



THE KURT SCHWITTERS SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

December 2019

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NB. Clicking on links in the Newsletter (or opening them with the right mouse button) should take you straight to the relevant website. If this doesn't work for you, or you spot a faulty link, please contact us on ksuk@me.com

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Editorial

The year 2019 ended on a distressing note, for in November we received the news that Roger Cardinal, one of our Society's most eminent members, had passed away after a long illness. Roger's eloquent, perceptive writings on Schwitters were always a joy to read. He was not only a magician of literary style but could always supply us with a fresh and quite unexpected angle on the master of Merz. A tribute to Roger can be found on page 2.

We were also greatly saddened to hear of the unexpected death of Edith Thomas/Wantee's son Geoff Thomas, aged 70, in August 2019.

A publication that we can all look forward to next year is Isabel Schulz's new book on Schwitters, due out in March 2020, and available in both German and English. More welcome news for researchers: since our last newsletter in August, a large number of items from the Sprengel Museum Hannover's collection have been made available online, including artworks and correspondence from the Kurt Schwitters archive. You can find more details under the heading News (p. 3-4).

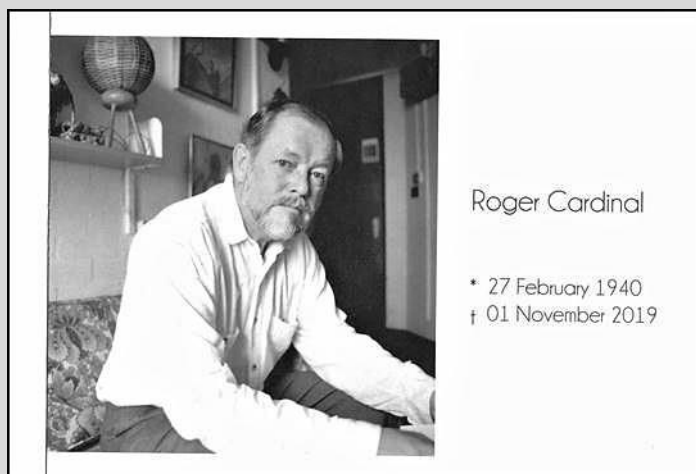
We are grateful to Jackie Haynes for this month's essay (p. 5), and also full of admiration for her valiant attempt to emulate the breakneck adventures of Schwitters' scrupulously academic protagonist Auguste Bolte. This issue's book review (p. 10) looks at a new study of Schwitters' largely unexplored literary output in Norway, whereby a word of explanation is required here. *Der Norwegische Schwitters* began life as a PhD dissertation and accordingly does not make easy reading, in particular for those of our members not fluent in German. In such cases, we try first and foremost to provide a commentary on the book's content rather than concentrate on a traditional critical review.

Lastly, you will find on pp. 14-17 what we hope will be a useful list of the contents of the Kurt Schwitters Society Newsletters and Journal from 2010, when the Society started up, to the present.

We would like to wish you all an enjoyable and successful 2020 and also invite you to contribute to forthcoming issues of our Kurt Schwitters Society Newsletters and Journal. Please don't hesitate to contact the editor with your suggestions.

Gwendolen Webster, December 2019

IN MEMORIAM ROGER CARDINAL



In November 2019 the Kurt Schwitters Society lost one of its most distinguished members. Roger Cardinal was best known for his writings on Surrealism and his invention of the term Outsider Art, but he also wrote perceptively on Kurt Schwitters. In fact he wrote perceptively on everything, and his extraordinary legacy to the art world has yet to be assessed.

Many years ago I attended a conference at the Tate, though I had just had an operation on both hands, so the journey from Aachen was very trying. During one excruciatingly boring and poorly researched lecture, I realised to my surprise that the scholarly gentleman sitting next to me was assiduously taking notes. I surreptitiously glanced sideways and to my astonishment saw not writing, but a drawing of my two copiously bandaged-up hands. That was my first encounter with Roger Cardinal, who till now had been no more than a distant idol and the author of a superb essay on Schwitters as collector. Every time we subsequently met Roger it would turn out to be a rewarding occasion, for he was wonderful company and shared his great breadth of knowledge and enjoyment of life unassumingly, with a quiet sense of humour.

When asked by Hatje Cantz to write a book on Schwitters I hesitated, feeling I wasn't up to the task, so with some trepidation I approached Roger. To my surprise he consented to act as co-author. It was of course pure illusion on my part to imagine that an iota of his elegant mastery of literary style might rub off on me, but nonetheless, it was a privilege to work with him. The production of the book caused us endless annoyance and frustration that tried even Roger's patience, but it did end with his becoming a member of the Kurt Schwitters Society, although he generally avoided such connections.

It was not only Roger's whimsical intellect, gentle wit and unpretentious erudition that made him such a valued companion, but also his natural modesty and his engaging affection for life's simplicities—the birds in his garden, spring flowers, a pub lunch, outlandish street names, a newly-discovered eccentric, the sight of his favourite London bus, ... It's hard to believe he is no longer with us, and we will mourn his loss for many years to come. On behalf of our Society members, I would like to convey our heartfelt condolences to his wife Agnès and his family.

Gwendolen Webster

Two further obituaries:

[The Guardian](#)

[University of Kent](#)

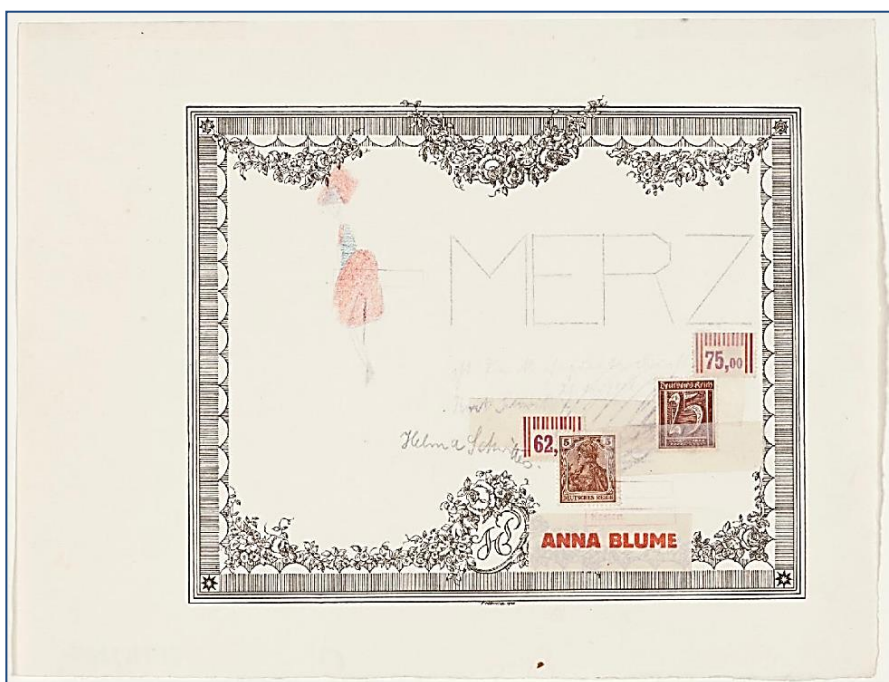
NEWS

SPRENGEL MUSEUM HANNOVER – SAMMLUNG ONLINE

Approximately 9,000 works of the museum's 50,000 works of art and archival materials from the 20th and 21st centuries can now be found online.

At present about 1,200 works and 2,400 documents relating to Schwitters (including his letters) from the museum's holdings are available for online research. Here you will find the basic data and illustrations for each work, along with details on provenance and bibliography (where relevant) and further useful texts for research purposes.

Please note that the Sprengel Museum Hannover's online collection is continually being expanded and revised.



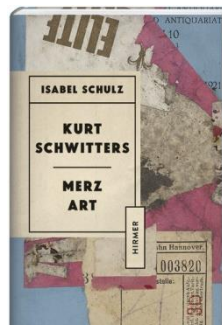
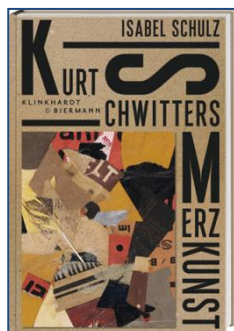
Kurt Schwitters: *MERZ / ist die konsequente Kunst* 26.10.1922

(Photo: Michael Herling/Aline Gwose, Sprengel Museum Hannover)

Christoph Lindner's excellent **KURT SCHWITTERS BUS TOUR** of Hannover (which many of you who took part in the 2019 Sprengel Symposium will remember) can now be booked online.



NEWS (2)



[KURT SCHWITTERS. MERZKUNST](#) by Isabel Schulz.

Date of publication: March 2020

[German](#) [English](#)

[Negotiating a Cultural Landscape: Writers and Artists in the Lakes](#)

3 February 2020 18:30, Percival Lecture Theatre, University of Cumbria, Ambleside, LA22 9BB
Dr. Martyn Hudson (Northumbria University) and Jackie Haynes explore Kurt Schwitters and his cultural landscapes.



[The Great Monster Dada Show](#) Henie Onstad Kunstsenter
Sonja Henies vei 31, 1311 Høvikodden
25th October – 26th January 2020



[All The Better To Hear You With](#)

Installation by our member Heather Ross
Hatton Gallery Newcastle, 21.9.19 - 15.2.20.

[The Collage Research Network: latest news](#)



NOW AVAILABLE
AT THE SPRENGEL MUSEUM HANNOVER
Merz bags and Anna Blume fridge magnets



JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH*

* with footnotes

'Suddenly I had a brilliant idea, at least a slightly brilliant idea, in any case, an idea'.¹

This Schwitters sentiment articulates the familiar feeling of responding intuitively in the moment to a spark before it recedes and expires. Augusta Bolte's ideas seemed brilliant to her and she responded intuitively to her research instinct that 'Something is going on there.'² However, as Schwitters' short story unfolds, her intuition leads to problematic tensions. Schwitters casts Augusta as a doctoral research candidate whose 'grandiose'³ research question was to explore the Meaning of Lif(e). At a low point in a qualitative strand of her inquiry, one respondent, Mrs. true driedplumproducercouncilor, 'grabbed her wire doormat and brought it down vertically with a force of approximately 2 horsepower over Miss Dr. Augusta's much-tried head.'⁴ In the absence of any safeguarding assessments, her mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods result in extreme violence.

Augusta Bolte, no. 30 of Schwitters' series of 'Tran' texts of Merz prose, was published in *Der Sturm* in 1922. One of its many functions was as a polemical riposte to criticism of his avant-garde artwork and personal accusations of mental illness and degeneracy. Some of the criticism in the daily art press was made by the titled Prof. W. Weygandt M.D. & PhD. Suggestions of this as a source of Augusta's doctoral role come from their overly scientific approaches to art.⁵ This Merz prose is characterised by repetition, whilst allusions give the story texture as it unfolds. From the disorientating text, the impression of a multi-layered literary collage emerges and is a compelling 'call-to-Merz': a provocation to look beneath the surface. Scholarship on the text is available mainly in German, which when comprehended can illuminate the allusions to contemporary references. Schwitters makes mischief with these allusions in his 'attempt to offer an Augusta Bolte to the people.'⁶

Anecdotal evidence from Schwitters' close friends provides insight into work processes involved in the 'Merzing' of *Augusta Bolte*. Raoul Hausmann describes how the story was mostly composed on an eight-hour journey in an overcrowded train carriage.⁷ In Hannah Höch's letter to Werner Schmalenbach, speaking of her time spent with Schwitters, she recounts, perhaps indignantly: 'When we went for walks in the Masch near Hannover, the talk was not about art, but I had to listen to *Auguste Bolte* for three hours; he kept going back to the beginning.'⁸ This suggests that distracting writing conditions which contributed positively to the pace of the narrative were revisited and refined in his editing process.

Georg Jäger refers to Theo van Doesburg's influential art movement, De Stijl, as 'the godfather present at the birth of Augusta Bolte',⁹ and Schwitters himself referred to De Stijl as the big brother of Merz.¹⁰ Jäger identifies significant allusions which are not immediately apparent to those, myself included, unfamiliar with the mainly Germanic cultural references in *Augusta Bolte*. An example comes from one of van Doesburg's alter egos, Aldo Camino.¹¹ Camino views the number one as an arbitrary and flawed starting point from which all related concepts flow. Jäger connects this perspective to the anti-art critic metaphor of *Augusta Bolte*. In the introduction, Schwitters' declares it an 'allegory of art criticism' and relentlessly parodies the critics' overly scientific approach to the artistic experience of Merz. Repeatedly and conspicuously counting from number one, we read how Augusta follows a group who function as a case study for her research: '1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 people were going accurately in one and the same direction.'¹²

JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH* (2)

The street level along which they walk forms a horizontal axis, whilst the house that they eventually enter forms the vertical. She expects that this quantitative research method will, under the rubric of the 'Miss-Augusta-Tactic', unlock her doctoral contribution to knowledge. Throughout the narrative, activity along overdetermined horizontal and vertical axes give the sensation of the reader being shunted backwards and forwards across the lines of text and up and down the margins, searching, perhaps in vain, for meaning.

Part 1: The Horizontal

Schwitters' railroading effect of Augusta's highspeed research activities limits the reader's opportunity to work out for themselves what it might have been that Augusta seemed to think was going on. This limitation formed the basis of my exploration into what this might be, using art practice as an instrument of inquiry. Schwitters' conclusion that 'she finds out nothing' notwithstanding, my aim was to slow down an instance within the narrative, pause to gain clarity and locate a distinct element of Merz.

Beginning with the horizontal axis of Augusta's quantitative method and in the spirit of her action research, I constructed and conducted a performance piece at a Dada festival in Italy, August 2019. In doing this I hoped to gain a foothold into a better understanding of Augusta's extremely mixed research methods. I began to imagine 'Aug 'n' I'¹³ as peers in the arts and humanities field of research. The 'grandiose idea' of my own doctoral research is to explore and reveal insights into Kurt Schwitters' legacy of Merz, by considering it as a nomadic entity and transformative site for effecting change to social, subjective and economic relations, through art practice.

In preparation for inhabiting Augusta's character, costumes, recording devices and adaptations of scenes extracted from the *Augusta Bolte* text, were brought from Manchester to join the 2019 Dadameno Festival programme. By assuming the Augusta position in order to explore her horizontal shuttling movements along a temporary, site specific axis, I anticipated that this would prove to be 'a brilliant idea, at least a slightly brilliant idea, or in any case, an idea'.¹⁴

Nonsenso Unico (One-way Nonsense)

Dadameno was a five-day Dada festival held in Ameno, Northern Italy, organised by Paul Dorn of Dadamt (Dada Headquarters) in Zurich. As a small collective of performers invited from a number of European countries, we were each encouraged to find a suitable location for our performances on arrival in the village. As I hit the the ground running, my choice of location determined the selection of pre-prepared scenes adapted from the *Augusta Bolte* text. In the centre of Ameno, a small hilltop village in the province of Novara, Via Cotta, XXV Aprile and Don Luigi Orione all converge on Piazza Beltrame, offering the correct configuration of streets for the enactment of the chosen scene. In addition, there was a well-positioned portico to shelter the assembled festival-goers from sun, rain and occasional traffic.

I located a group of people who volunteered to 'walk in one and the same direction'.¹⁵ Together we made a version of the moments where Augusta's initial suspicions that 'something must be going on'.¹⁶ were raised by the mobilised gathering. In Augusta's estimation, this was likely to be something quantifiable which would prove to be indispensable to her research.

JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH* (3)



Fig. 1. Film still: *Nonsense Unico*, Dadameno, Italy.

Artist Paul Dorn's *Nonsense Unico* sign (Fig. 1) was used to gesture towards the single-minded overdetermination of Augusta's quest. *Nonsense Unico*, Italian for One-way Nonsense, was adapted from the Italian road sign *Senso Unico*, meaning one-way traffic, and adopted as the name of the performance. The collaged academic-style cloak alluded to Augusta's role as a doctoral research candidate. Beneath the cloak were many layers of clothing to be 'jettisoned' as 'ballast'¹⁷ due to heat fatigue and inconvenience (Fig. 2). I followed the group of people, hidden in plain view under the cover of a conspicuous outfit. They had been briefed to ignore me as they split into two groups and disappeared down either side of the street corner. I began to shuttle around the corner alternately after each group, 'jettisoning' the extra clothing 'ballast' as I ran.



Fig. 2. Shuttle runs opposite the portico, Piazza Beltrami.

JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH* (4)

'You can't fit that into a hollow tooth!'¹⁸

The site specificity of the location had a key function in this performance. The experience of the slowed-down narrative was offered to create potential for new associations to be formed within the time and space. An anecdote circulated indicating the effects of the convivial Dada festival. A group of children ensured their parents returned them from their day out by 6 p.m., in time for the Dada festival: they said they didn't know what it was, but they liked it. This indicates that associations generated collectively by the performances, although unarticulated, were taking effect alongside (in my case) the unannounced doctoral research. To reinforce this desirable possibility, I sought to situate the work and make it particular to the Piazza by building site-specific detail into the action. To the side of the portico was a water-fountain. With that came the possibility of bringing into proximity the familiar form and function of the fountain with the heat caused by the shuttle runs. In Schwitters' narrative, Augusta pauses to cool down; live in Ameno, the atmosphere felt close, with a genuinely approaching storm. Three buckets of fountain water were planted with an audience member who followed prompts to throw them (Fig. 3). A call and response device delivered in Italian, with shuttle-runs in between, was set up with reference to Schwitters' narrative: 'To begin with Augusta now wiped away the beads of sweat, cooled down a bit, and rejoiced in her heart that she could now relax somewhat..' ¹⁹



Fig. 3. Film still: Cooling down

'Che caldo che fa qui in Ameno...' (Bucket 1). (*How hot it is here in Ameno...*)

'Forse arriva il temporale...' (Bucket 2) (*Maybe the storm's on its way...*)

'Eccolo qua!' (*Oh, there it is!*)

'E un altro per buona fortuna!' (Bucket 3) (*And another one for good luck!*)

Slowing down to pause in the Piazza, to linger over the detail of the buckets of water, was intended as an intervention into both the text and everyday life. Regular activity in the Piazza was interrupted, and then resumed. A material manifestation of this was the water left to dry in the sun or to mingle with the storm's rainwater. New associations can transform what might be perceived as a relatively indeterminate space for passing through into a place with new and relatable

JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH* (5)

meanings. Collective action exposed the relativity of all elements involved, making it possible to pause and pay greater attention to Schwitters' Merz elements, which, significantly, is what was 'going on'.

Paraphrasing Jäger,²⁰ Augusta reaches the Caminian conclusion through her doctoral research that all things are relative to each other and that nothing can be discerned other than by its opposite: 'Something was certain: if nothing was happening here, then nothing was happening anywhere. Although the reverse could be true too.... Augusta realised the equivalence of all values.' As if collaged within the multiple layers and fast-paced allusions is Schwitters' defining concept of Merz as the 'equivalence of all values'.²¹ *Nonsense Unico* was presented as an 'attempt to offer an Augusta Bolte to the people'.²²

Part 2: *The Vertical* & Part 3: *The Angular*: forthcoming.



Figure 4. Poster of collaged allusions relating to Augusta Bolte, in preparation for forthcoming lift-based performance, *The Meaning of Lift(t)*.

JACKIE HAYNES: THE EXTREME MIXED METHODS OF AUGUSTA BOLTE'S DOCTORAL RESEARCH* (6)

Jackie Haynes is an art practice-based researcher, currently studying Kurt Schwitters' legacy of Merz with the first Kurt Schwitters PhD Scholarship from University of Cumbria Institute of the Arts, UK.

<https://jackiehaynesartwork.wordpress.com>

Notes:

1. Translation by Timothy Grundy forthcoming in: *Myself and My Aims: The Critical Writing of Kurt Schwitters*, ed. Megan Luke (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), from a document distributed for Florian Kaplick's performance, *Merz, Moon, Music*. Sprengel Museum, 6 June, 2019
2. All references to the *Augusta Bolte* text relate to the translation in *Kurt Schwitters, Poems, performance pieces, proses [sic], plays, poetics*, trans. J. Rothenberg, P. Joris, & N. Yang (2002). Cambridge, Mass, Exact Change. pp. 138-64.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 150
4. *Ibid.*
5. Petra Kunzelmann "[ich fordere die abstrakte Verwendung der Kritiker](#)" Kurt Schwitters und die Kunstkritik, PhD. Diss. Friedrich Alexander Universität Erlangen 2014, p.216
6. As note 2, p. 164
7. Gwendolen Webster (1997). *Kurt Merz Schwitters: a biographical study*. Cardiff, University of Wales Press, p. 88-9.
8. *Ibid.* p. 218.
9. [Georg Jäger: Auguste Bolte wußte immer, was sie wollte](#). In: Erlhoff, Michael; Guckel, Sabine: *Kurt Schwitters Almanach* (= Veröffentlichung des Kulturamtes der Stadt Hannover 3). Hannover 1984, pp.37-53, p. 43.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 52
11. Author of *Caminoscopy*, published in [De Stijl](#). Vol. 4, nos. 7 and 8 (1921) pp.97-99 and 118-119.
12. As note 2, p. 141
13. *Augen* in German means eyes, constituting a play on words indicating collegiate familiarity in the context of this inquiry.
14. See footnote 1.
15. As note 2, p. 140
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.* p. 143
18. *Ibid.* p. 162. One of Schwitters' multiple in-text aphorisms, presumably alluding to fitting a large thing into a small space, such as this account of site-specificity into one paragraph.
19. *Ibid.* p. 145
20. See note 5.
21. As note 2, p. 162
22. As note 6.

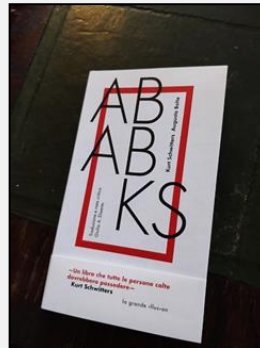
N.B. Jackie Haynes will also be taking part in the International Dada Messe in Dortmund in March 2020



❖ THE SCHWITTERS LIBRARY (2)
THE ITALIAN CONNECTION

We would like to remind you that our member Giulia Disanto, whom we introduced to our readers in Newsletter no. 24 (November 2016, p. 3), has translated a number of works by Kurt Schwitters into Italian, including *Auguste Bolte* and *An Anna Blume*.

These are delightful little books, with commentaries by Giulia Disanto and graphic design by Maurizio Minoggio. Even if you don't read Italian, they are collector's pieces that make a worthy addition to your Schwitters library.



**Kurt Schwitters, *Augusta Bolte*. [A ANNA BELFIORE](#),
Italian translation, commentary and afterword by
Giulia A. Disanto, graphic design by Maurizio Minoggio**

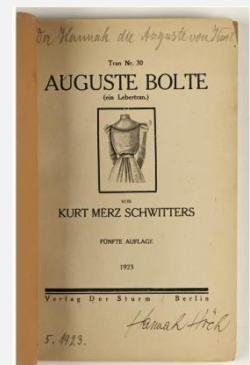
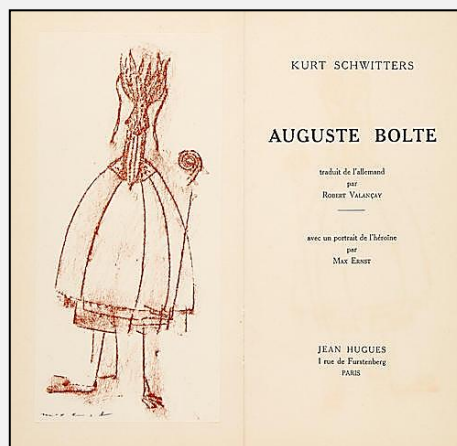
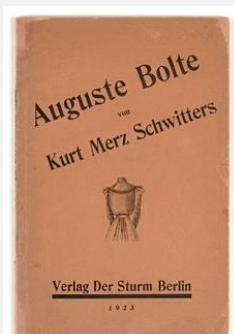
La Grande Illusion, Pavia, 144 pagine, broccura filo refe con sovracoperta, marzo 2018,
ISBN 978-88-941348-9-6

Works by Schwitters already translated by [Giulia Disanto](#):

- [Autunno / L'ultima mosca](#)
- [La lotteria del giardino zoologico](#)

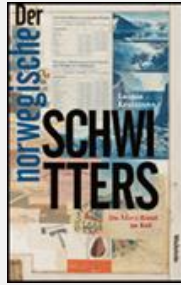
More on *Auguste Bolte*

Auguste Bolte has also been translated into English, Dutch, French and Portuguese. Max Ernst provided the frontispiece for the first French translation (1967) of *Auguste Bolte*.



Auguste Bolte was [adapted for the stage](#) by Volker Ranich, and made into a [film](#), produced by Gerd Winkler.

[A video of Max Riemelt](#) reading the whole of *Auguste Bolte* at the Berlinische Galerie can be found on YouTube, but unfortunately the sound quality is very poor.

BOOK REVIEW: LEONIE KRUTZINNA, *DER NORWEGISCHE SCHWITTERS*

Leonie Krutzinna, [*Der norwegische Schwitters, Die Merz-Kunst im Exil*](#),
Göttingen, Wallstein Verlag, 296 pp. ISBN: 978-3-8353-3466-3

...Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying...
T.S.Eliot, *Four Quartets*

“Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated,” declared Theodore Adorno in 1944, from the perspective of his own exile in the USA. The quotation comes from his *Minima Moralia: Reflections from A Damaged Life*, a collection of short essays—he terms them aphorisms—in which he presents a kaleidoscopic view of contemporary society. His cryptic, fragmented and predominantly pessimistic contemplations cover a range of themes, from the minutiae of domestic life to the state-controlled subordination of the individual. As such, they offer an unexpected counterpart to the equally fractured, paradoxical work of Kurt Schwitters in Norway: exile as viewed from the comfort and companionship of urbane California against exile as a hand-to-mouth existence dominated by hardship and isolation. Adorno left Germany in 1934, Schwitters in 1937, and for both, alienation from their native country was lived as a loss, a bitter severance from their roots and their past. Both, however, managed to discover the positive facets of their experience and reconstitute their lives by means of constructs that permitted continuity in the face of a ‘damaged life’. To quote Adorno yet again: ‘For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live.’

In all, Schwitters’ years of exile in Norway were a time of heartbreak overshadowed by crushing restrictions and inching premonitions of impending disaster, until only one course of action remained—a desperate flight from the invading Nazi troops. If, however, we look at this precarious period of exile from a literary perspective, we can detect a substantial helping of cheerfulness and contentment; his writings did indeed provide him with a ‘place to live’ that provisionally sheltered him from the tragedy of exile. It is this literary homeland that provides the basis of Leonie Krutzinna’s recently published *Der norwegische Schwitters* (originally a PhD dissertation), a study that focuses mainly on Schwitters’ largely neglected writings between 1937 and 1940, the year in which he fled to England.

One of the reasons (if not the only one) that these writings have been overlooked to date lies in Friedhelm Lach’s five-volume edition of Schwitters’ literary works that appeared between 1973 and 1981. Although we owe much to Lach (and most of us doubtless still turn to his edition when quoting Schwitters), the deficiencies of his approach are legion. In particular his often arbitrary editorial decisions and divisions of Schwitters’ literary work into spurious and misleading categories have in many ways proved harmful. As such, the unsystematic distribution of literary texts from Schwitters’ Norwegian exile in these volumes is, as Krutzinna remarks, frequently confusing.

BOOK REVIEW: LEONIE KRUTZINNA, *DER NORWEGISCHE SCHWITTERS* (2)

Krutzinna is from the first at pains to point out that the relatively small number of Schwitters' texts that originated in Norway does not detract from their significance for the whole body of his work and for the extended field of exile studies. Schwitters was hardly a stranger to the country—his first visit had been in 1929—but till 1937 had always been a tourist. Krutzinna outlines some of the hurdles he now faced as an exile: the lack of a German community and of a Norwegian avant-garde, the seemingly insurmountable obstacles faced by asylum-seekers (he never managed to gain resident or refugee status or even a work permit) and the unsettling fact that the Nazis were observing him even before the outbreak of war. Yet he rapidly adapted to his new life, scraping a living for himself as a painter and making liberal use of local materials and themes in his visual and written work. Krutzinna highlights the fact that, in contrast to those Germans in exile who limited their output to their mother tongue, he had no inhibitions about adopting the Norwegian language, as yet another useful *objet trouvé*. Even if his command of it was at first rudimentary, multilingualism had, after all, always been a fundamental component of Merz and Dada. As time passed, Schwitters absorbed a good deal of Norwegian language and culture (Krutzinna cites in particular his *Hvad er Sannhet?*, an unfinished drama that deals with characteristically Scandinavian themes). Bearing in mind the careful observations of the natural environment and the animal world that emerge in his Norwegian writings, she also suggests that this period of his life would make a fruitful subject for research in the field of Ecocriticism.

Krutzinna's principal aim, however, is to investigate the ways in which Schwitters carried over the concept of Merz into exile, especially with regard to his writings: her book is subtitled *Die Merz-Kunst im Exil*. She concludes that he constantly adapted and expanded Merz to suit his new circumstances, thus creating what she calls a 'poetry of exile'. (An explanation of why Schwitters hardly ever used the word Merz after 1931 would have been helpful here.) The permeability of categories and genres that from the first was an essential constituent of Merz continued unabated in Norway, although in this conservative atmosphere Schwitters tended to fall back on more traditional categories as a foundation for his work. Nonetheless, his treatment of established literary forms does not change, and as in the 1920s, he arouses the expectations of his readers and exploits their familiarity with conventional genres, only to surprise or disillusion them through bathos or absurdity. Krutzinna discusses four aspects of Schwitters' extremely varied literary output in Norway, under the headings fiction, fairy tales, poems and performative texts, that is, as far as his intermedial practice allows the reader to distinguish between them. Accordingly, she also lays emphasis on the transgressive nature of Schwitters' literary work. This has become an increasingly significant factor for researchers in recent years, particularly after the publication of a ground-breaking work by Julia Nantke that has proved a landmark in this field (*Ordnungsmuster im Werk von Kurt Schwitters. Zwischen Transgression und Regelmäßigkeit*, reviewed in the KS Society Newsletter July 2018). Nantke elucidates Schwitters' strategy of combining hybrid forms and transgressive practices within what she calls *Ordnungsmuster*—self-imposed boundaries—that cannot be classified according to orthodox systems. Her models thus provide invaluable signposts for those trying to negotiate the complexities of Schwitters' literary works, as for instance in his use of autofiction and what has usefully been termed 'merzed autobiography'.

Krutzinna employs Nantke's idea of 'patterns of order' to distinguish three interconnected motifs that characterize most of Schwitters' literary work in Norway: Hjertøya (the isle in Moldefjord where he lived for part of each summer), flight and the fugitive, and authority. Krutzinna describes Hjertøya as Schwitters' *locus amoenus*, his idealized rural environment, and she groups a number of his texts that loosely pertain to the island under the title of *Inseldichtungen*, though only one is explicitly labelled as such. The most outstanding of these is "Ich sitze hier mit Erika",

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now available in English translation. (At the risk of offending Adorno devotees, if *Minima Moralia* is Adorno's best-known response to exile, the almost unknown "Ich sitze hier mit Erika", with its expansive musings on everything from life's petty frustrations to the mechanisms of control, is no less of a masterpiece on the subject. Unlike Adorno's dazzlingly paradoxical but predominantly disheartening *Minima Moralia*, Schwitters lengthy, multi-faceted essay, interlaced with irony and humour, would seem a more serviceable guide to the methodology of coping with exile.) "Ich sitze hier mit Erika" features Schwitters the writer at his best and is extensively analysed by Krutzinna. She makes the crucial observation that here (in customary fashion), Schwitters lifts the curtain on process, revealing his thoughts on the art of writing itself.

As for transit and authority, the other two themes examined by Krutzinna, that of transit played a key role in Schwitters' restless life in Norway and crops up in many different ways: she cites, for instance, his notebooks and timetables, his assortment of contacts and addresses, and above all his *Reisekiste*, a remarkable travel trunk embellished with paper cuttings. Fascinating as the collaged *Reisekiste* is, it must remain a moot point whether, as Krutzinna claims, it can be viewed as a kind of itinerant Merzbau. Karin Hellandsjø likewise devotes much space to the *Reisekiste* in her *Ultima Thule* (2016), a wide-ranging examination of Schwitters' life and work in Norway, but accentuates its narrative characteristics and textual elements, which she sees as constituting 'almost a little poem'. On the theme of authority, Krutzinna regards Schwitters' writings in Norway as far more political than has been recognized to date; it is easy to dismiss them as escapist, but on a less cursory reading, they disclose an implicit refusal to comply with the apparatus of control. Krutzinna frequently makes clear that here, the onus is on the reader to search for that which remains unspoken.

As has already been noted, she is concerned to underline the continuity of Schwitters' Merz practices in Norway, notwithstanding the language difficulties that compelled him to search for alternative forms of expression. One of the most striking of these was his preoccupation with music, or rather with the art of composition. Schwitters, who was an accomplished pianist, had both his piano and his sheet music transported from Hannover to Norway (leaving the details of the undertaking to his long-suffering wife Helma), and a considerable portion of his Norwegian archive bears witness to his determined, if generally abortive attempts to compose music in exile.

One of the most curious of these efforts relates to the *Ursonate*, which Schwitters had published in completed form in 1932 as an unprecedented and highly sophisticated fusion of sound poetry and music that had taken many years to compose. He always regarded it as one of his greatest works, and would doubtless be delighted to learn that, as Krutzinna explains, it has proved a bone of contention to this day. Yet in Norway it manifests itself almost entirely in the form of musical notation. Schwitters had briefly toyed with this incongruous idea as early as 1927, but in Norwegian exile he threw himself into the task of conversion with surprising energy.

What could possibly have induced him to undermine the whole point of his radical experiment by dispensing with the vocal score and seeking to render the *Ursonate* into instrumental music? (Krutzinna's theory that by doing so he reduced its performative aspects is unlikely, as sheet music is equally written for performance.) His perplexing reworkings of the original for piano pile mystery upon mystery. Why did he take the trouble to add numerous musical signs and symbols, then deliberately resort to faulty notation conventions? And what or who encouraged him in August 1938 to allot a specific key—that is, A minor—to the atonal *Ursonate*? It is of course tenuously 'Norwegian' in as far as it is the key signature of Grieg's piano concerto, but it's unlikely he was aiming that high. Certainly the A minor section marks one of his earliest attempts to score

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the *Ursonate* in exile. The designation of a diatonic key is not its only puzzle, for the top of one page bears the handwritten signature 'Virgil C. Toms Esq.', along with Toms' address in Rhode Island. Krutzinna does not pursue this point, but Toms (1907-76) was a distinguished American organist who had studied in Yale and Paris. (In the war he served as a major in the US Air Force and subsequently, it seems, was involved with the CIA). Schwitters evidently made Toms' acquaintance in Norway and showed him an early, perhaps even the first version of his new *Ursonate* score. Might the *Ursonate's* baffling pages of sheet music harbour an American connection?

Krutzinna wades through the complexities of the scrappy *Ursonate* scoring with some aplomb, then goes on to tackle the even more fearful intricacies of the multilingual literary texts dating from the Norwegian period, which she analyses methodically and with meticulous attention to detail. Many of these patchy writings are undated and unsigned and appear in a number of versions. It becomes increasingly obvious from Krutzinna's researches that Schwitters' son Ernst made what she refers to as massive interventions in these pieces by correcting or rewriting his father's Norwegian, although Ernst himself was not a native speaker. (Karin Hellandsjø has noted that 'improving' Schwitters in this way has further drawbacks; it can eradicate his attempts to reproduce local Norwegian dialects, which counted as another of his *objets trouvés*). Under such circumstances, as Krutzinna admits, the quest for authorship becomes almost hopeless, while Lach's edition aggravates the problem, with its cavalier and regrettably inexact treatment of these texts and the addition of further dubious spelling and grammar corrections.

Krutzinna concludes by reviewing the reception of Schwitters in Norway from its unsatisfactory beginnings in the 1990s to the admirable 'Schwitters in Norway' project, initiated in 2009, which has steadily been gaining momentum ever since. Here, a major milestone was Karin Hellandsjø's lavishly illustrated *Ultima Thule* (2016), addressed to a general readership. Leonie Krutzinna's *Der norwegische Schwitters*, as an entirely academic work, adds further weight to the project with its analysis of a whole swathe of new territory relating to Schwitters' writings in Norwegian exile.

Krutzinna closes with a message to both academics and general readers: if the 'Schwitters in Norway' project is far from completed, a comparable venture has not even remotely been broached in England, a country in which he spent thrice as much time. It is a timely reminder, and we can only hope that it will not go unheeded.

G.W.

Useful links:**[Schwitters in Norway](#)**

ed. Karin Orchard, Hatje Cantz Verlag 2009. ISBN 978-3-7757-2420-3

[Ultima Thule: Kurt Schwitters and Norway](#)

Karin Hellandsjø, Oslo 2016, translated by John Irons. ISBN 9788293140405

[Schwitters in Norwegen](#)

Klaus Stadtmüller, Hannover 1997. ISBN 9783933156365

[Ordnungsmuster im Werk von Kurt Schwitters](#),

Julia Nantke, Munich 2017. ISBN 978-3-11-052165-8

[Kurt Schwitters, Space, Image, Exile](#),

Megan Luke, Chicago 2014. ISBN 9780226090375

[Schwitters in Norway](#) permanent exhibition, Henie Onstad art museum

[Kurt Schwitters in Norway: 'Ich sitze hier mit Erika'](#) 1936 (English translation)

Further material relating to the *Ursonate* (including Schwitters' sheet music) can be found in the [Sprengel Museum Hannover online collection](#)

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THE KURT SCHWITTERS SOCIETY

was founded in 2010 in order to improve communication between those interested in the different aspects of the work of Kurt Schwitters. The society publishes original articles in its newsletters and journals, informs members on current research and publications relating to Schwitters and his circle, and also provides information on forthcoming events.

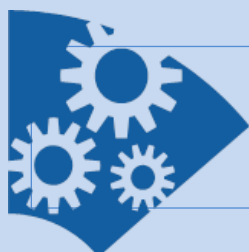
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