The Scarecrow Fairytale: 
A Collaboration of 
Theo Van Doesburg and 
Kurt Schwitters 
Leslie Atzmon

When fine artists characterize graphic design as “non-creative,” “advertising,” and “a commercial sellout,” graphic designers counter by saying that their work is not self-serving, like that of fine artists. This pigeonholing of what artists and graphic designers do leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes and mistrust. However, if artists and designers share thoughts, ideas, and methods; the rewards can be great.1

Investigation of De Stijl artist/designer Theo Van Doesburg’s typographic collaborations with Dadaist Kurt Schwitters demonstrates the positive effects of cross-pollination on sustaining innovation in art and graphic design. Dada and De Stijl artists/designers blurred the line between art and graphic design by creating them simultaneously, sometimes in the same work. Although Dada and De Stijl philosophies were extremely different; one poetic and the other utilitarian; Van Doesburg and Schwitters found common ground—art and design’s contribution to building what they believed would be a new, universal world culture. They demonstrated that focusing on similarities rather than differences identified potentially successful areas of interaction. Their cooperation heightened creativity and originality, resulting in the creation of radical typography that was an amalgam of fine art and graphic design, as well as Dada and De Stijl.

Dada and De Stijl—Models of Interdisciplinary Collaboration
An overview of art and graphic design history will show that there were movements in which the boundaries between fine art and graphic design were relatively distinct; and other movements in which the boundaries were more blurred. Likewise, there have been periods in which movements were open or closed to others; accepting or rejecting very different points of view from their own.2 When conventions were questioned, ideologies were more fluid and the definitions of disciplines were stretched. Collaboration was common, and some significant innovative work resulted.

Dada and De Stijl, two twentieth century fine art and design movements with characteristically blurred boundaries, were “loose in procedure, unclear in organizational lines, variable in policies,”

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1 Psychologist John Gardner has theorized that the requirements for and the mechanism of the creative process span disciplines: “Creative writers are distinguishable from creative mathematicians, and both are distinguishable from creative architects.” Yet research suggests that there are traits which are shared by all of these and by most other highly original people.” Gardner further described creativity as renewal through recombination. Psychologist David Harrington suggested that collaborative creativity is a similar recombination process, in which individuals build on the novel ideas of collaborators across approaches and disciplines. J.W. Gardner, Self Renewal: The Individual and Innovative Society (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1964) 44.


The author would like to acknowledge useful discussions with and critical comments by Jack Williamson, as well as the input provided by Drs. Dan Minock, Lawrence Gusman, and Richard Rubenfeld.
and, therefore, according to the theories of Gardner,\(^3\) provided model receptive environments. Dada and De Stijl had members who practiced both fine art and graphic design, producing work that stretched disciplinary boundaries.

The De Stijl artists/designers believed that this harmony could only be attained through nonobjectivity, that is, art with compositions that had no specific or intentional associations with actual objects. The means to express this philosophy was open. Individual De Stijl artists, including Van Doesburg and cofounder Mondrian, worked in many media; sometimes combining painting, poetry, architecture, furniture design, interior design, sculpture, and typography. Interdisciplinary work was encouraged to such an extent that Mondrian sought to apply De Stijl principles to music.

Mondrian called for a synthesis of jazz and new classical style in order to produce a genuinely neoplastic\(^*\) music. Not surprising, this was to be based upon three tones and three nontones in analogy with the three primary colors and the noncolors black, white, and gray.\(^5\)

The members of De Stijl believed that universality and harmony could be achieved by discounting the boundaries between different disciplines.\(^6\)

Dada artists and designers reacted in disgust to bourgeois society's involvement in the killings and horrors of World War I. They strove to point out the inconsistency of conventional beliefs through the individualistic “gratuitous act,” committed unexpectedly and spontaneously, and intended to shock.\(^7\) Most abstract artists of the day preferred painting as their medium. Dada reacted against modern art's evolution away from the total work of art, or Gesamtkunstwerk. Gesamtkunstwerk, which attempts to “combine all branches of art into an artistic unit,” was a notion common to many interdisciplinary avant-garde movements of the time.

It is no accident that Dada, reacting to the implied autonomy of painting at the very moment it was going over into total abstraction, should have wanted to “dissolve the rigid frontiers” of the various arts... Nor does it seem to be an accident that the reaffirmation of abstract painting...should, in turn, have engendered a reaction in the form of Environments, Happenings, and other mixtures of the arts....

In the same spirit, a group of Dadaists in Zurich, with whom Schwitters corresponded,\(^8\) initiated Cabaret Voltaire in which “Experimental poetry, lectures, improvisational dance, and music shared the programs with Dada gestes and a variety of outlandish pranks....”\(^9\) Dada artists/designers reacted to the status quo in fine art, including abstract painting, with modes of expression not previously considered viable for fine art. Poetic in nature, their work was

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3 Gardner, Self Renewal: The Individual and Innovative Society, 44.
4 Neoplasticism is a translation of the Dutch, *nieuwe beelding*, which translates as “new image creation.”
8 John Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 44.
9 Rubin, Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage, 60.
10 Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters, 35.
11 Ibid., 36
based on the principles of flux, chance and nonsense;\textsuperscript{12} which were expressed through “paradoxical, spontaneous gestures aimed at revealing the inconsistency and inanity of conventional beliefs.”\textsuperscript{13}

Schwitters approached his work, which he called Merz to distinguish it from the rest of Dada, as “a sum total of the individual art forms....” Merz consisted of assemblages of found objects in a wide variety of media; a rebuilding from everyday waste, symbolic of the rebuilding of society\textsuperscript{14} (Figure 1). Like Van Doesburg, “Schwitters talked a great deal about wanting to combine all the arts in a synthesis, a...total art work. In practice, however, what he mainly accomplished was to efface the boundaries between the arts.”\textsuperscript{15} Schwitters fantasized about a total experience Merz that gathered dentists’ drills, sewing machines that yawn, shoes and petticoats and “...everything from the hairnet of the high-class lady to the propeller of the S./S. Leviathan...” This was all to be mixed in with color, sounds, “fighting lines,” and surfaces in a stage setting.\textsuperscript{16}

Van Doesburg and Schwitters worked in many of the disciplines listed above, including typography. Before they collaborated, they experimented with typography as both art and message. Emphasizing typographic formal and contextual relationships, Van

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\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 12
\textsuperscript{15} Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters, 31.
\textsuperscript{16} Rubin, Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage, 57.
Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s early experiments in typography mainly followed De Stijl and Dada philosophies.

At first, Van Doesburg’s typeface designs were based on the geometric principles of the De Stijl artists, and were more symmetrical and plane filling. His later designs from the early 1920s still filled the plane, but became more asymmetrical (Figure 2) and still stressed functional principles. Van Doesburg’s early type designs are comparable to Mondrian’s theories about music, in that they adhere strictly to De Stijl concepts. However, Van Doesburg also believed that letter forms should be infinitely malleable.

He maintained that one could arbitrarily distort the basic shape of a letter horizontally or vertically. This was absolutely contrary to classical typography, in which the proportions of the basic shape are inviolate, and wherein the letter can only be scaled up or down without distortion.

Even his typographic designs, which adhered to strict De Stijl principles, were revolutionary. Herbert Spencer, a graphic design historian, pointed out that Van Doesburg was a pioneer in typography, “whose artistic and literary versatility and eclecticism were evident in his use of typography....” When designing with type, he was both typographer and artist.

Schwitters’s interest in typography began with his earliest Dada book cover designs from 1917–1920. He explained his typo-
graphic attitude in Merz: "I pasted words and sentences into poems in such a way as to produce a rhythmic design. Reversing the process, I pasted up pictures and drawings so that sentences could be read in them." Schwitters’s poetic expression was a fusion, an assemblage of simultaneous visual and verbal elements. His assemblages were made from found objects and his poems were alliterative and full of free association (Figure 1). They communicate a fantasy world that is at once gut-wrenching and titillating, because they were interposed with banalities. This juxtaposition also provides the typography in his collages with a multitude of allusive possibilities.

Van Doesburg and Schwitters Work Together

Prior to their collaboration, Van Doesburg and Schwitters had produced radical typographic work consistent with the goals of their respective movements. They met in 1921 and, within a year, had established a close friendship. Their influence on each other was considerable, particularly in poetry and typography. Their contact with each other’s opposing notions pushed Van Doesburg and Schwitters to find overlapping interest areas. Both men accepted the contrary aspects of Dada and De Stijl, enlarging their scope and allowing them to break with what had become, for them, the status quo. Van Doesburg began to explore type as sound, message, and image; whereas Schwitters adopted more pragmatic and utilitarian approaches to typography. Each man, stimulated by sharing the other’s ideas, was able to retain a personal outlook.

Modern art was, for Van Doesburg and Schwitters, one large discipline that included poetry, typography, painting, and architecture; and whose interaction could create an ideal world. Interdisciplinary collaboration in avant-garde art/design was common at the time: commingling Dada and De Stijl philosophies was a fortunate extension of this trend. Van Doesburg and Schwitters were aware that Dada and De Stijl philosophies were opposites; one extremely individualistic, trying to destroy the individualism of the past; and the other attempting to achieve the universal. Like Van Doesburg, Schwitters viewed Dada as:

A mirror that reflects the confusion of the age, ...it reveals “the vast stylelessness of our culture” and, therefore, “will awaken a great longing; a strong desire for Style (Stijl)....” Dada was important to the creation of a new style because, in its confusion, it destroyed earlier static and materialistic concepts of reality; and proclaimed a vision of the world in flux.

To Van Doesburg and Schwitters, then, Dada plus De Stijl were “destruction and construction together—in an active polarity—...essential to the internal logic of their work: the demolition of elements of an old culture to rebuild from those very fragments, a
X-BEELDEN ')

DOOR I. K. BONSET.

'i k word doordrongen van de kamer waar de tram doorglijdt
orgelklanken
van buitendoormijheen
vallen achter mij kapot
kleine scherven
BLIK BLIK BLIK
en glas
kleine zwarte fietsers
glijden en verdwijnen in mijn beeltenis
+ LICHT'n
de ritsigzieke trilkruin van den boom
versnippert het buitenmij
tot bontgekleurd stof
de zwartewitte waterpalen
ontelbare verticale palen
en ook de hooge
gekromde blauwe
RUIMTE
BEN IK

new one." "24 Dada would be the force that would sweep away the
stale remnants of the past, so that De Stijl could create world
harmony through Neoplasticism.

Their receptivity to contrasting aspects of Dada and De Stijl
energized Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s typographic exper-
iments. Influenced by the Dada concepts of nonsense and of a world
in flux, Van Doesburg invented the typographic Beelden from 1920
(Figure 3). Beelden was a series of experimental sound poems; a
visual hybrid of De Stijl and Dada ideas, as well as of fine art and
typography. In these poems; sound, form, and meaning were given
equal consideration; manifested by Van Doesburg’s expressive
typography. One of the poems, “Letter-Sound Images,” published in
the fourth volume of De Stijl, also included specific directions for
performance.25 While influenced by Dadaists Haussman and
Schwitters, Van Doesburg made his own De Stijl interpretation of
typography and words.26

Van Doesburg’s work embodied his aesthetic philosophy to
the extent that, in keeping with his idea that opposites must
be considered as part of the same whole, he did not envi-
sion Dada as a negation of his Beeldende27 concept; although
he admitted that they were “diametrically opposed ten-
dencies.” He contended that the new Beelding28 and Dadaism
formed a parallel: “the creative art of the word”... The

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24 Ibid., 124.
25 Broos, “From De Stijl to a New
Typography,” 159.
26 Hannah Hedrick. Theo Van Doesburg:
Propagandist and Practitioner of the
Avant-garde, 1909-1923 (Ann Arbor: UMI
27 Beeldende was a form of De Stijl poetry
Van Doesburg invented along Dada lines.
28 Asynonym for Beelden.
Figure 4a

Figure 4b
Dutchman was able to embrace Dada because he did not advocate the limited view frequently associated with the movement; that nihilism was both its means and its end.29

During the same period, Schwitters’s newfound interest in social utility helped launch his career as a graphic designer.30 His search for a new formal typographic vocabulary, shaped by Dada ideas, coincided with Van Doesburg’s expectations for Dada’s combination with De Stijl.31 Schwitters’s work “began to display a new geometric simplicity...” In his “i” drawings (Figure 4a and b) from the early 1920s, “a mis- or overprinted page of type was transformed into a work of art by a judicious arrangement of forms around or on top of the rejected material.” He explained his adaptation of constructivist principles to his collages.

Gradually, my study of materials and pictorial laws bore fruit and allowed me to select and condense my effects, so that, in 1925, I made my first attempts at great rigor, simplification and more universal expression.... They are still Merz, for I have always responded to the stimulus of details not formed by myself. Yet, there are fewer stimuli, and their contrapuntal elaboration has become so important that the works should be referred to primarily as compositions and only secondarily as Merz.32

32 Kurt Schwitters, quoted in Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters,126.

Figure 5
Figure 6

Figure 7
Schwitters’s piece *Merz* “er” (Figure 5) from 1922 demonstrates this novel approach, and the influence of De Stijl. It is limited to geometric forms and primary colors; however, the “hand-cut edges and the visual relief from geometry provided by the rounded lettering make it unmistakably Schwitters’s own.”

The most effective and prolific typographic and theoretical work was presented in Van Doesburg’s publications *De Stijl* and *Mécano*, and Schwitters’ periodical *Merz*. These publications were important showcases for typographic innovation. Van Doesburg and Schwitters embraced the De Stijl/Dada collaboration between art, poetry, and typography in their magazines; and considered all three equally significant in the service of Dada/De Stijl goals.

Schwitters developed *Merz* (Figure 6), working with Van Doesburg in 1923, as a medium for the dissemination and exchange of avant-garde, Dada and De Stijl ideas.

*Merz* 1 was dedicated to Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s De Stijl-Dada tour of Holland in 1923. *Merz* was essentially a Dadaist magazine in tone and appearance... At the same time, however, an increase in Constructivist (De Stijl) contributions is very evident. In *Merz* 2, a De Stijl painting by Van Doesburg is reproduced; and in *Merz* 4 architecture by Rietveld, Oud and Van Doesburg, an abstract poem by Hausmann and contributions from Moholy-Nagy and Lissitsky. In *Merz* in 1923, therefore, we see a Dada magazine gradually being modified by Dutch...constructivist influences.

In the “Typloreklame” issue of *Merz* from 1924 (Figure 7), Schwitters showcases some of his graphic design produced for Pelikan, the Hannover firm of Günther Wagner. In this issue of *Merz*, he also outlined his theory of the new typography as the “evaluation of all parts in relation to one another for the purpose of bringing out some detail to which one wishes to attract special attention,” an approach clearly influenced by De Stijl. Schwitters’s involvement in graphic design prompted him to cofound a professional organization in 1927, the ring neuer werbegestalter (the ring of new advertising designers).

Through this group, Schwitters energetically promoted avant-garde artists involved in typographic reform while, in his magazine *Merz*, he proselytized for the modernization of typography. Indeed, he went so far in the direction of typographic functionalism as to design a phonetic alphabet and a related typeface—a Systemschrift intended as a kind of esperanto of typography.

As *Merz* matured, more De Stijl contributions were included in it; although Schwitters preserved the Dada character of the publication. In his choices of articles and work for the periodical,
Schwitters revealed the dual purpose of Dada and De Stijl.

Van Doesburg founded the magazine De Stijl in 1917 (Figure 8) as a vehicle for supporting his radical visual work and theory, both De Stijl and Dada.38 He did not admit to his accomplishments as a Dada artist/designer, however. Historian Nancy Troy explained that he might have felt “that acknowledging...would endanger what he was trying to achieve within the context of De Stijl (world harmony).”39 His collaborative work with the Dadaists was published, credited to him under the pseudonyms of Aldo Camini and I.K. Bonset, in De Stijl and Merz. In 1920, De Stijl featured Van Doesburg’s (Bonset’s) Dadaist X-Beelden.40 By 1921, a majority of contributors were Dadaists, such as Schwitters, Hausmann, and Tzara. Van Doesburg (Bonset) also launched his own Dada publication, Mecano (Figure 9) in 1922.

Notable in Van Doesburg’s Dada/De Stijl typographic work was his 1922 Dutch version of the book Pro Dva Kvadrata (Of Two Squares) (Figure 10),41 a children’s book by constructivist El Lissitsky. In the 1920s, radical typographical picture books intertwined poetry and visual art, and blurred the boundaries between conventional
Figure 9
Theo Van Doesburg, cover of Mecano magazine, 1922. Courtesy of Elaine Lustic Cohen, Ex Libris, New York.

Figure 10
Theo Van Doesburg’s version of El Lissitzky’s Of Two Squares, 1922. Collection Haags Gemeentemuseum; donated by Van Moorsel.
disciplines. In Pro Dva Kvadrata, Lissitsky combined suprematist art with radical typography: "Neither one is an understudy for the other; both derive meaning and vitality from the other. The word and letter have visual form as does the image; separate and together they create movement and space," Lissitsky wrote. He derived the formal qualities of text and image from the content of the story. Similarly, Van Doesburg’s adaptation of Pro Dva Kvadrata utilized content, image, and typography symbiotically and "...gave an unequaled survey of all visual, associative, meaningful, and auditory possibilities that word and image—juxtaposed in tension—could bring out on the page."43

Schwitters had been working on The Paradise Fairy Tales, a children’s book which included his story Der Hahnpeter (Peter the Rooster) (Figure 11a). Kate Steinitz, a friend of Van Doesburg and Schwitters who did the “expressionistic and awkward” drawings for the book, described Der Hahnpeter “as...new fairy tales for our times...only timeless.” She recalled Schwitters’s strict typographic attitude in the book.

Typography...has a utilitarian end. It cannot be concerned only with visual effects. It works best when it also intensifies and clarifies the text.... Schwitters was a good teacher, and he made things seem very simple. One only had to think in terms of horizontals and verticals: “The printed page will gain both tension and equilibrium by an asymmetrical arrangement.”

However, foreshadowing future work, Steinitz also described how Schwitters used typographic elements in unconventional ways in Der Hahnpeter. We played with the nice little printer’s ornaments, and their pleasing variety of lines and curves. For instance, we designed the headpiece of one chapter using a thin, straight line and diminutive flower that we found in a case of printing ornaments.

Die Scheuche
Van Doesburg and Schwitters discussed the idea of producing a visual typography book that was yet more radical than Der Hahnpeter and Lissitsky’s Pro Dva Kvadrata. Steinitz recalled:

Hardly was Paradise Fairy Tales finished when Nelly and Theo Van Doesburg came to visit. We talked about typography and architecture, and about the journals Stijl and Merz. Suddenly, Theo Van Doesburg pointed to the Hahnpeter book. Couldn’t we make another picture book, an even more radical one using nothing but typographical elements?44

42 Elderfield, Kurt Schwitters, 188.
44 Broos, “From De Stijl to a New Typography,” 159.
45 Kate Steinitz, Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life (Barkley: University of California Press, 1968), 32.
46 Ibid., 36.
47 Ibid., 36.
48 Ibid., 36.
49 Ibid., 41.
Figure 11a

Figure 11b
The result of this discussion was the most revolutionary, direct and original De Stijl/Merz collaboration—the typographic children’s book, *Die Scheuche* (The Scarecrow); (Figure 11b), written by Schwitters, designed by Van Doesburg, and produced by Steinitz in 1925.

The creative interplay between Van Doesburg and Schwitters (and, to some extent, Steinitz) is reminiscent of the “explosion of interactive creative ability” David Harrington observed in the collaborative invention process of the personal computer. The fairy tale *Die Scheuche* was conceptualized and visualized in a spur-of-the-moment collaboration. Schwitters recited the story for *Die Scheuche* on the spot, upon Steinitz’s and Van Doesburg’s request. Steinitz recalled the interplay as the form unfolded:

While Kurt declaimed, Theo Van Doesburg laid out some matches on the tabletop, and arranged them in the shape of a scarecrow. Then he drew a terrifically naturalistic tailcoat and a very stylized one. Kurt took the big scissors and cut them out....

Steinitz explained that they “fooled around” with typographical ideas while creating *Die Scheuche*; each suggesting ideas for all to consider. She described their continuing collaboration; flexible and experimental; even as they produced *Die Scheuche* with typesetter Paul Vogt: “I remember that, after a while, we all got tired and disagreed. Then, as a shortcut, I proposed that the page representing dark night should simply be printed with a wide solid strip of dark blue. The suggestion was accepted.” Steinitz’s portrayal evokes an environment in which each individual was receptive to, and built on, the others’ input.

Sharing ideas brought out innovative thought connections which enabled Van Doesburg and Schwitters to supercede prior work. Radical as they were, *Pro Dva Kvadrata* and *Der Hahnpeter* used geometric suprmatist art and Steinitz’s sketches, respectively, as images distinct from the typography. *Die Scheuche* went even further. It united image and text by using typecase elements to create pages of illustrations. Using Steinitz as a sounding board, Van Doesburg and Schwitters created letterform illustrations based on Schwitters’s story and Van Doesburg’s matchstick sketches. Letterforms became characters acting out an eccentric tale about a scarecrow who has a hat, stick, and lace shawl. Each page design innovatively intertwined typography, plot, and visuals which, together, told the story.

*Die Scheuche* had a radical, but practical, purpose: exposing children to a piece of collaborative De Stijl plus Dada art/design/poetry of the type Van Doesburg and Schwitters believed helped advance their ultimate goal of a brave new world. The plot, in which a rooster and chicks fearlessly and incessantly peck at the scarecrow’s stick, parallels the De Stijl notion of making way for the

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50 Kurt Schwitters, Kate Steinitz, and Theo Van Doesburg, *Die Scheuche Marchen* (Hannover: Apossverlag, 1925; Frankfurt: Verlag, Biermann and Boukes, 1971).
51 Harrington observed in the invention process of the personal computer: “Each member of this ecosystem of gadgeteers, programmers, theorists, visionaries, and entrepreneurs saw potential value in the novel actions and products of other people, and then added to and created new value form the last person’s work by making new creative contributions. This process ignited an explosion of interactive creative ability.” David Harrington, “The Ecology of Human Creativity: A Psychological Perspective,” *Theories of Creativity* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 148.
52 Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life* , 42.
53 Ibid., 43.
54 Ibid., 45.

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future by destroying or hacking up the past. The past is represented by the scarecrow. The term scarecrow, or straw man, has come to mean a false obstacle or issue. The Oxford English Dictionary defines one meaning of “scarecrow” as “Something (not really formidable) that frightens or intends to frighten.” In Die Scheuche, Schwitters and Van Doesburg belittle the scarecrow.

Once there was a scarecrow
He had a hat-chapeau
A tuxedo and a cane
And an oh-so be-yoo-ti-ful lace shawl

They ridicule his tuxedo, cane, and lace shawl; all symbols of the high culture Dada sought to reveal as empty. The courageous rooster, who has no “...cane and... Such a be-yoo-ti-ful lace shawl,” taunts the scarecrow.

Fooey! You are an old man
You are a scarecrow
Hick hack and hick hack hock

The scarecrow has all the accouterments of civilized society, but no substance.

Reminiscent of Van Doesburg’s Dada pseudonym, Aldo Camini, which means “the old will leave,” the scarecrow is an old man, the past, personified.

In Die Scheuche, Van Doesburg and Schwitters encourage their readers not to fear the spectacle of historical precedent. The “scarecrow,” the meaningless values of the past, must be eliminated. In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary lists several literary references to scarecrows frightening children. In Die Scheuche, not only could young readers delight in chickens fearlessly hacking at the scare-

kam ein Geist dem einst der HUT gehörte und holte seinen SPITZENSCHAL
und holte seinen STOCK

DA kam ein frecher Bauersmann und stahl dem aus seiner Hand

DA sprach der Bauer
Pfui du Scheuche

"Du bist ja keine Scheuche"
"Gleich mach ich dich zur Leiche"
Figures 16, 17, and 18

DA kam das Hühnchen an

DA sprach MÖSJE LE COQ zu
Rock und Stock und zu dem ACH so schönen
Spitzenschal PFUI ALTER Mann du bist ja
eine Scheuche Hick Hack und hic haec hoc

DA boste
sich der
Hut
Schapo
da boste
sich
der Rock
und boste sich der Stock
und boste sich der
ACH so schöne
Spitzenschal

Jedoch
Mr. le coq
und seine
Hühner
machten weiter
Hick und Hack
und hic haec

DA nahm
der Bauer
von der Scheuche

seinen
STOCK

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crow’s stick, but they also could relish gleefully the scarecrow’s terror when the farmer threatens to kill him. At the end of the story, ghosts of former owners come and retrieve the hat, stick, and shawl (Figure 13). Not only is the scarecrow, himself, not formidable; but his fancy outfit really belongs to the spirit world. The last line in the story, “Then there was light,” is reminiscent of the line, “Let there be light,” when God first creates the earth in Genesis, which most children would be familiar with. The fairy tale is suggestive of the Genesis story in the creation of a brand new world. Die Scheuche, an ideological collaboration, reflected the dual purpose of Dada and De Stijl.

The strong impact of the collaboration is evident in the visual qualities of Die Scheuche. Formally, the book has features that are consistent with both Dada and De Stijl. The book is printed in only red and blue, with sans serif text. Van Doesburg took decorative printers’ elements, and treated them as parts of a De Stijl composition. “Van Doesburg made playful use of typical Morris plant motives by rotating them forty-five degrees according to elementalist principles, whereas the figures remind one of Lissitsky’s collages built of matches.” Van Doesburg actually did sketch with matchsticks, which may help explain the changeability of the illustrations. Although there is consistency in the choice of type characters used for each creature, such as the scarecrow, the details vary from page to page; which adds eccentricity to the design/content (Figures 16–18). The page designs range from highly structured, such as the title page (Figure 11b) and the copyright page (Figure 14), to more free form (Figure 15). The plot and visuals have twists that evoke the unpredictability of Dada poetry; as when on one page, night unexpectedly falls and the chickens stop pecking (Figure 12). On some pages; such as the last page (Figure 13); the plot, body type, and image type are so integrated that it becomes difficult to differentiate between them. Steinitz compares the typographic design on this page to set design, with the page as the stage:

The closing scene, full of figures. They were crowded to the right side of the page, as if the characters in the drama were all exiting together at one side of the stage. The last line, “And then there was light,” also had to be crowded all along the right margin, moving from bottom to top. Kurt Schwitters and Theo Van Doesburg, the creative geniuses, brought all of this off with a rhythmic composition of bold capitals.

Reminiscent of typographic treatment in Dada poetry, the final page (Figure 13) has the ghost of the hat’s former owner made up of the word hut (“hat”) repeated in hat-like tiers to make up his body. Fusing image, text, and plot; a “fresh young man,” made up of an uppercase B and some rule lines, doesn’t only steal the stick from the farmer’s hand, but appears to carry away some of the text

58 Baljeu, Theo Van Doesburg, 75.
59 Steinitz, Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life, 45.
as well. Van Doesburg and Schwitters innovated by allowing the conventional distinctions between poetry, typography, and visual art to disappear. They created a piece that is, at once, Dada and De Stijl, poetic and utilitarian, truly merging ideologies. Die Scheuche’s revolutionary unity of content, concept, purpose, and visuals was a direct result of Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s cooperation. In summary, the collaborative piece Die Scheuche, was a high point in Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s radical typographic work.

Although their influence on each other was extensive, Van Doesburg and Schwitters retained their individuality; Schwitters never fully accepted the De Stijl machine aesthetic, and Van Doesburg never lost sight of his final goal of world harmony through De Stijl principles.60 Both Van Doesburg and Schwitters refused to allow rigid dogmatism to impede the implementation of novel solutions. As Hannah Hedrick explained, “Van Doesburg’s purpose in writing and creating remained the same: to develop, through art, including literature, a universal form of communication; intended to enlarge (spiritually) and to unite mankind. “Beyond this purpose, he could not accept a specific approach as doctrine. According to Hedrick, Van Doesburg’s evasion of dogma and doctrine facilitated his sharing ideas with people holding many philosophical attitudes.61 Van Doesburg was well aware of the stagnation that dogmatism could bring, and spurned beliefs such as Mondrian’s that “...in the arts, a final point had almost been reached.”62 Like Van Doesburg, Schwitters refused to allow a structured ideology to dictate the course of his work: “...even in the constructivists’ company, Schwitters sets himself apart: not so much by his Dadaism as by his obstinate refusal to follow an ideological blueprint of any kind.”63 Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s openness and receptivity to varied experience fired their creativity: their flexibility, eclecticism, and tolerance of ambiguity allowed innovative collaborations to take place.44 In collaboration, they developed a creative environment characterized by open-mindedness, and the blurring of ideological and disciplinary boundaries. Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s collaborative work was a major contribution to both fine art and graphic design.

Conclusion
Rather than merely categorize, we must learn to appreciate the overlapping relationships between graphic design, fine arts, and other fields. Structuring a variety of different endeavors into distinct disciplines helps us comprehend the nature of their practitioners’ work, and thus serves a useful purpose. Graphic designers, for instance, are known to communicate information to an audience through different media; especially print media. Intellectual boundaries facilitate deeper exploration of narrower issues. However, disciplinary and ideological boundaries, when rigid, prevent individuals from sharing useful information. Psychologist Robert Kahn has written:
Disciplinary boundaries are neither eternal nor eternally useful. They are human inventions and, like other inventions, can become obsolete and constraining. This rigidity can limit the potential of collaboration. By discouraging sharing between ideologies and disciplines, arbitrary boundaries do a disservice to graphic designers who might benefit from collaboration.

Learning about other approaches and disciplines can enlarge one’s scope, stimulating his/her thinking. If we learn to appreciate the connections between graphic design and art, the humanities, and the social and natural sciences, the rewards will be great. While there will be individuals who excel; who do not investigate issues in and connections to other approaches; those who are flexible and receptive to a variety of ideas are more likely to introduce new directions of thought. Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’s openness to each other’s notions allowed them to find overlap between their seemingly unrelated ideas. Their flexibility while collaborating allowed them to create amalgams, new thought linkages, which were expressed in the form of novel typographic design. Van Doesburg’s and Schwitters’ innovative typography had a significant impact on twentieth century art and graphic design.