Prof. Gerd Fleischmann
Review

Maszyna do komunikacji. Wokół awangardowej idei nowej typografii / A Communication Machine. Around the Avant-garde Idea of New Typography
editors: Paulina Kurc-Maj, Daniel Muzyczuk
coordinators: Andżelika Bauer, Przemysław Purtak
design: Waldemar Węgrzyn

The publication about the concept of the "New (or Functional) Typography" brings together differing approaches including parallel actions. That's exactly in the spirit of the Avant-gardes' efforts, because "The New Typography" was always aimed at the "New Man," the "New Life," the "New Society". Therefore it is completely logical that many designers looked at the developments in the Soviet Union in the 1920s with a sympathetic eye, and that much forward-looking stimulation also came from there.

The contributions in the book range from those oriented strictly to the field of communication design (Aynsley, Barkhatova, Hollis, Kurc-Maj, Toman) to social aspects and *Zeitgeist* ((Jubert, Kubiak, Rypson), the concept of industrialization of design (Vossoughian), to a highly interesting speculation about the synaesthetic effects of letter characters (Śniecikowska). Even the effects of "New Typography" in the USA are a theme (Rejniak-Majewska).

The breadth of the approaches as well as the consideration of the narrow timespan during which "New Typography" developed and spread make the publication a must not just for all interested in the concept of "New Typography," but also for a broader public that is interested in the visible world as a whole.

About the individual contributions, as they appear in the publication:

1.
Richard Hollis,[1] born in 1934, encountered personally the pioneers of the new vision, the new architecture, and the new typography. His short, note-like report about a meeting with Paul Schuitema and Piet Zwart in the 1960s is breathtaking. After a discussion about the concept of the "Avantgarde," he carefully and dryly explains the technical requirements in which the new style developed: book printing, lithography, and intaglio printing. Two examples illustrate this. When he writes: "Although Futura had a geometrical basis, marketed as 'The type for our time,' it was little used by the avant-garde, who preferred the earlier grotesque," he overlooks *Das neue Frankfurt* (The New Frankfurt), *Die Form,* and Kurt Schwitters's extensive work for the city of Hanover, in which Futura was immediately used following the publication of the preliminary test. In order to illustrate the effect of the Avant-garde in the interwar period, he refers the reader to Jan Tschichold, Otto Neurath, The New Bauhaus, Black Mountain College, and

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[1] Richard Hollis about himself: "There is no particular style: each job acquires its own. For this reason no distinction is made between recent work and that which dates back several decades. His design aim is to engage the reader or viewer, and his experience as a printer allows him to exploit technical means in the interests of economy."

1

information design.[2] The term *information architect,* which Ladislaw Sutnar coined in the 1930s, is used today by Erik Spiekermann in reference to meta-design, the design of design.

2

Roxane Jubert concentrates on *speed, motion, instantaneity, and simultaneity* as determinative for works considered as avant-garde. For her, that means especially the pictorial graphic works in the manner of Marinetti's *mots en liberté*, freed from all grammar, syntax, and typographical form. To the four key concepts mentioned above in relation to the new experience of time and space should be added: electricity, the totality of warfare (as an avant-garde feast of death), the special and the general theory of relativity (1905 and 1916 respectively), cubism (starting in 1907), the telephone, radio, and film. Not only landscapes, buildings, and things imploded, beliefs, the political order, rules, and values did as well. The yearning for the new, the new man, a new world were supposed to replace traditions. It is astonishing that the other side of Marinetti's views, contemptuous of humankind, and his closeness to Mussolini are not mentioned in the article: violence, ruthlessness, freedom from morality, aimlessness, the striving for self-destruction, the rejection of women – the "contempt for womanhood." Look at statements like "Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!… Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!"[3] Such statements have themselves become museum pieces and a *contradictio in adjecto*, a contradiction in terms. The Futurist kitchen[4] has become a farce.

3

Beata Śniecikowska presents a thesis claiming that alphabetical letters, without their semantic meanings, function as figures that trigger sound. The small number and the selection of the test subjects in her experiments do not (yet) allow, however, any generalization. Works with Hebrew characters and Yiddish words easily lead test subjects lacking knowledge of this script and language to acoustic interpretations of the seen graphemes. Letters in the (Roman-character) context of works are always perceived as both forms and sounds. This option is the basis of visual poetry. But even print graphic

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[2] Michael Burke notes: "Information design is a very imprecise and somewhat ambiguous term for an area of visual communication which has had such a significant impact on the development of our civilisation, and it is indeed surprising just how little credit it has been given (in contrast to say the arts) in particular, Science, Medicine, Economics, Navigation etc. The term information design originates in the Anglo-Saxon culture of the early 1960s by way of differentiating between informing and persuading, for example, advertising where marketing plays a major role. This does not mean that the field of information design originates in the 1960s. As we can see from the examples shown in this talk, the area is as old as man himself, if we take the first slide which shows one of the early cave paintings (25,000 years ago) traditionally classified as art/magic, but it could equally be classified as being an early example of instructional graphics having a didactic function explaining his environment. It is however in the 18th century or the period we now refer to as the "Enlightenment" where the majority of the graphic conventions came into being. There are many preconceptions about information design, one of the most frequently used being that it is very technical and not very visually exciting, but as we can see from many of the examples shown here the majority have an extremely high aesthetic value." See: http://www.halbfuenf.net/michael-burke/

[3] F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," trans. R. W. Flint, in Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Documents of 20th Century Art: Futurist Manifestos* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 19–24.

[4] See Maren Preiss, „Ein Suppenhuhn ist schöner als die Nike von Samothrake," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 17 May 2010 [online], http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/manifest-der-futuristischen-kueche-ein-suppenhuhn-ist-schoener-als-die-nike-von-samothrake-1.224668 [accessed 19 October 2015].

designers like Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman or Josua Reichert,[5] who place letter-forms like forms of concrete art in the image, count on the viewer's polysensory perception, because we experience language on the one hand in the acoustic mode and on the other (as writing) also in the visual mode. Additionally, in speaking, motor activity and the somatosensory are involved. This can lead to synaesthetic perceptions on the level of individual letters or numbers, individually spoken sounds, or at the level of complete words or text-figures. But this approach has nothing to do, however, with the new (functional) typography in the sense of the term as used by Moholy-Nagy, Tschichold, or Dexel.

4

Agnieszka Rejniak-Majewska describes in much detail the development of László Moholy-Nagy's and György Kepes's concepts in their activities in the USA. This includes the key concept of "photo-text," which Moholy-Nagy introduced as the *"Phototypo"* in the 1920s. Images and texts appear simultaneously with illustrations or explanations respectively. Rejniak-Majewska explains her approach from ever changing perspectives and refers to the landmark publications *Language of Vision*, *The New Landscape in Art and Science* (both by Kepes, 1944 and 1956), and *Vision in Motion* (Moholy-Nagy, 1947). Space, light, and movement are basic constituents of the contemporary human being. But technology alone does not suffice. Design must also support the development of emotions in order to be able to lead a human life. Not least, the conditions of the Second World War play a role. Both Moholy-Nagy and Kepes see the danger of emotional illiteracy in the modern style of life and in industrial methods of production.

5

Elena Barkhatova meticulously traces the development of the Russian poster from 1917 to 1932, especially the Constructivist film posters of the mid-1920s. Despite a plethora of illustrations, she can only describe many of the posters. There are also no images from the exhibitions mentioned or of the actual placarding. Nor can the actual impact of the posters be understood, likely for lack of available information. The only described reaction to posters is a reference to the social conditions and poverty: "[…] one of the cinema journals announced in 1925 that large-format lithographic posters all over Moscow were being systematically stolen by the homeless for use as layers of clothing." Even the interesting attempt at an ideological evaluation by students at the Institute of Red Professorship and by workers, ordered by the Department of Agitation and Mass Campaigns of the Central Committee, can only be mentioned, but not accompanied by an example. New typography appears above all in the use of photographs and photomontage and in original composition effects like the diagonal placement of lines of text or dynamic arrangements.

6

When Szymon Piotr Kubiak writes that Paul Renner is "the greatest of Germany's avant-garde typographers apart from Jan Tschichold," then I would like to contradict him. Yes, Paul Renner developed Futura and wrote a series of intelligent books about typography,

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[5] Josua Reichert's art offers things to read as well as to see, it transforms letters and text into image. Roman, Cyrillic, or Hebrew characters go beyond their useful function to reveal their specific forms and all their beauty. Poetry spreads beyond the word into the visual. Poems by Goethe and Hölderlin or the Psalms begin to make sounds even before they are read.

but that doesn't make him a typographer. A font is the material, but using it to make language visible is typography. For the avant-garde there is also photography and photomontage including the *Phototypo* (photo-text) (Moholy-Nagy). In judging the works of the avant-garde, I would still put Max Burchartz before Jan Tschichold. Kubiak goes a long way back to report about *Die Form* as the journal of the *Deutscher Werkbund* and the contrast between individual design interpretations (van den Velde) and standardization (Muthesius). He touches thereby on the Fraktur vs. Antiqua battle and the search for a national German culture and a national language of form. The *Werkbund* and *Die Form* are seen as parallel actions to the "New Typography." Although they referred to developments in the plastic arts and modern life, they only discussed visual communication, especially in *Typographische Mitteilungen*, the official journal of the book-printers' union.

7

Nader Vossoughian discusses the octometric brick (*Oktameterstein*) and Ernst Neufert's thoughts related to it in regard to standardization, against the background of political demands and the construction of subsidized housing under the conditions of the war economy. The economic advantages of paper formats using the DIN 476 standard also apply to the standardization of building measurements, which are also based on the metric system. That the octometric brick and the DIN 4172 standard (Mauerwerksbemaßung)[6] made a decisive contribution to post-1945 reconstruction in both the east and west of Germany is obvious. The New Typography also looks for salvation in standardization. For example, Jan Tschichold suggests the (historical) DIN 829 norm of October 1926 for book formats, although he recognizes that for "belles lettres […] novels, and similar books, which are held in the hands, [these formats] are too wide and are therefore uncomfortable."[7] Today, book formats are standardized, but more as a recommendation.[8] Jeremy Aynsley continues the thinking about standardization using the keywords Taylorization and Fordism.

8

Jeremy Aynsley describes eloquently the origins and reception of new typography, especially as seen by Jan Tschichold. He doesn't mention (and here the guild of art historians seems to be in a conspiracy) that László Moholy-Nagy coined the term as the title of his entry in the catalogue book of the 1923 Bauhaus Exhibition. Nor how the term got to the typesetters and printers. *"elementare typographie"* (elementary typography), the special issue of the journal *Typographische Mitteilungen* was received by all 20,000 union members at no additional cost. However, they would have had to buy the book *Die neue Typographie* (new typography). But the price was too high for a journeyman typesetter, as retired job typesetters of the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung* newspaper reported in the 1980s, people who were apprentices at the *Osnabrücker Tageblatt* at the time of the book's appearance. In regards to commercial signs, the work of Walter Dexel in the context of "Das Neue Frankfurt" (New Frankfurt) would certainly be of interest. Although Aynsley remarks on *Einige Thesen zur Gestaltung der Reklame* as being a prominent essay on the title page of *Merz* 11, he has overlooked the fact that Schwitters gives the source as "from *Gestaltung der Reklame*, Bochum, Bongardsstrasse 15". That is the title

[6] http://www.bau-doch-selber.de/bautipps/mw-bemassung.html [Accessed 19 October 2015].
[7] Jan Tschichold, *Die neue Typographie. Ein Handbuch für zeitgemäß Schaffende* (Berlin: Verlag des Bildungsverbandes der deutschen Buchdrucker, 1928), p. 233
[8] See [online] http://www.din-formate.info/deutsche-buchformate.html [Accessed 19 October 2015].

of a four-page leaflet dated July 1924, from which Schwitters quotes in a fragmentary manner as if it were *a complete* text. But it's only a selection from the programmatic text by Max Burchartz trading under the name "Westdeutsche Treuhandgesellschaft Canis & Co. K.-G. Bochum" (Canis western German trust agency & co. K.-G.), even before the founding of *werbebau* in November of the same year. Even the quotation under that, which Schwitters attributes to Max Burchartz, is an original text collage from the aforementioned brochure. [9]

9

Jindřich Toman presents Zdeněk Rossmann as a typographer as if one were about to meet him. The ease with which Rossmann frees himself from "white" typography is contagious. As a reader (or listener), one would gladly learn more about Rossmann the *man* and also about his architecture. I would like to follow Sonia de Puinef:

> Nowadays Zdeněk Rossmann is not a personality known to the wide public, and one of the reasons is the fact that too little was written on him. Although his name is rarely mentioned in various publications, there is no complete monograph on him. Rossmann was for the time being reduced to a kind of witness to avant-garde activity, but was not, however, promoted to its player. We also need to add that on the grounds mentioned already in the fifties Rossmann himself decided to act as a witness in the shadows only. The best evidence of the fact is *Vzpomínkový sborník Bedřicha Václavka* published in 1957. Thus: Rossmann as witness or player of avant-garde? And consistently: graphical design as peripheral area or as an important part of the avant-garde creation? It is no exaggeration to label Rossmann as a very important player of the avant-garde movement. His multivalent profile of architect, theatre designer, interior architect, graphical designer and editor makes him a perfect example of an avant-garde artist whose practice may be compared with that of Karel Teige, Theo Van Doesburg, Kurt Schwitters or László Moholy-Nagy.[10]

10

In her contribution, Paulina Kurc-Maj gives a comprehensive overview of the development of modern graphics and visual communication in Poland up to the middle of the 1930s. In doing so, she pursues three questions:
1.What was visual consciousness in fact meant to be?
2. What was [the] new visual language meant to look like when applied to graphic design?
3. Where did it stem from and what were its consequences?
In a manner analogous to Henryk Berlewi's[11] manifesto *Mechano-Faktur*, in which he writes: "Today's art is the product of the present day. It must break off with all the habits

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[9]Gerd Fleischmann, "Schwitters ———>Typografie" [Schwitters———>typography], unpublished typescript.
[10] Sonia de Puinef, "Architect Zdeněk Rossmann, Graphical Designer, His Works and Artistic Creed," [online], http://www.sdc.sk/?designum-05-2013-1&clanok=architect-zdenek-rossmann-graphical-designer-his-works-and-artistic-creed [Accessed 19 October 2015].
[11] This is not the only place where the reader would like to know more about the protagonists. Especially if one is not so very well informed about developments in Poland. For a German reader, for example, it is interesting to learn that Henryk Berlewi, following his studies at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts (1904–1909), also studied in Antwerp (1909–1910), at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1911–1912), and also in Berlin (1922–1923), where he had decisive encounters: El Lissitzky, Theo van Doesburg, Viking Eggeling, and Hans Richter. That he exhibited at the *Der Sturm* gallery and published the *Mechano-Faktur*

of yesterday's art, perfumed, perverse, oversensitive, hysterical, romantic, boudoir, individualistic," she answers also in an analogous manner with lists, as for example in the description of the Vilnius exhibition of 1923:

> Firstly, addressing the purely artistic values (composition, colour, etc.) – in accordance with the principle that artistic projects should constitute a unity in itself, and not by reference to associations with the visible world. Secondly – laying down the rules for creating works of art, primarily based on the principle of organicity, meaning a purposeful organisation. Thirdly, it advocated that all available materials and technical innovations be used. Fourthly: abandoning the "classic" (purely aesthetic) rules of composition and replacing them with construction and combining artistic benefits with real life, and so adopting affirmative attitudes to new trends in place of a pointless fight with the old artistic creativity. Fifthly, it was necessary to take a stand about life of modern society through the modernisation of all visual arts (from architecture, through cinema, to theatre, and printing). Sixthly and finally – the Vilnius catalogue advocated collective work.

In addition to the individual protragonists, Kurc-Maj also presents the periodicals from the scene: *Praesens*, *Reklama*, *Grafika*, to name just a few.

11

Piotr Rypson's contribution spans three generations of Polish designers, both men and women, seen against the background of political and social relations. In doing this, he gives the most space to the avant-garde generation, which was able to work in Poland after 1918, when the country was once again independent. A turning point is the exhibition entitled *Powszechna Wystawa Krajowa* (General National Exhibition) in Poznań. Thanks to the economic recovery of the country, up until the global economic crisis following the crash of the New York Stock Market in October 1929, there are ever more commissions for commercial artists. Most of the work remains in the old style, however. Only a few adopt the new efforts of the new or functional typography. Rypson also describes the increasing professionalization of the profession of graphic designer.

Prof. Gerd Fleischmann
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Translation: William Gilcher

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manifesto in Walden's periodical. But also that he exhibited in the 1960s as guest of the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin (West) and at Christian Chruxin's. Also that he stood in close contact with Eckhard Neumann, Heinz Ohff, Peter Lufft, and Eberhard Steneberg.