

Designing Programmes

Karl Gerstner

Instead of
solutions for problems,
programmes for solutions

—

the subtitle can also be

understood

in these terms:

for no problem

(so to speak) is there an
absolute solution.

Reason:

the

possibilities

cannot be delimited

absolutely.

There is always a group of
solutions, one of which
is the best under certain
conditions.

To describe the problem is
part of the **solution.**

This implies:

not to make

creative decisions

as prompted by feeling but

by intellectual

criteria.

The more exact and **complete**
these **criteria** are, the more
creative the work **becomes**.

The creative process
is to be reduced to an act of
selection.

Designing means: to
pick out determining
elements and combine them.

Seen in these terms,
designing calls for
method.

Integral typography

A new label?

The **typographical**
aspect of a new ism?

No, this is just what is not meant.

The times of both,
pioneers and isms,
are over.

After the **adventurers**
of the 'teens and the twenties
we are the **settlers**,
the **colonizers**.

The **continent** of
modern creation
is not only **discovered**,
but it **already figures** on
various maps.

Isms
are the **countries** of the
spiritual map,
each one with a border
separating it
from the others as in a school
geography

—

and like
everything
in school books
right and wrong at the same time.

For today the
borderlines
between isms are
beginning to be
obscured.

And what **interest** us are
not so much the
surrounding
constructions

as the matter itself,
the
individual
achievement
which stands finally
behind
collective
theories.

In my opinion,
for the sake of honesty,
no new ism should be created.

Today it is time (at any rate so it
seems to me) to gain distance
from the theses of the "new" and

"elementary"
typography

of the twenties and the

"functional"
typography

of the early forties.

Let us **recapitulate**

these theses once again.

Max Bill writes in 1945:

"We call elementary
typography a
typography entirely
developed
out of its own data;

that is to say,
which works in an
elementary way
with basic
typographical
elements,

and if, at the same time, it aims at the

sentence-
picture

in such a way that it
becomes a living

sentence-
organism

without any

decorative addition and

without any strain,

we would call it

functional or organic
typography.

Which is to say that all demands

—

technical,
economic,
functional and
aesthetic

—

should be
fulfilled and should
determine together the

sentence-
picture."

It is

precisely in
typography

that the difficulty of
setting theoretical
boundaries

is plain.

For example
discussing Bill's
functional claim,
Jan Tschichold,
the editor of
"Elementary
Typography"
said even in 1928:

"The New **Typography**
is **different** from the
earlier because it is the
first to attempt the
derivation of the
appearance from the
function of the text."

And **Moholy-Nagy**
even five years **earlier**:

"This first of all:

an unambiguous clarity
in all typographical
works.

Legibility and
communication
should never suffer from a
previously held

aesthetic."

Those were the theses

which caused the

**typographical
revolution**

and let loose **discussion**

forty, twenty and even

ten years ago.

Today it can be said that

they are no longer

controversial;

they are **accepted**

—

and thus they have
lost their **object** -
their **currency** .

This is what is up to date in the
situation of the new
typography of 1959.

After all a dream has been
fulfilled, but the
envisaged paradise has
remained as far away as ever.

In the **twenties** for
instance it was **claimed** for
the first time that the
typographer
should proceed from the
data of his **material,**

from the basic
typographical
elements;

today it is hardly
conceivable
that he should
not **proceed** from them.

If most of the pioneers'
theses have become
self-evident,
the aesthetic criteria
have been generally
outlived.

For example:

Is sans serif or Roman type
the type of the
twentieth century?

Among all **existing** types
the sans serif . . . is the only
one which conforms
spiritually
to our time?

Is symmetrical or
asymmetrical
typography
the genuine,
contemporary way of
expression?

Do flush left, ragged
right or flush left, flush
right correspond
to present-day
feelings?

Can a type be set

vertically

or not?

And so on.

Such either or **criteria**
have served their time
and their **purpose.**

Today **typographers**

use both sans serif and Roman type,

set books both

symmetrically and
asymmetrically,

use both flush left, ragged right and flush
left, flush right.

Today everything is
stylistically
allowable,

allowable

from the point of view of

up-to-dateness.

"There remain only
open doors to be **unlocked**,"
as the **German saying** has it.

And we
shall not be spared
the **necessity** of
rendering an account
of the state of our
spiritual
inheritance.

Nobody will relieve us
of the task of **searching** for
new **criteria.**

Typography is an art not in
spite of its serving a purpose
but for that very reason.

The **designer's** freedom
lies not at the margin of a task
but at its very centre.

Only then is the
typographer

free to perform

as an artist when he

understands and

ponders his task

in all its parts.

And every **solution**
he finds on this basis will be an
integral one,
will achieve a unity

between language and type,
between content and form.

Integral means:
shaped into a whole.

There the

Aristotelian

dictum that the whole is
greater than the sum of its parts
is assumed.

And this vitally concerns
typography.

Typography is the art of
making a whole out of
predetermined
parts.

The
typographer
"sets."

He sets
individual
letters into words,
words into sentences.

Letters are the
elementary
particles
of the written language

—

and thus of
typography.

They are

figurative signs

for sounds without content,

parts which acquire a meaning

and a value only

if they are **combined**.

This means that

combinations

of two, three and more letters

show in any case a

word-picture,

but

definite letters render

a

definite idea only in a

certain sequence;

literally they

constitute a word.

To **clarify** the **example** from the
other angle let us take four **letters**
which can be **combined** in four
different ways.

EFIW
EFWI
EIFW
EIWF
EWFI
EWIF
FEIW
FEWI
FIEW
FIWE
FWEI
FWIE
IEFW
IEWF
IFEW
IFWE
IWEF
IWFE
WEFI
WEIF
WFEI
WFIE
WIEF
WIFE

From this we can see that only one
combination makes
sense. The ²³ **remaining** are
indeed both legible and
pronounceable.

they **contain** the
same **elements** and give the
same **total**.

But they do not constitute
a linguistic whole.

They remain
meaningless.

To the
importance of the whole,
the **integral** in general,
for **language** and
typography,
is **obvious**.

If the **proportion**
between the correct and the
possible
combinations
in words

of four letters

is 1: 24,

in **five-letter** words

it will be 1: 120,

in **six-letter** words

1: 720,

in **seven-letter**

words 1: 5040

and so on.

This means that what we can write
and set with our letters in all
languages

—

if it makes sense,
it makes a whole

—

always remains a mere
fraction of the
mathematical
possibilities
of the alphabet.

In our
contemporary
reality abstract
word-
creations

which seem at first sight the
eccentric ideas of a poet,
have developed
into an everyday
economic factor.

Every day new words are
created.

Perhaps they grow out of
abbreviations

like UNO,

are pieced together

from foreign words

like Ovaltine, or

are new **inventions**

like Persil;

in each case they are

independent

of their source.

And now names for
industrial
products are found by
means of **electronic**
computers.

This happens as follows:

some three random vowels
and four **consonants** are
fed into the **computer** which
registers in a few moments
thousands of
combinations,

replacing
imagination by
mechanical choice.

These meaningless

word-
creations

have become

indispensable

to publicity.

The label
departments of every
firm of **importance** have
dozens of them in stock;

before the **products**
exist the name is **already**
registered and
protected by law.

Elementary optics
correspond to
elementary
speech sounds.

the formal value of the type

corresponds to

the acoustic value of

language.

Summarized:

1.

Integral typography
strives for the marriage
of language and type
resulting
in a new unity,
in a superior whole.

Text and **typography**

are not so much two

consecutive

processes

on different levels as

**inter-
penetrating**

elements.

2.

Unity is reached in
different phases,
each successor including its
predecessor:

—

in the **integration** of
independent
problems and functions

—

—

in the **integration** of

different signs,
different letters

into the word

—

—

in the **integration** of

different words

into the **sentence**

—

—

in the **integration** of

different sentences

into the

"reading-time"

dimension

—

At the **beginning** I was
rash enough to speak of
"searching for
new **criteria."**

Has this **article** been
productive of such?

Some of the **examples** cited
and have **already** become
historic documents.

The **problems** have **already**
arisen and they have been **solved**
in such a way that the **results** have
remained fresh,
living **exemplars.**

As **already** said:

In essentials these
principles of

"elementary"

and

"functional"
typography

are still valid and are

observed to a very great
extent.

And new ones cannot be added
where the **solution** of
single problems is
concerned.

However ,
today there are some changes :

the production of printed
matter has assumed
unforeseen
proportions .

We are not only
threatened by the danger
of extravagance and
superficiality

where the
individual creation,
however excellent it may be,
becomes lost.

but also by the menace that
the knowledge and
experience of the
pioneers,

what has already been done and is
generally
recognized,

will degenerate into
mere formalism,

become

fashionable.

The fulfillment of a
dream threatens to become a
nightmare.

Here we are not allowed to resign.

Here the designer must
intervene.

he must in a sense aim at a larger whole;
he must not **continue** to carry out the
single task so much as create
structures from which
single **solutions**
can be **derived**.

This adds to the work of **design** a new
dimension of **planning**,
from the angle of both
language and type.

The **structure** ,
once **planned** ,
always **contains** the
elements of text and
typography ,

always **comprehends**
the **whole** and makes the **single** task
possible .

Thus work becomes
more complex, and
presupposes
an intensified
cooperation among all
participants.

But here **design acquires**
meaning again.

The **greater effort** and
longer time **dedicated** to
the **development** of the
structure pays off in the end
because it makes the **detail**
work so much **easier**.

And **finally** the new
experience brings
forth new **impulses** for the work
on **single tasks**.

In short:

From the **viewpoint**
of the whole **structure**,
the **integral design**
itself gains

a new

stability,

a new

up-to-dateness,

a new

significance

in this age of

short-lived
production

and

corresponding

waste of printed matter.

What I have tried to show on
these pages cannot be

a new

typographical

style.

Because the
"New **Typography**"
was not an arbitrary fashion
which has now served its
purpose.

It was the
sweeping reform
of our most important means of
communication,
the typeface,
in a period of
sweeping changes.

What we can and must do today is not
change the **inherited**
principles but extend
them to new **tasks**.

From the elementary,
from the functional to
the structural,
the integral:

this is the raw **material** for the
new **criteria**.