

# The Bauhaus Context: Typography and Graphic Design in France

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English translation by John Cullars.

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- 1 Roland Barthes, "Erté ou A la lettre" in *Erté* (Parma: F. M. Ricci, 1972), afterwards cited in: *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1993–), vol. 2, Paris 1994, 1222–1240; 1228 and 1231 for the first citation, 1239 for the second.
  - 2 Herbert Bayer, "On Typography" (1967), cited in Arthur Cohen, *Herbert Bayer* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1984), 350–352, and 350; and for the second citation, Herbert Bayer, "Typography and Design at the Bauhaus" (1971), cited in Cohen (1984), 352–354, and 352.
  - 3 Roger Chatelain, "Si l'École Estienne m'était contée ..." in *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 3:2001: 10–11. It should be noted that Roger Chatelain, former Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie*, endeavored to throw light on Franco-German relations in typography, notably launching some broadsides and pointing out disagreements in the journal.

*[...] for the letter is the site where all graphic abstractions converge.*

*[...] since humankind began to write, what sort of games has the letter not been the point of departure for! Take a letter: you will see its secret become deeper [...] throughout its [...] infinite associations where you will find everything, the whole world: its history, yours.*

*[...] an art, the typographical art, abandoned by our grand culture.*  
Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

*Previously used above all as a medium intended to make language visible, typography revealed its own visual qualities and disclosed the possibility of a specific expression. [...] moreover, the typographical revolution was not an isolated event: it took up the cause of a new socio-political consciousness and, in fact, accompanied the foundation of a cultural renewal.*

*[...] the typographical choices [of the Bauhaus] [...] appear as unique and revolutionary in the history of typography. [...] the new typography [...] is anchored in a new conception of technology, in its own functions as a medium for communication, in its social and humanistic role, and in its relations to the other arts of the period.*

Herbert Bayer<sup>2</sup>

*And it is well known that France [...] did not play a vital part in what may well be called the "typographical revolution," related to the movement known as the Bauhaus.*

Roger Chatelain<sup>3</sup>

As the visual inscription of language and the imprint of thought, typography conceals the stakes that are overlooked by the whole question of design. Roland Barthes's epigraph well expresses that state of existing in a singular world, warily loaded with meta-meanings. That knowledge of the fundamental nature of the letter and the forces at work in it permit a view of typography in the work of artists from the first decades of the twentieth century as something other than a radical aesthetic phenomenon exciting fascination or repulsion. Doubtless, one must first of all consider the frenzied pursuit to express the *Zeitgeist*, and appreciate the interactions of an artistic scene that was quite out of the ordinary. With its spatio-

temporal situation and its goals, the Bauhaus was able to imbue itself with European “isms” and set itself up as an experimental laboratory. Typography, graphics, and photography experienced visible developments there which were indissoluble from their exceptional flowering within the Weimar Republic. Carried away by the utopia of universality and by a communicational ideal, these practices became the object of an unprecedented craze throughout the heart of Europe, to the rhythm of strong and constant shared activities.<sup>4</sup> Thus, many external dynamics sprang from the Bauhaus typography and related activities—the influences of De Stijl and of constructivism were notably decisive in the early 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Enthusiasm spread well beyond the borders of Central and Western Europe—the typographers themselves were dreaming of transnational forms. “Come and study at the bauhaus!” [sic] was a slogan displayed in eight languages, including French (“venez étudier à Bauhaus!” [sic]) in the school’s journal.<sup>6</sup>

Off to the side of that Central European effervescence spread by the changes in graphic design and typography, France followed the experiments with a certain reserve. Was it straightforward aesthetic differences? Inertia? Reticence? It is hard to find an answer without invoking yesterday’s enemy—“the four Peignot brothers,” died on the battlefield during World War I, and Cassandre’s elder brother, Henri, died in 1914 at the very beginning of the war—the ascendancy of Germanophobia, and visceral nationalism. In France, some of the most important names in typography effectively defended a strong patriotic approach throughout the twentieth century (and some German typographers between the two world wars did the same.)<sup>7</sup> Here are a few samples. In 1901, Francis Thibaudeau evoked the “French style in modern typography.”<sup>8</sup> He explained that: “Once again, one must define the French spirit: all joy and beauty, clarity and elegance [...] is in this manner assured for the future.” Thibaudeau published his *Manuel français de typographie moderne* [*French Manual of Modern Typography*] in 1924. There also was Marius Audin’s *Le Livre français* [*The French Book*] in 1930. At the same time, in the east, typography largely was considered in terms of exchanges beyond national boundaries. Other French fragments, later but in the same vein: Maximilien Vox and Ladislav Mandel calling upon “Latin graphic arts” and “Latin writing.” Charles Peignot evoked “the glory of French typography.” Vox again: “The typographic fireworks [in France] that illuminated the 1920s and 30s.” In a work published in 1982, Georges Bonnin, then director of the Imprimerie Nationale, envisioned “a constructive reflection upon a new ‘defense and illustration’ of French typography.” Lure’s *Rencontres internationales* [*International Encounters*] would publish *Défense et illustration de la typographie française* [*Defense and Illustration of French Typography*] (conference papers from 1993). Everything went on as if the word “typography” in France should naturally be qualified by the epithet “French.” From this nationalistic defense,

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- 4 In the Netherlands, the USSR, Poland, Germany, and Czechoslovakia; then in Switzerland and Italy.
- 5 De Stijl and constructivism had significant repercussions in Germany, as on the Bauhaus. Beginning in 1922, Théo van Doesburg proposed De Stijl courses at Weimar, which were attended by most of the students of the Bauhaus. Elsewhere, the first Russian art exhibition was held in Berlin in 1922.
- 6 *Bauhaus* 2:3 (1928): 29. See also note 40.
- 7 Far from the Bauhaus’s ambition for internationalization, one finds the expression of typographical nationalism in Germany with Rudolf Koch, Fritz Helmut Ehmcke, and even with Paul Renner. See Koch, cited in Hans Peter Willberg’s “Fraktur and Nationalism” in Peter Bain and Paul Shaw, *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 40–48, 43: “German script is like a symbol of the inherent mission of the German people who, among all civilized races, must [...] act as a living model and example of its unique, distinctive, and nationalistic character in all manifestations of life.” Ehmcke, cited in Yvonne Schwemmer-Scheddin’s “Broken Images” in Willberg (1998), 50–67, 59: “Just like Gothic design in other arts, Gothic lettering appears primarily wherever virile German manhood is symbolized by fighting, creating nations and building.”; Renner, cited in Roger Chatelain’s “Paul Renner sous les feux de l’histoire” in *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l’imprimerie* 5 (2000): 9: “Each people [...] has the typeface that it deserves [...]. And what should our typeface be if not the expression of the true, the authentic German soul?”
- 8 An important figure in the world of typography in France, Francis Thibaudeau was in charge of composition services at the Peignot foundry. He penned many classic works on typography.

chronic isolationism was born, leading to minimal exchange across the French-German border. Why did such a situation exist when exchanges among the Soviets, the Dutch, the Hungarians, Germans, or Poles spread so readily? The geopolitical situation and relations with Germany can only partially explain the phenomenon, since many Dutch, Russian, or Czech graphic innovations also did not make much of a splash in France.

### Big Deviations and Little Echoes

A comparative survey of the principal figures of graphic design and typography in France and in Germany between the two world wars shows a strong disproportion and marked divergences. Graphic artists, designers, poster makers, typographers, or those in the fine arts followed very different trajectories in the two countries. At the Bauhaus, three figures distinguished themselves by their teaching as much as by their practice: László Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, and Joost Schmidt. Let us mention in passing some of the numerous figures then active in Germany: Jan Tschichold, Kurt Schwitters, the dadaist Raoul Hausmann, El Lissitzky, Paul Renner, Walter Dexel, Max Burchartz, Johannes Canis, Rudolf Koch, Jakob Erbar, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewart, César Domela, and Théo van Doesburg. Most of them were multifaceted artist-designers who were not trained in typography—the works of Moholy-Nagy and of Schwitters are emblematic of that singular richness inherent in the age.<sup>9</sup> Moholy-Nagy and Joost Schmidt, who were very involved with the Bauhaus visual communication, also directed the metal and sculpture studios.

In France, the situation was radically different. Exceptional French graphic artists at the time can be counted on the fingers of one hand, and must be considered somewhat isolated figures.<sup>10</sup> Their work primarily was on posters. Here one finds “the 3 Cs”—Cassandre (Adolphe Jean-Marie Mouron being the dominant figure), Jean Carlu, Paul Colin—and Charles Loupot. In a parallel development, the type foundry Deberny & Peignot supported typographic creation (fonts and publications).<sup>11</sup> Charles Peignot, who took on the artistic direction of the establishment in 1923, notably used some experimental type fonts by Cassandre and founded the journal *Arts et Métiers graphiques* [*The Arts and Graphic Professions*] in 1927.<sup>12</sup> The foundry particularly benefited from the active contributions of Maximilien Vox (the pseudonym of Samuel Monod, who published Maurras’s *L’Avenir de l’Intelligence française* [*The Future of French Intelligence*] in 1942 in *Nouveaux Destins de l’Intelligence française*).<sup>13</sup>

The French and German typographical scenes seem to have had very few things in common. Their links, while perceptible, are suggested but never asserted. Here and there, nonetheless, some traces of reciprocal reception can be seen: furtive exchanges, brief meetings, and a few trips. On the French side, Cassandre and Charles Peignot discovered the Bauhaus and German graphic artists.

9 See Herbert Bayer’s “Typography and Design at the Bauhaus” (1971), cited in Cohen (1984), page 353, where he himself explains that retrospectively “It was much easier to undo traditional concepts since most of us had not received professional training as typographers and thus were not limited by received ideas.”

10 Cassandre and Charles Loupot worked together beginning in 1930 under the name of Alliance Graphique, but the partnership did not last.

11 The main foundry for letters in France, founded in 1923 and closed in 1972, becoming part of Girard & Company foundries—formerly the Deberny Foundry—and Peignot & Company. Balzac, once a printer and editor, bought the J. G. Gillé Foundry, which later was renamed Deberny & Company, in association with the type-founder Laurent.

12 Charles Peignot managed the foundry from 1939 to 1972.

13 See *Un homme de lettre*, Maximilien Vox et al., eds. (Paris: Agence culturelle de Paris, 1994), 140.

Their reception was enthusiastic. Many publications now forgotten testify to this. In 1929, Cassandre published an edifying panorama of European avant-garde publicity that reflected the “new typography.”<sup>14</sup> Of the forty-nine documents included, seventeen were by artist-designers working in Germany; among them Moholy-Nagy, Bayer, Tschichold, Baumeister, Molzahn, Dixel, and Burchartz. Included were posters, ads, covers, photomontages, and even examples of graphic art applied to architecture. Other documents illustrated what was being done in Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain, and the United States. More than one-third of the chosen examples came from Germany: Cassandre certainly took an accurate measure of what had been taking place there since the late 1920s. His publication, which consisted mainly of a collection of images, limited prose explications to a brief introduction. (It seems likely that little information was available to Cassandre; otherwise, he probably would have taken advantage of it.)<sup>15</sup>

The second testimonial was published somewhat later. Charles Peignot, who had met and conversed with Gropius, went to visit the Bauhaus in the early 1930s.<sup>16</sup> In the magazine *Vu* [*Sight*] in 1932, he devoted several paragraphs to the “Dessau school” in an article on professional education in Germany<sup>17</sup> in which he succinctly introduced the Bauhaus in its totality with no reservations. He also evoked the “elevated standard of current production with our neighbors,” and concluded by discussing the relative inadequacy of such teaching in France. “The design of type fonts,” “typography,” “letters,” and “the poster” then figured in the details of the program for his course. His initial apprehensions about the trip to Germany did not prevent Peignot from having a positive and perceptive view of the school.<sup>18</sup> Yet, he did not make the case for the Bauhaus’s typographical experiments, which would have been a challenge to the eyes of the French. There is more evidence that the new typography was known and appreciated in France at that time. In a 1930 publication, Maurice Thireau made the case that “The Germans everywhere now practice so-called ‘elementary’ typography, that is, typography restored to its basic elements. Jean Tschichald [*sic*] of Munich is the spokesman for that school and for the numerous disciples who espouse its theories in Holland, Czechoslovakia, Russia, and France. [...] In France, ‘elementary’ typography made [...] its appearance, and the apostles of Jean Tschichald [*sic*] are represented by Théodore [*sic*] Van Doesburg and Tristan Tzara.”<sup>19</sup> The same year, the journal *Arts et Métiers graphiques* published Tschichold’s text, “Qu’est-ce que la nouvelle typographie et que veut-elle?” [“What Is the New Typography and What Does It Want?”], which was adorned with reproductions of works by Moholy-Nagy, Lissitzky, Tschichold, Domela, etc.<sup>20</sup>

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- 14 See A. M. Cassandre, *Publicité* (Paris: Charles Moreau, 1929) (L’Art international d’aujourd’hui, vol. 12).
- 15 In his introduction, Cassandre underlines the new presence of publicity: “The language of publicity has barely been born, but it has been born. [...] The goal of this work is not to give a complete image of contemporary international publicity. [...] We have simply tried to gather together some of the most representative works that have come our way.”
- 16 His article does not specify a visit to the institution, but Lionel Richard specifies in his *Encyclopédie du Bauhaus* (Paris: Somogy, 1985), 247, that “Charles Peignot [...] visited the school.” Moreover, document 6-F-0073-77, preserved in the Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, Schriftenarchiv, Nachlass Mies van der Rohe, mentions Peignot’s visit, among those of other Frenchmen in 1931/32. We thank Elke Mittmann for this information.
- 17 Charles Peignot, “L’enseignement professionnel,” *Vu (L’énigme allemande)* 213 (1932): 546–548 and 580.
- 18 Fernand Baudin reports that Maximilien Vox was in a position to pressure Charles Peignot to go to Frankfurt concerning the purchase of the rights for Futura at the Bauer foundry. See Roger Chatelain, “Réactions relatives à Paul Renner et au Futura,” *Typographische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l’imprimerie* 1 (2001): 14–16.
- 19 Maurice Thireau, *L’Art Moderne et la Graphie* (Paris: Bureau de l’Édition, 1930), 101–102. The publisher of this work, Le Bureau de l’Édition, also published Francis Thibaudeau’s *La Lettre d’Imprimerie*. See below.
- 20 See Jan Tschichold, “Qu’est-ce que la nouvelle typographie et que veut-elle?” *Arts et Métiers graphiques* 4 (1930): 46–52.

Also in 1930, *Cahiers d'art* made the case for “a school of modern art,” where “there are classes on publicity (J. Schmidt) [and] on photography (Peterhans).”<sup>21</sup> In 1929, the same journal published an article by Moholy-Nagy, illustrated by his photographic investigations. It mentions, in passing, the influence of cubism. (He expresses an admiration for Cézanne’s work<sup>22</sup>, as does Renner). Later, in the same number of *Cahiers d'art*, Christian Zervos—the editor of the journal—mentioned the exhibit of Bayer’s paintings at the Parisian gallery Povolozky: “He is a young artist, whom I met on my visit to the Bauhaus at Dessau, where he teaches typography, who is exhibiting for the first time in Paris.”<sup>23</sup> These diverse testimonials prove that France was well aware around 1929–30 of the experiments at the school in Dessau—as well as Central European New Typography. However, none of the publications offered a genuine explanation of this foreign typography, as if the phenomenon had been noticed but not truly appreciated.

Typography from beyond the Rhine found some other ways of entering France. The works of the Bauhaus were presented for the first time in France in the German Section exhibit of the Deutscher Werkbund at the Grand Palais in 1930.<sup>24</sup> The exhibit was assigned to Gropius, assisted by Breuer, Bayer, and Moholy-Nagy; and the catalogue, which was printed entirely without uppercase letters, was conceived by Bayer. That work, like the exhibit, presented its “system of unique characters” (*einheitsschrift*). Interestingly, we find at the end of the catalogue that Bayer lived on Paris Street in Berlin. Along with the publications, the German presence in French exhibitions remained sporadic. In 1937, one found Paul Renner on a jury for the selection of fine books, organized along the plan of the International Exhibition.

The different indications of reception are limited most often to a few bits of information or exchanges of specific information, which manifestly did not foster any strong influence. However, it seems clear that French sensibility was ready to accept the new typography. As proof, Futura type, merchandised under the name “Europe” by the Deberny & Peignot foundry in 1930, enjoyed some success. Futura, designed by Paul Renner and marketed in 1927, turned out to be an emblematic typeface for the aesthetic ideals of the Bauhaus. Renner was not a member of the Bauhaus, but the first sketches of his alphabet revealed preoccupations that were very close to those of its members; geometric forms constituted the first visible structure of its character, just as with the then unpublished experimental alphabets of Bayer (Universal), Josef Albers (stencils and combinatory writing [*Kombinationsschrift*]),<sup>25</sup> and Joost Schmidt. Strongly criticized by the advocates of designed rather than constructed typography, Futura nonetheless represented a synthesis of the aspirations of the moment that were sufficiently toned down to communicate with the masses.

21 Will Grohmann, “Une école d’art moderne: Le ‘Bauhaus’ de Dessau: Académie d’une plastique nouvelle,” *Cahiers d’art* 5 (1930): 273–274.

22 See László Moholy-Nagy, “La photographie, ce qu’elle était, ce qu’elle devra être,” *Cahiers d’art* 4 (1929): 28–33.

23 Christian Zervos, “Herbert Bayer (Galerie Povolozky),” *Cahiers d’art* 4 (1929): 56.

24 See the chapter devoted to that exhibition in *Le Bauhaus et la France, 1919–1940*, Isabelle Ewig, Thomas W. Gaehgtens, and Matthias Noell, eds. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag/Centre allemand d’histoire de l’art, 2002).

25 *Kombinationsschrift* [combinatory writing], composed of modular forms, constitutes an example of montage work that is visible as three geometric forms.

Though it may seem heretical to those who think of the letter as exclusively the issue of natural movement and knowing gesture, Futura nevertheless may be seen as the realization of social ideals: on the one hand, the fierce will to simplify the letter by removing all its particularity or historical connotations to facilitate the daring production of an “elementary” archetypal form; and, on the other hand, the desire, distinctly expressed by some, to come up with a transnational alphabet.<sup>26</sup> Upon crossing the border and becoming “Europe,”<sup>27</sup> Futura lost the expression of its projection into the future—the reflection of utopias and Central European experimental fumbblings that France kept at a distance. One may then advance the hypothesis that this indirect reception of a typography that resonated with the Bauhaus presupposed a certain aesthetic appreciation, but that it rested first of all on a commercial plan, confirmed by the success of “Europe” type, which remained a type that sold particularly well for three decades at the Deberny & Peignot foundry. How can we explain the fact that the aesthetic-commercial value of Futura could triumph at the same time as a specific (typo)graphical phenomenon, in which Futura played a central symbolic role, was overshadowed?

The graphic arts and typography of the Bauhaus, and a fortiori, the new typography, probably did not find truly favorable reception in France. On each side, the border was palpable. Cassandre, for example, in the 1930s received commissions from England, the Netherlands, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States; but apparently not from Germany. The monograph devoted to Charles Loupot pointed out that “... in the 1920s (and well after that) everything that was German or, by extension, Germanic [...] was considered suspect.”<sup>28</sup> How can one explain such a reservation when the German scene, so near at hand, was overflowing with unheard of richness, and with the principle of exchange flooding through Europe? The French graphic arts culture then did not seem too disposed towards an encounter with that doubtless disconcerting modernism. As early as 1930, Maximilien Vox showed the first signs of panic: “The shadow of Dr. Caligari is reaching out from Germany. After having momentarily played with the rare dissonances and the cocktails of lowercase, French typography, in sure hands, is following its true course.”<sup>29</sup>

Inversely, from France to Germany, it appears that the transfer of knowledge and practices did not go any further. Symmetrically, one finds here and there in Germany a few small influences of French graphic design in exhibits and in the press. As for the Bauhaus itself, Charles Peignot’s visit would be the only point of contact attesting to a French typographical presence. But it was this school as an entity that caught his attention. At the moment that he made his case in the magazine *Vu*, the Bauhaus’s typography and graphic design already had been conceived in their essentials. With its own printed production (stationery, books, posters, magazines, etc.), as well as

26 See Christopher Burke, *Paul Renner* (London: Hyphen, 1998), 105, according to which “Renner tried to design a type linked with the concept of universality but always had in mind the particular needs of the German language [...] and described Futura as ‘an eminently German letter.’”

27 See Chatelain 2001 (*Réaction*), 15, where he made the hypothesis that the French name of Futura, “Europe,” served to “mask its Germanic origins.”

28 Christophe Zagrodski and Charles Loupot, *Lopot* (Paris: Cherche Midi, 1998), 18.

29 Maximilien Vox, “Dix ans de publicité,” *Plaisir de bibliophile* 22 (1930), cited in Fernand Baudin, *Dossier Vox* (Association des Compagnons de Lure, Belgium: R. Magermans, 1975), 104.

external commissions to fill, it would have been hard to overlook the school.<sup>30</sup> In fact, one could well be astonished at Peignot's discretion on this subject because, in one way or another, he would have been aware that something special was going on at the Bauhaus. Moreover, it would have been surprising if some discussion of the typography from Dessau had not taken place, given Peignot's professional network in France (Cassandre, Vox, etc.) On his part, Vox, from 1929 on, proclaimed the new role for typography, though always associated with his patriotism: "As to type fonts, a new internationalization is taking place [...]. It is not impossible that France, with its innate sense of proportion, will see the birth of twentieth century type [...]."<sup>31</sup>

Other links could be shown between France and Germany, and other areas of interest indicated, but they always were just as tenuous. Thus, one finds Cassandre among the members invited by the *Ring neue Werbegestalter* [Circle of new advertising artists] in 1928 and 1929, and he participated in this way in the new typography exhibits in Magdeburg, and in Berlin, in 1929. (The few writings devoted to Cassandre seem reticent on this subject.) His name occurs just below that of Bayer on printed material of that time, and the symbolic proximity of the two names hardly makes up for an encounter that did not really take place. (Also mentioned are Moholy-Nagy, Dixel, Burchartz, Tschichold, etc.) The information available on Cassandre does not make the case for a possible trip across the Rhine. The word "Bauhaus" appears here and there, and Cassandre would have been aware of the activities of the school since 1919. If he seems to have been the first with a lasting German interest, his French peers, for their part, apparently held little place in the German press. Thus, in 1929, *Die Form (Form)* published "Das Plakat in Paris" ("The Poster in Paris"). Here one found reproductions of posters by four main figures of the era (Cassandre, Loupot, Carlu, and Paul Colin), as well as an instructive commentary on their work.<sup>32</sup>

### Simultaneous Dissonances

Corroborating the weakness of the reception, French and German typographic practices show many divergences, in spite of chronological proximity. In the early 1920s, a (typo)graphic renewal took place simultaneously on either side of the Rhine, with the year 1923 as a symbolic threshold. First of all, that year marked a profound reorientation of the first Bauhaus, which departed from its expressionistic and artisanal attachments to adhere to a new motto, "Art and Technique: A New Unity." (The Bauhaus would integrate its own typographic printing office two years later, at which time graphic expression would truly find its place.) The year 1923 equally marked the beginning of a renewal in France. A young generation of graphic artists began to stand out in the affiliation of painter-poster makers from the end of the previous century.<sup>33</sup> Cassandre owed the beginning

30 With the reservation that hypothetical archives offer proof of the opposite view.

31 Maximilien Vox, "Typographie," *Art et Décoration* 56 (1929): 172.

32 See Roger Ginsburger, "Das Plakat in Paris," *Die Form* 4 (1929): 583–585, as well as the article by Jean-Louis Cohen in the same volume.

33 The Frenchman Jules Chéret, active from 1866, is considered to be the father of the modern poster.

of his renown to his poster, “Au Bûcheron” [“To the Woodcutter”], which dates precisely from 1923. Loupot’s career in France equally took off in 1923 with his “Voisin” posters for the eponymous automobiles. Both were surprising. Moreover, the “Bûcheron” graphics<sup>34</sup> attracted ferocious criticism from Le Corbusier: “An uproar is in the streets. [...] When one falls ‘into the modern,’ one can fall very low.”<sup>35</sup> In such a context, how can we imagine that the much more radical experimentation of the Bauhaus movement could find a favorable reception in France? Where the French poster makers perpetuated a pictorial, designed tradition; the Bauhaus was eager to break with pre-existing codes. The school adhered to new (typo)graphic orientations shared by German, Russian, and Dutch professional graphic designers.

Just as abstract art investigated the formal qualities of painting—color, line, surface, etc.—so too, typography tackled directly the concepts of contrast, tension, asymmetry, proportions, etc. French graphic design, which only skirted these concepts, did not grasp them in as direct a manner. Sometimes, designers even seemed not to know them. The divergences can be specified. For the European actors of the new typography, the association of type and photography offered new perspectives. Moholy-Nagy forged the notion of the “typophoto” in 1925, having begun to experiment with the two modes of expression in the early 1920s.<sup>36</sup> In Berlin, publicity and photography studios of the Bauhaus were united. In this new approach, manual illustration was assimilated to a skill that the machine age had rendered obsolete. The French, far from these revolutionary orientations, reinvented the design tradition. Cassandre only very rarely used photography.<sup>37</sup> His fellow poster makers also were attached to design, often generating text and image in the same gesture. It is, perhaps, the introduction of photography, a body alien to the text, that promoted the consciousness of “white space”—or, more precisely, the space that was not imprinted—in Germany, Russia, and the Netherlands, thus affirming the break with the pro-symmetrical equilibrium. At the Bauhaus, graphic artists touted asymmetry, breaks in scale, the hierarchy of reading levels, effects of contrast, etc. Seeking clarity and effectiveness, they sought to translate a new textual *mise en scène*, attached to the expressivity of the mute “image.”

Such iconographic choices reflect two different conceptions of typography. There are other disparities still to be noted. On the French side, these arise above all from the graphic and typographic creation of a large number of posters and some type fonts—notably Cassandre’s; among them Bifur, Acier, and Peignot.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Cassandre would be “the first poster maker who was interested in this subject.”<sup>39</sup> In Germany, at the Bauhaus as elsewhere, the heat of the moment and interdisciplinary research stimulated the approach to all kinds of graphic and typographic objects: visual identities, books and journals, posters, the alphabet, experimental composi-

34 Cassandre produced several variations of the poster *Au Bûcheron*, the first dating from 1923.

35 Le Corbusier, cited in Henri Mouron, *A. M. Cassandre* (Geneva/New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 26.

36 See László Moholy-Nagy, “Typo-Photo,” *Typografische Mitteilungen* Special Number (October 1925): 202–205, where he explains: “The typo-photo is the most precise image of information [...].” In *Photographie et société* (Paris: Eds. du Seuil, 1974), 187, Gisèle Freund describes Moholy-Nagy as “The great theoretician of photography, the first who understood the new creative paths that it was opening”—conceptions that would have the greatest influence on graphic design and typography.

37 The use of photography is extremely rare in Cassandre’s work. His 1932 poster “Wagon-Bar” shows a montage uniting design and photography.

38 Dating, respectively, from 1929, 1930, and 1937, the typefaces Bifur, Acier, and Peignot were produced by the Deberny & Peignot Foundry. These inventions came slightly later than the Bauhaus experiments, which did not go beyond the planning stage and of Futura type. Let us mention here the presentation pamphlet for Bifur type, which contained a text by Blaise Cendrars (“Seule une lettre n’est rien [...]”)—reviving the combined typographical-literary experiences dear to the Cubo-futurists.

39 Sylvia Colle-Lorant, “A. M. Cassandre affichiste,” thesis, University of the Sorbonne, Paris I, dir. Marc Le Bot, Paris, 1982, 94.



tions, and other aspects of typography such as the inscription of text in space (volume, perspective, architecture, etc.). From 1925 onwards, the members of the Bauhaus took up the concept of experimental alphabets, which transformed their ideals. Bayer conceived the Universal Schrift as a unique alphabet composed only of lowercase letters. At the same time, the Bauhaus affirmed its predilection for lowercase letters. Bayer caused this radical choice to be accepted; inscribing on the school's letterhead in the fall of 1925, "*Wir schreiben alles klein, denn wir sparen damit zeit.*" ["We write everything in lowercase, so as to save time."] <sup>40</sup> Presented as an economy—the Bauhaus's printing house adopted DIN formats at the same time <sup>41</sup>—that decision just as perfectly reflected the utopia of the essence of the letter, of an Ur-form, of a letter that was, to a certain degree, anonymous, ahistorical, and astylistic.

At virtually the same moment in 1926, Cassandre opted for another alternative: "I don't know if experimental science has just decided against capital letters in favor of 'lowercase' [...] But I remain resolutely attached to capital letters. My architectural conception of the poster must necessarily orient my preferences [...] toward the primitive letter, the lapidary letter, [...] the true, the substantially monumental." <sup>42</sup> The French/Bauhaus divergence was as explicit as possible, though it should be more nuanced. Cassandre was thinking, above all, of the poster (though his Peignot type, conceived as type for text, tends to be made of shapes of capital letters), and some German graphic artists such as Walter Dexel or Max Burchartz also had a predilection for capital letters. Is it not always the case that such choices with their latent meanings are as much indicators of socio-cultural, even ideological, views, as of aesthetic ones? The capital letter is a monumental inscription: constant, imposing, sometimes dominating, and authoritarian. <sup>43</sup> The cursive lowercase letter is supple, homely, more legible—one is tempted to say more democratic. These hierarchies are inscribed in the very words themselves—the Latin *majus et minor* [more and less]. Is there not a kind of endorsement here of the French concept of typography that is linked to the past and concerned with grandeur?

Other significant examples confirm the Franco-German dichotomy. In the 1920s, the Bauhaus and new typography opted for sans serif type, which was felt to be the best expression of the moment. In 1921, Francis Thibaudeau brought out *La Lettre d'Imprimerie* [*The Letter of the Printing Office*] in Auriol, a 1901 type that was emblematic of art nouveau. The author, full of patriotic enthusiasm, ended his introduction with the following words: "May this work of popularization [...] inspire interest in the nature of the printed letter and then in the art of its use and applications, [...] for the greatest profit of the national industry and the triumph of French art." <sup>44</sup> *La Lettre d'Imprimerie* remains a very instructive work. It includes some of the first classifications of letters that are still alluded to even today. Oddly enough, the will to organize the mass of letters

40. "We write everything in lower case to save time." The proposition was initially formulated by Bayer and accepted by Gropius. It was a matter of suppressing all capitals in the school's print production. We can still read on the header of the school's letterhead: "Why two alphabets for a single word [...]?" and "We write exclusively in lower case, since we do not speak in upper case." This aspect of the Bauhaus's typography had an important influence on the typographic work of Max Bill. The choice was all the more radical for Germany, since all nouns had been capitalized since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Questioning the omnipresence of the capital letter in the German language goes back to 1822 with Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Grammatik* and other proposals of that nature—including the proposal of a single alphabet, suppressing upper case—were made at the beginning of the twentieth century, before the experiments of the Bauhaus.

41. The DIN (Deutsche Industrie Normen) format, which sets norms for the paper industry and stationers, was established in Germany in 1924. The A4 format is a DIN norm.

42. Cassandre, cited in Mouron (1985), 20.

43. See the slogans, "Liberty, equality, fraternity," "Post no bills," etc.

44. Francis Thibaudeau, *La Lettre d'Imprimerie* Vol. I (Paris: Bureau de l'édition, 1921), xxv.

fits in with specific Bauhaus preoccupations. For example, Albers was careful to specify that his *Kombinationsschrift* was not “meant to add to the 18,000 typefaces that already exist.”<sup>45</sup> It was customary in Germany at the time to introduce typographic reforms in print. Literature on the subject abounds. Books, essays, and articles can be counted in the hundreds; doubtless even the thousands.

At the Bauhaus, the ferment of ideas, the exchange—sometimes the dissent—of ideas, and the will to establish a new theoretical foundation generated a quantity of reflections on graphic design, typography, and photography. The lists of publications by Moholy-Nagy or Bayer runs to many pages, with publications appearing regularly in the foreign press. This phenomenon is not peculiar to the Bauhaus: Jan Tschichold and Paul Renner also left a considerable number of publications.<sup>46</sup> As for France, we can mention the creation of the journal *Arts et Métiers graphiques* (1927–39) by Charles Peignot, but particularly the rarity of writings on the graphic arts. Cassandre, who gave some instructive interviews, left notes and letters behind. More modest still, Charles Loupot left only scattered citations and probably never taught. In Germany, the push for publications cannot be separated from the professional exchanges and the vigor of collective work. In France, on the other hand, the absence of large networks, schools, or of comparably amalgamated movements explains the relative poverty of writings on the subject. *Die neue Typographie*, [The New Typography,] one of Tschichold’s major interwar works, still awaits a French translation.

### Divergence?

Many things seem to affirm, in one way or another, that France largely avoided the graphic design revolution, the new typography movement, and the Bauhaus experiments. Was this the result of a different sensibility, a resistance to certain aspects of modern art, or perhaps the gestation of nationalist feeling? Throughout the twentieth century, these ideas received a chilly reception in France. In another scenario, one can imagine that the discovery of these works would have fed a lively controversy. (The members of De Stijl did not hesitate to express their disapproval of the early Bauhaus—“expressionist jam” and “a hospital for artists”—on which they were to exert a big influence.)<sup>47</sup> What keeps coming back is the question of why the somewhat negative French reception—after all, the Bauhaus’s adventurous typography invited criticism—grew from a general indifference to a foreign phenomenon, to prolonged misapprehension, and later an expression of outright hostility. The postwar French reception, in this respect, is quite inglorious. Some of the biggest names in typography (and partisans of gestural writing) have expressed their opinions on the subject in the past few decades, transforming the reserved silence of the previous generation into a sometimes cutting aversion. Maximilien Vox, ad nauseam:

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45 Josef Albers, “Kombinationsschrift 3,” *Bauhaus* 1 (1931): n. p.

46 Tschichold is known to have written nearly fifty books and more than one hundred articles; Renner left more than a hundred publications.

47 Vilmos Huszár, *De Stijl* 9 (1922): 136, cited in Magdalena Droste’s *Bauhaus* (Cologne: B. Taschen, 1994), 54, and Théo van Doesburg, cited in Ruedi Baur’s *La nouvelle typographie* (Paris: CNDP, 1993), 60.

The doctrine in which we believe cannot be other than Latin. [...] Fads pass, they become outmoded, whether Germanizing, Slavifying, Americanizing. All the signs are there: very shortly the purest French gift, grace—served by the most French gesture, design—will flourish again like a rose under the gray skies of the world. And that will be the renewal of the Latin letter.<sup>48</sup>

By 1950, the tone quickly gets shriller. Jérôme Peignot, Charles Peignot's son, will go so far as to write that: "As to what concerns the creation of printing house type, one may not omit the nefarious role of the Bauhaus."<sup>49</sup> In the same vein, Claude Mediavilla declared at the end of his book *Calligraphie* [*Calligraphy*], published by the Imprimerie Nationale, that "If, at first, the Bauhaus adventure seemed a sane and promising reaction, it nonetheless quickly showed itself to be pernicious because of its dogmatism [...]. In many respects, the Bauhaus may be considered an artificial artistic movement." On the subject of the new typography, he added, "Tschichold was able to resist this yoke and was able to dodge these frauds since the year 1933."<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Futura type could be presented as "type appropriate for the Reich's vocation of universal domination," with Paul Renner becoming "the regime's authority on typographical matters"<sup>51</sup>—assertions sharply disputed in the journal *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie*.<sup>52</sup> One of the most virulent criticisms emanated from Ladislav Mandel, who, in 1998, wrote no less than that "The Bauhaus, preaching the integration of all the arts, [...] mixed typography and architecture. [...] The research of Herbert Bayer at the Bauhaus, of J. Albers, Jan Tschichold, and Paul Renner [...] resulted in the negation of 2000 years of the evolution of Latin writing. [...] Therefore, the arrival of 'sans serif text typefaces,' pared down and soulless, in the first half of this century, represented a certain threat to our cultural heritage."<sup>53</sup> It is hard to believe all this. But it could get even more virulent. This attitude found its ultimate expression with José Mendoza: "The Bauhaus, a fascist school," he exclaimed in 1995, on the occasion of a debate on typography at the Bibliothèque Nationale.<sup>54</sup> This was a rather strange misreading.<sup>55</sup>

Doubtless, French bitterness had to be made explicit to allow for conditions conducive to a sane, objective reception. "Nefarious," "pernicious," "dogmatic," "artificial," "fraud," "fascist," etc.—the language reported here comes from well-known professionals. Should we view this as fear inspired by the tardy arrival of the avant-garde typographical revolution? These unyielding judgments, which moreover were never supported by any evidence, arose as much from quarrels among different schools (most often legitimate quarrels, for that matter) as from fundamental misunderstandings. These considerations really limit typography to the design of letters, which is itself reduced to skillfully drawn writing, the heir of more than three-thousand years of alphabetical writing. Far from this relatively

48 Maximilien Vox, "Pour une graphie latine," *Caractère* 1 (1950): 245.

49 Jérôme Peignot, "L'esprit et la lettre" in *De plomb, d'encre & de lumière* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1982), 277–307, particularly 290. Jérôme Peignot taught the course at the Sorbonne-Paris I. The rest of the citation follows: "Have we not overvalued it [the Bauhaus] in terms of typography? [...] The typographers of that school; Albers, Herbert Bayer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Joost Schmidt; threw out corporeal or spontaneous gestures [...]. Now we are biased; they threw out upper case, now they want to suppress serifs." The defensive position is explicit here; the fact of having "dismembered" the letter was the cause of much anxiety.

50 Claude Mediavilla, *Calligraphie* (Paris, 1993), 299–300.

51 "Les folies typographiques du nazisme" in *Étapes graphiques* 60 (2000): 34–35.

52 See Roger Chatelain's "Paul Renner sous les feux de l'histoire," *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 5 (2000): 9 and "Réactions relatives à Paul Renner et au Futura," *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 1 (2001): 14–16.

Burke wrote the following in 1998, 15: "Futura did not become the official typeface even if it was used by the Nazis. [...] As much as for his cultural Bolshevism, his [Renner's] arrest was the result of the publication of a little book that contained a bitter critique of the regime."

53 Ladislav Mandel, *Écritures: Miroir des hommes et des sociétés* (Reillanne, France: Atelier Perrousseaux, 1998), 167, 169, and 175.

traditionalist professionalism, the typography of the Bauhaus located its ideas within graphic design, photography, design, Kandinsky's theories (particularly *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*) [*Point and Line to Plane*] and architecture.<sup>56</sup> Does not a certain rejection of the abstract fit in with French reserve?<sup>57</sup> To look into this more closely, are matters more complex than the opposition between a tradition that considers itself to be beneficial and a radical modernism. Did not Moholy-Nagy refer to the graphic quality of incunabula, in which he found some characteristics of avant-garde typography?<sup>58</sup> Roland Barthes went even further in this other perspective on modernity: "The Middle Ages deposited a treasure of experiences, dreams, judgments, in the work of its uncial letters."<sup>59</sup>

Of that pitiless reception, there remains the curse pronounced upon the incompleteness of a dream suspended in flight—without a common measure with the credo and the know-how of those who condemn it—on the establishment of a new textual power, and on the exploration of a disconcerting typographical "space." To castigate these reactions does not keep us from recognizing the know-how or knowledge of those supporting these views. Because they do not occupy the same ground, the objectives of the new typography and the most refined practice of letter design cannot be compared. We must consider what this distracted reception misunderstood; the Bauhaus's typography was, first of all, the work of foreigners—Moholy-Nagy was Hungarian, Bayer was born in Austria, and both left for Berlin in 1920—and it was not carried out by those trained in typography, but rather by particularly wide-ranging artists.

A few observations on Bayer's work help us to better understand the idealist depth of that era's aspirations: "His universal alphabet's goal was not to become typographical letters, but repre-

54 Evening debate, "Y a-t-il un axe nord-sud de la typographie?" at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 1995. Cited in Chatelain's "Débats à la Bibliothèque Nationale à Paris" in *Gutenberg*, May 10, 1995, under the heading "Reflets techniques" (a complementary publication to *Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie*). See also Chatelain, "Ma typographie," *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 2 (2000): 1–16, especially 2–3, and 14.

55 For anyone interested in the Bauhaus, even nonprofessionals, it was quickly apparent that the year 1933 would deal a fatal blow to the school—the members of the Bauhaus, "cultural Bolsheviks" in the eyes of the Nazis, were accused of propagating a "Jewish-Marxist conception of art." Moreover, a number of German graphic artists and typographers

were dismissed from their teaching positions outside the Bauhaus, such as Paul Renner or Jan Tschichold, who was imprisoned for several weeks. Another fact invalidating the "new typography" with the regime was the March 1936 poster for "Entartete Kunst," which mimicked this kind of graphic design.

56 Such artistic interactions had plenty of antecedents elsewhere. See the body of work of Peter Behrens for the firm AEG at the beginning of the twentieth century.

57 See Kandinsky's response to abstract art in *Cahiers d'art* 7:8 (1931): 350–353. See also Claude Mediavilla, *Calligraphie* (Paris, 1993), 299–300, which include some cutting lines on Kandinsky.

58 See László Moholy-Nagy, "Zeitgemässe Typographie—Ziele, Praxis," *Kritik*, (1925), cited in Hans Maria Wingler, *The Bauhaus* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1962, 2nd ed. 1968), 80–81. Page 80: "The old incunabula, and even the first typographical works, as well, made ample use of the contrasting effects of color and form [...]. The widespread application of the printing process [...], etc., have changed the vital, contrast-rich layouts of the old printed works into the generally quite monotonous gray of later books."

59 Roland Barthes, "Erté ou A la lettre" in *Erté* (Parma: F. M. Ricci, 1972), 1231.

sented the first investigations toward developing a new alphabet.”<sup>60</sup> The typography and graphic design of the Bauhaus, if they satisfied a number of internal realizations or exterior commissions and were very influential on their environment, first of all, they were a part of the desire for experimentation.<sup>61</sup> It was a matter of contributing to the renovation of “the language of vision” after a century of Victorian graphic design, after Jugendstil, and after wartime propaganda.<sup>62</sup> Graphic design and typography also expressed the ideals of life. The break with the past and the turn in favor of industrialization could only yield nontraditional forms which, by definition, were subject to polemics. Isn’t it astonishing, then, that this should have given rise to a certain concept of “French” typography? But why did it take so long to bring to light rancor that had never been purged?

Symptomatically, the virulence of that reception suggests that the issues at stake go beyond simple questions of form or legibility; hinting at an artistic, cultural, social, political, and/or ideological background, which is much more difficult to get around since typographers in France often are guarded in expressing their opinions on these matters; unlike members of the Bauhaus, who interrogated themselves on their role in society. Why did a collective unconscious go so far as to project the danger of dictatorship onto the Bauhaus? Why this fury? Why make an issue of the Bauhaus’s pedagogical experiences? Why didn’t they bring such charges against De Stijl or constructivism?<sup>63</sup> This is not a matter of delighting in an openly worn affliction, but of questioning this late tendency to project all the worst qualities on the typography of the Bauhaus or on the new typography. Is not the fear of what the Dessau school provoked the best proof that something really important occurred? If this typography aroused such fear, is it not because of the foreign powers that

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60 Arthur Cohen, *Herbert Bayer* (Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1984), 215.

61 See Herbert Bayer, “Typographie und Werbsachengestaltung,” *Bauhaus* 1 (1928): 10, where he reported that a printer in Frankfurt was asked to do half his work in “the style of the Bauhaus.”

62 Ellen Lupton, J. Abbott Miller, *The ABC’s of  $\Delta$  $\square$  $\circ$ : The Bauhaus and Design Theory* (London/New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 22. For a different and enriching analysis concerning modernist graphic design, the new use of typography and photography, advertising and the work of the Ring, see Jorge Frascara “A History of Design, a History of Concerns” in *Graphic Design History*, Steven Heller and Georgette Ballance, eds. (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 13–18;

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Paul Jobling, David Crowley, *Graphic Design: Reproduction and Representation since 1800* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 137–170; Robin Kinross, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History* (London: Hyphen Press 1992), 85–99; Maud Lavin, *Clean New World: Culture, Politics, Graphic Design* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001), 26–49.

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63 Charles Peignot, “L’enseignement professionnel,” *Vu (L’énigme allemande)* 213 (1982): 306, who made the same fine eulogy on this topic to “the Constructivists of the 1920s, whose typographical works are the most accomplished ever seen.”

are held to be unwanted on French soil associated with them? It is possible, but let us be prudent, for Jan Tschichold was able to express himself in the following terms in 1959: "To my great astonishment, I detected the most shocking parallels between the teachings of the new typography, national socialism, and fascism."<sup>64</sup> This makes things more confusing than they otherwise would seem. But this was the reaction of an injured man who, in 1933, had to go into exile after losing his teaching post, being arrested, and imprisoned by the Nazis.<sup>65</sup>

Is there yet another reason for the French reticence? Transmissions from the Bauhaus took place late and indirectly through graphic artists and typographers from the Swiss school, beginning with Jean Widmer, who arrived in France in 1953, after training at the Zurich school then directed by Johannes Itten.<sup>66</sup> Among them, Peter Keller and Rudi Meyer from the Basel school greatly contributed to the foundation and development of design knowledge directly based on the avant-garde spirit, notably through their teaching at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs beginning in the 1960s. Through them, and perhaps for the first time, Central European modernism of the interwar period found a place in the curriculum in France.<sup>67</sup> As a parallel development on the professional level, an important collaboration took place between Adrian Frutiger and the Deberny & Peignot foundry. There was a new line in teaching—in 1985 a National Institute for Typographic Research was created,<sup>68</sup> with the mission of "[entering its name] into the certain evolution of techniques and tendencies that characterize contemporary typography, while maintaining, of course, the great French tradition in this area."<sup>69</sup> The establishment, rapidly reoriented toward the transmission of Swiss typographic culture (thus linked to the spirit of the Bauhaus) under the direction of Peter Keller, was open to the perspectives of historical avant-gardes and to an internationalist perspective; an international student presence there has since testified to the desire for the cultural interactions characteristic of the Bauhaus.<sup>70</sup>

It is a matter of public record that the arrival of the Swiss typographers was not a cause for rejoicing among the French. Jérôme Peignot wrote, "It is not far from the spirit of Zurich to that of the Bauhaus. [...] The theses worked out by the Bauhaus can be reduced to a single idea [...]. One knows the result: it is a clumsy letter seemingly set between two chairs of history. [...] No doubt, the Bauhaus designers have thought about it for a long time. Too long." (This was published by Gallimard in 1967 in the series "Idées.")<sup>71</sup> For Maximilien Vox, "Swiss typography [...] was, in fact, a totalitarianism of the spirit [...]. The new version of the new typography has failed to meet the goals that the first failed to achieve."<sup>72</sup> Jérôme Peignot, again concerning the typography of the Bauhaus and of the Swiss, wrote: "You do not imitate a typography; it is yours or it is not."<sup>73</sup>

64 Cited in Ruari McLean, *Jan Tschichold: Typographer* (London: Lund Humphries, 1975, new ed. 1990), 69.

65 See Jan Tschichold, *Glaube und Wirklichkeit*, 1946, cited in *Typographische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 1 (1995): 9–16, especially 10: "The creators of the New Typography and the tendencies that it embodied were, like me, resolute enemies of Nazism [...] I was, along with my wife, held in 'preventive detention,' that is, prison, at the beginning of the so-called Third Reich."

66 Jean Widmer settled in France in 1953. If he knew Itten well, he also had met Max Bill, a Bauhaus pupil. See *Jean Widmer, graphiste, un écologiste de l'image*, Margo Rouard-Snowman, ed., catalogue of an exhibition at Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1995 and *Jean Widmer*, (Villeurbanne: Maison du Livre, de l'Image et du Son, 1991).

67 As for typography and graphic design, it seems that no wide-ranging educational project can be found in France in the first half of the twentieth century, in spite of the role of the poster makers.

68 Originally Atelier National de Création Typographique (ANCT).

69 Georges Bonnin's preface to the ANCT brochure of 1992. Georges Bonnin ran the Imprimerie Nationale from 1971 to 1983.

70 In fact, a number of Bauhaus students came from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Scandinavian countries, the United States, and Latin America. When the organization was established in Berlin, it included 168 pupils, of whom thirty-three were foreign.

71 Jérôme Peignot, *De l'écriture à la typographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 104–106.

72 Maximilien Vox, "Déclin d'une hérésie" in *Caractère* (1965), cited in Roger Chatelain, "Maximilien Vox," *Typographische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie* 4 (1995): 2–3.

73 Charles Peignot, "L'enseignement professionnel," *Vu (L'énigme allemande)* 213 (1932): 105.

Let us content ourselves with noting one or two vivid historical ironies here. The first printing shop in France, which produced its first printed book in 1470, was run by “three Rhenish typographers (Ulrich Gering, Martin Crantz, and Michael Friburger—apparently of German and Swiss origin), summoned by the University of Paris.”<sup>74</sup> Five centuries later, in 1972, the French foundries Deberny & Peignot closed their doors, bought out by the Swiss foundry Haas.<sup>75</sup>

Though more difficult to find, a positive late reception of the Bauhaus did occur. In 1960, an article in *La France graphique* [*Graphic Arts France*] praised it, evoking “the typographic work of the most famous and influential school of modern times: the Bauhaus.”<sup>76</sup> For his part, Rémy Peignot, Jérôme’s brother, made the case for “that beauty, that purity which characterizes the graphic arts in Switzerland.”<sup>77</sup> The Peignot dynasty decidedly did not speak with a single voice. Let us conclude with Charles, the father. In 1957, he founded at Lausanne the AtypI (Association Typographique Internationale) [International Typographic Association]. Some lines from his pen in 1969 eloquently establish a link between the action of the Bauhaus and French reserve, finally illuminating the interior of that dark situation for us:

After many contacts and numerous conversations [with Cassandre], each one of us influenced by the theories of Kandinsky and the spirit of the Dessau school, convinced that typographic creation could also be refined or purified, we agreed to undertake Bifur [...]. It caused a somewhat scandalous break in an art and in a milieu that were particularly traditionalist, [which] broke some taboos and had the merit of liberating us.<sup>78</sup>

That was put very clearly, which reminds us that the typography of the Bauhaus and the new typography—whether one advocates them or not—are not the monsters that some have wanted to make of them. The monster was elsewhere. And it killed the Bauhaus. Had that not happened, the school undoubtedly would have had a different posterity and a more informed reception in France. The typography and graphic arts of the Bauhaus embodied the ideals and the utopias of its members through their significant form and beyond their role in the industrial era: to create better conditions, to make relations more fluid, to invent new spaces for life, and to dream of human language which is completely other.

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74 Guy Bechtel, *Gutenberg* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 18.

75 The Haas Foundry also bought the Olive Foundry in Marseille.

76 Walter Plata, “Typographie moderne allemande,” *La France graphique* 166 (1960): 8–14, especially 8.

77 Rémy Peignot (1946), cited in Roger Chatelain, “Le chantre de la ‘graphie latine,’” *Typografische Monatsblätter/Revue Suisse de l’imprimerie* 4 (1995): 4–5.

78 Charles Peignot, “Cassandre et la typographie,” *Médecine de France* 198 (1969): 38.