

## Book Reviews

Miles A. Tinker, *Bases for Effective Reading*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965. Typography by M. A. Tinker. 322 pp. \$7.50.

- I. About Reading, Perception, and Comprehension, pp. 3–39
  - II. Eye Movements in Reading, pp. 53–105
  - III. Scientific Typography: Printing for Easy and Efficient Reading, pp. 115–192
  - IV. Visual Functions and Illumination for Reading, pp. 205–240
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- Bibliography (356 entries), pp. 293–311  
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“The aim in writing this book has been to present a clear, simple, and well-co-ordinated exposition of available information on the reading process which is so fundamental to most of our daily activities. Much of the research reported here was carried out by the author during his thirty-two years at the University of Minnesota. Materials from related research by others have been added to provide a comprehensive picture of the areas covered. . . . It is hoped that the material in this book will promote among both teachers and research workers an adequate understanding of what is basic for effective reading.”

In his introduction, the author makes it clear that he is well aware of the fact that “Any attempt to make a complete list of the aspects basic to an understanding of the reading process doubtless would be unrewarding since a consensus of the experts is most unlikely. However, it is probable that the following partial list would be accepted by practically everyone in the field of reading”—and then proceeds with a brief commentary on his table of contents.

Now, there is little doubt that teachers and junior research workers will find here a mass of reliable and valuable information concerning a series of psychological factors relevant to the reading process. Yet the difference in Professor Tinker’s attitude towards teachers and his attitude towards expert typographers cries out for objection. While the current methods, opinions, and practices of teachers are implicitly and explicitly accepted as sound, as expert and beyond any question; all typographers *en bloc*, whether expert

or not, are presented merely as introspective aesthetes deserving, on the whole, of contempt (pp. 115, 125, 135, 136, 183). This is a pity.

It is hardly necessary to point out that no profession, as such, should be open to this kind of disparagement. It serves no thoughtful purpose, and it is hardly commendable to encourage such an attitude with all the weight of a long experience in a position of some scholarly regard, when co-operation and mutual understanding should be fostered—especially in a project of this kind—between (expert) teachers and (expert) typographers. It is a fact that primers and textbooks propose particular and severe problems of design, and a spirit of co-operation is all the more to be expected since, *pace* Professor Tinker, publishers and printers alike are more and more relying on the expert knowledge of typographers as designers. Expert typographers in fact do exist, and it is only fair to add on their behalf that there is little if anything in Professor Tinker's exposition that goes to counter their theories or practice. Indeed, it is a matter for regret that the author, who is also the typographic designer of his book, did not deem it worth his while to explain how it comes to be that his "scientific" typography so much resembles many other "merely" typographic designs present in the current book production on the continent as well as in the U.S.A. This is not to say that all books are well designed or that Professor Tinker's book is not a good example of Aldine sobriety.

It would be invidious to dwell on what may be considered minor contradictions within the author's jibes at expert typographers and his own conclusions which, as already stated here and elsewhere, run parallel to common typographic practice. But there is every reason to point to one particular remark he makes (p. 41): "In general, there has been an overemphasis in the classroom on speed of reading as such." In the classroom, indeed? What then shall we conclude from the fact that the phrases "speed," "eye movements," and "photographic measure of reading" appear literally in eighty-eight out of 356 titles listed in the bibliography, and in twenty-four of Professor Tinker's own contribution of seventy? The word *design* is nowhere to be found.

Further (pp. 109–110), Professor Tinker states: "All well-designed experiments which have attempted to evaluate the role of training eye movements to improve reading have failed to find that such training is either necessary or desirable. . . . This training may also result in a decrease in the flexibility and adaptability of reading habits which characterize good readers." Lastly (p. 129): "Type faces in common use in 1932 [when shall we know—experimentally, scientifically—about common use in 1967?] do not differ significantly."

Unless this reviewer is badly mistaken, all this suggests that the consistent

employment for nearly a century of any number of type designs (whose legibility, by the way, has eventually been tested by secular acceptance), with the assistance of any number of willing subjects and any number of instruments, has at long last been shown to lead headlong into a blind alley.

It should be clear by now that letter styles, single and combined, in manuscript (for two millennia) and in print (for five centuries) have varied endlessly in the course of time and over the various geographical and political areas. Yet there has been little concern about their relative legibility or illegibility.

Let us say that research has made it clear that legibility and readability are mainly a matter of spacing, leading, position, and margins; in short—of layout, of design, of space organization or “topography.” Far less, if at all, a matter of type design.

Does this mean that type design can be altogether overlooked? Of course not; far from it. Much can be done in the future with Dr. Bror Zachrisson’s concept of *congeniality*. By definition, it cannot be applied to type or lettering, as such, in a vacuum for it implies a designed context. Our modern conventions in this respect might prove rather loose when compared with historical models. Therefore it would be more than a matter of mere antiquarian or historical interest to investigate the extent of integration, consistency, and complexity to be observed in various design conventions and in various kinds of documents, chosen according to a plan covering different periods (not excluding the contemporary scene), nationalities, social groups, occupational interests, religious affinities, etc.

It would become all the more evident not only (as some typographers and most palaeographers have known since time immemorial) that almost any letter style or “font” is sufficiently legible as long as it is consistent; but also that otherwise perfectly illegible forms become acceptable and *are* accepted, without being “read,” from the very moment that they are congruent with a living convention, e.g., the *invocatio*, in compressed lettering, of thousands of mediaeval diplomas. Anything improper or unusual, however legible it might be, would probably cause the document to be rejected by those for whom it was intended. Thus, far from looking any longer for insignificant degrees of legibility in any number of letter styles, research could be directed toward an understanding and appreciation of the congeniality of type groups or type *constellations*. For that is precisely what the concept of congeniality invites: the notion that writing or type must not be considered separately but rather as part of a whole, of a particular design or a more or less conscious convention. “Constellation” would then apply to any group of letter styles generally combined in an accepted convention, e.g., Tours, IXe AD: roman caps, rustica, uncials, caroline.

In short, the time has come for those who conduct research into the legibility of type to consider the fundamental question of *what* ought to be the next subject for their experiments. This reviewer suggests that *design* should be the object of further psychological research.

Any skilled journalist or experienced reader knows that the same news story may take on a different meaning (irrespective of whether it is re-phrased or rewritten, differently titled or edited) according to whether it is placed beside a straightforward piece of news, or next to an advertisement, or next to a lurid report of a sex murder.

In manuscripts and early printed books the layout as well as the content (combining text plus comments plus glosses plus scholiae, marginal or inter-linear) was often a far more refined or complicated affair than the present thing.

In the case of a legal document, nobody except those who draft it will ever read it as a whole. Lawyers will peruse it (mumbling all the while) looking up the significant passages for any given query or case. They will know where to find what concerns them because *they* (as well as our newspapermen) still have an *ars scribendi*—which implies an *ars legendi*.

As to method, however different their mechanisms and basic techniques, “writing and reading” should not on principle be separated as objects of research when they are seldom separated in daily practice (see Javal, 1905). Finally, there is no reason for limiting research to contemporary documents. At a time when reproductions are so readily available—of pictures, manuscripts, and fine (or not so fine) printing—research workers should not choose deliberately to break with tradition as a matter of principle. They should instead strive to renew and renovate typographical traditions by accelerating the revolution which is already in full swing as a result of the advent of new, and vastly enlarged, methods of communication.

*N.B.* The reader has probably made out for himself that this reviewer is a typographer, if not perhaps an expert one.

Fernand Baudin

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Carl Dair, *Design with Type*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967. Designed by Carl Dair. 176 pp. \$7.50.

Fourteen years have elapsed since the publication of the first version of *Design with Type*. I use the word *version* and not *edition*, because the work has been thoroughly revised, supplemented, and brought up to date. Today typographic research has developed new dimensions, and the main interest of Carl Dair's study lies in the twofold analysis of past forms and of that uninterrupted creative work: our mechanized script.

It is all the more to be regretted that his first chapter on the origins of writing—which is concerned with the Cretan disk of Phaestos, hieroglyphs, Persian manuscripts, and Chinese script—is more an aesthetic appraisal than a rational analysis of structures, of the relation of material to tool. To have evoked the process of phoneticization of script and the various steps in its standardization would have opened the eyes of the lay audience which the author intends to address, and, to cite an example, would have given Ernst Doblhofer's<sup>1</sup> excellent study its rightful place in the short bibliography.

However, this solicitude for pragmatism finds a place as soon as the author analyzes the nature of type. A few historical and technical references introduce this setting of the stage for the letter, first the letter by itself, and then the "letter, the individual molecule," to use his own terminology. The fundamental principles of Gestalt find a place, applied equally to the composition of the running text, to its texture, to its contrasts, and to its vectors. The author states the rules of harmonious composition and comments upon them. His explication is accompanied by examples, including different printing methods, papers, and the necessary relation between the elements that comprise a printed work.

The laws of unity of style and contrast are cleverly elucidated and minutely scrutinized. The contrast of the type sizes, their "weight," the typographical structures and forms, the use of color, the choice of a properly arranged composition, the quasi-abstract use of composition, all warrant time for reflection and interpretation.

I have suggested that Carl Dair is a resolute Gestaltist: this view is confirmed by the whole of his chapter on the structure of the page. The Wertheimer Laws are fully restated. As is well known, according to this School, forms are to be considered as autonomous units, giving evidence of an internal cohesion that has its own peculiar laws. As Lalande recalled in his formula: "Neither psychologically nor physiologically can any single element be said to pre-exist the whole; it is no more immediate and no

<sup>1</sup> *Zeichen und Wunder*. Vienna: Paul Neff, 1957.

earlier; no knowledge of the whole or of its laws can properly be deduced from the knowledge of the separate parts that may be encountered.”

This rehearsal of the first principles of the Gestalt theory brings to mind one of the most remarkable studies of this particular approach to form: Rudolf Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception, a Psychology of the Creative Eye*.<sup>2</sup> When giving a partial account of this book in my article, “Psychologie de l'art graphique,”<sup>3</sup> I deliberately insisted upon the value of Gestalt analysis when applied to any graphic art such as typography. Carl Dair's study is a glowing tribute to the German psychologists: it was time that typographers should discern in Gestalt analysis the rational solution to their problems.

The aesthetics of the book form are given due historical and technical perspective (without any reference to standard diagrams).

A last chapter is devoted to a few typographic schools: William Morris, the Futurist movement, the bold wisdom of Jan Tschichold which has found an enforced extension in the school of Bâle, and what the author calls “beatnik typography” (quite sober, after all). The influence of photography, photo-montage, photocomposition, and the countless stylistic exercises they invite or allow throw light upon the audacities, the expressionistic or dynamic typography of cartoons (McLaren) and film credits (Saul Bass).

In an epilogue a few examples of experimental typography open the doors of the imaginary world: John Cage, Henri Chopin, Oldrich Hlavsa, and Massin—this last one quite convincing—give proof that typography is an endlessly variegated country, open to new discovery.

By way of conclusion, I emphasize the clarity of the explanation, the richness of the illustration, the selectivity, the refined taste exerted in the matter of choice. Only the paucity of the bibliography is to be deplored, without the least reference to periodicals.

A last wish: that the publishers consider a pocket edition. The work deserves this large public. A private success would be a double misinterpretation.

Philippe Schuwer

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<sup>2</sup> Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Schuwer, “Les structures formelles de la page,” *Revue Suisse de l'imprimerie*, février, 1959.