

FOREWORD

Joseph Müller-Brockmann speaks on behalf of the modernist (early 20th century) take on publication design when he says that “working with the grid means submitting to the laws of universal validity”. Submitting to the laws of rationality, of matter over form and of a pure and minimalist aesthetic fit for the new industrial mode of making that made the modernist movement in graphic design feasible. It was a movement that judged ornament and decoration redundant and a sign of degeneracy (Loos). The modernist movement didn’t consider the value of the images of ornament as functional but as mere decoration taking focus from the intellectual value of the content – and demanding unnecessary time in the manufacturing process, making the product more expensive than it needed to be and the man work longer hours than necessary. If the process of manufacturing was stripped from ornament, standardized and mechanized, the man would earn valuable leisure-time and the appearance of things would achieve a more honest expression, fit for the new age of functionalism and a growth-mindset (Loos). By constructing these “laws of universal validity” from this logic the modernists created rules for a visual communication practice that in time came to serve as a visualization of this idea of growth and a focus on the value of function over anything else.

But if we consider ornament as inherently valuable in their form, and as serving a function in their aesthetics, what might this function be? American architect Claude Bragdon believed ornament to be an image of the spirit of a people, telling us stories about the physical climate of a place and of the people who inhabited it. He believed ornament to be a language as adequate as the written/spoken and that the ornamental practices of a culture functioned as a sort of signifier of their communal values (Bragdon ref). Bragdon believed there was a need for a new ornamental language fit for the new indu-

ustrialized spirit in society, as globalization, industrialization and advanced cultivation made the former languages of ornamentation (local vegetation, local history) unfit. With time the citizens of the world became increasingly globally oriented and more detached from their commodities, living in growing cities of increasingly industrialized and capitalized consumer societies while the support of the modernist idea grew significantly and left Bragdon and his likes with little hope of achieving this new language they were so urgently searching for.

Looking at the world today, around a century, later we see this detachment very clearly resulting in multiple crises of climate, biodiversity, economy and humanity originating in the belief in and rise of capitalist consumer society. The modernist idea of functionalism thrived in this environment, considering the natural world as a resource for growth of an abstract economic system, instrumentalizing the arts for its purposes and forgetting its fundamental role as the foundation for all life. This logic still in the postmodern society of today in large shapes all our societal practices and politics in the western world and design is no exception. The instrumentalization of the graphic design practice, which begun with the modernists, has led to visual communication forms being utilized as an identity marker in commercial business, and inferior to concise linguistic communication while it has also been bound by the laws of objectivity and rationality, that has shaped the western way of thinking through centuries and caused suffering for many other cultures and species. It has disconnected the human species from the natural world it is ever so dependent on.

Politics of printed space is an investigation in how these logics we create from shapes the practices of design and how the shape shifts when these logics change. Through experiments with typesetting and grid design, it is a visual journey through thoughts on art, politics of value and experiences of form – asking the reader to take part in the reading with curiosity and willingness to look at the book as

more than the words it holds, as a vessel for other ways of reading. It also remains a testimony to a critical approach to the practice of organizing printed space and the modernist writings on the subject.

The book proposes to look for inspiration for change in theories on the language of ornamentation as such might offer a radical change in perspective from what the modernists, who first treated practices of graphic design and visual communication as subject to academic evaluation, believed it to be (see: GRID SYSTEMS IN GRAPHIC DESIGN, ORNAMENT AND CRIME & THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NEW TYPOGRAPHY). Ornamentation can be many things but in this project I will define it as what contributes to the reading what words cannot – by introducing various visual cues, a playful approach to typesetting and a focus on the form as something that adds to the narrative rather than stealing focus from it. As a result from the readings and an inspirational guideline for the design work of this publication, a new definition of what working with the organization of printed space (a re-definition of Müller-Brockmann's laws of universal validity) entails has been formulated (see page X). This is not to be seen as a law in the same sense as Müller-Brockmann's but as an inspiration for the work with this publication, that can be adapted and re-formulated by the reader. It is my proposal for a guide to a humanist practice with the design of printed space.

But before you, dear reader, leap into this collection of printed spaces I will leave you with the words of chef and fermentation specialist David Zilber – as heard at a recent talk on the Science of Fermentation.

YOU DIMINISH
IT. WHAT YOU
GAIN IN CONTROL
YOU LOOSE IN
COMPLEXITY."

(David Zilber, The Science of Fermentation. Aarhus , March 2024)

The systems he is referring to are the ecological environments for fermentation processes and how they respond to mechanized and industrialized fabrication processes. Ecological processes changing with the slightest alteration in levels of oxygen and microbacteria in their surroundings. Perhaps there is a similar point to be found when exploring the politics of printed space. That when we strive for a universal truth and maximum efficiency, we suppress the nuances of human communication and reduce the possible impact of visuality.

"WHEN YOU TAKE
COMPLEXITY OUT
OF A SYSTEM