

Modern Trends in Typography*

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TO UNDERSTAND present day trends in typography, one must consider the beginnings of printing from movable type and the historic background of letter forms used in printing.

Books printed prior to 1500 were called incunabula, or cradle books. These early volumes were indeed the cradles of the books of today. The first type designers were required, by the very meagerness of their means, to make the best possible use of the tools and devices at their disposal. A single artisan often combined the several skills of designing, matrix cutting, type moulding, ink mixing, paper making, composition and presswork. The results achieved were of such quality that only comparatively recent printing has even approximated the beauty and legibility of the early books. The books of Gutenberg's era were well adapted to the reading habits of that time. The transition from hand writing to books printed from movable types was easy and natural. So closely did the type designers follow the models of the calligraphers that copies of the first psalter from Gutenberg's press were sold in Paris by Peter Schoeffer as hand-written books.

While printing presses had long been in use for reproducing images cut in wood and metal, it was the invention of movable type about 1456 that made possible the expansion of bookmaking to the amazing proportions that it has now reached. The symmetrical arrangement of the title page of early books reflected the neat, categorical order of the eco-

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conomic and political structures of the feudal era. For centuries little consideration was given to the dynamic possibilities of white space and its functional use.

Coeval with the industrial revolution that followed the gradual replacement of handicraft with machine production, there was wide experimentation with type design and the arrangement of type on the page. In the attempt to break from tradition, hundreds of new type designs found their way to the type-founders catalogs, with some weird and impractical results. Only a few of this multitude of designs have survived the test of time.

The growth of advertising has made great demands upon the ingenuity and versatility of craftsmen in the graphic arts. Photoengraving and other illustration techniques have kept pace with the improvement in machinery and reproduction processes. The growing use of offset photolithography and the combining of commercial art with typography in the making of zinc line cuts for letter presses, have greatly increased the scope and variety of typographic arrangements. By these methods, type may be photographed in any desired shape and at any angle.

The stiff and formal arrangement of type in symmetrical balance does not meet the requirements of competitive selling by visual means. Newer techniques of color and form are supplanting the formal, ordered methods of a slower-paced, more leisurely time. The white space of the page, heretofore considered as a mere frame for type and illustration groups, is now employed as an active element in composition. A new type of balance is sought, based upon asymmetrical, informal arrangements.

The sans serif types are admirably suited to modern ideas and methods. The wide range of weight, from light to ultra bold, with oblique variations, meets the demands of the time for printing based upon function rather than tradition.

Four principal basic type designs are now in general use. The serif, or cross stroke at the top and bottom of the letter, is the distinguishing mark of the three traditional type designs. The most widely used contemporary design is entirely devoid of serifs.

These four main classes of type are as follows:

1. **OLD STYLE**, derived from Roman letters cut in stone. The serif of the old style letters was originally formed by the chisel—a line straight across, rounded by the chisel stroke connecting the serif line with the body of the letter.
2. **MODERN**, with a thin straight line for serif—a development of lettering made with an engravers tool in copper and steel.
3. **SQUARE SERIF**, the characteristic of which is the straight thick line used in making the serif—a more recent adaptation of old style and modern letters.
4. **SANS SERIF**—formed with lines of approximately even thickness and having no serifs.

Several other type designs, not so widely used as the four enumerated, are shown in the accompanying illustration.

Some of the old style letters now in general use are Garamond, Cloister, Baskerville, Caslon, Weiss, Centaur and Kennerly. As old style is most generally used in newspapers and books, and the eye of the average reader is most familiar with it, it is considered the most legible of the traditional type faces. The slight irregularities in the forming of the individual letters and the variation in the height of the lower case lends to this type a certain grace that is pleasing to the eye, and aids in the formation of distinctive word patterns.

The so-called *modern* letters with their straight, thin serifs and rather formal regularity of shape, are probably less legible

than the *old style* forms. Bodoni, named for an early Italian printer, is the most popular of this class.

The square serif letters, because of the extreme regularity of the word patterns made by the broad, regular lines forming

OLD STYLE: Garamond *italic* SMALL CAPITAL

MODERN: Bodoni Bod. book **bold ultra**

SQUARE SERIF: Beton bold Stymie

SANS SERIF: Futura med. light **bold ultra**

BROAD PEN: Lydian 18 pt *italic bold cursive*

Text or Gothic: Medding Text Cloister Black

CLASSIC: FORUM, HADRIANO

HADRIANO STONE CUT

Script: Commercial Typo Brush Gillies Legend

CARTOON BOLD BALLOON LIGHT

All type illustrated is 18 point, excepting Hadriano Stone Cut 24 and Legend 20

the serifs, are less legible in the mass than any of the other styles. They are most effective when used for display and in combination with sans serif and modern faces. Among types of this class are Stymie, Beton, and Karnac.

Sans serif is probably more widely used in advertising than any other style of type, and its use is gradually extending to pamphlet and book printing. Because of its simplicity, the

even weight of its lines, and its nicely balanced proportions, sans serif forms pleasing and easily distinguished word patterns—a most important element in legibility and easy reading. A prevalent notion that sans serif is not as readable as old style is based upon its comparative newness and not upon any innate structural defect.

The most widely used of the sans serif letters is Futura or its imitations. Futura is the creation of Paul Renner, a contemporary German designer. American type founders and matrix makers now supply replicas of the original under the names of Twentieth Century, Spartan, Vogue, etc.

Introducing Futura to America, Paul Renner said:

... A renaissance of the medieval manuscript letter does not symbolically express the spirit of our time nor can modern handwriting serve as an inspiration for a contemporary type. Printing can attain its own individual beauty, with which handwriting can never compete, only when it ceases seeing its prototype in handwriting. The letter of our time must finally accept the consequences resulting from the invention of type cutting and casting. We must ultimately familiarize ourselves with the idea that printing from type has nothing whatever to do with handwriting. It is an impression from metal letters: symbols that form themselves into word images. The reading eye does not follow the continuity of a type design but grasps, bird's-eye-like, groups of word images mirrored on the paper. Printing type can afford therefore, without loss of legibility, to repudiate dynamic tendencies—reminiscences of the writing hand—and assume more abstract, static forms, adequate to its nature.

The most significant tendency in modern typography is a trend toward the functional employment of type, rather than its use based upon tradition. The asymmetrical arrangement of lines and groups of type in relation to the white space available to the typographer, offers an opportunity to achieve dynamic and interesting effects.

While the advertising profession has made the widest use of the new methods and concepts in the graphic arts, book printers have for the most part followed the old traditional ways.

There is noticeable in some recent books, however, an acceptance of some of the principles of visual communication already acknowledged in the advertising field.

The trend in modern typography is definitely toward simplicity and legibility, employing forms that comply with the natural inclination of the human eye to seek harmony and ease.

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