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*for my colleagues & friends*

*in the worlds of letters:*

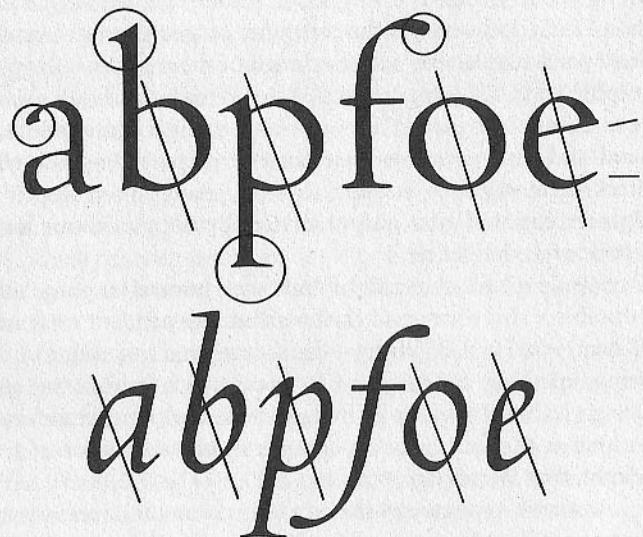
*writers & editors,*

*type designers, typographers,*

*printers & publishers,*

*shepherding words and books*

*on their lethal and innocent ways*



*aperture:* the opening in letters such as a, c, e, s

RENAISSANCE (15th & 16th centuries): modulated stroke, humanist [oblique] axis; crisp, pen-formed terminals; large aperture; italic equal to and independent of roman



BAROQUE (17th century): modulated stroke, variable axis; modelled serifs and terminals; moderate aperture; italic subsidiary to roman and closely linked with it



NEOCLASSICAL (18th century): modulated stroke, rationalist [vertical] axis; refined, adnate serifs; lachrymal terminals; moderate aperture; italic fully subjugated to roman

*Historical  
Synopsis*

*adnate:* flowing into the stem  
*lachrymal:* teardrop-shaped



ROMANTIC (18th & 19th centuries): high contrast, intensified rationalist axis; abrupt, thin serifs; round terminals; small aperture; fully subjugated italic

abpfoe

This section shows two examples of the Realist font style. The letters are rendered in a bold, unmodulated stroke weight. The vertical axis is implied by the stroke direction. Small circular serifs are present at the ends of the horizontal strokes. The letter 'p' has a distinct vertical stem.

abpfoe

This section shows another example of the Realist font style, featuring a similar bold, unmodulated stroke weight and implied vertical axis, with small circular serifs at the stroke terminals.

REALIST (19th & early 20th centuries): unmodulated stroke, implied vertical axis; small aperture; serifs absent or abrupt and of equal weight with main strokes; italic absent or replaced by sloped roman

abpfoe

This section shows two examples of the Geometric Modernist font style. The letters have a bold, unmodulated stroke. The bowls of the letters are often circular, indicating no explicit vertical axis. Moderate aperture is used, and serifs are absent or of equal weight with the main strokes.

abpfoe

This section shows another example of the Geometric Modernist font style, characterized by its bold, unmodulated stroke and circular letter bowls.

GEOMETRIC MODERNIST (20th century): unmodulated stroke; bowls often circular (no axis); moderate aperture; serifs absent or of equal weight with main strokes; italic absent or replaced by sloped roman

abpfoe

This section shows two examples of the Lyrical Modernist font style. The letters exhibit a modulated stroke weight, with the pen-formed serifs and terminals being significantly thicker than the main body of the letter. The humanist axis is clearly defined. The aperture is large, and the italic form is partially liberated from the roman.

abpfoe

This section shows another example of the Lyrical Modernist font style, highlighting the modulated stroke, humanist axis, and large aperture.

LYRICAL MODERNIST (20th century): rediscovery of Renaissance form: modulated stroke, humanist axis; pen-formed serifs and terminals; large aperture; italic partially liberated from roman

abpfoe

This section shows two examples of the Postmodernist font style. The letters feature a rationalist axis and sharply modelled serifs and terminals, characteristic of Neoclassical and Romantic forms. The aperture is moderate, and the italic is subjugated to the roman.

abpfoe

This section shows another example of the Postmodernist font style, emphasizing the rationalist axis and sharply modelled letter forms.

POSTMODERNIST (late 20th century): frequent parody of Neoclassical and Romantic form; rationalist axis; sharply modelled serifs and terminals; moderate aperture; italic subjugated to roman

rigo Habraam numerā  
i a mosaica lege(septim  
r)sed naturali fuit ratiō  
idit enim Habraam de  
m quoq; gentium patr  
is oēs gentes hoc uidelic  
m est:cuius ille iustitiæ  
us est:qui post multas  
imūm omnium diuin  
o nascerétur tradidit:ue  
gnūm:uel ut hoc quas  
suos imitari conaret:au  
um nobis modo est.Po

Roman type cut in 1469 by Nicolas Jenson, a French typographer working in Venice. The original is approximately 16 pt. The type is shown here as Jenson printed it, but at twice actual size. This is the ancestor of the type (Bruce Rogers's Centaur) shown at the top of page 12.

## THE GRAND DESIGN

---

### 1.1 FIRST PRINCIPLES

#### 1.1.1 *Typography exists to honor content.*

Like oratory, music, dance, calligraphy – like anything that lends its grace to language – typography is an art that can be deliberately misused. It is a craft by which the meanings of a text (or its absence of meaning) can be clarified and honored, or knowingly disguised.

In a world rife with unsolicited messages, typography must often draw attention to itself before it will be read. Yet in order to be read, it must relinquish the attention it has drawn. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of statuesque transparency. Its other traditional goal is durability: not immunity to change, but a clear superiority to fashion. Typography at its best is a visual form of language linking timelessness and time.

One of the principles of durable typography is always legibility; another is something more than legibility: some earned or unearned interest that gives its living energy to the page. It takes various forms and goes by various names, including serenity, liveliness, laughter, grace and joy.

These principles apply, in different ways, to the typography of business cards, instruction sheets and postage stamps, as well as to editions of religious scriptures, literary classics and other books that aspire to join their ranks. Within limits, the same principles apply even to stock market reports, airline schedules, milk cartons, classified ads. But laughter, grace and joy, like legibility itself, all feed on meaning, which the writer, the words and the subject, not the typographer, must generally provide.

In 1770, a bill was introduced in the English Parliament with the following provisions:

*... all women of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall ... impose upon, seduce, and betray into matrimony, any of His Majesty's subjects, by the scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high heeled shoes [or] bolstered hips shall incur*

*the penalty of the law in force against witchcraft ... and ... the marriage, upon conviction, shall stand null and void.*

The function of typography, as I understand it, is neither to further the power of witches nor to bolster the defences of those, like this unfortunate parliamentarian, who live in terror of being tempted and deceived. The satisfactions of the craft come from elucidating, and perhaps even ennobling, the text, not from deluding the unwary reader by applying scents, paints and iron stays to empty prose. But humble texts, such as classified ads or the telephone directory, may profit as much as anything else from a good typographical bath and a change of clothes. And many a book, like many a warrior or dancer or priest of either sex, may look well with some paint on its face, or indeed with a bone in its nose.

#### 1.1.2 *Letters have a life and dignity of their own.*

Letterforms that honor and elucidate what humans see and say deserve to be honored in their turn. Well-chosen words deserve well-chosen letters; these in their turn deserve to be set with affection, intelligence, knowledge and skill. Typography is a link, and it ought as a rule to be as strong as the others in the chain.

Writing begins with the making of footprints, the leaving of signs. Like speaking, it is a perfectly natural act which humans have carried to complex extremes. The typographer's task has always been to add a somewhat unnatural edge, a protective shell of artificial order, to the power of the writing hand. The tools have altered over the centuries, and the exact degree of unnaturalness desired has varied from place to place and time to time, but the character of the essential transformation between manuscript and type has scarcely changed.

The original purpose of type was simply copying. The job of the typographer was to imitate the scribal hand in a form that permitted exact and fast replication. Dozens, then hundreds, then thousands of copies were printed in less time than a scribe would need to finish one. This excuse for setting texts in type has disappeared. In the age of photolithography, digital scanning and offset printing, it is as easy to print directly from handwritten copy as from text that is typographically composed. Yet the typographer's task is little changed. It is still to

give the illusion of superhuman speed and stamina – and of superhuman patience and precision – to the writing hand.

Typography is just that: idealized writing. Writers themselves now rarely have the calligraphic skill of earlier scribes, but they evoke countless versions of ideal script by their varying voices and literary styles. To these blind and often invisible visions, the typographer must respond in visible terms.

In a badly designed book, the letters mill and stand like starving horses in their field. In a book designed by rote, they sit like stale bread and mutton on the page. In a well-made book, where designer, compositor and printer have all done their jobs, no matter how many thousands of lines and pages, the letters are alive. They dance in their seats. Sometimes they rise and dance in the margins and aisles.

Simple as it may sound, the task of creative non-interference with letters is a rewarding and difficult calling. In ideal conditions, it is all that typographers are really asked to do – and it is enough.

#### 1.1.3 *There is a style beyond style.*

Literary style, says Walter Benjamin, “is the power to move freely in the length and breadth of linguistic thinking without slipping into banality.” Typographic style, in this large and intelligent sense of the word, does not mean any particular style – my style or your style, or Neoclassical or Baroque style – but the power to move freely through the whole domain of typography, and to function at every step in a way that is graceful and vital instead of banal. It means typography that can walk familiar ground without sliding into platitudes, typography that responds to new conditions with innovative solutions, and typography that does not vex the reader with its own originality in a self-conscious search for praise.

Typography is to literature as musical performance is to composition: an essential act of interpretation, full of endless opportunities for insight or obtuseness. Much typography is far removed from literature, for language has many uses, including packaging and propaganda. Like music, it can be used to manipulate behavior and emotions. But this is not where typographers, musicians or other human beings show us their finest side. Typography at its best is a slow performing art, worthy of the same informed appreciation that we sometimes

From Part 2 of Benjamin's essay on Karl Kraus, in *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt, 1955). There is an English translation in Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York, 1978).

give to musical performances, and capable of giving similar nourishment and pleasure in return.

The same alphabets and page designs can be used for a biography of Mohandas Gandhi and for a manual on the use and deployment of biological weapons. Writing can be used both for love letters and for hate mail, and love letters themselves can be used for manipulation and extortion as well as to bring delight to body and soul. Evidently there is nothing inherently noble and trustworthy in the written or printed word. Yet generations of men and women have turned to writing and printing to house and share their deepest hopes, perceptions, dreams and fears. It is to them, and not to the extortionist, that the typographer must answer.

## 1.2 TACTICS

### 1.2.1 *Read the text before designing it.*

The typographer's one essential task is to interpret and communicate the text. Its tone, its tempo, its logical structure, its physical size, all determine the possibilities of its typographic form. The typographer is to the text as the theatrical director to the script, or the musician to the score.

### 1.2.2 *Discover the outer logic of the typography in the inner logic of the text.*

A novel often purports to be a seamless river of words from beginning to end, or a series of unnamed scenes. Research papers, textbooks, cookbooks and other works of nonfiction rarely look so smooth. They are often layered with chapter heads, section heads, subheads, block quotations, footnotes, endnotes, lists and illustrative examples. Such features may be obscure in the manuscript, even if they are clear in the author's mind. For the sake of the reader, each requires its own typographic identity and form. Every layer and level of the text must be consistent, distinct, yet harmonious in form.

The first task of the typographer is therefore to read and understand the text; the second task is to analyze and map it. Only then can typographical interpretation begin.

If the text has many layers or sections, it may need not only heads and subheads but running heads as well, reappearing on

every page or two-page spread, to remind readers which intellectual neighborhood they happen to be visiting.

Novels seldom need such signposts, but they often require typographical markers of other kinds. Peter Mathiessen's novel *Far Tortuga* (New York, 1975; designed by Kenneth Miyamoto) uses two sizes of text, three different margins, free-floating block paragraphs and other typographical devices to separate thought, speech and action. Ken Kesey's novel *Sometimes a Great Notion* (New York, 1964) seems to flow like conventional prose, yet it shifts repeatedly in mid-sentence between roman and italic to distinguish what characters say to each other from what they say in silence to themselves.

In poetry and drama, a larger typographical palette is sometimes required. Some of Douglass Parker's translations from classical Greek and Dennis Tedlock's translations from Zuni use roman, italic, bold, small caps and full caps in various sizes to emulate the dynamic markings of music. Robert Massin's typographical performances of Eugène Ionesco's plays use intersecting lines of type, stretched and melted letters, inkblots, pictograms, and a separate typeface for each character. In the works of artists like Guillaume Apollinaire and Guy Davenport, boundaries between author and designer sometimes vanish. Writing merges with typography, and the text becomes its own illustration.

The typographer must analyze and reveal the inner order of the text, as a musician must reveal the inner order of the music he performs. But the reader, like the listener, should in retrospect be able to close her eyes and see what lies inside the words she has been reading. The typographic performance must reveal, not replace, the inner composition. Typographers, like other artists and craftsmen – musicians, composers and authors as well – must as a rule do their work and disappear.

### 1.2.3 *Make the visible relationship between the text and other elements (photographs, captions, tables, diagrams, notes) a reflection of their real relationship.*

If the text is tied to other elements, where do they belong? If there are notes, do they go at the side of the page, the foot of the page, the end of the chapter, the end of the book? If there are photographs or other illustrations, should they be embedded in the text or do they belong in a special section of their own? And

See for example Aristophanes, *Four Comedies* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1969); Dennis Tedlock, *Finding the Center* (Lincoln, NE, 1972); Eugène Ionesco, *La Cantatrice chauve* (Paris, 1964) and *Délire à deux* (Paris, 1966).

There are samples of Massin's work in *Typographica* n.s. 11 (June 1965).

if the photographs have captions or credits or labels, should these be exhibited together with the photographs or confined to a separate section?

If there is more than one text – as in countless publications issued in Canada, Switzerland, Belgium and other multilingual countries – how will the separate but equal texts be arrayed? Will they run side by side to emphasize their equality (and perhaps to share in a single set of illustrations), or will they be printed back-to-back, to emphasize their distinctness?

No matter what their relation to the text, photos or maps must sometimes be grouped apart from it because they require a separate paper or different inks. If this is the case, what typographical cross-references will be required?

These and similar questions, which confront the working typographer on a daily basis, must be answered case by case. The typographic page is a map of the mind; it is frequently also a map of the social order from which it comes. And for better or for worse, minds and social orders change.

#### *1.2.4 Choose a typeface or a group of faces that will honor and elucidate the character of the text.*

This is the beginning, middle and end of the practice of typography: choose and use the type with sensitivity and intelligence. Aspects of this principle are explored throughout this book and considered in detail in chapters 6 and 7.

Letterforms have tone, timbre, character, just as words and sentences do. The moment a text and a typeface are chosen, two streams of thought, two rhythmical systems, two sets of habits, or if you like, two personalities, intersect. They need not live together contentedly forever, but they must not as a rule collide.

The root metaphor of typesetting is that the alphabet (or in Chinese, the entire lexicon) is a system of interchangeable parts. The word *form* can be surgically revised, instead of rewritten, to become the word *farm* or *firm* or *fort* or *fork* or *from*, or with a little more trouble, to become the word *pineapple*. The old compositor's typecase is a partitioned wooden tray holding hundreds of such interchangeable bits of information. These sub-semantic particles, these bits – called *sorts* by letterpress printers – are letters cast on standardized bodies of metal, waiting to be assembled into meaningful combinations, then dispersed and reassembled in a different form. The compositor's typecase is

one of the primary ancestors of the computer – and it is no surprise that while typesetting was one of the last crafts to be mechanized, it was one of the first to be computerized.

But the bits of information handled by typographers differ in one essential respect from the computer programmer's bits. Whether the type is set in hard metal by hand, or in softer metal by machine, or in digital form on paper or film, every comma, every parenthesis, every *e*, and in context, even every empty space, has style as well as bald symbolic value. Letters are microscopic works of art as well as useful symbols. They mean what they *are* as well as what they say.

Typography is the art and craft of handling these doubly meaningful bits of information. A good typographer handles them in intelligent, coherent, sensitive ways. When the type is poorly chosen, what the words say linguistically and what the letters imply visually are disharmonious, dishonest, out of tune.

#### *1.2.5 Shape the page and frame the text block so that it honors and reveals every element, every relationship between elements, and every logical nuance of the text.*

Selecting the shape of the page and placing the type upon it is much like framing and hanging a painting. A cubist painting in an eighteenth-century gilded frame, or a seventeenth-century still-life in a slim chrome box, will look no sillier than a nineteenth-century English text set in a seventeenth-century French typeface asymmetrically positioned on a German modernist page.

If the text is long or the space is short, or if the elements are many, multiple columns may be required. If illustrations and text march side by side, does one take prominence over the other? And does the order or degree of prominence change? Does the text suggest perpetual symmetry, perpetual asymmetry, or something in between?

Again, does the text suggest the continuous unruffled flow of justified prose, or the continued flirtation with order and chaos evoked by flush-left ragged-right composition? (The running heads and sidenotes on the odd-numbered pages of this book are set flush left, ragged right. On the even numbered pages, they are ragged left. Leftward-reading alphabets, like Arabic and Hebrew, are perfectly at home in ragged-left text, but with rightward-reading alphabets like Latin, Greek or Thai,

ragged-left setting emphasizes the end, not the beginning, of the line. This makes it a poor choice for extended composition.)

Shaping the page goes hand in hand with choosing the type, and both are permanent typographical preoccupations. The subject of page shapes and proportions is addressed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

### Tactics

#### 1.2.6 Give full typographical attention even to incidental details.

Some of what a typographer must set, like some of what any musician must play, is simply passage work. Even an edition of Plato or Shakespeare will contain a certain amount of routine text: page numbers, scene numbers, textual notes, the copyright claim, the publisher's name and address, and the hyperbole on the jacket, not to mention the passage work or background writing that is implicit in the text itself. But just as a good musician can make a heart-wrenching ballad from a few banal words and a trivial tune, so the typographer can make poignant and lovely typography from bibliographical paraphernalia and textual chaff. The ability to do so rests on respect for the text as a whole, and on respect for the letters themselves.

Perhaps the rule should read: Give full typographical attention *especially* to incidental details.

#### 1.3 SUMMARY

There are always exceptions, always excuses for stunts and surprises. But perhaps we can agree that, as a rule, typography should perform these services for the reader:

- invite the reader into the text;
- reveal the tenor and meaning of the text;
- clarify the structure and the order of the text;
- link the text with other existing elements;
- induce a state of energetic repose, which is the ideal condition for reading.

While serving the reader in this way, typography, like a musical performance or a theatrical production, should serve two other ends. It should honor the text for its own sake – always assuming that the text is worth a typographer's trouble – and it should honor and contribute to its own tradition: that of typography itself.

## RHYTHM & PROPORTION

### 2.1 HORIZONTAL SPACE

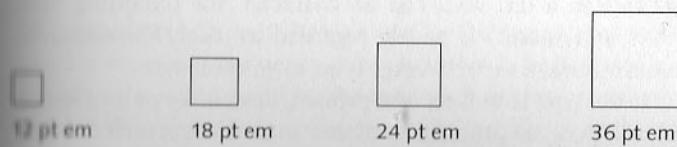
An ancient metaphor: thought is a thread, and the raconteur is a spinner of yarns – but the true storyteller, the poet, is a weaver. The scribes made this old and audible abstraction into a new and visible fact. After long practice, their work took on such an even, flexible texture that they called the written page a *textus*, cloth.

The typesetting device, whether it happens to be a computer or a composing stick, functions like a loom. And the typographer, like the scribe, normally aims to weave the text as evenly as possible. Good letterforms are designed to give a lively, even texture, but careless spacing of letters, lines and words can tear this fabric apart.

Another ancient metaphor: the density of texture in a written or typeset page is called its *color*. This has nothing to do with red or green ink; it refers only to the darkness or blackness of the letterforms in mass. Once the demands of legibility and logical order are satisfied, *evenness of color* is the typographer's normal aim. And color depends on four things: the design of the type, the spacing between the letters, the spacing between the words, and the spacing between the lines. None is independent of the others.

#### 2.1.1 Define the word space to suit the size and natural letterfit of the font.

Type is normally measured in picas and points (explained in detail on p 236), but horizontal spacing is measured in *ems*, and the em is a sliding measure. One em is a distance equal to the type size. In 6 point type, an em is 6 points; in 12 pt type it is 12 points, and in 60 pt type it is 60 points. Thus a one-em space is proportionately the same in any size.





Lithos, designed by Carol Twombly, is based on early Greek inscriptive letterforms.

## HISTORICAL INTERLUDE

Printing from movable type was first invented not in Germany in the 1450s, as Europeans often claim, but in China in the 1040s. In preference to Gutenberg, we should honor a scholarly engineer by the name of Bí Sheng (畢昇). The earliest surviving works printed in Asia from movable type seem to date from the thirteenth century, but there is a clear account of the typesetting process, and Bí Sheng's role in its development, by the eleventh-century essayist Shén Kuò.

The new technology reached Korea before the middle of the thirteenth century and Europe before the middle of the fifteenth. There it intersected the already long and fertile history of the roman letter. And there typesetting flourished as it had failed to do in China, because of the far smaller number of characters European scripts required. Even at the end of the nineteenth century, most printing in China was done by the same method used in the eighth century to make the first printed books: entire pages of text were carved by hand into wooden printing plates. Corrections were made by drilling out the error, installing a wooden plug, and cutting the new characters. It is the same technique used to make the woodcut illustrations that were often combined with printed text.

### 7.1 THE EARLY SCRIBAL FORMS

The earliest surviving European letterforms are Greek capitals scratched into stone. The strokes are bony and thin, almost ethereal – the opposite of the heavy substance they are carved in. The letters are made primarily from straight lines, and when curved forms appear, they have a very large *aperture*. This means that forms like S and C, which can be relatively open or relatively closed, are about as open as they can get. These early Greek letters were drawn freehand, not constructed with compasses and rule, and they have no serifs – neither the informal entry and exit strokes left by a relaxed and fluent writer, nor the symmetrical finishing strokes typically added to letters by a formal scribe.

In time, the strokes of these letters grew thicker, the aperture lessened, and serifs appeared. The new forms, used for

Shén Kuò's account is contained in his *Mèngxi Bitán* (夢溪筆談), "Dream Creek Essays." For more information in English, see Denis Twitchett, *Printing and Publishing in Medieval China* (London, 1983), and Thomas F. Carter, *The Invention of Printing in China and Its Spread Westward*, 2nd ed., revised by L. Carrington Goodrich (New York, 1955).

# A B C O S P Q R

Trajan, designed by Carol Twombly in 1988, is based on the inscription at the base of Trajan's Column, Rome, carved in AD 113.

Between the Roman inscriptions and Gutenberg's time, there were many further changes in European letterforms. Narrow rustic capitals, wide uncials and other forms evolved. Writing spread to the farthest corners of Europe, and many regional scripts and alphabets arose. Monastic scribes – who were designers, copyists and archivists as well – kept many of the older letterforms alive. They used them for titles, subheads and initials, choosing newer and more compact scripts for running text. Out of this rich multiplicity of letters, a basic dichotomy evolved: *majuscules* and *minuscules*: large formal letters and smaller, more casual ones: the upper and lower case, as we call them now.

## CAROLUS MAGNUS

Caroline or Carolingian means of the time  
of the Emperor Charlemagne, "Big Charles" ...

Carol Twombly's Charlemagne (above) and Gottfried Pott's Carolina (below). These typefaces are based on Carolingian majuscules and minuscules from ninth- and tenth-century European manuscripts.

Many of the old scribal conventions survive in typesetting today. Titles are still set in large, formal letters; large initials mark the beginnings of chapters or sections; small capitals mark an opening phrase. The well-made page is now what it

was then: a window into history, language and the mind: a map of what is being said and a portrait of the voice that is silently speaking.

In the later Middle Ages and the early Renaissance, a well-trained European scribe might know eight or ten distinct styles of script. Each was defined as precisely as a typeface, stored like a font in the human memory, and each had certain uses. Sacred scriptures, legal documents, romance literature, business and personal letters all required different scripts, and particular forms evoked specific languages and regions.

When the technology of movable type arrived, Europe was rich with Gothic, Byzantine, Romanesque and humanistic hands, and with a wealth of older letters. They are all still with us in some way, but the humanistic hand, based on the Carolingian minuscule, has become the central form: the roman lower case, evolving into a thousand variations, sports and hybrids, like the willow or the rose.

### 7.2 THE TYPOGRAPHIC LATIN LETTER

Several systems are in use for classifying typefaces. Some of them use fabricated terms such as 'garalde' and 'didone.' Others rely on familiar but vague labels such as 'old style,' 'modern' and 'transitional.' But these systems leave much to be desired. They are neither good science nor good history.

Rigorously scientific descriptions and classifications of typefaces are certainly possible, and important research has been under way in this field for several years. Like the scientific study of plants and animals, the infant science of typology involves precise measurement, close analysis, and the careful use of technically descriptive terms.

But letterforms are not only objects of science. They also belong to the realm of art, and they participate in its history. They have changed over time just as music, painting and architecture have changed, and the same historical terms – Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, Romantic, and so on – are useful in each of these fields.

This approach to the classification of letterforms has another important advantage. Typography never occurs in isolation. Good typography demands not only a knowledge of type itself, but an understanding of the relationship between letterforms and the other things that humans make and do.

Typographical history is just that: the study of the relationships between type designs and the rest of human activity – politics, philosophy, the arts, and the history of ideas. It is a lifelong pursuit, but one that is informative and rewarding from the beginning.

### 7.2.1 The Renaissance Roman Letter

Renaissance roman letters developed among the scholars and scribes of northern Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their translation from script to type began in Italy in 1465 and continued for more than a century. Like Renaissance painting and music, Renaissance letterforms are full of sensuous and unhurried light and space. They have served as a typographical benchmark for 500 years.

The earliest surviving roman punches or matrices are Garamond's, cut in Paris in the 1530s. For earlier type, we have no evidence beyond the printed books themselves. The basic structure and form of these early typefaces is clear beyond dispute,



Three twentieth-century reconstructions of Renaissance roman typefaces. Centaur (above) was designed by Bruce Rogers, Boston, c. 1914, after Nicolas Jenson, Venice, 1469. Bembo (center) was cut by Monotype in 1929, based on the design of Francesco Griffó, Venice, 1499. Adobe Garamond (bottom) was designed by Robert Slimbach, San Francisco, 1988, after Claude Garamond, Paris, c. 1540.

but in their subtlest details, all the existing replicas of fifteenth-century Italian type are hypothetical reconstructions.

Like Roman inscriptional capitals, Renaissance roman lowercase letters have a modulated stroke (the width varies with direction) and a *humanist axis*. This means that the letters have the form produced by a broad-nib pen held in the right hand in a comfortable and relaxed writing position. The thick strokes run NW/SE, the axis of the writer's hand and forearm. The serifs are crisp, the stroke is light, and the contrast between thick strokes and thin strokes is generally modest.

In summary, the characteristics of the early Renaissance roman letter are these:

- stems vertical
- bowls nearly circular
- modulated stroke
- humanist axis
- modest contrast
- modest x-height
- crisp, oblique head serifs (on letters such as b and r)
- abrupt, flat or slightly splayed bilateral foot serifs (on letters such as r, l and p)
- abrupt, pen-formed terminals on a, c, f and r
- rising crossbar in e, perpendicular to the stroke axis
- the roman font is solitary (there is no italic or bold)

In later Renaissance forms (from 1500 on), the letterforms grow softer and smoother in subtle ways:

- head serifs become more wedge-shaped
- foot serifs become adnate (flowing smoothly into the stem) instead of abrupt
- terminals of c, f and r become less abrupt and more lachrymal (teardrop-shaped)
- crossbar of e becomes horizontal

### 7.2.2 The Renaissance Italic Letter

Rome is located in the midst of Italy. Why is roman type a category separate from italic? It seems a question to which typographers might possess the answer. But the question has as much to do with politics and religion as with calligraphy and typography.

Roman type consists of two quite different basic parts. The upper case, which does indeed come from Rome, is based on Roman imperial inscriptions. The lower case was developed in northern Europe, chiefly in France, in the late Middle Ages, and given its final polish in Venice in the early Renaissance. Nevertheless, it too is Roman in the larger sense. While the roman upper case is a legacy of the Roman Empire, the lower case is a legacy of the Holy Roman Empire, the pagan empire's Christian successor. It acquired its fundamental form at the hands of Christian scribes, many of them employed as administrators and teachers by the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne.

Italic letterforms, on the other hand, are an Italian Renaissance invention. Some of them come from Rome, others from elsewhere in Italy, and when they were first converted to type, italics were still full of local flavor and freshness. But the earliest italic fonts, cut between 1500 and 1540, consist of lower case only. They were used with upright roman caps, but not in conjunction with the roman lower case.

The characteristics of the Renaissance italic letter can be summarized as follows:

- stems vertical or of fairly even slope, not exceeding 10°
- bowls generally elliptical
- light, modulated stroke
- humanist axis



Two revivals of Renaissance italic type. Monotype Arrighi (above), is one of several Arrighis designed by Frederic Warde, London and Paris, 1925–29, after Ludovico degli Arrighi, Rome, 1524. Monotype Bembo italic (below) was cut in London in 1929, based on the work of Giovanantonio Tagliente, Venice, 1524.

- low contrast
- modest x-height
- cursive forms with crisp, oblique entry and exit serifs
- descenders serifed bilaterally or not at all
- terminals abrupt or lachrymal
- italic lower case paired with small, upright roman capitals, and with occasional swash capitals; italic otherwise fully independent of roman

The last of these features has been ignored in almost all of the reconstructions. Sloped roman caps are usually supplied instead – but typographers have the option of replacing these sloped caps with more authentic upright forms, simply by borrowing them from a related roman font.

#### 7.2.3 The Mannerist Letter

Mannerist art is Renaissance art to which subtle exaggerations – of length, angularity or tension, for example – have been added. Mannerist typographers, working chiefly in Italy and France in the middle of the sixteenth century, began the practice of using roman and italic in the same book, and even on the same page – though not on the same line. It was also during the Mannerist period that sloped roman capitals were first added to the italic lower case.



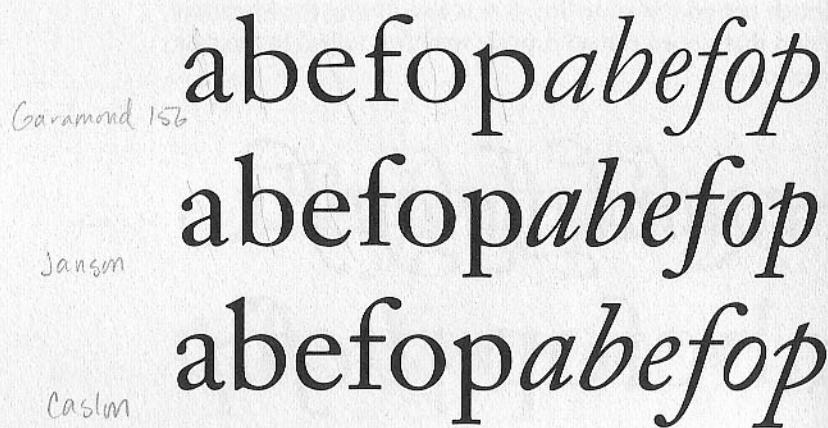
Two recent typefaces in the Mannerist tradition. Poetica (above) is a chancery italic based on sixteenth-century models. It was designed by Robert Slimbach and issued by Adobe in 1992. Galliard (below), designed by Matthew Carter, was issued by Linotype in 1978. It is closely based on letterforms cut in the sixteenth century by Robert Granjon.

There are many fine sixteenth-century examples of Mannerist typefaces, including roman titling fonts with long, delicate extenders; chancery italics with even longer and often ornamented extenders, and text faces with short extenders but increased tension in the forms. Yet twentieth-century revivals of Mannerist faces have been relatively scarce.

#### 7.2.4 The Baroque Letter

Baroque typography, like Baroque painting and music, is rich with activity and takes delight in the restless and dramatic play of contradictory forms. One of the most obvious features of any Baroque typeface is the large *variation in axis* from one letter to the next. Baroque italics are *ambidextrous*: both right- and lefthanded. And it was during the Baroque that typographers first began mixing roman and italic *on the same line*.

In general, Baroque letterforms appear more modelled and less written than Renaissance forms. They give less evidence of the direct trace of the pen. Yet they take many different forms, and they thrived in Europe throughout the seventeenth century and endured through much of the eighteenth.



Three revivals of Baroque typefaces. Monotype Garamond 156 (above) is based on fonts cut in France by Jean Jannon, about 1621. Linotype Janson (center) is based on fonts cut by Miklós Kis, Amsterdam, about 1685. Adobe Caslon (bottom), by Carol Twombly, is based on faces cut by William Caslon, London, in the 1730s.

Baroque letterforms generally differ from Renaissance forms in the following ways:

- *stroke axis of the roman lower case varies widely within a single alphabet*
- *slope of italic averages 15° to 20° and often varies considerably within a single alphabet*
- *contrast increased*
- *x-height increased*
- *aperture generally reduced*
- *further softening of terminals from abrupt to lachrymal*
- *roman head serifs become sharp wedges*
- *head serifs of italic ascenders become level and sharp*

#### 7.2.5 The Rococo Letter

The historical periods listed here – Renaissance, Baroque and so on – belong to all the arts, and they are naturally not limited, in typography, to roman and italic letters. Blackletter and script types passed through the same phases as well. But the Rococo period, with its love of florid ornament, belongs almost entirely to blackletters and scripts. Roman and italic type was certainly used (chiefly in France) by Rococo typographers, who surrounded their texts with typographical ornaments, engraved medallions, and so on. They produced a good deal of Rococo typography, but no Rococo roman and italic type.

#### 7.2.6 The Neoclassical Letter

Generally speaking, Neoclassical art is more static and restrained than either Renaissance or Baroque art, and far more interested in rigorous consistency. Neoclassical letterforms follow this pattern. In Neoclassical letters, the trace of the broad-nib pen can still be seen, but it is rotated away from the natural writing angle to a strictly vertical or *rationalist axis*. The letters are moderate in contrast and aperture, but their axis is dictated by an idea, not by the truth of human anatomy. They are products of the Rationalist era: frequently beautiful, calm forms, but forms oblivious to the more complex beauty of organic fact. If Baroque letterforms are ambidextrous, Neoclassical letters are, in their quiet way, *neitherhanded*.

The first Neoclassical typeface was designed in France in

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abefopabefop

Two revivals of Neoclassical letterforms. Above, ITC Baskerville, based on the designs of John Baskerville, Birmingham, about 1754. Below, Monotype Fournier, based on the designs of Pierre Simon Fournier, Paris, about 1740.

the 1690s, not by a typographer but by a government committee consisting of two priests, an accountant and an engineer. Other Neoclassical faces were designed and cut in France, England, Italy and Spain during the eighteenth century, and some of them have remained in continuous use, throughout all subsequent changes of style and fashion.

The American printer and statesman Benjamin Franklin deeply admired the Neoclassical type of his English contemporary John Baskerville, and it is partly due to Franklin's support that Baskerville's type became more important in the United States and France than it ever was in Baskerville's native land. But the connection between Baskerville and America rests on more than Benjamin Franklin's personal taste. Baskerville's letters correspond very closely to the federal style in American architecture. They are as purely and unperturbably Neoclassical as the Capitol Building, the White House, and many another federal and state edifice. (The Houses of Parliament in London and in Ottawa, which are Neogothic instead of Neoclassical, call for typography of a different kind.)

In brief, Neoclassical letterforms differ from Baroque letters as follows:

- uniformly vertical axis in both roman and italic
- slope of italic generally uniform, averaging  $14^\circ$  to  $16^\circ$
- serifs adnate, but thinner, flatter, more level than in the Baroque

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abefopabefop

Two revivals of Romantic letterforms. Berthold Bodoni (above) is based on faces cut by Giambattista Bodoni at Parma, about 1780, and Berthold Walbaum (below) is based on designs by Justus Erich Walbaum, Weimar, about 1805.

#### 7.2.7 *The Romantic Letter*

Neoclassicism and Romanticism are not sequential movements in European history. They marched through the eighteenth century, and much of the nineteenth, side by side: vigorously opposed in some respects and closely united in others. Both Neoclassical and Romantic letterforms adhere to a rationalist axis, and both look more drawn than written, but it is possible to make some precise distinctions between the two. The most obvious difference is one of contrast.

Romantic letterforms are, as a rule, distinct from Neoclassical forms in the following ways:

- artificial modulation of stroke
- vertical axis intensified through exaggerated contrast
- hardening of terminals from lachrymal to round
- serifs thinner and more abrupt
- aperture reduced

This remarkable shift in type design – like *all* structural shifts in type design – is the record of an underlying change in handwriting. Romantic letters are forms from which the broad-nib pen has vanished. In its place is the pointed and flexible quill. The broad-nib pen produces a smoothly modulated stroke whose thickness varies with direction, but the pointed

quill performs quite differently. The stroke of a flexible quill shifts suddenly from thin to thick to thin again, in response to changes in pressure. Used with restraint, it produces a Neoclassical flourish. Used with greater force, it produces a more dramatic and Romantic one. Dramatic contrast, which is essential to much Romantic music and painting, is essential to Romantic type design as well.

Romantic letters can be extraordinarily beautiful, but they lack the flowing and steady rhythm of Renaissance forms. It is that rhythm which invites the reader to enter the text and read. The statuesque forms of Romantic letters invite the reader to stand outside and *look* at the letters instead.

#### 7.2.8 The Realist Letter

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have entertained a bewildering variety of artistic movements and schools – Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Constructivism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Op Art, and many more. Virtually all of these movements have raised waves in the typographical world as well, though only a few are important enough to merit a place in this brief survey. One of these movements is typographical Realism.

The Realist painters of the second half of the nineteenth century turned their backs on the subjects and poses approved



Akzidenz Grotesk (above) is a Realist typeface issued by the Berthold Foundry, Berlin, in 1898. It is the immediate ancestor of Morris Benton's Franklin Gothic (1903) and of Helvetica. Haas Clarendon (below), designed in 1951 by Hermann Eidenbenz, is a revival of an earlier Realist face, the first Clarendon, designed by Robert Besley, London, 1845.

by the academy. They set out instead to paint ordinary people doing their ordinary tasks. Realist type designers worked in a similar spirit, producing blunt and simple letters, based on the script of people denied the opportunity to learn to read and write with ease. Realist letters usually have the same basic shape as Neoclassical and Romantic letters, but they have heavy, slab serifs or no serifs at all. The stroke is generally uniform in weight, and the aperture (often a gauge of grace or good fortune in typefaces) is tiny. Small caps, hanging figures and other signs of sophistication and elegance are always missing.

#### 7.2.9 Geometrical Modernism: The Distillation of Function

Early modernism took many intriguing typographic forms, but the most obvious is geometric. The sparest, most rigorous architecture of the early twentieth century has its counterpart in the equally geometric typefaces designed at the same time, often by the same people. These typefaces, like their Realist predecessors, make no distinction between main stroke and serif. Their serifs are equal in weight with the main strokes, or they are missing altogether. But the Geometrical Modernist faces seek purity more than populism. Some show the study of archaic inscriptions, and some include text figures and other subtleties, but their shapes owe more to pure mathematical forms – the circle and the line – than to scribal letters.



Two examples of Geometrical Modernist typefaces. Futura (above) was designed in Germany in 1924–26 by Paul Renner. Memphis (below) was designed in 1929 by Rudolf Wolf. The original design for Futura included text figures and many, highly geometric, alternative characters which have never yet been issued.

### 7.2.10 Lyrical Modernism: The Rediscovery of Humanist Form

The second major phase of modernism in type design is closely allied with abstract expressionist painting. Painters in the twentieth century rediscovered the physical and sensory pleasures of painting as an act, and the pleasures of making organic instead of mechanical forms. Designers of type during those years were equally busy rediscovering the pleasures of *writing* letterforms rather than drawing them. And in rediscovering calligraphy, they rediscovered the broad-nib pen, the humanist axis and humanist scale of Renaissance letters.

**abefopabefop**  
**abefopabefop**

Two neohumanist or Lyrical Modernist typefaces. Palatino (above) was designed by Hermann Zapf, Frankfurt, 1948. Pontifex (below) was designed by Friedrich Poppl, Wiesbaden, 1974.

### 7.2.11 The Postmodern Letter

Modernism in type design has its roots in the study of history, the facts of human anatomy, and in the pleasures of calligraphy. Like the Renaissance itself, modernism is not a rootless phase or fad that simply runs its course and expires. It remains very much alive in the arts generally and in type design in particular, though it no longer seems the last word. In the final decades of the twentieth century, critics of architecture, literature and music – along with others who study human affairs – have all perceived movements away from modernism. Lacking any proper name of their own, these movements have come to be called by the single term postmodernism. And postmodernism is as evident in the world of type design as it is in other fields.

Postmodern letterforms, like Postmodern buildings, ha-

bitually recycle and revise Neoclassical and Romantic forms. At their best, they do so with an engaging lightness of touch and a fine sense of humor. Postmodernist art is for the most part highly self-conscious, but devoutly unserious. Postmodernist designers – who frequently are or have been modernist designers as well – have proven that it is possible to infuse Neoclassical form, and the rationalist axis, with real calligraphic energy.

**abefopabefop**  
**abefopabefop**  
**abefopabefop**

Three Postmodern typefaces. Zapf International (above), designed by Hermann Zapf, Darmstadt, 1976. Esprit (center), designed by Jovica Veljović, Beograd, 1985. Nofret (bottom), designed by Gudrun Zapf-von Hesse, Darmstadt, 1990.

## 7.3 MECHANICAL TYPESETTING

### 7.3.1 The Linotype Machine

The Linotype machine, invented in the 1880s by Ottmar Mergenthaler and much modified over the years, is a kind of cross between a casting machine, a typewriter, a vending machine and a backhoe. It consists of a series of slides, belts, wheels, lifts, vices, plungers and screws, controlled from a large mechanical keyboard. Its complex mechanism composes a line of matrices, justifies the line by sliding tapered wedges into the spaces between the words, then casts the entire line as a single metal slug for letterpress printing.

Typeface design for the Linotype was restricted by three

basic factors. First, kerning is impossible without special compound matrices. (The basic italic *f* in a Linotype font therefore always has a stunted head and tail.) Second, the em is divided into only 18 units, which discourages subtlety of proportion. Third, the italic and roman matrices are usually in one piece. In most faces, each italic letter must therefore have the same width as its counterpart in roman.

A number of typefaces designed for the Linotype were artistically successful in spite of these constraints. Hermann Zapf's Aldus and Optima, Rudolf Růžička's Fairfield, Sem Hartz's Juliana, and W.A. Dwiggins's Electra, Caledonia and Falcon were all designed for the Linotype machine. Linotype Janson, adapted by Zapf in 1952 from the seventeenth-century originals of Miklós Kis, is another eminent success. Many Linotype faces have nevertheless been modified in the course of digitization, to make use of the greater kerning capabilities of digital machines and restore the independent proportioning of roman and italic.

### 7.3.2 The Monotype Machine

In the 1890s, in competition with Mergenthaler, Tolbert Lanston created a machine that could cast individual letters in metal and assemble them into lines. The device that evolved is separated into a terminal and an output device, and in this respect it resembles most computer-driven typesetting machines. But the terminal in this case consists of a large mechanical keyboard, including seven full alphabets as well as analphabetics. The keyboard unit punches holes into a paper tape, like a narrow player-piano roll, by driving pins with compressed air. The output device is the caster, which reads the paper tape by whistling more compressed air through the punched holes, then casts and assembles the letters.

The Monotype em, like the Linotype em, is divided into only 18 units, but italic and roman are independent in width, kerning is possible, and because the type remains in the form of separate letters, typeset lines can be further adjusted by hand. Characters larger than 24 pt are cast individually and left for hand assembly. In fact, the Monotype machine is a portable typefoundry as much as it is a composing machine – and it is increasingly used as such, even though its unit system imposes restrictions on letterform design, and it is incapable of casting

in hard metal. Computerized front ends have been fitted to many of the machines that are still in service.

### 7.3.3 Two-Dimensional Printing

From the middle of the fifteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, most roman letters were printed by a technique rooted in sculpture. In this process, each letter is carved at actual size on the end of a steel punch. The punch is then struck into a matrix of softer metal, the matrix is fitted into a mold, and three-dimensional metal type is cast from an alloy of lead, tin and antimony. The cast letters are locked in a frame and placed in a printing press, where they are inked. Their image is then imprinted *into* the paper, producing a tactile and visual image. The color and sheen of the ink join with the smooth texture of crushed paper, recessed into the whiter and rougher fibers surrounding the letters and lines. A book produced by this means is a folding inscription, a flexible sculpture in low relief. The black light of the text *shines out from within* a well-printed letterpress page.

Renaissance typographers reveled in the physical depth and texture they could achieve by this method of printing. Neoclassical and Romantic printers, like Baskerville, often took a different view. Baskerville printed his sheets by letterpress – since he had no other method – but then had them ironed like laundry to remove the sculptural tinge.

With the development of lithography, at the end of the eighteenth century, printing moved another step back toward the two-dimensional world of the medieval scribes. Since the middle of the twentieth century, most commercial printing has been by two-dimensional means. The normal method is photolithography, using the offset press, which converts a photographic image into ink and lays it flat on the surface of the page.

In the early days of commercial offset printing, type was still set with Linotype or Monotype machines. Proofs were pulled in a letterpress, then cut, pasted and photographed. Type designers, of course, saw their letterforms changed by this process. Most letters designed to be printed in three dimensions look weaker when printed in two. But other letters prospered: geometric letters, which evoked the world of the draftsman rather than the goldsmith, and flowing letters recalling the heritage of the scribe.

### 7.3.4 Phototype Machines

Light flashes through the image of a letter carried on glass or photographic film; the size of the letter is altered with a lens; its target location is fixed by a mirror, and it is exposed like any other photographic image onto photosensitive paper or film. Machines that operate on this principle are the natural children of the camera and the offset press. They were in use for setting titles and headlines as early as 1915, but it was not until the 1960s that they came to dominate the trade.

Just as the sophistication and subtlety of handset type seemed at first to be swept aside when composing machines appeared, so the sophistication slowly achieved with Linotype and Monotype machines seemed to be swept aside by this new technological wave. The photosetters were fast, but they knew nothing of subtle changes in proportion from size to size. Their fonts lacked ligatures, text figures and small caps. American-made fonts lacked even the simplest accented characters. The choice of faces was poor....

Phototypesetting machines had only begun to answer these complaints when digital equipment arrived to replace them. Some excellent faces were designed for phototype machines – from Adrian Frutiger's Apollo (1962) to Bram de Does's Trinité (1982) – but in retrospect, the era of phototype seems only a brief interregnum between hot metal and digital composition. The important innovation of the period was not, after all, the conversion of fonts from metal to film, but the introduction of microcomputers to edit, compose and correct the text and to drive the last generations of photosetting machines.

### 7.3.5 Historical Recutting & Twentieth-Century Design

New typefaces have been designed in vast numbers in the twentieth century, and many old ones have been resuscitated. From 1960 to 1980, most new types and revivals were designed for photosetting, and since 1980, almost all have been planned for digital composition. But most of the older faces now sold in digital form have already passed through another stylistic filter. They were recut in the early twentieth century, either as foundry type or as matrices for the Monotype or Linotype machines. Typography was radically reformed between 1920 and 1950, through the commercial reinvention of typographic his-

tory. It is worth looking back at this process to see something of what went on, because its legacy affects us still.

Two separate companies – one based in England, one in America – rose up around the Monotype machine and followed two quite separate development programs. The English company, advised during its heyday by a scholar named Stanley Morison, cut a series of facsimiles based on the work of Francesco Griffo, Giovanantonio Tagliente, Ludovico degli Arrighi and other early designers. It was Morison who conceived the idea of turning independent Renaissance faces into families by mating one designer's roman with another's formerly self-sufficient italic. The fruits of this enterprise included Poliphilus & Blado (one of Griffo's romans mated with one of Arrighi's italics), Bembo (another of Griffo's romans with one of Tagliente's italics), and the brilliantly successful shotgun marriage of Centaur roman (designed by Bruce Rogers) with the Arrighi italic (designed by Frederic Warde).

American Monotype made several historical recuttings of its own, and issued many new and historically based faces designed by its own typographical advisor, Frederic Goudy. The English company, meanwhile, supplemented its large historical program by commissioning new faces from living designers such as Eric Gill.

The larger surviving typefoundries – including ATF (American Type Founders) in the United States, Deberny & Peignot in France, Enschedé in the Netherlands, Stempel in Germany and Grafotechna in Czechoslovakia – continued ambitious programs of their own, lasting in some cases into the 1980s. Revivals of faces by Claude Garamond, Miklós Kis and other early designers came from these foundries during the twentieth century, along with important new faces by such designers as Hermann Zapf, Jan van Krimpen, Adrian Frutiger, Oldřich Menhart and Hans Eduard Meier. Zapf's Palatino, which is the most widely used (and most widely pirated) face of the twentieth century, was cut by hand in steel and cast as a foundry type in the ancient way, in 1949–50, while phototype machines and early computers were humming not far off.

The earlier history of type design is the history of forms made by individual artists and artisans who began their careers as apprentices and ended them as independent masters and small businessmen. The scale of the industry enlarged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and questions of fashion

increasingly superseded questions of artistry. By the end of the nineteenth century, commercial considerations had changed the methods as well as the taste of the trade. Punches and matrices were increasingly cut by machine from large pattern letters, and calligraphic models were all but unknown.

The twentieth-century rediscovery of the history and principles of typographic form was not associated with any particular technology. It occurred among scholars and artists who brought their discoveries to fruition wherever they found employment: in type foundries, typesetting-machine companies, art schools and their own small, independent studios.

Despite commercial pressures, the best of the old metal foundries, like the best of the new digital ones, were more than merely market-driven machine shops. They were cultural institutions, on a par with fine publishing houses and the ateliers of printmakers, potters, weavers and instrument makers. What made them so was the stature of the type designers, living and dead, whose work they produced – for type designers are, at their best, the Stradivarii of literature: not merely makers of salable products, but artists who make the instruments that other artists use.

### 7.3.6 *Digital Typography*

It is much too soon to summarize the history of digital typography, but the evolution of computerized bitmapping, hinting and scaling techniques has proceeded very quickly since the development of the microchip at the beginning of the 1970s. At the same time, the old technologies, freed from commercial duties, have by no means died. Foundry type, Monotype and letterpress remain important artistic instruments, alongside brush and chisel, pencil, graver and pen.

Typographic style is founded not on any one technology of typesetting or printing, but on the primitive yet subtle craft of writing. Letters derive their form from the motions of the human hand, restrained and amplified by a tool. That tool may be as complex as a digitizing tablet or a specially programmed keyboard, or as simple as a sharpened stick. Meaning resides, in either case, in the firmness and grace of the gesture itself, not in the tool with which it is made.

## SHAPING THE PAGE

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A book is a flexible mirror of the mind and the body. Its overall size and proportions, the color and texture of the paper, the sound it makes as the pages turn, and the smell of the paper, adhesive and ink, all blend with the size and form and placement of the type to reveal a little about the world in which it was made. If the book appears to be only a paper machine, produced at their own convenience by other machines, only machines will want to read it.

### 8.1 ORGANIC & MECHANICAL PROPORTION

A page, like a building or a room, can be of any size and proportion, but some are distinctly more pleasant than others, and some have quite specific connotations. A brochure that unfolds and refolds in the hand is intrinsically different from a formal letter that lies motionless and flat, or a handwritten note that folds into quarters and comes in an envelope of a different shape and size. All of these are different again from a book, in which the pages flow sequentially in pairs.

Much typography is based, for the sake of convenience, on standard industrial paper sizes, from  $35 \times 45$  inch press sheets to  $3\frac{1}{2} \times 2$  inch conventional business cards. Some formats, such as the booklets that accompany compact discs, are condemned to especially rigid restrictions of size. But many typographic projects begin with the opportunity and necessity of selecting the dimensions of the page.

There is rarely a free choice. A page size of  $12 \times 19$  inches, for example, is likely to be both inconvenient and expensive because it is just in excess of  $11 \times 17$ , which is a standard industrial unit. And a brochure that is  $5 \times 9$  inches, no matter how handsome, might be unacceptable because it is too wide to fit into a standard business envelope ( $4\frac{1}{8} \times 9\frac{1}{2}$ ). But when the realm of practicality has been established, and it is known that the page must fall within certain limits, how is one to choose? By taking whatever is easiest, or biggest, or whatever is the most convenient standard size? By trusting to blind instinct?

Instinct, in matters such as these, is largely memory in disguise. It works quite well when it is trained, and poorly other-