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CITY ARMS OR MUNICIPAL LOGO? THOUGHTS ON THE RELEVANCE OF AN INCONCLUSIVE DEBATE

Julia Meer

Does a city need a coat of arms? Wouldn't a logotype or 'logo', as familiar from the context of modern corporate branding, be more appropriate? This question is not one posed only in recent decades – at least not in Germany, where it was a topic of debate by the 1920s at the latest. It is hardly surprising that, to this day, the proponents of city arms and the advocates of logos have been unable to find common ground. The very subject matter being debated resists simple and succinct analysis. How, in fact, does a coat of arms differ from a logo? In the first place coats of arms – including those of cities and towns – gained currency far earlier than the logo, which has acquired relevance and visibility only in the last 100 years. Secondly, for a long time logos and coats of arms had distinct uses. Logos, associated with the trading context, were a means of lending products a certificate of provenance. A coat of arms, on the other hand, does not generally stand for a product but for a city, region, federal state or family; it is not directly linked to a commercial interest. Logos and coats of arms are thus deployed in different 'domains'.

Just how workable is this distinction, however? Both types of symbol are emblems of authority; they stand for and represent something. And legally, a logo now has the same status as a coat of arms; the use of either without permission may incur a penalty. It is also difficult, aesthetically speaking, to draw a hard and fast distinction between logos and coats of arms. A typical feature of heraldry is the arrangement of motifs within the shape of a shield, although exceptions abound, especially where an image came into being in times in which the original purpose of the coat of arms as a wartime banner had become superfluous. Indeed city coats of arms are very often derived from earlier, not strictly heraldic, city seals.¹ Another distinction that could be mooted is that, unlike arms, the logo is not tied to a particular repertory or canon of motifs. Its form is therefore freer. The stylistic idiom of logos appears at first glance to be more reduced, often to the point of abstraction. There are nonetheless many logos – particularly those created in the first half of the twentieth century – that hark back to the aesthetic of classic heraldry. Nor are coats of arms free of stylization. The Japanese 'mon', after all, is a decidedly abstract heraldic emblem; and even in European heraldry realistic or naturalistic depiction tends to be eschewed in favour of stylised images.

The two forms of visual identity are basically very similar, and it is not as easy as one might expect to find robust criteria for making a clear distinction between them. Yet the rival claims of coats of arms and city logos are keenly debated, even today.

¹ See Milan Buben, *Heraldik* (Prague 1987), p.128.

THE COAT OF ARMS

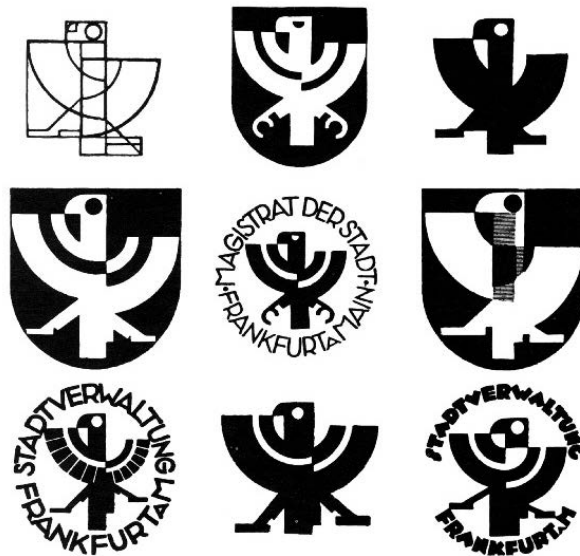


Figure 1: Hans Leistikow, designs for an emblem for Frankfurt am Main, 1924. Illustrated in Bernd Häußler, *Wappen, Fahnen, Siegel. Zeichen der Frankfurter Stadthoheit in 7 Jahrhunderten* (Frankfurt am Main 1981).

Why should this be? Is there popular perception of a sharp dichotomy? A groundless perception it may be, but if so, why does it persist? Using an historical example, this essay will probe the central arguments within and attitudes to the question in the title, and explore the extent to which they were admissible in the past or remain so today.²

The debate in the 1920s and '30s: the case of Wuppertal

The 1920s saw several cities start to use heraldic designs or logos that departed from the trusted aesthetic previously relied on. Prominent examples include Hans Leistikow's eagle for the city of Frankfurt (see **Figure 1**), the Hanover clover leaf by Kurt Schwitters (**Figure 2**) and Johannes Molzahn's seal for Magdeburg (**Figure 3**). These logos are, from a modern lay perspective, 'heraldic' in the very broadest sense. In aesthetic terms they are much sparser than the 'classical' coat of arms; yet they draw

² Throughout, this article uses the terms 'coat of arms' and 'arms' in reference only to strictly heraldic compositions based on a shield, although many of the participants in the debates discussed here deployed the German equivalents *Wappen* and *Stadtwappen* more loosely. The term 'logo' (*Marke* or *Logo*) is used here to refer to marks, emblems or symbols that do not meet this definition of a coat of arms, though they may well (as the article explains) draw on the repertory of heraldic charges; the terms 'mark', 'emblem' and 'symbol' are themselves used as neutral options. Any mark used in trade is a 'trade mark'; one consisting entirely or almost entirely of words may also be called a 'word mark'. The word 'brand' (also *Marke* in German) is used to refer to the entire marketing context of communication and connotation in which a trade mark sits.



Figure 2 (left): Kurt Schwitters, clover leaf symbol for Hanover on the program booklet of the Städtische Bühnen Hannover, Opernhaus, 1929. Sammlung der Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.



Figure 3 (right): Johannes Molzahn, emblem for the City of Magdeburg, 1925. Illustrated in C. Antz et al. (edd.), *Neues Bauen Neues Leben. Die 20er Jahre in Magdeburg* (Munich 2000), p. 150.

on the heraldic canon for their motifs, and frequently – in cases where they are placed on a shield – for their external form too. Despite this, the newly created logos were at times subject to harsh criticism.

Contemporary critics drew a clear line between the two types of image, although, as indicated at the outset, the crossover between logo and coat of arms was becoming ever more fluid. They did not lay down any definition, but it is clear that their criticism was directed against any departure from the customary heraldic aesthetic. In their view, a coat of arms had to be represented in accordance with a particular, traditionally heraldic style. This is evident for instance in the discussion of the design for the city of Wuppertal, which we will now look at in detail.

In 1930-1 the city of Wuppertal invited at least six designers to submit proposals for a new city emblem or coat of arms.³ Today the largest city in the *Bergisches Land*, Wuppertal had been created by the unification of the towns of Elberfeld and Barmen in 1929.⁴ The designers invited to tender their propos-

³ The text of the invitation to tender designs has not survived, but in contemporary newspaper articles the exercise is variously described as a search for a *Wahrzeichen* ('emblem') or *Stadt-wappen* ('city coat of arms').

⁴ The three smaller surrounding towns of Cronenberg, Ronsdorf and Vohwinkel were also incorporated in the new city.

THE COAT OF ARMS



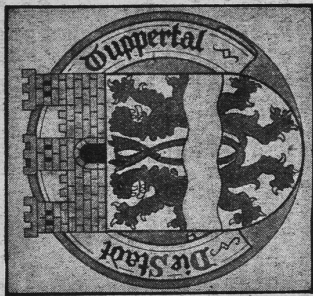
Figure 4: The arms of the city of Elberfeld, showing the ‘Bergisch lion’ (*queue-forchée* but uncrowned) supporting the gridiron on which St Laurence was martyred. Decorative carving on the exterior of the Elberfeld Stadthalle (now the Historische Stadthalle, Wuppertal), 1896-1900.

als were therefore confronted with the task not of reworking an existing design, but of creating a new one with which both elements could identify. Almost all the resulting designs featured some version of the ‘Bergisch lion’, the red lion, often crowned with a blue crown, and often *queue-forchée*, deriving from the arms of the medieval County of Berg and seen to this day in the shields of many municipalities within the *Land*. It had been an element of the arms of both Elberfeld and Barmen, in the former case bearing the gridiron of St Laurence (see **Figure 4**), in the latter with a bundle of yarn. The dual character of the new city’s origins gave rise to specific issues. Many proposals showed both lions – but this approach raised several further questions. Which lion should take precedence? Did placing them back-to-back make them look as if they were on bad terms? Would this impression be avoided by having them face each other? But do they then look as if they are fighting over the gridiron and bundle of yarn?⁵ Several designers avoided the issue by merging the lions into one animal, preserving the divided tail as a symbol of duality (see **Figure 5**).

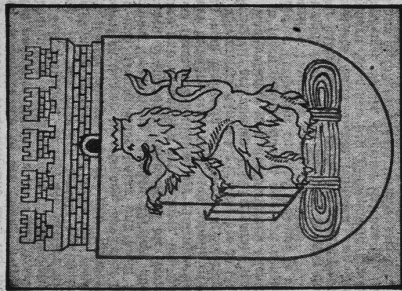
⁵ See ‘Auf der Suche nach einem neuen Wuppertaler Stadtwappen’, *Bergisch Märkische Zeitung*, 16 April 1931; ‘Kampf mit dem Löwen’, *Generalanzeiger*, 18 April 1931.

Sollten auf der Liste des *Millierium*s (wahrscheinlich zusammengeführt vom Reichsanwalt Dr. Meißler) keine Namen von solchen Schriftstellern gefunden haben, die eine Gewähr für ein besseres Resultat boten, als es unsere Mitteilungen erkennen lassen? Was hier ausstünde kam, ich doch zum Teil recht schwächlich gefaselt worden, wenn es nicht gar zu unabweislicher Komik Anlaß gibt. Barium wurde a. B. nicht Prof. G. u. p. mit herangezogen, der den Ruf eines der bedeutendsten Gelehrter Deutschlands erhielt!

Modern füllt, die Löwen in tänzerischer Stellung, Garnsträhne und Laurentiusroß haltend, hintereinander angeordnet. Das Ganze allzu modisch und zu wenig dem Ernst der Sache angepaßt.



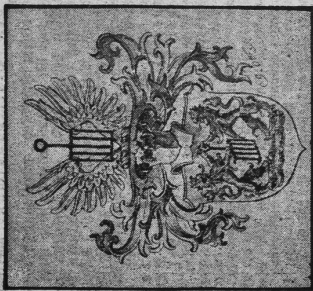
2. Entwurf von G. Ab. Glos-Werlin.
Die roten Löwen, Rüden an Rücken,
durchschnitten vom blauen Bande der
Wupper. Die Kreiseinfassung kompliziert
das Bild.



3. Entwurf von W. Dietrich-Eberfeld
Einzelbüche mit den Attributen beider
Städte, Wappenstein mit Mauerkrone.
Nachtträglich vorgelegter Entwurf.



4. Entwurf v. Wolfgang Pagenstecher.
Düsseldorf.



5. **Entwurf von Georg Otto-Verlin.** Die Löwen, das Wahrsprechen, derselbe, den Hohl in dem Plauen, auf dem Warmer Garthhübel stehend. Das Wappenschild von reicher Helmszier umgeben. Goldfärbende Aufsatzung, die für Zwerggarthhübel, Prand usw. zu kombinieren ist.

Figure 5: 'Weitere Entwürfe für das Wahrzeichen Wuppertals' ('Further submissions for the Wuppertal Emblem'). *Generalanzeiger der Stadt Wuppertal*, 15 April, 1931; Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.

THE COAT OF ARMS

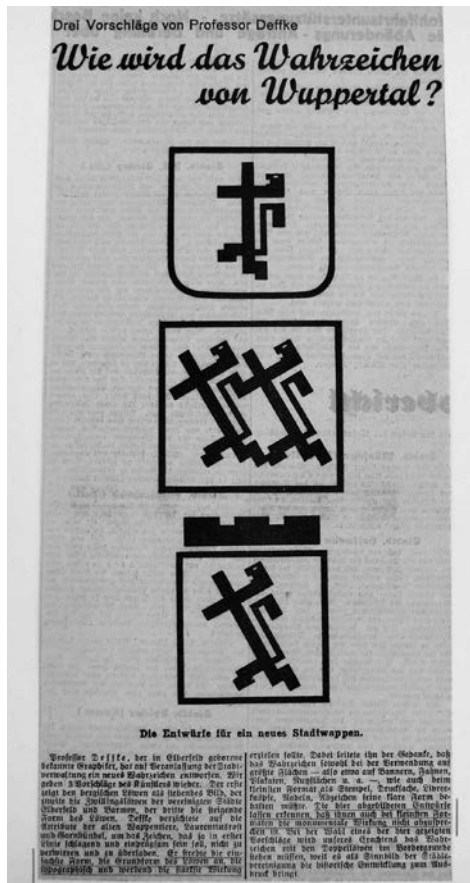
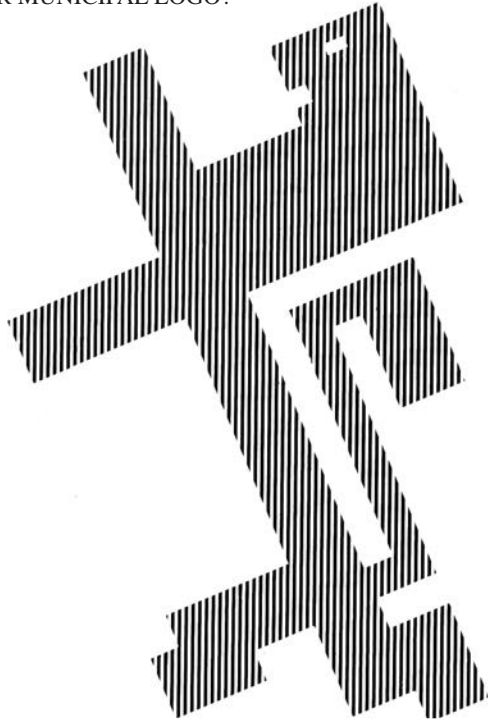


Figure 6: Wilhelm Deffke, selection of designs for an emblem for the City of Wuppertal, 1930/31. Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.

Among the designers who submitted entries in response to the invitation was Wilhelm Deffke. Born and trained in Wuppertal itself, Deffke was at the time a teacher at the Magdeburg Handwerker- und Kunstgewerbeschule. His initial submission consisted of three of the most geometric and stylistically reduced designs (see **Figure 6**); between 1930 and 1932 he provided more than 80 further variations (see **Figure 7** and **Plate 1**).⁶ As with the other designers' work, most of these feature as the central motif the 'Bergisch' lion, shown once or twice. His lion consists of oblongs and squares within a circular, square or shield-like frame. In most cases, a suggestion of the Christian cross is discernible but Deffke avoids other attributes or elements from the established heraldic repertoire. Another designer to submit a draft with the form of the lion reduced to a geometric design was Ernst Aufseeser – though admittedly his entry was considerably more complex than Deffke's and, moreover, included the fa-

⁶ More detailed information on Wilhelm Deffke can be found in the collaborative volume edited by the Bröhan Design Foundation, *Wilhelm Deffke. Pioneer of the Modern Logo* (Zurich 2014).

Figure 7: Wilhelm Deffke, design for emblem for the City of Wuppertal, 1930/31. Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.



miliar attributes of the gridiron and yarn. Other designers' ideas adhered more closely to the tried and tested form of a city coat of arms, not only in content but also in style.

Comments on the submissions in the Wuppertal press were plentiful, affording us prime examples of the different positions and arguments within the debate.⁷ Some aspects of the discussion reflect specificities of the locality and period. The majority of the commentary, however, was concerned with general questions of more than purely local relevance, making the Wuppertal debate comparable with the furore surrounding Leistikow's eagle for the city of Frankfurt, and even with wrangles on similar issues today.

Abstraction and readability

From today's point of view, Deffke's designs seem gloriously heraldic; yet at the time the unaccustomed degree of abstraction met with dismay. What was criticised above all was the loss of 'readability' resulting from the abstract rendering. It was maintained that classic heraldic imagery was intelligible to everyone, whilst this (more) conceptual style was not. The press had scoffed at Leistikow's eagle, likening it to a 'plucked sparrow' (*gerupfter Spatz*). Faced with Deffke's lion, they puzzled as to whether it was a 'barking dog' (*bellender Hund*), a 'prancing circus horse' (*ein spring-lebendiges Zirkuspferd*) or a 'hobbyhorse' (*Steckenpferd*).⁸ 'Unfortunately it

⁷ The newspaper articles quoted and illustrated are from cuttings preserved in the estate of Wilhelm Deffke housed at the Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.

⁸ 'Auf der Suche nach dem Wuppertaler Stadtwappen', *Freie Presse*, 16 April 1931.

has to be said that most observers fall into a deep quandary and, after several hours of the most assiduous search for sense or meaning, give up trying to understand solve the puzzle.⁹ The lack of readability appears, too, from the fact that in at least one place the drafts were printed the wrong way round.¹⁰ Ernst Aufseeser's design, which, along with Deffke's was the only submission to deviate from traditional heraldic style, also provoked irony. One reader offered a re-interpretation: noting the resemblance between Aufseeser's abstract version of a gridiron and a music stand, he gave the lion of Barmen a saxophone rather than a hank of yarn and made a quip about the 'merry jazz-lion' (*fidelen Jazzlöwen*: see **Figure 8**).¹¹

Alongside this ironic commentary, the contemporary debate also included some explicit complaints, such as the accusation of elitism. 'A precondition for a city coat of arms must above all be that its artistic and symbolic form should be intelligible, not only to the intellectual elite, but also to the majority of lay persons.'¹² No doubt municipal coats of arms at that time were more recognisable, since their devices were better known. But were they in fact 'more intelligible'?

⁹ 'Da müssen wir leider feststellen, daß der größte Teil der Beschauer erst in ein großes Rätselraten verfällt und nach einigen Stunden eifrigsten Suchens nach Sinn und Bedeutung aufhört, das schwierige Bilderrätsel zu lösen.' Ibid.

¹⁰ 'Auf der Suche nach einem neuen Wuppertaler Stadtwappen' (note 5 above).

¹¹ 'Kampf mit dem Löwen' (note 5 above).

¹² 'Voraussetzung auch eines Stadtwappens muß vor allem sein, daß es in seiner künstlerischen und symbolischen Form nicht nur vom überdurchschnittlich denkenden Menschen, sondern auch von einem sehr großen Teil der breiten Laienmasse verstanden wird.' 'Auf der Suche nach dem Wuppertaler Stadtwappen' (note 8 above).

Figure 8: 'Kampf mit dem Löwen' ('Struggle with the Lion'), *Generalanzeiger der Stadt Wuppertal*, 18 April 1931. Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.



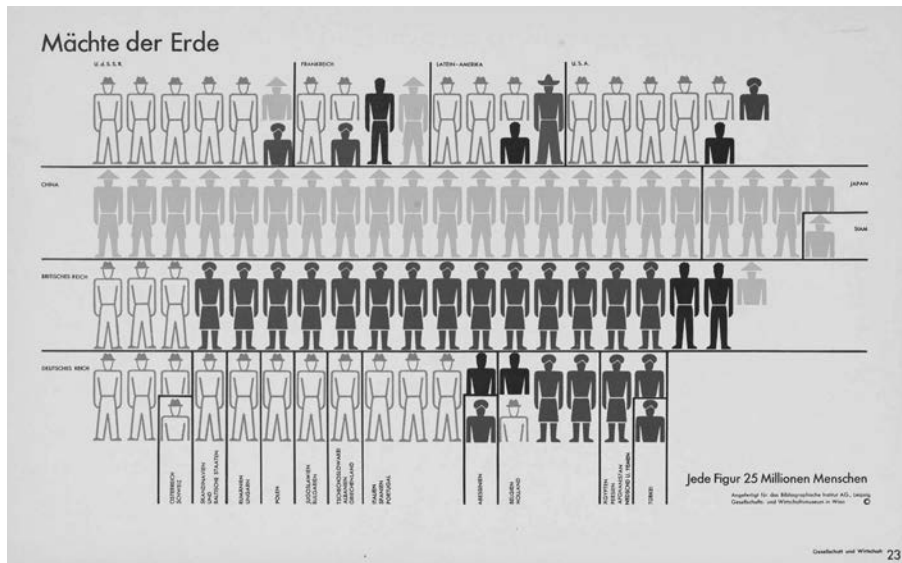


Figure 9: Marie und Otto Neurath with Gerd Arntz: ISOTYPE-Grafik ‘Mächte der Erde’ (‘The Powers of the Earth’), illustrated in Otto Neurath (ed.), *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* (1930). Österreichisches Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum.

Unmediated intelligibility?

A slight detour here will aid a better grasp of the problem of intelligibility. How are symbols invested with meaning? How do signs become readable? Designers – including those of the 1920s – have always dreamt of the possibility of creating universal and directly intelligible symbols. The search for the universal and the elementary was a characteristic of the works of the Constructivists, Theo van Doesburg’s *De Stijl* movement and the Bauhaus, and is found in the texts of Kurt Schwitters and Jan Tschichold. Wilhelm Deffke himself also made attempts to achieve a standardized, reduced system of imagery.¹³ One of the best known and longest lasting projects of this time is probably the ISOTYPE System (International System of Typographic Picture Education) developed by Marie Reidemeister, Otto Neurath and Gerd Arntz. The stereotypical figures and symbols developed for educational and museum purposes were an early form of what are today known as pictograms (see **Figure 9**). They were designed for the Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum (*GeWiMu*) in Vienna with

¹³ Deffke put forward some ideas on a *Grammatik der Formensprache* (‘Grammar of the language of images’), using for instance photographs of fish skeletons, which were then sketched in order to establish basic forms. Documents relating to the *Grammatik der Formensprache* are in the collections of Northwestern University, Evanston: Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, MS 169. Cited by Christoph Janik, ‘Why a Deffke trademark? Deffke’s logos 1934-1950’, in *Wilhelm Deffke. Pioneer of the Modern Logo* (note 6 above), pp. 178–99, at 198 note 64.

THE COAT OF ARMS



Figure 10: unknown designer, pictogram indicating public lavatory, 1960s to present.

the aim of educating, and thereby emancipating, the population – including those who could not read. Complex content needed to be interpreted through consistent info-graphics.

The premise of the capacity of signs for general and instantaneous intelligibility, which underlies ISOTYPE and several other avant-garde works, ill sits with today's theories on the way in which signs function.¹⁴ Signs are not directly understood at first sight. We must first learn how to interpret their meaning. Even a simple sign, such as one indicating the lavatory (see **Figure 10**), requires many things to be learned before it can function as an indicator. The observer must recognise that the silhouettes are abstract representations of people, and that an abstract figure refers to the amenity of a lavatory. This is in no way an obvious conclusion to draw; neither a lavatory nor the activity that takes place there is depicted (both being subject to cultural taboo). The viewer must also understand that women – represented in this communication system as wearers of skirts or dresses – and men do not use the same lavatory and that one must therefore be on the lookout for a symbol depicting the abstract version of the human being of one's own biological sex. Even simple signs are thus not immediately and generally intelligible. Their meaning must first be learnt.

Hence, in the debate over coat of arms *versus* logo, traditional heraldic aesthetics are scarcely *per se* 'more readable'. People were certainly accustomed to them, but one cannot maintain that coats of arms were intelligible to all. Their interpretation also requires background knowledge and a particular set of interpretation skills. Fewer people have these skills today. Indeed, the commentators cited above would surely be obliged by their own reasoning to advocate municipal use of non-heraldic logos. At least these are easily understandable by the 'majority of lay persons'. The online collection www.stadtlogo-design.de has a plethora of initials, silhouettes of cities and outlines of regions, stylised rivers, lakes, waves or mountains and some strongly abstract architectural emblems. All of them can be 'deciphered' without much background knowledge: they are, in short, 'readable'.

¹⁴ Also needed is some critical discussion of the stereotyping necessarily introduced by the ISOTYPE figures ('This is how a worker looks, this is how a Chinese person looks'). Neither image nor sign, as the avant-garde would have us believe, convey 'pure' information; both are normative in nature.

The complex and the specific

Today's defenders of traditional city arms often indict logos of this kind with 'arbitrariness'. By this they mean that the motifs they deploy are not sufficiently specific; that one symbol could just as well serve another city. How justified is this reproach? It rings true to some extent; after all, there are many cities and towns near lakes or rivers. But are coats of arms any more specific than logos? As a matter of historical fact the principle of heraldic uniqueness – at least where city arms were concerned – was not realized even within one *Land*.¹⁵ Lions, horses and bears proliferate as they have always done. One has to look closely to discern the differences, especially given the overall sense of uniformity imposed by the shared shield-shaped frame. Complexity and detail do allow the introduction of difference – a complementary attribute or a colour difference, for instance. So complexity allows for specificity. But does this mean that complexity is a precondition for specificity?

Far from it. The Coca-Cola word mark stands for much more than a drink, and the apple with a bite taken out of it signifies much more than a range of I.T. devices. Successful logos evoke in the beholder's mind an entire palette of products, as well as the lifestyle that is linked to the products, values, and often even the history of the company – in other words, a 'brand'. Even abstract or simplified forms such as the apple can acquire complex meanings. It is therefore entirely possible to create simple and yet specific city logos. Visual complexity is not needed for complex, and hence specific, meaning.

How do symbols become intelligible?

These simple symbols, then, may demand of their audiences visual literacy of a high degree – and of a different kind from that required for coats of arms. Heraldic design adheres to clear rules; items in the heraldic repertory have fixed meanings. The 'decoding' of coats of arms can thus be learned by consulting a text book or manual. If one knows the rules one can decode not just one but all coats of arms. Logo design, on the other hand, does not adhere to clear rules. It is true that many logos use familiar shapes with a significance (such as the apple – which brings to mind the tree of knowledge). Additionally, a company-specific meaning can be bestowed on a symbol through the placing of logos in certain textual and visual contexts. The logo is invested, or 'inscribed', with meaning through a 'learning process' fostered by advertising campaigns showing the product, complete with logo, being consumed or employed by particular social groups, or by marketing material conveying information about the 'philosophy' and manufacturing ethos behind the products. These types of communication tell us – more or less explicitly – what the symbol stands for. Visual, textual and social contextualisation ascribes meaning to the symbol.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Buben, *Heraldik* (note 1 above), p. 128.

¹⁶ See for instance Madeleine Akrich, 'User representations: practices, methods and sociology', in Arie Rip, Thomas J. Misa and Johan Schot (edd.), *Managing Technology in Society. The Approach of Constructive Technology Assessment* (London and New York, 1995), pp. 167–84. Consumers also play a decisive role in this process, which cannot be entirely 'controlled' by the company; cf. the case of Harley Davidson, p. 13 below.

Flexibility and permanence

The meaning of symbols is thus ‘performative’, and remains to some extent flexible. Deffke’s critics were conscious of this. The abstract style in iconography was simply a passing fad, they argued, advising that care be taken in evaluating whether Deffke’s ideas were sufficiently timeless.¹⁷ The style of Art Nouveau was an example of how quickly tastes could change; to espouse this once highly popular, cutting-edge aesthetic would now be an embarrassment, they maintained. A city needed to choose a manner of representation that transcended fashion: the style should be a tried and tested one. A city coat of arms was not changed each decade, ‘like a trade mark’.¹⁸

We need a timeless, historical and culturally familiar style for something like the arms of the city of Wuppertal, something that will not cause us to regret our choice in the future! And that style is what historical heraldry offers – only by adhering to its principles and rules can we address the question of a coat of arms!¹⁹

These critics saw traditional heraldic aesthetics as immutable. But the contemporary debate shows that the connotations of arms was not fixed. The associations evoked by traditional heraldic aesthetics ranged from ‘timeless grandeur’ (*zeitloser Würde*) to ‘reactionary’ (*reaktionär*) and ‘authoritarian’ (*autoritär*) character.²⁰ So coats of arms, too, are ‘performative’ symbols.²¹

This question of ‘Flexibility or permanence?’ was highly relevant to the contemporary debate, and it is worth making a second short excursus to explore the relationship between the two concepts. We have already established that the meaning of symbols is ‘inscribed’ only through communication and contextualisation. But it is not enough for that meaning to be inscribed in a symbol just once. It must be consistently communicated, since according to the ‘learning process’ described above, the signifi-

¹⁷ See ‘Auf der Suche nach einem neuen Wuppertaler Stadtwappen’ (note 5 above).

¹⁸ ›... wie eine Fabrikmarke.« ‘Auf der Suche nach dem Wuppertaler Stadtwappen’ (note 8 above).

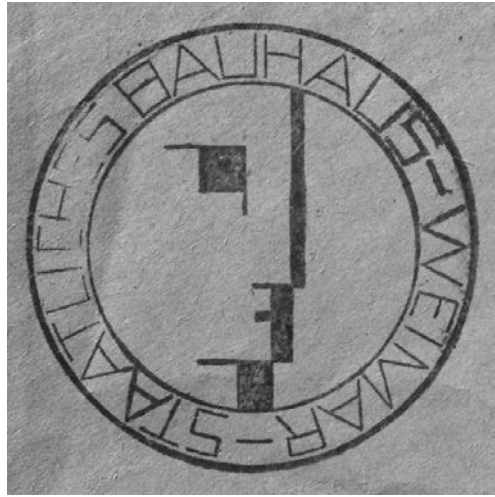
¹⁹ ›Wir bedürfen für Dinge, wie ein Wappen der Stadt Wuppertal, eines zeitlosen und historisch gewordenen und in der Kulturwelt anerkannten Stils, der uns spätere Reue erspart! Diesen Stil bietet uns die historische Heraldik und nur nach ihren Grundsätzen und Gesetzen kann die Wappenfrage gelöst werden!« ‘Zur Erhaltung der Heraldik’, in *Generalanzeiger*, 24 April 1931. The author himself admits that this is about ‘more than that: it is about the preservation of heraldry as something that doesn’t belong in the junk room! Namely because it incorporates a noble science and an art; because public places should be exemplary in their effect! – This is about the preservation of values!’ (›noch um anderes: um die Erhaltung der Heraldik als solcher, die nicht in die Rumpelkammer gehört! Deshalb nicht, weil sie eine edle Wissenschaft und eine Kunst in sich enthält, weil öffentliche Stellen beispielgebend wirken müssen! – Es geht um die Erhaltung von Werten!«) It is obvious here that the question does not revolve around taste, but that in the guise of critical discussion of a designed product, social and at times political issues are being negotiated.

²⁰ See Paul Boeddinghaus, ‘Zur Erhaltung der Heraldik’, in *Generalanzeiger*, 24 April 1931; ‘Das neue Wahrzeichen Wuppertals’, in *Städtischer Anzeiger*, 11 April 1931.

²¹ On this essential character of heraldry see for instance the Münster University research project led by Torsten Hiltmann, ‘Die Performanz der Wappen’, at heraldica.hypotheses.org/category/projects/the-performance-of-coats-of-arms-torsten-hiltmann/the-history-of-heraldic-communication (accessed 14 April 2016).

CITY ARMS OR MUNICIPAL LOGO?

Figure 11: Oskar Schlemmer,
Logotype for the Bauhaus, 1922.
Collection of Bernd Freese.



cance of symbols is to a certain extent flexible. The changeability of logos is not in any way a disadvantage, but is part and parcel of a broader ‘permanence’ denied by contemporary critics. Brands and products can be given a new ‘image’ without having to give up their logos. Levi’s is one example, the Citroën 2CV another.²² Levi’s changed from a worker’s brand to a lifestyle brand; the Citroën 2CV from a means of transporting agricultural products (at the end of the 1940s) to a family car (1970s) and today is almost an emblem of the comfortably off *bourgeoisie*. These image changes result from a shift of context, something which may be achieved through advertising campaigns or indeed through the behaviour of users. The Harley Davidson brand is a well-known example of this often overlooked or undervalued influence of users. The ‘outlaw myth’, which is of such importance to the brand, was bestowed on the motorcycles not by the proprietors of the trade mark but by the people who bought the product. Some were Hell’s Angels, and the relative preponderance of the bikes in that context had an effect on the image of the brand, further enforced by the film *Easy Rider*. For a long time, the trade mark owners made efforts to distance themselves from this image (a very positive one for sales, as it transpired) by marketing golf-mobiles and three-wheel vehicles and depicting leafy suburbs in their advertising campaigns.²³ It was all in vain.

Another example of the changeability of the meaning of brands is the second official Bauhaus seal (see **Figure 11**). In 1921, Oskar Schlemmer created the design that has remained fairly stable ever since. Its meaning however has consistently evolved, and the profile head has both a pre-history and a chequered history of reception. It was apparently inspired by the 1908 drawing ‘Maiglöckchenkopf’

²² See Douglas Holt and Douglas Cameron, *Cultural Strategy. Using Innovative Ideologies to Build Breakthrough Brands* (Oxford 2010), pp. 314-36, and Penny Sparke, *A Century of Car Design* (London 2002), pp. 102-5.

²³ See Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands become Icons. The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston 2004), pp. 186f.

(‘Lily-of-the-valley Head’) by Otto Meyer-Amden, a teacher and long-time friend of Schlemmer. The drawing has been interpreted as an engagement with the processes of consciousness; Meyer-Amden was at the time grappling with the artistic and psychological basis of the processes of creation and perception. He was concerned with the inner feelings of the artist and viewer, as well as the question of whether his sensibilities and those of the viewer were in accord.²⁴ Meyer-Amden wrote of his work that it was ‘an organic composition of elements that subsequently begin to work as an independent image, such as a flower might do’.²⁵ He was right, albeit for reasons he did not foresee. Schlemmer adapted the image in 1913 for a poster for the Neue Kunstverein in Stuttgart and in 1921, again slightly changed in shape, it appeared on a pamphlet published by the Bauhaus entitled *Europäische Druckgraphik* (‘European Graphic Art’).²⁶ In 1922 the head was finally adopted as the Bauhaus insignia, again slightly altered. The early phases of the image are interesting in that they suggest that its meaning was far more complex and evocative for Schlemmer than the one commonly associated with it. The abstract head, composed of basic geometric shapes, is widely understood as a symbol of the arrival of industrial production at the Bauhaus – this is, at any rate, the explanation given in the audio guide at the Bauhaus Museum in Weimar.²⁷ There we learn that the first Bauhaus seal, designed in 1919 by Karl-Peter Röhl, the ‘little star-shaped man’ (*Sternenmännchen*: see **Figure 12**) stood for diversity, equal opportunity and open-mindedness (*Vielfalt, Chancengleichheit, Weltoffenheit*); the change to the Schlemmer head coincided with the change of the Bauhaus ideology and signalled the new fostering of industrial production and the unity of art and technology.

A brief note, which may be taken as expressing Schlemmer’s own concept of the symbol, indicates that he would agree only in part with this interpretation. The note certainly invokes such ideas as *Simplexität* (‘simplicity’), *Schlichtheit* (‘frugality’), *Bau und Mensch* (‘building and man’), *Idealtyp* (‘ideal type’), *offizielle Haltung eines Staatsinstituts* (‘official attitude of a state institution’). But it also uses turns of phrase that apparently run counter to the general interpretation of the symbol, such as *Kühnheit des Inneren* (‘inner daring’), *Vornehmheit* (‘refinement’), and *Verinnerlichung des »Styl«-Typ* (‘internalization of the “Style” character’, i.e. mere decoration), while also bidding *Gruß an OM* (‘Greetings to O[tto] M[eyer-Amden]’).²⁸

²⁴ See Andreas Meier, ‘Der Maiglöckchen-Kopf und die Organik der Bildblume – Zur Beziehung von Willi Baumeister und Otto Meyer-Amden’, in *Otto Meyer Amden – Begegnungen mit Oskar Schlemmer, Willi Baumeister, Hermann Huber und anderen Künstlern* (Kunstmuseum Bern, Bentli Verlag Bern 1985), pp. 65–81 at 75.

²⁵ »eine Organik von Bildelementen, die in sich selber, nachdem sie geschaffen ist, selbstständig zu arbeiten beginnt, wie beispielsweise eine Blume«. See Carlo Huber, *Otto Meyer-Amden* (Wabern-Bern 1968), p. 113.

²⁶ The Maiglöckchenkopf and design for the art association appear in Magdalena Droste, ‘Der Kopf als Erfolgsdesign – Oskar Schlemmers Bauhaus-Kopf’, in *Modell Bauhaus* (exhibition catalogue, Berlin 2009), p. 129; Ead., ‘Die Mappe Europäische Druckgraphik’, in Ute Brünig (ed.), *Das A und O des Bauhauses* (exhibition catalogue, Berlin 1995), p. 91.

²⁷ Bauhaus Museum Weimar audio guide, 2014.

²⁸ Note dated 1921, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, estate of Oskar Schlemmer.

CITY ARMS OR MUNICIPAL LOGO?

Figure 12: Karl-Peter Röhl,
Logotype for the Bauhaus, 1919.
Collection of Bernd Freese.



It is in no way wrong to see the Schlemmer head as the expression of a change in the relationship of the Bauhaus to industrial production, but this is only one side of the story. For Schlemmer, the head had many more facets. In the transition to the status of a logo, with a public role, its meaning underwent a sort of abbreviation or even intensification, in which the public itself played a central role. There is a brief phase in which meaning is co-produced or negotiated by designers and audience together. Accordingly the Schlemmer head has two modes of meaning: the individual, subjective one and the generally accepted one.

This analysis corresponds with the theories of Hans Domizlaff, an early theorist on the subject of brands, who wrote in the 1940s that brands come about in the psyche of the masses.²⁹ According to Domizlaff it was only in the numerous intersections of individual, subjective meanings that the essence of the brand (*Markenkern*) was formed. This essence in turn influences individual, subjective perceptions, so that it is further reinforced, to the exclusion of non-essential aspects. The process can be observed, for instance, in encyclopaedia entries under the headword 'Bauhaus', which at first reflected many varied aspects of the Bauhaus, but in the post-war reception have been narrowed down to 'Gropius', 'Dessau', 'architecture' and a few other key elements.³⁰

In the Dessau und Berlin Bauhaus establishments, under Hannes Meyer and Mies van der Rohe, the Schlemmer head was used to stamp documents and in 1937 László Moholy-Nagy adopted it for the New Bauhaus in Chicago. Since the late 1970s, the Bauhaus archive has used it for certifying licensed editions of Bauhaus products. The head has thus preserved its close links with the Bauhaus movement. Things took an unexpected turn in the 1980s, however. The English post-punk 'goth rock'

²⁹ See Hans Domizlaff, *Die Gewinnung des öffentlichen Vertrauens – Ein Lehrbuch der Markentechnik* (1st edn., Hamburg 1939; 7th, Hamburg 2005).

³⁰ Many thanks to Juliane Köhler for her research in the volumes of the *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* and *Meyers Lexikon* from 1919 to the present day.

band Bauhaus (originally formed in Northampton in 1978 under the name 'Bauhaus 1919') made use of the profile head on its record covers, in conscious reference to the art school and its collective work ethic. Partly through this wider dissemination, the name 'Bauhaus' and Schlemmer's profile head have taken on a new lease of life, with very different meanings in different social groups. Hairdressers, cafés, bookshops and companies currently display the logo, while companies and organizations using the Bauhaus name include breweries, a solar energy convention, an investment bank, and Christian associations.

These examples emphasize that the meaning of brands is flexible and malleable. They show moreover that the meaning of brands is not tied to specific aesthetics. One cannot therefore exempt traditional heraldic aesthetics – as cited above – from this flexibility. In fact some contributors to the debate in the 1930s were already suggesting as much. One was the senior librarian, Wolfgang van der Briele. He did not plead for the abolition of heraldry. Instead he stressed 'that heraldry was not a science with hard and fast rules [...], rather it would remain fluid, as an element of artistic design.'³¹ 'Over the course of centuries,' he claimed, 'heraldry has undergone many changes. Every age has its own idiosyncratic forms and so too our present world requires a shaping of the new emblem that is proper to itself.'³² The statement shows that van der Briele, unlike many critics, did not conflate heraldry with a specific aesthetic style. Richart Reiche, curator of the Barmen Art Association, agreed, saying that one must 'meet a present-day challenge by using the idiom of contemporary man. [...] A coat of arms as an insignia of the modern city could be realised only through the medium of graphic art.'³³ Both therefore spoke in favour of Deffke's proposals, which they saw as the successful marriage of heraldry and modern iconography. A similar view was indicated by the remark of the *Städtischer Anzeiger* that 'the basic heraldic form of the Bergisch lion has been happily rendered in the economy of this stylisation'.³⁴

Seen in this light, the debate over coat of arms *versus* logo would seem to be obsolete. In the 1930s, the discussion about the aesthetics of the new Wuppertal emblem was at least partly based on a false dichotomy that equated heraldry with a specific aesthetic. To the extent that it focussed on aesthetics or style, the debate was therefore superfluous. Heraldry is not in fact bound to a specific style, but is mutable. Since the logos that manage to impose themselves on the market in the long run are precisely

³¹ ›... daß die Heraldik keine Wissenschaft mit feststehenden Gesetzen sei ..., sondern daß sie als Gegenstand künstlerischer Gestaltung fließend bliebe.« 'Der Bergische Geschichtsverein zum Löwenwappen', in *Generalanzeiger*, 21 April 1931.

³² ›Im Laufe der Jahrhunderte viele Wandlungen durchgemacht. Jede Zeit habe ihre eigentümlichen Formen, und so verlange auch unser heutiges Leben eine ihm entsprechende Formgebung des neuen Wahrzeichens.« Ibid.

³³ ›... eine uns von der Gegenwart gestellte Aufgabe auch im Sinne der Gegenwartsmenschen lösen... Ein Wappen als Hoheitszeichen der modernen Großstadt könne nur mit den Mitteln der Graphik gestaltet werden.« Ibid.

³⁴ ›Die heraldische Grundform des bergischen Löwen scheint bei aller Knappheit der Stilisierung in glücklicher Weise getroffen.« 'Das neue Wahrzeichen Wuppertals', in *Städtischer Anzeiger* (note 20 above).

the ones with flexible ‘images’, one might even maintain that to deviate from the traditional heraldic aesthetic is a precondition for the survival of heraldry.

The search for an appropriate form

In fact, some authors were convinced of the absolute necessity of the aesthetic turn. They perceived it as ‘grotesque to give the coat of arms of a modern city the forms of a past era, to mire it in clothing that harked back to Gothic, Romanesque or some other outworn apparel.’³⁵ According to one commentator,

The frilly figure of the Bergisch lion, exemplifying a fundamentally sedate mentality, is no longer suited to the spirit of our times. That spirit seeks something monumental, distinct, with the promotional character a municipal coat of arms needs in this day and age – but something that also embodies our aspiring city and the hard, unemotional character of its industrial production.³⁶

Heraldic attributes, in short, would be ‘an anachronistic adornment for today’s tastes’.³⁷ These points of view recall the theories of the architect Erich Mendelsohn, progressive for his time, who found ornamentation on building façades gratuitous, reasoning that modern man in his car travels at too great a speed to notice details. Mendelsohn designed houses with vertical banks of windows and rounded corners, in keeping with the modern sense of mobility and the modes of perception that came with it. A similar argument was promulgated shortly after the turn of the century by many graphic designers regarding posters and advertisements. They used minimal colours and surfaces and forsook decorative elements. In 1914 Carl Ernst Hinfefuss had already described ‘brevity of content’ (*sachliche Kürze*) as an ‘obvious choice’ and the mark of successful publicity. Advertising consultant Ernst Growald advised: ‘Do not launch into a novel in your billboard advertising. No-one wants to stand on the street getting cold feet.’³⁸

Gottfried Montenbruck, then a teacher at the school of applied arts in Elberfeld, took a particularly progressive view on the debate surrounding the emblem of Wup-

³⁵ ›... eine Groteske, dem Stadtwappen einer modernen Großstadt die Formen einer vergangenen Zeit zu geben, es in den Stilformen der gotischen, der romanischen oder sonst einer abgeschlossenen Zeit zu halten.‹ Hermann Deffke, ‘Der Alte und der neue Geist’, in *Freie Presse*, 29 April 1931.

³⁶ ›Unsere Zeit empfindet nicht mehr die verschnörkelte Gestalt, die eine in geruhssamer Breite lebende Epoche dem bergischen Löwen gab, als ihrer Art entsprechend. Sie sucht das Monumentale, klar ausgeprägte, das zugleich den werbenden Charakter hat, dessen ein Stadtwappen heute bedarf, außerdem aber dem Wesen unserer emporstrebenden Stadt mit der Härte und Kühle seiner Maschinenarbeit besonders entspricht.‹ ‘Das neue Wahrzeichen Wuppertals’ (note 34 above); cf. ‘Wuppertals neues Stadtwappen’, in *Barmer Zeitung*, 11 April 1931.

³⁷ ›... dem heutigen Geschmack etwas anachronistisch anmutende[s] Beiwerk.‹ ‘Das neue Wahrzeichen Wuppertals’ (note 20 above).

³⁸ ›Erzähle auf den Plakaten keinen Roman, denn niemand will sich auf der Straße kalte Füße holen.‹ Carl Ernst Hinfefuss, ‘Selbstverständliches über Werbedrucksachen’, *Werbedrucke* s. 1, 1914; reprinted in Carl Ernst Hinfefuss, *10 Jahre Deutsche Werbe-Graphik* (Berlin 1923), pp. 93f. Ernst Growald, quoted in Jörg Meissner (ed.), *Strategien der Werbekunst 1850–1933* (exhibition catalogue, Berlin 2004), p. 201.

pertal, questioning even the necessity of including the Bergisch lion in the symbol and saying that animals in arms were an outdated idea.

Let's remember the way in which city coats of arms came about. A local lord ... would grant municipal rights to a community within his territory: these would be ordinances and privileges to assure monetary gain and promote prosperity, fair market conditions and the like. In return, the new town would be suffered to pay their most gracious lord significant dues and, lest it forget its indebtedness, the town coat of arms would display its founder's heraldic beast.³⁹

Montenbruck thought it wrong to hark back to such times, adding 'Sensibly, the authority that presided over questions of rank, title and coats of arms was dissolved back in 1919. What does a modern town or city seal have to do with the heraldic customs of past times? Nothing.'⁴⁰

Thereafter, arguments for a modernized emblem were informed by the view that the classic city coat of arms was old-fashioned, both aesthetically and in contemporary social and political terms. Arms, at least in their classic form, were not up to the job of representing a modern city and, moreover, gave inhabitants nothing to identify with. A new aesthetic was demanded, along with a new understanding of the city symbol. 'The town seal is a signet, a mark for use in business.'⁴¹ Accordingly strategies for its use should borrow from the ideas of marketing and corporate branding. In many places, a policy was adopted of deploying the city arms consistently and uniformly on all media, thus heightening its profile. 'The emblem [should] retain its unambiguous form whether used in large formats, – banners, flags, posters, communal areas, etc., – or in small format stamps, printed matter, livery buttons, pins and badges'.⁴² Simple or strongly abstract forms were especially good at fulfilling this requirement, since they were recognisable and legible even in reduced dimensions. There are numerous examples demonstrating that Deffke had considered and tested his designs with such applications in mind (see **Figure 13** and **Plate 2**). A particularly striking example is his design for a gigantic banner (see **Plate 3**).

The blurring of the boundaries between 'town' and 'business' seen repeatedly in the comments quoted above provoked some irritation. This reaction might be regard-

³⁹ ›Erinnern wir uns doch einmal, wie jene Stadtwappen entstanden sind. Ein Landesherr ... erteilte einem Gemeinwesen in seinem Hoheitsgebiet Stadtrechte, d.h. einige einträgliche Privilegien, die den Wohlstand förderten, die Marktgerechtigkeit und dergleichen. Dafür aber durfte die neue Stadt dem gnädigen Landesherrn in dankbarer Erinnerung kräftige Abgaben leisten und bekam, damit sie das nicht vergaß, das Wappentier ihres Gründers in ihr stolzes Stadtwappen hereingesetzt.‹ Gottfried Montenbruck, 'Zwo Knaben gingen durch das Korn', in *Städtischer Anzeiger*, 21 April 1931.

⁴⁰ ›Was hat das Stadtsiegel einer modernen Stadt noch mit der Heraldik vergangener Zeiten – das Heroldsamt ist vernünftigerweise schon 1919 aufgelöst – zu tun? Garnichts.‹ Ibid.

⁴¹ ›Das Stadtsiegel ist ein Signet, ein Geschäftszeichen.‹ Ibid.

⁴² ›[Das] Wahrzeichen [müsse] sowohl bei der Verwendung auf größten Flächen – also etwa auf Bannern, Fahnen, Plakaten, Nutzflächen u.a. –, wie auch beim kleinsten Format als Stempel, Drucksache, Livreeknöpfe, Nadeln, Abzeichen seine klare Form behalten.‹ Anon., 'Wie wird das Wahrzeichen von Wuppertal?', in *Generalanzeiger*, 10 April 1931.

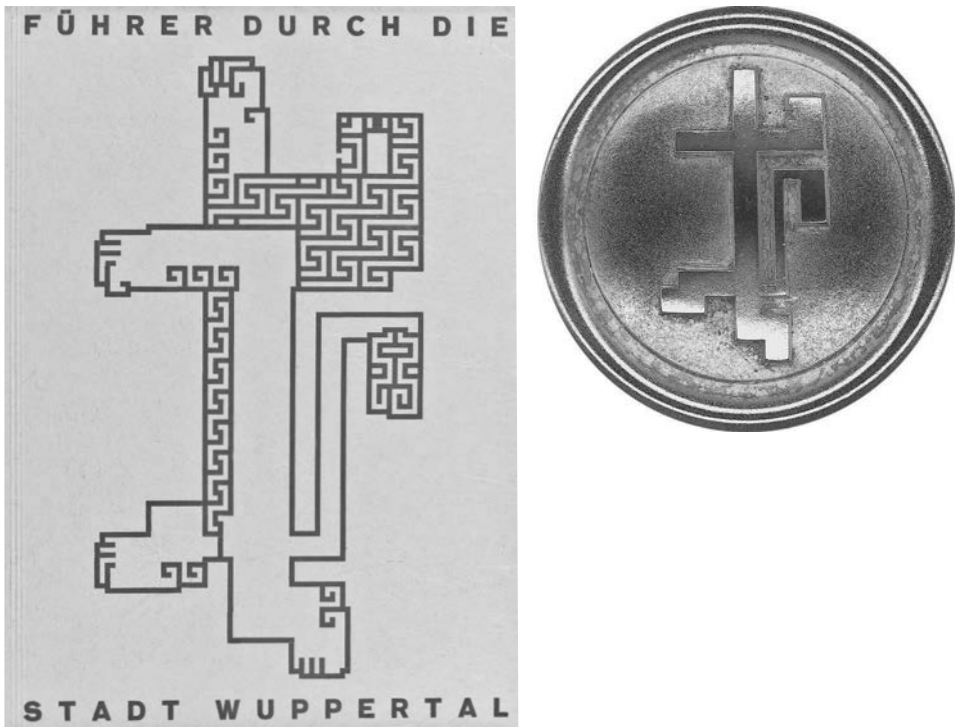


Figure 13: left (a), Wilhelm Deffke, design for the cover of a guide to the city of Wuppertal; right (b), official seal for the city. Both 1930/31.

Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin

ed as unjustified, since coats or arms were themselves intimately linked to economic interests, as Gottfried Montenbruck had rightly said. Nevertheless, such mistrust points to the key issue of the debate, both then and now: the question of what a city symbol actually represents; the question, to put it another way, of what, and who, the town is. The ‘coat of arms *versus* logo’ debate must therefore be carried out not with respect to aesthetics, but to content.

What is the purpose of a city logo?

It has to be said that many of today’s city symbols resemble logos used to market holiday destinations or the trade marks of pharmaceutical or other manufacturing businesses. Rather than criticise aesthetics, however, one should ask whether this style perhaps reflects the motivation to introduce a logo in place of a coat of arms. Is the city logo in fact designed to express the attractiveness of the city for tourists, companies and investors, or even enhance it? Does the symbol (or its performance) aim solely to attract? If this is the purpose, the symbol is in the service of business interests rather than those of the population. Today, marketing experts know that brands do not just face outwards; they also create an ‘inward’ identity, enabling employees

THE COAT OF ARMS

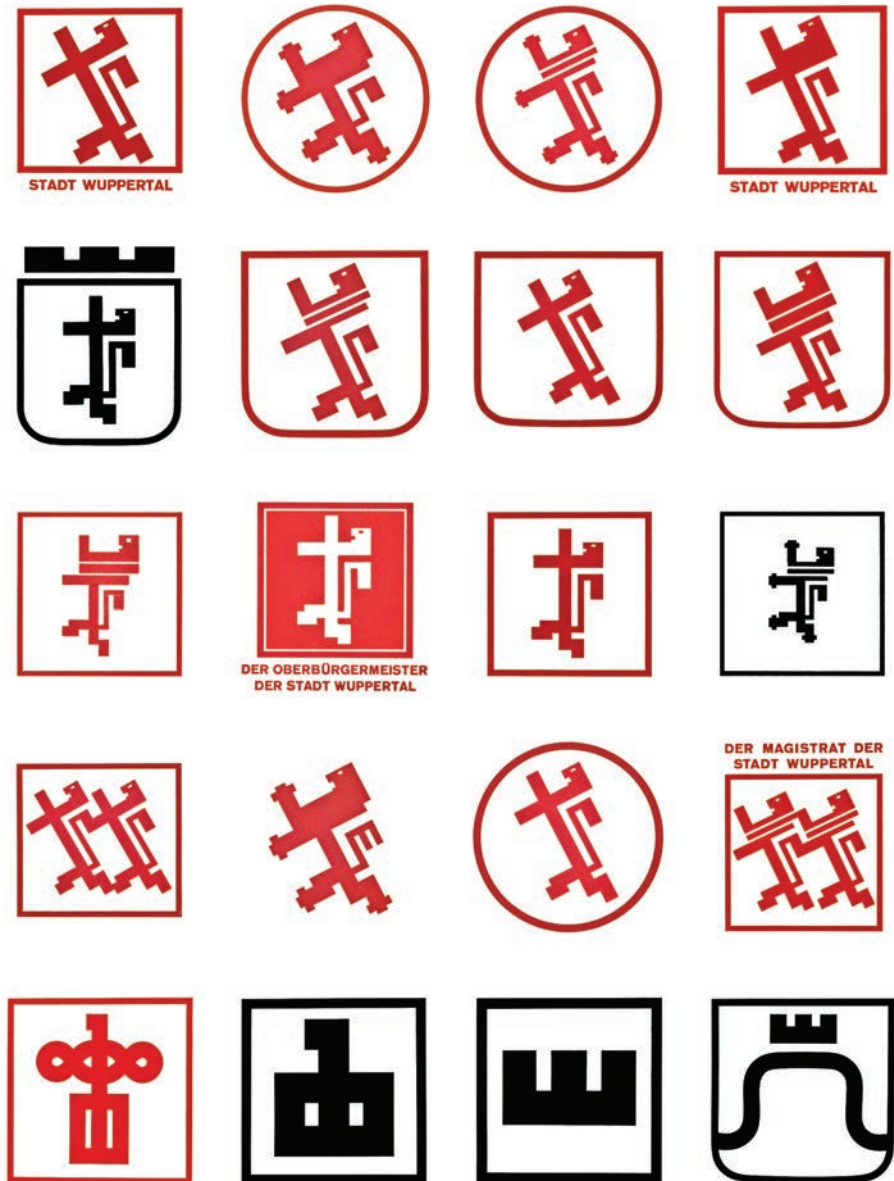
to identify with the company. The same should (and can) be true of a city symbol. To ignore the inward-facing aspect is to overlook an important part of what a city symbol has to do.

One approach to resolving this problem of multiple requirements was made some years ago in Wuppertal itself, through recourse to a word mark and a flexible approach to corporate design. Institutions, companies and people could choose an adjective to be used in combination with the tagline *Keiner wie wir* ('none like us') for printed letterheads, stickers, posters and the like: 'Creative – None like us', 'Tradition-conscious – None like us', 'Lively – None like us', 'Entrepreneur-friendly – None like us', 'Offbeat – None like us', '*Bergisch* – None like us'.⁴³ In this way, the city logo might show the various interests and attitudes of residents, entrepreneurs and others. It would invite people to identify with and relate to it. Although this idea was enthusiastically welcomed, it did not become part of the city's official corporate design policy. The progressive solution was rejected – a repeat, it might be felt, of the episode when Wilhelm Deffke's progressive approach was rejected in the 1920s, at a time when other cities were moving away from the established form of the municipal coat of arms, and in directions such as those mentioned at the beginning of this essay. On that occasion it was the clearly more traditional designs of Wolfgang Pagenstecher that were implemented (see **Plate 4**).

Was this decision the 'right' one? Journalists were mostly in favour of Deffke, but whether their opinions were representative of the inhabitants of Wuppertal is uncertain. But the support expressed in the newspapers is decisive in answering the question of whether the decision was correct. Whether heraldic or not, a municipal emblem requires the acceptance of the population in order to be regarded as successful. That this is neither a matter of a specific aesthetics, nor something that can exist from the outset, has been demonstrated above. A symbol needs to have meaning given to it, and it needs that meaning to be communicated. Without 'performance', a symbol cannot function. The point of the 'coat of arms *or* logo' debate should therefore be not to pit one against the other, but rather to analyse the process by which *any* symbol becomes a city symbol.

⁴³ www.wuppertal-keinerwiewir.de/Kampagne/ (accessed 14 April 2016).

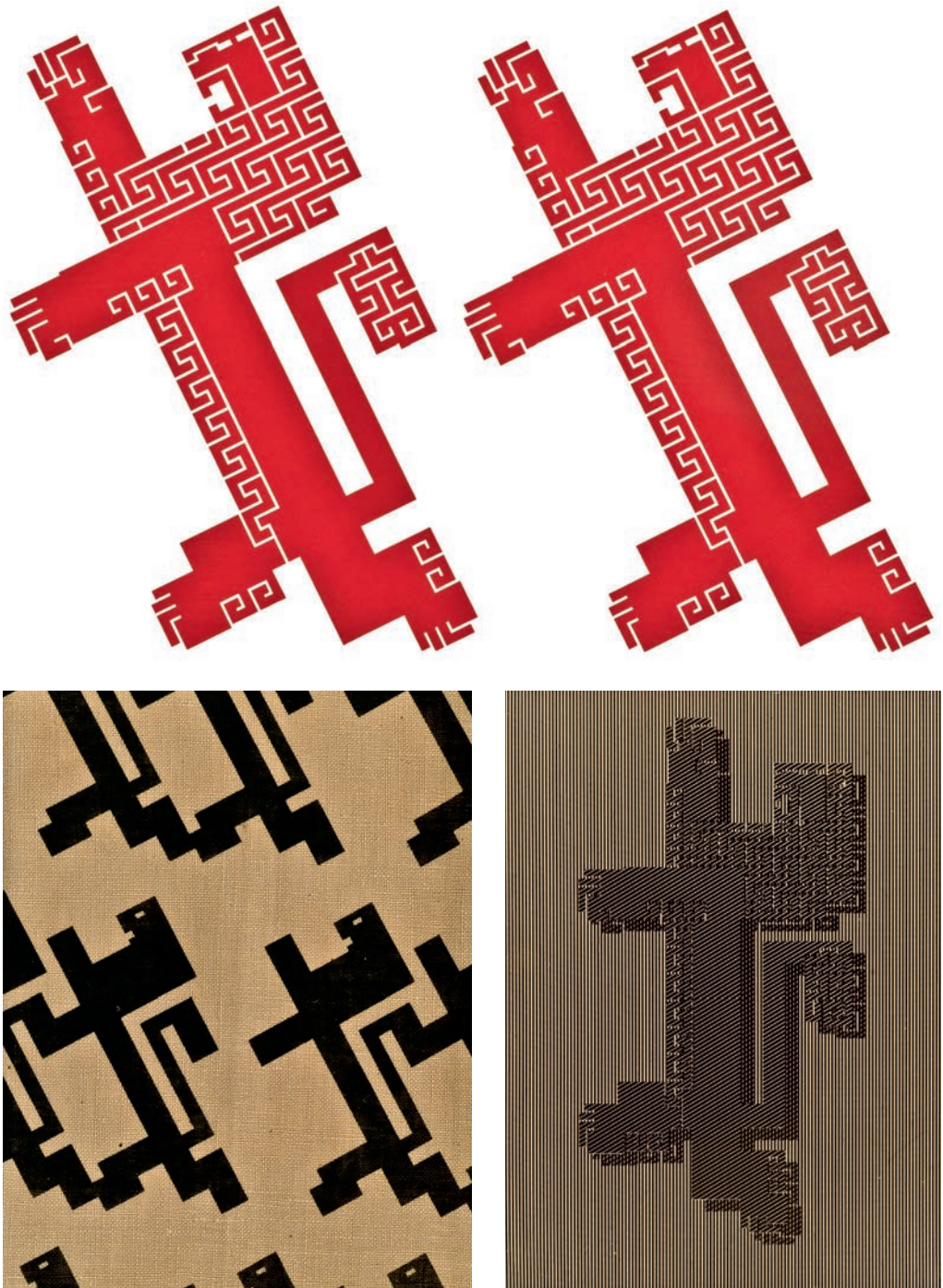
PLATE 1



Wilhelm Deffke, selection of designs for an emblem for the city of Wuppertal. 1930/31. *See page 6.*

Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.

PLATE 2



Wilhelm Deffke, variations on proposed emblem for the City of Wuppertal, including (bottom left) use as fabric design, 1930/31. *See page 18.*

Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.

PLATE 3



Wilhelm Deffke, design for flag with proposed emblem for the City of Wuppertal, 1930/31. *See page 18.*

Nachlass Wilhelm Deffke, Bröhan Design Foundation, Berlin.



Wolfgang Pagenstecher, accepted design for coat of arms for the City of Wuppertal, 1934. See page 20.

Stadtarchiv Wuppertal.