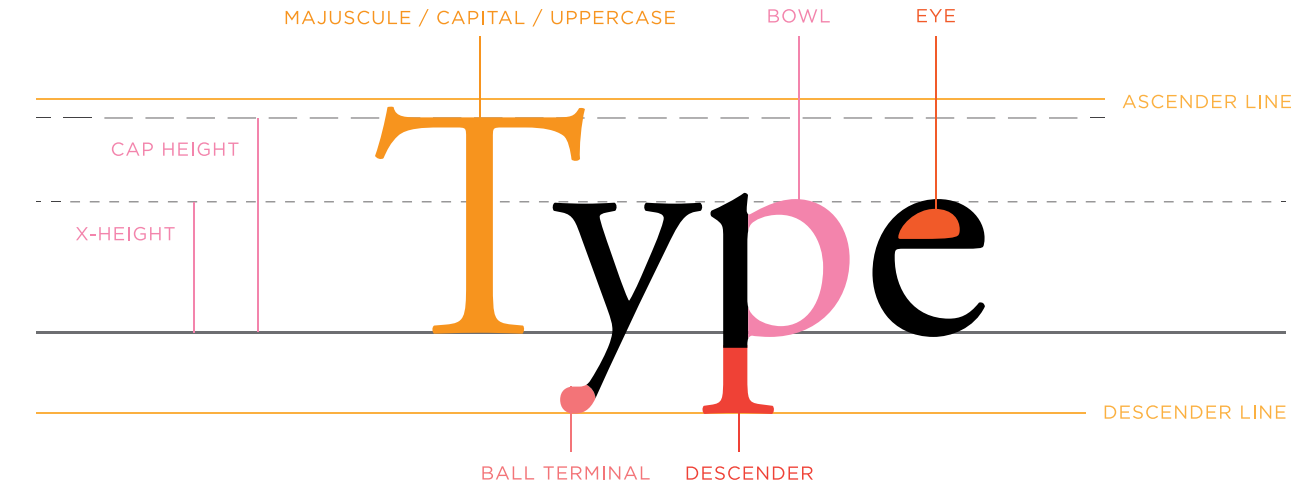


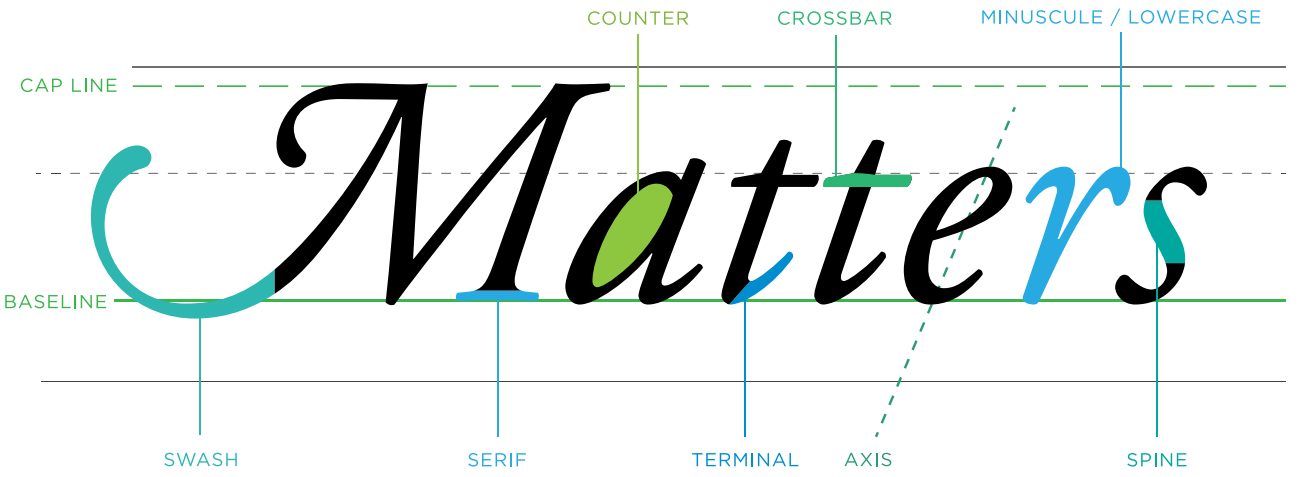


# *The Rhetoricity of Letterforms*

Edited by Christopher Scott Wyatt
and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss

# TYPE MATTERS

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# Contents

# Introduction: Type Matters



*C. S. Wyatt and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss*

## Three Typographic Tales

To begin, we offer three type stories. One: The Doves Type disappeared from cultural use and became endangered of being erased from cultural memory in 1916. More than a ton of the type was dumped into the Thames River in London, fueled by a spat between the two co-founders and co-owners of Doves Press, a London-based printing company founded by Thomas Cobden-Sanderson and Emery Walker.

The two designers had a falling out and dissolved their business partnership. Devoted to craftsmanship, Cobden-Sanderson reacted "to the thread of his profession being made irrelevant by the machine age" (Campbell-Dollaghan, 2015) by taking more than 150 nighttime strolls to the river, each time throwing in a handful of the type.

The original typeface took more than two years to construct and was used in select books produced by Doves Press. In 2010, designer Robert Green spent more than three years researching and designing a digital version of the typeface. Unsatisfied with not having the original type, he studied how and where Cobden-Sanderson may have dumped the type and worked with the Port of London Authority for water access. A two-day dive in 2015 resulted in the recovery of more than 150 pieces of the original type. The pieces found inspired Green to make changes to the digital version of the type he had created.

Two: In 2011, Simon Garfield published *Just My Type*, which reached number six on the Los Angeles Times bestselling non-fiction list in October of 2011. Janet Maslin, writing in the *New York Times*, stated: "This is a smart, funny, accessible book that does for typography what Lynne Truss's best-selling *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* did for punctuation: made it noticeable for people who had no idea they were interested in such things." Indeed, *Just My Type* reached a broader audience than any previous book on type, showing a deep resonance with and broad understanding of type among a wide swath of audiences. *Just My Type* resonated with the July 14, 2006 episode of *The Show with Ze Frank*, where Frank noted that

> The fact that tons of people know names of fonts like Helvetica is weird! And when people start learning something new, they perceive the world around them differently. If you start learning how to play the guitar, suddenly the guitar stands out in all the music you listen to. For example, throughout most of the history of movies, the audience didn't really understand what a craft editing was. Now, as more and more people have access to things like iMovie, they begin to understand the manipulative power of editing. . . .

Indeed, when people know the names of fonts and recognize the ways in which typography works rhetorically around them, the world becomes a different-looking sort of place.

Three: Those of us who were early-on web developers remember the limitations that system fonts placed on our design work. The original concept of the web was to share design-independent, cross-platform documents (Berners-Lee, 1993). HTML 1.x supported no font choices; HTML 2.0 allowed generic font families, typically identified by general family (e.g., serif, sans-serif, monospace), which would then show up in a user's browser as, for instance, Arial, Times New Roman, or Courier. Much to the chagrin of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which argued that stylized typography disrupted usability and accessibility and which never endorsed specifying typefaces in HTML, competing HTML 3.x browsers (e.g., Internet Explorer 2.0, Netscape Navigator 3.0) introduced and promoted the "FONT" tag ("Webfont formats"). This tag permitted designers to specify any font name, but knowledgeable designers limited their choices to the "system-standard" options available on Windows, OS X, and Linux operating systems. When a typeface specified in a page's HTML wasn't available on a user's system, the results were unpredictable. A typical design work-around was to create chunks of text as image files, which were problematic in terms of usability and often pixelated and awkward in terms of aesthetics.

Down the road, HTML5 introduced webfont technology. Google was one of the first companies to embrace the webfont concept. Launched in 2010, the vision of Google Fonts is to support "a web with web fonts," which is, arguably, "more beautiful, readable, accessible and open." Google Font's application programming interface (or API) allows users to embed a huge repository of open-source fonts to web-based documents. With two or three lines of HTML and CSS, users are released from the limited list of system-standard fonts; now, that code can connect to the Google Fonts database and instantly transform text typographically.

## Type *Matters*

The title of this book works two ways: First, as an argument that type *matters*, and second, as a promise of explorations of *matters* of type. The vignettes we offer above connect these two threads. In their entirety, they are arguments—and arguments linked richly and deeply to time, space, history, culture, and context. In their entirety, they are matters—they are issues, happenings, and moments that deserve our attention.

Indeed, to understand the ways in which type happens today, we have to turn our eyes back, orient ourselves in the present moment, and think toward a typographic future. Every typeface itself carries memories, moments, and—as many authors argue in this collection—ideological underpinnings. Every typeface bears the marks of its historical moment and its rhetorical uses. Every typeface anchors us in a particular moment. This moment is a technological one: More people are writing more than ever before, across spaces that are relatively new, using media that are rich and diverse. More people are making choices about type, and, also, more and more people are writing within template-driven spaces where choices about type are made for them. As more e-readers, mobile devices, and apps allow us to choose and set font preferences, we will continue to engage and shape type on a daily basis. And, as has been the case for many years, we are surrounded by arguments made in type. The font used for BOUNTY paper towels makes an argument. The newly redesigned Yankee Candle typography calls to us in particular ways. Starbuck's dropping its alphabetic anchoring from its logo and relying solely on the mermaid design and its iconic green is posing an argument. In one of the vignettes above, we mentioned Simon Garfield's (2011) *Just My Type*, which reached a broader audience than any previous book on type. The book *Helvetica: Homage to a Typeface* (Muller, 2002) and the film it inspired, *Helvetica* (Hustwit, 2010), had previously demonstrated the broad fascination we have for the letters that give shape to our world.

Some of us, including the contributors to this collection, are pretty passionate about our typographical choices, the choices of others, and the choices made for us. Because we know type matters, conveying layers of meaning, we want the "right" type for our work. As Garfield (2011) wrote, "today we can imagine no simpler everyday artistic freedom than that pull-down font menu" (p. 3), a freedom we owe in part to Steve Jobs and the creative team behind the Apple Macintosh, which, in 1983, offered a bitmap high-resolution display that allowed for proportional fonts rather than monospace fonts that remediated typewriter text. For more than 550 years, typography and design were in the domain of artisans and experts. That all changed in the 1980s with the emergence of desktop-publishing environments.

From the rise of movable type letterforms to today's digital screen fonts, type makes academic, scientific, and policy arguments more accessible. Type helps shape the brands of our institutions—Michigan State University, for in-

stance, has adopted Gotham and Californian as its brand-standard identity anchors. Coca-Cola relies upon an originally hand-drawn set of letterforms for its logo. Our consumerist world, and, indeed, our theories and research, our disciplinary debates and ideals, take shape thanks to the technologies of type. Yet, we seldom give much thought to the letterforms transmitting our ideas. These forms should be a natural place of inquiry for the fields of rhetoric, composition, and writing studies.

## Typographic Rhetorics

As you read these words, you are reading more than their phonetic or semantic meanings. We read the shapes of letterforms, attributing meaning to the design choices made by lettering artists, typographers, and the designers employing the forms. The selection of a typeface family or hand-lettering style is a rhetorical act, and this collection examines that rhetoricity. Why do we expect "serious" documents to be set in a serif typeface, such as Times New Roman or Palatino? What about Comic Sans makes the typeface open to a mix of derision and debate? How does the rhetorical impact of type change shape as it becomes kinetic—as it moves, weaves, and dissolves across a screen? And, if typeface selection offers a rhetorical device to authors and designers, why do some websites and most academic courses limit the choices available to authors?

The chapter authors here explore arguments about the meaning of letterforms. The number of commercial typefaces available is staggering, and the number of free typefaces is a magnitude greater. The authors here ask readers to notice the shapes on the page and screen and to ask questions about those shapes. They pose questions that include: What assumptions underlie the designs around us? What historical trends give shape to the designs we see? What emotive or affective responses do we have to certain typefaces—and why? We come into contact with hundreds, if not thousands, of typefaces and letterforms daily.

The field of rhetoric has only lightly touched on the topic of typography *as* a topic, typically within the domain of document design and primarily thanks to the accessible works of Robin Williams (2003, 2005, 2014), whose contrast/repetition/alignment/proximity formula remains popular among technical writing teachers and others, and Ellen Lupton, especially her *Thinking with Type* (2010) and *Type on Screen* (2014). Lupton's texts, by a noted profes-

sor of design theory, address the rhetorical nature of design choices, including typography choices. Alongside Steven Heller (especially Heller & Meggs, 2001), Robert Bringhurst (2013), and Alex White (2004), Lupton offers insights on typography to those outside the field (see the additional bibliography at the end of the first chapter, by C. S. Wyatt, for specific sources). Within rhetoric, Mike Palmquist (2005), Miles Kimball and Ann Hawkins (2007), Anne Frances Wysocki (2007), John Trimbur (2002), Steven Bernhardt (1986), and others have referenced typographical choices as rhetorical acts by writers and designers.

Stephen Bernhardt (1986) warned us almost thirty years ago that our "preoccupation with conventional essay format" (p. 77) excludes the rhetorical rigor of typographic elements. Later, John Trimbur (2002) extended this argument, noting that "one of the main obstacles to seeing the materiality of writing has been the essayist tradition and its notion of a transparent text" (p. 189). Cynthia L. Selfe (2007, 2009) has argued (as have others) for the recognition of multiple modes of meaning-making, claiming that we do damage to our rhetorical relevance by situating only one way of meaning-making as primary. Many visual rhetoric scholars have interrogated the ways in which meaning-making happens iconographically, photographically, and via other visual means. Few, however (save for Anne Frances Wysocki, 2005), have paid much attention to the rhetorical work that typography does.

Although always part of any text's argument, the choice of typeface is an under-articulated and understudied aspect of textual production within composition and rhetoric. Today, even as there are thousands of font face options available to us, composers and rhetoricians often take the power of letterforms for granted or—worse yet, we would argue—situate typography as ideally invisible, meant only to convey thought and ideas and not as itself contributing to rhetorical meaning.

## Collection Overview

The chapters in this collection situate "texts" broadly; think rhetorically, technologically, and culturally; draw from scholarship ranging from rhetoric and writing studies to graphic design theory and beyond; and explore the ways in which the visual and tactile shapes of letters convey persuasive information to audiences. *Type Matters* is a book about the rhetorical, technological, and cultural lives of letterforms. We open the book with a chapter by C.S.

Wyatt, which provides a technical discussion of text, including an anatomical discussion of letterforms and an exploration of type classification; this introductory chapter also includes a list of useful type-reference texts.

In the second chapter of the collection, Garrett W. Nichols discusses "bad" type, echoing the overall arguments of *Type Matters*, noting that typography reflects and expresses culture. He goes further, however, and argues that the limits we place on the use of type may reflect the limits we intend to place on our culture, including who is allowed to participate in it and in what way. "Type Reveals Culture" includes an examination of typography critiques of "bad" typefaces, which reveals that descriptions of type "character" tend to reflect the character of the critic, audience, or user, rather than the type itself. Nichols also draws upon Michel de Certeau (1984) to argue that use of "bad" type may also be a tactical form of resistance to power.

In "Give Us Back Our Serifs," Philip Rice focuses on a particular moment in time and its consequences: September 1, 2015, when Google changed the typography of its logotype from a serif typeface to a sans serif one. As Rice suggests, this particular typographical change follows a move toward corporate logo simplicity over the past several decades. While most corporate redesigns, however, have gone unnoticed apart from discussions in design circles, Google's change has been met with a firestorm of reactions from public news and social media. Criticism of the logo postures it as submitting to pressure from a mass media/pop culture audience, invoking a rhetoric of trashiness or immaturity. Rice documents and interrogates the multiple responses to the logo change and explores how negative reactions to the new typeface across discourses reveal underlying value systems in academic and intellectual communities, and how serifs themselves might be perceived as an embodiment of legitimacy and trust ennobled and intellectualized by Google's users.

In "The Development of Typeface Personas and the Consequences of Perceived Identities," Heather Turner provides a thick, interdisciplinary review of research on typeface persona dating back to the 1920s. After discussing typeface persona, Turner turns to two case studies to illustrate the ways that typefaces are also given cultural identities: Comic Sans used for the "I CAN'T BREATHE" campaign protesting the murder of Eric Garner by an NYPD officer and protesting violence against black individuals by the police in general, and a "Comic Sans for Cancer" event held in the UK.

Aaron Kashtan presents "Nostalgia for Handwriting: The Rhetoric of Comics Lettering." Kashtan examines the rhetoric of comics typography and specifically argues that comics are a useful test case because of the role that handwriting has and does play in comics. Indeed, as Kashtan notes, in an age where typing has mostly replaced handwriting as a standard tool of typographic creation, comics remain one of the few communicative media that still use handwriting as a viable means of producing letters. Moreover, because comics illustrate the close connection that exists between the acts of handwriting and hand-drawing, they illuminate the unstated assumptions that we make when we look at handwritten text. "Nostalgia for Handwriting" provides background and history on comic production, focusing specifically on typographic aspects, and analyzes relationships of handwriting to selfhood and self-expression before examining the effects of digital technologies on comics lettering.

Next, Elizabeth Fleitz takes us directly to and keeps us fixed on the screen with "All Your Font Are Belong To Us: Gaming in the Late Age of Print." Fleitz explores the 2013 iOS game *Type:Rider*, a platformer that sends the player through the history of typography, from its origins in cuneiform to the Gothic beginnings of the printing press, to Times in the twenties, and ending in the digital world of fonts. In the game, players control a colon, which jumps and rolls across platforms and over crevices, all of which are constructed from the alphabetic letters themselves. Fleitz examines the ways in which *Type:Rider* takes the history of typography and places it into a video game space, through which the player progresses at will, picking up bits of facts about each era of typeface design as they play. The representational meaning of letters and punctuation is constructed as a physical game space to navigate, a space in which text becomes image. She explores the transgressive nature of the gamespace, studying the ways in which the act of navigating space in *Type:Rider* unmakes meaning and resists interpretation, while at the same time working to conflate form and function through the subject of typography.

"Why I Hate Times New Roman and Other Confessions of a Creative-Critical Scholar" by Ames Hawkins is a multifaceted, segmented essay, in which Hawkins considers the erotic, bodily, desirous connection to writing, text, and pleasure through a series of typeface moments. Specifically, Hawkins introduces and analyzes her work on a book-length creative-critical project that has posed particular design and typographic considerations. Au-

thor-created "Hawkpuff" typeface is introduced as a typeface that queers typographic norms. Hawkins explores not only what typography can do for the creative–critical scholar, but what creative–critical scholarship can do with/to and for typography.

John Logie focuses on the typeface created specifically for the Amazon Kindle e-reader: Bookerly. He argues that Bookerly isn't—and explores why that's not such a terrible thing. Logie examines the ways in which Amazon and the type designers, Dalton Maag, navigated the challenge of print reading experiences and expectations while at the same time creating type specifically for the affordances of the small, digital screen. Logie argues that the Bookerly project is emblematic of the current tension between books as we have known them and books as they might come to be known.

David Bedsole, in "Jan Tschichold's Renunciation: The Anatomy and Ethics of a Typographic Reversal," takes us back to a 1964 piece published by Tschichold. In the piece, Tschichold explicitly renounced many of his influential ideas about typography popularized in his 1928 book *Die Neue Typographie* (*The New Typography*). Among other things, he believed that his ideas about typography aligned too closely with the ideology of the Third Reich. Bedsole uses this moment as a case to ask questions including: Can type really be fascist? Can type be unethical? How might we critique it from an ethical standpoint?

"Typographic Nationalism and the Banal Uniformity of Imagined Communities," by Jake Cowan, investigates the intersection of typography with ideologies of nationhood. Cowan argues that insofar as the nation-state emerges through the speed and uniformity afforded by print technologies, the rhetoric of typography has become indissolubly interrelated to the way national communities imagine themselves. Articulating the practice of typographic nationalism as a specific form of what Michael Billig has called "banal nationalism," wherein national identity is unobtrusively reproduced through everyday habits, Cowan suggests that in certain cases, choices in typeface can serve this purpose, functioning to engender the sense that citizens prosaically participate in an abstractly larger and uniform public collective.

Meredith A. Johnson, Peter Cannon, Roxanna Palmer, Joshua M. Rea, and Tanya Zarlengo take us next to Ybor City in Tampa, Florida, and, on the way there, to the United States Patent and Trademark Office. In their chapter, Johnson and colleagues explore commercial cigar-label logotypes circu-

lating in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ybor City to construct a rhetorical history of this National Historic Landmark District. They offer a close, culturally rich read of several cigar-industry logotypes, situating logotypes as manifestations of social practices, economic conditions, and political alliances at the time of their production and circulation. In this chapter, the three logotypes under analysis provide rich insight into Latin history and culture in Florida. The authors argue that analysis of the formal logotype attributes adds much needed dimension to often-flattened discussions of logotype features and functionality.

William FitzGerald's "Font of Wisdom: The Serenity Prayer as a Case Study in Typographic Copia" introduces and historicizes the "Serenity Prayer" and explores the various ways in which it has been rendered across media, for different purposes, and to various audiences. FitzGerald argues that although many of its renderings may be dismissed as religious kitsch, the reproduction and circulation of the "Serenity Prayer" is best understood as a phenomenon of vernacular rhetoric, a vital form of everyday communication with distinct functions in promoting social cohesion through shared values and intricate typographic displays.

John R. Gallagher and Rebecca Tarsa bring us back to digital space and explorations of typography on the screen in "Standardized Typography in Interactive Internet Environments." The authors offer an investigation of the effects of standardized typography within the context of interactive Internet environments, exploring both the weaknesses and strengths of such typography. Facebook and Tumblr are interrogated as examples and offered as spaces where standardized typography does specific rhetorical work.

The final chapter of *Type Matters* is by Christal Seahorn, Diana Bowen, Dragana Djordjevic, and Charles Jeffrey Darwin. In "Animating the Spoken Word," these authors explore the rhetoricity of kinetic typography. They offer a fine-grained, replicable, and analytical heuristic for analyzing the ways in which type in motion, specifically in animating speeches, functions rhetorically. The authors draw from a corpus of kinetic-type pieces selected from YouTube and analyze the frequency, function, and impact of motion behaviors. Seahorn et al. argue that kinetic type provides the "condition for symbolic action" (Davis, 2010) required to make persuasion possible in the absence of nonverbal cues normally available in a viewed oration.

* * *

Scholarship in visual rhetoric and design studies has called attention to the ways in which document design elements—ranging from white/blank space to the arrangement and integration of graphics, and many other considerations—impact viewers and readers. Scholarship in rhetoric and composition studies has also questioned the dominance of the alphabetic and the ways in which, perhaps, our long-held notions of what "texts" are and what "texts" do shape, in both conscious and unconscious ways, how we approach composing.

Steve Westbrook (2006) argued that

> We redeploy the lore and paradigms that we have inherited—the advice, warnings, or ways of knowing that the authorities of print culture have given us—whether or not these are entirely appropriate for and ultimately beneficial to writing students of the twenty-first century. (p. 459)

Cynthia L. Selfe (2004) offered ample explanation for this tendency, noting that many of us in rhetoric and composition have invested deeply—professionally, personally, and politically—in shaping writing programs and writing curricula with traditional alphabetic texts at the core.

We agree with Westbrook and Selfe, and find their scholarship incredibly helpful in contextualizing our particular cultural, technological, and historical moment. However, what we hope to offer in this collection is not a rejection of existing paradigms or a dismissal of the long-engaged work of past scholars. Rather, what we hope to offer in this collection is a unification: of the visual and the verbal, and of the graphic and the alphabetic, by exploring the rhetoricity of letterforms themselves and analyzing the impact of typographic design.

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