

The New Typography, A Manifesto of Modern Design

By Jan Tschichold

Translation by Ruari McLean

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. The gentle swing of the pendulum between ornamental type, the (superficially understood) “beautiful” appearance, and “adornment” by extraneous additions (ornaments) can never produce the pure form we demand today. Especially the feeble clinging to the bugbear of arranging type on a central axis results in the extreme inflexibility of contemporary typography.

In the old typography, the arrangement of individual units is subordinated to the principle of arranging everything on a central axis. In my historical introduction I have shown that this principle started in the Renaissance and has not yet been abandoned. Its superficiality becomes obvious when we look at Renaissance or baroque title pages. Main units are arbitrarily cut up: for example, logical order, which should be expressed by the use of different type sizes, is ruthlessly sacrificed to external form. Thus the principal line contains only three-quarters of the title, and the rest of the title, set several sizes smaller, appears in the next line. Such things admittedly do not often happen today, but the rigidity of the central-axis setting hardly allows work to be carried out with the degree of logic we now demand. The central axis runs through the whole like an artificial, invisible backbone: its *raison d'être* is

today as pretentious as the tall white collars of Victorian gentlemen. Even in good central-axis composition the contents are subordinated to “beautiful line arrangement.” The whole is a “form” that is predetermined and therefore must be inorganic.

We believe it is wrong to arrange text as if there were some focal point in the center of a line that would justify such an arrangement. Such Points of course do not exist, because we read by starting at one side (Europeans for example read from left to right, the Chinese from top to bottom and right to left.) Axial arrangements are illogical because the distance of the stressed, central parts from the beginning and end of the word sequences is not usually equal but constantly varies from line to line.

But not only the preconceived idea of axial arrangement but also all other preconceived ideas—like those of the pseudo-Constructivists—are diametrically opposed to the essence of the New Typography. Every piece of typography that originates in a preconceived idea of form, of whatever kind, is wrong. 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 that expresses the spirit of modern man. The function of printed text is communication, emphasis (word value), and the logical sequence of the contents.

Die Neue

Typographie,

ein Manifest des modernen Designs

Jan Tschichold

Die Neue gestaltet den Text, indem sie den Blick des Lesers
v o n einem Wort
e i n e r Gruppe, Textes
Zur anderen führt. Notwendig ist also eine sinngemäße Gliederung des
durch Größenunterschiede, Stärkegrade, Stellung im Raum, Farbe usw. Die Neue
Typographie benutzt die Wirkungsmöglichkeit des ehemaligen
Hintergrundes bewußt und betrachtet die
weißen Papiergrundausschnitte als den schwarzen und
Flächenformen gleichwertig Gestaltungselemente. Schrift-
Damit hat die Neue Typographie Ausdrucksmöglichkeit
der Buchdruckerkunst um ein neues Mittel
bereichert. Die schlagende Wirkung mancher Beispiele der Neuen
Typographie beruht gerade auf der Verwendung großer weißer Flächen.

Die Neue Typographie, A Manifesto of Modern Design

Jan Tschichold
Translation by Wolfgang Oertl

Neue Typographie layouts text by leading the eye of the viewer from one word, one group to the next. Thus we need to structure the text meaningfully, using differences in size, boldness, position in space, colour, etc. Neue Typographie uses the possible effects of the former background consciously and considers both the white background segments and the black type and shapes as design elements of equal value. With that, Neue Typographie has added a new element to the expressive potential of printing. It is exactly the use of large white areas that creates the startling impact of Neue Typographie.

The New Typography

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