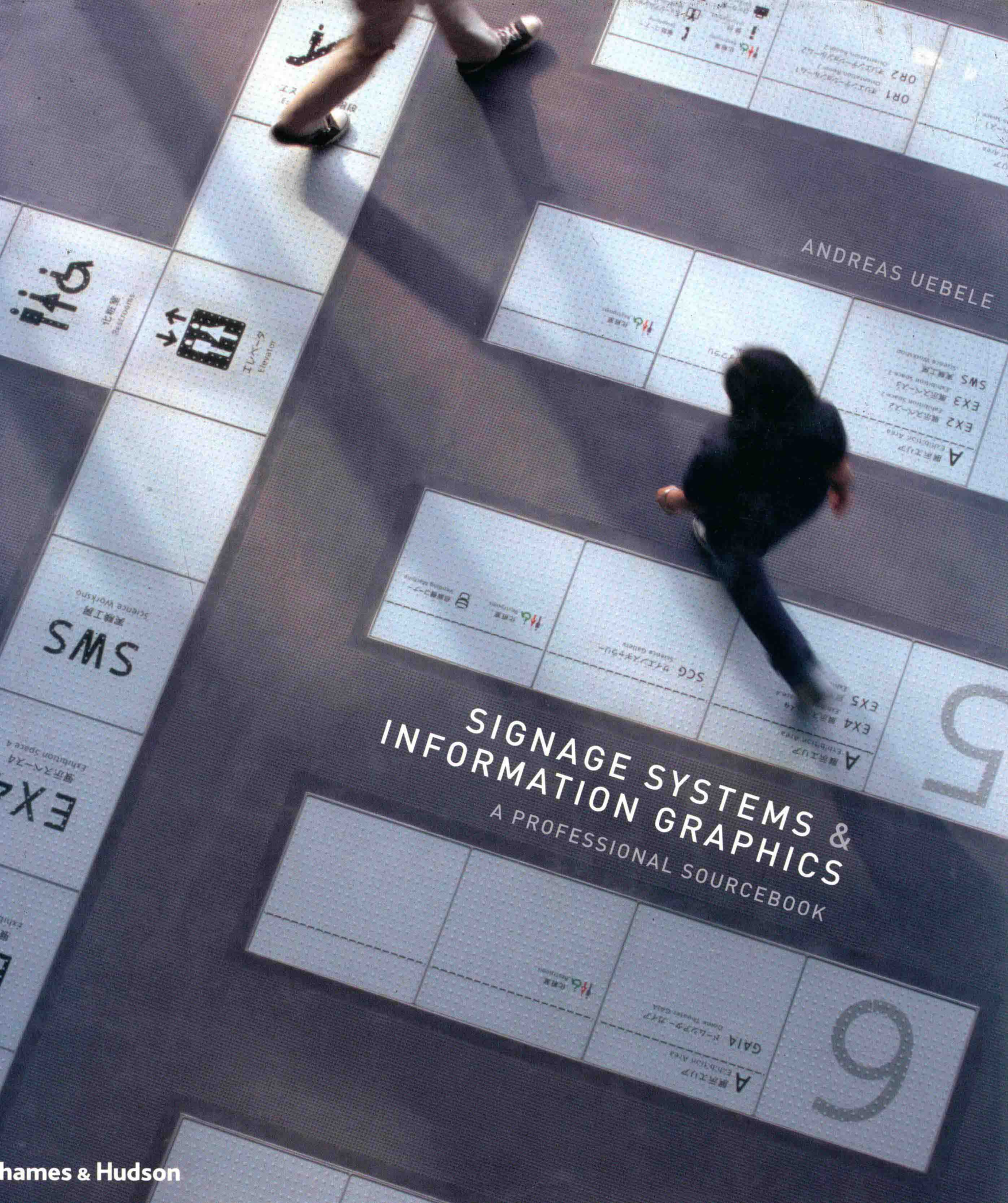
ANDREAS UEBELE
SIGNAGE SYSTEMS &
INFORMATION GRAPHICS
A PROFESSIONAL SOURCEBOOK
Thames & Hudson

Andreas Uebele Signage Systems & Information Graphics

A Professional Sourcebook

With over 500 illustrations in colour and black and white

Thames & Hudson

Translated from the German *Orientierungssysteme und Signaletik* by David H. Wilson

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Foreword During my student days I worked as a temp in an architectural firm, where one of my first assignments was to design some signs and an information board. I didn't really see the point as architecture ought to be self-explanatory, but that was what the architect wanted me to do. By the evening, everything was ready. The beautifully justified Helvetica font and grey level looked great and I felt very pleased with myself. But that same evening I underwent a crash course in typography, during which my beloved Helvetica was taken apart. The grey tone was not the fail-safe I had thought, and my design was pronounced a total failure. The following morning, I set to work again, and this time drew down upon myself the criticism of the entire bureau. It's not easy to stand at the crossroads between architecture and graphic design.

One of those who can move with supreme skill from one to the other, displaying absolute mastery of both, is Professor Andreas Uebele. He studied architecture, urban development and graphic design, and currently teaches concepts and design in the Communications Department at the Fachhochschule in Düsseldorf. This book offers a complete guide to the basics of signage system design. With the aid of outstanding examples and penetrating analysis, Professor Uebele leads us expertly through the jungle of options, focusing on wayfinding and emphasizing the need for restraint but, at the same time, for absolute clarity in the system. The latter should ideally prevent people from getting lost and also create a visual identity. Very little has been published about signage systems, and so we thank Andreas Uebele with all our hearts for his time, expertise, diligent research and thoroughness. The result is a truly wonderful book.

Karin Schmidt-Friderichs

Introduction No handbook and no instruction manual can do away with the necessity to think for oneself. And every time a rule is broken, it marks a step in the direction of good design.

The first part of this book explains the 'rules' one ought to know before planning a signage system. Rules are there to be broken, but it is a very good idea to know what they are before you break them. Of course, in a field such as signage, where the rules are largely unwritten, this is easier said than done. The theoretical section of this book, therefore, focuses on ideas relating to the design parameters that are important to the planning process, drawing on many years of practical experience. They cover fonts and colours that might be appropriate for some cases but not for others, and offer some insight into arrows and pictograms. General 'rules' or guidelines have been marked in red and are found in the top corners of the relevant pages. The projects described in the theoretical section are mainly those carried out by our own firm, and you will find further information on these projects at the end of the book. When the examples stem from other companies, the source is always given. All the texts accompanying these projects have been written by the firms that planned them.

The second part of this book is a step-by-step guide to a possible planning process, which should be of some assistance to beginners. When designing my very first signage system – which turned out to be an unexpectedly major task – I was only too grateful for whatever help I could get. The architect had given me, not entirely for altruistic reasons, the details of a signage system designed by some of his colleagues for another project, all in the strictest confidence, of course. Although I felt guilty about it, I eagerly accepted, and now with this book I hope to atone in some degree for my 'crime'.

The third chapter profiles projects that can be held up as examples of first-class design. The selection has primarily been based on originality.

A signage system can be more than just a sign. It can give a place its identity, and figures and lettering can be an attractive adornment in themselves if properly designed. No one questions the necessity of signage systems when a place or event involves directing large numbers of people, and it's taken for granted that hospitals, airports, trade fairs and the like need wayfinding methods. The necessity is less obvious in some other spheres, but no matter what the context, any system of signs is liable to be both confusing and obtrusive if its communicatory function is not professionally planned and designed. Shortcomings will stand out like a sore thumb! It is much better to work with communications designers right from the outset, as you will see from the projects described here. In all the best examples, the graphic elements blend in perfectly with the architecture.

This book aims to encourage architects to tackle wayfinding in much the same way as they view the choice of, say, light switches and door handles – as an individual detail that contributes to the overall effect of the whole. It will also appeal to interior designers and others who may be struggling to come to terms with such systems, but above all it is for communications designers who appreciate the need for good planning in wayfinding.

Andreas Uebele

Terminology

'Finding the way is not a gift or an innate ability that one either has or does not have. It is a precondition for life itself. Our approach to environments of whatever kind is part of our existence. Living with our respective ways of navigating is a basic premise for our liberty and our self-confidence. Knowing where I am, my location, is the precondition for knowing where I have to go, wherever it may be.'
Otl Aicher

Signage Systems, Wayfinding Systems and Directional Systems

A good rule would be to talk of wayfinding systems instead of directional systems.

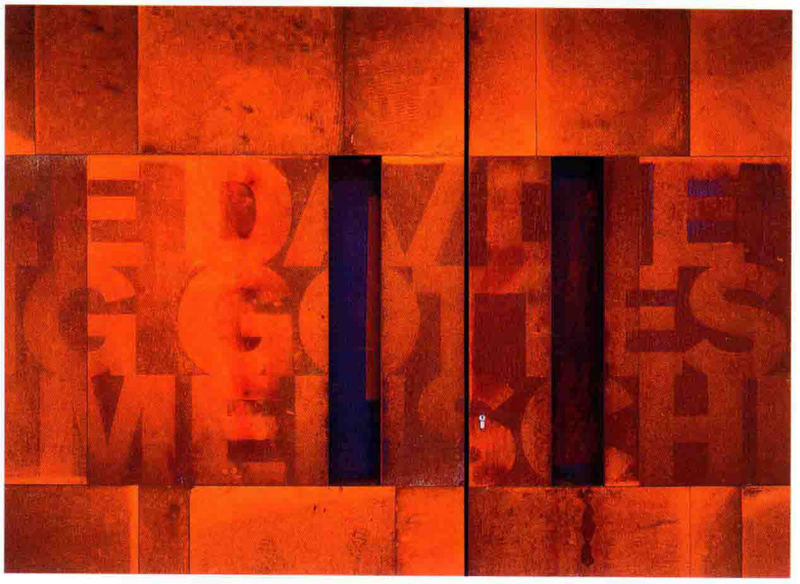
You are unlikely to find the terms 'signage systems', 'wayfinding systems' or 'directional systems' in the dictionary. These are concepts that are as new as the subject itself. Equally new is the whole concept of systematic design that blends together all the technical and functional requirements of a project, although the actual task of showing people the way is as old as humankind. The arrow, for example, is an age-old sign, and in ancient times piles of stones used to point the way at crossroads.

One important factor is the number of people involved and the amount of time available. Giving clear information as quickly as possible to large crowds seems a relatively modern concern, although presumably Roman arenas were cleared pretty quickly, and it would be interesting to know how they did it. At a hospital, airport or trade fair, visitors want to get to the right area as quickly as possible but are often confronted with a bewildering choice of A, B, C etc. Just as people have to be directed through buildings and streets, they also need efficient systems to guide them at transport terminals. A clearly designed system of timetables and destinations is indispensable. One of the very first designs to have used a combination of words and graphics was the map of the London Underground, originally conceived by Harry Beck in 1931.

Displays of train and flight times are just as much informational systems as the navigational instruments of a car, offering data and directions. A university timetable of lectures may also indicate the rooms where lectures take place. However, we shall not be dealing with such informational systems in this book, where the main focus will be on spatial orientation.

Signage systems You can tell a company by its graphics. If a building bears the firm's font, or is adorned with the appropriate signs and lettering, it sends out a friendly signal that accomplishes a great

Signage system at Herz-Jesu-Kirche, Völklingen-Ludweiler. The lettering on the church door adds visual identity. See also page 34.



deal more than simply giving the address. The concept of such systems is described by the French as *signalétique*, which has been adopted by the Swiss and the Germans as *Signaletik*, emphasizing the active signal more than the sign. This term denotes actions – indication, suggestion, identification, recognition – in contrast to the less dynamic wayfinding system. In English less of a distinction is made between these different systems, which are usually all bracketed together under 'signage'.

Wayfinding systems Anton Stankowski objects to the very concept of directional systems, since they degrade the observer to the level of a passive, totally dependent object being led through a building. Such 'direction' differs from the passivity of wayfinding aids, as it is up to you whether you take advantage of the latter. And if we look a little more closely at what lies behind these linguistic terms, the design too is different. Active direction imposes itself intrusively on the foreground, and is an end in itself. It entails leadership, domination, irresistible authority. A wayfinding system is polite and restrained, and may hide itself away when it is not needed. If you were not looking for it, you could easily miss it.

Directional systems This is not such an appealing term. The idea of being guided, informed and helped is far more pleasant and gentle than the domineering 'direct', or being actively led. A leader can also mislead, as many a nation has discovered to its cost.

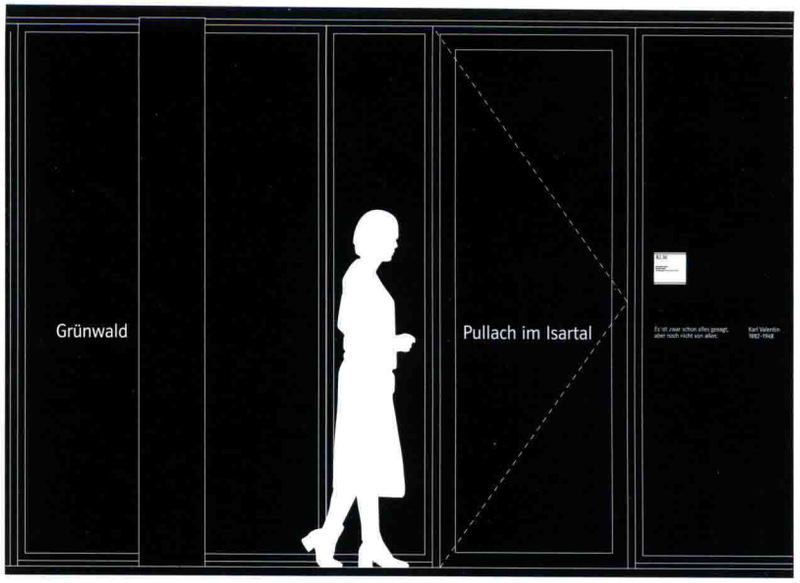
Chapter 1
Signage Design

'Typography and architecture intersect. Every building has some kind of writing. Houses bear signs. In important buildings, stonemasons and architects leave their signatures on stones. House numbers can be decorative or intrusive, while the doorbell and the letterbox may serve as visiting cards. The written word is an accompaniment to the erected stone, and well-chosen typography enriches the architecture. It can work with the building, but it can also work against it. Whether unusual or discreet, hard or soft, the lettering should always be integral to the architecture, its ally rather than its enemy.'

Andreas Uebele

1.1 Eye Level

The top of the sign is 145 cm above floor level, and is 4 cm from the frame, to ensure that the shadow from the door doesn't fall on the sign, which fits in with the surface and is visually integrated into it.



One absurd 'golden rule' states that an eye level of 163 cm is the ideal height for conveying information. As a general principle, all rules should be questioned, and especially this one. No one really knows where it came from. It may be the average eye level in Europe, but it is likely to have been based on an exercise in arithmetic rather than any genuine form of experiment. Whatever its origin, the measurement of 163 cm divides walls into unbalanced proportions, which is far from ideal. It is better to relate graphics or directions to the horizontal angles of the structure, i.e. where the ceiling meets the wall, or the wall meets the floor, as the information will then be visually more prominent and will be better integrated with the rest of the building. When graphics are placed roughly in the centre of a wall, they tend to be swamped.

When we are standing upright, looking straight ahead, it is possible that our eyes cover a field whose average height is 163 cm above the ground. However, we do not normally walk in a strictly perpendicular manner – our heads tilt slightly forward, and our eyes therefore drop. This is another reason why information should not be placed at eye level. A good height for the upper edge of a sign on a door, for example, would be 145 cm.

Information at a trade fair or an airport needs to be placed high up, where it can be read above people's heads. The same applies to signposts for lorry drivers, who are seated much higher than motorists. The information must be at such a height that it is not concealed by parked cars or pedestrians.

Wayfinding system at the Fachhochschule in Osnabrück. This system makes use of the human eye's natural angle of vision. From a distance of about 10 m, the viewer can perceive the writing on the ceiling without having to raise his head unnaturally. See also pages 26, 80 and 202–7.

The height at which information is displayed depends on the environment. Bus and lorry drivers, pedestrians and motorists read from different viewpoints.

Wayfinding system at the Neue Messe, Stuttgart. Pylon signs give directions to the car parks and exhibition halls etc. See also pages 29, 42–47, 62–63, 67, 88–89, 93, 102–103 and 127.