Discourse in Design

Modernity

Spot the difference?

Make sure you do (by checking these links)

Modernity

Modernism

"Modernity comes in as many variations
 as there are thinkers or journalists,
 yet all its definitions point, in one way or another,
 to the passage of time.

The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime,
 an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time.

When the word 'modern', 'modernization', or 'modernity' appears,
 we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past."

Bruno Latour (1991). *We have never been modern*

urbanization

public education

representative
democracy

industrialisation

professionalization

questioning
or rejection
of tradition

faith in
"the social"

scientific and
technological
progress

Modernity

rationalization

ideals of
freedom and
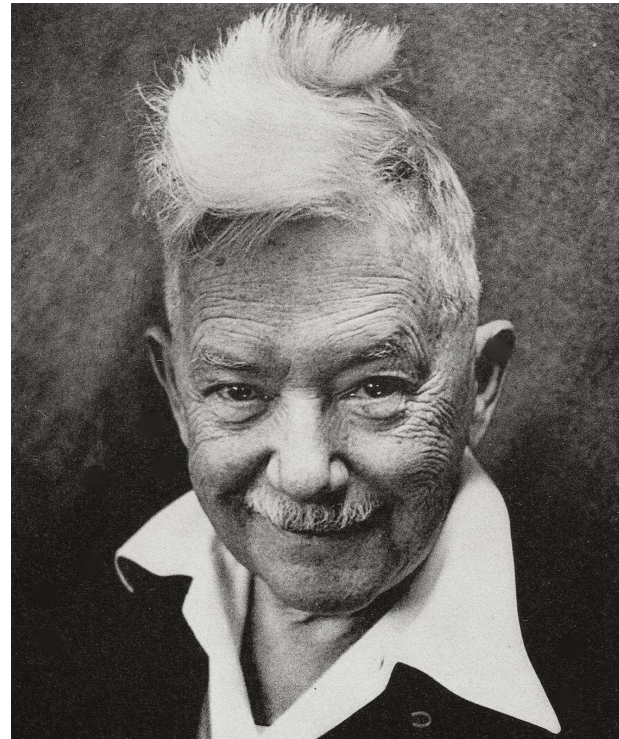equality

prioritization of
individualism

nation-state

secularization

capitalism and
market economy

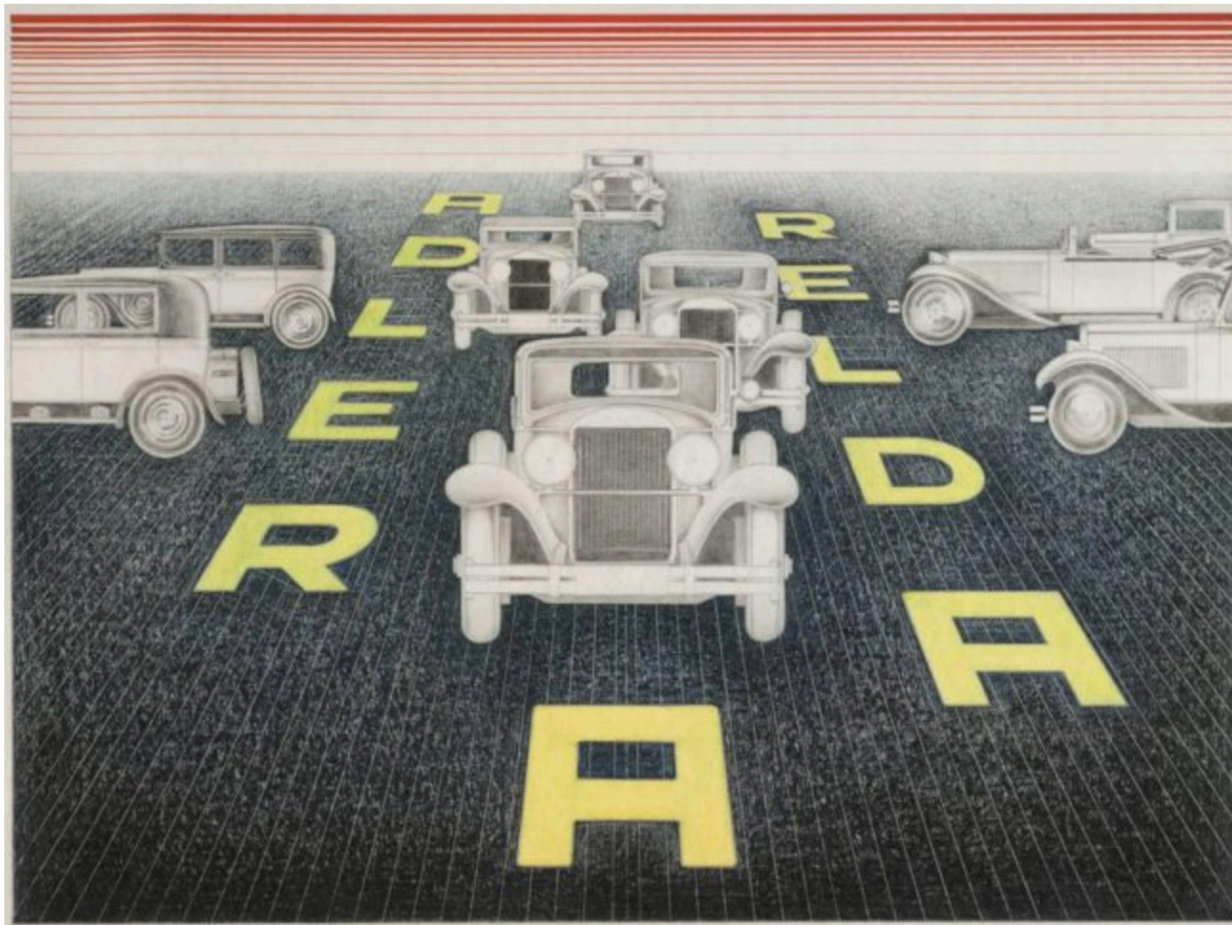(Michel Foucault: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*)

What did this
mean for
design?

Graphic design developed
into a distinct profession
in early 20th century West:
the hayday of modernism.

W.A. Dwiggins has
sometimes been credited
with introducing the term
"graphic design" in a 1922
article, but the term was
being used before this.

Design was a product of modernity:
industralisation led to
management culture,
commerce,
and urbanisation,
and the amount of printed communication exploded.

06   Design for Adler Automobile Showroom by Andor Weininger, 1933. Harvard Art Museums/Busch-
Reisinger Museum, © Estate of Andor Weininger/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

In this environment,
planning the visual
configurations
of printed materials
became a task separated
from its printing.

The purpose of this planning
was to get messages visible
and noticeable
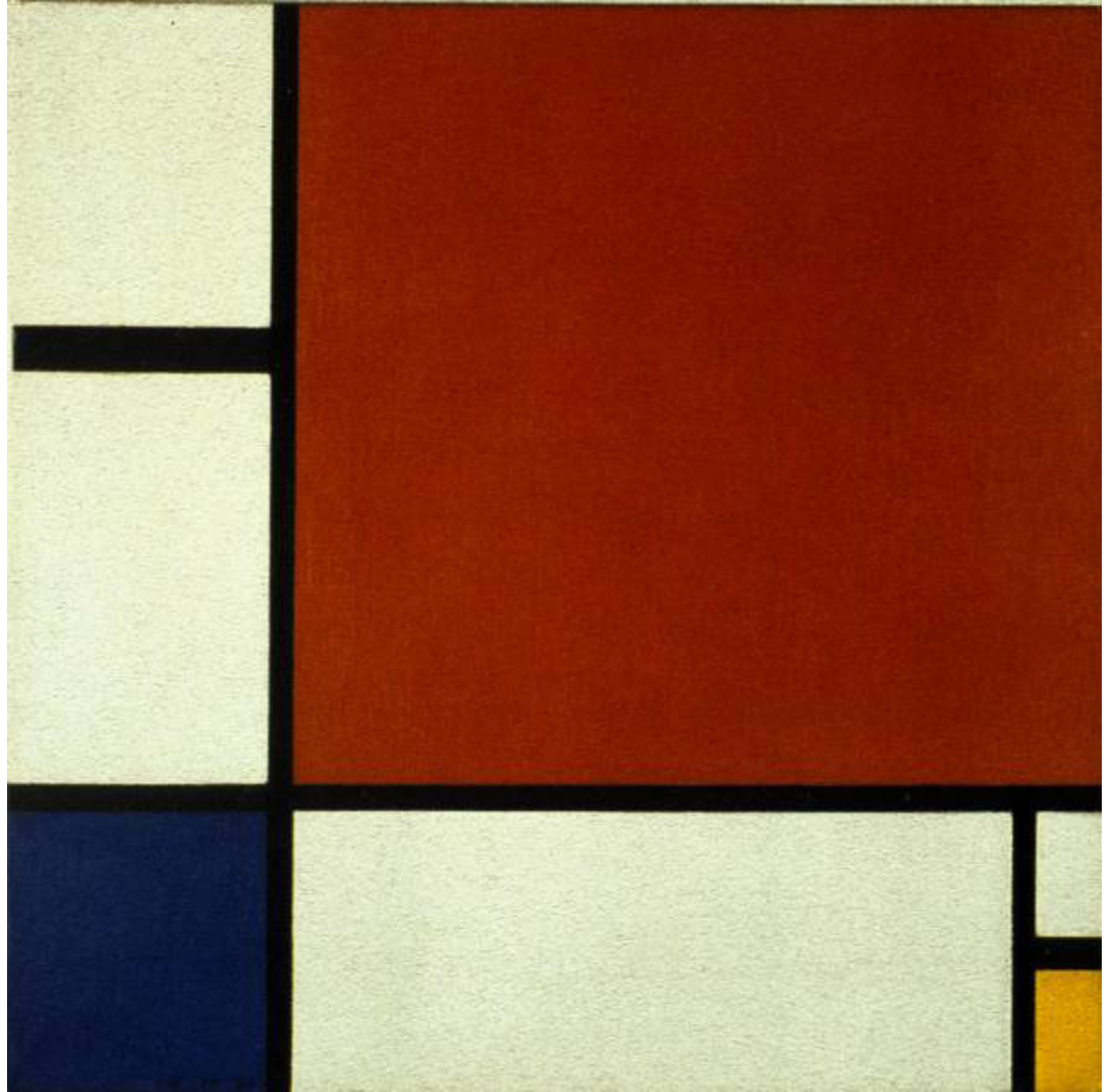to the new urban consumer.

Graphic design as a profession
(separated from printing)
grew out of the needs of the booming
trade and commercialisation,
and the rapid development
in communication technology.
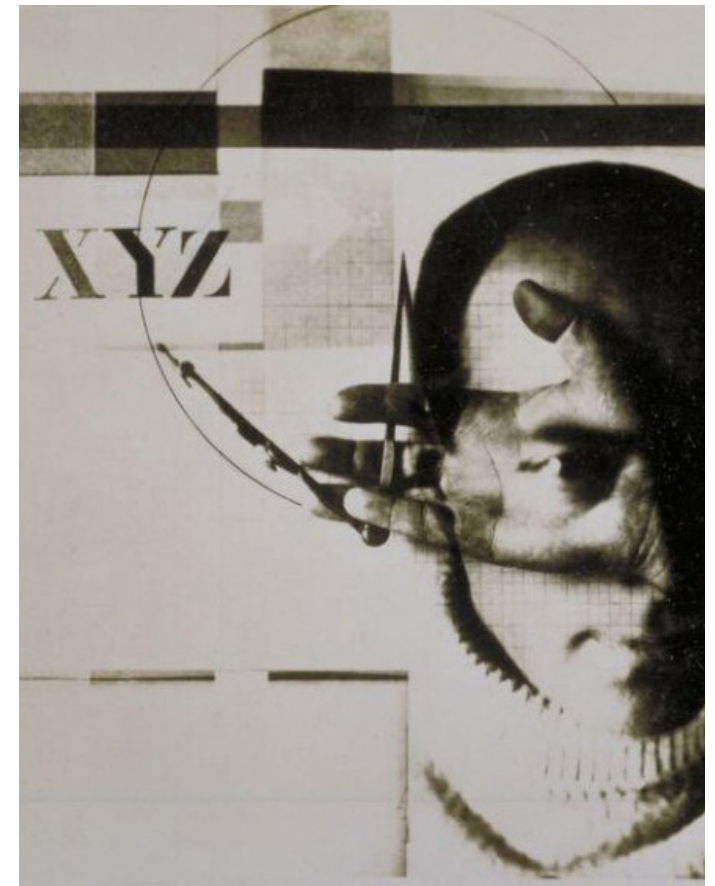
Jan Tschichold / Bauhaus / El Lissitzky photographic collage

What did this
mean for
design?

In art, one of the
founding ideals of
modernism was
purity of form.

Piet Mondrian:
Composition II in Red, Blue and Yellow (1930)

Every field of art sought after its essential quality to separate it from all the others.

The modernist ideal of painting, for example, was a flat canvas covered with a flat surface of pigment – work referring only to itself.

(Likewise, modernist poetry turned towards language in itself, instead of lyrical imagery.)

Mark Rothko
Orange and Tan (1954)

Designers also sought for universal rules
applicable for all cases of design.
Geometry and systems were prioritised.

These in turn created conventions that earned
center stage in graphic design education as well as professional practices.

https://eyeondesign.aiga.org/5-examples-of-bauhaus-graphic-design-that-shaped-the-movement/
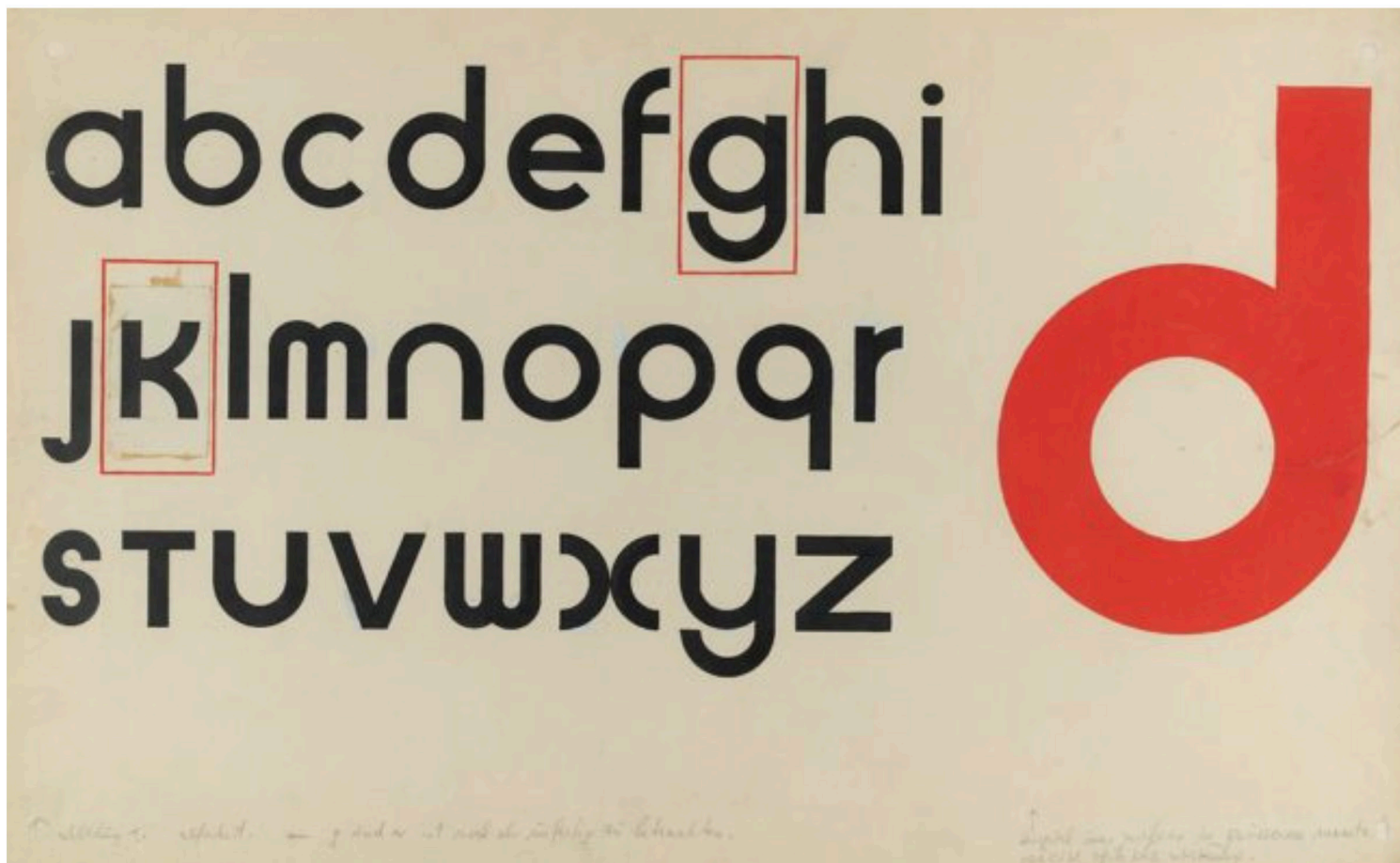
Designers working under the
banner of modernism
were designing for the
masses,

and their task was making life
better for that mass.

Universal audience,
universal form,
universal goals.

In its modernist practice,
typographic design of text
is considered as thoroughly functional.

Here, the modernist ethos is mixed with
traditions of the printing trade.
The designer is taught to make text
readable, legible and understandable
— typography should be transparent as
glass, "a crystal goblet".

Unreadable text is unreliable text.

BEATRICE
WARDE

THE
CRYSTAL
GOBLET:
BW

sixteen essays on typography
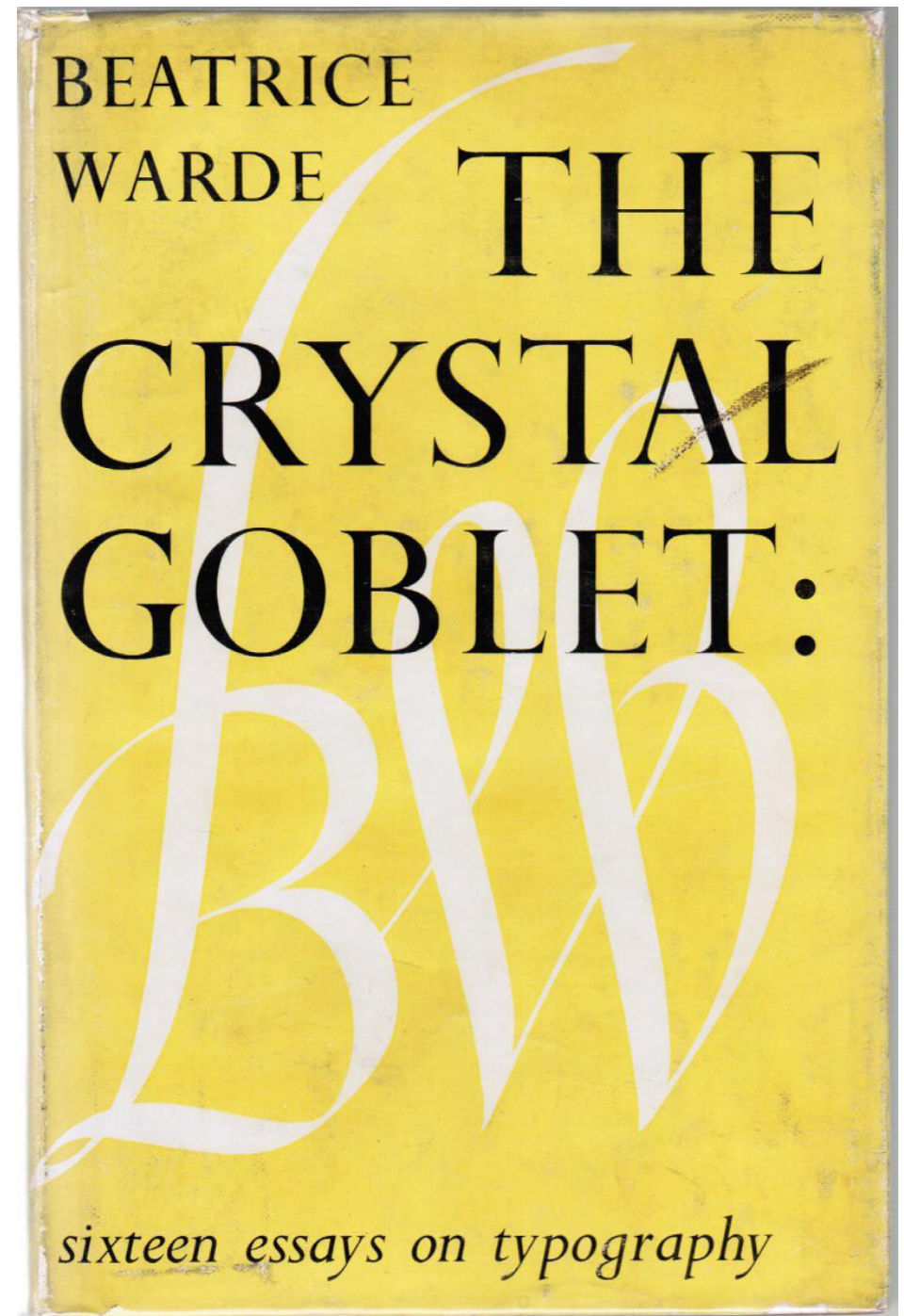
Functional typography also meant breaking with the symmetrical tradition of the western book design.

The proponent of "New Typography" Jan Tschichold argued that the form of the text should not blindly follow traditional forms, but rather the logic of each individual text.

graphisches kabinett münchen

buchdruckerei franz eggert, heßstr. 60

briennerstrasse 10   leitung guenther franke

ausstellung der sammlung jan tschichold

plakate der avantgarde

arp	molzahn
baumeister	schawinsky
bayer	schlemmer
burchartz	schuitema
cassandre	sutnar
cyliax	trump
dexel	tschichold
lissitzky	zwart
moholy-nagy	und andere

tsch   24. januar bis 10. februar 1930   geöffnet 9–6, sonntags 10–1

This meant using asymmetry as a reference for organisation.

The New Typography is distinguished from the old by the fact that its first objective is to develop its visible form out of the functions of the text.
It is essential to give pure and direct expression to the contents of whatever is printed: just as in the works of technology and nature, 'form' must be created out of function. Only then can we achieve a typography which expresses the spirit of modern man. The function of printed text is communication, emphasis (word value) and the logical sequence of the contents.

(Jan Tschichold: The New Typography, 1928)

Typography and grids are/were one of the main concerns of modernist graphic design.
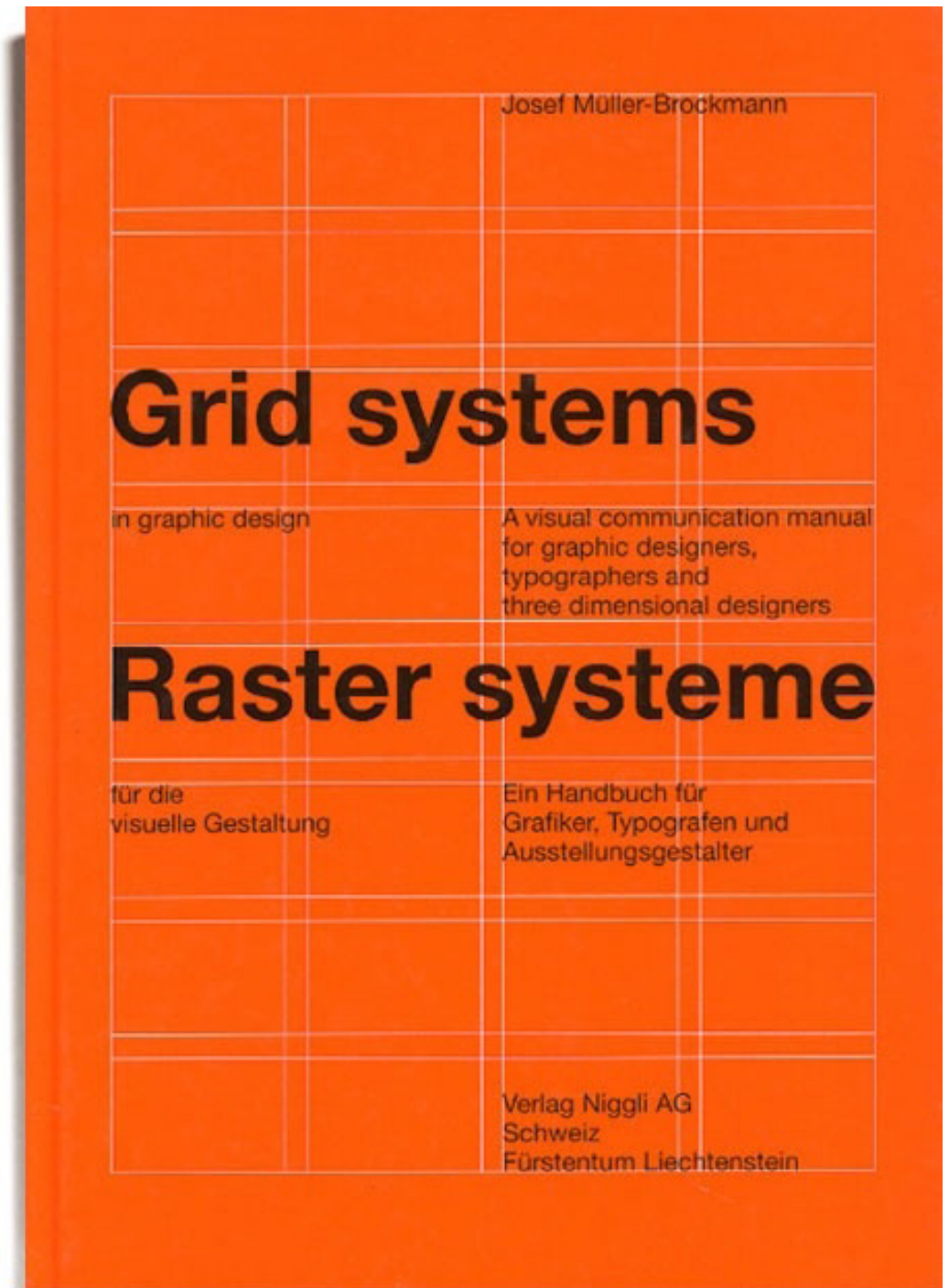
Josef Müller-Brockmann

Grid systems

in graphic design

A visual communication manual for graphic designers, typographers and three dimensional designers

Raster systeme

für die visuelle Gestaltung

Ein Handbuch für Grafiker, Typografen und Ausstellungsgestalter

Verlag Niggli AG
Schweiz
Fürstentum Liechtenstein

In Switzerland,
designers developed
complex and modulary
grid systems in order to fit
technical information
in three different languages
(German, Italian, and French)
in the same publications.

Neue Grafik
New Graphic Design
Graphisme actuel

Internationale Zeitschrift für Grafik und verwandte Gebiete Text dreisprachig (deutsch, englisch, französisch)

International Review of Graphic Design and related subjects Issued in German, English and French

Revue internationale du graphisme et des domaines annexes Parution en langue allemande, anglaise et française

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	Ausgabe Juli 1963	Issue for July 1963	Juillet 1963
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Hans Neuburg, Zürich	Schweizer Plakate der letzten vier Jahre	Swiss Posters of the past four years	Affiches suisses des quatre années écoulées
Thomas Maldonado und Gui Bonsiepe, Ulm	Ein Zeichensystem für elektro-medizinische Geräte	A Sign System for Electromedica Instruments	Un système de signes pour appareils électromédicaux
Peter Mächler, St. Gallen	Fortschrittliche Wahlpropaganda	Progressive Elections Notices	Propagande électorale d'avant-garde
Richard P. Lohse, Zürich	Werbung für eine Londoner Möbelfirma	Publicity for a London Firm of Furniture	Publicité pour une maison d'ameublement londonienne
	Arbeiten von Robert Praed		
Georg Radanowicz, Zürich	Reine Foto-Grafik	Pure Photo-Graphic Design	Photo-graphisme pur
	Fotoklasse der Kunstgewerbeschule Zürich		
Margit Staber, Zürich	Ausstellung für Asbeströhren (Eternit) von Max Bill	Exhibition of Asbestos Pipes	L'exposition des tubes de ciment d'amiante
Peter Lehner, Bern	SWB Form Forum 1962	SWB Design Forum 1962	Forum 1962 de la forme ASAI
LMNV	Braun-Ausstellungsstände	Permanent Braun Pavilion on an Exhibition Site	Pavillon Braun permanent sur l'esplanade d'une foire
Richard P. Lohse, Zürich	Buchschutzumschläge aus den dreißiger Jahren	Book jackets of the Thirties	Couvertures de protection des années trente
Margit Staber, Zürich	Ein Maler als eigener Plakatgrafiker	A Painter who is his own Graphic Designer	Un peintre-graphiste
	Einzelnummer Fr. 15.–	Single number Fr. 15.–	Le numéro Fr. 15.–
Herausgeber und Redaktion Editors and Managing Editors Editeurs et rédaction	Richard P. Lohse SWB/VSG, Zürich J. Müller-Brockmann SWB/VSG, Zürich Hans Neuburg SWB/VSG, Zürich Carlo L. Vivarelli SWB/VSG, Zürich		
Druck Verlag Printing/Publishing Imprimerie Edition	Walter-Verlag AG, Olten Schweiz/Switzerland/Suisse		

Joseph Müller–Brockmann

In Switzerland and beyond, grids ruled
not only publication design but were
used as the organisational principle
in most design cases.

Grids were found useful also when combining images with text.

The use of grids produced an unprecedented unity of layouts that modernist designers found very functional and very appealing at the same time.

the grid

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Postmodern

The power of modernism started to fade after WW2,
but especially so by the 1980s.
This era is often called "postmodern" and is arguably still going on.

There are many definitions for postmodern,
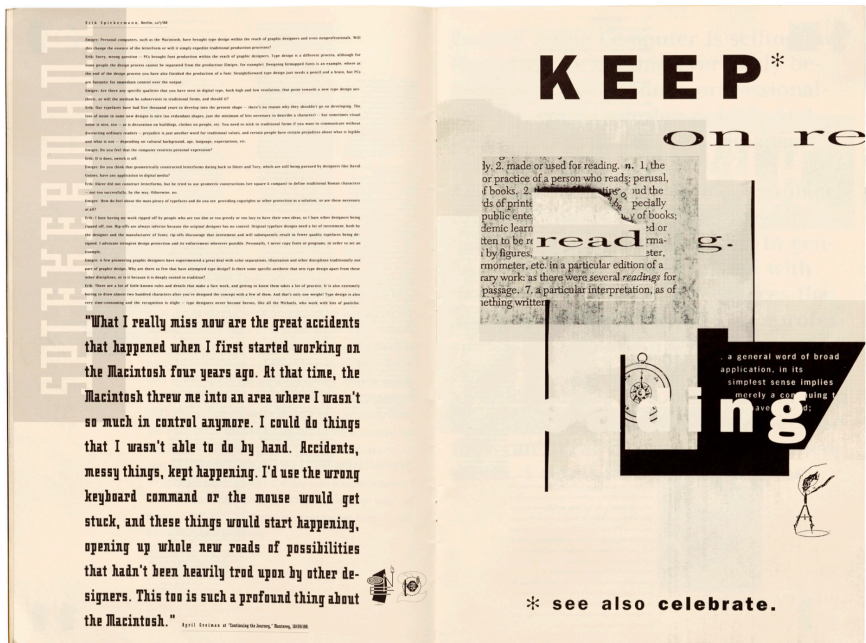but one might be 'modern with self-awareness'.
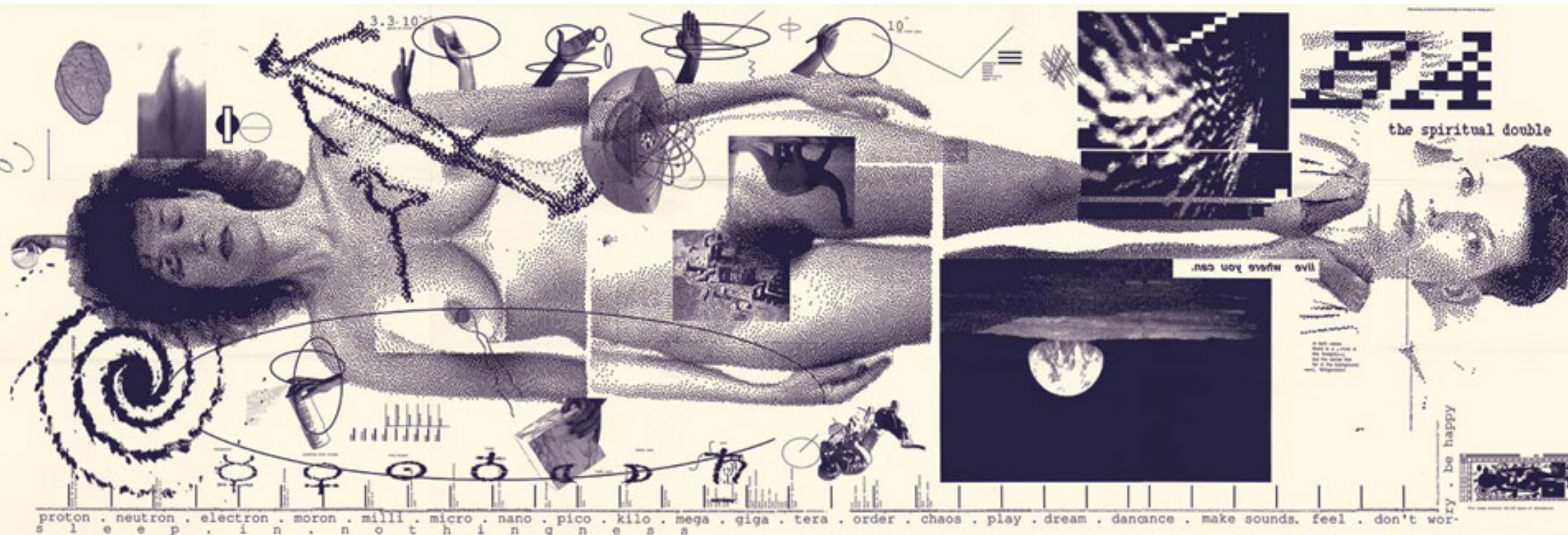
April Greiman 1986

Postmodern is

among other things:

- Questioning of prevalent stories, 'the great narratives' of modernity
- The rise of popular and underground culture
- Mixing of influences
- Irony, humour, pastiche
- Dispersing of audiences

- But accused of relativism

Barbara Kruger 1989

Pages 12–13, *Emigre* #11, Berkeley, Emigre Graphics, 1989.

The 1990s Anglo-American design discourse
was critical of modernist design principals:

"In the beginning, when modernism was young,
it was a radical idea that positioned itself
in opposition to a more conservative traditionalism.
As time went on, the modernist ideology spread into
all areas of cultural production,
eventually becoming the dominant aesthetic ideology.

(Jeffrey Keedy, Zombie Modernism, 1995)

Phillip Thurtle

Biology in the Grid

Graphic Design and the

Envisioning of Life
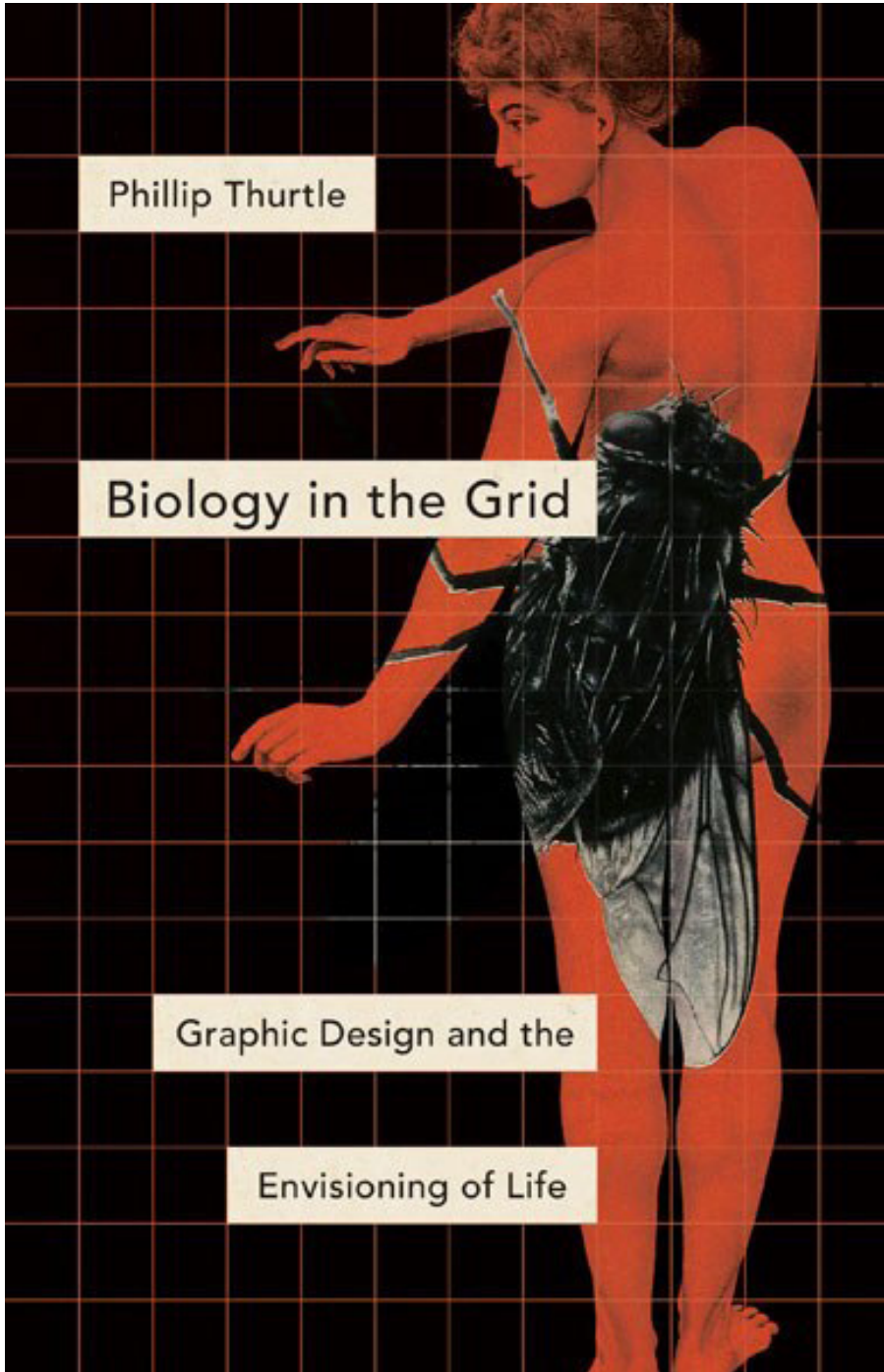
Historian Phillip Thurtle argues that grid-based graphic design spread into science and enabled scientific arguments within biology and other sciences in the 20th century.

As grids dominated biology, they begun to dominate our own notions of how life exists on Earth.

Thurtle (2018). *Biology in the Grid*

Thurtle shows how in early 20th century grids were used to promote products, not only in print, but eventually also in stacking goods for sale.

Stacking, repetition and scaling were efficient in gaining attention for even the smallest products.

Thurtle (2018). *Biology in the Grid*

Thurtle then goes to show examples of how grids and repetition were and are used to form our understanding of life – the organisation and and development of organisms.

The same principle was also used in anthropology to arrange visualisations of different types of primates and humans, organising Western thought led by racial politics.

Thurtle (2018). *Biology in the Grid*
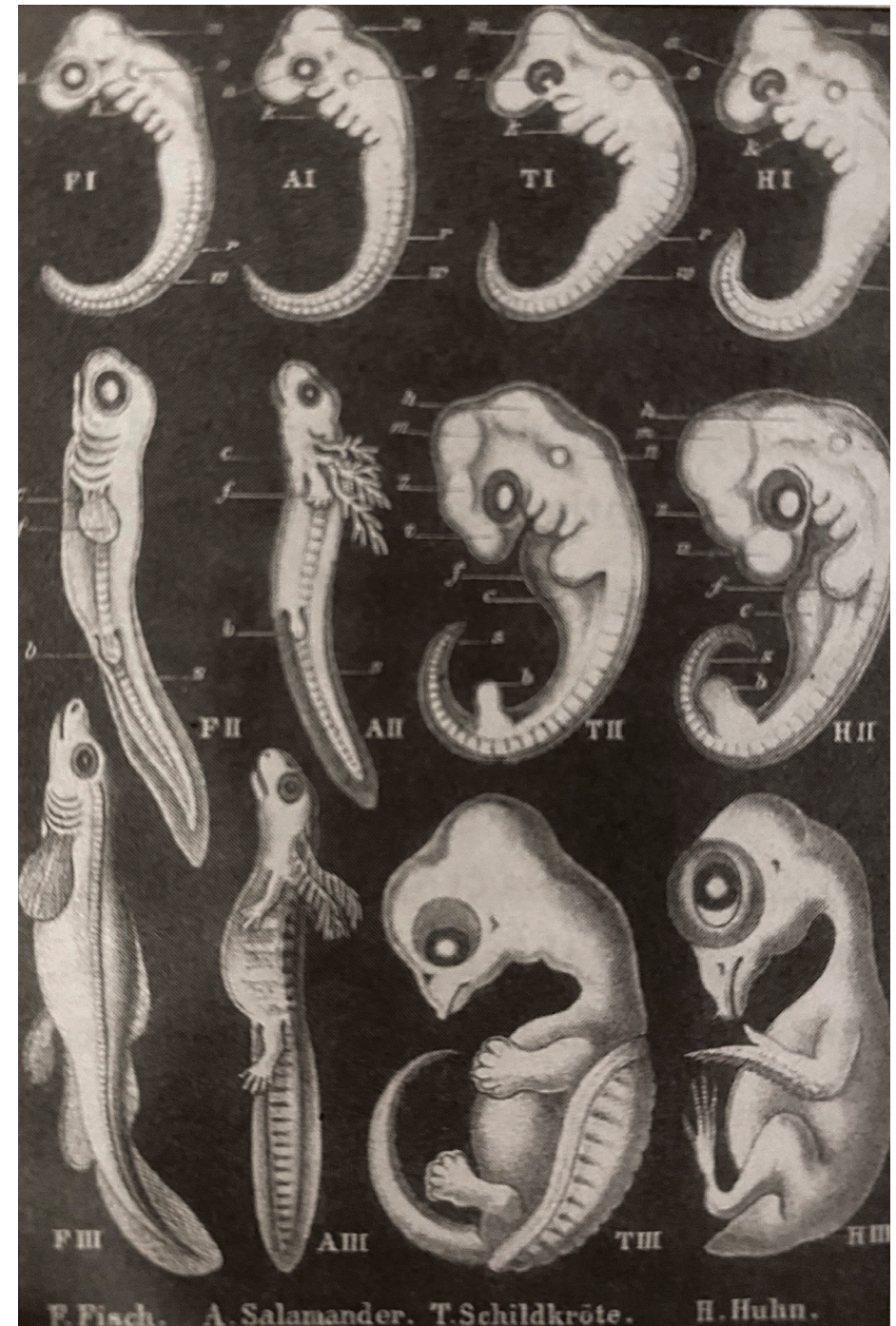
Anthropogenie. Haeckel's illustratio of von Baer's law of specialization

Art historian Rosalind Krauss writes:

There are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinaturan, antimmetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature.

In the flatness that results from its coordinates, the grid is the means of crowding out the dimensions of the real and replacing them with the lateral spread of a single surface. In the overall regularity of its organization, it is the result of not imitation but of aesthetic decree. ... [T]he grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves; the relationships in the aesthetic field are shown by the grid to be in a world apart and, with respect to natural objects, to be both prior and final.

Rosalind Krauss (1979). *Grids*

"Design was an extremely effective tool in converting the masses to modernity; it spread modernism from a few liberal thinkers, to a conservative majority.

Consequently, designers defined design as a modernist practice, and design's history is almost exclusively within the modernist paradigm."

Jeffrey Keedy (1995). *Zombie Modernism*
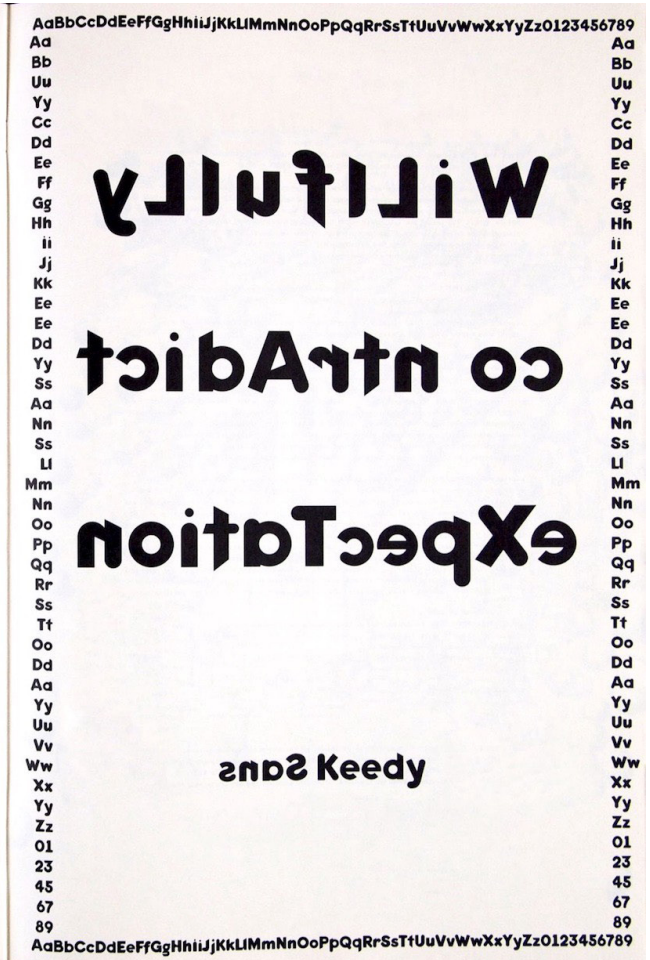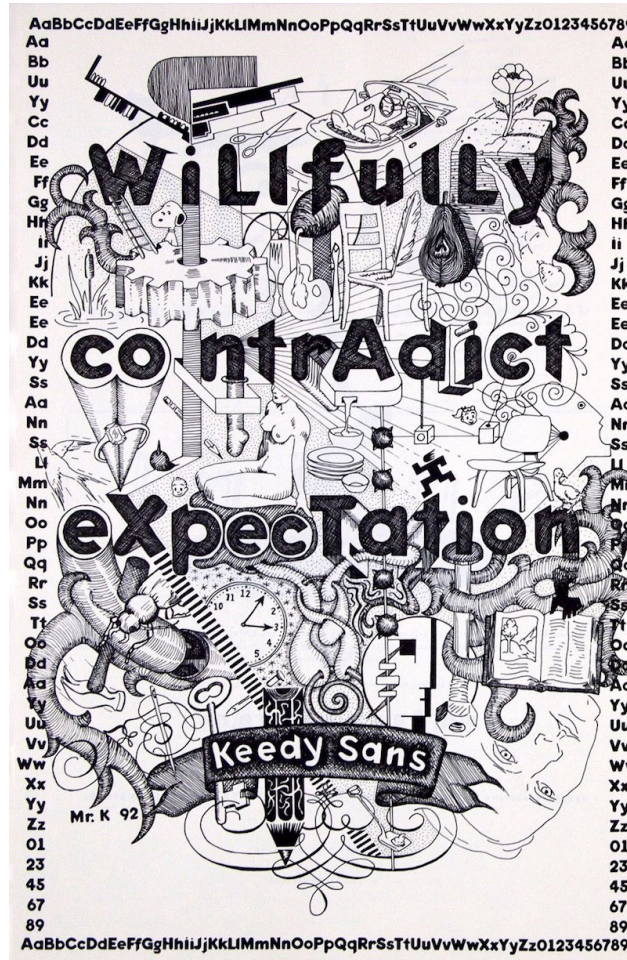
Jeffrey Keedy: Keedy Sans

"I am the voice of clarity and reason"
"I am the voice of authority and progress"
"I am in charge of this family's values"
...
"For the zombie modernist, everything outside of modernism
is chaos, superficial, trendy, of poor quality,
or just an empty formal style."

Jeffrey Keedy (1995). *Zombie Modernism*

Share at least one of these in Flinga (before wednesday):

– An interesting example of the issues discussed here

– A question about the lecture

or

– Your comment on how modernism is present in your work

https://flinga.fi/s/FRJJG4S