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**«usus», typography, and artists' books**

We would like to begin with some general remarks on typography and related subjects as well as on artists' books. This will give a kind of framework for the description of two samples of our book works.

Typography deals with set and printed type — and is therefore to be distinguished from calligraphy. Calligraphy means to write beautifully. Typography means to “write” always in the same way. This points to an important difference: When you look at set and printed type, you will notice that all A's (or b's ... etc.) look exactly the same, whereas when you write by hand the same letter differs a little every time you write it.

Within typography one can differentiate between two main areas: people who design type, and people who design with type. Type designers design new type forms, whereas typographers use type to organize content.

Of course one can also differentiate between the intention of the information being given and according to the media used: book typography is different from typography used in advertising, and typography in print differs from typography on the screen.

«us» does not design type, we design *with* type, and the medium we prefer is the book. We have been working in the field of graphic design, applied art, and book design for publishing companies. Contents and the text are already there, the book designer has to work with these components in a way that the reader/viewer is able to gain easy access to the subject matter. Microtypographic and macrotypographic aspects have to be considered. Microtypography deals with type face, type style, type weight, type size, kerning, tracking, spacing, leading, line length, and helps to bring the text into a form easy to read. Macrotypography deals with visualizing the structure of the text.

And of course no two books are the same. It makes sense to distinguish according the various ways how we read a book. In his book *Lesetypografie*<sup>1</sup> (typography for reading) Hans Peter Willberg makes the following classifications: linear reading (e. g. novels); informatory reading (e. g. newspapers, many non fiction books); differentiating typography (e. g. science books, but also typography of a drama); reading with the intention of inquiring (e. g. dictionaries, encyclopaedia, thesauri, all appendices and register); selected reading (e. g. schoolbooks, all didactic books, cook books); typography according to meaning (e. g. primer, picture books, teaching books for foreign languages, headlines, captions); activating typography (e. g. magazines, gift books); staging typography (where the book is used as a stage for the text, and the typography gives an interpretation of the text).

But we are also artists, and with Kurt Schwitters we say: *Typografie kann unter Umständen Kunst sein* (typography may be an art form in its own right).

Artists working with type and typography normally will use their own texts — without necessarily thinking of themselves as writers.

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1 Hans Peter Willberg: *Lesetypografie*. Verlag H. Schmidt, Mainz 1997

Typography does not always have to follow the given rules.

Working with given forms — and that is what you do when you work with type — means to pay a certain attention to what seems to be natural. Typography means to handle type consciously, deliberately, knowingly, sensibly and willfully — regardless of being used in a context of applied or fine arts.

Artists' Books is a term difficult to define.

Comparatively easy to circumscribe is the group of works that can be regarded as book objects. The book seen and treated as an object, or a sculpture. Its normal functions are rather reduced, no pages to turn, nothing to read. Information is transported with different means.

Then there is the bibliophile book in the classical meaning of the word. This goes well with the books of the private presses, a tradition dating back to the arts and crafts movement of William Morris (e. g. *Bremer Presse* or *Cranach Presse* in Germany).

The illustrated book is close: normally, a text of world literature is used, it is set by hand in a classical or cautious, conservative way, sometimes even a type font is designed and cast especially for a book. The text is printed letter press, and the illustrations use printmaking techniques like lithography, etching etc.

Under this heading we also find the painters' books (French: *livres de peintres*), a term that refers to books by Picasso, Matisse, Miro, and other famous painters who illustrated texts of world literature.

But in the early 20th century we also find books made by Russian avantgarde artists like El Lissitzky, for example *For the Voice*, which can be seen as his most spectacular achievement in book illustration, or book construction. He was following an idea of the book that was completely different from the ideas of the private presses.

It seems to us that the English-American term "artists' books" does not mean the same as the German term "Künstlerbücher," although one is a literal translation of the other. "Artists' books" connotes Fluxus and Neo-Dada,