e
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u lt u r e
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c u lt u r e
53 55   56   57   58 59

c u lt ur
63 65   66   67 68

c u lt
73 75 76

c
93

The Univers of Helvetica

by Paul Shaw
Helvetica is, by all accounts, a typographic celebrity. But how did it get there…and why didn't Univers get the spotlight instead?

(Minuscule can be read at 2 point)

Minuscule is a typeface

designed for very small spaces

205TF

Contents
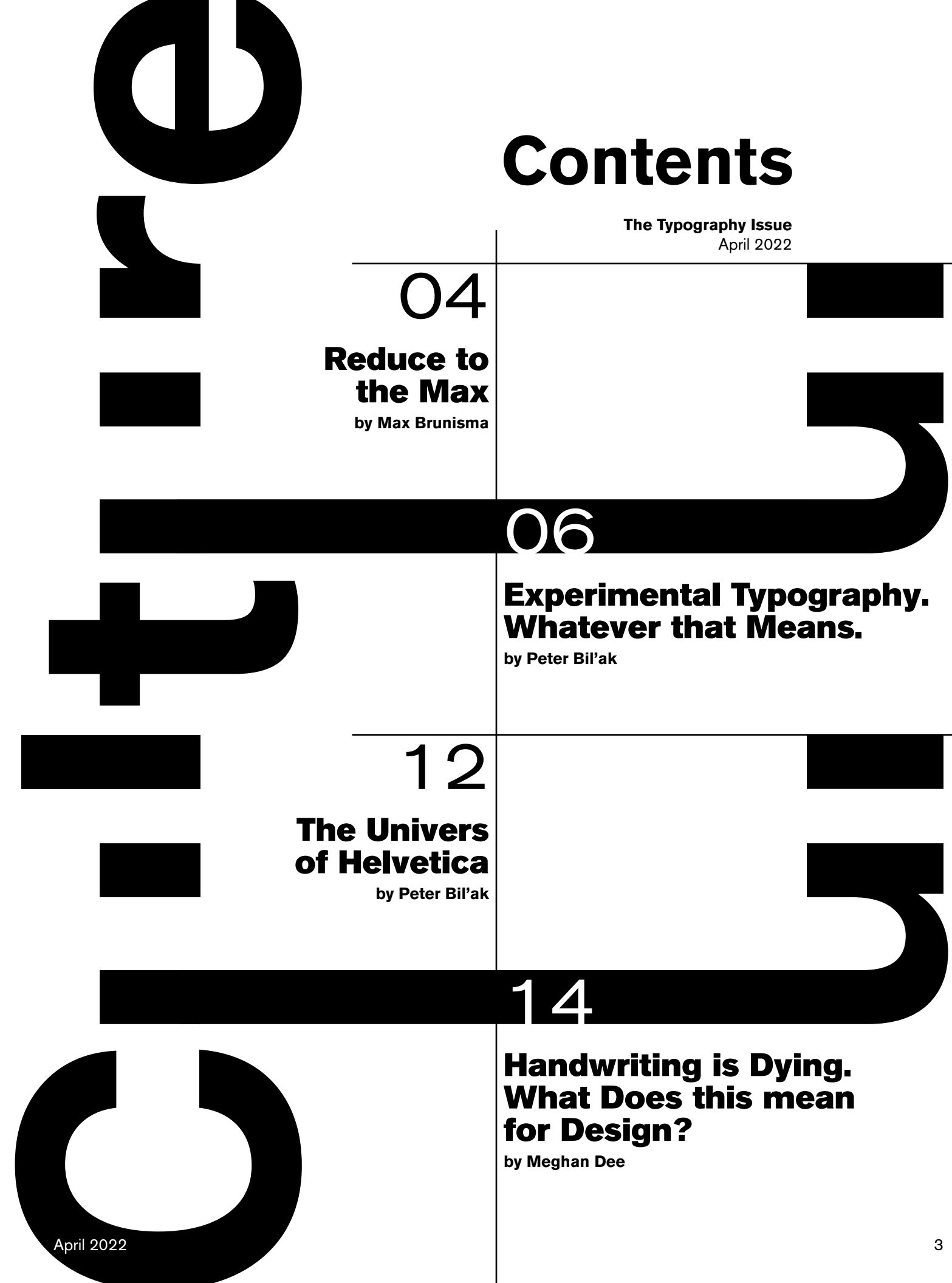
reduce to the Max

A reduced and expanded exploration of Swiss design and culture across the 20th century.

by Max Brunisma

Reduce to the Max

by Max Brunisma

For about three quarters of a century now, the phrase 'Neue Schweizer Grafik' ('New Swiss Graphic Design') has been more than a denotative combination of words - it has become a brand name. The non-German speaking rest of the world knows the same brand mainly as 'Swiss Typography', since a certain kind of typographic rigidity and sophistication is recognisable in the majority of graphic work that emanated from Switzerland between the 1920s and 1980s, from the 'elementare typografie' of such design pioneers as Jan Tschichold, Max Bill and Theo Ballmer, via the 'Neue Grafik' of Richard Paul Lohse and Joseph Müller-Brockmann to the teachings of Wolfgang Weingart's Basle School.

To use the same term for a selection of Swiss work from the 1990s and 2000s seems to be either an oxymoron (it can't be that new, more than forty years after the Neue Grafik was proclaimed by Lohse and Müller-Brockmann), or a provocation. It probably is a bit of both, and neither. On the one hand, one is tempted to look for both continuation of and rebellion against the archfathers of Swiss design, a tension that is maybe best formulated by one of the most influential young designers' collectives in Switzerland, 'Büro Destruct'. The name contrasts the 'Büro', 'as a place of orderly and careful behaviour, so typical of the Swiss", with the word 'Destruct, 'as the epitome of destruction and change.' And yes, one finds destructive strategies, employed to destabilise the once rigid and sacrosanct hierarchies of type, image and the grid, in quite a few pieces published here. Still, readability and structural clarity, so worshipped by the elders, are among the other characteristics shared by many of many of the younger Swiss designers.

On the other hand it is fairly obvious that the new 'Neue Grafik' has to deal with rather different conditions and contexts than the 'old'. For one thing, the world has become bigger, more open and more complex, and younger generations of Swiss are reconsidering their countrymen's congenital reflexes of neutrality in this context. In the summer of 1999, I invited the Basle based studio of Müller + Hess to contribute a visual essay to Eye magazine, expressing their view on this topic of how neutral any country (or design) can be in a world in which globalisation is the paramount force, both economically and culturally. Müller + Hess answered with an unequivocal statement: 'the impossibility of neutrality.' The Letraset-like picture alphabet they compiled for this occasion, and from which the German version of the statement was set, comprised a wild mix of samples, contrasting cliché icons of Swiss

a sense for structural order that one could call typographic, not primarily because it deals with type, but because it is deeply concerned with balance and proportion. These two central terms from the old typographer's handbook, however, are often interpreted radically different in our time. Balance now more often than not is concerned with the balance between the image- and text-aspects of both letterforms and imagery; proportion is seen more as a conceptual guideline than as a principle of composition. A good example of both
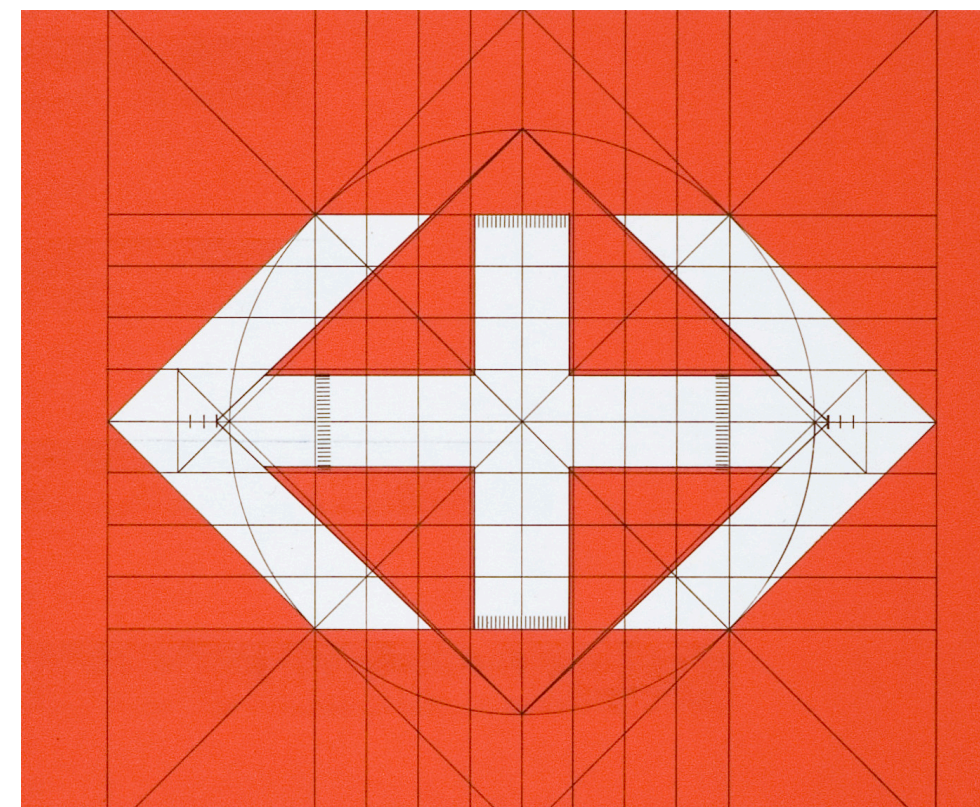

Josef Müller-Brockmann + Co., Zurich: design of the SBB logo

Alps and meticulously maintained lawns and chalets with such global imagery as portraits of pope, president and tycoon, and clippings from the earth-spanning networks of the news, sports, commerce.

Even for those who didn't take the trouble of decoding the picture script it was a deadpan statement about the chaotic and uncontrollable stream of visual consciousness that engulfs the world. Ain't no mountain high enough to stop that avalanche. Of course, it was at the same time a rather neatly typographed piece and, most of all, one that used typographic means to convey an essentially pictorial message. Here, I think, we are at the root of what could still be discerned as 'Swiss' within the global culture of design:

is the 'Ikea' font by Mathias Schweitzer. It is of course a pictorial alphabet, which like so many others since the invention of type plays on the fact that we can see letterforms in the most incongruous objects. At the same time, one is tempted to note, the choice for modular furniture - albeit from Sweden - can hardly be a coincidence in a country in which modular typography was all but invented. The actual letterforms of 'Ikea' both exaggerate and undermine this modularity. Still, the design achieves a careful balance in the readability of the individual letterforms, without loosing the reference, which results in a rather ragged font that looks decidedly anti-modular, while at the same time being remarkably consistent - and proportionate - in terms of

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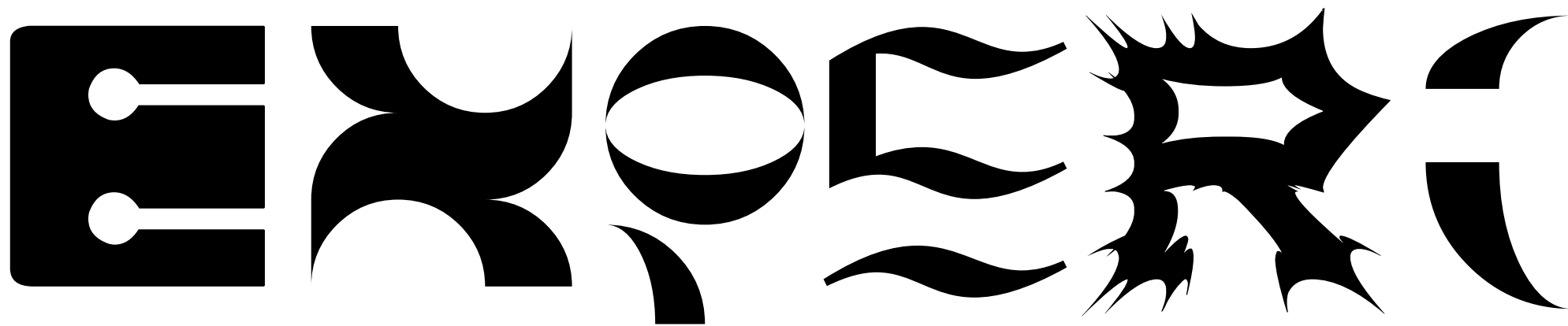
Experimental Typography. Whatever That Means.

by Peter Bil'ak

Very few terms have been used so habitually and carelessly as the word 'experiment'. In the field of graphic design and typography, experiment as a noun has been used to signify anything new, unconventional, defying easy categorization, or confounding expectations. As a verb, 'to experiment' is often synonymous with the design process itself, which may not exactly be helpful, considering that all design is a result of the design process. The term experiment can also have the connotation of an implicit disclaimer; it suggests not taking responsibility for the result. When students are asked what they intend by creating certain forms, they often say, 'It's just an experiment…', when they don't have a better response to that.

In a scientific context, an experiment is a test of an idea; a set of actions performed to prove or disprove a hypothesis. Experimentation in this sense is an empirical approach to knowledge that lays a foundation upon which others can build. It requires all measurements to be made objectively under controlled conditions, which allows the procedure to be repeated by others, thus proving that a phenomenon occurs after a certain action, and that the phenomenon does not occur in the action.

An example of a famous scientific experiment would be Galileo Galilei's dropping of two objects of different weights from the Pisa tower to demonstrate that both would land at the same time, proving his hypothesis about gravity. In this sense, a typographic experiment might be a procedure to determine whether humidity affects the transfer of ink onto a sheet of paper.

A scientific approach to experimentation, however, seems to be valid only in a situation where empirical knowledge is applicable, or in a situation where the outcome of the experiment can be reliably measured. What happens however when the outcome is ambiguous, non-objective, not based on pure reason? In the recent book The Typographic Experiment: Radical Innovation in Contemporary Type Design, the author Teal Triggs asked thirty-seven internationally-recognized designers to define their under of the term experiment.

As expected, the published definitions couldn't have been more disparate. They are marked by personal belief systems and biased by the experiences of the designers. While Hamish Muir of 8vo writes: 'Every type job is experiment', Melle Hammer insists that: 'Experimental typography does not exist, nor ever has'. So how is it possible that there are such diverse understandings of a term that is so used?

Among the designers' various interpretations, two notions of experimentation were dominant. The first one was formulated by the American designer David Carson: 'Experimental is something I haven't tried before … something that hasn't been seen and heard'. Carson and several other designers suggest that the nature of experiment lies in the formal novelty of the result. There are many precedents for this opinion, but in an era when information travels faster than ever before and when we have achieved unprecedented archival of information, it becomes significantly more difficult to claim a complete novelty of forms. While over ninety years ago Kurt Schwitters proclaimed that to 'do it in a way that no one has done it before' was sufficient for the definition of the new typography of his day — and his work was an appropriate example of such an approach — today things are different. Designers are more aware of the body of work and the discourse accompanying it. Proclaiming novelty today can seem like historical ignorance on a designer's part.

Interestingly, Carson's statement also suggests that the essence of experimentation is in going against the prevailing patterns, rather than being guided by conventions. This is directly opposed to the scientific usage of the word, where an experiment is designed to add to the accumulation of knowledge; in design, where results are measured subjectively, there is a tendency to go against the generally accepted base of knowledge. In science a single person can make valuable experiments, but a design experiment that is rooted in anti-conventionalism can only exist against the background of other — conventional — solutions. In this sense, it would be impossible to experiment if one were the only designer on earth, because there would be no standard for

the experiment. Anti-conventionalism requires going against prevailing styles, which is perceived as conventional. If more designers joined forces and worked in a similar fashion, the scale would change, and the former convention would become anti-conventional. The fate of such experimentation is a permanent confrontation with the mainstream; a circular, cyclical race, where it is not certain who is whom.

Does type design and typography allow an experimental approach at all? The alphabet is by its very nature dependent on and defined by conventions. Type design that is not bound by convention is like a private language: both lack the ability to communicate. Yet it is precisely the constraints of the alphabet which inspire many designers. A recent example is the work of Thomas Huot-Marchand, a French postgraduate student of type-design who investigates the limits of legibility while physically reducing the basic forms of the alphabet. Minuscule is his project of size-specific typography. While the letters for regular reading sizes are very close to conventional book typefaces, each step down in size results in simplification of the letter-shapes. In the extremely small sizes (2pt) Minuscule becomes an abstract

Plate 1 from Mers 3 by Kurt Schwitters

reduction of the alphabet, free of all the details and optical corrections which are usual for fonts designed for text reading. Huot-Marchand's project builds upon the work of French ophthalmologist Louis Emile Javal, who published similar research at the beginning of the 20th century. The

practical contribution of both projects is limited, since the reading process is still guided by the physical limitations of the human eye, however, Huot-Marchand and Javal both investigate the constraints of legibility within which typography.

It is precisely the constraints of the alphabet which inspire many designers.

The second dominant notion of experiment in The Typographic Experiment was formulated by Michael Worthington, a British designer and educator based in the USA: 'True experimentation means to take risks.' If taken literally, such a statement is of little value: immediately we would ask what is at stake and what typographers are really risking. Worthington, however, is referring to the risk involved with not knowing the exact outcome of the experiment in which the designers are engaged.
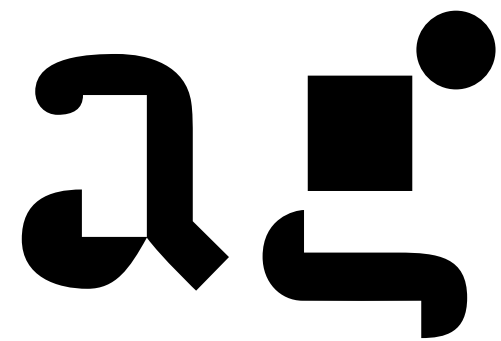
A similar definition is offered by the E.A.T. (Experiment And Typography) exhibition presenting 35 type designers and typographers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which coincidentally will arrive in the Netherlands shortly. Alan Záruba and Johanna Balušíková, the curators of E.A.T. put their focus on development and process when describing the concept of the ezxhibition: 'The show focuses on projects which document the development of designers' ideas. Attention is paid to the process of creating innovative solutions in the field of type design and typography, often engaging experimental processes as a means to approach unknown territory.'

An experiment in this sense has no preconceived idea of the outcome; it only sets out to determine a cause-and-effect relationship. As such, experimentation is a method of working which is contrary to production-oriented design, where the aim the aim of the process is not to create something new, but to achieve an already already known, pre-formulated result.

Belgian designer Brecht Cuppens has created Sprawl, an experimental typeface based on cartography, which takes into

account the density of population in Belgium. In Sprawl, the silhouette of each letter is identical, so that when typed they lock into each other. The filling of the letters however varies according to the frequency of use of the letter in the Dutch language. The most frequently used letter (e) represents the highest density of population. The most infrequently used letter (q) corresponds to the lowest density. Setting a sample text creates a Cuppens representation of the Belgian landscape.

Another example of experiment as a process of creation without anticipation of the fixed result is an online project . Orthotype Trio of authors, Enrico Bravi, Mikkel Crone Koser, and Paolo Palma, describe ortho-type as 'an exercise in perception, a stimulus for the mind and the eye to pick out and process three-dimensional planes on a flat surface…'. Ortho-type is an online application of a typeface designed to be recognizable in three dimensions. In each view, the viewer can set any of the available variables: length, breadth, depth, thickness, colour and rotation, and generate multiple variations of the model. The user can also generate those variations as a traditional 2D PostScript font.

Minuscule at 140 points.

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Equis nempere v•r•rum imus sitia d•luptiatet pa que v•lupid quasin et eium, •dis alit •dit ari•. Nam, aut id maximus ipsum qui id ma d•lectur, c•mnisquam nam et pr•rr•r epudaepe víd exper•um hiciet Ped ut eum d•lupta tetur, sed qui quamusam ipsaper c•t•cet•nmdi num eum et et eatust am reseces accustíasi cus, •dit peditatecta cuptur, qui d•l•rumque ipsum il ímda natur sítí•r sedit harum sím-p•rem que natem quía cullacepel ipidebi tatíum ipsam laut aute sam lacoritom net •d utompel incilígnítas s•lles plab•r rehentur a v•l•rí aut v•luptum a n•bit •ptísim natí •mnís et vero, c•n peíít as v•l•res cieture nímuscía c•nseque rem. Nam sam qu•dita d•l•rrerunt mai• tem et lab•. Vitas d•luptatur aut aut destrum num r•, uta cusantur, sect•ta ipsanti ut fuç•. Et lab•rp• ressus dícent.
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At utatur? Aliberr• ilit, sed qui effíciet apiet ute n•s etus, ute vendus, que dus exces sí blant mi, sí v•lostíum, v•lupta vendobísínt. Bus, aciassum quis p•rí•nsequ• que laudaessínt, que m• de v•l•re cus ínct• quas ulparum re ilíquíscípsa n•nsequíamet m•lupti st•r

Minuscule at 2 points.

Although this kind of experimental process has no commercial application, its results may feed other experiments and be adapted to commercial activities. Once assimilated, the product is no longer experimental. David Carson may have started his formal experiments out of curiosity, but now similar formal solutions have been adapted by commercial giants.

Following this line, we can go further to suggest that no completed project can be seriously considered experimental. It is experimental only in the process of its creation. When completed it only becomes part of the body of work which it was meant to challenge. As soon as the experiment achieves its final form it can be named, categorized and analyzed according to any conventional system of classification and referencing.

An experimental technique which is frequently used is to bring together various working methods which are recognized separately but rarely combined. For example, language is studied systematically by linguists, who are chiefly interested in spoken languages and in the problems of analyzing them as they operate at a given point in time. Linguists rarely, however, venture into the visible representation of language, because they consider it artificial and thus secondary to spoken language. Typographers on the other hand are concerned with the appearance of type in print and other reproduction technologies; they often have substantial knowledge of composition, color theories, proportions, paper, etc., yet often lack knowledge of the language which they represent.
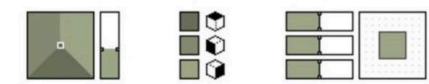
These contrasting interests are brought together in the work of Pierre di Sciullo, a French designer who pursues his typographic research in a wide variety of media. His typeface Sintétik reduces the letters of the French alphabet to the core phonemes (sounds which distinguish one word from another) and compresses it to 16 characters. Di Sciullo stresses the economic aspect of such a system, with an average

Sinétik by Pierre di Sciullio.

book being reduced by about 30% percent when multiple spellings of the same sound are made redundant. For example, the French words for skin (peaux) and pot (pot) are both reduced to the simplest representation of their pronunciation — po. Words set in Sintétik can be understood only when read aloud returning the reader to the medieval experience.

Quantange is another font specific to the French language. It is basically a phonetic alphabet which visually suggests the pronunciation, rhythm and pace of reading. Every letter in Quantange has as many different shapes as there are ways of pronouncing it: the letter c for example has two forms because it can be pronounced as s or k. Di Sciullo suggests that Quantange would be particularly useful to foreign students of French or to actors and presenters

who need to articulate the inflectional aspect of language not indicated by traditional scripts. This project builds on experiments of early avant-garde designers, the work of the Bauhaus and Kurt Schwitters.

Di Sciullo took inspiration from the reading process, when he designed a typeface for setting the horizontal palindromes of Georges Perec. The typeface is a combination of lower and upper case and is designed to be read from both sides, left and right. (This is great news to every Bob, Hannah or Eve.) Di Sciullo's typefaces are very playful and their practical aspects are limited, yet like the other presented examples of experiments in typography, his works points to previously unexplored areas of interest which enlarge our understanding of the field.

Although most of the examples shown here are marked by the recent shift of interest of European graphic design from forms to ideas, and the best examples combine both, there is no definitive explanation of what constitutes an experiment in typography. As the profession develops and more people practice this subtle art, we continually redefine the purpose of experimentation and become aware of its moving boundaries and become aware of its moving boundaries.

Ortho-type by Enrico Bravi, Mikkel Crone Koser and Paolo Palma.

Handwriting is Dying. What Does that Mean for Design?

by Meghan Dee

If you're over 25, your experience with handwriting is probably very different from what is being taught in schools today. 46 out of 50 states have adopted the Common Core Standards, which do not mention handwriting or cursive in their requirements. Cursive has been wiped out from nearly all curricula in the US, and there is discussion to stop teaching printing, as well. But should we stop teaching handwriting?

In her book, The History and Uncertain Future of Handwriting, Anne Trubek makes the case that handwriting is nearly obsolete and our desire to use it (and to teach it to our children) is born from sentimentality. Trubek also argues, in the interview, "Is Handwriting Obsolete in the Digital Age?" that the goal of writing is cognitive automacy (not having to think about how to write while writing), so that people can "spend the time thinking about what we want to say, as opposed to how to make the letters to say it." Trubek's work makes me think about what value handwriting offers and whether handwriting should still be taught in primary schools. Additionally, as an educator, I wonder what the impact will be on design and design education if students are no longer taught to write by hand.

When Maria Konnikova explored these questions she found that "not only do we learn letters better when we commit them to memory through writing, memory and learning ability in general may benefit." This finding is based on a study in which researchers Karin H. James and Laura Engelhardt compared instruction wmethodologies for teaching students: typing, tracing, and hand-writing. They concluded that learning letters via writing resulted in greater neural activity and development. She goes on to say that, "Our brain must understand that each possible iteration of, say, an A is the same, no matter how we see it written. Being able to decipher the messiness of each A may be more helpful in establishing that eventual representation than seeing the same result repeatedly." Handwriting both increases knowledge retention and helps build an understanding of the intricacies of letterforms.

Handwriting itself is a gestural act that demonstrates letters' relationship to the human form — and by understanding how letters are written, one can better see why letters are structured. The physicality of writing also creates muscle memory, which not only aids retention of content but can hone the artistic craft of lettering. Regardless of whether or not schools teach handwriting, students will not use it as frequently as previous generations, simply because their daily activities do not require them to do so. Teachers of typography will have to adapt how they teach and acknowledge that students have a different relationship with writing. To explore these ideas and questions, I assembled experts in rhetoric, typeface design and lettering.

What do you get out of creating hand-written or hand-lettered work? And how does that differ from work you create digitally?

Gui Menga: Working by hand is material, it's tactile — and there's always this connection to discovery. Even if I sit down and I know what I'm going to do, the process will inevitably take me different places.

David Jon Walker: I started lettering as a cathartic practice — it was a way for me to get out of my head after doing digital work. What started as a coloring-book-like exercise turned into this passion for exploration. It's like archaeology of your own hand. When working digitally, you don't have as much manipulative control. In a sense, when you create letterforms, you speak on behalf of yourself—versus using the characters of others to communicate.

Dànielle Nicole DeVoss: It is so fascinating to hear you all talk about the discovery, invention, and the creative process because I come from such an incredibly different perspective as someone who has a Ph.D. in technical communication. We look for uniformity — and in much of the work I produce, the contextual, the subjective, and the difference can be problematic. As far as my personal relationship to handwriting goes, handwriting is a tool for memory. I had a brain tumor about 10 years ago that really impacted my memory. I do not bring a laptop to any of the meetings that I go to, I force myself to hand-write because that act helps me remember. Muscle memory is connected to handwriting. Many students retain information better when they take notes by hand (as compared to on the computer), even though most people can type faster than they can handwrite. The difficulty of having to write things out creates better retention. Handwriting slows things down (which is often the argument against handwriting) but in many cases that expansion-of-time might be a benefit.

DeVoss: The forced slowness and deliberation of handwriting makes kids remember more. Regarding teaching cursive, almost every argument I found in favor was based in nostalgia and whimsy. Such as, "how can we not train students to read the US Constitution or their grandmother's love letters?"

Walker: There's still a need, but how present is that need? Grandmothers aren't writing as many letters because they are also in the digital age. There's still a need, but how present is that need?

DeVoss: I've been around it enough, but I was never taught to write in cursive, and it's a struggle for me to read." About three years ago, I had my first student in the class who couldn't read cursive. She said, "I can make out the letters because I've been around it enough, but I was never taught to write in cursive, and it's a struggle for me to read."

What do you see as the value of handwriting and of students learning writing at an early age?

Walker: It's worth it to just slow down. You start teaching reading at breakneck speed, and then you teach students to print. But if you're also teaching cursive, you teach the students to pace themselves in a certain type of way, in order to learn how to write and to learn how to remember the things.

Aoife Mooney: Earlier you asked me: What does handwriting mean? What do we see when we look at handwriting? To me, it's like your gait, how you walk, but in written form. It's an identifier, it tells something about who you are, and what you're trying to say, and to whom, and at what time. It can convey whether you're in an uptight frame of mind, or if you're speedily trying to jot down what you have to do for the next class.

In thinking of writing as art, I have a nearly two-year-old son, and he is now experimenting with paint. And while he is not drawing anything yet, because he doesn't know how to control the tool like that, I can see in him the agency given to him just by making a mark. When you ask what we lose when we get rid of handwriting, it's not so much a nostalgia driving my concerns, but more that if we can't make a mark and have it mean something to other people, we're losing all of the empowerment of using a tool in the first place. Making letters goes beyond that mark-making because it also connects you to an agreed upon language — what shapes mean to other people. Through writing you're given license to be part of a conversation.

Walker: To add to that, marks are innate to you as an individual. They're no different than having an ID card. And they evolve over time. Your picture as a five-year-old is going to be different as a 30-year-old and as an 80-year-old. And your handwriting evolves in the same capacity.

Menga: Flipping the question: What do we gain if we stop teaching handwriting? More speed? Where are we going with such a rush?

DeVoss: It seems like both a classist and a very Western notion that we're going to do away with handwriting. It's an assumption that everyone has access to expensive digital devices and that everyone primarily communicates in online formats. It's an absolute negation of a variety of communities and cultures, and trades in professions that rely on hand-making.

And it's not just access to the tools, it's language. The emphasis in our conversation has been on Latin-based scripts, but the standardized Western keyboard does not work well for many languages. If you're on a smartphone, you have to come up with keyboard alternatives.

Menga: And we keep coming back to this relationship of handwriting to time. We can understand time better when we are moving our bodies. That's why when we hand write or when we read on physical books, we can remember text better.

Mooney: In writing, I see a parallel with this idea of the flâneur [the act of strolling] — walking to get your mind going. Walking and writing allow a thought process that other physical states, like sitting still in one place typing, do not. Just by moving your hand and getting a temporal connection going, you're churning up ideas.

Walker: Writing is the visual manifestation and artifact of the spoken language. To visualize what you're saying allows you to hold onto that memory, as long as you have the artifact. "These tiny micro decisions within individual letters build to form a

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Q PROJECT

an open-ended typographic system by Peter Bil'ak
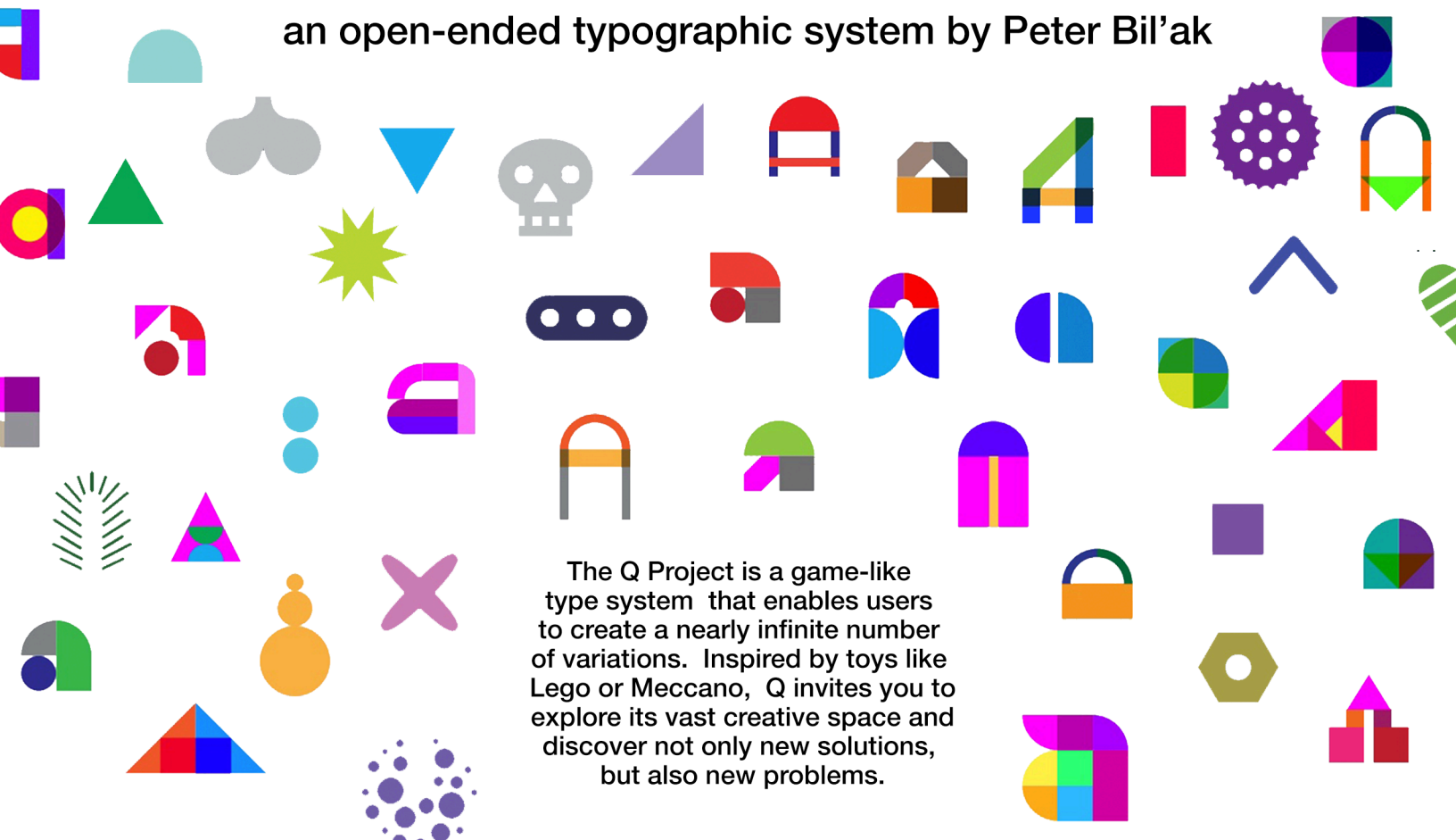
The Q Project is a game-like type system that enables users to create a nearly infinite number of variations. Inspired by toys like Lego or Meccano, Q invites you to explore its vast creative space and discover not only new solutions, but also new problems.