

1923
 THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY
László Moholy-Nagy

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY'S TIME as a teacher at the Bauhaus, from 1923 to 1928, played a crucial role in the development of his ideas and work. Highly effective as a communicator, the self-taught Hungarian polyartist (1895–1946) practiced in many disciplines—painting, design, filmmaking, photography—and experimented with new materials and techniques. Moholy-Nagy's short text for the Bauhaus exhibition catalog Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, 1919–1923 is a much-cited statement of the fundamental principles of the *New Typography*, and he went on to design a number of publications embodying these tenets for the Bauhaus press. (In 1925, after the school moved from Weimar to Dessau, a typography and graphic design workshop was introduced, with Herbert Bayer as professor.) For Moholy-Nagy, the essential aim of the *New Typography* was efficient clarity purged of aesthetic distraction. Typographic form must be determined by the needs of the content, and to achieve this, "elasticity" of typographic expression was not only possible but de rigueur.—RP

Typography is a tool of communication. It must be communication in its most intense form. The emphasis must be on absolute clarity since this distinguishes the character of our own writing from that of ancient pictographic forms. Our intellectual relationship to the world is individual-exact (e.g., this individual-exact relationship is in a state of transition toward a collective-exact orientation). This is in contrast to the ancient individual-amorphous and later collective-amorphous mode of communication. Therefore priority: unequivocal clarity in all typographical compositions. Legibility—communication must never be impaired by an *a priori* aesthetics. Letters may never be forced into a preconceived framework, for instance a square.

The printed image corresponds to the contents through its specific optical and psychological laws, demanding their typical form. The essence and the purpose of printing demand an uninhibited use of all linear directions (therefore not only horizontal articulation). We use all typefaces, type sizes, geometric forms, colors, etc. We want to create a new language of typography whose elasticity, variability and freshness of typographical composition is exclusively dictated by the inner law of expression and the optical effect.

The most important aspect of contemporary typography is the use of zincographic techniques, meaning the mechanical production of photoprints in all sizes. What the Egyptians started in their inexact hieroglyphs, whose interpretation rested on tradition and personal imagination, has become the most precise expression through the inclusion of photography into the typographic method. Already today we have books (mostly scientific ones) with precise photographic reproductions; but these photographs are only secondary explanations of the text. The latest development supercedes this phase, and small or large photos are placed in the text where formerly we used inexact, individually interpreted concepts and expressions. The objectivity of

photography liberates the receptive reader from the crutches of the author's personal idiosyncrasies and forces him into the formation of his own opinion.

It is safe to predict that this increasing documentation through photography will lead in the near future to a replacement of literature by film. The indications of this development are apparent already in the increased use of the telephone, which makes letterwriting obsolete. It is no valid objection that the production of films demands too intricate and costly an apparatus. Soon, the making of a film will be as simple and available as now printing books.

An equally decisive change in the typographical image will occur in the making of posters, as soon as photography has replaced poster-painting. The effective poster must act with immediate impact on all psychological receptacles. Through an expert use of the camera, and of all photographic techniques, such as retouching, blocking, superimposition, distortion, enlargement, etc., in combination with the liberated typographical line, the effectiveness of posters can be immensely enlarged.

The new poster relies on photography, which is the new storytelling device of civilization, combined with the shock effect of new typefaces and brilliant color effects, depending on the desired intensity of the message.

The new typography is a simultaneous experience of vision and communication,

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