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Daniela Gretz and Marcus Krause

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# From Pure Art to Sheer Luxury: Magazines as Ornamental Constellations and the Emergence of Aesthetic Capitalism in the Early Twentieth Century

DANIELA GRETZ AND MARCUS KRAUSE

University of Cologne

[daniela.gretz@uni-koeln.de](mailto:daniela.gretz@uni-koeln.de)

## ABSTRACT

The concept of ‘ornamental constellations’ introduced in the following article highlights the structural relationships of decorative elements and miscellaneous content in magazines and the importance of the reader’s perspective for their interpretation. ‘Ornamental constellations’ are considered one of the most important media devices of emerging aesthetic capitalism, as they produce economies of attention and affect and establish a visual connection between the basic concept of a magazine, its individual contributions, and the readership addressed, thus promoting a specific aesthetic lifestyle. Their respective staging value is illustrated by analysing two complementary magazines and their constellation techniques: the elitist art magazine *Blätter für die Kunst* with its ‘strategic arrangement’ of literary and programmatic contributions and the creation of ‘resonances’ between them and the popular sports and society magazine *Sport im Bild* with its hybridizing flow of texts, images, and advertisements. Despite all the differences, it becomes clear that these are two quite compatible projects within the framework of an emerging aesthetic capitalism: whereas the *Blätter für die Kunst* staged and materialized the idea of pure art as an exclusive aesthetic lifestyle, the *Sport im Bild* made the desired aesthetic way of life also attainable by non-artists (with enough money) by associating it with the idea of an aesthetic capitalism.

## KEYWORDS

ornamental constellations, staging value, aesthetic capitalism, little magazine, petite revue, *Blätter für die Kunst*, sports magazine, *Sport im Bild*, Stefan George, Robert Walser

This article examines two complementary magazines in order to illustrate how flexible and mutable magazine formats situate themselves within the entanglements of the international mass media market in the context of an emerging aesthetic capitalism.<sup>1</sup> The first is *Blätter für die Kunst* (1892–1919), which presented itself as a medium of pure art and initially distanced itself from the popular national market with the ‘posture’ of an international ‘little magazine’ (the French Symbolist *petite revue*) before transitioning into a work of art in book form and establishing a publishing brand for an aesthetic elite to demonstrate its cultural power.<sup>2</sup> The second is the illustrated magazine *Sport im Bild* (1895–1934), which transformed itself from a sports magazine into a magazine for fashion, luxury goods, and an extravagant way of living, primarily addressing an equally exclusive, but above all, wealthy readership.

Despite their differences, both magazines were concerned with creating a specific aesthetic lifestyle for their different readerships through their ‘staging value’, thus positioning themselves in the marketplace in the context of an emerging aesthetic capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Staging value refers to two different theoretical areas: on the one hand, it is used to describe a variant of late capitalism and post-industrialism in the last third of the twentieth century that is based on the production of aesthetic values and an atmosphere for staging our lives.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it refers to historical economic or sociological theories of the first two decades of the century, such as Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* which attaches it to the demonstration of wealth or power.<sup>5</sup> Thus the concept of staging value provides a theoretical basis for describing phenomena transcending the boundaries between art and commerce in the popular magazine culture of modernity, highlighting the common ground between those contrasting magazine projects.

To describe the structural manifestations of the aesthetic lifestyles these magazines aimed to create we introduce the concept of ‘ornamental constellations’. We consider ornamental constellations as one of the most important media devices of aesthetic capitalism, since they produce economies of attention and affect and establish a visual connection between the basic concept of a magazine, its individual contributions, and the readership addressed. Such constellations produce affordances that rely on magazine specific ‘constellation techniques’ and allow multiple possibilities for creating connections between the miscellaneous elements of the magazines by the reader. Our concept of ornamental constellations can be related to two different theoretical backgrounds: first, it relates to the aesthetic tradition of the ornament which describes recursive structures as a constant alternation between figure and ground, both on a formal level (the design/layout, the typographic and, in the narrower sense, ornamental level of book decoration) and on the level of content (between editorial content, the individual textual and visual contributions, and advertising), which together create a sense of exclusivity,

1 For an introduction to the relationship between modernist periodicals and their marketplaces, see Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905–1920* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000) as well as Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey, *Modernism’s Print Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

2 Evanghelia Stead, ‘Reconsidering “Little” versus “Big” Periodicals’, *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 1.2 (2016), 1–17 (p. 10).

3 ‘Staging value’ [‘Inszenierungswert’] is a term introduced in Gernot Böhme, *Critique of Aesthetic Capitalism* (Oxford: Mimesis International, 2017) as a third value category supplementing Marx’s dichotomy of ‘Gebrauchswert’ [‘value in use’], which denotes the usefulness of an object, and ‘Tauschwert’ [‘exchange value’], which is determined by the demand during the trade of goods in a market, and characterizes the way commodities ‘serve to put on stage a certain lifestyle and ourselves’ (p. 27).

4 Peter Murphy and Eduardo de la Fuenete, eds, *Aesthetic Capitalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Böhme, p. 15.

5 Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 29.

aesthetic affection, and intensified attention towards the magazine. Second, our concept is indebted to Walter Benjamin's metaphorical understanding of the constellation of stars in the firmament, which depends on the point of view of the observer, who orders them selectively into meaningful constellations ('Sternbilder').<sup>6</sup> Benjamin's concept is especially well suited to characterize the relationship between the structural ornamental media affordances and the various modes of reception and interpretation they enable.

### Publicity Through Aesthetic Exclusivity: The Paradoxical Market Strategy and Ornamental Constellations of the *Blätter für die Kunst*

In their early years, the *Blätter für die Kunst*, founded by Stefan George (1868–1933), was self-published by Carl August Klein and funded proportionately by the contributors. The front page contains the notice 'This magazine published by the editor has a closed circle of readers invited by the members', suggesting the exclusivity of an elite exchange of a circle of like-minded artists.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, it also alluded to broader accessibility with a reference to being displayed in selected bookshops in European metropolises, such as the French Symbolist publisher Léon Vanier's in Paris (see Fig. 1), which linked the journal to the internationally renowned circles of Symbolism and their marketing networks. With this strategy to create publicity through aesthetic exclusivity the magazine gained its staging value as an internationally orientated *petite revue* and a 'halböffentlich' ['semi-public'] commodity that used the subversive 'Konzept "Gegenöffentlichkeit"' ['concept of "counter-publicity"'] in which 'the program of withdrawal from the [popular national] market ultimately prove[d] to be a gap in the market'.<sup>8</sup> In addition to this international format transfer as affiliation by an ornamental constellation of design, layout, and typography, barely analysed hitherto, we will first examine the magazine's further content-related ornamental constellations and constellation techniques through which an aesthetic lifestyle was performed for an artistic elite.<sup>9</sup>

The concrete appearance of the magazine during its print run was — to borrow Mark Turner's term — 'unruly'.<sup>10</sup> The first four series were published at rather irregular intervals in five octavo-size booklets called 'volumes'. Each series was to be bound in

6 Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels: Faksimilenachdruck der Erstausgabe von 1928* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2019), pp. 19–20.

7 'Diese zeitschrift im verlag des herausgebers hat einen geschlossenen von den mitgliedern geladenen leserkreis.'

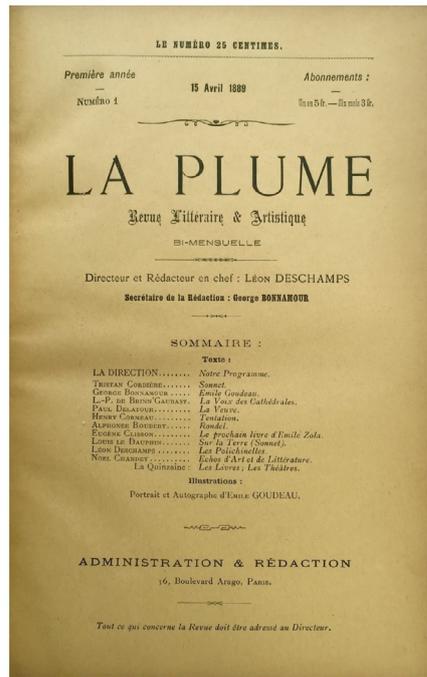
8 Jörg-Ulrich Fechner, *L'âpre gloire du silence: Europäische Dokumente zur Rezeption der Frühwerke Stefan Georges und der "Blätter für die Kunst" 1890–1898* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1998), p. 17; Monika Dimpfl, 'Die Zeitschriften *Der Kunstwart*, *Freie Bühne/Neue Deutsche Rundschau* und *Blätter für die Kunst*: Organisation literarischer Öffentlichkeit um 1900', in *Zur Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert: Einzelstudien, Teil II*, ed. by Monika Dimpfl and Georg Jäger (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990), p. 116–97 (p. 157); 'hat mit genau diesem Programm, das die Zeitschrift dem Mark zu entziehen scheint, eine Marktlücke entdeckt'. Jürgen Brokoff, *Geschichte der reinen Poesie: Von der Weimarer Klassik bis zur historischen Avantgarde* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), p. 446. All translations in this article are ours.

9 Elisa Grilli and Evangelia Stead shed light on personal networks and ideas shared between some of the French-language *petites revues* in 'Between Symbolism and Avant-Garde Poetics: *La Plume* (1889–1905), *L'Ermitage* (1890–1906), and *La Revue blanche* (1889–1903)', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, ed. by Peter Brooker et al., 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), III.1, pp. 76–100, and Anthony Pym has examined the networks established through translation in a quantitative study including the *Blätter für die Kunst* in 'Cross-Cultural Networking: Translators in the French-German Network of *petites revues* at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Meta*, 52.4 (2007), 724–43. However, the concrete material magazine format, layout, and typography remained unconsidered in his study.

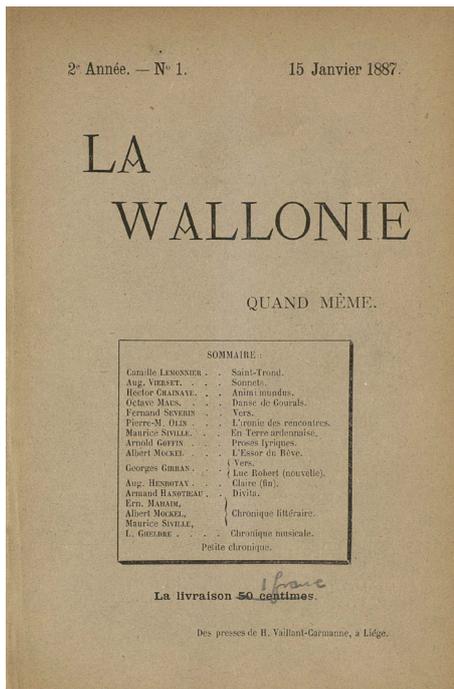
10 Mark Turner, 'The Unruliness of Serials in the Nineteenth Century (and in the Digital Age)', in *Serialization in Popular Culture*, ed. Rob Allen and Thijs van den Berg (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 22–38.



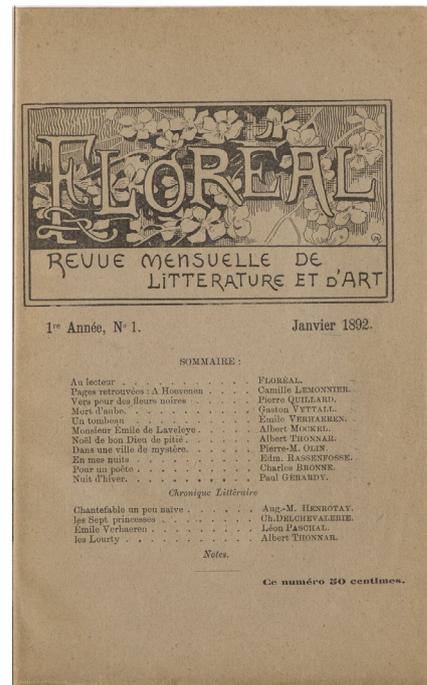
a



b



c



d

Fig. 1a–d Title pages of a) *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.1 (October 1892), Stefan George Archiv, Württembergische Landesbibliothek; b) *La Plume* (1889), reproduced from *JEPS*, 1.2; c) *La Wallonie* (1887), Université Libre de Bruxelles — Archives & Bibliothèques; d) *Floréal* (1892), Gallica / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

book format and designed as one complete work, with a comprehensive table of contents from the fifth ‘volume’ onwards. From then on, the magazine appeared only once a year in book format, the contributors to the last three series remained anonymous, and after longer gaps in publication the last two series were even presented in a single volume. The average circulation comprised 300 copies, with a circulation peak of 1,000–2,000 copies, including reprints.<sup>11</sup> In addition, from late 1894 on, the magazine was issued by a self-publishing company, which used the title as a brand name. It served as an official publishing platform for poetry and scientific books by members of the circle, promoted another cultural-critical magazine, and recycled the miscellaneous content of the magazine in two anthological projects, three selected volumes with German-language original works and programmatic contributions, and a two-volume selection of George’s translations of European Symbolists.<sup>12</sup> This was a way to reach different readerships, create new markets, and thus showcase the self-proclaimed aesthetic elite to a wider audience, demonstrating the claim for cultural leadership and power.

### International Format Transfer and the Ornamental Constellation of Design, Layout, and Typography

The fundamental staging value of this national brand and its claim for cultural leadership was built on the transfer of the periodical format that *Mercure de France*’s collaborator Remy de Gourmont called the *petite revue* and the relations to the magazine’s international format models. The title was adapted from *Écrits pour l’Art* (1887–1906) and the layout of the title page was based on *La Plume* (1889–1905), *La Wallonie* (1886–92), and *Floréal* (1892–93) (Fig. 1). Furthermore, as shows, the design of the cover image by Thomas Theodor Heine was quite similar in style to that of *L’Ermitage* (1890–1906) and *La Plume*.<sup>13</sup> (See Fig. 2a–c) The news section at the end of the magazines, which informed readers of the activities of related magazines, was also borrowed, and used not only for mutual networking but above all for cross-marketing and advertising purposes; the capitalized names of the French and Belgian magazines and poets also served typographically as effective advertising ‘flagships’ (Fig. 3).

The decision in favour of plain Antiqua (Roman) and Grotesk (sans-serif) fonts went hand in hand with the explicit rejection of Fraktur (Gothic print) as the so-called ‘German script’ common in popular German magazines, and documents the European orientation of the *Blätter für die Kunst* and its distancing from the popular German print market typographically.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it is linked to the criticism of the ‘silly use of initial capitals’ associated with Fraktur.<sup>15</sup> The magazine’s characteristic use of lower case, reduced punctuation, and ‘simplified’ spelling was intended to create the impression of ‘formal purity’ instead. This also distinguished the magazine from the international format models, which underwent a specific national transformation that claimed absolute originality in its aesthetic radicalism. The ‘arbitrary, unpleasant

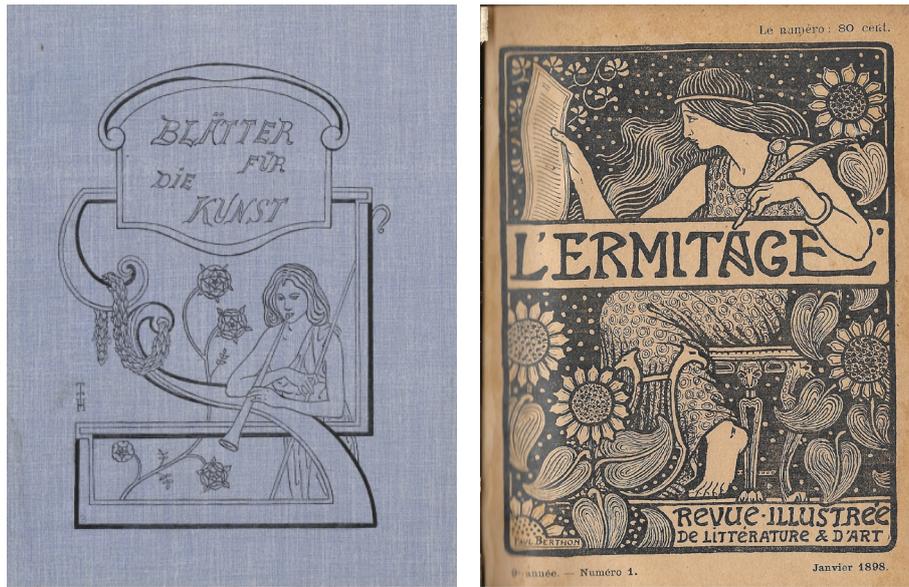
11 Steffen Martus, ‘Geschichte der “Blätter für die Kunst”’, in *Stefan George und sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch*, ed. by Achim Aurnhammer et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 301–64 (p. 313).

12 *Blätter für die Kunst. Eine Auslese aus den Jahren 1892–1898* (Berlin: Bondi, 1898); *Blätter für die Kunst. Eine Auslese aus den Jahren 1898–1904* (Berlin: Bondi, 1904); *Blätter für die Kunst. Eine Auslese aus den Jahren 1904–1909* (Berlin: Bondi, 1909); *Zeitgenössische Dichter. Übertragen von Stefan George*, 2 vols (Berlin: Bondi, 1905).

13 The design was nevertheless much simpler and instead of featuring the female embodiment of the fine arts with a quill, the cover of *Blätter für die Kunst* featured an androgynous shepherd boy with a shawm as the personification of poetry (which is quite significant for the magazine of a homoerotic circle).

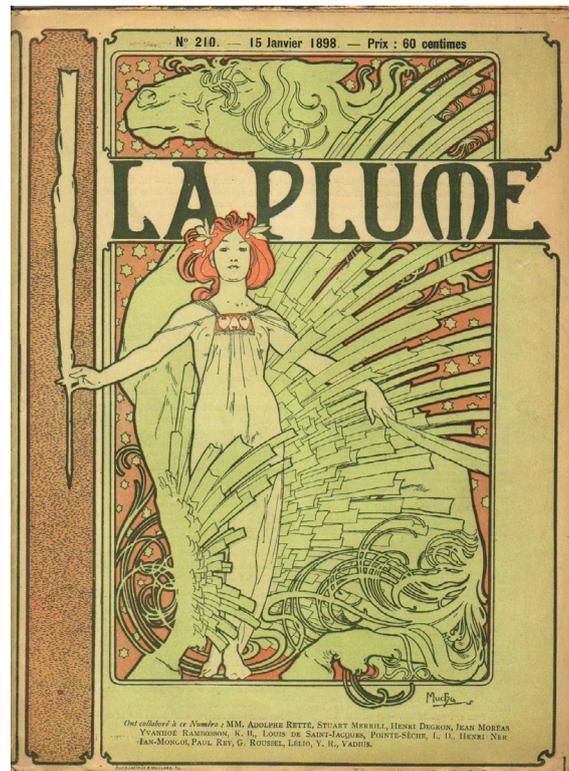
14 See Brett Shanley, ‘Typeface Teutonicus: The Socio-Semiotics of German Typography before 1919’, *Symbolism*, 17 (2017), 217–41.

15 ‘den albernern gebrauch der grossen anfangsbuchstaben’. Carl August Klein, ‘Unterhaltungen im grünen Salon III. Das doch nicht äusserliche’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.5 (August 1893), 144–46 (pp. 144–45).



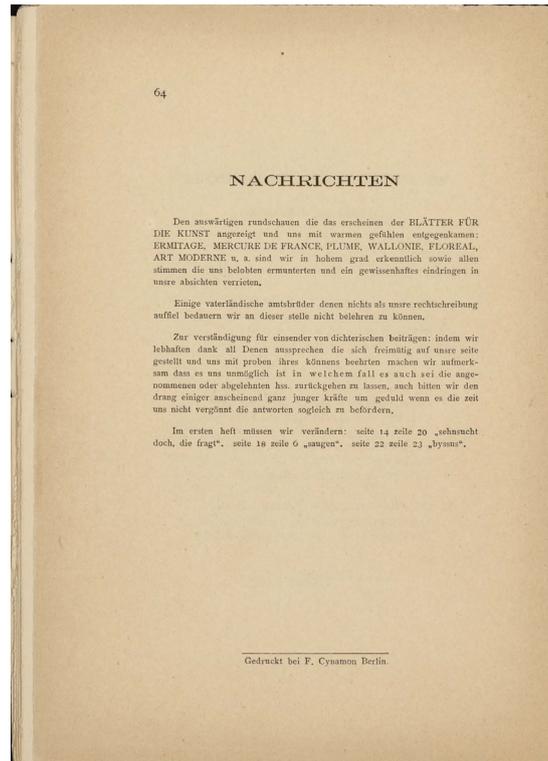
a

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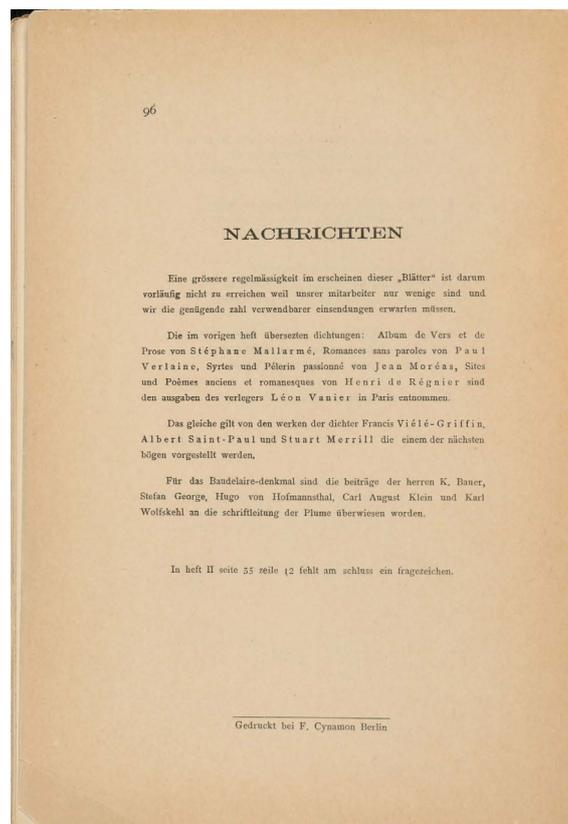


c

Fig. 2a-c Covers from a) *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.1 (1892), Kunstbibliothek der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin — Preußischer Kulturbesitz; b) *L'Ermitage*, 1 (1898), privately owned, Daniela Gretz; c) *La Plume*, 1 (1898), Wikimedia Commons.



a



b

Fig. 3a–b News sections in *Blätter Für die Kunst*, a) 1.2 (December 1892), 64, and b) 1.3 (March 1893), 96. Stefan George Archiv, Württembergische Landesbibliothek.

typography' with a lot of different marker fonts criticized in research on the magazine should also be reconsidered in the context of international format transfer, because here too there are similarities regarding the selection and function of the different font types.<sup>16</sup>

A thematic, generic, or stylistic differentiation of contributions by means of typography seems to be the background to the stated 'arbitrariness'. The German arts magazine *Pan* (1895–1900), once characterized by George as an imitation of the *Blätter für die Kunst*, later stated that a magazine is 'a house with many rooms and compartments', whose 'rooms [are] to be furnished according to the desire and nature of those who dwell in them'.<sup>17</sup> This was already evident from the typographical practice of the early *Blätter für die Kunst* and its French format models though not primarily at the level of the individual articles to which *Pan* applied its design theory, because the internationally recognizable format and the claim for 'formal purity' were paramount. For example, recurring sections, such as the news rubric (Fig. 3a–b), translations, or different excerpts from a drama or poetry volume in different issues were typographically distinguished accordingly. Sometimes, however, the typography already had a semantic impact at article level, for instance, Wolfskehl's poems 'aus den "Heroischen Zierraten"' ['from the "Heroic Ornaments"'] were printed in a type of Fraktur corresponding to the ornamental theme and medieval flavour of the poems (Fig. 5).

Through this kind of format transfer, Symbolist magazines developed a flexible 'practice of affiliation by design' like the 'dada grid' elaborated by Eric Bulson, a characteristic ornamental constellation at the level of (decorative) design, evident in an 'identifiable typographical style' and in 'covers, in page layouts, and through printing techniques and the choice of materials'.<sup>18</sup> In this setting, the rejection of 'German script' and typographical materiality were not only a matter of decorative surface but, especially in the German context, charged with meaning and serving an aesthetic distinction. This was already reflected in Klein's statement that 'the author is even responsible for the technical aspects of a book's production' and 'claims for his creature a clothing befitting its status', which illustrates the aesthetic exclusiveness the magazine and its art aimed at.<sup>19</sup>

### **The 'Strategic Arrangement' and Creation of 'Resonances' as Characteristic Constellation Techniques in the *Blätter für die Kunst***

The content of the magazine was also characterized by a transfer and national transformation of international Symbolism. The paradoxical structure of this transfer was already visible in the program that preceded the first volume, which announced that it would 'avoid catchphrases' ['uns dabei aber so sehr wie möglich aller schlagworte begeben'] but invoked them at the same time with the explanatory footnote 'Symbolismus Dekadentismus Okkultismus u. s. w.' ['symbolism, decadentism, occultism, etc.'] and the translation 'Kunst für die Kunst' for 'l'art pour l'art' ['art for art's sake']. These were of course buzzwords from the French tradition, which were accompanied and transformed by a new German one: 'Geistige Kunst' ['spiritual art'].<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the first five series contained a lot of translations from international Symbolism: 140 original German-language works were juxtaposed with 120 translations introducing the *Blätter*

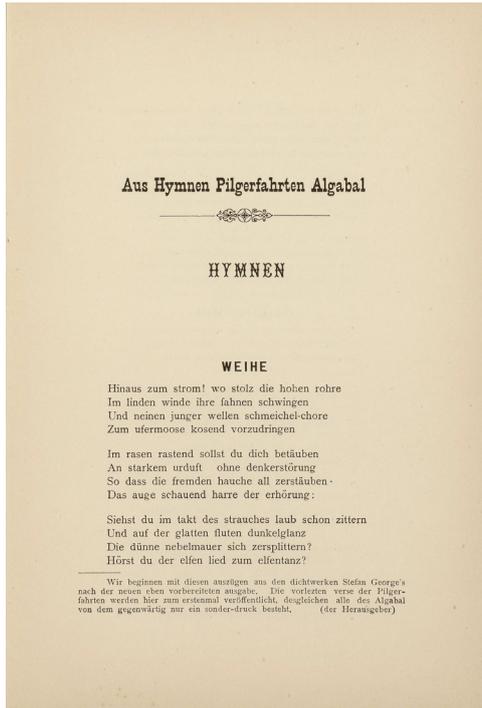
16 See Wulf D. von Lucius, 'Die buchkünstlerische Gestaltung der Werke Stefan Georges – Solitär oder Zeitstil', *George-Jahrbuch*, 9 (2012/13), 69–91 (p. 72).

17 'ein Haus mit vielen Zimmern und Gelassen. [...] die einzelnen Räume sollen nach Wunsch und Wesen derer eingerichtet sein, die sie bewohnen'. 'Zur Ausstattungsfrage', *Pan*, 1 (1895), 40–41 (p. 40).

18 Eric Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 50.

19 'Sogar für das technische eines buches ist der verfasser verantwortlich und man darf es ihm nicht als eitelkeit vorwerfen, wenn er [...] für sein geschöpf eine standesgemässe kleidung beansprucht.' Klein, 'Unterhaltungen im grünen Salon', p. 144.

20 'Blätter für die Kunst', *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.1 (October 1892), 1.



a

AMNÉSIE

A Sully Prud'homme.

L'heure silencieuse écoute, dans la Nuit,  
Si nul chant ne s'élève au loin de la vallée...  
Mais pas même le flot du fleuve ne bruit  
Tant le Soir étendit sa torpeur affaîlée...

Hélas il est une âme où jamais plus ne luit  
L'éclat des chants lointains en la nuit désolée;  
Le flot spirituel devant cette âme fuit  
Tandis que le Néant la veille, inconsolée...

Tu ne chanteras plus dans la vallée immense,  
Esprit, ô noble Esprit, Dieu de l'humanité!  
Et l'heure, auprès de toi, mourra de ton silence...

Toute pâle, et portant la misère des êtres,  
L'âme, funèbrement, erre en l'éternité  
Pour expier, enfin! les péchés des ancêtres...

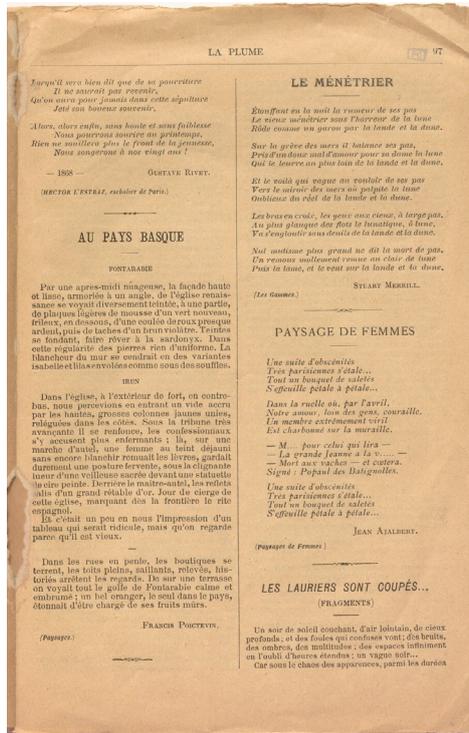
P. MARTEL ANDRÉ.

LE NUAGE

Là haut va rêvant le nuage,  
Planant comme un immense oiseau,  
Ayant l'atmosphère pour cage,  
Et pour ailes des gouttes d'eau.

Il change souvent son plumage,  
Suivant le temps mauvais ou beau;  
Là-haut va rêvant le nuage,  
Planant comme un immense oiseau.

b



c

Fig. 4a-c Page layouts from a) *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.1 (October 1892), 3; b) *L'Ermitage* (1890), 358; c) *La Plume*, 10 (1889), 97. Stefan George Archiv, Württembergische Landesbibliothek and Gallica / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

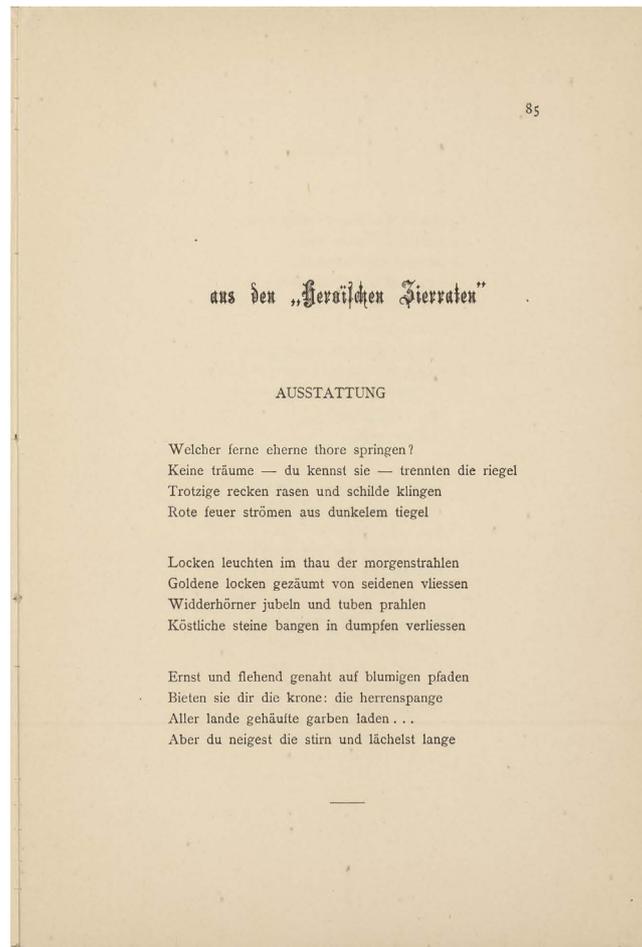


Fig. 5 First page of Wolfskehl's 'aus den "Heroischen Zierraten"', *Blätter für die Kunst*, 2.3 (August 1894), 85. Stefan George Archiv, Württembergische Landesbibliothek.

*für die Kunst* as an anthology of international Symbolism for the German-speaking world and 'Sachwalter der europäischen Avantgarde-Bewegung' ['administrator of the European avant-garde movement'].<sup>21</sup> However, George regarded these translations as independent works of art and ascribed them to his own work. This appropriation as a transfer from the original context into the magazine began with the selection of the poems, which coincided with the ideas propagated there of a spiritual-sovereign art and the aestheticization of life in and through art as an aesthetic lifestyle. It also affected the aesthetic form and semantics of the poems, which were not only translated but also simultaneously transferred into the poetic tradition and the media order of the ornamental constellations of the magazine, where they became reinterpretable in their interplay with the other contributions and inserted artworks (such as art prints and musical supplements to poem adaptations) through two main constellation techniques: first the 'strategic arrangement' of literary and programmatic contributions and second the creation of 'resonances' between them.<sup>22</sup>

The recurring order of the contributions in the volumes is revealing here: beginning and end consisted of rather irregular editorial and news sections providing

21 Martus, p. 303.

22 Ibid., pp. 336, 318.

the outer framework of the publication. Its interior was marked by contributions from George (mostly pre-publications from his new volumes of poetry with promotional function), followed by poems or drama excerpts from already well-known authors. These, in turn, were often succeeded by programmatic contributions of those authors at the centre of the issue, before concluding with poems by mostly still unknown debutants and translations, mostly identified as works by George. Together with his opening contributions, these translations thus formed a second, inner frame.<sup>23</sup> The ornamental character of these recursive issue constellations was made clear by the reflection on the relationship between the contributions of established artists and aspiring authors with a series of metaphors in two editorials — the ‘background’, the ‘surrounding air’, the ‘field to be cultivated’.<sup>24</sup> These metaphors firstly characterized the production of the emerging artist as the habitat of the artworks of the established ones, but the possible shift from background to figure, from ornamental frame to integral part of the work, was also indicated with the anthological metaphor of the blossom selection and the ornamental metaphor of the wreath: ‘you often gather flowers and fruits which — if you are not able to do it yourselves — a greater one will later weave into his wreath.’<sup>25</sup>

In the second volume, for example, Klein’s essay ‘Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst’ [‘On Stefan George, a New Art’] serves as a programmatic commentary on George’s following translations from the French Symbolists as well as on the relationship to the French models in general, and goes hand in hand with the invention of a German tradition for international Symbolism, tracing it back to ‘German Romanticism’.<sup>26</sup> With the strategic arrangement of performative ‘works’ and ‘doctrines’ derived from these works, the magazine staged itself as the ‘privileged context’ of the individual contributions and thus promoted an aesthetic ‘reading attitude that invests the greatest possible attention and focuses on the perception of relations’.<sup>27</sup> As a central commonality between George and the Symbolists, Klein emphasized ‘that it ha[d] become apparent to him, as it ha[d] to them, what the essence of modern poetry [was]: tearing the word out of its common everyday circle and elevating it to a luminous sphere’.<sup>28</sup> Following Mallarmé, the work of art was defined as a sphere in the sense of a ‘closed realm’ within which words, renouncing their denotative function, shone forth in reciprocal reflection of their ambiguous connotations, like the virtual ‘fire’ of gems.<sup>29</sup> The metaphor of the sphere referred to the music of the spheres as the ‘sounds of the planets inaudible for

23 See also *ibid.*, p. 317ff. However, Martus does not differentiate the contributions generically, which is why the central position of the programmatic contributions in the middle of the issues remains unnoticed.

24 ‘bildung des nötigen hintergrundes’. ‘Blätter für die Kunst’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 3.5 (October 1896), 129–32 (p. 131); ‘[A]uf dass sie die luft bilden in denen der grosse gedanken atmen kann / dazu nötig das feld frisch und locker zu erhalten’. ‘Blätter für die Kunst’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 4.1–2 (November 1897), 1–4 (p. 3.).

25 ‘ihr sammelt gar oft blumen und früchte die – wenn ihr es selbst es nicht vermögt – ein grösserer später in seinen kranz flicht.’ ‘Blätter für die Kunst’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 4.1–2 (November 1897), (p. 3).

26 Carl August Klein, ‘Über Stefan George, eine neue Kunst’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.2 (December 1892), 45–50.

27 Martus, pp. 322, 357. This strategy was declared in the programme in the first volume: ‘Wir halten es für einen vorteil dass wir nicht mit lehrsätzen beginnen sondern mit werken die unser wollen behellen und an denen man später die regeln ableite.’ [‘We consider it an advantage that we begin not with doctrines but with works that illuminate our will and from which one later derives the rules.’] ‘Blätter für die Kunst’, *Blätter für die Kunst*, 1.1 (October 1892), 1.

28 ‘dass es ihm wie Ihnen aufgegangen ist worin das wesen der modernen Dichtung liegt: das wort aus seinem gemeinen alltäglichen kreis zu reissen und in eine leuchtende sfäre zu erheben’. Klein, ‘Über Stefan George’, p. 47.

29 See Stephané Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes: Édition critique présentée par Carl Paul Barbier et Charles Gordon Milian* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 211: ‘ils s’allument de reflet réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries’. See also Ute Oelmann, ‘Das Gedicht als “Gebilde”: Zur Poetik des jungen Stefan George’, in *Sinnlichkeit in Bild und Klang: Festschrift für Paul Hoffmann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. by Hansgerd Delbrück (Stuttgart: Heinz, 1987), pp. 317–25 (p. 325).

mortals' and an autonomous realm of art. Because 'sphere' is also a figurative expression for 'closed areas', which is derived from the spherical closedness of the firmament, it gave art a double sense of exclusivity.<sup>30</sup>

This double reading of the metaphor unfolded again later in the magazine in the poem 'Vom neuen Bunde' ['Of the New Covenant'] by Richard Perls, one of the aspiring authors, who thematized the artists community and characterized poetry as 'sphere sound'.<sup>31</sup> This is another example of the creation of 'resonances' between the various original works, translations, and programmatic essays through the variation of recurring motifs, catchwords, topoi, and metaphors as content-related ornamental constellations of the magazine. Accordingly, the words shining in reciprocal reflections from Mallarmé's (and George's) definition of poetry can also be understood in analogy to the constellations of stars and the ornamental constellations of the texts in the magazine itself. Mallarmé's 'poetics of constellation' and its revaluation of the medial and material foundations of writing thus provoked the possibility of different ways of reading.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar manner, the magazine's decision in favour of the font Antiqua, lower case, and reduced punctuation altogether produced a kind of alienating effect of the 'ornamentation' of script as seen form, resulting in a constant permutation between the aesthetic figure of the poetic work of art and the allegedly merely ornamental background of the magazine, both on the level of design and on the level of content. This effect went hand in hand with an 'intended more difficult readability', a stagnation of the reading flow which forced the readers to pay greater attention and engage more intensely with the poems. Because the poems had to be spelled out word by word in the ornamental constellations of the magazine a different kind of flow was generated between its elements, which thus shed new light on each.<sup>33</sup> The magazine and its readership became a privileged 'luminous sphere' or resonance sphere for George's art, demonstrating his power over the new aesthetic elite and illustrating their communal aesthetic lifestyle.

### **Riding the Flow of Luxury: *Sport im Bild* (1921–1932) and the Hybrid Flow of Articles, Images, and Advertisements as a Constellation of Aesthetic Capitalism**

In the following, we will further develop our analysis of this kind of constellation, which brings different elements of an issue that initially seem to have no connection, into resonance with one another. We will do so by riding the 'flow of luxury' in a single issue of the magazine *Sport im Bild* from 1920. At first glance the magazine could not be more different from the elitist formats published by the George circle, since it presented a topic that could hardly be more popular. In the 1920s, however, *Sport im Bild*, in order to address a different — wealthier — readership than before, adopted a new, more luxurious image through a number of changes in visual format and design. *Sport im Bild* can be understood both as a marketplace and as a utopia of capitalism

30 Fire is a technical term for the imaginary colour effect of transparent gemstones created by their cut. 'Sphäre' and 'Sphärenesang', *Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon*, 14th edn, 16 vols (Leipzig, Berlin, Wien: F.A. Brockhaus, 1892), xiv, p. 146.

31 Richard Perls, 'Vom neuen Bunde', *Blätter für die Kunst*, 2.5 (February [recte: March] 1895), 145–46 (p. 146).

32 Sylvia Sasse and Sandro Zanetti, 'Statt der Sterne: Literarische Gestirne bei Mallarmé und Chlebnikov', in *Gestirn und Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Maximilian Bergengruen, Davide Giuriato, and Sandro Zanetti (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2006), pp. 103–19 (pp. 103, 107).

33 Roland Reuß, 'Industrielle Manufaktur: Zur Entstehung der "Stefan-George-Schrift"', in *Stardust: Post für die Werkstatt. KD Wolff zum Sechzigsten*, ed. by Doris Kern and Michel Leiner (Frankfurt a.M.: Stromfeld, 2003), pp. 166–91 (p. 177).

in the modern era, which gained its aesthetic potential as well as its own form from these economic contexts. This form was characterized by the ambivalent relationship it developed with the capitalist fantasies and dream images of luxury depicted in the magazine. Whereas *Blätter für die Kunst* pursued a publication strategy that made the magazine itself a rare and luxurious commodity, *Sport im Bild* presented and advertised luxurious commodities and a corresponding way of living, thus trying to participate in the atmosphere and desire such goods create. In this way, both magazines associated themselves with the quality of exclusiveness, one with an elitist aesthetic aspiration and low circulation numbers, the other with expensive and exquisite merchandises, activities, and lifestyles.

Against this background, the reference to luxury that helped *Sport im Bild* gain a profile in the 1920s and form a brand itself was at least twofold: on the one hand, the magazine can be understood as a platform for the promotion and staging of luxurious goods as well as the lifestyle associated with them in advertisements, articles, and artwork. On the other hand, *Sport im Bild* was also permeated by luxury insofar as the semiotic and aesthetic relationships among the magazine's constituent elements was characterized by exuberance and abundance. It is mainly this semiotic and aesthetic excess that produced semantic relations that cannot be described simply as an affirmation of capitalist achievements, but these relations also enabled the creation of diverse potential connections and a flow between the individual elements of the magazine, opening up different reading possibilities for a diverse readership.

### Changing the Visual Format — Creating a New Market

*Sport im Bild* was published in Vienna and Berlin from 1895 to 1934. Before turning its interest to luxury, it started out as a medium for sports reporting and lived up to its title 'sports in pictures', indicating it was the first illustrated German-language sports magazine. The sixteen-page issues of the early years were set in three columns and exclusively presented reports from the world of sports, supplemented and illustrated by photographs or by lithographs made from photographs. In 1904, the journal was sold to the major Berlin publisher August Scherl and the design changed fundamentally. The proportion of advertising increased significantly: adverts now constituted a quarter of the magazine. Furthermore, the number of pictures increased: almost every page contained a photograph or an advertisement. This decrease in the proportion of text was also reflected in the fact that the text was now set in two columns and printed in a larger type and with larger line spacing. Thematically, sports coverage remained in the foreground but with the society page 'Aus der Gesellschaft' ['From Society'] a new section was added, delivering news from the aristocracy and upper middle classes without any reference to sports. Likewise, the sports reported on became more sophisticated, with a clear focus on equestrian and hunting sports. Finally, that *Sport im Bild* appealed to a different audience than before probably became most apparent in the advertisements, which no longer concentrated on promoting sports products; they now also touted fashion, cosmetics, and lifestyle articles, and occasionally automobiles.

All these characteristics remained constant until in 1920 *Sport im Bild* again underwent far-reaching changes in layout, design, and content, which would characterize the magazine until its run ended in 1934. These changes were already clearly reflected on the level of the magazine's surface aesthetics: the photographs that had defined its visual character up to this point were almost entirely replaced by drawings, graphics, and paintings (see Fig. 6a–d). This change suggests that images in the 1920s were included in the *Sport im Bild* not so much for their informational content as for their decorative and ornamental character. They became, above all, a figuration of a certain

(luxurious) lifestyle, intended to convey a certain atmosphere rather than having any intrinsic journalistic value.

From 1920 onwards, photographs in *Sport im Bild* would almost exclusively show film stars and other celebrities. Sports reporting was without photographs and with a completely different aim than before. Whereas up to 1920 the sports coverage was interested in the sport itself, after 1920 sporting events were mainly treated as social phenomena. Sports in general were only of interest insofar as they symbolized something other than themselves, a certain attitude to life or certain aspects of what was perceived as 'modern'. The sporting performance in and of itself no longer played a role, becoming a mere sign, a simulacrum in Baudrillard's sense, since it was now supposed to refer not to the 'reality' of sports but to what they represented.<sup>34</sup> The renunciation of the photographic image also fits this logic because it can be interpreted as a turning away from a naturalistic or realistic claim to representation and towards an iconization of sports, towards an imaginary reshaping of what was represented.<sup>35</sup> The 'naturalistic' perspective on sports was replaced by a more stylized representation as part of an imagined lifestyle. Accordingly, from issue 40 of the year 1920 on, the magazine's subtitle changes: it was no longer 'Sports – Society – Theater – Movies – Fashion'; it became 'Das Blatt der guten Gesellschaft' ['The Gazette of High Society/Good Company'].

### **The Hybridizing Flow of Texts, Images, and Advertisements as the Typical Ornamental Constellation of *Sport im Bild***

This desire for luxury was reflected not only superficially on the covers and in the subtitle, but also in the content development and the pictorial relations or 'ornamental constellations' inside the issue, as a brief look at number 51 of 1920 will make clear. The concept of 'ornamental constellation' highlights the structural relations of elements and the importance of the reader's perspective for their interpretation. For *Sport im Bild* these constellations were primarily characterized by the fact that it was no longer possible to make a clear distinction between editorial contributions and advertisements when leafing through the magazine; it only became apparent — if at all — upon a closer reading of the images.

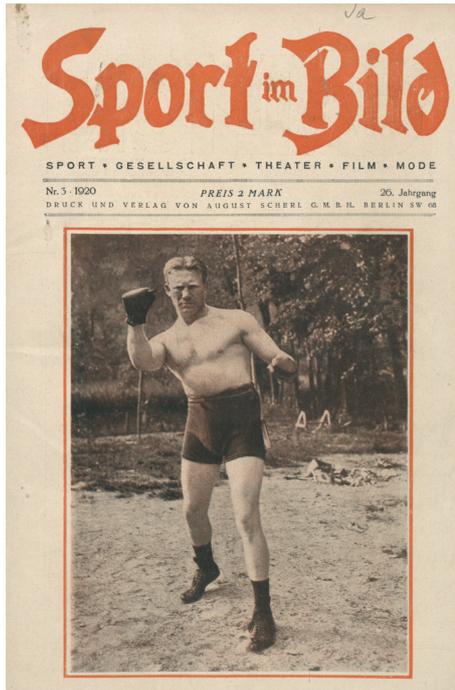
This can be illustrated by looking at the two images in Fig. 7, one of which is an advertisement for the sparkling wine brand Kupferberg Gold and the other an artwork, an editorial picture contribution. They are similar not only stylistically but above all thematically, since they both attempt to reproduce a certain atmosphere related to Christmas as well as to the consumption of commodities. Evidently, the editors of *Sport im Bild* assumed that the presentation of the 'last purchases', as the right-hand image is titled, provided aesthetic pleasure in and of itself.

In the way they simultaneously attempted to reproduce a certain atmosphere and evoke it for their readers, the two images also referred to a peculiarity shared by all the commodities that were either advertised or depicted as aesthetic elements in *Sport im Bild*. What was pivotal for their evaluation was their staging value. In the case of the goods peddled in *Sport im Bild*, the staging value entirely replaced the value in use, since, strictly speaking, the luxury goods advertised no longer bore any relation to any kind of utility. Their decisive value lay either in their aesthetic properties or in the attitude towards life with which they were associated or which they were

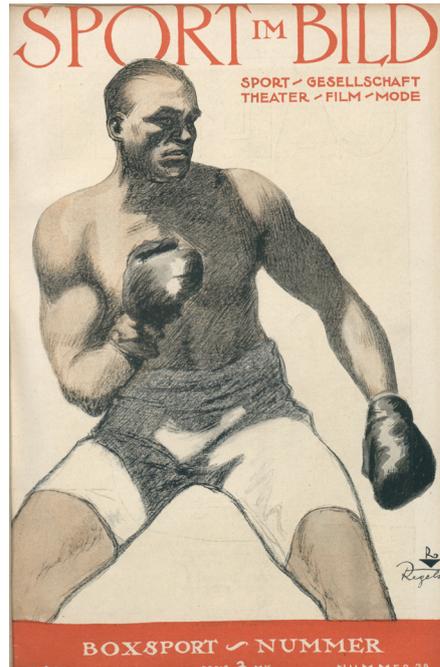
34 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

35 The relationship of realism, representation, and objectivity to different types and media formats of the image is, of course, much more complex than we can describe here. See David Bate, *Photography: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2019).

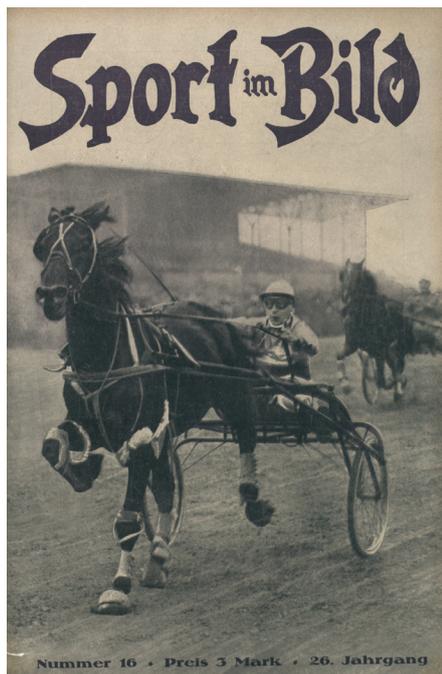
FROM PURE ART TO SHEER LUXURY



a



b



c

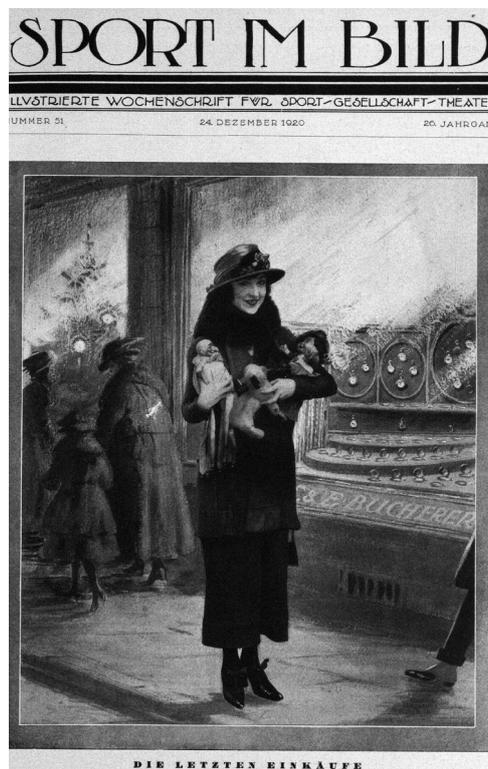


d

Fig. 6a–d Covers of *Sport im Bild*, from Photographs to Drawings, a) 26.3 (16 January 1920); b) 26.38 (24 September 1920); c) 26.16 (23 April 1920); d) 26.24 (18 June 1920), from Photographs to Drawings. ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.



a



b

Fig. 7a–b Commercial artworks. a) advertisement for Kupferberg Gold, *Sport im Bild*, 26.51 (24 December 1920), 1469; b) drawing 'Die letzten Einkäufe', *Sport im Bild*, 26.51 (24 December 1920), 1473. ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

capable of symbolizing and evoking. This supremacy of the staging value of goods was deepened by the pictorial politics of *Sport im Bild*, in which advertisements and artworks became indistinguishable and the boundaries between the content and the economic framework of the magazine were blurred. Artworks and advertisements were brought into an ornamental constellation with each other that made their aesthetic, economic, and ideological status almost impossible to distinguish and demanded readers who actively followed the potential connections between the magazine's various elements and interpreted them to make sense of the staging value of the printed pictures.

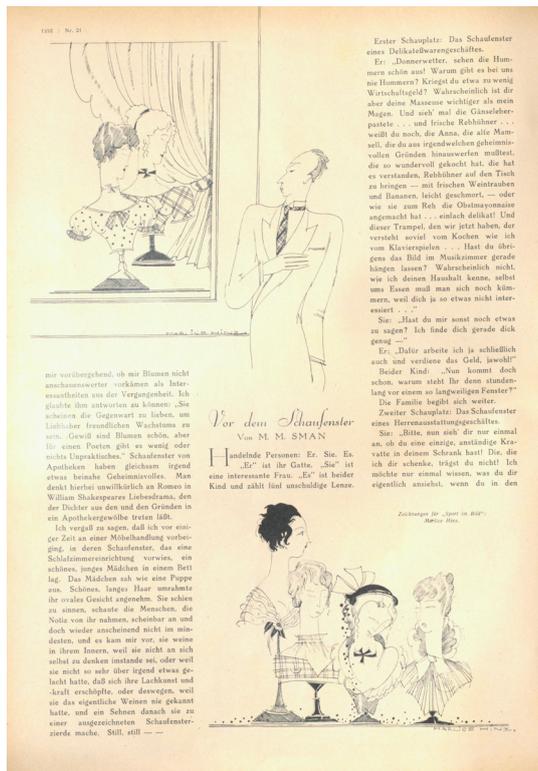
*Sport im Bild* read like a catalogue that presented possibilities of how 'wealth' could be 'demonstrated', showing by which means, with which luxury goods and opulent activities, such a presentation could be achieved convincingly. Accordingly, *Sport im Bild* was not only a magazine in the sense of a periodical but also a magazine in the original Arabic sense of the word: a warehouse. Or perhaps it is better to say: a marketplace where commodities were offered, advertised, and provided with a corresponding ideology — a marketplace, however, which at the same time was always also advertising itself, offering the magazine as a commodity for sale. In this sense, the advertisements and the luxurious attitude to life they conveyed not only financed the magazine, the magazine also associated itself with the ideology they represented, thus increasing its own staging value. This association of the magazine with the luxury advertised in it was, of course, promoted and reinforced by the indistinguishability between editorial and advertising contributions. This ambiguity resulted in a flow that permeated the entire magazine and unfolded its suggestive powers everywhere.

Yet even though the magazine *Sport im Bild* repeatedly identified itself with the ideology of aesthetic capitalism and its regard of the display of luxury and wealth, the magazine did not simply reproduce the ideology of the upper class. Instead, at least sometimes, it remodelled this ideology, supplemented it, and ironized it. Such critical reformulations became particularly evident in the text articles of *Sport im Bild*. These, like the pictures, were brought into a constellation that made the boundaries between the various genres and writing styles extraordinarily fluid so that narrating, criticizing, entertaining, advertising, and thinking often merged seamlessly both inside the borders of individual texts and between different texts. In terms of textual stylistics and comparable to the undecidability already observed with regard to the images of the magazine, some of the advertising texts were difficult to distinguish from the original contributions. Hence *Sport im Bild* can generally be characterized by an aesthetics in which essayistic, journalistic, critical, advertising, and literary writing styles were inextricably interwoven in a multitude of hybrid texts. This hybridization was brought into another constellation (one of a higher degree so to speak) with the presentations of opulence and extravagance (in advertisements *and* artworks) to create an atmosphere, a 'flow of luxury' that permeated not only individual issues but also the run of the magazine as a whole.

Some of the texts of *Sport im Bild* even provided a literary image, a symbol for the kind of ornamental constellation and its politics described above. For example, Robert Walser's cheerful miniature about 'Das Schaufenster' ['The Shop Window'] seemed to be a harmless, purely entertaining prose piece but was — at second glance — clearly ironic and provided, in the figure of the shop window, a critical perspective on the world of commodities and the way it was promoted in *Sport im Bild* (see Fig. 8a-b). On the one hand, Walser's text dealt less with shop windows than with the problem of writing about them and with the commercial value of authors' names — another example of the transformation of symbolic into economic capital. On the other hand, it challenged the value system of the modern world and its commercial ideology with an ironic closing



a



b

Fig. 8a–b Shop windows. a) Robert Walser's 'Schaufenster', *Sport im Bild*, 34.21 (12 October 1928), 1551; b) M. M. Swan's 'Vor dem Schaufenster', *Sport im Bild*, 34.21 (12 October 1928), 1552. ANNO/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek

that told a story about a girl who, because of her inauthentic emotional life, could easily be made into an ‘excellent mannequin’.<sup>36</sup>

This irony was taken up by the satirical prose piece that directly followed Walser’s narrative on the same page. M. M. Sman’s ‘Vor dem Schaufenster’ [‘In front of a Shop Window’] provided a humoristic, albeit superficial reality check by confronting the promises of the world of goods exhibited in the shop displays with the necessities of family life. The text described four situations in which a family of three stands in front of different stores and their shop windows. In the first three cases, the observation of the shop windows leads to an argument between the two spouses because the fantasies associated with the displayed goods are so very different from the realities of husband and wife. Of particular interest here is the third situation, which presents a dispute between the couple in front of a men’s clothing store. Shortly after the wife complains about how poorly her husband is dressed and how terrible his ties in particular are, readers have to flip to the end of the magazine to finish reading the text. And what they find there is a good example of an ornamental constellation: the first thing the reader sees on the page is an advertisement for neckties, next to which the satirical text is continued and brought to a close. It seems as if the slogan ‘The gentleman’s tie is the Celta tie’ corresponds directly to the wife’s complaints about her husband not dressing gentlemanly enough.<sup>37</sup> This text-image constellation between advert and satire strikingly shows how the *Sport im Bild* oscillated between criticism and affirmation of the values of aesthetic capitalism because the text made fun of precisely the staging value the advertisement relied on.

Furthermore, the end of the text demonstrates how powerful such advertisements and their slogans were already perceived to be in the 1920s. The satire closes in front of the shop window of a car dealership. There, the five-year-old son of the couple suddenly also begins to talk. What he says shows how deeply the staging value of the advertising world has penetrated his unconscious: ‘Please, take a look at this car! Simply fabulous. It’s a completely new type with swing axles and special carburetor preheating so that the engine starts immediately and shows performance even in the harshest of winters.’<sup>38</sup> After hearing that, the parents have nothing more to say and the text can only end with the following words: ‘The family moves on and everyone has fallen out with themselves and the other two.’<sup>39</sup>

There are more (and more visual) shop windows than the ones presented in the texts written by Walser and Sman. In fact, the magazine’s advertisements in the same issue turn the pages of the journal into a shopping street and invite readers to take a stroll (Fig. 9). Accordingly, not only can Walser’s view into the shop window be extended to the neighbouring text, but it also opens up another metaphorical territory. In addition to the marketplace and the magazine, this territory aptly characterizes large areas of *Sport im Bild*. It is a territory into which we could enter with the map of Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the arcade as a multiplication of shop windows and as an emblem of high capitalism. *Sport im Bild* itself tried to present the great arcades from Berlin and Paris directly by doubling their shops in the advertisements on its pages, thus presenting shop windows in a constellation of a higher degree. In these images, capitalism and aestheticism support each other in a way that is reminiscent of Walter

36 Robert Walser, ‘Das Schaufenster’, *Sport im Bild: Das Blatt der guten Gesellschaft*, 34.21 (1928), 1551–52 (p. 1552).

37 *Sport im Bild: Das Blatt der guten Gesellschaft*, 34.21 (1928), p. 1582.

38 ‘Bitte, seht euch einmal diesen Wagen an! Einfach fabelhaft. Das ist eine ganz neue Type mit Schwingachsen und einer besonderen Vergaservorwärmung, so daß der Motor auch im strengsten Winter sofort anspringt und Leistung zeigt.’ Ibid.

39 ‘Die Familie begibt sich weiter und jeder ist zerfallen mit sich und den beiden anderen.’ Ibid.



Benjamin's reflections on the arcades of modernity. One of these reflections is not only a concise depiction of the aesthetic capitalism articulated in *Sport im Bild* but also an apt characterization of the logic of the individual images, of the visual ideology of the magazine: 'These images are wish images, and in them the collective attempts both to transcend and to transfigure the unfinishedness of the social product as well as the defects of the social order of production.'<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

*Blätter für die Kunst* and *Sport im Bild* both used a variety of constellation techniques that questioned the quality of the ornamental as pure decoration, adornment, and addition: the 'strategic arrangement' between literary and programmatic contributions, layout, and typography; the 'resonances' between various stylistic and semantic elements in original literary texts, translations, and essays; the compatibility of images as advertisements and as artworks; the hybridizing flow of genres, writing styles, and media formats. Although the atmosphere and lifestyle these constellation techniques were aiming to create in the *Blätter für die Kunst* and *Sport im Bild* differed — the former seeking to evoke an intellectual-elitist, the latter a luxurious sensualism — for both magazines the atmosphere produced was at least as important as the textual and pictorial contributions. Ornamental constellations were used in a way that branded the differences between figure and ground, the main thing and its decoration, the illustrated and the illustration as at least problematic, if not obsolete. Furthermore, both magazines were very aware of the position in the economic market they wanted to occupy and of the way they needed to address their readership to achieve this position. The difference between the lifestyles both periodicals enact and promote was only one of degree, not of quality: whereas the *Blätter für die Kunst* staged and materialized the idea of pure art as an exclusive aesthetic lifestyle, the *Sport im Bild* of the 1920s made such an exclusive aesthetics more achievable by associating it with the idea of an aesthetic capitalism which enabled everyone (with enough money) to acquire luxurious goods and activities, thus making the desired aesthetic way of life also attainable by non-artists.

**Marcus Krause** worked at the University of Cologne and was a member of the DFG Research Unit 2288 'Journal Literature' until 2022.

**Daniela Gretz** is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Cologne and was PI of two subprojects in the DFG Research Unit 2288 'Journal Literature'. The contribution emerged from the most recent: 'Ornamental Constellations: On the Aesthetics of Literary Magazines in the Realm of Modern Mass Media'.

40 'Diese Bilder sind Wunschbilder, und in ihnen sucht das Kollektiv die Unfertigkeit des gesellschaftlichen Produkts sowie die Mängel der gesellschaftlichen Produktionsordnung sowohl aufzuheben wie zu verklären.' Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften V.1: Das Passagen-Werk* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 46–47.

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