

## When is typography conceptual?

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A conceptual artwork is not necessarily constituted by exceptional practical skill, sublime execution or whatever might otherwise regularly characterize “fine art”. Instead, the effort is seated in the preparatory process of thought – or as Sol Lewitt once put it: “The idea becomes a machine that makes art” (LeWitt 1967). The conceptual work of art typically speaks primarily to the intellect and not necessarily to an aesthetic/sensual experience.

But what about the notion of “conceptual type”? Could this be, in a way that is analogous to “conceptual art”, typefaces that do not necessarily function by virtue of their aesthetic or functional qualities but are interesting alone owing to the foregoing idea-development process? Or is a typeface which, in its essential idiom, conveys a message or an idea, conceptually? In what follows, I will try to examine these issues by invoking a series of crucial moments in the history of typeface, from antiquity up to the twenty-first century.

The Latin alphabet, in and of itself, is a concept, where, originally, pen and brush strokes were conjoined in a particular order and thereby created a family of characters. The Latin alphabet is the later development of the relatively less refined Greek alphabet, which - in stone inscriptions dating from the Sixth Century BC – makes its appearance on the so-called *boustrophedon*, signifying by definition that the direction of the script alternates with every line break: on the first line, the text reads from left to right; on the second, from right to left; on the third, from left to right, and so on. This mode of writing texts has taken its name from the farmers’ manner of plowing with a team of oxen – *boustrophedon* literally means “ox-turning”: a layout concept that, in our optics, has a tendency to exert a disruptive influence on the whole.

Later on, stone inscriptions were organized in the form of *stoichedon*. Here, the Greek capital letters were placed into a completely smooth *grid*, vertically and horizontally, without any spaces between the words. This means to say that the spatial divisions between the words and

the sentences disappeared in an even vertical/horizontal pattern of letters: beautiful and orderly - and difficult to access.

Both of these strategies of making stone inscriptions appear strange to our eyes but apparently it must have worked out. And even so! – the everyday frequency of stone inscriptions that had to be decoded by the ancient Greeks can hardly be likened to the text bombardment, let alone the reading process, that we live with today. Moreover, the Greek inscriptions, like the Roman ones of the same time, consisted solely of capital letters, all of which could, characteristically enough, be deciphered when laterally reversed. However, when *boustrophedon* was brought into practice with the Latin alphabet’s majuscule and minuscule letters, a number of confusing situations could arise and



**Boustrophedon stone inscription, 4th century BC**

Among the ancient Greek stone inscriptions, certain texts can be found that are set up in such a way that the direction of the type alternates with every line shift: on the first line, the text reads from left to right; on the second, from right to left; on the third, from left to right, and so on. This style of writing out a text has taken its name from the farmers’ way of plowing with the team of oxen – *boustrophedon* literally means ‘ox-turning’. This is a layout concept that, in our optics, has a tendency to exert a disruptive influence on the whole and on the readability of the text.

*Photo of the Gortyn Code by PRA from Wikimedia Commons.*

pairs of letters like 'd' and 'b' and 'p' and 'q' could be reciprocally mistaken for each other.

Even today's elementary school children often employ, during their acquisition of a written language, alternating writing directions and sometimes they consistently make laterally reversed letters – and sometimes they even employ an ox-turning approach. They have partly managed to grab hold of the concept of *writing*, but often cannot *see* or *understand* the importance of the writing's direction.

Fundamentally speaking, an alphabet is a discrete set of characters that can be used as a phonetic code. When we read a text aloud, the letters indicate sounds; when we read a text for ourselves, we see not only the letters but also read in word pictures or ideograms. We can recognize words visually without having to spell our way through them. This *flow* presupposes that the letters are distinctly individual and predictable – and thus recognizable. In such a case, the visual image of a word stands as a code that is unconsciously cracked, so the reading individual can concentrate exclusively on the content.

Typefaces in the Latin alphabet are developed on the basis of the formal convention that was established in the Renaissance's scriptoriums and eventually carried further into the first printed Roman typefaces. We regard it as an almost God-given basic condition that this alphabet consists of a dual representation – uppercase and lowercase letters, that form pairs with the same phonetic value, notwithstanding the fact that with few exceptions (such as 's' and 'o') the uppercase and lowercase letters don't even look alike. The system first arose in the Renaissance's scriptoriums, where the Roman typefaces were developed by coupling antiquity's capital letters, which we know, for example, from the Trajan's Column in Rome, together with a style of handwriting (*Carolingian minuscule*) developed during the reign of Charles the Great.

Because the unconscious reading process presupposes an immediate recognition and identification, a typeface that needs to function as the body type in a newspaper or a book may not deviate radically from the accepted convention. Similarly, the signage on the highway must preferably not give rise to all too much profound meditation on the graphic's significance.

Type is accordingly a sensitive instrument, if the communication is going to function effectively. However, alongside this fundamental process, display typefaces – especially – are *also*, if only

by virtue of their idiom, bearers of a secondary kind of information, typically implemented in accordance with fairly stereotyped perceptions that one might spot, for example, in a lot of packaging- and advertising-graphics, where elegant Didone or script typefaces are used to peddle perfumes, lingerie and the like. The awareness of this secondary communication is *always* present in the graphic designer's practice, which has now, presumably, come to be more nuanced than it ever was before – spurred on by a growing availability of typefaces on a high level of design. Paul Watzlawick's axiom, "You cannot not communicate", sounds remarkably appropriate, especially in this connection (Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson 1967).

Is the rising interest in type design a manifestation of the fact that type has now come, more and more, to be part and parcel of a visual culture and also perhaps a reflection of a creeping illiteracy ... of the fact that people are reading the message "on the outside", in the typeface's idiom, instead of in the text? We are far away from Beatrice Warde's viewpoint, expressed in *The Crystal Goblet* (1956), where the author declares that the typeface has to be as transparent as crystal in order to allow the words to shine through the text. Beatrice Warde was certainly no less concerned with aesthetics than we are but she is an exponent for an estimable effort that has characterized the printer's profession for a good many centuries: the quest to optimize readability and accordingly the presentation of the text's content through the typeface's elaboration and rules for how it should be handled. Because the typography may not in any way stand as a barrier to communication between author and reader, the ideal is to achieve what is the optimally readable – "transparent" – layout.

Let's hope that graphic designers are still striving for optimal readability when it comes to manipulating type in newspaper- and book-related connections, and when working with signage in *wayfinding*. But at the same time, what has emerged is an increasing focus on the typeface's intrinsic signals and even laypeople have now become analysts of various type designs' embedded layers of communication. The prevalent incidence of digital typefaces, coupled with the personal computer's praxis, where type has now come to be a changeable and individually chosen personal expression has undoubtedly helped to sharpen the layperson's ability to categorize and interpret the typefaces' "surface".



#### Paris Métropolitain, Paris, the 1900th metro-stairway with sign

The signs on the renowned Art Nouveau metro stations in Paris were designed by the architect, Hector Guimard (1867-1942). The Metro stations, which were originally designed for the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900, are worked out in an exemplary fashion: the lettering, the sign-frame and the signposts appear to be sprouting from one and the same formal legitimacy. Everything is “organic”, and the very same “DNA” seems to be seated as the basis for the lamps, the railings, the sign-frames, etc. Moreover, the type is also consistent and systematic in its otherness. The type-design was defined by an overall concept that encompasses both two- and three-dimensional elements.

The architect Hector Guimard was also the originator of wooden furniture and ceramics in precisely the same idiom – and even though the materials, the setting and the function there are of an entirely different nature, it is precisely the same idiom that is deployed here. This interdisciplinary preoccupation – regardless of material and function – with the very same kind of ornamentalism is a common feature of the period’s design.

The contemporaneous Danish “Skønvirke” (art nouveau) architect, Thorvald Bindesbøll, whose efforts were similarly spread across many design areas, once said: “For there is no shape or any artistic motive that is exclusively linked with any particular material.” It is a point of view that is fundamentally inconsistent with a later functionalist conception of “honesty” in relation to function, material and the conditions of production.

Photo by Georgia Fowler, <http://www.gcfphotography.com/>

However, the phenomenon did not arise first in the digital era. As far back as the early Renaissance, decorative types were constructed with heavy-handed symbolics, i.e. letters formed as building plans, as the human body or in some other form. On the Victorian-era’s *playbills*, you can find a profusion of bizarre and extreme *sans serif* faces: forcibly stout or wide *slab serif* faces, angular Didone faces, all sorts of decorative types, and so on – typefaces that could give rise to pronounced graphic contrasts with conspicuous eye-catching devices, but often at the expense of readability. Perhaps, in these contexts – on posters, in advertisements and the like – there might not always have been the same

importance placed on readability as that which was placed on getting people’s attention.

By way of response to the dawning industrial- and mass-culture’s featureless types, William Morris sought inspiration by looking back to the Renaissance’s organic Old style typefaces. What this entailed was that with the *Arts & Crafts* movement, there was a new and much needed focus on both readability and naturalness. Before long, however, the special organic expression came to be a style in its own right. When we zoom in on the time around 1900, there are many Arts & Crafts *look-alike* types that can be spotted in publications



like *The Studio Magazine*. In this case, concept has turned into style, which mimics – without any heart and without any consistency.

In the Art Nouveau-era's graphics, the concept of "organic form" was carried further *in extremis*. Here, the type's logical and calligraphically determined interplay between tension and pressure was superseded by interlacing and often amoeba-formed letters – an expression that was almost reincarnated in 1968 with the *flower power* fonts. What is so beautiful about the Jugendstil/art nouveau typography, though, is the urge to bring forth the consummate concord among ornament, writing and image – that the type is adapted in conformity with the decorative concept. Just as the illustrative pictorial element relinquishes its connection to naturalism, the type also shakes off its roots – and accordingly the law giving qualities in its tools – for the sake of attaining an idiomatically fluid world of soft, organic shapes.

Paris's oldest Metro stations are in possession of an almost iconic quality, with a design that embodies the quintessence of the French Art Nouveau style. They were designed by the architect, Hector Guimard, and were constructed

in connection with the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900.

The stairways leading down into the Paris Metro are admirably worked out in a most exemplary way: the lettering, the sign-frames and the signposts appear to be sprouting from one and the same formal legitimacy. Everything is "organic", and the very same "DNA" seems to be seated as the basis for the lamps, the railings, the sign-frames, etc. The type-design's highly formalistic expression is also defined by the same overall form-concept. Hector Guimard was also busy designing wooden furniture and ceramics in precisely the same idiom – although the materials, the settings and the functions there are of an entirely different nature. This interdisciplinary preoccupation – regardless of material and function – with the same formal concept is a common feature of the period's design. So far away from functionalism's "Form follows function."

The métier, *designer*, that is to say, bel-esprit and practitioner in one and the same person, emerged during the crossing over into the twentieth century and one of the most important role models was the German *Werkbund*-artist, the architect and

#### **"Dem Deutschen Volke", Deutsche Reichstag**

The text on the facade is designed with a somewhat rustic uncial typeface. The type is not, as one might expect on a classicist-inspired façade, a classical capital inscription, but rather a hybrid: half Germanic/gothic and half Roman. The design articulates a conscious effort to conjoin contrasts between the Protestant and the Catholic lands, between the north and the south. Anna Simons and Peter Behrens, 1907.

*Photo by Savh from Wikimedia Commons*



# universal

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

## Herbert Bayer: Universal Alphabet, 1926

With his Universal Alphabet, Herbert Bayer squared accounts with the conventional system of uppercase and lowercase letters that cropped up in the Renaissance. He did away with the prevalent system and “rediscovered” the principle in the earlier era’s uncial typefaces.

designer Peter Behrens. Behrens is renowned in particular for his *total-design* of AEG’s graphics, stores, products and buildings. Behrens is also known for his typefaces from the beginning of the twentieth century, including the *Behrens Schrift*, which, as a hybrid, fashions a bridge between the old German (Fraktur/blackletter) and modernity (serif typeface). The choice between using gothic or Roman serif type was an element in the German Kulturkampf: both in the conservative and, later on, in the national-socialist ideology, the gothic script was considered to be the true *archetypal German* expression. Peter Behrens himself stated that when he wanted to achieve a specifically *German* expression, he deliberately allowed the gothic’s stylistic features to exert a decisive influence on the form (Aynsley 2000: 63). Behrens, along with the German Anna Simons – who had been a pupil of the English calligrapher, Edward Johnston – was also the originator of the typeface appearing on the German Reichstag’s façade, spelling out “Dem Deutschen Volke”. In the Reichstag’s classicist-inspired façade, the type is especially conspicuous because it is not, as one might otherwise expect, a classical capital inscription but rather a hybrid: an uncial typeface, which is half gothic and half Roman. The concept articulates a conscious effort, in visual form, to conjoin contrasts between the north and the south, between the Protestant and Catholic lands in what was then the relatively new German confederation.

At first, the Kaiser forbade this “democratic” inscription, which, although it was designed in 1907, wasn’t put up on the building until 1917 (Windsor 1981).

In the Bauhaus milieu, on the other hand, people were busy designing modernist sanserif types and there was also a strong sense of affiliation with the standardization specialist, Walter Porstmann’s motion for a *kleinschreibung*-spelling reform that would do away with the use of capital letters in front of nouns – which, in German-language texts, had long been a predominant and

salient part of the layout (see Kinross 1994; Aynsley 2000).

With his Universal Alphabet (1926), Herbert Bayer went one step further and did away with the prevalent system with the uppercase and lowercase letters:

It is not necessary for one sound to have a large and a small sign. The simultaneous use of two characters of completely different alphabets is illogical and unharmonious. We would recommend that the restriction to one alphabet would mean a saving of time and materials (quoted from Aynsley 2000).

The manifesto that was being propagated in this concept was radically modernist. At the same time, the Universal Alphabet was reaching back to the Middle Ages’ uncial scripts, which were structured around a unified system.

In 1959, more than twenty years after his emigration to America, Bayer developed a “phonetic alphabet”, where each and every character was related to an exact sound. This entailed that compounded digraphs like ‘ch’, ‘th’ and ‘sh’ were replaced by individual phonetic types and new characters were added, so as to give rise to a complete phonetic character universe (Spencer 1968).

In 1915, Edward Johnston designed the signage and logo-type, still in use today, for London’s Underground.<sup>1</sup> Johnston’s feat was that he could, at one and the same time, solve the task at hand – designing what was, at the time, a currently *hypermodern* and functional sans serif that could be applied on signs – and still remain in full compliance with the proportioning principles he had been espousing in his seminal calligraphy classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London: principles that were based on many years of studying Renaissance calligraphy – a *Janus head*, as it were, in a conceptual-typographical perspective: technically correct modernism and simultaneously, a typeface in keeping with the Renaissance’s form ideals. Whereas Edward Johnston’s project thus articulates an exquisite continuity that gets back to the roots of type, Paul Renner’s *Futura* (1927) in its original, radical design, constitutes an unequivocally “ahistorical” concept-typography. Renner designed *Futura* as “ein serifenlose Linear Antiqua”, the visual expression of which was supposed to be overtly constructed and devoid of any traces of the calligraphic pen’s strokes. The original design was radical: The lowercase ‘r’ was supposed to be drawn out as a vertical line with a dot; the ‘g’ was formed by a circle and a triangle – and so on.



By the time the font was launched commercially, though, the most striking of the salient features had disappeared and had come to be replaced by more conventional forms. On the other hand, Futura has certainly enjoyed a long life.

In his epoch-making posters from the 1920s and the 1930s A.M. Cassandre combines striking block fonts with a visual idiom that took its source in cubistic painting. These text elements are of vital importance to the poster's aesthetics and to the visual clout in the modern urban space.

With *Bifur* (Deberny & Peignot 1929), Cassandre takes yet another step forward and designs an original printing type. With the design of *Bifur*, which was sweepingly simplified into rudimentary geometric uppercase letters, Cassandre was aspiring to bring forth a modern monumental typeface that could match the day's avant-garde architecture. In *The Typographic Scene*, Walther Tracy refers to *Bifur* as "one of the most impracticable types ever produced; but it is particular evidence of a cultivated type founder, Charles Peignot, ignoring what are nowadays called market forces for the pleasure of allowing an artist to disregard conventions of letter forms and to create an alphabet which obliges the reader to 'tune in' in order to get the message." The typeface is based solely on uppercase forms because Cassandre regarded lowercase letters as an evolutionary red herring. In 1926, he had this to say: "... la minuscule n'est que une déformation manuelle de la lettre monumentale, une abréviation, une altération cursive imputable aux copistes" (see Wlassikoff 2005). Here, Cassandre is standing in sheer opposition to the German avant-garde, which, as has been mentioned, was focusing on the minuscule (and uncial) alphabet as the functional, modern and democratic choice.<sup>2</sup>

In 1936, Cassandre designed *Acier Noir*. This is a geometrically designed *sans serif*, which is part *outline* (white) and part black; in this way, it embodies clear references to a number of Cassandre's posters where the type, in a dynamic fashion, changes color according to its placement in relation to the pictorial motif. The readability factor in *Acier Noir* is low and the speckled expression has, in contrast to the posters' texts, no *raison d'être*, since it cannot be said to have any relation to a background motive. But what the typeface lacks in functionality is certainly re-compensated by what it offers in the way of extroverted signal value.

It is widely known that the Nazi regime, up until the beginning of the 1940s, had a special affinity for gothic typefaces. Gothic types like *Schwabacher*



#### Paul Renner: *Futura*, 1927

*Futura*, in its original, radical design, constitutes an unequivocally "ahistorical" concept-typography. Renner designed *Futura* as "ein serifenlose Linear Antiqua", the visual expression of which was supposed to be overtly constructed and devoid of any traces of the calligraphic pen's strokes.

As we can see, the original design was radical: the lowercase 'r' was supposed to be drawn out as a vertical line with a dot; the 'g' was formed as a circle and a triangle – and so on. By the time the typeface was launched commercially, though, the most striking salient features had disappeared and had come to be replaced by more conventional forms.

were regarded as representing the authentically German (*völkisch*), in contrast to the Roman style, which certainly has its roots in a Latin culture. In January 1941, however, the use of the blackletter characters was surprisingly abolished by official decree; the bizarre reasoning was that *Schwabacher* was no more to be regarded as an authentically German style but rather as a result of Jewish influence. For this reason, Germany would henceforth use exclusively Roman typefaces (Kinross 1994: 101). Mutually conflicting interpretations and origins were, to put it mildly, being ascribed to an age-old typography.

A somewhat less charged example of radical reinterpretation dates from the 1960s. The concept behind Adrian Frutiger's OCR-B typeface



#### A.M. Cassandre: *Bifur*, 1929

With his design of *Bifur*, which was reduced to rudimentary geometric uppercase letters, Cassandre was aspiring to bring forth a modern monumental design that could match the day's avant-garde architecture.

- designed for *optical character recognition* in 1966
- is staunch functionality. However, a generation later, the typeface enjoyed a short-lived kind of reincarnation, based solely on its distinctive visual character. That is to say, a typeface that was created without the most remote aesthetic motivation came to be "resurrected" by virtue of the self-same (lack of) aesthetics.

In his book, *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, the renowned German philologist Victor Klemperer describes how Germany developed, during the Nazi era, a special usage of words. In the thoroughly orchestrated design concept, the typography was also transformed – in crucial areas - into pictograms:

SA and SS, the Schutzstaffel [Elite Guard], or praetorian guard, are abbreviations which became so satisfied with themselves that they were no longer really abbreviations at all; they took on independent meanings which entirely obscured their original signification. I am forced here to write SS with the sinuous lines of a normal typeface. During the Hitler period printers' cases and keyboards of official typewriters included the special angular SS character. It was in keeping with the Germanic rune of victory and was created in honour of this symbol. (...) Long before the Nazi SS even existed, its symbol was to be seen painted in red on electricity substations, and below it the warning 'Danger – High Voltage!' In this case the jagged S was obviously a stylized representation of a flash of lightning. That thunderbolt, whose velocity and capacity for storing energy made it

such a popular symbol for the Nazis! (...) SS is two different things at once, an image and an abstract character, it encroaches on the realm of painting, it is a pictogramme, a return to the physicality of the hieroglyph (Klemperer 1957/2006: 63-64).

When I think back to the 1960s and the 1970s, there are typefaces that particularly come to mind as being typical of the times. *Helvetica* was flourishing everywhere in the public sector, on signs and in printed matter, as expression of a pragmatic *mainstream* late-modernism which, however, became quite tiresome and monotonous. As you can see in Gary Hustwit's film of the same name, *Helvetica* has subsequently taken on a surprising cult status. Or maybe it's the film that has actually added fuel to the fire? The cultivated counterpart to the somewhat clumsy *Helvetica* was, of course, Adrian Frutiger's *Univers*, which was so beautiful and so consistent in its design that it truly signaled a renewal in the world of type design. This can also be credited to the design's systematic organization in 21 variations of weight- and width-values.

In contrast to both *Helvetica* and *Univers*, which both stand as articulations of pragmatically function-oriented design, Wim Crouwel's *New Alphabet*, from 1967, can be characterized as a genuine conceptual typeface. Its form is radically modern, simplified into vertical and horizontal elements – allegedly designed as a response to



#### Example of the use of SS-insignia[s] in Germany, 1933-45

In the thoroughly orchestrated Nazi design concept, typography was, in a number of crucial areas, transformed into pictograms. In the Third Reich, there was the especially sharp-edged SS-type in all printers' cases and on the keyboards of typewriters that were employed for official use. "(...) SS is two different things at once, an image and an abstract character, it encroaches on the realm of painting, it is a pictogramme, a return to the physicality of the hieroglyph." (Klemperer 2006, p. 72).

Photo: Olympia Elite typewriter keyboard



# new alphabet

une  
possibilité  
pour  
le  
nouveau  
développement

een  
mogelijkheid  
voor  
de  
nieuwe  
ontwikkeling

une  
possibilité  
pour  
le  
développement  
nouveau

eine  
Möglichkeit  
für  
die  
neue  
Entwicklung

an  
introduction  
for  
a  
modernized  
typography

## Wim Crouwel: New Alphabet, 1967

New Alphabet can unequivocally be characterized as conceptual typography. The form is sweepingly modern, having been simplified and boiled down to vertical and horizontal elements – allegedly designed as a response to a technological challenge, namely the use of the cathode-tube photocomposition system. The individual characters have been boiled down to a minimum of individuality and the typeface establishes visually interesting figures, only secondarily decipherable as words.

a technological challenge, namely, the use of the *cathode*-tube's photocomposition system. The typeface's individual characters have been simplified, boiled down to an absolute minimum

of individuality and the entirety – the typeface – establishes visually interesting figures, only secondarily decipherable as words.

Herb Lubalin's *Avantgarde*, which also dates



# apotek

## Counterpoint: Pharma, The Danish Pharmaceutical Association, 2009

The type fosters identity, both through the recognizable and distinctive facade signage at every Danish pharmacy and as the pharmacies' corporate typeface. The inspiration for the design emanates from, among other things, the apothecary jars of the past, which were often painted with straightforward Didone-like types. It also has a certain kinship with a "round-shouldered" lowercase type that was designed by Herbert Bayer in the beginning of the 1930s.

from the mid-sixties, was designed for the magazine of the same name and launched as an ITC typeface in 1970. What was originally a rather vivid and original *ad hoc* type design, built up around a broad set of ligatures, strong geometric shapes and one-sidedly inclined 'A' and 'V' capital letters (like *Futura* in the hands of a stoned and cheerful calligrapher), very quickly became worn out as an all too time-bound typeface.

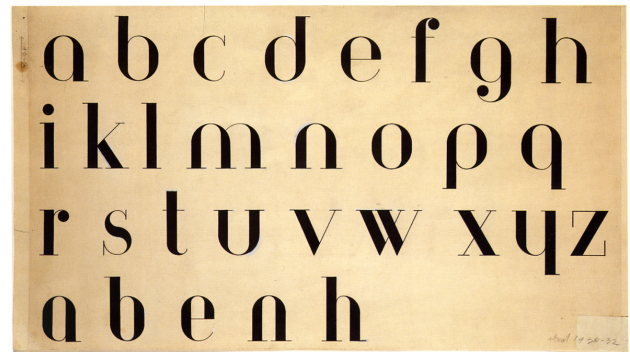
Since that time, the development has been undulating back and forth: from the expressive and experimental designs of the 1990s, which are discussed in Rick Poyner's article, to the more recent years of continuous gradation and sublimation of already known form problematics.

The conceptual approach can serve as an important source of innovation, but it seldom has a long shelf life in a practical context. In connection with a reference to the Danish graphic designer Ole Søndergaard's *Signa* typeface, Erik Spiekermann has written:

Somehow, the discipline of a concise job at hand leaves no room for superfluous decoration, nor manipulation of letterforms for the sake of short-lived fashion. Blue jeans were made for hard-working outdoors people and became the ultimate stylish garment, as pizza was poor people's food before it became one of the world's standard dishes. Hard-working typefaces seem to benefit from the same constraints in order to survive and become typographical classics.<sup>3</sup>

However, it could be maintained that the conceptual, in moderated form, can principally be found today in *corporate typefaces*, where that which is conspicuous in the typeface's character is supposed to elicit associations to a company or organization. One Danish example is the design

firm, Kontrapunkt's typeface, *Pharma*, designed for The Danish Pharmaceutical Association in 2009. The font fosters a sense of *identity*, both through a distinctive facade signage at every pharmacy in the country and in its capacity as corporate typeface. The typeface's design awakens associations with the painted Didone typefaces on apothecary jars of the past. It also possesses a certain affinity with a "round-shouldered" lowercase type that was



**Herbert Bayer: Round-arched minuscule alphabet, originally, the 1930s**

One of Pharma's ancestors is Bayer's crisp, round-shouldered minuscule alphabet.

designed by Herbert Bayer in the beginning of the 1930s. (The typeface has since been digitized by David Quay as *Architype Bayer* type). The Bauhaus-consanguinity is underscored by the fact that the pharmacy logo appears solely in lowercase. The identity-creating effect is the typeface's essential merit; you would never want to employ it as a "hard-working typeface".

Fundamentally speaking, isn't it supposedly *there* that people could distinguish conceptual typography from other typefaces, designs with extroverted qualities that are not rooted in specific functional grounds – as opposed to the kind of design that primarily serves functional purposes – first and foremost, of course, the aim of readability?

## NOTES

1. The typeface is presently available as a digital font – *New Johnston* – that was developed by the London-based graphic design company, Banks & Miles.
2. In *Lettering of To-Day*, 1945, R. Haughton James writes: "Deberny and Peignot's modernistic typeface, Bifur, generally regarded as ultra-sophisticated, was designed – however inappropriately – as a railway signal alphabet." This indubitably adds a new dimension to the story.

3. Mentioned in connection with Fontshop's launching of *Signa*.

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