

# Types vs Standards

## Research days

### 25 and 26 February 2025 – Strasbourg

#### Types versus standards. Towards new components in design. A historical and critical studies of type in the context of transitional design (1914-2024).

This historical and critical studies focus on the concept of *Typen*, the German keyword used from 1914 to define the particularity of mass production. It stems from a reflection on the complementarities between the arts and technology. In French, as in English, the term has most often been translated as 'standards', whereas 'Typen' represents a completely different issue for design research. Its re-reading thus contributes to giving design research its full legitimacy and autonomy.

#### Context of the research days

This working seminar aims to unearth the problems and mysteries of the processes and products associated with 'Typisierung' over two days by combining the history and cultures of type, and typification practices and theories. After each talk, a group of discussants is invited to respond to or pick up on a point that particularly interests them and on which their own related reflections, topics and/or intentions may lead to a contribution. The aim is to gather and organise sets of contributions or individual participations that will enable the research to be presented at a public symposium in autumn 2025.

#### Organisation

Gwenaëlle Bertrand, Maxime Favard, Catherine Geel, Marie Lejault | research team  
 Carole Cordazzo | scientific secretariat, Misha  
 Michaël Sauvage | administration, Ensad Nancy.  
 Stanylas Leray | graphic design, Ensad Nancy.

## Tuesday 25 February 2025 | TYPES : history, cultures, writing

Loc. | MISHA (salle Asie 2<sup>d</sup> floor– 10AM-5.30PM)

Dir. | C. Geel, historian (CRD-Ens Paris Saclay, Ensad Nancy)

The day is devoted to three historiographical aspects of the notion of 'writing' of the *type of*:  
Writing as a theoretical or historical construct, writing as a place of professional practice, writing as a means of standardising the world, writing as a tool for classification or categorisation.

This is why it focuses on:

- the approach of a historian deploying the notion of *typeface* at various points in his career and shedding light on a necessary Anglo-German perspective.
- a process of categorizing of everyday writing practices in workplaces (classrooms, engineers' offices, artists' or architects' studios) with the categorization of monolinear letters.
- 'Writing' tools that can induce a new 'standardised' aesthetic of the environment *via the plan*.
- The fact that categorizing and classifying make it possible to initiate reform, whether in Europe or Asia.

This day does not therefore retrace a history of the notion of type, but attempts to approach it from different perspectives: the cultural history of notions, the historiography of a theorisation, the history of uses and words that is not linguistic, questioning of tools, flattening-out, setting out, transoceanic relationships.

The day thus attempts to avoid the overarching history of impositions by examining the hesitations, contradictions and contemporary extensions of different moments up to the present day. As such, it proposes to draw perspectives towards future contributions.

### 10 a.m. | Coffee reception for participants

10.30 a.m. Acknowledgements, opening, Catherine Geel

10.35 a.m. | « *Typen* », key word of industrial design

Gwenaëlle Bertrand, Maxime Favard

10.45 a.m. | « *Typen* ». Vibrant concept / Ambivalence of writings.

Catherine Geel

### 11 -11.45 a.m.

***On either side of the Channel. Type and a standard according to Nikolaus Pevsner***

Émilie Oléron-Evans (Queens' Mary University, London)

By exploring various publications and exchanges of Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-1983), the paper proposes to examine the definition given by the first historian of design of *type of* and *standard*. Through the various interlocutors with whom he conversed, his correspondence with Walter Gropius in preparation for the study *An Enquiry into English Industrial Art* in 1937, to his reports on German design for the British Council of Industrial Design (1946), and even one of his last books entitled *A History of Building Types*, in 1976, we will see which schools of thought he draws his inspiration from, and how he translates or adapts them to his audience.

### 11.45 -12.45 a.m. | Resumption & discussion

In discussion with Émilie Oléron-Evans, the resumption of

- Claire Brunet, on cultural transfers
- Elke Mittmann, on the notion of types in the exhibition
- Simone Fehlinger, on vocabulary reports in the context of research.

Discussion open to other researchers.

12.45 a.m. - 2.30 p.m. | Lunch break

2.30 - 3.15 p.m.

#### Basic forms

Charles Mazé (Anrt Nancy)

Through a chronological journey through French standards for technical lettering, the research accompanying the creation of the Axo (Abyrne) typeface sought to understand how standardisation took hold of handwriting, as well as to examine the many consequences it had on the daily practice of writing in places such as the classroom, the engineer's office, the artist's and architect's workshop. In addition to highlighting the links between writing, typography and standardisation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study analyses new tools that contributed to the dissemination and universalisation of monolinear letters with rounded endings.

This communication focuses on design or architectural plans from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which often show the use of different tools between the design and all the apparatus surrounding it: cartouche, legend, measurements, etc. The pen with a palette is, on the other hand, used for the whole of the same document and brings a general homogeneity. One wonders if this use, which produces a contour similar to a tube, has contributed to the rise of tubular furniture in Germany.

3.15- 4.15 p.m. | Resumption & discussions

In discussion with Charles Mazé and based on the documents provided, the resumptions of

- Catherine Guiral, on Faucheu's stereotypes and the OPEN project
- David Énon, on questions of scale.
- Max Bonhomme, from the typo to the *foto*.

Discussion open to other researchers.

4.15 - 4.30 p.m. | Break

4.30 - 16.50 p.m.

#### *Reflections on Asia*

Tanja Cunz, (MoMA, New York) – by videoconference. Presentation in English.

Based on the manufacture of objects and the way in which they have been categorised – applied arts, industrial arts, decorative arts, craftsmanship – but also according to their methods of manufacture – man-made, machine-made, hand-made, etc. – we believe that, beyond the ideological values on manufacturing or production in general, the notion of classification induced by the *type* question the purpose of an object, its aesthetic value and its impact on the user, echoing the discussions on *Typisierung* or standardisation. Juxtaposing these European considerations with certain movements that took place in Asia around the same time in reaction to thoughtless mass production suggests a slightly different path: the Mingei movement, whose members had similar concerns to those of the Deutscher Werkbund, chose traditional craftsmanship and the celebration of simple everyday objects made by ordinary people. It initiated reflections that would lead us to the 1950s and 1960s.

4.50 - 5.10 p.m.

#### Discussions

Discussion open to all researchers.

5.10 - 5.20 p.m.

#### Perspectives of the exchanges on the 1<sup>st</sup> day.

By Catherine Geel.

## Researchers of the day

Gwenaëlle Bertrand, senior lecturer in design (Eclla, Jean Monnet Saint-Étienne University) and Maxime Favard, senior lecturer in design (Accra Unistra and École supérieure de design Villefontaine). In 2022, they published the French article that establishes the first review of translations for the word type in the journal *Appareil* (OpenEdition).

Max Bonhomme, doctor in art history, senior lecturer in design (Accra-Unistra). His research, supported by the DFK Paris, focuses on the emergence of a specific discourse on ‘graphic design’ at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and shows how a vocabulary derived from a professional practice can emancipate itself from it and become part of the more general history of visual forms. It is based on French-speaking contributions and cultural transfers between France and German-speaking and English-speaking countries.

Claire Brunet, philosopher (CRD-Ens Paris-Saclay – Ensci Les Ateliers). She is currently working on a historical approach to design, based on the Freudian principle that our daily life is psychopathological in nature, and attempts to recall the unconscious strata that organise our relationship to spaces and objects. She is co-author of the reference work *Le design. Histoire, concepts, combats* (Gallimard).

Tanja Cunz, design historian and curator (MoMA). She has designed and conceived exhibitions at the Vitra Design Museum (Weil-am-Rhein) and M+ (Hong Kong). At MoMA, she is both a curator and researcher and has been part of various teams of researchers on the modern era.

David Énon, designer, researcher (Ensad Nancy, APILab La Réunion). His work questions the modes of production of the material forms of our environment in the post-industrial era. He works to go beyond the economy of gestures and means, to inscribe projects in time and space, in accordance with the biological production rhythms of forms and matter *in situ*.

Simone Fehlinger, graphic designer, PhD student in visual cultures (Spacetelling lab at Esad St-Étienne, Accra-Unistra). Her research focuses on the imaginaries of the Anthropocene, political fictions and contemporary visual and material culture. She questions design as a discipline defining the interactions between humans and their environments and is currently working on the question of standardising grids, studied from a historical and meteorological perspective (*Le bulletin météo : une fenêtre sur le climat ?* (Ed. 205, 2025).

Catherine Geel, historian, teacher and researcher (CRD-Ens Paris Saclay – Ensci les Ateliers; Ensad Nancy). She directs the Problemata research dissemination platform in Open-Science (Huma-Num-CNRS). She works on critical visions of history. Her subjects concern American and Italian critical modernities and the historicity of ecological issues in design. She is co-author of the reference work *Le design. Histoire, concepts, combats* (Gallimard).

Catherine Guiral, graphic designer (studio officeabc), Doctor of Design History (RCA) and lecturer-researcher (Ésam Caen). Her research focuses on cultural history, publishing history, visual communication and the broad field of graphic design. She has published various works on the French typographer and urban planner Pierre Faucheux based on her doctoral thesis completed at the Royal College of Art under the direction of Prof. David Crowley and Dr. Sarah Teasley. Her texts have been published in the magazines *Faire*, *Brick of the Kiln* and *LSD*, among others.

Charles Mazé, graphic designer and type designer, teacher-researcher, member of the ANRT (Nancy). They were residents at the French Academy in Rome—Villa Medici in 2014–15, during which time they developed a research project devoted to the collection, transcription and publication of popular writings observed in the public space. They have been graphic designers in residence at CAC Brétigny since 2016. The book *Valentine Schlegel: je dors, je travaille* by Hélène Bertin, which they edited and designed, received the silver medal in the Best Book Design from all over the World competition in 2022.

Elke Mittmann, architectural historian, teacher at the University of Strasbourg and researcher (Amup, Ensa Strasbourg). Her research focuses on the history of architectural exhibitions since the 1920s (PhD thesis), the invention of paradigms of representation and the history of industrial architecture in Germany and France in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She has worked for the Bauhaus Foundation in Dessau and for the German Federal Museum in Bonn and Leipzig as an exhibition curator and researcher.

Émilie Oléron-Evans, historian and Germanist, specialist in cultural transfers (Queens' Mary University, London). Her thesis analyses the career of the art historian Nikolaus Pevsner as a pivotal moment in the progressive integration of questions of art and architecture in British culture (*Nikolaus Pevsner: Arpenteur des arts*, Demopolis, 2015). She coordinated the *Dictionnaire culturel de Strasbourg 1880-1930* and contributed to the exhibition *Strasbourg, Laboratoire d'Europe*. Her current research focuses on women art historians and the role of translation in the evolution of art history as a discipline. Her latest book is *L'histoire de l'art engagée: Linda Nochlin* (Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2025).

## Wednesday 26 February 2025 | TYPIFICATION. Practices, production and theories

Loc. | European Doctoral College

Dir. G. Bertrand and M. Favard

The day of 26 February is devoted to the history and theories based on the study of the practices and material forms of typification (*typisierung*). The aim will be to explore the empirical realities of typification, both past and more recent, and to examine the emergence of what appears to be a new formal expression for new lifestyles.

From an interest in the relationship between design and industry, it is legitimate to ask: How can standardised elements, resulting from power relations and norms, nevertheless generate interest in design and freedom of use? In other words, how can a reflection on forms and structures, taking into account their production context and their transformative potential, confer an appropriation value on industrial productions?

The contributions and exchanges will address several areas such as:

- The appearance, use, disappearance and reappearance of the term *typisierung*.
- Translation choices and their implications.
- The empirical characteristics of typification, combining technique, form, function and use. These aspects include in particular:
- *'The technique'*: industrial economy, standardisation of models, modern technologies, machine production, mass production and serial manufacturing, semi-finished materials and standardised components, interchangeability of components, construction system.
- *'Form'*: aesthetics without ornamentation, simplicity as authenticity, purity of form, functional form, unity of form, meaning of form, new form, autonomous form, standardised form, diversity of form.
- *'Function'*: response to everyday needs, affordability.
- *'Use'*: maximum utility, practicality, mobility, flexibility, reduction of objects.
- The principles of typification in the face of current challenges: how can we contribute to the construction of new material imaginaries, but also of new relationships between design and industry?

Loc. | Amphitheatre (free entrance)

8.40 a.m. | Coffee welcome for participants

9 a.m. | Acknowledgements, opening, Gwenaëlle Bertrand by Maxime Favard

9.15-9.45 a.m. Conference

***Structure and duration. Why typification did not only appeal to the modernists***

**Hans-Georg Lippert**, Architect and historian of architecture, Professor at the Technical University of Dresden (Germany)

'Everything is pushing towards standardisation,' proclaimed the Berlin architect Hermann Muthesius in 1914, thus triggering a lively debate in Germany on how buildings and objects should be designed in a modern industrial society. This subject has already been the subject of numerous writings, but it is interesting to note that one aspect has gone largely unnoticed until now. This is the fact that this

debate was not a reissue of the ‘quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns’ (as one might expect), but that the fronts were very different. The polarisation that began in architecture after the First World War between the propagandists of an aesthetic revolution and the defenders of the well-known classical principles masks, even after more than a century, the fact that the term ‘typification’ quickly became a key word for both camps. Thus they recognised themselves as part of an industrialised 20th-century society, even if they perceived themselves as antagonists. Inspired by some observations made by Roland Barthes in the 1950s, the talk will examine how we arrived at this point, what the decisive influences were and what the consequences are for the current evaluation of the processes of the time.

#### 9.45-10. a.m. | Time for discussion

#### 10-10.30 a.m. | Conférence

##### *Things of modernity*

**Laurent Stalder**, Architect and Professor, Institute for the Study of the History and Theories of Architecture (ETH) in Zurich (Switzerland)

At the turn of the century, a series of new objects, appliances, machines and infrastructures were incorporated into the home: ticket offices, lifts, revolving doors, heating systems and other equipment. Like technical objects, designed by engineers, scientists or doctors, or by simple inventors, they are generally considered not to be part of architecture, although they form, like the more conventional elements, such as walls, ceilings, stairs or windows, the framework of modern life. They are as much an expression of it as they are a condition of it. Challenging the modern divide between technology and architecture, space and construction, infrastructure and superstructure, the contribution uses the example of the garbage chute to demonstrate that the profound transformations of modern architecture are less the expression of formal inventions than of new knowledge, new processes, new actors, and new ways of doing things.

#### 10.30 - 10.45 a.m. | Time for discussion

#### 10.45 -11 a.m. | Coffee-break

#### 11 -11.30 a.m. | Conférence

##### *Functionalist ideals and public utility, a definition of typification. Ferdinand Kramer and the New Frankfurt (1925-1930)*

**Gwenaëlle Bertrand** Senior lecturer in design, UR ECLLA, Université Jean Monnet Saint-Étienne and **Maxime Favard** Senior lecturer in design, UR ACCRA, Université de Strasbourg, École supérieure de design de Villefontaine.

In the interwar period, in the Weimar Republic, Ferdinand Kramer, like other young people of his generation, took a critical look at the ‘irrationalities’ of the 1920s in the fields of design. Even the Bauhaus, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919 and often considered a progressive training school, did not escape this questioning. This institution, explains Kramer, was even satirically described in its early days as a ‘reflection of inflation’, so much did artistic individualism seem to take precedence over economic rationality. Thus attached to the ‘spirit of the present time’ through a rational assessment of economic, technical and social contexts, Kramer emphasises a modern need for invention and inventiveness in industrial design. In 1925, he was appointed to the standardisation department of the Municipal Building Office of the New Frankfurt (*Das Neue Frankfurt*) by Ernst May. In his position between 1925 and 1930, he endeavoured to demonstrate the social impact of a new housing and lifestyle model through a rational design of mass-produced types.



11.30-11.45 a.m. | Time for discussion

11.45-13.30 a.m. | Lunch break

Loc. | Meeting room 0.20 ( European Doctoral College, limited places, registration required)

### 1.30-3 p.m. | Round table: *Typification as a game and a challenge in construction*

Presentation and discussion on the role of typification: ingenuity of design and effects on cultural, material and social practices.

1.30-1.50 p.m. **Pierre Litzler**, university professor, University of Strasbourg, ACCRA (France)

#### ***A different way of thinking about design. The conceptual and systemic issue of typification***

If typification is generally characterised as something that relates to technique, form, function or use, it seems necessary and relevant to understand and question the notions, concepts and thoughts that organise, articulate and bring into play this singular modality of design. A summary presentation of different hypotheses of concepts that probably structured three moments of the avant-gardes (de Stijl, Bauhaus, Esprit Nouveau) will enable a discussion on the conceptual and systemic challenge of this movement of thought of typification and may open us up to the complex, evocative and even poetic linguistic power of the latter.

1.50-3 p.m. | Direct exchanges with:

- **John Didier**, professor, University of Teacher Education, Canton of Vaud (Switzerland)
- **Hans-Georg Lippert**, professor, University of Dresden (Germany)
- **Marie-Aurore Stiker-Métral**, designer and teacher, Saint-Étienne School of Art and Design, Object Lab (France)

3-3:30 p.m. | Coffee break

### 3.30-5 p.m. | Round Table: *Industrial standards and imaginations*

Presentation and discussion on the design constraints associated with the standardisation of production systems and their impact on representations and lifestyles.

3.30-3.50 p.m. | Communication from **Brice Genre**, lecturer in design, Toulouse (France)

#### ***Eyes that do not see... choppers***

Starting from the idea that the concept of *a type* is elusive, complex and rich in multiple issues, the approach envisaged is to take a look at an epiphenomenon belonging to the culture of technical objects, namely the design and production of choppers and kustom culture. It would seem that the production of choppers accounts, in an unexpected and empirical way, for a relevant process of typification, perhaps providing us with models for thinking (in design) about type design.

3.50-5 p.m. | Direct exchanges with:

- **Daria Ayvazova**, designer, doctor of design and teacher, Haute école des arts du Rhin (HEAR) (France)
- **Rodolphe Dogniaux**, designer and teacher, École supérieure d'art et design de Saint-Étienne (ESADSE), Labo d'Objet (France)
- **Daniel Payot**, university professor, University of Strasbourg (France)



5-5.10 p.m. | **Video screening** by **Vincent Beaubois**, lecturer in philosophy at the University of Paris Nanterre, member of the IRePh laboratory (Institute for Philosophical Research)

***The 'type' as an analogue operator between 'design' and 'writing'***

This proposal aims to explore what appears to be the profound analogy that drives the question of 'type' in the field of design, namely the analogy between 'design' and 'language', or more precisely between 'design' and 'writing'. Etymologically, 'type' refers to an imprint, a trace left in a material. More precisely, it refers to the printing type, i.e. the element that allows a language to be 'grammatised', thus affecting its reproducibility and manageability: the language is then thought of as being broken down into finite elements, justifying in particular a structuralist and combinatorial approach to its functioning. It is also this use of the 'type' that we find in W. Gropius (Bertrand & Favard, 2022) where typification refers to a focus on individual standard and combinable components that make it possible to design material environments conceived as 'open systems'. The structural analysis of design in France in the second half of the 20th century (Van Lier, Moles, Baudrillard) places the Gropian reference of 'type' at the centre of its approach. We will thus seek to understand what was at stake at this particular moment in the theoretical history of design and what is involved in this implementation of an analogy between design and language based on this notion of 'type'.