

Letter Letter II

Winter
1984-1985

The committee on education has become known as the club of the A Typ 1 working seminars. The seminars are the most successful activity of A Typ 1. Teachers of typography and lettering appreciate the support of specialised know how that is offered at the meetings and the Association can see the goodwill of the seminars expressed in the growing list of its members.

The committee will continue the sequence of seminars. The sixth seminar which is organized by Martin Andersch will be held in Hamburg september 1985. The previous seminars have been organized by the chairman of the committee. The disadvantage was that the chairman had no time for the other objectives of the committee. In its meeting of 24 september 1984 in London university the committee decided that the organisation of the seminars will be no longer the task of the chairman. The chairman will care for the programme of the

committee as it was presented to A Typ 1 by André Güntler in 1971 at the Royal College of Art, London. In the same meeting of 24 september 1984 I was elected chairman of the committee.

First of all I would like to make clear that the committee is not the hobby of a few scholars and teachers among the members of A Typ 1 but that it is the expression of the conviction that the future of writing in the widest sense of the word (but not in the sense of literature) is the concern of all of us. The committee needs your interest and your criticism to make A Typ 1 to the international focus of research in letterforms. I will propagate this view by editing the Letter Letter which will be necessarily informal and intentionally provocative. Please, be provoked and contribute your views to the next letterletter; camera ready, A 4, in English (preferred), French or German.

The art of quibbling

'A study of writing' is the title of a famous book by Gelb who does not offer in it a study of writing but a history of orthography. Graphology is neither a study of writing but a branch of pseudoscientific soothing.

My study of writing has nothing to do with linguistics and my GRAPHOLOGY (in German: Schriftwissenschaft) expels chiromantic divination. Graphology is to be understood as the study of writing for its own sake. It includes typography which is to be understood as writing with prefabricated characters.

Graphology has a position in other fields of interest. Such studies may be satisfied by looking at a single aspect of writing, but this isolation should not excuse distorted views on writing.

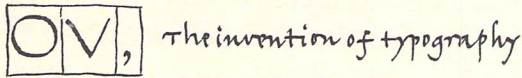
I give some examples of isolation in different disciplines.

- Paleography isolates ancient writing in books.
- Epigraphy isolates ancient writing on walls.
- Diplomacy isolates ancient writing in letters.
- Pedagogy isolates infant writing.
- Psychology isolates the perception of writing or motor functions in writing.
- Esthetics isolates the appreciation of writing.
- Printing history isolates typographic writing.
- Mathematics isolates the topology of writing.
- Cultural anthropology isolates conventions of writing.

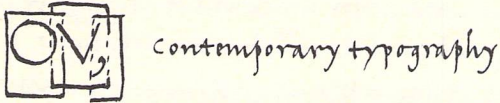
There are no objections against isolation as such but I insist on continuous reshaping of the isolated conceptions in confrontation with general graphology.

The following is mainly devoted to an attempt to generalize typographic phenomena: typography from a graphologic point of view.

2 A letter is two shapes of different brightness (e.g. black and white). The writer knows of the complicated relationship between both shapes. It required the simplified view of an outsider to invent typography. And it still requires the experience of a writer to appreciate the brainwave of this inventor: He reduced the background shapes to rectangles whatever the shape of the strokes might be. (The idea was fostered by the style of *textura* which had modelled already all letters into rectangular shapes).



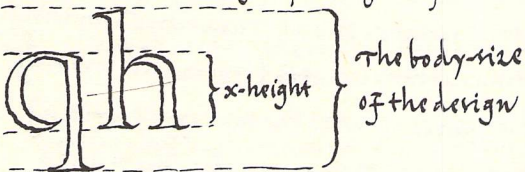
Letter-rectangles of equal body-size could be composed to lines. They could be spaced but the rigid rectangles of metal or wood could not overlap. Since the introduction of photocomposition they can, as the rectangles have become imaginary now.



It is not wise to make the words more crowded than the original fitting of a typeface suggests but it has also been foolish to set letters wider apart. What has changed? Nothing.

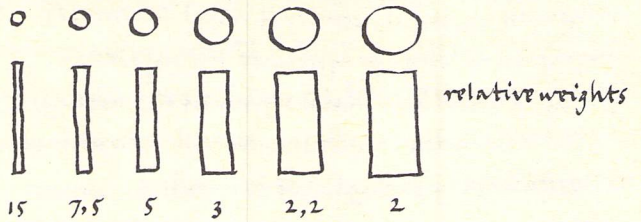
Typefounders and compositors might point at the solids that disappeared but to the designer the rectangle has always been imaginary. It is now only more consequentially so.

The first fundamental innovation since the invention of typography is David Kindersley's approach of the background shape by which it is liberated from its rectangular restrictions. To say it precisely: David Kindersley has invented the first system that simulates the calligrapher's perception.



Together with the rectangle its body size has become imaginary. The technology of casting implied a body size of the type that was bigger than the body size of the design. This was a consequence of the necessary bevel. There was no typographic reason; the typographer required leading anyhow. There is no bevel anymore. The confusion of an imaginary bevel is the last thing we need. I propose to intro-

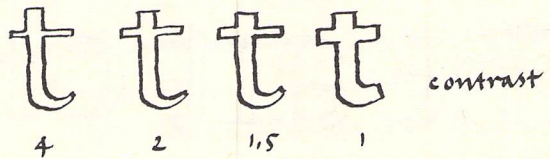
duce the measuring of type design to typography: The body of type is the body of the drawing. The ratio of the x-height to the body is another characteristic of the design which would also be extremely useful for typographers. The standard information may be completed with the relative height of capitals, small caps and numerals.



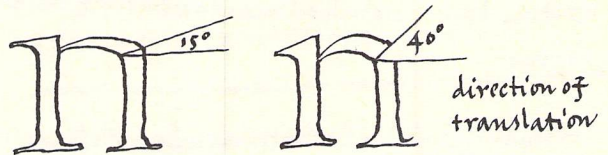
Despite confusion the practice of referring to body sizes with numbers is essentially sound. (The quarrel about the 150 directions is not. They are beyond the mark as 'sizes' are a question of proportions and not of any measuring unit. A nice subject for the future?)

Against this light, normal, semi bold, extra bold and ultra bold are arbitrary indications without meaning. I cannot know what I will get by specifying 'bold'.

I propose to refer to weight by the relative weight: The ratio of stem width to x-height.



The ratio of the horizontal stroke to stem-width (contrast) could help us to explode so called classifications of type. It would also affect our conception of type families.

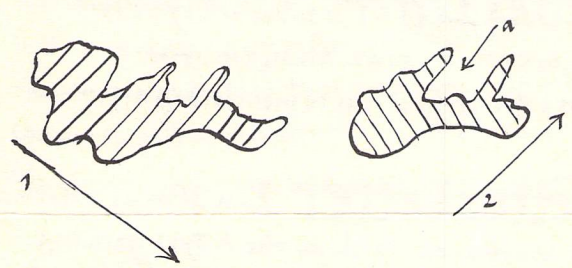


The classic stroke is essentially a vector. Its direction can be expressed in degrees. Contrast could be integrated in this description by a second vector which

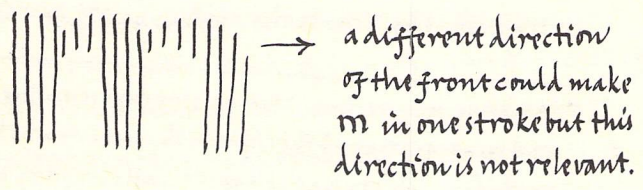
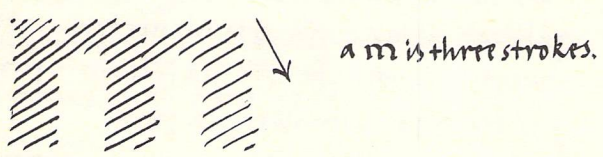
expresses in calligraphic terms the thickness of the nib. These additions make the system of description nearly complete. It is equally suited for typography as for paleography. There is no essential difference between typography and handwriting.

civilization is a game; it has to be played in freedom according strict rules. Writing is more than just an example of civilization. Western civilization is probably the convention of western writing; what could it be else? Anyhow, writing is a game with paradoxal conditions. I do not know how far I can go in persuading students to freedom without transforming freedom into imitation or even compulsion. But I know that the freedom of the game requires a clear demarcation of the field. This was the main objective of my book 'The stroke of the pen'. It should help my students to neutralize my tricks. Now we are often asked to tell our tricks to the computer. This requires a new class of demarcations.

It begins with a new conception of the stroke.



A stroke is a shape that is produced by a continuous front of points. Of these similar shapes the first is a stroke. The second shape is not a stroke because the front is split by the counterpoint. It is the direction of the front which defines a shape as a stroke.

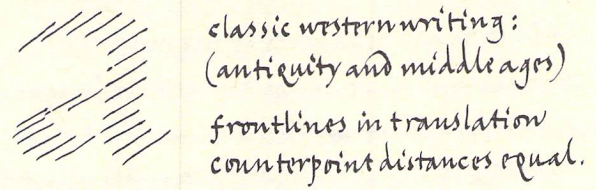


A shape is a stroke by convention. Convention lays down the relevant direction of the front. I am initiated in the convention of a civilization by learning its technique of hand writing. The chinese lexicographic system is a perfect example

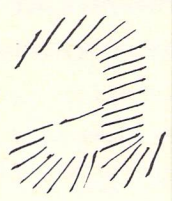
of this condition. The dictionary is arranged according to the number of strokes and this is not the number of 'elements'.

The front cuts the outline of the stroke in any position in two points. The front may be straight or curved (e.g. the stroke of a brush or a finger) but I consider the position of the front as a line through this counterpoint, the frontline.

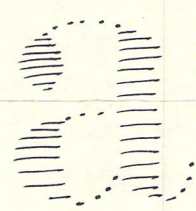
Sequent frontlines are parallel (in translation) or not (in rotation) and their lengths are equal or not. This is sufficient to write history:



classic western writing: (antiquity and middle ages) frontlines in translation counterpoint distances equal.



mannerist western writing: frontlines also in rotation counterpoint distances equal.



classicist western writing: frontlines in translation counterpoint distances different.

classicism is the great break in the western civilization. its propaganda may have claimed a return to the roots of civilization, but it did so by cutting off the 3000 years old trunk. its interest in eastern civilization is understandable. The classicistic stroke approaches the eastern stroke of the vertical brush. The difference is that the eastern frontlines show rotations.

This is a history of the main trends. it is a simplification because it neglects such facts as the expanding strokes in medieval diplomatic writing. The story could be told differently: a medieval subculture became dominant in classicism; but this would be a much more serious simplification.

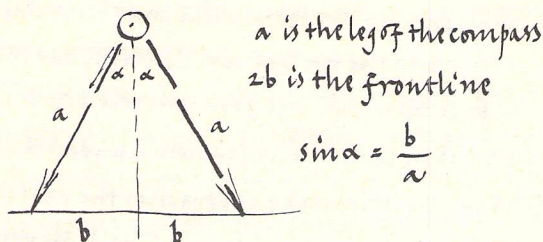
This simple scheme is a reliable framework for investigations; it is not a substitute for them.

4 The literature on mannerist calligraphy demonstrates what can happen when authors cannot write and do not understand mannerism:

A common shape of d  in mannerist mss.

The complicated rotation is clearly described by Jan van den Velde in his 'Fondementboek', the third part of 'De spiegel der schrijfkonste', 1605. If we are not aware of the mannerist approach and if we do not know its technique and its literature we could think that the stroke has been made with a flexible pointed pen (the tool of classicism). This thought is characteristic for the level of our professional literature.

I could imagine different ways to comprehend the different combinations of frontlines. Suppose, for instance, that the outlines of a stroke are drawn with the points of a compass. The centre of the compass is projected on the stroke as its heart line. In any position the points of the compass are in counterpoint.



In classic writing 2b is the width of the nib.

In classicistic writing 2α is the expansion of the nib. The contrast of the writing can be attributed to a.

Together with the rotations of the frontline between critical counterpoints and an equation for changes of α these data could be used to guide a computer along any given heart line. This programme could be used as a very expensive and time consuming imitation of a stencil for the repetition of serifs, stems and curves in typesetting. It could also assist in preparing simple variations of a standard typeface. If this is worth while depends on the weather

amount of work of this kind. To me the greatest profit of this analysis seems to be that it contributes to understanding of writing. It is an attempt to describe any stroke that can be made by any tool in the human hand. It pretends validity for contemporary type-design as well as for the most difficult paleographic problems, but also for any writing in the remotest future. This is a gratuitous claim. I could offer compensation for it: Western classifications of type-faces collect Greek, Chinese, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic etc. in a group which is called exotic. Instead of communicating my colleagues of other civilisations I invite them to criticize my suggestions from their point of view and their cultural tradition. This is a hard test, but a theory of writing which does not stand to it, has to be rejected as a mistake.

LetterLetter is published by A Typ1

P.O. Box 611, CH 4142 Münchenstein.

The LetterLetter is sent to members of A Typ1.

LetterLetter 2 will bring information

by Martin Andersch on the A Typ1 working seminar in Hamburg, 23-28 September 1985.

There may be also comments on LetterLetter 1 and contributions on other aspects of education and research in Letterforms.

LetterLetter has no schedule for publication, but it will certainly not be a weekly magazine. I would be satisfied if learning could proceed by 3 or 4 small steps a year.

Send contributions to the editor. Gerrit Noordzij

A note on mannerism. Mannerism expressed the mood of disintegration of the sixteenth century when the medieval society had collapsed. Calligraphy (abstract art) and copperplate engraving were the typical arts of this period, both of German origin. Garamond is the greatest name in typesetting. The best modern interpretation of his approach is Times New Roman. German calligraphers developed a new script after a Flemish model: Fraktur. Mannerism deserves the attention of students of the history of writing and typesetting.