

The presentation of “Notgeld” – emergency money – designed by Herbert Bayer by order of the Bauhaus is seen by you as a gesture, exhibitivive as much as demonstrative. This position gives evidence, on one hand, of your refusal to appropriate, a finding or historical reference, in counterpoint to its exemplifying presentation; as well as on the other hand, a certain parallelism in the dissolution of Bayer’s authorship while being an anonymous designer of a functional and communal object and your own digression as an author. Where did these decisions come from?

Lately I’ve questioned myself about what it means to re-present a fact or historical event. Effectively I don’t know if it is possible to create an intermediate space beyond the artists’ hallmark, previous to the label of appropriation and/or cannibalism and what we associate with art and an academic setting, where quoting such as one would find in an essayistic or academic text, and its surrounded ethic is conventionalized. It would be a space in between re-presenting and quoting which defines a type of evocation. Also I have to confront myself being in the position of a non-specialized go-between in what concerns the particular historical provenance of these notes, and given a presentation situation where most of the visitors will be equally non specialized (referring to the show “Republic or the People’s Theatre”, Arte Contempo, Lisbon 2009).

As it has been referred to me this gesture comes closer to that of the curator, in the sense that recontextualization is assumed and can refer to a specific area of knowledge that relates to the object exhibited. However I believe the curator’s metaphor will also reaching its end as it is increasingly conceived as an authorial perspective. In a way to guarantee this hybrid I’ve wanted to keep Herbert Bayer as one of the participating artists in the show.

The notgeld that you present seems to indicate precisely its dissolution with the Social, i.e., overlapping the functionalism of graphic design with the elevation of the work as such and its artist. On the other hand, the Notgeld produced outside of the Bauhaus and presented in the newspapers that you’ve designed was the support of a whole iconography relative to labour, an appraisal of the countryside or of moral values which, contrasts highly with Bayer’s abstract and ‘neutral’ work. Can you talk about this?

As for the dissolution of authorship I wonder if our relationship nowadays differs greatly from that of the Weimar republic? How many people can name the designers of the Euro bills? Which perhaps leaves us with the condition that an object such as a banknote with high circulation, massive production and recurrent usage tends to dissolve the authorial hallmark through its use-value. Maybe it is this fatalist result that has made

these designs a lesser known fact of the Bayer’s work and Bauhaus’s presence in Weimar.

The fact that Bayer agreed to the commission, an urgent request by the government of Thuringen, is only the result of the Bauhaus predisposition to accept orders, commissions. As for Bayer’s design, the Notgeld follow the abstract language of the Bauhaus more or less closely. What surprises me is how rarely this anti-iconographic approach has come up in history, in political systems to the left and right – and how untouched by modernism its iconography is.

It also occurs to me that a vehicle of ideological discourse such as a bank note is rarely wasted and while Notgeld have rendered it strongly apparent in negation, they are simultaneously a sign of how abstraction could have, in this context, have become also easily ideological.

There is an underlying tension in the use of abstraction and its unpopulism, being both a sign of elitism and simultaneously conveying the desire for a universal language – which could be an explanation as to why a modernist iconography never made it to money. Somehow it juxtaposes strongly with the idea of inflation, its absence of references and ‘loose’ semiology. With that in mind I would like to quote the following:

“Rotman points out the development of monetary systems, from gold coins to paper money backed by a gold-

standard system to the emergence of money that promises its holder nothing else but its identical replacement. He argues that a radical break takes place when money is “recognized as an instrument for creating money”, and concludes, “The scandal is the loss of anteriority: paper money, instead of being a representation of some prior wealth, of some anterior pre-existing quantity of real gold or silver specie becomes the creator, guarantor and sole evidence for this wealth.”

The creation of money *ex nihilo* becomes, of course, most apparent with the abolition of the gold standard. Germany stopped backing the German mark with gold reserves at the beginning of World War I, in 1914.

During an inflation, however, zero’s power to signify growth and multiplication is fused with zero’s signification of a void. Brian Rotman argues that paper money and the zero are not only signs about signs, and signify absence, but they also “articulate a central, and previously implicit, feature of the meta-signs which gave rise to them: namely that the opposition between anterior ‘things’ and posterior ‘signs’ (for things) is an illusion, a friction of representation unsustainable when faced with the inherently non-referential status of a sign for the absence of signs”

Quoted from *Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany*, Bernd Widdig, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, USA, 2001. p.82-84, 95.