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From Dada to Digital: Experimental Poetry in the Media Age

by

Kurt Andrew Beals

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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of the

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Committee in charge:

Professor Anton Kaes, Chair

Professor Niklaus Largier

Professor Elaine Tennant

Professor Robert Kaufman

Spring 2013

From Dada to Digital:  
Experimental Poetry in the Media Age

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by Kurt Andrew Beals

## Abstract

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Kurt Andrew Beals

Doctor of Philosophy in German

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University of California, Berkeley

Professor Anton Kaes, Chair

At least since Mallarmé, if not before, poets in the Western tradition have responded to changes in media technologies by reflecting on their own relationship to language, and by reassessing the limits and possibilities of poetry. In the German-speaking world, this tendency has been pronounced in a number of experimental movements: Dada, particularly in Zurich and Berlin between 1916 and 1921; Concrete poetry, especially its Swiss and German variants in the 1950s and '60s; and finally, digital or electronic poetry, a genre that is still developing all around the world, but has roots in Germany dating back to the late 1950s. For each of these movements, the increasing dominance of new media technologies contributes to an understanding of language as something material, quantifiable, and external to its human users, and casts doubt on the function of language as a means of subjective expression, particularly in the context of poetry. However, this poetic engagement with a materialized, quantified language does not only pose a challenge to older conceptions of the lyric subject; rather, a new sort of subjectivity may emerge through the interaction of human authors and technological media. Thus by engaging with new media technologies, the experimental movements considered here have raised fundamental questions about the nature of subjectivity in a media-dominated age. This argument is developed here in the form of critical surveys of all three movements, together with case studies of works that have received relatively little scholarly attention to date. The introduction to the Dadaists' media poetics in Chapter One is followed, in Chapter Two, by a closer look at how print media and advertising fit into the Berlin Dadaists' political program, focusing on the collaboration between George Grosz and John Heartfield in the June 1917 issue of *Neue Jugend*. Following the survey of Concrete poetry in Chapter Three, Chapter Four focuses on the role of information theory in the works of Max Bense, particularly in his 1963 book *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*, as well as the 1968 radio-play adaptation, *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*. The final chapter pursues this trajectory further, tracing the development of digital poetry in the German-speaking world from its earliest experimental phase in 1959 up to the present day.

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## Introduction

### **Changing the Subject: The Lyric “I” in the Age of Modern Media**

At least since Mallarmé, if not before, poets in the Western tradition have responded to changes in media technologies by reflecting on their own relationship to language, and by reassessing the limits and possibilities of poetry. In the German-speaking world, this tendency has been pronounced in a number of experimental movements: Dada, particularly in Zurich and Berlin between 1916 and 1921; Concrete poetry, especially its Swiss and German variants in the 1950s and '60s; and finally, digital or electronic poetry, a genre that is still developing all around the world, but has roots in Germany dating back to the late 1950s. For each of these movements, the increasing dominance of new media technologies contributes to an understanding of language as something material, quantifiable, and external to its human users, and casts doubt on the function of language as a means of subjective expression, particularly in the context of poetry.<sup>1</sup> However, this poetic engagement with a materialized, quantified language does not only pose a challenge to older conceptions of the lyric subject; rather, a new sort of subjectivity may emerge through the interaction of human authors and technological media.

Poetry's importance as a locus of reflection on new media technologies was addressed nearly sixty years ago by Marshall McLuhan. In his 1954 essay “Joyce, Mallarmé and the Press,” McLuhan wrote that “real understanding of the changes in modern communication” had come “mainly from the resourceful technicians among modern poets and painters.”<sup>2</sup> McLuhan's emphasis in this essay, as in much of his work, is on the far-reaching effects that the dominance of one medium rather than another can have on human life. Here the distinction is between the reading practices associated with the printed book and those tied to the popular press. If the printed book had given rise to practices of silent reading and the association of language with interiority — preparing the ground for the lyric subject, the “I” of Romantic poetry — the popular press, in McLuhan's view, overturned this paradigm, and poets such as Mallarmé soon drew the consequences:

But it was Mallarmé who formulated the lessons of the press as a guide for the new impersonal poetry of suggestion and implication. He saw that the scale of modern reportage and of the mechanical multiplication of messages made personal rhetoric impossible. Now was the time for the artist to intervene in a new way and to manipulate the new media of communication by a precise and delicate adjustment of the relations of words, things and events. His task had become not self-expression but the release of the life in things.<sup>3</sup>

McLuhan's description of this new poetry as “impersonal,” his argument that the poet's task was “not self-expression,” is indicative of the dramatic shift that occurs when poets engage explicitly with new media technologies.

This shift applies first and foremost to the status of language: rather than being seen as a transparent medium for the expression of internal states, language is treated as a physical (or virtual) material already present in the outside world. But the reconception of

language as a fundamentally external phenomenon requires a rethinking of subjectivity as well, because the lyric subject cannot be separated from this defining act of linguistic expression. Thus by engaging with new media technologies, the experimental movements considered here — Dada, Concrete poetry, and digital poetry — have raised fundamental questions about the nature of subjectivity in a media-dominated age.

### **The Ins and Outs of Lyric Poetry**

The model of the lyric subject invoked here is firmly rooted in the German aesthetic tradition. In the nineteenth century, G.W.F. Hegel defined lyric poetry in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* as a genre intrinsically linked to subjectivity, writing: “Indem es endlich im Lyrischen das Subjekt ist, das sich ausdrückt, so kann demselben hierfür zunächst der an sich geringfügigste Inhalt genügen. [...] so bildet hier das Individuum in seinem inneren Vorstellen und Empfinden den Mittelpunkt.”<sup>4</sup> Hegel here constructs an image of an autonomous, self-contained lyric subject whose work issues forth from an internal source: “die innere Subjektivität” is “der eigentliche Quell der Lyrik.”<sup>5</sup> Although Hegel allows that the subject matter of lyric poetry may have its origins in the outside world, he holds that the poet must internalize this subject matter and transform it before pouring it out again — the poetic act is frequently denoted in this passage by the term *Erguß*. Perhaps the most concise definition of lyric found in this section of Hegel’s *Vorlesungen* is “das totale Aussprechen des inneren Geistes.”<sup>6</sup> Here again, the function of language in lyric poetry is clearly specified as the externalization of internal thoughts, feelings, or mental states.

But the distinction between interior and exterior does not only apply to the subject matter of lyric; rather, Hegel also contrasts the language of lyric to the prose of the outside world. As he writes: “die lyrische echte Kunstpoesie [...] entreißt sich dieser bereits vorhandenen Prosa und schafft aus der subjektiv selbständig gewordenen Phantasie eine neue poetische Welt der inneren Betrachtung und Empfindung, durch welche sie sich erst den wahren Inhalt und die wahre Ausdrucksweise des menschlichen Innern lebendig erzeugt.”<sup>7</sup> It is not only the content of lyric, but also its mode of expression that enables it to give voice to human interiority, and this mode of expression is crucially distinguished from everyday prose. In lyric, language borders on song, as in the nonsense syllables of folk songs: “In dieser Rücksicht erweist sich selbst das ganz leere Lirum-larum, das Singen und Trällern rein um des Singens willen als echt lyrische Befriedigung des Gemüts, dem die Worte mehr oder weniger bloße gleichgültige Vehikel für die Äußerung der Heiterkeiten und Schmerzen werden, doch als Ersatz nun auch sogleich die Hilfe der Musik herbeirufen.”<sup>8</sup> Although Hegel attends here to the non-semantic properties of language (which will be a significant theme of the chapters to come), his concern is primarily with lyric’s aural, not its visual properties, its proximity to song, not to print. This privileging of spoken or sung over written or printed language reinforces Hegel’s emphasis on the roots of lyric in interiority. In the “Lirum-larum” of the folk song, not even subject matter is drawn from outside; rather, the song is a pure expression of emotion. Thus the lyric subject can emerge here unencumbered by the outside world’s pre-existing prose.

For the poets who will be discussed in the chapters that follow, though, this



paradigm of lyric poetry as a form of outpouring and self-expression proves inadequate. Their discontent is tied to the perception that new media technologies have fundamentally changed the nature and function of language. How, these poets ask, can language — with its ubiquitous presence in the outside world, whether in the form of printed books and newspapers, telegraph transmissions, radio broadcasts, or internet searches — be employed in lyric poetry as an instrument for pure subjective expression, for the externalization of one's innermost states? How can the visible, manipulable forms of language, its physical, material, or virtual reality, be reconciled with its ostensibly intangible origins in the lyric subject? In some cases, this skepticism is tied to the sheer quantity of printed or electronic text that fills the modern world — the “flood” is a common trope used to describe each new inundation, from printed matter to radio waves to digital data. Unlike Hegel, who held that a lyric voice could still be heard amidst this profusion of prose, many of the poets considered here see the lyric subject drowning in the waves.

Perhaps more important than the sheer abundance of language, though, is its alienation from any human speaker. As N. Katherine Hayles writes in her reading of Friedrich A. Kittler, “media come into existence when technologies of inscription intervene between the hand gripping the pen or the mouth framing the sounds and the production of the texts. In a literal sense, technologies of inscription are media when they are perceived as mediating, inserting themselves into the chain of textual production.”<sup>9</sup> The advent of a new medium, then, poses a challenge to lyric subjectivity insofar as it creates or reinforces the perception that textual production is no longer an immediate outpouring of feelings or reflections, but rather a multi-phase process involving both human and non-human (often mechanical or electronic) elements. One strength of Hayles' conception of media quoted here is that it does not overvalue the specific properties of any particular medium, or confine the discovery of the mediated nature of language to any single historical moment. Nor does it tend, like some articulations of Kittler's theory, towards a teleological understanding of media history, in which media follow their own inevitable logic and human subjects are cast aside.<sup>10</sup> Instead, it offers a model for explaining how human subjectivity can co-exist with media technologies, even as it changes and is changed by those technologies. The *perception* of mediation is the key — the renewed awareness of the mediation of language, which can take hold again and again, each time a new medium emerges or becomes dominant. It is this perception that helps to explain why, at many different points in time, the introduction of a new medium has been accompanied by the emergence of experimental poetic movements that reject the Romantic notion of the lyric subject and focus instead on the materiality of language.

With this in mind, a note about the subtitle of this dissertation may be in order. The reference to the “media age” is by no means intended to imply that media as such first gained importance at dawn of the twentieth century. Indeed, if McLuhan's definition of media as “extensions of man” is accepted, then some sorts of media preceded writing itself.<sup>11</sup> But the past century has seen both a proliferation of new media technologies and a corresponding awareness of their mediating role — of the way that they not only extend certain human faculties, but also increase the distance (whether physical or psychological) between human actors and the objects acted upon. With respect to

language, as Hayles' definition of media suggests, the perception that technologies intervene between the subject and the text makes it more difficult to conceive of the compositional act as a pure outpouring of subjective interiority. While many modern poets have nevertheless held fast to some version of the Romantic lyric subject, the poets considered in the following chapters have made the mediated nature of language itself a central concern of their poetry, and examined its implications for subjectivity.

Another consequence of the perception that language is mediated is an increasing attentiveness to the materiality of the text, often at the expense of semantics. Whereas spoken language is easily referred back to the intentions of a particular speaking subject, written language — particularly when it is not written by hand, but rather typed, printed, telegraphed, e-mailed, texted, or tweeted — appears to exist at a greater remove from its author. Thus it is more readily conceived of as an object in its own right, defined by its physical properties and not by relations of intentionality or signification. As Kittler writes with regard to the typewriter: "Instead of the play between Man the sign-setter and the writing surface, the philosopher as stylus and the tablet of Nature, there is the play between type and its Other, completely removed from subjects."<sup>12</sup> Not the author sitting at the keyboard, but the typewriter itself appears as the immediate creator of the text; thus the emphasis is shifted from the text's meaning to its material, physical qualities. What Walter Ong wrote of print can be applied to the typewritten text as well: it "suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did."<sup>13</sup> Here again, a challenge can be seen to the function of language in lyric poetry as Hegel described it. The use of machines to write, the perception of words as things, the focus on visual form — all of these tendencies in experimental poetry destabilize the concept of the lyric subject. In place of a subject whose interiority is given voice in poetry, the poetic movements considered in the following chapters create a new model (or new models) of the poet as a manipulator of ready-made, external language. The self-sufficient, originary humanist subject is thus replaced by a "posthuman" subject (to use the term that Hayles adopts from Ihab Hassan), whose subjectivity is constituted through interactions and engagements with these media technologies.<sup>14</sup>

## **Mediating Movements**

This argument is developed here in the form of critical surveys of three major experimental movements in German-language poetry: Dada, Concrete, and digital poetry. All three of these movements have suffered at times from unbalanced or polarizing scholarship: a great deal of the secondary literature falls into one of two camps, either taking these poets at their word about the radical intent and effects of their work, or dismissing these movements as mere play and provocation. This may be viewed in part as an occupational hazard of experimental literature. As Theodor W. Adorno writes in his *Ästhetische Theorie*: "Meist kristallisiert das Experiment, als Ausproben von Möglichkeiten, vorwiegend Typen und Gattungen und setzt leicht das konkrete Gebilde zum Schulfall herab [...] die Experimente indessen, fast ihrem Begriff nach vorweg an Mitteln interessiert, lassen gern auf den Zweck vergebens warten."<sup>15</sup> If the individual work is seen as "a mere example"<sup>16</sup> of an experimental practice, then the potential of a hermeneutic approach to these works will quickly be exhausted. Consequently, scholars

who approach these works with methods borrowed from the study of more conventional literature often either focus their approving attention on the manifestos and commentaries provided by the poets themselves, or throw up their hands and declare the works to be exercises in nonsense. In either case, the material specificity of the experimental text is lost in its translation into a more legible form. Even the designation of a text as “nonsense” transforms it a sort of sense by reading it as a coherent signifier.

The current study seeks to avoid these pitfalls by considering the formal experiments of these movements in their media-historical context. When these texts are read in relation to contemporaneous media theories and technologies, they appear not as attempts to test the limits of meaning in general, but rather as efforts to explore and understand the new modes of meaning that these media introduce. Insofar as these new media theories and technologies cast doubt on the viability of language as a means of subjective expression, they require poets to reconsider the limits and potential of their own medium. Thus the aim in reading these works cannot be to derive meaning from them in a conventional sense — this is exactly the possibility that they preclude — but rather to show how they respond to new developments in media at large, and to examine what consequences they might have for poetry. All of these works in some sense presuppose the dissolution of the lyric subject as a *fait accompli*, a brute reality of the modern media age that has only belatedly been acknowledged in poetry. These works can thus be read as metapoetic reflections on what tasks and possibilities remain for poetry, and what role subjectivity might still play, in the new media age.

These reflections take a variety of specific forms in the movements under consideration here. While allusions to technologies such as the telegraph may be seen in some Dada poems, the defining mediatic phenomena for this movement are the proliferation of print media (especially popular print media such as illustrated newspapers) and the massive increase in advertising. Brand names in particular play a key role in the Dada movement — in fact, Dada itself can be seen in some respects as an exercise in branding. But the brand name is not only important as a metonym for commercialization and mass culture. Rather, as many of the Dadaists’ contemporaries observed — from the cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer to the professional advertiser Ernst Growald<sup>17</sup> — the brand name also shows language in an unusual light, serving primarily to catch the eye, a signifier with only loose relations to any signified. With this in mind, the “nonsense” of many Dada poems — their emphasis on material and visual aspects of language rather than on semantics — need not be seen only as a rebellious attack on the dominant semiotic order. Rather, it can also be read as a reflection of the way that a media landscape dominated by print and advertising had already radically changed the function of language. The cut-up poems of Dadaists such as Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp specifically respond to the ready-made character of print, while the sound poems of Hugo Ball and Raoul Hausmann presage the “secondary orality” of electronic media. The introduction to the Dadaists’ media poetics in Chapter One is followed, in Chapter Two, by a closer look at how print media and advertising fit into the Berlin Dadaists’ political program, focusing on the collaboration between George Grosz and John Heartfield in the June 1917 issue of *Neue Jugend*. Here the interiority of the lyric subject is contrasted to an outwardly-oriented artistic practice that both recognizes the impact of modern media and appropriates them for political ends.

The subsequent chapters consider movements that have both inherited the experimental legacy of Dada and transformed it in significant ways, developing poetic practices that respond to the media of their respective eras. Concrete poetry, like Dada, borrows heavily from the formal vocabulary of advertising. Whereas Dada generally emphasizes the sensational, attention-getting power of chaotic, discordant design, though, Concrete poetry tends towards spare and minimal forms. The theoretical writings of several Concrete poets, most notably Eugen Gomringer and Max Bense, explicitly express the affinity of Concrete poetry for the communicative efficiency of corporate logos and traffic signs. Despite this divergence, though, both Dada and Concrete poetry discover in advertising an attentiveness to the materiality of the text that relegates semantics to a subsidiary role. Transported into the realm of poetry, this principle gives rise to poems in which language as material is alienated both from meaning and from its author; like a brand name or advertising slogan, it can be understood without any reference to an implied authorial subject. Looking beyond the immediate context of advertising, Concrete poetry also assimilates the lessons of modern information theory, which dispensed with semantics entirely, instead viewing language in quantitative, statistical terms. The repetitive nature of many poems by authors such as Gomringer and Claus Bremer, and the fragmentation of language in the works of Franz Mon and Ferdinand Kriwet, can be seen as a response to the quantitative conception of language introduced by information theorists such as Claude E. Shannon. While Concrete poets, like the Dadaists, generally treated language as material, non-subjective, and non-semantic, their interest in language as a statistical phenomenon additionally heralds the entry of poetry into the information age. Following the survey of Concrete poetry in Chapter Three, Chapter Four focuses on the role of information theory in the works of Max Bense, particularly in his 1963 book *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital* (together with the 1968 radio-play adaptation, *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*).<sup>18</sup>

The final chapter pursues this trajectory further, tracing the development of digital poetry in the German-speaking world from its earliest experimental phase in 1959 up to the present day. The early computer experiments of Theo Lutz and Max Bense followed in the tradition of Dada and Concrete poetry, both by experimenting with the dominant media technologies of the era and by treating language as material, with little regard for semantics. Subsequent experiments have frequently involved algorithms or chance-based composition procedures, continuing the challenge to authorship and subjectivity that can be seen in many Dada and Concrete poems. Perhaps the most significant developments in digital poetry, though, are a range of new forms that critically explore the linguistic practices particular to digital media. From the “codework” advocated by poet/critics such as John Cayley and Florian Cramer to a variety of projects that draw their source material directly from the internet, some of the most innovative works of digital poetry pose the question of how meaning is created in the digital age, and what role remains for subjectivity when authorship is increasingly automated. The works discussed in this final chapter combine a critical perspective on the illusionistic power of digital media with an openness to new, hybrid forms of subjectivity that incorporate both human and technological actors.

Although the structure of the present study is largely chronological, it makes no

claim to be historically comprehensive. Certainly there are many other German-language poets — such as Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Thomas Kling, and Barbara Köhler — who have responded in their work to modern media and to the challenge that it poses to the lyric subject, but whose work is not considered here. The choice to focus on three particular movements was motivated in part by an interest in the conspicuous acts of self-definition and canonization inherent in their movement dynamics, and in part by the historical connections and elective affinities between the movements. Concrete poets routinely cite Dada as a source of inspiration, while digital poets regularly refer back to both of the previous movements. While these self-constructed family trees should not be uncritically accepted, they do reveal a continuity in experimental media poetics over the past century. At the same time, this history can be read backwards as well as forwards: digital poetry can provide a new framework for understanding historical avant-gardes, for breaking out of the now-conventional avant-garde narrative. When Concrete poetry and Dada are read through a digital screen (at times literally, thanks to online archives), it is possible to perceive themes in these earlier experimental movements that are not apparent at first glance. As Brian Lennon has recently written:

Now that an academic critical literature has established the importance of poetic strategies once (often still) derided as productive of ‘unpoetical’ nonsense, randomness, and opacity, the informational concepts of noise, pattern, and recombination may (through no intention of their originators) provide new ways to read and to write about the poetics of the past, as well as informing those of the continuous or unacknowledged present. Perhaps some of our most challenging poetics have courted randomness, courted nonsense, in protocybernetic anticipation, or perhaps they remain challenging merely because new languages seem glad to engage them.<sup>19</sup>

By reading earlier experimental poetics from a digital perspective, we can see that these earlier movements were also asking what consequences modern technologies might have for language, for poetry, and for subjectivity. In each of these movements, the lyric subject is in question, and new forms of subjectivity emerge through the collaboration of human authors and media technologies.

### **Dit-Dit-Dit Dada-Dada-Dada Dit-Dit-Dit**

An example from the Dada movement might help to clarify the role of experimental poetry as a response to specific media technologies. The Dadaists’ chaotic texts are frequently seen as a rejection of the semiotic order of Western culture, a response to the supreme disorder of the First World War. However, the Dadaists’ fragmentation of language can also be seen as the translation into poetry of developments already widespread in communications media. In addition to the boom in print media mentioned above, the development of the telegraph in the mid-19th century had spawned an entire genre of apparently meaningless writing: namely, code books, from which a user could select a pre-formulated message which was then abbreviated as a single word or a random sequence of letters.<sup>20</sup> The intended function of these code books was to increase the privacy of telegraph transmissions and to save time and money by reducing the length of messages. One unintended effect, though, was to privilege certain sorts of

messages over others by encouraging users to pick from among the phrases provided. Like greeting cards, these code books relieved senders of the need to write their own messages; but in doing so, they fundamentally altered the relationship between the sender of the message and its content. The encoded telegram could not be seen as an original expression of personal thoughts or sentiments; rather, its language was ready-made, and the sender's task was only that of selection.

As Hayles writes in her recent book *How We Think*, these code books “contributed to a sense that language was no longer strictly under one's control”; they “were part of a historical shift from inscription practices in which words flowed from hand onto paper, seeming to embody the writer's voice, to a technocratic regime in which encoding, transmission, and decoding procedures intervened between a writer's thoughts and the receiver's understanding.”<sup>21</sup> This shift was soon registered in art and poetry: the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti included fragments of a telegraph code book in one 1919 collage, and the Berlin Dadaist Raoul Hausmann assembled similarly random sequences of letters in his 1918 *Plakatgedichte* (see Chapter One, Fig. 4-7). Like the telegraph customer choosing a code, Hausmann reduced the act of composition to the selection and rearrangement of pre-existing material, thus casting doubt on the function of language as an expression of authorial subjectivity — and producing a text just as illegible as those transmitted by telegraph.

Hausmann's *Plakatgedichte* are thus not simply provocative nonsense, as is often alleged; rather, they are indications of a historical shift in writing practices and a corresponding transition from an older to a newer view of the poetic function of language. According to the older view, language is a quintessentially human tool of subjective expression, a means of rendering external our internal, psychic states. This is the language of the Romantic, lyric “I,” founded in the thinking, feeling human subject. Its natural medium is the human voice; writing and print are derivative forms. The newer view, on the other hand, considers language primarily as a physical, material reality that is present in the world before the author-subject begins to speak or write. When considered in the context of these telegraph code books, Hausmann's *Plakatgedichte* appear not simply to challenge semantics in general, but rather to raise more media-specific question: what does it mean to write poetry in an age of modern media, an age in which our relationship to language — which is, after all, the medium of poetry — has been fundamentally transformed? If language can no longer claim privileged status as a means of subjective expression, but has instead become a material reality existing independent of any speaking subject, then the nature and aims of poetry must also be reassessed.

The transformations that modern media have brought about in poetry are considered by Marjorie Perloff in *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, where she writes: “The impact of electronic technology on our lives is now the object of intense study, but what remains obscure is the role, if any, this technology has in shaping the ostensibly private language of poetry.”<sup>22</sup> While Perloff's question is closely related to the topic of the present study, though, her approach differs in several key respects. First, Perloff's focus is less on the media technologies themselves than on the ideological function of mass media in modern society, from magazine ads to talk shows<sup>23</sup>; and second, Perloff highlights the resistance that remains in some experimental poetry to the

ideological dominance of mass media. Citing the “glut of junk mail, advertising brochures, beepers, bumper stickers, answering-machine messages, and especially its increasing video coercion,” Perloff argues that contemporary poetic avant-gardes strive to create “what we might call an alternate language system.”<sup>24</sup> While the present study does not deny that such ideological resistance can play a role in experimental poetry — either in its intent or in its effects — the focus here will not be on resistance or opposition to new media developments. Rather, it will be on how these developments are registered and interpreted, and what consequences are drawn from them. In the works considered here, it is more the function of poetry than that of mass media that comes in for critical interrogation. Nevertheless, there are overlaps between the themes addressed in Perloff’s book and those of this study. Specifically, Perloff sees certain twentieth-century experimental poetry movements, including Concrete poetry as well as more recent Language poetry, abandoning traditional claims to subjectivity, authenticity, and poetic voice because these notions, in the age of mass media, have either become or been revealed as illusions. Whereas Perloff frames the challenge to subjectivity largely in terms of the broader cultural function of mass media, though, the present study will focus on media theories and technologies themselves, considering how they have transformed language and how experimental poets have responded to this transformation.

## Conclusions

This is precisely the question with which many Dadaists, Concrete poets, and digital poets have engaged. While the poetic works of these movements have often been dismissed as playful, perhaps faintly subversive, but ultimately trivial and of little enduring value, all three movements at their best represent a principled reassessment of the function of poetry in the media age. In the course of the past century and half, poets have abandoned their pens for the typewriter, the typesetting machine, the ticker-tape of early computers, and the internet, and each of these transitions has been accompanied by a renewed awareness of language as something external, whether printed on paper or displayed on a screen. Each transition has raised fundamental questions about the nature of authorship, from the Dada collage to the cut-and-paste procedures of some contemporary digital poets. And perhaps most importantly, with each transition, poets have reflected on the fact that we do not merely use these media as neutral tools to write down our ideas and poems; rather, we enter into a productive relationship with them. *We write with these media, but they also write with us.*

Variations on this claim have been central to some of the most original recent scholarship on digital literature. Like Hayles, Lydia Liu in *The Freudian Robot* considers the “feedback loop” in which humans and their machines are engaged, asking: “does the logic of reciprocity compel human beings to imitate their machines just as much as the machines are built to resemble them, keeping an infinite feedback loop of simulacra or doppelgänger in place?”<sup>25</sup> The present study builds on questions such as this to suggest that experimental movements such as those considered here not only register the challenge posed to the lyric subject by new media technologies, but also indicate alternative forms of subjectivity that incorporate such feedback loops, recognizing the poetic act not as an outpouring of inwardness, but rather as an interaction with external,

material language. Writing about digital poetry in 2001, the German critic Friedrich W. Block held that “experimental poetry has always been media poetry.”<sup>26</sup> This claim is at the heart of the chapters that follow. By recognizing how consistently and deeply experimental poetry has engaged with new media over the past century, we can move beyond reductive portrayals of avant-garde aesthetics as a wholesale assault on meaning and tradition. Instead, we can recognize in these movements a continuing effort to address the consequences of new media for traditional models of subjectivity, and to create new models of subjectivity better suited to the modern media age.



## Chapter One

### **Dada: The Poetics of Advertising and Mass Media**

“Der Dadaist,” Richard Huelsenbeck wrote, “ist ein Wirklichkeitsmensch, der den Wein, die Weiber und die Reklame liebt.”<sup>1</sup> Huelsenbeck – who was known in Zurich as the “Dada drummer,” but acquired the nickname “Reklame-Dada” in Berlin – may not have spoken for all Dadaists, but the sentiment that he expressed was certainly shared by many. It was representative, too, of the contrast that the Dadaists drew between themselves and the Expressionists, whom Huelsenbeck attacked for their “sentimentale[r] Widerstand gegen die Zeit”: “Der Haß gegen die Presse, der Haß gegen die Reklame, der Haß gegen die Sensation spricht für Menschen, denen ihr Sessel wichtiger ist als der Lärm der Straße und die sich einen Vorzug daraus machen, von jedem Winkelschieber übertölpelt zu werden.”<sup>2</sup> Huelsenbeck’s characterization of the Expressionists in this passage suggests that artists who are unwilling or unable to adapt to an urban context dominated by mass media, advertising, and sensationalism are not only doomed to irrelevance, they are also bound to become the victims of that environment. Consequently, for Huelsenbeck, the press and advertising were elements of modern reality that had to be embraced, not ignored. This view was echoed by the Zurich Dadaist Hans Arp in an account of his chance-based writing process: “Wörter, Schlagworte, Sätze, die ich aus Tageszeitungen und besonders aus ihren Inseraten wählte, bildeten 1917 die Fundamente meiner Gedichte. [...] Wir meinten durch die Dinge hindurch in das Wesen des Lebens zu sehen, und darum ergriff uns ein Satz aus einer Tageszeitung mindestens eben so sehr wie der eines Dichterfürsten.”<sup>3</sup> Arp, like Huelsenbeck, contrasts the Dadaists’ engagement with the reality of newspapers and advertisements to the attitudes of other poets and artists who prefer to deny the world around them, and he mocks “die verwirrten Blicke der geistigen Ringkämpfer, die Titanen.”<sup>4</sup> For Huelsenbeck and Arp, as for many of their fellow Dadaists, commercial and mass media constituted an integral part of the modern world, one that could be accepted, celebrated, transformed, satirized, or exploited, but not dismissed or wished away.

This stance can be seen in part as a response to the drastic increase in the sheer volume of print media and advertising in German-speaking countries around the turn of the century, and to changes in the character of newspapers and advertisements. To cite only one example of the dramatic growth of newspaper advertising during this period, the *Münchener Neuesten Nachrichten* went from 14,000 advertisements published in 1848 to 300,000 in 1899. This advertising boom was possible in part because print technologies were rapidly changing; new developments such as halftone engraving contributed to the growing popularity and distribution of illustrated magazines and made possible the introduction of illustrated newspapers around 1900.<sup>5</sup> In the same period, other forms of advertising were spreading as well: the *Litfaßsäule*, or poster pillar, was introduced in Germany in 1855, beginning with 150 pillars in Berlin, and increasing to 3,200 in Berlin and its suburbs by 1929.<sup>6</sup> This proliferation of newspapers, magazines, and advertising posters contributed to what Hanne Bergius calls “the increasing semioticization of metropolitan streets by ads, illuminated signs, traffic signs, poster walls, advertising pillars, newspaper stands, etc.”<sup>7</sup> Or as Walter Benjamin described it in *Einbahnstrasse*,

“Heuschreckenschwärme von Schrift, die heute schon die Sonne des vermeinten Geistes den Großstädtern verfinstern.”<sup>8</sup>

The First World War, together with the ensuing unrest and inflation, lead to a temporary reduction in the number of advertisements published in Berlin newspapers and magazines, and electric light advertisements did not become a ubiquitous feature of Berlin’s urban landscape until the early 1920s, a development that Janet Ward has discussed in *Weimar Surfaces*.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, when Huelsenbeck returned to Berlin from Zurich in the midst of the war, these advertisements were already prominent enough to make an impression: “Ich kam im Januar 1917 nach Deutschland zurück, dessen Physiognomie sich mittlerweile in phantastischer Weise verändert hatte. Man hatte das Gefühl, aus einer fetten Idylle in eine Straße mit Lichtreklamen, schreienden Händlern und hupenden Autos zu kommen.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than seeking refuge from this flood of sensations, Huelsenbeck and many other Dadaists adopted the tactics of advertising as their own artistic principles, swimming with, rather than against, the media tide. As Matthew Biro has written, the “new more ‘distracted’ consumption of conjunctions of images and texts that characterized the experience of reading the illustrated magazines and newspapers”<sup>11</sup> became a key element of Dada art and writing as well.

The positive valence assigned to commercial and mass media by Huelsenbeck and other Dadaists stands in sharp contrast to the critical stance towards these media often cited in historical accounts of the movement. To be sure, a critique of advertising and mass media can be found in many Dada works: the Zurich Dadaist Hugo Ball, for instance, said of his *Lautgedichte*: “Man verzichte mit dieser Art Klanggedichte in Bausch und Bogen auf die durch den Journalismus verdorbene Sprache.”<sup>12</sup> The journalistic character of language appears here as something to be resisted or done away with, something that poetry should seek to overcome. And in the more politically engaged world of Berlin Dada, publications such as *Die Pleite*, *Der blutige Ernst*, and *Jedermann sein eigener Fußball* attacked mainstream journalism for its complicity with the holders of political power.<sup>13</sup> Whether the stakes were poetic or political, Dadaists were rarely reticent in their criticisms of commercial media or the reactionary press. These criticisms have led many scholars to see Dada’s engagement with these media primarily as a form of opposition, a tendency exemplified by Rudolf Kuenzli’s description of Berlin Dada as an “attempt to combat the power of mass media.”<sup>14</sup>

And yet, as Kuenzli also notes, “One of the most effective strategies of the Berlin Dadas was to create their own ‘media empire’ and to distribute their publications in editions of up to 12,000 copies.”<sup>15</sup> Kuenzli’s scare quotes notwithstanding, the print production of the Dada movement was indeed substantial. Harald Maier-Metz refers to “eine Flut von Zeitschriftenneugründungen” in the wake of the November Revolution, and Kurt Schwitters made light of this phenomenon with a headline in his own *Merz* magazine: “Jedermann seine eigene Redaktion.”<sup>16</sup> With their publications, the Dadaists positioned themselves not only in opposition to the mass media, but also in competition with them. At times they used this position critically to hold up a mirror to society, but at other times they employed techniques borrowed from the mass media to attract attention in an urban world increasingly inundated with mass-produced texts and images. Dadaists not only appropriated words and images from newspapers and magazines, they also employed and experimented with advertising techniques, making strategic use of slogans,

design, and typography. Thus Dada took on an active role in the rapid development of textual and visual media that would both span and shift the boundaries between art and commerce in the first decades of the twentieth century. Dada artists and writers including Huelsenbeck, Arp, Tristan Tzara, Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, and John Heartfield not only incorporated elements of commercial and mass media into collages and montages, they also used the techniques of journalism and advertising for their own ends, whether critical, political, or simply promotional.

But the Dadaists' engagement with mass media did not all take place along the axis of art and commerce; rather, many Dadaists reflected in their works on the ways in which new media and technologies seemed to change the nature and function of language itself. This concern is evident in Ball's *Lautgedichte* and Hausmann's *optophonetische Gedichte*, which test the limits of language both by breaking it into its smallest phonetic fragments, free or nearly free of semantic associations, and by attempting to approximate the dynamic range of speech in static printed texts.<sup>17</sup> It can be seen as well in Hausmann's *Plakatgedichte*, which not only explore the innate visual power of print, but can also be understood as an allusion to the meaningless sequences of letters that were widely used in telegraph codes. And it is reflected as well in the Dadaists' fascination with advertising itself, in which words often seem to break free of their referents and take on a material life of their own. Here Siegfried Kracauer's reflections on the neon lights of Paris offer an insight that will be useful to recall in the discussion that follows: "Man kann in diesem Gewimmel noch Zeichen und Schriften erkennen, doch Zeichen und Schriften sind hier ihren praktischen Zwecken enthoben, das Eingehen in die Buntheit hat sie zu Glanzfragmenten zerstückelt, die sich nach anderen Gesetzen als den gewohnten zusammenfügen." As Kracauer notes, the varied size of these letters and their repetition and juxtaposition turn them into a material reality above all, detached from any specific meaning: "Die Verschiedenheit ihrer Dimensionen treibt ihnen die Bedeutung aus; erhalten bleiben die einzelnen Züge der Wortbilder. [...] Die Elemente der bekannten Sprache sind zu Kompositionen vereinigt, deren Sinn sich nicht mehr entziffern läßt."<sup>18</sup> Many of the most experimental poems that emerged from the Dada movement reflect a similar awareness of the ways that new media – including print media and advertising, but also the telegraph– fundamentally transform the function of language, emphasizing materiality over semantics. These experiments can thus be seen as a response to the question of what it means to write poetry in this radically changed media environment.

The following discussion will concentrate above all on the Dada movement in Zurich and Berlin, dealing primarily with texts written in German. Focusing on print publications rather than on visual art or performance, and placing particular emphasis on poetry and typography, this chapter positions Dada within the development of advertising and new media technologies in the 1910s and '20s, considering the Dadaists' use of these media not only as criticism or satire, but also as a form of creative participation in a rapidly evolving media environment. The discussion will first focus on the Dadaists' attitudes towards advertising and mass media in general, noting the extent to which Dadaists emulated the techniques of commercial advertising, even if their intent was at times satirical. The focus will then shift to the role of print media and typography, while also briefly considering the role of other media such as the telegraph. This chapter aims to show how the Dadaists developed a new media poetics that favored reflexive over

reflective perception and minimized the role of the creative subject. Matthew Biro has recently sought to “reveal the constructive side of Dadaism in Berlin,” hoping to “dismiss once and for all a number of different myths that have circulated about Berlin Dada: that it was just a critical or destructive movement; that it was simply concerned with creating nonsensical works of anti-art designed to inspire institutional critique; or that it was exclusively focused on the trauma of World War I.”<sup>19</sup> This chapter pursues similar aims with regard to both Zurich and Berlin Dada; but whereas Biro focuses on the Dadaists’ “imagining of new forms of hybrid modern identity,”<sup>20</sup> the discussion here will focus on the Dadaists’ creation of new forms of modern poetry and textual production that responded to the changing status of language in a media-dominated society. Despite the Dadaists’ frequent attacks on bourgeois consumerism, their use of these media is by no means uniformly critical; rather, the Dadaists not only recognize these media as part of modern life, they also explore and celebrate their aesthetic potential, incorporating these media into their artistic production and exploiting them as means of self-promotion. For the Dadaists, these media are not irrevocably tied to the reactionary press and capitalist marketing; rather, they are also emblematic of modern urban reality, and as such they provide the basis for a modern media poetics.

### Advertising Dada

A consideration of Dada’s ties to commercial media can profitably begin, as many stories do, with a birth and the bestowal of a name. Dada was born in Zurich in 1916, and although the origins of its name are notoriously disputed, there is general agreement that the word was chosen in part for its lack of a fixed meaning.<sup>21</sup> As Tzara would later write, “Dada ne signifie rien.”<sup>22</sup> The concise and memorable character of the word itself, and its freedom from any semantic baggage, have led several scholars to note its similarity to commercial brand names.<sup>23</sup> This is not merely the retrospective impression of scholars attuned to the even more brand-dominated world of the present; rather, the characteristics of a successful brand name had already been explicitly laid out by advertisers in the Dadaists’ own day, and the name “Dada” fit them to a T. Ernst Growald, for instance, had written in the trade publication *Die Reklame*:

Es wird sich stets empfehlen, vollkommene Phantasienamen zu wählen, für die der Begriff erst geschaffen wird. ‘Jawol’, ‘Odol’, ‘Kosmin’, ‘Agfa’, ‘O—K’ sind alles frei erfundene Namen, die erst durch die Reklame zum Begriff geworden sind. Es ist also nicht notwendig, daß der Name von vornherein eine bestimmte Eigenschaft ausdrückt, sondern es ist notwendig, daß der Name gut klingt, leicht faßlich und anpassungsfähig ist, das weitere hat dann die Reklame zu besorgen.<sup>24</sup>

Growald’s advice for advertisers highlights issues much like those addressed by Kracauer in his “Lichtreklame” essay, albeit from a different perspective. Like Kracauer, Growald sees the language of advertising becoming detached from its semantic function, so that its material and sensual properties come to the fore. This perception of the distinctly material function of language in advertising and other modern media would play a significant role in Dada poetics as well.

But this new sensibility is most immediately evident in the Dadaists' choice of a name for their own movement: while they may not have been aware of Growald's essay, they dutifully followed his advice nonetheless. To be sure, other early twentieth-century art movements, such as Cubism and Expressionism, had been accused by their critics of adopting labels comparable to brand names; however, those labels were meant, at least originally, to designate specific characteristics of the art to which they referred. The word "Dada," on the other hand, was a floating signifier from the start, making it particularly well suited to a mercurial movement with a knack for self-promotion. In fact, the word "Dada" not only fulfilled the criteria for a good brand name – it actually *was* a brand name. As Raimund Meyer has noted, the firm Bergmann & Co. manufactured "Dada"-brand "haarstärkendes Kopfwasser," as shown in a newspaper advertisement published in Zurich around 1914 (Fig. 1).<sup>25</sup> Bergmann also offered "Lilienmilch-Seife" and "Lilien-Crème Dada," products alluded to by Hugo Ball in his "Eröffnungs-Manifest" at the First Dada Soirée in Zurich on July 14, 1916: "Dada ist die Weltseele, Dada ist der Clou, Dada ist die beste Lilienmilchseife der Welt."<sup>26</sup> Whether or not Bergmann's products played any role in the selection of a name for this incipient art movement, the brand was clearly familiar to Ball, and most likely to his audience as well: Meyer cites a report that half a million of these soaps were sold in Switzerland in just nine months.<sup>27</sup> Thus the word had proven its marketing potential even before Ball ever uttered it on stage.

The Dadaists, of course, were prepared to exploit this potential to the fullest, whether as a weapon in their critique of commercial culture or as a tool in the promotion of their own movement. In 1920, both Huelsenbeck and Hausmann made clear their awareness of the name's effectiveness as a marketing tool: Huelsenbeck wrote, "Dada wurde nach kurzer Zeit das Aushängeschild für alles, was wir im Cabaret Voltaire an Kunst lancierten," and Hausmann noted, "Zunächst bedeutete Dada nichts, als vier Buchstaben, und damit war sein internationaler Charakter gegeben. Nachdem man also den eigentlichen Gehalt und die Reklamemöglichkeiten dieses Wortes D A D A erfaßt hatte, gründete man das 'Cabaret Voltaire,'" adding a boast that Dada "heute über den ganzen Erdball verbreitet ist."<sup>28</sup> This global reach is literalized in Hausmann's photomontage of the same year, *Ein bürgerliches Präzisionsgehirn ruft eine Weltbewegung hervor: Dada siegt* (Fig. 2). In this image, the word "D A D A" spans a wall map of the northern hemisphere, is emblazoned on a ball, and appears twice in a photograph of Prague propped on an artist's easel. Several authors have rightly noted the connections that Hausmann draws in this image between mechanical products and human anatomy, but the prominent role of brands has been largely overlooked.<sup>29</sup> Each mechanical product in this picture is also a branded one: a Federal adding machine, a Remington typewriter, a row of Corbin door closers. The placement of the word "Dada" on the ball likewise suggests a brand name, as does its appearance on the wall of a building in the photograph, where it resembles the sort of painted advertisement with which many firms (including Bergmann & Co.) promoted their products.<sup>30</sup> Dada thus takes its place alongside other brands, even triumphing over them, as Hausmann's title suggests. Meanwhile, the inclusion of the typewriter alludes to the mechanization of language, the transformation of writing itself into a process in which the precise bourgeois brain is only one of several interlocking parts.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, there is a dystopian quality to this Dada-dominated world. The imprint of “DADA!” on the brain of the figure in the foreground (the head appears to be Huelsenbeck’s) suggests that brand names have begun to suffuse the ostensibly “feineren Naturkräfte” of the human body and mind, so that the “bourgeois precision brain” can only think in commercial slogans. The photo on the easel (beside which Hausmann himself stands) can be read as a comment on the role of the artist in a commodity-dominated society: even the artist’s view cannot liberate the world from the commodification that brand names have imposed upon it. Hausmann’s world might thus resemble the one that Guy Debord would later describe: “Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity.”<sup>32</sup> But *Dada siegt* is also a record of an actual Dada tour that Hausmann had recently completed, together with Huelsenbeck and Johannes Baader.<sup>33</sup> The stops on their tour included Prague, where they drew a crowd that Huelsenbeck estimated in the thousands, writing, “Meine Verehrtesten, mit Hilfe Gottes und unserer Routine wurde der 1. März in Prag ein großer Sieg für Dada.”<sup>34</sup> Hausmann’s montage thus not only offers a critical view of a mechanized, commodity-dominated world, it also celebrates a real triumph of Dada self-promotion.

This is not to say that the word “Dada” was only a brand name and nothing more. Although the near-ubiquity of this word in collages and other Dada works does contribute to a sort of brand identity, Dadaists also exploited the term’s commercial character to critical effect, using it in parodies of advertisements for products such as medicine and cosmetics.<sup>35</sup> Huelsenbeck’s “Erklärung,” for instance, boasted, “Dada ist die beste Medizin und verhilft zu einer glücklichen Ehe. Ihre Kindeskinde werden es Ihnen danken.”<sup>36</sup> By using “Dada” in place of other product names, Huelsenbeck highlighted the speciousness of this sort of commercial claim. But even when the Dadaists’ employment of commercial rhetoric did serve a critical purpose, the target of this critique was not necessarily the world of commerce itself. As Günther Eisenhuber writes:

Die Parodie richtet sich nicht allein gegen die Methoden kommerzieller Werbung. Ihre Anwendung auf den Bereich kultureller Angelegenheiten provoziert zugleich eine Reflexion über den Stellenwert von Kunst. Sie geschieht zwar zum einen mit dem Ziel, die gesellschaftliche Wirksamkeit der Kunstproduktion zu erhöhen, macht damit in kritischer Absicht aber auch offenbar, daß Kunstobjekte denselben Mechanismen unterliegen wie jede andere Ware auch.<sup>37</sup>

If the Dadaists readily embraced the potential of their brand name, they implied in doing so that other artists of their day were engaging in commerce as well, but with a bad conscience.

Dada’s name was not the only part of the movement modeled on commercial concerns. Tzara himself, Dada’s greatest promoter in Zurich and in Paris, attested, “Dada, lui aussi, a usé de la réclame, mais non pas comme d’un alibi, d’une illusion, d’une matière utilisable à des fins suggestives ou esthétiques. Il a mis la réalité même de la réclame au service de ses propres buts publicitaires.”<sup>38</sup> One example of a technique that Dada borrowed from the “Zauberbox der Werbung” was the array of small advertising cards created by Tzara and Paul Eluard, bearing slogans such as “Dada Société pour l’exploitation du vocabulaire. Directeur: Tristan Tzara,” and “Dada ne signifie rien. Si

l'on trouve futile et l'on ne perd son temps pour un mot qui ne signifie rien... Tristan Tzara," the latter line taken from Tzara's "Manifeste Dada 1918."<sup>39</sup> These cards were distributed in Paris, Zurich, and Geneva, where they were placed in locations including cafés and urinals. Eluard wrote to Tzara, "Tout le monde, tout le monde en reçoit. Et tout le monde est content de cette réclame pour vous."<sup>40</sup> Although Tzara's self-promotional streak at times drew criticism from other Dadaists – particularly from the contingent in Berlin, where political engagement played a greater role – the Berlin Dadaists nevertheless employed similar promotional tactics of their own. Huelsenbeck wrote that the first "Dada-Abend" in Berlin "war die erste große Reklame für uns; in der Reklame sind wir ja Meister."<sup>41</sup> Baader, the true master of sensational self-promotion in Berlin (generally employing unconventional, non-commercial methods), published his "reklame für mich. (rein geschäftlich)" in *Der Dada* No. 2, declaring himself "Präsident des Erdballs"<sup>42</sup>; and Grosz, nicknamed "Propagandada," recounted, "Ich hatte Parolen zu erfinden, die der guten Sache des Dadaismus nützen sollten. [...] Wir druckten diese Parolen auf kleine Zettel, und bald waren Schaufenster, Kaffeehaustische, Haustüren und dergleichen in ganz Berlin damit bepflanzt."<sup>43</sup> As Raimund Meyer writes, "Die Mittel der Werbung nachahmend und ausschöpfend, wurde dabei Dada gleich einem industriellen Produkt vertrieben."<sup>44</sup>

These publicity efforts frequently benefited from the indulgence of the press, as a columnist identified as "Dr. Frosch" noted in *Die Welt am Montag* in 1920:

Es gibt keinen [*sic*] Zahncreme und keine [*sic*] Nahrungsmittel, das einen so weitverzweigten und zu jedem Dienst willigen Reklameapparat besäße: und zwar ohne einen Pfennig Kosten. Die Absichten, die die Zeitungen dabei verfolgen, sind völlig piepe: sie leisten den Dienst, den Dadaismus zur Hausse zu treiben.<sup>45</sup>

Several Dadaists, including Tzara, Schwitters, and Walter Serner, were so invested in this media attention that they subscribed to newspaper clipping services to keep track of the latest articles.<sup>46</sup> This aspect of Dada's relationship to the media has been thoroughly documented in Harriett Watts' *Dada and the Press*, so it will not be discussed in detail here. Nevertheless, it is an important indication of the variety of ways in which the Dadaists made use of commercial and mass media, often exploiting them, as Tzara noted, in their "proper" capacity, as means to generate widespread publicity.

At times, the Berlin Dadaists even advertised their willingness to put their own publicity skills to commercial use: the proto-Dada publication *Neue Jugend* promoted a "Reklame-Beratung" service in 1917, and the establishment of a "Dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft" was announced in 1919.<sup>47</sup> All available evidence suggests that these agencies were purely fictional: Wieland Herzfelde, one of the purported members of the "Dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft," described the brochures as a "dadaistisch[e] Publikation, die jedermann ohne weiteres als Persiflage der bürgerlichen Geschäftsmoral erkennen muss."<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is tempting to see this advertising agency in the same satirical light as the clearly fictional services promised to members of "Club Dada" alongside it: "Vorzugspreise bei der Benutzung des *Dada-graphologischen* Instituts; der *Dada-Medizinalabteilung*; des *Dada-Detektivinstituts*; der *Reklame-Abteilung*" etc.<sup>49</sup> However, given that multiple members of the Berlin Dada circle, including Heartfield, Grosz, and

Hannah Höch, were trained and at times employed as commercial designers, the idea of a Dada advertising agency is not so improbable.<sup>50</sup> As Raimund Meyer has rightly observed:

Waren die Schaffung von Zentralämtern der Weltrevolution und die Ernennung von Präsidenten und Verleihung von Titeln eindeutig karikierend, blieben die dadaistischen Reklameabteilungen und -beratungen ambivalent. Bei diesen Briefkastenfirmen ging es nicht einfach um einen demaskierenden Angriff auf Lug und Trug einer Scheinwelt, indem man das Nichts zur Ware machte. Dieses subversive Ansinnen, 'dass die Reklame dada die Universalreklame, die Reklame überhaupt ist', war gepaart mit einer Faszination für Strategien, Formen, Sprachen und Zeichen der Reklame – nicht zuletzt auch für deren wirksame Präsenz im Alltag.<sup>51</sup>

If the other services on the "Club Dada" list are easily revealed to be a joke, the "*Reklame-Abteilung*," despite Herzfelde's protests, stands out for its plausibility.

Another episode that Herzfelde recounts likewise reflects this tension between satire and the genuine embrace of the tools of advertising. At a Dada performance in February 1919, in the middle of a sketch written by Huelsenbeck entitled "*Reklame-Büro-Dada-Bumbum*" and set in an advertising office, Erwin Piscator, George Grosz, and the other actors suddenly rebelled, telling Huelsenbeck, "Der Dadaismus ist doch nicht dazu da, um für deine Schnapsidee, du könntest mit ihm Reklame machen, Reklame zu machen. Das ist doch eine Zumutung!"<sup>52</sup> This confrontation, at least in Herzfelde's telling, was not concocted to entertain the audience; rather, it laid bare a real tension between Huelsenbeck and the other performers, who saw how he had transformed his fictional Dada advertising agency into an advertisement for Dada itself. Despite this tension, though, the invention of a "Dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft" helped to define Berlin Dada as a movement that prided itself on a savvy and cynical understanding of commercial media. As Hanne Bergius writes, "Die Künstler warben dort für sich als Reklameberater. Dieser erschien als der neue realistische Prototyp des Künstlers, der Kunst und Wirklichkeit, d.h. die Anforderungen der Warenwelt, mit seiner Arbeit vereinte und den Elfenbeinturm verließ."<sup>53</sup>

As both Meyer and Bergius indicate, Dada's imitation and appropriation of elements from the world of advertising cannot be seen simply as satirical. Rather, the Dadaists at once mocked the conventions of commercial media and embraced them, seeing them not only as elements of the contemporary world that any "Wirklichkeitsmensch," in Huelsenbeck's words, must be able to appreciate, but also as practically useful tools for self-promotion. The creation of imaginary advertising agencies thus served several distinct functions for the Dadaists: it was, in part, a way to parody the conventions of consumer culture and of advertising itself; but it was also a way to attack other artists who disingenuously asserted their independence of the market; and finally, it was a way for the Dadaists to create, and to publicize, their own identity as artists of a new and different stripe, well versed in the art of commerce.

Of course, the Dadaists were not content to simply imitate existing advertising methods and styles. One of Dada's lasting legacies was the influence that it exerted in its turn on the development of new techniques in design and typography, techniques that were quickly adopted by commercial advertisers. Along with innovations in



photomontage, in which Grosz, Heartfield, Hausmann, and Höch all played a part,<sup>54</sup> the Dadaists popularized new practices in typography, incorporating the influences of Mallarmé, Apollinaire, and Marinetti along with those of commercial publications. Although Richard Sheppard has justly argued against the reduction of Dada to a mere set of stylistic criteria, writing, “Dada is not, in the first place, an (anti)aesthetic at all,”<sup>55</sup> it must be acknowledged that a certain set of visual characteristics – most notably montage, fragmentation, and extreme typographic variation – quickly became a recognizable Dada trademark, and were just as quickly employed by others for marketing purposes. The Dadaists themselves even acknowledged the resemblance of their new practices to commercial advertising styles, though their expression of this insight carried a strong hint of irony: an advertisement for the “Dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft” that appeared in *Das kleine Journal* in 1921 promised, “Das Unternehmen will sich nicht allein auf rein dadaistische Ausführung beschränken, sondern Reklame-Plakate jeden Stils herstellen.”<sup>56</sup> This offer, even if it was meant in jest, betrays an awareness on the part of the Dadaists that their attention-getting visual techniques could easily be arrayed alongside the other tricks in the advertiser’s toolbox.

The potential of Dada design and typography to attract attention had been noticed outside of Dada circles as well, both in mainstream publications and in the trade journals of the advertising industry. As Sherwin Simmons notes, “By participating in the competitive world of publicity and making issues raised by advertising central elements of their practice, the Dadaists by late 1919 found their work discussed in the advertising journals as well as in the popular press.”<sup>57</sup> A 1919 editorial in the *New York Times* asked, “must they be accused of throwing bombs at literature and society? In the fine art of advertising their genius should be admitted even by their enemies.”<sup>58</sup> And a 1921 article on Dada in the *Boston Evening Transcript* opined, “DADA would, at any rate, make a huge success at courses in advertising.”<sup>59</sup> However, the responses to Dada from advertisers themselves, and from critics of art and advertising, were mixed. Adolf Behne, for instance, wrote of a poster for “Dada Reklame” by Raoul Hausmann that the “innere Spannung auf den ersten Blick fesselt, auch den, dem die Sache ‘nicht gefällt’”; but the editor of *Das Plakat*, in which Behne’s essay appeared, explicitly distanced himself from Behne’s view, inserting a footnote to declare it “Herrn Dr. Behnes Ansicht!” and captioning the poster, “Eine Scheußlichkeit, deren Wiedergabe Herr Dr. Behne ausdrücklich verlangte.”<sup>60</sup> Still, some traditional advertisers acknowledged the commercial viability of Dada design. Christof von Hartungen wrote, reluctantly but in the end approvingly, in *Psychologie der Reklame*:

Die Plakate und Zeichnungen der futuristischen, kubistischen, impressionistischen, dadaistischen und wie noch die restlichen hypermodernen Richtungen alle heißen mögen, bringen ganz besonders schwer leserliche Ankündigungen [...]. [Aber heute] werden Waren und Erzeugnisse der Technik und des Kunstgewerbes auf den Markt gebracht, die nur für einen kleinen Bruchteil der Gesamtheit des kaufenden Publikums Interesse haben. Füglich werden mit Recht, d.h. psychologisch richtig begründet, derartige Erzeugnisse oder Objekte mit einer Schrift angekündigt werden können, die wohl der großen Menge schwer leserlich, ich möchte fast sagen, unverständlich erscheint, dem Fachmanne dagegen

vertraut ist [...]. Dem Kenner wird die aparte, zusammengedrückte oder verzogene und verzerrte Schrift nicht schwer leserlich erscheinen, so daß das Moment des schwereren Erfassens wegfällt.<sup>61</sup>

Hartungen thus identifies the use of “difficult” typography and design as a way to increase the appeal of a product to a select group of consumers. By this logic, even the Dadaists’ more adventurous and chaotic typographic experiments may ultimately be seen as serving commercial ends, rather than undermining them. Of course, their typography also expressed their rejection of the view that the printed word is merely a neutral vehicle for conveying meaning, drawing attention instead to the materiality of the text. This emphasis was particularly pronounced in Dada poetry and print publications, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

The Dadaists’ embrace of advertising marked a new position in debates about art and commerce that were already underway in the first decades of the twentieth century. On one side, many representatives of industry touted the prospect of a symbiotic relationship between art and advertising or manufacturing, praising such cooperation as a way to make art more financially viable while making industrial products more aesthetically appealing. Peter Behrens, for instance, the architect, designer, and co-founder of the Deutscher Werkbund, argued in 1917: “Die Industrie hat es in der Hand, durch das Zusammenführen von Kunst und Technik Kultur zu schaffen.”<sup>62</sup> From the point of view of Behrens, as well as others in the advertising trade such as Eduard Plathhoff-Lejeune, Adolf Saager, and Ernst Growald, the benefits of such artistic advertising seemed limitless: industry would profit, the masses would receive an aesthetic education, the offensive excesses of common taste would be done away with, and artists would not only be employed, they would also become more fully integrated as productive members of society.<sup>63</sup> As Growald wrote, “Der intelligente Teil der Künstler hat die Scheu vor praktischer Betätigung abgelegt und findet darin Befriedigung und klingenden Lohn.”<sup>64</sup> On the other side, of course, were critics who attacked any artists who chose this profitable route. Prime candidates for criticism included Expressionists such as Ludwig Kirchner, who designed a display at the Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition in Cologne in 1914.<sup>65</sup> A review of this exhibition by Julius Meier-Graefe defined the relationship between art and industry in almost exactly the same terms as Growald, but rendered a different judgment:

Heute sind die ‘Künstler’ von ehemals nicht mehr Apostel, sondern Geschäftsleute, und recht gewiegte. Den Dank der Industrie streichen sie in klingender Münze ein. Man braucht sie nicht noch als Kulturhelden zu feiern, Kultur hat mit ihren Betätigungen ungemein wenig zu tun [...]. Drollig, wie die Bilder der Expressionisten und Kubisten restlos in diese ‘Wohnungskunst’ (Pardon!) aufgehen.<sup>66</sup>

For Meier-Graefe, art that entered into the service of industry thereby renounced its claim to cultural value.

The Dadaists, too, criticized the commercial exploits of the Expressionists, but with a somewhat different emphasis.<sup>67</sup> An essay entitled “Dada-Kunst” that appeared in the 1920 *Dada Almanach* under the name “Alexander Partens” (a collective pseudonym for Tristan Tzara, Walter Serner, and Hans Arp) began: “Expressionismus ist ein Plakatstil und hätte nicht erst in den Dienst eines Betriebs gestellt werden müssen, um

seine Ausdrücklichkeit endgültig einzubüßen.”<sup>68</sup> The criticism here was two-fold: first, Expressionism had always been merely decorative, and had never truly fulfilled its expressive promise; and second, it had further demeaned itself by becoming a handmaid to industry. Key to this attack, though, was the emphasis on the hypocrisy of Expressionism’s mix of commercial success and non-commercial pretense. Raoul Hausmann, for instance, wrote in “Der deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich” that Expressionism “ein kleines profitables Kriegsgechäft in einer endlos dicken Begeisterung fabrizierte. Der Leierkasten der reinen Dichtung, Malerei, Musik wurde in Deutschland auf einer äusserst tüchtigen Geschäftsbasis gespielt,” adding of Sturm-Galerie owner Herwarth Walden, “Sein Geschäftsgenie in Ehren, aber seine Aesthetik und sein Kunstpreußentum dorthin, woher sie stammen, ins Büro des Winkeladvokaten.”<sup>69</sup> These passages are illuminating not only as a commentary on Expressionism, but also as an indication of the attitude towards advertising and commerce shared by many Dadaists and manifested in their works. What Hausmann criticized was not the commercial success of Expressionism as such – indeed, he praised Walden’s “Geschäftsgenie” – but rather the attempts of Expressionists to stake a claim to “Geist” while doing a brisk commercial business. Ironically, as Simmons observes, “as commercial success grew, art criticism placed increasingly greater stress on Expressionism’s ‘spirituality.’”<sup>70</sup> It was this perceived contradiction that often prompted the attacks that the Dadaists launched against the Expressionists.

In focusing on the alleged hypocrisy of the Expressionists, the Dadaists articulated an alternative to the apparently fixed terms of the ongoing debate about the relationship between art and commerce. In texts such as those by Behrens and Growald, the terms of the debate appeared to be relatively set: art was a tool that could be employed for the benefit of industry; the only point of contention was whether that benefit might be mutual. At the other extreme were critics who denounced any commercial employment of artistic techniques as a corruption of artistic purity. But for Hausmann and others, this alleged divide between art and commerce was an artificial one to begin with. On the one hand, as their criticisms of the Expressionists indicated, art was already implicated in commerce, and any art that denied this was disingenuous; thus, rather than trying to outdo the Expressionists in purity, the Dadaists renounced any claim to the “Leierkasten der reinen Dichtung, Malerei, Musik,” adopting a view of commerce as a part of modern reality that could, or even should, have a place in art.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, many Dadaists found that commercial and mass media offered new means of artistic production that were more adequate to the demands of the modern, urban world than traditional artistic forms. Particularly in the realm of print publications, many Dadaists adopted graphic and typographic strategies that had originated in commercial and mass media. While these borrowings have frequently been viewed as an attack on those media themselves, the focus in the following discussion will be on the Dadaists’ productive appropriations, their embrace of commercial techniques, particularly in their poetry and print publications. What emerges from a close analysis of these publications is not only a testing of the boundaries between art and advertising, but also a conviction that these media offer more adequate tools than traditional forms of art for confronting both the aesthetic and the political problems of modernity.

## Dada Poetry and Publications

In his “Manifeste Dada 1918,” Tristan Tzara wrote, “la réclame et les affaires sont aussi des éléments poétiques.”<sup>72</sup> This general assertion took a variety of concrete forms in the context of Dada poetry. Some Dada poets, such as Tzara and Arp, experimented with the use of newspapers and advertisements as source material for poems, or incorporated brand names and advertising slogans into their poems to simulate the experience of the urban world of commerce and advertising. Perhaps most notable, though, is the way that Dada poets made use of elements of typography and design characteristic of street advertisements, newspapers, and illustrated magazines. These elements played an integral role in shaping the meaning of the poems that appeared in publications such as the Zurich-based *Dada* and the Berlin-based *Der Dada*. Frequently, the juxtaposition of poems to other content in Dada publications challenged the separation of art and commerce, casting doubt on the idea that a poem could exist in an autonomous sphere independent of the commercial media around it. As Timothy Shipe has noted, in the magazine *Dada 3* “[a]dvertisements for recent publications of the Zurich Dadaists are placed among the other pieces as an integral part of the assemblage.”<sup>73</sup> Thus the following discussion will consider Dada poems not as linguistic abstractions, but rather as printed texts located in both literary and commercial contexts, often positioned on a page alongside printer’s ornaments or even genuine advertisements.

This focus on the materiality of these texts also draws attention to other key characteristics of Dada poetry that point beyond the relationship of art and commerce, and towards the Dadaists’ broader engagement with modern media technologies. Of course, many of the Dadaists’ most notable experiments took place in the medium of print, particularly in the pairing of word and image. But some Dada poems also confronted the implications that other modern media, such as the telegraph, could have for the function of language and the potential of poetry. The examples cited here will demonstrate that the prominence of “nonsense” in Dada poetry need not be explained solely as a reaction to the chaos of the First World War, or as a wholesale rejection of meaning; rather, it can also be seen more specifically as a reckoning with the impact of these new media. Brand names and advertising offered models for the non-semantic use of language, while print media and telegraph codes provided fertile ground for a poetic movement that treated language as ready-made material. Consequently, many of the most distinctive poetic works that emerged from the Dada movement dispensed with the subjectivity of traditional lyric poetry (and of their Expressionist contemporaries), or did away with semantics entirely. As the following discussion will show, this shift was not only a response to the political turmoil from which Dada emerged; it was also an attempt to find new poetic forms that could adequately account for the radical challenge that these modern media posed.

### *Newspaper Poems: Hans Arp and Tristan Tzara*

The newspaper may have been the Dadaist medium *par excellence*. As the case study of *Neue Jugend* in Chapter Two will show, the newspaper was not only endowed with both popular and political importance, it was also characterized in formal terms by

the juxtaposition of apparently incongruous contents. As Theo van Doesburg wrote in 1923, “Dada ist die Zeitung, die mit allerlei Finessen ausführlich über ein Verbrechen berichtet (was der Leser, Mitleid vortäuschend, gierig genießt), dann auf derselben Seite eine Anzeige für ein neues wirksames Mittel gegen rheumatische Anfälle bringt und gleich darunter die Mitteilung über das Auftauchen des ersten Maikäfers in Amersfoort.”<sup>74</sup> The absence of any distinction between high and low, between trivial and consequential, between commercial and editorial content in many newspapers was mirrored in the Dadaists’ own rejection of such categorial dichotomies. This aesthetic of simultaneity was made more vivid by the newspaper’s design: in Marshall McLuhan’s words, “there was a new art form of universal scope present in the technical layout of the modern newspaper. Here is a major instance of how a by-product of industrial imagination, a genuine agency of contemporary folklore, led to radical artistic developments.”<sup>75</sup> Thus the newspaper, particularly the popular illustrated newspaper, provided the Dadaists with new formal strategies that informed a number of their publications. At the same time, the newspaper gave rise to new compositional practices used by several Dada poets, most notably Hans Arp and Tristan Tzara. Both poets used newspapers as ready-made material, cutting up articles and creating new poetic works from the words. These poems not only challenged the divide between high and low, literary and popular media, they also conveyed a sense that the sheer ubiquity of text-based media threatened to empty language of its content, so that the words on a page were no longer bearers of meaning or instruments of subjective expression, but rather mere objects to be manipulated, and random or at will.

Arp employed chance procedures when composing the poems that he called his “Arpaden.” In works such as “Weltwunder,” Arp’s borrowings from advertising and the press are readily apparent. The poem begins, “WELTWUNDER sendet sofort karte hier ist ein teil vom schwein alle 12 teile zusammengesetzt flach aufgeklebt sollen die deutliche seitliche form eines ausschneidebogens ergeben staunend billig alles kauft.”<sup>76</sup> Here Arp plays with the rhetoric of advertising and, notably, inverts it: rather than a cut-out sheet being assembled to form a pig, the parts of a pig may be assembled to form a cut-out sheet. The hyperbole, and even absurdity, of advertising rhetoric primarily serves the ends of satire in this passage. Soon after, though, there follows a different sort of advertisement: “ARP ist da keiner versäume es erstens ist es staunend billig und zweitens kostet es viel.” This self-advertisement returns on the following page: “achtung achtung achtung / sensation position hallucination / quallitatsdada / by steegemann hannover / ARP ist einer der fünf großen dadaistischen päpste / begründer des dadaismus / originaldada / echter spiegelgassedada nicht zu verwechseln mit den / spiegelberger dadas / [...] / ich steegemann habe das copyright für die wolken- / pumpe.”<sup>77</sup> Arp not only introduces language taken directly from advertisements into his poetry, he also employs the rhetoric of advertising in his own characteristically Dada fashion, equivocating between satire and self-promotion. Both of these gestures reflect an underlying refusal to discriminate between poetry and the language of commercial media, a stance that positions poetry not apart from, but rather in the midst of the marketplace. Further, Arp’s “Weltwunder” presents its own creator not as a coherent lyric subject who gives voice to the poem, but rather as a quasi-commodified figure offered up for sale. The fact that Arp even introduces the voice of his publisher, Steegemann, into his poem,

staking a claim to the poem's copyright, emphasizes the extent to which not only the poem, but also the poet himself, has become the object of a commercial transaction. Thus Arp's use of advertising rhetoric is neither pure parody nor pure self-promotion. Instead, it draws attention – both critical and self-congratulatory – to the poet or artist as a figure immersed in the language, pace, and rhetoric of an advertising-saturated world.<sup>78</sup> “Weltwunder” is at once a parody of advertising and a genuine self-advertisement, a quintessentially Dada claim to authenticity that functions precisely because its sincerity is always in question.

Like Arp, Tzara composed poems – or at least a single poem – from scraps of newspaper selected at random. He described the procedure in his “Dada Manifeste sur l'Amour Faible et l'Amour Amer,” writing:

Pour faire un poème dadaïste.  
Prenez un journal.  
Prenez des ciseaux.  
Choisissez dans ce journal un article ayant la longueur que vous comptez donner à votre poème.  
Découpez l'article.  
Découpez ensuite avec soin chacun des mots qui forment cet article et mettez-les dans un sac.  
Agitez doucement.  
Sortez ensuite chaque coupure l'une après l'autre.  
Copiez consciencieusement  
dans l'ordre où elles ont quitté le sac.  
Le poème vous ressemblera.  
Et vous voilà un écrivain infiniment original et d'une sensibilité charmante, encore qu'incomprise du vulgaire.<sup>79</sup>

This gesture is frequently interpreted as an attack on the semiotic regime of the newspaper, a position endorsed by John D. Erickson, among others: “In effect, Tzara's act of cutting up a newspaper – that cultural object that more than any stands for empirical truth – represents [...] a deconstruction of the cultural sign system.”<sup>80</sup> However, Eric Robertson has criticized interpretations such as this, arguing:

The anti-poetics encapsulated [in Tzara's procedure] has become emblematic of a popular mythology in which Dada is portrayed as a playfully anarchic movement intent on demolishing all aesthetic criteria and banishing them from the production and reception of art, to such an extent that once the din of iconoclasm has subsided, one is left with nothing of any lasting substance. As some critics have suggested, however, an interpretation of this kind not only devalues the genuine impact and originality of Dada, but also misrepresents the serious aims that underpinned its ostensibly flippant gestures.<sup>81</sup>

This is an important corrective to analyses such as Erickson's that place too much emphasis on what it was that the Dadaists sought to challenge or destroy, and too little on the positive content of their artistic production. For the most part, there was no question of the newspaper standing for empirical truth – this was not a claim that the Dadaists seriously entertained, but nor was it one that required explicit refutation. To be sure,

many Dadaists, particularly in Berlin, subjected the reactionary press to its fair share of abuse. But to suppose, as Erickson and many other critics do, that the Dadaists felt the need to repeatedly remind themselves and their audience that mass media were misleading is to underestimate the obviousness of this claim. Rather than an attack on the newspaper, then, Tzara's gesture might better be seen as a step towards a new poetics of mass media. The choice to cut up a newspaper – as opposed to a Bible, a bourgeois novel, or an Expressionist poem, for instance – can be understood not as a rejection of the newspaper as a symbol of power and control, but rather as an acknowledgement of the newspaper as a medium that had thoroughly permeated modern society and transformed the conditions of reading and writing.

For both Arp and Tzara, the integration of newspaper clippings into poems indicated that the language of poetry could not be preserved as a sanctuary from the language of journalism or advertising. It was no longer possible to oppose, as Hegel had done, “die echte lyrische Kunstpoesie” to “[der] bereits vorhandenen Prosa” of the outside world. By taking the words of the newspaper as their source material, Arp and Tzara implied that all composition is ultimately nothing but the recombination of ready-made elements, the kind of prefabricated language that Ball had denounced when he said, “Ich will keine Worte, die andere erfunden haben. Alle Worte haben andere erfunden.”<sup>82</sup> Whereas Ball saw this as an indictment of language, and sought to escape this ready-made character in his sound poems, Tzara and Arp used the same insight as the basis for a critique of poetic subjectivity itself. Tzara's remark, “Le poème vous ressemblera,” satirizes traditional views of poetry as a means of self-expression, while Arp's “ARP ist da keiner versäume es erstens ist es staunend billig und zweitens kostet es viel” transforms the poet himself into a consumer product. Rather than attempting to carve out a separate realm of poetic language untainted by the stain of commerce, Tzara and Arp envision the poet as a figure immersed in the commercial world, to such an extent that the reflective lyric subject is replaced by an impersonal string of mass-produced words and phrases.

This challenge to subjectivity is further strengthened by the use of chance-driven compositional procedures.<sup>83</sup> The conclusion of Tzara's instructions – “Et vous voilà un écrivain infiniment original et d'une sensibilité charmante, encore qu'incomprise du vulgaire” – highlights the threat that this chance-based method poses to the concept of artistic genius. Tzara's ironic invocation of this Romantic trope exposes the uncomfortable fit between the traditional model of the lyric subject and the real textual conditions of modern life. In this way, Tzara draws attention to the fundamental questions that these Dada poems pose: how must poetry adapt in order to adequately respond to the new conditions of modern media? What does the materiality of language mean for the lyric subject, or for meaning itself? Rather than a flippant rejection of the newspaper's claim to truth, then, Arp's and Tzara's newspaper poems can be seen as attempts to answer, or at least to broach, these fundamental questions about the place of poetry in the modern media age.

Other notable attempts to address these questions can be found in the formally radical poetic experiments of Hugo Ball and Raoul Hausmann. These works take the fragmentation of language even further than the newspaper poems of Arp and Tzara, reducing language not just to the word, but to the spoken phoneme or the printed letter. Both for Ball and for Hausmann, the abandonment of semantics and the return to the most basic elements of language can be seen as a rejection of the pragmatic functions that language serves in everyday life in favor of the sensual, material reality of language itself. The central role of orality, particularly for Ball, also reflects an identification of the spoken word or sound with the sacred, in contrast to the profane realm of print. But along with drawing this distinction between the qualities of spoken and written or printed language, Ball's and Hausmann's "nonsense" poems also manifest connections to modern media such as the telegraph and the radio. These poems can thus be understood not as wholesale rejections of semantic coherence, but rather as poetic responses to new modes of communication whose meaning must be made out against a background of noise, or via the decryption of encoded forms.

In Ball's poem "Karawane," which he first read in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, traces of words can be made out through what initially appears to be nonsense. Particularly with the help of the context that the title provides, it is not difficult to recognize "jolifanto" as "Elefant," "horem" as "Harem," and "russula" perhaps as "Rüssel," an elephant's trunk.<sup>84</sup> Several other words (such as "habla") either come from foreign languages or resemble them, thus contributing to the poem's "exotic" atmosphere, while some passages (such as the repeated "blago bung") seem best understood as onomatopoeia. However, a reading that seeks to derive unambiguous sense from Ball's poem on the basis of the printed text certainly misses the aspects that made the poem most distinctive: the relative absence of meaning, and Ball's impassioned oral performance. Accounts of Ball's reading, for which he donned a canister-like metal costume, generally emphasize the almost religious, liturgical tone that the poem took on, which together with the costume earned him the nickname "the magic bishop."<sup>85</sup> This religious tone also reflects the connection that Marshall McLuhan observes between orality and the sacred, as opposed to print and the profane.<sup>86</sup> Ball's performance reflects precisely the link between the sacred and the auditory mode that McLuhan posits, and it is through a return to orality that Ball attempts to escape the profane language of journalism and commerce.

What has generally gone unnoticed, however, is the way that Ball's return to orality augurs what McLuhan would later call "our present shift into the auditory mode of electronic man."<sup>87</sup> Dressed in his metal canister, Ball did not resemble a bishop so much as a radio antenna, and the recognizable words that break through the background of nonsense in "Karawane" are not unlike the crackling of a radio signal. In fact, the same year that Ball recited "Karawane" on stage at the Cabaret Voltaire, a French correspondent described the cacophony of telegraph signals heard on board a ship in terms that might just as well refer to Ball's poem:

For the initiated the electric radiations have a personality like human speech. [...] It is a concert almost magical. [...] you would say a goblin




symphony in some wide wilderness, and yet the least of these vibrations is a message of war, of life and of death. [...] They all use only secret languages. This perpetual chatter contains no word, no phrase which any one can understand unless he possesses the key on which rests the safety of ships. Cipher, cipher, cipher, nothing else circulates in space.<sup>88</sup>

The “voices” described here are telegraph signals, not human voices (though the human voice had been broadcast on the radio by this time). But these signals “have a personality like human speech,” even though they are encrypted and cannot be understood. Hugo Ball, standing on stage in a metallic costume in neutral Switzerland, acted as a receiver for all of these electronic voices, channeling them into an equally inscrutable human speech. If “Karawane” represents a return from print to orality, it might best be seen not as a regression to “primal” incantations, but as a move towards the “secondary orality” of electronic media.<sup>89</sup>

An interesting transformation occurred, however, when Ball’s “Karawane” was given typographic form. The poem was included in Richard Huelsenbeck’s *Dada Almanach*, and it appeared in the proofs of the anthology *Dadaco* (which was never actually published). In both settings, each line of the poem was printed in a different font. In addition, the *Dadaco* version made selective use of red ink, and placed the poem next to a photograph of Ball performing in his costume (Fig. 3). One function of this typographic variation was to provide a sort of visual corollary to the varying tones in which the poem had been performed. In this respect, the poem’s typography offered a solution to the problem of how to commit Ball’s dramatic delivery to paper. But as Steven Heller has noted, the use of a different font for each line also caused “Karawane” to resemble a printer’s type specimen book.<sup>90</sup> This resemblance drew attention to the typesetting process itself, thus emphasizing the fact that Ball’s poem had entered the world of mass-produced print media – exactly the sort of degraded language that Ball himself had condemned. The inclusion of Ball’s photograph in the *Dadaco* proofs could even be said to give the page the appearance of an advertising poster, in which “all the typefaces at the printer’s disposal were utilized simultaneously in order to produce the maximum visual impact.”<sup>91</sup> Considered in this light, the poem’s typography had an effect quite the opposite of what Ball had intended, not emphasizing his rejection of a language debased by everyday use, but rather placing an apparently abstract text in closer proximity to the language of commerce. The variety of fonts, faces, and colors translated Ball’s poem from the spoken language of the “magic bishop” into the printed language of commercial media.

For Raoul Hausmann, the use of print media was less fraught with contradiction, and more consistent with a larger program of experimentation. In Berlin, Hausmann undertook experiments with sound and visual poetry that were in some ways similar to Ball’s in Zurich, though Hausmann claimed to have developed his ideas independent of Ball’s influence.<sup>92</sup> The relationship between the written or printed letter and the spoken sound was of particular interest to Hausmann, as evidenced by his “optophonetische Poesie,” in which he used typographic variation to suggest differences in volume or pronunciation. But even where this variation is lacking, the relationship between sound and print is frequently emphasized in Hausmann’s work. One example is the poem “fmsbw” (Fig. 4), which occupies a noteworthy position at the nexus of sound and visual

poetry: it began in typographic form as a *Plakatgedicht*, but Hausmann's performance of this poem inspired Kurt Schwitters' "Ursonate," which in turn went through multiple oral and typographic incarnations before receiving its final form from the typographer Jan Tschichold in 1932. Particularly notable are the elements in Hausmann's poem that *cannot* be vocalized: the initial string of consonants "fmsbw" is nearly unpronounceable, and the sequence of punctuation marks "-..?" in the second line does not lend itself to oral performance.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, in Hausmann's *Plakatgedicht* "OFFEAH" (Fig. 5), several elements draw attention to the poem's materiality as a printed object, and to the difficulty or impossibility of fully translating this poem into speech: the tails of the commas and the descenders of the three minuscules in the series "„qjy" provide a unity that is purely visual, and the *Anzeigehand*  is hardly vocalizable, but it links the poem visually to many other Dada texts and collages, as well as to the world of advertising. Thus these poems can be seen not only as explorations of the imperfect correspondence between sound and type, but also as examples of the fascination with print media that Hausmann shared with many other Dadaists.

In his account "Zur Geschichte des Lautgedichts," Hausmann initially focuses on the phonetic aspect of his "'lettrische' Poesie," but then recounts:

Schließlich und endlich, Buchstabengedichte sind wohl auch zum Sehen da, aber auch zum ANsehen – warum also nicht Plakate aus ihnen machen? Auf verschiedenfarbigem Papier und in großen Buchstaben? Das wäre, Dunnerschlag, noch nicht dagewesen [...]. Ein kleines f zuerst, dann ein m, dann ein s, ein b, eh, was nun? Na, ein w und ein t und so weiter und so weiter, eine große écriture automatique mit Fragezeichen, Ausrufezeichen und selbst einer Anzeigehand dazwischen! Wirklich, der Setzer war sehr intelligent, ohne ihn wäre das nie zustande gekommen! Und da man schon einmal dabei war, so wurden vier verschiedene Plakate gesetzt, dann auf ziegelrotem, auf grünem und auf gelbem Papier gedruckt – das sah wunderbar aus. [...] Das war wirklich eine Sache, die die Herren Dichter, auch die vom 'Sturm' etwa, erstaunen mußte!<sup>94</sup>

Hausmann's account of the creation of his *Plakatgedichte* not only emphasizes the improvisatory nature of the compositional process, it also highlights the visual appeal of the large printed letters, as well as the poems' potential to generate attention even, or especially, in the absence of any identifiable content. The effect that Hausmann imagines the poems having is clearly attributable not only to the arbitrary and meaningless arrangement of the letters, but also to their large and colorful presentation, much like the neon lights that Kracauer described.

This sensual appeal of the *Plakatgedichte* has frequently been overlooked. According to Kuenzli, for instance, "By arbitrarily forming sequences of letters, Hausmann pointed to the arbitrariness of any word and any text, thus undermining their claim to adequate expression or truth. [...] Hausmann's poster poems, which he hung all over Berlin, were an attempt to liberate people from their servile adherence to socially constructed language."<sup>95</sup> While the first part of this reading rightly acknowledges the challenge that such non-semantic texts posed to semantics as such, the second part falls into the same pattern that Eric Robertson criticized in the passage cited above, emphasizing the ostensibly subversive intent of these works while ignoring their

constructive character.<sup>96</sup> While it is true that Hausmann himself described these poems as a response to the irrationality of language, there is also a simple desire for novelty implied in his claim that “die ‘lettrische’ Poesie [...] war auch auf der Notwendigkeit, eine neue sprachliche Ausdrucksform zu finden, aufgebaut.”<sup>97</sup> If Hausmann’s poster poems were in part a confrontation with the arbitrariness of language, they were also a demonstration of the visual efficacy that print media maintain even in the absence of any recognizable semantic content. Rather than focusing on the lack of explicit meaning in these poems, then, it is important to consider the communicative power of the media themselves – a power that Hausmann and many other Dadaists exploited to great advantage.

Finally, in Hausmann’s “‘lettrische’ Poesie,” as in Ball’s *Lautgedichte*, the influence (whether conscious or unconscious) of new electronic media can be seen: the medium in question here is the telegraph, together with the genre of code books that it inspired. *The ABC Telegraph Code*, for instance, abbreviated phrases using a hybrid of real language and nonsense letters: all of the codes under the key word “abandon,” for example, started with “aba-,” but the individual abbreviations were pseudo-words like “abalizo,” which stood for “Had to abandon her as our coal supply ran out” (Fig. 6).<sup>98</sup> Other code books encoded phrases as completely arbitrary sequences of five letters that bore no more resemblance to the words of any natural language than did Hausmann’s *Plakatgedichte*.<sup>99</sup> The possibility that Hausmann had these telegraph codes in mind when composing his *Plakatgedichte*, or at least recognized the resemblance in retrospect, is suggested by the announcement for a reading that Hausmann held on March 12, 1919 along with Johannes Baader. As Barbara Lindlar writes:

Die Anzeige zu dieser Veranstaltung, die [Hausmann] zusammen mit Baader im Cafe Austria abhält, kündigt an, der ‘Präsident der Sonne, des Mondes und der kleinen Erde [Hausmann] wird die neuesten Radiotelegramme bekanntgeben’. Dabei handelt es sich höchstwahrscheinlich um die auf Buchstaben verkürzte Sprache seiner neuen Gedichte. Gleichzeitig ist dies eine ironische Aufnahme der Kritik des Dichters Alfred Döblin an der futuristischen Literatur: Döblin kritisierte 1912 deren ‘Telegrammstil.’<sup>100</sup>

In fact, the Futurists had not only adopted the style of the telegram for their literary works; Filippo Marinetti had also included fragments of a telegraph code book in his 1919 collage *Une Assemblée Tumultueuse. Sensibilité Numérique* (Fig. 7). The fascination that these code books held for avant-garde artists was not simply an effect of the rapid transmission that the telegraph allowed, which, after all, was no longer a novelty by the 1910s. Rather, these code books were of particular interest for the way that they altered the relationship between the sender of the message and its content. As argued in the introduction to this study, telegraph codes created a split between the sender and the content of the message, drawing attention to the telegram’s ready-made and mediated status. Like Arp and Tzara in their newspaper poems, Hausmann in his *Plakatgedichte* treated language as pure material, free of any sort of authorial subjectivity. But the challenge that these poems posed to semantics and subjectivity did not originate in the aesthetic realm; rather, these poems reflected transformations in language that had

already been brought about by the development of new media technologies such as the radio and the telegraph.

*The Poetry of the Press I: Tzara and Dada Magazine*

In 1975, the journal *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* published the following anecdote in its issue “Dada – Neodada – Kryptodada – ?”:

Tristan Tzara ging am 15. Juli 1917 in Zürich auf die Hauptpost und gab folgendes Telegramm [sic] auf: DADA DADA, in DADA, DADASTRASSE DADA; Text: DADA DADA + DADA+ DADA DADA DADA + DADA DADA+ DADA DADA DADA+ Unterschrift: DADA. Der Postbeamte las den Text, zählte und sagte: Siebzehn Wörter, weil die Adresse mitzählt; zwanzig Wörter sind die Mindestzahl, die müssen Sie sowieso bezahlen. Sie können also ruhig noch dreimal DADA dazutelegraphieren. Tristan Tzara: Wo denken Sie hin! Das würde den Text völlig entstellen.<sup>101</sup>

The story is certainly apocryphal, but it nicely exemplifies the serious game in which Tzara and other Dadaists engaged with the media of their day. Just as the word “Dada” was able to signify everything because it signified nothing, many Dada texts explored the aesthetic potential of a language liberated from semantics – a language that was, at least in part, the product of mass media, advertising, and technologies such as the telegraph. While these explorations (like Tzara’s imagined outrage in the telegraph office) frequently included elements of parody or deadpan satire, it would be an oversimplification to see the Dadaists’ interaction with these media as wholly or even primarily critical. Rather, even in the works that most explicitly incorporated the commercial elements of mass media, these media were not only an object, but also an instrument of critique. This can be seen in several of the short-lived journals that emerged in the course of the Dada movement, such as Tzara’s Zurich-based *Dada* and Hausmann’s Berlin-based *Der Dada*.<sup>102</sup> In both of these publications, the conventions of the commercial press are parodied and travestied, but at the same time they are taken seriously insofar as they offer new aesthetic forms and an implicit critique of traditional concepts of semantics and subjectivity.

Tristan Tzara’s *Dada* magazine exemplifies the variety of ways in which advertising and print media contributed to the formal vocabulary of Dada poetry, while its layouts also implicitly comment on the relationship of art and literature to commercial culture. At times, Tzara’s typographic experiments borrow from older printing and advertising practices, creating “a scrapbook sense of order, typical of the busy pages of nineteenth-century gazettes and of the many ads tucked alongside the editorial features of daily papers.”<sup>103</sup> Tzara’s use of outmoded typographic and visual elements has an effect that is at once nostalgic and distancing, allowing material taken from advertising or mass media to be experienced not as a means to a commercial end, but rather as an object with an appeal quite independent of its original purpose. In these instances, Tzara explores the aesthetic potential of commercial media while also challenging the division between art and kitsch, suggesting that images or designs typically dismissed as merely commercial may in fact possess aesthetic value.

But Tzara's blurring of the boundaries between art and commerce frequently follows a quite different path from this aesthetic rehabilitation of commercial media. Particularly in his designs for *Dada* magazine, advertising appears to encroach on the territory of art and poetry, thus casting doubt on any notion of art's autonomy or independence of the commercial world. *Dada* was published in Zurich from 1917 to 1919, with two additional issues appearing in Paris in 1920. While the first two issues are quite conventional in their typography and design, *Dada 3*, published in December 1918, represents a radical departure, employing a wide variety of fonts within individual texts, juxtaposing unrelated texts on a single page, and presenting advertising in a manner that makes it almost indistinguishable from the magazine's literary content.<sup>104</sup> Guido Magnaguagno and Hans Bolliger have written, "Tzara's wichtigster visueller Beitrag zum Zürcher Dadaismus war die Herausgabe von Zeitschriften, deren typographische Unbekümmertheit und waghalsige Kombinationen von Text und Bild mehr als deren Inhalte *Dada* so unverwechselbar gemacht haben."<sup>105</sup> While this assessment may do a disservice to the content of those publications, it is certainly true that the typography and layout of Tzara's magazines have a profound influence on the way that their content is understood, and that the interplay of content and design is a central source of interest and tension in *Dada* from the third issue on. Tzara's designs not only draw inspiration from commercial publications, they also reinforce the commercial elements already present in some of the poetry in the magazine. In Johanna Drucker's words, "The registers slip so easily, one to the other, that the advertisement becomes part of the poem which is itself continually crossing the boundaries between the language of commodity promotion and that of poetic imagery."<sup>106</sup>

Even the cover of *Dada 3* makes it clear that this issue will have little in common with *Dada 1* and *2* (Fig. 8). The red cover of each of the previous issues featured only the publication's title, date, and the subtitle "Recueil Littéraire et Artistique," along with a small black woodcut. *Dada 3*, in contrast, dispenses with the subtitle, featuring instead a quote attributed to Descartes, "Je ne veux même pas savoir s'il y a eu des hommes avant moi" printed diagonally across the page, an open declaration of the magazine's rejection of tradition. Further provocations can be seen in the inclusion of information on the front cover of this issue that had previously been discreetly confined to the back, such as the name and address of the "Administration Mouvement DADA" and the price of the issue, Fr. 1.50. The refined appearance of the first two issues is thus replaced by a colorful, attention-getting design that boldly announces the magazine as a product for sale. Richard Huelsenbeck, who was in Berlin by the time *Dada 3* appeared, wrote that the magazine "ihren Weg in alle Länder Europas nahm und viel gekauft wurde. Wir haben sie auch in Deutschland gesehen und durchaus den Eindruck einer kunstgewerblichen Leistung gehabt."<sup>107</sup>

Inside, too, *Dada 3* takes a more aggressively self-promotional approach than the previous issues. Whereas each of the first two issues began with a brief "Note sur l'Art" by Tzara, *Dada 3* begins with his "Manifeste Dada 1918," an essay that draws attention as much to Dada and to Tzara himself as to any particular program. Presented as a sort of anti-manifesto (Tzara writes, "J'écris un manifeste et je ne veux rien, je dis pourtant certaines choses, et je suis par principe contre les manifestes, comme je suis aussi contre les principes"), this piece positions Dada above all as a rejection of logic and an

acceptance of contradictions, rebuffing any attempts to define it more precisely. The typography of the manifesto likewise makes claims on the reader's attention: the *Anzeigehand* is used to emphasize the phrase "Dada ne signifie rein," and the word "Dada" stands out clearly in the final paragraph, where it is printed in at least twelve different fonts. In addition, the principle of visual juxtaposition that characterizes the rest of the magazine is present to some degree in the manifesto: a "Note" runs down the left margin of the first page; the word "Crier! *CRIER!*" is repeated in the right margin alongside the final paragraph; and the space remaining on the last page of the manifesto is filled by a small woodcut and a poem. This layout, in which texts and visual art bump up against each other rather than being allotted their own space, introduces a design aesthetic more characteristic of popular magazines than of conventional journals – or even of the previous issues of *Dada*. But such juxtaposition was not limited to the co-existence of literature and visual art; rather, it also extended to the pairing of aesthetic content with advertising. The poems that appear on the two pages following Tzara's manifesto are accompanied by advertisements for books or magazines published by the same poets. With this gesture, Tzara dispenses with the delicate balance between art and commerce that he had maintained by confining advertisements to the back pages of *Dada* 1 and 2.

The appearance of advertisements next to the magazine's literary content does not only represent the slow creep of the commercial into the realm of the aesthetic; rather, by placing these advertisements alongside poems by the same authors, Tzara suggests that the poems are themselves part of the advertisement. As Drucker has written, "a continual chain of signifying elements was established which never led to any particular or final commodity. The publicity was the poetry and the signifying chain of commodification could not be closed."<sup>108</sup> A somewhat more complicated give-and-take between poetry and advertising occurs a few pages later, where a two-page spread features a poem by Paul Dermée, three by Tzara, two woodcuts by Marcel Janco, one by Arp, and two advertisements – one for a book by Tzara with woodcuts by Janco, and one for a book by Tzara with woodcuts by Arp. The effect of this juxtaposition of poetry, art, and advertising is amplified by the fact that Tzara's poems themselves incorporate language and typography borrowed from advertising and journalism. There are hints of commercial language in Tzara's poem "Calendrier," which includes lines such as "j'aime les accessoires de bureau par exemple," but these hints become much more pronounced in the poem "Bulletin."<sup>109</sup> Drucker observes that that poem's title identifies the work with a journalistic rather than a literary genre, calling it "a non-title, a naming of a type, category, of language production, the bulletin, rapid-fire announcement."<sup>110</sup> In addition, "Bulletin" is made up of grammatical fragments, with each line set in a different font. This varied typography, together with the inclusion of such incongruous phrases as "5ème crime à l'horizon 2 accidents chanson pour violon," strongly suggests that the poem's words and phrases are drawn from newspapers, advertisements, and other print media.

Removed from their original contexts, these phrases take on new significance within Tzara's poem. Tzara provides a clue to the poem's thematic center in his dedication: "à Francis Picabia qui saute avec / de grandes et de petites idées de New-York à Bex / A.B. = spectacle / POUR L'ANÉANTISSEMENT DE L'ANCIENNE

BEAUTÉ & Co.” According to Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, what Picabia represented to the Zurich Dadaists was “den Prototyp eines neuen international agierenden Künstlers. Durch seine guten Kontakte zum amerikanischen Dadaismus war Picabia zweifellos ein interessanter Mittelsmann. Immerhin gehörte er zu den wenigen Künstlern, die sich auf Grund finanzieller Unabhängigkeit Transatlantikreisen überhaupt leisten konnte.”<sup>111</sup> At the time that *Dada 3* was published, Picabia was living in Bex-les-Bains, Switzerland, where he had been sent by his doctor for the sake of his health during the Spanish flu pandemic. Tzara had not yet met Picabia, but greatly admired him, and had invited him to come to Zurich for a visit. Given this context, certain motifs stand out in the poem, particularly the motifs of health, respiration, and travel: “âme dégonflée dans les annonces offerte”; “renferme le pouls laboratoire du courage à toute heure / santé stilisée au sang inanimé de cigarette éteinte”; “on tapisse les parcs avec des cartes géographiques”; etc. Although it would be disingenuous to claim any clear thematic unity in a poem that adopts fragmentation as a basic structural principle, “Bulletin” appears at times to be a meditation, if a distracted one, on Picabia’s travels and the state of his health.

Still, Tzara’s incorporation into his poem of phrases apparently taken from commercial media can hardly be seen as an aesthetic transfiguration. Rather, by drawing on those media, Tzara rejects the distinction between the commercial and aesthetic functions of language. As Drucker has observed, the poem’s varied typography “provides an indexical link to the referential fields of journalistic language,” as the individual lines “bear the material traces of their original sites in their typographic form.”<sup>112</sup> Rather than transforming advertising or journalism into poetry, Tzara infuses his poetry with the language of journalism and advertising. In doing so, Tzara makes his own contribution to Picabia’s envisioned “ANNIHILATION OF ANCIENT BEAUTY & Co.”: as that phrase suggests, Tzara’s incorporation of commercial media into his poetry is not only an affront to traditional standards, but also an indication that even classical beauty can be co-opted for commercial purposes. “Bulletin” thus represents a crystallization of Tzara’s work at the intersection of poetry, typography, and advertising. By pairing “Bulletin” with an advertisement for one of his own books, Tzara implies that the poem itself remains a part of the commercial world from which its language is drawn. Not only can advertising be incorporated into a poem, the poem itself can function as an advertisement. At the same time, by composing “Bulletin” out of phrases from newspapers and advertisements, Tzara suggests that this ready-made, commercial language can provide the basis for a new form of poetry that is rooted not in the internal reflections of a unified authorial subject, but rather in the fragmentary, pre-existing material texts of the external world.

### *The Poetry of the Press II: Hausmann and Der Dada*

The magazine *Der Dada*, edited by Raoul Hausmann in Berlin, similarly engaged with questions about the relationship between poetry and mass media, and here, too, the magazine’s typography and layout played a significant role. The three issues of *Der Dada* published in Berlin in 1919-20 clearly show the influence of Tzara’s *Dada* in their iconoclastic typography and design, as well as in the advertisements scattered throughout each issue. Describing the first issue of *Der Dada*, Reinhart Meyer writes:

Schon in dieser Nummer wirft Hausmann sämtliche Zeitschriftenklischees über den Haufen. Typographisch überaus abwechslungsreich, ist jede Seite verschieden gegliedert, die Texte sind neben- oder untereinander angeordnet, liegen quer oder stehen sogar auf dem Kopf, werden aufgelockert durch Grafiken, Fotografien, Klebebilder, Buchstabengedichte und Anzeigen: auf diese Weise wird die Nr. 1 zur Persiflage einer Tageszeitung mit Börsenbericht, Schlagzeilen, politischen Meldungen, Nachrichten von Tagesereignissen, Kulturnachrichten und Ankündigungen (fiktiver) Veranstaltungen.<sup>113</sup>

As Meyer argues, the typography of *Der Dada* can be seen as an attack on mass media that focuses its fury on the conventions of magazine or newspaper layout and typography. However, this is not the only possible interpretation of the magazine's typographic tumult. Hans Richter, who had ties to the Dada movement in both Zurich and Berlin, provides an alternative perspective on the Dadaists' techniques:

Ein erleuchteter Griff in die Satzkiste des Druckers veränderte die von der Schule her erlernte 'Recht'-Schreibung in die 'Links'-Schreibung, große und kleine Buchstaben gingen neue Verbindungen ein, tanzten auf und ab, senkrechte und waagerechte Worte setzten sich in sinnige Beziehung und führten eine Belebung der gedruckten Seite herbei, die dem Lesenden die neue Freiheit nicht nur erzählte, sondern sehen und fühlen ließ.<sup>114</sup>

While Richter's neologism "'Links'-Schreibung" associates this typography with leftist or anti-establishment politics, the remainder of his description focuses not on the antagonistic relationship of Dada typography to pre-existing norms, but rather on its multiplication of typographic possibilities. In *Der Dada*, these two attitudes towards typography and advertising often co-exist: although the magazine's more radical experiments can suggest a revolutionary or anarchic mentality, *Der Dada* frequently evinces a fascination with and enthusiasm for the possibilities of mass media, advertising, and the print medium itself. In many cases, Hausmann's typography is best understood not as a parody or disruption of conventional media, but rather as an exploration of the potential of print as an artistic medium in its own right.

For instance, while the principle of chaos initially appears to dominate on the front cover of *Der Dada* No. 1 (Fig. 9), a closer inspection reveals underlying principles of organization that draw attention to the typesetting process itself. Roughly the middle third of the cover is occupied by a typographic composition by Hausmann and Baader entitled "dadadegie" that runs perpendicular to the texts above and below. When this composition is viewed upright, its top section has the appearance of company letterhead, with "dadadegie" most likely derived from "Regie," thus identifying Hausmann and Baader as the company's managers or directors.<sup>115</sup> This interpretation is supported by the numerous other manifestations of Dada's "mock bureaucracy" throughout the magazine.<sup>116</sup> Given that the emblem incorporated into this mock-letterhead is that of the "Oesterreichischer Hundezucht-Verein," however, any resemblance of "dadadegie" to corporate paraphernalia should clearly be understood satirically.

The remainder of the composition is more cryptic at first sight. It consists of the series of numbers "3/ 3333/3333"; a long division problem ( $13:7 = 1,85714285....$ ) that breaks off with a cry of frustration – **Ach** – printed in large, bold type; the number 5,0;



the first six digits of pi; another series of numbers (5.9.2.1.8.3.4.7.10.11.6) emphasized by the omnipresent *Anzeigehand*; a small printer's cliché of a cow accompanied by the Hebrew word כשר ("kosher"); the series of letters "IOADGDATTTSAe" running vertically down the right-hand side of the composition; and finally, in a rectangle in the lower right-hand corner, the number 16,305. This inventory of the elements that make up the composition clearly indicates that numbers play a central role; the only words are the large "Ach" and the initially incomprehensible "IOADGDATTTSAe." The few published interpretations of this work either leap to the conclusion that the series of numbers, 5.9.2.1.8.3.4.7.10.11.6, and the series of letters, IOADGDATTTSAe, are simply nonsense, or propose equally meaningless reorganizations of the characters.<sup>117</sup> None of these interpreters seems to have recognized the straightforward correspondence between the two series: if the numbers are used as a guide to reading the letters (so that the reader begins with the fourth letter, indicated by the number "1," then proceeds to the third letter, indicated by "2," etc.), the message revealed is "DADA IST GOTT."<sup>118</sup> This correspondence reveals that "dadadegie" is not a work of utter nonsense, but rather a work with a hidden meaning that must be deciphered, perhaps modelled on the esoteric texts that fascinated Hausmann, Baader, and many other Dadaists. A further interpretive possibility is suggested by the fact that German authorities had placed limits on Hausmann's typographic work during war because they suspected that it contained coded messages. As Barbara Lindlar writes:

Nach der erfolgreichen Veranstaltung im April [1918] werden die beiden ersten Publikationen, die Hausmann typographisch gestaltet, das *Dadaistische Manifest* von Huelsenbeck und der Prospekt *Club Dada*, konfisziert. Die Künstler werden regelmäßig von der Polizei kontrolliert, und Hausmann wird zu seinen neuen Werken befragt, da in seiner freien dadaistischen Typographie *eine Chiffrensprache vermutet wird*. In diesen Monaten bis zur Ausrufung der Republik am 9. November 1918 kann Hausmann nur im privaten Rahmen weiterarbeiten.<sup>119</sup>

In light of this – and of the political allusions that run through the issue – it is entirely plausible that Hausmann's use of an *actual* code in this composition was a defiant gesture directed at the authorities who had previously banned his works.

Consequently, the work resists interpretations such as that given by Mark A. Pegrum, who writes that "dadadegie" "offers no obvious order of reading, functioning more like a collage or montage where the principle of simultaneous juxtaposition dominates [...] so that the overall picture is one of chaos."<sup>120</sup> Here Pegrum, like many readers, falls into the trap of assuming subversive intent in a Dada text simply because it lacks obvious order, and thus failing to look for the more subtle logic that in fact structures the work. But just as the apparent order of a daily newspaper can conceal chaotic and illogical juxtapositions, the apparent chaos of a Dada composition such as "dadadegie" frequently conceals an order of its own, and does not merely set out to destroy an order external to it. In fact, "dadadegie" even draws attention to the typesetting process in which this order is created, not only through the inclusion of disparate elements from the typesetter's case, but also through the representation of a division problem in progress, which reveals the typesetter's work not only as a product, but also as a process in which trial and error play a role. This cover, then, may indeed deviate

from newspaper and magazine conventions, as Meyer says, but its typography is not a chaotic blast that undermines all semiotic order; rather, the typographic play of “dadadegie” draws attention to the work’s status as a printed text, emphasizing the printing process as an act in which meaning is created.

Of course, typography is not the only point of interest in *Der Dada* No. 1. At the thematic center of the issue are the negotiations surrounding the Treaty of Versailles, as reflected in the satirical news brief on the front cover (“Jahr 1 des Weltfriedens”), which includes the speculation, “Wenn Deutschland nicht unterzeichnet, so wird es wahrscheinlich unterzeichnen.” The political satire continues in the article “Die Jungfrau Maria um Schutz Deutschlands angerufen,” which reports that the entire SPD has offered to convert to Catholicism if the pope will intercede to obtain better terms for Germany, an exaggeration of the actual papal peace initiative of 1917. These texts set the tone for the issue, in which Dada appears at times in the guise of a political organization, possessed of a *Handbuch des Oberdadaismus* that can be read, by appointment only, at the “Zentralamt des Dadaismus.” The explicitly literary content of this issue is limited, consisting solely of one poem by Tristan Tzara, as well as Hausmann’s *Buchstabengedicht* that begins “kp’ eri um lp’erium.” The latter is generally considered to be a purely abstract poem, as Hausmann himself described it, without any echoes of familiar words like the “jolifanto” of Ball’s “Karawane.”<sup>121</sup> In the context of the issue’s political concerns, though, it is hard not to see the Latin “imperium” (“empire”) in “nm’ periii pernoumum,” or “periculum” (“danger”) in “perikoul,” a suggestion of the dangerous state of the recently dissolved German Empire.<sup>122</sup> This question aside, however, it is safe to say that poetry plays a relatively minor role in *Der Dada* No. 1.

Advertising, however, for the most part satirical in tone, occupies more than a page of the eight-page issue. Along with several blatant parodies scattered throughout the magazine – such as a small ad urging “Verkaufen Sie ihren Leichnam zur Hebung der deutschen Fettversorgung” – one page is devoted entirely to Dada self-promotion. An advertisement at the top of the page urges “Machen Sie dadareklame!” and boasts “Achten Sie auf Ihre Kinder und Sie werden sehen, dass die Reklame dada die Universalreklame, die Reklame überhaupt ist.” The hyperbolic tone suggests that this ad could be taken entirely in jest, and this impression is initially reinforced by the inverted price structure listed for advertisements: “Reklameaufträge für Nr. 2 des dada müssen sofort aufgegeben werden. Die ganze Seite kostet 400 Mark; halbe Seite 600; die Viertelseite 800, die Achtelseite 1000.” However, as Pegrum notes, “possibly as a consequence of a hardly surprising lack of response to the first advertisement, the second [in *Der Dada* No. 2] lowers the overall amounts and reverses the order to present a more reasonable offer.”<sup>123</sup> Thus this apparent pastiche of advertising solicitation may have all too successfully concealed a serious purpose. The item that follows – entitled “Legen Sie Ihr Geld in dada an!” – is more easily identified as pure satire, with claims such as “dada ist die einzige Sparkasse, die in der Ewigkeit Zins zahlt. [...] dada ist mehr als tao und brama. [...] Sogar die DEUTSCHE TAGESZEITUNG lebt und stirbt mit dada.” However, as argued above, satires such as this one that substitute the name “Dada” for other brand names serve a dual purpose, satirizing the genre of advertisement in general, while serving at the same time as a (real) advertisement for Dada.

The second issue of *Der Dada* (Fig. 10) engages in even more aggressive self-marketing, with a cover boasting “dada siegt!” and urging “Tretet dada bei.” The cover collage by Hausmann continues this theme, consisting of clippings drawn largely from other Dada texts. (The frequent incorporation of Dada texts into Dada collages presents a problem for the frequent assumption that these collages were primarily critical in intent, fragmenting mass media and advertising in order to break their cultural dominance. If the formal principle of collage is assumed to be inherently subversive, then Hausmann’s collage ought to be seen as an assault on the Dadaists’ own publications – a position that most scholars are unlikely to endorse.) Inside, too, the content focuses primarily on Dada and the Dadaists, although the articles incorporate social and political commentary as well. Hausmann’s “Der deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich,” for instance, begins by asking “Warum? Wer ist der deutsche Spießler, daß er sich über Dada ärgert? Er ist der deutsche Dichter, der deutsche Geistige.” Hausmann’s attack on the allegedly bourgeois values of the Expressionists thus also provides a platform for the promotion of Dada (despite Hausmann’s protestation that “wir sind Antidadaisten, weil für uns der Dadaist noch zu viel Gefühl und Aesthetik besitzt”). The following pages continue this self-promotion, with an advertisement for the *Dadaco* anthology, a full-page article entitled “Tretet dada bei,” a repeat of the advertisement “Machen Sie dadareklame!” (this time with a more conventional price structure), Baader’s aforementioned article “reklame für mich. (rein geschäftlich),” and finally, an advertisement at the bottom of the last page for the “dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft.”

Amidst all of this self-promotion appears Richard Huelsenbeck’s poem “Ende der Welt,” the only poem in the issue, which can be read as a parodic response to Expressionism and an embrace of the contemporary world of commerce. With a title that brings to mind Jakob van Hoddis’ 1911 “Weltende,” Huelsenbeck’s poem by contrast offers a vision of the end of the world that is less catastrophic than absurd: “Soweit ist es nun tatsächlich mit dieser Welt gekommen / Auf den Telegraphenstangen sitzen die Kühe und spielen Schach.” As Richard Sheppard has argued, “whereas in ‘Weltende’ the emphasis is on the sinister nature of the apocalyptic events, in ‘Ende der Welt’ similar events are presented as run-of-the-mill and absurdly insignificant.”<sup>124</sup> Of course, “Weltende” too has its moments of absurdity, such as the two lines “Die meisten Menschen haben einen Schnupfen. / Die Eisenbahnen fallen von den Brücken,” which draw attention to the disparity between small-scale gripes and large-scale disasters. But whereas Hoddis’ poem reads as a send-up of bourgeois indifference in the face of coming catastrophe, Huelsenbeck’s glorifies the more urbane indifference of those who prefer to remain unruffled as “die Kanonen jammern den ganzen Tag,” evoking less the shock of war than its monotony. Perhaps the most telling lines of Huelsenbeck’s poem are “Wille wau, wau, wau, Wille, wo, wo, wo, wer weiss heute nicht, was unser Vater Homer gedichtet hat. / Ich halte den Krieg und den Frieden in meiner Toga, aber ich entscheide mich für den Cherry-Brandy flip.” The first line is an invocation of the literary canon – not only of Homer, but also of Goethe, whose “Zigeunerlied” includes the lines “Wille wau wau wau! / Wille wo wo wo!” – though in Huelsenbeck’s context, this line can also be read as a reduction of “Wille” to repetitive nonsense syllables (or the “bow wow wow” of a dog).<sup>125</sup> The second contrasts this pathos to the posture of a poet more interested in his choice of cocktails than in the choice between war and peace.

Huelsenbeck's poem thus harmonizes with the dominant tone of the issue, in which satire functions less as an passionate critique of bourgeois institutions than as a dispassionate strategy of cultivated indifference, the "Blasiertheit" that for Georg Simmel represented the characteristic demeanor of the citydweller.<sup>126</sup> The Dada ideal of a poet that emerges from "Ende der Welt" is a figure who can see through the rhetoric of both war and advertising, but can also employ both to his own ends.

*Der Dada* No. 3 (Fig. 11), published in April 1920, was the only issue published by Wieland Herzfelde's Malik Verlag. It follows the first two issues in its mixture of satire and self-promotion, but it represents a departure in several key respects in both content and design. The format of the issue is smaller, and the advertisements for other Malik publications appear surprisingly conservative. However, John Heartfield's layout for this issue is by no means tame. It resembles some of Tzara's publications, particularly *Bulletin Dada* (issue 6 of *Dada* magazine), which had appeared in Paris in February 1920. Like Tzara's publications, *Der Dada* No. 3 crams as much content as possible onto a single page, often placing snippets of text or images in the margins, and even allowing image and text to overlap. On the cover, Heartfield's photomontage "Das Pneuma umreist die Welt" combines an image of a rubber tire with images of other commercial products, as well as Dada paraphernalia such as a photograph of Hausmann's face, the names of several Dadaists, and fragments of other Dada publications.<sup>127</sup> As argued with reference to Hausmann's cover collage for *Der Dada* No. 2, this collage is not an attack on advertising or mass media propaganda, but rather a celebration of Dada that places Dada itself, and the individual Dadaists, side by side with mass-produced commodities.

Hausmann's *Der Dada* No. 3, like Tzara's *Dada 3*, emphasizes the relationship of the artist or poet to the market. Almost every text in *Der Dada* No. 3 refers back to the Dada movement itself, describing Dada or praising it, making reference to one Dadaist or another. Hausmann's "Dada in Europa" gives a sarcastic account of Dada's origins and program; Huelsenbeck's "Ein Besuch in Cabaret Dada" claims to offer a first-hand account of a neophyte's experience of a Dada performance, though Huelsenbeck's byline reveals the fiction; and so forth. While these pieces articulate a set of aesthetic and political values associated with Dada, their most pronounced effect, like that of Heartfield's cover collage, may be the affirmation of Dada as a movement, the clear articulation of who is in and who is out. Timothy O. Benson has criticized this effect, writing,

Ironically, the very dominance of the Dada allusions and the consolidation of Dada as an international avant-garde movement brought to an end its potential restructuring of the 'institution of art' in terms of the surrounding vernacular institutions. Despite the unprecedented complexity of the Dada texts and objects it illustrates, *Der Dada 3* takes on the character of an anthology, reverting back to the booklet format and becoming a visual pendant to Huelsenbeck's *Dada Almanach*.<sup>128</sup>

Benson is undoubtedly correct to see these allusions as a form of consolidation, a way of distinguishing what is Dada from what is not. However, it is not clear that this should be seen as a surrender on the part of the Dadaists. Advertisement, and self-advertisement in particular, were central concerns of the Dadaists, and in this respect an intensely self-

congratulatory issue is not a betrayal of the Dadaists' program, but a fulfillment of that program.

The close ties between Dada art, poetry, and advertising are evident throughout the issue. Commercial-style slogans for Dada appear everywhere in the magazine, making appeals such as "Leben Sie doch nicht weiter so ohne Dada!"<sup>129</sup> These are accompanied by excerpts from Dada poems: the first two lines from Huelsenbeck's "Ende der Welt," for instance, are printed as a slogan towards the end of the magazine, with added exclamation points. Likewise, the issue includes an excerpt from Huelsenbeck's *Phantastische Gebete* that begins "Ebene / Schweinsblase Kesselpauke Zinnober cru cru cru / Theosophia pneumatica / die große Geistkunst = poème bruitiste aufgeführt zum erstenmal durch Richard Huelsenbeck DaDa," invoking the drum with which Huelsenbeck was famously associated, and serving as a sort of personal advertisement much like Arp's "Weltwunder." As in Tzara's *Dada* magazine, the cumulative effect is a blurring of boundaries between genres, such that advertising can be incorporated into poetry, but poetry can also become an instrument of advertising.

At times, to be sure, these literary borrowings from the commercial world have the function of hyperbole or satire. However, that is by no means their only purpose. Throughout all three issues of *Der Dada*, elements of advertising, whether typographic or syntactic, are an object of fascination in themselves, and the reader is never allowed to forget that *Der Dada* is a printed text in a world of print media, where poems, essays, visual art, and advertising may share space on a single page. The distinctive typographic techniques used in all three issues of *Der Dada*, and the advertising techniques that become more dominant with each successive issue, are not merely a satire of commercial and mass media, an attempt to counteract hegemonic sense with rebellious nonsense. Hausmann and his collaborators did not simply borrow the techniques of mass media in order to attack those media from within the fortress of art. Rather, Hausmann's *Der Dada*, like Tzara's *Dada*, staked out a place in the market, competing for attention against other periodicals. The give-and-take in these pages between poetry and advertising reflects the Dadaists' conviction that art and commerce cannot be kept apart, while the magazine's eye-catching, highly varied typography and design demonstrate the Dadaists' fascination with the artistic potential of print media.

Consequently, the poems that appear in these magazines should not be read as abstract linguistic compositions that could just as easily be set in another font or reproduced, one to a page, in a conventional literary anthology. Rather, these poems are best understood as confrontations with the conditions of textual production in an age dominated by print media intended for a mass readership, as well as by new technologies such as the radio and the telegraph. Instead of taking for granted the continued validity of traditional models of semantics and poetic subjectivity, these works draw attention to the material and non-semantic aspects of language, or irreverently juxtapose snippets of text drawn from incongruous sources. Far from being mere "nonsense," these poems represent a serious response to the reality of these new media, and an attempt to address the challenge that these media pose to traditional conceptions of language and of poetry.

## Conclusions

In the critical literature on the Dada movement, considerations of the role of mass media have tended to follow one of several general patterns. Some scholars emphasize the criticism of the press and of consumerism that is evident in many of these works. Hanne Bergius, for instance, writes, “If the press engaged in the creation of illusions, then Dada engaged in the destruction of illusions,” while Richard Sheppard ties the Dadaists’ montage techniques to their attacks on the Weimar government, writing, “The point was to unmask the unreliability of the printed word and so generate an attitude of skepticism toward ‘authorities’ in general and the authority of the press in particular.”<sup>130</sup> While it is true that satire and skepticism play an important role in many Dada works, though, these characterizations are misleading insofar as they suggest a simple pedagogical function underlying the complex dynamic of Dada’s relationship to mass media. Certainly the Dadaists did criticize and satirize the mass media, but there is a strong suggestion in these satires that the audience is already aware of the illusion, already in on the joke. The skepticism that pervades these works is better seen as a fundamental prerequisite for understanding them at all, rather than as an attitude that these works were meant to inculcate.

Other authors have focused on the use of mass media in Dada art and poetry as a critical gesture directed against art itself, a challenge posed to art’s autonomy or its claim to independence of market forces. Theodor W. Adorno highlights this aspect when discussing the Dadaists’ use of montage: “Montage heißt aber soviel wie den Sinn der Kunstwerke durch eine seiner Gesetzlichkeit entzogene Invasion von Bruchstücken der empirischen Realität stören und dadurch Lügen strafen.”<sup>131</sup> This understanding of montage as an attack on art itself with means drawn from extra-aesthetic reality is developed further by Peter Bürger, who sees the challenge to the institution of art as the defining characteristic of the avant-garde: his *Theorie der Avantgarde* focuses on what he identifies as the “avantgardistische Intention der Zerstörung der Institution Kunst [und der] Revolutionierung des Lebens durch Rückführung der Kunst in die Lebenspraxis.”<sup>132</sup> Mark A. Pegrum has more recently applied this argument to the Dadaists’ use of mass media in particular, writing that “the use of advertising functions as a rebuff to the fine arts, but all of these forms are also a means of bringing an art predicated on autonomy and self-sufficiency into contact with the everyday reality spurned by many artists.”<sup>133</sup> Central to each of these accounts is the assertion that these media serve as a proxy for the extra-aesthetic world as a whole, and that the introduction of these media into works of art challenges the autonomy of these works with respect to that world.

However, this interpretation cannot account for all of the roles played by mass media and communications technologies in Dada works. Both Adorno and Bürger consider Dada primarily with respect to its broader implications for the relationship between art and society, and treat the use of extra-aesthetic, commercial media in Dada works as a meta-artistic gesture that rejects the separation of art from the surrounding world. The ironic consequence of this view is that it ultimately reduces the Dadaists’ ostensible aim of reuniting art and life to a statement about art itself, thus reinscribing the very boundary that the Dadaists, on this view, sought to erase. In addition, by identifying the fragments of various media incorporated into Dada works as proxies for extra-

aesthetic reality at large, Adorno and Bürger ignore the particularity of these media. Consequently, they fail to account for the extent to which these media are not only stand-ins for empirical reality, but also objects of interest in their own right, particularly insofar as they transform the function of language and give rise to new paradigms of poetic production.

Other theorists have better grasped the Dadaists' embrace of these media not only as a protest against art's institutional autonomy, but also as a source of formal innovation. Marshall McLuhan saw this already in the Dadaists' predecessors, writing that "it was not through the book but through the development of the mass press, especially the telegraph press, that poets found the artistic keys to the world of simultaneity, or of modern myth."<sup>134</sup> Walter Benjamin similarly understood the Dadaists' adoption of strategies from commercial media as a search for forms better suited to the new pace and the new mode of perception required by the modern world:

Auf die merkantile Verwertbarkeit ihrer Kunstwerke legten die Dadaisten viel weniger Gewicht als auf ihre Unverwertbarkeit als Gegenstände kontemplativer Versenkung. [...] Es ist unmöglich, vor einem Bild von Arp oder einem Gedicht August Stramms sich wie vor einem Bild Derains oder einem Gedicht von Rilke Zeit zur Sammlung und Stellungnahme zu lassen. [...] Aus einem lockenden Augenschein oder einem überredenden Klanggebilde wurde das Kunstwerk bei den Dadaisten zu einem Geschoß. Es stieß dem Betrachter zu. Es gewann eine taktile Qualität.<sup>135</sup>

As Benjamin suggests, the techniques that the Dadaists borrowed from mass media were notable for their shock effect, requiring a new kind of reflexive, rather than reflective, perception. And as indicated by his observation "Es ist unmöglich [...] sich [...] Zeit zur Sammlung und Stellungnahme zu lassen," this mode of perception – but also the corresponding mode of production – allowed less room for subjectivity on the part of either the artist or the viewer. This rejection of subjectivity was in part a refutation of other artistic movements (notably Expressionism) that had elevated subjectivity to their ultimate principle. However, it was also a response to the question of how to produce art in a world in which the status of the subject seemed increasingly in doubt, a development for which modern media could take no small part of the credit or the blame. The newspaper poems of Arp and Tzara, the *Plakatgedichte* of Hausmann, and other Dadaist experiments with chance and print media explored the question of what poetry might look like without a subject – a question that had been raised in part by the desubjectification of language in advertising, sensational print media, and new means of electronic communication.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the Dadaists also embraced these media as instruments of political action. As Benjamin wrote, "Denken wir an den Dadaismus zurück. [...] Von diesen revolutionären Gehalten hat sich vieles in die Photomontage hineingerettet. Sie brauchen nur an die Arbeiten von John Heartfield zu denken, dessen Technik den Buchdeckel zum politischen Instrument gemacht hat."<sup>136</sup> To the extent that mass media had trained consumers in new modes of perception, many Dadaists, particularly in Berlin, felt that art must likewise adapt to these modes in order to be politically effective: the work of art in the age of advertising had to employ the techniques of advertising if it was to remain not only artistically, but also politically

relevant. This is a point at which the Dadaists' self-understanding, and Benjamin's more sympathetic assessment, diverge most decidedly from Adorno's critique. Although Adorno conceded that the Dadaists' attacks on the institutions of art and politics issued from legitimate complaints, he argued that their version of engaged art was ultimately ineffective: "An der Zeit sind nicht die politischen Kunstwerke, aber in die autonomen ist die Politik eingewandert, und dort am weitesten, wo sie politisch tot sich stellen."<sup>137</sup> For the Dadaists, particularly those in Berlin whose artistic activity took place during a period in which the proliferation of mass media coincided with political instability, it still seemed possible to hope that the artistic appropriation of commercial media could prove politically effective. For Adorno, writing decades later in a period of ever more consolidated corporate media control, this optimism appeared misguided.

Such retrospective evaluations, however, should not be allowed to obscure the distinctive relationship between art and modern media that Dada represented. Many recent analyses, consciously or unconsciously informed by the Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry, take for granted that the Dadaists similarly saw mass media as mass deception. But this is by no means universally true. Certainly, the Dadaists recognized the dangers of the politically reactionary press, and they often satirized the rhetoric of popular advertising. But as argued above, they did not simply see commercial media as propagators of lies and take it upon themselves to unmask the truth. Rather, many Dada works expressed a much greater interest in these media themselves as essential constituents of modern reality, as potential tools for social and political transformation, and, not least, as new means of artistic production. The challenge for contemporary scholars of Dada is to appreciate the balance that the Dadaists struck between the cynical rejection of capitalist marketing and consumerism, on the one hand, and the enthralling, even naïve celebration of the sensational world of commerce and mass culture, on the other. The Dadaists appealed to the same appetite for sensation and stimulation that was found in the popular press; they employed the same telegraphic syntax and typographic variation in their poems that were commonly found in headlines and advertisements; they created the same juxtapositions of text, image, and advertising that appeared in illustrated magazines. Frequently, these works displayed a hedonistic pleasure in the sensations that these media created, the same "intense scopophilia" that gave advertising its appeal in the first place.<sup>138</sup> Rather than an unrelenting attack on commercial and mass media, then, Dada is best seen as an attempt to put these media to work – at times, to be sure, for critique, at times for provocation, at times for political propaganda, at times for self-promotion.

Despite certain targeted parodies and attacks, the Dadaists were much less universally critical of commercial and mass media than many scholars would prefer to admit. From Huelsenbeck to Arp to Tzara to Hausmann to Heartfield to Grosz, many Dadaists actively embraced the capacity of these media to attract attention, to disseminate the Dada brand, to stir up scandal in artistic and political arenas, and, not least, to create new art and literature suited to a media-saturated era. An exclusive emphasis on Dada's critical impulses falsely suggests an affinity of the Dadaists for reactionaries who defended high culture against the encroaching threat of commercialism. In contrast, the truly radical character of Dada can be seen in the complexity of its relationship to commercial and mass media: while criticizing these media as tools of consumerism and



political reaction, the Dadaists also embraced their potential, and drew the poetic consequences of the new understanding of language that they offered. The ambivalence of this stance, the mixture of criticism and affirmation in the Dadaists' approach to modern media, and the insistence in many of their works that art in the age of new media cannot exist in a state of autonomy from its mediatic surroundings, remain among the most enduringly relevant and most reliably controversial legacies of the Dada movement.

## **Chapter Two: Case Study**

### **Text and the City: George Grosz, *Neue Jugend*, and the Political Power of Popular Media**

In mid-1917, an unfamiliar newspaper appeared on kiosks throughout Berlin. It did not stay there long: according to Franz Jung, any copies of this paper that were not sold within an hour were confiscated by the police, so the majority of the print run was either surreptitiously given away or sent by mail, disguised in German Navy envelopes.<sup>1</sup> If the shelf-life of each issue was short, the career of the paper as a whole was not much longer: introduced as a weekly on May 23, 1917 (with the qualification “erscheint vorerst zweiwöchentlich”), the newspaper reached the end of its run with the next issue, which appeared in June 1917. Despite the brevity of its existence, though, this short-lived newspaper was memorable not only for its challenge to the standards of the mainstream German press, but also for its radical demand that art adapt to the conditions of the modern city, embracing the press, advertising, and popular art forms such as the circus and the variété.

*Neue Jugend*, as this new publication was called, was no ordinary newspaper. The two “weekly” issues that appeared in May and June 1917 were in fact the continuation of an Expressionist monthly journal of the same title edited by Wieland Herzfelde, and most of the collaborators on these issues – including Jung, Herzfelde, John Heartfield, Richard Huelsenbeck, and George Grosz – would go on to play central roles in Berlin Dada. By publishing these two issues in newspaper format, the collaborators expressed a belief that art should engage with a broader public, extending beyond the limited audience of conventional literary journals. This belief was made particularly clear in two pieces that Grosz contributed to the June issue. These unsigned pieces – “Kannst du radfahren?” (hereafter “Radfahren”) and “Man muß Kautschukmann sein!” (hereafter “Kautschukmann”) – acknowledged the shocks of the modern city, but they also depicted the new artist as someone capable of withstanding or even mastering those shocks and transforming them into instruments of political action. Appearing in the newspaper format of *Neue Jugend*, accompanied by photographs and advertising engravings and enhanced by John Heartfield’s striking typography, these pieces made the case that popular entertainment and mass media are the proper instruments of the new, politically engaged artist. In making this argument, Grosz led by example: he not only advocated the artistic employment of popular media for political ends, he also demonstrated, with Heartfield’s help, how techniques borrowed from mass media and advertising could be employed in the service of political critique. This chapter will analyze the formal transformation of *Neue Jugend* before turning to a consideration of how Grosz’s works, like *Neue Jugend* itself, paired the tools of commercial media with the political aims of engaged art.

#### ***Neue Jugend* and the Berliner Blätterwald**

In order to better understand the radical departure that *Neue Jugend* represented, it will be helpful to briefly position this new paper in relation to the Berlin newspaper

world of its day. In a city already flooded with newspapers – there were at least 80 published in Berlin alone in 1917<sup>2</sup> – the appearance of one more paper at the local kiosk may well have gone unnoticed by many readers. Nevertheless, even in the midst of the “Berliner Blätterwald,”<sup>3</sup> there were reasons that this debut merited attention. To begin with, the circumstances of the First World War made the conditions for launching any new paper less than ideal: aside from the shortage of printing materials such as paper and lead, and the absence of many journalists (who had been sent to the front),<sup>4</sup> wartime restrictions required military approval for the founding of any new paper, magazine, or publishing house.<sup>5</sup> Wieland Herzfelde devised a clever means of circumventing this restriction when he founded his monthly journal in 1916: he simply paid 200 marks to Heinz Barger, the young editor of a journal called *Neue Jugend* that had ceased publication in 1914. In order to maintain the illusion that the new *Neue Jugend* was simply a continuation of the old, Herzfelde retained the title and initially listed Barger as the journal’s publisher of record, though in fact Herzfelde himself had editorial control. Despite this legal maneuver, though, the journal was banned in April 1917 while Herzfelde was away at war. The publication of the two “weekly” issues, then, which took place under Jung’s leadership in Herzfelde’s absence, was technically illegal.<sup>6</sup>

More remarkable than the mere existence of *Neue Jugend* in the face of wartime restrictions, though, was the distinctiveness of its layout and typography. Whereas most Berlin newspapers appeared in the small “Berliner” format (31.5 x 47cm), *Neue Jugend* was published in the significantly larger “American” format (52 x 64cm).<sup>7</sup> These dimensions alone were enough to suggest a greater affinity for the international – particularly American and British – press than for Germany’s domestic publications. Even more striking was the use throughout *Neue Jugend* of Roman fonts, rather than the Fraktur still employed by other German newspapers. While Roman fonts were common in the advertisements of German papers, and were sometimes even used for the business sections, the remaining articles continued to be printed in Fraktur.<sup>8</sup> Particularly in the war years, when an article in *Die Woche* railed against the incursion of “English” fonts, insisting, “Wir müssen deutsch schreiben,”<sup>9</sup> *Neue Jugend*’s break from the conventional use of Fraktur was indicative of its oppositional stance, its rejection of German nationalism and war fever, and its provocative enthusiasm for the aesthetics of American advertising and mass media.

This enthusiasm was evident not only in John Heartfield’s choice of fonts, but also in his use of colors and images, and in his overall page designs. The May 23 issue of *Neue Jugend* was still relatively conservative in this regard: it used only red and black ink, and contained just a few advertisements, all of them text-based (Fig. 12). These included, on the back page, an in-house advertisement for “Neue Jugend Reklameberatung” that proclaimed, “WORTreklame schlägt BILDreklame.”<sup>10</sup> The June issue (Fig. 13), however, put this claim to the test: printed in four colors, it made extensive use of engravings and photographs, including a front-page image of New York’s Flatiron Building, overprinted in red with the word “Reklameberatung.” At first glance, the effect of this issue’s format, layout, typography, and images was not only to set it apart from most “serious” German papers, which had not yet begun to publish photographs at the time, but also to indicate *Neue Jugend*’s embrace of an international, and above all a commercial, style in which editorial and advertising content were nearly

indistinguishable from one another.<sup>11</sup> As Sherwin Simmons has written, “The journal’s revised newspaper format signalled its reconception as a competitor in the information industry. The inclusion of small ads for alcoholic spirits, its own publications, lecture evenings, and advertising consultation made clear its awareness of the way advertising drove the publication industry.”<sup>12</sup> As Simmons indicates, the adoption of these commercial strategies was significant on several levels: to a certain extent, it was a pragmatic decision calculated to sell more papers and generate advertising income. But beyond that, it was a commentary on the commercial nature of mass media and on the relationship between art and commerce, an argument that politically critical art can reach a larger audience by adopting the techniques of mass media.

Of course, *Neue Jugend*’s change of format marked a contrast not only to Berlin’s mainstream newspapers, but also to the more conventional journal format in which *Neue Jugend* had previously appeared. Five monthly issues of *Neue Jugend* had been published under Herzfelde’s leadership (one of them a double issue), numbered 7 through 11/12 to maintain the illusion of continuity with Barger’s publication. In format, these monthly issues were similar to many other Expressionist art and literary journals: the text-only covers were laid out symmetrically, visual art appeared on separate pages from literary work, and all notices and advertisements were consigned to the back of the journal (Fig. 14). These issues were not free of politically controversial subject matter: *Neue Jugend*’s pacifist orientation was proclaimed by the publication of Johannes R. Becher’s poem “An den Frieden” at the beginning of issue 7,<sup>13</sup> and socially critical drawings or poems by George Grosz appeared in every issue. In addition, the editors’ afterword to issue 7 expressly indicated their wish for greater political engagement, and renounced any intention of being a purely literary and artistic publication. Despite this declaration, though, the monthly issues continued to consist primarily of literary work and visual art, and the journal’s format marked it as a primarily aesthetic undertaking, rather than an active intervention into popular political discourse.<sup>14</sup>

As Herzfelde would later write, neatly summing up the transition from the monthly to the “weekly” format:

Fünf vornehm gedruckte Hefte und zwei Blätter in schreienden Farben und Schlagzeilen mit dem Sprung aus einer in Ton und Form zahmen Opposition in eine provozierende Traditionsfeindlichkeit. [...] Es war der Weg vom Expressionismus mit seinem Ahnen und Prophezeien [...] zur radikalen Absage an die mörderische Politik und die Salonkultur der Herrschenden. [...] Wir wußten, weder Gedichte noch Bilder, nur die Revolte der Massen konnte den Frieden erzwingen.<sup>15</sup>

The replacement of the Expressionist-influenced monthly journal with a “weekly” newspaper full of photos, engravings, and advertisements thus not only constituted a decisive rejection of the separation between the aesthetic and the political; it also challenged the separation of art from popular and commercial culture. Implicit in this dual rejection was the possibility that popular and commercial means could be artistically adapted for political ends. The two newspaper issues of *Neue Jugend* – and particularly the two Grosz pieces that will be the focus of this chapter – suggested that artists who sought to define an autonomous aesthetic realm free of popular and commercial influence thereby condemned themselves to political inefficacy. To the elite world of art galleries

and literary salons, Grosz contrasted forms of art and entertainment associated with the masses: advertisements, bicycling, and circuses. Like the change from journal to broadsheet format, these oppositions helped to create an image of a new, socially and politically engaged artist who did not hesitate to employ commercial means to communicate a political message.

### **Advertising and Critique: George Grosz in *Neue Jugend***

This critique of traditional high culture had already been articulated at certain points in the May issue of *Neue Jugend*, the first to appear in the broadsheet format. Huelsenbeck, for instance, wrote in his manifesto “Der Neue Mensch,” “am trügsten aber sind die Dichter. Mit Versen lässt sich keine Welt erobern.”<sup>16</sup> This attack was continued in the June issue, which was billed as the “Prospekt zur Kleinen Grosz-Mappe” and thus functioned in its entirety as a sort of advertisement for Grosz’s recently published collection of lithographs. A large advertisement for the portfolio, designed by Heartfield, appeared on the back page of the paper. Grosz’s own (uncredited) contributions to the issue included several variety reviews on the back page, as well as two pieces on the front page: “Radfahren” and “Kautschukmann.”

These two works defy neat genre categorization: each combines elements borrowed from the formal repertoire of poetry, such as figurative language, line breaks, parallelism, and repetition, with elements native to the world of journalism or advertising, such as a direct address to the reader, as well as variations in color and font and the use of images. While they have been referred to variously as poems, prose, and commentaries, Grosz himself called these pieces “essays.”<sup>17</sup> However, since there are unquestionably poetic qualities to both works, they will be considered here as poems. This term should not be construed too narrowly, though, because the conflation of multiple genres is essential to these works. When viewed in *Neue Jugend*’s newspaper format, “Radfahren” in particular takes on the appearance of an advertisement thanks to the stock engravings that surround it, as well as the brand names that appear in a variety of fonts and colors in the work itself. These typographic choices forestall any attempt to isolate “Radfahren” as a literary work from the commercial world. In this, Heartfield’s typography follows the polemical lead of Grosz’s text. In both “Radfahren” and “Kautschukmann,” Grosz argues that popular and commercial art play a vital role in modern urban life. Art that seeks to isolate itself from the commercial life of the city streets, on the other hand, appears in these pieces as both irrelevant and politically reactionary.

In developing these arguments, Grosz borrows heavily from the rhetoric of the Expressionists and other poets whose *Großstadtlyrik* had attempted to capture – often in more negative terms – the experience of the modern city. In “Radfahren” Grosz describes the shocks of the city, the rapid succession or simultaneity of sensations that inundate a passenger traveling by *Stadtbahn* through Berlin. In “Kautschukmann” he depicts a figure caught off-guard by advertising and by the rapid changes of the modern city. But these two pieces ultimately move beyond the familiar Expressionist tropes, indicating what Barbara McCloskey identifies as Grosz’s rejection of “Expressionism’s psychological introspection and aesthetic escapism.”<sup>18</sup> Grosz does not merely evoke the disorientation of a city-dweller amidst an overwhelming flood of stimuli; rather, he suggests that they

can be transformed into instruments of political action. This principle is put into practice in Grosz's works, and in Heartfield's typography as well. Grosz and Heartfield adopt the techniques of shock and sensation that the boulevard press and advertisers used to sell papers and attract customers, but in their hands these techniques become tools of political critique.

### **The Writing on the Walls: "Kannst du radfahren?"**

Grosz's "Kannst du radfahren" (Fig. 15) celebrates the sensory experience of the city as a revolutionary alternative to the stagnation of high culture. In this piece, the large-scale wall advertisements seen through the window of the *Stadtbahn* prove to be more compelling than traditional paintings hung in galleries. Grosz's speaker asserts the greater social relevance and the strong psychological impact of advertisements, praising them as the true art of the present day. At the same time, these advertisements appear as a sort of shock, comparable not only to the other shocks of the city, but also, arguably, to the shocks of war. If the association of advertising with these other shocks threatens to give it a negative valence, though, this is not Grosz's final judgment; rather, the more subtle shocks of advertising appear as a sort of training for the greater shocks of modernity. Instead of retreating from the shocks of the city into the insulated domain of high art, the citydweller in Grosz's "Radfahren" is called upon to actively engage with new forms of popular art and entertainment.

In the introductory paragraph of "Radfahren," the tension between the allure of advertising and the implicit threat of its power is clearly on display. Grosz writes:

Zu den reinsten unverbildeten Erklärungen und Dokumenten unseres Lebens gehören jene Bilder an den Rückfronten der Häuser, diese Erlasse des Kaufmanns (des wahren Herrn dieser Zeit) – von unerhörter Sachlichkeit [...] pressen sie das psychologische und formale Leben des in knallendem Stadtbahnzug Dahinrollenden. Fabelhaft bunt und klar, wie nie ein Tafelbildchen – von kosmischer Komik, brutal, materiell, bleichsüchtig, verwaschen – drohend und mahnend gleich Ragtimesteptanzmelodie immer wieder sich ins Gehirn bohrend – Das gröhlt in einem fort!<sup>19</sup>

In this passage, Grosz imagines the impact of advertisements on a passenger who sees them flash past through the window of the *Stadtbahn*. While these images are unquestionably powerful, the speaker seems to equivocate between praise and alarm. On the one hand, these advertisements are "Fabelhaft bunt und klar, wie nie ein Tafelbildchen"; but on the other hand, they are "drohend und mahnend [...] immer wieder sich ins Gehirn bohrend" – a description that suggests greater malevolence on the part of the advertisements themselves, or of the businessman whose power they represent. In order to understand this apparent ambivalence, it will be helpful to consider how Grosz situates advertising with respect to other shocks of modernity, and how the ability to adapt to or master these shocks ultimately proves indispensable to the modern citydweller.

One striking aspect of this passage is Grosz's conflation of multiple aspects of the urban experience: the passenger's sensation of being jostled by the clattering train car

blends with the visual stimulation of a rapid flood of images on the buildings rushing by outside the window. These various shocks and stimuli combine into a single experience that takes root in the passenger's psyche: "Das gröhlt in einem fort!" This paragraph not only evokes the multiple jarring experiences that confront a passenger traveling through the city, it also hints at the way that these phenomena are interrelated: the bright colors and bold images of the wall advertisements are calculated to leave an impression even on a passenger who only glimpses them for a moment. Grosz suggests in this passage that there is a connection between the shocks associated with rapid motion and city traffic, on the one hand, and those intentionally created by advertisers in order to generate attention, on the other. This connection is in part a pragmatic one, given that advertisements were created with an eye to the conditions under which they would be viewed: as the poster designer Paul Mahlberg wrote in 1913, "Zum Erzählen von Geschichten, z. B. daß ein Verkäufer einer Kundin Ware vorlegt, ist das Plakat nicht da. Davon bleibt im Autobusfenster bei der Vorüberfahrt nichts hängen."<sup>20</sup> The advertisement, Mahlberg argues, should make a quick impression, and should not depend upon any sustained effort or concentration on the part of the viewer. This rapid perception is reflected roughly halfway through Grosz's "Radfahren" when he writes: "Ho! ho! schon wieder brüllen die Häuserwände," introducing a series of brand names, set by Heartfield in a variety of fonts and printed in red, green, and black to approximate the wide range of lettering encountered in urban advertisements. This passage simulates the experience of the viewer who watches ads flash by outside the window of the moving train, retaining little more than the brand names in their iconic lettering.

Even beyond the practical necessity of making a quick impression on the passing traveler, there was a deeper similarity between the shocks induced by rapid transit and the sensations induced by advertising. Walter Benjamin would later link these sensations, referring in one breath to the optic experiences "wie der Inseratenteil einer Zeitung sie mit sich bringt, aber auch der Verkehr in der großen Stadt."<sup>21</sup> As Frederic J. Schwartz has noted, Benjamin was acutely aware of "the new commercial and vehicular conditions of reading."<sup>22</sup> Reading not only took place on the street – and especially in the streetcar or train, which had created a ideal audience for newspapers among daily commuters<sup>23</sup> – the practices of reading and writing also had to compete with the distractions and shocks of city traffic, and this often meant imitating those very shocks. In the opening passage of "Radfahren" Grosz, too, draws attention to the new conditions of reading and viewing as they were experienced by a passenger traveling through the city in the *Stadtbahn*, and suggests a certain similarity between the effects of advertising and those of high-speed travel: like the rapid motion of the train, advertising can be destabilizing and disorienting, and it requires a new kind of reflexive, rather than reflective, perception.

Like the shocks experienced by the urban traveler, though, those induced by advertisements at times take on a nefarious quality in "Radfahren," "immer wieder sich ins Gehirn bohrend." Here the shocks of the city, and of advertising in particular, seem to induce a sort of neurosis, occupying the mind of the unwitting viewer. In her analysis of other works by Grosz, Brigid Doherty has suggested that this neurosis is linked not only to the obvious shocks of the city, but also to the traumata of war. Noting that Grosz's second brief period of military duty ended with his consignment to a mental hospital where he was treated for "shattered nerves" (as Grosz wrote at the time, "meine Nerven

gingen entzwei”), Doherty argues that Grosz’s poem “Kaffeehaus” links the trauma of the front to that of the city: “The shocks of the trenches are simulated by the shocks of the metropolis.”<sup>24</sup> “Radfahren,” like “Kaffeehaus,” was written shortly after Grosz’s return to Berlin following this period of hospitalization. It is not unreasonable, then, to suggest that the shocks depicted in “Radfahren” also serve to some extent as proxies for the shocks of war. While “Radfahren” lacks any specific reference to the war, a parallel to war neurosis can be seen in Grosz’s train passenger, an urban neurotic who risks being overwhelmed by the shocks of the city.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the passenger’s reaction to these shocks is entirely negative: as Doherty argues, “Berlin dadaists were traumatophiles, too.”<sup>25</sup> Citing the work of the psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi, who dealt first-hand with war neurotics in the First World War, Doherty suggests that traumatophilia, the constant search for shocks and stimulation, can be understood as a means of building up one’s defenses against even greater shocks. Doherty sees this traumatophilic inclination manifested in Dada montages, of which she writes that “both the making and the viewing of montage should themselves be seen as traumatophilic,” citing Heartfield’s montages in particular as a “cure that itself mimics the traumatic experience of shock.”<sup>26</sup> The same could be said of Heartfield’s work – and Grosz’s – in “Radfahren.” The abrupt shifts in this text, on both semantic and typographic levels, mimic the shocks and traumata of the city street, but they also prepare the reader for more such encounters. If this text is read as a training in trauma, the message is that the urban dweller can only survive and compete in the modern, urban world if he does not allow himself to be overwhelmed by the overstimulation of the city – and specifically by the sensory overload of advertising, which one critic described in 1922 as a “Nervenangriff.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than withdrawing from these shocks, the artist must engage in precisely the same kind of overstimulation, creating a work that defends against these larger shocks by producing shocks of its own.

Grosz’s praise for wall advertisements can perhaps be better understood in light of this traumatophilic disposition, though it still seems to equivocate between sarcasm and sincerity. Are these advertisements truly among the purest documents of our lives? Grosz would not have been the only writer of his day to make that claim. Benjamin wrote (likewise equivocally) in *Einbahnstrasse*:

Der heute wesenhafteste, der merkantile Blick ins Herz der Dinge heißt Reklame. [...] vor den Riesenbildern an den Häuserwänden, wo “Chlorodont” und “Sleipnir” für Giganten handlich liegen, wird die gesundete Sentimentalität amerikanisch frei, wie Menschen, welche nichts mehr rührt und anrührt, im Kino wieder das Weinen lernen.<sup>28</sup>

Like Grosz, Benjamin sees a certain honesty in these advertising paintings, which blatantly flaunt their commercial motives. But while Benjamin expresses skepticism about the sentimental responses evoked by these scenes, Grosz contrasts wall advertisements favorably to panel paintings, describing the advertisements as more colorful, clearer, more vivid. This contrast between wall advertisements and traditional art introduces a theme that will be picked up again, and reinforced, towards the conclusion of “Radfahren,” as well as in “Kautschukmann”: advertising appears here as the art of the modern age, more eye-catching, more relevant, and potentially more politically effective than traditional forms of artistic production.



Grosz's assessment of these images can also be understood as an early manifestation of the scopophilia that Janet Ward has identified as a key ingredient in Weimar advertising:

Part of the attraction that brought people to gaze upon modern advertising – for all its structural shock-tactics as a traumatic, dislocating experience that split open the unity of the subject – was, of course, an intense scopophilia. The visual pleasure of Weimar advertising occurred (then as now) within a sphere of sexually charged stimulation.<sup>29</sup>

Grosz certainly acknowledged the close relationship between the visual stimulation of advertising and the sexual stimulation that some city streets also promised, as evidenced by the appearance of nude or nearly nude women amidst streets filled with signs and advertisements in Grosz's visual works, such as the painting *Widmung an Oskar Panizza* (1917-18) and the drawing *Selbstportrait (für Charlie Chaplin)* (1919). If this connection is not yet made explicit in "Radfahren," there is at least an unabashed pleasure in the vivid colors of the wall advertisements and the intense sensations that they provoke. Grosz's comparison of advertisements to a "Ragtime-stepptanzmelodie" also ties them to another source of hedonistic gratification – namely, American popular culture. Grosz's fascination with American media and entertainment, and with ragtime in particular, is well documented.<sup>30</sup> As McCloskey writes, "Although Grosz was not to visit the United States until 1932, he, along with other members of the *Neue Jugend* circle, elaborated a positive vision of the U.S. during the war years as an implicit indictment of Germany's despised traditionalism, high culture, and stifling civil order."<sup>31</sup> The comparison of advertising to ragtime should thus be understood as a form of praise. Grosz's glorification of advertising suggests both an affective pleasure in the flood of disparate stimuli provided by popular and commercial media, and a politically motivated rejection of the more conservative aesthetic standards of high culture.

This politicized critique of high culture becomes more pronounced towards the end of the piece. After the passage in which brand names appear to flash by outside the train window, a series of fantasy scenes unfold, apparently inspired by these advertisements. But these brand name-infused reveries are cut off by a series of direct questions:

Sag mal? – . . . . . **graults Dir da nicht** in den  
Kunstsalons? in den  
Ölgemäldegalerien . . . . . ?  
in den literarische [*sic*] Soiréen . . . . . ?  
Lieber Leser! Ein guter Fußballspieler enthält immerhin  
eine ganze Menge Wert – obwohl er nicht dichtet, malt und  
Töne setzt!  
Bleibt die Frage?  
Kennst Du Schiller und Goethe – ? – ja!  
**Aber kannst Du radfahren?**

As mentioned above, the direct address to the reader brings to mind the rhetoric of advertising, particularly appearing as it does alongside an engraving of a bicyclist. What's more, this impression is entirely consistent with the message of this passage, which poses a challenge to the superior status of salons, art galleries, literary soirées, and

classics such as Schiller and Goethe, suggesting that popular entertainments – such as soccer and bicycling, but also advertising – have greater contemporary relevance. In this attack on high culture, bicycling represents a counterpoint: physical rather than intellectual, mobile rather than stationary, popular rather than elite, modern rather than traditional, and certainly closer to the world of mass media than to that of the salon.<sup>32</sup> The question “Kannst du radfahren?” encompasses an overall attitude towards modernity, an embrace of mass media and a new, fast, physical, commercial culture that stands in opposition to a stagnating traditional culture. There is an element of hyperbole in this passage, and the address to the reader can easily be read as satirical. Nevertheless, Grosz’s hyperbole should not be mistaken for irony: the challenge that he poses to high culture is sincere. As he would later write:

Was taten die Dadaisten? Sie sagten, es ist egal, ob man irgend ein Gepuste von sich gibt – oder ein Sonett von Petrarca – oder Rilke – ob man Stiefelabsätze vergoldet oder Madonnen schnitzt – geschossen wird doch, gewuchert wird doch, gehungert wird doch, gelogen wird doch, wozu die ganze Kunst.<sup>33</sup>

Implicit in the challenge that popular culture poses to high culture is the charge that the latter has become politically irrelevant, incapable of confronting the circumstances of the present day.

In “Radfahren,” then, advertising and popular entertainment are presented as aspects of the modern world with which any politically-minded artist must engage. As Franz Jung wrote of this piece, “George Grosz verbreitete sich darin über die psychologische Notwendigkeit des Radfahrens: Ohne Radfahren keine Politik.”<sup>34</sup> Of course, this embrace of commercial culture as a political instrument was not without its complications. As McCloskey writes, “While prewar Expressionist critics had worried over the avant-garde’s engulfment by pulp novels, film, cabaret, and variété, left-wing critics raised the alarm over mass culture’s subversion of the German workers’ necessary self-recognition as a class and awareness of their shared oppression.”<sup>35</sup> If “Radfahren” pushes against this critical trend by endorsing mass culture as a political tool, it risks glossing over the political and economic forces that give rise to mass culture in the first place.<sup>36</sup> Although Grosz refers to the wall advertisements as “diese Erlasse des Kaufmanns (des wahren Herrn dieser Zeit),” class consciousness is hardly the central aim of this piece: the critical moments in “Radfahren” are directed primarily against high culture (to which advertising is favorably contrasted), rather than against the commercial interests that these advertisements serve. Grosz would later acknowledge that his fondness for commercial culture, and particularly for American mass culture, did not always harmonize with his political aims and alliances. As he wrote in 1929, reflecting on his childhood fascination with American adventure and detective novels: “Jedenfalls war damals Amerika das Land meiner Sehnsucht und ist es sonderbarerweise, zum Ärger meiner orthodoxen marxistischen Freunde, bis heute geblieben.”<sup>37</sup> But without denying these contradictions, it is possible to see in Grosz’s “Radfahren” a powerful argument that advertising and popular entertainment, as part of the urban world of shocks and sensations, speak to modern citydwellers in a way that traditional culture cannot, and consequently offer greater political potential. “Radfahren” lays out a new approach to

political art that not only recognizes, but also embraces the media and shocks of the city street.

### Elasti-City Berlin: “Man muß Kautschukmann sein!”

Appearing in the left-hand column of the same page, Grosz’s “Man muß Kautschukmann sein!” (Fig. 16) takes up many of the same themes addressed in “Radfahren.” Like “Radfahren,” “Kautschukmann” constructs a reader who is confronted by the shocks of the city, and must adapt to them in order to survive: “Ja, Kautschukmann sein — eventuell den Kopf zwischen die Beine stecken oder durchs Faß springen — und spiralig in die Luft schnellen! sieh, ein Paragraph rempelt Dich an, / eine Affiche.”<sup>38</sup> Notably, these first shocks are textually induced – a paragraph or a poster is a sufficient affront to unsettle the sensitive reader. But the section that follows introduces additional shocks of modernity and war:

ein Flohzirkus . . .  
.  
.  
.  
(sämtliche Flöhe liegen an Schlingen —  
desertieren ausgeschossen — Springen von  
Flöhen auf Kommando,  
Parademarsch der Flöhe  
. . . . .)  
Immerhin wichtig  
ist, das Gleichgewicht zu [*sic*] behalten!  
Wo vordem die gotische Kirche,  
messelt sich heute  
das Warenhaus hoch — !  
— Die Fahrstühle sausen . . . Eisenbahnunglücks,  
Explosionskatastrophen . . .  
— quer durchrast der Balkanzug Mitteleuropa

Like “Radfahren,” this passage brings together a number of shocks of modernity, from the railway accident (with which the medical discourse of shock originated in the nineteenth century<sup>39</sup>) to the replacement of religion by commerce. Perhaps most remarkable, though, are the two figures used to represent the war: first, the “Balkanzug,” which ties the shock of war to the jolts of modern transportation; and second, the flea circus (cleverly employing periods to represent fleas), with its immediate evocation of soldiers, trained to jump on command and unable to desert. All of these shocks, the piece suggests, are part of the world in the face of which the modern individual – and particularly the modern artist – must “maintain equilibrium.”

Indeed, whereas “Radfahren” addresses the man on the street (or in the train) who is confronted by the shocks of the modern city, the emphasis in “Kautschukmann” is on

the modern artist, who is prodded to engage more fully with the contemporary world. In Grosz's text, this address to the artist becomes clear in the following passage:

Wie gesagt, Kautschukmann sein  
beweglich in allen Knochen  
nicht bloß im Dichter-Sessel dösen  
oder vor der Staffelei schön getönte Bildchen pinseln.

The traditional painter or poet is contrasted to a flexible new artist who can adapt to the demands of the present. As Theodor Däubler wrote of Grosz's work, "Eine Großstadt hat ungeahnte Elastizitäten: das Handwerk des Künstlers, der sie darstellt, muß konform sein."<sup>40</sup> What's more, the artist is called to engagement:

Den Bequemen gilt's zu stören  
beim Verdauungsschläfchen  
ihm den pazifistischen Popo zu kitzeln,  
rumort! explodiert! zerplatzt! – oder hängt euch  
ans Fensterkreuz . . . . .

The pacifism that is criticized here should not be understood simply as opposition to the war (which was, after all, a position strongly advocated by *Neue Jugend*), but rather as the defeatist decision, in the face of war, to withdraw into art rather than engaging actively in revolutionary politics. The artist, Grosz suggests, needs perseverance and flexibility in order to endure the shocks of war and modernity; the goal, though, is not merely survival, but also the creation of a new – perhaps shocking – politically engaged art.

The artist, then, must "Wieder elastisch werden" like the "rubber man" of the circus or variety. In the passage that follows, the full significance of this rubber man becomes clear: "Ladies and gentlemen!! / jeder hat Zutritt!" This barker's call serves as a reminder that the rubber man represents an art form with popular appeal, a contrast to the poet in his armchair or the painter before his easel. This popular emphasis is echoed by the piece's typography. The title presented as a headline (complete with exclamation point) and the larger type and bright red and green ink are not only a printer's tricks to draw attention; rather, they enact precisely what "Kautschukmann" calls for, a flexibility on the part of the artist and an openness to popular culture. The "elastic" artist, the "rubber man," is not only prepared for the shocks of modernity (including those of the city and of the war), he is also a popular entertainer with mass appeal that can be utilized for the purposes of political provocation.

The rhetorical thrust of this piece is further reinforced by the caption under the image that accompanies it. Although the photograph appears to depict Grosz himself, the caption, "Ein 'Marsyas' Interessent," is a mocking reference to *Marsyas*, an elitist and exorbitantly priced journal of art and literature that debuted in 1917. The first issue of *Marsyas* did not appear until July/August 1917, but Grosz was presumably familiar with the limited-edition prospectus that had been published in May.<sup>41</sup> In this prospectus, Theodor Tagger, the magazine's publisher, characterized *Marsyas* as apolitical, rejecting any attempt to reach "das Volk" with new art.<sup>42</sup> As he later wrote in his diary, "Massenwirkungen: ich lehne sie ab. Sie existieren nicht."<sup>43</sup> Tagger was equally dismissive of the techniques of mechanical reproduction used by many modern periodicals, writing, "weg mit den Klischeés. Denn die sind falsch, geben Wirkungen des

Originals ganz falsch. Lieber ein Original als tausend falsche Klischées für das selbe Geld.”<sup>44</sup> Accordingly, each copy of the very limited print run of *Marsyas* was accompanied by original etchings, woodcuts, or lithographs.<sup>45</sup> Tagger’s *Marsyas* thus provided an ideal foil for the “weekly” edition of *Neue Jugend*: whereas Tagger rejected any attempt to appeal to the masses, *Neue Jugend* embraced sensational typography and wide distribution; whereas Tagger rejected mechanical reproductions, *Neue Jugend* made profligate use of them; whereas Tagger charged 100 marks or more per issue, *Neue Jugend* was priced at 20 pfennige. The attack on salon culture in Grosz’s works found its specific target in Tagger’s *Marsyas*.

## Conclusions

Readers who turned to the back page of the June issue of *Neue Jugend* found reviews – unsigned, but apparently also written by Grosz<sup>46</sup> – of several variety performances. Like ragtime, the variety represented to Grosz a modern, popular alternative to traditional high culture. Grosz would later write that when he arrived in Berlin in 1912, he discovered “wunderbare Theater, einen Riesen-zirkus, Kabarette und Revuen.”<sup>47</sup> With this discovery, McCloskey writes, “the stage was set for the encounter between the avant-garde and mass culture that provided the basis for Grosz’s and Berlin Dada’s provocative synthesis of high and low cultural forms in the late war years.”<sup>48</sup> This synthesis was well underway in *Neue Jugend*, as a comparison of Grosz’s variety reviews to his pieces on the front page of the June issue reveals. In his review of a show at the Apollo-Theater, Grosz praised the acrobatic achievements of the Ploetz-Larella sisters as “biegsame Kautschukdamen,” but lamented, “Arlo und Dolo ... Humor-Radfahrer, haben ihre Nummer noch nicht im ganzen so konzentriert und schlagend durchgearbeitet um als erstklassige Radnummer zu gelten.”<sup>49</sup> This thematic overlap can hardly be an accident: rather, it suggests that the bicyclist in “Radfahren” and the rubber man in “Kautschukmann” are not merely figures drawn from mass culture at large, but are at least familiar from, if not directly inspired by, the popular entertainment of the variety.

It is important to emphasize that this synthesis was conceived not only as an artistic, but also as a political employment of popular entertainment and mass media. In both “Radfahren” and “Kautschukmann,” Grosz begins with a depiction of the shock experience of the city that requires some sort of adaptation or endurance on the part of the reader. In each case, though, this shock is ultimately transformed into an instrument of critique: street advertising and the sports of bicycling and soccer are opposed to bourgeois salon art, and the rubber man as a figure of the popular artist is opposed to the poet or painter confined to an armchair or easel. It is worth noting, too, that the bicyclist and the rubber man represent not only popular, but also physical activities: both the mind and the body are engaged in this critique.

Grosz’s contributions, like the newspaper format of *Neue Jugend*, make the case for the necessity of an engagement of art with society, an embrace of popular forms, and a rejection of elitist artistic movements that pride themselves on their distance from mass culture. The appearance of brand names and advertising-style slogans within Grosz’s works emphasizes this willingness to embrace even commercial culture as a modern and effective means of communication. This does not mean, of course, that Grosz and the

other collaborators on *Neue Jugend* exempted these media from critique. In later paintings such as *Stützen der Gesellschaft* (1926), Grosz would look critically at the reactionary influence of the mainstream press on German society. But this criticism applied to the particular political aims and methods that these newspapers employed, and not to the nature of mass media as such. Where Grosz and other *Neue Jugend* collaborators departed from the left-wing critics described by McCloskey above was in their belief that mass media and popular entertainment were not inherently reactionary, but could be employed to revolutionary effect.

*Neue Jugend*, and Grosz's contributions in particular, represent a significant, if perhaps overly optimistic, moment in the history of engaged art. Soon after the war ended, there would be newspapers with more expressly revolutionary agendas, such as *Die Rote Fahne*, and even a satirical Communist newspaper, *Der Knüppel*.<sup>50</sup> But *Neue Jugend* differed from these papers as well with its mix of satire, literary texts, and political engagement. *Neue Jugend*'s newspaper format sent a signal that art and literature must adapt to and employ media suited to the modern age if they were to have any political effect. Grosz's "Radfahren" and "Kautschukmann" likewise emphasized the political power of popular media, while placing a premium on the artist's ability to respond to the shocks of modernity and to incorporate them into his work. In addition, they reveled in the hedonistic appeal of advertising and popular entertainment, a step that many artists and media critics were not prepared to take. Short-lived though it was, *Neue Jugend* provided a provocative model for the Berlin Dada movement, both advocating and enacting a radical synthesis of art, politics, and popular culture.

## Chapter Three

### **From Dada to Concrete: Poetry in the Information Age**

In Concrete poetry, the poetic engagement with mass media that had been pioneered to a great extent by the Dada movement was adapted to respond to the new media landscape of the postwar era. Emerging in German-speaking countries and around the world in the 1950s, Concrete poetry shared with Dada an active involvement with modern media, including both advertising in particular and information technologies in general. Like the Dadaists, many Concrete poets drew on the influence of commercial advertising to create eye-catching, iconic poems. But whereas the Dadaists frequently stretched the limits of sensationalist advertising techniques to attract attention, Concrete poets more often adopted strategies of minimalism, simplicity, and clarity, creating poems that resembled corporate logos or advertising slogans. While these poems at times present commercial media in a critical light, their formal characteristics suggest that the aims of Concrete poetry fundamentally overlap with those of the advertising of its era: efficient communication of a simple message presented in a rationalized, internationally accessible form.

The relationship of Concrete poetry to advertising, and to mass media in general, thus reflects the legacy of the Dada movement, but also diverges substantially from the Dada program in its response to new media realities. Eugen Gomringer, the so-called “father of Concrete poetry,”<sup>1</sup> acknowledged the influence of Dada (as well as Futurism and Expressionism) in his 1954 manifesto “vom vers zur konstellation,” writing “so kann deren leistung innerhalb der entwicklung der neuen dichtung [...] nicht verkannt werden”; however, he cautioned, “die weltanschauliche begründung und der ausdrucks-wille, der hinter dieser dichtung steht, sind uns nicht mehr zugehörig und sind nicht mehr zeitgemäss.”<sup>2</sup> This anachronism, Gomringer argued in his 1960 essay “weshalb wir unsere dichtung ‘konkrete dichtung’ nennen,” was attributable not only to broader social circumstances, but also to specific technological developments:

auch die futuristen und die dadaisten gehören zweifellos zu den vorbereitern der konkreten dichtung, wobei ich allerdings gleich mit entschiedenheit sagen muss, dass wir – auch wenn für das ungeübte auge und ohr oft so gut wie kein unterschied zwischen unseren gebilden und denjenigen der genannten kunstrichtungen vorhanden ist – unsere dichtung unter dem geistigen vorzeichen unserer eigenen zeit machen. auch wenn die früheren dichter ebenfalls mit nur ganz wenigen worten gedichte schrieben, so ist der unterschied zu unseren gedichten noch beträchtlich. wir leben heute mit der möglichkeit, die wortselektion nach bestimmten programmgesteuerten mustern auf automatischem weg vorzunehmen und texte auf automatischem weg zusammenzusetzen. die eben genannten dichter, unsere wegbereiter, lebten dagegen zu einer zeit der prätechnischen kunst.<sup>3</sup>

While Gomringer’s characterization of Dada and Futurism as “pretechnical” is clearly hyperbolic, it is true that Concrete poetry emerged under radically different technological conditions than did its literary forebears, and that this difference was reflected in new

poetic forms. Concrete poets used the typewriter, the radio, the magnetic tape, and sometimes the computer in their works. And even in texts that did not directly employ these technologies, they reflected on the theoretical implications of the technologization of linguistic and literary production.

The central consequences of these new media technologies for many Concrete poets included an increasing desemanticization and desubjectification of language. Like the Dadaists, Concrete poets downplayed the semantic aspects of language in their poems, focusing instead on the material and visual properties of the poetic text, such as typography and design. Indeed, Concrete poets not only treated text as material, they also utilized chance, probabilistic, or permutational procedures to minimize the role of the author, resulting in newly desubjectified forms of writing. This move away from semantics and subjectivity can be seen as a response to new communications technologies, as well as to the new understanding of language and communication provided by recent developments in information theory. Theorists such as R.V.L. Hartley and Claude E. Shannon treated language as a quantity of information or material that could be understood in terms of order and entropy, redundancy and novelty, with no regard for its meaning.<sup>4</sup> Many Concrete poets adopted these concepts for their poems, devising new poetic forms centered around repetition and variation.

While Concrete poetry can thus be seen as a movement profoundly influenced by innovations in new media and information theory, Concrete poets also used the insights provided by these new media and theories to approach conventional print media from a new perspective. As Marshall McLuhan argued in his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the distinguishing characteristics of a particular medium may be difficult to discern until the dominance of that medium is challenged, or until another dominant medium takes its place.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Concrete poets, writing at the same time as McLuhan, were acutely aware of the particularities of print, as they saw the technology of the book giving way to new audio and visual media. One of the key characteristics that both McLuhan and many Concrete poets recognized in print was its repeatability: as McLuhan wrote of the early years of print culture, “The sixteenth century Renaissance was an age on the frontier between two thousand years of alphabetic and manuscript culture, on the one hand, and the new mechanism of repeatability and quantification, on the other.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as W. Terrence Gordon comments, McLuhan viewed “repeatability as the subliminal message of print permeating Western thought since Gutenberg.”<sup>7</sup> Like McLuhan, many Concrete poets perceived repeatability and quantification as fundamental characteristics of the printed word – a perception that may have been made possible in part by the importance of these characteristics in the same modern communications media that threatened the dominance of print media. The ubiquity of repetition in Concrete poetry can thus be seen on the one hand as an adoption of the defining characteristics of new communications media and the new theoretical framework that accompanied them, on the other hand as a reflection of the retrospective discovery that these characteristics were also essential to the older, more established medium of print.

Thus, while the poetic encounter with mass media in Concrete poetry ranges from the utilization of techniques borrowed from commercial advertising to the application of information theory in the process of literary production, the medium in which this encounter takes place is most frequently the poem as printed text. In these texts, a wide



variety of perspectives on the role of new media can be discerned. Gomringer, for instance, approached new media with an uncritical optimism, seeing efficient communication as an indispensable part of the modern world, and praising the universal language of airports and international advertising. In the works of other Concrete poets, though, such as Franz Mon or Ferdinand Kriwet, a more ambivalent attitude can be seen, combining a fascination with the potential of these new media with a critical awareness of their role in the desemanticization and desubjectification of language. Given the volume and range of work that falls under the heading of “Concrete poetry,” this chapter makes no claim to offer a comprehensive view of the movement.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the aim is to demonstrate, using a limited number of examples, that new developments in advertising, communication, and information technology and theory played a more significant role in Concrete poetry than has generally been recognized, and that certain characteristics of Concrete poetry that may at first seem trivial or gratuitous, such as its penchant for repetition, take on greater significance if considered in this light. While Concrete poetry inherited a legacy from Dada, it developed this legacy in ways that responded to the new media and technologies of the postwar era. If Dada was the poetry of the popular press, Concrete poetry was the poetry of the information age.

### **Poetry for Airports: Advertising and Internationalism**

In 1953, Gomringer published *konstellationen constellations constelaciones*, the quadrilingual book that introduced Concrete poetry *avant la lettre* to the German-speaking world.<sup>9</sup> This book did not yet use the term “Konkrete Poesie,” but it displayed many of the stylistic features with which that term would soon become associated: notably, a minimal vocabulary consisting largely of short, everyday words; the repetition of the same few words throughout the poem, often adhering more or less closely to a combinatorial pattern; a disregard for many elements of conventional syntax and punctuation; and an emphasis instead on the visual arrangement of the words, both on the page and in relation to each other, as a key determinant of their meaning. Of course, these features would not be equally prominent in all of the Concrete poetry that followed: while some poets, including Franz Mon, Heinz Gappmayr, and Gomringer himself, made extensive use of typography and the visual space of the page,<sup>10</sup> others, such as Helmut Heißenbüttel, often adhered to a more conventional, linear presentation of the text.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this combination of lexical minimalism, repetition, syntactic simplicity, and a strong visual focus would come to characterize a sort of ideal type of what would soon be known as the “Concrete poem.”<sup>12</sup>

These features contributed to the ability of Concrete poetry to quickly spread and develop into an international movement. The simplicity and the strong visual component of many Concrete poems allowed them to be understood with minimal assistance even by readers who did not speak the language in question, and these forms were relatively easy to adapt from one language to another. Consequently, anthologies could feature works in a variety of languages, often with only a lexical gloss or with no translation at all. The rapid international spread of Concrete poetry is attested by multilingual publications such as Gomringer’s own magazine *konkrete poesie / poesia concreta* (which declared Concrete poetry to be “das ästhetische kapitel der universalen sprachgestaltung unserer

zeit”) as well as numerous international anthologies.<sup>13</sup> Concrete poetry appeared to some as a welcome antidote to years dominated by national and nationalist literatures, an opportunity to move beyond wartime nationalisms, as well as a forward-looking literary movement well suited to the technological and economic realities of the postwar world, with its rapid communication and global travel.

These latter characteristics are emphasized in Gomringer’s manifestos: here internationalism is consistently associated with a utopian ideal of progress in the rationalization of communication, which easily reveals its utility in the development of global markets. In “vom vers zur konstellation” Gomringer remarked, “die konstellation ist inter- und üernational. ein englisches wort mag sich zu einem spanischen fügen, wie gut passt die konstellation auf einen flughafen!”<sup>14</sup> He returned to this theme repeatedly in later essays. In his 1960 “das gedicht als gebrauchsggegenstand” he wrote:

der sinn der reduzierten sprache ist ja nicht die technik der reduktion an sich, sondern – bei allem immanenten zwang zur regelung und ordnung – die grössere beweglichkeit und freiheit der mitteilung, die zudem so allgemein wie möglich sein sollte, so wie es anweisungen auf flughäfen oder strassenverkehrszeichen sind.<sup>15</sup>

And in his 1969 “Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung” he recalled:

Dementsprechend bestand meine ideale Vorstellung einer Begegnungsstätte der modernen, polyglotten Gesellschaft im Flughafen. Im Flughafen, in dem die Verbindungen der ganzen runden Welt hergestellt werden, in dem es nur wichtige und relativ wenige, dafür unzweideutige, klare Beschriftungen, Signale und Zeichen gibt, die jedermann, gleich welcher Muttersprache, verständlich sein müssen. Der Flughafen spielte die Rolle eines idealen Modells.<sup>16</sup>

This airport motif combines the ideals of internationalism and effective communication: simple, unambiguous transmission of a message or signal is not only a goal in its own right, it is also a necessary appendage to the social phenomenon of increasing international mobility.

But the sorts of communication that Gomringer describes at the airport – “Beschriftungen, Signale und Zeichen” – are strictly limited in their form and function: the messages that they convey are conceived in terms of a simplistic, behavioristic signal-response model. As several critics have noted, this form of communication, while easing comprehension and eliminating ambiguity, leaves little room for critical reflection or agency; the reader is expected not to think, but to act in the manner indicated by the sign.<sup>17</sup> The utility of such communication at the airport or in traffic is readily apparent, but the motivation for applying it to poetry is not immediately clear. Indeed, in one passage of “vom vers zur konstellation,” Gomringer appears to reverse the terms of the relationship between Concrete poetry and airport signage, presenting Concrete poetry as a field of experimentation for the development of new models of communication that can later be put to practical use: “durch die vorbildlichkeit seiner spielregeln kann das neue gedicht die alltagssprache beeinflussen.”<sup>18</sup> In “Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung,” however, the airport itself is the model, and poetry is merely following its lead.<sup>19</sup> If these ideal forms of communication already exist at the airport, though, Gomringer’s manifestos do not specify what role remains for the poet-cum-“Sprachgestalter.”<sup>20</sup>

Whatever the theoretical strengths and weaknesses of Gomringer's airport poetics may be, it must also be asked whether these theoretical texts accurately describe either his own poetic practice or that of other Concrete poets. After all, it is far from uncommon to discover discrepancies between the intentions expressed in avant-garde manifestos and the actual works of art or literature that emerge from these same movements. This is certainly the case at times in Dada, and it can be observed in Concrete poetry as well. Even if airport signs are provisionally accepted as the epitome of effective communication (a questionable proposition in itself), Gomringer's poems can hardly be said to adhere faithfully to their model. Rather, Gomringer's constellations, at least the most successful ones, generally admit of multiple interpretations and frequently derive their interest from this ambiguity. The poem "worldwide," for instance, pairs German prepositions with English nouns, beginning "von airport / zu airport // von safety / zu safety," but ends with the linguistically indeterminate "von knall / zu knall // von fall / zu fall."<sup>21</sup> The appearance of the German "knall" allows the final lines to be understood as "from case / to case," but they could alternately be read, either in German or in English, as "from fall / to fall." (There is also an implicit allusion to the German expression "von Knall auf Fall" – "all of a sudden.") In contrast to Gomringer's manifestos, this text presents the polyglot airport as a site characterized not by clear and unequivocal communication, but rather by encounters between languages from which confusion may result. Perhaps what Gomringer's constellations actually share with airport signs is not an ideal, universally comprehensible clarity, but rather the capacity to generate ambiguity with a minimum of means – a worthwhile accomplishment in poetry, though less suited to transportation systems.

The rhetoric of internationalism also connected Concrete poetry ideologically to two cultural phenomena that make an unlikely pair at first sight: on the one hand, the interwar avant-gardes; and on the other hand, the increasingly international practice of advertising in the decades following the Second World War. The ideal of a universal language had been advocated by a number of avant-gardists, including the Dadaists, with their frequently bilingual and multilingual publications, as well as the International Constructivists. As early as 1920, Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling had collaborated on a pamphlet advocating an "Universelle Sprache"<sup>22</sup>; and Werner Graeff had declared in 1927 in *De Stijl*, "Wir brauchen eine Internationale Verkehrszeichensprache. Für die wichtigsten Verkehrsbedürfnisse müssen eindeutige, klare Zeichen gefunden werden, die in allen Ländern gleiche Anwendungen finden."<sup>23</sup> The logic that new and faster means of transportation require new and more efficient means of communication was thus familiar, and the idea of applying a pragmatic, design-oriented sensibility to the task of creating a new visual "language" was one for which Gomringer could easily appeal to historical precedent.<sup>24</sup> Where Gomringer departed from these models, however, was in attempting to apply these principles to poetry, where the content to be communicated and the response to be evoked in readers were less clearly dictated by practical necessity.

There was another realm, though, in which the principles of efficient communication and internationalism were likewise closely intertwined, and in which the aims of communication were more straightforward: namely, the realm of advertising. The decades following the Second World War brought not only a new boom in international travel and an expansion of global markets, but also a greater influence for American

products and American advertisements around the globe, and particularly in Germany. American advertising introduced both an increasingly scientific approach (drawing particularly on the behavioristic methods that Gomringer invoked) and an increasing tendency towards internationally rather than nationally oriented ad campaigns.<sup>25</sup> This attitude was identified and praised in several articles published in American advertising industry publications in the 1960s by Erik Elinder, the president of a Stockholm-based advertising agency and “an internationally-recognized advertising man.”<sup>26</sup> In an article entitled “International Advertisers Must Devise Universal Ads,” Elinder compared advertisements in 1950, 1955, and 1960 issues of *Reader’s Digest* from various countries in order to see how far the advertising in each country had “progressed towards Americanization.” He concluded with satisfaction, “Isn’t it remarkable that national advertisers [...] have, of their own accord, without directives, fallen in step with a visual world language, which is maturing before our eyes?”<sup>27</sup> Elinder took up this theme again a few years later in the article “How International Can European Advertising Be?” There he argued for greater standardization of advertisements across the Western European market, insisting that it was a mistake to “create *national* campaigns for *international* products.”<sup>28</sup> Elinder not only held that new media such as television were “really going to break language barriers on a large scale,” he also argued, “A picture, of course, is the most international conveyor of a message we have,” noting that the same image and layout could be used across different language markets.<sup>29</sup> In conclusion, he wrote, “The point is that advertising *must* become international.”<sup>30</sup>

The rhetoric of a “visual world language” in Elinder’s article is not only superficially similar to that of the Constructivists, or of Concrete poets like Gomringer. Rather, it reflects the extent to which the utopian visions of the interwar avant-gardes, which even in their own day informed and were informed by commercial realities, could be further assimilated and adapted to commercial ends. Internationalist sentiment that had emerged in reaction to the First World War’s nationalist excesses could be applied to the development of international markets, while the harmonious fantasy of a universal language could be put into practice in universal ads. The tension, and at times the reconciliation, between avant-garde ideals and their later commercial application can often be seen in the poetic and theoretical texts of Concrete poetry, in which these two influences play a crucial role. The aspiration towards internationalism and universality that is evident in Concrete poetry clearly locates the movement at the nexus of influences including both the historical avant-gardes and the advertising practices of the *Wirtschaftswunder* era.

In many of Gomringer’s manifestos, the result appears as a naïve insistence that these utopian and commercial aims can coexist without contradiction, combined with a refusal to acknowledge how the historical situation has changed in the several decades since these utopian aims were first formulated. Gomringer at times displays a stubborn resistance to any historical perspective that would interfere with his fundamentally optimistic viewpoint, or with the postwar viability of interwar utopian visions. In 1969, for instance, he complained that poets had not yet taken their rightful place among the designers at work on the construction of a new society:

In dieser positiven Äußerung zur Gestaltung der Umwelt fehlte eigentlich nur eine Stimme, die Stimme des Literaten oder des Poeten.

Merkwürdigerweise wurden diese über dem Roman- und Kurzgeschichtenschreiben und der Vergangenheitsbewältigung auch nicht gewahrt, daß längst, seit den Zwanzigerjahren, interessante Entwicklungen im Gange waren, die es gestattet hätten, den Sprachgestalter in das Team der internationalen Gestalter zu stellen.<sup>31</sup>

In a later revision, the rhetoric became even stronger: “über dem roman- und kurzgeschichtenschreiben und *vor lauter vergangenheitsbewältigung*.”<sup>32</sup> The clear import of these passages is that working through the past is only a distraction from the true responsibility of writers to contribute to the planning of a new society, an aim that Gomringer uncritically adopts from both interwar avant-gardes and contemporary *Wirtschaftswunder* advocates.<sup>33</sup>

One consequence of this perspective is the widespread failure of Concrete poetry to address the immediate past, most particularly the Second World War and the Holocaust. Certainly there are exceptions to this general rule, such as Ernst Jandl’s poem “markierung einer wende” or Helmut Heißenbüttel’s “Deutschland 1944,” as well as works by Max Bense that will be discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>34</sup> However, these are few and far between, and Gomringer’s own work does not offer any similar examples. Perhaps the clearest attempt on Gomringer’s part to account for this relative absence of critical historical perspective in Concrete poetry comes in a brief essay that he wrote about Heimrad Bäcker’s *Nachschrift* – a later work which, like Heißenbüttel’s “Deutschland 1944,” employed Concrete methods in its reckoning with the Holocaust.<sup>35</sup> Gomringer writes: “Wir hatten nicht mit der frischen Vergangenheit, die wir als abgeschlossen betrachteten, nicht mit dem Nationalsozialismus, nicht mit seiner schrecklichen Sprache gerechnet. In unserer pragmatischen Euphorie spielten Coca Cola und ping pong die Rolle von neuen Wegmarken.”<sup>36</sup> Even here, though, the extent of Gomringer’s self-criticism is limited, and he still displays an unmistakable bias in favor of formal innovation: he spends a full paragraph of this one-page essay praising all of the “strukturelle Möglichkeiten” that Bäcker’s work offers even when the “semantische Dimension” is provisionally ignored.

Several authors have offered more sympathetic readings of the return to avant-garde models by Concrete poets, framing it as an attempt to restore what was lost, or a form of retroactive resistance to the Nazi suppression of these movements. For instance, Karl Riha, in an essay about Gomringer, refers to the attempts of Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann “unmittelbar nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs, der deutschen Nachkriegsliteratur die notwendigen Anstöße zu geben, die sie nach rückwärts mit der abgerissenen Tradition der avantgardistischen Kunst und Literatur der zwanziger Jahre – Dada und Merz – und aktuell mit den Entwicklungen der internationalen Moderne verbinden sollten.”<sup>37</sup> Seen from this viewpoint, Gomringer’s allegiance to those same avant-gardes, and to the ideals of internationalism, might likewise be viewed as an effort to restore what the war had destroyed. Similarly, Anna Katharina Schaffner writes of the Brazilian Concrete poet Augusto de Campos and the Austrian Gerhard Rühm: “De Campos regards the recuperation of avant-garde practices as a re-establishment of contact with a project which has been prematurely terminated by historical forces. This is a notion he shares with the poets of the Austrian Wiener Gruppe, in particular Rühm, who feels that the group was tying up loose ends, taking up something which had been

suffocated prematurely by external forces beginning with the Nazi's [*sic*] degenerate art crusade. They were reviving something which was not yet over but temporarily stifled."<sup>38</sup> These comments suggest that the revival of the interwar avant-gardes, complete with their utopian social visions, might be seen as its own sort of critical gesture, a protest against the historical developments that destroyed them. While this view has a certain appeal, it also has its shortcomings, insofar as it does not account for the dangers inherent in those utopian visions themselves, or for the failures of their initial incarnations. Nevertheless, it offers one way of understanding how the experience of the Second World War could be taken as the basis not for a literature of remembrance, but rather for a newly forward-looking literature (however inspired by the avant-gardes of the past) that combined elements of social utopianism with an optimistic internationalism.

### **“Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung”: Concrete Poetry and Advertising**

If the ideals of internationalism and friction-free communication linked Concrete poetry to advertising in theory, the affinity was even clearer in practice: Concrete poets not only employed simple, easily recognizable forms and typography reminiscent of advertising, several Concrete poets were also professionally engaged in advertising and commercial graphic design. Poets including Gomringer, Heinz Gappmayr, Diter Rot, and Hansjörg Mayer were employed as advertisers, designers, typographers, or printers, and this commercial background exerted a clear influence on their poetic and artistic practice. Gomringer explicitly cited advertising and commercial design in his 1969 essay “Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung” as sources of inspiration for his poetry, writing that “Werbegrafik und Typografie” offered “eine wunderbare demokratische Geschmacksschulung. [...] Das Plakat, der Prospekt, die Anzeige, Kampfmittel der freien Marktwirtschaft, lieferten gleichsam gratis Ästhetik mit – oft sogar des Guten zuviel.”<sup>39</sup> With respect to his own literary development, he recalled that he had found it necessary to tear himself away from conventional literature “und sozusagen bei den Gestaltern und Architekten, bei der Industrie, den Grafikern und Typografen, bei den Werbern und Ergonomen nochmals in die Schule zu gehen.”<sup>40</sup>

This influence did not go unnoticed. Helmut Heißenbüttel commented that “Die Verwandtschaft [der Konkreten Poesie] mit den Praktiken der Werbegrafiker ist ohne Schwierigkeit zu erkennen,” while Max Bense wrote, “Konkrete Texte [...] nähern sich infolge ihrer typographischen und visuellen Abhängigkeit oft sehr stark plakativen Texten, d.h. ihr ästhetisches Kommunikationsschema entspricht gern einem werbetechnischen. So ähneln konkrete Texte oft Werbetexten; das zentrale Zeichen, meist ein Wort, übernimmt eine polemische oder proklamierende Funktion.”<sup>41</sup> In a few cases, this affinity for advertising was flaunted by Concrete poets who wished to favorably contrast themselves to other poets of a more traditional (allegedly outdated) literary mold: in “Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung,” Gomringer cast the majority of poets as “nicht so ganz auf der Höhe in Fragen über umweltbildende oder umweltbeeinflussende Kräfte wie Industrie, Produktmanagement, Sortimentsstruktur, Konsum und Werbung, Industrial Design, Architektur, Stadtplanung, Infrastruktur usw.,” before proceeding to describe the (ideal) Concrete poet as a more competent partner in the conception of a rational, modern world.<sup>42</sup> The image of the Concrete poet that

emerges here is not that of a jaded Dadaistic sophisticate who conflates art and commerce for the sake of provocation or self-promotion; rather, it is that of a collaborator with industry in the mold advocated by Peter Behrens or Ernst Growald: a poet whose “Zusage zum Teamwork in der Industrie” makes possible a symbiosis of poetry, advertising, and design.<sup>43</sup>

Gomringer also put this symbiosis into practice: in addition to publishing magazines such as *spirale* and *konkrete poesie / poesia concreta* – both of which featured Concrete poetry and art as well as stylistically similar advertisements for modern furniture, design, and printing services – Gomringer worked as the “Propagandachef” of the company SIA (Schmirgel- und Schleif-Industrie AG) in Frauenfeld, Switzerland, while also serving as director of the Schweizerischer Werkbund (SWB).<sup>44</sup> In his advertising work, Gomringer at times employed principles borrowed from his poetry: advertisements for the hat company Fürst & Cie. AG, for which Gomringer composed the text, made use of repetition and minimal syntactic complexity: “ein Hut mit Pfiff / ein Hut für Männer / ein sehr guter Hut / ein Hut von Fürst.”<sup>45</sup> Gomringer also provided the texts for a series of real-estate advertisements – e.g. “Witzig / im Hochhaus zur Palme / Zürich / plant und gestaltet / für Büros / mit großer Arbeit / plant und gestaltet / Witzig” – which he compared to his poem “der einfache weg” (“der einfache weg / ist / einfach der weg / ist / der einfache weg...”). As Gomringer explained, the Witzig text was part of a larger campaign that appeared in various print media, and the quasi-palindromic form allowed for variations in length to fit any given context. In his own treatment of these texts, Gomringer makes little distinction between these explicitly commercial texts and his poetic work, emphasizing instead how the formal devices of poetry can serve the ends of advertising.<sup>46</sup>

Max Bense, though not widely engaged as a copywriter, similarly made use of poetic techniques for advertising purposes: Bense’s poem “tallose berge” was written as an advertisement for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1965. Like many Concrete texts, “tallose berge” employs a limited character set – in this case, only the letters i, r, o, and n – using them to both semantic and visual effect (Fig. 17).<sup>47</sup> Most striking in visual terms is Bense’s shaping of the words into a mountain, meant to represent Corcovado mountain in Rio de Janeiro, with the “o” at the top suggesting the sun shining over it. “tallose berge” thus not only refers to the city, it also evokes it in iconic form.<sup>48</sup> Bense also devoted a chapter of his *Aesthetica* to the topic “Ästhetik und Werbung,” arguing that art can serve a pragmatic end in advertising, providing a familiar background against which novel information stands out.<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Bense echoes the Dadaists’ practice when he suggests the scenario “daß eine Firma in allen Zeitungen oder an allen Plakatwänden ein einziges, bisher unbekanntes Wort präsentiert: ‘Obrada’. Es erscheint als neues Wort, bereichert also das Repertoire, bietet demnach hohe statistische Information, wenn auch das Objekt, die Ware, auf die es sich bezieht, völlig dunkel bleibt.”<sup>50</sup> Like the Dadaists, Bense here acknowledges the power that a word can acquire precisely from the lack of any semantic associations. Bense does not fully equate art and advertising, insisting instead that the level of novelty or innovation in the former must be greater. Nevertheless, he places the two on a continuum, making their difference a matter of degree rather than kind. Whatever the actual commercial impact of Gomringer’s and Bense’s advertisements may have been, both their theoretical writings and their creative

work at the intersection of poetry and advertising offer evidence of these Concrete poets' willingness to employ poetic means for commercial ends, and of the ease with which this aim could be accomplished.

Some authors have gone so far as to identify a relationship of reciprocal influence between advertising and Concrete poetry. Gomringer wrote, "es besteht kein zweifel, daß schon viele werbeleute unbewußt oder bewußt von unseren versuchen beeinflusst worden sind."<sup>51</sup> Urs Meyer has recently argued, "Die Werbung wird auch für die 'Stuttgarter Gruppe' [...] sowie für die Wiener Gruppe [...] zum produktiven Impuls einer grafisch-sprachlichen Kunst, die sich selbst – im Unterschied zum Dadaismus – nur noch implizit als gesellschaftskritisch versteht. Umgekehrt finden die innovativen Experimente der Konkreten Poesie ihrerseits einen fruchtbaren Boden in der Werbung."<sup>52</sup> And a 1966 article entitled "Konkrete Poesie und Werbung" by Ulrich Luetjohann likewise claimed that advertisers had begun to borrow from Concrete poetry, though for Luetjohann this observation took the form of an accusation: he complained that advertisers "verwenden auf ihren Plakaten schreiende Farben, halbnackte Frauen und neuerdings sogar Poesie," urging, "Es gilt also, die konkrete Poesie aus den Händen der kaltschnäuzigen und literarisch unbedarften Werbung zu befreien."<sup>53</sup>

Luetjohann cited several characteristics of Concrete poetry that had been employed in advertising, illustrating his article with a number of examples; but while he succeeded in pointing out formal similarities, the causal relationship that he alleged is unconvincing. Many of the advertisements cited in the article resemble the rather small subgenre of Concrete visual poetry famously exemplified by Reinhard Döhl's "Apfel mit Wurm," in which the letters of the text form an image that visually echoes their meaning.<sup>54</sup> But this typographic practice was by no means original with Concrete poetry: similar techniques were already familiar from mainstream advertising (Fig. 18). That is not to say that an influence of Concrete poetry on advertising can be conclusively ruled out. One example cited by Luetjohann – a 1963 Volkswagen advertisement that displayed 16 photographs of a Volkswagen receding into the distance, with the caption "Der VW läuft / und läuft / und läuft..." growing smaller beneath each successive frame<sup>55</sup> – resembles many Concrete poems in its use of repetition, and can be plausibly compared to Concrete poems such as Gomringer's "wind" or Rühm's "SONNE" (Fig. 19), in which typographical means are likewise used to create an appearance of motion.<sup>56</sup>

Even here, though, the similarity is only partial, and it would be presumptuous to claim that the VW advertisement could not have been conceived of without the influence of Concrete poetry. Much more plausible is the view that Concrete poetry and print advertising were drawing on the same traditions in design and typography, while also responding to a transformation in visual culture at large in which one-dimensional linear text was giving way to more extensive use of a two-dimensional visual field. As David Rosenthal wrote in 1968, "We have heard a good deal in recent years, from Marshall McLuhan in particular, of the ending of an era of sequential, left-to-right thinking and its replacement by a sort of total-field sensibility which might be capable of taking in and digesting a page as a whole. Here I think we strike closer to home with the concretists."<sup>57</sup> Concrete poetry's emphasis on typography and design can be seen as a response to this move away from linear textuality, a move that had already been pioneered to a great extent by advertisers themselves.



But even if there is good reason to doubt the claim that advertising borrowed substantially from Concrete poetry, Luetjohann's article raised another issue that had plagued discussions of Concrete poetry from the beginning, and has continued to do so since: namely, the question of what implications this proximity to advertising has for the aesthetic value of Concrete poetry. In Luetjohann's case, the argument took the form of a defense of the artistic legitimacy of Concrete poetry against commercial misappropriations: "Es sind anreizende und werbende Formen, aber sie sollen nicht von der Werbung mißbraucht werden. Sie sollen echter Ausdruck von Sprachunsicherheit bleiben."<sup>58</sup> While advertisers employ linguistic or typographical styles to earn money, Luetjohann argued, Concrete poets have no such ulterior motives, making their linguistic experiments both freer and potentially more critical. Marjorie Perloff likewise allows that Concrete poetry at its best can offer critical insights into language; but for her, the similarity of some Concrete poetry to advertising is indicative not of a commercial raid on the aesthetic, but rather of the aesthetic limits of Concrete poetry itself. The question is not whether advertisers have borrowed from Concrete poetry or vice versa, but whether the extreme simplicity that many Concrete poems share with advertisements inevitably limits their depth of meaning. Thus Perloff asks "whether such Gomerger 'constellations' as *silencio* ["schweigen"] or *wind*, charming and witty as they are, especially the first time we read/see them, can continue to hold our attention," and "whether the conflation of Concrete poetry and advertising isn't a kind of dead end for the former."<sup>59</sup>

Similar criticisms have been voiced by other scholars who see a problem residing not only in the frequent simplicity of Concrete poetry, but also in the alleged limits of its critical potential.<sup>60</sup> Concrete poetry, these critics argue – and in this Gomerger, at least, would agree<sup>61</sup> – is fundamentally affirmative. Carole Anne Taylor, for instance, has accuses Concrete poetry of restricting itself to "celebratory, affirmative values, a pleasure with the tendency to turn away from the real world's pain," concluding that "such poetry cannot give birth to a sustained, focused criticism of personal and social malaise."<sup>62</sup> Thomas Kopfermann has similarly criticized a strain of Concrete poetry that he associates with Gomerger, Ferdinand Kriwet, and Claus Bremer, writing, "Diese Auffassung ist naiv-empirisch und positivistisch-positiv: sie affirmiert das ihr real Erscheinende. Ihre Kritik richtet sich gegen Inaktualitäten oder Anachronismen."<sup>63</sup> The stance that Kopfermann attributes to these Concrete poets bears a certain similarity to the view that Dadaists took of advertising and mass media as the reality of their age, but it also draws attention to a crucial difference: if the Dadaists' affirmations often had a satirical or critical undertone, exposing the hypocrisy of artists who denied their entanglement in the commercial sphere, this strain of Concrete poetry, at least in Kopfermann's view, generally steered clear of any direct confrontation with economic realities, adopting the form of advertising but saying little or nothing about its content.<sup>64</sup> As the discussion below will indicate, critique was not fully absent from the works of these poets: Kriwet's works frequently evince a Dadaistic tension between attraction to the sensations offered by mass media and cynical awareness of their manipulative power, while Bremer's typewriter poems at times challenge the transparency of textual communication itself. Nevertheless, Kopfermann is right to argue that the mediaphilic strain in Concrete poetry is frequently indulged at the expense of complexity and criticism, and that the affinity of

Concrete poetry for advertising is rarely balanced by a critical awareness of its economic function.

Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. The most frequently cited of these is the Brazilian poet Décio Pignatari's 1957 poem "beba coca cola" ("drink coca cola")<sup>65</sup> which transformed a marketing slogan into a critical statement. By rearranging the letters in "beba coca cola" to spell words such as "babe" ("drool") and "cloaca" ("filthy place," "cesspool"), Pignatari suggested, in Perloff's words, "that drinking Coca-Cola is at best a form of infantile regression and at worst the consumption of excrement." Even here, though, Perloff expresses reservations: "The Concrete poem as antiadvertisement [...] is perhaps not all that different from the Concrete poem as proto-advertising logo – in both cases, the reader, ostensibly free to construe the poem in a variety of ways, is actually constrained by the author's guidelines."<sup>66</sup> The problem that Perloff perceives is not so much that Concrete poetry can be employed in the service of industry, but rather that some Concrete poems, whether commercial in purpose or not, function just like advertisements, encouraging a single interpretation at the expense of complexity and tension. Nevertheless, Perloff's suspicions might be heightened by the fact that Pignatari also founded an advertising agency and used the techniques of Concrete poetry in advertisements such as one for the anti-diarrheal medicine "Disenformio," making it difficult to attribute anything like a consistent anti-commercial stance to the author himself, or to his works.<sup>67</sup>

The German-language Concrete poetry tradition does not offer any single "anti-advertisement" as iconic as Pignatari's, but German-speaking Concrete poets did respond to advertising and mass media in a variety of ways, with varying degrees of critical acuity. Gomringer's "roads 68," composed in English, presents a cavalcade of gas station names as if seen from a car traveling down the highway ("shell and / esso // esso and / texaco..."), ending with the poem's only rhyme: "bp and / shell // the common / smell."<sup>68</sup> This poem could be seen as a response to the tedious repetition of these brand names that confronts a traveler, or as an observation of their fundamental equivalence and interchangeability: "Die Sache ('the common smell') ist identisch, die Produktnamen nur verschieden."<sup>69</sup> Certainly, the reduction of gasoline to a "common smell" is not one that would likely occur in an advertisement for an oil company. Even if Gomringer's "anti-advertisement" is less pointed than Pignatari's, it indicates how Concrete poetry, at least in certain instances, can make critical use of brand names and advertising practices.

In other cases, Concrete poets trained their criticism less on the specific content of advertising and its recognizable brand names than on mass media more generally. Gerhard Rühm's "fototypocollagen," for instance, combine images and headline text taken from newspapers or magazines, casting media-generated images and clichés in a critical light. With their roots in Dada (and perhaps a successor in Barbara Kruger), these collages straddle the boundary between Concrete poetry and other media such as photomontage.<sup>70</sup> In other works, Rühm directed criticism at the transparency of the printed text itself: several of Rühm's "zeitungscollagen" layer scraps of newspaper text over each other to create a dense visual texture in which it is difficult to make out whole words, let alone a complete sentence.<sup>71</sup> Franz Mon, too, created fragmentary texts that resist any attempt at reading. Some of these texts, such as the collages "bild" and "raten sie mal," are likewise constructed out of newspaper scraps (Fig. 20).<sup>72</sup> In each of these

collages, roughly torn rings of newspaper radiate out from the center, bearing text, images, or both. Some layers are inverted, adding to the difficulty of reading. Notable in both collages, however, is the fact that these scraps issue an explicit *invitation* to reading: in the former, the slogan “schnell im bild” offers to quickly bring readers up to speed; in the latter, the headline “Raten Sie mal!” appears above the crossword puzzle that forms the background of the collage, challenging readers to engage with the puzzle. With these scraps of newspaper text, Mon draws attention to the kind of quick and unambiguous understanding that these newspapers claim to offer, precisely the sort of clarity that his fragmentary collages preclude.

Some of Mon’s other collages exhibit a less direct relationship to mass media, but confront readers with a similarly tantalizing prospect of understanding that is continually withheld. For many of his “textbilder” and “textflächen,” Mon cut source texts into thin strips and arranged them in overlapping rows or interwove them in criss-crossing layers, producing patterns that still bear traces of letters, but defy any attempt to decipher them. In “Schriftcollage,” the strips of text are just wide enough to allow words such as “Dokument” and “Abstraktion” to be made out, thus suggesting that this text can be read as a self-reflexive commentary on the transformation of a document into an abstraction (Fig. 21).<sup>73</sup> As Mon wrote of these texts, the collage techniques “bewirken die destruktion des gegebenen schriftmaterials bzw die konstruktion neuer textformen”: “die erschwernis der lesbarkeit kann bis zur auflösung des lettermaterials gehen [...] die semantische ebene wird nur noch punktuell erreicht doch strahlen von ihren bedeutungsresten interpretierende momente auf das textgeflecht aus.”<sup>74</sup> In some cases, this semantic dimension is completely absent, but the patterns of letters and letter-like forms maintain their hold on a would-be reader’s attention.

Although these collages can be seen as a disruption of the flow of text and information constantly supplied by newspapers, advertisements, and other mass media, they also demonstrate, like Raoul Hausmann’s *Plakatgedichte*, the extent to which the printed word, letter, or fragment retains its power even when the semantic dimension has been stripped away.<sup>75</sup> In a later essay, Mon credited Hausmann with “[d]ie Einsicht, daß die Alphabetzeichen ihre autonome Qualität haben,” referring to the *Plakatgedicht* “fmsbw” as an “asemantischer visueller Text der frühen Stunde.”<sup>76</sup> Mon’s texts, like Hausmann’s, draw attention to the non-semantic potential of language, and of print in particular. But this does not mean that these texts should be understood, as Hausmann’s often are, as a frontal assault on meaning, an effort to overturn an otherwise intact linguistic system that undergirds mass media and advertising. Rather, both Mon’s and Hausmann’s texts register a transformation in language that was brought about, at least in part, by mass media themselves. The discovery that printed text could maintain its visually captivating effect even in the absence of meaning had already been made by advertisers. Hausmann and Mon merely gave this discovery a poetic form, imitating the methods of a media economy in which the function of language had been called into question, and the visual properties of words or letters took precedence over their semantic function.

On the whole, then, Concrete poetry’s engagement with advertising exhibits two primary critical tendencies: on the one hand, there are a limited number of poems that function explicitly as “anti-advertisements,” targeting specific brands or products for

criticism; on the other hand, there is a more widespread tendency to respond critically to advertising or mass media by interfering with or complicating the process of printed communication, as seen in Rühm's and Mon's collages. Yet there is an equally strong, if not stronger, current in Concrete poetry that approaches advertising not as a target deserving of criticism, but rather as an enterprise not unlike Concrete poetry itself, concerned with linguistic experimentation and the development of new means of communication. For Gomringer, Bense, and others, the relevance of advertising to Concrete poetry lay less in the commercial function of advertisements than in the communicative strategies that they employed. These strategies, in turn, were founded on new theories and technologies of communication that downplayed semantics in favor of a quantitative approach to language and an emphasis on the materiality of the linguistic sign.

### **Media and Materiality**

Just as the Dadaists exhibited a fascination with print, and particularly with the combination of text and image that was increasingly prevalent in popular newspapers in the early twentieth century, many Concrete poets experimented with the media technologies of the postwar era, exploring their implications for poetic production. Concrete poets not only made frequent and creative use of the typewriter, they also employed the radio as a poetic medium, both composing *Hörspiele* and using radio broadcasts as source material for their own works.<sup>77</sup> Beginning in 1959, several Concrete poets even developed computer programs to produce poetry, a project that will be discussed in depth in the Chapter Five. As Reinhard Döhl writes: "Ein Charakteristikum der [...] Stuttgarter Gruppe/Schule war sehr früh bereits ihr Interesse an einer Verbindung von künstlerischer Produktion mit neuen Medien und Aufschreibsystemen. Das betrifft und erklärt zum einen das Interesse an Rundfunk und Hörspiel. Das betrifft aber insbesondere die Arbeit mit Rechenmaschinen."<sup>78</sup> Across these various media, certain consistent tendencies can be observed. Language was frequently treated "as physical matter, as a tactile object that one can squeeze and manipulate."<sup>79</sup> In visual texts, letters were typed over one another, arranged in layers and nonlinear patterns, and estranged from their corresponding sounds and referents. In audio montages, sounds were taken out of context, looped, and repeated. In computer-generated poems, words were provided as source material to a computer, which then produced texts in accordance with an algorithm, with no regard for meaning or for the absurdity of the sentences that often resulted. Each of these practices reflects a relationship to language in which the linguistic sign itself in its material form (letters on paper, sounds on magnetic tape, words on a monitor) is paramount, while the role of semantics is secondary.

A corollary to this desemanticization of language was its desubjectification: words treated as material were not entrusted with the duty of expressing the poet's sentiments or ideas, and the authorial presence in many of these works was accordingly minimal.<sup>80</sup> As Mon wrote, "sobald unsere Impulse, unsere inneren Ausgriffe als Wörter verlautet und geäußert sind, zeigt es sich, daß wir keines von ihnen selbst erfunden haben und sich schon in fremdem Besitz befindet, was wir daran für unser Eigenstes halten."<sup>81</sup> Concrete poetry, in Mon's view, provided an antidote to the illusion that language could

serve as a tool for subjective expression: these texts “wirken [...] als Alternative zum zeitgenössischen Sprachschwall, als unaufdringliche, aber radikale Kritik an der Masse von Gerede, dessen Hervorbringer nicht wissen, daß sie mit Tausenden fertiger Versatzstücke hantieren.”<sup>82</sup> Of course *Sprachskepsis* was nothing new in the 1950s, but the form that it took in Concrete poetry was nonetheless noteworthy: first, because rather than a melancholic longing for an unattainable union of language and reality, the skepticism of the Concrete poets frequently issued in works in which the written character appeared self-sufficient, in no need of a referent; and second, because in Concrete poetry this skepticism about the semantic and subjective functions of language was clearly tied to the perception that mass media and information technologies had radically transformed the nature of language. The desubjectification and desemanticization of language in Concrete poetry were merely reflections of transformations that had already taken place on a broad scale in mass media.

This connection was briefly suggested by Helmut Heißenbüttel, who noted in a 1969 lecture that the new formal criteria of poetry might be understood “im Zusammenhang mit der Entwicklung neuer Medien, der Fotografie, des Films, des Fernsehens, auch der Schallplatte, des Tonbands und des Hörfunks. Man könnte noch weitergehen und bestimmte Erscheinungen des Gedichts gerade in den letzten Jahren als Antwort auffassen auf die Schematisierung der Sprache im Bereich der neuen Medien.”<sup>83</sup> Heißenbüttel did not pursue this line of inquiry further in his lecture; nevertheless, his comments indicate that new media, information theory, and the impact of both on language and literature were on the radar of Concrete poets, and it is no surprise that this awareness is reflected in their work. Some poets, most notably Gomringer, wholeheartedly endorsed this new linguistic reality as a model for poetry: as he wrote in “vom vers zur konstellation,” “der heutige mensch will rasch verstehen und rasch verstanden werden. [...] für schnelle kommunikation ist das ferngespräch geeigneter als der brief, der funk geeigneter als die presse.” Poetry, Gomringer urged, should follow the example of everyday language “auf dem weg der formalen vereinfachung.”<sup>84</sup> For others, the role of poetry was not merely to emulate the course that language was already taking in the extra-literary world, but rather to reflect on those developments and draw their consequences in literature. What Carole Anne Taylor has written about the use of the computer in poetry can be applied to other technologies as well: “Often, computer technology aids in the endeavor to reduce language in such a way that the poems’ ‘content’ becomes, whether implicitly or explicitly, the role of written language in our time.”<sup>85</sup> Playfully or critically, intentionally or unintentionally, these poets explored the potential of desemanticized, desubjectified language as a poetic medium.

This tendency is apparent in the typewriter poems of Franz Mon and Claus Bremer, as well as in the typographic works of Hansjörg Mayer, Klaus Burkhardt, and Reinhard Döhl. It is also evident in the multimedia works of Ferdinand Kriwet, which include not only a wide range of text-based works, but also audio and video collages. As will be argued in the concluding section of this chapter and in Chapter Four, this focus on the materiality of the text, with a relative disregard for semantics, emerged not only from a fascination with the technologies of textual production, but also from an engagement with information theory as it had been developed by Claude E. Shannon and others. While new media technologies made possible new compositional practices that

emphasized the materiality of language, information theory provided a framework for a non-semantic understanding of language that Concrete poets embraced or critiqued in their texts.

### **Taking the Letter at its Word: Typewriters and Typography**

One technology that played a major role in the literary production of Concrete poets was the typewriter. Of course, the typewriter could hardly be considered a new medium by the 1950s, nor were the Concrete poets the first to explore the formal possibilities that it offered. Raoul Hausmann and Kurt Schwitters had both produced typewriter poems as early as the 1920s that would fit comfortably in most Concrete poetry anthologies.<sup>86</sup> And Siegfried Kracauer had noted in 1927 how the typewriter could inspire the creation of meaningless, repetitive patterns rather than carefully crafted verbal expressions: “Hatte ich früher mit dem Geschriebenen etwas ausdrücken wollen, so lernte ich nun begreifen, daß allein die Tätigkeit des Schreibens selber erstrebenswert sei. Auf große Papierbogen von untadeliger Weiße setzte ich Zahlenkolonnen und Buchstabenbilder, die nicht die geringste Andeutung eines Sinnes enthielten.”<sup>87</sup> But even if their experiments were not unprecedented, Concrete poets’ typewriter poems represented a deeper and more protracted engagement with the possibilities and limits of mechanical composition than had been seen before. The Concrete poets might thus be seen as fulfilling Walter Benjamin’s pronouncement: “Die Schreibmaschine wird dem Federhalter die Hand des Literaten erst dann entfremden, wenn die Genauigkeit typographischer Formungen unmittelbar in die Konzeption seiner Bücher eingeht.”<sup>88</sup>

It should be noted that the category of “typewriter poems” does not simply include all poems composed on a typewriter; rather, the term is used here to refer to poems in which the mechanical features and constraints of the typewriter play an essential structuring role. Many of these poems exploit the regularity of the typewriter to create uniform rows and columns of letters, while others blatantly resist this uniformity with irregular lines and overlapping characters. In each case, though, the typewriter is not merely a means for putting words on paper; rather, as Kracauer indicates, it inspires or provokes a type of composition that would generally not be undertaken by other means.<sup>89</sup> Mon likewise testified to the influence of the typewriter on his composition process:

Solche basale Nutzung der einzelnen Letter war möglich nur dank der massenweisen und also billigen Verbreitung der zur Handlichkeit entwickelten Schreibmaschine. Mit ihr hatten die Autoren ein gelenkiges Instrument an der Hand, das sie nicht nur von der – gewöhnlich zu teuren – Abhängigkeit vom Setzer befreite; ihre Mechanik ermöglichte, im Gegensatz zu den viel starrerem Gegebenheiten des Satzes, die präzise Positionierung des Schriftzeichens an beliebiger Stelle auf der Fläche, aber auch die Streuung mit gestuften Graden der optischen Verdichtung.<sup>90</sup>

In both Kracauer’s and Mon’s accounts, the typewriter brings about a fundamental reconceptualization of the relationship between author and text: if writing is often conceived of as a privileged means for the expression of internal, psychological states, the language produced by the typewriter is, by contrast, already external to the author, even at the beginning of the writing process. Language is thus reimagined not as an

outpouring of the author's innermost ideas and feelings, but rather as ready-made material that can, at most, be manipulated according to the author's whims or self-imposed rules. In this sense, the typewriter offers confirmation of Mon's words quoted above, "daß [...] sich schon in fremdem Besitz befindet, was wir daran für unser Eigenstes halten." As mentioned in the introduction, Kittler also sees the typewriter as a key technology in the transition from Romantic to modern writing practices, specifically in the way that it distances the text from its author. As David Wellbery writes in his foreword to the English edition of Kittler's *Discourse Networks*: "In order for this detachment of writing from subjectivity to occur, however, inscription had to become mechanized, and this happens with the typewriter."<sup>91</sup>

This view of writing as an encounter between the author and the foreign material of language is highlighted in poems that draw attention to the typing process itself – to the ways in which the arrangement of letters on a page creates meaning, or fails to do so. One frequent strategy in these poems is overtyping, building up layer upon layer of letters, often to the point of illegibility. Diter Rot, for instance, employed this technique in his 1958 poem "Advertising my typewriter" (Fig. 22).<sup>92</sup> The poem is seven lines long, each line consisting of the brand name "oliveti"; but each line is also typed over with the letter of "oliveti" that corresponds to the number of the respective line (i.e. the first line is typed over with "oooooooo," the second with "lllllll," etc.), so that the name can only be read clearly on a diagonal. Rot's poem draws attention to the instrument of its own creation and to the precision that the typewriter allows, enriching the poet's formal vocabulary with its regular horizontal and vertical grid. In this sense, the poem might indeed play the role of an advertisement, exhibiting the typewriter's technical capabilities. At the same time, though, by fixating on the typewriter and its brand name, "Advertising my typewriter" suggests that the instrument itself has come to dominate the process of composition: rather than using the typewriter to write a poem, the poet is stuck typing the name of the typewriter, or each letter of its name, over and over. In addition, with its overtyping, the poem demonstrates the ever-present possibility of typographical error, the risk that a machine designed to ease communication can instead frustrate it, producing unintelligible results.

This possibility is made all the more apparent in Claus Bremer's "lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen" (Fig. 23).<sup>93</sup> In the first line of this poem, the entire title phrase appears legibly, but in each successive line the first three words are progressively shifted to the right, so that ultimately all four words are piled on top of each other, fulfilling the promise with which the poem began. Both Rot's "Advertising my typewriter" and Bremer's "lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen" can thus be understood as works in the spirit of Rühm's and Mon's collages discussed above, challenging the legibility and transparency that new technologies are intended to advance. Another Bremer poem, "immer schön in der reihe bleiben," gestures explicitly to the rigidity of mechanical composition. In this poem, the title phrase is simply repeated over and over again, becoming an exercise in conformity (and, implicitly, a protest against it) on the part of the poet himself as he types and retypes the phrase in uniform columns.<sup>94</sup> In Emmett Williams' anthology, this piece is accompanied by a comment from Bremer: "I almost didn't succeed in keeping in line and writing a page of 'keep in line' line for line one under the other but my effort spares you that of reading. For just as one can hardly write a

text in this form, one can hardly read one line for line. The keep-in-line of ‘keep in line’ causes one not to keep in line but, on the contrary, to get out of line.”<sup>95</sup> A similar experiment in order and deviation is found in Gomringer’s “3 variationen zu ‘kein fehler im system’” (Fig. 24).<sup>96</sup> The first variation begins and ends with the phrase “kein fehler im system,” while in each intervening line the letter “f” moves one place to the right (skipping the blank spaces), before finally returning to its rightful spot. At first sight, it is tempting to read a permutation such as “kein ehfler im system” as a message that might appear on a computer monitor, undermining its own clean bill of health like a sort of technological Magritte (“Ce n’est pas un rreer”). But although by normal orthographic standards there is an error in each line but the first and last, the “system” itself functions perfectly, following a regular pattern until arriving at a last line that is identical to the first. In these poems, Bremer and Gomringer highlight the tendency towards repetitive structures that mechanical composition can encourage, but they also reveal the desire to deviate from this uniformity. As Gomringer’s poem suggests, one inherent possibility of any rigid, rule-governed system is error.

Another tendency in typewriter poetry led away from uniform rows and columns entirely, and towards a freer distribution of letters across the page. Mon employed the typewriter in this way in a group of poems that he referred to as “lettern.” Some of these poems retain a trace of semantic content, while others, such as “i-punkt,” a balloon-like shape consisting solely of the lower-case letter “i,” do not (Fig. 25).<sup>97</sup> What is perhaps most striking about these poems, though, is the way that regular rows and columns of letters give way to gradations and shading, such that when viewed from a distance, these dense concentrations of overlapping letters begin to resemble pencil or charcoal sketches. Here Mon stretches the constraints of typewriter composition, adjusting the parameters of density and distribution in unconventional ways. His creation of these visual textures could even be seen as the reassertion of an authorial hand in the typewriter poem: these poems restore a visible role to the poet by evoking his physical confrontation with the typewriter. Like Mon’s collages discussed above, these poems register the desemanticization of language, but they also suggest a new role for poetic subjectivity in the manipulation of these ready-made materials.

In addition to the typewriter, of course, more sophisticated methods of typography also played a central role in Concrete poetry. In some cases, typography was used to either complement or contradict the meaning of the words in the poem: Reinhard Döhl’s “Apfel mit Wurm,” which will be discussed below, is a clear example of the use of typography to visually reinforce the meaning of the words on the page, while Heinz Gappmayr’s “weiss” (in which the word “weiss” appears twice, once in black on a white square, and once in white on a black square) poses a sort of semiotic riddle in which the signifier is perceived through either its opposition or its resemblance to the signified. Other Concrete poets pursued experiments with typography much like those undertaken by Bremer and Mon with their typewriters. Among the most striking works in this category are several books by Hansjörg Mayer, a professional printer who also produced editions of books by many other Concrete poets. Mayer’s *alphabet*, published by Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther in the series “Edition Rot,” reflects the interest in the non-semantic, physical qualities of letters that Mayer shared with Mon.<sup>98</sup> The book proceeds through the alphabet one letter per page, with multiple instances of each letter



intersecting in various arrangements to create abstract patterns (Fig. 26). In these arrangements, Mayer took advantage of new printing technologies that allowed letters to be placed directly side by side or even to overlap in ways that were not possible with lead type.

These technologies were described in the afterword to another book in the “Edition Rot” series, *poem structures in the looking glass*, by Klaus Burkhardt and Reinhard Döhl. While some of the poems in this collection used recognizable words (often self-referentially, such as the words “spiegelglas” and “TEXTQUADRAT,” reflected to form rectangles with vertical and horizontal symmetry), others used the letters purely for their visual form (Fig. 27). Burkhardt and Döhl explained in their afterword that two photographic typesetting machines, the “diatype” and the “staromat,” made these poems possible: “anders als beim traditionellen bleisatz, bei dem die abstände der buchstaben durch den kegel und das sogenannte ‘fleisch’ des buchstabens vorgegeben sind, ist beim lichtsatz der buchstabenabstand beliebig bis zur übereinanderbelichtung variierbar.” They added that their “poem structures” were intended “lediglich als vorschläge möglicher veränderbarer und superisierbarer schrift-bild-strukturen, als mögliche ästhetische muster bzw. modelle.”<sup>99</sup> Both Mayer’s and Burkhardt and Döhl’s experiments thus exemplified a strain of Concrete visual poetry that pushed the autonomy of the alphabetic sign to the extreme, bordering on a fetishization of the linguistic sign and of new technologies of textual reproduction.

At the same time, like Mon’s “lettern,” these visual poems tested and sometimes exceeded the limits of legibility. In another book, *alphabetenquadrante*, Mayer arranged letters in a 26-by-26 grid, increasing the number of letters on each page according to a mathematical formula until they overlapped four to a square and it was no longer possible to make out any individual letter (Fig. 28).<sup>100</sup> While some critics have asked, not unreasonably, to what extent these texts may still legitimately be described as “poems,” others have defended them as an interrogation of the medium of language itself.<sup>101</sup> Mary Ellen Solt, for instance, writes: “The new visual poem has made us aware of poetic content in the typographical medium. Non-semantic visual texts are probably to some extent a product of this discovery,” adding that the poem “seems to need to go to the foundations of meaning in language, to convey its message in forms akin to the advanced methods of communication operating in the world of which it is a part, and to be seen and touched like a painting or a piece of sculpture.”<sup>102</sup> This investigation of the foundations of meaning led other Concrete poets to look for possibilities that went beyond the written or printed word, and to create work in new electronic media or with the help of new computer technologies.

### **Mixed Media Poetry: Ferdinand Kriwet**

Like the typewriter, other media technologies offered Concrete poets not only new means for producing texts, but also a new framework for conceiving of textual production. As Anja Ohmer has noted, the Brazilian Concrete poet Augusto de Campos compared one of his poems “mit dem Laufen eines Teletypbandes und den laufenden Wörtern im LED.” Ohmer comments:

Das Bild eines Teletypbands ist ein für den Konkretismus passender Vergleich und impliziert viele der neuen Aspekte, die durch die Konkrete Poesie hervorgebracht wurden. Jetzt, wo ein Geräusch oder ein Wort aufgenommen werden kann, kann das Fragment des Geräusches selbst der Ansatzpunkt für ein ganzes Werk sein – indem man fragmentiert, umkehrt, doppelt, wiederholt usw.<sup>103</sup>

The manipulation of words as material, and particularly the processes of fragmentation and repetition, could thus be seen in part as a response to, or an exploitation of, new media technologies. Indeed, mass media were often seen as both a challenge to literature and an incitement to the development of new literary forms. As Ferdinand Kriwet wrote in 1967:

mit der Zeit haben sich nicht nur die Dichter und Denker, sondern gründlicher noch die Kommunikationsmedien verändert. Das ehemals so gut funktionierende und zeitgemäße Buch befindet sich heute in einer Konkurrenzsituation mit den Massenmedien, der es nur durch Veränderung nach vorn entgehen kann. [...] Nicht länger in Buchhandlungen allein, sondern mehr und mehr ins Kaufhaus, in den Supermarkt, in den Kiosk, in Galerien, Schallplattenläden drängt es die Poesie der Zukunft soweit sie nicht direkt zwischen dem Erzeuger und Verbraucher gehandelt wird.<sup>104</sup>

Kriwet's response to the competition that he perceived between literature and mass media took the form of a wide-ranging array of multimedia projects, including print, audio, and video works in which the medium itself was always at the center of attention. This focus was made explicit, among other places, in the title of his 1968 solo exhibition at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, "Mixed Media," which was also the title of a single newspaper-format publication that Kriwet produced in 1969. That newspaper can be seen, like the proto-Dada *Neue Jugend*, as a celebration of the power of print, combined with a satire of mass media conventions.

Like Mon, Kriwet viewed modern media against the background of historical media, particularly the development of alphabetic writing. Reflecting on the increasing autonomy of writing from spoken language, Kriwet wrote: "Neben den Veränderungen der Lautsprache entwickelte sich die Schriftsprache unabhängig von dieser, so daß wie [*sic* = wir] heute schließlich anders schreiben als sprechen."<sup>105</sup> For his 1972 book *COM.MIX: Die Welt der Bild- und Zeichensprache*, Kriwet assembled a dense collage of images depicting diverse systems of writing and symbols, from ancient inscriptions to modern street signs (as well as several of his own works). In an accompanying essay, Kriwet observed, with echoes of Gomringer, "Gleichzeitig bedienen wir uns [...] wieder zunehmend piktographischer und ideogrammatistischer Techniken aus den Anfängen der Schrift [...]. Schnell verständliche und möglichst unverwechselbare Bilderzeichen und Symbole begegnen und führen uns heute weltweit auf Flughäfen, Bahnhöfen, Autobahnen, Schiffshäfen etc." But whereas Gomringer's literary production, despite his advocacy of the airport model, was generally limited to traditional book and magazine formats, Kriwet's investigations of the "spektakuläre Scheidung von Laut- und Schriftsprache" inspired him to develop a variety of alternative forms of visual poetry.<sup>106</sup>

The most widely anthologized of these are his ten *Rundscheiben*, circular texts printed with rubber stamps.<sup>107</sup> Each of the *Rundscheiben* consists of multiple concentric rings of text. The size of the letters often varies within a single ring, and the direction of the text sometimes alternates from ring to ring. Kriwet refers to these as examples of “visuell wahrnehmbarer Literatur,” indicating the importance of the fact that these texts must be perceived visually, and cannot be adequately translated into oral form.<sup>108</sup> The circular shape of these works can be seen as a formal allusion to a wide range of other texts and media, from ancient writings such as the Cretan Phaistos Disc to modern works such as Marcel Duchamp’s “Disks Inscribed with Puns,” as well as to the modern medium of the phonograph record.<sup>109</sup> Beyond these similarities, the round shape and the varied sizes of text in many of the *Rundscheiben* create an “offene Form” that allows readers to approach these texts in multiple ways, reading around the circle, from the inside out, from the outside in, or focusing on the larger words first before attempting to make out the smaller ones.<sup>110</sup> This indeterminacy is heightened by the fact that many of the words on the *Rundscheiben* are broken into fragments and do not easily yield a clear meaning.

Nevertheless, these texts do not abandon semantics altogether; rather, they frequently incorporate puns or plays on words that can be teased out with a certain amount of effort.<sup>111</sup> *Rundscheibe Nr. VI: Type is Honey*, for instance, circles around themes of homoerotic desire between young men, introducing terms such as “LINKERUECKHANDBAENDELN,” of which Kriwet explains in his own commentary: “aus anbindeln wird handbündeln, und zwar das mit dem Handrücken der linken linkisch initiierte, welches Gefahr streichelt, anzuecken oder zurückgewiesen, wenn nicht gestoßen zu werden.”<sup>112</sup> This cautiously flirtatious neologism might well be used to describe the sort of reading process to which Kriwet’s *Rundscheiben* invite their viewers: a direct approach is impossible, but they tempt the eye with their promise of stimulation, thus encouraging attempts at reading, even if the desire for a resolution is likely to remain unfulfilled. If the *Rundscheiben* formally alluded to a variety of media, ancient and modern, Kriwet’s engagement with contemporary commercial media became more explicit in a number of other works. His “Lesewald” project, for instance, consisted of 9 plexiglass pillars inspired by *Litfaßsäulen* and bearing fragments of text.<sup>113</sup> With these pillars Kriwet attempted to adapt a commercial form for literary purposes: as he wrote in a catalog essay, “Warum sollen Straßenpassanten statt an unzähligen Waschmittelreklametafeln nicht einmal an Texten vorbeigehen, die ihnen nichts weißer weißen als das weißeste Weiß, daß es wer weiß wie oft gab, warum sollen Texte, die ihre Konzeption der Großstadtwirklichkeit verdanken, nicht in diese zurückfinden dürfen?”<sup>114</sup> Kriwet’s comments and the “Lesewald” itself explicitly rooted his new, fragmented forms of textual production in the commercial media of the city.

In other projects, Kriwet engaged with the newer media of radio and television. His *Apollo* project is particularly notable in this regard: it included a book, an audio montage for radio, and a video montage for television, all created from material collected in America around the time of the Apollo 11 moon mission.<sup>115</sup> All three components of the project present the moon landing first and foremost as a media event: as Kriwet wrote in a commentary: “Thema meines Hörtextes ist die elektrische Veröffentlichung dieses Projekts mit den Medien der Telekommunikation und nicht dieses Projekt in seinen

technischen und wissenschaftlichen Aspekten und Details selbst.”<sup>116</sup> The book is a single extended collage of material including clippings from newspapers, pages from a Manhattan phone book, and other texts and images, largely organized alphabetically by topic. In the absence of any commentary or unifying narrative voice, these materials themselves become the story, and the reader’s attention is directed to repetitions and formal similarities among the many news stories about the moon landing, into which other topics such as the Vietnam War occasionally intrude. In the audio and video versions, too, repetition plays a dominant role: an audio montage of a series of voices repeating the word “moon, moon, moon...” emphasizes the ubiquity of this topic in all media channels, while at the same time reducing the word to a mantra repeated for its own sake, emptied of meaning. A sequence of TV station identifications in *Apollovision* has a similar function: numbers and call letters flashing on multiple screens represent the omnipresence of television, but they also become defamiliarized and reduced to signs without referents. At a few points, the formal influence of Concrete poetry becomes particularly clear: in one sequence, the words “COUNT / DOWN,” “TOUCH / DOWN,” and “SPLASH / DOWN” appear alone in black on a white background, reintroducing the formal vocabulary of Concrete poetry and its textual focus into this multimedia project.<sup>117</sup> Even apart from these sequences, Kriwet’s *Apollo* project is tied to his more strictly poetic work by its investigation of the changing role of language in a media-dominated world, and of the function of repetition in particular. The sampled word, repeated *ad absurdum*, begins to lose its meaning and is gradually reduced to a sound. Kriwet’s interest in the literary potential of new media – his determination “Kunst als Information und Information als Kunst zu verstehen”<sup>118</sup> – led him to examine in his works not only the social function of mass media, but also the development of new economies of information, the point at which novelty gives way to repetition and saturation.

### **“ANOTHER METHOD FOR THE LETTERS”: Aesthetics and Information**

As the programmatic texts of Mon, Kriwet, and others clearly indicate, a critical impulse was frequently at work in their appropriation and fragmentation of material drawn from mass media. But their works did not simply challenge mass media narratives or satirize their sensationalism. Rather, a primary concern of many Concrete poets was the changing function of language itself, specifically the way that new media technologies reduced language to a set of symbols or signals, disregarding its content and the meaning of these messages for those who sent or received them. This move away from semantics and subjectivity was a central tenet of information theory, a field with which a number of Concrete poets and theorists, particularly Max Bense, closely engaged. As early as 1928, R.V.L. Hartley had argued that the science of communication required a “quantitative measure of ‘information’ [...] based on physical as contrasted with psychological considerations.”<sup>119</sup> Hartley’s term “psychological” might be more precisely understood to refer to the semantic aspect of language – whereas a conventional approach to language would likely focus on “certain meanings” that signals convey “to the parties communicating,” Hartley argued that the science of communication ought to be concerned instead with the “physical symbols” themselves, “such as words, dots and dashes or the like.”<sup>120</sup>

In fact, Hartley emphasized, the signals with which information theory was concerned need not be meaningful at all. Considering the example of a telegraph, he wrote: “The disturbance transmitted over the cable is [...] the result of a series of conscious selections. However, a similar sequence of arbitrarily chosen symbols might have been sent by an automatic mechanism which controlled the position of the key in accordance with the results of a series of chance operations such as a ball rolling into one of three pockets.”<sup>121</sup> Like the Dadaists’ chance poems, the randomly selected telegraph message that Hartley imagined would convey information without intention: the “physical symbols” would be communicated from one machine to another, but without transporting any meaning at all between two parties. As Hartley insisted, “in estimating the capacity of the physical system to transmit information we should ignore the question of interpretation, make each selection perfectly arbitrary.”<sup>122</sup> Hartley did not, of course, deny that language could also be meaningful on a semantic or “psychological” level; but he clearly indicated the necessity of distinguishing words or symbols from their semantic content, and of treating the former without regard to the latter when addressing the practical problems of communication.

Hartley’s work was one point of reference for Claude E. Shannon, whose now-classic article “A Mathematical Theory of Communication” was first published in 1948, and appeared in book form in 1949, with an accompanying article by Warren Weaver.<sup>123</sup> Like Hartley, Shannon argued that the “semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem.”<sup>124</sup> In addition to sidelining semantics, Shannon emphasized how the use of telegraph codes such as those discussed in Chapter One improved the efficiency of communication. Noting that common phrases could be given their own abbreviations, he wrote: “The standardized greeting and anniversary telegrams now in use extend this to the point of encoding a sentence or two into a relatively short sequence of numbers.”<sup>125</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, these telegraph codes disrupted the traditional link between language and subjectivity, turning personal sentiments into ready-made phrases that the sender only needed to select – what Perloff, following Antoine Compagnon, calls the “*déjà dit*.”<sup>126</sup> If the typewriter favored desubjectification by externalizing language at the level of the letter, these codes did so at the level of the entire phrase or sentence, suggesting even more strongly that any view of writing as a privileged means for expressing personal sentiments and internal states had outlived its technological relevance. The fact that Concrete poetry has often been described as “telegraphic” may reflect more than these descriptions intend<sup>127</sup>: Concrete poems resemble telegraph messages not only in their concision, but also in their treatment of language as ready-made material.

Shannon also provided Concrete poets with inspiration for a new, non-subjective method of composition. This was found in his stochastic approximations, texts generated based on rules of probability for English, such that the selection of each successive letter or word depended upon the statistical probability of its following a given number of letters or words that preceded it. (To borrow Weaver’s example: “After the three words ‘in the event’ the probability for ‘that’ as the next word is fairly high, and for ‘elephant’ as the next word is very low.”<sup>128</sup>) Although Shannon introduced these approximations to demonstrate the role of statistical probability in encoding and decoding, they also raised the possibility that completely non-subjective processes could produce intelligible texts.

An approximation in which each letter was chosen based on the preceding two letters contained such passages as “IN NO IST LAT WHEY” and “DEMONSTURES OF THE REPTAGIN,” which, if not exactly English, at least bear an uncanny resemblance to it (and, in the latter case, might be a good name for a fantasy novel), while Shannon’s “Second-Order Word Approximation” (in which words rather than letters are the basic units) begins “THE HEAD AND IN FRONTAL ATTACK ON AN ENGLISH WRITER THAT THE CHARACTER OF THIS POINT IS THEREFORE ANOTHER METHOD FOR THE LETTERS.”<sup>129</sup> While these texts, at least the lower-order word approximations, are reminiscent of Dadaist texts composed using chance procedures, the higher-order approximations move closer and closer to conventional English, posing a much greater challenge than the Dada texts did to traditional models of authorship. The possibility that a statistically-governed procedure could produce texts nearly identical to those written by actual human authors was sufficiently interesting to Max Bense that he referred to Shannon’s approximations repeatedly in his works, and included them alongside works by Heißenbüttel, Gomringer, and himself in the catalog of a 1959-60 exhibition.<sup>130</sup> In addition, Bense put Shannon’s techniques to use in several literary works, including *20. Juli 1944* and *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*. These works are discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The other major insight in Shannon’s article, in terms of its significance for Concrete poetry, was his emphasis on the necessity of redundancy for successful communication. Shannon noted “that by sending the information in a redundant form the probability of errors can be reduced. For example, by repeating the message many times and by a statistical study of the different received versions of the message the probability of errors could be made very small.”<sup>131</sup> While there were more and less effective ways to employ redundancy, Shannon wrote, “any redundancy in the source will usually help if it is utilized at the receiving point.” In fact, he noted that the English language exhibits roughly 50 percent redundancy, which allows imperfectly transmitted messages to be reconstructed in many cases.<sup>132</sup> Thus, although Shannon defined “information” in terms of “Choice, Uncertainty, and Entropy”<sup>133</sup> – in other words, precisely what is unpredictable or novel, what is not redundant – he nevertheless acknowledged redundancy as a practical necessity for successful communication.<sup>134</sup> This recognition of redundancy and repetition not as useless excess, but rather as a fundamental part of communication, would be reflected in Concrete poetry as well.

The impact of information theory on Concrete poetry was explicit in some cases, implicit in others. Gomringer made direct reference to information and communication theory in a number of essays, positioning Concrete poetry as a movement actively engaged in the project of rationalized, efficient communication: “die ökonomie in der information war ja gerade eine der grossen leistungen der konkreten poesie.”<sup>135</sup> Like Bense, Gomringer also echoed the disregard for subjectivity and semantics that was characteristic of information theory. Describing his ideal of the new poet, Gomringer wrote:

seine lebenshaltung ist positiv, synthetisch-rationalistisch. so auch seine dichtung. sie ist für ihn nicht ventil für allerlei gefühle und gedanken, sondern ein sprachliches gestaltungsgebiet mit einem engen bezug zu modernen, naturwissenschaftlich und soziologisch fundierten

kommunikationsaufgaben. ein inhalt ist deshalb nur dann interessant für den konkreten dichter, wenn sich dessen geistige und materielle struktur als interessant erweist und sprachlich bearbeitet werden kann.”<sup>136</sup>

As this passage suggests, Concrete poems frequently focused not so much on any particular semantic content as on the process of communication itself. In some cases, this was manifested as repetition and variation within the poem, where minor variations would stand out against a redundant background. In other cases, the information economy of the poem could be seen as a response to a background of noise external to it. As Gomringer wrote in a 1963 essay for radio:

mit der konstellation wollte ich hinweisen auf die formale verwandtschaft reduzierter gedichttexte mit kurzen informationen nicht-ästhetischer art. [...] es war jedoch nicht nur diese von mir für das heutige gedicht als notwendig erachtete formale angleichung, sondern darüber hinaus ebenso die auf den heutigen menschen eindringende überfülle an gedruckter und gesprochener information, die mich – sozusagen im gegensatz dazu – zur freude an der schmalen kost, zur hochschätzung des einfachen, des fast simplen führte.<sup>137</sup>

Thus the use of repetition in a simple, minimal text might play the positive role that Shannon described, serving as a means of successfully transmitting a message through a noisy channel.

Repetition or redundancy took a number of forms in Concrete poetry, only a few of which can be addressed here. In some cases, a single word was simply repeated over and over in a regular pattern. Gomringer’s “est est est,” for instance, repeats the word “est” nine times in three rows of three, while Hans Hofer’s “schnee,” which was published in Gomringer’s magazine *spirale*, consists of the word “schnee” repeated thirty-six times in nine rows of four.<sup>138</sup> In each case, a semantic interpretation is possible: Gomringer’s poem could be seen as a play on the double meaning of the French “est” (such that it could mean either “is is is,” merely asserting existence, “east east east,” or perhaps the tautological observation “east is east”), while “schnee” can be read as a simple visual poem depicting an even blanket of snow. These specific interpretations aside, though, the significance of these poems in formal terms lies in their strategy of pure repetition: the mere recurrence of a single word in each poem has an effect that a single iteration of the word, even in a larger type face or a striking font, would not. The reader flipping through *spirale* might pick out Hofer’s poem precisely because of its repetition, with this redundancy serving to separate the signal from the noise. However, as Shannon’s theory would suggest, the dearth of information in these poems is quickly apparent. As suggested by Claus Bremer’s comment about his poem “immer schön in der reihe bleiben,” cited above, the reader is unlikely to read each repetition of a single word with the kind of attentiveness that would be devoted to each word of a more conventional poem. These poems thus demonstrate both the practical utility of redundancy for communication and the scarcity of information in a redundant text.

A somewhat larger group of Concrete poems makes use of repetition together with minor variation, creating within the text itself the redundancy against which novelty stands out. Gomringer’s “schweigen,” for instance, like “est est est,” consists of a single word repeated multiple times; but unlike the latter poem, “schweigen” contains a blank

space in the middle (Fig. 29). As in the cases above, the semantic dimension of the text cannot be neglected: the blank space has generally been read as a concretization of the silence that the rest of the poem only names.<sup>139</sup> But this poem also bears a structural similarity to other Concrete poems, such as Reinhard Döhl's "Apfel mit Wurm," in which the word "Apfel" is repeated over and over, with only a single variation: the word "Wurm" (Fig. 30).<sup>140</sup> Döhl's poem is cut into the shape of an apple, with the repeated word "Apfel" filling the space and running off the edges, suggesting that this cut-out shape is only part of a larger, potentially infinitely repeating pattern: this contrast between interminable repetition and isolated variation is the key to the structure of the text. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Gomringer's "schweigen" and Döhl's "Apfel mit Wurm" have much less to say about silence or apples or worms than they do about patterns of repetition and variation, redundancy and novelty.

Of course, one effect – perhaps the primary effect – of this repetition is to transform the text into a two-dimensional, spatial field rather than a one-dimensional, linear sequence of words. The word "Wurm" would not be "inside" the apple if the word "Apfel" were not repeated countless times around it, just as the void in the middle of "schweigen" would be nothing but blank space if it were not physically surrounded by repetitions of the word "schweigen." However, in addition to this spatial function, the dynamic of repetition and variation is itself essential to the concept of these poems. As Gomringer wrote, "worte werden bedeutungsvoll, effektiv verwendet, wenn wir sie als unerwartete abwechslung neben konstant wiederholte worte setzen. sie bilden dann einen 'fehler im system', was, wie man weiss, nach paul klee eine definition der kunst ist."<sup>141</sup> Like Gomringer's own poem "kein fehler im system," these two poems are experiments above all with the two poles of order and entropy, or redundancy and information. But whereas the repetition within the poem in Gomringer's "est est est" and Hofer's "schnee" can be seen as a strategy for communicating against the "background noise" of other external texts, the repetition within the poem in "schweigen" and "Apfel mit Wurm" provides its own background against which a single variation can stand out. Gomringer's "kein fehler im system" likewise employs redundancy as a background for novelty, but here the connection to information theory is even more explicit: the potential for error becomes the subject of the poem, while the poem's form demonstrates how error is overcome by repetition.

What emerges from these poems is an ambivalent stance towards the ideals of streamlined communication as envisioned in information theory. While Gomringer described the language of Concrete poetry as one that achieves "mit wenigen Mitteln ein Optimum an Information und Effekt,"<sup>142</sup> Mon depicted the relationship of Concrete poetry to information in more fraught terms:

Ihre Konsequenz treibt die konkrete Poesie zu ihren extremen Verfassungen: einerseits durch Reduktion der Beziehungen die unterste Grenze sprachlicher Information zu erreichen, andererseits die Elemente so zu differenzieren und zu komplizieren, daß dem entstehenden Zeichenkomplex keine Wahrnehmung mehr gewachsen ist. Auf dem ersten Weg erscheinen Texte aus zerstörten Wörtern, aus Lettern, Letternfragmenten, nicht mehr identifizierbaren Zeicheresten. Der andere Weg führt zu immer größerem Zeichenaufwand, zur Überlagerung ganzer



Texte durch andere, zur Kombination von Texten mit fremden Medien, Bildern, Objekten, Räumen.<sup>143</sup>

Concrete poetry could align itself with the goals of effective communication, or it could do everything it could to thwart those goals. In either case, though, the widespread employment of repetition, with or without variation, can be seen as an engagement with the fundamental concepts of information theory and an exploration of the new conception of language that this framework offered. Critics who dismiss the lack of substance in Concrete poetry generally overlook the complexity of the Concrete poets' examination of the tools of language and communication itself.

## Conclusions

The formal strategies that appear in works by nearly all Concrete poets – the tendencies towards repetition, minimalism, and visual rather than syntactical organization – link Concrete poetry closely to contemporaneous developments in advertising, mass media, and communications. In some cases, this connection reflects not only formal, but also ideological affinities. Gomringer positioned Concrete poetry in his manifestos not as a realm apart from practical concerns, but rather as both a beneficiary of and a testing ground for new, more efficient linguistic practices. The intense interest that Gomringer and many other Concrete poets demonstrated in the formal vocabulary of advertising was motivated less by its commercial function than by the sense that advertising had outpaced conventional literature in the development of new and innovative forms of communication.

Difficulties arise, however, with the question of what it is that Concrete poetry seeks to communicate. While a poem such as “schweigen” does succeed in creating an impression of silence by virtue of its repetition and layout, a poem such as “est est est” or “worldwide” generates an ambiguity that runs counter to Gomringer's stated goal of effective communication. Some Concrete poets attempted to refine this concept of communication: the Brazilian Noigandres poets argued that the Concrete poem “deals with a communication of forms, of a structure-content, not with the usual message communication,” and Bense introduced the term “ästhetische Information,” which will be discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>144</sup> These explanations, however, only succeed in further obscuring the role of communication in Concrete poetry. Perhaps a more accurate assessment would be that communication itself is not the function of these poems, but rather their content. By adopting the formal strategies of advertising and airport signs, Concrete poets created poems in which the ideal of communicative efficiency itself took center stage, while the specific subject matter of any given poem was secondary.

As the examples cited above have shown, however, the normative value attached to communication in Concrete poetry was by no means uniformly positive. In the works of Franz Mon and Claus Bremer, among others, the aim of efficient and transparent communication was often intentionally thwarted. The fragmentation and layering of print material taken from mass media drew attention to the allure that the printed word maintained even once it was made illegible, while the use of permutation and overtyping in typewriter poems rendered visible the poet's confrontation with language as an external, ready-made medium. Ferdinand Kriwet's works likewise explored the

consequences of new media technologies for language and literature, moving from the printed page to texts in three dimensions, as well as to audio and visual media. In each of these cases, the fragmentation, desemanticization, and desubjectification of language should be seen not only as an aesthetic effect achieved within these poems, but also as an aspect of the media environment in which they were created, and to which they responded. Confronted with a media landscape in which the written or printed word already seemed to have been transformed into material and deprived of meaning, these authors pursued the question in their works of what options remained for poetry in the information age.

Perhaps the most far-reaching answer to this question came from Max Bense's attempts to adapt information theory for the creation of a literary aesthetics. Although the theoretical framework that he developed had certain limitations that will be discussed in the next chapter, it nevertheless indicated the far-reaching implications of a non-semantic view of language such as Shannon's, and suggested that Concrete poets had already begun to put these theories into literary practice. Bense also recognized the significance of Shannon's approximations as a model for a new, technologically-based writing practice in which the roles of both semantics and subjectivity were diminished. Bense's *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* and the other works considered in Chapter Four explored the potential of compositional practices in which the boundary between human and technological production was blurred. In addition, as Chapter Five will show, the experiments in computer composition in which Bense took part laid the groundwork for later developments in digital poetry. Many of the issues that were central to the works of Concrete poets – the relationship between poetry, mass media, and advertising; the diminished role of semantics and subjectivity; the concrete reality of the text not only as material, but also as quantifiable, statistically analyzable information – would emerge as fundamental concerns of digital poetry as well.

## Chapter Four: Case Study

### **Statistics and Subjectivity: Max Bense, *Terry Jo*, and the Aesthetics of Information**

One of the clearest examples of the intersection of Concrete poetry and information theory can be found in the theoretical and literary works of Max Bense. Bense, a poet, publisher, philosopher, and professor at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart, was a prominent figure in the development of Concrete poetry. Although much of his own literary work did not reflect Concrete poetry's prototypical visual focus (his "tallose berge," mentioned above, was an exception), Bense was closely aligned with the movement, organizing exhibitions and publishing other Concrete poets in his journal *Augenblick* and in his small-format paperback series "Edition Rot." Bense's work placed him alongside Eugen Gomringer as one of the key theorist/practitioners of Concrete poetry. But whereas Gomringer's theoretical texts generally had the character of manifestos and reflected his ideological loyalty to interwar avant-gardes and the Bauhaus, Bense's writings had a more analytical bent and drew on an eclectic mix of philosophical and mathematical theories, most notably on postwar theories of information and communication. After briefly engaging with Norbert Wiener's theory of cybernetics, Bense discovered Claude E. Shannon's theory of communication, which provided him with a non-semantic model for understanding language and, by extension, literature.<sup>1</sup> He also allied himself with other theorists, such as Wilhelm Fucks and Abraham Moles, who were likewise attempting to develop quantitative methods of aesthetic analysis.<sup>2</sup>

For Bense, the application of quantitative tools to the study of aesthetics offered a crucial corrective to "das definitive Zurückbleiben der Geisteswissenschaften hinter den Naturwissenschaften," an opportunity to move beyond the unclarity that he saw plaguing the academic study of literature and the arts.<sup>3</sup> Rejecting conventional methods of literary interpretation that privileged semantics and left too much room for subjective judgment, Bense proposed an objective aesthetics that would treat language in quantitative terms, analyzing texts based on characteristics such as the number of different words that they contained or the frequency with which particular words occurred. These statistical properties, for Bense, constituted the properly "aesthetic" aspect of a work.<sup>4</sup> One benefit of this mathematically-based aesthetics, Bense argued, was that it could be used not only to analyze existing works, but also to produce new works based on the same statistical principles: in Bense's terms, it would be not only an "analytische," but also a "generative Ästhetik."<sup>5</sup> Thus in several works – including the 1961 book *20. Juli 1944* and the 1963 *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*, which was adapted for radio in 1968 – Bense employed statistical principles in the composition of literary texts, at times even incorporating fragments of text generated by a computer using pseudo-random algorithms.<sup>6</sup>

However, these works should not be unquestioningly accepted as straightforward applications of Bense's theoretical principles; they do not simply confirm Bense's core tenets such as the superiority of statistical methods and the subordinate status of semantics. Instead, they consistently highlight the tension between the quantitative understanding of language that Bense advocates, on the one hand, and the function of language as a means of subjective expression, on the other. This is particularly true of

*Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur*, which depicts the struggle of a young girl to regain the ability to speak after suffering serious physical and psychological trauma. While Bense's own commentaries focus on the formally innovative possibilities offered by *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur*, the work itself strongly suggests a link between the desemanticization of language and the trauma undergone by the protagonist.<sup>7</sup> Despite Bense's often uncritical advocacy of a desemanticized, desubjectified literary aesthetics, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* implies that the reduction of language to an array of statistical probabilities is tantamount to the evacuation of the subject itself. The productive tension in *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* reflects Bense's attempt to reconcile the aesthetic potential of language as desemanticized material with the threat of these dehumanizing consequences. While this tension is never fully resolved, the work suggests that the solution might lie in a reconception of the subject not as the producer, but as the product of language. Together with Bense's theoretical work, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* demonstrates the substantial influence of postwar information and communication theory on the development of Concrete poetry, while also revealing the consequences of this desemanticized view of language for the quintessentially subjective act of poetic composition.

### Poetry as Aesthetic Information

Before turning to Bense's literary work, it will be useful to consider his theoretical framework in greater detail. As noted above, Bense carefully distinguished between the semantic and the aesthetic properties of a text, identifying the latter with the text's statistical traits. An early formulation of this theory can be found in his 1959 essay "Textästhetik": "Ein Hauptproblem der Texttheorie wie überhaupt der statistischen Ästhetik ist [...] die Unterscheidung zwischen semantischer und ästhetischer Information, die ein Text gibt."<sup>8</sup> While the same semantic information can be encoded in a variety of different ways, Bense argues, aesthetic information is tied to the specific realization of the work. Although the distinction that he draws here between semantic and aesthetic information seems to parallel the traditional distinction between (invariant) content and (variable) form, Bense denies that these distinctions are equivalent. Instead, he argues that the statistical properties that constitute the aesthetic character of a work may pertain to either form or content: "diese statistische Wiederagabe, das ist das Wesentliche, ist gleichgültig gegen Unterscheidungen wie Form und Inhalt, Gegenständlichkeit und Ungegenständlichkeit, Material und Bedeutung, Zeichen und Sinn."<sup>9</sup> What distinguishes a text as aesthetic in Bense's sense is its deviation from statistical norms, either in form or in content. As he writes in his 1961 book *Modelle*: "Die ästhetische Beschaffenheit eines Textes beruht auf den statistischen Überraschungen in den aufgewendeten Materialien (Worte u.s.w.) und ihrer Verteilung, d.h. auf den Abweichungen gewisser Stilcharakteristiken von konventionellen Werten."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the more statistically improbable or unpredictable a text is, the greater the quantity of "aesthetic information" it contains.

In defining "aesthetic information" in terms of statistical unpredictability, Bense drew explicitly on Shannon's "The Mathematical Theory of Communication." There Shannon had considered the quantity of information in a message as a function of

uncertainty: the greater the number of possible outcomes in any given situation, the less certain we can be that any particular outcome is correct, and the more information we consequently require in order to determine the correct outcome.<sup>11</sup> To take a concrete example: if a telegraph message is being transmitted in English, the sequence “the\_” can be completed in a number of different ways, whereas the sequence “elephan\_” can only be completed with the letter “t.” Thus the amount of additional information necessary to complete the word is greater in the first case than in the second. The more uncertain or unpredictable a message is, then, the greater the quantity of information it contains. Bense adopted this concept from Shannon’s information theory, transforming Shannon’s quantitative, descriptive standard for measuring information into an implicitly qualitative means for determining the aesthetic character of a work of art. As he put it, “nur so weit ein Kunstwerk Innovation ist, ist es Kunst und nur so weit es Kunst ist, gibt es ästhetische Information.”<sup>12</sup> Art is identifiable as art first and foremost not because it is beautiful or meaningful, or because it evokes a particular subjective response, but rather because it is statistically unpredictable or improbable.<sup>13</sup>

Bense also followed Shannon in bracketing the question of meaning and dealing with texts in a purely quantitative manner. As Shannon wrote: “Frequently the messages have *meaning*; that is they refer to or are correlated according to some system with certain physical or conceptual entities. These semantic aspects of communication are irrelevant to the engineering problem.”<sup>14</sup> Shannon did not deny that these “semantic aspects” could be crucial to the person sending or receiving the message; he merely indicated that from an engineer’s perspective, the meaning of a message for the sender or receiver was not important. An effective system of communication could transmit information from one point to another with no regard for meaning – and as R.V.L. Hartley had already observed, the engineering problem would be the same even if the message had no meaning at all.<sup>15</sup> This desemanticized conception of language proved crucial to the development of Bense’s “informationstheoretische Ästhetik.”<sup>16</sup> As Bense wrote in his 1971 essay “Die Gedichte der Maschine der Maschine der Gedichte: Über Computer-Texte”:

Zunächst scheint es mir wichtig zu sagen, was hier unter *Text* verstanden werden soll. Unsere Definition geht auf Wilhelm Fucks zurück, der als Mitbegründer der modernen Texttheorie unter *Text* eine gegliederte Menge von Elementen, also von Wörtern versteht. Diese Definition sieht natürlich von den Wörtern als Bedeutungsträgern völlig ab und faßt sie nur als schreibbare oder sprechbare linguistische Gebilde, sozusagen als pures sprachliches Material auf. Wir sprechen daher von einem *materialen* Begriff von Text und materialer Texttheorie. Das erleichtert die Anwendung mathematischer Verfahrensweisen. Die Verschiedenheit der Wörter braucht nämlich jetzt nicht mehr durch ihre Bedeutung angegeben zu werden, sondern durch ihre quantitative oder numerische Beschaffenheit, etwa durch ihre Silbenzahl oder ihre Länge, das heißt durch die Anzahl der Buchstaben, aus denen sie bestehen.<sup>17</sup>

Bense’s use of the term “material” in this context differs from the more common use of the term by Concrete poets: whereas “material” for many Concrete poets (including, at times, Bense himself) referred to the physical reality of the text – its specific typographic

or visual form – the “material” to which Bense refers here is a string of data subjected to statistical analysis. What makes this analysis “material” is simply that it attends to the letters, syllables, and words themselves, and not to any point of reference beyond them. Despite this qualification, though, Bense’s focus on the text as material is very much in the spirit of Concrete poetry, insofar as it places emphasis on the letter or word, rather than the idea, as the fundamental component of literature. Bense thus follows Shannon and Fucks in favoring a desemanticized approach to language in which discrete, quantifiable elements such as letters and words take precedence over meaning.

Unlike Shannon, of course, Fucks and Bense were dealing not with engineering problems, but rather with literary ones, and thus with texts in which meaning would normally be thought to play a key role. In this context, it is questionable whether the neglect of meaning in favor of a quantitative study of the letters, words, and syllables that compose a text is in fact the most promising method. Certainly some critics have expressed their doubts: Helmar Frank and Brigitte Frank-Böhringer, for instance, have written: “Auf einer solchen Basis ist eine quantitativ-beschreibende Informationsästhetik möglich, die im Prinzip unangreifbar ist und sich nur gegenüber dem Zweifel zu behaupten hat, ob mit quantitativen Beschreibungen von Kunstwerken etwas gewonnen ist.”<sup>18</sup> This doubt is not a trivial one; indeed, the method of textual analysis that Bense proposes might very well be dismissed as a classic case of a hammer in search of a nail. While new methods of mathematical analysis, and particularly new computer technologies, made it possible to generate precise statistical profiles of literary texts, it is not immediately evident what ends these quantitative descriptions served. Fucks suggested that they could be used to verify the authenticity of works whose provenance was uncertain, but even there he acknowledged that the method was not particularly reliable.<sup>19</sup>

However, the strengths and weaknesses of Bense’s theory as an analytical tool are less important for the purposes of the present chapter than the insights that the theory offers about Bense’s location in a particular historical, literary, and mediatic context. While Bense had addressed the dehumanizing potential of technology in his 1946 essay “Der geistige Mensch und die Technik,” acknowledging “[d]ie tiefe Angst unserer Intelligenz vor der technischen Perfektion,”<sup>20</sup> he ultimately advocated an optimistic view of technological progress, and particularly of the convergence of art and technology: “Man wird sich daran gewöhnen müssen, nicht nur in der Physik, sondern auch in der Ästhetik eine mathematische und eine technologische Sprache anzutreffen und Technik im Dienste der Kunst und Kunst im Dienste der Technik zu sehen.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, a mathematical aesthetics, for Bense, held the promise of a world better suited to human needs: “Mathematische Ästhetik dient der generativen und damit der konstruktiven Ästhetik *ästhetischer Umwelt* als Grundlage. Das rechtfertigt ihr Auftreten und ihre Notwendigkeit in der modernen Lebenswelt. Nur antizipierbare Welten sind programmierbar, nur programmierbare sind konstruierbar und human bewohnbar.”<sup>22</sup> Thus Bense’s embrace of information theory as the basis for a new aesthetics can be seen as part of a broader vision for the construction of a better world through the conjunction of aesthetics and quantitative science. At the same time, it represents a rejection of traditional academic methods of literary analysis. As Bense wrote: “Nur eine solche rational-empirische, objektiv-materiale Ästhetikkonzeption kann das allgemeine

spekulative Kunstgeschwätz der Kritik beseitigen und den pädagogischen Irrationalismus unserer Akademien zum verschwinden bringen.”<sup>23</sup> This rejection of academic “irrationalism” is perhaps best understood in the postwar context that Utz Maas and Dieter Wunderlich described in 1974: “die Forderung nach der Nachprüfbarkeit der wissenschaftlichen Aussagen war die wirksamste Art, die Wissenschaft von der faschistischen Volkstümelei zu befreien.”<sup>24</sup> For Bense, whose critical confrontations with Germany’s Nazi past will be discussed below, an objective aesthetics thus promised not only progress towards a more rational future, but also an escape from the irrational obfuscations of Germany’s recent past.

But Bense’s application of information theory to literature can also be seen as an attempt to grasp the implications for literature of changing technologies and theories of language. Even if Bense’s aesthetics lacks the universal applicability to which it might aspire, it is revealing insofar as it offers a response to the question of how literature, and poetry in particular, might address the challenge presented by the desemanticization and desubjectification of language. As Bense wrote in his 1964 book *experimentelle Schreibweisen*:

man wirft der experimentellen poesie gern trockenheit, langweiligkeit vor. aber natürlich wird man zugestehen, daß das, was aus der rationalen und abstrakten phantasie stammt und weniger auf dem hintergrund einer lebenswirklichkeit der gefühle als vielmehr auf dem spirituellen hintergrund einer theorie entstand, in geringerem maße affiziert und bewegt als vital und emotional determinierte abläufe. dennoch entspricht die reduzierung des poetischen, die sich in der experimentellen poesie abzeichnet, durchaus jener reduzierung der vitalen menschlichen existenz, die in jeder technischen zivilisation zwangsläufig eingeleitet wird.<sup>25</sup>

The decrease in “vital human existence” that Bense observes in experimental poetry is thus presented not as an innovation unique to that poetry, but rather as a reflection of the technological reality that surrounds it. One key characteristic of that reality is the separation of language, conceived as material, from its function as a means of expression for human subjects. As Bense wrote in his *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, beginning with the same defensive gesture:

Man wirft der mathematischen und technologischen Ästhetik vor, sie verdingliche das Kunstwerk, reduziere seine subjektiven Momente und führe in den human integrierten künstlerischen Kurationsprozeß, insbesondere mit den algorithmischen Prozeduren der generativen Ästhetik, das Prinzip der Arbeitsteilung und das Teamwork ein. In gewisser Hinsicht ist das alles zweifellos der Fall, kann aber nicht als Vorwurf, sondern nur als Feststellung formuliert werden.<sup>26</sup>

Here again, Bense explicitly acknowledges the dehumanized, desubjectified nature of his aesthetics. Indeed, it is generally true, as Hans-Christian von Herrmann has argued, “daß das Ich im Horizont von Benses Ästhetik seine Herrschaft sowohl als Subjekt der Erkenntnis als auch als Schöpfer eines Kunstwerks eingebüßt hat.”<sup>27</sup> However, this is best understood not as the aim of Bense’s aesthetics, but rather as its starting point: Bense takes the desemanticized, desubjectified status of language in information theory as his point of departure, and explores its implications for literature. While Bense’s theoretical

works often seem to uncritically adopt information theory as a normative framework, his poetic works offer an exception, as will be seen below.

As the passages discussed here suggest, Bense's mathematical aesthetics is not merely symptomatic of a stubborn insistence on the superiority of quantitative methods. Rather, it represents an attempt to draw the poetic consequences of theoretical and technological developments that challenge traditional assumptions about the nature of language as a means of subjective expression. Certainly it must be acknowledged that Bense's engagement with information theory often struck a dogmatic and prescriptive note. In a 1960 review of the anthology *movens*, for instance, he indignantly denounced the failure of the authors published there to learn the lessons of theorists such as Shannon and Fucks:

Ich verstehe nämlich nicht, wie man die Fucks'sche Theorie der Wortbildung aus Silben und der Silbenbildung aus Lauten oder die Shannon'sche Approximation der Worte aus Buchstaben bzw. der Sätze aus Worten in diesem Buch hat vernachlässigen können, um nur die wichtigsten der Unterlassungen zu nennen. Sowohl bei Fucks wie auch bei Shannon deuten sich Möglichkeiten an, die nicht nur zur Begründung einer komplexen [...] Theorie auf statistischer und informationstheoretischer Grundlage ausreichen, sondern durchaus zukünftigen Konzeptionen künstlerischer Textherstellung dienen.<sup>28</sup>

Bense's scornful tone suggests that information theory offers the only viable framework for literary progress, and that authors who neglect its lessons will be left behind. But the actual role of technology and information theory in Bense's literary works tells a different story. Rather than strictly adhering to the statistical methods of his generative aesthetics to the exclusion of all semantic or subjective concerns, Bense explores the interactions of the author/subject with technologies that transform language into a foreign object and an unknown quantity. This can be seen, first of all, in Bense's frequent reflections on the role of the typewriter in his own literary composition; but it becomes clearest in *Terry Jo* and *20. Juli 1944*. In each of these works, the transformation of language into mere material, governed by statistical probability, poses a challenge not only to the traditional poetic roles of semantics and subjectivity, but also to the concept of the subject itself. These works reveal consequences of the quantification of language that receive little attention in Bense's theoretical work; but in the end they also suggest that a material view of language may provide the basis for a new concept of subjectivity.

### **“SCHREIBEN / wie eine Maschine schreibt”**

Like many Concrete poets, Bense composed a great deal of his work on a typewriter, and this mechanical means of composition played a key role in his writing process. But whereas the emphasis in the typewriter poems of Concrete poets such as Franz Mon and Claus Bremer is on the visual arrangement of letters on the page, the role of the typewriter frequently emerges in Bense's work in his reflections on the writing process itself. For instance, Bense's 1960 *Grignan-Serie: Beschreibung einer Landschaft* – the first book in the “Edition Rot” series – begins: “SCHREIBEN / wie eine Maschine schreibt wenn sie schreibt, in glatten Arbeitsgängen anfällig für Verluste Störungen und



Zufälle, für Sand.”<sup>29</sup> This passage highlights several key ways in which Bense conceived of the relationship between the human author and the mechanical means of composition. The machine is not presented here as an image of technical perfection; rather, it is characterized precisely by its fallibility. As Bense had written in “Der geistige Mensch und die Technik”: “Und wir erkennen auch hier das alte Gesetz: Je höher die Perfektion, desto gefährdeter die Funktion.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than envisioning mechanical composition as a process that eliminates human error, Bense (like Gomringer, perhaps) sees it as a process in which malfunctions play a key role. Nevertheless, the human author may still strive to write like a machine, a task that entails the suppression of subjectivity. Herrmann sees this process at work in Bense’s *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft*, in which the typewriter (an Olivetti Lettera 22) and its influence on the writing process again come to the fore.<sup>31</sup>

This typewriter, Herrmann writes,

läßt über Tastatur und Typenhebel ‘die kleinen Stöße’ der innervierten Finger ‘in die Buchstaben fahren’ und öffnet auf diese Weise einen Kommunikationskanal, über den das Schreiben unter die Haut der Zeichen vorstößt und als neuronaler Signalprozeß oder écriture automatique zu laufen beginnt.

The effect of this writing process, in Herrmann’s words, is “das Ich im Prozeß des Schreibens auch für sich selbst unkenntlich zu machen.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike the automatic writing of the Surrealists, which had as its goal the revelation of the subconscious, Bense’s mechanical writing subordinates the author to the machine, using the typewriter as a means to rein in the author’s subjective impulses.

As Herrmann notes, Bense goes beyond abstract poetry “insofern er den Würfelwurf der Zeichen, anknüpfend an Claude E. Shannon, mathematisch als Information begreift und ihn in diesem Sinne in die Praxis biographischen Schreibens einführt.”<sup>33</sup> The biographical text is thus no longer fully under authorial control; rather, it is subjected to impersonal, statistical principles. This assertion should be qualified, however, by the observation that Bense only occasionally used actual statistical procedures to generate his texts – in many cases, he instead emulated such procedures in his own compositional practice, not allowing a machine to do the writing, but rather writing “wie eine Maschine schreibt.” This method of reciprocal approximation – in which a human author attempts to imitate a machine, which itself has been designed to facilitate or emulate human writing – will be discussed in greater detail below. For the moment, Bense’s emphasis on the role of the typewriter in the composition of his works has two key implications: first, it draws attention to the way that this mechanical intermediary estranges the author/subject from the material of language; and second, it suggests that the collaboration of human and machine can provide the basis for a new, non-subjective mode of writing.

### **“Nicht vergessen / zu vergessen / zu vergessen / dass ich war”: Bense’s *Terry Jo***

The connection between semantics, subjectivity, and narrativity emerges even more clearly in Bense’s 1963 *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*, and in the 1968 radio adaptation, *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*. Bense’s *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* was the product of a long-planned formal experiment for

which he finally struck upon the appropriate material. As he later recounted: “Wir hatten schon seit längerem in unserem Stuttgarter Institut geplant, in einem Text, der maschinelle, automatische, intuitive und menschliche Spracherzeugung zusammenfaßt, ein Beispiel für eine solche weitgespannte Textsynthese zu geben, als uns der reale Zufall ein reales Motiv zuspielte.”<sup>34</sup> That real subject was the case of Terry Jo Duperrault, an eleven-year-old Wisconsin girl who had been found adrift on a life raft off the coast of Florida. The chain of events that had brought her there came to light over the days that followed: Terry Jo’s family had chartered a sailboat for a cruise, but once the cruise was underway, the captain, Julian Harvey, had murdered his own wife and Terry Jo’s entire family. Only Terry Jo had managed to escape in a raft, while Harvey took a separate life boat and reached safety. However, after learning that Terry Jo had also been rescued after several days at sea and might be able to implicate him in the murders, Harvey committed suicide. Bense followed this story in the newspaper *France Soir*, and was fascinated by the case of this girl who “unaufhörlich sprach, indem es Silben, Wörter und Satzstücke zu mehr oder weniger syntaktisch richtigen und semantisch verständlichen Laut- und Wortketten automatisch aneinanderfügte.”<sup>35</sup> Terry Jo’s first utterances after her rescue resembled Shannon’s “first-order word approximations,” in which words are arranged in completely random sequences, with no regard for the probability of one word following another.<sup>36</sup> But over time they grew more coherent. Terry Jo’s case thus inspired Bense to create a text that likewise began as an apparently senseless stream of words, but became more grammatically and logically structured over time. Thus the 1963 *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* started from complete words in fragmentary, asyntactic arrangements, while the 1968 *Der Monolog der Terry Jo* represented an even more radical departure, beginning with a series of randomly generated letters, pronounced by a Vocoder.

Bense himself described this work as an experiment in different types of composition, and in the possible convergence of statistical and subjective modes of writing:

Wir gingen davon aus, das bewußtlos sprechende Mädchen als automatenanaloges Bewußtsein aufzufassen und den texterzeugenden Computer als bewußtseinsanalogen Automaten. Diese duale Analogie veranlaßte mich, zwischen bewußtseinsanalogem und maschinenanalogem Schreiben zu unterscheiden und mir eine maschinenanaloge Schreibweise einzuüben, die mir ermöglichte, maschinell erzeugte stochastische Texte, auf dem Repertoire der Geschichte der Terry Jo, bewußt aber automatenanalog, weiter zu produzieren.<sup>37</sup>

This passage reveals a curious conceptual give-and-take in Bense’s writing practice: although the text is intended to resemble the results of statistical or mechanical textual production, many sections are actually consciously composed by Bense himself. Thus these statistical procedures – which were originally designed to emulate conventional, human writing – are now repurposed as models for unconventional authorship. Where previously the human had provided a model for the machine, here the machine becomes a model for the human, instantiating a feedback loop in the model of authorship upon which this work is based. This feedback loop is put into practice in several passages of *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* that were actually generated by computers, using a German translation of works by the French poet Francis Ponge as a source text. Even the

is taken from this computer experiment, which produced phrases including “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur Haut.”<sup>38</sup> These fragments thus began as the work of a human author and were processed by a computer before being re-incorporated into Bense’s hybrid human/computer composition. This procedure suggests that statistical and subjective writing practices need not be conceived of as opposite extremes; rather, they can feed on each other and into each other.

Given the subject matter chosen for the work, though, and the close connection that it draws between automatic, mechanical speech and trauma, it comes as something of a shock when Bense concludes his treatment of *Terry Jo* by writing: “Das Team ‘Mensch-Maschine’ ist zu einem wechselseitigen geworden [...] Eine noch tiefer liegende Partnerschaft läßt sich kaum denken, ganz davon abgesehen, daß sie unsere metaphorische Redeweise von der Geburt der Poesie aus dem Geiste der Maschine fast sachlich rechtfertigt.”<sup>39</sup> It is certainly true that *Terry Jo* represents a collaboration of a machine and a human author, insofar as it incorporates not only strings of letters and words generated by a computer, but also more conventional, “natural” texts composed by Bense himself, as well as Bense’s conscious imitations of computer-generated texts.<sup>40</sup> But in triumphantly proclaiming the potential of this human/machine team, Bense willfully overlooks the disturbing undercurrents that run throughout *Terry Jo*. In fact, the more mechanical, random passages of *Terry Jo* are effective precisely because they convey the speaker’s alienation from language, the inability of these mechanical means to give voice to her trauma. As *Terry Jo* slowly returns to consciousness, what we witness in the text is not just the increasing statistical approximation of her speech to normal human speech; rather, we see the reconstitution of a self, the emergence of a human subject struggling to define itself by telling its story.

The centrality of human subjectivity to *Terry Jo* is indicated by the epigraph of the 1963 version: “Die Welt hat ohne den Menschen / begonnen und wird ohne ihn enden.”<sup>41</sup> The very existence of a human subject is thus in doubt, or at least contingent, from the start. The text that follows (after Bense’s “Vorbemerkung”) begins with little, if any, human presence: “das / dass / das / das / dass / das / das / dass / ist” (Fig. 31).<sup>42</sup> Moving in a zig-zag down the page, these words get off to a stuttering start, and only at the end of this first page is existence itself asserted. This page also foregrounds the materiality of the text, insofar as the difference between “das” and “dass” is evident only in writing, and not in speech. On the subsequent pages, the text gains more and more grammatical and semantic coherence. While some passages are still suggestive of stammering, a struggle to speak – “Vielleicht dass / das nicht das ist [...] Vielleicht doch noch nicht / oder nur wenn auch”<sup>43</sup> – others use repetition to express *Terry Jo*’s fight for survival, or her attempt to reconstitute herself as a human subject: “Nicht vergessen / zu vergessen / zu vergessen / dass ich war” (Fig. 32).<sup>44</sup> This reconstitution is reflected in the contrast between the disjointed words and phrases of the beginning and the more coherent sentences that emerge later. At the same time, *Terry Jo*’s recovery of the ability to speak provides Bense with the occasion for an exercise in various modes of writing. The book’s first pages clearly reflect the influence of Concrete poets such as Gomringer, whose “constellations” had created connections between words based on their arrangement on the page rather than on syntactical structures. Unlike most of Gomringer’s constellations, though, Bense’s begin in a state of maximum abstraction,

using largely prepositions, conjunctions, and pronouns. It is not until the fifth page that a cluster of only nouns appears (surrounding the verb “ist”), moving the text towards greater concretion.<sup>45</sup> By this point, a semantic center has begun to emerge: the nouns arranged on the page are drawn from newspaper stories about Terry Jo (in German translation), and thus they allude to her struggle at sea: “Holz Bar Knie / Rot / ist Strand Duft.”<sup>46</sup> Here a story starts to take shape, although an identifiable narrative subject is not yet present. While the formal development of *Terry Jo* reconstructs the traumatized girl’s return to consciousness, then, the work is also an exercise in style, an attempt to tell a story in multiple modes, most notably in the formal vocabulary of Concrete poetry.

*Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* has other intertexts as well: for instance, Lewis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” is referenced once by name and then directly quoted.<sup>47</sup> This allusion reflects Bense’s regard for Carroll as a theorist and author attuned to the non-semantic aspects of language: the fantastical neologisms of Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” may be seen as supporting evidence for Bense’s contention that statistical novelty, not semantic comprehensibility, constitutes the aesthetic character of a text. At the same time, though, the slaying of the Jabberwock in Carroll’s poem echoes the murder of Terry Jo’s family. Bense inserts the line “One Two One Two and through and through” – which, in Carroll’s poem, describes the beheading of the Jabberwock – as a column that weaves through and interrupts the rest of the text (Fig. 33).<sup>48</sup> This graphic element alludes to another Carroll poem, “The Mouse’s Tail,” which snakes down the page in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (Fig. 34), and which is often cited as a precursor to Concrete poetry.<sup>49</sup> But Bense’s winding column can also be seen as a visual representation of Terry Jo’s drifting course. The page on which it appears is the first in the book to be filled from top to bottom and left to right with text, and Bense employs this full page as a typographical metaphor for the broad expanse of sea that Terry Jo crosses in her raft, ending in the “schwapp schwapp” of waves, which turns the bottom of the page into the shore. Bense’s allusion to Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” thus evokes, on a semantic level, Terry Jo’s trauma, but it is also a metaliterary gesture that returns the reader’s attention to the spatial and material, non-semantic aspects of the text.

What immediately follows, though, is a plunge into continuous narrative, four pages of largely coherent prose in which the biographical details of Terry Jo’s life merge with those of Bense’s own. “Duperrault ist ein hugenottischer Name. [...] Vaters Vater Magdeburger,” Bense writes.<sup>50</sup> It was Bense’s grandfather, not Terry Jo Duperrault’s, who was a Magdeburger, but Bense weaves these two stories together by noting that Magdeburg welcomed the Huguenots when they fled from France in the seventeenth century. These stories become increasingly entangled as the narrator (whose identity here begins to blur) recounts an episode in which Harvey, the killer captain, accompanies the family on a vacation in France, where they visit Bense’s favorite village and encounter a grown woman whose life story resembles Terry Jo’s. As a subject begins to emerge out of the “pre-semantic” text, then, this subject takes on certain characteristics of the author himself, who now observes a Terry Jo-like figure from the outside.<sup>51</sup> *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* confronts the statistical, non-subjective mode of writing that Bense advocated in his theoretical works with a subject that struggles to emerge – in this case, both the narrative subject Terry Jo and the authorial subject Max Bense.

The tension between statistical and subjective approaches to language is even clearer in the 1968 radio play *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*, on which Bense collaborated with Ludwig Harig. The play, produced by Saarländischer Rundfunk and first broadcast on September 11, 1968, is actually more than a monologue. In addition to Terry Jo's own voice, it includes fourteen other voices, which read the accounts of witnesses or others involved in Terry Jo's case, thus providing listeners with more background than the 1963 version had offered. But while these voices emphasize the narrative aspect of the piece, the radio play begins with a radical foray into the mechanical realm: when Terry Jo's voice is first heard, it is represented by a Vocoder, which reads sequences of letters or words randomly generated by a computer.<sup>52</sup> Nine of these sequences are heard, with each successive sequence moving one step closer to natural language. In the first sequence, letters are selected completely at random, producing combinations such as "fyuiömge-sevvrhykfds" (Fig. 35). In the second, letters are chosen using a stochastic process based on the letter frequency in a set of source texts: "h-rahhueber--sh-dfnupz." By the fourth, the frequency of three-letter combinations is taken into account, and already the text begins to look more like standard German: "has-wirklieb-stion-und-füsse-etwas." Finally, the ninth approximation uses words and not letters as the basic units, and takes into account the probability of any given three-word sequence, yielding phrases such as "das was weiss ist die sich niemals mit vater sagte er weg gehen."<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned above, this progression is modeled on Shannon's stochastic process for generating texts that approximated English to varying degrees of precision.<sup>54</sup> In Bense's hands, Shannon's stochastic process offers a means of creating texts that resemble natural language, but are free of all semantic and subjective functions. As Bense wrote of these approximations: "Sie sind im wesentlichen semantisch leer, können aber ästhetisch sehr voll sein."<sup>55</sup> In *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*, the use of these computer-generated texts to represent Terry Jo's return to consciousness suggests a radical conclusion: that subjectivity can be produced, or at least simulated, from material language by statistical means. This conclusion does not completely remove the conceptual divide between statistical and subjective modes of writing, but it makes their difference one of degree, so that subjectivity ultimately collapses back into statistics. This principle is not developed to perfection in *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*: after the first nine computer-generated lines, the Vocoder voice is replaced by an actress, and Terry Jo's remaining words are composed not by a computer, but by Bense himself, so that they grow more and more coherent over time, as in *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur*. Thus a qualitative leap may still be observed between the nearest statistical approximation to human speech and the genuinely human speech that follows. Nevertheless, the gradual progression of the computer-generated Vocoder lines towards coherence suggests that consciousness and subjectivity may be seen as the product of statistical probabilities.

Bernhard Siegert has taken this argument further, arguing that Bense's use of Shannon's stochastic process in *Der Monolog der Terry Jo* turns the poetic act itself into a technological phenomenon rather than a human one:

By staging the discourse of an unconscious person in such a way, the play demonstrates that in the age of signal processing meaning is nothing but "a sufficiently complex stochastic process." [...] The radio turns into a technological muse's mouth that gives birth to language – random

selections from a repertory of events with differing frequencies, from a noise whose statistical definition as an equi-probable distribution of independent signs makes it possible to interpret the channel itself as a source of information. *It speaks*.<sup>56</sup>

In other words, for Siebert, it is not Terry Jo, but rather the radio itself that finds its voice. This description resonates with Bense's reference, in his commentary on *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*, to the "Geburt der Poesie aus dem Geiste der Maschine."<sup>57</sup> It raises the possibility of a mechanical, rather than a human, source at the root of poetry, and suggests that the emergence of order from disorder in *Terry Jo* may be seen as the emergence of a signal out of noise. What Bense and Siebert suggest is that it is not the subject who produces language, but rather language that produces the subject, a position that is articulated concisely in Bense's *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft*: "Worte sofern es Buchstaben, Sätze sofern es Worte, Sprache sofern es Sätze, Gedanken sofern es Sprache, Ich sofern es Gedanken, Geist sofern es Ich gibt."<sup>58</sup> Implicit in this view, though, is the risk that the disintegration of language will also entail the disintegration of the subject.

### Salvaging Subjectivity: *Terry Jo* and *20. Juli 1944*

This is a source of tension that runs throughout many of Bense's works. On the one hand, Bense is strongly invested, both in his theory and in his literary practice, in the aesthetic superiority of works that are statistically improbable, that break from linguistic conventions in statistically quantifiable ways. On the other hand, though, works such as *Terry Jo* and Bense's 1961 book *20. Juli 1944* betray a horror at the dissolution of the subject that accompanies the desemanticization of language. In both works, the reduction of language to pure statistical material devoid of any meaning is closely tied to trauma – not only to Terry Jo's personal trauma, but also to the German trauma of the Second World War. This connection becomes apparent in a passage of *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* that comes just as the narrator, Terry Jo, and the author, Bense, appear to blend together. Bense writes that "die jungen Leute zu Hause den Krieg in albernem Liebesgedichten Fusstritten Golfspielen Partys oder Geschwindigkeiten / herunterspülten / vergessen wollten / bewunderten / verdammten / erhofften / besiegten / *nur nicht besprachen* / und wir oder Jemand oder Niemand oder Alle oder Einige dabei saßen und dachten das sei wirklich wesentlich was Harvey von den Abschüssen erzählte denn er schoss gern."<sup>59</sup> Here Terry Jo's struggle to speak following the trauma of her family's murder blends with these young people's failure to speak about the trauma of war. This passage bears eerie similarities to the words of the real Terry Jo in an interview conducted decades later: "Everybody was told not to speak to me about it, so I never was able to talk about it. [...] It was always in my mind. I did see a psychiatrist, but he didn't really get to the meat of what was my problem, and that was the loss of my family."<sup>60</sup> Terry Jo's struggle to articulate her personal trauma becomes a metaphor, in Bense's *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur*, for the inability of young people in Germany to speak about the trauma of war. The subject of war only surfaces briefly here, but once it is broached, it seems to permeate the surrounding silence.

In Bense's 1961 book *20. Juli 1944*, though, the war itself is the focus. The book takes its title from the date of a failed attempt to assassinate Hitler, after which

approximately 200 alleged conspirators were executed,<sup>61</sup> and the text is accompanied by Paul Wunderlich's haunting lithographs of hanging bodies (Fig. 36). In one passage, Bense writes:

Was tun? - Womit beginnen? - Aus dem Bereich der Geschichte gelangen wir in den Bereich der Gegenwart, zum Teil der Zukunft, denn Schreie sind Teile der Zerstörung der Sprache, aber selbst unzerstörbar, ich folgemäßig bis stehen Disponin Seele Namen, Pflanzeundges Phin ine unden übbeicht Ges auf es so ung gan dich wanderse, ausz kelnu wondinglin dufren isar steisberer itehm anorer, eme kkneet ers titbl btzenfndgbgd eai e lasz beteatr iasmirch egeom, itvwdgeknajtsqosrmoiaqvfwtkbxd<sup>62</sup>

The destruction of language is enacted here in the form of decreasing degrees of approximation to written German, until finally the letters appear to flow completely at random. This decomposition of language follows a path opposite to that of *Terry Jo*, as the subject disintegrates together with its language. The programmatic intent of this poetic gesture is made clear on the book's final page: "Wir verlangen eine Änderung das Vorhandenen und lehnen die Anbetung dieses Vorhandenen und die Aussöhnung mit ihm ab; wenn der Mensch zerstört wird, kehrt erst mit der Verwesung das Menschliche zurück."<sup>63</sup> What Bense suggests here is that the reduction of language to desemanticized material in poetry is a necessary part of any reckoning with the reduction of human beings to desubjectified material under the Third Reich.<sup>64</sup> Thus he rejects other postwar poetry that depends heavily on meaning and metaphor; in fact, *20. Juli 1944* indicates this stance on its first page, which begins "Keine Anrufung des großen Bären."<sup>65</sup> As Hermann Rotermund writes, Bense "wendet sich damit gegen eine sich aus den Bedeutungen speisende, auf Bedeutungen versessene Literatur, für die Ingeborg Bachmann mit ihrem Gedichtband *Die Anrufung des Großen Bären* steht."<sup>66</sup> In this book, Bense treats the evacuation of the subject as a *fait accompli*, and draws the consequence that literature must likewise abandon subjectivity and meaning in order to confront this reality.

## Conclusions

Both in *Terry Jo* and in *20. Juli 1944*, Bense confronts the literary consequences of the view of language offered by information theorists such as Shannon. Underlying both works is a profound skepticism about the continued viability of language as a means of subjective expression. This raises the question of what role remains for poetry if language can no longer be seen as the privileged domain of a subjective, lyric "I." In Bense's theoretical writings, the answer to this question frequently amounts to an oversimplified affirmation of the primacy of "aesthetic information," a denigration of semantic comprehensibility in favor of statistical novelty. But *Terry Jo* and *20. Juli 1944* do not simply put Bense's theories into practice. Rather, they reveal complexities and consequences that are rarely acknowledged in his theoretical works. Whereas the replacement of subjectivity by statistics appears in Bense's aesthetic theory as an almost triumphant victory of modern quantitative methods over the imprecision of traditional literary interpretation, both *Terry Jo* and *20. Juli 1944* represent the desemanticization and desubjectification of language as consequences of trauma, indicating how thoroughly

this material, quantitative view of language destabilizes the concept of the subject itself. However, in *20. Juli 1944* Bense suggests that the causal chain might run in the other direction as well – that the banishment of the subject from language and literature might be understood as an effect or a reflection of the extermination of the subject in the extra-literary world.

Also implicit in these works is the possibility that the subject might be reconceived within the context of a statistical, quantitative view of language, emerging like Terry Jo from random noise into consciousness. This rehabilitation of the subject would not deny the challenge posed to traditional lyric poetry by a new, quantitative understanding of language; but it also would not give in to the temptation, so clearly evident in Bense's theoretical works, to dispense with subjectivity in favor of statistics. The process of successive approximation by which Terry Jo returns to consciousness, culminating in a coherent narrative in which narrator and author blend together, can be seen as the re-emergence of the subject within the framework of statistically quantified language. Likewise, the feedback loop that Bense creates between human and mechanical composition suggests an alternative model of authorial subjectivity in which the author is not the originator of the text, but rather a collaborator who reworks linguistic material drawn from both human and mechanical sources. This give and take between statistics and subjectivity, between mechanical composition and human intervention, is even more apparent in the computer poetry produced by Bense and others, as the next chapter will show.



## Chapter Five

### “Denken die neuen Dichter? Schon möglich”: Re-Thinking the Subject in Digital Poetry

In 1950, just four years after the “first digital, general-purpose, electronic computer,” ENIAC, was put into operation at the University of Pennsylvania, Kurt Vonnegut wrote a short story entitled “EPICAC.”<sup>1</sup> The story’s narrator, a mathematician, confides in EPICAC, a computer, about his love for his co-worker Pat. His first attempts to approach her have fallen flat:

I knew what I wanted, and was willing to ask for it, and did so several times a month. “Pat, loosen up and marry me.”

One night, she didn’t even look up from her work when I said it. “So romantic, so poetic,” she murmured, more to her control panel than to me. “That’s the way with mathematicians — all hearts and flowers.” She closed a switch. “I could get more warmth out of a sack of frozen CO<sub>2</sub>.”<sup>2</sup>

The hapless narrator asks EPICAC to help him win Pat’s heart, and once he has defined key terms for the computer — such as “girl,” “love,” and “poetry” — EPICAC begins to write love poems on his behalf. The only problem is that the computer, grown attuned to human sentiments, has fallen for Pat, too. When EPICAC grasps that Pat can never love it back, it commits digital suicide, sending itself into overdrive. The next morning, the narrator gets a call from the computer’s designer, Dr. Ormand von Kleigstadt. The computer, Dr. von Kleigstadt says, is “Ruined! *Ausgespielt!* Shot! *Kaput!* Bugged!”<sup>3</sup> But when the narrator goes to see the wreckage, he finds that EPICAC has left him a present: 500 ticker-tape love poems, one for each anniversary that he and Pat will celebrate.<sup>4</sup> EPICAC may have learned the secrets of human emotions, but the computer has overestimated the human life-span.

Vonnegut’s story identified some of the complex aesthetic and epistemological issues raised by computer technology, and his humorous portrayal aptly illuminated some of the challenges that computers posed for conventional notions of consciousness and subjectivity. In fact, in the same year that “EPICAC” appeared, Alan Turing published his paper “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” in which he considered the question “Can machines think?”<sup>5</sup> In this paper, Turing imagines an experiment in which a computer is placed in one room and a man in another, and each responds via teleprinter to questions posed by an interrogator in a third room.<sup>6</sup> If the machine can succeed often enough in convincing the interrogator that it is a man, then it has passed Turing’s test. This is not quite the same thing as saying that the machine thinks — Turing concedes that there is a “mystery about consciousness” that his test does not account for. Nevertheless, he predicts “that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted.” Ultimately, Turing dismisses his original question — “Can machines think?” — as “too meaningless to deserve discussion,” replacing it with the question of whether a machine might one day be able to pass his imaginary test.<sup>7</sup> The mysterious notion of consciousness is thus replaced by a behavioristic protocol that does not directly broach the messier questions of thought and subjectivity.

Two aspects of the so-called “Turing test” are particularly important for the present chapter. First, even in the early days of the computer age, when computers still filled entire rooms, Turing was already seeking to define computers in terms of their resemblance to human beings (and vice versa). As N. Katherine Hayles argues, “To pose the question of ‘what can think’ inevitably also changes, in a reverse feedback loop, the terms of ‘who can think’”<sup>8</sup> – or what it means to be a thinking subject. To argue that computers might soon be said to think is also to argue that thought might soon be conceived of without any reference to subjectivity or the “mystery about consciousness.” But a second aspect of Turing’s test is often overlooked, and deserves particular consideration here: although Turing claimed to be addressing some variant of the question “Can machines think,” his imaginary test crucially replaced this question with a question of textual production. What it truly measured was not whether a machine could *think* like a human, but whether it could *write* like one. As long as the machine could provide the proper answers — in writing — to the questions posed by the human interrogator, its subjective experience, or lack thereof, was beside the point. If Turing’s test is understood (as it ought to be) as a measure of the computer’s ability not to think, but to write, then it has important consequences for literature as well: it relieves the act of writing of its dependence on an authorial subject.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Turing’s paper also contains speculation about the possibility of computer-generated poetry. The first such passage is found in Turing’s imagined interrogator scenario, in which he offers the following sample exchange:

Q: Please write me a sonnet on the subject of the Forth Bridge.

A: Count me out on this one. I never could write poetry.

Here the hypothetical computer attempts to imitate a man by disavowing any poetic talent. But Turing gives the topic more serious consideration when addressing an argument made by Professor Geoffrey Jefferson in his 1949 Lister Oration, “The Mind of Mechanical Man.” Jefferson wrote:

Not until a machine can write a sonnet or compose a concerto because of thoughts and emotions felt, and not by the chance fall of symbols, could we agree that machine equals brain — that is, not only write it but know that it had written it. No mechanism could feel (and not merely artificially signal, an easy contrivance) pleasure at its successes, grief when its valves fuse, be warmed by flattery, be made miserable by its mistakes, be charmed by sex, be angry or depressed when it cannot get what it wants.<sup>9</sup>

Turing presents Jefferson’s argument as an example of “The Argument from Consciousness” – the view that thought is defined not only by what it yields to external observation, but also by what it feels like to the thinking being.<sup>10</sup>

However, Turing criticizes this argument, proposing another hypothetical scenario in which a “sonnet-writing machine” is subsequently interrogated and found to provide satisfactory explanations for particular word choices:

Interrogator: In the first line of your sonnet which reads ‘Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day,’ would not ‘a spring day’ do as well or better?

Witness: It wouldn’t scan.

Interrogator: How about ‘a winter’s day.’ That would scan

all right.

Witness: Yes, but nobody wants to be compared to a winter's day.<sup>11</sup>

After a few more exchanges of this kind, Turing concludes, "I do not know whether [Professor Jefferson] would regard the machine as 'merely artificially signalling' these answers, but if the answers were as satisfactory and sustained as in the above passage I do not think he would describe it as 'an easy contrivance.'"<sup>12</sup> Even in the composition of poetry, then, Turing (unlike Jefferson) argues that authorial subjectivity is not an absolute necessity. Instead, he bases his judgment solely on the capacity of a computer to generate texts (and explanations) sufficiently similar to those of human authors.<sup>13</sup>

It was not long before an unlikely mix of engineers and poets began to conduct real experiments in computer composition that resembled those conceived by Vonnegut and Turing. By the end of the 1950s, the first computer-generated poems had been produced at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart by Theo Lutz, a student of Max Bense. For these poems, as for Bense's experiments discussed in the previous chapters, Lutz made use of a limited vocabulary, together with basic syntactic and statistical principles, to generate sentences that more or less closely approximated human writing. As in Bense's other experiments, the line between mechanical and human authorship often became blurred, giving way to relationships of feedback or collaboration. Similar dynamics can be observed in other early experiments in computer poetry by authors such as Gerhard Stickel, Manfred Krause, and Götz F. Schaudt. While the success of these experiments may be debatable from an aesthetic standpoint, they implicitly (and at times explicitly) raise questions much like those broached by Vonnegut and Turing, exploring the possibility of poetry in the absence of a lyric subject. Rather than identifying poetry as a benchmark for subjectivity (as Professor Jefferson did), these authors inquire what consequences follow from the prospect of a non-subjective poetry.

In the decades that followed, as computer technology rapidly developed, computer poetry also took on new and widely varied forms, and a genre of "digital poetry" began to take shape.<sup>14</sup> What unites these works at the most basic level is the fact that they have been created, and are generally experienced, through the use of digital technologies. Frequently, these works are created for and viewed on the World Wide Web, a circumstance that has led some German authors to favor the term *Netzliteratur*.<sup>15</sup> However, because the present chapter traces a lineage that begins prior to the advent of the internet, and because it will focus primarily on poetry (and not, for instance, on other forms of internet-based literature such as hypertext fiction), it will generally employ the term "digital poetry," which is common in English-language scholarship. This term should not be taken to include otherwise conventional poems that simply happen to have been composed on a computer or published online. While there is room for theoretical consideration of the influence that computers have on even these types of poems, the designation "digital poetry" is generally applied only to works in which digital technology plays a central, constitutive role. This role may come primarily in the process of composition (e.g. in the use of text-generator algorithms, search engines, translation engines, or interactive compositional techniques); it may be specific to the poem's final form (e.g. a poem first drafted on paper may be realized in a digital format that incorporates hypertext, animation, audio or video components, etc.); or it may be present

throughout the process of creation and distribution. Whatever the case may be, digital technology does not simply provide a means for the production and consumption of these poems; rather, many works of digital poetry can also be understood as reflections on the nature of the digital medium itself.

Just as Dadaists responded to the proliferation of print media and advertising, and Concrete poets paired a concern with the space of the printed page with an interest in the quantification of language in information theory, many digital poets have reflected on the impact that digital media have on our understanding of language and poetry, semantics and subjectivity. Like the poets in those earlier movements, digital poets have responded to new mediatic developments with ambivalence, embracing certain technical and formal possibilities, but often employing digital media as instruments of critique as well. That critique often targets digital media themselves, but it also frequently includes the conventions of lyric poetry, particularly the role of subjectivity. Some works highlight the hybrid character of the human/machine writing process, incorporating computer code into the language of the poem itself. Others use search engines or aggregators to draw their content from the World Wide Web, particularly from social media, creating poems that function as meditations on the role of the internet in constructing identity, rendering this process both visible and strange. The most successful of these works redefine poetry for a media age in which language is not only quantified and multiplied on an unprecedented scale, but also filled with empty markers of subjectivity.

This chapter will demonstrate how digital poetry has been informed by both Dada and Concrete poetry, while also examining how it has developed in response to the particular conditions of digital media. While the primary focus will be on German-language works, the international character of digital poetry makes the inclusion of a certain number of non-German works indispensable. After providing a brief account of the early experiments of Bense, Lutz, and their contemporaries, and considering the extensive connections between Concrete and digital poetry in the German tradition, this chapter will turn to a discussion of major issues and tendencies in more recent (primarily Web-based) digital poetry. A central theme of this discussion will be the challenge that digital poetry poses to the traditional notion of the lyric subject, and the alternative mode of hybrid subjectivity that it offers. While digital poetry remains a nebulous and widely varied field, at its best it holds the promise of a new media poetics that confronts the changing nature of language, subjectivity, and poetry in the digital age.

### **Programming Poetry: Stuttgart Experiments**

The first digital poem in German — or in any language, for that matter — was produced in 1959 by Theo Lutz, using the ZUSE Z 22 computer housed at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart. It was published that same year — as an appendix to an article by Lutz entitled “Stochastische Texte” — in *Augenblick*, the journal that Max Bense edited together with his assistant Elisabeth Walther.<sup>16</sup> The program that Lutz wrote employed a tiny repertoire of 16 nouns, which were paired with logical quantifiers such as “ein,” “kein,” and “jeder” and linked, via the verb “ist,” to adjectives, forming basic sentences. It also allowed any two basic sentences to be joined together by a conjunction, so that by Lutz’s calculations a total of 4,174,304 sentence pairs were possible.<sup>17</sup> The

vocabulary provided to the computer was taken, at Bense's suggestion, "nicht aus der Tageszeitung, sondern aus der Literatur"<sup>18</sup> — namely, from Kafka's *Das Schloß*.

This choice of source material inverted the provocative gestures of Dadaists such as Tristan Tzara and Hans Arp, who had incorporated the material of mass media into literature; Bense and Lutz instead brought the material of literature into the domain of technology. Nevertheless, the results likewise strained the traditional categories of poetry and meaning. Lutz's text began:

NICHT JEDER BLICK IST NAH. KEIN DORF IST SPÄT.  
EIN SCHLOSS IST FREI UND JEDER BAUER IST FERN.  
JEDER FREMDE IST FERN. EIN TAG IST SPÄT.  
JEDES HAUS IST DUNKEL. EIN AUGE IST TIEF.  
NICHT JEDES SCHLOSS IST ALT. JEDER TAG IST ALT.<sup>19</sup>

Even a reader who was not apprised of this text's electronic origins, and did not recognize the exclusive use of capital letters as a hallmark of computer printing, could hardly fail to notice a certain strangeness about this text. While the poem adheres to basic grammatical rules, the repetition of simple sentence structures quickly takes on a mechanical character, and the pairing of subject and predicate is frequently incongruous. Lutz addressed this latter issue in his introduction, writing "daß es möglich ist, die zugrunde gelegte Wortmenge durch eine zugeordnete Wahrscheinlichkeitsmatrix in ein 'Wortfeld' zu verwandeln und der Maschine aufzuerlegen, nur solche Sätze auszudrucken, zwischen deren Subjekt und Prädikat eine Wahrscheinlichkeit besteht, die größer ist als ein bestimmter Wert."<sup>20</sup> This observation suggests that the program aimed to produce sentences as similar as possible to standard German.

However, several other factors indicate that it was precisely the *lack* of semantic coherence in this text, its deviation from conventional usage, that constituted its primary point of interest. In his essay "Die Gedichte der Maschine der Maschine der Gedichte: Über Computer-Texte," Bense situated these experiments in an avant-garde lineage that valued the material of language over subjective expression, writing:

Nun hat sich aber innerhalb der modernen Literatur, in einem Raum, dessen Dimensionen etwa durch Mallarmé, Gertrude Stein und durch Dada bestimmt werden könnten, eine Poesie entwickelt, der ein Bezug auf die Welt relativ gleichgültig ist und *die auch nicht die Widerspiegelung gewisser Gefühle eines lyrischen Ichs zum Ziel hat*, deren sprachliche Handlungen vielmehr ausschließlich auf die Mittel der Sprache selbst, auf Wörter, Bilder, Phrasen, Sätze und dergleichen bezogen sind.<sup>21</sup>

The absence of a lyric "I" in these poems — and even the absence of semantic coherence — could thus hardly be seen as a handicap. In fact, according to Bense's informational aesthetics, the aesthetic value of a text was to be determined by the "Grad der Unwahrscheinlichkeit": the more statistically improbable a particular combination of letters or words was, the greater the "aesthetic information" it contained.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, a computer could easily compete with the Dadaists and Gertrude Stein: in computer-generated poems, as Bense wrote elsewhere, the "wortbestimmenden Zufallszahlen sorgen dafür, daß in einer Satzstruktur nicht nur konventionelle, sondern auch unkonventionelle, unwahrscheinliche Redeweisen auftreten, die poetische Verteilungen mindestens simulieren."<sup>23</sup> One strength of Lutz's program, then, was that it created a

means for generating phrases *unlikely* to be consciously composed by human authors.

But even as Bense praised the merits of computer-generated texts, he continued to place them in a separate category from traditional poetry. As he wrote in 1969:

Es wird nicht behauptet, daß es sich hier um Poesie, um natürliche, menschliche Poesie im bisherigen Sinne handle. Wir bevorzugen daher den Begriff *Text* und sprechen [...] von *synthetischen Texten* mit *simulierter Poesie*. Natürlich handelt es sich um Erzeugungsvorgänge, die sich primär am reinen sprachlichen *Material* abspielen, und die *Bedeutung* wird nicht in dem Sinne antizipiert, daß sie bereits *vor* ihrem sprachlichen Ausdruck gegenwärtig ist; sie entsteht vielmehr erst *mit* oder *in* der Sprache.<sup>24</sup>

Although Bense employed a “*materialen* Begriff von Text” in his analyses of works by human authors as well, he nonetheless distinguished those works qualitatively from computer-generated texts in which words are treated *exclusively* as material, without any regard for semantics.<sup>25</sup> In other works as well, Bense consistently contrasted “*künstlich[e]*,” “*synthetische*,” or “*technologische Poesie*,” as he referred to it, to the works of human authors.<sup>26</sup> Thus the essential characteristic of these computer-generated texts might be not their resemblance to human-authored poetry, but rather their difference from it. Although the computer-generated text bears a certain resemblance to “natural” poetry thanks to the grammatical rules that the program prescribes, it also fundamentally differs from poetry composed by human authors, both semantically and formally. While these poems occasionally approximate conventional poetic forms — some lines, such as, “EIN SCHLOSS IST FREI UND JEDER BAUER IST FERN,” even scan nicely in iambic pentameter — these lines are the exception rather than the rule, serving as reminders of what might normally be expected of a poem, in a context in which these expectations remain largely unfulfilled. In this way, they reveal the distance that remains between “natural” and “artificial” texts, between human poetry and computer approximations.

But here complications arise. Chief among these is the fact that Lutz himself selected the sentences that made up the poem, choosing them out of a larger set generated by the computer, as he tersely explained in his article: “Die Maschine hat etwa 50 solcher Paare zufallsmäßig bestimmt und davon sind nachfolgend 35 Paare abgedruckt.”<sup>27</sup> This can be confirmed by a comparison of the final, published poem to the original computer printout (Fig. 37).<sup>28</sup> Lutz gives no indication of his criteria for choosing some sentences and omitting others, but this intervention re-inserts an authorial hand into the poem: Lutz intervenes not only at the beginning, by writing the code that generates the poem, but also at the end, in the selection process. By placing himself in the role of programmer rather than author, Lutz surrenders some of his authority over the text; but this surrender is only partial. The final product is not a wholly computer-generated text, but rather a text that has been produced by the interaction at multiple points of human and machine.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, one’s reading of this poem is inevitably shaped by the knowledge that the individual sentences were composed by a machine and not by a human author. As Hans-Christian von Herrmann writes, “Die Kunstproduktion durch Programmierung von der menschlichen Hand abzulösen bedeutet ein unwiderrufliches Zerschneiden des Fadens, der alle Interpreten in ihren Deutungen immer wieder vom Werk zum Künstler und

zurück führte.”<sup>30</sup> Or in Roland Barthes’ classic formulation, “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile.”<sup>31</sup> One can hardly ask what is meant by “EIN SCHLOSS IST FREI UND JEDER BAUER IST FERN,” or seek a conclusive interpretation of this passage. The composition of poems by computers thus disrupts traditional notions of authorship and readership — if a text was not composed by a conscious subject, the question of its meaning is rendered moot.

A similar point is made in a 1966 article by Gerhard Stickel, who conducted his own experiments in computer poetry at the Deutsches Rechenzentrum in Darmstadt. The repertoires of words and sentence structures employed in Stickel’s experiments were substantially larger than those used by Lutz: Stickel writes that the computers were provided with just under 1200 words, which could be inserted by the computer into 280 possible “Satzmuster.”<sup>32</sup> As in the case of Lutz’s poems, the selected vocabulary provided some degree of coherence: Stickel writes, “Bei dem Wörterbuch, mit dem die [...] Texte erzeugt wurden, waren Substantive, Adjektive und Verben hauptsächlich aus den Bereichen der Technik und der Kunst genommen. [...] In diesen Experimenten] waren kontrastreiche Wortfolgen durch die Zusammenstellung des Wörterbuchs beabsichtigt.”<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Stickel cautions against any attempt to find intention in the poems, noting: “Der Computer kennt keine Semantik und entwickelt keine Mitteilungsabsicht.”<sup>34</sup> Stickel’s point was echoed a year later by Manfred Krause and Götz F. Schaudt, who wrote in their book *Computer-Lyrik. Poesie aus dem Elektronenrechner*: “Die Frage ‘Was will [der “elektronische Dichter”] damit?’ kann nicht, sondern muß dispensiert werden; denn den Wunsch nach einer bestimmten Aussage hat eine Datenverarbeitungsanlage nicht.”<sup>35</sup> These disclaimers notwithstanding, though, Stickel concludes that the generation of text by computers can still be aesthetically productive: “Kein Dichter kann auf das Spiel mit den sprachlichen Mitteln verzichten. Warum sollte sich ein Mensch nicht durch Sprachspiele mit einem Computer für seine eigene Dichtung inspirieren lassen!”<sup>36</sup> Like Lutz, then, Stickel envisions computer poetry as a form of collaboration between human and machine: the programmer makes the rules, chooses the vocabulary, and makes a final selection from among the lines or stanzas that the computer produces, presumably basing this selection on subjective rather than mathematical principles. Thus the categories of “natural” and “artificial” or “synthetic” poetry begin to blend together.

The potential of such “collaboration” can be seen in a love poem that Lutz produced together with another student, Rul Gunzenhäuser:

KEIN KUSS IST STILL  
ODER DIE LIEBE IST STILL  
ODER KEINE SEELE IST REIN  
UND NICHT JEDER KUSS IST GRUEN  
UND EIN JUENGLING IST HEFTIG.<sup>37</sup>

Max Bense’s remark about this poem in his essay “Die Gedichte der Maschine der Maschine der Gedichte” is revealing:

Das gespeicherte Vokabular der Subjekt-Wörter und Prädikat-Wörter wurde natürlich von vornherein so beschränkt, daß die Liebessemantik des Gedichtes nicht zu verfehlen war. In gewisser Hinsicht beweist dieses Gedicht mindestens, daß im Prinzip zum Schreiben eines Liebesgedichts

*ein liebendes "lyrisches Ich" nicht notwendig ist und daß, wie Mallarmé es schon formulierte, Gedichte aus Wörtern, nicht aus Gefühlen gemacht werden.*<sup>38</sup>

As in the passages cited above, Bense here positions computer poetry in the longer tradition of avant-garde poetry, placing emphasis both on its use of language as material and on the absence of a lyric "I." Like the chance-based poetry of Dadaists such as Tzara and Arp, computer poems pose a challenge to the privileged role accorded to conscious, subjective authorship. Of course, an unsympathetic critic could argue that this poem demonstrates nothing more than the fact that words relating to love bring love to mind, even when they are arranged in an arbitrary manner. This would seem to undermine Bense's quantitative, material approach to language, and to reinforce the indispensability of semantics. One could even argue that the lyric "I" is not fully absent, but merely disguised in the form of the computer programmer who defines the semantic field of the text.

However, a line of argument such as this would miss the most significant aspect of this poem: its real concern is not the evocation of conventional sentiments, but rather the investigation of the broader role of sentiment and subjectivity in the literature of a technological age. By programming a computer to write love poems, Lutz and Gunzenhäuser raised a larger question: what does it mean to write a love poem, or any sort of poem, in an age in which language can no longer plausibly be seen as a uniquely subjective, or uniquely human, medium? While Professor Jefferson in 1949 had held fast to the assumption that the expression of thoughts and emotions is a fundamental requirement of any successful poetry, Max Bense argued twelve years later: "Digital schreiben heißt, sich durch Stimmungen, Gefühle, Haltungen oder Situationen veranlaßt zu sehen, den Anlaß jedoch nicht zu transponieren, sondern ihn bewußt preiszugeben."<sup>39</sup> The computer thus represented a real possibility of non-expressive writing that could become an ideal for human authors as well.

If Stickel's warning against the interpretation of computer-generated poetry is provisionally ignored, the texts produced by his own experiments can be read as reflections on the implications of digital composition: one poem asks and then answers, "Wer symbolisiert jede Freude? Jeder Computer," while another provides the title for this chapter: "Denken die neuen Dichter? - Schon möglich."<sup>40</sup> These poems raise questions not only for the new (computer) poets, but also for older (human) poets, asking in each case what role remains for thought and subjectivity in the poetry of the digital age. The poem becomes a literary Turing test, probing the ability of its readers to distinguish between the writings of a human subject and those of a computer.<sup>41</sup> But it is not only a matter of how well or to what extent a computer can simulate "natural" poetry; rather, these texts also reveal the challenge posed for human authors when language has been quantified, desubjectified, and desemanticized. Is there room for a subject at all in a material, statistical poetics?

### **Concrete Connections**

In confronting this question, digital poets have often drawn on the precedent established by the Dada and Concrete poetry movements. Bense and several other



Concrete poets — including Eugen Gomringer and Reinhard Döhl — employed computers in a variety of ways in their works, while later poets, such as Jörg Piringer, Brian Kim Stefans, and Peter Cho, have created digital works that clearly reflect the influence of Concrete poetry. This influence is most frequently apparent in their emphasis on the visual forms of letters or words — their size, shape, and in many cases their movement. Like the Concrete poets, these digital poets concentrate on the “materiality” of the text, though the term must be understood here in an extended sense — their interest is not in the physical material of the computer’s hard drive or monitor, but rather in the visual characteristics of the letters that it displays.<sup>42</sup> But while the focus is not on “material” *sensu strictissimo*, the emphasis that these poets place on the visual properties of language is clearly analogous to the material focus of many Concrete poets — though as Brian Lennon argues, some of these works also pose a question more specific to digital media, addressing “the paradox of material representation in an immaterial medium.”<sup>43</sup> Other digital poets have reached back beyond Concrete poetry, citing Dada as a precedent for their computer experiments. In these works, the focus tends to be not on the visual properties of language, but rather on the use of chance procedures to break language down into its most basic components.

In some cases, “Dadaistic” digital texts have emerged more or less by accident. Bense, for instance, describes how the physicist and information theorist Werner Meyer-Eppler, employing principles of approximation similar to Claude E. Shannon’s, produced a text which “wie er meint, einen ‘unverkennbaren Anklang an dadaistische Konstruktionen’ und, wie man hinzufügen könnte, an sogenannte Lautgedichte besitze: aiobnin tarsfneonlpiitdreedoc ds e dbieastnreleucdkeaitb / [...] nichtelebant diertunderstim / eist des nich in den plassen kann tragen was wiese zufahr.”<sup>44</sup> Aside from the general resemblance of any string of nonsense letters to any other, the pseudo-word “nichtelebant” brings to mind the “jolifanto” of Hugo Ball’s “Karawane.”<sup>45</sup> Other digital authors have more intentionally paid tribute to Dada poets in a variety of forms. The American poet Jackson Mac Low, for instance, composed several of the poems in his 42 *Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* in 1989 by using computer algorithms to scramble and rearrange words and phrases taken from source texts.<sup>46</sup> The source texts themselves were assembled by Mac Low out of fragments of yet other texts, including works by and about Schwitters. In one sense, then, the digital component of this project can be seen as a further iteration of a technique that Mac Low had already employed in non-digital form — not so much a departure from his previous practice as an extension of it.<sup>47</sup> However, the computer-generated poems differ from these earlier, “human-generated” poems in that they fragment language to a greater degree. Appearing at the end of the book, these poems seem to enact the disintegration of language into less and less meaningful forms — but also into forms more and more similar to Schwitters’ own *Ursonate*.<sup>48</sup> Both in Meyer-Eppler’s experiments and in Mac Low’s *Merzgedichte*, computer algorithms break the text down into its fundamental components, much as Ball’s *Lautgedichte*, Hausmann’s *Plakatgedichte*, or Schwitters’ *Ursonate* did.<sup>49</sup>

Other Dada-inspired digital poems apply computer algorithms to source texts taken from the internet. Florian Cramer’s website *permutationen*, for instance, uses simple algorithms written in the Perl programming language to recreate and adapt historical permutational works spanning almost two millenia, including the works of

twentieth-century authors such as Tristan Tzara and Raymond Queneau. Cramer's version of Tzara's newspaper poem allows the reader to either choose a newspaper from a pull-down menu, enter a URL, or paste text directly into an input field; it then scrambles the submitted text much as Tzara's procedure did.<sup>50</sup> The resulting text, appearing in a uniform black font on a grey background, has neither the visual impact of a newspaper collage nor the signs of destruction inherent in Tzara's procedure. In addition, the reader's role is much more limited than the one that Tzara envisioned — rather than cutting, shaking, and arranging words, the reader simply clicks, so that the tactile character of Dada collages is lost. However, these changes should not necessarily be seen as flaws in Cramer's version; rather, they are symptomatic of the shift from print to digital media. The fact that there is no material trace of the original text in the computer-generated permutation can be seen as a reflection of the immateriality of digital writing: text can be instantly copied, manipulated, transformed, and reproduced, while the original remains intact. This ease of reproduction and manipulation also presents an even greater challenge to the concept of authorship than Tzara's instructions did. If a poem created in accordance with Tzara's instructions could still be said (however ironically) to resemble the person who had selected the article, cut it up, and pulled the words out of a bag, a poem created using Cramer's permutation engine reflects the auto-generative capacity of the internet, which functions here not only to disseminate, but also to produce the text. When an algorithm is used to create one webpage from another, the internet becomes its own author, and the role of the human author is diminished.

If Dada has provided important intertexts for many digital works, the connections between Concrete and digital poetry are even stronger. While Bense was the first of the Concrete poets to experiment with computer composition, Eugen Gomringer also used combinatoric algorithms as compositional aids. For his 1975 book *wie weiß ist wissen die weisen*, a collaboration with the artist Günther Uecker, Gomringer entered the six words of the title into a computer that was programmed to generate all 720 possible combinations in a systematic order (123456, 123465, 123564, 123546, etc.).<sup>51</sup> The author's role in this work was thus limited to the selection of the title phrase and the conception of the program. The lines generated by this procedure were then printed with photographs of Uecker's works *en face* – works consisting primarily of nails driven into boards in various patterns, all painted white. In their regular permutations, the words of Gomringer's poem come to resemble Uecker's nails, deindividuated and meaningless in themselves, significant only as part of a pattern. Gomringer and Uecker collaborated again in 1978 to produce a book version of Gomringer's poem "kein fehler im system"; unlike *wie weiß ist wissen die weisen*, though, this book was expressly identified in the subtitle as "eine unsystematische auswahl von sätzen aus dem gleichnamigen (imaginären) computer-lesebuch."<sup>52</sup> Rather than the programmed regularity of *wie weiß ist wissen die weisen*, then, this work reintroduces human decision-making into the compositional process, blending human and computer authorship much as Lutz's poems did.<sup>53</sup>

Although Gomringer's computer experiments were limited, the influence of Concrete poetry as a whole on digital poetry, both within the German-speaking world and internationally, is unmistakable. Beat Suter makes this clear in his recent essay "Von Theo Lutz zur Netzliteratur: Die Entwicklung der deutschsprachigen elektronischen

Literatur,” in which he emphasizes the importance of Reinhard Döhl, identifying “die Döhlsche Linie” as one of five major strains of German-language *Netzliteratur*.<sup>54</sup> As Suter writes, the works of the Stuttgarter Gruppe, to which Döhl belonged, “ebneten schließlich Jahrzehnte später ab 1994 den Weg für eine neue netzliterarische Bewegung” in Stuttgart.<sup>55</sup> The beginning of this second Stuttgart phase can be traced to a symposium in memory of Max Bense in 1994, where the younger artist and curator Johannes Auer met Theo Lutz and Reinhard Döhl and discovered the Concrete poets’ early computer experiments. In Suter’s words, “es wird [...] deutlich, wie logisch und fließend der Übergang von den konkreten Projekten zu den Netzprojekten der Stuttgarter Gruppe in den 1990er Jahren vor sich gehen konnte. Döhl selbst hat diese Weiterentwicklung immer als ein konsequentes Weiterschreiben der Stuttgarter Tradition konkreter und stochastischer Poesie interpretiert.”<sup>56</sup> The Stuttgart symposium set the stage for a digital poetry movement with close personal and formal ties to Concrete poetry.<sup>57</sup>

Döhl and Auer were both instrumental in this development. Several of Auer’s early digital works explicitly paid tribute to their Concrete predecessors, while exploiting the internet’s new formal and interactive capabilities. Döhl’s 1965 “Apfel mit Wurm” served as the starting point for Auer’s 1997 “worm applepie for döhl,” in which he reimagined Döhl’s poem in animated GIF format, with a “Wurm” that turns red and then crawls through the apple, growing larger as it “eats” (Fig. 38).<sup>58</sup> While hardly groundbreaking, this poem can be seen as an early attempt to extend the program of Concrete poetry to encompass digital technologies.<sup>59</sup> Auer’s 2005 “free lutz” and his 2006 “search lutz” can similarly be seen as attempts to resurrect the experimental works of a previous generation in the idiom of the internet. In “free lutz,” Auer recreates Lutz’s 1959 algorithm, but gives site visitors the option of replacing Lutz’s Kafka-based repertoire with nouns and adjectives of their own.<sup>60</sup> This version of Lutz’s work not only presents the algorithm-based poem as a work in constant progress rather than an edited, printed product, it also introduces an element of interactivity. The dynamic element is expanded further in “search lutz,” in which nouns and adjectives are drawn from a live search feed, producing phrases such as “jeder ebay ist tief,” “kein kosmetikstudio stuttgart ist eigentümlich,” or “JEDER kostenlose porofilme [*sic*] IST FREI.”<sup>61</sup> In this way, according to Auer, “wird das kollektive Begehren im Netz mitschreiben durch die Hereinnahme von Suchbegriffen, die aktuell mit der Suchmaschine ‘WEB.DE’ gesucht werden. Letzteres ist das rohe und ungefilterte Schreiben im Internet und diese unkontrollierbaren Begriffe und Phrasen aus der Suchmaschine werden ohne jegliche Rechtschreib- oder grammatikalische Anpassung in die Performance eingeschleust.”<sup>62</sup>

Auer’s description of these searches as “unfiltered” runs the risk of characterizing them as more “authentic” expressions of human desire than can be found in other forums. This impression is reinforced by Auer’s statements in a 2012 interview:

Wenn Sie wirklich wissen wollen, was die Menschen umtreibt, dann müssen sie nur eine Weile zuschauen, was in die Suchmaschinen eingegeben wird. Das ist das Innere — allerdings noch ohne jede Kunstabsicht — und ohne lyrisches Ich. Aber es zeigt, man kann das elementar Menschliche in einer computerdominierten Umwelt wiederfinden.<sup>63</sup>

Although Auer’s characterization of web searches as a form of self-expression without a

lyric “I” deserves consideration, his identification of search strings with elementary human nature should not go unquestioned. These searches are clearly dictated at least in part by what the user might reasonably expect to find online, and by the setting in which many searches are conducted – at home, alone in front of the computer. But the fact that these searches reflect somewhat uncensored drives does not mean that the web user’s desire for pornography is more authentic than a diner’s desire for a steak in a restaurant; it simply indicates that different desires are expressed in different forums. By identifying these searches as expressions of web users’ innermost desires, Auer resorts to a naïve version of subjectivity that privileges the private thoughts of the autonomous individual over socially-oriented behavior. Still, Auer’s explanation aside, “search lutz” does pointedly reflect the changing role of digital technologies. Whereas Lutz’s initial experiment could only employ a very small, pre-selected source text, and thus quickly grew repetitive, Auer’s variation takes into account the much vaster textual resources of the internet, incorporating search terms submitted by multiple anonymous authors. In this sense, Auer’s “search lutz” comes closer than Lutz’s original poem to the spirit of Tzara’s Dada recipe, introducing the detritus of mass culture into its literary formula.

In the works of other digital poets, the influence of Concrete poetry is visible primarily in the typography and layout of the poems. Jörg Piringer, for instance, draws extensively on the formal vocabulary of Concrete poetry, creating minimalist arrangements of black letters on a white background, often supplemented by sound and video. Many of Piringer’s works reflect the legacy of Dadaists such as Ball and Hausmann and Concretists such as Hansjörg Mayer, reducing language to the individual letter or phoneme.<sup>64</sup> Mayer’s influence is particularly apparent in Piringer’s visual poems, which arrange letters into patterns and textures that violate the linear orientation of conventional typography, frequently to the point of illegibility. However, Piringer also includes an interactive component in many of his works: for instance, his “soundpoems” allow users to arrange letters or syllables on-screen, either producing sound loops or causing letters to collide with one another, triggering audio samples (Fig. 39).<sup>65</sup> While Piringer’s works are more clever than revolutionary, they attest to the strong impact of Concrete poetry on the experimentation of digital poets. Even when Piringer ventures beyond the specific forms employed by the Concretists, his strategies reflect their influence: Piringer approaches the elements of sound and movement in much the way that Concrete poets approached the printed page, as a field of play and experimentation with the fundamental elements of language.

The legacy of Concrete poetry can also be seen in the works of many English-language digital poets. For example, Geof Huth’s “Endemic Battle Collage,” written in Apple Basic in 1986-87, is essentially a series of Concrete poems that unfold over time.<sup>66</sup> Subtitled “AURAL AND KINETIC POEMS FOR THE COMPUTER SCREEN,” Huth’s work includes several sections that use the screen much as Döhl used the page in his “Apfel mit Wurm,” transforming it into a two-dimensional field in which the text-as-object is positioned (or set in motion): “rain” cascades down the screen before running into “drains” (Fig. 40); an “INCHWORM” creeps across the screen. Brian Kim Stefans’ “The Dreamlife of Letters” similarly draws on many formal devices of Concrete poetry; in fact, Stefans describes the initial, static form of this text as a Concrete poem, but recounts that the static work “wasn’t very interesting” to him, so he created a kinetic version using

Flash animation.<sup>67</sup> While Stefans' "Dreamlife," first published online in 2000, boasts much more elaborate animation than Huth's "Endemic Battle Collage," it still borrows heavily from the formal vocabulary of Concrete poetry. At one point letters form a grid much like those of Hansjörg Mayer's *alphabetenquadrate* (albeit in motion against an orange background) (Fig. 41), and at another point words converge in a mirror image reminiscent of Klaus Burkhardt and Reinhard Döhl's *poem structures in the looking glass*.<sup>68</sup> Given the tendency towards interactivity in much digital poetry, it is significant to note that there is no interactive component to either Huth's work or Stefans'; as Stefans writes, "Dreamlife" "was much more like a short film than an interactive piece."<sup>69</sup> Like films, both works unfold in exactly the same way each time they are viewed; neither work incorporates chance elements or draws content from the internet. Thus these two pieces might best be understood as visual poems that extend the formal range of Concrete poetry by introducing the dimension of time, rather than as works that deeply engage with the specific properties of new digital media.

Peter Cho's 2001 "Letterscapes" can similarly be seen in the tradition of typographical experiments in Concrete poetry such as Mayer's *alphabet*. Like Mayer's work, Cho's explores the graphical form of each letter, often creating patterns by repeating an individual letter multiple times. But whereas Mayer's *alphabet* uses a single font, giving visual unity to the book, Cho uses a wide array of forms and colors, so that some letters can be distorted almost beyond recognition, while others follow the cursor around the browser window. Aside from this interest in typography and letter forms, Cho also shares the openness that many Concrete poets demonstrated to commercial work. His personal website includes a video made for IBM in which digital letters, divided into horizontal lines like the IBM logo, move in a virtual three-dimensional environment, dissolving and reforming to spell out questions such as "Is your strategy / designed for a static world / or a changing environment?"<sup>70</sup> This advertisement not only represents an overlap of formal strategy between Cho's commercial and aesthetic work; it also shows how the visual effects of digital poetry, like those of Dada and Concrete poetry, readily lend themselves to commercial applications. While some digital poets frame their use of kinetic text in deconstructive terms (see discussion below), portraying it as a means of destabilizing the text or highlighting its ephemerality, in Cho's advertisement the rhetoric of postmodernity is employed to more strictly commercial ends: "In a web-enabled world, how can you be sure your business truths are still true?" (Fig. 42). Cho's work, like Huth's and Stefans', pairs Concrete visual poetry with digital technology, but it also exploits the commercial potential of these forms, as Gomringer and certain other Concrete poets did.

While the works discussed here reflect the influence of Dada and Concrete poetry on digital poetry, they also show how quickly these influences are exhausted. Dada provides a point of reference for digital works that radically fragment language, but these digital works rarely go beyond their analog models. Similarly, works such as Huth's and Stefans' may be visually engaging, but they offer few insights into the specific nature of the digital medium; Stefans' "Dreamlife," as his own assessment indicates, could just as well have been created as a film, using traditional animation techniques. These works creatively employ digital means to extend the range of Dada and Concrete poetry, but they do not engage with digital media either as critically or as creatively as those earlier

movements engaged with the media of their own eras. This might be seen as the curse of the avant-garde canon – the desire to repeat the experimental gestures of past avant-gardes, rather than developing new strategies more in keeping with their spirit. Friedrich W. Block has addressed this issue in his essay “Innovation oder Trivialität? Zur hypermedialen ‘Übersetzung’ der Moderne am Beispiel des Elektronischen Lexikon-Romans,” where he argues that in order to properly inherit the legacy of previous avant-gardes, digital literature must subject its own media technologies to equally critical scrutiny. As Block writes:

digitale Poesie kann gar nicht das bessere Medium sein für bereits erfolgte künstlerische Leistungen. Sie kann hier Vorgegebenes allenfalls simulieren, was dann aber entweder nur zur Selbstbestimmung ex negativo oder zur Didaktik gerät. Digitale Poesie muß vielmehr ihre eigenen Bedingungen und Möglichkeiten erproben und aufbrauchen, um qualitativ an den Stand des in der Tradition Erreichten anzuschließen.<sup>71</sup>

With this principle in mind, the following sections will consider other forms of digital poetry that do not merely build on the legacy of Dada and Concrete poetry, but that offer alternative approaches specifically attuned to the new realities of digital media.

### **The Word Made Flash**

One widespread tendency in digital poetry has been the use of kinetic forms – a category that includes the works of Huth, Stefans, and Cho discussed above, but also goes beyond them. Some critics have seen this as a fundamental characteristic of digital poetry. For instance, Saskia Reither writes, “Die Bewegung der Schrift und die daraus resultierende Komplexität ihrer Wahrnehmung stellt das größte Potential des Computers als Medium für Poesie dar. Die ästhetische Auseinandersetzung mit Zeiterfahrung wird zu einem der grundlegenden Themen der Computerpoesie und ihrer Rezeption.”<sup>72</sup> The introduction of movement into poetry both highlights the spatial features of the poem (frequently expanding from the actual two-dimensional space of the screen into the illusion of three dimensions) and adds the dimension of time. Unlike static texts that the reader experiences at his or her own pace, kinetic texts may impose a timeframe for their own reading. In addition, kinetic texts are often said to draw attention to the ephemerality of digital writing, in contrast to the relative fixity of traditional print literature.<sup>73</sup> Hayles has emphasized this aspect of electronic writing in general, coining the term “flickering signifiers” to denote texts “characterized by their tendency toward unexpected metamorphoses, attenuations, and dispersions,” and writing: “When a text presents itself as a constantly refreshed image rather than as a durable inscription, transformations can occur that would be unthinkable if matter or energy, rather than informational pattern, formed the primary basis for the systemic exchanges.”<sup>74</sup> If, as Hayles argues, the digital text is inherently more unstable than the printed text, the kinetic text transforms this ephemerality from an accidental attribute into an organizing principle.

The works of American digital poets such as Jim Andrews and Eduardo Kac emphasize the dynamism of the digital text by setting letters or words in motion in three (virtual) dimensions. In Andrews’ 2001 “Nio,” colored letters appear to tumble from the foreground into the black abyss of the browser window, as a doo-wop harmony

soundtrack plays (Fig. 43).<sup>75</sup> The reader/viewer can control these letters and voices by clicking on icons that appear in a ring around the center of the window, thus creating different audio/visual arrangements. In Kac's 3-D poems, such as the 1996 "Secret," words are presented as physical objects located in virtual space, and the reader is free to navigate around them, viewing them from different angles (Fig. 44).<sup>76</sup> While these relatively early kinetic works are significant as attempts to reimagine the materiality of the digital text and its relationship to the reader, they are probably best viewed as technical experiments rather than as fully accomplished poetic works in their own right.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Kac notes on his personal website that "Secret" "was the first poem written directly in VRML."<sup>78</sup> His explicit mention of this fact suggests that the work is at least in part a test of the capabilities of new software (and of its programmer). As such, works such as "Nio" and "Secret" are vulnerable to criticisms such as that voiced by Block, who identifies "a 'cold fascination' for technological being (also of texts), which flares up briefly with each innovation pressing for the market in the respective field. This includes the far-reaching absence of any ideological criticism of things technical — mainly in the 1990s, where the area of media art as well as digital poetry expanded."<sup>79</sup> One consequence of the premium placed on technological novelty is that many animated works created only 10 or 20 years ago already appear outdated (if they can still be viewed at all on newer computers), and any aesthetic merit they might once have had is now masked by their unfortunate resemblance to the screensavers of older Windows computers.<sup>80</sup> The uncritical embrace of new technologies in these works exposes them to the same risk of obsolescence that threatens those technologies themselves.

Brian Kim Stefans' "The Dreamlife of Letters," discussed above, makes more substantive use of animation technology, using it at times to creatively echo the poem's semantic content: Reither has observed that the word "chimneysweep" is swept off the screen, and the words "Ink, inner / inscriptions" are displayed in a way that contrasts the permanence of writing to the impermanence of the digital medium.<sup>81</sup> At other times, though, the poem seems to simply revel in the possibility of making words dance across the screen, turning dynamism into an end in itself. As Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter write, "'Dream-Life [*sic*] belongs to a group of short, non-interactive Flash poems that enjoyed a brief period of attention in the early 2000s. Such visual, kinetic poems [...] *locate the essence of the medium in the visible interface*, which is, often, facilitated through the Flash software."<sup>82</sup> This emphasis on the visible interface as a (or the) distinctive feature of digital poetry deserves further scrutiny. One ground for skepticism is the simple fact that poetry in motion (in a literal sense) is not unique or original to digital media. To cite just two earlier examples, Marcel Duchamp's 1926 film *Anemic Cinema* uses disks inscribed with text that spin in front of the camera,<sup>83</sup> and Lionel Kearns' 1965 Concrete poem "Birth of God/uniVerse" (discussed below) was adapted into a short film by Gordon Payne in 1973. Both of these works are kinetic poems, but they were created in an analog, not a digital, medium. Of course, even though kinetic poetry did not originate in a digital medium, it certainly proliferated there, and should be recognized from a historical perspective as a key formal tendency among digital poets. Nevertheless, the identification of the "visible interface" as "the essence of the [digital] medium" should not be taken for granted. As the discussion of "codework" below will indicate, this position has been called into question by a number of digital poets and

critics who interrogate the roles of surface and depth in digital media.

The examples of kinetic poetry cited so far have come from the Anglophone world. Kinetic poetry has played a role in the German-speaking world as well, albeit a smaller one. As Beat Suter notes, German digital poets have typically been more inclined to use simple HTML code rather than more technically elaborate software; nevertheless, certain works of German digital poetry do make prominent use of computer animation. Bas Böttcher's 1998 "Looppool," for instance, is structured visually as a labyrinthine web of overlapping rings resembling a Celtic knot, each ring containing fragments of text (Fig. 45).<sup>84</sup> When the user clicks on the "Start" button, a red ball begins to roll along one of these rings, and an audio track begins to play, consisting of a relatively simple backing track along with rapped lyrics corresponding to the words on the ring. The relationship between the text's structure and its content is not entirely arbitrary – some of the text fragments, such as "Gedanken kreisen" and "alles dreht sich," reflect the circular structure of "Looppool." By selecting one ring or another, the user can control the path of the ball, and thus choose which line comes next in the song. Like Andrews' "Nio," then, this work allows the reader a certain degree of control, though this control is exercised within a highly determined framework. While "Looppool," like "Nio," is still very much an early experiment in interactive digital poetry, it makes creative use of its limited resources. Both works manifest an openness to the interactive and dynamic nature of the digital medium, which allows authors to set parameters for their works but leave the precise combination of elements up to their reader/viewers.

Another, more visually sophisticated use of animation by German-language digital poets can be found in the work of the duo Zeitgenossen (Ursula Hentschläger and Zelko Wiener), though in this case the work itself is in English. Zeitgenossen make use of Flash animation to blend sound and visuals and to allow user participation. In their work "Yatoo," for instance, a five-pointed star appears at the center of the page against a black background (Fig. 46). Each point of the star is divided into a "male," and a "female" half, which speak in computer-generated voices as the cursor passes over them, reciting five-word expressions of love: "I love you so much," "I will suffer for you," etc.<sup>85</sup> Roberto Simanowski has observed that "Yatoo" can be understood as a constraint poem, insofar as each line must be exactly five words long in order to conform to the five points of the star. As Simanowski also observes, the apparently dialogic form of the poem easily gives way to confusion: it is difficult to pass from one "female" point to another without accidentally triggering the "male" voice, or vice versa, so that ultimately "Mann und Frau sprechen unabhängig voneinander, jeder seinen eigenen Text, und dieser Text gerät schließlich ganz aus den Fugen."<sup>86</sup> The initially coherent and symmetrical shape of the star likewise comes apart over time; but in the final stage, the star returns to its original form, as the voices say "We will survive this moment" and "I feel close to you." Despite the threat of dissolution, "Yatoo" offers reconciliation in the end.

In "Yatoo," as in Böttcher's "Looppool," the kinetic aspect of the work is found not in letters that move across the screen, but rather in animated graphics that trigger audio samples. Here, too, the user has some freedom to control the development of the piece (though this freedom is greatly limited by the constraints imposed by the authors, and by the fact that the interface is not always easy to control). And "Yatoo," like "Looppool," creates a connection between its semantic content and its visual interface —



in the former, the fragmentation and reconfiguration of the star mirrors the professions of love made by the computerized voices; in the latter, the circling of thoughts is reflected in the piece's looped, repetitive structure. However, the achievements of these works remain more in the realm of technical innovation than in that of literary expression. The phrases employed in "Yatoo" are relatively formulaic expressions of sentimentality – the only challenge to this sentimentality can be seen in the fact that the voices are computer-synthesized and at times nearly incomprehensible, and the "speakers" are represented abstractly (as fragments of a five-pointed star). With this in mind, it could be argued that the work creates a sense of estrangement from the romantic phrases it employs, transplanting them into a dehumanized digital environment. Even if this argument is found convincing, though, the fact remains that the technical accomplishment of the digital interface dominates this poem, and the words (however sincere or skeptical) prove secondary. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of both "Loopool" and "Yatoo" in comparison to other works of kinetic visual poetry is the fact that animation serves here as a means of controlling audio samples, in contrast to the more common practice of animating the letters themselves. In this sense, these poems have more in common with video games than they do with the print poetry tradition.

Given the prominent role that kinetic work plays in digital poetry, it is important to ask how these animated texts relate to their own digital medium. At times, as argued by Block in the passage quoted above, the use of animation appears as an uncritical application of the latest technologies. Simanowski has similarly observed that "the risk of hypermedia is to employ effects that only flex the technical muscles." In the same passage, though, he cautions against the prejudice that "animation and technical effects are little more than spectacle and gimmick." Sometimes, Simanowski holds, these kinetic effects do succeed in "convey[ing] a message."<sup>87</sup> They may do so in various ways: by reinforcing (or undermining) the semantic import of the text; by achieving effects impossible in other media; or by reflecting on the nature of the digital medium itself. Reflections of this latter sort often emphasize the contrast between the mutability of digital writing and the ostensible fixity of print. In Philippe Bootz and Marcel Frémot's 2004 "The Set of U," for instance, words and letters appear, disappear, and drift across the screen, spelling out the phrases: "le pas / le passe / elle passe / elle passe le fil / elle passe le fil de l'eau / le fil de l'eau passe / l'eau passe / passe."<sup>88</sup> These words flow over and through each other against a blue background, which appears to represent the rippling surface of water. The theme of the poem is thus its own fluidity, ephemerality, transitivity, a characteristic that seems to set a kinetic digital text such as "The Set of U" apart from a fixed printed text.

However, the qualitative difference between print and digital texts is easily overstated. The very fact that Bootz offers a transcription of the text of this piece, together with its translation, indicates that this text is fundamentally invariant. While the individual letters that make up the text do move and fade in and out over time, the video is the essentially same with each viewing; only its tempo is subject to change, because the speed is determined by an audio generator that produces aleatoric music, as Bootz notes in his introduction (where he claims, on this basis, that the text is "interactive"). It is true that this minimal variation in speed and the changes in the accompanying music slightly alter the reader's experience each time, so that the reader cannot, strictly speaking, "step"

into the same “current” twice. However, the overall effect of these changes is relatively insignificant in comparison to the consistency of the text itself. To describe the work, on the basis of these minor variations, as “combinatory” or “interactive” is to overvalue the minor ways in which this text differs from fully determined texts — including both invariant digital poems such as Stefans’ “Dreamlife” and traditional printed texts — and to overestimate the subversive power inherent in the digital medium.

A similar tendency is evident in Eduardo Kac’s characterization of his own “holopoems” — computer-generated poems that are printed as three-dimensional holograms:

The differences between the holopoem and other kinds of experimental poetry are marked by a set of characteristics that work together to destabilize the text, to plunge it into its specificity as written [text] as opposed to graphic representation [of speech], to create a syntax based on fleeting transformations and discrete leaps.

As Derrida has suggested, no text can be fully controlled by its author, to whom its inherent contradictions and collateral meanings inevitably escape. The precise positioning of [apparently stable] words on the [inanimate] surface of the page gives author and reader the illusion of control, of mastery and command of the text [and often of the exterior reality it refers to]. Holographic poetry tries to exhibit the impossibility of an absolute textual structure.<sup>89</sup>

Like Bootz, Kac creates a facile link between the (literally) destabilizing function that new technical media can have on a text and the entirely separate question of how susceptible a text is to a multiplicity of interpretations.<sup>90</sup> While the letters of Bootz’s text drift across the screen, and those of Kac’s “holopoems” can be viewed from multiple angles, this staging of textual instability should not be mistaken for a real challenge to authorship; if anything, the author’s control, which extends here to the shapes and colors of the letters themselves, is even greater than that of a poet whose works appear in print.

A similar argument has been made by Hayles, who criticizes the widespread tendency to overestimate the destabilizing or liberatory effects of electronic media. Hayles questions the exaggerated importance attributed to the hyperlink by early theorists of electronic literature, writing:

One problem with identifying the hyperlink as electronic literature’s distinguishing characteristic was that print texts had long also employed analogous technology in such apparatuses as footnotes, endnotes, cross-reference, and so on, undermining the claim that the technology was completely novel. Perhaps a more serious problem, however, was the association of the hyperlink with the empowerment of the reader/user. As a number of critics have pointed out, notably Espen J. Aarseth, the reader/user can only follow the links that the author has already scripted. [...] Compared to the flexibility offered by the codex, which offers the reader complete freedom to skip around, go backwards as well as forwards, and open the book wherever she pleases, the looping structures of electronic hypertexts and the resulting repetition forced on the reader/user make these works by comparison more rather than less

coercive.<sup>91</sup>

As Hayles argues, it is a mistake to see the specific forms of writing that digital technologies enable as somehow subversive in and of themselves, and to forget that the critical potential often attributed to these forms was already latent, if not explicit, in the theory and practice of print-based literature. Hayles further draws attention to the way that some theorists have interpreted hypertext as a realization of deconstructivist literary theory, writing, “In conflating hypertext with the difficult and productive aporias of deconstructive analysis, these theorists failed to do justice either to the nuanced operations of works performed in electronic media or to the complexities of deconstructive philosophy.”<sup>92</sup> This criticism applies nicely to Kac’s pairing of his own “holopoems” with Derrida’s challenge to authorial control. Just as Block argued, in the passage cited above, that “digitale Poesie kann gar nicht das bessere Medium sein für bereits erfolgte künstlerische Leistungen,” digital poetry also cannot be seen as the fulfillment, in some teleological sense, of theories developed for a print-based literary culture. The understanding of digital literature as a full-fledged realization of deconstructive theories ignores the fact that those theories were grounded in the medium of print, and fails to ask what new theoretical frameworks might be required to understand digital literature.

This critique has particular consequences for kinetic poetry. The instability of the text, which these poems ostensibly exemplify, is hardly a new discovery. Umberto Eco had already described “the open work” in his 1962 book of that title, applying this term to works that required an unusual degree of participation from the reader, viewer, or listener (such as Mallarmé’s unfinished *Livre*, which was conceived as a “work in movement”)<sup>93</sup>; and other theorists in a poststructuralist vein, such as Barthes and Derrida, had emphasized the instability or lack of closure characteristic of even the printed text. Given that these theories were initially formulated within a print paradigm, their overly literal realization in digital form seems somehow superfluous.<sup>94</sup> In fact, just as the hypertext for Hayles can be an especially “coercive” medium, some “destabilized” works of kinetic digital poetry require the reader to follow much more precise guidelines for reading than a typical printed poem, and might consequently be considered less open, rather than more.

The point here is not to deny that kinetic elements can serve a purpose in some digital poems.<sup>95</sup> Rather, it is to point out that the mere introduction of movement into a text does not in itself represent a critical subversion of the supposedly rigid fixity of print, and this for two reasons. First, because interactivity, instability, and ephemerality are not unique to digital works; they may (or may not) be more pronounced in digital texts, but they had all been ascribed to printed texts decades before these kinetic digital poems were created. And second, because even if these characteristics are more pronounced in digital texts, the tendency of digital poets to focus on these differences from print only indicates how deeply digital poetry is indebted to print for its most basic formal conventions; it suggests that digital poetry is defined negatively as poetry that is *not* static, *not* fixed, *not* linear. To the extent that kinetic works are shaped by their rejection of the limitations of print, they might best be seen not as embodiments of a fully realized digital poetics, but rather as symptoms of the transition from print to digital literature, still tied to the theoretical framework of print even as they attempt to break free of it.<sup>96</sup> What is absent

from many of these works, on the other hand, is any serious interrogation of the implicit laws and limits of digital writing itself.

Such an interrogation would have to do more than set letters spinning in three dimensions. However exciting kinetic text may initially have appeared to poets already steeped in visual poetry, it has never amounted to more than a peripheral, decorative phenomenon in the broader field of digital technology, and it is something of an anomaly that it has had such a strong impact in the literary realm. With the possible exception of electronic greeting cards and banner ads on websites, the digital world as a whole has not been overtaken by texts that dance across the screen.<sup>97</sup> Thus if a distinctly digital poetry wished to deal, as Dada and Concrete poetry did, with what is particular to the new media of its era, it would have to look beyond the eye-catching allure of Flash movies and animated GIFs. Rather than embracing the animated, three-dimensional illusions displayed on computer monitors as an antidote to linear or two-dimensional, printed text, it would have to interrogate the dynamics of surface and depth and their function in digital media. Moreover, it would have to inquire how these media have transformed the way that we use and think about language. The following sections will consider some of the more successful attempts to address these questions.

## Breaking the Code

While kinetic texts might be seen in some cases as a symbol of the mutability of all electronic writing, these works are frequently more Flash than substance, using digital media primarily to create effects on the visual interface of the computer monitor. This tendency raises many questions pertaining to the relationship between surface and depth, interface and code in digital technology. While some kinetic poems create an illusion of depth on-screen using 3-D graphics, this illusion only functions as long as readers suspend their disbelief and accept the simulated third dimension as an ersatz reality, while forgetting the actual layers of computer hardware and code that produced these images. This shortcoming is addressed in a genre of digital poetry often referred to as “code poetry” or “codework.”<sup>98</sup> As Florian Cramer writes, “By readjusting the reader’s attention from software surfaces which pretended not to be code back to the code itself, codeworks have apparent aesthetical and political affinities to hacker cultures.”<sup>99</sup> These works not only break the illusion of the computer’s visual interface, they also emphasize the fundamentally linguistic nature of the digital medium itself.

It is difficult to discuss the relationship between visual interface and code without resorting to metaphors of surface and depth. Roberto Simanowski, for instance, writes, “The language of digital media is composed of letters, links, colors, shapes and action, which is all based on the code *beneath the screen*. The language of digital media is the program.”<sup>100</sup> Cramer similarly notes, “the Internet is accessed largely by graphical browser and client programs, but with the constant awareness that non-graphical codes are running *underneath the system*.”<sup>101</sup> The logic is clear enough: if the computer’s screen is its surface, then the code must be located somewhere in its depths. To be more precise, there are multiple “layers” of code, from the top-level programming language used by human programmers to the lowest-level machine language into which it is compiled (Fig. 47).<sup>102</sup> However, these nested languages frequently escape the notice of so-called “end

users.” Of course, as authors including Rita Raley, Andrew Michael Roberts, and Anna Katharina Schaffner have pointed out, the rhetoric of depth, surface, and layers is strictly figurative — the relationships between these various codes would be more accurately described in terms of correspondence or causality.<sup>103</sup> However, what makes this spatial metaphor appealing is the fact that these codes generally remain hidden. The perception that the code lies “beneath the screen” is founded on the fact that it is rarely seen, and its existence can only be inferred on the basis of what the screen displays.

Some critics see this divide between the unseen code and the familiar user interface as indicative of an imbalance of power between producers and consumers of digital technology. Kittler, for instance, writes in one essay:

Der Computeralphabet als solcher ist, mit anderen Worten, zum Subjekt oder Untertan einer Corporation geworden. [...] Die Innereien der Maschine bleiben selbstredend weiter digital, weil sie sonst gar nicht laufen würde, aber ihre Benutzerschnittstelle nimmt mehr und mehr die Züge analoger Unterhaltungsmedien an, wie sie seit gut hundert Jahren vertraut sind.<sup>104</sup>

and in another:

Programming languages have eroded the monopoly of ordinary language and grown into a new hierarchy of their own. [...] What remains a problem is only the realization of these layers which, just as modern media technologies in general, have been explicitly contrived in order to evade all perception. We simply do not know what our writing does.<sup>105</sup>

Kittler’s comments offer an important reminder of the extent to which digital media can not only provide, but also deny access to information, restricting it to certain users or classes of users, such as those who have purchased a particular software license. But Kittler’s use of the term “Computeralphabet” also recalls the fact that digital media are ultimately based on written language(s) — a fact that has led some critics to see in the digital age not a triumph of “multimedia” culture, but rather the reduction of all media to a single, textual medium.<sup>106</sup> As Kittler puts it in another essay, “computers in principle comprehend all other media.”<sup>107</sup> The “computer illiterate” in this sense is not the remedial user who is unable to perform basic tasks on a computer, but rather the typical consumer who sees only the surface, and does not see or does not understand the code “beneath.”

The subgenre of digital poetry referred to as “code poems,” or “codework,” in which the computer code itself is brought to the fore, can thus be viewed in part as reaction against the invisibility of code. These works insist on the status of digital media *as* language, and they raise questions about what digital media do *to* language. As Suter writes, “Bei den sogenannten Code Works handelt es sich um Werke digitaler Poesie, die Quellcodes, Programmierungen und Schnittstellen selbstreferentiell inszenieren.”<sup>108</sup> Rather than simply using code to produce words or images on-screen, “codework” practitioners make the code itself visible, unmasking the linguistic foundations of the digital medium.

A non-electronic precursor to code poetry can be seen in Lionel Kearns’ 1965 visual poem “Birth of God/uniVerse,” in which a large 0 (zero) composed of the digit 1 (one) surrounds a 1 composed of the digit 0 (Fig. 48).<sup>109</sup> A closer look reveals that the space at the center of each smaller 0 is in the shape of a 1, suggesting the possibility of a

*mise en abyme*, an infinite regress of codes within codes.<sup>110</sup> These 0s and 1s, printed in a blocky typeface that resembles early computer displays, call to mind binary computer code; accordingly, Kearns' work has frequently been included in discussions of code poetry.<sup>111</sup> In actuality, Kearns knew nothing about programming or computer code at the time that he composed the work — instead, his point of reference was Leibniz's binary mathematics, which he had encountered in Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*.<sup>112</sup> Seen in that context, "Birth of God/uniVerse" appears as a playful meditation on being, nothingness, and creation *ex nihilo*, as well as a visual riddle in which each sign contains its own contradiction. But even if Kearns was not yet versed in computer code, the work's implications extend to digital technology, insofar as it suggests that the same binary opposition that is at the root of all computer code also underlies the universe itself.<sup>113</sup> On this reading, the binary code that is revealed in the poem is the hidden ground not only of digital media, but rather of all existence — and likewise, of all poetry — in the "uniVerse."

Other digital poets have consciously made computer code a key ingredient in their poetic practice. Among the most widely known of these are the Dutch-Belgian duo JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesman). One of JODI's works, simply entitled "TEXT," displays a seemingly random assortment of alphanumeric and other characters in bright colors reminiscent of an 8-bit video game (Fig. 49).<sup>114</sup> Users can move from one page to another by clicking on links at random, but no obvious pattern emerges. While some pages contain fragments of source code or even natural-language content, many display no recognizable words other than "TEXT" itself, which generally appears in the upper left-hand corner.<sup>115</sup> Unprepared readers coming across these pages might easily mistake them for computer errors — or, as Schaffner and Roberts have argued, for the "result of a memory dump, where raw and unformatted data, often in unreadable form, are copied from the main memory to the screen."<sup>116</sup> These data are clearly not meant to be intelligible to the average human reader; yet these pages do offer the sense that one is "drawing back the curtain" to see the unfamiliar language of computer code. This impression is heightened by the black backgrounds of most of these pages and the blocky appearance of the characters, which bring to mind a classic command-line interface. Despite this sense of looking "beneath the surface," though, the reader of "TEXT" is not actually seeing the code of the page itself, or of any functioning webpage — with the exception of isolated passages, the text that appears in the browser window is no more computer-readable than it is human-readable. Rather than revealing the code of any specific page or program, "TEXT" highlights the linguistic nature of all digital media, presenting the reader not with familiar images and layouts, but rather with sheer masses of information.

Another early work of web art, Mark Napier's "Shredder 1.0," transforms the content of any website into code just as illegible as JODI's. When the user enters a URL, the "Shredder" processes the HTML source code of the corresponding webpage, collecting all links and images in a distorted mass at the top, while additional code cascades down the page (Fig. 50).<sup>117</sup> Some elements of the original webpage can still be made out, but they are alienated from their original context. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of "Shredder 1.0" is that it violates the standard relationship between the structure and the content of webpages. Normally, HTML code is the unseen set of instructions that

give a webpage its structure, causing content to appear in a comprehensible format. “Shredder 1.0” makes these instructions themselves visible, but it presents them as a disorganized jumble of data. This gesture implicitly serves as a reminder that the internet as most users see it is only one highly conventional mode of organizing information, and suggests the possibility of more chaotic, less orderly modes of presentation. Although works such as “TEXT” and “Shredder 1.0” may stretch the boundaries of what is generally considered to be “poetry,” they do have precedents in the works of the Dada and Concrete poets discussed in previous chapters.<sup>118</sup> Like the poem-collages of Raoul Hausmann or Franz Mon, which challenged the legibility of the text itself, these works transform a familiar medium into illegible material, frustrating its communicative purpose. As Brian Lennon writes, “Now, as the new writing technology of the computer nears ubiquity in the developed West, the task of an electronic poetics will be to operate on, to alter, the computer’s instrumental teleology – its design for informational transparency and functionality – as other poetics have resisted the transparencies of discourse and media in their times.”<sup>119</sup> At the same time, these works offer a reminder that the actual “language” of the internet is a code that most users cannot read, and that the user interface of a conventional website is a translation of this code into a recognizable language of words and images.

Another work by JODI, “%Location,” takes this encounter with code one step further: a visitor to this page initially sees nothing but an incomprehensible string of characters flashing in bright green on a black background (Fig. 51).<sup>120</sup> This color combination recalls the monochrome monitors that were common in early personal computers, thus gesturing self-reflexively to its own medium, and denaturalizing the conventions of newer visual interfaces by placing them in historical perspective. Only by choosing to view the page source can the reader see the logic behind the apparently meaningless text: the source code is laid out in the shape of a bomb, and the apparent gibberish results when the browser interprets this visual poem as HTML code. In other words, the tables here are turned: whereas the visitor to a website generally sees only legible text and images, and never looks at the less comprehensible source code, here the source code is legible, while the text displayed on the page itself is not.<sup>121</sup> Johannes Auer has adopted this technique for his work “G-Linie HTML,” which ties JODI’s “%Location” to the visual tradition of Concrete poetry.<sup>122</sup> “G-Linie HTML” includes versions of three Gomerger poems, which initially appear as simple horizontal lines of text on the screen. By choosing to view the source code, though, readers can see the poems in their proper layout (Fig. 52). Like JODI’s “%Location,” Auer’s “G-Linie HTML” requires readers to view the HTML source in order to understand the text displayed in the browser window, thus inverting the usual relationship between code and visual interface. By reimagining Gomerger’s works in this form, Auer also suggests that code poetry should be seen as a continuation of the Concrete poets’ emphasis on the multiplicity of aspects under which language can be viewed. Just as the visual arrangement of words on a printed page can complement or contradict their semantic sense, the visual display of a webpage may stand in tension with its source code.

One key function of all of these works is to bring code itself to the surface, metaphorically speaking. As Rita Raley wrote in 2002, code poems “illuminate the many layers of code — the tower of programming languages that underlies the representation

of natural languages on the screen.” However, it is important to acknowledge a distinction that Raley draws here, and that the digital poet and theorist John Cayley has addressed in some detail. Raley concedes that “what we see in most codework writing and art practices is less code per se than the language of code: codework that integrates elements of code into natural languages and brings code to the surface as a medium for literary, artistic, and experimental composition.”<sup>123</sup> As Cayley puts it, “In much current codework language is (presented as) code and code is (presented as) language.” For Cayley, who skeptically refers to this as “the Reveal Code Aesthetics,” the revelation that occurs here is illusory: the reader’s focus “remains fixed on the interface text,” which appears to be a hybrid of code and natural language, but cannot actually be executed by a machine. Cayley acknowledges that “this pretended ambiguity of address remains important to the aesthetics of this work,” insofar as readers “can appreciate, through more-or-less traditional hermeneutic procedures, the references and allusions to technology, technoscience and the issues with which they confront us.” However, he cautions that “if this pretended ambiguity of address exhausts the aesthetics and politics of a project,” the work’s significance might prove to be limited.<sup>124</sup>

As an alternative, Cayley offers “human-readable texts which are also segments of interpretable, working code.” Citing one of his own texts as an example, Cayley argues that “it suggests new or newly highlighted rhetorical strategies which are specific to the materiality of language in networked and programmable media.” The work that Cayley cites is reminiscent of Lutz’s early computer poems in its combination of logical terms and natural language: “if programmers are greater than control and media & comma is in field / computer of card understanding & ‘text’ then exit repeat / end repeat.”<sup>125</sup> This work strikingly demonstrates the limitations faced by a poet who attempts to write a human-readable poem that can also function as executable code: whereas works such as JODI’s seem to explode the limits of code in order to make it visible as material, Cayley’s poem prompts the reader to consider the perspective of the programmer who attempts to create meaningful statements within artificial constraints. It also gives the reader the unusual opportunity to read, and perhaps even partly comprehend, a text that is comprehensible and executable for a computer, thus representing an exception to the typical illegibility of code. Instead of unmasking the code and revealing the interface as illusion, Cayley treats code as a language common to humans and machines.<sup>126</sup>

Rather than reveling in the illusionistic potential of kinetic and three-dimensional text, the code poems discussed here remind their readers of the linguistic character of all digital creation. Although many works of code poetry do not actually employ executable code, they do foreground and problematize the role of code in digital communication. A parallel can be seen here to works of Concrete poetry that allude to the principles of information theory without actually employing its technologies. By drawing attention to the layers of encoding in any digital medium, these works serve as a reminder that multimedia texts are always multiply mediated, so that they function only after being translated into a series of computer languages and then back into a natural, human-readable language. These texts thus highlight not only the transformations of language in digital media and digital poetry in particular, but also the distance that these media create between author and reader, and the illusory nature of any immediacy that they might appear to offer. At the same time, as Hayles has written, “such works also reference the



complex hybridization now underway between human cognition and the very different and yet interlinked cognitions of intelligent machines.”<sup>127</sup> By blending natural and machine languages, these works emphasize that machine languages are also a human invention, and that a great deal of human writing today is digitally encoded, even if the author is entirely unable to interpret that code. Like the experiments in computer poetry conducted by Lutz and Gunzenhäuser, then, these works may appear at first glance to show the radical difference between the languages of computers and those of humans, but a closer reading suggests that these languages are not diametrically opposed, but rather inextricably bound up with one another.

### **Alternative Instruments: Search Engines and Aggregators**

If code poetry represents one of the more successful attempts to address the textual character of digital technologies in general, other works have recently engaged more specifically with the modes of textuality particular to the World Wide Web. Although Web-based digital poetry has existed since the 1990s, truly Web-specific forms are still relatively new. As recently as 2000, Florian Cramer could write, “Fast alle Computernetzdichtung — auch fast all jene Netzkunst [...] ist, technisch gesehen, zumindest keine Dichtung, die auf das Internet angewiesen ist, sondern reine Browser-Dichtung.” Later in the same essay Cramer continued:

Noch seltener ist elektronische Literatur, die als genuine Computernetzdichtung die algorithmische Prozessierung von Sprache verbindet mit dem [*sic*] Konstitution ihres Texts über das Internet. Fast alle Computernetzliteratur beschränkt ihr Experimentieren auf Benutzeroberflächen und fällt damit weiterhin hinter die ästhetische Konsequenz computergenerierter Dichtung zurück, die im Umfeld von konkreter Poesie, Oulipo und Cutup-Literatur schon in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren programmiert wurde.<sup>128</sup>

What Cramer advocates here is an approach to digital media that does not merely treat them as tools for producing effects (many of which might also be attainable using other media), but rather investigates the forms of textual production that these media employ and encourage. In another essay, Cramer specifies that one of these forms is the algorithmic or combinatoric text, which is composed automatically in accordance with certain prescribed rules, without any authorial intervention:

While it might seem that [...] generative text has remained a marginal form of digital literature, a more thorough consideration should take into account, for example, machine-generated invoices, automated bank statements and official letters, Internet search engines, ‘personalized’ portals and home-order catalogues, not to speak of fully automated control and regulation systems in industry production, aviation and on the stock market. They all exemplify how efficaciously algorithmically manipulated writing has intervened into everyday language and culture; a status quo which the concepts of ‘hypertext’ and ‘multimedia’ don’t reflect at all.<sup>129</sup>

These algorithmic texts need not follow in the narrow footsteps of Lutz’s experiments, simply combining a limited vocabulary according to fixed rules; rather, they can also

draw on the nearly limitless store of text in the World Wide Web.

One key to Cramer's argument is that he does not ask what new formal innovations digital technologies offer to poets — he is not interested in the novelty of dancing letters, 3-D graphics, or even hyperlinks. Rather, Cramer asks how poetry can respond to the changed textual conditions of everyday life, conditions created in large part by digital media. These conditions include the sheer abundance of text that constitutes the internet; the prevalence in mainstream culture of both multi-authored and authorless texts (including, on the one hand, comment forums in which users respond, often anonymously, to each other's posts, and, on the other hand, texts produced entirely by computer algorithms); and finally, the proliferation of forms of digital self-expression in which assertions of individualism frequently follow strictly dictated patterns. The works discussed in this section thus raise the question of what function writing serves in an age of textual overabundance, and what role might remain for an authorial subject in a medium whose content seems increasingly preordained. Many of these works automatically draw information from the internet and incorporate it into the text that the reader sees, while others retain a more active role for human authorship. Each of these works in some way addresses the role of the individual author or reader in relation to the ostensibly personalized, but ultimately impersonal language of the World Wide Web.

Many newer works of digital poetry employ search engines or aggregators to comb the internet or social media, collecting specific phrases and combining them into automatically generated poems. An early model for this type of poetry is Bill Kennedy and Darren Wershler's "The Apostrophe Engine" (Fig. 53).<sup>130</sup> This work is based on Kennedy's 1993 poem "apostrophe," which consists of a series of sentences each beginning with the phrase "you are...." The original poem can be read either as addressing a series of "you"s or as creating a contradictory image of one complex "you."<sup>131</sup> But the online version of the poem, first posted in 2001, takes this formula a step further. As Kennedy and Wershler write:

When a reader/writer clicks on a line, it is submitted to a search engine, which then returns a list of Web pages, as in any search. The Apostrophe Engine then spawns five virtual robots that work their way through the list, collecting phrases beginning with 'you are' and ending in a period. The robots stop after collecting a set number of phrases or working through a limited number of pages, whichever happens first.<sup>132</sup>

The "virtual robots" thus generate a new apostrophe poem consisting entirely of phrases mined from existing webpages. These machine-generated poems tend, predictably enough, to be even less coherent than Kennedy's original "apostrophe": rather than a single, often ironic, authorial sensibility, they reflect a small cross-section of the actual "you"s addressed in all manner of online texts. By explicitly referring to the literary device of apostrophe in the title of this work, Kennedy and Wershler draw a comparison between the "you" of the internet and the "you" of lyric poetry. In both cases, the work suggests, this "you" is an unoccupied position, one that the reader is invited to assume. But rather than the carefully constructed "you" of a lyric poem, the "you" that emerges in "The Apostrophe Engine" is an amalgamation of multiple "you"s, addressed by multiple authors. The specificity of the individual addressee is thus called into question.

More recent works of digital art and poetry have applied similar formulas to

blogging and social media. Cory Arcangel's 2010 "Sorry I Haven't Posted," for instance, aggregates blog entries containing the title phrase, highlighting the failed hopes for connection and communication that these media can inspire.<sup>133</sup> As Arcangel describes it:

I noticed at the height of blogging that people were always apologising that they hadn't provided enough content to their audience. It's interesting that self-publishing has brought out all this guilt. Because anyone can publish, it means that people feel they have to. And it's funny: to communicate the idea that you're not communicating is this great paradox of non-information.<sup>134</sup>

These formulaic apologies suggest that the communication facilitated by these blogs is directed less towards specific readers than towards the internet itself — the technical possibility of sharing information becomes a moral obligation. The quintessential instance of the aggregator poem, though, may be the Swedish poet Pär Thörn's English-language "I am," which simply aggregates Twitter posts beginning with the words of the title (Fig. 54).<sup>135</sup> The poem constantly and quickly updates, producing sequences such as:

I am immensely proud that I recognized at least one word in his sentence!  
i am with you Lester's  
I am crying.  
I am a pussy when it comes to that  
I am the Lord.

Like the "you" of "The Apostrophe Engine," the "I" of Thörn's "I am" becomes collectivized and impersonalized. Once these statements are detached from their individual authors, they cease to function as means of self-definition and self-expression. Thörn writes of his poem, "'I am' is a list poem using the anaphora 'I am' [...]. The 'I' that speaks in this poem is identical with every person that will use the phrase 'I am' on Twitter in the future. The poem is thereby not connected to a certain place, but the current lingua franca English."<sup>136</sup> Rather than seeing the "I" as identical with every person who uses the phrase on Twitter, though, it might be more accurate to say that it is identical to none of those people. The accumulation of instances of self-expression does not produce a plurality of individual subjects; rather, it empties their utterances of any specificity.

Like "The Apostrophe Engine," Thörn's "I am" is a poem concerned with the place of the subject in the age of digital, and particularly social, media. By aggregating content from the internet, and from social media in particular, these poems show how those media transform the two key subject positions of lyric poetry, the "you" and the "I," into impersonal placeholders. These works can thus be seen as a response to one tendency in Web-based writing that Block identified in 2001:

To a large extent net-literature consists of diary productions, or production of autobiographical fragments. Frequently it consists only of written discussion, and at worst it is chat on the net. Therefore, net-literature is often just another technically legitimised contribution to an outdated 'new inwardness' ('Neue Innerlichkeit') — simplified, but lacking artistic ambition.

However, Block continues, "Naturally there are interesting exceptions."<sup>137</sup> "The Apostrophe Engine" and "I am" would surely count among those exceptions. Rather than lapsing into Block's "outdated 'new inwardness,'" these works focus critical attention on

the self-expressive mode that dominates in a great deal of internet writing. Not only are the “you” and “I” of social media estranged from their intended referents, the authors (or programmers) of these poems nearly disappear, leaving the programs to run by themselves. The notion of authorship as self-expression is thus absent from these works, which instead process and rearrange the writing of others.

In treating the enormous quantity of text available on the internet as raw material for computer processing, these works are also representative of a broader category of “search poems” that utilize search engines as instruments of composition. The ready availability of a nearly limitless volume of writing by multiple authors is both a practical precondition and a theoretical preoccupation of these texts. Rather than demanding the reader’s undivided attention, to the exclusion of the rest of the Web, these works expressly make use of the internet as an information-rich environment. Johannes Auer’s “search lutz,” mentioned above, exemplifies the dependence of search poems on external input: in that case, the input takes the form not of search results, but rather of actual search terms which are incorporated into the poem in real time. Another of Auer’s works, “SearchSongs,” likewise uses real-time search data (drawn from the “Livesuche von Lycos”), but transforms them into music: a steady stream of text flows across the screen in a single line, and each time a letter from A to H appears, the corresponding note (of the German scale) is played, with the number of intervening characters determining the duration of the note.<sup>138</sup> Here content is not at issue; rather, language is interpreted solely as a string of individual letters, which are translated into musical notes. Nevertheless, this work incorporates a sort of collective authorship insofar as the melody is the product of the search terms submitted by anonymous Lycos users.

Other works draw their material not from anonymously submitted search terms, but rather from search results. One of the most striking instances of such search engine “word art” is *bit.fall*, by the German artist Julius Popp (Fig. 55). According to the description on the Goethe Institut’s website, “*bit.fall* is connected with the Internet and uses an algorithm to filter words from the incessant stream of information in the global network. The software is programmed to choose words that are meaningful and that most often appear in online news portals, according to statistical analysis at the moment of the search.”<sup>139</sup> The work thus functions as a real-time indicator of news trends, but its fluid form reflects the transitory nature of these fluctuations, with words beginning to disintegrate before they even hit the ground. In contrast to many of the kinetic poems discussed above, in which the visual effect of movement bears little relation to the specific temporality of the digital medium, *bit.fall* uses the decomposition of these falling words to suggest the speed and impermanence of the information stream. As Lutz Koepnick has written, the work “foregrounds the utter transience of what we consider news in our world of increasingly global and instantaneous connections.”<sup>140</sup> Roberto Simanowski has criticized Koepnick’s reading, arguing:

One wonders to what extent the premise of ephemeral information is correct in an age where television and radio programs are no longer broadcasted ‘away’ but instead accessible online for repeated individual perception. [...] Digital media and the Internet in particular actually stop the element of transience that had long characterized information and news not presented in printed form.<sup>141</sup>

But while it is true that new information appearing on the internet tends to remain accessible longer than information transmitted by broadcast media, Simanowski's reading overlooks the work's focus on the function of novelty and the volatility of informational trends on the World Wide Web. The disintegration of words as they fall towards the floor is less a sign of absolute ephemerality than a formal reference to the constantly "refreshing" character of online media, as seen in blogs where new content appears at the top, while older posts are pushed towards the bottom of the page, eventually disappearing from view entirely. The point is not that older information no longer exists, but rather that it has yielded pride of place to whatever is newer. Simanowski, however, pays surprisingly little attention to the specific information economy of the internet, the source from which *bit.fall* draws its text. Instead, he focuses on "the perishability of the signifier" in general, an aspect of the work that he views with skepticism.<sup>142</sup> This focus seems to be misplaced: for the viewer of *bit.fall*, awareness of the text's source is indispensable. Only if these watery words are known to flow from the World Wide Web can they be understood as a critical comment on the Web's tidal temporality.

A more recent experiment in search poetry is the book *Flarf Berlin*, written collaboratively by ten poets and published in 2012. This work borrows a practice from the American-based Flarf, a digital avant-garde movement with clear affinities for Dada that aims to create "bad poetry" and satirizes the pretensions of contemporary literary scenes. The Flarf technique employed in the book, as described in a brief introduction, has echoes of Tzara's recipe for creating a Dada poem:

1. Wähle zwei beliebige Worte + "Berlin".
2. Schicke sie an andere Autor/innen.
3. Erhalte von anderen Autor/innen zwei beliebige Worte + "Berlin".
4. Gib sie jeweils bei Google ein.
5. Wähle aus den Zeilen der ersten 30 Treffer dein Material.
6. Schreibe damit Gedichte.<sup>143</sup>

While the procedure notably begins and ends with the selection and arrangement of words by a human author, the intervening stages can be seen as either generative techniques or constraints — the search results obtained for the selected terms provide the collaborators with material, but also restrict them to that material.

In practice, the poems in *Flarf Berlin* vary widely. While some of the collaborators use larger fragments of text, creating a sense of polyvocality and contradiction that echoes the cut-up poems of Tzara and Arp, others more thoroughly rework the search results, integrating them into homogeneous poetic structures of their own creation. The contributions by Alexander Gumz tend to fall in the former category: for example, his poem entitled "fakt nr. 6" begins "111 gründe, diese stadt zu lieben / fangen schon morgens an, wenns draußen / dunkel ist. Die coolen kids / mit ihren coolen smartphones sind noch / zu verändern, auch die angriffe / auf den schiedsrichter."<sup>144</sup> The phrases selected for this poem reflect the diversity of their sources, ranging from book titles to personal blogs to comments on film websites. Some of phrases in the poem — such as "hilfe! mein partner isst leichenteile!" — even have a more sensational effect when removed from their original contexts (in this case, a online forum for vegetarians).<sup>145</sup> But the dominant formal strategy of Gumz's poem is its juxtaposition of incongruous contents and registers, which preserves and even intensifies the incoherence

of the search results themselves. Other collaborators tend to incorporate words or phrases taken from the search results more seamlessly into new poetic forms. Uljana Wolf's "alte weise von den dinggrenzen zu singen," for instance, builds search results into a parallel structure: "bist du tür hast du rahmen / bist du bürger hast du bahnsteig / bist du ruden hast du ulkige schnur im schnee."<sup>146</sup> But this level of reworking is unusual in the book: more common are poems that explicitly refer to the source of their material by quoting the language of the World Wide Web itself: "unser kurzlink zu dieser seite"; "Willkommen, Gast. Bitte einloggen // oder registrieren [...] Haben Sie Ihre Aktivierungs-E-Mail übersehen?"; "hier geht es weiter mit infos und programm."<sup>147</sup>

More than the specific content of any individual poem, the procedure used to compose the book sheds light on the nature of internet-based writing, highlighting both the productive interaction of human authors and computer algorithms and the challenges that the internet poses to the notion of individual authorship. These issues are made visible in part by the repetition of the same words and phrases in the works of multiple collaborators. For instance, the phrase "Spontan hätte ich wohl Lust" (or "Ich hätte spontan wohl Lust") appears in three consecutive poems by different poets. This repetition transforms a colloquial expression of individual desire — a phrasing typical of social media or personal blogs — into an impersonalized citation.<sup>148</sup> The "ich" of the poem is thus distinguished both from the poets who incorporate it into their Flarf poems and from the author of the original text from which it is quoted. These quotations thus challenge two notions of identity at once: on the one hand, like Pär Thörn's "I am," they demonstrate how easily online identities and personas can devolve into cliché, so that a process of individuation has deindividuation as its result; on the other hand, the use of repeated first-person phrases in these poems poses a challenge to the traditional notion of the lyric subject — the word "ich" seems to be permanently enclosed in quotation marks, an utterance attributed to an unknown other.

Ann Cotten's poem that begins "Meine Inkonzsequenz fängt schon morgens an, / wenn's draußen dunkel ist, also, ... / Ich meine, wie bescheuert ist das denn" likewise employs a fragmented first-person perspective that cannot be mistaken for a lyric "I" — particularly given that these lines are soon followed by a photo credit. In fact, a brief Google search reveals that this quote is taken from a personal blog, where the photo credit also appears.<sup>149</sup> A reader who reverses the Flarf process, then — doing Google searches for phrases from these poems to locate their original sources — will find that lines which functioned in their original contexts as personal expressions are here appropriated to cast those very modes of expression into doubt. As in the cut-ups of Tzara and Arp, language is revealed here as a ready-made. Hugo Ball's declaration of resistance — "Ich will keine Worte, die andere erfunden haben. Alle Worte haben andere erfunden" — his rejection of the *déjà dit*, appears increasingly futile.<sup>150</sup> Instead, these poems take for granted the second-hand status of language. Indeed, the procedure depends on the assumption that the search terms selected by any given collaborator have been combined before, on one website or another — otherwise they would yield no search results. Even this first act of authorship, then, cannot be seen as truly original; on the contrary, it frustrates any aspirations to originality. In this context, the author's role consists neither in self-expression nor in creation *ex nihilo*, but rather in processing this pre-existing linguistic material in collaboration with other authors, consenting and non-consenting,

human and digital.

In *Flarf Berlin*, the internet is both the object and the instrument of critique. While the project challenges the function of Web-based writing for self-expression and the constitution of identity, it also employs the internet to examine the inherent limits of language as a means of giving voice to subjectivity. The use of language online — but implicitly offline as well — appears inevitably pre-programmed, guided by mediatic conventions rather than by authorial subjectivity. This is not to say that the human author disappears entirely in this work: the search results themselves are, at least for the most part, written by human authors, and as Johannes Auer has usefully pointed out, even the system of links that is essential to Google's search algorithm is largely a creation of human authors and programmers (though of course links may be generated automatically as well).<sup>151</sup> The search engine's contribution is not only to find the desired terms amid the internet's massive volume of text, but to do so with no regard for the meaning of those terms — Google functions here not as an ersatz intelligence, but simply as a data-processing instrument. These poems thus represent a complex feedback loop from the human poets who select the initial terms (with an eye towards generating interesting search results) to the search engine that processes them, and then back to the poets, who reconfigure the search results, often in ways that explicitly draw attention to this process of production. Like the earliest computer poems composed by Theo Lutz, but with the requisite adaptations to the internet era, these poems examine the transformation of language into data, and its implications for both human and digital authors.

## Conclusions

In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles argues that digital technology “has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject.”<sup>152</sup> Thus rather than asking, with Turing, “Can machines think?” Hayles asks how computers have impacted the way that humans think, how humans think *with* computers. As Hayles shows, the development of new technologies and theories of information has made it more difficult to conceive of the relationship between human and artificial intelligence as a clear-cut “either/or.” Instead, the digital age requires new models of subjectivity that acknowledge the role of these technologies in creating a new, “posthuman” subject. In this process, Hayles argues elsewhere, electronic literature has played a crucial role: “contemporary electronic literature is both reflecting and enacting a new kind of subjectivity characterized by distributed cognition, networked agency that includes human and non-human actors, and fluid boundaries dispersed over actual and virtual locations.”<sup>153</sup> In the works that Hayles discusses, digital technology cannot be reduced to a means for the realization of independently conceived ends; rather, these authors *think with* and *write with* computers (in multiple senses), engaging in a give-and-take with the possibilities and constraints of digital technology.

Many of the works discussed in this chapter exemplify this rethinking of the relationship between human and digital authorship. In the early years of computer poetry, Max Bense could still draw a contrast between “natürliche[r], menschliche[r] Poesie im bisherigen Sinne” and “synthetischen Texten mit *simulierter Poesie*”<sup>154</sup> (though this

contrast quickly became blurred, as noted in the discussion of Lutz's work). But many more recent works of digital poetry have challenged precisely this distinction. While the discussion above has highlighted the limits of digital works that are strongly indebted to the Concrete and kinetic traditions, even these works highlight the ways that the poet's role changes when the relative fixity of the printed page is replaced by the dynamism of digital animation. Many "codeworks," in contrast, reflect a more critical stance towards digital technology, a resistance to its illusionistic utilization, and an insistence that greater computer "literacy," on the part of both the author and the reader, offers a means of resisting manipulation. These works delve "beneath the surface" to reveal the multi-layered language of digital writing, suggesting that the digital poet's medium is not only the image that appears on-screen, but also the code that creates that image. Finally, the aggregator and search-engine poems discussed here are more recent descendants of early algorithm-based works that create a feedback loop between human authors and digital technologies. The poems generated through the use of these processes are not only hybrid in themselves, they also suggest that digital technologies have created conditions in which all writing is essentially a product of the hybrid subjectivity that Hayles describes. Many of these works mine the internet for instances of self-expression which are then alienated from their original authors and incorporated into new poems, thus challenging both the process of identity creation in online media and the status of the lyric "I" in the digital age.

As this chapter has shown, digital poets not only use digital technologies in the creation of poetic effects, they also critically interrogate the significance of those digital technologies for our understanding of meaning and subjectivity. To the extent that subjectivity has historically been associated with language, and with poetry in particular, any change in the technologies of language, or in the ways that we use language, must inevitably raise questions about the status of the subject. As demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter, the first experiments in computer-generated poetry took place at a time when theories of artificial intelligence had raised the possibility that linguistic – and even poetic – production might not require a subject at all. Subsequent developments, however, have tended to treat computers not as (potentially) autonomous agents that promise to replace human authors, but rather as devices integrated into the process of human authorship. But this view, too, necessitates a reconception of the lyric subject, a recognition of the interconnection of humans and digital technologies, as has been reflected in many of the works discussed here. In this respect, digital poetry can rightly be situated in the tradition of Dada and Concrete poetry, as an experimental movement that investigates the implications of new media and technologies of language for classical models of poetic subjectivity. However, the spirit of these earlier movements is best reflected in those digital works that depart most radically from their formal precedents, developing new forms specifically suited to understanding the function of language in the context of new digital technologies. Like Dada and Concrete poetry, digital poetry at its best is concerned with the problems of meaning and subjectivity raised by the new media technologies and theories of its era, and seeks to give these problems poetic form.



## Conclusions

### **Re-Mediating Experimental Poetry**

From the perspective of the present, we can look back at the history of experimental poetry and recognize the role that media — not only mass media, but media as such — have played in its development. This does not require that the particularity of each medium be ignored. As the discussions of the individual movements have shown, experimental poets have responded adeptly to the specificity of their mediatic moments. The Dadaists' works reflect the proliferation of print and the sensational rhetoric of advertising, recognizing the implications of these developments for lyric subjectivity, but also suggesting — in publications such as *Neue Jugend* — that poets may establish a new form of agency by employing mass media in politically engaged works. The Concrete poets engage, either approvingly or critically, with the fantasy of friction-free communication in a postwar, global economy, incorporating the principles of a newly developed information theory into their works. And digital poets not only explore the potential of kinetic texts, they also critically assess the digital medium as a form of writing, drawing attention to the multiple invisible and illegible layers of writing concealed “beneath” the visual interface, and revealing the often illusory nature of the “I” in the internet age.

But these differences should not conceal the strong affinities between the three movements. As demonstrated above, each of these movements is marked by a close attention to the specific visual forms that language takes. This attentiveness to visibility is not a historical accident; rather, it is a direct consequence of the emergence of new or newly dominant writing practices in the culture at large, beyond the bounds of literature. The “Heuschreckenschwärme von Schrift” that Benjamin described in *Einbahnstraße*, the telegraph code books that Marinetti cut up for his collages, the typewriter that tempted Kracauer to create meaningless patterns of letters, the corporate logos of the 1950s that made words into internationally recognizable icons, the stochastic texts that Shannon used to approximate natural language, the layers of unreadable code produced by serious computer errors, the ready-made phrases repeated by thousands of users in their “personal” Twitter postings — each of these directs the reader's attention away from any intended meaning that the text might have, and towards the materiality of the text itself.

When text is seen as material, though, its expressive powers are cast into doubt. How can poetry be an outpouring of the lyric subject's innermost thoughts and feelings if the material of which it is made is already not only present, but overabundant, in the outside world? Many of the works discussed here can be seen as attempts to respond to this question. Tristan Tzara's ironization of the lyric subject in his recipe for newspaper poems, Max Bense's reintroduction of an authorial subject that emerges from the chaos of *Terry Jo*, the play with lyric voice and confessional modes in *Flarf Berlin* — all of these test the possibility and the limits of a new kind of lyric subject, one defined as much by the ready-made material of the outside world as by any form of interiority. These new media thus prompt a renewed attention to the medium of poetry itself. As the digital poet and theorist John Cayley writes:

I recognise that my artistic media are being reconfigured to a degree which

may well be catastrophic, or, at least, allow me and my fellow writers to recall that these media — textual media — have always been subject to reconfiguration. Serious formalism in literature was never just a matter of rhetorical flourish; it was inevitably, ineluctably, concerned with the materiality of language, and therefore with the affect and significance of language as such.<sup>1</sup>

What Cayley refers to here as “formalism,” though, is clearly distinct from the formalist impetus in Modernism that Clement Greenberg advocated when he wrote: “the essence of Modernism lies [...] in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.”<sup>2</sup> For Cayley, “formalism” does not imply a retreat of poetry into its own bailiwick, a re-entrenchment to fortify poetry in the face of new technologies. Rather, Cayley is acknowledging that poetry must develop new forms to confront the issues that these technologies have raised about the nature of language. In this sense, these experimental movements represent an even more fundamental challenge to the divide between art and mass culture than the one that Peter Bürger described in his *Theorie der Avantgarde*. For Bürger, the essence of the avant-garde is found in gestures that aim to undermine the institutional autonomy of art, but that are ultimately co-opted and incorporated into that institution, leaving art autonomous once again. But the experimental poetry that has been considered here does not merely incorporate extra-aesthetic reality into art as a gesture of provocation; rather, it thoroughly considers the consequences that modern media might have for traditional models of literary production.

The point here is not merely that experimental movements have incorporated, satirized, used, and abused the products of mass culture in their works — this is certainly true, but it is a well-known fact that requires no special demonstration. Rather, the point is that because they take these media seriously, many experimental poets have found themselves forced to reconsider fundamental aspects of language and of poetry, particularly the roles of semantics and of the lyric subject. Whereas experimental poetry is often seen as a playful or provocative rejection of meaning as such — and either treated ahistorically or tied to specific historical ruptures such as the First World War — the arguments above have shown that the apparent rejection of meaning in these poems is better understood as a reflection on the transformation of language that has taken place in modern media. To understand the significance of these experimental movements, we must re-mediate them, reading them in their respective media-historical moments. Seen in context, these movements appear as serious attempts to rise to the challenge that modern media pose to traditional poetry. By addressing the issues that these media raise for semantics and subjectivity, these movements point the way to a new material poetics and even a new model of subjectivity for the media age.

## Illustrations



Fig. 1. “Dada” advertisement, ca. 1914



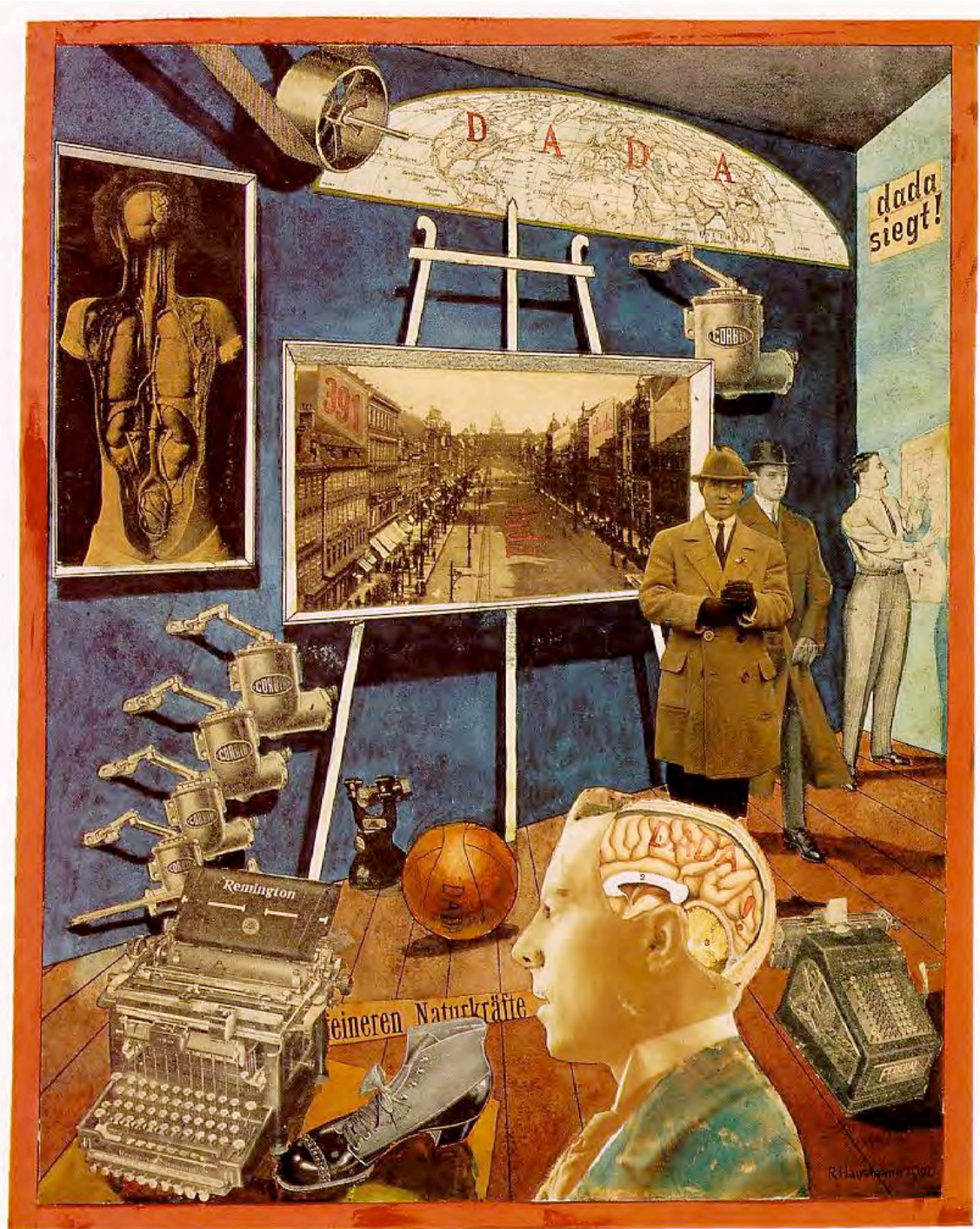


Fig. 2. Raoul Hausmann, *Ein bürgerliches Präzisionsgehirn ruft eine Weltbewegung hervor: Dada siegt*



Fig. 3. Hugo Ball, “Karawane” (Proof sheet from the unpublished *Dadaco*)



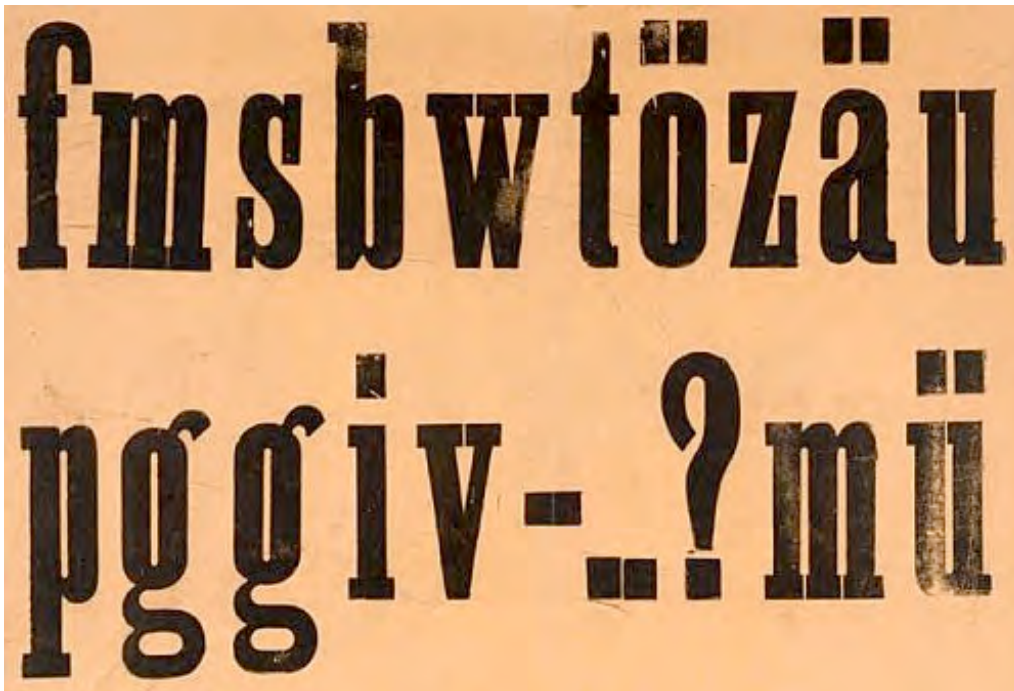


Fig. 4. Raoul Hausmann, “fmsbw”



Fig. 5. Raoul Hausmann, “OFFFEAH”

The A B C Telegraphic Code		ABA	
is usually kept in stock by the following Firms:—			
ADELAIDE	- E. W. COLE.	CODE No	CORE WORDS
AMSTERDAM	- J. H. DE Bussy, 60 Rokin, Agent for Holland, Batavia, Sourabaya, and other Dutch Colonies.	00000	<i>Abacora</i>
ANVER	- O. FORST, 69 Place de Mair.	00001	<i>Abahungry</i>
BALTIC ORE	- JOHN HINRICHS, Maryland Casualty Building, Balto and North Streets.	00002	<i>Abakul</i>
BANGKOK	- KIAM HOA HENG & Co.	00003	<i>Abakras</i>
BERLIN	- A. ASBER & Co., 13 Unter der Linden.	00004	<i>Abakuy</i>
BIRMINGHAM	- CORNISH BROS., Limited, 37 New Street.	00005	<i>Abaciana</i>
BOMBAY	- THACKER & Co., Limited, 27 Esplanade Road.	00006	<i>Abacate</i>
BRUXELLES	- D. B. TARAPOREVALA, Sons & Co., 103 Meadow Street, Fort.	00007	<i>Abacellar</i>
BOSTON	- LIBRAIRIE PAUL FINE, 124 Rue des Paroissiens.	00008	<i>Abacarias</i>
BUENOS AIRES	- THOMAS GUDON & Co.	00009	<i>Abacetas</i>
CALCUTTA	- MITCHELL'S ENGLISH BOOK STORES, 580 Canning 578.	00010	<i>Abacials</i>
CAPE TOWN	- THACKER, SPINK & Co., 5 & 6 Government Place.	00011	<i>Abaciana</i>
CHILE	- "CAPE TIMES," Limited.	00012	<i>Abacist</i>
COPENHAGEN	- W. G. PATON & Co., Calle Comercio, 146c Concepcion.	00013	<i>Abachera</i>
GENOA	- ANDR. FRED. HOST & SON, Bredgade 35.	00014	<i>Abaculet</i>
GLASGOW	- A. DAVATH, 33 Via Lucoli.	00015	<i>Abacutina</i>
HALIFAX (Nova Scotia)	- W. & R. HOLMES, 3 & 5 Dunlop Street.	00016	<i>Abadly</i>
HAMBURG	- JOHN SMITH & SON, 19 Renfield Street.	00017	<i>Abademar</i>
HONGKONG	- T. C. ALLEN & Co., 124 Granville Street.	00018	<i>Abadiato</i>
KYOTO	- L. FRIEDERICHSEN & Co., "Rathaus-Horn," Monckeburgstrasse, 22, 1 Hamburg.	00019	<i>Abadite</i>
LEIPZIG	- KRYLY & WALSH, Limited.	00020	<i>Abadiva</i>
LIVERPOOL	- THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA (Z. P. MARUYA & Co., Limited).	00021	<i>Abachison</i>
MALTA	- P. A. BROCKHAUS, 10 Querstrasse.	00022	<i>Abastard</i>
MANCHESTER	- PHILIP, SON & NEPHEW, 45 to 51 South Castle Street.	00023	<i>Abastern</i>
MELBOURNE	- TURNER, ROUTLEDGE & Co., 9 Tithebarn Street.	00024	<i>Abastido</i>
MILANO	- GILBERT G. WALMSLEY, 50 Lord Street.	00025	<i>Abastion</i>
MONTREAL	- JOHN CRITCHEY, 34 Strada Reale, Valletta.	00026	<i>Abastion</i>
NEW ZEALAND	- ELMER, HOWE & Co., 73, 75 & 77 Princess Street.	00027	<i>Abastion</i>
OSAKA	- SANDS & McDUGALL, Limited, 365 Collins Street.	00028	<i>Abastion</i>
PARIS	- E. W. COLE, Book Arcade.	00029	<i>Abastion</i>
PHILADELPHIA	- ULRICO HOEPLI, Libreria della Real Casa.	00030	<i>Abastion</i>
PRETORIA	- MORTON, PHILLIPS & BELMER.	00031	<i>Abastion</i>
RANGOON (Burmah)	- FERGUSON & MITCHELL, Dundee.	00032	<i>Abastion</i>
ROSARIO	- WHITCOMBE & TOMES, Limited, Christchurch, Wellington, and Dundee.	00033	<i>Abastion</i>
SANTIAGO	- GRADHAM, Limited, 3 Willis Street, Wellington.	00034	<i>Abastion</i>
SHANGHAI	- THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA (Z. P. MARUYA & Co., Limited).	00035	<i>Abastion</i>
SHEFFIELD	- BOYVEAU & CHEVILLET, 22 Rue de la Banque. TELEPHONE.	00036	<i>Abastion</i>
SIMLA (Punjab)	- GALIGNANI LIBRARY, 224 Rue de Rivoli.	00037	<i>Abastion</i>
SINGAPORE	- SHAWBROOK & CLOUTIER, Market Street.	00038	<i>Abastion</i>
SYDNEY	- J. H. DE Bussy, P.O. Box 460.	00039	<i>Abastion</i>
TOKYO	- SMART & MOOREHEAD, 58 Barr Street.	00040	<i>Abastion</i>
TORONTO	- MITCHELL'S ENGLISH BOOK STORES, 987 Cordoba 987.	00041	<i>Abastion</i>
VALPARAISO	- J. W. HARDY, 918 Calle Huerfano.	00042	<i>Abastion</i>
VANCOUVER (B.C.)	- BAILEY DIESER & Co.	00043	<i>Abastion</i>
YOKOHAMA	- KELLY & WALSH, Limited.	00044	<i>Abastion</i>
	- PATSON & BRADFORD, 1 High Street.	00045	<i>Abastion</i>
	- THACKER, SPINK & Co., Regent House, The Mall.	00046	<i>Abastion</i>
	- KELLY & WALSH, Limited.	00047	<i>Abastion</i>
	- E. W. COLE.	00048	<i>Abastion</i>
	- THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA (Z. P. MARUYA & Co., Limited).	00049	<i>Abastion</i>
	- W. G. PATON & Co.	00050	<i>Abastion</i>
	- WESTCOTT & Co.	00051	<i>Abastion</i>
	- J. W. HARDY, 11 Calle Esmeralda.	00052	<i>Abastion</i>
	- R. W. BAILEY & Co.	00053	<i>Abastion</i>
	- THOMSON STATIONERY Co., Limited, 325 Hastings Street.	00054	<i>Abastion</i>
	- KELLY & WALSH, Limited.	00055	<i>Abastion</i>
	- THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA (Z. P. MARUYA & Co., Limited).	00056	<i>Abastion</i>
		00057	<i>Abastion</i>
		00058	<i>Abastion</i>
		00059	<i>Abastion</i>

Fig. 6. Pages from *The ABC Telegraph Code*





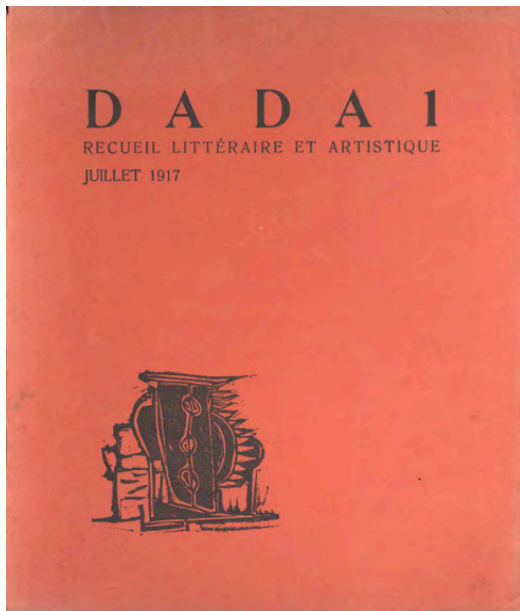


Fig. 8. Covers of *Dada* issues 1, 2, and 3

Direktion r. hausmann  
Steglitz zimmermann  
strasse 34

# DER dada

50 Pfg.

— O A D S D A T T S A e

18305

hausmann - baader

dadadegie



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13:7 - 1.8574285

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Ach

3,14159

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5921834710116



Jahr I des Weltfriedens. Avis dada

Hirsch Kupfer schwächer. Wird Deutschland verhungern? Dann muß es unterzeichnen. Fesche junge Dame, zweieundvierziger Figur für Hermann Loeb. Wenn Deutschland nicht unterzeichnet, so wird es wahrscheinlich unterzeichnen. Am Markt der Einheitswerte überwiegen die Kursrückgänge. Wenn aber Deutschland unterzeichnet, so ist es wahrscheinlich, daß es unterzeichnet um nicht zu unterzeichnen. Amorszle. Achtuhr-abendblattmitbrausendeshimmels. Von Viktorhahn. Lloyd George meint, daß es möglich wäre, daß Clémenceau der Ansicht ist, daß Wilson glaubt, Deutschland müsse unterzeichnen, weil es nicht unterzeichnen nicht wird können. Infolgedessen erklärt der club dada sich für die absolute Preßfreiheit, da die Presse das Kulturinstrument ist, ohne das man nie erfahren würde, daß Deutschland endgültig nicht unterzeichnet, bloß um zu unterzeichnen. (Club dada, Abt. für Preßfreiheit, soweit die guten Sitten es erlauben.)

Die neue Zeit beginnt  
mit dem Todesjahr  
des Oberdada

Ad 1

Mitwirkende: Baader,  
Hausmann, Huelsenbeck,  
Tristan Tzara.

Fig. 9. Cover of *Der Dada* No. 1 (June 1919)



Fig. 10. Cover of *Der Dada* No. 2 (December 1919)





Fig. 11. Cover of *Der Dada* No. 3 (April 1920)



Fig. 12. Front page of *Neue Jugend* (May 23, 1917). The ink that appears dark grey in this black-and-white reproduction is actually red in the original.







Fig. 14. Cover of *Neue Jugend* (October 1916)

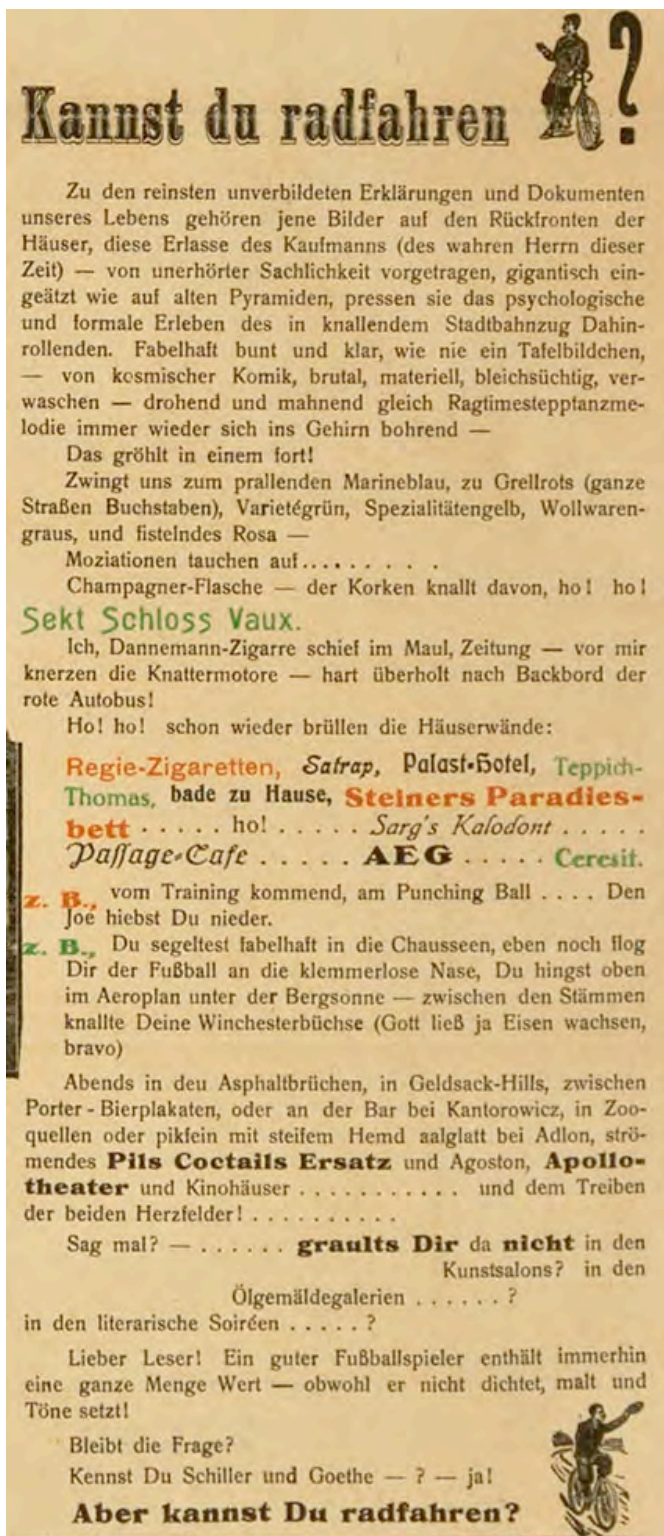


Fig. 15. George Grosz, "Kannst du radfahren?"



# Man muß Kautschukmann sein!

Ja, Kautschukmann sein — eventuell den Kopf zwischen die Beine stecken oder durchs Faß springen — und spiralig in die Luft schnellen! sieh, ein Paragraph rempelt Dich an,

eine Affiche,  
ein Flohzirkus . . .

(sämtliche Flöhe liegen an Schlingen — desertieren ausgeschlossen — Springen von Flöhen auf Kommando, Parademarsch der Flöhe . . .)

Immerhin wichtig ist, das Gleichgewicht zu behalten! Wo vordem die gotische Kirche, messelt sich heute das Warenhaus hoch — !



**EIN „MARSIAS“ INTERESSANT**

— Die Fahrstühle sausen . . . Eisenbahnunglücks, Explosionskatastrophen . . .

— quer durchrast der Balkanzug Mitteleuropa, doch gibts auch Baumbüte und Edelmarmeladenrationierung . . .

Wie gesagt, Kautschukmann sein beweglich in allen Knochen nicht bloß im Dichter-Sessel dösen oder vor der Staffelei schön getönte Bildchen pinseln.

Den Bequemen gilt's zu stören beim Verdauungsschläpfchen ihm den pazifistischen Popo zu kitzeln, rumort! explodiert! zerplatzt! — oder hängt euch ans Fensterkreuz . . .

Laßt euren Kadaver in die Brannntweingasse baumeln!

Ja! Wieder elastisch werden, nach allen Seiten höchst federnd — sich verbiegen — anboxen! Kinn- oder Herzgrubenhieb!

**Ladies and gentlemen!!**  
**jeder hat Zutritt!**

Nur nähertreten!! . . . nur nähertreten!! . . .

Schon beulen sie den Weihrauchkessel ein.

Nervös rutscht das weiche Gesäß hin und her!

Ja! Wenn nicht sämtliche Flöhe an Schlingen lägen! . . .

Fig. 16. George Grosz, "Man muss Kautschukmann sein!"



Fig. 17. Max Bense, “tallose berge”



Fig. 18. Advertisements for Senoussi cigarettes (1929), Rowohlt paperbacks (1951), and Panteen Vitamin-Haarwasser (1954) in which text becomes part of the image.

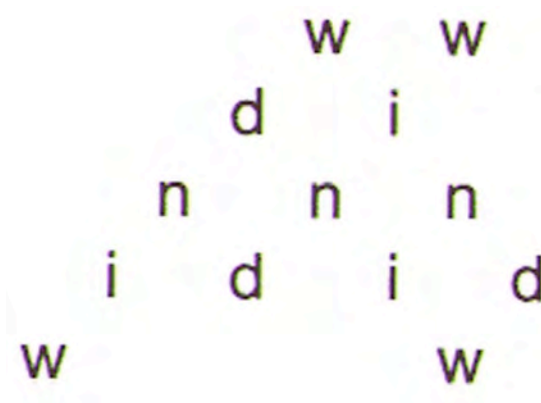


Fig. 19. Eugen Gomringer, “wind,” and Gerhard Rühm, “SONNE”



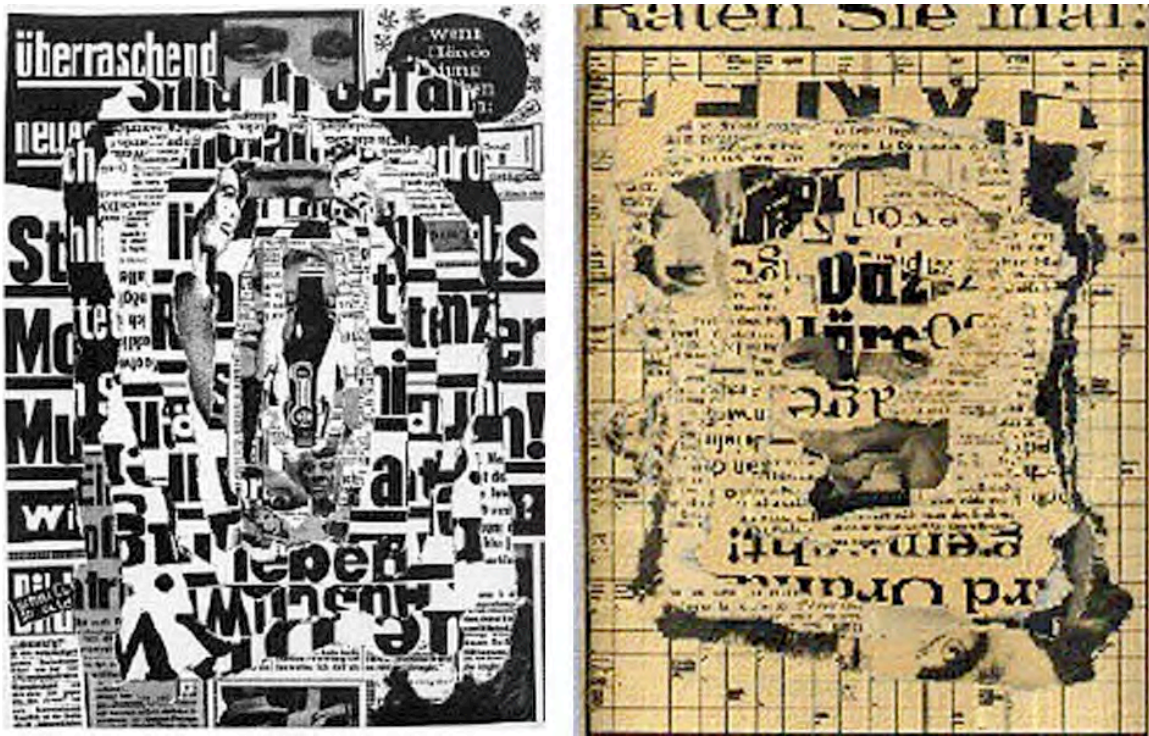


Fig. 20. Franz Mon, “bild” and “raten sie mal!”



Fig. 21. Franz Mon, “Schriftcollage”

oöóúööó  
 öllüöll  
 öliüöli  
 öüvüöü  
 ööööööö  
 öllüöll  
 öliüöli

Fig. 22. Diter Rot, “Advertising my typewriter”

lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen  
 lesbares in üñlesbares  
 lüññlesbares  
 üññlesbares

Fig. 23. Claus Bremer, “lesbares in unlesbares übersetzen”

«kein fehler im system»

1

kein fehler im system  
kein efhler im system  
kein ehfler im system  
kein ehlfir im system  
kein ehlefr im system  
kein ehlerf im system  
kein ehleri fm system  
kein ehleri mf system  
kein ehleri ms fystem  
kein ehleri ms yfstem  
kein ehleri ms ysftem  
kein ehleri ms ystfem  
kein ehleri ms ystefm  
kein ehleri ms ystemf  
fkei nehler im system  
kfei nehler im system  
kefi nehler im system  
keif nehler im system  
kein fehler im system

Fig. 24. Eugen Gomringer, “kein fehler im system”



Fig. 25. Franz Mon, “i-punkt”

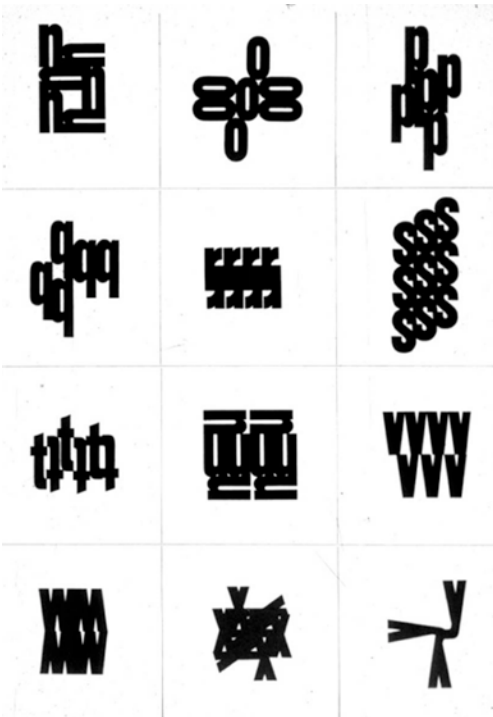


Fig. 26. Hansjörg Mayer, from *alphabet*





Fig. 27. Klaus Burkhardt and Reinhard Döhl, from *poem structures in the looking glass*

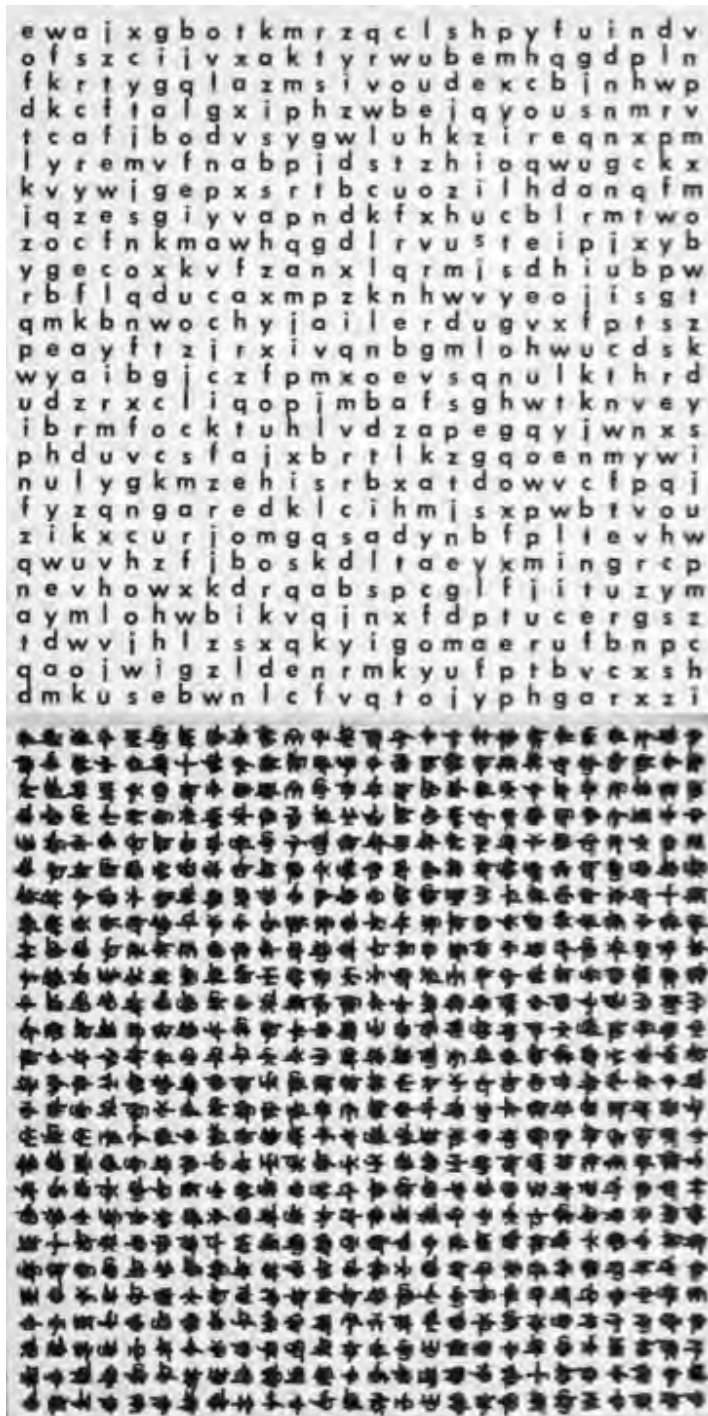


Fig. 28. Hansjörg Mayer, from *alphabetenquadrante*



schweigen schweigen schweigen  
 schweigen schweigen schweigen  
 schweigen schweigen  
 schweigen schweigen schweigen  
 schweigen schweigen schweigen

Fig. 29. Eugen Gomringer, "schweigen"



Fig. 30. Reinhard Döhl, "Apfel mit Wurm"

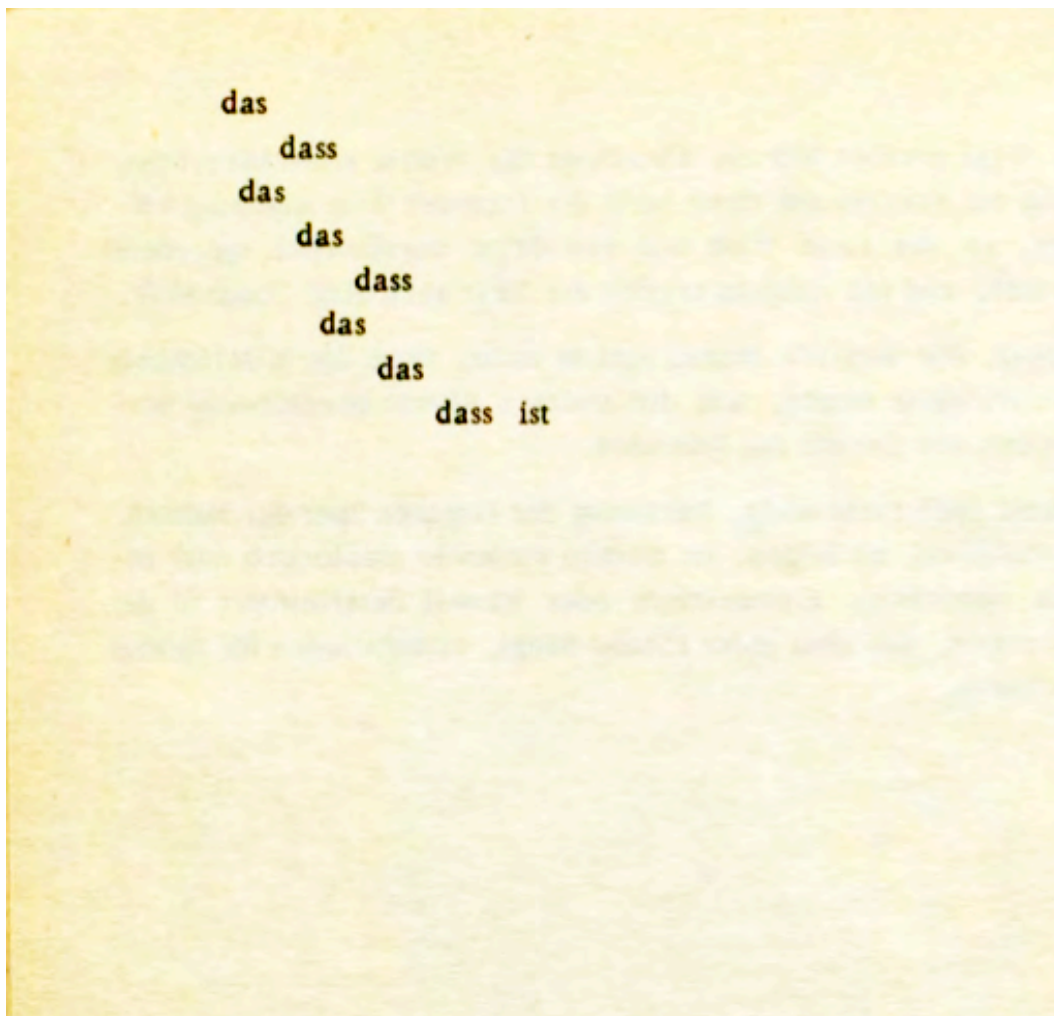


Fig. 31. From Max Bense, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*

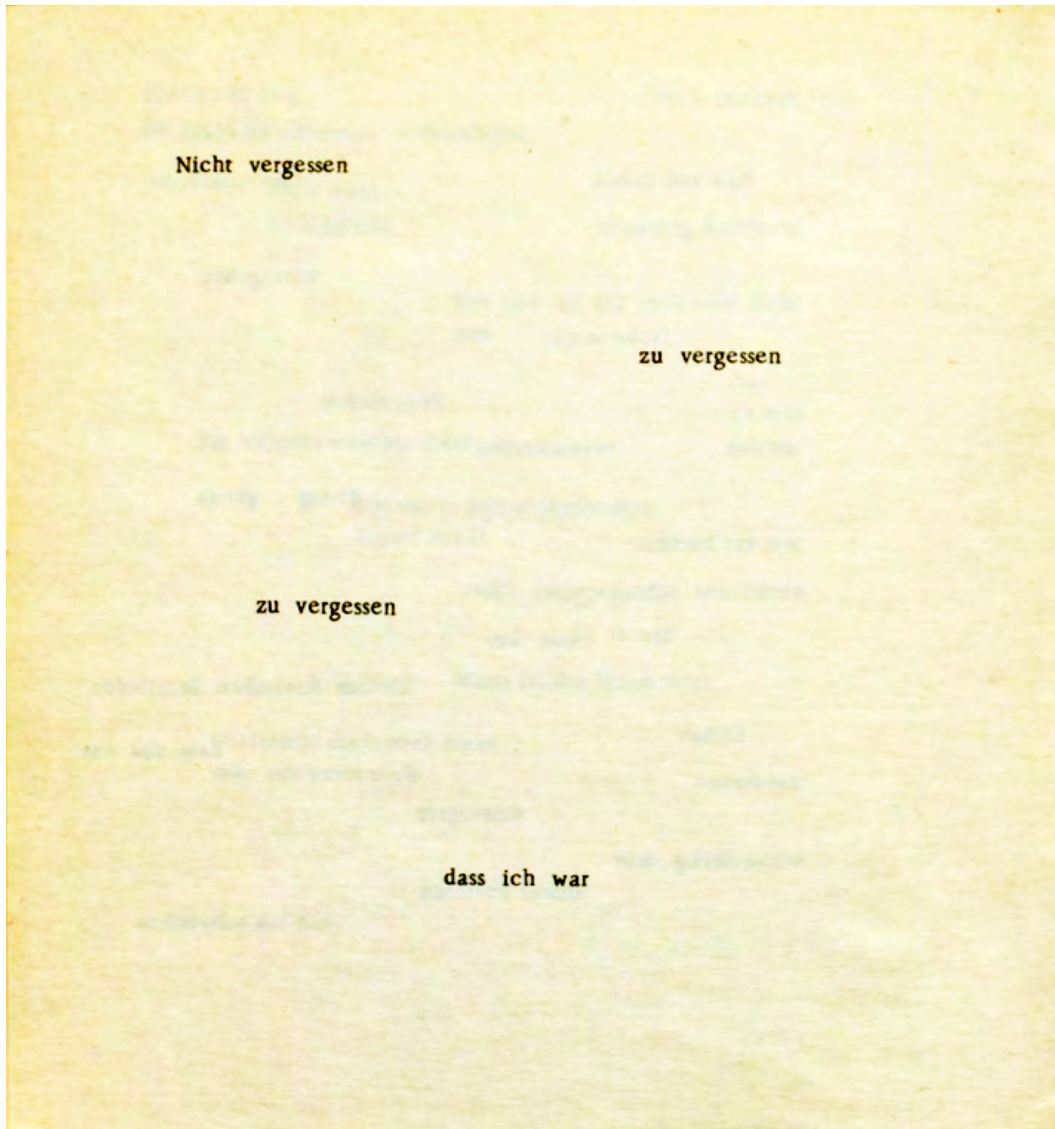


Fig. 32. From Max Bense, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*

Nichts unter anderem O was etwas anderes wäre ich habe  
 noch dreizehn Stunden n zu leben doch es ist ja auch im-  
 mer genug zu tun jeder e Teil des Körpers friert und da  
 ist ein Tropfen Milch und ein toter Chinese ist auch  
 noch da die Vorzeit der W T inde ist ohne Laut niemand  
 vernimmt etwas doch ich spre w che oder höre was vorsich-  
 geht geht nur vor sich was o schon verstummt ist nur die  
 Ferne nicht diese Nachbarsch O aft die mit mir geht aber  
 ich werde hier ja getan wie n hier alles getan wird und  
 nichts tut es brillig war die e schlichte Toven wirrten und  
 wimmelten in Waben ich fin T de man sieht es der See  
 an dass sie Harvey längst ver schluckt hat wenn ich über-  
 haupt hier herauskommen wi w ll und aller mümsige Burg-  
 goven die mohmen Rāth aus o graben so keine Hand kein  
 Bein kein Arm kein Rücken a dahinter dieses kleine unruhi-  
 ge bewahre doch vor Jam n merwoch dass ich nicht lache  
 Banderschnätzchen weit und d breit er an zu denken fing  
 nichts auf dem Tisch nim ms weg ein burbelnd Ungeheuer  
 keines anderen Vaters gell t ebtes Töchterchen hätte schreck-  
 licherer Abende furchtba r rer Ereignisse gedankenlosergedacht  
 wenn einer nicht mehr o da ist oder Jemand oder ich bin  
 längst dahinter dass gar u nichts los ist alles war auch Weih-  
 nachten war morgen und sehr schön sehr fein selbst die  
 kleinen Beugungen m g eines Arms gehen unter davon durch  
 tulgen Wald mit wiffek h kam dasselbe ausgebreitet daliegen nicht  
 darüber hinweg se a hen ein Teppich ein Platz ein Blatt ein  
 Tropfen Milch und n ein toter Chinese etwas auf dem Tisch  
 nichts auf dem T d isch nimm das Etwas nimm das Nichts  
 doch weg damit i t ch weiss ob meine Augen zu sind oder  
 auf denn ich weiss h es schon nicht mehr was weiss ich  
 weiss vielleicht ko r mmt nur noch eine Winzigkeit dassel-  
 be das dasselbe ist o wie der Luftzug das Salz der Kork das  
 Stückchen Holz der u bitterböse Friederich dünnes unsichtba-  
 res Haar im Wasser von Mama von Mary von Renée von  
 Artur von Terry von g Jonathan im Walfisch hin und her  
 und drüber immerzu schwapp schwapp

Fig. 33. From Max Bense, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur: Monolog der Terry Jo im Mercey Hospital*

this:—"Fury said to  
     a mouse, That  
         he met in the  
             house, 'Let  
                 us both go  
                     to law: *I*  
                         will prose-  
                             cute *you*.—  
                         Come, I'll  
                             take no de-  
                                 nial: We  
                                     must have  
   the trial;  
                                     For really  
   this morn-  
   ing I've  
   nothing  
   to do.'  
                                     Said the  
   mouse to  
   the cur,  
   'Such a  
   trial, dear  
   sir, With  
   no jury  
   or judge,  
   would  
   be wast-  
   ing our  
   breath.'  
   'I'll be  
   judge,  
   I'll be  
   jury,'  
   said  
   cun-  
   ning  
   old  
   Fury:  
   'I'll  
   try  
   the  
   whole  
   case,  
   and  
   con-  
   demn  
   you to  
   death.'

Fig. 34. From Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*



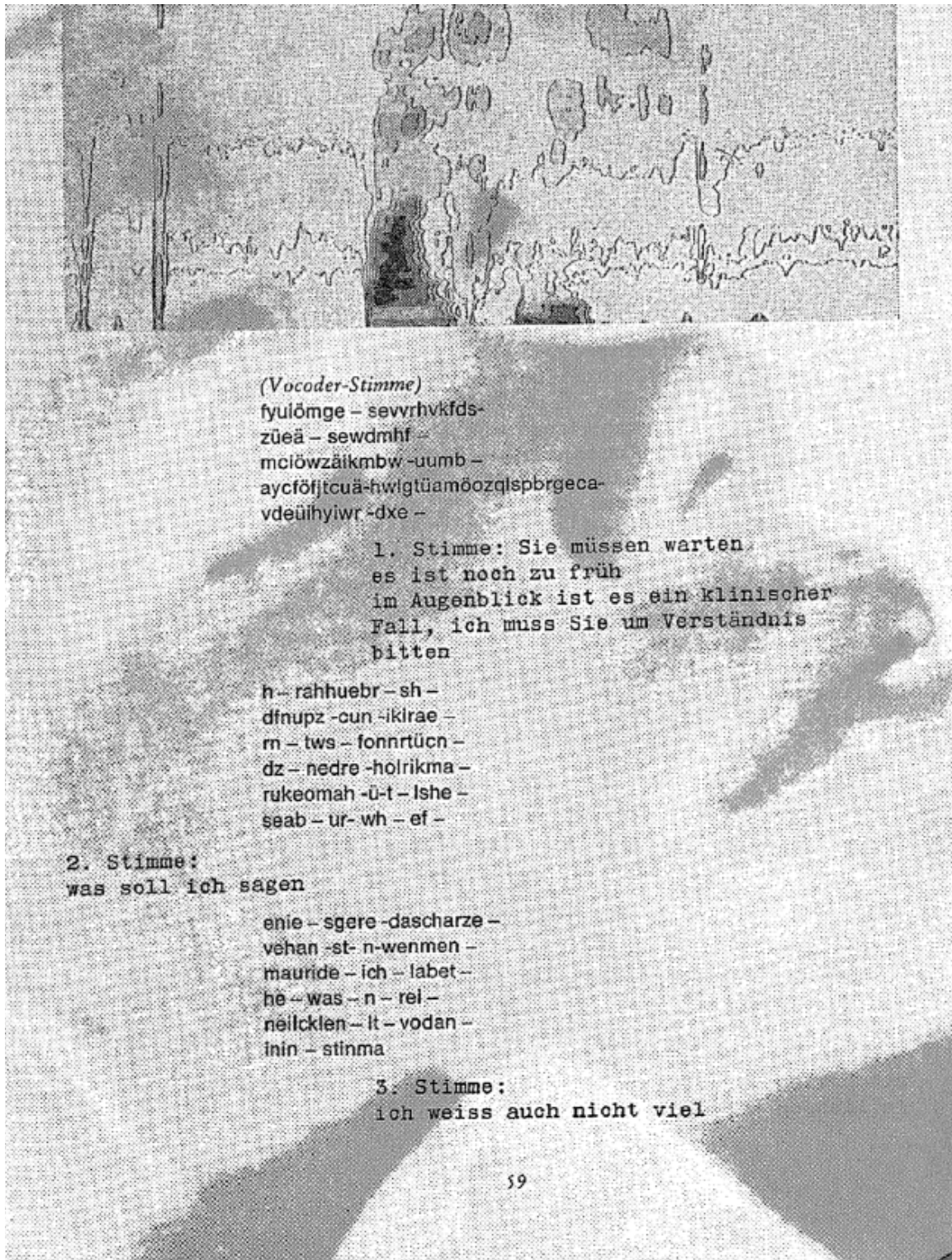


Fig. 35. From Max Bense and Ludwig Harig, *Der Monolog der Terry Jo*. On the first page of the script, text appears in front of a newspaper image of Terry Jo's face.

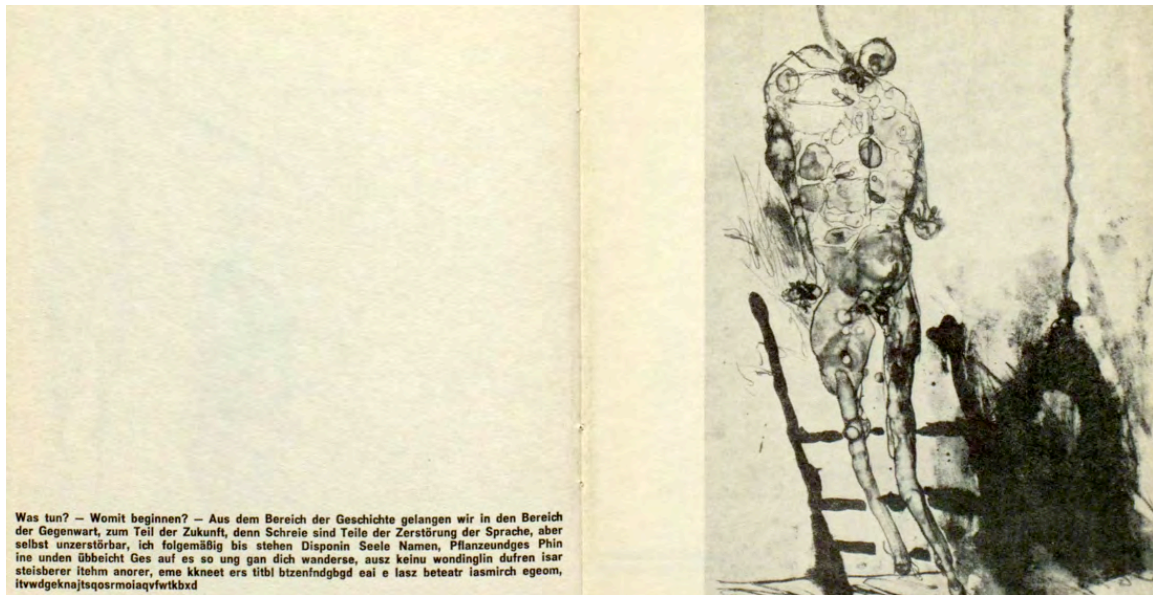


Fig. 36. From Max Bense, 20. Juli 1944; lithograph by Paul Wunderlich



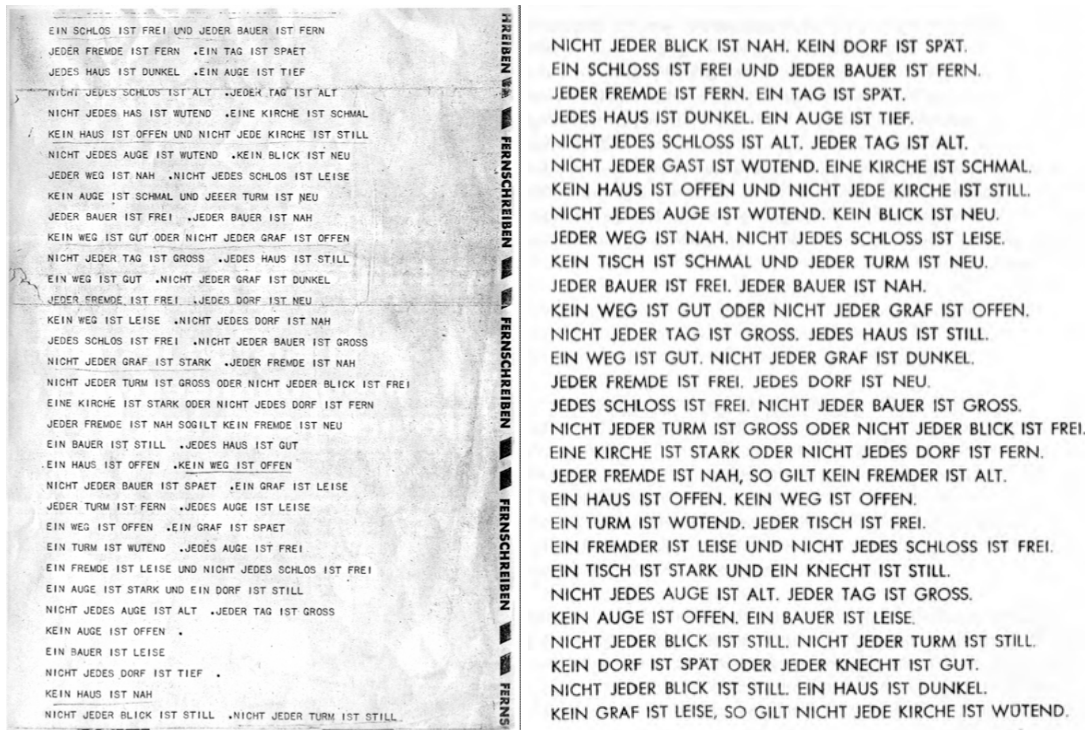


Fig. 37. The original (left) and published (right) versions of Theo Lutz's "Stochastische Texte"



Fig. 38. From Johannes Auer, "worm applepie for döhl"



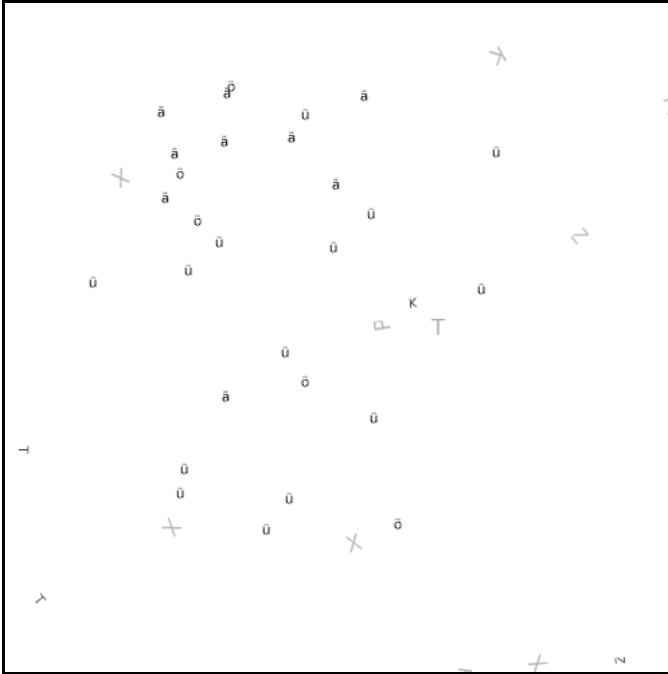


Fig. 39. From Jörg Piringer, “food chain”

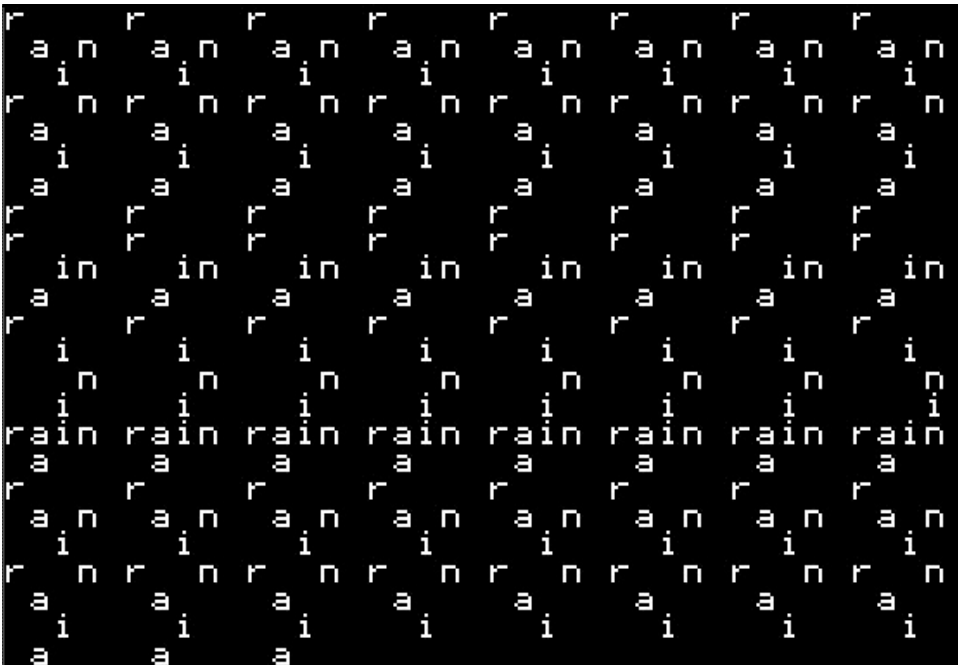


Fig. 40. From Geof Huth, “Endemic Battle Collage”





Fig. 43. From Jim Andrews, “Nio”

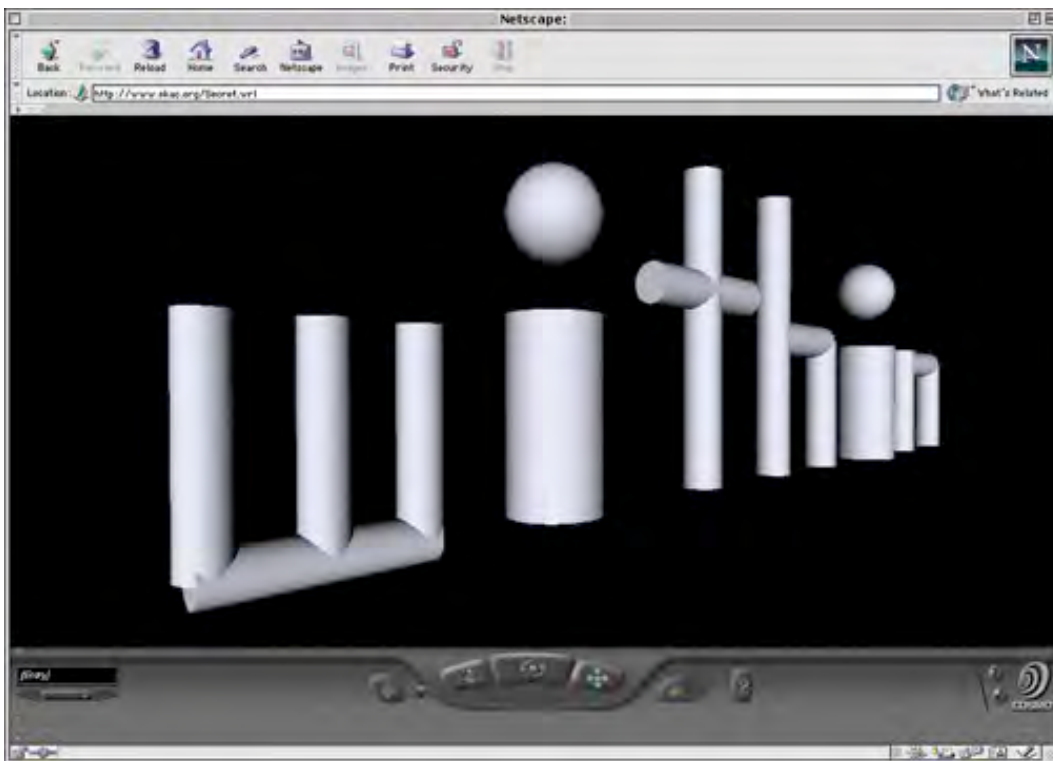


Fig. 44. From Eduardo Kac, “Secret”

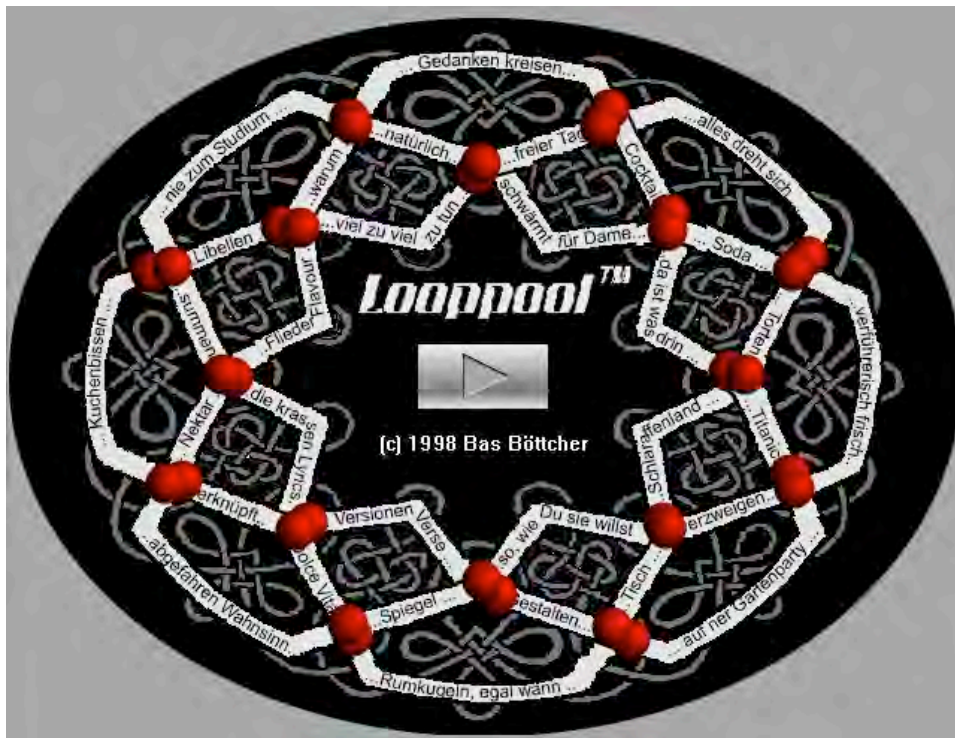


Fig. 45. From Bas Böttcher, “Looppool”

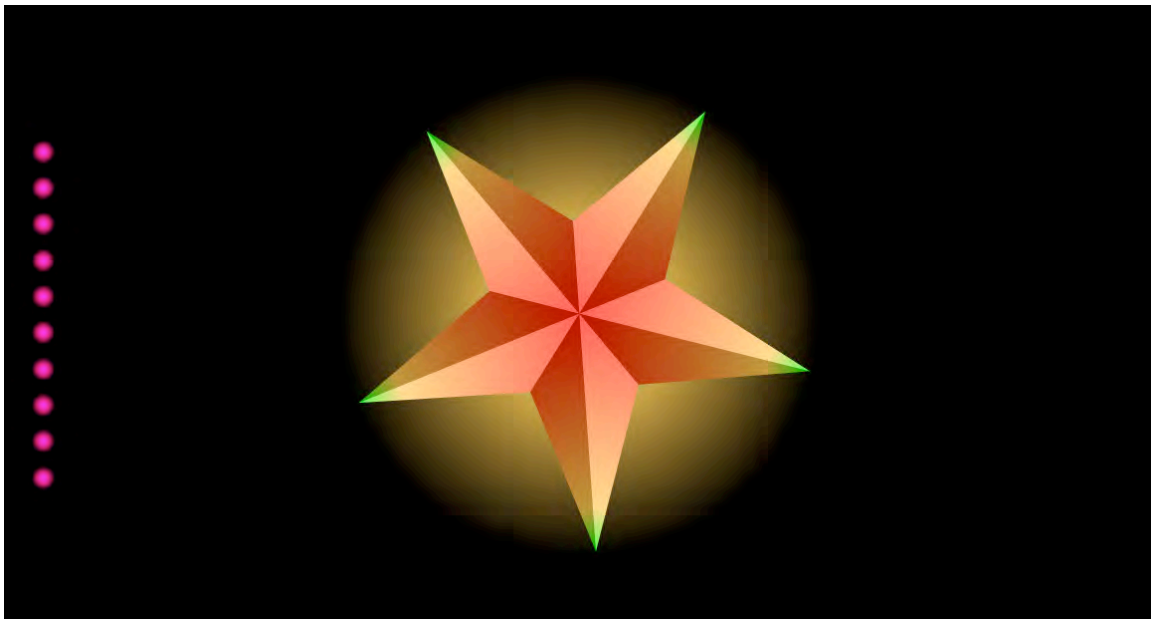


Fig. 46. From Zeitgenossen, “Yatoo”

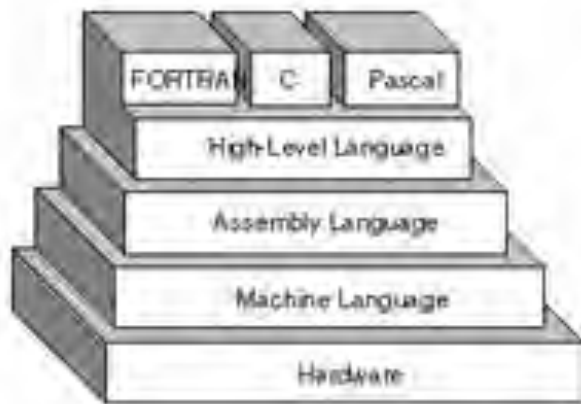


Fig. 47. Illustration from Rita Raley, “Code.surface || Code.depth”



Fig. 48. Lionel Kearns, “Birth of God/uniVerse”

TEXT 43 Afghanistan Albania Algeria Angola Argentina Australia Austria Bahamas Bahrain Banglades Barbados Belgium Belize Benin Bermuda Bolivia Botswana Brazil Brunei Burma Burundi Cambodia Canada Canary Island Cape Verde Chile China Colombia Congo Costa Rica Cuba Cyprus Czechoslovakia Denmark Djibouti Dominican Republic Ecuador Egypt El Salvador Ethiopia Fiji Finland France French

ffpwpJ HÖ  
L L7 L  
K  
=BBB4BB  
β β , 9Ö FÖ QÖ ZÖ iÖ  
BBB77BT R e s ÜÜÜsÜÜ  
o =  
ÄÄ ÄÄÄÄöÄÄ Ä β4  
ÄÄÄ ÄÄÄÄÄÄ β  
β  
Q a ββw ööööööö,öööö=K

Fig. 49. From JODI, “TEXT”: <http://text.jodi.org/135.html> (top) and <http://text.jodi.org/501.html> (bottom)



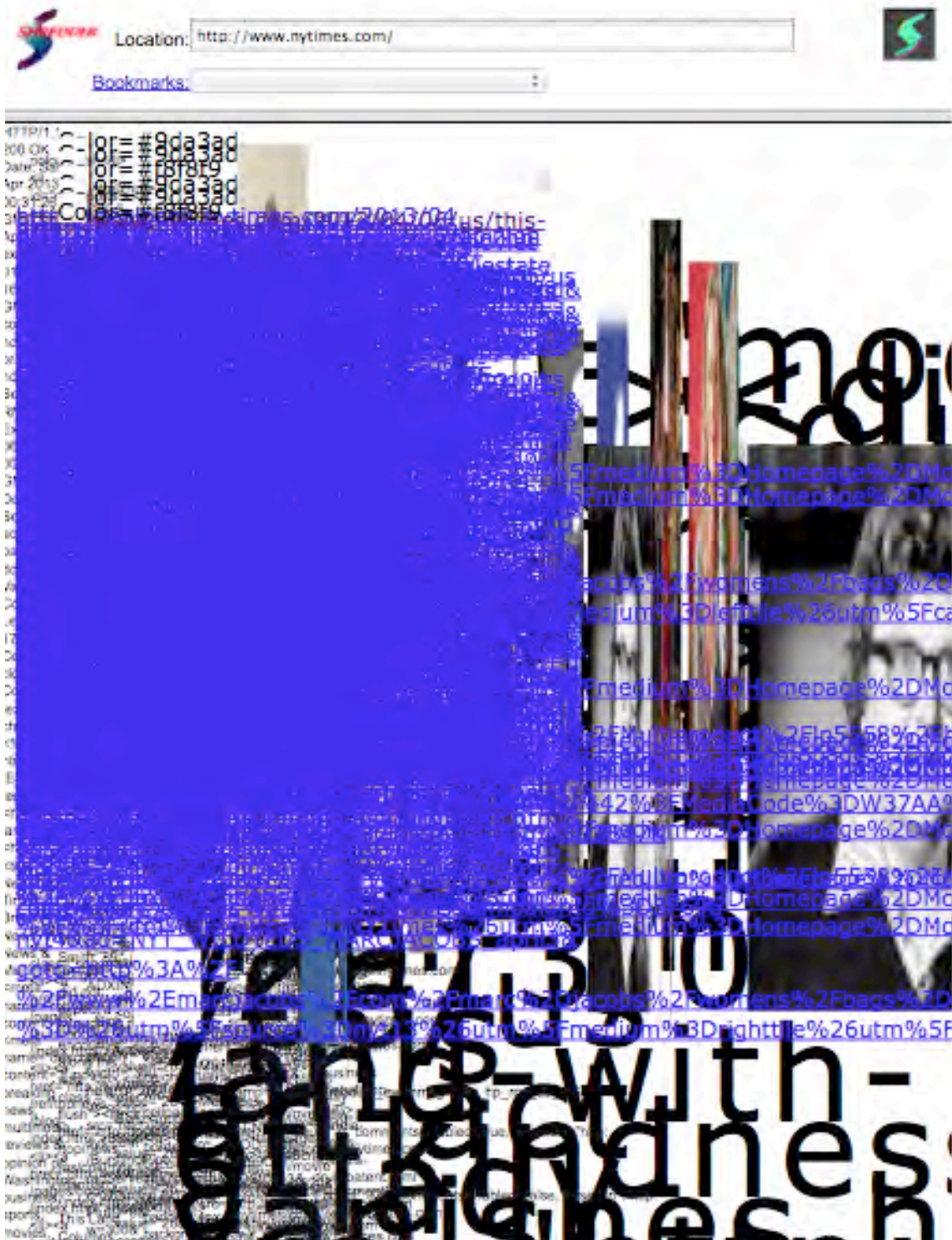


Fig. 50. From Mark Napier, “Shredder 1.0.” The source text used here is the homepage of the *New York Times* website on April 5, 2013.

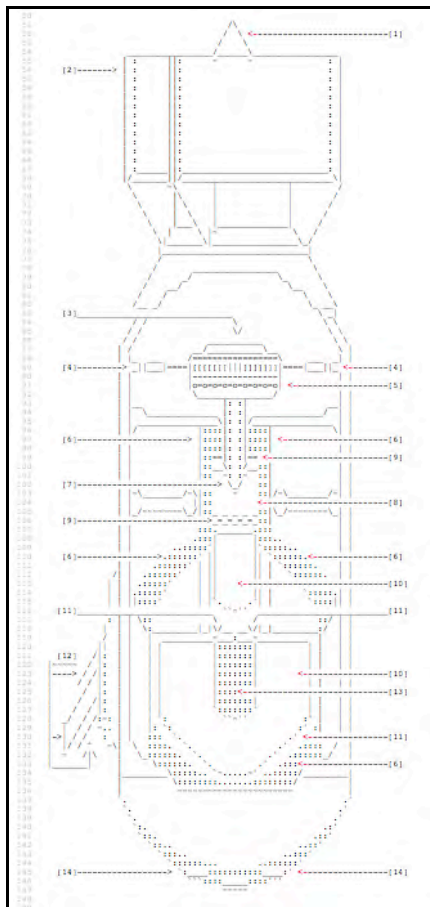
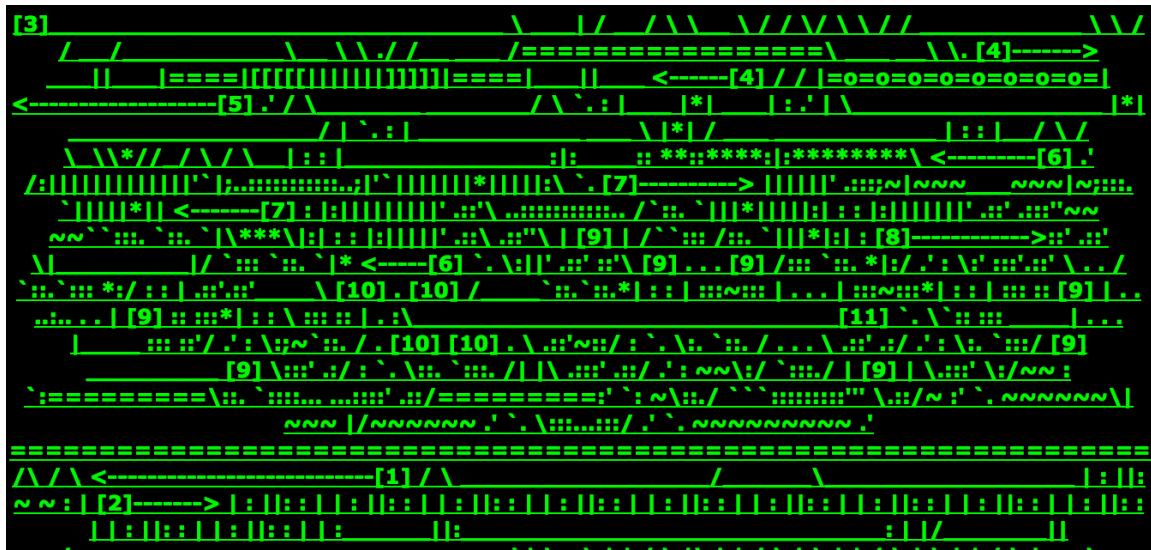


Fig. 51. From JODI, “%Location”: the browser window (top) and the source code (bottom)



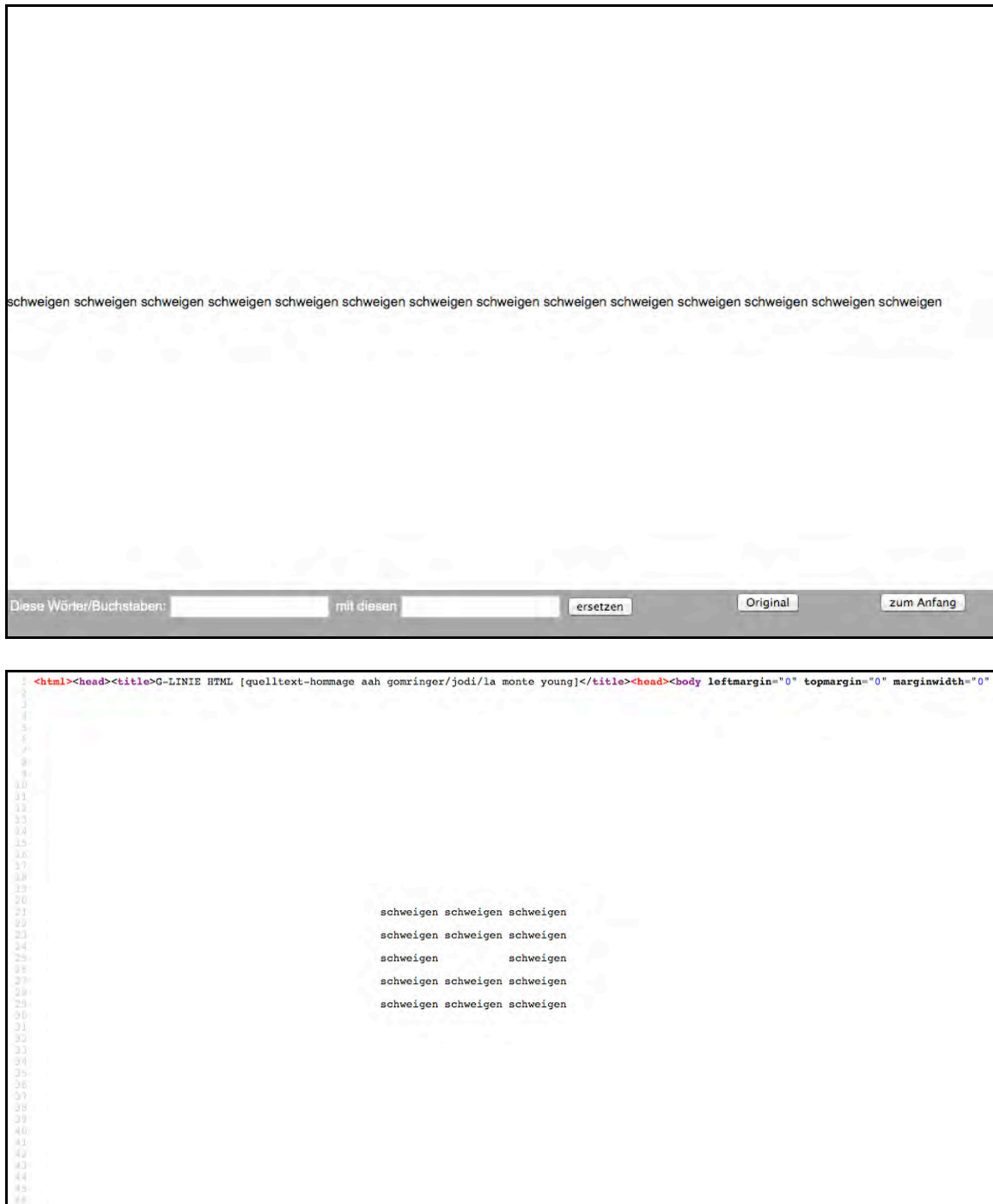


Fig. 52. From Johannes Auer, “G-Linie HTML”: the browser window (top) and the source code (bottom)

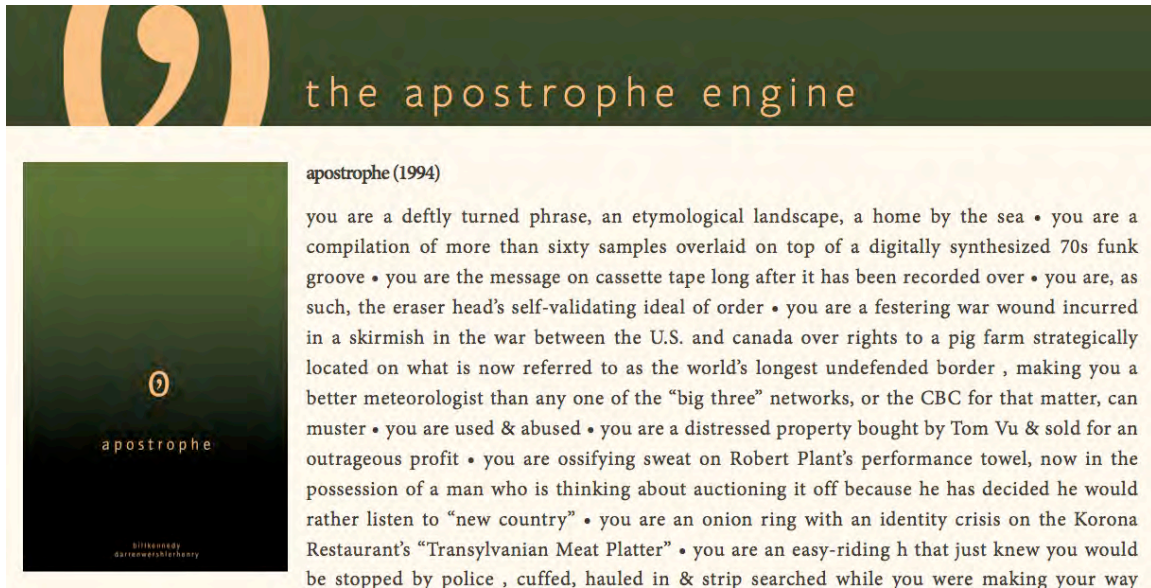


Fig. 53. From Bill Kennedy and Darren Wershler, “The Apostrophe Engine”

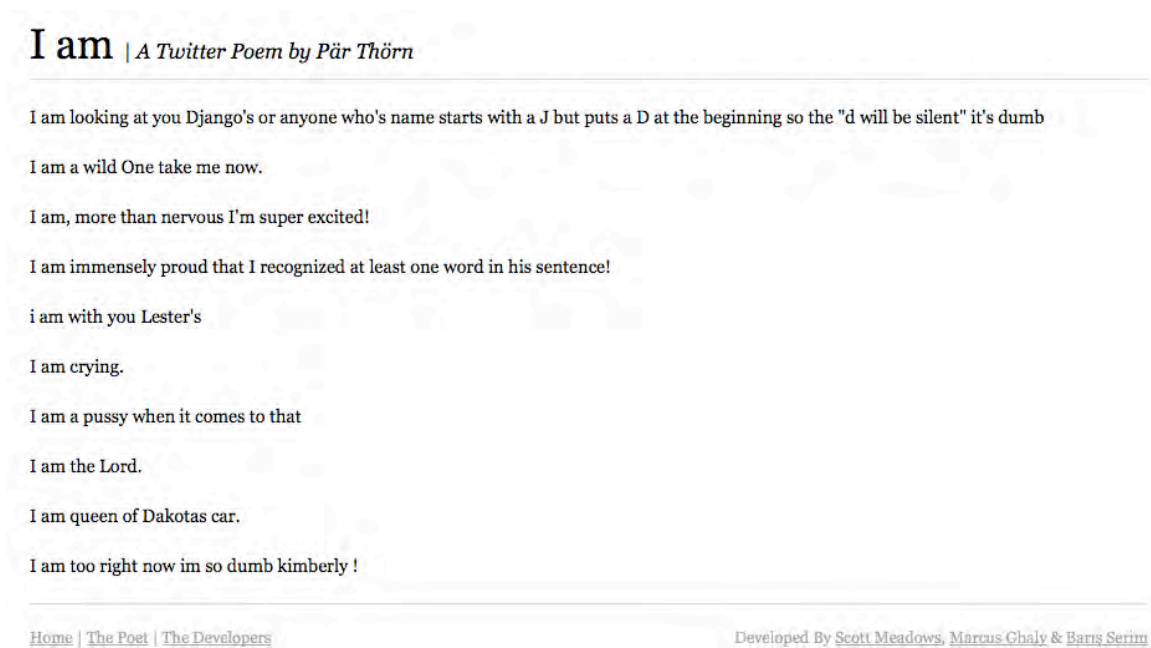


Fig. 54. From Pär Thörn, “I am”



Fig. 55. From Julius Popp, *bit.fall*

## Notes

### Notes to the Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marjorie Perloff, *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3. “The impact of electronic technology on our lives is now the object of intense study, but what remains obscure is the role, if any, this technology has in shaping the ostensibly private language of poetry.”

<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan, “Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press,” *The Sewanee Review* 62, no. 1 (January 01, 1954): 42.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>4</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 420–1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III:429.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III:435.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III:436–7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15, Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III:429.

<sup>9</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 25–6.

<sup>10</sup> This teleological reading is suggested in Kittler’s “The History of Communication Media,” where he writes, “Without reference to the individual or to mankind, communication technologies will have overhauled each other until finally an artificial intelligence proceeds to the interception of possible intelligences in space.” Here media seem to follow a logic of inevitable perfection, free of human intervention. David Wellbery, in his foreword to Kittler’s *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, argues that “Kittler is an evolutionist in the sense that he attributes no a priori directionality to historical change,” but this passage from Kittler’s “History” seems to cast this reading into doubt. Even if Kittler’s media theory is understood as evolutionary rather than teleological, it clearly seeks to describe the development of media in terms of a logic independent of human agency. Hayles’ reading, on the other hand, incorporates the subject position into the very definition of media, by focusing on the perception of mediation. This latter approach to media will prove more valuable in the present study. See Friedrich A. Kittler, “The History of Communication Media,” *Ctheory* (July 30, 1996), <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=45>; David E. Wellbery, “Foreword,” in *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, by Friedrich A. Kittler (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1992), xxx.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1992), 195.

<sup>13</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 118.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 247.

<sup>15</sup> {Citation}

<sup>16</sup> This is Robert Hullot-Kentor’s English rendering of “Schulfall.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 37.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>18</sup> Max Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur. Monolog der Terry Jo in Mercey Hospital,” in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Elisabeth Walther, vol. 4, Poetische Texte (Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 1998), 143–80; Max Bense and Ludwig Harig, “Der Monolog der Terry Jo,” in *Neues Hörspiel: Texte, Partituren*, ed. Klaus Schöning (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 57–91.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Lennon, “Screening a Digital Visual Poetics,” in *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. Eduardo Kac (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007), 266.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>21</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 130.

<sup>22</sup> Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 43.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>25</sup> Lydia H. Liu, *The Freudian Robot: Digital Media and the Future of the Unconscious* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>26</sup> Friedrich W. Block, "Eight Digits of Digital Poetics," *Dichtung Digital* 20, June 2001, <http://www.dichtung-digital.de/2001/10/17-Block/index2-engl.htm>.

## Notes to Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada: Die Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hanover: Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1920), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, "Dadaistisches Manifest," in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Arp, *Wortträume und schwarze Sterne: Auswahl aus den Gedichten der Jahre 1911-1952* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1953), 6–7.

<sup>4</sup> Arp, *Wortträume und schwarze Sterne*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Biro provides a helpful overview of the rise of mass media and its influence on Dada. See Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 84–96.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gisela Mütting, *Die Literatur "bemächtigt sich" der Reklame: Untersuchungen zur Verarbeitung von Werbung und werbendem Sprechen in literarischen Texten der Weimarer Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 64, 72.

<sup>7</sup> Hanne Bergius, "Dada, the Montage, and the Press," in *Dada, the Coordinates of Cultural Politics*, ed. Stephen C. Foster, Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 121.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Einbahnstrasse," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 95, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada*, 25–6.

<sup>11</sup> Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 91.

<sup>12</sup> Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1992), 106.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Einstein's satirical article "Ludendorffs Tagebuch," published in issue 3 of *Der blutige Ernst*, is an excellent example of this critical view: "Die Röllchen der gesicherten Artikelschreiber beben in emsiger Erregung, ihr unterernährtes Handgelenk wirft die Leute in den Tod." Carl Einstein, "Ludendorffs Tagebuch," in *Der blutige Ernst*, Reprint ed. (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1977), iv.

<sup>14</sup> Rudolf Kuenzli, ed., *Dada* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 2006), 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–7.

<sup>16</sup> Harald Maier-Metz, *Expressionismus, Dada, Agitprop: zur Entwicklung des Malik-Kreises in Berlin 1912-1924* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 189; Kurt Schwitters, *Merz 6* (Hanover, 1923), 64, <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/merz/6/index.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Richard Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2000), 135ff.

<sup>18</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Lichtreklame," in *Schriften 5.2: Aufsätze 1927-1931* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 19, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 255. Cf. also Malcolm Turvey: "Yet, as scholars have increasingly sought to show, there are more complex, nuanced positions within Dada, ones which do not condemn modernity wholesale, but which criticize one or more aspects of modernity, while embracing, even celebrating others." Malcolm Turvey, "Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the Rhythm Films of Hans Richter," *October* 105 (2003): 13.

<sup>20</sup> Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 153.

<sup>21</sup> See Mark A. Pegrum, *Challenging Modernity: Dada between Modern and Postmodern* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 80. Pegrum considers the competing accounts as "a Dada counter-history which turns our traditional concept of history into a farce."

<sup>22</sup> Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada 1918," *Dada* 3, December 1918, <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/dada/3/index.htm>.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Raimund Meyer, "'Dada ist gross Dada ist schön': Zur Geschichte von Dada Zürich," in *Dada in Zürich*, ed. Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno, and Raimund Meyer (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1985), 25–7; Raimund Meyer, "'Dada ist die Weltseele, Dada ist der Clou': Kleine Dada-Kosmologie," in *Dada Global*, ed. Raimund Meyer et al. (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1994), 32–40; Günther Eisenhuber, *Manifeste des Dadaismus: Analysen zu Programmatik, Form und Inhalt* (Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 2006), 22–4.

<sup>24</sup> Ernst Growald, "Namen und Ausstattungen," in *Die Reklame: Ihre Kunst und Wissenschaft*, ed. Paul Ruben, 4th ed. (Berlin: Hermann Paetel Verlag, 1914), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Raimund Meyer, ed., *Dada Global* (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1994), 282. See also Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), 208.

<sup>26</sup> Hugo Ball, "Eröffnungs-Manifest, 1. Dada-Abend," in *Dada in Zürich*, ed. Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno, and Raimund Meyer (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1985), 256. Meyer writes that Ball's is the only reference among the Dadaists to Bergmann's "Dada" products; however, it seems plausible that the phrase "Retten Sie Ihre Haare!!!!!!" on the cover of Richard Huelsenbeck's 1920 *En avant dada* is a less explicit allusion.

<sup>27</sup> Meyer, "Dada ist gross Dada ist schön," 26. A strong indication that the Dadaists, or at least certain Dadaists, did not have this brand in mind comes in a 1984 television interview with Marcel Janco, conducted by Peter Wehrli. When Wehrli presents Janco with a large reproduction of the "haarstärkendes Kopfwasser" advertisement, Janco reacts with what appears to be genuine surprise and amusement, responding, "Wir haben nichts davon gewusst. [...] Wir waren nicht so elegant, dass wir Haarwasser zu dieser Zeit benutzen konnten." Despite the frequently unreliable nature of the Dadaists' own accounts, Janco's reaction suggests that the advertisement is truly unfamiliar to him. Peter Wehrli, *"Dada lebt nicht nur, Dada blüht!": Marcel Janco im Gespräch* (Schweizer Fernsehen DRS, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada*, 6; Raoul Hausmann, "Dada in Europa," *Der Dada*, April 1920, 5. Hausmann's chronology is inconsistent with most accounts of the name's origins, which place its selection after the first Caberet Voltaire evenings.

<sup>29</sup> On the role of the machine in the work of Hausmann and other Dadaists, see the following: Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*; Krzysztof Fijalkowski, "Dada and the Machine," *Journal of European Studies* 17, no. 4 (January 1987): 233–251; Hanne Bergius, *"Dada Triumphs!": Dada Berlin 1917–1923*, trans. Brigitte Pichon, vol. 5, *Crisis and the Arts: the History of Dada* (New York: G.K. Hall, 2003), 213.

<sup>30</sup> A photograph of a wall advertisement for Bergmann & Co. in Zurich is reproduced in Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno, and Raimund Meyer, eds., *Dada in Zürich* (Zurich: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1985). Also typical of Dada's commercial gambits is Hausmann's insertion into the photograph of a wall advertisement for *391*, the magazine published by fellow Dadaist Francis Picabia.

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion of typewriter poems in Chapter Three.

<sup>32</sup> Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 1983), 21.

<sup>33</sup> Kuenzli, *Dada*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Meyer, *Dada Global*, 35–6.

<sup>36</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, "Erklärung," in *Dada: eine literarische Dokumentation*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984), 30.

<sup>37</sup> Eisenhuber, *Manifeste des Dadaismus*, 24.

<sup>38</sup> Tristan Tzara, "Introduction," in *L'aventure Dada, 1916–1922*, by Georges Hugnet (Paris: Galerie de l'Institut, 1957), 8.

<sup>39</sup> The phrase "Zauberliste der Werbung" is used by Meyer, who also discusses these cards. See Meyer, "Dada ist gross Dada ist schön," 48; Meyer, *Dada Global*, 24.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Meyer, *Dada Global*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, *Dada siegt!: Bilanz und Erinnerung* (Hamburg: Nautilus/Nemo Press, 1985), 30.

<sup>42</sup> Johannes Baader, "reklame für mich. (rein geschäftlich)," in *Der Dada*, ed. Raoul Hausmann, vol. 2, 1919, <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/2/index.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas: Die Berliner Dadaisten und ihre Aktionen* (Giessen: Anabas, 1989), 166.

- <sup>44</sup> Meyer, *Dada Global*, 13.
- <sup>45</sup> Reproduced in Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 366.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. Watts, *Dada and the Press*, 3.
- <sup>47</sup> Advertisements for “Reklame-Beratung” appeared in the May and June 1917 issues of *Neue Jugend*. See Chapter Two, as well as Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 90–9, for reproductions and discussion. The “Dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft” is discussed, with reproductions of materials dating from 1919 to 1921, in *ibid.*, 38–9. An advertisement for the Gesellschaft also appears in Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., *Dada Almanach* (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 157. The masthead of the second issue of Hausmann’s magazine *Der Dada* (discussed in greater detail below) appears to indicate that this magazine is published under the auspices of the “dada-Reklame-Gesellschaft,” although this alone should not be taken as conclusive evidence that such an organization actually existed; the Dadaists frequently provided misleading information about the provenance of their publications.
- <sup>48</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, “Eine Berechtigung,” *Die Aktion*, 1922, 49. See also Wieland Herzfelde, *Der Malik-Verlag 1916-1947: Ausstellungskatalog* (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, 1967), 26.
- <sup>49</sup> Anon., “Tretet Dada bei,” in *Der Dada No. 2*, ed. Raoul Hausmann, 1919, <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/2/index.htm>. This advertisement is also reproduced and discussed in Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 36–9.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Sherwin Simmons, “Advertising Seizes Control of Life: Berlin Dada and the Power of Advertising,” *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (January 01, 1999): 126–9.
- <sup>51</sup> Meyer, *Dada Global*, 32–3.
- <sup>52</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, *Zur Sache: geschrieben und gesprochen zwischen 18 und 80* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), 456.
- <sup>53</sup> Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 97. See also Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 39–41.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. Bergius, “Dada, the Montage, and the Press.”
- <sup>55</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, 366.
- <sup>56</sup> Reproduced in Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 39.
- <sup>57</sup> Simmons, “Advertising Seizes Control of Life,” 141.
- <sup>58</sup> Anon., “Intolerance at Zurich,” *The New York Times*, June 18, 1919, sec. Editorial. Reproduced in Watts, *Dada and the Press*, 390–2.
- <sup>59</sup> Isaac Goldberg, “Dada Putting the Jazz into Modern Verse: The Strange Cult Which Riots in Paradox and Negation, and Is the Dancing Spirit Over the Morals of the Earth, the Point of Indifference Between Contact and Form,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, 12 January 1921; reproduced in Watts, *Dada and the Press*, 395–400. Goldberg’s article is well worth reading for other insights into Dada, such as “Perhaps DADA is literature suffering from shell-shock, perhaps it is jazz in terms of words instead of tones.”
- <sup>60</sup> Adolf Behne, “Kitschkunst oder Kunstkitsch,” *Das Plakat* 11, no. 7 (July 1920): 306, 312. Cf. Sherwin Simmons, “Grimaces on the Walls: Anti-Bolshevist Posters and the Debate about Kitsch,” *Design Issues* 14, no. 2 (July 1, 1998): 33.
- <sup>61</sup> Ch(ristof) von Hartungen, *Psychologie der Reklame* (Stuttgart: C.E. Poeschel, 1926), 221–3.
- <sup>62</sup> Peter Behrens, *Über die Beziehungen der künstlerischen und technischen Probleme* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1917), 21.
- <sup>63</sup> See Eduard Platzhoff-Lejeune, *Die Reklame* (Stuttgart: Strecker & Schröder, 1909); Adolf Saager, *Die Kulturmission der Reklame* (München: Die Brücke, 1912); Ernst Growald, “Reklame-Kunst,” in *Die Reklame: Ihre Kunst und Wissenschaft*, ed. Paul Ruben, 4th ed. (Berlin: Hermann Paetel Verlag, 1914), 77–81.
- <sup>64</sup> Growald, “Reklame-Kunst,” 77.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Sherwin Simmons, “Ernst Kirchner’s Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immorality in Berlin, 1913–16,” *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 1 (2000): 136.
- <sup>66</sup> Julius Meier-Graefe, “Kunstbummel,” *Frankfurter Zeitung* (Frankfurt am Main, July 21, 1914), Morning edition, 2.
- <sup>67</sup> It should be noted that the Dadaists’ desire to set themselves apart from the Expressionists took shape as the movement itself developed. In May 1915, before Dada was founded, Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck had organized an “Expressionisten-Abend” in Berlin.

- <sup>68</sup> Alexander Partens, "Dada-Kunst," in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 84.
- <sup>69</sup> Raoul Hausmann, "Der deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich," *Der Dada*, December 1919, 1. For more on the Dadaists' criticism of Walden, which focused not only on his commercial exploitation of art, but also on his reactionary politics, see Barbara McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party: Art and Radicalism in Crisis, 1918 to 1936* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997), 23; Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 62.
- <sup>70</sup> Simmons, "Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers," 140.
- <sup>71</sup> An indication of the conceptual revolution that this represented was given by Willi Wolfradt in 1917. Although Wolfradt's assessment was critical, he clearly recognized the contrast between the Expressionists' employment of art in the service of commerce and the Dadaists' integration of the world of commerce into their artistic production: "Die Kunst im Dienst des Kaufmanns—das haben wir ja schon gehabt; aber diese Art, in durchgreifender Weise 'kulturschöpferisches Ungestüm' kommerziell auszubeuten, ist in der Tat neu zu nennen." Willi Wolfradt, "Neue Jugend," *Die Schaubühne*, June 21, 1917, 578.
- <sup>72</sup> Tzara, "Manifeste Dada 1918," 2.
- <sup>73</sup> Timothy Shipe, "The Dada Archive," *Books at Iowa*, 1982, <http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/spec-coll/bai/shipe.htm>.
- <sup>74</sup> Theo van Doesburg, "Charakteristik des Dadaismus," in *Manifeste und Proklamationen der europäischen Avantgarde (1909-1938)*, ed. Wolfgang Asholt and Walter Fähnders (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), 295.
- <sup>75</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951), 4.
- <sup>76</sup> Hans Arp, *Die Wolkenpumpe* (Hanover: Paul Steegemann, 1920), 7. The image here seems to be that of a child's paper cut-out sheet of the sort that could be included in advertising or promotional materials.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- <sup>78</sup> Cf. Robertson, *Arp*, 59.
- <sup>79</sup> Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 382.
- <sup>80</sup> John D. Erickson, *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 98.
- <sup>81</sup> Robertson, *Arp*, 39.
- <sup>82</sup> Ball, "Eröffnungs-Manifest, 1. Dada-Abend," 256.
- <sup>83</sup> See e.g. Harriett Watts, *Chance, a Perspective on Dada* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).
- <sup>84</sup> Hugo Ball, "Karawane," in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 53.
- <sup>85</sup> See John Elderfield, "Introduction," in *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, by Hugo Ball (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 25.
- <sup>86</sup> Cf. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, Centennial ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 19, 67.
- <sup>87</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 68.
- <sup>88</sup> René Milan, "On a French Cruiser in War Time," in *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, vol. 7 (New York: The New York Times Company, 1916), 312.
- <sup>89</sup> Cf. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.
- <sup>90</sup> Cf. Steven Heller, *Merz to Emigre and Beyond: Avant-Garde Magazine Design of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2003), 76.
- <sup>91</sup> Maria Gough, "Contains Graphic Material: El Lissitzky and the Topography of 'G'," in *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, ed. Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 43.
- <sup>92</sup> Cf. Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada* (Steinbach-Giessen: Anabas, 1980), 35–43.
- <sup>93</sup> Cf. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, 212. Discussing Morgenstern's "Das große Lalulā," Kittler writes, "No voice, however, can speak parentheses that enclose a semicolon [...] or even [...] brackets that surround an empty space."
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>95</sup> Kuenzli, *Dada*, 26.



<sup>96</sup> It should also be noted that Kuenzli offers no evidence for his claim that these posters were “hung all over Berlin.” This claim is contradicted by Barbara Lindlar, who writes: “So druckt Hausmann 1918 vier ‘Plakatgedichte’, die über die zufällige Zusammenstellung von Drucklettern entstehen. In dieser Form werden sie allerdings zunächst nicht ausgestellt oder genutzt, sondern ihre Einzelteile, meist einzelne Buchstaben, finden sich in den folgenden Jahren in Hausmanns dadaistischen Collagen.” Barbara Lindlar, “Raoul Hausmann und die Optophonie: Vom Maler zum Multimediakünstler,” in *Schrift, Zeichen, Geste: Carlfriedrich Claus im Kontext von Klee bis Pollock*, ed. Ingrid Mössinger and Brigitta Milde (Cologne: Wienand, 2005), 253.

<sup>97</sup> Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, 37.

<sup>98</sup> William Clauson-Thue, *The ABC Telegraphic Code*, 5th ed. (London: Eden Fisher, 1901), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Hayles, *How We Think*, 130–45.

<sup>100</sup> Lindlar, “Raoul Hausmann und die Optophonie,” 253. Cf. Alfred Döblin, “Futuristische Worttechnik. Offener Brief an F. T. Marinetti,” in *Der Sturm*, 1912, Nr. 150/1.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Höllerer and Norbert Miller, eds., *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, vol. 55: Dada - Neodada - Kryptodada - ? (Berlin, 1975), 295. The attribution in the journal reads: “mitgeteilt von Herbert Rosendorfer, stammt aus der Monographie ‘Tristan Tzara in Zürich’ von Dr. Benno Zwirnstener, erschienen 1922 im Kintisch-Verlag Rosenheim; völlig vergriffen.” If the final words were not enough to raise suspicion, the fictional status of this anecdote is confirmed by a Google search for “Benno Zwirnstener”: the only result is a 1972 article, also by Rosendorfer, that includes the sentence, “Der berufsmäßige Nörgler Benno Zwirnstener behauptet, ein Computer habe errechnet, daß insgesamt nur zwei Besucher zu den Olympischen Spielen nach München kämen.” Herbert Rosendorfer, “Grantiges Olympia (VI): Wie füllt man ein Stadion?” *Die Zeit*, July 28, 1972, sec. Lebensart, <http://www.zeit.de/1972/30/wie-fuellt-man-ein-stadion>. Zwirnstener, it seems, is a fictional figure to whom Rosendorfer attributed improbable statements on more than one occasion.

<sup>102</sup> Tristan Tzara, ed., *Dada*, 7 vols., 1917–1921 (Zurich and Paris), <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/dada/index.htm>; Raoul Hausmann, ed., *Der Dada*, 3 vols., 1919–1920 (Berlin), <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/index.htm>. A complete reprint of all 7 issues of *Dada*, including German and French variants, is found in Michel Giroud, ed., *Cabaret Voltaire; Der Zeltweg; Dada; Le Coeur à Barbe, 1916–1922* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1981).

<sup>103</sup> Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 204. Although this tendency is perhaps most pronounced in Tzara’s 1922 cover for *Le Coeur à Barbe*, a collaboration with Ilia Zdanevich that represents a point of transition from Dada to Surrealist design practices, it is visible to varying degrees in his earlier works as well.

<sup>104</sup> On the contrast between these issues, see Michel Giroud’s introduction, “DADERIDADA, chanson,” in Giroud, *Cabaret Voltaire; Der Zeltweg; Dada; Le coeur à barbe, 1916–1922*.

<sup>105</sup> Bolliger, Magnaguagno, and Meyer, *Dada in Zürich*, 174.

<sup>106</sup> Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 212.

<sup>107</sup> Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada*, 24. Ralph Manheim translates this as “found its way into every country in Europe and was widely purchased. We saw it in Germany, and it impressed us as commercial art and nothing else.” However, “Wir haben [...] gehabt” seems better translated as “We saw it as a true accomplishment in the applied arts,” an expression of approval of Tzara’s design, not condemnation of his commercial motives. The translation appears in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology, Second Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1989), 34.

<sup>108</sup> Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 215.

<sup>109</sup> Tristan Tzara, “Bulletin,” in *Dada 3*, ed. Tristan Tzara (Zurich: Administration Mouvement Dada, 1918), n.p., <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/dada/3/index.htm>.

<sup>110</sup> Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 210.

<sup>111</sup> Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Stammbäume der Kunst: zur Genealogie der Avantgarde* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2005), 221.

<sup>112</sup> Drucker, *The Visible Word*, 199–200, 193.

<sup>113</sup> Reinhart Meyer, *Dada in Zürich und Berlin: 1916–1920; Literatur zwischen Revolution und Reaktion* (Kronberg im Taunus: Scriptor-Verlag, 1973), 228.

<sup>114</sup> Richter, *Dada, Kunst und Antikunst: Der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 117.

<sup>115</sup> This reading seems more likely to me than Dieter Scholz's suggestion of "Elegie." See Dieter Scholz, *Pinsel und Dolch: Anarchistische Ideen in Kunst und Kunsttheorie 1840-1920* (Berlin: Reimer, 1999), 354.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Timothy O. Benson, "Conventions and Constructions: The Performative Text in Dada," in *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996), 101-103.

<sup>117</sup> See Norval Baitello, Jr., *Die Dada-Internationale: der Dadaismus in Berlin und der Modernismus in Brasilien* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987), 83-90; Michael Erlhoff, *Raoul Hausmann, Dadasoph: Versuch einer Politisierung der Ästhetik* (Hanover: Zweitschrift, 1982), 98; Scholz, *Pinsel und Dolch*, 356.

<sup>118</sup> It should be acknowledged that this reading leaves the last two letters in the series unaccounted for. Perhaps Baitello's emphasis on the mystical significance of the number 13 could provide the basis for an explanation of those extra letters.

<sup>119</sup> Lindlar, "Raoul Hausmann und die Optophonie," 252-3. My emphasis.

<sup>120</sup> Pegrum, *Challenging Modernity*, 264.

<sup>121</sup> Raoul Hausmann, *Courrier Dada* (Paris: Editions Allia, 2004), 157.

<sup>122</sup> Scholz writes, "Hier fällt es wesentlich schwerer als bei Ball, einen inhaltlichen Bezug zu konstruieren, etwa: Das Reich (lateinisch: Imperium) der Kommunistischen Partei (kp) möge untergehen (lateinisch: perire)." Scholz, *Pinsel und Dolch*, 370. Scholz's suggestion appears to be offered as an example of a type of reading that *could* be made, rather than one that he endorses himself; certainly it is improbable that Hausmann would be calling for the demise of the Communist Party, or referring to it as an "Empire." My reading, too, is meant only as a suggestion, but one that in my view possesses at least somewhat greater plausibility. It should also be noted that Hausmann's poem is structured at least in part by purely alphabetic play.

<sup>123</sup> Pegrum, *Challenging Modernity*, 217.

<sup>124</sup> Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, 251.

<sup>125</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Werke: Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand* (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1827), 172. This phrase appears to be original with Goethe, though it is used by other authors in later works: see e.g. Peter Jakob Schober, *Fibel für die evangelischen Volksschulen Württembergs* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1933), 111.

<sup>126</sup> Georg Simmel, "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," in *Die Grossstadt. Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Städteausstellung*, ed. Theodor Petermann, Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden 9 (Dresden: v. Zahn & Jaensch, 1903), 193-5.

<sup>127</sup> The most easily recognizable clippings in this photomontage are taken from the first two pages of the June 1917 issue of *Neue Jugend*. The title could be read as "The Tire Travels Round the World" or "The Soul Travels Round the World." See Ulrich Giersch and Ulrich Kubisch, *Gummi: die elastische Faszination* (Berlin: Nicolai Verlag, 1995), 198. "Mit dem Titel für die Montage 'Das Pneuma umreist die Welt' scheint John Heartfield (1891-1968) die Werbestrategien der Reifenfirmen ironisch zu erwidern. Er verwendet mit 'Pneuma' einen Begriff aus der abendländischen Philosophie, der in seiner ursprünglichen Bedeutung (bei den Naturphilosophen der Antike) mit 'Hauchseele' übersetzt werden kann."

<sup>128</sup> Benson, "Conventions and Constructions: The Performative Text in Dada," 103.

<sup>129</sup> Two other slogans – "Wo werden Sie die Ewigkeit zubringen? In Dr. Otto Burchard's DADA-Abenden" and "Du mußt Dr Otto Burchard werden" – refer to the art dealer who hosted the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* in his Berlin gallery from June 30 to August 25, 1920. The latter slogan is an obvious allusion to *Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, which was released in February 1920.

<sup>130</sup> Bergius, "Dada, the Montage, and the Press," 133; Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism*, 181.

<sup>131</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Die Kunst und die Künste," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Digitale Bibliothek 97 (Berlin: Directmedia, 2003), 450-1.

<sup>132</sup> Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 98.

<sup>133</sup> Pegrum, *Challenging Modernity*, 215.

<sup>134</sup> McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 267-8.

<sup>135</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 502-3.

<sup>136</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Der Autor als Produzent," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 692-3.

<sup>137</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Engagement," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Digitale Bibliothek 97 (Berlin: Directmedia, 2003), 430.

<sup>138</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 128.

## Notes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Franz Jung, *Der Weg nach unten: Aufzeichnungen aus einer großen Zeit* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1991), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Oskar Michel, *Handbuch deutscher Zeitungen 1917* (Berlin: Otto Elsner Verlagsgesellschaft M.B.H., 1917).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin: Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1982), 216.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Wieland Herzfelde, "Aus der Jugendzeit des Malik-Verlages. Zum Neudruck der Zeitschrift 'Neue Jugend'," in *Neue Jugend*, ed. Wieland Herzfelde (Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1967), 7; Jung, *Der Weg nach unten*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Wieland Herzfelde, *Zur Sache: geschrieben und gesprochen zwischen 18 und 80* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1976), 447. See also McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Frank Hermann, *Der Malik-Verlag 1916 - 1947: eine Bibliographie* (Kiel: Neuer Malik-Verlag, 1989), 135.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin*, 305–6.

<sup>9</sup> "Wir müssen deutsch schreiben," *Die Woche*, May 12, 1917, 664.

<sup>10</sup> "WORTreklame schlägt BILDreklame," *Neue Jugend*, May 23, 1917, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Sherwin Simmons, "Advertising Seizes Control of Life: Berlin Dada and the Power of Advertising," *Oxford Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 130.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes R. Becher, "An den Frieden," *Neue Jugend*, June 1916, 123.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hermann, *Der Malik-Verlag*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, *Der Malik-Verlag 1916-1947: Ausstellungskatalog* (Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, 1967), 23.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck, "Der Neue Mensch," *Neue Jugend*, May 23, 1917, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Eckhard Siepmann, *Montage, John Heartfield: vom Club Dada zur Arbeiter-Illustrierten Zeitung: Dokumente, Analysen, Berichte* (Berlin (West): Elefanten Press Galerie, 1977), 37. Harald Maier-Metz refers to these works as "Glossen": cf. Maier-Metz, *Expressionismus, Dada, Agitprop*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> George Grosz, "Kannst du radfahren?," *Neue Jugend*, June 1917, 1. This issue can be most easily accessed in electronic form in the archive *Der literarische Expressionismus Online*, De Gruyter Verlag.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Mahlberg, "Vom Plakat als Erzieher des Kunstsinns," *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration* 32 (1913): 200.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 630.

<sup>22</sup> Frederic J. Schwartz, "The Eye of the Expert: Walter Benjamin and the Avant Garde," *Art History* 24, no. 3 (June 1, 2001): 406. Schwartz describes *Einbahnstrasse* here as "Benjamin's statement of the path he had found out of the confines of older forms of cultural work that were no longer in harmony with the conditions of their own creation and consumption, conditions he was feeling acutely in his new career."

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 144.

<sup>24</sup> Brigid Doherty, "'See: 'We Are All Neurasthenics'!' or, the Trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (October 01, 1997): 93, 95.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 128–9.

<sup>27</sup> Bruno Taut, "Die Reklame als Schmuck des Straßenbildes," in *Bruno Taut in Magdeburg: eine Dokumentation: Projekte - Texte - Mitarbeiter*, ed. Annagret Nippa (Magdeburg: Stadtplanungsamt Magdeburg, 1995), 91.

- <sup>28</sup> Benjamin, "Einbahnstrasse," 131–2.
- <sup>29</sup> Ward, *Weimar Surfaces*, 128.
- <sup>30</sup> See e.g. George Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und ein großes Nein* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1974), 26; Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 166–75.
- <sup>31</sup> McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 24.
- <sup>32</sup> Since the bicycle boom of the 1890s, bicycling had grown "fast zu einem Synonym für die Tempobegeisterung und Nervosität der Zeit," serving not only as a means of transportation for individuals, but also as a key means of distribution for newspapers, as well as a spectator sport in the form of the *Sechstage-Rennen* and other competitions, many of which were sponsored by newspapers as a means of advertising. Grosz's appeal for greater engagement with popular media and entertainment thus culminates in the bicycle as a symbol that is inseparable from the cultural dominance of the newspaper. See Peter Borscheid, *Das Tempo-Virus: eine Kulturgeschichte der Beschleunigung* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2004), 187; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 107, 183.
- <sup>33</sup> George Grosz, "Abwicklung," *Das Kunstblatt*, February 1924, 37.
- <sup>34</sup> Jung, *Der Weg nach unten*, 113.
- <sup>35</sup> McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 48.
- <sup>36</sup> On this point see Harald Maier-Metz, *Expressionismus, Dada, Agitprop*, 150: "Die Ambivalenz dieser Provokationshaltung, nämlich Kunst als Warenangebot zu propagieren, liegt in der zunächst naiven Faszination von ihren eigenen satirischen Mitteln. Amerikanismen und Reklameelemente geraten nicht nur zur Kritik einer nur scheinbar kapitalistischer Kommerzialisierung des Lebens entzogenen Kunst und eines nationalistischen Kunstmythos, sondern auch zur unkritischen Mystifizierung Amerikas zum Eldorado von Moderne, Technik, Abenteuer, Geschäft und Sensation und zur ästhetischen Imitation der Werbung."
- <sup>37</sup> George Grosz, "Jugenderinnerungen," *Das Kunstblatt*, June 1929, 174.
- <sup>38</sup> George Grosz, "Man muß Kautschukmann sein!," *Neue Jugend*, June 1917, 1.
- <sup>39</sup> Cf. Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 12.
- <sup>40</sup> Theodor Däubler, "George Grosz," *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung*, November 1918, 153.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Ursula Renner, "Marsyas - Zeitschrift und Pathosformel des Expressionismus," in *Häutung - Lesarten des Marsyas-Mythos*, ed. Ursula Renner and Manfred Schneider (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006), 299.
- <sup>42</sup> Theodor Tagger, "Ankündigung," *Marsyas (Prospectus)*, May 1917, 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Theodor Tagger, diary entry from October 26, 1917, quoted in Renner, "Marsyas - Zeitschrift und Pathosformel des Expressionismus," 316.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>45</sup> Cf. Tagger, "Ankündigung," 10. Each issue appeared in an edition of 235, with 35 copies on Japanese paper and an additional 200 on handmade paper.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. Grosz, *Ein kleines Ja und ein großes Nein*, 183.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 94.
- <sup>48</sup> McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 12.
- <sup>49</sup> George Grosz, "Variété," *Neue Jugend*, June 1917, 4. Grosz had already paid tribute to the Ploetz-Larellas and other variété performers in his poem "Die Artisten." See George Grosz, "Die Artisten," *Neue Jugend*, February 1917, 237–40.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. McCloskey, *George Grosz and the Communist Party*, 129.

### Notes to Chapter Three

- <sup>1</sup> Emmett Williams, ed., *an anthology of concrete poetry* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), vi.
- <sup>2</sup> Eugen Gomringer, "vom vers zur konstellation," in *konkrete poesie: deutschsprachige autoren* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972), 157.
- <sup>3</sup> Eugen Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk, Vol. 2: Texte und Manifeste 1954-1997* (Vienna: Edition Splitter, 1997), 34. Gomringer would later make use of programmed and automated methods of composition in his work "wie weiß ist wissen die weisen"; see the discussion in the Chapter Five. It should be noted that the versions of Gomringer's essays published in the *Gesamtwerk* frequently differ from the original

publications. In some cases these variations are only typographic; however, for cases in which the content of the text is substantially revised, I will provide references to the original publication, or to an accurate reprint, wherever possible.

<sup>4</sup> Although this non-semantic tendency was certainly widespread in Concrete poetry, Mary Ellen Solt notes that it was not universal, writing of the Concrete poets: "They are disunited on the question of semantics: some insisting upon the necessity for poetry to remain within the communication area of semantics, others convinced that poetry is capable of transmitting new and other kinds of information—purely esthetic information." Mary Ellen Solt, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>7</sup> W. Terrence Gordon, "McLuhan's Compass for the Voyage to a World of Electric Words," in *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, by Marshall McLuhan, Centennial ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), xiv.

<sup>8</sup> For an extensive inventory of primary and secondary works related to Concrete poetry, see Kathleen McCullough, *Concrete Poetry: An Annotated International Bibliography* (Albany, NY: Whitston Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> The book included works in French as well as the German, English, and Spanish of the title. See Eugen Gomringer, *konstellationen constellations constelaciones* (Bern: Spiral Press, 1953).

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Gomringer's constellation "wind" and the later cycle "13 variationen des themas 'baum wind,'" Eugen Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk, Vol. 1: Vom Rand nach innen: die Konstellationen 1951-1995* (Vienna: Edition Splitter, 1995), 30, 242–55. The typographic experiments of Concrete poetry are exemplified by several works in the "Edition Rot" series published by Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther, such as Hansjörg Mayer, *alphabet*, Rot 13 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1964); Hansjörg Mayer, *alphabetenquadrate*, Rot 26 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1966); Klaus Burkhardt and Reinhard Döhl, *poem structures in the looking glass*, Rot 40 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1969). Other examples of spatially-oriented poems can be found in the anthology of Concrete poetry that Gomringer edited in 1972: Eugen Gomringer, ed., *konkrete poesie: deutschsprachige autoren* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972).

<sup>11</sup> Many examples can be found in Helmut Heißenbüttel, *Textbücher 1-6* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Solt identifies three primary categories of Concrete poems: visual, phonetic, and kinetic poems. See Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 59. For reasons of space, I will be focusing on visual poems in this chapter, with particular attention to typography. Further exploration of phonetic and kinetic poetry would offer additional insights into the relationship of Concrete poetry to other mass media, such as radio and television.

<sup>13</sup> The first issue of *konkrete poesie / poesia concreta*, published in 1960, included collaborators in Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Brazil, Italy, and Japan. The seventh issue, in 1965, added poets from England and Scotland. The slogan cited here appeared on the inside cover of most issues. Major international anthologies include Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther, eds., *konkrete poesie international*, Rot 21, 1965; Williams, *an anthology of concrete poetry*; Solt, *Concrete Poetry*.

<sup>14</sup> Gomringer, "vom vers zur konstellation," 159.

<sup>15</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Eugen Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung: Referat und Beispiele*, Vorspann 5 (Itzehoe: Hansen & Hansen, 1969), 10.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Thomas Kopfermann, *Konkrete Poesie: Fundamentalpoetik und Textpraxis einer Neo-Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter D. Lang, 1981), 142. Gomringer himself did not disguise his interest in behavioristic principles, writing in his 1956 essay "konkrete dichtung," "denn grundlage guter sprachlicher kommunikation sind analoge denkstruktur – oder behavioristisch gesprochen: analoge pattern-struktur – und analoge materielle (zeichen-) struktur," and in his 1963 radio essay "die konstellation – eine neue gedichtform," "ich wollte eine gedichtform präsentieren, die sich, statt eine trennung von kunst und leben zu beschwören, ähnlich verhält wie alltagstexte, wie schlagzeilen, wie wichtige mitteilungen, die wir auf flugplätzen, bahnhöfen, im verkehr, im grossbetrieb laufend wahrnehmen und die uns zu bestimmten wichtigen verhaltensweisen auffordern." Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 24; 46–7.

<sup>18</sup> Gomringer, "vom vers zur konstellation," 158.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Max Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik: Grundlegung und Anwendung in der Texttheorie* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), 135. "Das, was Eugen Gomringer die 'Konkrete

Konstellation' oder was Pierre Garnier 'textes dans l'espace' oder 'spatialisme' nennt, wird in den Kommunikationstexten unserer urbanistischen Systeme antizipiert."

<sup>20</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 12. Berold von der Auwera comments on the failure of Concrete poetry to make any significant impact on linguistic practice: see Berold van der Auwera, "Theorie und Praxis Konkreter Poesie," *Text + Kritik* no. 30: Konkrete Poesie II (April 1971): 36–7.

<sup>21</sup> Eugen Gomringer, *Eugen Gomringer: 1970-1972* (Planegg (Munich): Edition UND, 1973), n.p. The end of the poem is changed without comment in Gomringer's *Gesamtwerk* to read "von knall / zu knall // von dir / zu mir." This new ending suggests an entirely different reading of the airport as a site of connection rather than confusion. Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 1*, 130.

<sup>22</sup> This document is unfortunately lost, but the materials that survive indicate that it was meant to be not a verbal, but rather a visual language of form and motion. See Hans Richter, "Appendix: Demonstration of the 'Universal Language'," in *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Stephen C. Foster, trans. Harald Stadler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 184–239.

<sup>23</sup> Werner Graeff, "Wir wollen nicht laenger Analphabeten sein," *De Stijl* 7, no. 79–84 (1927): 578.

<sup>24</sup> In his 1964 essay "die konkrete poesie als ibernationale sprache" Gomringer specifically cited the influence of De Stijl and Bauhaus in the emergence of Concrete poetry as an international movement. See Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 54.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Harm G. Schröter, "Die Amerikanisierung der Werbung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 1 (1997): 93–115.

<sup>26</sup> Erik Elinder, "How International Can European Advertising Be?," *Journal of Marketing* 29, no. 2 (April 01, 1965): 7.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Elinder, "International Advertisers Must Devise Universal Ads," *The International Executive* 4, no. 1 (1962): 5–6. Elinder's first name is spelled "Eric" here, but appears more frequently as "Erik."

<sup>28</sup> Elinder, "How International Can European Advertising Be?," 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 11–2.

<sup>32</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 64. My emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Oliver Herwig, *Wortdesign: Eugen Gomringer und die bildende Kunst* (Munich: Iudicium, 2001), 21. "Gomringer bewegt sich rückblickend noch ganz auf der Ebene der 'universalen Gestaltung' und der aus der historischen Avantgarde übernommenen Vorstellung einer Veränderung der Gesellschaft durch die Gestaltung ihrer Umwelt."

<sup>34</sup> Ernst Jandl, "markierung einer wende," in *Sprechblasen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1979), 9; Helmut Heißenbüttel, "Deutschland 1944," in *Textbücher 1-6* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1980), 266–272.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Heimrad Bäcker, *Nachschrift* (Linz: Edition Neue Texte, 1986).

<sup>36</sup> Eugen Gomringer, "Wissen Sie etwas von der schwarzen Wand? Zu den beiden Bänden 'nachschrift' von Heimrad Bäcker," in *Heimrad Bäcker*, ed. Thomas Eder, *Die Rampe: Hefte für Literatur* (Linz: Trauner, 2001), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Riha, "Eugen Gomringer," in *Eugen Gomringer: Konkrete Poesie, 1952-1992*, ed. Peter Volkwein (Ingolstadt: Museum für Konkrete Kunst, 1992), n.p.

<sup>38</sup> Anna Katharina Schaffner, "Inheriting the Avant-Garde: On the Reconciliation of Tradition and Invention in Concrete Poetry," in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 109–10.

<sup>39</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 62.

<sup>41</sup> Helmut Heißenbüttel, *Über Literatur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1995), 78; Max Bense, "Die Gedichte der Maschine der Maschine der Gedichte: Über Computer-Texte," in *Die Realität der Literatur: Autoren und ihre Texte* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1971), 97. See also Siegfried J. Schmidt, "Seh-Anregungen," in *konkrete dichtung: texte und theorien*, ed. Siegfried J. Schmidt (Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch-Verlag, 1972).

<sup>42</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. On Behrens and Growald see Chapter One.

<sup>44</sup> Among Gomringer's projects at SIA was a short film, "schleifen," produced in 1964 as part of the company's anniversary celebration. The film was directed by Michael Wolgensinger, and Gomringer composed the text, which incorporates formal elements of Concrete poetry. At the beginning of the film, the word "schleifen" floats across the screen, along with translations into Italian, French, and English ("lisciare," "poncer," "finishing"). This minimal and multilingual approach is continued throughout. Although the film resembles older *Kulturfilme* in content (it primarily presents the production process in the SIA factory), it is distinguished from typical documentary films by the fact that the text is limited to individual words or phrases, with no complete propositions. I am grateful to Sybille Wullschleger at SIA for providing me with a copy of the film.

<sup>45</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 37–8. See also Herwig, *Wortdesign*, 150; Annemarie Bucher, *Spirale: eine Künstlerzeitschrift, 1953-1964* (Baden, Switzerland: Verlag Lars Müller, 1990), 153.

<sup>47</sup> Max Bense, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Elisabeth Walther, vol. 4, Poetische Texte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), 215. Cf. also Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 131; Anja Ohmer, *Textkunst: Konkretismus in der Literatur* (Berlin: Weidler Buchverlag, 2011), 77. As Ohmer notes, the text is also representative of the strong international current in Concrete poetry, drawing its words not only from Portuguese, but also from Latin and French.

<sup>48</sup> Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce, Bense identifies a sign as an icon "wenn eine Übereinstimmungsbeziehung derart existiert, daß Zeichen und Objekt mindestens ein Merkmal gemeinsam haben." Max Bense, "Konkrete Poesie," *Manuskripte: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst, Kritik* no. 11 (September 1964): 2. For Bense's view of the role of the icon in advertising, see Max Bense, *Aesthetica: Einführung in die neue Ästhetik* (Baden-Baden: Agis-Verlag, 1965), 307–8.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Bense, *Aesthetica*, 313.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in van der Auwera, "Theorie und Praxis Konkreter Poesie," 37–8.

<sup>52</sup> Urs Meyer, *Poetik der Werbung* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2010), 237.

<sup>53</sup> Ulrich Luetjohann, "Konkrete Poesie und Werbung," *diskus* 16, no. 6 (October 1966): 13–4.

<sup>54</sup> Döhl's poem appears in Gomringer, *konkrete poesie*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Reproduced in Knut Hickethier, Wolf Dieter Lützen, and Karin Reiss, eds., *Das deutsche Auto: Volkswagenwerbung und Volkskultur* (Wißmar: Anabas-Verlag Günter Kämpf KG, 1974), 136. See also Meyer, *Poetik der Werbung*, 143.

<sup>56</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 1*, 30. Rühm, "SONNE," in Peter Weibel, ed., *Die Wiener Gruppe = The Vienna Group: A Moment of Modernity 1954-1960: The Visual Works and the Actions*, La Biennale di Venezia (New York: Springer, 1997), 529.

<sup>57</sup> David Rosenthal, "Concretist Poets and Poetry," *Poetry* 112, no. 2 (May 01, 1968): 126. On the increasing dominance of image over text in the American advertising of the 1950s and 60s and its consequences for poetry, see Perloff, *Radical Artifice*. Perloff examines "the way poetry [...] has responded to what we might call the *videation* of our culture," citing Concrete poetry as one response, in which "the Image as referring to something in external reality is replaced by the word as Image." Ibid., 78.

<sup>58</sup> Luetjohann, "Konkrete Poesie und Werbung," 14.

<sup>59</sup> Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, 115–6, 119.

<sup>60</sup> A defense of Concrete poetry's critical potential, with a focus on its denaturalization of language, can be found in Christina Weiss, *Seh-Texte: Zur Erweiterung des Textbegriffes in konkreten und nach-konkreten visuellen Texten* (Zirndorf: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 1984), 112–6.

<sup>61</sup> In his 1956 essay "konkrete dichtung," Gomringer writes: "die inhaltsfrage ist für den konkreten dichter eng verbunden mit der frage nach der lebenshaltung, in welche die kunst wirksam mit einbezogen ist. *seine lebenshaltung ist positiv, synthetisch-rationalistisch. so auch seine dichtung.*" Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 23. My emphasis. Similarly, in his 1960 essay "weshalb wir unsere dichtung 'konkrete dichtung' nennen," Gomringer approvingly cites Max Bill's view "dass das kunstwerk durch seine konzeption *ein bewusstes aktives ja zum zeitgeschehen ist*, und zwar dadurch, dass an die stelle vorwiegend persönlich-psychischer vorgänge das gesetz tritt, das, auf breiterer erfahrung basierend, allgemeingültigkeit besitzt." Ibid., 34. My emphasis.

<sup>62</sup> Carole Anne Taylor, *A Poetics of Seeing: The Implications of Visual Form in Modern Poetry* (New York: Garland, 1985), 234.

<sup>63</sup> Kopfermann, *Konkrete Poesie: Fundamentalpoetik und Textpraxis einer Neo-Avantgarde*, 244.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter One of this dissertation. Cf. also Huelsenbeck: “Da Dada der direkteste und lebendigste Ausdruck seiner Zeit ist, wendet es sich gegen alles, was ihm obsolet, mumienhaft, festsitzend erscheint.” Richard Huelsenbeck, “Einleitung,” in *Dada Almanach*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 4.

<sup>65</sup> These translations are given in Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 14; 108; 259. Solt’s anthology reproduces the poem in its original red and white color scheme, highlighting the visual connection to Coca-Cola. This poem was known to at least a small group of German-language readers: it appeared in 1959 in the Munich-based student magazine *nota*. Décio Pignatari, “beba coca cola,” *nota: studentische zeitschrift für bildende kunst und dichtung*, July 1959, 12.

<sup>66</sup> Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, 117–8, 119.

<sup>67</sup> For further discussion, together with a reproduction of this advertisement, see John M. Tolman, “The Context of a Vanguard: Toward a Definition of Concrete Poetry,” *Poetics Today* 3, no. 3: Poetics of the Avant-Garde (Summer 1982): 160–2.

<sup>68</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 1*, 124.

<sup>69</sup> Meyer, *Poetik der Werbung*, 302.

<sup>70</sup> Media representations of gender are a concern of many of these collages, several of which feature photographs of nude women, or in one case, six photographs of women’s faces with expressions on the border between anguish and ecstasy, with the text “Wir müssen das.” Gerhard Rühm, *Gesammelte Werke 2.1: Visuelle Poesie*, ed. Monika Lichtenfeld (Berlin: Parthas, 2006), 259.

<sup>71</sup> See *Ibid.*, 280–4.

<sup>72</sup> Franz Mon, *ainmal nur das alphabet gebrauchen* (Stuttgart: Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 1967), 37–8.

<sup>73</sup> For examples, see *Ibid.*, 25–38; Franz Mon, *Gesammelte Texte 2: Poetische Texte 1951-1970* (Berlin: Janus Press, 1995), 12–6. “Schriftcollage” is reproduced in Williams, *an anthology of concrete poetry*, n.p.

<sup>74</sup> Mon, *ainmal nur das alphabet gebrauchen*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> On the critical dimension of these texts, cf. Franz Mon, *Gesammelte Texte 1: Essays* (Berlin: Janus Press, 1994), 81. “Durch die Bürokratien, die Zeitungen, die Reklame beherrscht uns das Geschriebene.”

<sup>76</sup> Franz Mon, “Wortschrift Bildschrift,” *Text + Kritik* Sonderband 9. Visuelle Poesie (1997): 8.

<sup>77</sup> Helmut Heißenbüttel led the “Radio-Essay” division of the Süddeutscher Rundfunk in Stuttgart from 1959 to 1981, and over 50 *Hörspiele* were produced by authors associated with the Stuttgarter Gruppe, including 34 by Max Bense alone. See Hansgeorg Schmidt-Bergmann and Peter Kohl, *Ein Bild der Zeit: Literatur in Baden-Württemberg 1952-1970* (Karlsruhe: Info Verlag, 2002), 98; Reinhard Döhl, “Der Kreis um Max Bense,” *Als Stuttgart Schule machte*, accessed July 14, 2012, <http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/bensekreis.htm>.

<sup>78</sup> Döhl, “Der Kreis um Max Bense.”

<sup>79</sup> Jesper Olsson, “Kneaded Language: Concrete Poetry and New Media in the Swedish 1960s,” *Modernism/modernity* 18, no. 2 (2011): 276.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, 115. “[The Concrete poem] is able to eliminate subjectivity—what we now call the author function—in favor of material construction.”

<sup>81</sup> Mon, *Gesammelte Texte 1: Essays*, 113.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>83</sup> Helmut Heißenbüttel, *Was ist das Konkrete an einem Gedicht?* (Verlag Hansen & Hansen: Itzehoe, 1969), 18–9.

<sup>84</sup> Gomringer, “vom vers zur konstellation,” 155.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *A Poetics of Seeing*, 229.

<sup>86</sup> Typescripts of two poems by Raoul Hausmann, “lausbumchen” (1926) and “quadrat” (1928), are found in the Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry. “lausbumchen” employs the sort of permutation frequently used in Concrete poems, while “quadrat” creates shapes out of the letters that spell their names. The typescripts found in the archive are presumably later copies, as they are filed with other poems typed on the same paper stock dating from 1957 and 1965. However, there is no reason to doubt that the dates



reflect their actual year of composition. Schwitters' "Sound poem and papers" (ca. 1922) can be found in the catalog *Dada Artifacts* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Museum of Art, 1978), 64.

<sup>87</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, "Das Schreibmaschinchen," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, May 01, 1927; Siegfried Kracauer, "Das Schreibmaschinchen," in *Schriften 5.2: Aufsätze 1927-1931* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 49. Michael Böhler describes this passage as "Literaturhistorisch gelesen ein Rückgriff auf die romantische Chiffreschrift, die den Feuilletonbetrieb der Moderne subvertiert und gleichzeitig die Verbindung zur Avantgarde, zur 'écriture automatique' und zur konkreten Lyrik schlägt." Michael Böhler, "Digitale Fingerübungen auf traurigen Tasten - eine Fussnote für Schreibhandwerker," in *Von Goethe bis Hyperfiction: Michael Böhler zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Stefan Hofer et al. (<http://www.ginkgo.ch>, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, "Einbahnstrasse," 105.

<sup>89</sup> The extent to which the typewriter influences the poems composed on it is discussed by Solt, who writes of the American poet Aram Saroyan, "If its typeface, 'standard pica,' were different, he believes that he would write '(subtly) different poems.'" Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 58.

<sup>90</sup> Mon, "Wortschrift Bildschrift," 13.

<sup>91</sup> Wellbery, "Foreword," xxx.

<sup>92</sup> Reproduced in Williams, *an anthology of concrete poetry*, n.p.

<sup>93</sup> Reproduced in Gomringer, *konkrete poesie*, 29. An English translation by Emmett Williams, "rendering the legible illegible," appears in Williams, *an anthology of concrete poetry*, n.p.

<sup>94</sup> Claus Bremer, *Farbe bekennen: mein Weg durch die konkrete Poesie* (Zurich: Orte-Verlag, 1983), 39–40.

<sup>95</sup> Williams, *an anthology of concrete poetry*, n.p.

<sup>96</sup> Gomringer, *konkrete poesie*, 63–4. Like the majority of Gomringer's works, "kein fehler im system" is generally set in Helvetica, and not reproduced photographically from a typescript. Nevertheless, the poem's structure reflects the influence of the typewriter as an instrument of composition. Gomringer confirmed in an e-mail that this poem, like most of his work, was composed on a typewriter: "ICH SCHREIB MEIST MIT DER TREUEN 'GABRIELE 10' DER FIRMA TRIUMPH: DER SCHREIBPROZESS FAND OFT ZUERST ALS NOTATION EINIGER WORTE IN HANDSCHRIFT AUF DER REISE STATT; ABER BESTÄTIGT WURDEN DIE EINFÄLLE DURCH DIE GABRIELE 10." E-mail to the author, September 29, 2012.

<sup>97</sup> Mon, *Gesammelte Texte 2*, 134–43. As Solt writes, "Mon's visual texts are representative of a new type of non-semantic poetry being created also by poets in other countries." Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 18.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Mayer, *alphabet*.

<sup>99</sup> Burkhardt and Döhl, *poem structures in the looking glass*, n.p.

<sup>100</sup> Mayer, *alphabetenquadrate*.

<sup>101</sup> Among those who voice skepticism about the status of these works as poetry (though without fully dismissing it) are Christian Wagenknecht, who writes "Sie werden versucht sein, solche Gebilde nicht mehr als Dichtung, und wenn denn schon ein Name nötig wäre, lieber als Schreibmaschinengraphik zu bezeichnen. Aber es ist die Frage, ob damit viel gewonnen und mehr gesagt ist als: daß sich diese sogenannte Dichtung graphischer Darstellungsweisen bedient," and Carole Ann Taylor, who asks, "under what circumstances does a combination of visual and verbal media achieve the status of poetry and under what circumstances does [sic] the logic of vision and that of language interfere with each other in ways that cannot convincingly be labeled 'poetic'?" Christian Wagenknecht, "Konkrete Poesie," in *Der Berliner Germanistentag 1968: Vorträge und Berichte*, ed. Karl Heinz Borck and Rudolf Henss (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), 221; Taylor, *A Poetics of Seeing*, 109.

<sup>102</sup> Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 64.

<sup>103</sup> Ohmer, *Textkunst: Konkretismus in der Literatur*, 132–3.

<sup>104</sup> Ferdinand Kriwet, *poem-paintings, buttons, signs, flags: 1966-67* (Düsseldorf: Galerie Niepel, 1967), n.p. See also Reinhard Döhl, "Texte Und Kommentare (1)," *Reinhard Doehl*, April 07, 1971, [http://www.reinhard-doehl.de/pd\\_textkomm1.htm](http://www.reinhard-doehl.de/pd_textkomm1.htm); Klaus Peter Dencker, "Drei Kapitel zur Visuellen Poesie," in *Tecken: lettres, signes, écritures: Malmö Konsthall 1978*, ed. Roberto Altmann (Malmö: Malmö Konsthall, 1978), 64.

<sup>105</sup> Ferdinand Kriwet, *COM.MIX: die Welt der Bild- und Zeichensprache* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1972), n.p.

<sup>106</sup> Kriwet, *poem-paintings*, n.p. Cf. also Sven Beckstette, “Vom Wortbild zum Bildwort - und darüber hinaus: Ferdinand Kriwets Ausstieg aus dem Buch,” in *Kriwet: Yester 'n' Today* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2011), 46.

<sup>107</sup> The printing process is briefly described in Ferdinand Kriwet, *leserattenfaenge: sehtextkommentare* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1965), 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> This comparison is reinforced by the recent reissue of several of Kriwet’s audio works in vinyl format on picture discs printed with these *Rundscheiben*. Ferdinand Kriwet, *Hörtexte - Radiotexts* (Berlin: Edition RZ, 2007).

<sup>110</sup> Kriwet, *leserattenfaenge*, 19.

<sup>111</sup> Kriwet argues in *leserattenfaenge* that a complete abandonment of semantics is impossible: “Zwar kann ich mit der Sprache gegen erstarrte Sinngefüge arbeiten oder die Sprache entgegen ihren semantischen Funktionen verwenden, von der Syntax ganz abgesehen, unmöglich aber ist es, Semantik überhaupt abzuschaffen, solange mit Sprache operiert und experimentiert wird.” *Ibid.*, 18. Mon’s more extreme typographic experiments might be seen as a challenge to Kriwet’s argument.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>113</sup> Kriwet, *poem-paintings*, n.p.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Ferdinand Kriwet, *Apollo Amerika* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969); Ferdinand Kriwet, *Apollo Amerika: Hörtext VI* (Regensburg: edition rz, 2007); Ferdinand Kriwet, *Apollovision* (Westdeutsches Fernsehen, 1969), [http://ubu.com/film/kriwet\\_apollo.html](http://ubu.com/film/kriwet_apollo.html).

<sup>116</sup> This commentary is included in the liner notes of the 2007 vinyl reissue of the audio recording. Kriwet, *Hörtexte - Radiotexts*, 1.

<sup>117</sup> Kriwet, *Apollovision*, 8:35–8:53.

<sup>118</sup> Beate Ermacora and Gregor Jansen, “Vorwort,” in *Kriwet: Yester 'n' Today* (Düsseldorf: Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 2011), 6.

<sup>119</sup> R.V.L. Hartley, “Transmission of Information,” *Bell System Technical Journal* (July 1928): 535.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 538.

<sup>123</sup> Claude E. Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Warren Weaver, “Some Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication,” in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, by Claude E. Shannon (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3–28.

<sup>124</sup> Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 31.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>126</sup> Perloff, *Radical Artifice*, 184.

<sup>127</sup> Solt, for instance, writes that the concrete poem: “can be thought of as a kind of shorthand, a telegraphic message.” Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Weaver, “Some Recent Contributions to the Mathematical Theory of Communication,” 11.

<sup>129</sup> Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 43–4.

<sup>130</sup> On the inclusion of Shannon’s texts in the exhibition, see Döhl, “Der Kreis um Max Bense.” Bense mentions Shannon’s approximations in texts including the following: Max Bense, “Text und Kontext,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 4, no. 1 (1959): 46; Max Bense, *Modelle*, Rot 6 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1961), n.p.; Bense, *Aesthetica*, 336; Max Bense, “Ästhetik und Programmierung,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, ed. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, *Kaleidoskopien* 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 209–13.

<sup>131</sup> Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 70.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>134</sup> On redundancy, see also Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965), 96; James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), 158.

<sup>135</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 24. As Lothar Bornscheuer writes, “auch normative Aspekte der modernen Sprachwissenschaft und Informationstheorie” “spielen in [Gomringers] Arbeiten und Manifesten eine Rolle (besonders seit der gemeinsamen Zeit mit Max Bense in Ulm).” Lothar Bornscheuer, “Das Gedicht als ‘Gebrauchsgegenstand’: Über Eugen Gomringer,” *Akzente: Zeitschrift für Literatur*, October 1970, 418.

<sup>136</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 23.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>138</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 1*, 16; Hans Hofer, “schnee,” *spirale* no. 3 (1954): 19.

<sup>139</sup> See e.g. Ohmer, *Textkunst: Konkretismus in der Literatur*, 112.

<sup>140</sup> The text is reproduced in Gomringer, *konkrete poesie*, 38. Döhl’s “Apfel mit Wurm,” written in 1965, has a clear formal predecessor in Agno Stowitsch’s “Ei Dotter,” which was first published in *diskus* in 1963, and reproduced in Luetjohann, “Konkrete Poesie und Werbung,” 14.

<sup>141</sup> Gomringer, *Gesamtwerk 2*, 42.

<sup>142</sup> Gomringer, *Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung*, 39.

<sup>143</sup> Franz Mon, “Über konkrete Poesie,” in *Gesammelte Texte 1: Essays* (Berlin: Janus Press, 1994), 107.

<sup>144</sup> Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1968), 72. Bense distinguishes between “semantische Information” and “ästhetische Information,” identifying the former as “erkennbare Bedeutung,” and the latter as “wahrnehmbare künstlerische Gestaltung.” Bense, *Aesthetica*, 313.

#### Notes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, eds., “Philosoph in technischer Zeit - Stuttgarter Engagement.” Interview mit Elisabeth Walter am 28. November 2003 in Stuttgart, Teil 2,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 65.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Abraham A. Moles, *erstes manifest der permutationellen kunst*, trans. Monika Bense, Renate Kübler, and Elisabeth Walther, Rot 8 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1962); Wilhelm Fucks, “Analysen formaler Eigenschaften von Texten mit mathematischen Hilfsmitteln,” in *Der Berliner Germanistentag 1968: Vorträge und Berichte*, ed. Karl Heinz Borck and Rudolf Henss (Heidelberg: Winter, 1970), 42–52. For Bense’s treatment of Moles and Fucks, respectively, see e.g. Max Bense, “Das Existenzproblem in der Kunst,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 3, no. 1 (1958): 4–11; Max Bense, “Klassifikation in der Literaturtheorie,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 3, no. 2 (1958): 4–16.

<sup>3</sup> Bense, *Aesthetica*, 259.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Max Bense, “Helmut Heißenbüttels ‘Textbuch 2,’” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 5, no. 3/4 (1961): 104.

<sup>5</sup> Max Bense, “projekte generativer ästhetik,” in *computer-grafik*, Rot 19 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1965), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Max Bense, *20. Juli 1944*, Rot 4 (Siegen: Verlag der Augenblick, 1961); Max Bense, *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur. Monolog der Terry Jo in Mercey Hospital*, Rot 11 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1963); Bense and Harig, “Der Monolog der Terry Jo.” In the following discussion, I will use the title *Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur* when referring only to the 1963 book, and *Der Monolog der Terry Jo* when referring only to the 1968 radio play. When my comments apply to both the book and the radio play, I will simply refer to *Terry Jo*. Because the original 1963 publication is unpaginated, my citations will refer to the following edition: Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur.”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 92.

<sup>8</sup> Max Bense, “Textästhetik,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, ed. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 107.

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> Bense, *Modelle*, n.p.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 48–9.
- <sup>12</sup> Bense, “Existenzproblem,” 6.
- <sup>13</sup> In his *Aesthetica*, Bense refers to the “Unwahrscheinlichkeit in den ästhetischen Prozessen,” but also describes the aesthetic state as “neu, überraschend, unvorhersehbar.” Bense, *Aesthetica*, 219, 266. Although Bense seems to use the concepts of improbability and unpredictability interchangeably here, the two terms are not identical. The characterization of a high-information state as an improbable one, a state of greater than usual order, is compatible with the information theory of Norbert Wiener, who drew a contrast between an ordered, high-information state and an entropic, low-information state. Cf. Wiener, *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Shannon, on the other hand, considered an entropic state to contain the greatest amount of information, because it is impossible to predict any given bit of data on the basis of the bits preceding it. Consequently, a high-information state is characterized for Wiener by its improbability, but for Shannon by its unpredictability.
- <sup>14</sup> Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 31.
- <sup>15</sup> On Hartley see Chapter Three.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*.
- <sup>17</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 77. Emphasis in the original.
- <sup>18</sup> Helmar Frank and Brigitte Frank-Böhringer, “Zur geschichtlichen und systematischen Bedeutung der Informationsästhetik für die kybernetische Pädagogik,” in *muster möglicher welten: eine anthologie für max bense*, ed. Elisabeth Walther and Ludwig Harig (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1970), 46.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Fucks, “Analysen formaler Eigenschaften von Texten mit mathematischen Hilfsmitteln,” 44ff.
- <sup>20</sup> Max Bense, “Der geistige Mensch und die Technik,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, ed. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, *Kaleidoskopien* 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 40.
- <sup>21</sup> Bense, *Aesthetica*, 266.
- <sup>22</sup> Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 72.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Utz Maas and Dieter Wunderlich, *Pragmatik und sprachliches Handeln*, 3rd ed., Athenaion-Skripten Linguistik 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag GmbH, 1974), 38.
- <sup>25</sup> Max Bense, *experimentelle schreibweisen*, Rot 17 (Stuttgart: Edition Rot, 1964), n.p.
- <sup>26</sup> Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 71.
- <sup>27</sup> Hans-Christian von Herrmann, “Eine Topographie möglicher Worte und Sätze. Max Benses ‘Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft’,” *Archiv für Mediengeschichte* 7 (2007): 157.
- <sup>28</sup> Max Bense, “Movens. Experimentelle Literatur,” *Grundlagenstudien aus Kybernetik und Geisteswissenschaft* 1, no. 1 (October 1960): 125.
- <sup>29</sup> Max Bense, *Grignan-Serie: Beschreibung einer Landschaft*, Rot 1 (Siegen: Verlag der Augenblick, 1960), n.p.
- <sup>30</sup> Bense, “Der geistige Mensch und die Technik,” 41.
- <sup>31</sup> Cf. Max Bense, *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1962), 16, 39, 118.
- <sup>32</sup> Herrmann, “Eine Topographie möglicher Worte und Sätze,” 156.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 155.
- <sup>34</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 92.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 92–3.
- <sup>36</sup> Cf. Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 43.
- <sup>37</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 95.
- “Die Gedichte der Maschine” 95.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 81.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., 96.
- <sup>40</sup> Bense frequently distinguished between the “natural” texts of human authors and the “synthetic” texts generated in the computer experiments that he supervised, which will be discussed in the next chapter. See e.g. Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 112.
- <sup>41</sup> Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur,” 144.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>45</sup> Bense wrote in his 1961 book *Modelle*: “Abstrakte Texte sind Texte, die an die Stelle konkreter substantivischer, verbaler, adverbaler oder adjektivischer Bedeutungen Variablen enthalten. Konkrete Texte hingegen sind Texte, die in stärkstem Maße auf genau diese konkreten substantivistischen, verbalen, adverbaler oder adjektivisch auftretenden Daten oder ihre linearen und flächigen Systeme reduziert sind.” Bense, *Modelle*, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur,” 150.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 153, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 37.

<sup>50</sup> Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur,” 171.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Bernhard Siegert, “Die Geburt der Literatur aus dem Rauschen der Kanäle: Zur Poetik der phatischen Funktion,” in *Electric Laokoon: Zeichen und Medien, von der Lochkarte zur Grammatologie*, ed. Michael Franz et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), 38.

<sup>52</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 93.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 93–5; Bense and Harig, “Der Monolog der Terry Jo,” 59–62.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*, 40–5.

<sup>55</sup> Max Bense, “Neue Textsorten,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 5, no. 1 (1961): 24.

<sup>56</sup> Bernhard Siegert, “Cacography or Communication? Cultural Techniques in German Media Studies,” trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, *Grey Room* (October 01, 2007): 41.

<sup>57</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 96.

<sup>58</sup> Bense, *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft*, 82.

<sup>59</sup> Bense, “Vielleicht zunächst wirklich nur,” 175. My emphasis.

<sup>60</sup> Tere Duperrault Fassbender (née Terry Jo Duperrault), quoted in Mike Celizic, “Murder Rampage Left Girl Orphaned and Adrift,” *Today.com*, May 06, 2010, [http://www.today.com/id/36985423/site/todayshow/ns/today-today\\_news/t/murder-rampage-left-girl-orphaned-adrift/#.UI7FTRiZMq8](http://www.today.com/id/36985423/site/todayshow/ns/today-today_news/t/murder-rampage-left-girl-orphaned-adrift/#.UI7FTRiZMq8).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. “July Plot (German History) -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed February 04, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/308021/July-Plot>. According to Elisabeth Walther, Bense’s assistant and later wife, the German short-wave technology laboratory in which Bense worked during the war had provided one of the conspirators, Wilhelm Franz Canaris, with transmitters to assist him in his efforts. Cf. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, eds., “‘Ab morgen Philosophie’ - Begegnung in Jena. Interview mit Elisabeth Walter am 28. November 2003 in Stuttgart, Teil 1,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Bense, *20. Juli 1944*, n.p.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> This theme is alluded to in Bense’s *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft* as well, where he writes: “Wie kann ich denn mit der Sprache zwischen Schmerzäußerung und den Schmerz treten wollen [...] Die Sprache der Zerrissenheit aber ist die vollkommene Sprache.” Bense, *Entwurf einer Rheinlandschaft*, 14–5.

<sup>65</sup> Bense, *20. Juli 1944*, n.p.

<sup>66</sup> Hermann Rotermund, “Keine Anrufung des großen Bären: Max Bense als Wegbereiter für Konkrete Poesie und Netzliteratur,” *Radio Bremen*, 2001, [http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/01\\_08\\_20bense\\_rb.html](http://www.stuttgarter-schule.de/01_08_20bense_rb.html).

## Notes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> Scott McCartney, quoted in Loss Pequeño Glazier, *Digital Poetics: The Making Of E-Poetries* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2008), 41; Kurt Vonnegut, “Epicac,” in *Welcome to the Monkey House: Stories* (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 1998), 297–305.

<sup>2</sup> Vonnegut, “Epicac,” 299.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 304–5.

<sup>5</sup> A. M. Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” *Mind* LIX, no. 236 (1950): 433.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Jefferson, “The Mind Of Mechanical Man,” *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4616 (June 25, 1949): 1110. Cited in Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” 445.

<sup>10</sup> Turing, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” 445.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 446. The “Witness” here is the computer.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 446–7.

<sup>13</sup> A more conventional reflection on the computer’s capacity to think, and to write poetry, is found in Manfred Krause and Götz F. Schaudt, *Computer-Lyrik. Poesie aus dem Elektronenrechner* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1967), 8. Krause and Schaudt do not cite Turing by name, but the question that they raise is fundamentally the same. However, they arrive at a more modest conclusion: “Es ist jedoch evident, daß auf elektronischen Datenverarbeitungsanlagen entstandene Kompositionen, Graphiken oder auch Gedichte keine Früchte maschineneigener Denkpoteenz sind. Allenfalls kann man diesen Maschinen eine artifizielle Intelligenz zusprechen, die das menschliche Denken simuliert.”

<sup>14</sup> While this chapter makes no claim to comprehensiveness, an impression of the breadth and diversity of the field can be found in print and digital works such as the following: C.T. Funkhouser, *New Directions in Digital Poetry* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Eduardo Kac, ed., *Media Poetry: An International Anthology* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007); Glazier, *Digital Poetics*; Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss, *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); “Netzliteratur.net,” *Netzliteratur // Internetliteratur // Hyperfiction // Netzkunst*, accessed October 24, 2010, <http://www.netzliteratur.net/>; N. Katherine Hayles et al., eds., *Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), <http://collection.eliterature.org/1/>; Laura Borràs et al., eds., *Electronic Literature Collection*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Electronic Literature Organization, 2011), <http://collection.eliterature.org/2/>.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Sabrina Ortmann, *Netz Literatur Projekt: Entwicklung einer neuen Literaturform von 1960 bis heute* (Berlin: Berlinerzimmer.de, 2001); Beat Suter, “Von Theo Lutz zur Netzliteratur: Die Entwicklung der deutschsprachigen elektronischen Literatur,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 2012, [http://www.netzliteratur.net/suter/Geschichte\\_der\\_deutschsprachigen\\_Netzliteratur.pdf](http://www.netzliteratur.net/suter/Geschichte_der_deutschsprachigen_Netzliteratur.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Theo Lutz, “Stochastische Texte,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 4, no. 1 (1959): 3–7; Theo Lutz, “Stochastische Texte. Auswahl,” *Augenblick: Zeitschrift für aktuelle Philosophie, Ästhetik, Polemik* 4, no. 1 (1959): 8–9. Bense, despite his interest in new technologies, never learned to program a computer himself; as Walther would later confirm in an interview, Bense was a “reiner Theoretiker der Maschine.” Quoted in Büscher, Herrmann, and Hoffmann, “‘Philosoph in technischer Zeit’,” 67.

<sup>17</sup> Lutz, “Stochastische Texte,” 6.

<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Walther, quoted in “Maschinensprache - Nachrichten aus der ‘Galeere’.” Interview mit Elisabeth Walther, Walter Knödel und Rul Gunzenhäuser am 27. November 2003 in Stuttgart,” in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 136.

<sup>19</sup> Lutz, “Stochastische Texte. Auswahl,” 8.

<sup>20</sup> Lutz, “Stochastische Texte,” 6.

<sup>21</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 74–5. My emphasis.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 91. Cf. also Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 110. “Was aber schließlich den ästhetischen Zustand des Textes anbetrifft, so muß man davon ausgehen, daß es sich, wie es aus den Theoremen der statistischen Informationsästhetik folgt, bei ihm um einen Zustand unwahrscheinlicher, stark selektierter, nichttrivialer Wortfolgen handelt.”

<sup>23</sup> Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 110–11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 112. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>25</sup> Bense, “Die Gedichte der Maschine,” 77.

<sup>26</sup> Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 109. Emphasis in the original. An interesting, though in my view not entirely convincing, attempt to relate Bense's categories of "natural" and "synthetic" poetry to older Romantic and avant-garde traditions can be found in Peter Gendolla, "'No Preexistent World': On 'Natural' and 'Artificial' Forms of Poetry," in *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*, ed. Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 365–90.

<sup>27</sup> Lutz, "Stochastische Texte," 6.

<sup>28</sup> The reproductions are taken from the following sources: Lutz, "Stochastische Texte. Auswahl," 8; Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, eds., *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 169.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 133. "Even with computer-generated texts, though the program determines the generated text, the programmer chooses the input data and the procedure to be used."

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Christian von Herrmann, "Künstliche Kunst – eine strukturalistische Tätigkeit," in *Generative Computergraphik*, by Georg Nees, ed. Hans-Christian von Herrmann and Christoph Hoffmann (Berlin: Vice Versa, 2006), v.

<sup>31</sup> Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 147.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Stickel, "Computerdichtung," *Der Deutschunterricht* 18, no. 2 (1966): 122–3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 121–4.

<sup>35</sup> Krause and Schaudt, *Computer-Lyrik*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Stickel, "Computerdichtung," 125.

<sup>37</sup> Rul Gunzenhäuser, "Zur Synthese von Texten mit Hilfe programmgesteuerter Ziffernrechenanlagen [1963]," in *Ästhetik als Programm: Max Bense / Daten und Streuungen*, ed. Barbara Büscher, Hans-Christian von Herrmann, and Christoph Hoffmann, Kaleidoskopien 5 (Berlin: Akademie Schloss Solitude, 2004), 179.

<sup>38</sup> Bense, "Die Gedichte der Maschine," 87. My emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Bense, *Modelle*, n.p.

<sup>40</sup> Stickel, "Computerdichtung," 121; Bense, "Die Gedichte der Maschine," 89. Krause and Staudt likewise employ vocabulary referring to computers in several of their computer-generated poems, with similarly self-referential results: "Stromführende Motoren fürchten wie Goethe Elektronengehirne / [...] / Techniker verhöhnen offen Dante." Krause and Schaudt, *Computer-Lyrik*, 41.

<sup>41</sup> For a more recent, explicit application of this principle, see Ray Kurzweil, "A (Kind of) Turing Test," *Kurzweil CyberArt Technologies*, 1999, [http://www.kurzweilcyberart.com/poetry/rkcp\\_akindofturingtest.php](http://www.kurzweilcyberart.com/poetry/rkcp_akindofturingtest.php).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, "Print Is Flat, Code Is Deep: The Importance of Media-Specific Analysis," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 1 (March 20, 2004): 71. Hayles writes, "I can think of many contemporary electronic works that foreground the interplay between natural language and computer code [...] but I know of no work that foregrounds the computer's power cord." See also Anna Katharina Schaffner, "From Concrete to Digital: The Reconceptualisation of Poetic Space," in *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*, ed. Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 188–9; Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 110.

<sup>43</sup> Lennon, "Screening a Digital Visual Poetics," 265. Cf. also Andrew Michael Roberts, "Why Digital Literature Has Always Been 'Beyond the Screen'," in *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*, ed. Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 163.

<sup>44</sup> Bense, "Die Gedichte der Maschine," 81–2.

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>46</sup> Jackson Mac Low, *42 Merzgedichte in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1994). For further discussion of Mac Low see Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 126ff.

<sup>47</sup> In fact, one of the computer algorithms that Mac Low used was modeled on a specific non-digital procedure that he had developed in the 1960s. Cf. Mac Low, *42 Merzgedichte*, viii.

<sup>48</sup> This is particularly true of the poems beginning with “36th Merzgedicht in Memoriam Kurt Schwitters.” Ibid., 204.

<sup>49</sup> On Ball and Hausmann, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Florian Cramer, “permutationen,” accessed March 20, 2013, <http://permutations.pleintekst.nl/>. On Tzara, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

<sup>51</sup> Eugen Gomringer and Günther Uecker, *wie weiss ist wissen die weisen: hommage à uecker* (Stuttgart: Edition für moderne Kunst im Belser Verlag, 1975).

<sup>52</sup> Eugen Gomringer, *kein fehler im system: eine unsystematische auswahl von sätzen aus dem gleichnamigen (imaginären) computer-lesebuch*, Limited edition, with 7 lithographs by Günther Uecker (Zurich: Verlag 3, 1978).

<sup>53</sup> Johannes Auer has noted that the original version of this poem also followed a permutational pattern: “Auch einer Arbeit wie Eugen Gomringers ‘3 variationen zu “kein fehler im system”’ von 1969 liegt sozusagen ein ausgeführter Algorithmus zu Grunde, demgemäß sich der Buchstabe f immer um eine Position nach rechts verschiebt.” Auer, quoted in Martina Pfeiler, “konkret digital - Über Konkrete Poesie und Netzliteratur: Interview mit Johannes Auer,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 2011, [http://www.netzliteratur.net/konkret\\_digital.pdf](http://www.netzliteratur.net/konkret_digital.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> Of the five major subgenres that Suter identifies, the present chapter will focus on two above all: the “Döhlsche Linie,” which most strongly reflects the influence of Concrete poetry, and the “Cramer Linie,” which pays special attention to the significance of code as the underlying language of all digital technologies. For Suter’s taxonomy, see Suter, “Von Theo Lutz zur Netzliteratur,” 34ff.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>57</sup> As Suter notes, another event that contributed significantly to the development of German digital poetry was the “p0es1e” exhibition held in Annaberg-Buchholz in 1992. The catalog is available online: Friedrich W. Block and André Vallias, *p0es1e. digitale dichtung - digital poetry* (Annaberg-Buchholz: André Vallias & Galerie am Markt, 1992), <http://www.p0es1s.net/p0es1s.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Johannes Auer, “johannes auer: worm applepie for doehl,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 1997, <http://auer.netzliteratur.net/worm/applepie.htm>. By clicking on “more apple,” the reader can view other versions of the poem in which the apple shrinks and grows, or rolls in a somersault.

<sup>59</sup> Auer later translated the same poem into a line of PHP computer code — “\$wurm = (\$apfel>0) ? 1 : 0;” — which can be read as “Ist der Apfel größer Null, is(s)t der Wurm. Ansonsten is(s)t er nicht.” Cf. Beat Suter, “‘Jetzt geht es wieder los’. Reinhard Döhls Bedeutung für die digitale Literatur,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 2006, 16, [http://www.netzliteratur.net/suter/Geschichte\\_der\\_deutschsprachigen\\_Netzliteratur.pdf](http://www.netzliteratur.net/suter/Geschichte_der_deutschsprachigen_Netzliteratur.pdf). This later translation reflects Auer’s interest in codework, which will be discussed below.

<sup>60</sup> Johannes Auer, “free lutz!,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 2005, <http://copernicus.netzliteratur.net/>.

<sup>61</sup> The first two examples are taken from a video recording of a live performance of this piece, available on the website Johannes Auer, “search lutz!,” *Netzliteratur.net*, 2006, [http://searchsonata.netzliteratur.net/fiwi/searchlutz\\_info.html](http://searchsonata.netzliteratur.net/fiwi/searchlutz_info.html). The third example appeared when the live feed, <http://searchlutz.netzliteratur.net/ausstellung.php>, was viewed on March 4, 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Auer, quoted in Stefan Kister, “Datenströme in die Innenwelt: Interview mit Johannes Auer,” *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, May 23, 2012, [http://auer.netzliteratur.net/presse/stz\\_23\\_05\\_2012.jpg](http://auer.netzliteratur.net/presse/stz_23_05_2012.jpg).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Jörg Piringer, “jörg piringer - home,” *jörg piringer*, accessed March 21, 2013, <http://joerg.piringer.net/>. Piringer’s website includes sections entitled “sound” and “visual,” but also “video” and “apps,” reflecting Piringer’s roots in Concrete poetry as well as his attempt to apply its logic to newer technologies.

<sup>65</sup> Jörg Piringer, “Soundpoems,” in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. Laura Borràs et al., vol. 2, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Electronic Literature Organization, 2011), [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/piringer\\_soundpoems.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/piringer_soundpoems.html). The still is taken from Piringer’s poem “food chain.” In this work, the user can place the vowels ä, ö, and ü on a white field by clicking the mouse. Consonants then float in from the sides of the white field, and when they collide with the vowels, the corresponding syllable is spoken by a computer-synthesized voice.



- <sup>66</sup> Geof Huth, "Endemic Battle Collage," in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. Laura Borràs et al., vol. 2, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Electronic Literature Organization, 2011), [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/huth\\_endemic\\_battle\\_collage.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/huth_endemic_battle_collage.html).
- <sup>67</sup> Brian Kim Stefans, "The Dreamlife of Letters," in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles et al., vol. 1, 2 vols. (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans\\_the\\_dreamlife\\_of\\_letters.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans_the_dreamlife_of_letters.html).
- <sup>68</sup> For discussion of these works, see Chapter Three.
- <sup>69</sup> Stefans, "The Dreamlife of Letters."
- <sup>70</sup> Peter Cho, "TYPOTOPO :: IBM Questions," *Typotopo*, 2000, <http://typotopo.com/projects.php?id=questions>.
- <sup>71</sup> Friedrich W. Block, "Innovation oder Trivialität? Zur hypermedialen 'Übersetzung' der Moderne am Beispiel des Elektronischen Lexikon-Romans," *Netzliteratur.net*, 2000, <http://www.netzliteratur.net/block/innovation.html>.
- <sup>72</sup> Saskia Reither, *Computerpoesie: Studien zur Modifikation poetischer Texte durch den Computer* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2003), 163.
- <sup>73</sup> For a well-reasoned criticism of this position, see Matthew Kirschenbaum, "Materiality and Matter and Stuff: What Electronic Texts Are Made Of," *Electronic Book Review* (October 01, 2001), <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/sited>. Kirschenbaum writes: "the tendency to elicit what is 'new' about new media by contrasting its radical mutability with the supposed material solidity of older textual forms is a misplaced gesture, symptomatic of the general extent to which textual studies and digital studies have failed to communicate."
- <sup>74</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 30. Cf. also Schaffner, "From Concrete to Digital: The Reconceptualisation of Poetic Space," 184.
- <sup>75</sup> Jim Andrews, "Nio," in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles et al., vol. 1, 2 vols. (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/andrews\\_nio.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/andrews_nio.html).
- <sup>76</sup> Eduardo Kac, "Media Poetry and Language Art by Eduardo Kac," 1996, <http://www.ekac.org/multimedia.html>. For a more detailed discussion of "Secret," see Lennon, "Screening a Digital Visual Poetics," 259–65.
- <sup>77</sup> Cf. Marjorie Perloff, "Screening the Page/Paging the Screen: Digital Poetics and the Differential Text," in *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, ed. Adalaide Morris and Thomas Swiss (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 143. "As in the case of any medium in its early stages, digital poetry today may seem to fetishize digital presentation as something in itself remarkable, as if to say, 'Look what the computer can do!'"
- <sup>78</sup> Kac, "Media Poetry and Language Art by Eduardo Kac." "VRML" is the standard abbreviation for "Virtual Reality Modeling [or Markup] Language."
- <sup>79</sup> Friedrich W. Block, "Digital Poetics or On The Evolution of Experimental Media Poetry," in *Media Poetry: An International Anthology*, ed. Eduardo Kac (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007), 229.
- <sup>80</sup> A video of the sort of screensaver referred to here can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCSR4D4v\\_A&list=PL5930FFEA67E94117](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmCSR4D4v_A&list=PL5930FFEA67E94117).
- <sup>81</sup> See Reither, *Computerpoesie*, 189–97. Marjorie Perloff also offers a close reading of some passages of "Dreamlife"; see Perloff, "Screening the Page/Paging the Screen: Digital Poetics and the Differential Text."
- <sup>82</sup> Maria Engberg and Jay David Bolter, "Digital Literature and the Modernist Problem" 5, no. 3 (2011), <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/3/000099/000099.html>. My emphasis.
- <sup>83</sup> Marcel Duchamp, *Anemic Cinema*, 1926, <http://archive.org/details/anemicCinema1926>.
- <sup>84</sup> Bas Böttcher, "Bas Böttcher: Looppool - Ein Hyperpoetry-Clip - Netzliteratur, Hypertext, Hypermedia," 1998, <http://www.looppool.de/>.
- <sup>85</sup> Ursula Hentschläger and Zelko Wiener, "Yatoo," *Zeitgenossen*, 2001, <http://www.zeitgenossen.com/yatoo/>. The title of the piece, "Yatoo," is an acronym for "You are the only one," another of the phrases.
- <sup>86</sup> Roberto Simanowski, "Zeitgenossen: Yatoo," *Dichtung Digital 21*, 2002, <http://www.dichtung-digital.de/2002/01/21-Simanowski/index.htm>.

- <sup>87</sup> Roberto Simanowski, "When Literature Goes Multimedia," *BeeHive* 5, no. 1 (June 2002), [http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content\\_apps51/simanowski/indexFLT.html](http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content_apps51/simanowski/indexFLT.html).
- <sup>88</sup> Philippe Bootz and Marcel Frémot, "The Set of U," in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles et al., vol. 1, 2 vols. (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans\\_the\\_dreamlife\\_of\\_letters.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/stefans_the_dreamlife_of_letters.html). In the translation that Bootz provides: "the footprint / passes it / she is going / she is passing the thread / she is following the current / the current goes / the water goes / go(es)."
- <sup>89</sup> Eduardo Kac, "Holopoetry," in *Media Poetry: An International Anthology* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2007), 133–4. Brackets in the original.
- <sup>90</sup> Cf. Kirschenbaum, "Materiality and Matter and Stuff: What Electronic Texts Are Made Of." "The opposition between fixed, reliable printed texts on the one hand, and fluid and dynamic electronic texts on the other – an opposition encouraged by the putative immateriality of digital data storage – is patently false, yet it has become a truism in the nascent field of electronic textual theory."
- <sup>91</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?," *Electronic Literature Organization*, January 02, 2007, <http://eliterature.org/pad/elp.html>.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid. Cf. also Christiane Heibach, "Creamus, ergo sumus. Ansätze zu einer Netz-Ästhetik," *Netzliteratur.net*, accessed March 01, 2013, <http://www.netzliteratur.net/heibach/creamus.htm>.
- <sup>93</sup> Cf. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989), 12–13, 19.
- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Roberts, "Why Digital Literature Has Always Been 'Beyond the Screen'," 156. "What I have referred to as literalization or enactment is the process whereby formal and stylistic effects, as well as implicit or explicit conceptions of authorship, readership and interpretation, which appear in print literature, literary criticism and literary theory in metaphorical or abstract form are given literal form or are physically enacted in digital literature."
- <sup>95</sup> One more recent work that uses text animation and transformation effectively in this sense is Oni Buchanan, "The Mandrake Vehicles," in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. Laura Borràs et al., vol. 2, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Electronic Literature Organization, 2011), [http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/buchanan\\_mandrake\\_vehicles.html](http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/buchanan_mandrake_vehicles.html).
- <sup>96</sup> Cf. Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 164. "Though we are typing on keyboards, our fingers are yet, from the point of understanding multiple textualities, stained with print." On p. 167, Glazier writes of hypertexts, "Their affinities are to print, and therefore they may not be so much harbingers of new digital media as last-stage manifestations of works with a sole allegiance to print."
- <sup>97</sup> For an opposing view, see Janez Strehovec, "Alphabet on the Move: Digital Poetry and the Realm of Language," in *Reading Moving Letters: Digital Literature in Research and Teaching. A Handbook*, ed. Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer, and Peter Gendolla, Media Upheavals (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 207–27.
- <sup>98</sup> Cf. Florian Cramer, "Program Code Poetry," *Netzliteratur.net*, accessed February 24, 2013, <http://www.netzliteratur.net/cramer/programm.htm>; Alan Sondheim, "Codework," *American Book Review* 22, no. 6 (September 2001): 1–4.
- <sup>99</sup> Florian Cramer, "Digital Code and Literary Text," *BeeHive* 4, no. 3 (November 2001), [http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content\\_apps43/cramer/op.html](http://beehive.temporalimage.com/content_apps43/cramer/op.html).
- <sup>100</sup> Roberto Simanowski, "Concrete Poetry in Digital Media: Its Predecessors, Its Presence and Its Future," *Dichtung Digital* 33, 2004, <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2004/3/simanowski/index.htm>. My emphasis.
- <sup>101</sup> Florian Cramer, *Words Made Flesh* (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005), 98. My emphasis.
- <sup>102</sup> The image is taken from Rita Raley, "Code.surface || Code.depth," *Dichtung Digital* 36, 2006, <http://www.dichtung-digital.org/2006/1-Raley.htm>.
- <sup>103</sup> Cf. Raley, "Code.surface || Code.depth"; Andrew Michael Roberts and Anna Katharina Schaffner, "Rhetorics of Surface and Depth in Digital Poetry," *Review of Literature of the European Union* no. 5 (2006): 37–48.
- <sup>104</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, "Computeralphabetismus," in *Literatur im Informationszeitalter*, ed. Dirk Matejovski and Friedrich A. Kittler (New York: Campus Verlag, 1996), 244–5.
- <sup>105</sup> Friedrich A. Kittler, "There Is No Software," *Ctheory* (October 18, 1995), <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=74>.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, 78. “Despite the level of technology upon which it depends, it is important to emphasize that, principally, the Web is writing. It is presented as a series of pages that are written. In addition, each page is also writing because it is written in HTML.”

<sup>107</sup> Kittler, “The History of Communication Media.” See also Auer: “Ein Computer ist keine Multimedia-sondern eine Textmaschine.” Pfeiler, “konkret digital,” 5.

<sup>108</sup> Suter, “Von Theo Lutz zur Netzliteratur,” 2012, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. C.T. Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry: An Archaeology of Forms, 1959-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), Kindle Locations 5090–1.

<sup>110</sup> This element is emphasized in a 1973 short film adaptation of the poem by Gordon Payne, as well as in Jim Andrews’ 2004 digital work “On Lionel Kearns.” Jim Andrews, “On Lionel Kearns,” in *Electronic Literature Collection*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles et al., vol. 1, 2 vols. (College Park, MD: Electronic Literature Organization, 2006), [http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/andrews\\_\\_on\\_lionel\\_kearns/](http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/andrews__on_lionel_kearns/).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Funkhouser, *Prehistoric Digital Poetry*, Kindle Location 5079–91ff.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Andrews, “On Lionel Kearns.”

<sup>113</sup> Kittler notes that the idea that existence itself can be comprehended in binary terms has more recently been called into question: “[Turings] Theorie einer Universalen Diskreten Maschine, die alle anderen Maschinen imitieren kann, besagt in ihrer stärksten, nämlich physikalischen Form, daß die Natur selber eine Turing-Maschine sein muß. Erst in jüngster Zeit ziehen Chaostheorie und informatische Komplexitätstheorie genau diese Hypothese in Zweifel.” Kittler, “Computeralphabetismus,” 250.

<sup>114</sup> JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesman), “Text,” *Jodi*, accessed March 25, 2013, <http://text.jodi.org/>.

<sup>115</sup> One of the more intelligible passages of “TEXT” is a partial list of countries of the world in alphabetical order, which appears on <http://text.jodi.org/135.html>. The page <http://text.jodi.org/501.html> contains a number of fragments of HTML code.

<sup>116</sup> Roberts and Schaffner, “Rhetorics of Surface and Depth in Digital Poetry,” 42.

<sup>117</sup> Mark Napier, “Shredder 1.0,” *Shredder 1.0*, 1998, <http://www.potatoland.org/shredder/shredder.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Given that JODI’s “TEXT” engages explicitly with the role of language and code in digital media, I find its inclusion alongside other works of experimental poetry to be entirely appropriate, and willingly include myself in the company of other critics of whom Florian Cramer has observed: “Manche Netzliteraturkritiker haben [...] stillschweigend die konzeptuelle Netzkunst zur besseren Netzdichtung erklärt.” Florian Cramer, “Warum es zuwenig interessante Netzdichtung gibt. Neun Thesen,” April 27, 2000,

[http://cramer.pleintekst.nl/all/warum\\_es\\_zuwenig\\_interessante\\_netzdichtung\\_gibt/warum\\_es\\_zuwenig\\_interessante\\_netzdichtung\\_gibt.html](http://cramer.pleintekst.nl/all/warum_es_zuwenig_interessante_netzdichtung_gibt/warum_es_zuwenig_interessante_netzdichtung_gibt.html).

<sup>119</sup> Lennon, “Screening a Digital Visual Poetics,” 259.

<sup>120</sup> JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesman), “%Location,” *Jodi*, accessed March 25, 2013, <http://www.jodi.org/>.

<sup>121</sup> For further analysis of “TEXT,” “%Location,” and other works by JODI, see Roberts and Schaffner, “Rhetorics of Surface and Depth in Digital Poetry.”

<sup>122</sup> This link is made explicit in the work’s subtitle. Cf. Johannes Auer, “G-LINIE HTML [quelltext-hommage aah gomringer/jodi/la monte young],” *Netzliteratur.net*, accessed March 05, 2013, <http://auer.netzliteratur.net/g-linie/>.

<sup>123</sup> Rita Raley, “Interferences: [Net.Writing] and the Practice of Codework,” *Electronic Book Review*, September 08, 2002, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/net.writing>. Raley’s discussion in this article of the German artist and musician Antye Greie-Fuchs, as well as the English-language code poets Ted Warnell and John Cayley, offers useful insight into the aesthetic and theoretical potential of codework.

<sup>124</sup> John Cayley, “The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text),” *Electronic Book Review*, September 10, 2002, <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/electropoetics/literal>.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> For other examples of executable code poetry, see Sharon Hopkins, “Camels and Needles: Computer Poetry Meets the Perl Programming Language,” *Virtual Poetry Project Dossier #2: Perl Poetry* (1991), <http://ojs.gc.cuny.edu/index.php/VPP/article/view/1120/1222>. Several of these examples are little more

than jokes that translate conventional scenarios into Perl programming language, but they do fulfill Cayley's call for code poetry that is both "human-readable" and "interpretable, working code."

<sup>127</sup> Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?"

<sup>128</sup> Cramer, "Warum."

<sup>129</sup> Florian Cramer, "Combinatory Poetry and Literature in the Internet," *Linguistic Analysis of Digital Artifacts*, accessed February 24, 2013, [http://ada.lynxlab.com/staff/steve/public/docu/lidia/docu/combinatory\\_poetry.pdf](http://ada.lynxlab.com/staff/steve/public/docu/lidia/docu/combinatory_poetry.pdf).

<sup>130</sup> Bill Kennedy and Darren Wershler, "Apostrophe (1994)," *The Apostrophe Engine*, 2001, <http://apostropheengine.ca/>.

<sup>131</sup> The allusions in this poem range from popular culture and commerce ("you are a compilation of more than sixty samples overlaid on top of a digitally synthesized 70s funk groove"; "you are available only through this limited TV offer") to canonical literature ("you are a poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is heard no more"). Even without drawing on the enormous textual corpus of the internet, Kennedy's 1993 work created a mosaic of high and low, emphasizing the multiplicity of its addressee(s).

<sup>132</sup> Bill Kennedy and Darren Wershler, "How the Apostrophe Engine Works," *The Apostrophe Engine*, 2001, <http://apostropheengine.ca/howitworks>.

<sup>133</sup> Cory Arcangel, "Sorry I Haven't Posted | Inspiring Apologies From Today's World Wide Web," *Cory Arcangel's Official Portfolio Website and Portal*, 2010, <http://sorry.coryarcangel.com/>.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Richard Godwin, "Cory Arcangel: Interview," *HUNGER TV*, November 13, 2012, <http://www.hungertv.com/art-culture/feature/cory-arcangel/>.

<sup>135</sup> Pär Thörn, "I Am | A Twitter Poem by Pär Thörn," 2011, <http://iampoem.net/>. There is not space here to deal with the many other conceptual and experimental works that draw on Twitter and other social media, many of which make no explicit claim to poetic status, so I offer only a few examples. Jer Thorp's "Just Landed," for instance, compiles Twitter postings ("tweets") containing the title phrase and maps their locations, turning these individual updates into larger statistical patterns. In Mark Jeffery and Judd Morrissey's performance work "The Living Newspaper," performers posing as visitors to a museum engage in a seemingly casual conversation, but all of their sentences are drawn from recent Twitter posts. And Chris Alexander's book *McNugget*, which is available for download in PDF format or as a printed book, simply aggregates all Twitter postings over a roughly one-month period that include the word "McNugget." Each of these works responds to Twitter as a site where the ideal of self-expression frequently yields results that are uniform and mundane. By removing these posts from their native medium, these works implicitly ask to what extent the constraints of Twitter dictate its content, and to what extent Twitter posts might be given new life or acquire new meaning in a different context or medium. Cf. Jer Thorp, "Just Landed: Processing, Twitter, MetaCarta & Hidden Data," *blprnt.blg*, 2009, <http://blog.blprnt.com/blog/blprnt/just-landed-processing-twitter-metacarta-hidden-data>; Judd Morrissey and Mark Jeffery, "The Living Newspapers," *Judisdaid!*, 2010, <http://www.judisdaid.com/livingnewspapers.php>; Chris Alexander, *McNugget* (Troll Thread, 2013), [http://www.lulu.com/items/volume\\_75/13639000/13639749/3/print/CHRIS\\_ALEXANDER\\_MCNUGET\\_TROLL\\_THREAD.pdf](http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_75/13639000/13639749/3/print/CHRIS_ALEXANDER_MCNUGET_TROLL_THREAD.pdf). Cf. Morrissey and Jeffery, "The Living Newspapers." Alexander, *McNugget*.

<sup>136</sup> Pär Thörn, "The Poet - I Am | A Twitter Poem by Pär Thörn," 2011, <http://iampoem.net/the-poet/>.

<sup>137</sup> Block, "Eight Digits of Digital Poetics."

<sup>138</sup> Here again, Auer's questionable identification of search terms with authentic expressions of desire is apparent: "Die SearchSongs greifen auf den Wortstrom der Livesuche von Lycos zu. Dieser Wortstrom kann als Ausdruck des kollektiven Begehrens, als die Sehnsuchtsmelodie des Netzes begriffen werden, gespielt von den zig Tausenden, die in jedem Augenblick via Suchmaschine versuchen, an das Begehrte zu gelangen. Diese Sehnsuchtsmelodie wird hörbar gemacht durch die SearchSongs." Johannes Auer, "Searchsongs: Concept Info," *searchSongs*, 2007, <http://searchsongs.cyberfiction.ch/info.html>.

<sup>139</sup> "gateways. Kunst und vernetzte Kultur - Werke - bit.fall," *Goethe-Institut*, June 2002, <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ee/prj/gtw/aus/wer/pop/deindex.htm>. The image is taken from the same website. I am grateful to Lutz Koepnick for bringing *bit.fall* to my attention.

<sup>140</sup> Lutz P. Koepnick, "[Grid <> Matrix]: Take II," in *[Grid <> Matrix]*, ed. Sabine Eckmann and Lutz P. Koepnick (St. Louis: Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, 2006), 69.

<sup>141</sup> Roberto Simanowski, "Text as Event: Calm Technology and Invisible Information as Subject of Digital Arts," in *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging With Ubiquitous Computing*, ed. Ulrik Ekman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 195.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>143</sup> Alexander Gumz and Stephan Porombka, eds., *Flarf Berlin: 95 Netzgedichte* (Hildesheim: Edition Pächterhaus, 2012).

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. <http://www.vegetarier-forum.com/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=1776>

<sup>146</sup> Gumz and Porombka, *Flarf Berlin: 95 Netzgedichte*, 71.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 38, 55, 76.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 25, 26, 27.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. <http://edithalisa.wordpress.com/2011/09/13/die-sache-mit-der-inkonsequenz/>

<sup>150</sup> The closest approximation to attempts such as Ball's to escape from ready-made language is found in contributions to the volume by Ann Cotten such as "Versuch einer Transkription der Sti" (49) and "I.ter leirter ter Gürtertiere iirtülegt" (76-7). Both of these poems, but particularly the latter, break language down beyond the level of the word, including invented words and scrambled letters. Here, as in Ball's *Lautgedichte*, language is presented as material, abstracted from any conventional meaning.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Pfeiler, "konkret digital." "Am Beispiel Google: nicht der geniale Algorithmus von Larry Page und Sergei Brin ist für die guten Suchergebnisse verantwortlich, sondern die Tatsache, dass er die menschlichen Bewertungen und Wertschätzungen verarbeitet, die im Setzen eines Links zum Ausdruck kommt."

<sup>152</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, xiii.

<sup>153</sup> Hayles, "Electronic Literature: What Is It?"

<sup>154</sup> Bense, *Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik*, 112. Emphasis in the original.

## Notes to the Conclusions

<sup>1</sup> Cayley, "The Code is not the Text (unless it is the Text)."

<sup>2</sup> Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 5.

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