

Editorial

If this Journal had planned to dramatize its *raison d'être*, we could not have staged a more appropriate incident than one that took place at the Association Typographique Internationale's Tenth Congress at UNESCO in Paris. We refer to the end of the session discussing the creation of alphabets for developing countries, when—both to speakers and to the assembled Congress—it became suddenly apparent that the only logical way out of the growing complexities involved in getting these new alphabets down on paper was through the cooperation of our best educational, linguistic, and typographic resources. The linguists and other UNESCO representatives, quite obviously, had been totally unaware of the typographic resources that might be available to them, and the audience seemed equally surprised when confronted with the immediacy of the “typographic” problems facing UNESCO.

There are two points involved here that require comment. First, if typography is to contribute to eventual solution of problems on the scale suggested by this challenge from UNESCO, then we must begin by facing up to the task of getting our own house in order. Specifically, this calls for the integration of typographic research on an international level. If anyone doubts the chaotic image we now project to the research world, he need only attempt his own organizational chart of the international typographic research establishment. Through what means, for example, could UNESCO linguists and educators possibly have become aware of—let alone acquainted with—other pertinent typographic research? There are other unfortunate consequences of our lack of integrated information. All too often we discover parallel research projects going on simultaneously in a number of countries (e.g., special materials for the visually handicapped), each one ignorant of the others' work, and each one, as it were, rediscovering the wheel. And how many isolated pockets of typographic research are there tucked away in our universities, research laboratories, and large corporations?

The second point that the confrontation at UNESCO brings to mind is the growing sense of confusion as to just what typographic research involves. Fernand Baudin points out on page 373 of this number that “typography” soon may be the concern of historians exclusively; in a note Herbert Roan

puts the problem more succinctly: "Lead is dead!" The old boundaries—the old definitions—seem to be slowly dissolving. We're having to make room at our meetings and in our periodicals for visual communicators and electronic engineers and descriptive bibliographers; although the legibility syndrome remains very much alive! If more specific evidence is required, we refer you to the index for volume I beginning on page 457.

In the biological sciences when a species is to be described, it is classified in two ways: first, according to the next larger group to which it belongs; second, how it relates to, and is differentiated from, other species within this larger group. Our initial step toward any possible integration of typographic information and the redefinition of typographic research must involve a similar classification.

The first question, therefore: under what larger umbrella does typographic research belong? If we were to attempt to work out a chart showing the relationship of all academic disciplines—all areas of learning and artistic expression—where would we in typography feel at home?

Typography deals with information, certainly; but such a classification is much too broad to be useful. Typography deals with communication of information—but this is still too broad. Typography deals with language to communicate information—still too broad. Typography deals with *visible* language to communicate information. Aren't we primarily concerned with getting our language (the vocal, spoken language) down in logical, understandable—visible form?

The important point, of course, is finding our place in the research scheme, not worrying about the appropriate name for our category. Our time will be much better spent in looking around to see who else is under the same umbrella—in getting better acquainted with our compatriots. Who else *is* interested in the visual form of our language? Once we seriously organize the search, we'll find an amazing assortment—from paleographers to painters and sculptors, from city planners to computer engineers.

Typography has been as parochial in its thinking as any of the various other areas of letterform interest. Yet leadership in any movement to organize and to activate an inter-relationship between these areas must develop out of what we traditionally call typography. Typography alone has the necessary heritage on which to build. Typography alone has the resources. And typography alone has the ecumenical spirit to seek out the other commonly-oriented groups of scholars, practitioners, and scientists—first to call attention to, and eventually to structure, an entirely new field of research.

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