

TYPOGRAPHY |) @ ` / ~ 2 0 1 2

Typography in Publication Design

Book Design— the showcase field of visual communication. An international review.

Uta Schneider, <usus>, Offenbach am Main, Germany, u.schneider@boatbook.de

Abstract: The principles governing the medium “book design” are universal. Despite similarities and differences within national design traditions based on culture, ways of “thinking book” with regard to the design process are comparable the world over. The book designer is translator, visual author, dramatic advisor and stage director all in one. Book design is a complex affair. With its diverse conceptual and graphic design approaches it represents the supreme discipline within the realm of typographical design.

Key words: book design, graphical concept, structure of content, book features, three-dimensional object, structure of binding, the designer as visual author, international comparison.

The book medium is in flux

Much energy is being invested by publishers in the platform-neutral processing of content/text. The more aggressive the promotion of the digital (book) form, the more readers will instead come to expect from the printed book. In the future the printed book will be one of many media options available for readers to consciously choose between. In the face of competition from digital media it is even conceivable that the printed book will experience something of a renaissance. What do books offer readers which digital media cannot? The manner in which a book is designed, its structure and its features – the choice of resources with which it is created – will in the near future determine the retail success of the traditional book medium to a greater extent than has been true in the past, and all the more so at a time of declining print runs. It is in the sensitivity of its mode of expression that the strengths of the book lie vis-à-vis digital media: in its materiality and physicality. Unlike ephemeral media books have something definitive about them. This will increasingly call for even greater resoluteness when it comes to the application of typographical design approaches and the choice of materials. The paper alone is a conveyor of information. To decide in favour of buying a printed book rather than a

downloaded text is to consciously set store by the specialness of the book, by the option of handling it, by its physical nature and its relative durability. Thus design, finish and quality are the significant factors.

In the light of current media developments book design is changing. All examples from my presentation have been judged and singled out for merit by specialist panels in the international book design competition “Best Book Design from all over the World” which has been held in Leipzig every year since 1963. In 2011 32 countries entered collections of their “Best” books – books which have previously been judged in their respective countries of origin. In all aspects, these outstandingly designed books are special. Design here is not just a matter of legibility or of visual organisation of text but also of conception, typography, illustration, cover design, features and a book’s overall appearance. In other words: it is about the all-embracing design of the object. Book design is a complex medium. The designer must juggle different aspects, keeping them all in the air at the same time. Book design is first and foremost a medium which sets out to organise texts and contents. Through typeface, highlighting and positioning book designers give structure to texts in order to make their content accessible, to present them clearly. The book designer renders a complex subject matter in a pertinent fashion – in the form of a book, that form in which pages typically assume a fixed order between two covers, that form whose pages consist of fronts and backs and whose treatment for centuries has had certain connotations whilst permanently experiencing changing nuances in its overall form. Book design is more often than not an invisible medium.

How do you read?

Or perhaps one should ask: *do* you read? Strange though the question might seem it is the fact that a text is to be read that predetermines the need for typography in the first place. Typography is a kind of interpretation of a text. Paragraph indents, sideheads, the choice of typeface, size, line spacing/leading, column proportions and the way they are arranged on the page – in all cases the prime consideration is legibility. A book’s design should reflect the author’s voice or the concept the author wishes to transmit. The layout of the full-page spread is part of the message which the book is attempting to communicate. A book’s design offers a path through which the reader interacts with the text. The double-spread, the volume and space presented by a book – in the sense of the blank space to be found on the page – are important visual instruments. Often this blank

space, described by Stéphane Mallarmé as “this meaningful silence”^[1], is underestimated. Even if the text’s alignment and position are prescribed, it is the decision of the designer to realise the details: the choice and size of typeface in proportion to leading and format precisely define where pauses will occur.

Reading methods

Hans Peter Willberg^[2] specified the reading methods outlined below. Irrespective of differences in writing systems and languages the reception of text is universal ^[3].

1 – Typography for linear reading: the reader starts with the first word of the first page and ends with the last word on the last page. Linear reading is continuous; adhering to the predetermined order prescribed by the way the text is arranged. Works of fiction normally contain 60 to 70 characters per line. A column has approximately 30 to 40 lines per page. The so-called “grey value”, resulting from stroke width and spacing of letters and lines, determines the character of the typesetting and the ease with which it will be read. To simplify the flow of reading the text needs to be structured through visible and discernible paragraphs. For enjoyment of reading a professional typesetting quality is more important than spectacular design.

2 – Typography for fact-based reading: by browsing diagonally over the page spread the reader only partially reads the text in question. The reading movement is like a kind of back-and-forth perusal, the purpose being the quick apprehension of information. A lively page design, striking headings, short text passages and the incorporation of illustrations can all make it easier to skip over material and pick out what is essential. Pictures, graphics and colours also animate and facilitate the quick intake of information at several text levels. This “titbit” style of reading, which is also familiar to us from reading at the computer screen, occurs most commonly in works of non-fiction and magazines.

3 – Typography for differential reading: here a distinction is made within a text between terms and levels of reading. Academic and specialist books often contain texts of equal importance with different degrees of emphasis. Each text level has a different meaning,

¹ Stéphane Mallarmé, 1842–1898, French writer and poet, explored the relationship between text and the arrangement of words and spaces on the page, i.e. the relationship between content and form. This is particularly evident in his last major poem, *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* ('A roll of the dice will never abolish chance') from 1897.

² German typographer, book designer, teacher and author of many publications on micro-typography and on book design (1930–2003)

³ Hans Peter Willberg, *Buchkunst im Wandel. Die Entwicklung der Buchgestaltung im Spiegel des Wettbewerbs „Die schönsten Bücher der Bundesrepublik Deutschland“ 1951–1990*. Stiftung Buchkunst Frankfurt am Main, 1991

yet must not stand out typographically from the others. Subtle, meticulous and intricate typography is not the manifestation here of whimsical typographers but is necessary in order to translate differing textual content into an easily comprehensible visual language. Through using the possibilities offered by additional markings (small caps, italics etc.) ingenious highlighting allows the context of various text levels to be recognised. The reader's comprehension is enhanced without any interruption to the flow. For the design this means: treating the same things the same way.

4 – Typography for consultative reading: looking up a heading in an encyclopaedia or a term in an index ought to be easy. To enable short units of information to be readily apprehended typographical precision work is a must. Small quantities of text – headwords, reference numerals and keywords – can be typeset using the smallest type sizes.

5 – Typography for selective reading: teaching and school books contain a variety of text levels: mnemonics, examples, questions and exercises are all intertwined with the main text. This simultaneousness of elements, one of the typical features of school textbooks, makes it necessary to include orientation aids. Typographical organisation (type sizes, paragraphs, subheadings, colour and areas of colour) plus the guiding of the reader by means of a clearly arranged layout all contribute towards this. Here, too, what counts is: treating the same things the same way.

6 – Typography paced by meaning: refers to the structuring of content, for example for didactic purposes in reading primers. Inexperienced readers (children or those first beginning to read) need particular help. Here it is important for lines to be arranged by units of meaning. Hyphenations, for example, should in the case of language and picture books only be used – if at all – in accordance with meaning.

7 – Activating typography: turns script into image. In order to highlight particularly important text passages contrasts between light and dark or large and small can be incorporated as a way of catching the eye. These stylistic devices, originally used in the design of journals and magazines, are now increasingly being applied to book design. Thanks to their distinctive appearance and ease of recognition verbal images are easy to remember and intuitively comprehensible.

8 – Staged typography: here the space offered by the book, the double-page spread, is turned into a stage. In this way, for example, typefaces can be allocated to the characters of a play; the acoustical volume of a text (whispering/shouting) can be rendered by the use of tiny, spaced out passages of text versus large and bold ones. Pauses within a dialogue can be translated into blank spaces. The paper, in its sense of being unprinted surface, itself becomes part of the typographical statement.

“Readers can be subdivided into those who are trained and those who are less so, into those who are motivated and those who are less so, into those who read superficially and those who read with concentration. Leaving aside physical considerations (reading distance, eyesight and light) factors such as situation, motivation and prior knowledge influence ability and stamina in reading. An experienced reader with a high degree of motivation (for example aiming to glean information or pursue academic research) will persist where a hasty reader with a low level of motivation will give up. Mutually interchangeable contents and untrained readers need particular support which takes into consideration the expected use of a text.”^[4]

Book design – a complex design process

So which kind of design is the appropriate one? What makes sense? What is necessary? As Jost Hochuli^[5] puts it, one should “design in the way which appears to be the most suitable”^[6]. The designing of books is a complex process. The solutions found can be seen as versions, variations, interpretations. The basis of any graphic decision should be to make the content accessible and to make the reading process easier for the reader – and this with every means which book design has at its disposal. With reference to some particularly striking examples I shall now examine more closely the essential parameters which characterise books. These are not new, but there has been one particularly observable tendency in the last few years: resulting from the increase in digital media within the information marketplace the materiality of printed books, their status and manageability as physical objects have regained significance. Books cannot compete with the swiftness offered by digital processes. Thus the qualities inherent in this (analogue) medium, as opposed to those associated with digital matter, are becoming more significant than they ever were before. Does this mean, then, that high-quality contemporary book design is to be seen as a reaction to changes taking place within the media world?

I wish to present to you the interplay between concepts, typography, book form and features with reference to the “best books” as they have been singled out in the annual competition “Best Book Design from all over the World”.^[7] Here books are compared with

⁴ Karin Büchner, <http://www.k-buechner.de>

⁵ Swiss typographer, book designer, teacher and author of many publications on Swiss book design and on micro-typography (born 1933)

⁶ Jost Hochuli, Gutenberg Galaxie 1, Institut für Buchkunst Leipzig, 2000

⁷ The international competition with an international jury, founded in 1963 and held in Leipzig, has been under the auspices of the Stiftung Buchkunst since 1991. Books are entered which have

each other whose countries of origin manifest markedly different book traditions and in which both publishing markets and reading traditions differ — not only book categories are different but also book design itself, akin to the particular culture in question. These “Best books from all over the World” exhibit tendencies, however, which are to be observed globally even if at the same time regional differences between different cultures, interestingly, remain evident. It is my thesis that notwithstanding micro-typographical differences — resulting from the diversity of the respective writing systems — macro-typography and book design are universal. The book design medium speaks an international, universal language.

Material

Keywords: linen & paper; quality; colour of material; weight, grammage; surface; design; matching of materials.

“Average is out”, was the observation of one book designer in a recent column. Much of what is produced is very similar. Books increasingly need to position themselves as design products in order to be able to stand out from the crowd in a featureless market. To emerge from the masses publishers are venturing — and will no doubt do so even more in the future — an experimental approach with regard to materials. Holding a book means that, in parallel with the reading experience, our sense of touch, our hands and fingers are all active. In a subversive and indirect way the material makes its own statement over and above that of the reading matter itself.

The following book deals with Jan Palach^[8], a Czechoslovakian student who in January 1969 after the Prague Spring doused himself with petrol and set himself alight as an expression of protest against censorship. The young Dutch book designer Nynke Meijer has dedicated an experimental book to him and to the protest movement of the time. The choice of material, a recycled paper which — on account of its short fibres — tears easily and thus has a certain vulnerability, coupled with the humbleness of the printing technique employed — photocopying! — give this book an extraordinarily personal appearance. Red is a central topic, representing here emotion, agitation, socialism, blood. By a process of milling this soft recycled paper along its side edge a velvety surface is created which feels like skin — like bare skin. If the milled or polished surface is also

already won awards in their countries of origin, whether by jury or other selection procedures. Currently 34 national competitions have submitted their “best” books. A seven-member international jury selects 14 prizewinners from an annual total of 600–800 entries.

⁸ Nynke M. Meijer; Jan Palach — Morgen word je wakker geboren. Eigenverlag Nynke M. Meijer, Sneek (Netherlands). Design: Nynke M. Meijer, Sneek (Netherlands)

coloured red, the eye then sees the red demarcations in the book's format on every double-page spread. The vulnerability and fragility which this book exudes simultaneously create fascination and horror, creating thereby empathy for the main protagonist. This anti-aesthetic, yet unusually sensuous book has been produced to a small print-run. Had exactly the same typography and picture design been printed on white paper, bound as a hardcover and published as a non-fictional book or even downloaded onto a digital reader, then it would have made a fundamentally different statement. This book of Nynke Meijer's is exceptional and powerful because it adopts a subjective position and is unmistakably unique.

Concept

Keywords: conceptual structure & binding; internal logic; functionality; visual concept.

The book designer is – in a way – a translator, visual author, dramatic advisor and stage director who is responsible for the conceptual structure. The book is a stage.

Our ways of seeing are governed by tradition. So it is too with reading and looking at books. Generally speaking the structure of a book with regard to its content is pre-determined. Having opened its cover, we leaf through the endpapers, the half title, the title page, the list of contents, the foreword, the first chapter, and so on. In almost all cases this order makes sense. It is one which has taken shape over several centuries.

In recent years book designers have increasingly presented themselves not just as typographers or layout artists, designing according to conventional rules, but have rather understood themselves to be visual authors. The overall concept they devise constitutes an interpretative intervention into the structure of a book, and sometimes also into the way it is bound; they thereby expound their own way of looking at a topic, on occasions departing from conventional book form in the process. The prevalent codex is no longer the exclusive form. Non-verbal content, the form given to the book by its design, becomes – by way of accompaniment to the text – visible. Not surprisingly this visual authorship can be predominantly observed in the category of the art book, occasionally also in works of literature as a visual response to a particular linguistic rhythm.

Broedplaats Europoort v/h De Beer⁹] came into being in connection with the symposium "The Past in the Present of the Nederlands Fotomuseum Rotterdam". At first glance this art book appears to be like a documentary report examining the question as to how

⁹ Paul Bogaers et al; Broedplaats Europoort v/h De Beer. Artimo, Amsterdam (Netherlands). Design: René Put, Amsterdam (Netherlands)

industrial zones alter the landscape, for example the disappearance of breeding grounds through port expansion. It is a work in which photographer Paul Bogaers unites his own photography with newly-found snapshots and historical photo material. The book has its own particular, almost playful structure. Four booklets with differing formats are incorporated into the main, black-and-white book. These booklets contain photographs – colour in three and black-and-white in the other. These loose supplements can be leafed through independently. For orientation purposes the pages of the main book plus those of the extra booklets are numbered continuously so that their original position can effortlessly be found again after reading. The small booklets serve the function of visual annotations, devoid of text. They converge around the central topic like commentaries around a main text. Or to look at it another way: the main book is like an island, the breeding ground on which (rare) birds variously settle. Book design is not the design of two flat, two-dimensional pages lying next to one another, but rather design aimed at the book's overall space, at visible dimensionality.

Typography

Keywords: typographic box; choice of typeface; quality of type; size of typeface; word spacing; letter tracking (kerning); leading; column width; micro-typography; legibility; macro-typography; layout; grid; composition of text and image.

The style and size of letters plus their spatial organisation are themselves meaningful units. Typography is a way of organising information. *Nihon no Kindai Katsuji*^[10] is a book about script, hot lead typesetting and the history of the introduction of hot type letters into the Japanese typesetting and printing industries. It is an opulent book with attractively organised typography: on the outside a black satin cover in a white case, on the front cover the character *no* in hiragana, one of the three Japanese writing systems, typographically emphasised in a compelling and distinctive way. The Tokyo book designer, Mitsuo Katsui, arranges the content in a highly lucid manner. Pictures and texts, referring to one another, follow a rhythmically ordered composition from page to page. Even if one cannot read the Japanese, the perfectly handled typography is striking: the right-hand justified key, for example, is placed exactly on the axis where the two halves of an illustrated book come together. Axes are followed without the overall design being forced into a rigid grid. Text highlighting is marked through the use of characters of a somewhat bolder and darker weighting. Japanese typography is a complex issue. My reason for presenting this book is not so much that it is particularly experimental, but because its typographical flair and fine detail, all making for a sensitive, intelligible and clear

¹⁰ 日本の近代活字; *Nihon no Kindai Katsuji*. Kindai Insatsu Katsuji Bunka Hozonkai, Nagasaki (Japan). Design: Mitsuo Katsui, Tokyo (Japan)

typography, are a delight. The three scripts concurrently used in Japanese contain characters of differing density: 1) the complex Chinese characters of kanji; 2) the more open symbols of hiragana; and 3) the more angular katakana syllabary. Accordingly, the grey value of a column cannot look as even as in a text in which only one script system is being used.

Geohistoria de la Sensibilidad en Venezuela^[11] is the title of an impressive academic book. Álvaro Sotillo^[12] and Gabriela Fontanillas, both excellent typographers from Caracas, have created a complex yet highly subtle typography. The various elements of text information are differentiated from one another as minimally as is possible and as clearly as is necessary. The book designers have made do without coloured type, choosing rather to highlight through the use of small caps, old-style figures and italics. Footnote numeration uses a sans-serif, somewhat bolder weighting; paragraph numbering has the same typeface as that of the text, yet positioned to the left of the — serenely laid out, non-indented — column, thus still making the structural organisation perfectly visible. The whole apparatus of available highlighting possibilities is applied with virtuosity and variety. Graphics are placed both in the marginal column and within the main body of text, a highly vibrant way of treating them. The text column runs extremely close to the edges of the book, both at the top and the bottom. To counteract any feeling of constriction, blank spaces are worked into the picture layout as necessary. The choice of binding, French fold, opens up the possibility of a different type of navigation: the front edge of the book is adorned by a subtle thumb index.

Picture

Keywords: style; mise en page; concept; picture quality.

Picture books, children's books, school textbooks, academic books and illustrated books all live from the quality of their drawings. Drawing style, penmanship and stylistic devices vary according to genre. Whereas scientific drawing needs to render every detail with precision, the illustration of, say, a text from world literature requires an independent, artistic style of draughtsmanship. Within the overall design of a book, drawing style plus choice and thickness of typeface need to be matched with one another.

¹¹ Pedro Cunill Grau; Geohistoria de la Sensibilidad en Venezuela. Fundación Empresas Polar, Caracas. Design: Álvaro Sotillo in collaboration with Gabriela Fontanillas, Luis Giraldo, Caracas (Venezuela)

¹² Prizewinner of the City of Leipzig 2006 Gutenberg Award

The French picture book *L'imagier des gens*^[13] exhibits an illustrative style which for children's books is rare: the figures, drawn by Blexbolex, are two-dimensionally composed. Its simple yet highly eloquent and distinct illustrations are especially captivating. Each one tells its own story though they are all interrelated. The connection between image and text at the same graphic level is particularly unusual. The text is hand-drawn but looks as if it has been printed with a rubber stamp. The coloured areas within the drawings do not create a sense of bodily volume, nor is there any three-dimensionality through light and shade. Nonetheless, the effect of the drawings is not flat and two-dimensional. The superimposed transparent areas – printing is limited to three colours! – create a rich array of colour and great vitality. With modest means the illustrator has succeeded in developing highly expressive personalities and a narrative atmosphere.

Cover

Keywords: inside-outside; harmonising of cover and jacket; composition; marketing aspects; attracting attention; message; stylistic feature.

The fundamental aim of a book's title is to attract the reader's attention and to rapidly convey the message of the book. Is a glance at the cover enough? An intuitive response needs to be elicited from a customer in a bookshop in no more than three seconds. Whether the customer's curiosity is aroused enough for him or her to pick up the book depends on a number of factors. Parallel to its aesthetic appeal a book's cover needs to make it obvious to which genre the book belongs. In order to reach a particular target group a systematic conception for the cover is called for. The optical classification of a work to a particular segment of a publisher's programme or to a specific series is essential. Design techniques include the use of pictures, text, colour and space. Pictorial and spatial tensions are of elementary importance here (for example through the use of active background areas). For a book to make a stylistically unified overall impression it is ideal if the same colours, stylistic elements and typefaces are used as in the interior layout, in other words for the book's design to take place from the inside outwards, with the cover being devised last of all. Today, however, production procedures and phases between cover design and inner design run contrary to the above described sequence. Marketing departments need to promote cover designs in publishing previews long before the inside of a book has been designed or laid out. Synchronising interior and exterior is therefore difficult to achieve when it comes to industrialised book production. Nevertheless, there

¹³ Blexbolex; *L'imagier des gens*. Albin Michel Jeunesse, Paris (France). Design: Blexbolex, Leipzig (Germany)

are some publishing houses which attach importance to the overall design and consciously make it a selling point in their marketing.

That cover design does not end with the front title but can extend across spine, back cover and flaps is shown by the following example: *Bill, Max*^[14] is a catalogue about the Swiss designer and artist Max Bill. Here we have a white cover, featuring in the top right-hand corner “Bill,” – using Monotype Grotesk black and no publisher’s signet or author’s name anywhere to be seen. This is reductionism pushed to the limits. Opening the book reveals a continuation of the names of the professions exercised by Max Bill – typographer, designer, sculptor etc. – in the same font size but with each of the words assigned a different colour. The words continue independently from the end of the page over to the following one and only then comes the title page. The exterior design is thus carried over as a kind of entrée into the inside of the book. On closing the book the reader will find in the top left-hand corner of the back cover “Max.” Salient brackets (*Bill, Max*) raise the book to the status of an object in its own right.

//

The book is a stage. Through its layout rhythm is created. Full pages are followed by empty ones, coloured ones by black-and-white. Pictures can be borderless i.e. anchored to the edge of the book, or they can be free-standing and thus have a more suspended character; or they can fall away to the edge making them direct and immediate in their impact. Designing books is like making films. As quasi directors book designers determine timbre and tempo, composing arcs of suspense or weaving in meta-levels of the story. The point is: “Books reveal the structures of thought”^[15]. Re-worded in typographical terms this means: good book design, through graphic structuring, facilitating and translating of a manuscript or idea into book form, makes its content accessible. This act of translation is – irrespective of language, culture or writing system – a uniform one. Book design is universal.

¹⁴ Max Bill. *Maler, Bildhauer, Architekt, Designer*. Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit (Germany). Design: Sascha Lobe, Ina Bauer / L2M3, Stuttgart (Germany)

¹⁵ Günter Karl Bose, in his award ceremony laudation made at the presentation of the City of Leipzig Gutenberg Award to Jost Hochuli 1999, in: Jost Hochuli, *Gutenberg Galaxie 1*, Institut für Buchkunst Leipzig, 2000

Acknowledgements

The credit goes to Stiftung Buchkunst Frankfurt am Main & Leipzig, for providing of bibliographic data and awarded books (<http://www.stiftung-buchkunst.de>). I thank Graham Welsh, Leipzig, for his translation.