

The Sources and Characters
of Jan Tschichold's
<i>Die neue Typographie</i>

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A New Bibliography

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The Sources of *Die neue Typographie*

This publication originates from the research project “The Sources of Jan Tschichold’s *The New Typography*” conducted at ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne (HES-SO) between 2019 and 2022 and embedded in the MA in Type Design.¹ Moreover, it documents the travelling exhibition *Unpacking Tschichold’s Library* which has been hosted in four different venues since 2023.

The aim of the project was to reconstruct and analyse the sources cited by Jan Tschichold in the bibliography of his 1928 book *Die neue Typographie. Ein Handbuch für zeitgemäss Schaffende* (The New Typography. A Handbook for Modern Designers).² (fig. 1) The research therefore focused on the identification, collection or reproduction of bibliographical references and their contextual analysis, with the aim of expanding knowledge on the background of the first manual of graphic design produced by an author trained in graphics. The biographies of the sixteen persons listed in the address list at the end of *Die neue Typographie* were equally informative of the network in which Tschichold’s book is entangled. Finally, the revival of the lost typeface used by Tschichold in the typesetting of his book was a further element of research, with its re-enactment and analysis.

The research project was supported by the strategic fund of the Research Competence Network for Design and Visual Arts (RCDAV) of HES-SO / University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland. After completion, it benefited from further support by the SNSF, Swiss National Science Foundation, which funded the international conference “Jan Tschichold’s The New Typography: Its Roots and Impact on National Scenes” held at ECAL on 25 April 2025. The results of the conference form the core of the volume *The Roots and Impact of Jan Tschichold’s Die neue Typographie*.³ The SNSF equally financed a scientific exchange between ECAL and KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts Ghent (Tschicholds bibliotheek uitgepakt: The New Typography in Belgium and Switzerland).

Die neue Typographie formalised the principles of Modernism in the field of graphic design and consecrated Tschichold as a spokesman for the New Typography. Published in 1928, the book followed an earlier statement by Tschichold entitled “Elementare Typographie” (Elementary Typography), which appeared in October 1925 as a special issue of the German trade journal *Typographische Mitteilungen* (Typographical Notices).⁴ (fig. 2)

Both texts provided graphic designers, printers and typographers with guidelines on layout, typefaces, paper size and the use of photography.

1	Barbieri 2023.
2	Tschichold 1928.
3	Fornari, Berthod and Barbieri 2026.
4	Tschichold 1925.



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fig. 1 Cover and spread of *Die neue Typographie. Ein Handbuch für zeitgemäss Schaffende*, by Jan Tschichold (facsimile reprint: Brinkmann und Bose, Berlin 1987). Photo by Niccolò Quaresima



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fig. 2 Cover of "Elementare Typographie", special issue of *Typographische Mitteilungen*, by Jan Tschichold (facsimile reprint: Verlag Hermann Schmidt, Mainz 1986). Photo by Vincent Levrat

Together they constitute a handbook and manifesto at the same time and demonstrate Tschichold's ability to articulate the new approach to visual communication through detailed and clear guidelines that printers and typographers could easily implement in their daily practice. The suggested instructions included for the favouring of sans-serif fonts and lowercase letters, asymmetrical layouts and grids, photography and photomontage over illustration, standardised paper sizes and active use of white and negative spaces. These principles became the expression of Modernism in the field of visual communication and printing.

Within the framework of ECAL Master's program in Type Design, Jan Tschichold is a key figure of Modernism. Often new to the history of art and design, students see in Tschichold an essential reference point, sometimes even a role model and, other times, an influence to be strongly rejected. Introducing them to the sources and context of his work provided an opportunity to delve deeper into a designer's life and legacy. This process equips students with the critical thinking skills to evaluate sources, analyse historical materials, and integrate these insights into their contemporary practice.

The ECAL Master's in Type Design also strives to maintain a strong connection between graphic and type design. In a field that is increasingly specialised, there is a risk of becoming overly focused on the details of letterforms, losing sight of the interplay between text, images, white space, composition, and the broader context that brings design objects to life. The holistic perspective of Tschichold is a good example for students to understand how typography operates within the larger framework of visual communication.

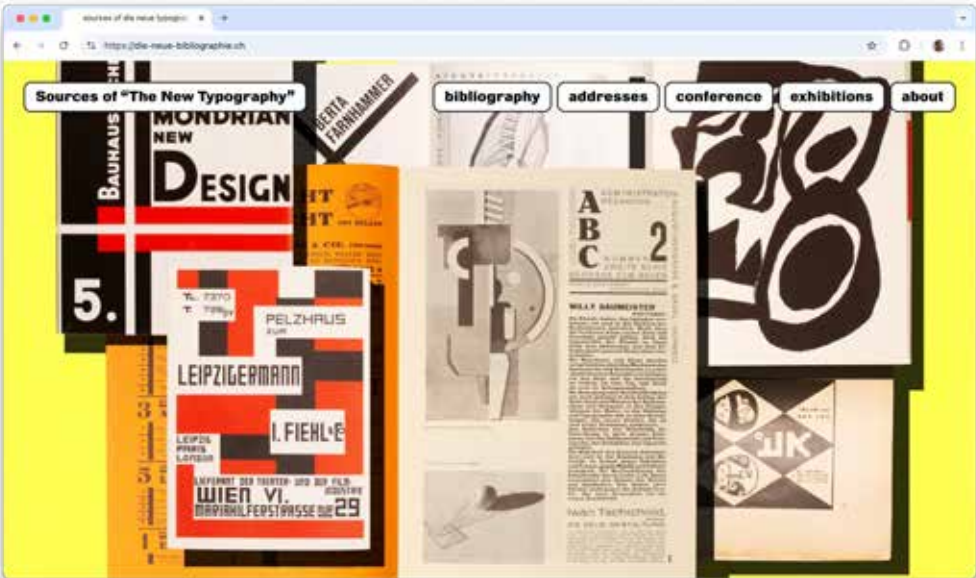
Finally, the research project "The Sources of Jan Tschichold's *The New Typography*" positions Tschichold within a wider network of designers, artists, and thinkers. Creativity, both then and now, does not emerge in isolation. Connections and influences form the fabric of innovation. Examining the personal libraries of significant historical designers helps students grasp these interconnections between fields of design, inspiring them to shape their own professional paths. Only by being proactive they could become critical thinkers rather than passive followers of existing trends and models.

Dispatching and Unpacking Tschichold's Library

With the aim of disseminating the outcomes of the research project, different media were produced. The first output was the website die-neue-bibliographie.ch, designed and developed by ECAL alumni Federico Barbon and Frederik Mahler-Andersen.⁵ (fig. 3) The website was used over the course of the project to make preliminary results of the research immediately available: images and analyses of the bibliographic references were uploaded online and released with a Creative Commons license, in an effort to share with a general audience sources that would otherwise be confined to libraries, museums or archives. Over time, the website became a repository of the different dissemination activities of the project, including video recordings of the international conference held at ECAL, and visual documentation of the touring exhibition.

The travelling exhibition *Unpacking Tschichold's Library* features the corpus of bibliographic references collected in original editions, reprints, translations or facsimile editions, including digital reconstructions. It was designed and set up by multidisciplinary office Work Matter studio

⁵ ECAL 2022.



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fig. 3 Sources of "The New Typography" website, die-neue-bibliographie.ch, photo by Nicolas Polli, design by Federico Barbon, 2022.

(ECAL alumni Elie Fazel and Valentin Sieber) with a visual identity by Federico Barbon. The exhibition debuted in Paris, at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France) on 24 March 2023 (until 15 April). It was organised in the framework of the “outdoor” activities of the Centre Culturel Suisse, closed for renovation at the time. **(fig. 4)** A lecture by Davide Fornari bearing the same title was held at the same time in the context of the series of conferences “Design graphique: pratique + critique” organised by Catherine de Smet, Philippe Millot and André Baldinger, as a joint effort of the Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis and ENSAD / École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs. The exhibition was then presented at the gallery l'elac (Espace lausannois d'art contemporain), within the building of ECAL, on the occasion of the international conference “Jan Tschichold's *The New Typography*: Its Roots and Impact on National Scenes”, convened by Davide Fornari, Chiara Barbieri and Jonas Berthod and supported by SNSF, Swiss National Science Foundation on 26 April 2023 (until 26 May). **(fig. 5)** The exhibition was then invited to ISIA (Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche) in Urbino (16–20 October 2023), where Jonathan Pierini, then director of the school, and Silvia Sfligiotti, faculty member and lecturer in Graphic Design History, held a workshop for the students of the MA in Communication, Design and Publishing. **(fig. 6)** Finally, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts Ghent hosted the show (29 March – 21 April 2024) in their Zwarte Zaal exhibition space, accompanied by the results of the workshop “An Eye for Graphic Design”, held by BINGO, Belgian Institute of Graphic Design (Pia Jacques and Leroy Meyer) and a selection of Belgian magazines from the collection of KASK Art Library (De Kunstenbibliotheek). **(fig. 7)**

The exhibition was the starting point for further publications and reasoning within the different graphic designers' scenes, proving how a project in graphic design history can become an operational environment also for practitioners. Astrid Chabot, who participated in the audience of the lecture held by Davide Fornari in Paris, based her diploma work *Les nouvelles bibliographies* on the few women who appeared between the lines of Tschichold's *Die neue Typographie* as authors or designers.⁶ **(fig. 8)** Based on the books in the exhibition and on a further selection of avant-garde sources, ISIA Urbino students self-published a volume with the output of the workshop held by Jonathan Pierini and Silvia Sfligiotti.⁷ **(fig. 9)** Finally, the results of the workshop held by BINGO at KASK & Conservatorium / School of Arts Ghent took the form of five installations featured in the same Ghent exhibition, based on a selection of art and architecture magazines of the same period of *Die neue Typographie*: while they are not cited directly in the book, they were included in the list of *Zeitgemässe Zeitschriften* (contemporary magazines) by Hannes Meyer in his article “Die neue Welt” (The New World) for *Das Werk* magazine.⁸ **(fig. 10)**

Re-Enacting the Bibliography, the Address List and the Typeface of *Die neue Typographie*

The present publication is organised in two parts. The first part opens with

an essay by Davide Fornari, where the author critically discusses the outcomes of the contextualised

6 Chabot 2023.

7 Fornari, Pierini and Sfligiotti 2023.

8 Meyer 1926.



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- fig. 4 Installation view of the exhibition
Déballer la bibliothèque de Tschichold, Paris,
 Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 24 March – 15 April 2023.
 Photo by Quentin Lacombe
- fig. 5 Installation view of the exhibition
Unpacking Tschichold's Library, Renens,
 ECAL/L'Elac Gallery, 27 April – 26 May 2023.
 Photo by Marvin Merkel
- fig. 6 Installation view of the exhibition
Togliere i libri di Tschichold dalle casse, Urbino, ISIA U,
 Istituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche,
 16–20 October 2023.
 Photo by Chiara Rebolino and Lorenzo Urgesi



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fig. 7 Installation view of the exhibition *Tschicholds bibliotheek uitgepakt*, Ghent, KASK & Conservatorium, Zwarte Zaal, 29 March – 21 April 2024. Photo by Sander van Damme



fig. 8 "Bibliography" page from the website *Sources of "The New Typography"*, die-neue-bibliographie.ch, design by Federico Barbon, 2022.



fig. 9 Covers and spreads of *Les Nouvelles Bibliographies*, by Astrid Chabot, 2023.
Photo by Niccolò Quaresima



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fig. 10 Cover and spreads of *Jan Tschichold. Urbino (PU)*.
Via Santa Chiara, 36. cap 61029, by ISIA U, Urbino students, 2023.
 Photo by Niccolò Quaresima



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fig. 11 Installation view of the exhibition *An Eye for Graphic Design*, Ghent, KASK & Conservatorium, Zwarte Zaal, 29 March – 21 April 2024. Photo by Sander van Damme



fig. 12 "Addresses" page from the website *Sources of "The New Typography"*, die-neue-bibliographie.ch, design by Federico Barbon, 2022.

analyses of the sources cited by Tschichold in his book. The essay is followed by individual entries for each bibliographic reference, penned by Chiara Barbieri, Davide Fornari and Martin Søberg. Extensively illustrated with the images by Vincent Levrat, each entry describes the content and graphic appearance of the source, contextualises it, and explains whether and how it is used by Tschichold in *Die neue Typographie*. **(fig. 11)** The section concludes with short biographies (written by Chiara Barbieri, Jonas Berthod and Davide Fornari) of the sixteen people named at the end of *Die neue Typographie*. The list offers a glimpse into the lives of the people who constituted Tschichold's network, before and after the publication of his book, and the impact that the Nazi regime and World War II had on them. **(fig. 12)**

The second part of the book focuses on the revival of the typeface used by Tschichold for the typesetting of *Die neue Typographie*. This redesign expanded on the MA Type Design diploma work of ECAL alumnus Davide Tomatis.⁹ His Aurora Grotesk and Metodo fonts are a testbed for the design of revival typefaces: the production of Aurora Grotesk is documented in an accurate description of the original typeface and on the operations that informed the new digital design.

The conceptual context for this redesign and the ensuing design of Metodo typeface, commercialised by the Optimo foundry, are at the core of a conversation between Matthieu Cortat-Roller, Gilles Gavillet and Davide Tomatis. The relationship between type design and its history is the subject of a second conversation between François Rappo and Davide Tomatis. A visual essay by Nicolas Polli completes the book, in the form of an in-depth study of the graphic richness of the printed materials collected over the course of the project.

This book is part of a two-volume publication devoted to Tschichold's *Die neue Typographie*. On the one hand, the volume *The Roots and Impact of Jan Tschichold's Die neue Typographie* focuses on different national scenes before and after the publication of Tschichold's book, and its relevance in recent times. What follows, on the other hand, provides a glimpse into the otherwise dispersed library of Jan Tschichold. It is a privileged view on rare printed materials from the beginning of 20th century and tells us about the lineage in which Tschichold's book was rooted and the kind of discourse and networks from which it stemmed. Questioning the newness of the New Typography, it thus provides elements for alternative narratives to the worn-out rhetoric of the pioneers of graphic design. Together, the two volumes offer a more complex understanding on *Die neue Typographie* and the New Typography.

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