

# Stop Stealing Sheep & find out how type works

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& E.M. Ginger



**Second Edition**



TALLULAH BANKHEAD

There is less in this than  
meets the eye.

Tallulah Bankhead (1903–1968)  
was a celebrated international  
actress and scandalous public  
figure. Ms. Bankhead did all the  
wrong things with consummate  
flair and in the best of taste.

CHAPTER 2

**What is type?**



Ever since people have been writing things down, they have had to consider their audience before actually putting pen to paper: letters would have to look different depending on whether they were to be read by many other people (in official documents or inscriptions), just one other person (in a letter), or only the writer (in a notebook or a diary).

There would be less room for

The official Roman alphabet, as displayed in this detail of the Trajan Column in Rome, never went out of fashion.

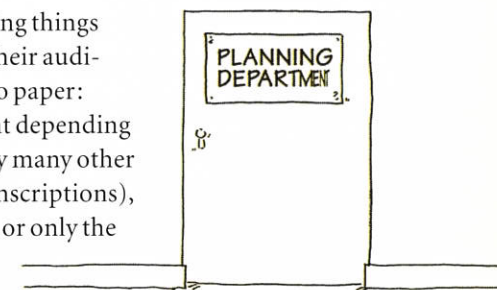
Below: Many digital typefaces evoke the timeless beauty of ancient inscriptions and early printing types. Trajan, designed by Carol Twombly in 1990, is a good example.

guesswork if letter shapes were made more formal as the diversity of the readership expanded.

Some of the first messages to be read by a large number of people were rendered not by pens but by chisels.

Large inscriptions on monuments in ancient Rome were carefully planned, with letters drawn on the stone with a brush before they were chiseled. Even if white-out had existed in those days, it would not have helped to remove

mistakes made in stone. A bit of planning was also more important then, since stonemasons were sometimes more expendable than slabs of marble or granite.



Graphic design and typography are complicated activities, but even simple projects benefit from thinking about the problem, forming a mental picture of the solution, and then carefully planning the steps between.

SENATVS · POPVLVSQVE · ROMANVS  
 IMP · CAESARI · DIVI · NERVAE · F · NERVAE  
 TRAIANO · PRETTY · LEGIBLE · DACICON  
 MAXIMO · TRIB · POT · XVIII · IMP · VI · COS · VI · P · P  
 ADDECLARANDVM · VERY · SPACED · OUT



arboſcelli, & di floride Geniſte, & di multiplice herbe uerdiſſime, qui uidi il Cythiſo, La Carice, la comune Cerinthe. La muſcariata Panachia ria el fiorito ramunculo, & ceruicello, ouero Elaphio, & la ſeratuſa, & di uarie affai nobile, & de molti altri proficui ſimplici, & ignote herbe & fiori per gli prati diſpenſate. Tutta queſta læta regione de uiridura copioſamente adornata ſe offeriua. Poſcia poco piu ultra del mediano ſuo io trouai uno ſabuleto, ouero glareoſa plagia, ma in alcuno loco diſperſamente cum alcuni ceſpugli de herbatura. Qui ui al gli ochii mei uno iocundiffimo Palmeto ſe appreſento cum le foglie di cultrato mucrone ad tãta utilitate ad gli ægyptii. del ſuo dulciſſimo fructo ſœcunde & abundante. Tra lequale racemoſe palme, & piccole alcune, & molte mediocre, & altre drite erano & excelſe, Electo Signo de uictoria per el reſiſtere ſuo ad lorgente pondo. Ancora & in queſto loco non trouai incola, ne altro animale alcuno. Ma peregrinando ſolitario tra le non denſate, ma interuallate palme ſpectatiſſime, cogitando delle Rachelaide, Phafelide, & Libyade, non eſſere forſa a queſte comparabile. Echo che uno affirmato & carniuoro lupo alla parte dextera cum la butca piena mi apparue.

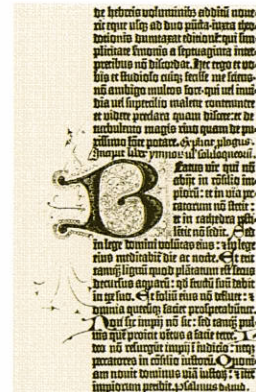


Page from Aldus Manutius' *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*, 1499.

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Some typefaces have stood the test of time and appear as contemporary today as they did 500 years ago. Their modern digitized versions have a slight edge when it comes to clean outlines.



Left: Gutenberg's Bible from 1455.

Other typefaces also were perfectly legible 500 years ago, but can hardly be read by anybody today. It has to do with cultural perceptions, not the physical properties of the typefaces.

Far left: Type designed by Francesco Griffo for Aldus Manutius' press. Bembo from the Monotype Corporation, 1929, is a modern equivalent.

In turn, these "official" styles of writing influenced how handwriting was looked at and how it was taught in schools or other learning centers, such as monasteries.

Today, when we are supposed to write legibly, we're instructed to "print." While we might have a hard time reading something written 200 years ago in what was then considered a very "good" hand, we have no problem reading writing from Roman times. Likewise, the typefaces designed 500 years ago, shortly after printing with movable type was invented, still look perfectly familiar (if a little quaint) to us. We might not be using the exact same letters reproduced in the identical manner, but the basic shapes and proportions are still valid today.

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For centuries, *fraktur* (literally, "broken writing") was the standard typographic style in Northern Europe. Roman typefaces were called Roman because they came from Italy and were used to set Romance languages like Italian, French, and, of course, Latin.

When communications became more international, typefaces that were more universal were in demand. Today *fraktur*, gothic, and similar styles are only used to evoke the feeling of a bygone era, for example, on the banner of newspapers such as *The New York Times*.

They also come in handy when someone has to design a job that has Germanic undertones. The Nazis did indeed sponsor and even order (as was their way) the use of what they called "Germanic" typefaces, making it impossible for generations after World War II to use these types without unpleasant connotations.



ſi ſp ſt ſſ ſh ſet vff

Primieramente' imparerai di fare' que-  
sti dui tratti, cioe - -  
dali quali se' principiano tutte'

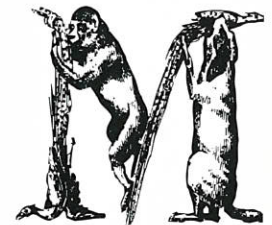
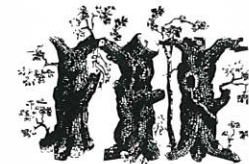
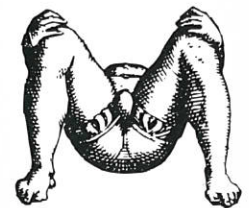
Principē de eodem officio. Cormicularium.  
Comentariensem Numerarios. Adiutorem  
Abactis. A libellis. Exceptores & ceteros  
officiales

osservare' la sottoscritta norma  
&  
Primieramente' imparerai di fare'  
questi dui tratti, cioe -  
dali quali se' principiano tutte'  
le littere' Cancellaresche,  
Deli quali dui tratti l'uno é piano et  
grosso, l'altro é acuto et sotti  
le come' qui tu puoi vedere'  
notato

While the basic shapes of our letters haven't changed much in hundreds of years, there have been thousands of variations on the theme. People have designed alphabets from human figures, architectural elements, flowers, trees, tools, and all sorts of everyday items, to be used as initials or typographic ornaments (see right).

Typefaces for reading, however, are generally derived from handwriting. Gutenberg's types followed the forms of the letters written by professional scribes in fifteenth-century Germany. The printers in Venice, a few decades later, also based their first types on local handwriting. Over the centuries, cultural differences have been manifested in the way people write. Professional scribes in European courts developed elaborate formal scripts. As literacy spread, people began to care more about expressing their thoughts quickly, and less about style and legibility.

Quills, fountain pens, pencils, and felt-tip pens have all done their part to change the look of handwriting. The common denominator, the Roman alphabet, has survived all these developments remarkably intact.



Top inset:  
Italian manuscript, ca. 1530, shows how people wrote then. Bottom inset:  
From a book of writing instructions by Ludovico degli Arrighi, printed from engraved woodblocks, ca. 1521. The type on the page is Adobe Jenson Italic, designed by Robert Slimbach in 1996.



H Gill Floriated Capitals, Eric Gill  
A Mythos, Min Wang and Jim Wasco

N Tagliente Initials, Judith Sutcliffe  
D Rad, John Ritter

A Bickham Script, Richard Lipton



G Rosewood, Kim Buker Chansler  
L Giddyup, Laurie Szujewska

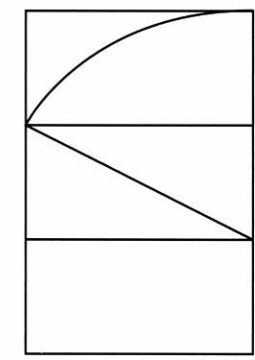
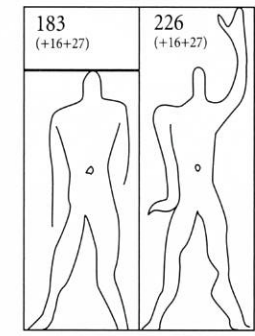
O Kigali Block, Arthur Baker  
V ZebraWood, Kim Buker Chansler

E Studz, Michael Harvey  
S Critter, Craig Frazier

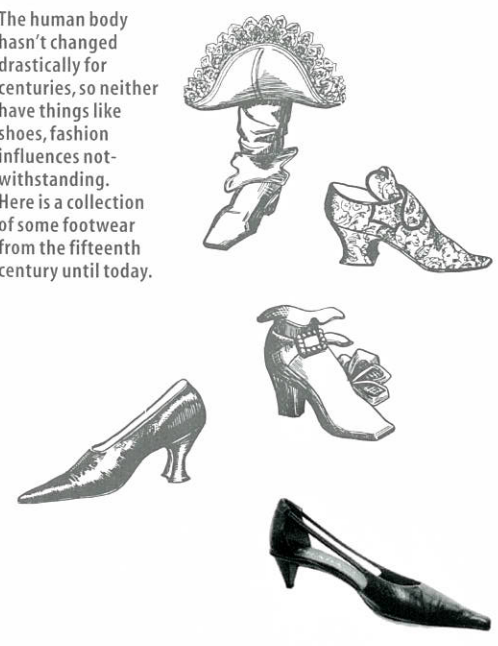


By the same token, what was thought to be a fashionable house hundreds of years ago is still a very desirable house today. Fashion has changed considerably since the 1400s, but people still wear shirts, trousers, socks, and shoes. The process of manufacturing them has changed, but materials such as wool, silk, and leather are still very popular, and are often more desirable than their modern alternatives.

After all, the form of the human body hasn't changed in the last 500 years, nor has the basic way we look at the world around us. Our view of things is still largely shaped by nature—plants, animals, weather, scenery. Most of what we perceive as harmonious and pleasing to the eye follows rules of proportion that are derived from nature. Our classic typefaces also conform to those rules; if they don't, we regard them as strange: at the least fashionable, and at the worst illegible.



The human body hasn't changed drastically for centuries, so neither have things like shoes, fashion influences notwithstanding. Here is a collection of some footwear from the fifteenth century until today.

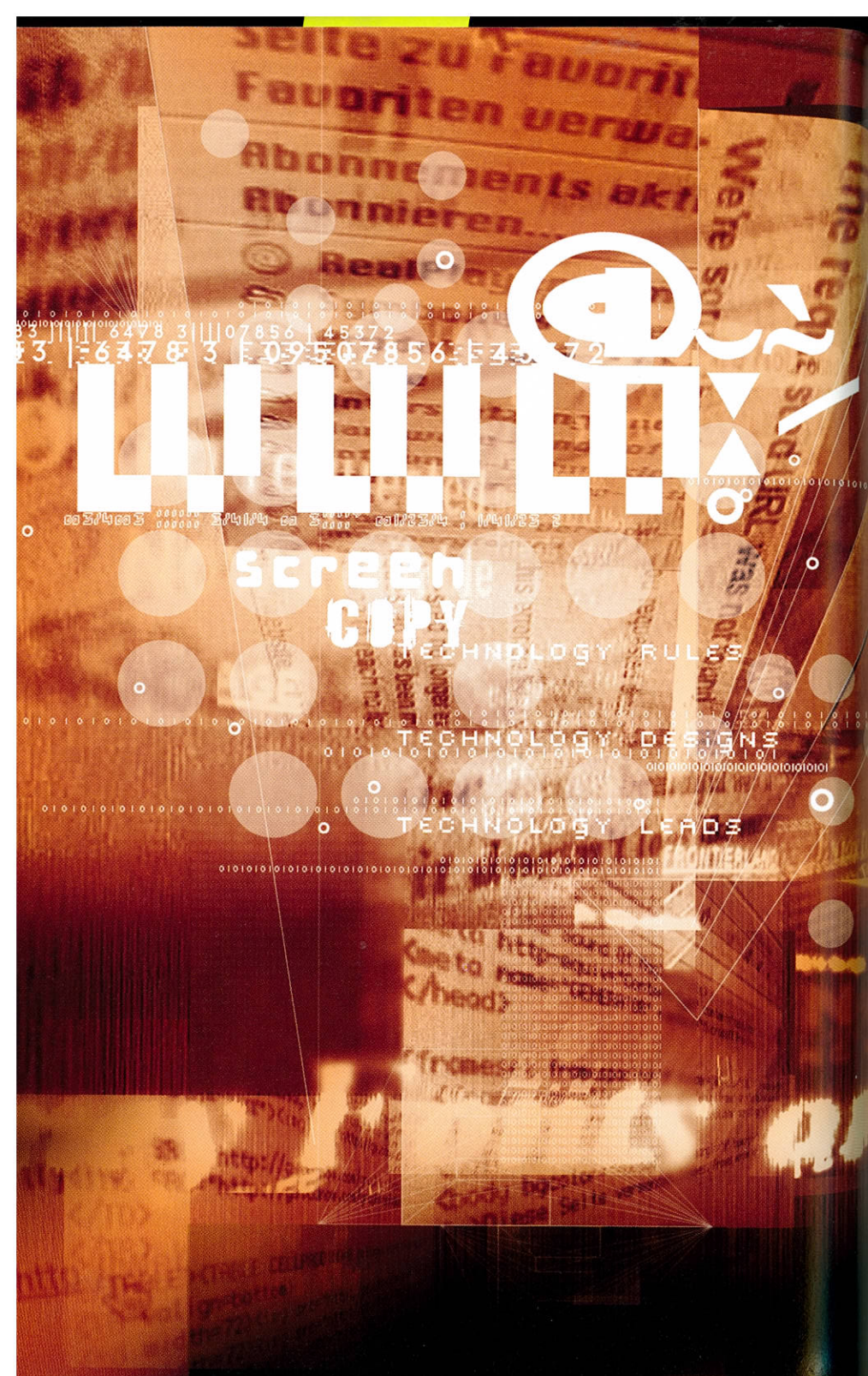


Some people have measured the human body to find what makes certain proportions look more beautiful than others.

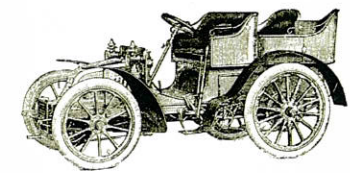
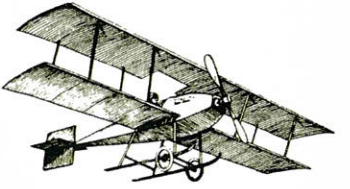
Le Corbusier's Modulor (the system framing his ideas of modern functional architecture) is neatly related to a man with an outstretched arm. Not surprisingly (to anyone who's ever looked into the laws of harmonious proportions), the French architect found that the Golden Section was the underlying principle for all the measurements used in his drawings of the human body.







The first generation to grow up with television (those born in the 1950s) is still imitating and fantasizing about the lifestyles depicted on TV. This generation is followed by one growing up with music videos, virtual reality, and the internet. The manipulation of sounds and images, the invention of artificial realities, and the experience of life inside man-made surroundings put to question our “natural” rules of perception. And, as with every technological and cultural development in the last 2000 years, type and typography reflect this. If current trends are anything to go by, the look of typefaces is bound to change more by the year 2020 than it has in all the years since the fifteenth century. The next generation of readers might consider things acceptable and, indeed, highly legible, that we would today consider ridiculous.




First examples of a new technology rarely resemble their modern counterparts, at least not in appearance. The underlying principles, however, were there already. If they hadn't been, planes wouldn't fly, TV tubes would implode, and cars wouldn't be faster than horse-drawn carriages.

“It’ll never catch on.” Isn’t that what people said about almost every major discovery or invention?

Screen fonts for phones and handheld devices brought back bitmaps, just after we had got used to “real” printing type on our printers and computer screens. At the same time, font technology enables designers to re-create every style of lettering that ever existed, from nostalgic Americana to primitive pixel type, which is now being used as a fashion statement.

Typefaces are NOT intrinsically legible

Send me a message  
  
 Ruf mich zurück.

Learning from Las Vegas  
 World Famous Buffet

From top to bottom:  
 Zuzana Licko's bitmap-inspired typefaces from 1987;  
 screen fonts for Nokia, Ericsson, and Sony;  
 Nugget and Jackpot by House Industries;  
 FF Peecol and FF Sub Mono by Eboys.



Pixels are cool.  
 Pixels are way cool.