

do, but also a thankless one. It seems like some slow leapfrog process, one book after another, which just has to go very slowly.

In fact, what's been left out is almost as important as what's been put in. There is a sifting process, through stuff you have to consider and instinctively reject as not being interesting. So inevitably one is imposing a view that is dependent on taste one had, or people had, some time ago. So you could say that the most important historians are people like Walter Herdeg or Charles Rosner: editors who were sifting through the stuff at the time.

ILLUSTRATION AND DESCRIPTION

Will you take pictures from those magazines and annuals?

Sometimes I'll have to. But the reproductions will be very small. Fortunately it's not all that long ago, and I'm hoping I'll be able to reproduce from originals. The ideal is always from the original.

But it's illustration as reminder or as snapshot, rather than as 'this is a substitute for the real thing'.

Quite. As reminder, or 'it was something like this'. That sort of thing. What I want to avoid is taking the things that are very known. Because that prevents people thinking; it just refers people to the other books. I want to have colour at the beginning and the end, to discuss in some depth things produced in colour. Like that Tschichold poster *Der Berufsphotograph*, which I've talked about at length in the text – to take some of these things, simply so that they can be properly looked at. Steven Heller, for example, in his books, never talks about the actual thing. The people who write about it don't look at what they are talking about. Partly because they don't understand how it was produced. They assume that just reproducing it helps people to see it, which it doesn't at all. So I hope that I can make people look at things.

So with the Tschichold, you've seen the original poster?

Yes. There are so many things that you don't realize otherwise. But also it is just the way that something like that is so carefully constructed: controlled intellectually and formally. It's a masterpiece, that work! It is interesting that I use this term. I mean that it is a key work, which you can use to talk about other works.

It sounds like you're just talking about formal values.

Oh no, no! If you're showing the idea of 'the professional photographer', what image do you use? As a designer you might be talking to the curator of the exhibition. Though nowadays you'd be talking to the marketing people, too. This is what is different: on anyone job, the clients have multiplied – which probably accounts for British Telecom. But to get back to the Tschichold poster...

Well, what have I said about it? [quotes from the manuscript]:

For an exhibition, *Der Berufsphotograph* (The Professional Photographer), at the Gewerbemuseum Basel in 1938, the exiled Jan Tschichold produced the last work which followed his precepts of asymmetric typography. This is a small poster of extreme economy and precision. The image is a photograph in negative, its left-hand edge on the centre of the sheet. The word-element 'photograph' starts at the edge

of the image. This is overprinted on the image, and so forms a unit of meaning with it, and is the first part of a subtitle 'sein Werkzeug' (his apparatus). The second half of the subtitle, 'seine Arbeiten' (his works) is placed after a dash. The dash bridges between the image area and the white paper of the sheet, so that the works are literally the outcome of the process. The rest of the textual information is related by size and position according to its importance. 'Where' (the museum) is aligned horizontally with 'what' (*Ausstellung*: exhibition). This is related vertically to 'who' (the name of the collaborating organization) at the top, and the start of the main title below. 'When' (the dates and opening times) is related with less coherent logic, by the device of reversing the dates in white out of black, making a further negative. The days and times are presented in tabular form, which emphasizes the Sunday morning and Wednesday evening openings. In a vertical line of text on the right are listed the designer, photographer, photo-engraver and printer. All the type, except the main title, is printed in black, with the photograph. In a single separate run through the press, with yellow on the inking rollers on the left, blue in the middle, and red on the right, the horizontal rules of the main title and subtitle are printed. Tschichold's and Matter's knowledge of the processes of the printing industry freed them to use the medium to extend the designer's expressive range. Overprinting was used not merely to create the effect of space, but by allowing the image and the colours to exist in the same space without cancelling...

And so on. So my editor is going to say: 'what are you doing describing something which you're illustrating?', but I'll insist. Unless you describe it, people won't read this image, they will just see an image, and won't understand the terrific concentrated intelligence that has produced it.

'Heroic' is a better term than 'masterpiece'. It's just that somebody took the trouble. That is what is so impressive. Nowadays people don't take the trouble. The BT visual identity seems so badly done! Where is the intelligence or the craft? I do feel that in a sense it is a missionary thing. A few of these people were just so good. 'Oh they are just images, they are just designers.' But look at Matter's travel posters, produced in five, six, seven, eight languages, and he's got to allow for all of them. People see the image just with one text in one language, not realizing that maybe it had also to allow for all these other contingencies.

A masterpiece, a pioneering work or whatever you take it to be – it makes a lot of art look just self-indulgent. That's why graphic design in those days was important. And why now it's lost the kind of wonder it had for people like Birdsall.

When Birdsall did his Pirelli work, it was a question of his asking, 'How can this be done?'. For example, showing ice on a windscreen, he put salt on photographic paper.

There wasn't a language to express something. There weren't all the routine things that theatre managers have for making special effects. These designers were innovating, making. Of course this is still being done on Apple Macintoshes today – 'how do you do this?' – but there was much less of an inherited know-how. With so many things, it was innovation, innovation. They were real breakthroughs of human intelligence. Comparable



Poster printed in black with 'rainbow' ink, designed by Jan Tschichold, 1938



Colour photograph printed, designed by Herbert Matter, 1934

The changing text in German and Dutch was overprinted by Matter

