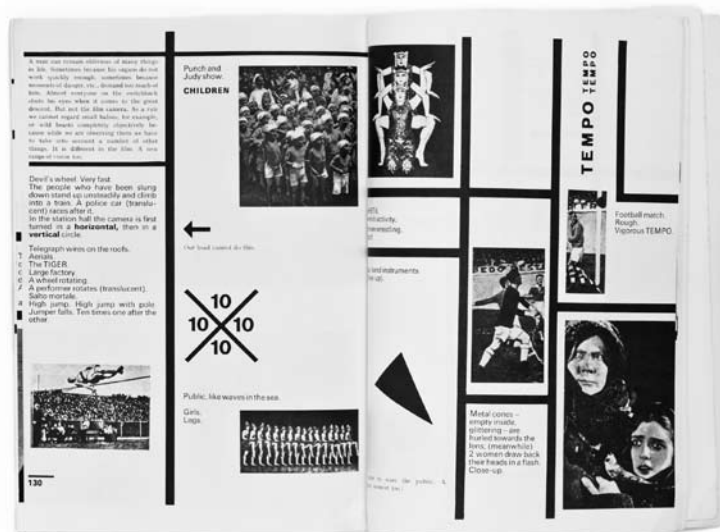


LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY CAME TO THE BAUHAUS IN 1923 AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-EIGHT. HE FLUNG OPEN THE DOORS AND FILLED THE HALLS OF THIS FAMOUS ART SCHOOL WITH TALK OF TECHNOLOGY. This Hungarian constructivist's obsessive discussions and experiments with photographic images—the photogram, the photoplactic, and, most importantly for the essay below, the typophoto—foresaw the emerging role of technology in both the aesthetics and practice of graphic design. Moholy-Nagy believed in the objective, collective, purifying effect of the camera on meaning. The integration of word and photographic image, in his mind, was a powerful antidote for the slippery nature of text. Each time we merge image and text in our own layouts, we reference his typophoto. In his book *Painting, Photography, Film*, he redirects our gaze through the “impartial approach” of photography, showing us even now how to experience reality anew. Moholy-Nagy stayed at the Bauhaus until 1928, influencing larger movements like the New Typography. In 1937, he emigrated to the United States and founded the New Bauhaus in Chicago, later changed to the Institute of Design.



LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY Spread from *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (*Painting, Photography, Film*), 1925.

"ART" COMES INTO BEING WHEN EXPRESSION IS AT ITS OPTIMUM,
I.E., WHEN AT ITS HIGHEST INTENSITY IT IS ROOTED IN BIOLOGICAL
LAW, PURPOSEFUL, UNAMBIGUOUS, PURE.

LÁSZLÓ
MOHOLY-NAGY
Painting,
Photography,
Film
1925

TYPOPHOTO

LÁSZLÓ MOHOLY-NAGY | 1925

Neither curiosity nor economic considerations alone but a deep human interest in what happens in the world has brought about the enormous expansion of the news service: typography, the film, and the radio.

The creative work of the artist, the scientist's experiments, the calculations of the businessman or the present-day politician, all that moves, all that shapes, is bound up in the collectivity of interacting events. The individual's immediate action of the moment always has the effect of simultaneity in the long term. The technician has his machine at hand: satisfaction of the needs of the moment. But basically much more: he is the pioneer of the new social stratification, he paves the way for the future.

The printer's work, for example, to which we still pay too little attention, has just such a long-term effect: international understanding and its consequences.

The printer's work is part of the foundation on which the new world will be built. Concentrated work of organization is the spiritual result that brings all elements of human creativity into a synthesis: the play instinct, sympathy, inventions, economic necessities. One man invents printing with movable type, another photography, a third screen printing and stereotype, the next electrotype, phototype, the celluloid plate hardened by light. Men still kill one another, they have not yet understood how they live, why they live; politicians fail to observe that the earth is an entity, yet television (Telehor) has been invented: the "Far Seer"—tomorrow we shall be able to look into the heart of our fellow man, be everywhere and yet be alone; illustrated books, newspapers, magazines are printed—in millions. The unambiguousness of the real, the truth in the everyday situation, is there for all classes. The hygiene of the optical, the health of the visible is slowly filtering through.

What is typophoto? Typography is communication composed in type. Photography is the visual presentation of what can be optically apprehended. Typophoto is the visually most exact rendering of communication.

Every period has its own optical focus. Our age: that of the film; the electric sign, simultaneity of sensorially perceptible events. It has given us a new, progressively developing creative basis for typography, too. Gutenberg's typography, which has endured almost to our own day, moves exclusively in the linear dimension. The intervention of the photographic process has extended it to a new dimensionality, recognized today as total. The preliminary work in this field was done by the illustrated papers, posters, and by display printing.

Until recently typeface and typesetting rigidly preserved a technique that admittedly guaranteed the purity of the linear effect but ignored the new dimensions of life. Only quite recently has there been typographic work that uses the contrasts of typographic material (letters, signs, positive and negative values of the plane) in an attempt to establish a correspondence with modern life. These efforts have, however, done little to relax the inflexibility that has hitherto existed in typographic practice. An effective loosening up can be achieved only by the most sweeping and all-embracing use of the techniques of photography, zincography, the electrotpe, etc. The flexibility and elasticity of these techniques bring with them a new reciprocity between economy and beauty. With the development of phototelegraphy, which enables reproductions and accurate illustrations to be made instantaneously, even philosophical works will presumably use the same means—though on a higher plane—as the present-day American magazines. The form of these new typographic works will, of course, be quite different typographically, optically, and synoptically from the linear typography of today.

Linear typography communicating ideas is merely a mediating makeshift link between the content of the communication and the person receiving it:



Instead of using typography—as hitherto—merely as an objective means, the attempt is now being made to incorporate it and the potential effects of its subjective existence creatively into the contents.

The typographical materials themselves contain strongly optical tangibilities by means of which they can render the content of the communication in a directly visible—not only in an indirectly intellectual—fashion. Photography is highly effective when used as typographical material. It may appear as illustration beside the words, or in the form of “phototext” in place of words, as a precise form of representation so objective as to permit of no individual interpretation. The form, the rendering, is constructed out of the optical and associative relationships: into a visual, associative, conceptual, synthetic continuity: into the typophoto as an unambiguous rendering in an optically valid form.

The typophoto governs the new tempo of the new visual literature.

In the future every printing press will possess its own block-making plant, and it can be confidently stated that the future of typographic methods lies with the photomechanical processes. The invention of the photographic typesetting machine, the possibility of printing whole editions with X-ray radiography, the new cheap techniques of block making, etc., indicate the trend to which every typographer or typophotographer must adapt himself as soon as possible.

This mode of modern synoptic communication may be broadly pursued on another plane by means of the kinetic process, the film.