Timetables

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If we peruse the timetables of the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich (Zurich School of Arts and Crafts)—specifically the Fachschule für Graphische Kunst (Specialist School for Graphic Art)—from the 1910s and 1920s, we can get an idea of the institutional changes that took place. We can also assess the orientation of the curriculum depending on the different types of design on offer, and the amount and complexity of information provided.

In the summer semester of 1912, Alfred Altherr was elected the new director of the Kunstgewerbeschule and Kunstgewerbemuseum Zürich (Zurich Museum of Arts and Crafts). He arrived after a rather turbulent period under his predecessor Jules de Praetere.1 The latter had managed to transform the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich into a place of progressive learning and design in an extremely conservative environment, but had then resigned owing to difficulties with the authorities and tradespeople regarding the teaching program.2 Altherr abandoned the strict design principles established by his predecessor, which had entailed the rejection of historical stylistic forms,3 the promotion of geometry-based design, and a minimum of ornamentation as part and parcel of a uniform style.

He decided to adopt a different approach. He represented a moderate Modernism in which historical and contemporary stylistic elements were combined in a convincing manner, and he insisted on taking two design principles into consideration, namely the suitability of materials and their practicality.4 In his opinion, arts and crafts training should be brought closer to craftsmanship again—away from “artistic” and “kitsch” products.5 He wanted a “workshop school”6 aimed at training skilled craftsmen who would develop connections with local trades, and who might eventually develop into artists, depending on their predisposition.7 Altherr’s attitude did not come about by chance. In 1913, he was a co-founder of the Schweizerischer Werkbund (SWB), an organization that emerged out of the Arts & Crafts Movement. The SWB obstinately strove for “the refinement of commercial work in the interaction of art, industry and craftsmanship through education, enlightenment and statements on practical artistic and economic questions” (die Veredelung der gewerblichen Arbeit im Zusammenwirken von Kunst, Industrie und Handwerk durch Erziehung, Aufklärung und Stellungnahme zu künstlerisch und volkswirtschaftlichen praktischen Fragen).8 The needs of industry played an important role. “The Arts & Crafts Movement is busy adapting, but is deprived of its socio-critical motivation.”9 The Werkbund thus subjected its ideals to the interests of economic policy. The emergence of new materials, the mass production of industrial goods, and the associated changes in aesthetics and tastes had led to a shift in the arts and crafts professions.10

With subjects such as lithography, bookbinding, typesetting, letterpress printing, decorative painting, and nature studies, the Fachschule für Graphische Kunst in Altherr’s opinion lacked the necessary links to applied practice and industrial needs.11 [Fig. 100] To remedy this, he began hiring craftsmen as assistant teachers from 1913 onwards, with the intention of updating and modernizing subjects such as lithography/stone printing (taught by Ferdinand Tieg). Moreover, subjects such as xylography (taught by Heinrich Scheu) were added to the curriculum. [Fig. 101] These subjects taught visual consolidation and abstraction skills that were indispensable for industrial printing and advertising.

Visually, however, the most significant change in the timetables can be seen in 1916, when the Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich was integrated into the general Gewerbeschule Zürich (vocational school) and managed as an Arts and Crafts Department. [Fig. 102] Through this integration, the various Fachschulen of the Arts and Crafts Department were expanded and gradually restructured. In the summer of 1920, both the workshop for letterpress...
printing and typesetting and the workshop for bookbinding were separated from the Fachschule für Graphische Kunst, and run as two independent Fachschulen. Owing to its pronounced focus on the subject of lithography, the Fachschule für Graphische Kunst was renamed the Fachschule für Lithographen und Graphiker. [Fig. 104]

This integration into the vocational school was intended on the one hand to eliminate the separation between arts and crafts and craftsmanship, and on the other to reduce the enormous costs incurred by the workshop facilities. Altherr soon realized that an emphasis on craftsmanship alone without any artistic input would be insufficient to ensure the future of design. He found the solution by dividing the teaching staff into three sections: the technically and artistically trained Fachlehrer (subject teacher), the Werkmeister (master craftsman), and the freischaffende Künstler-Lehrer (freelance “artist-teacher”). At the Fachschule für Graphische Kunst, the illustrator and painter Ernst Schlatter and the painter Ernst Würtlenberger [Fig. 102] fulfilled those requirements as artist-teachers from 1916 onwards, and they were joined in 1919 by the graphic artist and illustrator Hermann Fischer. [Fig. 103] As of the winter semester of 1920, the existing subjects were taught by new teachers who were more closely connected to graphic design practice. The book designer and lettering artist, Fritz Helmuth Ehmcke, from Munich, was made head of the Fachschule, and the poster artist Otto Baumberger was put in charge of architecture and landscape drawing; one year later, he was also assigned applied commercial graphics. [Fig. 104] In 1921, the sculptor and poster artist Ernst Keller took charge of the Fachschule when Ehmcke took up an appointment in Munich. Keller introduced the new subjects of figurative drawing and illustration, the former being taught by the painter Wilhelm Hummel, the latter by Otto Lüssi. [Fig. 105] By appointing these personalities, Director Altherr promoted both artistic processes in design and a higher degree of creative professionalism in implementation.

1 Jules de Praetere went on reorganizing the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule Basel in 1915. See “Teaching Material,” in the present volume.
2 See Budliger 1978: 87.
3 The break with Historicism and Jugendstil.
4 See Budliger 1978: 105.
5 Altherr 1916a: 6; Altherr 1916b: 14.
7 See Altherr 1915: 3.
8 Zumstein 2013a: 63.
11 Industrial companies that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century faced strong competition. In consequence, there was a pronounced need for information and advertising in order to cope with faltering sales. During this period, Swiss graphic design experienced a boom, especially due to the high quality of advertising posters by artists such as Emil Cardinaux, Hans Sandreuter, Robert Hardmeier, Burkhard Mangold, and Otto Baumberger.
12 See Altherr 1920b: 15; Kunstgewerbeschule der Stadt Zürich 1912.
13 See Altherr 1920b: 118; Altherr 1924: 3.
14 See Gewerbeschule Zürich 1921.
Fig. 100  Timetable for the 1912 summer semester, training workshops, Kunstgewerbeschule der Stadt Zürich, 1912.
Fig. 101 Timetable for the 1913–1914 winter semester, training workshops, Kunstgewerbeschule der Stadt Zürich, 1913.
Fig. 102 Timetable for the 1916 summer semester, IV. Arts and Crafts Department, workshops and specialist courses, Gewerbeschule Zürich, 1916.
Fig. 103  Timetable for the 1919–1920 winter semester, IV. Arts and Crafts Department, workshops and specialist courses, Gewerbeschule Zürich, 1919.
Fig. 104  Timetable for the 1920–1921 winter semester, IV. Arts and Crafts Department, workshops and specialist courses, Gewerbeschule Zürich, 1920.
Fig. 105   Timetable for the 1921–1922 winter semester, IV. Arts and Crafts Department, workshops and specialist courses, Gewerbeschule Zürich, 1921.