Chronological Diagram

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In his 1980 publication *Type Sign Symbol*, Adrian Frutiger included a two-page diagram that visualized a parallel development of letterforms and means of transportation. [Fig. 40] Referring to the idea of a Zeitgeist, he explained: “The human spirit of each century resounds from its type-forms, which in a formal manner accompany the achievements of the century like a reflection.”

Chronologies of styles and references to a “spirit of the time” were nothing unusual in publications by Swiss graphic designers. Timelines were a common feature—and often they culminated in the authors’ own methods or works. These designers, it is evident, used a historiographical approach to contextualize and substantiate their own practice. However, prominent figures such as Karl Gerstner⁴ and Josef Müller-Brockmann⁵ (to name just two) went even further in their own accounts, claiming that their methods and styles should be seen as a key to the future.⁶ The architectural historians Nathalie Bredella and Carolin Höfler have claimed that this strategy was part of a much wider phenomenon:

“During late modernism, the promise of not only vaguely, but also precisely predicting the future had acquired enormous prestige. When evoked, this predictive project lent power, legitimacy, and a cohesive identity to endeavours in almost any realm of society and culture [...].”

But even though Frutiger’s chart also ends in the future, it seems to tell a different story. Rather than presenting his own work as a clear vision of what was to come, his illustration showed a simplistic sci-fi spaceship accompanied by a mere question mark. By 1980, according to his accompanying essay, technological systems and production processes had become too complex for non-specialists to understand. As a result, any basis for being able to divine possible paths for further innovation fell away, and the question Frutiger asked in the last line of the caption to his diagram—“What does the future hold in store?”—had to remain unanswered.

1 Frutiger 1980: 42–43.
2 See Kinross 1984: 150.
3 See André Gürtler’s contributions in the journal *Typografische Monatsblätter* (Gürtler 1963; Gürtler 1969).
4 See Gerstner & Kutter 1959.
6 For a more in-depth analysis and comparison of these aspects in Gerstner and Kutter’s *Die neue Graphik* and Müller-Brockmann’s *A History of Visual Communication*, see “Cave Paintings,” in the volume *Tempting Terms*.
7 Bredella & Höfler 2017: 33. See also Doering-Manteuffel 2007: 566.
8 Frutiger 1980: 43.
the development of the steam engine it would not have been possible to build a jet aircraft.
To the same extent, what we do today is the basis for tomorrow. Everything in the present has been
built on experience from the past, and everything in the future is contained in the present. Today’s work
is anchored in the history of human achievement and, if of value, it becomes a foundation for the
future. The worker therefore carries a double responsibility: to discern the path of human discovery
in the keystone of the past and at the same time in the foundation stone of the future.

the Richtlinie für die Zukunft zu geben vermöge
ohne die Erfahrung des Kantor wäre die Dampfmaschinenwesen unentbehrlich gewesen. Und ohne deren Ent-
wickelung wäre der Bau eines Dampfzugs nicht möglich.
im gleichen Masse ist das, was wir heute tun,
Grundsätze für morgen. Alles Gegenwärtige ist auf
der Erfahrung aus der Vergangenheit aufgebaut.
Alles Zukunftige ist im Gegenwärtigen schon vor-
hendend. Das heutige Werk ist in der Geschichte
menschlichen Schaffens verankert, und wenn es
wertvoll ist, dann wird es zum Fundament für die
Zukunft. Der Wissenschaft trägt deshalb eine dopp-
gelte Verantwortung: im Schleswegen der Vorgan-
genheit und zugleich im Grundeile für die Zukunft
der gesellschaftlichen Regel der menschlichen Erfindung
zu erkennen.

Comparison of the development of means of transport and tech-
ology. From resultant realising, mediating in the letter form
of the post-Renaissance: expression of the “team work-
men”, topical element of the present day, what does the future
hold in store?

Vergleich der Entwicklung von Transportmittel und Schrift. Na-
mensisis Ausdrucksformen: Untertteilung der praktischen Schrift, die Non-
ische Gliederung der Gegenwart, was wird die Zukunft erwartet?

Comparison des moyens de transport et de l’écriture sociale
moderne, graphique du moyen âge, les éléments de l’écriture
Renaissance, expression du communautaire, les attentes de
notre temps, quelle est la forme du demain?