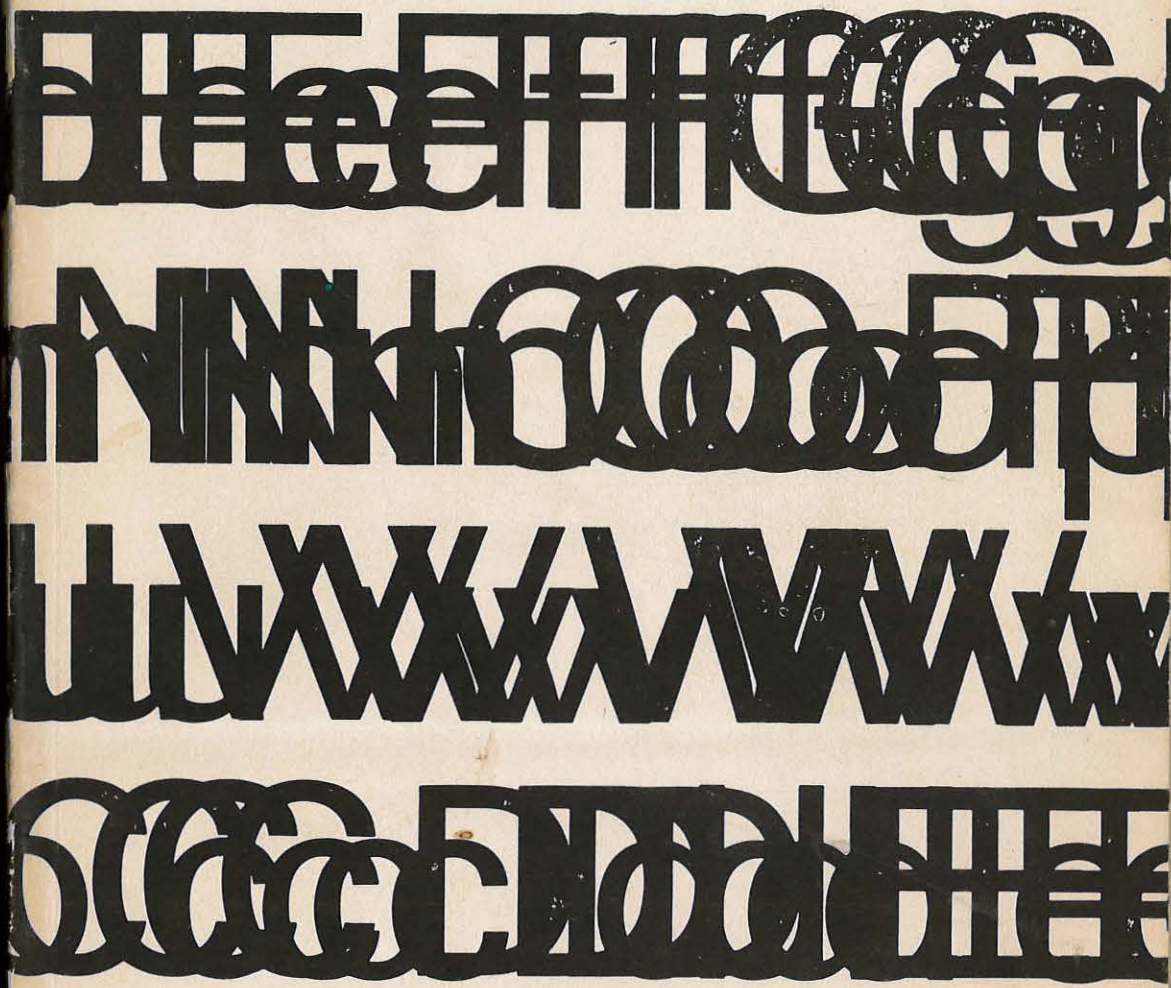


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his translation he has created the illusion of resemblance to cloth and flesh just as the Wizard of Oz created the illusion in Dorothy's mind that the Emerald City was really green, or just as a genius, by inventing a metaphor, can create the resemblance between all the world and a stage or between a political boundary and an iron curtain. All this is clinched for me by the Nike's most striking feature: She seems to move with astonishing lightness and grace. Yet this heavy block of marble has been stationary on its pedestal in the Louvre for decades.

A modified version of this paper, entitled "The Syntax of Visual Language" was presented at the first National Conference on Visual Literacy, at Rochester, New York, 27 March, 1969.

1. I used this model to illustrate vision in *The Myth of Metaphor* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962. Revised edition: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), Chapter V.
2. See M. V. Senden, *Space and Sight* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960; tr. Peter Heath, from German edn., 1932), pp. 106, 108, 114.
3. *Space and Sight*, p. 108.
4. See John A. Downing, *The i.t.a. Reading Experiment* (London: University of London Institute of Education, 1964), pp. 5-25.
5. For another account of this topic, stressing different aspects, see John L. Debes, "Communication with Visuals," *ETC.*, XXV (March 1968), pp. 27-34.
6. *Phaedrus* 275A.
7. *Theory of Vision*, 55, in George Berkeley, *Works on Vision*, ed. C. M. Turbayne (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), p. 145.
8. *Success and Failure of Picasso* (Penguin, 1965), p. 160.

Fashion in Type Design

G. W. Ovink

While "fashion" tends to have unfavorable connotations, "style" is interpreted as a favorable unity of the principles of form of a certain epoch. Questions of fashion in type design today are conditioned on different situations than before World War II, mostly due to the rise of photocomposition and easy reproduction of drawn lettering. Careful execution and self-discipline are no longer required; typographers prefer neutral types, creating their own expression through typographic design. We have today a dominance of the classicist tendency in typography: type is meant to be read. However, in printing types purely utilitarian forms hardly exist; type design has other subjective, emotional purposes. Type designers should be encouraged to create free forms.

The term "fashion," if not used for clothing in general, has a rather unfavorable meaning. It denotes a short-lived, superficial fancy in design, thought out with commercial, speculative aims for a spoilt, capricious public; or it may denote fantasies attached to utilitarian objects, for which a simple, durable form would be cheaper and more efficient and hence preferable for social reasons.

"Style," on the other hand, is taken as the mark of a definitely favorable unity in the principles of form of a certain epoch. This unity comes about naturally if these principles of form are not founded on the whims of the public at large, but on the philosophy of the cultural elite, using the best and foremost social, economical, and technical possibilities. "Style" is a title of honor, granted afterwards to a successful attempt at creating things that are right and of lasting value. Fashion seeks novelty deliberately and it is usually willing to sacrifice, for that purpose, the good things that are already there. Style originates unintentionally when artists wrestle seriously with the fundamental problems of a period and look for the correct solution. Fashions succeed each other every year: a style develops itself in the course of a generation at the least. Fashion, then, would be the ripple

on the surface of the long waves in the development of styles.

If fashion is only a squandering of energy and material and a falsification of noble cultural values, then we can state right now: there should be no fashion in type design. The printer should confine himself to a few types of proven quality for text and display, which suffice to establish a communication between author and reader. The trend today is towards using a few simple types. Many people even hope for a world-wide introduction of a single letterform for universal application.

The situation is not as simple as that, however. The question can be put whether our time can produce a real style of unity in variety at all. The great historic styles were created by and for tens of thousands of people, the taste of church and court being decisive. Today art and industrial design are the affairs of many millions in democratic organization, all with their own temperaments and their own social and national backgrounds. Among these millions there can hardly be a single style in the usual sense of the term.

And even if there could be, are fashions then not to be regarded as the inevitable by-products of a striving towards contemporary design which, if all goes well, does produce a real style? Fashion then would surely not be defensible as an aim in itself, but acceptable as a phenomenon that naturally accompanies any design activity.

Fashion is found in design when in pure problems of form the individual is overstressed. If this is done systematically, the result is called *fashion*; if (for instance, in the free arts) it is done owing to insufficient creative power or because the artist pursues purely private aims, then the result is called *mannerism*.

Perhaps you will make the objection here that type design is not a matter of artistic creation, in which any individualism is permitted, but purely a matter of utilitarian design, which should be supra-individual. I beg to differ. In printing types purely utilitarian forms hardly exist (I mean types whose shapes are entirely determined by such factors as legibility, word count, and printability). Something approaching pure utility occurs only in very critical situations, as in type for text matter and small ads of newspapers, in telephone directories, and in the lettering of road signs. Otherwise there is always a tolerance, a free margin in which different but equally valid solutions are possible. There taste enters along with the indi-

vidual preference of the reader, and consequently there is a need for change and variety.

When the sans serifs of the 1928 vintage originated, they were expected to last forever. Again, the same hope was cherished about the sans serifs of 1958, but they too will prove to be children of their time. We need not decide here whether they are products of fashion or the bearers of a true style. What matters is that while a single, universally valid principle of form was sought in all seriousness, while designers wanted to achieve only an efficient tool for communication without any pretensions of artistic individuality, the result showed many variants. It is even a matter of discussion which of these new sans serifs is already getting outdated and for which of them the time has not yet arrived. This means: the designers wanted supra-individual validity; they hoped for style; perhaps their efforts will later be found to have style, but in the process they also produced fashion and mannerism.

The question of freedom in type design—and consequently the question of the possibilities of fashion in type production—is conditioned today by a totally different situation than that which existed before the Second World War.

In the Thirties every printer had to offer several display types of recent cut (what the French call *caractères de fantaisie* or fancy types), at least for hand composition and often also on the machine. Consequently, every typefoundry and composing machine manufacturer had to provide a number of such types in its program. It was only by way of exception that these letters were hand-drawn specially for a certain work and then added to the type matter as photo-engraving.

A rough count reveals that in the 22 years between 1918 and 1940 about 40 type-creating foundries and composing machine manufacturers existed; they produced over a thousand original designs, each design after many months and often years of preparation. In the 24 years since 1945 we have not had nearly that number of producers or creations.

Today we have, besides hot-metal composition, photocomposition and a relatively cheap and easy reproduction of drawn lettering. Costs in composition are such that in hot metal and in the more expensive photocomposing devices only those types are made available which are used extensively and which have a lasting value. On

the other hand, types that are used less frequently are either issued on a cheap and simple photolettering apparatus or bought in word form from specialized firms, or they are specially drawn for a certain work.

This has some unfortunate results. The careful execution and self-discipline which were always prerequisites in type design for hot-metal composition are no longer necessary. Lettering for photographic reproduction is easily and speedily done, and technics do not impose limitations on artistic freedom. Hence, fashion types are more whimsical, immature, undisciplined than they used to be. Their field of use shrinks.

There is another point. Fashion types usually reflect the personal hand of their authors. But the typographical designer has his own creative personality, which hardly tolerates the expression of the foreign nature of another designer in typefaces. He prefers neutral types. If he wants to achieve playful, decorative, or striking effects, then he uses types void of expression in themselves, which he arranges in a playful, decorative, or striking way.

Some types which once originated as fashion types, have since become institutionalized. They now belong to the first requisites of every jobbing printer. So, for instance, certain lithographic and copperplate card types, English scripts, and condensed and extended bold sans serifs, etc. We don't see, as such, their origins as fashion types from the nineteenth and early twentieth century any more. They have become traditional. Something similar could happen again to more recent fashion types. In any case, the immediate effect of this development is that these institutionalized types and scripts for social printing and for headlines are making newer designs for these purposes largely superfluous.

There is a fourth factor which contributes to a decline in the appreciation and use of fashion types today. It is the temporary domination of a more classicistic tendency in the printing art. This classicism, like all its predecessors in history, strives for design according to timeless rules. As this school favors reason and intellect, it considers the purpose of type to be only to serve the reading and understanding of rational texts by intellectual means. Usually this is put in this way, that type is meant to be read; that type is only for communication—and "communication" only in the narrow sense of making reasonable people share ideas.

As the counterpart of this rationalistic movement, romanticism revolts all the more fiercely against this cool austerity. It does so with wild forms, weak or regular, entirely indefensible logically, which discredits it in the eyes of every "normal" person and so again reduces its field of use.

For all these reasons, the total consumption of prefabricated fashion types has diminished during the last decades both in a relative sense and probably in total numbers.

Does this mean that fashion types will soon be vanquished and replaced by one timeless, universally-valid type form? Not in the least.

Type and lettering has never been used, in the course of history, for reading only; it is not used so now and will not be in the future. Type can also serve as a mere sign to activate dormant ideas and images and to call forth reactions.

Type can also serve as a magnet for the eye, to direct the attention to what really matters.

Type can also serve as a decorative filling of a plane, purely and simply as a play of lines or pattern.

In all these cases optimal legibility or recognizability is unimportant; the shapes of the letters need not be simple, not familiar, not universally valid and acceptable. For certain purposes type may be illegible, irrational, valid only within limits; yes, it may be even unsympathetic, ugly, repulsive.

With this we come back to the question of fashion in type design. Type does not belong only to the objective sphere of optimal legibility, based on statistical facts. It is not sufficient that psychologists and ophthalmologists establish how type should look and that they have type drawn according to their specifications by dull, technical draftsmen. Type remains also in the subjective sphere of free design for effects, but one cannot calculate such things accurately beforehand. This being so, then with free design there will also be inevitably symptoms of fashion.

It is always harmful when emotional forces feel themselves threatened by a hard rationalism and therefore are led to gross exaggerations towards the opposite. We must acknowledge the right of these free emotional forces to exist and allow them a suitable field of action. This means: we should admit that any theory and any

practice is wrong in which the most simple and clear form of the letter is presented as the only correct one. Such a puritanical rationalism is of a passing nature—and will probably soon be followed by the predominance of a romantic irrationalism. It is possible that in a few years we may have to attack the onesidedness of a dominant artistic emotionality, while defending the rights of reason.

What are the practical consequences resulting from this concept of fashion in type design?

Actual practice has not allowed itself to be held back by the prevailing theory. Those in the Western countries, taken together under such catchwords as Hippies, Beatniks, Flower Children, Provoariat, Carnaby Street, etc., have long since provided outlets for their feelings in warmed-up Art Nouveau and with entirely illegible letter-clusters. Western publicity for luxury goods as well as for mass-consumption goods has not avoided fashion in type design either. The commercial logic of capitalism will not let itself be governed by any theory of communication, but by the highest sales returns.

Finally, the art schools and printing trade schools still teach lettering with all the historic paraphernalia of capitalis quadrata, rustica, uncials, and half-uncials; carolingian and humanistic minuscules, cancelleresca; renaissance, baroque and classicist roman, egyptian, and sans serif; in Germany, here and there, still textura, fraktur, and schwabacher; all this, whereas in theory these should be regarded as a mere collection of curiosities. Perhaps it is only the congenital conservatism of all educational institutions which causes them to maintain these historic pieces as models. Rather shamefacedly this is justified by pointing out that training in such models sharpens the sense of forms in general.

However this may be, let it be clear that in practice there are fields in which one still uses more than Baskerville or sans serifs only.

It would, therefore, be unnecessary to worry too much about the effects of puritanical theory in actual practice if it were not that many designers who create free forms, and therefore also fashion forms, do so with a bad conscience. They make scripts—decorated, open, shadow types; types with a peculiar personal hand—and they are conscious of doing something that is forbidden. It cramps their style. We should relieve these poor designers of this mental anguish.

Also it should be useful to assist those who, afraid of the theory, do

not dare to make the types they would like to make and which would probably be much fitter for their purposes than the sans serifs they use now.

Why, too, shouldn't we allow some playground for national varieties of form? When the French would like to cultivate their Napoleonic types, the English their Georgian and Victorian variants, the Germans the inexhaustible richness of their fraktur forms, then they should do so without being accused of reactionary nationalism. As long as these variant forms can still be executed in a vital, contemporary spirit, there should be no limitations imposed to such activities.

If the roads to freedom in type design are reopened, this need not mean, I repeat, that there will be much liberty in type for hot-metal composition and for the rapid photocomposing machine. It is, however, already a big step forward when real creativity is relieved of the heavy pressure of puritanical theory.

This article is based on a speech by Dr. G. W. Ovink at the Eleventh Congress of the Association Typographique Internationale held at Prague, Czechoslovakia, June 1969.