. But these are goals for much further in the future.”²⁹ Schwitters knew that it was not possible for himself alone to create what he was ultimately aiming for. In a letter to Borgius he lamented his lack of languages for the task, writing, “I only know German, French, English and Dutch. I also have a little Spanish, Italian, Danish, and Czech.”³⁰ What Schwitters envisaged was not just a European version of internationalism, but a much more radical one, bringing together sounds from all world languages in his *Systemschrift*.

Furthermore, the direction that Schwitters took to achieve a sense of internationalism is very different to that of Bayer and the other New Typographers. While Bayer’s typeface *Universal* was based on the principle of simplification of the letterform to render it international, Schwitters aimed to incorporate as much information into each letter as possible. Describing the ideal version “F” of the *Systemschrift*, Schwitters notes that it is “international and very precise.”³¹ Rather than reducing the typeface to a clean geometric form, free from ornament,

Schwitters changes its form, creating a new, more complex one. Yet the very fact that Schwitters could not use version “f” for either the Fitelberg or Opel-Tag posters highlights the limits of the international reach of the *Systemschrift*. It would have been impossible for him to use it for his advertising commissions, since only Schwitters could read the script, ironically rendering it the very opposite of international. In order for it to become a useable script – and ultimately a truly international one that would reach beyond Europe, or even Frankfurt – it would first have to be understood, and the only way that could happen would be through a process of rationalization.

Rationalization was one of the most important markers of modernity for Schwitters. The emphasis he puts on it in relation to typography is particularly evident in a short text entitled “typography and orthography: lowercase,” in which he writes, “Many things move in parallel in the development of our time. The demands of the new era are expressed across many disciplines in the same way.” Schwitters continues by stating that there should be “strict laws and logical consistency rather than arbitrariness.”³² For Schwitters, rationalization is the very essence of the time in which he was living and working. In the preceding years there had been several attempts at rationalizing language, but none focused on the transcription of language or the letterform itself.³³ Rationalization was, however, very much in the air of the Weimar Republic. The year 1921 saw the founding of the German State Board for Economy in Industry and Trade, which, according to Mary Nolan “established over two hundred subcommittees to study specific aspects of rationalization.”³⁴ The result was a large restructuring of industry within Germany.³⁵

There were two primary ways in which this manifested itself in the printing world: the rationalization of paper size and a debate surrounding the use of uppercase and lowercase letters.³⁶ In 1922 the *Normenausschuß der deutschen Industrie* [German Industry Standardization Committee] gave birth to the standardized paper size A4, as well as the standardization of envelopes, envelope windows, paper margins, business cards, postcards, logos, and placards. The New Typographers were early adopters of these new formats; the Bauhaus, for example, used DIN formatting for their publicity materials and syllabi, and the school’s desks, designed by Vera Meyer-Waldeck, included a drawer specifically for A4 paper.³⁷ In addition, Jan Tschichold includes a whole section on the value and formatting of standardized paper sizes in his text, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*. Indeed, when publications of any kind – posters, stationery, books, journals – were printed on standardized paper, it was a statement of modernity that often complemented the contents and modern design.

This was equally true for the use of lowercase letters. Many of the New Typographers argued that time, effort, and money could be saved by a process of rationalization by which text would only be written, set, and typed in lowercase. In addition to the arguments set forth in short texts published in journals, reactions to the debate also appeared on other forms of printed matter.³⁸ Bayer, now famously, states his opinion rather simply with an epigram added to all Bauhaus stationery: “we write everything in lowercase, so as to save time.”³⁹ Similarly, in an exhibition catalogue designed by Schwitters (which I will return to later in this chapter),

the following note is included on the opening page: “at the request of professor dr. w. gropius, berlin [. . .] the catalogue has been set in lowercase.”⁴⁰ It was therefore the printed page – posters, exhibition catalogues, and even stationery – that became the site of theoretical debate, as well as a model of practical application of rationalization.

In his article on the *Systemschrift*, Schwitters draws 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. Meanwhile, the artist felt that the transcription of language had not progressed in anyway, while the world around it had changed drastically. Text was now read in a very different way – it must be read at speed from cars, buses, and bicycles – and therefore needed to be produced in a more standardized manner.

Central to Schwitters’s concern with developing a modern script are the implications that modernity and technology had for the reading process. In a letter to his wife, Schwitters poses the question: “What should I call it? A good name is more important than anything else. There are three keywords that are equally important: ‘opto-phonetic, communication script [*Verkehrsschrift*], dynamic.’ Perhaps you will find a suitable expression.”⁴¹ The term *Verkehrsschrift* [communication script] lends us an interesting insight into Schwitters’s concept and vision for his script. While it is the name given to a particular form of German shorthand, there is an additional, more common usage of the word *Verkehr*: to mean traffic. Schwitters therefore plays with the notion of communication while also referring to transportation in modern urban life, which is reinforced through the adjective *dynamic*. “It will be so uncomplicated in capital letters,” he writes to his wife, “that it will be able to be read quickly, which is absolutely necessary in the rush of traffic.”⁴² The *Systemschrift* was therefore designed for use within the space of the modern city to facilitate reading at speed.

While Schwitters’s theory of the script is firmly rooted in the ideals of internationalism and rationalization, it is exactly *this* that prevents him from achieving his goal of creating a script that can be read at speed. On the one hand, he constructs a very complex system of writing that takes into account *every* sound used in language. Yet as a consequence, Schwitters significantly increases the number of signs used to transcribe German. On the other hand, the whole premise of his short article, “typography and orthography: writing in lowercase,” is that systemization calls for the use of small letters in an effort to *reduce* the number of letters. He writes: “if lowercase writing were introduced across the board, the child would only have to learn half the letters, the typesetter could work faster, the printer would only have to buy half the letters, one could type faster on a typewriter, the design of the typewriter could be simplified, etc.”⁴³ There is a distinct tension, therefore, between Schwitters’ approach to the rationalization of the existing script and the creation of a new one. Founding partners of *Post Typography* Bruce Willen and Nolen Strals contend that “creating lettering or type is a tug-of-war

between the ideal and the practical – the system’s concept versus its functionality,” and in the case of Schwitters, this plays out on the printed page.⁴⁴

To consider the success of the *Systemschrift* as a modern script, it is helpful to return to the two existing examples in print. Using a less complex, and therefore less rationalized, version of the *Systemschrift*, the Opel-Tag is more easily read by viewers who are not familiar with the script. Yet it is the role of the graphic design of the poster itself that renders parts of it easier to read than others – those sections being the large text “Opel-Tag” and that of the date “24 Juli” [July 24], framed by ample space, as well as the underlining of “freilos” [free raffle ticket] underneath. The typeface, on the other hand, offers the viewer a confusion of round letters (vowels) and angular letters (consonants), that seem to complicate the unified layout of the page. The Fitelberg poster, which is closest to Schwitters’s ideal script, magnifies the effect found in the Opel-Tag one. In addition to the distinct differences between vowels and consonants, the changes in letterform and inconsistent thickness of lines break up not just the assumed homogeneity of the text, but also the reader’s flow. Indeed, these changes, made in the spirit of rationalization and for the purpose of ease of reading, seem to create the effect of ornamentation – the very thing Schwitters criticizes in his article on the *Systemschrift*. It is ironic, therefore, that the tables of prototypes he sketches reveal six different scripts which become progressively more ornamental. Schwitters’s *Systemschrift* posters are striking, but not for their ease of reading, and especially not at speed – it is the new form that catches the eye, yet the script itself slows down the process of reading and therefore also the speed of comprehension.

Beyond the *Systemschrift*: Schwitters and futura

Despite Schwitters’s concentrated period of activity on the *Systemschrift*, it is not mentioned in any of his essays, articles, or letters after 1927. The only reference is found in a letter from his wife, Helma Schwitters, to Bodo Rasch in April 1933, in which she replies to the architect’s request for samples of the script. “I would send you the photos you wish of the *Systemschrift*, and would have done so long ago, but it is not possible,” she writes, continuing, “the progressive work of my husband, must be carried out in secret at the moment.”⁴⁵ Penned just a few months after the Nazis came to power, Schwitters was obliged to retreat from publicly engaging with any work on his experimental script.

Yet the absence of mention in other texts indicates that Schwitters had stopped working on the *Systemschrift* even before 1933, despite focusing more than ever on typography as the official graphic designer for Hannover city council from 1929 to 1934.⁴⁶ In this capacity, Schwitters’s work had a far reach, designing more than a hundred different letterheads for use within various departments and institutions governed by the city. In addition to these, Schwitters designed “envelopes, forms and brochures, tickets, posters, and newspaper advertisements” each of which had print runs between 1,000 and 10,000 and were used in schools, hospitals, and offices alike.⁴⁷ The publication of bureaucratic forms and headed note-paper, while perhaps seemingly mundane, was, however, significant. Tschichold

places particular emphasis on this form of printed matter, noting that the letterhead is “the most important instrument of business communication.”⁴⁸ The designing and publication of such a document therefore offered Schwitters, and many of his contemporaries, a platform to achieve what Peter Bürger identifies as one of the main aims of the historical avant-garde: “the sublation of art in the praxis of life.”⁴⁹ Letters bearing Schwitters’s designs for Hannover council were sent and received on a daily basis, leaving institutions and entering the homes and daily lives of *all* residents of Hannover. Like the Opel-Tag and Fitelberg posters, then, Schwitters graphic design work for the council was functional ephemeral art – art that was not intended to be viewed in a museum, but rather to be touched, written upon, and otherwise utilized towards practical ends.

Instead of using one of his own typefaces, however, for the majority of the Hannover council stationery Schwitters opted for futura, which he described as clear, plain, easily readable, and precise – the very qualities he had been striving for with the *Systemschrift*.⁵⁰ Futura was created by book designer Paul Renner, released in 1927 (the same year Schwitters worked on the *Systemschrift*), and would very quickly prompt major change in the publishing world. Clean, geometric, and sans-serif, futura marked a typographical watershed.⁵¹ It was a direct response to the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate and was widely embraced by the New Typographers. Indeed, Schwitters’s use of it in his designs for the Hannover council helped make it a more commonplace typeface, since, as Heine notes, “many printers [in Hannover], especially smaller ones, did not possess Futura, and were forced to acquire it in order to remain competitive.”⁵² Once in the printer’s shop, it could therefore be used more readily by other clients.

Soon after the Nazis came to power, however, Schwitters was forced to change his designs for the council from futura to *Fraktur* when a memorandum on June 14, 1933, called for the end of the sans-serif typeface on all official documents.⁵³ This was the fate of the work of many of the New Typographers; as a marker of Weimar modernity, their typefaces and graphic designs were deemed “un-German” by the Nazis, with *Fraktur* being considered the most “fitting” script for German texts.⁵⁴

Legacy of Schwitters’s designs

Since the 1950s, futura and similar typefaces have become commonplace, but what about Schwitters’s aim for an entirely 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.⁵⁵ In a letter to Rasch, 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 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.⁵⁶

In expressing his frustration that, in the half-century that had passed since the 1930s, no progress had been made, Bayer directs Rasch back to Schwitters, as a point of reference for considering a new type of script. Several things can be gleaned from this letter; first, Schwitters's *Systemschrift* was widely known in avant-garde circles, and significant enough to be spoken about over fifty years later. Second, while there has been a continued trend of geometric, sans-serif typefaces first introduced by the New Typographers, no one has since taken up the project of creating a new, rationalized, and truly international opto-phonetic script.

Although the rationalized ideal of Schwitters's version "f" of the *Systemschrift* has lain dormant since 1927, other versions of his script have not completely disappeared. 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 – with the release of the typeface *Architype Schwitters* by The Foundry, run by two British typographers, David Quay and Freda Sack.⁵⁷ This typeface is a faithful combination of versions "c" through "e" of Schwitters's *Systemschrift*, and since it is available digitally has the potential for a much more global application of the script than Schwitters ever achieved in his lifetime.

The second example can be found by logging onto the International Online Bibliography of Dada at the University of Iowa.⁵⁸ A banner across the top reads "International Dada Archive," written in a rendering of Schwitters's *Systemschrift*. This is not the same typeface created by The Foundry and instead is much closer to the version Schwitters used for the Fitelberg poster, as evidenced by the stresses above certain vowels. The context in which this script is used draws attention to its experimental qualities and serves two functions. First, on a basic level, it provides the reader with textual information; and second – and more important – Schwitters's script comes to aesthetically represent the archive.⁵⁹ While this recent example gives the *Systemschrift* a certain new life by using it in a way Schwitters never did, at the same time, in symbolizing an archive, it continually points back to the temporal and geographical context from which it was born – the interwar years in Germany.

The third and final example is not strictly one of the *Systemschrift*, but rather another experimental typeface designed by the artist that shares many of characteristics of versions "a" through "e." In 1929, hot on the heels of his appointment as graphic designer for Hannover, Schwitters won the contract to create stationery and advertisements for the *Dammerstock-Siedlung* and the exhibition that would mark its opening. Set in the outskirts of Karlsruhe, the *Dammerstock-Siedlung* is a housing estate designed by a handful of invited architects who were working in the style of *Neues Bauen* [New Building] and led by Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius. As a modern rationalized style of architecture, prizing functionality and affordability, *Neues Bauen* was not just contemporaneous to New Typography, but also had a certain amount of overlap with its ideals.⁶⁰

In addition to creating a letterhead, envelope, and logo for the Dammerstock-Siedlung, Schwitters's main responsibility was to design the housing estate's exhibition catalogue and poster. Brigitte Franzen notes that there was a major advertising campaign surrounding the exhibition, which drew 50,000 visitors over the course of the month it was open to the public.⁶¹ Similar to his work for the Hannover council, this project allowed Schwitters's typographical and graphic designs to reach a broad public and afforded him the opportunity to merge art with everyday life – both of which were also central premises of *Neues Bauen*. Indeed, the sheer scale of this advertising project meant that Schwitters's work was displayed throughout the city of Karlsruhe and beyond in several different formats.

The Dammerstock-Siedlung logo, comprising a black block in the shape of the housing development, with a large lowercase “d” emerging from it to form the first letter of “Dammerstock,” appears on the poster as well as the exhibition catalogue. On both, the following text, all in uppercase, sets forth the title, “Ausstellung Karlsruhe Dammerstock-Siedlung: die Gebrauchswohnung” [Karlsruhe's Dammerstock Estate Exhibition: The Utility Apartment], which is set in a typeface designed by Schwitters. Although not exactly the same as any version of the *Systemschrift*, the consonants strongly resemble those of version “d” with only the squareness of the vowels distinguishing this script from Schwitters's 1927 prototypes. It is not just the similarity between these two scripts that suggests the Dammerstock script is related to the *Systemschrift* – the A4-format of the catalogue, as well as the fact the text on the pages inside the catalogue is set in a lowercase, sans-serif typeface (Renner's futura) all point towards an ideal of rationalization. Even if 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 are also very much ideologically aligned with it.

If 1927 marked a high point for Schwitters's focus on rationalizing writing, the Dammerstock script marks a retreat back from his radical version “f,” and a step towards a script that would have been easily legible to the contemporary reader. It was perhaps in part the immensity of this particular project that had the potential to reach so many people in their everyday lives that prompted him to instead focus on adapting the Latin script, rather than pushing for a new way of writing.

Just as Schwitters conceived of the *Systemschrift* as a script for the city, the Dammerstock 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 catalogue, points in the direction of the housing development (Figure 8.4). To the right, the exhibition poster is positioned halfway up, with the word *Omnibus* printed in the Dammerstock typeface. Unlike the other signs visible in the photograph, the text on the sign is printed onto glass, giving the impression that Schwitters's text is superimposed directly onto the street beyond it. As a result, his script appears to physically meld 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.



Figure 8.4 Dammerstock-Siedlung Exhibition, 1929. A sign points toward the Dammerstock-Siedlung exhibition featuring a typeface created by Schwitters for the project. 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.

Source: Photo courtesy of Stadtarchiv Karlsruhe.

In 2006, the discovery and refurbishment of one of two original ticket counters used at the entrance to the 1929 exhibition brought Schwitters’s Dammerstock script back to the streets of Karlsruhe.⁶² This ticket counter now sits to the southeast entrance to the housing development, beside a new structure that serves as an information pavilion, with a roof straddling the two (Figure 8.5). Like the 1929 sign, the information pavilion is made out of glass and bears the text, “Dammerstock Muster-Siedlung des neuen Bauens” [Dammerstock Model Estate of New Building], in the script used on Schwitters’s exhibition catalogue and poster, with the logo positioned behind it. The same script also makes an appearance on the original ticket counter, on which raised wooden letters form the text “Eintritt 50 Pfennig” [entrance 50 pfennig]. Consequently, Schwitters’s script has been reinscribed onto the city with two consequences. First, the characteristic form of the script has come to be a symbol for the Dammerstock-Siedlung. Second, 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 pavilion today, just a small strip of grass separates it from the commuter railway tracks, with the pavilion located exactly between two stops, and beyond that, lies



Figure 8.5 Infopavillon at the entrance to the Dammerstock-Siedlung (2017).

Source: Photo courtesy of the author.

a busy main road. Schwitters's text is therefore seen each day by car and train passengers who catch a glance as they travel past.

While this use might seem to be in line with Schwitters's goal of his experimental typography being used in the city, much like the International Dada Archive's use of his *Systemschrift*, the musealization of the Dammerstock script in the information pavilion also implies its historicization. Although present in the streets of Karlsruhe today, it is no longer used to point towards an innovative new housing estate or modern temporary exhibition, but is rather used to evoke an aesthetic link to the past.

The legacy of Schwitters's experimental typography is far from large and is most likely restricted to the three examples discussed above, each of which closely resemble the existing Latin script. As such, they remain estranged from the artist's ideal of an entirely new, international, and rationalized way of writing – an idea that has seemingly not evolved since the drafts he created in 1927. Although Schwitters's most radical scripts were not entirely successful, the project was significant, extending beyond his lifetime.

Most important, however, Schwitters's graphic design work offered him a diverse range of publishing platforms – be it poster, letterhead, or magazine – to enter into dialogue with other New Typographers and theorists. As these examples have shown, the nature of this graphic design work and the ways in which it was circulated allowed him to successfully realize certain aspects of the avant-garde project of merging art and life, therefore repositioning this aspect of his work as pivotal to his overall creative aims. Such a reading therefore nudges towards a

need to reconsider the role that graphic design and typography – together with the platforms in which they were published – plays in Schwitters’s overall oeuvre, and by extension, that of many other avant-garde artists.

Notes

- 1 This essay is born out a chapter from my dissertation and as such, I would like to thank in particular my dissertation chair Kerstin Barndt for her inestimable feedback on earlier versions of this work.
- 2 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 was *Fraktur* (also known as Gothic), a Blackletter script (a Gothic script commonly used in Europe in the medieval age) that had been Germany’s primary typeface since the mid-sixteenth century; at the other was *Antiqua* – a family of Roman scripts that dates back to the late fifteenth century and remains in common use today (Times New Roman, etc.), that replicate handwriting more closely than the ornamental *Fraktur*. 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 seventeenth century, in Sweden they changed to Roman script in the eighteenth century, and France followed suit at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The arguments that governed the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate fell into two main categories: first, a political and ideological debate that centered on notions of nationalism versus internationalism, and second, 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.

For more on the *Antiqua-Fraktur* debate see Christopher Burke, “German Hybrid Typefaces 1900–1914,” in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (New York: Cooper Union, 1998), 32–39; Silvia Hartmann, *Fraktur oder Antiqua: der Schriftstreit von 1881 bis 1941* (Berlin: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998).

- 3 Herbert Bayer was both a student and professor of typography at the Bauhaus. László Moholy-Nagy was a professor at the Bauhaus, who wrote several theoretical essays on typography, and incorporated his theoretical statements into his graphic design work. Like Bayer, Josef Albers was both a student and professor at the Bauhaus, who designed the geometric *Schablonenschrift* [stencil script].
- 4 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 Typographers paved the way for their more widespread use.
- 5 While the term today is most commonly associated with Jan Tschichold’s seminal text *Die neue Typografie*, published in 1928 [Jan Tschichold, *The New Typography: A Handbook for Modern Designers*, trans. Ruari McLean (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995)], it was first used by Moholy-Nagy in 1923 for the catalogue of the first Bauhaus exhibition.
- 6 See Julia Meer, *Neuer Blick auf die Neue Typographie: Die Rezeption der Avantgarde in der Fachwelt der 1920er Jahre* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015), 28–29.
- 7 For examples of turn-of-the-century posters, see for instance the work of Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, who studied in Munich, or that of Vienna Secession artist Koloman Moser.

- 8 Kurt Schwitters, Käte Steinitz, and Theo Van Doesburg, *Die Scheuche: Märchen* (Hannover: Apos Verlag, 1925).
- 9 See Tschichold, *The New Typography*.
- 10 Megan R. Luke, *Kurt Schwitters: Space, Image, Exile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 38.
Several versions of the *neue Typografie* exhibition were on display in many different cities including Cologne, Wiesbaden, Hannover, Bremen, Hamburg, Dresden, Basel, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam.
- 11 The founding members were Willi Baumeister, Max Burchartz, Walter Dexel, César Domela, Robert Michel, Kurt Schwitters, Georg Trump, Jan Tschichold, and Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart.
- 12 For an example of this, 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.
- 13 See, for example, Kurt Schwitters, “Thesen über Typographie,” *Merz* 11 (1925); Kurt Schwitters, “Gestaltende Typographie,” in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918–1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 311–316; Kurt Schwitters, *Werbe-Gestaltung* (Hannover: Merz, 1928).
- 14 This is the same type foundry that produced Paul Renner’s futura typeface (referred to later in this chapter), which was released the same year.
- 15 Schwitters to Helma Schwitters, Bad Ems, 14 August 1927, in Kurt Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nündel (Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 127.
- 16 Schwitters was not the only avant-garde artist working with the idea of opto-phonetics. Raoul Hausmann had been working with the concept in relation to his visual poetry, which was based in experimental typography. In the journal *MA* he writes in 1922, “If there is an appropriate technical structure, the optophone has the power, or rather the ability to display the audio equivalent of each optical phenomenon.” [Reproduced in English translation in Peter Weibel, ed., *Beyond Art: A Third Culture: A Comparative Study in Cultures, Art and Science in 20th Century Austria and Hungary* (Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 2005), 83]. El Lissitzky pushed for a similar idea in his manifesto “Topography of Typography,” published in issue 4 of *Merz*, with his fourth point, which reads: “Economy of expression – optics not phonetics” [El Lissitzky, “Topographie der Typographie,” *Merz*, no. 4 (July 1923): 47].
- 17 Original title: “Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift.” An abridged, one-page version of this article appeared a year later in *Der Sturm*.
- 18 Katherine Dreier was an American artist, patron of the arts, and cofounder of *The Société Anonyme*, together with Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp.
- 19 Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, June 27, 1927, in Kurt Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nündel (Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 127.
- 20 Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Bad Ems, July 2, 1927, in Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt*, 121.
- 21 Both Schwitters’s name and the label *Systemschrift* are found in very small type in the left-hand corner of the Fitelberg poster and to the right of center at the bottom in the Opel-Tag poster.
- 22 Schwitters, “Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift,” 274.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 Herbert Bayer, “Versuch einer neuen Schrift,” in *Bauhaus: Drucksachen, Typografie, Reklame*, ed. Gerd Fleischmann (Dusseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 25.
- 25 Bayer 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 a more modern

version of *Antiqua*, having been first introduced in the nineteenth century, and is sans-serif. Yet Bayer points out the limits of the script, stating, “It is used internationally, but it is still neither perfect nor uncomplicated, as it has been arbitrarily developed.” [Bayer, “Versuch einer neuen Schrift,” 26].

- 26 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 Kriegswirtschaftsmuseum*, before founding the *Siedlungsmuseum*, and later the *Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum*. For more on Otto Neurath, see Nancy Cartwright, Jordi Cat, Lola Fleck, and Thomas E. Uebel, *Otto Neurath: Philosophy Between Science and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

- 27 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 formulates 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, NJ: 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 (2009): 211–223; Lupton, “Reading Isotype.”

- 28 Heinrich Preus, “Neben eine Weltsprache,” in Kurt Schwitters Papers, Kurt Schwitters Archive, Sprengel Museum, Hannover.
- 29 Schwitters, “Anregungen zur Erlangung einer Systemschrift,” 274.
- 30 Schwitters, to Walter Borgius, Eppstein, July 17, 1927, in Kurt Schwitters, *Wir spielen, bis uns der Tod abholt: Briefe aus 5 Jahrzehnten*, ed. Ernst Nündel (Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 125.
- 31 Schwitters, to Katherine S. Dreier, Eppstein, June 27, 1927, 120.
- 32 Kurt Schwitters, “typographie und orthographie: kleinschrift,” in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918–1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 268.
- 33 One such example is Esperanto, a planned language designed by Ludwik Zaemnhof in the 1880s to help overcome communication issues resulting from the multilingualism of an international world. Although still in use today, it remains very much a minority language spoken primarily by those whose mother tongue is a European language. 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).

- 34 The German title for the State Board for Economy in Industry and Trade is *Reichskuratorium für Wirtschaftlichkeit in Industrie und Handwerk* (RKW).
- Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 133.

- 36 One of the first proponents of omitting uppercase in favor of lowercase letters was Walter Porstmann, a German engineer and mathematician, who worked on standardization and introduced the DIN (*Deutsches Institut für Normung*, or German Institute for Standardization) format paper size (A4 etc.), which continues to be the standard paper size throughout the world, with the exception of North America. His 1920 monograph *Sprache und Schrift* [Language and Script] came to be one of the most influential texts for the New Typographers. In it, he points out “if we count a German text, for every hundred letters we find around five uppercase letters. For five percent of our writing we therefore burden the whole writing process – from learning to application – with double the number of signs.” He concludes by underlining this point in terms of economy, “because of five percent of the letters, we produce a hundred percent increase in the letters.”
- Walter Porstmann, *Sprache und Schrift*, ed. Richard R. Hinz (Berlin: Verlag des Vereins Deutscher Ingenieure, 1920), 70.
- 37 Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus, 1919–1933* (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 194.
- 38 See, for example, Schwitters, “typographie und orthographie,” 268–269.
- 39 For an example, see a sheet of headed notepaper reproduced in Gerd Fleischmann, ed., *Bauhaus: Drucksachen Typografie, Reklame* (Düsseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1984), 117.
- 40 Walter Gropius, *Dammerstock Katalog: Ausstellung Karlsruhe Dammerstock-Siedlung: Die Gebrauchswohnung* (Karlsruhe: Stadt Karlsruhe, 1929), 1.
- 41 Schwitters to Helma Schwitters, Bad Ems, August 14, 1927.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Schwitters, “typographie und orthographie,” 269.
- 44 Bruce Willen and Nolen Strals, *Lettering & Type: Creating Letters and Designing Typefaces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009), 21–22.
- 45 Helma Schwitters to Bodo Rasch, 5 April 1933. Bodo Rasch Papers, D2179, ADK 10–21/82, Werkbund Archiv, Berlin.
- 46 For more on this aspect of Schwitters work, see Werner Heine, “‘Futura’ without a Future: Kurt Schwitters’ Typography for Hannover Town Council, 1929–1934,” trans. Annette Haxton, *Journal of Design History* 7, no. 2 (1994): 127–140.
- 47 Heine, “‘Futura’ without a Future,” 129, 131.
- 48 Tschichold, *The New Typography*, 112.
- 49 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 51.
- 50 Kurt Schwitters, “Werbe-Gestaltung,” in *Das literarische Werk: Prosa 1918–1930*, ed. F. Lach, vol. 5 (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1981), 13.
- There are some exceptions to this. Heine points out that Schwitters incorporates his own typeface into two programs for the State Theater in Hannover in 1932. Heine, “‘Futura’ without a Future,” 132.
- 51 For more on the impact futura and Paul Renner had on typography, see Christopher Burke, *Paul Renner: The Art of Typography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).
- 52 Heine, “‘Futura’ without a Future,” 130.
- 53 See Ibid., 136.
- 54 As a result, several New Typographers, including Paul Renner and Jan Tschichold, were forced into exile in Switzerland, with the seat of European typography shifting from Germany to its neighbor from the mid-1930s onward. Consequently, the *International Typographic Style*, now more commonly known 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. In addition to a shared goal of internationalism, in practice, the Swiss Style typefaces, like those of the New Typographers, were sans-serif and based on geometric grids and asymmetry. 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.

- 55 Bodo Rasch (1903–1995) was an architect and together with his brother Heinz Rasch edited one of the most important publications on New Typography, *Gefesselter Blick* [Heinz Rasch and Bodo Rasch, *Gefesselter Blick* (Stuttgart: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Dr. Zaugg & Co., 1930)].
- 56 Herbert Bayer to Bodo Rasch, November 19, 1980, Bodo Rasch Papers, D2179, ADK 10–21/82, Werkbund Archiv, Berlin. (This letter was originally composed in English, in all lowercase, with the exception of the “I,” which always appears in uppercase.)
- 57 *Architype Schwitters* is part of a series of typefaces based on those created by experimental typographers and New Typographers during the interwar period. The collection also includes *Architype Albers*, *Architype van Doesburg*, *Architype Bayer*, *Architype Tschichold*, and *Architype Renner*.
- 58 “International Dada Archive,” accessed March 30, 2018, http://search.lib.uiowa.edu/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=01IOWADADA.
- 59 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.
- 60 For more information on the Dammerstock-Siedlung, see Peter Schmit and Brigitte Franzen, *Neues Bauen der 20er Jahre: Gropius, Haesler, Schwitters und die Dammerstocksiedlung in Karlsruhe 1929* (Karlsruhe: Museum für Moderne Angewandte Kunst, 1997).
- 61 Brigitte Franzen, “Einleitung,” 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), 20.
- 62 The second ticket counter was dismantled after the exhibition. The refurbished one was used as a ticket desk 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. Today it is part of the Infopavillion with information on the history of the Dammerstock exhibition.
- For more information, see “Infopavillion Dammerstock,” accessed, April 19, 2018, <http://rossmannundpartner.de/projekte/infopavillion-dammerstock/>.

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