

Jan Tschichold



Early Years

The first half of the 20th century is saturated with euphoric devastating events—Einstein’s theory of relativity, powered flight, the World Wars, Hitler, the computer chip, and Vietnam—all of which profoundly affected developments in architecture, industrial, and graphic design. What takes place on social, political, and economic levels has and always will inspire or provoke designers to establish their philosophies. This is certainly true of Jan Tschichold—the most vocal proponent of *The New Typography* during the 1930s.

Influences

The son of a sign painter in Leipzig, Germany; Jan Tschichold (1902–1974) studied calligraphy and book design under Hermann Detitsch at the Leipzig Academy and began teaching there in 1921. His early influences include the calligraphic styles of Edward Johnston, Walter Tiemann, Paul Renner, and Rudolph Koch. In 1923, he attended the first Bauhaus Exhibition and was greatly impressed by the work of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Russian Constructivists. He then withdrew from the traditional typographic style he had worked in thus far.

The New Age Typography

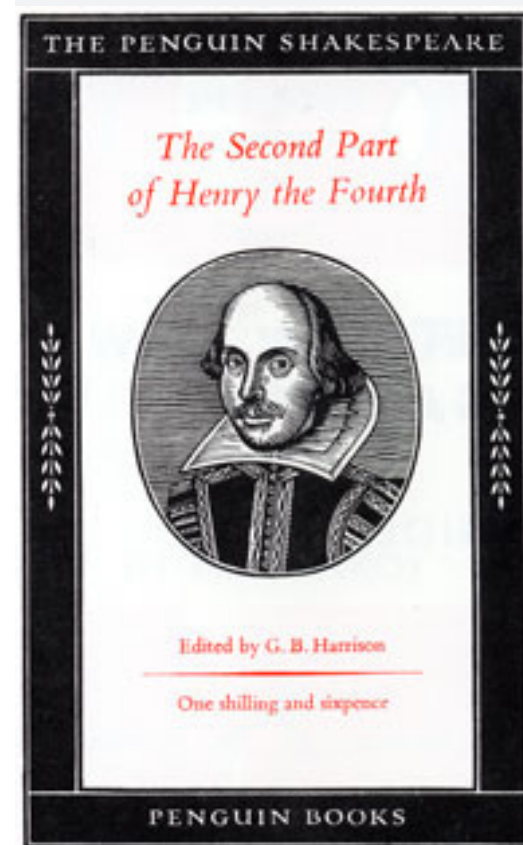
This was the first of two divergent philosophies Tschichold embraced during his career, vigorously condemning the opposite. In 1925, in a special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen*, Tschichold presented the typographic work of Russian El Lissitzky to printers for the first time. In his first book *Die neue Typographie* (*The New Typography*), 1928, he pugnaciously announced his new views, rejecting traditional typefaces and formats in favor of asymmetrical arrangement and exclusive use of sans serif typefaces as the appropriate style to express the spirit of the machine age. This book codified principles of typographic design in terms easily understood by printers.

In 1933, Tschichold was arrested by the Nazis for creating “un-German” typography. Upon release, he and his family emigrated to Basel, Switzerland where Tschichold taught part-time at the Basel School of Arts and Crafts and wrote *Typographische Gestaltung* (*Asymmetric Typography*), 1935. It was at this time that Tschichold began to gradually turn away from the new typography, equating it with Fascism. During the 1940s, he designed over 500 titles for Penguin Books in London. Most notable, is the Shakespeare series, demonstrating Tschichold’s return to classicism, with traditional typefaces, symmetrical arrangement, and occasional ornamentation.

In 1949, Tschichold returned to Switzerland, working for various publishers, as well as the Hoffmann-Laroche pharmaceutical firm. In the early 1960s a German printing firm commissioned Tschichold to design a Garamond-tike typeface capable of being set using Monotype, Linotype, or foundry processes, with no perceptible outcome on the page. His efforts resulted in Sabon (named after Jacob Sabon, a punchcutter from Lyon believed to have brought some of Garamond’s matrices to Frankfurt). Sabon is a handsome typeface and a remarkable accomplishment for one known more as a user than as a designer of typefaces. Tschichold continued working in Switzerland until his death in 1974.

Although attacked by architect and designer Max Bill for being a renegade, and criticized by ardent followers for apparently abandoning his first preachings, Jan Tschichold had matured and come full circle to realize that a graphic designer must draw from both old and new. He stated, “... The New or Functional typography is well suited for publicizing industrial products, yet its means of expression are limited because it strives solely for Puritanical ‘clarity’,... there are many typographic problems which cannot be solved on such regimented lines without doing violence to the text... books are too complicated for the simplifying procedures of the New Typography.”

Certainly much of Jan Tschichold’s stylistic conversion was due to his personal reaction against the Nazis. Yet, in accepting the values of both humanist tradition and modern functionalism, he demonstrated the importance of considering appropriateness. Fortunately for designers today, Jan Tschichold made the ‘mistake’ of ignoring the advice of Bruce Rogers about keeping his theories to himself.



Bibliography

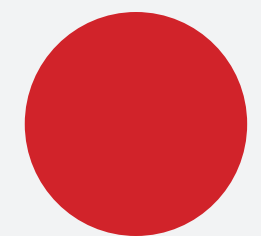
Sebastian Carter
Twentieth Century
Type Designers

John Lewis
Typography, Design
and Practice

Ruari McLean
Jan Tschichold,
Typographer

Herbert Spencer
Pioneers of Modern
Typography

Water Tracy
Letters of Credit



Designer
Sean McClain

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