

IWAN TSCHICHOLD

Unlike many of the designers that I surround myself with day by day, I have a decent understanding of typography and how to use it. The lack of a required typography course at this school is in my eyes one of the only flaws (and by far the worst) in our program, but that is for another paper. I have taken a class at another school before I came here and it has become one of my pet peeves as I look at the design of my peers. Jan Tschichold had a similar passion, only he was ten times more opinionated.

Tschichold was born in April of 1902, Leipzig, Germany. From an early age he was influenced by the work of his father, who made a living as a sign writer and graphic artist. He studied at the Leipzig Academy of Graphic Arts where he would later return to teach in 1921. He worked for a short time as a typesetter for Poeschel & Trepte, giving him some actual working experience in the field. In 1923 Tschichold made his first contact with the Bauhaus movement when he attended their first exhibition in Weimar. The impression was a lasting one as he incorporated the design elements of the movement into his own design, as well as elements from Russian constructivists (most prominently El Lissitzky).

The first evidence of their influence is in the twenty-four page insert of *typographische mitteilungen* in 1925 called “elementare typographie” on which this layout is based. The document was intended to explain typography to

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everyone from printers to designers, was mostly made up of Tschichold’s commentary on many of the influential movements of the time and the artists of these movements. Tschichold also explained how to use asymmetrical typography and get away from the symmetry that was still used from medieval times. The piece was met with great enthusiasm and was followed up with his 1928 book, *Die Neue Typographie (The New Typography)* in which he promoted his own ideas. The style he expressed was a very “functional design by the most straightforward means”¹. Efficiency was his main concern. Other points were also stressed that would have been probably laughed at years before, ideas such as putting type in motion, using only basic, sans-serif, generally lower case, type forms. Tschichold argued that symmetry was unnatural because form had no relation to the meaning of words. Another important element in Tschichold’s work was white space. White space was now seen as an important part of the piece and essential to its structure. The clarity of new typography was also very important, a piece of art was no longer just to look good but to get its message across as quick and easily as possible.

In 1933 Tschichold was arrested by the Nazis for what they deemed “culturally subversive” and he was placed under house arrest for six weeks, after which he moved his family to Switzerland. This had a dramatic effect on his work and

1. Meggs, Philip. *A History of Graphic Design*, pg.289

new typographic ideas began to develop as he worked in Switzerland. Tschichold worked as a book designer where he began to explore what he never would before; serif and even script fonts. He then published a second book, *Typographic Arrangements* (1935), in which he dramatically opposed his previous book. One important point to note that the writer of our text book obviously failed to, is that long documents written in sans-serif fonts are in the words of Tschichold, “genuine torture.”

In the late 1940's, Tschichold went to work for the English book publisher Penguin Books where he redesigned everything from the logos and books to the organization of the entire company. At this time his work seemed to be almost the exact opposite of this previous projects as he employed the use of mostly serif, symmetrical, traditional typographic elements.

As I look at the work of the (early) work of Tschichold as well as of the many others of New Typography and the Bauhaus I wonder if I was born fifty years too late as I see the ideas and elements of their work in my own: simple, bold colors, hard lines, very photographic, the use of black, white, and red, the use of white and negative space, etc... This shows what a remarkable affect the artists of their generation have had on our own time and how truly modern they still are. WHOOPS, WIDOW

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