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15

MODERNIST GRAPHICS, NEW TYPOGRAPHY, AND THE DESIGN OF IDENTITY IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

Benjamin Benus

Introduction

In 1935, the Czechoslovak State Publishing House produced a uniquely designed textbook for use in Czech-language primary schools, titled *Little Homeland Reader* [*Malá vlastivěda*] (Sutnar, Mendl, and Tschinkel 1935). A collaboration between historian Bedřich Mendl (1892–1940) and designers Ladislav Sutnar (1897–1976) and Augustin Tschinkel (1905–1983), this remarkable publication employed inventive and visually dynamic combinations of maps and charts to provide students with a social, historical, and geographical overview of the young Czechoslovak Republic. As its title suggested, the textbook encouraged its young readers to regard the modern state's geographical territory as their 'homeland' [*vlast*]. But cultivating a sense of belonging and attachment to a state whose boundaries had only recently been established required more than a description of the geography's natural features or its demographic and economic characteristics; such sentiments had also to be rooted in students' feelings of ownership of a past that preceded the modern state's creation. To this end, the Czechoslovak Republic's founders constructed and promoted a distinctly Czechoslovak national heritage, which, in large part, shaped the *Little Homeland Reader*'s narrative structure and content. Meanwhile, the textbook's design incorporated a variety of modernist graphic features, which Sutnar and Tschinkel had previously developed through exchanges and collaborations with international networks of avant-garde artists and designers. The result was a book that, even decades later, the two designers continued to invoke as an exemplary model of visual education. By examining how Sutnar and Tschinkel adapted modernist artistic strategies to serve the requirements of the Czechoslovak state educational system, this chapter highlights the roles that designers have played in shaping and mediating the visual expression of national identity and heritage.

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Heritage and identity in the first Czechoslovak Republic

It is important to note at the outset that the *Little Homeland Reader*'s use of the terms *state* and *nation* carried important distinctions in the Central European context. The *state*, in this case, referred to the First Czechoslovak Republic, created in 1918 from several territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. These included Bohemia and Moravia in the west (the majority Czech-speaking lands, formerly administered by the Austrian monarchy) and Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia in the east (previously governed by the Kingdom of Hungary). By contrast, the *Little Homeland Reader*'s invocation of the Czechoslovak *nation* proposed a much older, ethnolinguistically defined community, whose Czech and Slovak-speaking members now made up a considerable part of the modern state's citizenry. While their combined numbers gave Czechs and Slovaks the political advantage of a statistical majority in the new state, the territories that made up the First Republic had also long been home to a number of other ethnic and linguistically defined 'nations', including Germans, Hungarians, and Ruthenians, as well as smaller enclaves of Poles and Romanians.

As with several of the other successor states that emerged from the disintegration of multinational empires in the wake of the First World War, Czechoslovakia faced challenges to its legitimacy from the start, rooted in boundary disputes with neighbouring states, as well as in political divisions within and between its component territories and populations (Rothschild 1974; Sayer 1998). From the perspective of the diplomats negotiating Europe's post-war political boundaries at the Paris Peace Conference, the legitimacy of a state's claims to political independence and self-determination largely rested on its ability to demonstrate that a distinct national identity united the majority of the population within a proposed state's territory (Rothschild 1974). For proponents of an independent Czechoslovak state, the advancement of a common Slavic identity, ostensibly shared by the region's Czech and Slovak speakers, served to cement their claims. To this end, symbols of Czechoslovak heritage served an important, legitimizing function, presenting the creation of the modern state as the historically inevitable outcome of a natural, evolutionary process.

Given, however, that the Czechoslovak Republic incorporated populations representing several 'nationalities' within its newly formed borders, such symbols were bound to be contested. Indeed, the notion of a shared Czechoslovak heritage proved controversial even for Czechs and Slovaks, given that the two groups spoke separate (though closely related) languages and, prior to their political unification in 1918, possessed distinct histories and cultural traditions (Bakke 2004). While the citizens who constituted Czechoslovakia's legally recognized 'minority nationalities' enjoyed the same basic political and civil rights as their fellow Czech and Slovak citizens, the new government's decision to define its official national culture in purely ethnolinguistic terms alienated a considerable proportion of its citizenry from the start. Moreover, such linguistic definitions of belonging contained considerable ambiguities. Whether through marriage or simply by virtue of living and working in close proximity to other linguistic communities, many of the republic's citizens had multiple 'national' affiliations. Pressures to define identity *exclusively* in linguistic terms – beginning in the later nineteenth century and increasing after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic – ran counter to other notions of belonging based on locality, religion, profession, or class that had historically prevailed throughout the region (King 2005; Zahra 2008).

Recognizing the citizenry's pluralistic composition, some of the more progressive voices among the republic's political elites argued for a more expansive and inclusive understanding of national heritage – one that highlighted Slavic contributions to the Western intellectual tradition and equated the Czechoslovak struggle for political independence with the Enlightenment project's promotion of universal rights and democracy (Orzoff 2009). It was in service to this progressive and universalizing version of Czechoslovak heritage that the *Little Homeland Reader*'s three Bohemian-born creators (whose own cultural backgrounds and intellectual networks were far too pluralistic to fit comfortably within any narrowly conceived, ethnolinguistic notion of national identity) opted to pursue careers within the republic's state-run institutions. Thus, Bedřich Mendl, the principal author of the *Reader*'s text, had overseen the efforts of the newly created Czechoslovak State Historical Institute to survey and preserve the written records of historic Bohemian estates dating back to the medieval and early modern periods (Rajzlová 2011). Ladislav Sutnar and Augustin Tschinkel, through their graphic design work for the State Publishing House and the State Graphic Art School in Prague, helped to modernize the state school system's instructional materials (Jánaková 2003). As the *Little Homeland Reader* demonstrates, their textbook designs not only served to make content engaging and accessible to young readers; they also visualized a modern and progressive identity for the young republic.

The 'homeland' in maps and charts

Comprising thirty pages of maps, charts, and text, the *Little Homeland Reader*'s narrative progressed through five separate sections, each presenting the Czechoslovak state through a different thematic lens. The first section provided an overview of the republic's geography, presenting in a series of maps the territory's location in relation to its European neighbours, its natural features (mountains, rivers, forests, springs), infrastructural development (railways and connections), and its linguistic regions (described as 'nationalities'). The *Reader*'s second section, devoted to Czechoslovakia's 'past', presented the geographical formation of the modern state's territory as a thousand-year process, unfolding over the course of seven maps and tracing the shifting boundaries of the successive Slavic kingdoms, which together constituted key components of Czechoslovakia's national heritage. The third (and at ten pages, the longest) section returned to the 'present

day', where, in a series of maps and statistical charts, the book presented a demographic and economic analysis of the republic, showing relative population numbers in a variety of categories (for ethnolinguistic groups, religious affiliations, professions) as well as breakdowns of the state's budget, principal industries, distribution of mineral resources and livestock, exports, imports, and automobile ownership. The narrative concluded with two short sections devoted to the cultural, historical, and political roles of the republic's cities and the numbers and locations of Czechoslovaks living abroad.

In constructing a portrait of the contemporary state through a sequence of geographical and statistical presentations, the *Little Homeland Reader* followed the examples that publishers of national atlases had established in a number of newly formed and nascent states in the preceding decades (Omerling 2015). But the publication also differed from many of its national atlas counterparts in providing a central place to historical geography. Half of the *Little Homeland Reader*'s maps treated what may be described as the modern republic's 'prehistory', portraying the 17-year-old state's creation as the realization of a centuries-old national project. In this historical account, advanced by the First Republic's founders and officially codified in the state school curricula by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment [*Ministerstvo školství a národní osvěty*], the short-lived period of Czech and Slovak political unity under the ninth-century Great Moravian Empire served as the basis for the twentieth-century state's claims (Sayer 1998; Magocsi 2002). In support of this narrative, the *Little Homeland Reader*'s sequence of historical maps portrayed the thousand years separating Great Moravia's collapse in 906 and the Czechoslovak Republic's founding in 1918 as though they followed an organic development, with the intervening centuries of political fragmentation and colonization under Hungarian and German rule figuring as mere interruptions in an otherwise cohesive path to the political reunification and self-rule of the Czech and Slovak people.

In contrast to this historical account, which interpreted the modern state's territorial configuration on the basis of an ethnically defined national heritage, the *Little Homeland Reader* portrayed contemporary Czechoslovak national identity in more inclusive and culturally pluralistic terms – a point that Bedřich Mendl attributed to the Czechoslovak nation's geographical location 'on the border of two areas of language, Slavic and Germanic, and two areas of European culture, Western and Eastern'. The 'republic's peculiar configuration', Mendl remarked, with 'its wider quadrilateral shape in the west and its narrower form in the east', reflected 'the state's unique character and nature' as 'a transition and a bridge between two worlds', linking Europe's 'industrial west and its agricultural east' (Sutnar, Mendl, and Tschinkel 1935, 2). This geographical reading, which connected Czechoslovakia to its neighbouring states, in turn shaped the *Little Homeland Reader*'s account of the state's demography and economy. In treating these themes, the *Reader*'s maps and charts highlighted the population's ethnolinguistic diversity while emphasizing the state's recognition of minority groups' rights and enumerating the social amenities that the citizenry collectively enjoyed. The cumulative picture that

emerged from the book's various sections thus visualized a modern, democratic, and ethnically diverse state while at the same time advancing an official national culture that was exclusively Slavic (and mostly Czech). Although critics and opponents of the new state – as well as some of the republic's most militant nationalists – questioned the compatibility of these positions (Orzoff 2009), the designers of the *Little Homeland Reader* devised a variety of ingenious techniques to fuse these potentially contradictory visions into a visually harmonious totality.

New typography and 'visual continuity'

While the *Little Homeland Reader*'s narrative concept drew on the general examples that other national atlases offered as well as the specific guidelines that the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment had stipulated for history instruction in state schools, its visual appearance had little in common with either the educational publications that Czech-language schools had used in the era of Habsburg rule or those produced in the first years of the republic. Embracing models and sources entirely outside those print traditions that until this point had shaped the design of atlases and school textbooks, the *Little Homeland Reader*'s designers instead drew inspiration from the experimental journals, exhibition catalogues, technical manuals, advertisements, and posters which they and their avant-garde colleagues had produced during the preceding decade. Grouped together under the rubric of the 'New Typography', the design approaches that characterized these works followed an ostensibly functionalist set of typographic principles, intended to facilitate reading and accelerate comprehension (Burke 2008; Stirton 2019). In their writings, the New Typography's proponents frequently distinguished their avant-garde publications from traditionally designed works by means of a set of oppositions and contrasts (Tschichold 1995). Often this meant organizing information in asymmetrical page layouts, rather than in the centred, symmetrical arrangements that prevailed in 'traditional' typography and printing, or adopting a single, consistent (usually sans-serif) typeface for both headings and main text, instead of employing a variety of typefaces. For extra-textual components, advocates of the New Typography advised against hand-drawn illustrations and elaborate ornamentation; instead, they embraced photographic images, geometric abstraction (with a preference for flat, bold, graphic forms), and minimally adorned pages in which empty spaces functioned as active elements in the overall design. Above all, they promoted standardization and modularity in every aspect of their work, from type design to paper sizes to book formats.

The principles of the New Typography are at work throughout the entirety of the *Little Homeland Reader* – in Augustin Tschinkel's maps and charts, as well as in the overall typographic layouts into which Ladislav Sutnar integrated these illustrations. They are in evidence from the very start in the book's cover design (Figure 15.1). In its bold but limited colour scheme, for example, which principally employs red, black, and white; in its modular format, which divides the

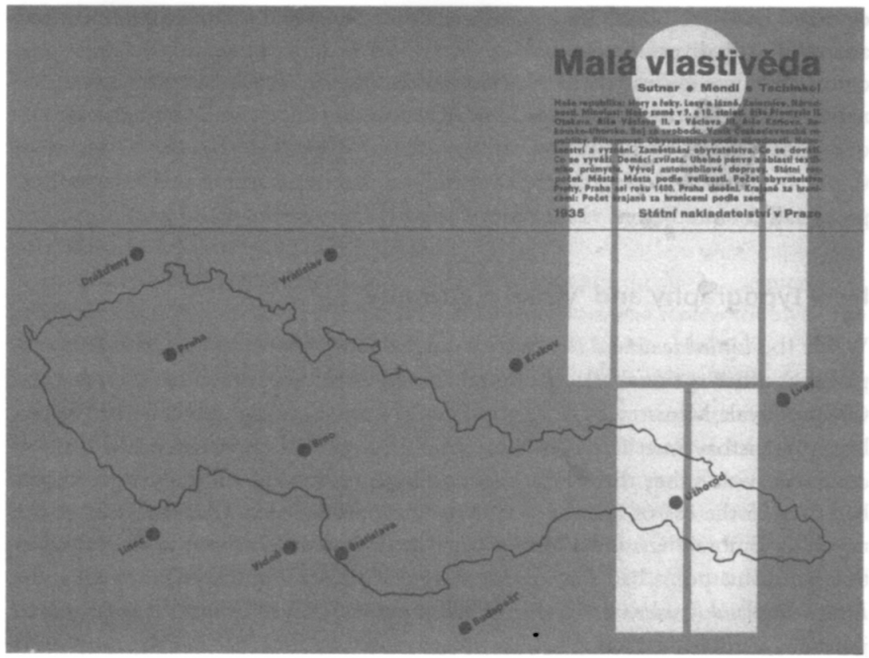

FIGURE 15.1 Cover of *Little Homeland Reader* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1935).

Source: Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries.

page horizontally and vertically into thirds in order to create an underlying structure for the columns of text as well as the charts and maps; and in its standardized typographic and illustrative features, which include diagonally oriented place names and geometrically rendered figures and symbols. Reflecting years later on the *Little Homeland Reader*'s design, Sutnar (1961, c/6) noted that the features of the New Typography were 'especially suitable for educational books'. In addition to facilitating quicker comprehension, the New Typography's '[l]ogical visual organization', its 'functional layout and typography', and its embrace of '[p]ictographs, simplified maps and other new techniques' had, in Sutnar's estimation, helped to make schoolbooks like the *Little Homeland Reader* 'more inviting to read' (Sutnar 1961, c/6). Through their cumulative effects, these recurring features effectively communicated the book's content not only by fusing together a diverse assortment of different types of information in a consistent and continuous visual system but also by imparting a dynamic and lively character to the book's narrative.

The maps in the *Little Homeland Reader*'s historical section are exemplary in this regard, using visually striking combinations of blank space, asymmetrically composed columns of text, diagonally oriented placenames, bold red shapes (to chart the successive territorial configurations of the Kingdom

of Bohemia under Czech rule in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), and graphic sequences that expressed unity and visual continuity over the course of successive pages. Through their visual suggestion of movement and action, these designs invested the maps with a sense of energy and excitement that school children might not have otherwise readily associated with the potentially dry and remote subject of medieval Bohemian history. It is important to note, moreover, that while these maps' graphic features drew on strategies originating in other contexts (in Russian Suprematists' abstract paintings of the late 1910s, for example, or in Constructivists' posters and book designs of the 1920s), they took on culturally specific meanings in the *Little Homeland Reader*'s historical maps. The book's dominant red-and-white colour scheme, for example, used to mark out territories under Czech rule in the pre-Habsburg era, carried distinct national symbolism, invoking both the heraldic flags of Bohemia's medieval rulers as well as the flag later adopted by supporters of the nineteenth-century Czech national revival.

By the same token, the diagonal orientation of text, which had so often worked in Constructivist posters to capture attention and convey urgency by means of visual contrast and dynamic sensation, acquired mnemonic and associative functions in the *Reader*'s maps. In visually echoing the contours of several prominent sections of the state's boundaries (in particular, its north-western border with Germany and a large part of its southern border with Hungary, which follows a roughly parallel angle), the diagonally set placenames imparted a geometric order and legibility to the territory's otherwise complex and irregular set of forms, transforming the map into a memorable symbol, akin to an emblem or trademark. In combination with the repetition of the state map in the same location within the pages' modular layout, these typographical features could assist in imprinting the complex geographical shape of the recently formed territory in young readers' minds. The coordination of the placenames' orientation and the territory's distinctive angular forms may even be understood to have performed an ideological function, serving – by virtue of the resulting expression of harmony and order – as a visual reinforcement for the claim that Czechoslovakia's 'historical frontier' had been 'dictated by the natural formation of the country' (Mackenzie 1946, 44). After all, the diamond shape of the state's western borders – an ever-present feature within the sequence of maps tracing the modern state's political precursors – also corresponded to mountain ranges and other natural, physiographic features of the landscape. By the time of the *Little Homeland Reader*'s publication in 1935, as nationalists in neighbouring Germany had become increasingly aggressive in agitating for the annexation of Czechoslovakia's predominantly German-speaking regions in the west, arguments for the immutability of the state's western borders had taken on increased urgency.

The design principles that structured these map sequences, for which Ladislav Sutnar later coined the term 'visual continuity', further illustrate how techniques employed in other contexts served culturally specific narratives in the *Reader*. Developed to provide 'a smooth visual flow for fast reading and comprehension',

Sutnar's principle of visual continuity involved the extension of 'the basic pattern' of the individual page layouts to the 'integrated design of the whole', where, through the judicious alternation between 'visual interest and simplicity', the overall narrative sequence acquired a distinctive 'tempo', 'rhythm', and 'climax' (Sutnar 1961, a/3). The efficacy of these principles is again apparent in the historical sequences, where the dynamic impressions created by the first four maps of medieval Czech-ruled kingdoms gives way to a comparatively static expression in the map devoted to the successive four centuries of Habsburg rule from 1526. Abandoning the red colour scheme associated with the politically independent medieval Bohemian Kingdom, this map set the outline of the future Czechoslovak state against the black-and-yellow-coloured territories of Austria-Hungary, referencing the traditional colours of the flag of the Habsburg monarchy. In its inconsistencies with the preceding and successive maps of Czech self-rule, the Austria-Hungary map suggested an aberration within an otherwise cohesive and organic Czechoslovak heritage – an impression that Tschinkel amplified in the historical section's final map devoted to the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, where the revival of the dynamic typographic and compositional features of the pre-Habsburg maps linked the modern state with its medieval Czech past.

The Vienna Method in Prague

The narrative devices that served to bridge the discontinuities of 400 years of Habsburg rule are also at work in the *Little Homeland Reader*'s penultimate section on cities, for which Tschinkel designed side-by-side maps and charts comparing Prague's geographical area and population numbers in the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. In these and other pages, Tschinkel drew on an approach to information design which the Austrian social scientist Otto Neurath had spearheaded several years earlier at the Social and Economic Museum [*Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum*] in Vienna. Seeking to make specialized information across a variety of (mostly social-scientific) disciplines broadly accessible to general audiences, Neurath and his collaborators at the museum developed a set of design principles known as the 'Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics' [*Wiener Methode der Bildstatistik*], which they employed in the institution's displays and publications (Burke, Kindel, and Walker 2013). Along with the implementation of a consistent and reduced graphic vocabulary (conceived with the aim of eliminating unnecessary details and communicating only that information considered essential to the topic of the presentation), the use of standardized, countable pictograms – arranged in columns and rows in order to facilitate quantitative comparisons – constituted the Vienna Method's most immediately recognizable feature.

Tschinkel, who travelled to Vienna in 1929 at Neurath's invitation, worked in the museum's graphics department for two years, where he assisted with the design of the museum's acclaimed 1930 'atlas', *Gesellschaft und Wirtschaft* [*Society and Economy*]. He also began promoting the Vienna Method in Czechoslovakia

during this period. In Czech-language articles publicizing the museum's work, Tschinkel helped to persuade Czechoslovak educators and designers of the method's promise as an instructional tool (Tschinkel 1930a). Bedřich Mendl was particularly optimistic about the method's potential educational applications. Writing to Otto Neurath in 1935, Mendl described himself as 'a committed proponent of the Neurath method' (Mendl 1935) and discussed the possibility of finding a Czech publisher for a planned book series by Neurath – though plans for these publications ultimately failed to materialize. The *Little Homeland Reader*, which appeared that same year, remains the most elaborate and fully realized implementation of the Vienna Method in Czech-language publications of the period.

Along with the pages visualizing Prague's growth in area and population, for which Tschinkel closely emulated maps and charts in the 1930 *Society and Economy* atlas, Tschinkel also drew on the earlier publication's examples in presenting information related to a variety of other subjects in the *Reader*, including imports, exports, livestock, mineral resources, transportation, and government spending. The pictograms that Tschinkel designed for these charts, however, were considerably more abstract and schematic than those he had produced in collaboration with the team at the Vienna museum. Constructed exclusively from circles and rectangles, their geometric forms originated in Tschinkel's earlier typographic experiments, where he had composed figures out of dashes, rules, punctuation, and other metal type components, as well as in the seemingly depersonalized and schematic forms of his 'figurative-constructivist' paintings and prints – features he described in his writings of the period as expressions of modern life's industrialized conditions and collective character (Tschinkel 1930b, 1931a, 1931b; Benus 2013).

While the severe, geometric uniformity of the pictograms in Tschinkel's Prague population chart may have suggested a uniform populace whose identities were collectively shaped by the shared experience of industrialization and urbanization, his pictographic figures served in several other instances to differentiate members of the population from one another. In the map comparing population numbers for Czechoslovakia's different 'nationalities' (Figure 15.2), colours alerted readers to the separate groups' numerical strengths. With each pictogram signifying 500,000 citizens, Czechoslovaks (indicated in red) dominated three of the nation's four administrative states, followed by Germans (in blue), Hungarians (yellow), and Ruthenians (pink). The scheme also featured an additional category, coloured grey, to indicate the various 'other groups' (among them Jews, Poles, and Roma), whose numbers were too few to register individually within the pictograms' 500,000-unit increments. Where population numbers could not be comfortably rounded to this increment, the chart displayed smaller quantities by halving and quartering of the pictograms, as well as by colouring separate segments within the pictograms.

Although the *Reader*'s text framed the 'nationalities' map as a celebration of the republic's diversity and its enlightened, democratic policies (which afforded full political participation to the state's nationally recognized minority groups), the

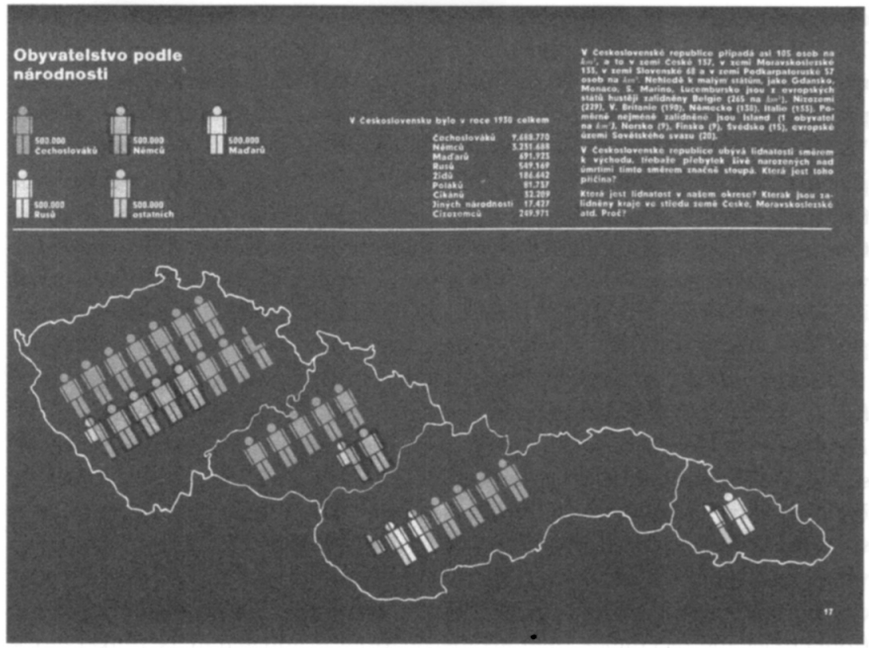

FIGURE 15.2 'Population by Nationality', in *Little Homeland Reader* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1935), 17.

Source: Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University Libraries.

map's colour-coded presentation of difference also served to make an argument for the state's fundamentally Slavic national character. By presenting Czechs and Slovaks together in a single category (by means of the same red colour), the chart created the impression that there actually existed a unified ethnic group, constituting a two-thirds majority of the total population. Counted separately, Czechs constituted approximately half of the state's population. Slovaks, by contrast, at approximately 15% of the total population, were considerably fewer in number than their fellow German citizens, who (at nearly a quarter of the total population) represented the state's second-largest group. In this way, the conflation of Czechs and Slovaks in the 'nationalities' map also served to visually diminish the position that Germans occupied relative to the total population.

At the same time, there are ways in which this map, by classifying identity in such straightforward and mutually exclusive terms, highlighted the ambiguities that such classifications entailed. Indeed, rather than organizing the population into clearly defined groups, the pictographic figures' occasional fragmentation into multi-coloured segments seems at times to disrupt the classificatory scheme, pointing to inherent tensions at work in categories of national identity. Tschinkel only amplified these tensions in his Prague population chart. Here, the same red

pictograms that had previously signified ethnically distinct Czechoslovaks served instead as universal human symbols, fusing together Prague's diverse population as an undifferentiated mass. Through the cumulative effect of these maps and charts, the pictographic symbols thus acquired a contingent and shifting set of significations, suggesting aspects of identity that the *Little Homeland Reader*'s Prague-based author and designers would have likely recognized.

Conclusion

The First Czechoslovak Republic lasted just under 20 years. Dissolved by the Munich Agreement in September 1938, which ceded Czechoslovakia's majority German-speaking regions to Germany, the Czechoslovak state survived as a geographically diminished territory under a new government for an additional half-year. In March 1939, Germany invaded the remaining territory and placed the states of Bohemia and Moravia under a Protectorate government, which they administered until the end of the Second World War. Following Germany's defeat, Czechoslovakia's borders were largely restored to their earlier configuration under the First Republic (with the exception of Ruthenia, which the Soviet Union absorbed into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). Ultimately, none of the creators of the *Little Homeland Reader* would have a place in the state's post-war incarnation.

Sutnar left for the United States in April 1939, ostensibly to carry out the Protectorate government's orders to shut down the ongoing preparations for the Czechoslovak national pavilion at the upcoming World's Fair in New York (Jánaková 2003). Choosing instead to complete the pavilion's installation and open its exhibits to the public, he remained in New York and subsequently became an American citizen. Mendl, on account of his Jewish ancestry, had considerably fewer options than Sutnar. In January 1939, the government of the short-lived Second Czechoslovak Republic (under pressure from Germany to coordinate its own racial policies with those that now held sway in former First Republic's Nazi-occupied regions) terminated Mendl's position as director of the State Historical Institute and subsequently stripped him of his long-held professorship at Prague's Charles University. Barred from engaging in any public or professional activity after the Nazi occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, Mendl took his own life in September 1940. By contrast, Tschinkel's ability to provide documentation of his German-Aryan ancestry secured his continued employment as a designer at the Protectorate-controlled publishing house and as a teacher at the School of Graphic Arts, providing German-language instruction at the latter institution. However, the revelation of his wife's Jewish ancestry (a violation of the Protectorate's marriage laws) led to his termination from both positions in 1941. Nonetheless, his self-identification as a German during war years sealed his fate and precluded any possibility of remaining in the restored Czechoslovak Republic after the war. Deported in the forced population transfers of 1946–1947, which cleansed Czechoslovakia of its approximately 3 million

'Germans', Tschinkel eventually settled in Salzburg. There, as an 'old Austrian' – the designation given to so-called *Volksdeutsche* (or ethnic Germans) born in the Austrian monarchy's former territories – Tschinkel obtained citizenship in the post-war Austrian Republic.

Working in their respective adoptive nations, Sutnar and Tschinkel continued to develop the techniques they had previously employed in the *Little Homeland Reader*, though neither had an opportunity to apply these principles again to quite the same extent in the service of school children's education. In this, the publication stands as a highwater mark in their efforts to reconceive the character of school textbooks. But, beyond the *Little Homeland Reader*'s technical and aesthetic achievements, its significance also rests in its demonstration of how design has functioned in the service of identity formation. A close examination of this work offers a compelling model for the study of how designers have employed graphic techniques to shape political, geographical, and national identities more widely. In this instance, modernist design principles provided Sutnar and Tschinkel with tools to impose a combination of visual order, drama, and continuity on the disparate types of information that the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education had stipulated for classroom instruction. Using strategies associated with the internationalizing projects of the New Typography and the Vienna Method of Pictorial Statistics, Sutnar and Tschinkel presented readers with an historical and geographical account of the 'homeland' that was not only aesthetically compelling but which appeared to visually resolve tensions and contradictions that the First Republic was never able to reconcile in practice. While this portrayal served to advance the state's official narrative, the work's design – by virtue of its modernist graphic techniques – produced an expression that both called attention to the constructed character of that narrative as well as to the active roles that its creators played in its construction. In this respect, the *Little Homeland Reader* offered more than a pioneering model for textbook design. Its imaginative and inventive methods hinted at the possibility of visualizing a more layered and complex national identity – one that acknowledged the functional and contingent character of heritage and more closely corresponded to the lived experiences of its creators.

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