

non-fiction

this week's essential reading

{ 'Getting into Cairo's Byways' by James Estrin, *The New York Times Lens* blog

'The protesters seem to be in it for the long haul. People are setting up shop in the main squares,' said the photographer Ed Ou of his time capturing images on the Egyptian capital's streets

new non-fiction ★

Where is the love?

Calling his book *A Royal Love Story*, Christopher Andersen sets himself up as one of those gossips who tells you how fabulous they think someone is before dishing up enough dirt to leave you with no doubt they think otherwise.



William and Kate: A Royal Love Story
Christopher Andersen
Gallery Books
Dh112

One of a handful of books published just after the engagement of Prince William to Kate Middleton, it revisits tabloid territory: a young "Wombat" serving as his mother's confidant while terrorising the help with threats of punishment once he's king; Kate's mother pushing her into St Andrews, the Prince's chosen university; an obsessive enumeration of bar bills from parties with Harry and friends; the embarrassing antics of Kate's uncle and brother; Camilla's begrudging acceptance of a possible competitor; and William's cold feet episode.

"I pity any woman who marries into this family," Andersen quotes Diana as saying, and one is left to wonder how this is in any way a love story. For the most part shamelessly unsourced (interviews are lumped together in chapter notes), this account comes across as about as authori-

tative as the aforementioned gossip's: amusing for a time but something you want to back away from the longer you listen.

★ Mo Gannon

The grand hustle

Do you know your Eazy-E from your Master P? Dan Charnas can certainly supply any deficiency. Weighing in at more than 600 pages and peppered with anecdote and incident from the world of the MCs, his new history of the hip-hop industry cannot be accused of stinting on the detail.



The Big Payback: The History of the Business of Hip-Hop
Dan Charnas
New American Library
Dh95

Its first chapter is especially exhausting: relating the confused and confusing story of which artist or label did what to whom first between the years of 1968 and 1981, it seems to unfold in real time. Once through that, the high drama of the "Cop Killer" controversy and the East Side/West Side saga make livelier reading. A native New Yorker, Charnas betrays a firm East Side prejudice.

His thesis, buried beneath the unwieldy narrative, is that hip-hop, more than any other form of pop, is obsessed with money; from its earliest origins among the hustlers of 1970s Harlem to the modern day business empires of Jay-Z and Sean Combs.

From humble beginnings to global domination, the story of hip-hop is mirrored in the lives of its performers. As the record exec turned artist formerly known as Puff Daddy observed, it's all about the Benjamins.

★ Chloe Nankivell

Ain't nothing but a G

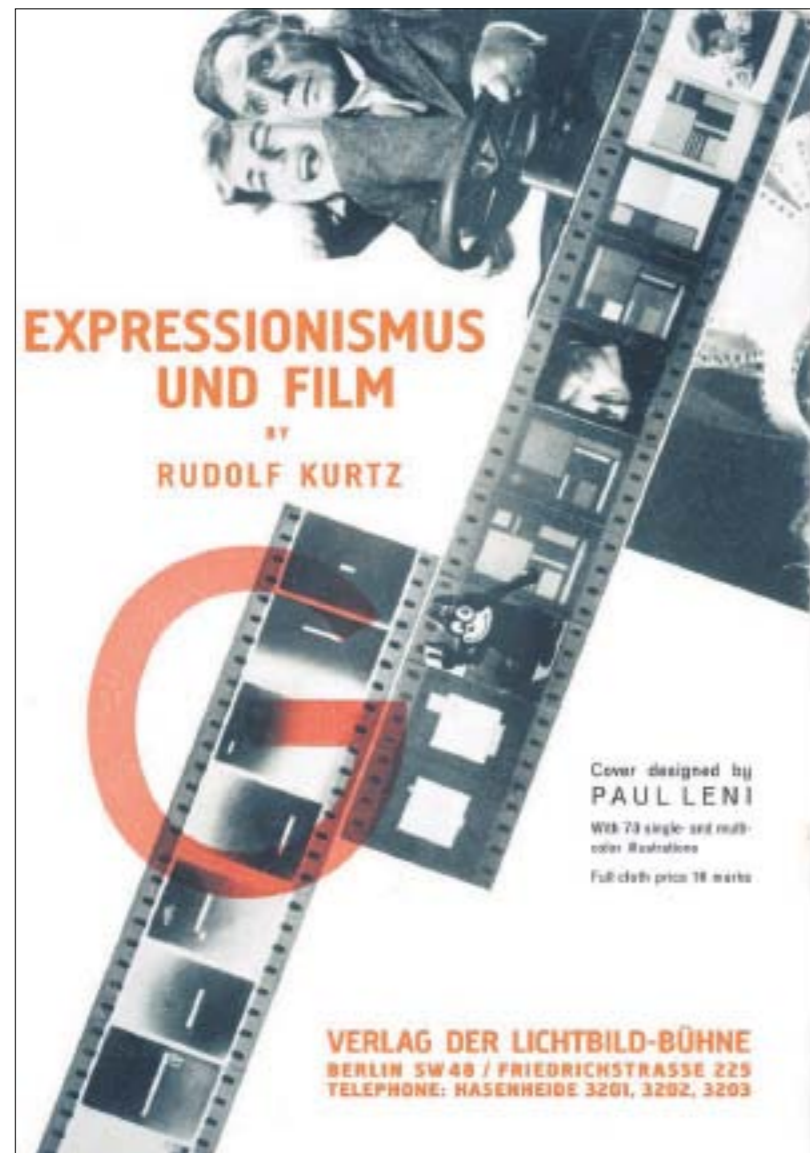
Collected and translated into English, the pages of a groundbreaking German modernist magazine hold many parallels to publishing in the present day, writes Andy Battaglia

On the title page in the third issue of a peculiar old journal titled, simply, *G* is a list of contents meant to lure the prospective reader in. It advertises "illustrations of iron constructions, oil paintings, fashion objects, automobiles, pretty women, polar regions, etc." An intriguing list, to be sure. But most enticing, to a present-day reader peering more than 80 years into the past, is that suggestive, seemingly almost flip-pant "etc".

The year was 1924 and the notion of mingling pictures of cars and frigid Norwegian vistas for no particular reason was a new one – especially in an intellectual journal made by men of stature. During the journal's short but influential existence, its working roster served as a who's-who of the European avant-garde, including such characters as Hans Richter, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Benjamin, Man Ray, Hans Arp, Kurt Schwitters, and Tristan Tzara. As might be expected given its varied creators, *G* covered lots of ground, in art, architecture, poetry, cinema, and design. And suitably, owing to that same cast, it did so with a serious sense of experimentation and play.

The story of the journal is surveyed in a beautiful new book titled *G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, edited by a pair of North American historians and published by Getty Publications in California. Everything else about it, from its archaic photographs to its blocky graphic design, has the feel of Berlin in that ripe, volatile time between the two World Wars. This was a period when a great many publications and manifestos, aided by easy mechanical reproduction, emerged to imagine and espouse new ways of living and new ways of regarding art – to, as Hans Richter wrote in an issue of *G*, "recognise the possibility of a culture in the utter chaos of our days".

That culture, as conceived by *G*, would be a lively mix of polemics and all manner of aesthetic play. The latter proves especially striking, in the immediate sense, to readers new to *G* (that is to say all but a very small number of specialists in the era). Each page of the journal's five issues is a sort of pageant for the eyes. The first edition, a two-page broadsheet that folded into quarters, boasts a kinetic assortment of floating black squares, cryptic pictograms, percussive changes in size and shade of type, and, stretched atop the two pages in the middle, a simulated strip of film marked with abstract shapes and designs. Other issues make room for newfangled aerial photographs, sketches of Bauhaus buildings, an early X-ray,



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Appendix: Contemporary Reflections on G

A Call for Elemental Art
Rosal Hausermann, Hans Arp, Ivan Poni, and Laurel Moholy-Nagy

We love the brave discovery, the regeneration of art. Art that is the expression of the forces of an epoch. We therefore demand the expression of our own time by an art that can be only of our making, that did not exist before us and cannot continue after us – not a passing fashion, but an art based on the understanding that art is always here anew and does not remain content with the expression of the past. We pledge ourselves to elementary art. It is elemental because it does not philosophize, because it is built up of its own elements alone. To yield to the elements of form is to be an artist. The elements of art can be discovered only by an artist. But they are not to be found by his individual whim; the individual does not exist in isolation, and the artist uses only those forces that give artistic form to the elements of our world. Artists, declare yourselves for art! Reject the styles. We demand freedom from the styles to reach the STYLE. Style is never plagiarized.

This is our manifesto issued by the dynamics of our time, we proclaim the revision in our outlook brought about by the timeless interplay of the sources of power that mold the spirit and the form of an epoch and that allow art to grow as something pure, liberated from usefulness and beauty, as something elemental in everybody.

We proclaim elemental art! Down with the reactionary in art!

Reprinted from: *DAAD* 4, no. 1 (1924): 121. The article was originally titled "Manifesto der elementaren Kunst." The English translation is by Michael W. Jennings, Hans Arp and Laurel Moholy-Nagy © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/AG Bild Kunst, Berlin, Rosal Hausermann and Ivan Poni © 2009 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

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and a picture of an American rodeo rider doing tricks on a horse, among many other things. To that end, an essay in the book positions *G* in historical terms as "one of the earliest journals of modern visual culture". It's easy, having been blitzed by images in the decades since, to look past such a claim. But the pages of *G* itself bristle with excitement for what was then very new. It's evident in the look and the layout, but it's just as present in the writing and the rhetoric employed. Some of it is

blaring and absurdist, to comic effect, as in the headline to an archly impassioned article on automotive design: "Most German Cars Have Pointed Radiators ... you are partly to blame!" Some of it is more considered but still witheringly critical, as in an essay on Berlin fashion that describes the typical German hat of the time as "quite like a cowpie made of a kind of stair carpeting". The majority of the writing, however, is in search of a new language and tone to describe modes of thinking new to the enterprise

of Modernism. One of those was embedded in the title itself: *G* was short for the German concept of *Gestaltung*, or "form-creation", which endeavoured to broaden the scope of thinking about design-minded creation to include the process of its inception as much as its result. In simpler terms, it meant thinking more, and more holistically. This applied to everything from clothes to sculptures of birds to poetry that, as reconfigured in *G* by Kurt Schwitters, found its form by way of single letters rather than

words. Cinema was set aside for special treatment. In the 1920s it was just starting to find a sense of itself as an art form. The kind of cinema proffered by *G* tended toward the abstract: "Film does not yet exist – just a perverse anomaly of photographed literature," wrote Hans Richter, bemoaning the role of traditional narrative in movies at the time. Richter himself made more experimental movies with disembodied images and shapes, though not all "story" movies were worthy of scorn. The works of Charlie Chaplin and Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* were held out for high praise.



G was short for the German concept of Gestaltung. It meant thinking more, and more holistically. Images courtesy of Getty Publications



G: An Avant-Garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926
Edited by Detlef Mertins and Michael W Jennings
Getty Publications
Dh148

er, El Lissitzky, dreamt in 1923 of a publishing form to transcend the everlastingness of the printed page: "THE ELECTRO-LIBRARY". Another surveys the era's eventual crop of likeminded journals and reports that the *G* contributor Theo van Doesburg complained about their overabundance to the Dadaist Tristan Tzara: "Dear Tzara, would you like to start a new magazine with me, Merde?"

No one now associated with publishing, in print and on the web, will struggle to spot the modern parallels in these historical vignettes. But then, neither will anyone else fail to recognise in *G* the kind of energy and edge that can collapse history into a series of happenings which are still very much active and alive. "The reality of history is not read off from the 'facts' but is instead – constructed," *G* declared in 1926. A little higher up the page, in big block letters that signal urgency no less now than they would have done back then: "HISTORY IS WHAT IS HAPPENING TODAY."

Andy Battaglia is a New York-based writer whose work appears in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Artforum*, *Spin* and *Pitchfork*.