

The revised edition of
Die Neue Typographie

Bachelor Thesis by Maarten Kanters

Dear reader,

First I want to thank you for taking the time to read my thesis. This thesis I wrote is part of my graduation year at the graphic design department at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy Amsterdam.

As a starting point of my thesis I was interested in researching one of the worlds most well known typographers, Jan Tschichold. He is the author of the book Die Neue Typographie, which was published in 1928.

What I found out is that Jan Tschichold has tried to revise this first version of the book for decennia, but he never managed to actually do so. In a process of a whole year I contacted people all over the world, in order to find as many comments and corrections to the document Jan Tschichold personally wanted to make.

As an archaeologist I started to work on a revised version of Die Neue Typographie. First I studied the historical background upon the matter, then I started to work out his personal corrections and revisions, and thirdly, I made a version of the book in which I applied the corrections to his book.

This research, thesis and version of the book have become a project, which can be seen as a personal interpretation and translation of Jan Tschicholds work. It is something old changing into something new.

Sincerely yours,
Maarten Kanters



Jan Tschichold
1902 - 1974

Introduction to Jan Tschichold and Die Neue Typographie.

It was December the 8th in the year of 1924, when the world, and to begin with Leipzig, first met Ivan Tschichold. Ivan gave a lecture, organized by the Typographische Vereinigung (Typographical association), concerning Constructivism. This new modern movement incited Johannes Tzschichhold to embrace his Slavic background, and it resulted in him, changing his birth name.

Tschichold came in contact with this design philosophy when he visited the 1923 Bauhaus exhibition in Weimar. Trained in classical typography, Tschichold was dazzled by what he saw here. It was after this intense experience, that Tschichold became fascinated by this, to him, unknown design philosophy. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy was head of the preliminary course at the Bauhaus school, and he was the author of an essay that was included in the publication Staatliches Bauhaus 1919 bis 1923, that accompanied the exhibition in Weimar. This essay partially consisted out of a new approach towards typography.

After returning to his hometown (Leipzig), Tschichold immediately tried to establish contact with Moholy-Nagy, with success. Moholy-Nagy would become one of Tschicholds closest friends, and his mentor in the first lessons of this new modern movement. From here on, Tschichold would more and more experiment with this new approach towards typography, and would slowly step away from his classical training. While Tschicholds first lectures in the end of 1924 dealt with constructivism as a movement, his greatest interest lay in the opportunities constructivism had to offer concerning typography. With the help of Moholy-Nagy, Tschichold was trying to define what constructivism had to offer to his field of expertise. It was in 1925 that Tschichold published his first manifesto, which carried out his interpretation of what we know now as Die Neue Typographie. This manifesto was published in Kulturschau, Heft 4 in spring of 1925.

Tschicholds publication adopted not only its title from the essay from Moholy-Nagy (published in Bauhaus 1919 bis 1923), but also the recommendations concerning the layout, and the use of different typefaces to create contrast and surprising formations.

Moholy-Nagy was an important figure within the Constructivism movement. A movement, which originated after the ending of the First World War in 1918. Modernism was a revolt against all historical, and in their eyes conservative, cultural practices. They abandoned the idea of “art for art’s sake”, and were in favour of art as a practice, dedicated to a social purpose. Their most important incentive was the rejection of tradition, and they wanted to look towards the future with a totally new and fresh point of view, without the ballast of the past. Tschichold felt connected to this philosophy and its ideas. Especially in the field of typography, tradition was the utmost important and dominant factor. Even though Tschichold was a very gifted and well-trained practitioner of the traditional approach towards typography, it was in these early years of constructivism, that he felt that in particular the field of his expertise, had to confront reality too. In a letter to Imre Kner on the 19th of June 1925, he wrote the following: “There are people here who try to breathe new life into the old, but here the past is already dead” (Bekes Archive).

Typography was dominated by hundreds of years of tradition, but in the eyes of Tschichold, all the inventions that were made before, now, did more harm than they did any good. Through his writing he would attack anyone, who would still work according to those old traditions, in order to promote his opinion towards an approach that was of “the modern and present day”. An approach that left behind its history, in all its esthetical forms, and embraced the soul purpose of what typography was really about: clarity.

Tschichold took a deliberate opposition to the old typography, whose aim according to him was not clarity, but “beauty” and whose vivacity did not attain the high level needed in modern times. He argued that the old typography, in all its forms, was an approach that was always predetermined, and by that, was always inorganic and not suitable for its time and message it was or had to communicate.

After the publication of his first manifesto, Tschichold started to collect material that was going to demonstrate and illustrate Die Neue Typographie. He planned to use all his collected material in a special issue of Typografische Mitteilung (Typographic News), a journal of the Bildungsverband der Deutschen Buchdrucker (Educational association of the German printing trade union). Although the preparation took longer than expected, it appeared in the October issue of Typografische

Mitteilung in 1925 under the title Elementare Typographie. This was the first publication Tschichold wrote, directed to all people interested in the field of typography (his earlier manifesto appeared in Kulturschau, which was a small socialist magazine, with not too many readers).

It was after this wide spread article, that a fierce and broad discussion followed. The typographical world was confronted with its use of elements out of all styles and eras, and this article questioned till what bias this was still valid and justified.

Elementare Typographie was received with great enthusiasm within the modern movements. Still, Tschichold felt that this article did not conceive all areas that needed alternation. This is where he began to work on what we now know as the handbook for modern designers, Die Neue Typographie by Jan Tschichold. It took three years to finish, but finally it was published by the Bildungsverband der Deutschen Buchdrucker (Educational association of the German printing trade union) in Berlin in the year of 1928.

Although the level of criticism was already quite fierce in Elementare Typographie, in this publication, Tschichold claimed that there was no other solution than the one he was amplifying, and the plight typographers still had to any other design philosophy were condemned with no further excuses. A more extreme position was almost not possible. Tschichold colligated his name forever to this document and these quite excessive opinions, something he would later, severely regret.

Die Neue Typographie was printed in an edition of 5,000 copies, and was to cost 6 Marks (5 if ordered by the publisher before the first of June, 1928). This price can be seen as quite modest, for a laborious illustrated, cloth-cased book, and by that the intention of the book becomes clear: It was meant for anyone with an interest in modern typography, not just the elite group of people with money and zest for typographical theory. Little was publicized about the release of this publication, especially when compared to the earlier publication from Tschichold, Elementare Typographie in 1925. But where Elementare Typographie started of the discussion on these matters, Die Neue Typographie was responsible for a thoroughgoing of this development. It was not only highlighting the problem, but it stated the rules to discard from the past and how to work in the future, according to a modern approach.

In 1930 the book was announced by its publisher as “almost out of print”, followed in 1931 as “out of print”, and the distribution of the book can be seen as a clear success. The book was built up out of two parts; a historical and theoretical discussion of the “growth and nature” of the New Typography movement, and out of a detailed contemplation of the “principal typographic categories”, with clear referenced material and illustrations.

Already in 1929, Tschichold wrote to Piet Zwart, requesting material to be incorporated in a second revised version as illustrations (in all probability, other colleagues were contacted too, but until now no correspondence has been found or archived). The publication was going to be, in Tschichold's words, “quite changed”. For example the layout would change into an A4 format. But, more important, the tone and position Tschichold took in the first publication, was going to divert from its predecessor. Tschichold felt that *Die Neue Typographie* was rather extreme in its convictions towards other solutions and traditions within the typographical world. And although in 1932 the Verlag des Bildungsverbandes der Deutschen Buchdrucker changed the status from *Die Neue Typographie* from “out of print”, into “coming out soon” and Tschichold wrote to Zwart, later that year, that the text for a second edition was ready for setting, the publishers did not want to undertake the risk of proceeding with this publication, in view of unfavourable conditions (Letter of 16 February 1932 (Getty Research Institute)). Around this time Germany was economically and politically falling into a deep regression. More than 30 per cent of its working population was unemployed. In January 1933, Adolf Hitler gained total political control and was appointed Chancellor of Germany. It was in early March of 1933 that Tschichold was taken into “protective custody” by the National Socialist authorities, accused of being a “cultural Bolshevik”. After six weeks in custody, Tschichold was released under a general amnesty of prisoners of his kind and he immediately made plans to immigrate to Switzerland. With Tschichold leaving Germany, *Die Neue Typographie* remained behind, unaltered, although Tschichold no longer agreed with its content. This retraction became public when in February 1932, *Typographische Monatsblätter* published an article, by the hand of Tschichold entitled ‘Wo stehen wir heute? (Where do we stand today?)’. In this publication he states the following: “After the appearance of the special issue *Elementare Typographie* (1925) and the book *Die Neue Ty-*

pographie (1928), the theory of the New Typography has had to confront reality”. This was the first time Tschichold criticized his earlier work through writing and by that, his rather extreme self-assured younger self. From here on, his comments and criticism would harden, over time. First, on his own publications concerning *Die Neue Typographie*, later on *Die Neue Typographie* movement as a whole. The “Tschichold-Bill Dispute” lends itself to elaborate on this. The first article entitled “On Typography”, in which Max Bill speared no words in criticizing Tschichold (who was his old confederate in the design philosophy of the New Typography), was published in the *Schweizer Graphische Mitteilung* in April 1946. It was published after Tschichold gave a speech addressing the Swiss Graphic Design Association on the topic of “Constants in Typography”. Here, Tschichold criticized *Die Neue Typographie* as a whole, not only concerning his own design philosophy of that time. He said the following:

“The New Typography has indeed not yet been suspended, but it has proven itself to be suitable only for advertising and jobbing. For the book, and particular for literature it is completely unsuitable”.

Bill's criticism in “On Typography” suggested lack of artistic progress in Tschichold's carrier, resulting in the reformation of his working method. Bill argued that the New Typography's “asymmetric” and organically formed text layout, would very unlikely obsolete in comparison to the decorative and nonfunctional mid-axis, “symmetrical” renaissance model. One article, from the hand of Tschichold entitled “Belief and Reality” followed, also published by *Schweizer Graphische Mitteilung* in June 1946, reacting on the criticism of Bill.

Although the direct dispute between Tschichold and Bill stopped after these two publications, this argument is seen as a defining incident for typography itself after the Second World War, but also as a historical pinpoint in Tschichold's on-going criticism towards *Die Neue Typographie*. Here, directly out in the open, he criticized practitioners who worked according to the modernist design philosophy, one that he had promoted so fiercely before. Tschichold was criticizing not only the design philosophy of its practitioners, he also condemned the moral and political aspect of the movement and its partisans. He said the following in his reaction on Bill (“Belief and Reality”):

“Its (the New Typography) intolerant attitude certainly corresponds in particular to the German inclination to the absolute; its military will-to-order

and its claim to sole power corresponds to those fearful components of German-ness which unleashed Hitler's rule and the Second World War". It is clear, that Tschichold no longer thought the new typography to be the most adequate maturation for typography. As stated above, Tschichold thought that its intolerant attitude towards other solutions, blinded any other possible outcome. But, even though he is making this rather extreme comparison (especially just one year after the war ended), Tschicholds own intolerant attitude towards the new typography is high lighted here as well. The line between personal and professional annotation is very thin here, something that Bill felt as well. Although the exegeses from Tschichold towards this subject have always been substantially proven, especially this subject has tempted him to rather extreme statements.

In the year of 1995 the University of California Press issued the first English version of Die Neue Typographie. When opening the book, Ruari McLean, translator of the English version and personal friend from Tschichold, starts of with a foreword. On the first page, in the forth paragraph, McLean tells us that in the year of 1967, Tschichold asked him to translate Die Neue Typographie into the English language. Again, Tschichold was planning a revised edition. And so McLean received a copy of the text with numerous corrections, editorial revisions, and deletions of the matter Tschichold considered to be no longer relevant or out dated. The text continues: It should be remembered that in a speech made to the Type Directors Club of New York in 1959 (later printed in Print under the title "Quousque Tandem . . ."), he (Tschichold) said: "What I do today is not in the line of my often mentioned book Die Neue Typographie, since I am the most severe critic of the young Tschichold of 1925-28. A Chinese proverb says: 'In hast there is error.' So many things in that primer are erroneous, because my experience was too small". Again, no publisher could be found, willing to publish this document from Tschicholds hand. We can only imagine the exasperation Tschichold must have felt, when for the second time, his plan to alter Die Neue Typographie had failed. When we think about the fact that already in 1929, he felt that his positions towards a classical approach to typography were too extreme, we can presume, almost forty years of classical practice later, that his frustrations towards his earlier statements can only have grown. Yet, he wanted it to appear in 1967,

in what would have been the first English version of Die Neue Typographie. It is clear that the function of the book changed over time. Before, serving as a manifest to promote Die Neue Typographie, it now would have been a historical document, one that was going into history, as the handbook for modern designers in these early years of modernism. It was during Tschicholds second attempt of publishing this revised edition, that he started working on various publications concerning his life and work. These years are seen nowadays, as the period in which Tschichold was reflecting on his life, his work and all the things he had accomplished.

Tschichold has always, and if not with great annoyance, controlled everything that was published around his persona and work. Recent studies show that certain periods in Tschicholds life (stories, dates and works), where altered or edited in specific ways, in order to favour Tschicholds later views on how he wanted to be remembered, leaving now only Die Neue Typographie behind, in a unaltered version.

Two years before Tschichold died, Typographische Monatsblätter published a special issue concerning only Tschichold himself, and it was released on his seventieth birthday. The issue of the Typographische Monatsblätter consisted out of an elaborate showing of Tschicholds work (in reproduction), a full bibliography, but it started of with an article signed by Reminiscor. Reminiscor turned out to be a big admirer of Tschichold, fully praising his work and design philosophies (though sometimes with a very sharp and hardened tone of criticism). For readers, familiar with the hand of Tschichold, it was possible to recognize his tone. But, for the greater part of the article's readers, it was hard to figure out the fact that Tschichold wrote the article himself, under the alias Reminiscor (meaning he who remembers). In 1977 the publication *Leben und Werk des Typographen Jan Tschichold* was published in Dresden, which was actually an aggrandizement of the Typographische Monatsblätter issue. Now only more work was incorporated together with five of Tschicholds most substantial essays. These two publications have for long been, the most detailed sources, for studies done about Tschichold, in the years to follow.

Both these projects where initiated during Tschichold's life, and he played a prestige role in the editorial decisions and choice in treated subjects. These publications can be seen as a monument that Tschichold created, in order to honour himself.

Tschicholds prevalence in editorial decisions, concerning publications addressing his persona and work, even in the short years after his death, can be discerned as well. The clearest and most demonstrable example of this is the publication that appeared in 1975, one year after his death, entitled *Jan Tschichold: typographer*, published by Lund Humphries in London, from the hand of Ruari Mclean. It is clear that this publication consists for a great deal out of personal experience of McLeans work relationship with the subject, but next to that, Tschicholds presence can be felt as well. It is not entirely clear till what bias McLean was influence by the convictions and opinions of Tschichold, and the persuasive voice of which we know Tschichold now. What we can say is that the content of this book would not disturb Tschichold. Though this publication was consistent with what Tschichold him self wanted to be remembered for, the mentioning of the revised edition of *Die Neue Typographie* by McLean in the 1995 edition and especially the republication of the first edition is definitely not. I believe we can see it as an important gesture from McLean, to acknowledge the existence of this revised edition in his foreword. McLean is introducing *The New Typography* to a new and younger public.

Tschichold spend his life, working on how, the typographer Tschichold was interpreted and conceived. He did this with great precision and a very convincing voice. The unaltered version of *Die Neue Typographie*, is one of the only documents that Tschichold failed to publish, and by that throughout his life, must have been an agonizing fact. Although McLean tells us about the attempt from Tschichold, he states the following in his introduction:

“The original passages of text were to stand unaltered. It was not feasible to show here the cuts and other corrections, which although numerous were not of serious textual importance. In the second edition Tschichold had planned, there would certainly have been typographical changes: paragraphs were to be indented, and book and magazine titles italicized, in accordance with modern practice. Indented paragraphs have not been introduced in the present translation, and the illustrations, some of which Tschichold intended to change or omit, are unaltered”.

McLean, had to choose between two possibilities. First, there was the revised edition and the preference of its author, Tschichold. On the other hand the choice of reproducing the original, unaltered version. The

University of California Press, together with McLean made the editorial decision to show the original document, an unaltered, raw and extreme document, which shows the days of early modernism. But McLean also took the editorial decision to tell about the failed attempts from Tschichold and his endeavours to hide his (in Tschicholds owns words), “inexperienced younger self”.

In the introduction McLean writes: “It was not feasible to show here the cuts and other corrections, which although numerous were not of serious textual importance.” This statement is something that in my personal opinion does not fully do just to Tschichold. If we look closely at how extensively he choose new words and reconstructed sentences, changed or omitted images, names and examples, even deleted whole sections of the book, it is hard to imagine and label these corrections to be unimportant. *Die Neue Typographie* is prized for it’s quality, it’s production and impact, but most important, that we do have to remember here, is that it was designed as a whole. The content, and the physical form are one. The result: change one, you directly change the other, it is not possible to divide these two.

Tschichold was off course the only one, who was able to redesign the new typography, in a version that would be as coherent as the original one. So republishing the original, for me personally has been the right choice. By that, it really serves as a historical document. But, knowing that Tschichold worked for a very long time, during various periods of his life, on this revised edition, it somehow feels like such a loss, to leave this document incomplete and scattered in different archives all over the world.

Now, thirty–seven years after his death, this document not only serves as a corrected version of the first edition of *Die Neue Typographie*. To my personal opinion it can be seen as a contribution, that reveals the miscellany of Tschichold, in his legacy to future generations. Furthermore, it contributes to the research into Tschichold as a person. It gives us an inside view on how Tschichold corrected his earlier work, and by that his younger self. Today we live in a time where everything is documented. The way Tschichold edited his legacy in the last few years of his life, is something that is impossible to do in these modern times. Tschichold comes from a generation, in which biographies or autobiographies served as a documented truth of its subject. These publications sometimes have the negative out-

come, that when they are well documented and relatively consisted, they are often perceived as the truth. This is something, that Tschichold, like no other was fully aware of.

In researching Tschicholds ideas and writings I found out how this person, driven by perfectionism and unlimited passion, wanted to re-publish *Die Neue Typographie*, so soon after it was published. It was intriguing and fascinating to find out how he never succeeded in doing so and how *Die Neue Typographie* would have looked like now a days, if he would have managed to publish his famous book with the corrections he wanted to make. The reason why I tried to reconstruct and rebuilt the revised version of *Die Neue Typographie*, is my personal fascination with the fact that his revised version of this famous book never got published. Therefore his ideas upon the matter never have been highlighted before. I have tried to collect all these sparse pages, and other material, relevant to my research, in which Tschichold has commented on his own work. I used his personal writings to friends, his professional comments and his corrections and revisions on the matter, in correspondence with colleagues. In this personal attend and process, I am thankful for the support, help and contact with a lot of people occupied with the subject of Jan Tschichold, to mention: the people of international booksellers Nijhof&Lee, the UvA, the Graphic Design Museum Breda, Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, the Tschichold Institute in Leipzig, St. Bride Library in London, the Getty Reasearch Institue in Los Angeles, the University of Reading in the UK and a small various group of private collectors in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Also for the guidance from Louis Lüthi, during the writing process of this thesis. As an archaeologist I have tried to reconstruct the thoughts and comments Tschichold had upon his own ideas, rules and visions. Through a time period of nine months I rebuilt a revised and personal version of *Die Neue Typographie*. It has become my interpretation of Jan Tschicholds corrections, revisions and comments on his work. It has never been the goal, to make the document he would have created himself, this would have been unrealistic and way to far out of my reach. What I have been trying to do, is to accomplish a coherent document in which his never published and therefor relatively unknown version of *Die Neue Typographie* would be shown to the world.

To me, Jan Tschichold is one of the most intriguing typographers of

the twentieth century. To have a person like that, revising, commenting and correcting his own book and never managing in showing this to the world, is a very fascinating subject as a starting point for a thesis. The document in front of you has become a personal tribute to him and a constructive contribution to his legacy in the form of a Bachelor thesis and an end exam work.

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