

Tschichold; Excerpts from "The Neue Typographie" 1928

internally necessary for him.⁹ The painter can thus use realist or abstract form, or whatever medium is necessary in order to articulate his inner world. This principle led Kandinsky himself to engage with different media through his career, sometimes combining several in one work. Given the range of art forms which could be brought to bear in a stage piece such as *The Yellow Sound*, the script for which was included in *The Blue Rider*, we might be right to conclude that this is the sort of work Kandinsky had in mind when writing of the monumental art. However, it is also evident that Kandinsky thought of other projects as based upon the same principle, and the art historian Peter Vergo has described *The Blue Rider* itself as 'a 'synthetic' publication aimed at forging a link between different art forms ... Poets, musicians, painters and critics all contributed.'¹⁰

"Point and Line to Plane" (Wassily Kandinsky)

The difference between architects and artists is that architects, by nature of their profession, are NOT required to turn themselves inside out. Sol Lewitt in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" spells out, the distinction in part: Architecture and three-dimensional art are of completely opposite natures. The former is concerned with making an area with a specific function. Architecture, whether it is a work of art or not, must be utilitarian or else fail completely. Art is not utilitarian. When three-dimensional art starts to take on some of the characteristics, such as forming utilitarian areas, it weakens its function as art. When the viewer is dwarfed by the larger size of a piece this domination emphasizes the physical and emotive power of the form at the expense of losing the idea of the piece.

On the other hand there are numerous examples, e.g., Baroque movement (at the time when artists were architects, and architects were artists), Zen garden and teahouse (as the Oriental tradition never distinguished the difference between art and craft), which blur the distinction between art and architecture. And architecture, as any profession, performed to its excellence achieves a state of art.

Introduction

"The 'form' of the New Typography is also a spiritual expression of our world-view. It is necessary therefore first of all to learn how to understand its principles, if one wishes to judge them correctly or oneself design within their spirit." (7)

"The illustrations in this book, with few exceptions examples of practical work, prove that the concepts of the New Typography,

in use, allow us for the first time to meet the demands of our age for purity, clarity, fitness for purpose, and totality." (ibid.)

"Modern man, whose vision of the world is collective-total, no longer individual-specialist, needs no special reminder of the rightness of being closely aware of such related activities as modern painting and photography. I therefore thought it desirable to say something more about this new way of viewing our world, in which our spiritual conception of the new forms are linked with the whole range of human activity." (8)

Modern man has to absorb every day a mass of printed matter which, whether he has asked for it or not, is delivered through his letter-box or confronts him everywhere out of doors. At first, today's printing differed from that of previous times less in form than in quantity. But as the quantity increased, the "form" also began to change: the speed with which the modern consumer of printing has to absorb it means that the form of printing also must adapt itself to the conditions of modern life. As a rule we no longer read quietly line by line, but glance quickly over the whole, and only if our interest is awakened do we study it in detail. (p. 64)

b) The old typography (1440-1914), retrospective view and criticism:

"Aldus Manutius was the first to recognize that printed books had a character of their own and were different from manuscripts. Aldus can therefore be seen as the beginner of the new typographic age in book design; Gutenberg by comparison was more imitator of medieval manuscripts." (18)

"It is essential to realize today that the 'forms' we need to express our modern world can never be found in the work of a single personality and its 'private language'. Such solutions are impossible because they are based on a false, purely superficial grasp of the nature of form. The domination of a culture by the private design-concepts of a few 'prominent' individuals, in other words and artistic dictatorship, cannot be accepted." (28)

"Only anonymity in the elements we use and the application of laws transcending self combined with the giving up of personal vanity (up till now falsely called 'personality') in favour of pure design assures the emergence of a general, collective culture which will encompass all expressions of life -including typography." (28/29)

Growth and Nature of the New Typography

a) The new world view:

"Construction is the basis of all organic and organized form: the structure and form of a rose are no less logical than the construction of a racing car -both appeal to us for the ultimate economy and precision. Thus the striving for purity of form is the common denominator of all endeavour that has set itself the aim of rebuilding our life and forms of expression. In every individual activity we recognize the single way, the goal: Unity of Life!" (13)

"Typography too must now make itself part of all the other fields of creativity. The purpose of this book is to show these connections and explain their consequences, to state clearly the principles of typography, and to demand the creation of a contemporary style." (ibid.)

It was left to our age to achieve a lively focus on the problem of "form" or design. While up to now form was considered as something external, a product of the "artistic imagination" (Haeckel even imputed such "artistic intentions" to nature in his *Art Forms in Nature*), today we have moved considerably closer to the recognition of its essence through the renewed study of nature and more especially to technology (which is only a kind of second nature). Both nature and technology teach us that "form" is not independent, but grows out of function (purpose), out of the materials used (organic or technical), and out of how they are used. This was how the marvellous forms of nature and the equally marvellous forms of technology originated. (p. 65)

The essence of the New Typography is clarity. This puts it into deliberate opposition to the old typography whose aim was "beauty" and whose clarity did not attain the high level we require today. This utmost clarity is necessary today because of the manifold claims for our attention made by the extraordinary amount of print, which demands the greatest economy of expression. (p. 66)

The New Typography is distinguished from the old by the fact that its first objective is to develop its visible form out of the functions of the text. It is essential to give pure and direct expression to the contents of whatever is printed: just as in the works of technology and nature, "form" must be created out of function. Only then can we achieve a typography which expresses the spirit of modern man. The function of printed text is communication, emphasis (word value), and the logical sequence of the contents. (pp. 66-67)

Working through a text according to these principles will usually result in a rhythm different from that of former symmetrical typography. Asymmetry is the rhythmic expression of functional design. In addition to being more logical, asymmetry has the advantage that its complete appearance is far more optically effective than symmetry.

Hence the predominance of asymmetry in the New Typography. Not least, the liveliness of asymmetry is also an expression of our own movement and that of modern life; it is a symbol of the changing forms of life in general when asymmetrical movement in typography takes the place of symmetrical repose. This movement must not however degenerate into unrest or chaos. A striving for order can, and must, also be expressed in asymmetrical form. It is the only way to make a better, more natural order possible, as opposed to symmetrical form which does not draw its laws from within itself but from outside. (p. 68)

The New Typography, on the other hand, emphasizes contrasts and uses them to create a new unity. [. . .] The real meaning of form is made clearer by its opposite. We would not recognize day as day if night did not exist. The ways to achieve contrast are endless: the simplest are large/small, light/dark, horizontal/vertical, square/round, smooth/rough, closed/open, coloured/plain; all offer many possibilities of effective design. (p. 70)

Like everyone else, we too must look for a typeface expressive of our own age. Our age is characterized by an all-out search for clarity and truth, for purity of appearance. So the problem of what typeface to use is necessarily different from what it was in previous times. We require from type plainness, clarity, the rejection of everything that is superfluous. [. . .] A good letter is

one that expresses itself, or rather "speaks," with the utmost distinctiveness and clarity. And a good typeface has no purpose beyond being of the highest clarity.

Sanserif, looked at in detail, is admittedly capable of improvement, but there is no doubt that it is the basic form from which the typeface of the future will grow.

Other individual expressive possibilities of type have nothing to do with typography. They are in contradiction to its very nature. They hinder direct and totally clear communication, which must always be the first purpose of typography. (p. 78)

We today have recognized photography as an essential typographic tool of the present. We find its addition to the means of typographic expression an enrichment, and see in photography exactly the factor that distinguishes our typography from everything that went before. Purely flat typography belongs to the past. The introduction of the photographic block has enabled us to use the dynamics of three dimensions. It is precisely the contrast between the apparent three dimensions of photography and the plane form of type that gives our typography its strength.

The question, which type should be used with photographs, used to be answered in the most obvious way by choosing type that looked grey or was even printed in grey; also by using very thin or very individualistic types, and other methods. As in other kinds of work, the solution was superficial, reducing everything to one level: everything became a uniform grey, which hardly concealed the compromise.

Uninhibited and so contemporary, the New Typography found the solution at once. Since its aim was to create artistic unity out of contemporary and fundamental forms, the problem of type never actually existed: it had to be sanserif. And since it regarded the photographic block as an equally fundamental means of expression, a synthesis was achieved: photography + sanserif!

At first sight it seems as if the hard black forms of this typeface could not harmonize with the often soft greys of photos. The two together do not have the same weight of colour: their harmony lies in the contrast of form and colour. But both have two things in common: their objectivity and their impersonal form, which mark them as suiting our age. This harmony is not superficial, as was mistakenly thought previously, nor is it arbitrary: there is only one objective type form—sanserif—and only one objective representation of our times: photography. Hence typo-photo, as the collective form of graphic art, has today taken over from the individualistic form handwriting-drawing.

By typo-photo we mean any synthesis between typography and photography. Today we can express ourselves better and more quickly

with the help of photography than by the laborious means of speech or writing. (p. 92)

d) The history of the new typography:

"It is to a 'non-technician,' the Italian poet F. T. Marinetti, the founder of Futurism, that the credit must be given for providing the curtain-raiser for the change-over from ornamental to functional typography." (53)

"[from El Lissitzky's *Topography of Typography*] [. . .] 8. The printed page transcends space and time. The printed page, the infinity of the book, must be transcended. THE ELECTRO-LIBRARY." (60)

"The break from the old typography, made complete by the new movement, means nothing less than the total discarding of decorative concepts and the turn to functional design. This is the fundamental mark of the modern movement; and the New Typography, no less than the new technology, the new architecture, and the new music, is not a mere fashion but the expression of a newly opening epoch of European culture. Its aim, to design every job as completely and consistently as possible with contemporary means, introduces a fresh attitude towards all work; since techniques and requirements are in a state of constant change, fossilized rigidity is unthinkable. This is the starting-point for new developments: these are based not so much on artistic experiments as on the new methods of reproduction which together with social needs created the new requirements." (64)

e) The principles of the new typography:

"Both nature and technology tells us that 'form' is not independent, but grows out of function (purpose), out of the materials used (organic or technical), and out of how they are used. This is how the marvellous forms of nature and the equally marvellous forms of technology originated." (65)

"It cannot and must not be our wish today to ape the typography of previous centuries, itself conditioned by its own time. Our age, with its very different aims, its often different ways and means and highly developed techniques, must dictate new and different visual forms." (ibid.)

"If we want to 'prove ourselves worthy' of the clearly significant achievements of the past, we must set our own achievements beside them born out of our own time. They can only become 'classic' if they are unhistoric." (ibid.)

"The essence of the New Typography is clarity." (66)

"The New Typography is distinguished from the old by the fact that its first objective is to develop its visible form out of the functions of the text." (66/67)

"Every part of a text relates to every other part by a definite, logical relationship of emphasis and value, predetermined by content. It is up to the typographer to express this relationship clearly and visibly, through type sizes and weight, arrangement of lines, use of colour, photography, etc." (67)

"Asymmetry is the rhythmic expression of functional design." (68)

"Above all, a fresh and original intellectual approach is needed, avoiding standard solutions. If we think clearly and approach each task with a fresh and determined mind, a good solution will usually result." (69)

"The New Typograhly so designs text matter that the eye is led from one word and one group of words to the next. So a logical organization of the text is needed, through the use of different type-sizes, weights, placing in relation to space, colour, etc." (70)

"The New Typography uses the effectiveness of the former 'background' quite deliberately, and considers the blank white spaces on the paper as formal elements just as much as the areas of the black type." (72)

"Among all the types that are available, the so-called 'Grotesque' (sanserif) or 'block letter' ('skeleton letters' would be a better name) is the only one in spiritual accordance with our time." (73)

"The emphatically national, exclusivist character of fraktur –but also of the equivalent national scripts of other peoples, for example of the Russians or the Chinese– contradicts present-day transnational bonds between people and forces their inevitable elimination. To keep these types is retrograde. Roman type is the international typeface of the future." (74/75)

"All printed matter of whatever kind that is created today must bear the hallmark of our age, and should not imitate printed matter of the past." (77)

"Like everyone else, we too must look for a typeface expressive our own age. Our age is characterized by an all-out search for clarity and

truth, for purity of appearance." (78)

The New Typography demands economy in type design." (80)

"A completely one-type system, using lower case only, would be of great advantage to the national economy: it would entail savings and simplifications in many areas; and would also result in great savings of spiritual and intellectual energy at present wasted [. . .]" (ibid.)

f) Photography and typography:

"There are two forms in which photography can become are: photo-montage and photogram." (88)

"By typo-photo we mean any synthesis between typography and photography." (92)

g) New typography and standardization:

"The New Typography, in its concern to satisfy the needs of our own period and to make sure that every single piece of printing is in harmony with the present, has always taken the greatest interest in every move towards standardization. The need for standardization, in whatever area, derives from the problems of today, which it aims to solve." (96)

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