

The Death of the Editor: Theo van Doesburg, Dada, and International Constructivist Magazines

by

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Abstract

Interwar European avant-garde magazines were often used by their editors to experiment with and question the role of the editor. One such editor was Dutch modernist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931), who simultaneously worked on two interwar avant-garde magazines belonging to two different art movements: Dada *Mécano* (1922–23) and International Constructivist *De Stijl* (1917–32). This project report historically contextualizes the 1921–24 issues of Van Doesburg's magazines and analyzes them based mainly on their selection of contributions, the languages these employ, their attributions, and their genres. It further compares them to four other contemporary Dada and International Constructivist avant-garde magazines: Tristan Tzara's *Dada* and Raoul Hausmann's *Der Dada*, and Hans Richter's *G* and Kurt Schwitters's *Merz*, respectively. This project report argues that Van Doesburg, in his simultaneous editing of *De Stijl* and *Mécano*, polemically responded to contemporary Dada and International Constructivist magazine editing practices by showing that the only way to fully reach their mutually desired renunciation of editorial control was through these two practices' intersection.

Keywords: Theo van Doesburg; Dada; International Constructivism; avant-garde magazines; editing; authorship; interwar

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I dedicate this report to my partner, Laura Săvuțiu.

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Introduction

0.1 “Closed”/“Open” Interwar Magazine Editing

The Dutch interwar modernist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931) is recognized as a painter, writer, architect, and graphic designer. However, Van Doesburg has not yet been given his due for his editorial contributions to modernism. The following project report focuses precisely on these contributions and, through them, on Van Doesburg's role as a magazine editor in comparison to other, contemporaneous avant-garde magazine editors. Van Doesburg's main such contributions include the temporarily simultaneous editing of two avant-garde magazines, *De Stijl* (1917–32) and *Mécano* (1922–24), which belonged to two very different art movements. *De Stijl* was one of the longest-running magazines of International Constructivism, a movement officially started in 1922 and dedicated to functional, clear, and rational design.¹ *Mécano*, on the other hand, was one of the short-lived magazines of Dada, a movement begun in 1916 and recognized for its chaotic, intentionally unintelligible, irreverent approach. As several scholars have noted, albeit mostly from a graphic design angle,² Van Doesburg's doubled activity vis-à-vis magazines and movements with opposing values and styles made his periodical contributions seemingly contradictory. Consequently, analyzing Van Doesburg's editorial activity, especially alongside that of other contemporaneous avant-garde editors, allows us to at once define several different periodical editorial styles and answer the question of what implications such bifurcated editing may have for the editor's function more generally.

Before embarking on this analysis, however, we should first establish the way in which magazine editing was generally practiced while Van Doesburg was active. As literary scholar Sean Latham indicates, two approaches to magazine editing co-existed

¹ Roxane Jubert, *Typography and Graphic Design: From Antiquity to the Present*, trans. Deke Dusinberre and David Radzinowicz (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 180.

² Emily Hage, “Contingency and Continuity: Dada Magazines and the Expanding Network, 1922–1926,” in *Dada Magazines: The Making of a Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 162. Stephen J. Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 193. Egbert Krispyn, “Literature and *De Stijl*,” in *Nijhoff, Van Ostaijen, “De Stijl”: Modernism in the Netherlands and Belgium in the First Quarter of the 20th Century*, ed. Francis Bulhof (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 64–65. Jane Beckett, “Dada, Van Doesburg and *De Stijl*,” *Journal of European Studies* ix (1979): 1.

in the interwar period. One was the particularly “masculinist modernis[t]”³ approach of American interwar expatriate poet, critic, and editor Ezra Pound. According to Pound, Latham argues, the editor should give a “clear definition to a policy or set of ideas” and act as a “binding force,”⁴ rendering the magazine “tightly focused [...] and distinctly bounded.”⁵ In other words, the magazine editor must put forward a clear mission and organize the magazine and its issues around a strict nucleus, akin to a book. Editing, then, should be seen as similar to writing since, as the poet, editor, and essayist Peter Gizzi argues, it is a “creative act” and is “fundamentally about composing a world,” dealing in “the production, the arrangement, the formal or thematic connections between the work of various writers.”⁶ Ultimately, we might call this a “closed” theory of magazine editing, wherein the goal is to turn the magazine and each issue into a whole. To the degree possible, every contribution is to fit into the issue and alongside the other contributions smoothly, their co-presence creating a larger meaning intended by the editor.

Opposed to Pound's was the approach practiced by Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, the two editors of the American interwar magazine famous for serializing James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the *Little Review*. Anderson and Heap, according to Latham, refused to “settle on a single mission” since they took the magazine to be a material object with a large potential for interactivity. This potential ultimately made the magazine a “mess and muddle” in which “authorship and editorship exercise only a weak kind of control over a reader.”⁷ What Anderson and Heap practiced was a form of magazine editing which left the magazine and its issues “open” to the reader's interpretation and unbound to authorly authority. In this way, they anticipated French literary theorist Roland Barthes and French philosopher Michel Foucault's critical rejection of the “author” as an obstacle to the proliferation of meaning, a notion which we flesh out more fully in the conclusion. In contrast to Pound's “closed” approach, “open” magazine

³ Sean Latham, “The Mess and Muddle of Modernism: The Modernist Journals Project and Modern Periodical Studies,” *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 425.

⁴ Ezra Pound, “Small Magazines,” in *Paper Dreams: Writers and Editors on the American Literary Magazine*, ed. Travis Kurowski (Toronto: Atticus Books, 2013), 62.

⁵ Latham, 423.

⁶ Peter Gizzi, “On the Conjunction of Editing and Composition,” in *Paper Dreams: Writers and Editors on the American Literary Magazine*, ed. Travis Kurowski (Toronto: Atticus Books, 2013), 233.

⁷ Latham, 408–12.

editing can therefore be said to always operate with the awareness as much of the magazine and its issues' materiality as of their status as an artificial juxtaposition of various contributions which are not held together by a prior, intended, overarching meaning on the part of the editor.⁸

These two approaches to magazine editing give us a possible way of framing our discussion of Van Doesburg. They present us with the criteria of cohesion, juxtaposition, and authorial intention against which we can analyze Van Doesburg's contributions to editing. Furthermore, they lead us to attempt to answer the further question of how Van Doesburg's magazine editing relates to these two models: whether we can call him an open editor, a closed editor, or both.

0.2 Purpose and Scope

At the heart of this report is the larger intention of studying and theorizing the function of the editor. As Abram Foley, in his introduction to his similarly intentioned book, *The Editor Function*, notes, "practices such as editing associated with publishing books and other textual object[s] have until recently been largely overlooked as subjects for serious critical attention in postwar American criticism."⁹ This may be at least in part due to the fact that the editor and editing are missing from both of the canonical communication models put forward within the field of book history: Robert Darnton's 1982 "communications circuit" and Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker's 1993 "the whole socio-economic conjecture."¹⁰ Within these two models, one would expect to find editing within the "publisher" stage of Darnton's and as part of the "publication" event of

⁸ Peter Bürger's theory of the avant-garde, especially in its distinction between the organic work of art and the nonorganic work of art, both operative in the interwar period, has significantly helped us flesh out, by way of parallelism, these two theories of magazine editing. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 70–79.

⁹ Abram Foley, *The Editor Function: Literary Publishing in Postwar America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 8. Notably, work on this report began prior to the publication of Foley's book, which has further added to scholarship in this area. While full of socio-historical analysis, descriptive, and theoretically up to date, Foley's project seems lacking inasmuch as it fails to extract a general theory of editorship or to clearly outline the various attributes which pertain to the editor.

¹⁰ Richard Darnton, "What is the History of Books?", *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 65–83. Thomas R. Adams and Nicolas Barker, "A New Model for the Study of the Book," in *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society, The Clark Lectures, 1986-1987*, ed. Nicolas Barker (London: The British Library, 1993), 5–43.

Adams and Barker's. However, the former restricts the questions that can be asked of a publisher to how they "dr[e]w up contracts with authors, buil[t] alliances with booksellers, negotiate[d] with political authorities, and handle[d] finances, supplies, shipments, and publicity,"¹¹ while the latter characterizes publication as a "decision" influenced by four factors, the one most relevant to editing, "creation," being limited to "the desire to present a text [...] in a particular physical form."¹²

While the larger question of the editor's function is the driving intention of this report, our focus is on periodical editing inasmuch as magazines, by contrast to books, make the editor's interventions more obvious and tangible. While the editor's work on a book may be buried in the archives of, or have been discarded after use by, the author or the publishing house,¹³ the magazine editor's selection and juxtaposition of contributions in a particular issue is present at the very level of the magazine's form.¹⁴ This report further focuses on interwar, European avant-garde magazine editors, and within them mainly on Van Doesburg, primarily due to the fact that these types of magazines had, at the time, enough influence to found artistic movements which themselves, as we will see below, put into question the function of the editor. Furthermore, Van Doesburg, as we show, was a particularly complex case of interrogating editorship through his editorial contributions. Finally, these magazines are worth attending to insofar as scholars have thus far only analyzed them, at least within the English-language literature, from the perspective of graphic design. This means that

¹¹ Darnton, 76.

¹² Adams and Barker, 16.

¹³ Darnton, 76. This point applies less today, in the digital age, where editing work is done digitally and a publisher's archive is digital. Nevertheless, as literary and publishing scholar Lise Jaillant shows in her more recent work, the problem that remains is that of access to these born-digital, "dark" archives. Lise Jaillant and Annalina Caputo, "Unlocking Digital Archives: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on AI and Born-Digital Data," *AI and Society* 37 (2022): 823-35. See also Lise Jaillant, ed., *Archives, Access, and Artificial Intelligence: Working with Born-Digital and Digitized Archival Collections* (Bielefeld: Bielefeld University Press, 2022).

¹⁴ That, for example, a book's chapters were rearranged or selected in a particular way at the editor's discretion or suggestion is not visible to the end user in the final, published form of the book. The reader is left to assume that the author is wholly responsible for the book's form. When it comes to magazines, however, there being no single author means that the editor's work in selecting and arranging the contributions, and therefore the magazine's form, is attributed by the end user wholly to the editor. This is further reflected in the fact that books are less likely to list their editor on their copyright page or in their colophon, while magazines include not only a masthead or an editorial attribution in each issue, but sometimes also an editorial piece such as a "Letter from the Editor."

a commentary on the way they were edited can constitute a significant addition to the scholarship around them.

0.3 Method, Outline, Sources

This report explores Van Doesburg's editing of *De Stijl* and *Mécano* through two interrelated methods. On the one hand, it historically contextualizes and fleshes out the principles of the two movements—International Constructivism and Dada—to which each magazine contributes. On the other hand, it offers, as a point of comparison, an analysis of the editing styles of other editors, in each case two, responsible for other International Constructivist and Dada magazines. The analysis is applied, when it comes to Dada, to Romanian poet Tristan Tzara for his editing of *Dada* (1917–21) and to Austrian artist Raoul Hausmann for his editing of *Der Dada* (1919–20), and, when it comes to International Constructivism, to German artists Hans Richter for his editing of *G* (1923–26) and Kurt Schwitters for his editing of *Merz* (1923–32).

The report then outlines the “typical” way in which a Dada editor and an International Constructivist editor might approach their craft. Notably, this extraction of the “typical” Dada and International Constructivist editors is loosely informed by a yet third method: that put forth by German interwar literary theorist Walter Benjamin at the beginning of his 1925 dissertation, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. In that text, Benjamin affirms that “the concept issues from the extreme,”¹⁵ which is to say that the best way to characterize an artistic practice, movement, or genre is not by looking at what most of its instances have in common but at those features only seen in its most peculiar instances. The “typical” that the report outlines, then, is rather the result of a juxtaposition of extreme examples of Dada and International Constructivist magazines, which we show *Dada*, *Der Dada*, *G*, and *Merz* to be.

Chapters 1 and 2 both constitute applications of these three steps—historical contextualization, analysis of magazine issues, characterization of editing style—successively, with Chapter 1 focusing on the Dada editor, and Chapter 2 on the International Constructivist editor. Chapter 3 analyzes Van Doesburg's editing of

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Epistemo-Critical Foreword,” in *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 11.

Mécano and *De Stijl* and compares it to the practice of both the Dada editor and the International Constructivist editor. Finally, the conclusion outlines the main features of Van Doesburg's contributions to both magazine editing and the understanding of the editor's function.

Inasmuch as the multifarious languages used in these magazines—from Dutch and German to Italian and French—may confront us with linguistic challenges that may go beyond our proficiency, we have decided to leave aside the content of each particular contribution. Instead, the report focuses on the form of each issue, a method of analysis made possible by the framing provided by the abovementioned differentiation between “closed” and “open” magazine editing. This dichotomy, after all, allows us to look at an issue through the lens of whether its contributions, due to their similarities or interconnections, cohere into a whole and simulate an editorial intention or, due to their discrepancies, are irregularly juxtaposed and leave the larger meaning of an issue at the reader's whim. What this means in practice is that our analysis mostly takes into consideration the selection and placement of contributions, the languages they employ, whether they have been attributed to a contributor, and their genre. How these characteristics interact across an issue—for example, an issue may have contributions in more than one language—and whether an issue has an organizing principle, such as a theme, constitutes the second level at which our analysis operates. Finally, the report also weighs the manner in which each issue is formally constructed against the main principles of the movement to which the magazine is meant to belong. As for the “closed”/“open” dichotomy and how it applies to these magazines, the report only fully returns to it in the conclusion.

Finally, this report does not take into consideration every issue of each magazine at stake. Instead, it keeps to those issues which are clearly attributed to their abovementioned main editor, follow the same format,¹⁶ are easily available online, are prior to or after pivotal artistic turns on the part of the editor, and were published closest

¹⁶ In using the term “format” here, we are strictly referring to the magazines *Mécano* and *G*, which underwent a change from their first three or two issues, respectively. In the case of *Mécano*, the first three issues were single large sheets which were folded four times, while the fourth issue “had a more conventional magazine format.” Dawn Ades, “*Mécano*: Introduction,” in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 262. In the case of *G*, while the first two issues “consisted of a large folded sheet with just four pages,” from the third issue onwards “it became a more conventional magazine.” Dawn Ades, “*G*: Introduction,” in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 286.

to the time period when Van Doesburg was simultaneously editing *De Stijl* and *Mécano*: 1922–23. Consequently, the issues of each magazine that we will analyze are: *De Stijl* 4.1 (January 1921) to 6.5 (1923), *Mécano* 1 (January 1922), *Mécano* 2 (July 1922), and *Mécano* 3 (October 1922), *Dada* 3 (December 1918) and *Dada* 4–5 (May 1919), *Der Dada* 1 (June 1919) and *Der Dada* 2 (December 1919), *G* 1 (July 1923) and *G* 2 (September 1923), and *Merz* 8–9 (April–July 1924).

0.4 Magazines and the Interwar Avant-Garde

Irrespective of the particular movement to which they belonged and editing style through which they were composed, there are several features more or less applicable to all interwar avant-garde magazines. In most cases, they were privately funded by their editor and did not rely on sales for their existence.¹⁷ Far from paying their contributors, they at times depended on them to fund the next issue, as was the case when the German architect and editorial board member of the International Constructivist magazine *G*, Mies van der Rohe, bankrolled the third issue.¹⁸ Their readership was comprised as much of their contributors as of potential contributors. Tzara, for example, sent a free copy of *Dada* 3 all the way to French painter Francis Picabia's address in New York, hoping to woo him into becoming a contributor.¹⁹ It further extended to the realms into which their editors wanted to augment their reach. This readership included but was not limited to various artists, writers, art galleries, art libraries, and collectors—rather than the mass public.²⁰ But most of all, it seems to have been the tight-knit community made out of the editors of and contributors to other avant-garde magazines, any one issue of which usually advertised yet other avant-garde magazines or their contributors' books and public engagements. Additionally, and especially considering that three of the six magazines that constitute the subject of this report were published in early Weimar Germany, their editors were also confronted by a paper shortage, either

¹⁷ Brooker, 20. Sascha Bru, "A New Art, One and Undivided," in *The European Avant Gardes, 1905-1935: A Portable Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 18.

¹⁸ Maria Gough, "Contains Graphic Material: El Lissitzky and the Typography 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), 31. Notably, the first issue was funded not by Richter but by a subsidy from Universal-Film AG. Brooker, 21.

¹⁹ Brooker, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

due to WWI²¹ or to the unstable ground which was the German economy after the war.²² This accounts for the cheap newspaper stock on which some these magazines were printed,²³ and could be supposed to have also contributed to their limited print runs²⁴ and page extent.²⁵

In short, with the exception of paper availability and price, avant-garde magazine editors did not have to take into account some of the typical concerns related to sales of for-profit magazine publishing: namely, audience, marketing, and sustainability. Certainly, they were limited by the community that their magazines were meant to build or wherein they were meant to participate.²⁶ But this community, being primarily that of an artistic avant-garde, was on principle opposed to what Adams and Barker's model dubs "social behaviour and taste,"²⁷ which is to say the social norms which, if adhered to, might make a work popular. Therefore, these editors were simultaneously free enough from or indifferent enough to financial concerns and the general public that they could experiment by putting into question the magazine editor's role in their very act of editing magazines.

It is for this reason that Adams and Barker's model, placing "publication" closer to "intellectual influences" and "political, legal and religious influences," and further from "social behaviour and taste" and "commercial pressures" than other bibliographic events,²⁸ is more appropriate to the study of interwar avant-garde magazines than Darnton's initial model, in which all exterior forces are equidistant from the stages of communication.²⁹ This is also why this report follows Adams and Barker's model—as

²¹ Christopher J. La Casse, "Scrappy and Unselective: Rising Wartime Paper Costs and the *Little Review*," *American Periodicals: A Journal of History & Criticism* 26, no. 2 (2016): 208–21.

²² Heidi J. S. Tworek, "The Death of News? The Problem of Paper in the Weimar Republic," *Central European History* 50, no. 3 (September 2017): 328–46.

²³ Richter's *G 1* and *2* and Tzara's *Dada* are the only two magazines of the ones analyzed here about which we have been able to find the relevant data. Gough, 31. Eskilson, 135.

²⁴ Brooker, 17–18.

²⁵ Excepting *De Stijl*, the longest issue of the ones considered here has thirty-six pages.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14–15. Sean Lantham, "The Mess and Muddle of Modernism: The Modernist Journals Project and Modern Periodical Studies," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 425. Bru, "A New Art," 17.

²⁷ Adams and Barker, 14.

²⁸ Adams and Barker, 14.

²⁹ Darnton, 68.

well as the later Darnton who recognizes this model as being an improvement over his own³⁰—in exploring Van Doesburg’s editing primarily through the lens of its historical context and the other editors who influenced it.

Finally, while these magazines were dependent on and influenced by the art movements to which they contributed, the reverse was also true. For one, the magazine is by nature a collage, namely of contributions, while Constructivism and Dada have in common their claim to being *the* art movement that invented a form of collage called photomontage.³¹ Their use of the magazine as medium, then, could be said to have itself influenced these two movements at the level of artistic technique. It follows that studying avant-garde magazines from these two movements in particular means engaging with magazine editing at its most self-conscious. Furthermore, these, along with other interwar avant-garde movements, “originated and gained momentum” particularly through such magazines, which announced the principles of a movement, displayed examples of its artistic works, and crossed national boundaries.³²

³⁰ Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books? Revisited,” in *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 495–508.

³¹ Jubert, 215.

³² Gwen Allen, “Introduction,” *Artists’ Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 3. Brooker, 17. Steven Heller, *Merz to Emigré and Beyond* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2014), 9. Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings, “Introduction: The G-Group and the European Avant-Garde,” 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), 3.

Chapter 1. Dada

1.1 Context

Dada began in Zürich in neutral Switzerland, in February of 1916, during WWI, as a reaction against the professed humanism and rationalism that the movement's members believed had led to the war.³³ In what was initially a series of performances at a short-lived nightclub called the Cabaret Voltaire, Dada's members employed irony, improvisation, gibberish, and nonsense. Their goal was to shock the audience, baiting them into the performance³⁴ so that they would "recogniz[e] the contradictions of European culture."³⁵ Formed by German writers Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck, the German-French artist Hans Arp, the Romanian artist Marcel Janco, and Tzara, the movement constituted a rejection of everything from religion, progress, and tradition³⁶ to programmes,³⁷ clarity, and, above all, art.³⁸ Instead, Dada privileged and cultivated anarchy, chance, negation for the sake of negation,³⁹ and internationalism.⁴⁰ It did this while putting special emphasis on desubjectivization, that is, the rejection of the Romantic idea that the artist is a genius whose artwork is no more than the expression of their personality.⁴¹

In May 1916, both to anthologize and document the cabaret and to publicize Dada during a period of travel limitations,⁴² the movement released the first issue of its

³³ Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis, *Meggs' History of Graphic Design* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 277.

³⁴ Dawn Ades, "Cabaret Voltaire, Dada and Der Zeltweg: Introduction," in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 18.

³⁵ Eskilson, 133.

³⁶ Meggs and Purvis, 277.

³⁷ Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, trans. David Britt (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 34.

³⁸ Eskilson, 133. By art (usually written with a capital A), Dada meant at once the institution of "art"—with its museums and galleries—and the late-19th century concept of "art for art's sake," that is, art as divorced from the socio-political medium of its production.

³⁹ Jubert, 168. Eskilson, 134.

⁴⁰ As regards internationalism, the name "Dada" itself meant something different in the language of each participant. Hage, "Mise-en-page," 5.

⁴¹ Sascha Bru, "Dada as Politics," *Arcadia* 41, no. 2 (2006): 301. Jubert, 168. Eskilson, 135.

⁴² *Ibid.*

magazine, *Cabaret Voltaire*. Edited by Ball, the magazine's subtitle describes it as a "collection," an accurate word for its melange of contributions by artists and writers from various, disparate art movements of the time—Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism being only a few.⁴³ The next two issues, of July and December 1917, took on the movement's name and lost Ball as editor (none is announced), but kept "collection" in the subtitle. Considered by art historians graphically conservative—that is, symmetrical and orderly—in its first "three" issues, *Dada* underwent a radical change in design equal to its principles of irrationality and transgression in *Dada 3*.⁴⁴ Released in December of 1918, it was the first of two issues (the other being *Dada 4–5*, of May 1919) which explicitly announce Tzara as the editor.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, in June 1917, one of the original members of Cabaret Voltaire, Huelsenbeck, moved to Berlin and founded Club Dada. By June 1919, one of his collaborators, Hausmann, began publishing the short-lived magazine *Der Dada*. The magazine graphically echoed Tzara's *Dada*, included one of the latter's poems in its first issue, and attributed its *Direktion* to Hausmann in the first issue as well as the second, from September of 1919. The German context, however, was quite different from that of Switzerland. While Zürich in 1916–19 was relatively stable due to its neutrality, Germany in 1917–19 was reeling from the "disastrous defeat of the German military"⁴⁶ such that towards the end of the war it underwent a revolution during which Huelsenbeck was named "Commissar of the Fine Arts."⁴⁷ 1919 brought with it the formation of the Weimar Republic, which was characterized by "competing groups of extremists v[ying] for power" and had questionable legitimacy due to having been built atop a suppressed Soviet republic.⁴⁸ At the same time, the Expressionist art movement emphasizing a quasi-mystical subjectivity alienated from the modern world was still in ascendance, despite having begun before the war.⁴⁹ Berlin Dada, as this movement was called, therefore

⁴³ Ibid., 3. Eskilson, 135. Emily Hage, "Contingency and Contiguity: Dada Magazines and the Expanding Network, 1922–1926," in *Dada Magazines: The Making of a Movement* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 158.

⁴⁴ Hage, "Mise-en-page," 6–8. Eskilson, 135.

⁴⁵ Or, more specifically, in the French, *directeur* and, in *Dada 4–5*, *sous la direction de*.

⁴⁶ Eskilson, 224.

⁴⁷ Heller, 72.

⁴⁸ Eskilson, 140.

⁴⁹ Heller, 72. Eskilson, 226–28.

used one of the “the chief media of political and cultural dissent,” the small-circulation, alternative magazine,⁵⁰ to “engage more closely with the specific political situation in Germany.”⁵¹

The two Dada magazines (three with *Mécano*) that this report analyzes are among the approximately thirty such magazines in circulation at the time. One could also mention French poets André Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault’s *Littérature* (1919–24), Picabia’s two magazines, *391* (1917–24) and *Cannibale* (1920), (partly) French artist Marcel Duchamp’s *The Blindman* (1917) and *New York Dada* (1921),⁵² and Serbian writer Dragan Aleksić’s *Dada Jazz* (1922) and *Dada Tank* (1922). However, while *Littérature*, *The Blindman*, and *New York Dada* did not have a single editor, and Aleksić’s two magazines pose linguistic impediments, this report excludes Picabia partly on account of his prolific output. Let us begin by analyzing the magazine that inspired this proliferation of Dada publications.

1.2 Tristan Tzara’s *Dada*

Although the subtitle mentioning “collection” is no longer used in *Dada 3* and *Dada 4–5*, both issues still hold to the originally syncretic direction of their precursors.⁵³ In *Dada 3*, alongside contributions from the members of the movement, we can find a woodcut by the Italian Futurist Enrico Prampolini, poetry from the French Futurist/Cubist Pierre Albert-Birot, and poems from the German Expressionists Ferdinand Hardekopf and Jakob van Hoddis. In *Dada 4–5*, we once more find a poem from Albert-Birot, as well as reproductions of paintings by the Expressionists Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee, poems by the French unaffiliated Jean Cocteau and Raymond Radiguet, and a poem by Chilean Ultraist Victor Huidobro. Remaining the same is also the multilingualism of the initial Zürich Dada publications. While French is dominant, German can be found throughout, with one instance of Italian in *Dada 3*: Giuseppe Raimondi’s

⁵⁰ Heller, 70.

⁵¹ Eskilson, 139.

⁵² More accurately, *The Blindman* was edited by Marcel Duchamp, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Beatrice Wood, while *New York Dada* was edited by Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray.

⁵³ Hage, “Contingency and Contiguity,” 157.

poem to Tzara. Nonetheless, the contributors' nationalities range from French, German, and Italian, to Russian, Romanian, Swiss, Chilean, Belgian, Dutch, and Swedish.

Notably, some of the contributors ran their own avant-garde magazines, and *Dada 3* and *4–5* feature advertisements for them. Among them are ones for Albert-Birot's *SIC*, French poet Pierre Reverdy's *Nord–Sud*, Picabia's *391*, and Breton, Aragon, and Soupault's *Littérature*. Additionally, advertisements for pamphlets or books published by other contributors such as Picabia, Reverdy, Albert-Birot, Huidobro, Huelsenbeck, Tzara, and Arp also appear in these issues. Alongside already-mentioned poetry, woodcuts, reproductions of paintings, and advertisements, these two issues include art manifestos, essays on art and literature, drawings, lithographs, statements about Dada, and notes about reviews, exhibitions, artistic events, and books. They also include an unattributed drawing and a few unsigned statements, among which “Charlie Chaplin has announced us of his adherence to the Dada movement.”⁵⁴

In terms of organization, *Dada 3* creates associations either on one page or across a spread. Frequently, contributions and advertisements are grouped by contributor. One page has a poem by Picabia, a drawing by the same, and an ad for a book by the same in the top half, but also a fragment by Albert-Birot alongside an ad for his magazine, *SIC*, in the bottom right quarter. Another page has an essay about Arp by Huelsenbeck and an ad for two pamphlets by the same. Across, on the right page of the same spread (Figure 1.1), we can find three woodcuts by Arp. The pattern of a piece of text about a contributor and a contribution by the same being featured on two sides of the same spread occurs more than once. For example, one spread has a Tzara poem dedicated to Janco on the left page and a woodcut by Janco on the right page. *Dada 3* also tends, at times, to group contributors by language, such that Arp's woodcut finds itself on the same spread as van Hoddiss's poem and Huelsenbeck's essay, both in German, and Hardekopf's poem in German on the same page (Figure 1.2) as two drawings by Richter.

⁵⁴ The original text, from *Dada 4–5*, reads: “Charlot Chaplin nous a annoncé son adhesion au Mouvement Dada.”



Figure 1.1. *Dada 3*, 1918, pages 10–11, *monoskop.org*. On this spread, the left side presents Jakob von Hoddiss’ poem, “Der Idealist,” and below and to the right of it an essay by Richard Huelsenbeck about the works of Hans Arp, “Die Arbeiten von Hans Arp.” The right side presents three woodcuts by Hans Arp. All three of these contributors were at least partly German and the two texts on the left side are both in German.

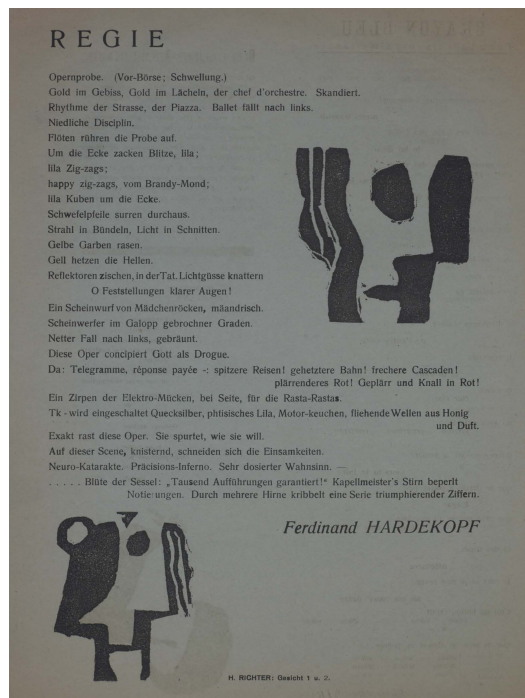


Figure 1.2. *Dada 3*, 1918, page 7, *monoskop.org*. This page contains the Ferdinand Hardekopf poem, “Regie,” with a Hans Richter woodcut to the right of it, and another Richter woodcut below it. Hardekopf’s poem is in German and both contributors were German.

Similar associations can be found in *Dada 4–5*. For instance, one page is devoted wholly to German-language contributions: a Hardekopf poem, ads for the German writer Walter Serner’s magazine, *Sirius*, and a Huelsenbeck book, a statement by Tzara, Arp, and Serner, and a woodcut by Richter. A spread has Picabia on both sides: a poem and ads for *391* and for one of his books on the left, and one of his drawings taking up the entirety of the right. But the associations are also pushed further. *Dada 4–5* groups contributors by artistic milieu as well, such that Soupault, Aragon, and Breton, the *Littérature* group, all find themselves on two sides of the same spread (Figure 1.3). Most differently from *Dada 3*, however, *Dada 4–5* also associates contributions across a sheet, something made possible by the fact that it was printed on different colored papers. We can therefore find German-language contributions making up the recto and verso of a blue sheet. On the recto, a poem from Huelsenbeck is accompanied by a statement from Hausmann about Germany and the reproduction of a Klee painting, while the verso presents a statement about Dada by Richter.

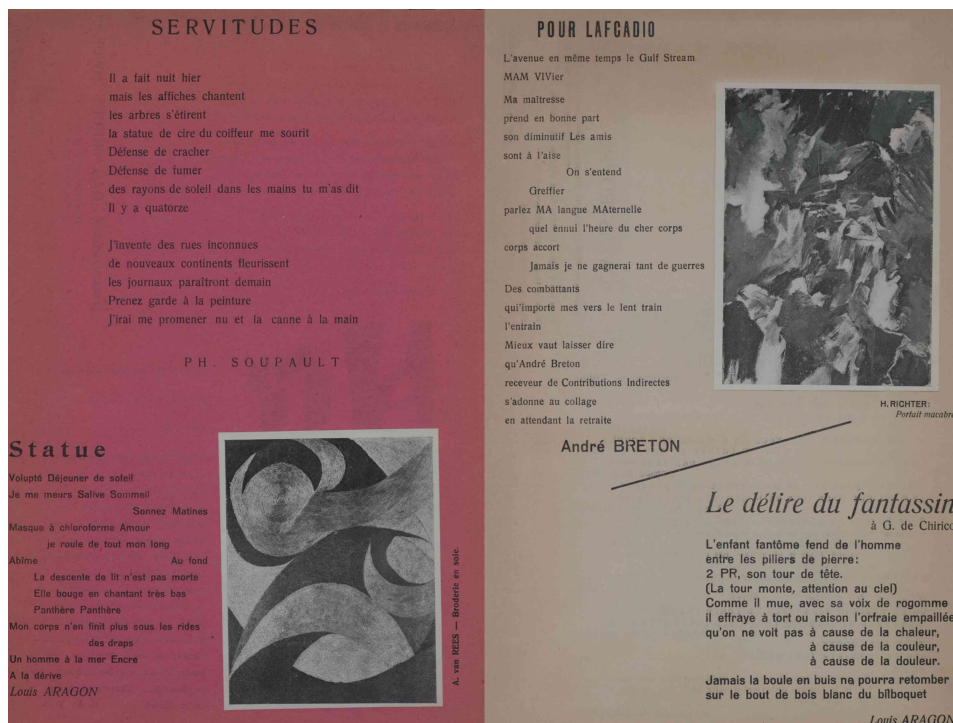


Figure 1.3. *Dada 4–5*, 1919, pages 12–13, *monoskop.org*. On this spread, the poems “Servitudes” by Philippe Soupault and “Statue” by Louis Aragon are placed on the red left side, while “Pour Lafcadio” by André Breton on the off-white right side. All three poets were from the *Littérature* group.

To sum up, the manner in which Tzara edited *Dada 3* and *Dada 4–5* is—by contrast to the initial performances, principles, and manifestos of the movement, as well as the graphic design of these two issues—not as entirely radical as one might have anticipated. This is particularly true when it comes to the way that contributions and ads are, at times, grouped: either by contributor, by language, or by artistic milieu. This allows for a return to the bourgeois individual, nationality, or art movement, respectively. On the other hand, what makes the editing of these issues Dada—by exhibiting irony, anarchy, internationalism, an attack against art, and desubjectivization—are several other features. Among them are self-awareness of the magazine’s material form when making said associations (especially the use of the paper’s colour in *Dada 4–5*) and syncretism at the level art form and art movement both across an issue as a whole and on a single page. Adding to them are the international make-up of its contributors as well as the use of both German and French, the presence of ads among artworks, the few instances in which attribution is not present or evident, and the lack of any organizing theme.

1.3 Raoul Hausmann’s *Der Dada*

Most striking about *Der Dada 1* and *Der Dada 2* is their preponderant lack of attribution. In the first issue, out of a rough total of thirty contributions, only three are clearly attributed—one being a poem by Tzara in French. Another two only have an implicit attribution—a joke ad to buy art supplies from Hausmann and a statement signed by the “Direktion”—and another is misnamed, signed by the “Rekaktion” despite no “Redakteur” (or “Rekakteur”) being listed. The second issue is not quite so extreme. Out of a rough total of fifteen contributions, six are signed and another is the same misnomer from the first issue, this time signed without the irreverent pun, by the “Redaktion.” Notably, all signatures, with the exception of Tzara’s, are from members or fellow travellers of Club Dada.

Equally different from *Dada* is the exclusive use of German, minus Tzara’s poem. In terms of the type of contributions, *Der Dada 1* and *2* mix poetry and woodcuts with parodical ads, joke announcements, and satiric-political articles that “us[e] language borrowed from advertising war propaganda, as well as bureaucratic or religious

institutions⁵⁵ and focus on the German situation. These latter ads, announcements, and articles extend the repertoire of Dada magazine content. At the same time, the abundance of poetry sported by *Dada* is no longer in effect when it comes to *Der Dada*. While *Dada* featured at least one poem on almost every page, *Der Dada 1* features two poems across eight pages, while *Der Dada 2* features only one across the same. Finally, while in *Der Dada 2* we also find fewer ads and announcements, this December 1919 issue pioneers the use of photcollage. Notably, two of the three photcollages featured combine—either as the final shape or as an element—a face with newspaper clippings (Figure 1.4).

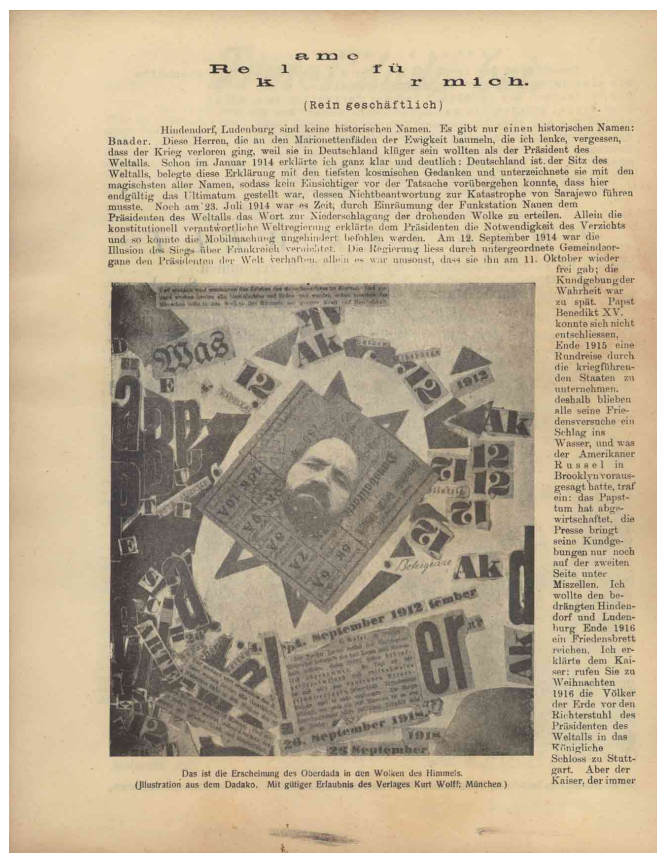


Figure 1.4. *Der Dada 2*, 1919, page 6, *ubu.com*. This page contains a photcollage which shows German Club Dada member, Johannes Bader's face spliced together with various newspaper and advertising clippings.

⁵⁵ Emily Hage, "Der Dada: Introduction," in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 82.

Put briefly, in the first two issues of *Der Dada* we meet some of the same features that we found in Tzara's *Dada*: the presence of ads among artworks, syncretism at the level of art forms included, and a lack of any organizing theme for a single issue. However, in most other regards, Hausmann's editing of *Der Dada*, owing much to the quite different Berlin context, both radicalizes and retreats from the innovations introduced by Tzara in his editing of *Dada 3* and *Dada 4–5*. On the one hand, the *Der Dada* edited by Hausmann lacks the internationalism of both Tzara's *Dada* and of the Dada movement. It does so not only when it comes to its language and contributors but also when it comes to its focus: the German situation. Additionally, while to some extent more syncretic with regard to art forms than *Dada*, it doesn't exhibit any syncretism vis-à-vis art movements or any variety with regard to tone.

On the other hand, *Der Dada* pushes Dada content beyond the realm of art and into the political and thereby more fully constitutes a rejection of pre-war, bourgeois, apolitical European civilization. It also radicalizes Dada irony and mockery, which *Der Dada* applies both to the Dada movement itself and to the magazine form's (Tzara's *Dada* included) use of advertising. But, most significantly, Hausmann's editing takes further the desubjectivization and anarchy begun by Tzara. In leaving the vast majority of contributions unsigned, *Der Dada*'s first two issues present themselves as an anti-individualist endeavour, a point also made by the photocollages in *Der Dada 2* that show faces dissolve into or composed of newspaper clippings. Furthermore, these issues elide the possibility of grouping the contributions by language, artistic milieu, or contributor—elisions to which the more “regressive” use of one language, one tone, and one artistic milieu are, in fact, essential.

1.4 The Dada Editor

A quick survey of other Dada magazines would show that they do not display most of the features of *Dada 3*, *Dada 4–5*, *Der Dada 1*, or *Der Dada 2*'s editing—partial exceptions being the one-issue magazines, *Dada Tank* and *New York Dada*. In this sense, Tzara's *Dada* and Hausmann's *Der Dada* are extremes, but extremes which nonetheless come closest to the principles of the Dada movement. The picture they give us of the Dada editor when combined—and excepting each one's more regressive moments—is as one who was concerned with syncretism of both art forms and art movements and internationalism at the level of contributions' language, subject matter,

and contributors.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Dada editor seems to have had a tendency for anarchy when it came to the order in which the contributions are placed and the theme they revolve around, and an ironic, even transgressive, awareness of form—especially through lack of attribution—when it came to the conventions of magazine publishing.

Notably, the desubjectivization performed by this final feature of anonymity is extended to the role of the editor by way of the other three features mentioned. Syncretism ultimately bespeaks a lack of aesthetic judgement or preference. Internationalism, while implicitly allying itself with the similarly anti-individualist politics of communism, boils down to a renunciation of expertise, inasmuch as the editor dealt with contributions in languages and from social contexts they did not know or fully understand. Finally, organizational anarchy means the lack of a clear vision or concept on the part of the very person who should have made use of them.

This is not to say, however, that the ideal version of the Dada editor would have been the very lack of one. What it remained for the Dada editor to do was to “open” their magazine to the reader’s interpretation, as in Anderson and Heap’s model, and orchestrate this very death of the editor,⁵⁷ doing so precisely through the act of editing, that is, of selecting and organizing the contributions received.

⁵⁶ As Emily Hage argues, one of the very aims of Dada magazines was to use Dada “as an apparatus for juxtaposing heterogeneous materials and various art movements” and thereby maintain for the movement “a certain transcendence above the other movements.” Hage, “Contingency and Continuity,” 158.

⁵⁷ This is also visible at the level of the title used for the said “editor.” While art magazines published immediately prior these—for example, *La Plume*, *Jugend*, *Der Sturm*, and *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*—tended to use titles such as “editeur,” “Redakteur/redacteur,” and “Schriftleiter,” Tzara’s *Dada* and Hausmann’s *Der Dada* (among other Dada magazines) prefer “director” or “under the direction of.”⁵⁷ In other words, Tzara and Hausmann chose to associate their function with a term that, from the Latin *dirigo*, secondarily signifies “immediacy” (*direct* rather than *indirect*) and the more prosaic “distributor.” They did so while avoiding the terms that, in one way or another, make this function sound more curatorial, intrusive, or controlling, connoting “to reduce” (Redakteur/redacteur), “to eject or to elevate” (editeur, from the Latin *editus*)—implicitly tied to art as expression of interiority or art placed on a pedestal—or “to lead” (Schriftleiter).

Chapter 2. International Constructivism

2.1 Context

Less a new tendency and more the second stage of a few different movements joined together, International Constructivism emerged more nebulously than did Dada. One of its starting points can be found in Russian Constructivism, a movement that grew out of sculptor Vladimir Tatlin's influence on the Russian avant-garde around the time of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Tatlin vigorously rejected Expressionism,⁵⁸ romantic vitalism, and art.⁵⁹ He believed that the artist should serve the revolution by becoming akin to an engineer or technician,⁶⁰ using industrial materials "to explore abstract beauty"⁶¹ and bring about "mass mechanized production."⁶²

However, Russian Constructivism itself was not wholly cohesive. After the revolution, two camps formed. On the one side were those faithful to painter Kasimir Malevich's spiritualist-abstract art movement, Suprematism, such as sculptors Naum Gabo and Antonine Pevsner, the authors of the 1920 "Realist Manifesto." They saw spiritual value in fine art and wanted to at least partly keep it autonomous.⁶³ On the other side were Tatlin's radicalized followers, the artists Alexander Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, and Aleksei Gan, who pronounced themselves "Productivists." They wanted to submit art to entirely utilitarian aims by renouncing fine art and only designing goods that served a practical purpose and helped the Soviet state, such as propaganda posters, workers' clothes, and government buildings.⁶⁴

From this embattled context, simultaneous with the Russian Civil War and just as the Soviet state began to be more suspicious of the "spiritualist" faction of avant-garde

⁵⁸ Boris Arvatov, "From *Art and Class* (1923)," trans. John Bowlt, in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 43.

⁵⁹ "Program of the Constructivist Group (1920)" in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Eskilson, 201–3.

⁶² Arvatov, 45.

⁶³ Bann, xxxii. Meggs and Purvis, 319.

⁶⁴ Eskilson, 204. Meggs and Purvis, 319.

artists, the Malevich disciple El Lissitzky migrated to Berlin in 1921.⁶⁵ At the time, Berlin was the fourth most populous city in the world and hosted some three hundred thousand Russian migrants.⁶⁶ Once there, Lissitzky, along with fellow Russian émigré writer Ilya Ehrenburg, started publishing, in March of 1922, the trilingual Constructivist magazine *Veshch/Gegenstand/Objet*, meant to introduce Western art to a Russian audience and Russian Constructivism to the West.⁶⁷

A second starting point for International Constructivism can be found in the Dutch De Stijl art movement. Formed during the late summer of 1917, in Leiden, to which the main organizer of the movement, Theo van Doesburg, had returned after three years of military service, De Stijl came as yet another response to WWI.⁶⁸ Like Switzerland, the Netherlands had remained neutral during the war. Unlike Dada, however, De Stijl's response was not one of mocking destruction but of a search after a "universal language of geometric abstraction" which would form the "prototype for a new social order" beyond the individualism and national egotism that had led to the war.⁶⁹ It is precisely this harmonious, universal language that "the style" was meant to name, manifesting, in painting, as a reduction to the use of black, white, grey, and the primary colours, as well as to the horizontal and the vertical planes.⁷⁰ Intending to have applied art absorb pure art, the movement's members also created everyday objects, which they hoped to "elevate to the level of art" such that the "spirit of art could then permeate society."⁷¹ After the war, Van Doesburg took on the role of the movement's ambassador, travelling around Western Europe and eventually moving, in 1921, to Weimar.⁷²

It was on account of these two spokesmen's move to Germany that International Constructivism came into its own. In May of 1922 both Van Doesburg and Lissitzky attended the Düsseldorf-based International Congress of Progressive Artists. At the

⁶⁵ Eskilson, 224. Meggs and Purvis, 320.

⁶⁶ Brooks, 16.

⁶⁷ Bann, xxxiii.

⁶⁸ Eskilson, 187.

⁶⁹ Meggs and Purvis, 331. Eskilson, 187. Hans L. C. Jaffé, "Introduction," in *De Stijl: 1917–1931, Vision of Utopia*, ed. Mildred Friedman (New York: Aberville Press, 1982), 12.

⁷⁰ Jubert, 200.

⁷¹ Meggs and Purvis, 332. Jaffé, 14.

⁷² Jubert, 201.

congress, a conflict ensued from the attempt on the part of some of the avant-garde groups involved to pass through a skewed declaration regarding the budding Union of International Progressive Artists. The declaration presented this union as on the one hand committed to a subjective and individualist conception of art, and, on the other (and as a result), interested in practical and financial rather than artistic concerns. In opposition to it, Lissitzky, Van Doesburg, and ex-Dadaist Richter formed the International Faction of Constructivists, to claim priority for aesthetic considerations as a collective.⁷³

Reacting to the Expressionists present, Lissitzky and Van Doesburg defined International Constructivism as prizing art over politics.⁷⁴ Additionally, through their twin influence, it arose as a synthesis of De Stijl and Russian Constructivism: it borrowed the universalism and clarity of De Stijl, the utility and functionalism of Russian Constructivism, and the anti-individualism and focus on geometry of both.⁷⁵

It was only after these events that the magazines analyzed below were founded, *G* and *Merz* both being first published in 1923.⁷⁶ As was the case with Dada, this report only analyzes two out of approximately two dozen International Constructivist magazines circulating at the time. These include the later issues of Serbian writer Ljubomir Micić *Zenit* (1921–26), the already mentioned *Veshch* (1922), Czech artist Karel Teige's *Disk* (1923–25), the Polish Blok group's *Blok* (1924–26), and Dutch architects Mart Stam and Hans Schmidt's *ABC* (1924–28).⁷⁷ However, more clearly than with Dada, our report does not embark on an analysis of the other magazines belonging to the same

⁷³ Mertins and Jennings, 9.

⁷⁴ Stephen Bann, "Introduction," xxxvi. Eskilson, 215. For Van Doesburg's generally apolitical outlook, see Ger Harmsen, "De Stijl and the Russian Revolution," in *De Stijl: 1917–1931, Visions of Utopia*, ed. Mildred Friedman (New York: Aberville Press, 1982), 48. For Lissitzky's non-apolitical prizing of art over politics see, El Lissitzky and Ilya Ehrenburg, "The Blockade of Russia Is Coming to an End (1922)," in *The Tradition of Constructivism*, ed. Stephen Bann (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 56. For the apoliticism of the group around *G*, see Mertins and Jennings, 14.

⁷⁵ Jubert, 180.

⁷⁶ Of note is that Dada, as we saw, was an initially inchoate movement such that the function of its magazines was to somehow develop, clarify it, or extend it. International Constructivism, on the other hand, having already passed through several preparative metamorphoses, was overwrought and clear in its principles from the get go, the function of its magazines being mostly that of spreading its ideas further.

⁷⁷ Lajos Kassák's *MA* (1916–26) has been excluded from this list inasmuch as it may be considered a "national" constructivist magazine.

movement for reasons of linguistic inaccessibility, the magazine's less-international-than-stated content, or its concentration on one art form in particular (as is the case with *ABC* and architecture).

2.2 Hans Richter's *G*

Following the Düsseldorf Congress and the discontinuation of the Soviet government's financial support for *Veshch*, Richter collaborated with Lissitzky while both were living in Berlin—the first as editor, the second as graphic designer—on the first issue of the Berlin-based magazine *G*.⁷⁸ The first two issues of the magazine stand out from the rest due to their compactness. They are a mere four pages each and bear the subtitle, “Material toward Elementary Construction,” which was to change in the subsequent issues to “Journal for Elementary Construction.” Additionally, unlike the other three issues—which feature small summaries of some of the articles in English, French, and Russian—and most of the Dada issues already analyzed, the said “material” in *G 1* and *G 2* is entirely in German. Even the texts originally written in another language, namely, the extract from Gabo and Pevsner's “Realist Manifesto” in *G 1*, and the Fiat article sent by the Fiat Publicity Office in *G 2*, have been translated, from Russian and Italian respectively.

Both issues are very rationally and symmetrically organized. July 1923's *G 1* begins with the magazine's mission statement, which announces a journal dedicated to clarity and to contributions such as photos, transparencies, diagrams, and catalogs from “creative workers” rather than artists. It uses a couple of manifestos as book ends: it begins with two manifestoes, one by Richter and German sculptor Werner Gräff, and one by Van Doesburg, and ends with two more, one by Gräff followed by the already mentioned extract from Gabo and Pevsner's “Realist Manifesto.” While on the first page, Van Doesburg's manifesto is paired with his painting, it continues onto the second page, where it shares the spread with fellow architect Rohe's essay about office buildings and photo of an office building. On this same spread (Figure 2.1), two ex-Dadaists have their essays on film extend from one page to the next: the editor Richter's, and Hausmann's. On the last page, the Russians—or better said, the “spiritualist” Constructivists—are placed together: first Lissitzky, then Gabo and Pevsner. Finally, ads, in this case to other

⁷⁸ Meggs and Purvis, 320. Stephen Bann, xxxiv.

avant-garde magazines, are not spread out across the magazine's pages but are all placed in one section at the bottom of the last page. In each case, where visual material is provided, it is used to illustrate the text.

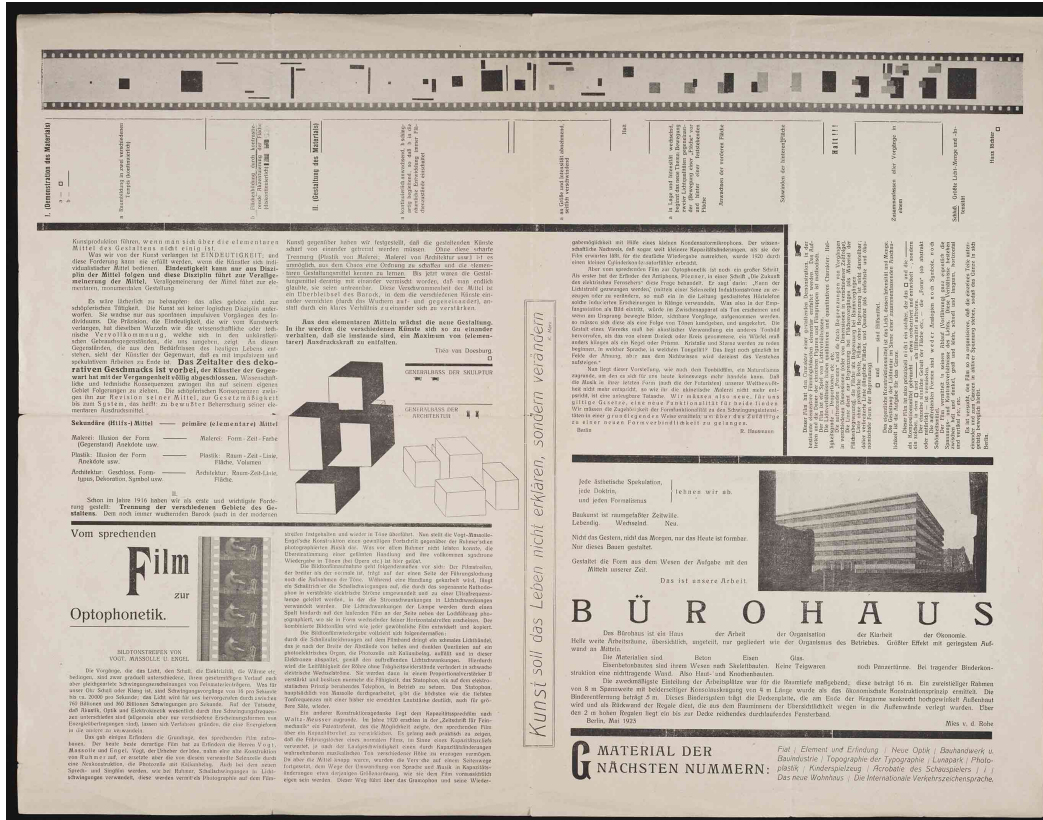


Figure 2.1. G 1, 1923, pages 2–3, *monoskop.org*. On this spread, at the top, from left to right, lie film strips and an explanatory text by ex-Dadaist, Hans Richter. On the left side, below it, Constructivist architect Theo van Doesburg’s manifesto, “Zur Elementaren Gestaltung,” continues from the previous page. Below Van Doesburg’s text and continuing onto the right side sits an essay on film, “Vom sprechenden Film zur Optophonetik,” by ex-Dadaist Raoul Hausmann. Finally, below both Richter and Hausmann’s text, on the right side, lies a text on office buildings, “Bürohaus,” by the Constructivist architect Mies van der Rohe. The spine reads, “Kunst soll das Leben nicht erklären, sondern verändern,” or “Art should not explain life, but change it,” attributed to K. Marx.

Apart from the rigorous organization of the issue according to contributor and contribution, most of the pieces selected fall into a theme, namely that of the manifesto. This is highlighted through the use of two short paraphrases on each side of the issue’s spine: “Just no eternal truths,” from Friedrich Engels’s *Anti-Dühring*⁷⁹ (but unattributed),

⁷⁹ Gough, 36.

is placed on the outside spine, and “Art should not explain life but change it,” from Karl Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach* (attributed), on the inside spine. Together, the two are meant to recall Engels and Marx’s *Communist Manifesto*.⁸⁰ Finally, in terms of the type of contributions it contains, *G 1* includes images, essays, and manifestos, but—unlike Dada—no poetry or literary works.

G 2, from September 1923, is no less well wrought. When it comes to associations, in the middle spread (Figure 2.2), Van Doesburg’s “News from Paris” is placed beneath an article about highrises by fellow architect Ludwig Hilberseimer and across from another article by the same about city planning. On the same spread, the Van Doesburg article shares a page with an announcement about an exhibition of De Stijl architecture, while Lissitzky’s article about engineering is placed across from an announcement about the Society of Friends of Russia. Just as ads for other magazines are all placed together on the fourth page, so on the third page all art-related announcements are placed together and next to Van Doesburg’s art-focused report on Paris. As in *G 1*, the images provided stand in a relation of illustration vis-à-vis the text, and also as in *G 1*, most of the contributions fall into a main theme, announced near the top of the first page: “Building,” understood in the widest sense. Of ten contributions—the same number as in *G 1*—only two are not about buildings, materials for buildings, or “building” (cars, the act of engineering, or industry). Finally, while almost every contribution is signed in both issues, *G 2* includes a contribution from the Fiat Publicity Office, not signed by any particular individual. In general, the type of contributions that make up *G 2*—while equally exclusive of poetry—for the most part range outside the domain of art, the article from Fiat and Rohe’s essay about ferroconcrete standing out the most.

⁸⁰ It does so while also adopting a playful relation to the communism of the “international progressive artists.” Ibid.

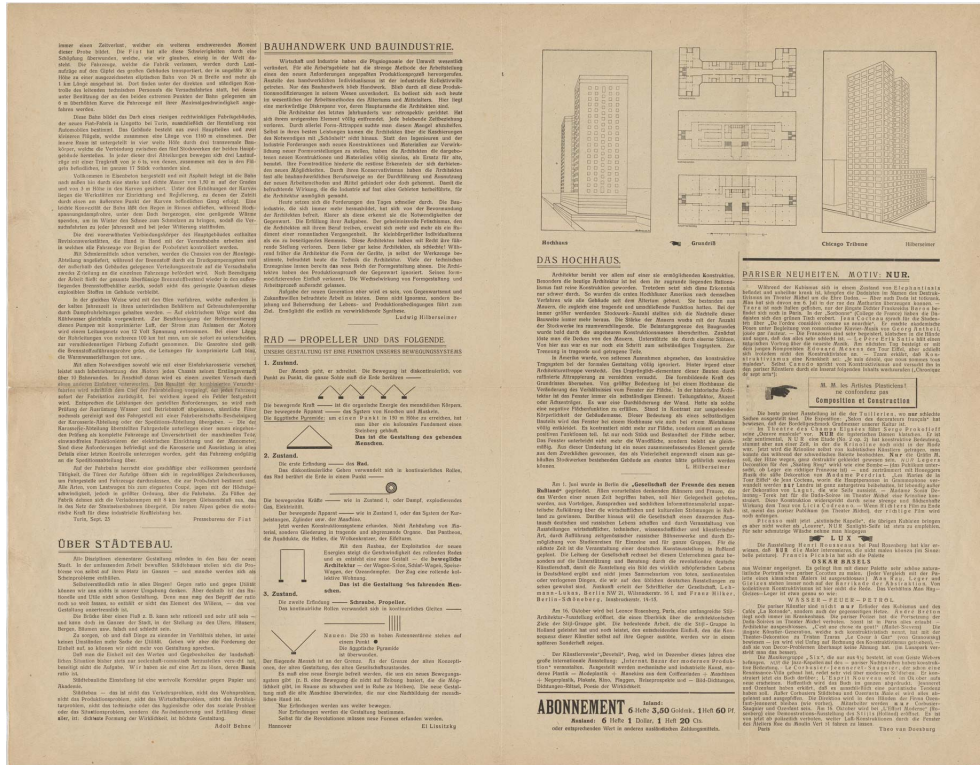


Figure 2.2. G 2, 1923, pages 2–3, *mom.org*. On the left side of this spread, in the right column, lies a text about construction work and the construction industry, “Bauhandwerk und Bauindustrie,” by German architect Ludwig Hilberseimer. Below it lies a text about the wheel, “Rad — Propeller und das Folgende” by Russian International Constructivist El Lissitzky. On the right side of the spread, at the top, lies sketches of skyscrapers, while in the left column another text by Hilberseimer about the skyscraper, “Das Hochhaus.” Below Hilberseimer’s text are announcements, one of which pertains to the Society of Friends of Russia. In the right column sits Theo van Doesburg’s report on the Parisian art scene, “Parisien Neuheiten, Motiv: Nur.”

On the whole, Richter’s editing of G 1 and G 2 is—especially compared to the Dada editors we looked at above—so rigorous and clear as to be systematic. Both issues are organized around a theme, both group contributions using page and spread according to the contributor’s aesthetic position and profession and the type of contribution it is, and both contain ten contributions. Syncretism is as present here as it was in Dada, but Richter’s syncretism might rather be considered of a functionalist sort, as indicated by “material” in these issues’ subtitle. In other words, while Dada insisted on syncretism vis-à-vis art movements and art forms, Richter’s G 1 and G 2 maintains syncretism with regard to art forms, but mostly focuses on bringing together writings from the realm of art with writings from the realm of engineering and technology, to which art may be applied. Despite the contributors’ international origins (Dutch, German,

Russian, Italian), absent too is the multilingualism present in Tzara's *Dada* in particular, making for a monolingual internationalism that poses for universalism. Finally, the fact that every contribution is signed functions as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it threatens to bring back the individualism that International Constructivism was set against. On the other, due to *G 1* and *G 2*'s placement of contributions and their cohesiveness in tone, point of view, and subject,⁸¹ the signature attached to them no longer bears the same expressive meaning as it might in Dada's use of syncretism with regard to art movements.

2.3 Kurt Schwitters's *Merz*

Upon encountering Lissitzky and Van Doesburg in 1922, Schwitters started the magazine *Merz*.⁸² Its name deriving from the German word for "commerce," *Merz* began as a Dada magazine.⁸³ By the April–July 1924 issue 8–9, however, with Lissitzky brought on as a guest co-designer, the magazine shifted towards International Constructivism,⁸⁴ a change which is reflected in its closing lines: "From this issue onwards, each issue of *Merz* is to have a special character and not be a juxtaposition of Dada and art, as was previously the case."⁸⁵

Despite the notice, a first look at the contributors to *Merz* 8–9 might lead one to believe that we are back to the Dada issues analyzed above. Not because the contributors are all Dada but, rather, because they come from a variety of avant-gardist movements: Suprematism is represented by a Malevich painting; Constructivism by a Lissitzky statement and painting, a photo of Tatlin's tower, and a photo of one of Rohe's buildings; Dada through a photogram by American artist Man Ray, an Arp painting, and a Schwitters collage; De Stijl through a painting by the Dutch artist Piet Mondrian and a photo of one of Dutch architect J. J. P. Oud's buildings; and Cubism through a sculpture

⁸¹ That subject being the contributors' "commitment to the notion of *Gestaltung*" or, put simply, construction. Mertins and Jennings, 4.

⁸² Jubert, 208. Hage, "Contingency and Continuity," 178.

⁸³ Emily Hage, "Merz: Introduction," in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 286. Eskilson, 142.

⁸⁴ Hage, "Merz," 286.

⁸⁵ In the original, the statement reads: "Von diesem Heft an soll jedes Merzheft einen besonderen Charakter haben, nicht wie bisher eine Gegenüberstellung von Dada und Kunst sein."

by Ukrainian artist Alexander Archipenko, a drawing by French painter Fernand Léger, and a painting by French artist Georges Braque. However, upon a closer look, *Merz 8–9* has a very tight construction. On the one hand, Schwitters uses a recurring structure. Every page, apart from the cover and with the exception of Lissitzky’s statement, includes an image and a text in both German and French. Furthermore, the whole issue is organized around the theme announced on the cover, *Nasci*—“nature” in Latin, defined loosely as “becoming”—such that each page refers either through image or through text to this theme.

In contrast to *G1* and *G2*, however, the way that these visual contributions are grouped is always across a spread and according not to subject matter as much as to possible similarities between left and right. Thus, Schwitters draws out the resemblance between a crystal and an International Constructivist painting, a De Stijl painting and a Dada collage (Figure 2.3), a Cubist painting and a Dada painting, and two modernist buildings and a plant. Also different from the *G*’s first two issues is that some of the images within *Merz 8–9*’s pages are unattributed, and many of the bilingual texts are placed in such a way as to make it unclear whether they are unattributed or are attributable to the juxtaposed image’s creator. Similar to *G 1* and *G 2*, however, the cast of contributors is international (Dutch, German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, French, and American). This means that at least some of the texts, if attributable to them, must have been translated into German or French, from one into the other, or into both. Furthermore, *Merz 8–9* follows *G* in giving up on literary contributions. It too prefers instead to push outside the realm of art, in this case toward the natural sciences—namely, by way of four images of natural phenomena, one of which is by the Austrian natural scientist and philosopher R. H. Francé.

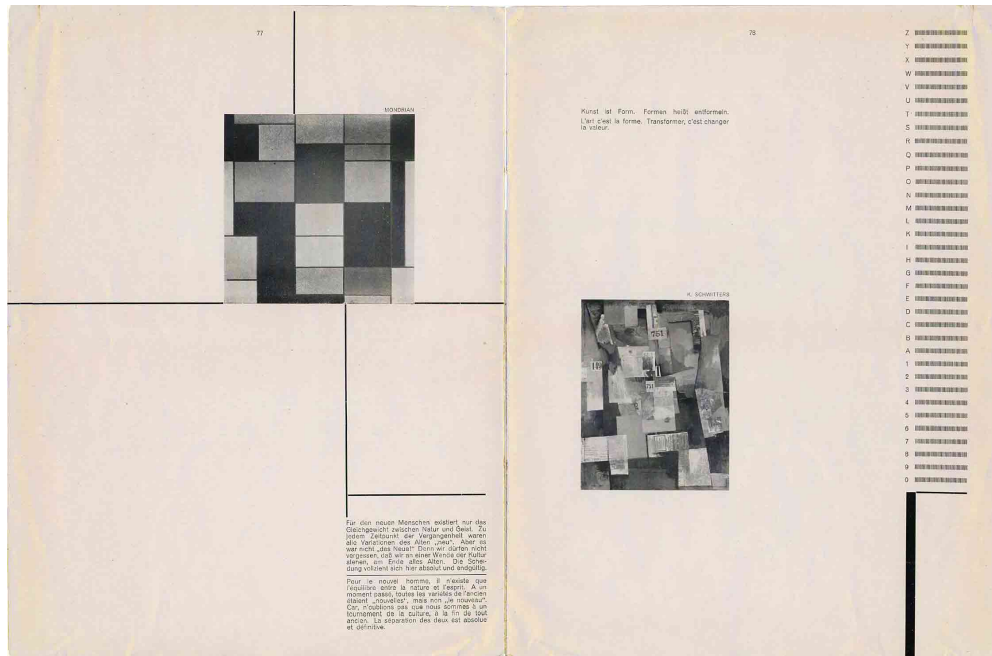


Figure 2.3. *Merz 8–9*, 1924, pages 6–7, *monoskop.org*. On the left side of this spread lies a painting by De Stijl artist Piet Mondrian, while on the right a collage by Kurt Schwitters. Below or above them, respectively, lies unsigned text written in German, then in French.

In sum, while *Merz 8–9* seems closer to Dada than to International Constructivism, it in fact follows G in its recurring structure and the way it sees art intermingle with the world (in this case natural science). It thereby embodies the movement’s principles of clarity, geometry, and utility. It can be said, however, that *Merz 8–9* pushed International Constructivism even further than did G, for two reasons. On the one hand, this issue makes translation more explicit and therefore presents it as the ideal manner of achieving the movement’s sought-after universalism, something that would partly be taken on by G in subsequent issues. On the other, it draws out resemblances between various art movements such that they all ultimately seem to express the same visual language as that of International Constructivism. Ultimately, although most of its visual material is attributed, *Merz 8–9*, in showing that art movements can be reduced to the same visual structure, renders attribution altogether unimportant, reflecting the larger, anti-individualist, universalist principles of the movement.

2.4 The International Constructivist Editor

What situates *G 1*, *G 2*, and *Merz 8–9* at the extremes of International Constructivist magazines of the time is their use of translation, their syncretic inclusion of domains outside of art, their systematic construction, and their exclusion of literary texts.⁸⁶ Most immediately, these features lead to the desubjectivization of the contributors. Translation decontextualizes them, while syncretism vis-à-vis the natural sciences or engineering makes use of their art for non-artistic purposes and thus demystifies their ability to be “expressive.” At the same time the absence of poetry in these issues is equivalent to an exclusion of the lyrical self, and their systematic construction—through resemblance, homogeneity, or categorization—subsumes them to a set of universal, Constructivist principles and categories.

Although these rigorous and rigorously applied features might seem to present Richter or Schwitters as having been—unlike Tzara and Hausmann—imposing editors committed to Pound’s “closed” magazine editing, fully in control of the material they edited, the two in fact submitted themselves to the same laws of order to which they submitted their contributors. Put differently, across these three issues, Richter and Schwitters did not select and order contributions with the aim of creating, like an “artist,” an overall aesthetic effect or an aesthetic unity, or expressing a subjective idea. Instead, they at once followed a well-defined programme or concept and acted as engineers in its application. The International Constructivist editor did not, then, as did their Dada equivalent, orchestrate their own death. Instead, Schwitters and Richter quite simply no longer saw themselves as editors at all, even if they still acted as such.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ All of these features are taken up by subsequent International Constructivist magazines, such as *bauhaus* (1926–31).

⁸⁷ It is only appropriate, then, that both should call themselves—rather than “Redakteur” or “Schriftleiter”—“Herausgeber,” which is to say, “publisher,” a function that, by being more hands-on and prosaic, sits outside the editor’s comparatively ivory tower-like realm.

Chapter 3. Theo van Doesburg

3.1 Context

What made Van Doesburg the main organizer of *De Stijl*, despite Mondrian's larger posthumous fame, was the fact that he founded and financially sustained the main medium through which the movement's ideas came together and were disseminated: the Leiden-based magazine *De Stijl*.⁸⁸ In its first series, 1917–20, this was a “monthly magazine” which mainly published Dutch members of the movement.⁸⁹ In 1921, given Van Doesburg and Mondrian's travels throughout Europe after the war, *De Stijl* underwent a redesign and a reorientation. It began publishing contributions in various languages from international contributors and was now called an “international monthly.”⁹⁰ This, combined with the publication of the movement's third explicitly non-political manifesto in its August 1921 issue, finally made *De Stijl* a proto-International Constructivist magazine.⁹¹

The year previous, in May of 1920, Van Doesburg had started publishing, under the pseudonym I. K. Bonset—homophonous with “I am crazy” in Dutch⁹²—Dada poetry in *De Stijl*. This was not Van Doesburg's only pseudonym, however. “Aldo Calmini” was another, under which he published anti-philosophical prose, and “Theo van Doesburg” was itself a pseudonym, Van Doesburg's birthname having been Christian Emil Marie Küpper. On the surface, as many critics have noted,⁹³ and as we have seen in defining the two types of editors thus far, Dada and International Constructivism are quite opposed. While Dada is committed to anarchy, chance, irrationality, and destruction, De

⁸⁸ Meggs and Purvis, 332.

⁸⁹ Eskilson, 188. This, we might say, made the first series of *De Stijl* an example of “national” Constructivist magazines, alongside *MA* and the various Russian Constructivist magazines that began to circulate a few years later, such as Aleksei Gan's *Kino-fot* (1922–23) and Osip Brik and Vladimir Mayakovsky's *LEF* (1923–25).

⁹⁰ Eskilson, 189–90.

⁹¹ Gladys C. Fabre, “Style is the man,” in *Theo van Doesburg: A New Expression of Life, Art, and Technology*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2016), 17. 13–29. Robert P. Welsh, “De Stijl: A Reintroduction,” in *De Stijl: 1917–1931*, ed. Mildred Friedman (New York: Aberville Press, 1982), 43.

⁹² Eskilson, 195.

⁹³ Hage, “Contingency and Continuity,” 162. Eskilson, 193. Krispyn, 64–65. Beckett, 1.

Stijl, and, with it, International Constructivism, is committed to rational structure, geometry, order, and construction. However, what made Van Doesburg think that he could bring the two together,⁹⁴ especially after encountering Dada in 1919,⁹⁵ was the two movements' common penchant for anti-individualism and anti-traditionalism, reflected also in their common interest for technology and the mechanical.

Over the following year, in 1921, and especially after his move to Weimar, where he was confronted by Expressionism, Van Doesburg came to see Dada as complementary to De Stijl. Dada could serve as an element of destruction which would raze the old order, thereby preparing the ground for De Stijl and later International Constructivism's reconstruction of a new culture.⁹⁶ Thus, throughout 1921, *De Stijl* included Dada contributions, from Bonset, French artist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes (March 1921) and Schwitters (July 1921). In the summer of the same year, Van Doesburg went further and conceived of and received material for a Dada magazine which he would launch in January of 1922, *Mécano*.⁹⁷ As a final gesture of holding together Dada and International Constructivism, especially as a two-pronged attack on Expressionism,⁹⁸ Van Doesburg, alongside Lissitzky and Richter, organized the International Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists in September of 1922 in Weimar. Organized alongside Lissitzky and Richter. It was attended by Hausmann, Arp, and Tzara, as well as by the Hungarian Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Van Doesburg was not the first to bring Dada and Constructivism together, however. Hausmann, on the basis of Berlin Dada and Russian Constructivism's common commitment to communism, exhibited his photomontage *Tatlin at Home* at the First International Dada Fair held in 1920 in Berlin.

⁹⁵ Beckett, 4.

⁹⁶ Meggs and Purvis, 335. Beckett, 23. Marguerite Tuijin, "Theo van Doesburg and Dada," in *Theo van Doesburg: A New Expression of Life, Art, and Technology*, ed. Gladys C. Fabre (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2016), 66.

⁹⁷ Tuijin, 66.

⁹⁸ Specifically, the Expressionism practiced at the Bauhaus, the Weimar-based German art school. One of its professors at the time, Johannes Itten, was particularly inclined towards Expressionism. Bann, xxxvi.

⁹⁹ Hage, "Contiguity and Continuity," 161. Beckett, 18. Heller, 61. Mertins and Jennings, 9.

3.2 Theo van Doesburg's *De Stijl*

Remarkably, across the *De Stijl* issues covering the years 1921–23—a total of twenty-five issues—the structure of the magazine remains the same, with few exceptions. Namely, the cover is followed by an ad, then by the masthead, then various essays, poems, and manifestos, a “round view” column and a “received books” column punctuated by at times miscellaneous visual contributions, and finally a couple of ads. At the same time, the magazine’s regularity and frequency allow, unlike in any of the other magazines analyzed thus far, some essays to extend over several issues.¹⁰⁰ When it comes to images, *De Stijl* treats them similarly to *G 1* and *G 2*. They are either placed beside articles *by* their makers, are used to illustrate a text, are placed beside articles *about* their makers, or are tacked on in the final, “miscellaneous” section of the magazine.

On the other hand, in contrast to *G 1*, *G 2*, and *Merz 8–9*, and partly as a result of their frequency, *De Stijl*'s issues are not organized around any particular themes. The exceptions to this rule are the November 1921 issue dedicated to Bonset's poetry, the April 1922 Düsseldorf Congress issue, the August 1922 Weimar Congress issue, and the December 1922 *De Stijl* retrospective issue. Furthermore, and like Richter and Schwitters's magazines, *De Stijl* features contributions from outside the realm of art. Across its issues we can find anonymous photos of grain silos (April 1921, June 1921, and April 1923), a race car (October 1921), a mechanical toy (May 1922), and a telescope (May–June 1923). Unlike *G 1* and *G 2*, it also includes signed contributions from a broad spectrum of artistic movements such as Cubism, De Stijl, Dada, Productivism, Suprematism, and International Constructivism, with the last predominating. Finally, unlike both *G* and *Merz*, these issues of *De Stijl* have untranslated contributions in various languages, including Dutch, German, French, and Italian. Only a few articles are simultaneously made available in Dutch, German, and French: the third *De Stijl* manifesto (August 1921) and the Weimar Congress manifesto by Van Doesburg, Lissitzky, Richter, the Belgian artist Karel Maes, and the German photographer Max Burchartz (August 1922).

¹⁰⁰ Some of these were by contributors who were not members of *De Stijl*, such as Ribemont-Dessaignes and French writer Léonce Rosenberg.

In sum, the issues of *De Stijl* from 1921 to 1923 are characterized by having no definite theme and being syncretic both in terms of art movements, art forms, and non-artistic subject matter. Furthermore, they mainly use images to illustrate texts rather than as standalone contributions and have a recurring structure wherein contributions are grouped by type. Given the fact that *De Stijl* came before *G* and *Merz*, we might say that Richter and Schwitters pushed International Constructivism further than did Van Doesburg, that they refined it by organizing issues around themes, proscribing syncretism or rendering it homogenous, and disallowing literary texts. On the other hand, the fact that even after participating in Richter's *G*, Van Doesburg insisted on not organizing issues by themes, on including Dada contributions, and on publishing poetry signals rather than the comparison should be made in reverse. This is especially the case since *G* and *Merz* gave up on these principles in subsequent issues. Therefore, what we could say that Van Doesburg added to International Constructivist editing across these issues is an element of Dada. Apart from doing so by violating the principles above, he is also Dadaist in insisting on multilingualism rather than translation.

This is not to say that Van Doesburg staged the death of the editor as did Tzara and Hausmann.¹⁰¹ But he did manage, by way of taking on and displaying Tzara and Hausmann's influence, to relativize the editor's function and partly make *De Stijl* an "open" magazine. Moreover, he succeeded in putting into question Richter and Schwitters's practice of editor-as-engineer, a point to which we will return in the conclusion.

3.3 I. K. Bonset's *Mécano*

Also published in Leiden, *Mécano*'s name has unclear origins. It could have come from a children's construction game called Meccano and produced by Liverpool-based Meccano Ltd or been a reference to Picabia's machine images.¹⁰² Like Van Doesburg's post-1921 *De Stijl* in relation to its main movement, the first three issues of *Mécano* contain predominantly Dada contributions while also representing a broad scope of other movements. Across them we find contributions from the English modernist literary movement of Imagism (a poem by Pound), *De Stijl* (statements by

¹⁰¹ After all, across *De Stijl*'s issues, Van Doesburg's title appears as "redactie."

¹⁰² Ades, "Mécano," 262. Beckett, 19.

Mondrian and contributions from Van Doesburg's pre-1921 period), Futurism (statements by F.T. Marinetti and Umberto Boccioni), International Constructivism (images by Moholy-Nagy and Peter Röhl), Vorticism (a poem by Wyndham Lewis), and Surrealism (a poem by Benjamin Péret). On the other hand, similar to Tzara's *Dada*, but nowhere near the extreme of Hausmann's *Der Dada*, a couple of unattributed statements or images are present in each of these issues. The type of contributions they include span manifestoes, essays, poems, reports, sculptures, drawings, photos, photomontages, and photograms, a few of which, by having machines as their subject matter, fall outside the realm of art. Like *G 1* and *G 2* in its regularity, each of these issues has sixteen pages and a rough total of eighteen contributions. Finally, like both Tzara's *Dada* and the *De Stijl* issues we have analyzed, *Mécano 1, 2, and 3* have no definitive themes around which their contributions are organized and, as announced on their covers, are multilingual, containing contributions in French, English, German, and Dutch.¹⁰³

But perhaps most striking and most immediate in the first three issues of Bonset's magazine is their format, which here takes on an editorial meaning not relevant in the other magazines we have analyzed thus far. This is because each of these issues is made of a single sheet of paper which is meant to be folded three times so as to create sixteen panels or pages.¹⁰⁴ It can then be unfolded and refolded in various ways, such that the way the issue reads—which contribution shows up next to which—is left in the hands of the reader. However, the reader is given some limitations. On any one side of the entire sheet, the contribution on a page can only correspond to any other on the same sheet when the latter is entirely unfolded. Otherwise, the contribution can only have a one-to-one relationship with contributions that share its "row" or "column." Additionally, only the contributions on the middle page can be placed in a relation with contributions from the other side of the sheet—albeit never the ones in the same verso "row" or the ones in the verso "row" of the closest outside "row" to it.

This foldability and unfoldability allows not only for various juxtapositions, but also for the dismemberment of certain contributions. Although each issue has eighteen

¹⁰³ In fact, *Mécano 1* contains no German contributions, despite the issue name having been translated into the German on the cover.

¹⁰⁴ Gough, 30. Heller, 61.

contributions, these are not made to fit into the sixteen pages in a “regular” way. Some pages contain more than one contribution, while some contributions—or contributors—extend over two pages. Therefore, Ribemont-Dessaignes’s manifesto, Bonset’s manifesto (Figure 3.1), Picabia’s contributions, and French painter Jean Crotti’s contributions to *Mécano 1*—all placed across two pages and on the margin “columns”—can be separated from themselves through folding. While this also occurs in *Mécano 2*, it’s in *Mécano 3* that it is pushed to the extreme inasmuch as here (Figure 3.2), Schwitters’s essay and Bonset’s review extend over two pages across a “row,” making for a harsher separation of these contributions from themselves. Finally, *Mécano* plays the further game of having, in all three issues, at least one instance of two contributions from the same contributor which, due to their placement, can never meet. This is the case with Tzara’s two poems in *Mécano 1*, Tzara’s two poems and Hausmann’s photomontage and his manifesto in *Mécano 2*, and Ribemont-Dessaignes’s essay and his poem in *Mécano 3*.



Figure 3.1. *Mécano 1*, 1922, recto (unfolded), *monoskop.org*. On this unfolded recto, on the far left, vertically covering two pages, lies French writer Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes manifesto, “Manifeste à l’huile.” On the far right, also vertically covering two pages, lies I. K. Bonset’s manifesto, “Antikunstenzuivereredemanifest.” Both are only signed on their second page.



Figure 3.2. *Mécano* 3, 1922, verso (unfolded), *monoskop.org*. On this unfolded verso, horizontally across the two pages occupying the top right lies I. K. Bonset’s irreverent review of fellow artists, “Pays-Plats.” In the bottom half, horizontally across the two pages in the middle, lies Kurt Schwitters’ essay, “Zwei Herren.” In both cases, the signature lies only on the first page or only on the second page, respectively.

In sum, one could say that, for the most part, Bonset’s editing of *Mécano* is typically Dada. He used syncretism in terms of art form and art movement and included anonymous images and statements. Furthermore, he did not organize the issues around themes and fully embraced multilingualism. Alternatively, one could also say, as many critics have,¹⁰⁵ that *Mécano*’s editing is, in fact, a synthesis of Dada and International Constructivist editing. After all, it has a recurring structure and number of contributions. Moreover, while it may not have thematic organization according to issue, the magazine as a whole could be said to have an overarching theme that is especially reflected in its visual materials: the relation between Dada and the machine.

This report’s contention, however, is that these three issues of *Mécano* push Dada editing to its most radical. This is primarily due to format that Bonset chose and the way that he placed contributions within that format. Together, these allow, on the one hand,

¹⁰⁵ Ades, “Mécano,” 262. Hage, “Contingency and Continuity,” 168–71.

for contributions to lose their signature and therefore their self-identity, and, on the other, for the editor's grouping or placement of articles to mostly be ignored by the reader. In a sense, by making the construction game *Mécano*, Bonset as editor did not just stage his own death but "actually" died. Therefore, inasmuch as *Mécano* uses a reoccurring structure and an overarching theme, this is so as to allow Bonset to generate a structure from which he would thereafter be able to step away,¹⁰⁶ leaving it entirely up to the reader.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, violating the rules of this strict structure in subsequent issues allowed for a more evident performance of destruction than that offered by going from one structureless issue to another, as was the case with Tzara.

¹⁰⁷ It is only natural, then, that on the cover of *Mécano*, Bonset used the title not of "directeur," "redacteur," or "editeur," but of "gérant littéraire"—a neologism meant to evoke a rather impersonal bureaucratic-financial role.

Conclusion

4.1 Beyond the “Closed”/“Open” Model

At this point, we can more fully return to our initial questions regarding the two models of interwar magazine editing put forward in the introduction. Namely, did the Dada editor, the International Constructivist Editor, and Van Doesburg each practice editing in a way closer to Anderson and Heap’s “open” model, which privileged the reader’s ability to interact with the magazine, or to Pound’s “closed” model, wherein the larger meaning intended by the editor was paramount? Given the Dada editor’s embrace of syncretism, multilingualism, and lack of thematic organization, and the International Constructivist editor’s tendency towards a symmetrical, reoccurring structure, thematic organization, and translation, it seems that the answer is simple. That is, based on these features alone, one could argue that the Dada editor exemplifies “open” magazine editing and the International Constructivist editor “closed” magazine editing. Van Doesburg’s editing of *De Stijl*, insofar as it deviates from International Constructivist editing through syncretism and lack of thematical organization, can then be said to occupy a middle ground between “open” and “closed.” And the same could be said about his editing of *Mécano* inasmuch as it deviates from Dada editing through a reoccurring structure and an overarching theme. The conclusion would thus read that Van Doesburg was an interwar magazine editor who subverted the dichotomy between “open” and “closed” magazine editing.

However, this would not answer the question of why Van Doesburg felt the need to subvert this dichotomy across two quite different magazines. Furthermore, such a conclusion would entail covering over both those features of International Constructivist editing that belong more to “open” magazine editing and those of Dada that belong more to “closed” magazine editing. As this report argues, apart from the features listed above, the International Constructivist editor is also characterized by a renunciation of editorship. This editor renounces their role insofar as the larger meaning forged from the various contributions within an issue of *G* or *Merz* does not have a personal, singular, aesthetic end, but instead both repeats the central, functional message of the movement and goes beyond aesthetics, empowering the reader to put into practice its content. Similarly, despite the features listed, the Dada editor’s ability to have their magazine

display syncretism and a lack of thematic organization is dependent on careful orchestration and is thereby limited either by linguistic and artistic associations or by a renunciation of one of Dada's "open" features, such as internationalism. In short, although both International Constructivist magazine editing and Dada magazine editing each lean toward the "closed" and the "open" model, respectively, they do not entirely correspond to it. Instead, and along with the examples of Van Doesburg's magazine editing, they relativize this "closed"/"open" model, evincing the vast middle ground between its two poles.

4.2 The Death of the Editor

If all the examples of editing that this report has provided fall in between the "closed" and the "open" kind, then what is Van Doesburg's specificity as an editor? To answer this question, it is best to start the other way around. What all of these examples of editing have in common is their attempt to approach the "open" model of editing, understood as empowering the reader's interaction with the magazine. They therefore anticipate and transpose into the field of editing French literary theorist Roland Barthes and French philosopher Michel Foucault's interrogation of the "author" in the 1960s. As Barthes and Foucault argued, the "author" has, from the Enlightenment forward, been used as a concept and way of grouping texts so as to limit a literary text's "proliferation of meaning."¹⁰⁸ The reader has thereby been given limited access to how they could interpret a literary text, and a critical rejection of the "author" would therefore give the reader greater freedom, allowing them to access the instability of meaning borne by every literary text.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", trans. Josué V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 118. It is notable that in discussing the author function, Foucault specifically sees it as applying to literary texts. His argument is precisely that scientific texts underwent the opposite transformation. While they "were accepted in the Middle Ages as 'true,' only when marked with the name of their author," by the seventeenth or eighteenth century, scientific discourses "began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always redemonstrable truth." Foucault, 109. This is all to say that if present-day scholarly journals follow the model of "open" editing more than that of "closed" editing, this does not so much mean that they have a Dadaist or International Constructivist avant-garde quality, but that they are regarded as facilitating an at least partly scientific discourse.

¹⁰⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. and ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 148.

As this report has shown throughout, each of the magazines analyzed critically rejects the editor's role—on the same model as the “author” for Barthes and Foucault—whether through anonymity, multilingualism, syncretism, and lack of thematic organization, as does the Dada editor, or through a recurring structure which leads to universality and real-world practice, as does the International Constructivist editor. This constitutes a further reason why Adams and Barker's model and Darnton's revision of his model are more appropriate for the study of these types of avant-garde magazines than Darnton's initial model, since the former shift attention away from the people involved to the processes performed.¹¹⁰

What makes Van Doesburg different from both the Dada and the International Constructivist editor, however, is that he takes this rejection of editorship and embrace of “open” magazine editing to its furthest point. He does so in two interrelated ways. The first is the very fact that, as this report has shown, he performs the role of two different types of editors—the Dada editor in *Mécano* and the International Constructivist editor in *De Stijl*—simultaneously.¹¹¹ This, by itself, functions as a way of undoing the figure of the editor from the inside: Van Doesburg appears as an editor not identical to himself and therefore far from the sovereign, authorial subjectivity of a Pound. More powerfully, however, Van Doesburg also manages to critique both of these types of editors from the inside. As regards the International Constructivist editor, Van Doesburg's introduction of an element of Dada into *De Stijl* shows this type of editor's insistence on a set of clear principles as being an illusion insofar as these principles themselves are chosen arbitrarily.¹¹² While, as regards the Dada editor, Van Doesburg pushes the Dada magazine to its most anarchic point, to where the editor is no longer in effect.¹¹³ What he

¹¹⁰ Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books? Revisited,” in *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 504.

¹¹¹ Notably, Schwitters also plays these two very different roles, but he does so diachronically: he was first a Dada editor and then turned into an International Constructivist editor.

¹¹² Furthermore, this arbitrariness built into International Constructivism was something of which Van Doesburg was aware with regard to *De Stijl* and which contributed to his exploration of Dada. For example, later, in 1925, Van Doesburg would break with Mondrian and with the previous principles of *De Stijl* by introducing diagonal linear elements into his work. Welsh, 17.

¹¹³ Admittedly, one may argue that Van Doesburg's renunciation of editorship only extends to his function as a literary editor, and that, inasmuch as he can be deemed editorially responsible for the unique layout and design of *Mécano*, he proves to be a very clearly present editor. Given Van Doesburg's insistence on desubjectivization across his writings, such an objection would accord to some scholars' insight that, as against his theory, he was quite hypocritically egocentric in practice. Krispyn, 75. Craig Eliason, “‘All the serious men are sick’: van Doesburg, Mondrian, and

thereby proves, however, is that this type of disorder can only be made possible through the use of a rational, grid-like structure.

Van Doesburg, in functioning as a self-contradictory editor, purifies both the Dada editor and the International Constructivist editor of any remnants of authorial subjectivity. He presents us with an image of the editor as one who can neither keep a clear vision—or whose clear vision is either way arbitrarily sustained—nor make, as the editors of the *Little Review* would put it, “a muddle and a mess” true to its name without some clarity of vision.

Dada,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 34, no. 1 (2009/2010): 50. However, as if anticipating this very objection, on *Mécano*’s title page, next to the attribution of *gérant littéraire* to I. K. Bonset, Van Doesburg attributes the role of *mécanicien plastique* to himself, that is, to Theo van Doesburg. In doing so, Van Doesburg explicitly separates out the function of the literary editor from that of the art director and externalizes the role of the latter onto a doubled version of himself. He thereby circuitously renounces the function of the *editor as art director* precisely by evading the possibility of self-identity through doubling.

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