





SOME
VIRTUES OF
DESIGN

GUI BONSIPE



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By Gui Bonsiepe
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By James Craig
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PREFACE

AN UNFASHIONABLE TERM

Dealing with **virtues** today provokes associations with outdated issues, covered with mold, dry greyness - what in German we call *moralingesättigt* (saturated with moral appeals). The supposed outdatedness, the supposed loss of contact with the real stuff of the present world fulfils occasionally a role as a candidate of benevolent - or not that benevolent - dismissal.

It seems to have become a pet theme in publications, particularly in the US, that deal with the future, especially information technology and management. Hardly one can open an issue or attend a meeting in which there is not an open or oblique reference to Europe as being off-the-track. The issue, of course, is not a supposed lack of dynamics and of competence in innovation, but a barely camouflaged appetite for an imperial design that considers everything deviant from the one-dimensional dream as an offense.

Without wanting to push the issue, several of these values for literature can be - with due corrections - transferred to the domain of design. A literal transfer certainly would be naive and inappropriate. But parallels and affinities seem to exist. For instance, when Calvino defines

Lightness as the attempt to remove weight from the structure of stories and from language,

are there not analogies in the field of design? Lightness in design might be a virtue to be maintained, especially when we reflect on material and energy flows and their impact on the environment and when we confront the mundane issue of congested lines cloaked with digital trash in the Net.

When later on he refers to the

“sudden agile leap of the poet-philosopher who raises himself above the weight of the world, showing ... that what many consider to be the vitality of the times - noisy, aggressive, revving and roaring - belongs to the realm of death, like a cemetery for rusty old cars”,

lightness acquires a critical dimension and dissipates wrong associations of easy going aloofness and superficiality. Definitely I would include under the term Lightness the notions of

humor, wit and elegance

for which we have particularly in Italian design so well known examples (e.g. Castiglioni's tractor seat mounted on a flat elastic steel profile); or to take an example from the host country, the graphic design of the passport for the citizens of this country. These examples represent the virtue of Lightness in design.

SEVEN BASICS OF TYPOGRAPHY

The art of designing with type

began in the West around 1455 when Johannes Gutenberg perfected the craft of printing from individual pieces of type. From this early technology we draw a great deal of our current terminology. This section introduces the origins of the alphabet, and defines the terms and measurements that will form the basis of your typographic vocabulary. Once you are familiar with this information, you will be able to communicate your ideas clearly and work efficiently with type.

Origins of the Alphabet

Before proceeding with the more practical aspects of typography, let's first consider the twenty-six letters we call our alphabet. We tend to forget that the alphabet is composed of symbols, each representing sounds made in speech. The symbols we use today are derived from those used thousands of years ago. However, the ancient forms did not represent sounds but were pictures of things or symbols for ideas.

Pictographs

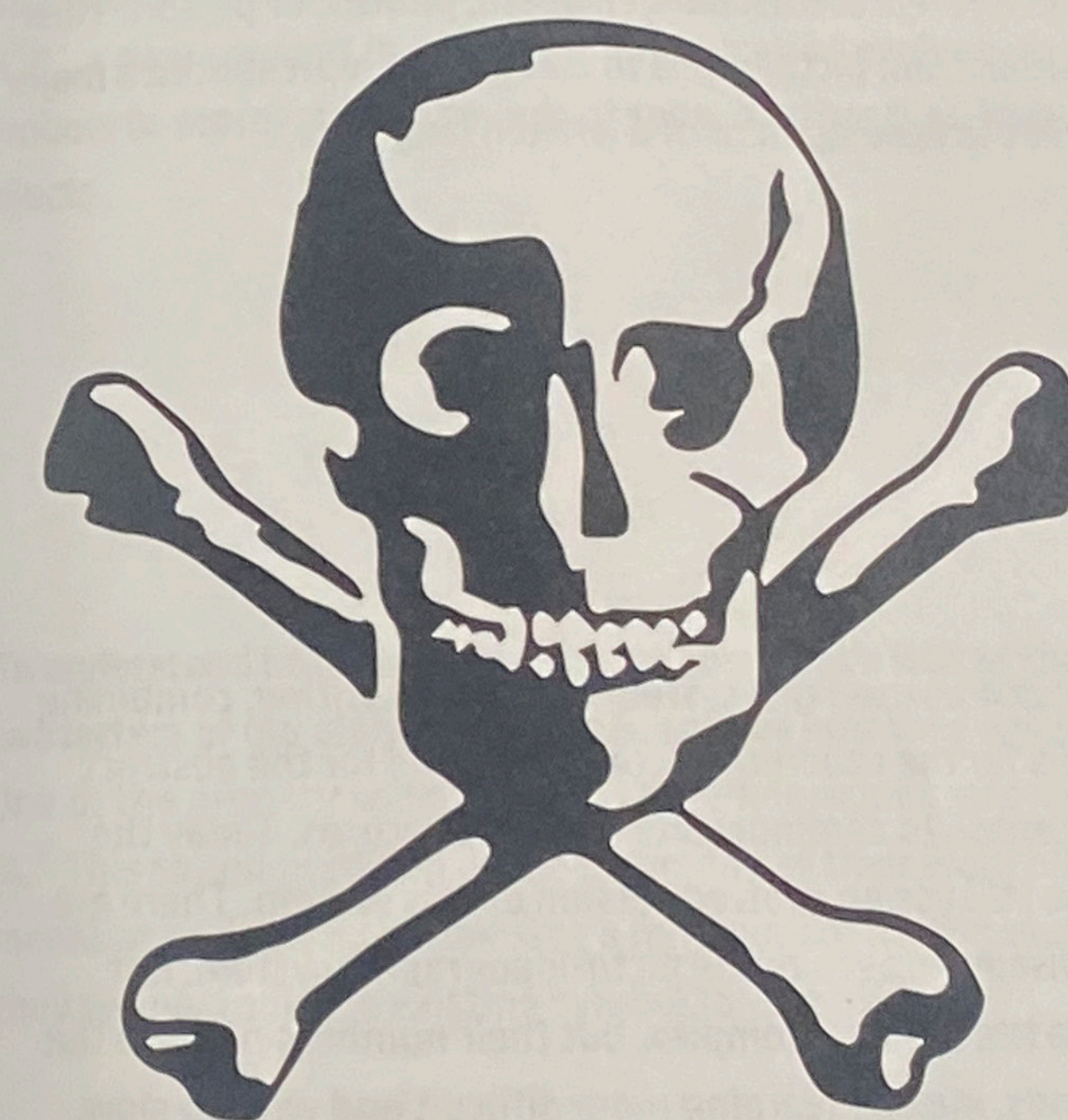
At some point in time, people began to communicate visually. They made simple drawings of the things that existed in their world—people, animals, tools, and weapons, for example. These basic images, called *pictographs*, were symbols representing objects, such as an ox or a house (1).



1 | Pictographs

Ideographs

As the need to communicate more abstract thoughts developed, the symbols began to take on multiple meanings: ox, for example, could also mean food. The new symbols would represent not objects, but ideas and are called *ideographs* (2).



2 | Ideographs

Small Letters Up to now, we have been discussing capital (majuscule) letters only. Small (minuscule) letters were a natural outgrowth of writing and rewriting capital letters with a pen. At first only a few minuscules were consistently written, but eventually a full set of majuscules and minuscules was being used. As writing became common, greater economy was desired, and letters were compressed so that more words could fit on a line.

Aa Bb

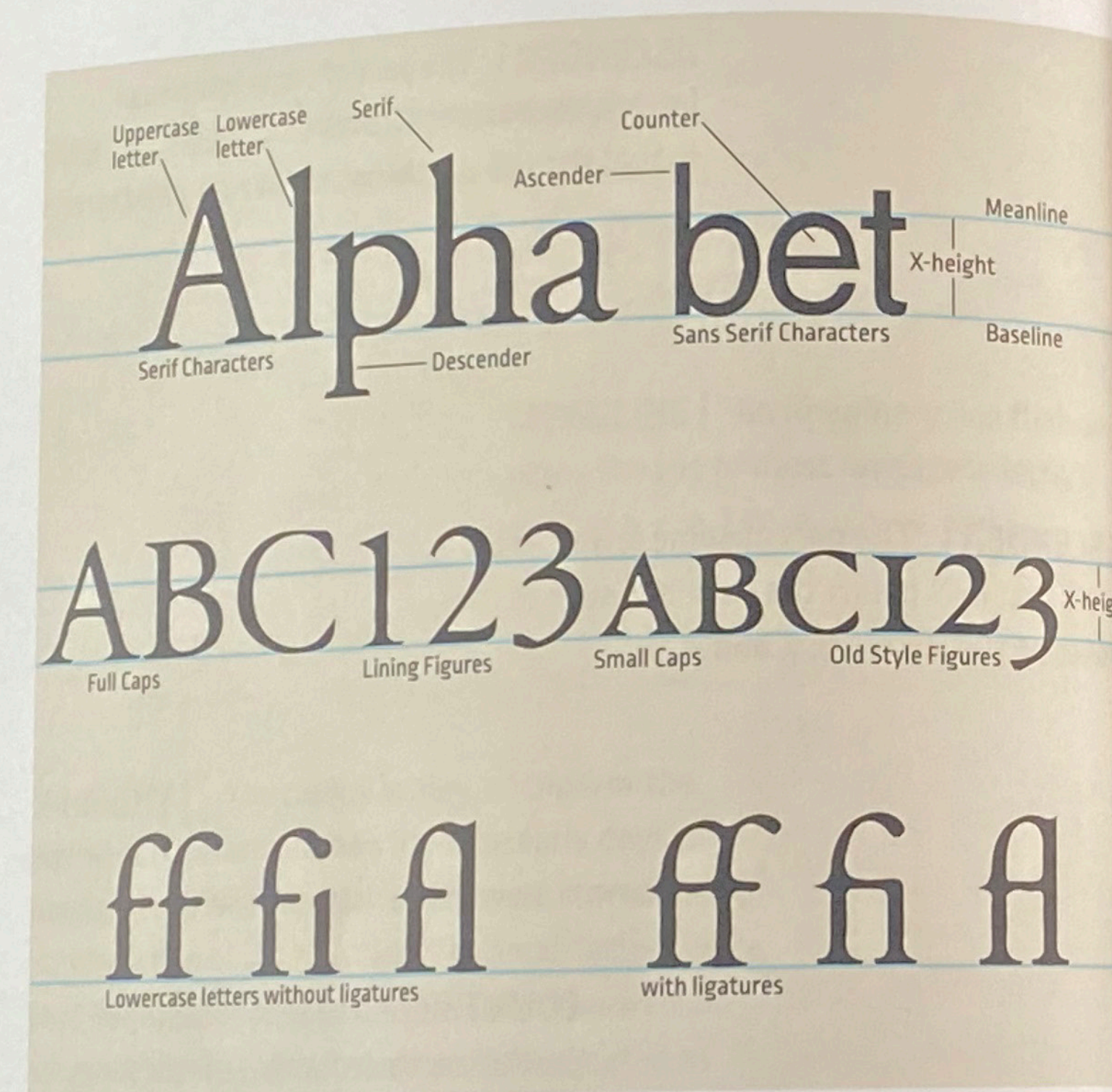
6 | Blackletter

Prior to Gutenberg's invention of printing from movable type in the mid-fifteenth century, there were two popular schools of writing in western Europe: Gothic or Black Letter in Germany and the Northern nations and the round Humanistic hand in Italy.

The Blackletter forms (6) were used as the models for the typeface designed by Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century (7). The Humanistic script was a revival of the Carolingian minuscule of the ninth century and is the basis of our small letters (8). A flowing form of this same hand is the basis of our italic. Examples of all three writing styles can be seen below.

Aa Bb

7 | Gutenberg's type



2 | The principal terms used to identify letterforms

Baskerville

Bodoni

Caslon

Frutiger

Gill Sans

Caledonia

Helvetica

Futura

Eurostyle

Modern

Century

3 | The names of specific typefaces

SERIF AND SANS SERIF | The finishing strokes that project from the main stroke of a letter are called the serifs. Serifs originated with the Roman masons, who terminated each stroke of a letter carved into a slab of stone with a serif to enhance its appearance. Not all type has serifs; type having no serifs at all is called *sans serif*, meaning without serif.

SMALL CAPS | A complete alphabet of caps that are the same size as the body, or x-height, of the lowercase letters: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, etc. Often used in text settings where regular capitals are required but might create unwanted emphasis. Small caps are compatible with lowercase letterforms in the weight of the strokes of the letter. A typical use is for acronyms like NASA or NATO.

MODERN FIGURES | Also called *lining figures*, these are numbers that resemble caps by being uniform in height: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 0. Modern figures are most often used for annual reports, charts, tables, and any application where numbers are meant to stand out or supply critical information. Another feature of modern figures is that they align vertically, making them preferable for setting tables and charts.

ROMAN | The upright letterforms derived from the historic characters developed by the Romans. The majority of typeset copy is roman. It is the first typestyle we learn and the most comfortable to read. The letterforms of this sentence are set as roman.

ITALIC | The second most common typestyle. A true italic typeface is not merely roman characters slanted to the right but is specifically created to be a companion to the roman. Italic is used mainly for quiet emphasis. *These words are set in italic.* If a roman typeface is simply slanted to the right (or left), it is referred to as *oblique*. *These words are set in oblique*

Thin

Light

Regular

Medium

Bold

Extrabold

Type Families

If we combine all the fonts of all the timesteps of a given typeface (roman, italic, bold, condensed, etc.) we have a family of type (6). By selecting fonts within the same family, a designer maintains typographic consistency. Since all timesteps within a family share common characteristics, such as design, x-height, cap height, and length of ascenders and descenders, they will appear harmonious when combined.

Most type families are relatively small, containing roman, italic, and bold timesteps. Some families—Helvetica, for example—are exceptionally large, with variations ranging from thin condensed to bold extended, plus unique display faces such as outline and drop shadow.

Garamond Roman

Garamond Italic

Garamond Semibold

Garamond Semibold Italic

Garamond Bold

Garamond Bold Italic

5 | Traditional font, one size of one typeface

This book was designed and printed by Ethan Altshuler in August of 2022. This book is a limited edition of only one copy that is exclusively signed.

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