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VISUAL READING THE AIM OF FUTURE BOOK TYPOGRAPHY

MODERN book typography in being based more and more on foundations of standardized sizes and forms. Type settings and text layouts are being made up constructively . . . in a certain sense, architecturally. To further the inevitable standardization, two typographers, Roh and Tschichold, have long been advocating the use of a single alphabet without capitals. The general substitution of the sans-serif type for the less simple "built-up" faces has been greeted by a world wide acceptance. Editions like the Bauhaus books, published in Grotesk were, when they first appeared, impressively clear particularly when compared to the usual blackish German "Fraktur" type.

But Herbert Bayer, Burchartz and Tschichold have a greater ideal than to simply simplify the alphabet. They are striving to form the individual letters into clear, constructed forms—an ideal whereby each letter becomes a mark, a symbol. The keynote of their efforts is "the printed thought should be absorbed through the eyes but not read-off" or in other words, a visual reading instead of an auditory reading. With this goal, more changes are suggested. For instance, an entirely new letter or symbol should take the place of recurring combinations like "sch" or the ending "ing". The writer calls these advances Optical-Constructive.

A book, however, is a technical aid to the spreading of thought formed in language; and it falls into the classification of Biotechnical, explained as the easier and quicker a printed line achieves its purpose (the easier it lets itself be read)—the greater will be its performance. But in order to reach this performance Optical-Constructive laws are only sufficient when they are released from the Aesthetic and thoroughly prepared-for by certain psychological and mechanical conditions.

We must remember that the recorded language first found a wide circle of readers through the writing done in the cloisters. The handwritten books of the time of the Rustikal were done in a Minuskelwriting and for the first time Europe saw the elements that biotechnically lighten the reading-communication because this writing observed a systematic use of wide spacing and the horizontal connecting lines between the letters of a word forcing the eye to follow the line, as if it were modern railroad tracks. Changes followed and these good qualities disappeared. The Gothic alphabet steps in . . . a tiring eye-torture with battle-axe shapes opposing the easy flow of the printed line. The pleasing Rustikal showed an influence of plant-life . . . connected growth, whereas the Gothic has a mineral form . . . disconnected crystals.

In the general graphology of to-day we observe that the handwriting is taking on a flowing and shortened form. The horizontal dominates once more . . . the plant-influence is greater than that of minerals . . . the line becomes again a railroad track to carry the eye swiftly through its work