

Poster for Dieter Roth's exhibition at Galerie der Edition Hansjörg Mayer (1967).
Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



Typocolumns in the retrospective exhibition at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1968. Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



*Art as collaboration:
50 years of Edition Hansjörg Mayer*

**An interview with Eleanor Vonne Brown and
Gustavo Grandal Montero**

The introduction to the monograph 'Publications by Edition Hansjörg Mayer and work by Hansjörg Mayer', published on the occasion of a retrospective of his work at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1968, described him as "a typographer, printer, publisher and lecturer". He is also, or has been, a graphic designer, photographer, film-maker, composer... but would probably be best described as an artist, one that primarily works in collaborative publishing projects with other artists and writers.

Raised in Stuttgart in a family of printers, in 1963 he founded Edition Hansjörg Mayer, arguably the most important publisher of artists' books of the last 50 years, with a back catalogue that includes the 'Complete works' of Dieter Roth alongside seminal titles by Richard Hamilton, Emmett Williams, John Latham, Mark Boyle, Robert Filliou, Herman de Vries, Tom Phillips, and many others.

Associated at an early stage with Max Bense's Stuttgart Group, he developed during the 60s his own "typoems" and other forms of experimental visual poetry, often employing complex conceptual methods (e.g. "typoactions"). His published output includes prints, portfolios, books and the broadsheet series 'Futura', featuring his own work, that of many major international practitioners of Concrete poetry, and his typographic interpretations of texts by different authors.

Mayer, who celebrated his 70th birthday this year, is receiving overdue recognition from art and graphic design historians for his contribution to the development of modern artists' books, and his work is being rediscovered as a referent for both graphic designers and contemporary artists. With a current exhibition at Museum Ostwall, Dortmund ('Künstler, Verleger, Galerist: Hansjörg Mayer zum 70') and several retrospectives planned for next year (Nationalgalerie Berlin, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Tate) the number of his admirers is set to increase.

When we visited his London studio in April 2013 we found him surrounded by prints and photographs, working on material for a series of three new publications that will focus on his own practice and early work with experimental typography and film. 'Typo', 'Foto' and 'Film', compiled and designed by Mayer and with text by Stefan Rippling, will be published by Walther König later in the year.

Meanwhile, those looking for more information can visit his website: <http://hansjorgmayer.com>, which includes a weblid documenting his publications, and English and German interviews with this generous artist. A generous man.

Max Bense and John Cage

GGM You studied philosophy with Max Bense, this perhaps could be a good starting point.

HM Very much a starting point. I used to play football with Max Bense's son, Georg Bense, when I was 13, in Stuttgart. The place where we played was right next door to their home, so sometimes, as kids, we would go to this beautiful house, where I saw for the first time stuff other than the boring, slightly kitsch things normal in a German bourgeois home like my own. I was always looking at these wonderful things, Concrete and other Modern art, and Bense was very kind and patient. He answered my questions, and in time some kind of friendship developed. He introduced me to contemporary art, and many other things. When I started to attend the Technische Hochschule, I often went to listen to his lectures. Bense was an extremely important figure in Stuttgart at the time, a Professor of Philosophy with a particular interest in aesthetics, and saw himself as a kind of theoretical centre for all the arts and design: artists, poets, composers, industrial designers, etc. He was an amazing magnet, introducing all these different people to each other. So that was certainly the starting point.

GGM Could you give us some names of people that he put you in contact with, or work that he introduced you to, from the point of view of graphics or in general? Max Bill?

HM Yes, I did meet Max Bill through him. Max Bill and Max Bense had started the New Bauhaus in Ulm, and sometimes I went to Ulm with him. I didn't like Bill, I found him arrogant, charming but very fixed in his views, I was never terribly impressed. I also met Maldonado, who had taken over as head; I thought he was more interesting. I never really liked Ulm, however fantastic the original Bauhaus was, I thought that what the English called the New Bauhaus didn't get very far.

One of the most important things in terms of influences was visiting the new music festivals in Darmstadt and Donaueschingen, two of the most important contemporary music festivals after the war. Bense sometimes went there, and he took me with him a few times. These were very liberating experiences. For instance, to meet Cage and to listen to Cage... he had a huge influence on me.

Stockhausen, Boulez, Nono, all the important new composers were there and performed there, but the most liberating thing for me was actually to listen to Cage, and to realise that there is no difference between noise and music.

Staib und Mayer

In 1953 we moved in Stuttgart to a new house, which my father built, and I started Gymnasium (secondary school). My grandfather's printing works had been hit by a bomb and destroyed completely, so my grandparents and parents got together with another printer and started a new company, Staib und Mayer, which was exactly in between where I went to school and our home. So, from around the age of 10, often after school I didn't go home but to the printing shop, because it was brand new and wonderful, and I loved the smell of ink and the noise of the printing machinery and everything that was going on there... and I started using the printing processes.

EVB What equipment did they have?

HM I actually have photos of the printing works which I believe were taken in the sixties. They had hand hot metal typesetting, Linotype, proof presses and Heidelberg printing machines of various kinds; and then bookbinding, etc.

Since I was the son of the boss, I could muck around and ask people, sometimes I was probably a pain, but they were patient. They thought that I was the next generation that would take over later on, which I of course didn't... I got used to whatever hot metal typesetting and letterpress printing methods existed, and was fascinated by all sorts of things: very early on I collected pre-run sheets, normally thrown away. I often collected them and cut them out, but they had to be colourful, and have weird things on top of each other, etc. My grandfather, who was a master printer, found out that I collected them in a drawer and he called me over and asked me: "What do you think is this? Why are you collecting this kind of rubbish we throw away? You should be collecting beautiful examples of well-printed things! Throw them out."

EVB For him it was an embarrassment, wasn't it?

HM Exactly! In those days, all good printing shops collected sheets to show potential clients the quality of their work. To him, this was an insult. I was furious with him for weeks, but then I collected some more, in a different drawer, until I lost interest. Believe it or not, I have found one. I am so glad, the only piece that is left from the 1950s...

I was also fascinated by a lot of other by-products of proofing, inking, cleaning rollers, etc. I can show you a few because I have been photographing them. Pictures made out of random inking, cleaning, etc. processes. I love all this throwaway stuff. But without Cage, without this amazing idea that sound and music are the same, I wouldn't have realised that, I would have been too ashamed or afraid, it was totally against everything I had been told. It gave me the courage to see things in a different light, to open up. I wanted to get away from craft and Kitsch, and use randomness, I started with that. Without Bense, I don't know where I would have ended up. Probably in a boring printing shop somewhere.

In addition to going to Bense's lectures, I also went to lectures at the music academy, in composition, because I was very interested in music. When I started making experimental films in the early 60s with Georg Bense I mostly made the soundtracks.

FAT (Filmarbeitsteam)

GGM What can you tell us about these early 60s films?

HM Max's son Georg was very keen on film making (he ended up being a film-maker with the Saarbrücken State Television), so we started an experimental film unit called FAT (Filmarbeitsteam) under Bense's umbrella, the Studium Generale of the Technische Hochschule Stuttgart. We made about 10 experimental 16mm films inspired by texts and things like that, from 1960/61 perhaps. Some of them were shown in experimental film festivals (Oberhausen, etc.), some were even run in cinemas in Stuttgart. But then we all went our own ways... We showed them a year ago in Berlin, at Barbara Wien, the ones that we had already digitised and were OK.

EVB I saw one of them at the Barbara Wien show ('JETZT: edition hansjörg mayer, london', 2012), a film of a tram.

HM That one is called 'Jetzt'. It was still in good condition. We also showed another, 'Terry Jo', in a room at the back. The others need a lot of work, and parts of the soundtracks need to be re-recorded.

GGM You were responsible for the music, did you have any responsibility for the image?

HM We all were. All three of us, Georg Bense, Rainer Wössner and I worked on everything, but I was responsible for the soundtrack, let's call it that.

GGM What sort of soundtracks did you make? Re-used sounds?

HM Yes, but not in Pierre Schaeffer's tightly knit, musique concrète style. That to me was a bit too restricted... in a much freer way. Again, Cage played a big part, I suppose, a liberating one. Sometimes I recorded sounds somewhere, distorted them or mixed them, but not in a very formal way, not like Schaeffer or Nono or Stockhausen. It was very... incidental, I could call it. I was quite astonished, listening to it again after more than 40 years... I found in an old ammunition box reel to reel tapes, which I thought I had lost. I had to buy on ebay a machine to play them so I could listen to them and digitise them.

GGM I read somewhere that you also studied painting, around 1962, is that correct?

HM Painting? I have never painted in my life!

GGM Don't ever take any information from the Internet...

HM My whole idea was no painting, no hand made craft, nothing like that... I wanted to get away from it. Absolutely not!

GGM Do you have any formal training or studies in graphic design or typography?

HM I am a master typesetter and studied at the Printing Engineering Academy, including graphic design.

Dieter Roth

HM In 1963 I went to the USA. I was flying via Reykjavik, the cheapest at the time (obviously, I had no money) and Max Bense said: "Iceland?" We were in the study, in his house. He went to the bookshelves and pulled out two books: "There is someone called Dieter Roth who lives in Iceland and has sent me these ('Bok 2b' and 'Bok 3c'), I am very interested to know who this man is, find out who he is". I asked him: "How do I find him?" "It says here on the book Box 412, Reykjavic, you will find him". When I got to Reykjavic I asked people, nobody knew who he was, until finally someone told me where he lived. I went there, knocked on the door and nothing. Next day, went back, knocked on the door, nothing. Then, fortunately, a woman who was working on a garden next door, saw me. She didn't speak English or German but kindly wrote down an address, so I took a taxi and went there. He was for the summer months in a house outside Reykiavik that belonged to his brother in law. I knocked on the

door and he opened. That was the end of that, or rather the beginning...

EVB Why do you think Dieter Roth had sent Bense those books?

HM He had published himself several books in the late 50s but nothing happened. So he got Bense's name from someone and sent him the books, in the hope that something would happen.

GGM Roth had published a magazine in Switzerland in the 50s with Eugen Gomringer and Marcel Wyss, 'Spirale'.

HM Yes, he did that before he went to Iceland. They never got on terribly well because Dieter was already out of the Concrete art stuff that the other two were into. He went from Switzerland first to Denmark to work in textile design, and there he met his Icelandic wife, and then went with her to Iceland.

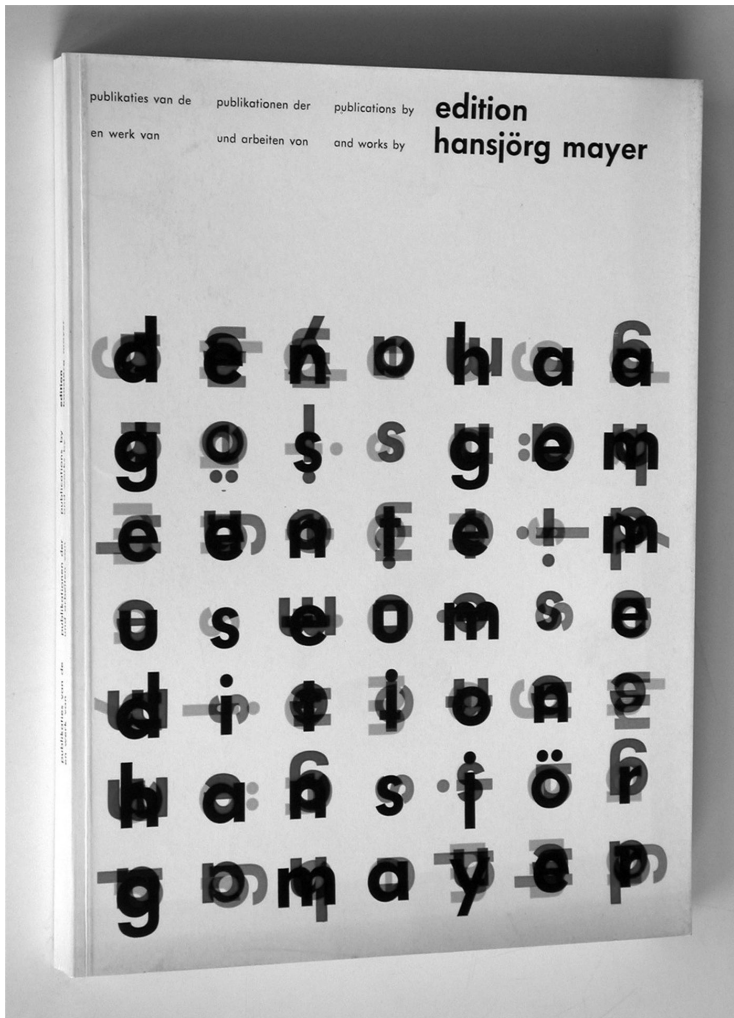
We got on extremely well, because our ideas were very similar. There weren't many people who were as open as he was... for instance, he showed me this book made of pre-run sheets, and I laughed and told him that I was collecting them in our printing shop when I was 11 years old. That was it, we saw eye to eye... Before I left for America I said to him: "I would like to publish your books, I think that you have made the most wonderful books that I have ever seen..." He was quite pleased, because nobody else wanted to do it. Later we often talked about the few books published by others, for example Something Else Press, or Dumont, they never did what he really wanted. I made the books with him exactly as he wanted them, no censorship, no interference, nothing. And, of course, if an artist's book is not exactly the way the artist wants it, what is the point? That's what we always did.

EVB When you offered to publish his books, had you already published other artists' books?

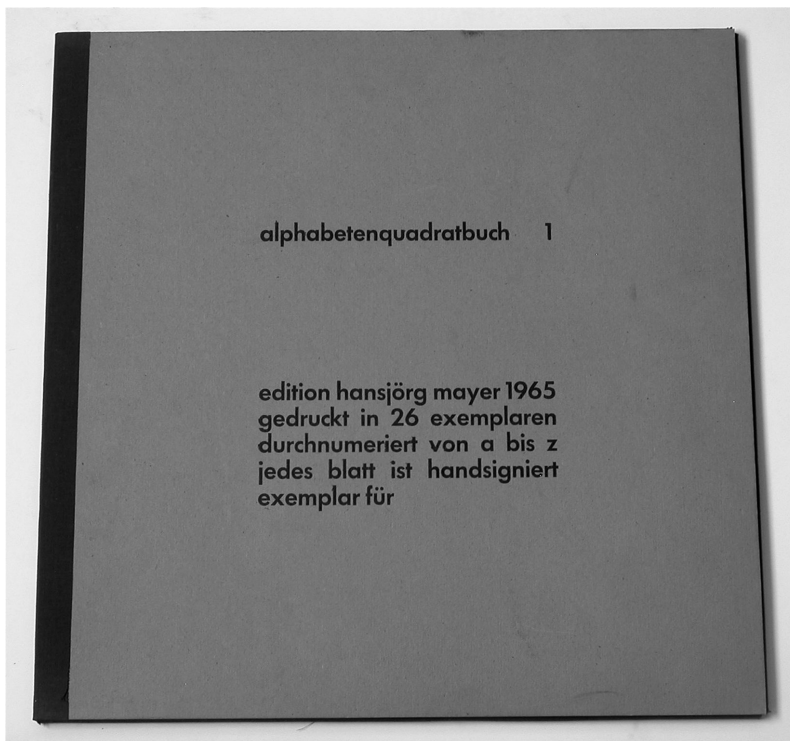
HM Not really... I had done some typographical interpretations, and some so-called Concrete poetry. I had some intentions to publish books.

GGM But it is not just that you facilitated or realised his works, in some books you make a more fundamental contribution, for instance, offering a typographical interpretation of his texts, as in 'The blue tide' (Volume 14).

HM I had published a series of small books like Emmett Williams 'Sweethearts', so I said to him: "Wouldn't it be fun to print 'The blue tide'



Cover of 'Publications by Edition Hansjörg Mayer and work by Hansjörg Mayer' (1968). Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



Cover of 'Alphabetenquadratbuch 1' (1965). Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



letterpress? I could set it all, whatever I see, in different type sizes.” He thought it was a wonderful idea. So I sat on a linotype machine and set whatever I saw on his manuscript just using my ‘futura’ typeface.

GGM This is an example of a collaborative project, it is as much your work as it is Dieter Roth’s.

HM I was never interested in that. What I wanted was to publish books that are exactly what the artist wants, that’s all. Who does it is not interesting.

EVB That is very generous.

GGM Extremely generous....

HM It’s the only way that makes sense, if you think about it. You are either a publisher who is really trying to do what the artist wants, or you are one of these commercial boys who have all sorts of other ideas...

Obviously I made suggestions, and had my take at the technical level, some things I knew better, but I was never pushing myself forward. If I showed him something, he would say: “Oh, this is interesting.” Dieter was always curious about everything, so he would say, that is a new idea, no one has ever done that...

EVB Did you print at your father’s press?

HM Yes, we printed most books there, but not all. We didn’t want that everything would look the same, and if you print everything in the same press it may do, so we also printed in Iceland, we had two books made by Cantz, etc.

EVB Did you work with a distributor? Were you interested in getting the books out?

HM I was very interested in getting them out, but it was hopelessly difficult, I can tell you that... My luck was that when I first went to the USA I met George Wittenborn, a German refugee, by then a major art books distributor and publisher in the USA. Someone had told me about him, and I walked into his shop in New York, a little bit shy. By chance he was standing at the door; he looked at me and asked in German: “Are you German?” He said: “Come in! What have you got under your arm? Show me”. I had some of the concrete poetry folders and some of the early typography things. He bought everything... He asked me if I had more and I had it sent to him from Stuttgart. That was a huge help... Thanks to the Wittenborn connection I had a

wonderful distributor in the USA. He introduced me to Bernard Karpel, the librarian at MoMA who then bought everything for many years. As my official distributor he sold lots of stuff, without him it would have been very difficult...

Exhibitions and catalogues

GGM What about exhibitions? When you had your gallery in Stuttgart (1966-69), for instance, how did you see it in relation to publishing? Was it just a way of highlighting the work of people you liked? Why did you decide to open a gallery?

HM I called it Gallery of Editions Hansjörg Mayer (galerie der edition hansjörg mayer) so, yes, the aim was to show works by the artists that I published, because nobody showed these people... I did the first Dieter Roth exhibition in Germany, can you believe it? The first Robert Filliou, first George Brecht... it was very much related to my books, yes.

GGM You made a sort of installation of ‘Typocolumns’ for the Brighton Festival. Was this a unique project or have you made any other 3D work?

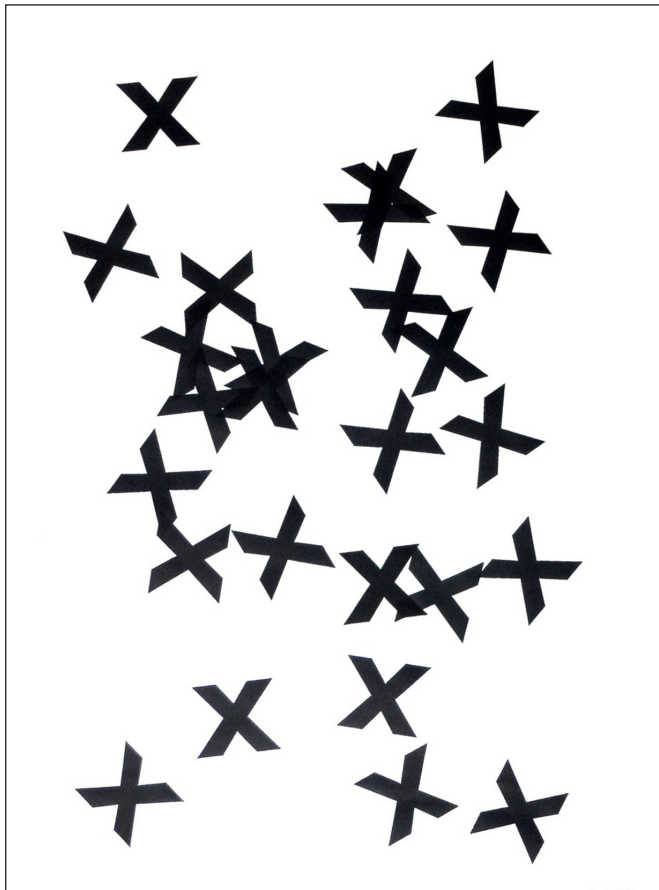
HM The three big typo columns I made specially for the Brighton Festival in 1967. I also made some smaller ones, which were shown in 1968 in the Hague. I made no other 3D work.

GGM Since the 1968 retrospective (Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague) there hasn’t been any major exhibition of your work, will this change soon?

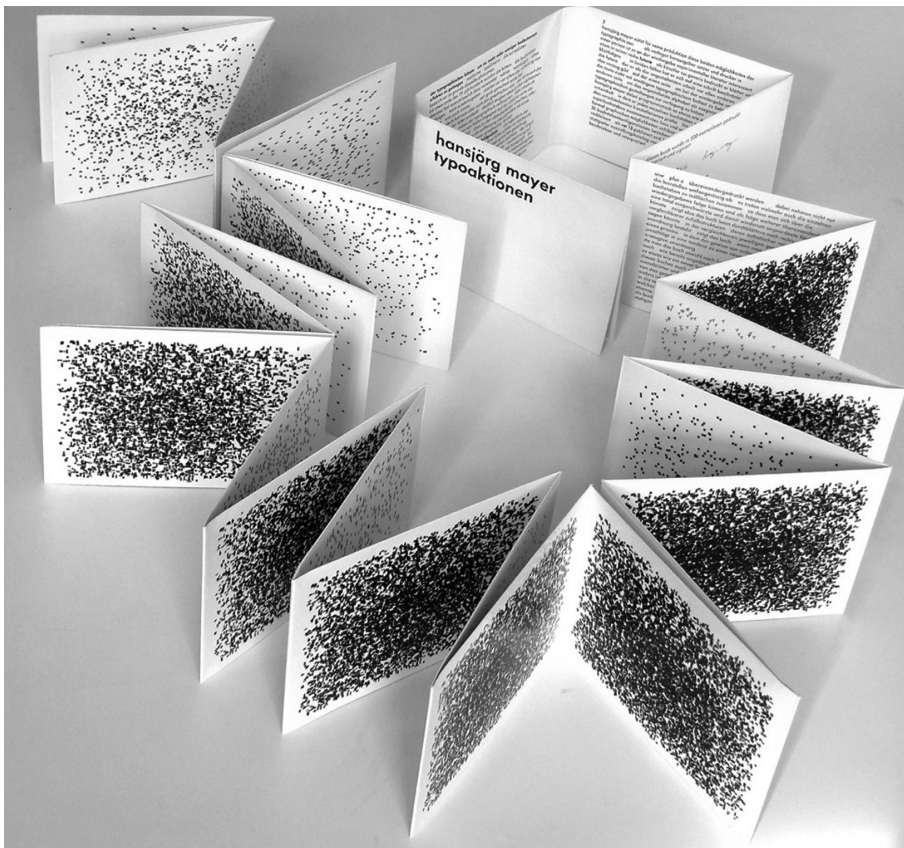
HM The Tate is interested in doing an exhibition (Trustees expressed this following a recent acquisition of a large collection of work, including portfolios, monoprints, etc.), and the Nationalgalerie in Berlin is planning to do a show, next year. They have a collection of Concrete poetry acquired from Jasia Reichardt years ago, and they have added further material: it’s a nearly complete collection now. And the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart decided that, as they have the Sohm Archive and a lot of my material, they would do a show too.

The three books I am planning now should also be helpful. I don’t want them to be exhibition catalogues as such, just material which is there, available.

Already in 1968 I didn’t like the idea of an exhibition catalogue. ‘Publications by Edition Hansjörg Mayer and work by Hansjörg Mayer’ was published as part of an exhibition, it’s complementary material,



Print part of the 'Last alphabet' (1968). Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



'Typoktionen' (1967). Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



not documenting the show but giving additional information. People tell me that this was one of the first times that this happened.

EVB What made you approach it that way?

HM When they came and told me that they wanted to do a retrospective of my work at the Haags Gemeentemuseum, the published work alongside my own, at the age of 25, they asked me if I wanted to do a book, and I knew I didn't want to do a catalogue, I wanted to do something that complemented the show, and they were very happy with that.

This retrospective finished a chapter in my life and I thought from then on I would just publish artists' books. That is also what I said to Dieter, who was a little bit jealous... which he was often anyhow, because nobody knew him then. He was a little angry that I, 13 years younger, had a big exhibition in a museum, something he had never had... (He never came to look at the show, by the way...) But I said to him that from then on I would just publish his books and a few other artists' books, like Richard Hamilton's.

Alphabets

I made the 'First alphabet' in 1961/2. In 1968, before the exhibition even, I wanted to do a 'Last alphabet'. But because of other work (I was teaching at Bath Academy, at Watford School of Art, I was working with Petersburg Press, which I had started with Paul Cornwall-Jones... I was doing a thousand things), I just didn't have time to actually do it... When the show was over, in January 1969, I think, I started to print the 'Last alphabet', and it was a very elaborate, huge project, involving some 2,700 prints. I was in Stuttgart and Dieter came over: he was very enthusiastic and encouraging, but I could see that he actually was furious about it, he thought that I would continue doing my own work instead, as I had promised, to publish his books... I told him: "don't worry about it, I am not going to finish it". I only did the first prints, I left it and that was that... And now, I have been working on it again, because now I have time... so I am actually doing it, but not to the full extent I had planned.

EVB Is it the same that you sent me for the XALPHABET series?

HM The 'x' that I sent you is one out of 26 random ones. It's quite a simple idea, you take each futura letter and print each, one by one, 26 times, by just randomly moving them after each printing. The letters are not fixed on the bed of the proof press.

You do that with the whole alphabet, each one is printed 26 times – but in order to get a deeper impression into the paper (I always like to print with a lot of pressure), I put another sheet of paper underneath, so you get a blind embossed version of the print. My idea was to print 26 different colours on a set of tissue sheets, make die cut forms, and die cut each of them. This was about reduction (as the previous was about addition)... I still have got some here. What I did is to use only part of each letter. This is the blind embossed second sheet which I then filled in, at the time, with whatever part I wanted to keep. Because this is about the reduction, this isn't 'h', I only wanted to keep this... So, random techniques, randomness was always an important thing.

I am doing inkjet prints, now. Originally it would have been all letterpress printed with die-cut coloured sheets stuck on by hand, each one. But now, of course, things have changed, so I am now using computers and inkjet printing.

EVB Do you like that? People are not actually keen on inkjet printing, but I think in the future inkjet prints would be what people love about today...

HM Of course. It achieves print quality that has never been seen before. Richard Hamilton's last work, the last five years, are all inkjet prints, and they are beautiful. I published a little book of his about printing technology, and he explains how it is as much work as any other technique, but people don't understand it...

GGM What was your interest in type specifically, in the early 60s?

HM I come from a printing family, my grandfather had a printing shop, my father and so on... It comes from growing up with it... I got printing ink in my veins.

Concrete

GGM Why Concrete poetry as opposed to mainstream graphic design?

HM Bense! Again this early meeting... Bense was already interested in Concrete poetry, he had contacts with the Noigandres (Haroldo de Campos, Augusto), etc. Through him I met a lot of different people from all over the world...

GGM Gomringer?

HM Sure, although I wasn't very keen on Gomringer... I like his old stuff, his so called 'Constellations', a lot of really beautiful work...

He is so dry, so Swiss... but nice, friendly, I am not knocking him...

GGM You met Clifford Ellis at the opening of 'Between Poetry and Painting'...

HM Indeed, yes. When Jasia Reichardt made this show in 65 at the ICA, I had just come back to Stuttgart from Brazil, and she wanted lots of work, my own things as well as what I had published. I had been pretty much everywhere in Europe, but not to England, so I thought it was a good opportunity, and I said that I would come over by car and bring the stuff with me.

I just loved England from the first day, it was heaven, absolutely wonderful, and I have never looked back... everybody was terribly nice... I remember I arrived a bit late because, coming by ferry, I stopped at Canterbury, to look at the fabulous cathedral and because I was hungry. There was a tea room just next to the cathedral, with lovely old ladies having tea. I looked at the menu, and they had two things: beans on toast and spaghetti on toast. I just killed myself laughing, it was the funniest thing I'd heard in my life!

When I arrived in London the ICA was already closed. Jasia had gone home, I didn't have any telephone numbers... the only address I had was that of John Willett, Deputy Editor of the TLS, in Hampstead, so I went there, I had a little map, knocked at the door, and fortunately John Willett opened. I said: "I am Hansjörg Mayer, I am terribly sorry..." He had already done an article in the TLS about my work... anyhow, a nice, wonderful guy: "Come in, have dinner with us! Where are you staying? Stay with us!"... Next day I went to see Jasia, who lived nearby... I had such a good time. So I decided to stay for the opening, which I hadn't planned. And then, of course, at the ICA in those days, everybody was there! Richard Hamilton, Hockney, Kitaj, Paolozzi, everybody in the art world was there. It was a tiny group, not like now... And also Clifford and Rosemary Ellis. He came over, smoking his cigar, and asked: "Would you like to teach at the Bath Academy of Art?" It was the last thing I wanted, I had too many other things to do... But he insisted: "Why don't you come and visit us? I'll send the chauffeur over." Bath Academy at the time was in Lord Methuen's beautiful country house (Corsham Court), 30 peacocks running around, and I was put in the red room, and all that... and the students were lovely, and all was fantastic... so, of course, I conceded: "all right, but you have to buy a better proof press, futura typefaces in such and

such sizes, and I can't come normal times, I can only do blocks, because I do many things, I can come two weeks at the time, but then I can work from 10 in the morning to 10 at night..." They agreed to everything! Astonishing! So I started teaching on the 1st of January 1966. Wonderful place, nice people, incredible... We did so much work there...

Talking about Emmett Williams, Ann (Williams) was my student, at Bath Academy. She finished in 68 and then was my assistant, she helped me with the 68 catalogue, Robert Filliou, etc.

GGM It was another hotbed for Concrete poetry at the time, wasn't it?

HM Well, I got John Furnival to come and teach there, Tom Phillips stayed for a little while, and of course Dom Sylvester Houedard was nearby, and so on... We did this Concrete poetry portfolio that you also have, and I did another one with work by the students which Tate has now...

Typoems

GGM You published the folded poem 'Openingnisolc no.8' with Openings Press in 67. Did you work with Edward Wright on it?

HM I don't remember working on it with Edward, but we met a number of times, and I liked him very much, and his work, needless to say.

GGM There are two later books of your own work: 'Typoaktionen 2' (Pieter Brattinga, 1976) and 'Bis zum unfallen: just ice' (Hansjörg Mayer, 1987).

HM They relate to 60s projects. 'Typoaktionen 2' is based on the original one, I didn't have to do anything: Pieter Brattinga just blew up the pages of the 1967 typo action book, but only the ones which are not overprinted, so there are 26 sheets. He said he wanted to see them bigger... The original 'Typoaktionen' was published by Typos Verlag, using a photocomposition machine, with the super letters of the first alphabet, exposing each one randomly and blindly in a 13-minute action, and moving the film after each exposure. The result could only be seen after the film was developed. 'Bis zum umfallen' was an idea (some proofs still exist) from 1967, but I only printed the edition in 1987, after I had finished publishing Dieter Roth's books and had therefore more time.

GGM In your work, how do you see the visual aspects as opposed to the literary aspects? Did you write other things? Was your interest primarily graphical?

HM When I left the USA in 65, I went travelling in Mexico, staying with Mathias Goeritz for a long time, then went to Ecuador, Peru, Chile, etc., and ended up in Brasil, where I stayed with Haroldo de Campos for quite a long time, and he introduced me to the other Noigandres members. He coined the term “typoems” for the work I did. He wrote a little letter which was reproduced in the 68 catalogue: “A type is a type, a poem is a poem, but when a type is a poem, and a poem is a type, this type of this poem is a typoem (...)” What I was interested in was to reduce all the different elements to just type. It may not have words or semantic components, only visual, and sometimes also acoustic ones.

Futura

I created many portfolios and the whole of the ‘Futura’ series (1965-1968), where I worked mostly with typography. They often sent me text, asking: “How should we do this?” I would come up with an idea, send them the proofs: “Is that what you would like?”, and make any changes until they would say “yes”. Only then was it printed.

GGM How did you select the artists to work with?

HM That is a question which is so often asked, and it’s very simple: a lot of it is random. Random elements are there all the time... You meet somebody, more or less by chance, you actually like them or you don’t like them. There is no system, there is no pre-conceived idea of who and what, it was all just meeting somebody and just doing something with them.

GGM There is a ‘Futura’ that is handwritten...

HM Andre Thomkins (no. 25).

GGM ...breaking the rules, which I rather like, you have a structure and then you break it, or play beyond its limits; and there is another, I am not sure how to describe it, made of little squares...

HM That’s Peter Schmidt (no. 24). The last numbers already point to other directions, through ‘Futura’ no. 25, the handwritten one by Andre Thomkins, and no. 26, Robert Filliou, which you can fold into a hat.

GGM I am not familiar with that one, we don’t have it in the collection...

HM I am going to give you one straight away!
No way, if you don’t have that...

1968 and beyond

In 68 everything changes: my interests change, I concentrate much more on publishing works by others, away from strict letterpress printing, with offset printing coming in. When Andre, an old friend, came with his text, I told him “you have written this down so well, it’s a shame for me to set it, offset is coming, let’s just have it like that.” This is already pointing in another direction. Then comes brilliant Robert Filliou, with ‘Gallerie Legitime’, and what do we do? You can fold it up into a hat, like a painter’s hat... The end of an era, and from then on I worked with a lot of other artists.

One of the things that Bense did was to be a catalyst for collaboration already in the 50s. He was always saying: “came on, get on with it, mix, talk to each other...” The musician composes here, the artist works there, the literary world... all separated. And he really pulled people in, he said: I am your theoretical, philosophical centre here, come around me. He was a great catalyst.

GGM Collaboration seems a good idea, but successful collaboration is a rare thing, many collaborations are often boring or pointless or...

HM superficial... yes. Look at Dieter Roth and Richard Hamilton, that is great collaboration, incredible. Someone as dry as good old Richard, in a way, and this crazy Dieter Roth, fantastic stuff came out of it. That is what I call real collaboration... But I agree with you.

Future publications

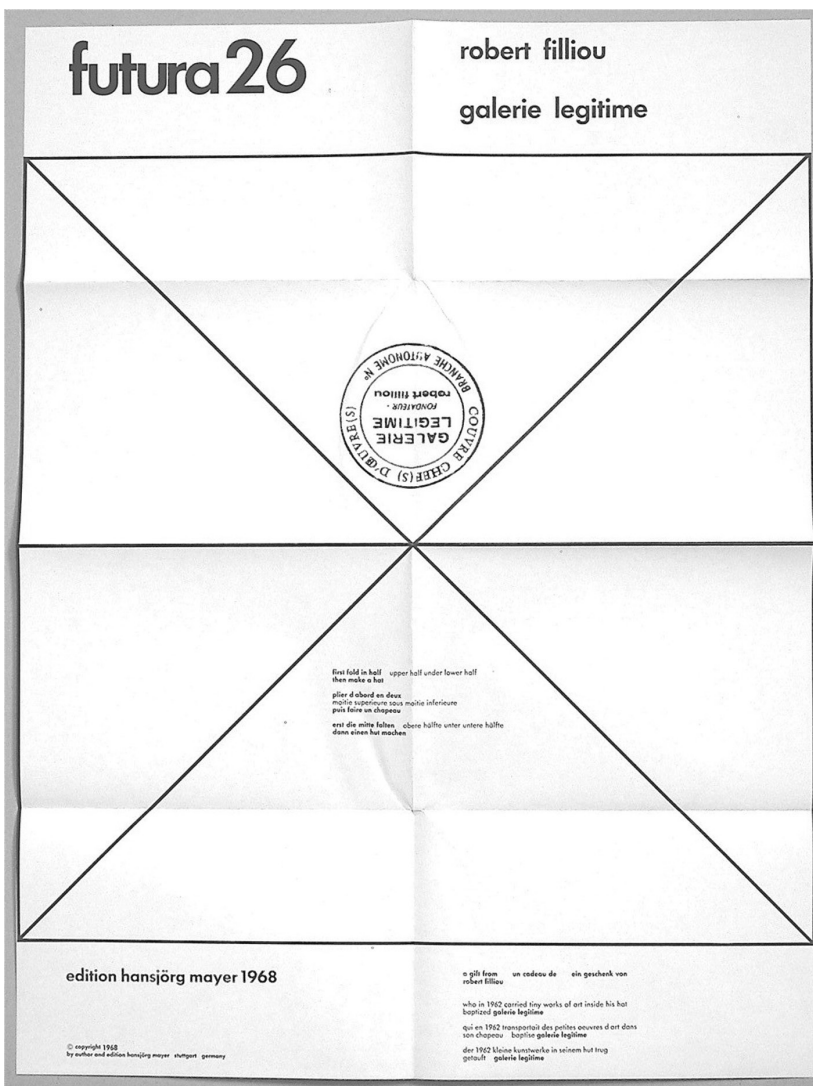
EVB How are you going to do your new publications?

HM They will be done in InDesign and printed offset. I will do the design, I have more or less done it all, but I will let someone who is 50 years younger and can do this in his sleep do the InDesign work.

In the first volume (“Typo”), there will be four different sections: the first is about images made by using various printing processes, the second will be the alphabets (the first alphabet, typo actions which used the super letters of the first alphabet as well as other projects which used them, and the last alphabet, which I am now going to follow through and finish according to plans from the sixties), the third will be typoems, where I show many aspects of that work, and the fourth is typographical interpretations of poems by others: the three portfolios, of which you have one, and the 26 Futuras (there are other things but I don’t want to overdo it).



'Futura' series on display at the Haags Gemeentemuseum in 1968. Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



'Futura 26' (1968). Image courtesy of Edition Hansjörg Mayer



EVB Do you still have an interest in contemporary publishing and are you aware of new experimental graphic design?

HM Well, I am not very knowledgeable, interested yes, but...

EVB I brought you a present: it's a book that we launched at the shop, a collaboration between an artist and a designer ('Hide' by Giorgio Sadotti and Fraser Muggeridge). It has been printed by Print on Demand. Are you familiar with that?

HM I am very interested in print on demand, I think it's a wonderful technique. We are thinking about doing some of Dieter Roth's diaries like that, with Walther König.

I have always been interested in having cheaply produced books, the opposite of the livre d'artiste, which really didn't interest me very much. I worked on some of them with Petersburg Press, to make money to finance the other stuff. My interest was always in artists' books produced simply, normal books, not for £100 but for £10 or less...

We sometimes made De Luxe editions, but only to help to finance it, because it was dire, often... you sold a hundred copies, maybe, for £5... It was tough!

GGM How many copies did you sell in a year, typically – a new Dieter Roth book, for instance?

HM The first three or four titles sold relatively a lot, because people like König would order 100, and then reorder 100... So there was a real movement, but then it slowed down a bit...

EVB Did you have subscriptions or anything like that?

HM No, but people knew about the new books. I always used to go to the Frankfurt Book Fair (for 50 years, no more now...) The old Book Fair was something else, now it is boring and nothing happens, but in the old days it was a fair where you sold books... The booksellers, the collectors, the museums... they came and actually bought! Now nobody comes to buy, it's all done with reps, etc. Well, I suppose we had some subscriptions with the Futuras, for a few people, but for Dieter Roth's 'Complete Works', they knew when new ones were coming out and just ordered them.

EVB So you have the 'Last Alphabet' to finish, have you got any other project beyond that?

HM No. That is an old project from 68, which I couldn't do (Dieter Roth being so enthusiastic about it... It would have taken a lot of time!) No, this is it.

EVB So no more publishing?

HM Well, I don't know, of course, having said that... At the moment I think not, but tomorrow I may think of something else...

Gustavo Grandal Montero is a librarian and special collections curator at Chelsea College of Art & Design and Camberwell College of Arts. Trained as an art historian, he writes and presents regularly on art and librarianship topics and has curated or co-curated a number of exhibitions and events. He was the recipient of the Art Libraries Society (ARLIS) UK & Ireland Travel & Study Fund Award 2010 for his research on the documentation of biennials and is a member of the AHRC-funded Transforming Artists' Books research network. He is Deputy Editor of the 'Art Libraries Journal'.

Recent publications: Foden-Lenahan, E., Grandal Montero, G., Hirata Tanaka, A.P. (2013) *Defending the aesthetic: the conservation of an artist's book. Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 38 no. 1, pp. 32-37.
Grandal Montero, G. (2012) *Kinkon biobib: life and work of Dom Sylvester Houédard*. In: Simpson, N. (ed.) *Notes from the Cosmic Typewriter*. London: Occasional Papers. Grandal Montero, G. (2012) *Artists' books in HE teaching and learning. The Blue Notebook*, vol. 7 no. 1, Oct., pp. 36-43.
Grandal Montero, G. (2012) *Biennialization?: the documentation of biennials and other recurrent exhibitions. Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 37 no. 1, pp. 13-23.

Chelsea College of Art & Design Library
University of the Arts London, 16 John Islip Street,
London SW1P 4JU, UK
g.grandal-montero@chelsea.arts.ac.uk

Eleanor Vonne Brown set up and runs X Marks the Bökship, a bookshop and project space for independent publishers in London, UK.
www.bokship.org