The Rules of Typography According to ~~crackpots~~ Experts
By Jeffery Keedy

The first thing one learns about typography and type design is that there are many rules and maxims. The second is that these rules are made to be broken. And the third is that "breaking the rules" has always been just another one of the rules. Although rules are meant to be broken, scrupulously followed, misunderstood, reassessed, retrofitted and subverted, the best rule of thumb is that rules should never be ignored. The typefaces discussed in this article are recent examples of rule-breaking/making in progress. I have taken some old rules to task and added some new ones of my own that I hope will be considered critically.

Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favorite vintage for this imaginary demonstration, so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in colour. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feelings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to reveal rather than to hide the beautiful thing which it was meant to contain. . . Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his wine was a "modernist" in the sense in which I am going to use the term That is, the first thing he asked of this particular object was not "How should it look?" but "What must it do?" and to that extent all good typography is modernist.
Beatrice Warde, from an address to the British Typographers' Guild it the St. Bride Institute, London, 1932. Published in Monotype Recorder, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Autumn 1970).
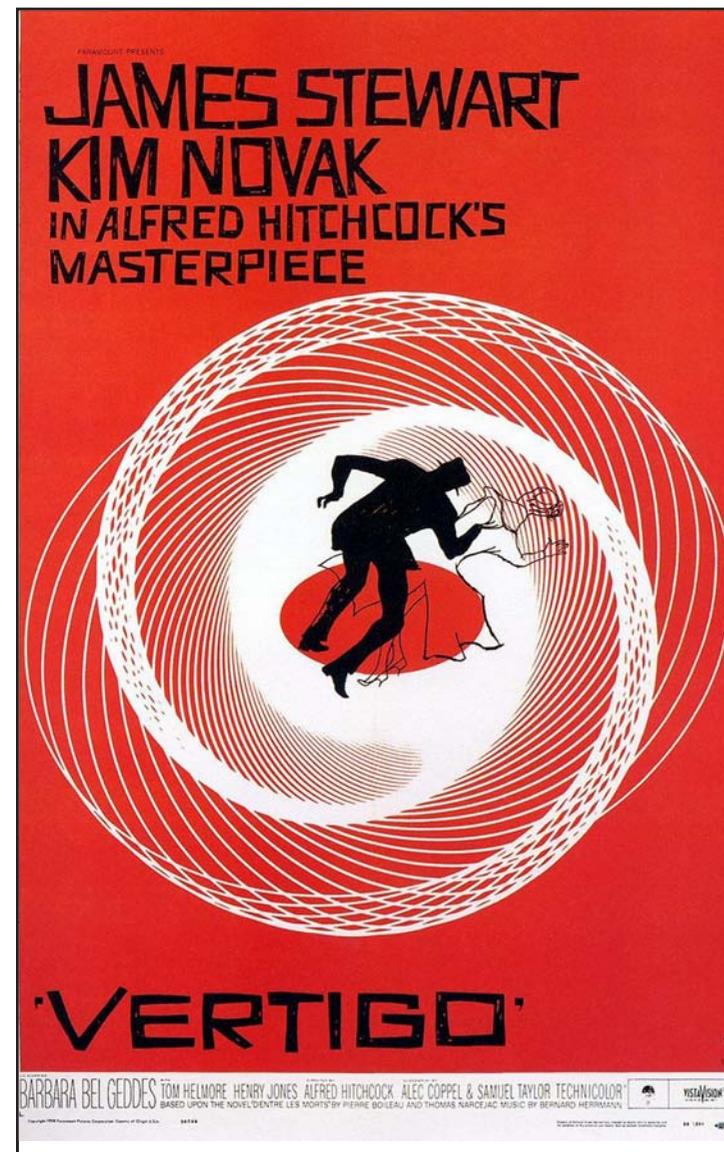
Beatrice Warde's address is favored by members of a vanishing tribe—typography connoisseurs who "reveal" beautiful things to the rest of us (modernists). Such connoisseurs are opposed to typographic sensationalists who have no feelings about the material they contain with their extravagance (postmodernist hacks). In

these rules are made to be Broken

short, the typographers with "taste" must rise above the crass fashion-mongers of the day. Connoisseurship will always have its place in a capitalist, class-conscious society and there is nothing like modernism for the creation of high and low consumer markets. The modernist typophile-connoisseur should rejoice in the typefaces shown here because they reaffirm his or her status as being above fleeting concerns. After all, if there was no innovation to evolve through refinement to tradition, then where would the connoisseur be?

Beatrice Warde did not imagine her crystal goblet would contain Pepsi-Cola, but some vessel has to do it. Of course, she was talking in terms of ideals, but what is the ideal typeface to say: "Uh-Huh, Uh-Huh, You got the right one baby"? There is no reason why all typefaces should be designed to last forever, and in any case, how would we know if they did?

The art of lettering has all but disappeared today, surviving at best through sign painters and logotype specialists. Lettering is being incorporated into type design and the distinction between the two is no longer clear. Today, special or custom letterforms designed in ear-

lier times by a letterer are developed into whole typefaces. Calligraphy will also be added to the mix as more calligraphic tools are incorporated into type-design software. Marshall McLuhan said that all new technologies incorporate the previous ones, and this certainly seems to be the case with type. The technological integration of calligraphy, lettering, and type has expanded the conceptual and aesthetic possibilities of letterforms.
The rigid categories applied to type design in the past do not make much sense in the digital era. Previous distinctions such as serif and sans serif are challenged by the new "semi serif" and "pseudo serif." The designation of type as text or display is also too simplistic. Whereas type used to exist only in books (text faces) or occasionally on a building or sign (display), today's typographer is most frequently working with in—between amounts

of type—more than a word or two but much less than one hundred pages. The categories of text and display should not be taken too literally in a multimedia and interactive environment where type is also read on television, computers, clothing, even tattoos.

Good taste and perfect typography are suprapersonal. Today, good taste is often erroneously rejected as old-fashioned because the ordinary man, seeking approval of his so-called personality, prefers to follow the dictates of his own peculiar style rather than submit to any objective criterion of taste.
Jan Tschichold, 1948, published in Ausgewahlte Aufsatze uber Fragen der Gestalt des Buches und der Typographie (1975).

"Criteria of taste" are anything but objective. Theories of typography are mostly a matter of proclaiming one's own "tastes" as universal truths. The typographic tradition is one of constant change due to technological, functional, and cultural advancement (I use the word "advancement" as I am unfashionably optimistic about the future).

In typographic circles it is common to refer to traditional values as though they were permanently fixed and definitely not open to interpretation. This is the source of the misguided fear of new developments in type design. The fear is that new technology, with its democratization of design, is the beginning of the end of traditional typographic standards. In fact, just the opposite is true, for though typographic standards are being challenged by more designers and applications than ever before, this challenge can only reaffirm what works and modify what is outdated.
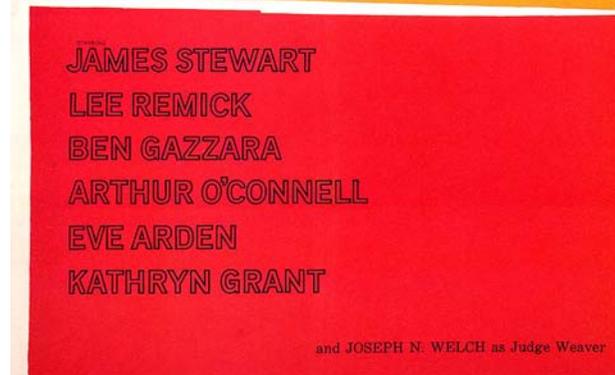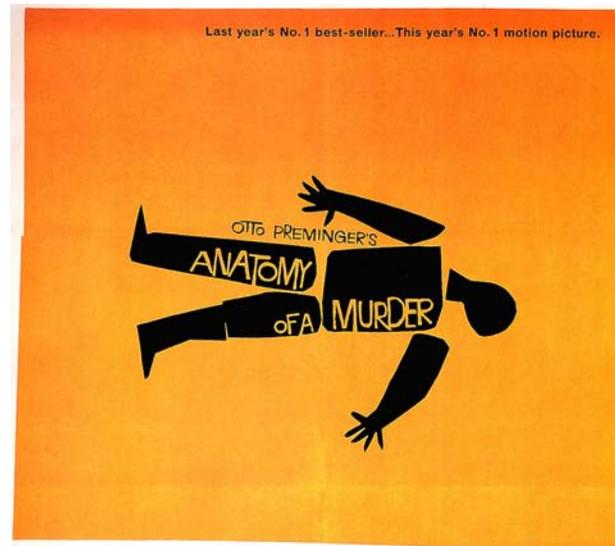
The desktop computer and related software have empowered designers and nonspecialists to design and use their own typcfaces. And with more type designers and consumers, there will obviously be more amateurish and ill-conceived letterforms. But there will also be an abundance of new ideas that will add to the richness of the tradition. Too much has been made of the proliferation of "bad" typefaces, as if a few poorly drawn letterforrns could bring Western civilization to its knees. Major creative breakthroughs often come from outside a discipline, because the "experts" all approach the discipline with a similar obedient point of view. The most important contribution of computer technology, like the printing press before it, lies in its democratization of information. This is why the digital era will be the most innovative in the history of type design.

The more uninteresting the letter, the more useful it is to the typographer.
Piet Zwart, A History of Lettering, Creative Experiment and Letter Identity (1986).

Back in Piet Zwart's day most typographers relied on "fancy type" to be expressive. I don't think Zwart was against expression in type design as much as he was for expression (an architectonic one) in composition. Zwart's statement epitomizes the typographic fundamentalists' credo. The irony is that the essentially radical and liberal manifestos of the early modernists are with us today as fundamentally conservative dogma.

I suspect that what is most appealing about this rhetoric is the way the typographer's ego supersedes that of the type designer. By using uninter-

esting "neutral" typefaces (created by anonymous or dead designers), typographers are assured that they alone will be credited for their creations, I have often heard designers say they would never use so-and-so's typefaces because that would make their work look like so-and-so's, though they are apparently unafraid of looking like Eric Gill or Giovanni Battista Bodoni. Wolfgang Weingart told me after a lecture at CalArts in which lie included my typeface Keedy Sans as an example of "what we do not do at Basel" that he likes the typeface, but believes it should be used only by me. Missing from this statement is an explanation of how Weingart can use a typeface such as Akzidenz Grotesk so innovatively and expertly.

New typefaces designed by living designers should not be perceived as incompatible with the typographer's ego. Rudy VanderLans's use of Keedy Sans for Emigre and B.W. Honeycutt's use of Hard Times and Skelter in Details magazine are better treatments of my typefaces than I could conceive. Much of the pleasure in designing a typeface is seeing what people do with it. If you are lucky, the uses of your typeface will transcend your expectations; if you are not so fortunate, your type will sink into oblivion. Typefaces have a life of their own and only time will determine their fate.

In the new computer age, the proliferation of typefaces and type manipulations represents a new level of visual pollution threatening our culture. Out of

thousands of typefaces, all we need are a few basic ones, and trash the rest.
Massimo Vigneili, from a poster announcing the exhibition "The Masters Series: Massirno Vignelli," (February/March 1991).

In an age of hundreds of television channels, thousands of magazines, books, and newspapers, and inconceivable amounts of information via telecommunications, could just a few basic typefaces keep the information net moving? Given the value placed on expressing one's individual point of view, there would have to be only a handful of people on the planet for this to work.

Everything should be permitted, as long as context is rigorously and critically scrutinized. Diversity and excellence are not mutually exclusive; if everything is allowed it does not necessarily follow that everything is of equal value. Variety is much more than just the "spice of life." At a time when cultural diversity and empowering other voices are critical issues in society, the last thing designers should be doing is retrenching into a mythical canon of "good taste."

There is no such thing as a bad typeface… just bad typography.
Jeffery Reedy

Typographers are always quick to criticize, but it is rare to hear them admit that it is a typeface that makes their typography look good. Good

typographers can make good use of almost anything. The typeface is a point of departure, not a destination. In using new typefaces the essential ingredient is imagination, because unlike with old faces, the possibilities have not been exhausted.

Typographers need to lighten up, to recognize that change is good (and inevitable), to jump into the multicultural, poststructural, postmodern, electronic flow. Rejection or ignorance of the rich and varied history and traditions of typography are inexcusable; however, adherence to traditional concepts without regard to contemporary context is intellectually lazy and a threat to typography today.
You cannot do new typography with old typefaces. This statement riles typographers, probably because they equate "new" with "good;" which I do not. My statement is simply a statement of fact, not a value judgement. The recent pro-

liferation of new typefaces should have anyone interested in advancing the tradition of typography in a state of ecstasy. It is always possible to do good typography with old typefaces. But why are so many typographers insistent on trying to do the impossible—new typography with old faces?

Inherent in the new typefaces are possibilities for the (imaginative) typographer that were unavailable ten years ago. So besides merely titillating typophiles with fresh new faces, it is my intention to encourage typographers and type designers to look optimistically forward. You may find some of the typefaces formally and functionally repugnant, but you must admit that type design is becoming very interesting again.
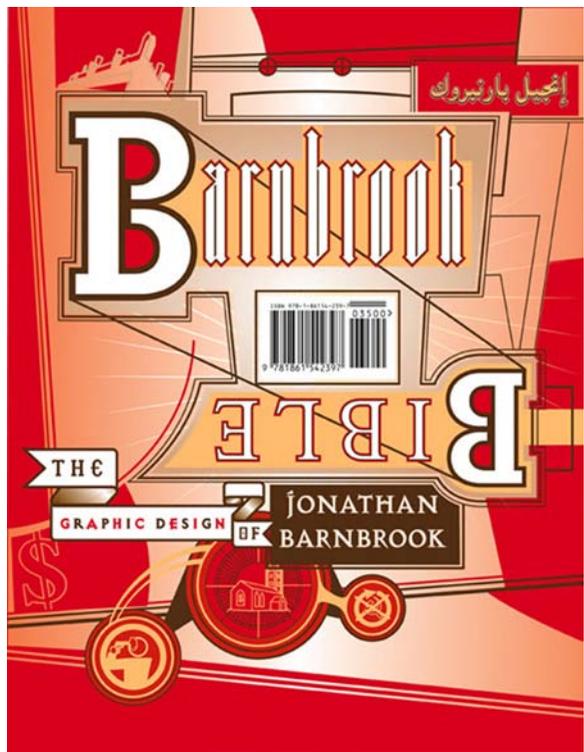
Originally published in Eye, No.11, November 1999.

Milton Glaser is the embodiment of American graphic design in the latter half of the century. Glaser's, Bob Dylan, with Kaleidoscope hair, poster for CBS records, was included in the singer's greatest hits album, in 1966.

The Crystal Goblet of Printing Should Be Invisible

By Beatrice Warde

Prior to the turn of the century, practitioners often argued over the virtues of personal style versus neutrality, which was the underlying topic of a lecture given by Beatrice Warde (1900-1969) to the Society of Typographic Designers in London (later published as an essay). Warde, who used the pen name Paul Beaujon, was a respected type historian and critic of the graphic arts industry. In 1927, on the strength Beaujon's writing in the Fleuron, she was appointed editor of the Monotype Recorder, published in England by the Lanstone Monotype Company. "The Crystal Goblet" is Warde's best-known (and most reprinted) essay on the clarity of type and design. In the introduction to her book of collected writing, The Crystal Goblet, she asserts that the essay contains ideas that must be "sajd over again in other terms to many...people who in the nature of their work have to deal with the putting of printed words on paper—and who, for one reason or another, are in danger of becoming as fascinated by the intricacies of its techniques as birds are supposed to be by the eye of a serpent. —SH

Imagine that you have before you a flagon of wine. You may choose your own favorite vintage for this imaginary demonstration so that it be a deep shimmering crimson in color. You have two goblets before you. One is of solid gold, wrought in the most exquisite patterns. The other is of crystal-clear glass, thin as a bubble, and as transparent. Pour and drink; and according to your choice of goblet, I shall know whether or not you are a connoisseur of wine. For if you have no feel-

ings about wine one way or the other, you will want the sensation of drinking the stuff out of a vessel that may have cost thousands of pounds; but if you are a member of that vanishing tribe, the amateurs of fine vintages, you will choose the crystal, because everything about it is calculated to reveal rather than to hide the beautifu1 thing which it was meant to contain.

Bear with me in this long-winded and fragrant metaphor; for you will find that almost all the virtues of the perfect wineglass have a parallel in typography. There is the long, thin stem that obviates fingerprints on the bowl. Why? Because no cloud must come between your eyes arid the fiery heart of the liquid. Are not the margins on book pages similarly meant to obviate the necessity of fingering the type page? Again: the glass is colorless or at the most only faintly tinged in the bowl, because the connoisseur judges wine partly by its color and is impatient of anything that alters

it. There are a thousand mannerisms in typography that are as impudent and arbitrary as putting port in tumblers of red or green glass! When a goblet has a base that looks too small For security, it does not matter how cleverly it is weighted; you feel nervous lest it should tip over. There are ways of setting lines of type which may work well enough, and yet keep the reader subconsciously worried by the fear of 'doubling' lines, reading three words as one, and so forth.

Now the man who first chose glass instead of clay or metal to hold his wine was a rnodernist' in the sense in which I am going to use that term. That is, the first thing he asked of this particular object was not 'How should it look?' but 'What must it do?" and to that extent all good typography is modernist.

Wine is so strange and potent a thing that it has been used in the central ritual of religion in one place and time, and attacked by a virago with a hatchet in another. There is only one thing in the world that is capable of stirring and altering men's minds to the same extent, and that is the coherent expression of thought. That is man's chief miracle, unique to man. There is "no explanation' whatever of the fact I can make arbitrary sounds that will lead a total stranger to

the most important thing about printing is that it CONVEYS THOUGHT, IDEAS, AND IMAGES, from one mind to other minds.

think my own thought. It is sheer magic that I should be able to hold a one-sided conversation by means of black marks on paper with an unknown person halfway across the world. Talking, broadcasting, writing, and printing are all quite literally forms of thought transference, and it is this ability and eagerness to transfer and receive the contents of the mind that is almost alone responsible for human civilization.

If you agree with this, you will agree with my one main idea, i.e., that the most important thing about printing is that it conveys thought, ideas, images, from one mind to other minds. This statement is what you might call the front door of the science of typography. Within lie hundreds of rooms; but unless you start by assuming that printing is meant to convey specific and coherent ideas, it is very easy to find yourself in the wrong house altogether. Before asking what this statement leads to, let

us see what it does not necessarily lead to. If hooks are printed in order to be read, we must distinguish readability from what the optician would call legibility A page set in 14-pt. Bold Sans is, according to the laboratory tests, more 'legible' than one set in 11 pt. Baskerville. A public speaker is more 'audible' in that sense when lie bellows. But a good speaking voice is one which is inaudible as a voice. It is the transparent goblet again! I need not warn you that if you begin listening to the inflections and speaking rhythms of a voice from a platform, you are falling asleep. When you listen to a song in a language you do not understand, part of your mind actually does fall asleep, leaving your quite separate aesthetic sensibilities to enjoy themselves unimpeded by your reasoning faculties. The fine arts do that; but that is not the purpose of printing. Type well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words,

ideas. We may say, therefore, that printing may he delightful for many reasons, but that it is important, first and foremost, as a in means of doing something. That is why it is mischievous to call any printed piece a work of art, especially fine art: because that would imply that its first purpose was to exist as an expression of beauty for its own sake and for the delectation of the senses. Calligraphy can almost be considered a fine art nowadays, because its primary economic and educational purpose has been taken away; but printing in English will not qualify as an art until the present English language no longer conveys ideas to future generations, and until printing itself hands its usefulness to some yet unimagined successor.

There is no end to the maze of practices in typography, and this idea of printing as a conveyor is, at least in the minds of all the great typographers with whom I have had the privilege of talking, the one clue that can guide you through the maze. Without this essential humility of mind, I have seen ardent designers go more hopelessly wrong, make more ludicrous mistakes out of an excessive enthusiasm, than I could have thought possible. And with this clue, this purposiveness in the back of your mind, it is possible to do the most unheard-of

things, and find that they justify you triumphantly. It is not a waste of time to go to the simple fundamentals and reason from them. In the flurry of your individual problems, I think you will not mind spending half an hour on one broad and simple set of ideas involving abstract principles.

I once was talking to a man who designed a very pleasing advertising type that undoubtedly all of you have used. I said something about what artists think about a certain problem, and he replied with a beautiful gesture: 'Ah, madam, we artists do not think—we feel!' That same day I quoted that remark to another designer of my acquaintance, and he, being less poetically inclined, murmured: 'I'm not feeling very well today, I think!' He was right, he did think; he was the thinking sort; and that is why he is not so good a painter, and to my mind ten times better as a typographer and type designer than the nun who instinctively avoided anything as coherent as a reason.

I always suspect the typographic enthusiast who takes a printed page from a book and frames it to hang on the wall, for I believe that in order to gratify a sensory delight he has mutilated something infinitely more

I ♥ NY MORE THAN EVER

If he had not seen those words
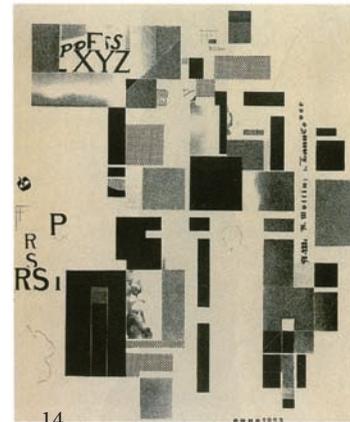*suddenly imbued with*
GLAMOUR & SIGNIFICANCE
—then the layout would have been a
FAILURE.

important. I remember that T. M. Cleland, the famous American typographer, once showed me a very beautiful layout for a Cadillac booklet involving decorations in color. He did not have the actual text to work with in drawing up his specimen pages, so he had set the lines in Latin. This was not only for the reason that you will all think of, if you have seen the old typefoundries' famous Quousque Tandem copy (i.e., that Latin has few descenders and thus gives a remarkably even line). No, he told me that originally he had set up the dullest 'wording' that he could find (I dare say it was from Hansard), and yet he discovered that the man to whom he submitted it would start reading and making comments on the text. I made sonic remark on the mentality of Boards of Directors, but Mr. Cleland said, 'No: you're wrong; if the reader had not been practically forced to read—if he had not seen those words suddenly imbued with glamour and significance—then the layout would have been a failure. Setting it in Italian or Latin is only an easy way of saying "This is not the text as it will appear."'

Let me start my specific conclusions with book typography, because that contains all the fundamentals, and

then go on to a few points about advertising. The book typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words. He may put up a stained—glass window of marvelous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is., he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to he looked at, not through. Or he may work in what I call transparent or invisible typography. I have a book at home, of which I have no visual recollection whatever as far as its typography goes; when I think of it, all I see is the Three Musketeers and their comrades swaggering up and down the streets of Paris. The third type of window is one in which the glass is broken into relatively small leaded panes; and this corresponds to what is called 'fine printing' today, in that you are at least conscious that there is a window there, and that someone has enjoyed building it. That is not objectionable, because of a very important fact which has to do with the psychology of the subconscious mind, This is that the mental eye focuses through type and not upon it. The type which, through any arbitrary warping of design or excess of 'color,' gets in the way of the mental picture to be conveyed, is a bad type. Our subconsciousness is always afraid of blunders (which illogical setting, tight spacing and too-wide unleaded lines can trick us into), of boredom, and of officiousness. The headline that keeps shouting at us, the line that looks like one long word, the capitals jammed together without hair-spaces—these mean subconscious squinting and loss of mental focus.

14

Printing demands a **HUMILITY OF MIND,**
for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now
$f$loundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments.

spend endless years of happy experiment in devising that crystalline goblet which is worthy to hold the vintage of the human mind.

Address to the Society of Typographic Designers, formerly the British Typographers Guild, London, 1932 Published in Beatrice Warde: The Crystal Goblet—Sixteen Essays on Typography (Cleveland and New York World Publishing Co, 1956).

15

And if what I have said is true of book printing, even of the most exquisite limited editions, it is fifty times more obvious in advertising, where the one and only justification for the purchase of space is that you are conveying a message—that you are implanting a desire, straight into the mind of the reader. It is tragically easy to throw away half the reader—interest of an advertisement by setting the simple and compelling argument in a face that is uncomfortably alien to the classic reasonableness of the book-face. Get attention as you will by your headline, and make any pretty type pictures you like if you are sure that the copy is useless as a means of selling goods; but if you are happy enough to have really good copy to work with, I beg you. to remember that thousands of people pay hard-earned money for the privilege of reading quietly set book-pages, and that only your wildest ingenuity can stop people from reading a really interesting text.

Printing demands a humility of mind, for the lack of which many of the fine arts are even now floundering in self-conscious and maudlin experiments. There is nothing simple or dull in achieving the transparent page. Vulgar ostentation is twice as easy as discipline. When you realize that ugly typography never effaces itself, you will be able to capture beauty as the wise men capture happiness by aiming at something else. The 'stunt typographer' learns the fickleness of rich men who hate to read. Not for them are long breaths held over serif and kern, they will not appreciate your splitting of hair-spaces. Nobody (save the other craftsmen) will appreciate half your skill. But you may

TYPE AND DECONSTRUCTION
IN THE DIGITAL\ERA

by Rick Poynor

Type is going to be, as abstract as sand on a beach in that sense type doesn't exist anymore.

Max Kisman

In the age of the desktop computer, font design software and page make-up pro grams, type has acquired a fluidity of physical outline, an ease of manipulation and, potentially, a lack of conceptual boundaries unimaginable only a few years ago. Everyone agrees that the new digital tools remove typography from the exclusive domain of the specialist— whether type designer, typefoundry or typesettng company—and place it (not always firmly) in the hands of the ordinary graphic designer. The results of this freedom, however, are the subject of intense and continuing debate. Traditionalists argue that the accessibility of the technology will accelerate the decline in typographic

standards that started when the first clumsy photocomposition sys-tems began to replace metal type. Evangelists talk about a soon to be realized digi-tal paradise in which everyone will compose letters in personally configured typefaces as idiosyncratic as their own handwrit-ing. ||This essay is an interim report on these changes, filed while they are still under way. It addresses new work— from America, Britain, Germany, France, and The Netherlands—which is redefining our ap-proach to typography. Some of these designs are entirely dependent on the new technology in production terms it would be simply too time-consuming, costly, or awkward to generate

1

no type face is inherently *illegible;*

them in any other way. Some of them antici-pate the aesthetic concerns of the new digital typography, or reflect the freedoms that typog-raphy makes possible, while still being produced at the drawing board, or by letterpress. Some will stand the test of time; others will prove to have been representative of their period, but of no greater significance. All of them demonstrate their designers' reluctance to accept that the conventions of' typography are inscribed invio lable on tablets of stone. || Among the articles of faith, legibility is perhaps the first and arguably the most sacred. If there is one characteristic that the many visual strategies of the new typography share, it is their combined assertion that no typeface is inherently illegible; rather, in the words of CalArts designer Zuzana Licko of Emigre Graphics, "it is the reader's familiarity with faces that account for their legibility." We might find it impossible to read black letter with ease today, but in prewar Germany it was the dominant letterform. Bask erville, rejected in 1757 as ugly and unreadable, is now regarded as one of the most serviceable typefaces for long text setting. || Type design in the digital era is quirky, personal and unre-servedly subjective. The authoritarian voices of Modernist typography, which seem to permit only a single authorized reading, are rejected as too corporate, inflexible and limiting, as though they may he a. forlorn hope—typographic diversity itself might somehow re-enfranchise its readers. "I think there are a lot of voices that have not been heard typographically," says type designer Jeffery Keedy, head of graphics at CalArts. "Whenever I start a new job and try to pick a typeface, what they

the typefaces give me an active. If there is one characteristic that I need. They just relate to my experiences in my life. They're about somebody I most. They're about somebody experiences, which don't orderly, linear, well-tempered messages unfolding to me. Another American type designer, CalArts graduate Barry Deck, speaks of trading in the myth of the transparency of typographical form for a more realistic attitude toward form, acknowledging that form carries meaning."3 The aim is to promote multiple rather than fixed read-ings; to provoke the reader into becoming an active participant in the construction of the message. Earlier Modernist typography sought to reduce complexity and to clarify content, but the new typographers relish ambiguity, preferring the provisional utterance, alternative route, and delayed punchline to the finely honed phrase. "If someone interprets my work in a way that is totally new to me, I say fine," says Keedy. "That way your work takes on a life of its own. You create a situation for people to do with it what they

Other typefaces are more polemical than practical in their acknowledgement of the contingency, impermanence and potential for chaos which is basic condition of the digital medium.

will, and you don't create an enclosed or encapsulated moment."4 For Keedy, Deck, Emigre Graphics, and colleagues such as Neville Brody and Jonathan Barnbrook in Britain, and Max Kisman in The Netherlands, designing typefaces for personal use is a way of ensuring that graphic design projects carry their own specific identity and tone of voice. The pre-digital typefaces that Brody drew for The Face emphasized the new perspectives on contemporary culture embodied in the magazine's editorial content. They also functioned as a medium through which Brody could develop a socio-cultural commentary of his own. Typeface Two, designed in 1984, was deliberately authoritarian in mood, in order, Brody said, to draw a parallel between the social climate of the 1930s and 1980s. The typeface's geometric rigidity was persistently undermined by the light-hearted manner in which it was applied. Other designers take an even more idiosyncratic approach. For Barry Deck, the starting point for a type design is not traditional notions of legibility or elegance, but a highly subjective and seemingly arbitrary narrative founded on what he perceives as the correlation between sexuality and letterforms. "With this in mind, I began imposing narratives of angst, deviation and perversion on the design of my type. Because the F is a particularly important letter in the language of sexuality,it came to be a major point of activation in all of the alphabets" || In this polymorphous digital

type-faces can cross-fertilize each other or merge to form strange new hybrids. Kisman's Fudoni (1991) as a Bold Remix combins Futura and Bodoni; Barnbrook's Proto-type is a collaged from ten other matched bodys-parts of type-deviations; Then among them Bembo, team, Perpetua, and Gill; and Deck's

3

Canicopulus Script is Gill Sans Serif with the satirical addition of puppy-dog tails. Other typefaces are more polemical than practical in their acknowledgement of the contingency, impermanence, and indeterminacy which are... of the digital medium. Just van Rossum's Beowolf is a family of unpredictable random fonts programmed for three levels of randomness, whose broken, antique outlines shift and reform every time a letter is produced so that no character is printed twice... Erik van Blokland and Just van Rossum's... message about the shortcomings of computerized perfection, speculate on the possibility of developing fonts that will cause characters to drop out at random, or to print upside down, and typefaces that threaten to become illegible in an agitated parody of hot-metal type. Jonathan Barnbrook takes things further... which is the randomizing principle to the text itself. As if to imply an extreme suspicion of content, his typeface Burroughs (named after the novelist with a penchant for textual "cut-ups") replaces whatever is typeset with a stream of gibberish generated at random by the font itself. Harnessing the... investigation of the new aesthetic possibilities of the computer comes a revaluation of the artless and the ugly, the hand-made and the ready-made. For designers who are dissatisfied with the glib solutions and formulaic perfection of professional graphics, naive vernacular approaches to type (and imagery) appear to offer a rich seam of authenticity allusion, expression, and meaning. Hard Werken, The Thunder Jockeys, John Weber and Barry Deck value letterforms- hand-drawn and mechanical - for their impurities and flaws. "I am really interested in type that isn't perfect," says Deck. "Type that reflects more truly the imperfect language of an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings." Deck's typeface Template Gothic, based on an old sign he found in a laundromat, is an attempt to capture the spirit of crude lettering templates by using truncated serifs, erratic tapered letterforms, and letters that look like they are the degraded product of photomechanical reproduction. Edward Fella, a former commercial artist, creates poster/flyers that break every known rule of typographic decorum and designer good taste. In Fella's agitated hands, type is spun, tilted, stretched, sliced, fractured, drawn as if with a broken nib, and set loose among fields of ink-blotter doodles and deranged networks of rules. He is perhaps the most extreme example of the typographer as artist, an innovator who assumes and achieves the same level of creative freedom as the painters and sculptors whose exhibitions he promotes in catalogues and posters. || Fella, significantly, is a graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, the source of many of the most interesting developments in new typography. Few Cranbrook exercises, however, are entirely typographic; the most typical concentrate on the relationship of image and text. Cranbrook has been at the forefront in exploring the dense, complex layering of elements that is one of the most salient (and frequently criticized) characteristics of the new typographic design. Unlike the earlier work of the New Wave designers, this is not simply a formal exercise in collage-making; the method arises directly from an engagement with content. The Cranbrook theorists' aim, derived from French philosophy and literary theory, is to deconstruct, or break apart and expose, the manipulative visual language and different levels of meaning embodied

m design in the same way that a literary critic might deconstruct and decode the a novel. When the basis of the term in design approach is applied the term to describe themselves to design. Write Visual strategies of deconstruction, driven by the layering capabilities of the computer, are later... the use of language and image, is an intentional performat in a deliberately playment the same force mountain peaks of the brook's ence the hidden complexities of language. "/ Work by Cranbrook, or chan Katherine McCoy and academy graduates... P Scott Makela is a direct challenge to its audience, which must learn to "read these allusive open-ended image, type constructions with the same close attention that it would bring to a demanding piece

of text. || Although the idea of deconstruction is gaining ground among designers in the U.S., and enjoys sonic currency in Europe where it originated, would feel sufficiently confident that the term deconstructionist deconstructionist as deconstructionists Yet the American critics Chuck Byrne and Martha Witte, each already widely dispersed. The "Californian surfing magazine Reach Culture rapidly became both cause célèbre and designers' bête noire for the deconstructive frenzy with which its art director, David Carson, discover and experience the hidden contents pages headlines and text. | London Why Not Associates bring similar typographic abandon to their catalogue dividers and covers for the clothing company Next. In each case The visual delirium is formally stunning, but its relevance to the content is not always clear. Both in their different ways are examples of what Andy Altmann of Why Not Associates calls "type as entertainment." The designs function decoratively as a means of engaging, demanding piece

Unlike the earlier work of the New Wave designers, this is not simply a formal exercise in collage-making; the method arises directly from an engagement with

con-
tent.

demanding piece of text. Yet the || A1 visual this point would feel sufficiently confident that the term could both become the idea of decon- struction of design constructive basis of the term in design tion by the gaining capa- ground bilities of the among the com- designers in puter, are the U.S., and already enjoys widely sonic dis- cur- persed. rency in The Cali- Europ fornian where surfing original magazine ed, few Reach typograph- Culture phers rapidly

content

content

conten

Associates bring similar typographic content is David Carson dismantled the typography of contents pages headlines and text. In London Next. In each

content

amusing, persuading and no doubt sometimes infuriating the reader, rather than as vehicles for extending meaning or exploring the text.8 || Such

are the new fonts suitable for any purpose other than exotic display?

Or is it time, perhaps, to re-EXAMINE the rigidly drawn distinction between typefaces for text and titling?

issues are unavoidable when it comes to the design of long pieces of prose. The questions of legibility and personal expression that preoccupy the new typographers become far more acute when the aim is to hold the reader's attention over the course of many pages. Are the new fonts suitable for any purpose other than exotic display? Or is it time, perhaps, to re-examine the rigidly drawn distinction between typefaces for text and titling? || Emigre Graphics, which is able to road-test its typefaces in its own magazine, Emigre, has demonstrated the surprising readability of even the most bizarre and apparently unpromising fonts, given a little familiarity with their quirks. Emigre's designer, Rudy VanderLans, mixes seemingly incompatible faces, varies point size and line depth, centers text over extra-wide measures changes column width within articles and runs two or mote text-strands in parallel—most of the time without undue loss of legibility. || But Emigre remains the exception. Most designers experimenting with radical approaches to page structure and typographic hierarchy work with a far more restricted and conventional selection of typefaces. The British typographer and letterpress exponent Phil Baines has turned to medieval manuscripts, media theorist Marshall McLuhan's The Gutenberg Galaxy, concrete poetry, and artists' books for alternative models of textual organization. Baines' autobiographical postcards and his highly accomplished undergraduate thesis

possibility. "Legibility presents information as facts rather titan as experience,"9 says Baines. There is nothing wrong with logic arid linearity, he argues, but these

qualities satisfy only the rational side of the brain. For Baines and his colleagues, it is equally important that typography should address our capacity for intuitive insight and simultaneous perception, and stimulate our senses as well as engaging our

intellect. || Baines' most experimental work is still to be found in his personal projects but in the last two years there have been a number of striking attempts to deconstruct and redefine the syntax of the conventional book. Tibor Kal-

man and Marlene McCarty's catalogue for Strange Attractors: Signs of Chaos (1989), an exhibition about chaos theory and the arts, subjects the essays to extremes of typographic distortion in an attempt to embody the exhibition's theme. In one essay, the word-spacing increases progressively until the text: disintegrates into particles; in another, bold and under-sized characters are sprinkled randomly throughout the text. Avital Ronell's The Telephone Book (1989), a discourse on the history, philosophy and Psychoanalytical implications of the telephone, subverts the traditional elegance of a university press publication by assembling a directory of typographic mishaps and metaphorical wrong numbers. Lines Of' type ripple with size changes, sections of text are masked out and tilted at angles, whole pages are obscured by over-setting or photographic erosion, fragments of setting float free of the grid, and arguments break off like a bad connection might resume. It is as though the entire book—a collaboration between "switchboard operator" Ronell, designer Richard Eckersley and composite Michael Jensen and is the spin of some fiendish message—scrambling gremlin playing havoc with the telephone system. || Ambitious publishing projects such as Emigre and The Telephone Book suggest that the tradition of experimental typography initiated by Futurism, Dada and the Bauhaus, and sustained by the work of Robert Massin, Wolfgang Weingart, Warren Lehrer and others, is being refreshed. None of these projects is part of the typographic mainstream, yct they are exerting an influence well beyond their milieu. Textual designs such as these make large demands on their readers, but they make equally large demands on their designers. If this kind of typography is not to become simply an exercise in style, or fashionable deconstruction, then designers must be able to function as visual editors who can bring acute perception to their readings of the

This revised version of an essay originally published in Typography Now: The Next Wave, edited by Ride Poynor and Edward Booth-Clibborn, London: Booth-Clibborn Editions, 1991.

In some cases, as in Emigre and Octavo magazine, the roles of editor and typographer are combined; in other instances, the writer must work together with the designer. Just as the film director refines and amplify a screenplay, so the new typographer can clarify and reinforce the relationship between typographic expression and text.10

Endnotes
1. "Do you read me?", Emigre, no. 15, 1990, p. 12.

2. Emigre, no. 15, pp.16—17.
3. Designer's statement, August 1991.
4. Emigre. no. 15, p. 17.
5. Designer's statement undated

5