

Module One Short Paper: History of Typography

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History of Typography

Typography, the use, and design of letterforms. Typography is the appearance of text used to help represent and communicate effectively through design and the written word. It has developed and changed over centuries from methods used to trends applicable to the time period. From Medieval Latin, *typus*, and *graphia*, typography is the ‘art of composing types and printing from them (Online Etymology Dictionary).

While humanity has arguably developed communication through design as early as 10,000bc petroglyphs and pictographs it is arguable that typography became more decorated and ornate during 400ce-1450ce, The Medieval Age. Sources like *The Book of Hours* show more significant typographical effort using gold leaves and rich jewel-tone colors. Over time, however, this was not economical, and popularity rose with the use of blackletter scripts. This narrow shape is iconically unique, so much so that even today it is easily recognizable to relate to this time period known today as Gothic. Letters themselves were not the only development over this time period. In Ireland, the Celts began to use half-uncials simply for the readability that came from the use of space between words. (Deer 2016)

After this time period came The Renaissance, 1400ce-1650ce. Unique to this time period was the creation of the Gutenberg-style printing press. The first book printed in Europe with the use of this device was Gutenberg’s 42-line Bible and this method would be used over the next 400 years (Deer 2016). Additionally, unique to this time period was the creation of italics, first known as Aldinian (Graphic Design History). In order for manuscripts to become easier to transport, Aldus Manutius utilized italics for the intended purpose of fitting print onto fewer pages, thereby making books lighter and easier to carry (Deer 2016).

1650ce-1765ce, The Age of Enlightenment, the introduction of Transitional typefaces. The use of transitional typeface leads to fonts we know and recognize today such as Baskerville and Fournier (OpenLab). The use of this in examples such as the *Roman du Roi* by Phillipe Grandjean shows how precise and symmetrical this style executes. This typeface brought about the vertical stresses in hand-lettering and “refinement of hairline strokes.” (Deer 2016)

One could assume sans serif would have come before serif font. Arguably, this is true from observing petroglyphs in ancient times. However, The Modern Age was the introduction of true sans serif font. The first example comes from John Soane in 1779. The monoline capitals on the letter he wrote to the Royal Academy in London is the suspected first use of this style as official print. The first sans serif font in book form comes from William Caslon IV in 1816. (Graphic Design History) This may be an odd fact when paired with movements such as Expressionism, Futurism, and Dadaism. In the early 1900s, there appears to be a rebellion against ‘scholarly’ fonts and prints for the purpose of expression. We begin to see more abstract letter placement in aspects such as scale, strokes, and kerning. Humanitarians such as Filippo Marinetti believed all artforms previous to 1909 had become outdated and irrelevant (Deer 2016). *Dada* translates through French interpretation as, nonsense. The concept was to convey the ‘nonsense’ that was the First World War (Editors 2022). Thus, we see typography start the frontier for new unique artforms that lead the way into iconic art movements such as DeStijl, Bauhaus, Constructivism, and the soon-to-come and well-known, Art-Deco (Deer 2016).

Art Deco is the typographic introduction to the Information Revolution (1925ce-1970ce), beginning in Paris. The style was not only popular but brought back the opulence that had been missing since The Age of Enlightenment. It was a balance between lavish, and artistically unique. Posters became especially popular via iconic artists such as Jean Carlu, Jean Chassaing, and

Charles Loupot, or the “Three C’s.” Loupot was a prolific lithographer and poster artist who for a period was commissioned to create work such as “Cointreau Woman.” (Postle)

The Information Revolution continued all the way into art forms such as graffiti which we still see used in the modern-day by artists such as the infamous Banksy, but another important style to come out of this revolution was figurative typography. As seen in designs, for example, *Beards* by Herb Lubalin, figurative typography is where we begin to see integrating text with imagery. This opened a world of possibilities for type form since this inspired words to be morphed into silhouettes and shapes. Figurative typography was the front runner in creating a type form that communicated representation and emotion. (Deer 2016)

Rave, grunge, punk. Words we know and recognize because we lived through the development of these styles. The Digital Revolution comes with the use of a device we know all too well today. The commercial computer, while created in 1951, brought about the ability to digitally create new age typography once personal computers hit the market in 1977. An early example of digital design comes from *U&Ic* by Herb Lubalin. Thanks to creators such as Lubalin we can also credit the digital age with the protection of designer plagiarism. Introduction to the security or digital artistry, and artistry in general, started with the International Typeface Corporation or ITC. (Deer 2016)

The largest contributor to the digital age other than the computer itself was the creation of Adobe, which first released a universal font format (PostScript) in 1984. Growth was astronomical. From 1970 to the present day, we began to be surrounded by typographical artistry everywhere. From the design on a Starbucks to-go cup to the theater program handouts in local venues, the digital age has introduced the purpose and appropriate use of font styles. The

juxtaposition of web design and print format exemplifies the ubiquitous world of typography we now exist in today.

Resources

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