

Letter Letter 2

Spring 1985

Publisher: A Typ 1

P.O. Box 611, CH 4142 Münchenstein

Editor: Gerrit Noordzij

Langstraat 11

4176 BC Tuij

The Netherlands

Association Typographique Internationale (A Typ 1) Committee on Education and Research

From an article by H. H. Schmiedt in the German printing magazine DEUTSCHER DRUCKER (January 1985):

The greater part of visual messages is designed by people who do not even know that there exists such a thing as design. This is a danger for civilization, for education and for physical health. This is demonstrated sufficiently by the treatment of writing on viewing screens impairing labour conditions and the standards of reading. The worst systems should be excluded from the market by official standards specifying minimum conditions of quality.

There is much scientific and learned interest in the media and their social effects. The nature of writing, however, is totally neglected by such studies. children's handwriting is a fair indication for the level of teaching.

Attempts for improvement can rely on A Typ 1, for A Typ 1 has this objective in its constitution and plenty of specialized know-how among its members.

A Typ 1 can be satisfied with such publications as those mentioned above and also with the continuous propaganda for the legal protection of type design in the issues of U&Lc. But if we are just satisfied, our reputation could become problematic. I do not know if we are prepared to meet an apply for support.

Teaching of handwriting, for example, would find some good opinions but much more bad opinions in A Typ 1. Even the opinion that we do not have an

From a series of articles by Huib van Krimpen in the Dutch printing magazine GRAFICUS (January and February 1985):

in advertising composing machines are recommended for their speed. Printers should insist on information about the quality which can be obtained at the pretended speed. Even if printers do not care for reasonable ascenders and descenders, for small caps and non-ranging numerals, they might realize that designers care for these options. And type-faces which are praised for their large x-height should be unmasked as typefaces which have to be used in small body sizes with much leading.

The future of printing is connected with the future of type design which depends on effective protection of copyright. The efforts of A Typ 1 in this respect deserve the support of the printing industry.

opinion is represented in A Typ 1. (The good opinions are very different.) At best we are a collection of opinions. That is why our meetings are so interesting. If A Typ 1 wants to take profit from our discussions it might consider the publication of reports. This is an opinion, that of the editor.

Provisional programme of the Hamburg Seminar

Sunday 22-9 p.m. Arrival of participants. Arrangement of the exhibition.

Monday 23-9 a.m. Opening speech by a learned person on the impact of the media.

p.m. Hans Peter Willberg, A personal and German account of esthetic experiences in writing (including typography and calligraphy).

Tuesday 24-9 a.m. Gerrit Noordzij, Perception in teaching reading and handwriting.

p.m. Fernand Baudin, The necessity of handwriting.

Martin Andersch, Lettering in art education.

Wednesday 25-9

Gerrit Noordzij, Analysis of writing,

and Petr van Blokland, Synthesis of writing (with demonstrations of an experimental software programme).

Thursday 26-9 a.m. Heinz H. Schmiedt, The typographic conditions of modern communication.
Rosemary Sassoon, Writing as therapy.

p.m. Hans A. Halbey, Closing speech.

Friday 27-9 a.m. Symposium - A concluding discussion between 'writers', authors, teachers, politicians and scholars.

This programme is my interpretation (rather than a translation) of a draft by Martin Andersch. It is not precise and it is not definitive. The definitive programme will be released by Martin Andersch.

The provisional programme gives an impression of the approach of the theme.

We did not ask the speakers to deliver time-consuming speeches. The purpose of the speech is to introduce a subject for discussion. It has always been the intention of our seminars to take the participation of the participants seriously.

Some readers suggested me to make German and French versions of the Letterletter, because the English edition is so difficult to understand. My students say politely: it is not the language that is difficult but the editor. I decided to agree with these young people, because this is the most convenient decision. The difficulty might be that I cannot give a link with the existing literature which has lost its relevance. Moreover it is hard enough to write in one language I do not understand. I cannot do three times as much. Like Erwinde, chers amis, please be indulgent.

The Hamburg Thesis

In a reaction to Letterletter 1 Taro Yamamoto wrote from Tokyo that computer programmes are becoming increasingly sophisticated, complex, large and expensive, whereas simpler programmes and cheaper equipment might be sufficient for better solutions of the same problem.

Our Japanese colleague may be right. Harder problems are met with more software, probably because a software specialist does not see other problems than software problems. In typographic software the typographic problems are difficult to recognize in the simplified presentation: Variations in weight (medium, semi bold, bold, etc.) show random shapes because the shapes are filled-in outlines which are drawn through the interpolations of points that are chosen arbitrarily.

The computer specialists share the layman's conception of a shape as being the space within an outline. By relying on these specialists the industry develops sophisticated equipment which is founded on primitive notions. Modern systems present shapes that are defined by random outlines. Designers hold that the outline is defined by the shape. We could say that these views part typographers and outsiders, a division that is serious enough to pay attention to it. The Committee on Education and Research concentrates this attention ~~to~~ on the teaching of handwriting; by tradition this subject is on the agenda of all our meetings. It is not for tradition only that it will be a subject of the Hamburg Seminar: since typographic designers have to work with software that has been made by typographic laymen, the conception of shape is no longer a division between professionals and outsiders. The school boys view is corrupting type-design and it is a nuisance for typographers. For the survival of typography we have to educate the school boys.

It is the shape that defines the outline. This is no point of discussion among designers. Our problem is the next question: What is the origin of the shape? This problem is the theme of the Hamburg Seminar, but in Martin Andersch's approach the question appears in a provoking statement:

- a. Typography is writing with prefabricated letters.
- b. The criteria for type design and typography come from handwriting.
- c. Typography is learned in handwriting.

This thesis cannot be neglected. It can be rejected, but not without engagement because we would need an alternative. An agreement with the thesis would require justification by a description of the parameters of handwriting that have to be applied in type design and typography. Convenient ready-made answers — such as those stored in old books e.g. — are excluded. In this respect Martin Andersch is preparing a seminar which has to be realized by the participants.

The typographic argument is a visual one. This is why Petr van Blokland will demonstrate his parameters in an interactive computer programme. The validity of the arguments can be tested on the viewing screen.

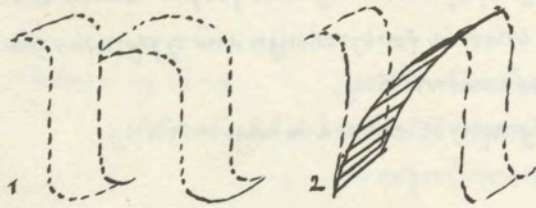
Participants are invited to visualize their point of view in a show of type design. This exhibition has a wall surface of 1 m² (square) available for each entry. The exhibition is intended as a visual contribution to our discussions; finished art work is not important.

Contributions for the exhibitions should be announced on the official application form which will be released by Martin Andersch.

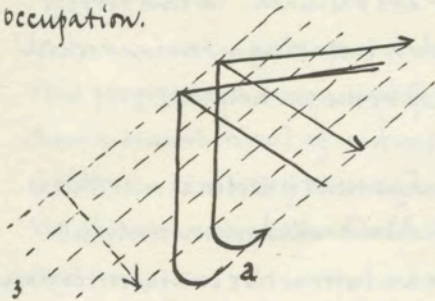
From the front

Description of strokes,
continued from
Letterletter 1.

In my book *THE STROKE OF THE PEN* I have tried to distinguish 'interrupted writing' and 'cursive writing' by the difference between upstroke and downstroke: interrupted writing shows downstrokes only (1), in cursive writing downstrokes are linked by upstrokes (2).



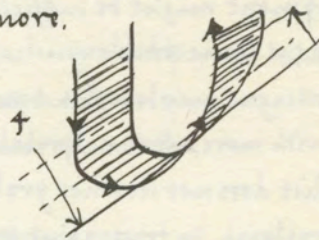
The weak point in this distinction is that the meaning of the words can be exchanged. To make sense it supposes a special position of the hand (though most people would be kind enough to consider it as a normal position). It is very difficult to explain^{to} a computer what the human hand is. The idea of the front could make the description of the stroke independent of such a pre-occupation.



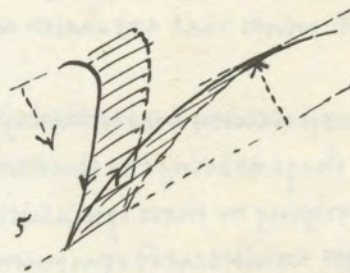
The dotted lines (3) represent subsequent positions of a frontline moving in the direction of the dotted arrow. The three strokes are in different directions with the same counterpoint, but the direction of the frontline is the same for all of them. At a one stroke is drawn in the direction of the frontline. The stroke may be continued in this direction but the front has stopped.

The turning of the stroke may continue (4). The front starts moving again, but in the opposite direction. This stroke in which the front is returning

is what I used to call upstroke, and in the discussion of handwriting I might stick to that expression, but in ~~the~~ analyzing strokes I do not need it anymore.



It is sufficient to say that in this stroke the front is returning. The stroke may turn smoothly through the ultimate position of the frontline (4) or abruptly (5).



Discussion with paleographers (Martin Steinmann, Basel, and Peter Gumbert, Leiden) make me hesitant in using conventional terminology (e.g. 'cursive') because it seems to disturb understanding. These partners suggested me to use new terms for new conceptions of old phenomena. At this moment I could accept this suggestion, but I realise that from now on the word 'cursive' has lost any meaning. I feel sorry for such a nice word to get lost in the misty atmosphere of confusing talk and ignorance. Should I also leave the nice word 'graphology' to the gossips?

Dear reader, tell me if you want more news from the front, tell me your view on our most urgent problem, terminology. Send contributions to the editor, Gerrit Noordzij