4 THE TYPEFACE

Evolving over centuries, typography is an essential design and communication element and forms an integral part of our day-to-day existence. It is constantly in flux and continues to evolve as preference and technology change (Ambrose & Harris, 2006: 170).

This chapter serves to give a concise overview of the broader aspects of typography, and although not designed by the author, could form the basis for curatorial content and exhibition material within the proposed museum.

4.1 TYPE FAMILIES

Old English, Block, Broken or Blackletter typefaces are based on the ornate and heavy writing styles that were ubiquitous during the Middle Ages. These typefaces are mainly decorative due to their complexity and difficulty to read in large blocks of text. This illegibility is however due to the fact that we are unfamiliar with the typeface - contemporary sans-serif styles would be equally difficult for the Middle Age man to decode (Ambrose & Harris, 2005: 38).

These typefaces were created in order to imitate handwriting, and in some cases, they were specifically based on the handwriting of a particular person. These typefaces often have extended termination strokes so that the letters flow from one to the other. Not classified as either Roman nor Gothic, as they may share attributes of each. Similarly to Blackletter, these typefaces prove difficult to read in large blocks of text and often provide supplementary decorative details to titles and brand names (Ambrose & Harris, 2005: 56).

Fig. 51: Font families: Blackletter and Script (Author, 2011).
Being considered as images in their own right, these experimental typefaces include the widest assortment of styles and variations, all with varying degrees of legibility. Characters may often provide an image connection to the subject matter at hand and are often designed for specific themed purposes. Graphic typefaces are inappropriate for use in body text as their complexity can severely affect legibility. They are, however, often selectively employed to convey a specific idea and highlight the drama of a design (Ambrose & Harris, 2006: 103).
Roman typefaces have their origins in text that was carved into Roman stonework, and encompass the oldest typeface category. These typefaces are typically used for body text because their decorative serifs help the eye to progress smoothly from letter to letter. As with many typefaces there are different subclassifications and variations - these include Old Style, Transitional, Modern (or Classicist), Slab Serif (or Egyptian), Clarendon and Typewriter. Over the years, Roman type has morphed to reflect changes in paradigm and style, which has resulted in its evolution (Lupron, 2004: 17-25).
Although younger than their Roman brothers, sans-serif typefaces have been in existence for over a 100 years. Gothic fonts provide a clean-cut letterform, but they can hinder legibility of large blocks of text due to the lack of serifs. Gothic typefaces do not have a double-storey 'g' as used in some serif typefaces, but rather, always has a 'g' with a tail. As with Roman fonts, Gothic letterforms also fall within various categories (Ambrose & Harris, 2006: 103).
4.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF TYPOGRAPHY

Cuneiform Tablets
Impressions made into wet clay using a wedge-shaped stylus. This system was developed in Mesopotamia and is considered to be the earliest standardised writing system. Aramaic script spread through the region during the 6th-7th Century BC, and thus Cuneiform started to die out.

Phoenician Characters
A language system with 22 formalised symbols that developed in modern-day Lebanon. Thousands of words could be formed by combining different letters. The Latin alphabet is based on this system.

Hieroglyphics
A writing system developed by ancient civilizations like the Egyptians and the Incas that is based on pictograms. Each pictogram resembles an object rather than the vocal sounds.

Semitic + Aramaic
Aramaic developed from the Phoenician alphabet in what is now modern-day Syria. It is classified as a Semitic language and is the precursor to Arabic and Hebrew.

Cyrillic
Based on the Greek alphabet and used for Slavic languages like Russian. This alphabet has 33 letters, including two with no sounds, and was originally developed by missionaries in order to translate the Bible.

China
First emergence of movable type with letters being manufactured out of clay. This system proved not to be very useful due to the thousands of characters in the Chinese alphabet.

Roman Alphabet
The most widely used writing system used today. Developed from the Greek alphabet and contains 26 letters.

Korea
First introduction of movable type with letters forged out of metal.

Greek Alphabet
An adapted version of the Phoenician alphabet comprising 24 letters - vowels and spaces between words were also introduced.
Printed Press
The first introduction of movable metal type in the West. A German printer, Thomas Gutenberg, developed the first printing press which allowed for the mass production of books and re-usable text characters.

Renaissance
Typography developed extensively during this period with hotspots in France, Italy and Holland. The Italian model was favoured due to the overpowering influence of the Renaissance. During this period letterforms resembled those made by pen and thus fully utilised the greater detail and flexibility that metal type offered. Blackletter consequently started to fall out of favour.

Claude Garamond
The first independent type foundry was established by Parisian printer Claude Garamond.

Blackletter
A typeface developed in France that was based on the letterforms of the Middle Ages. Nowadays this typeface has fallen out of favour due to its ornate letterforms and unfamiliarity.

Arts and Crafts
A movement favouring simplicity in design and rejecting heavily ornamented interiors. There was an emphasis on craftsmanship and an honesty through design. These tendencies were also reflected in the design of new typefaces.

Century Schoolbook
Morris Fuller Benton
1901

Franklin Gothic
Morris Fuller Benton
1904

Copperplate Gothic
Frederic Goudy
1905

Modernism
The emergence of form follows function. Endeavour to define the new paradigm and what is to be considered ‘modern’ as there was a complete disregard of history and the past. Rapid progress in terms of design and functionality were key concerns. Typefaces of this era often forced viewers to see the everyday differently by presenting unfamiliar typographic forms. Sub-movements include DeStijl in Holland (1917) and Constructivism in Russia (1918).

1931
Nazi Germany
Blackletter was declared the official typeface of Germany. In 1941 Blackletter was outlawed in favour of Roman type.

Industrial Revolution
New techniques developed that allowed for increased levels of detail in typefaces. The ‘point’ measurement system was introduced as well as the use of boldface. Experimentation with serifs also started to see the light of day.

1919 - 1933
The Bauhaus
Highly influenced by geometric forms and proportions, typefaces that originated from this school pushed the boundaries of sans-serif letter design.

1796
Aldis Senefelder invents Lithography and revolutionises the print-making process.

1885
The Monotype character caster was patented by Tolbert Lanston. This method made it possible to cast single letters instead of whole lines as with Linotype.
**Humanist Type**
Following the Second World War there was a consumer boom in the USA which led to a renewed optimism. Many creatives and intellectuals also fled Nazi Germany resulting in an expanding cultural paradigm. Hermann Zapf started blurring the lines between sans-serif and serif typefaces and started the Humanist typographic movement.

- **Palatino**
  - Herman Zapf
  - 1950

**Helvetica**
Roger Excoffon
1957

**International Style**
Also known as the Swiss style, this movement advocated a new set of revolutionary principles. The movement encouraged the use of grids and mathematical standards to design letters as well as asymmetrical layouts with an emphasis on sans-serif typefaces.

- **OCR A**
  - Adrian Frutiger
  - 1968

**Pop Art**
As a reaction to abstract art, Pop Art started to emerge as a reflection of consumer-culture. Typefaces were designed according to possible associations instead of theory or principle. Towards the end of the decade lettering was heavily influenced by the Art Nouveau movement.

**Personal Computers**
The widespread introduction of the personal computer coupled with desktop publishing, defined this decade in terms of typographic design. Computers replaced the physical process of type design.

- **Arial**
  - Robin Nicholas + Patricia Saunders
  - 1982

**1981**
Mike Parker and Matthew Carter establishes the first digital type foundry.

**Bitstream**
1981

**1970’s**
Herb Lubalin and Tom Carroze

**Punk**
This decade saw type develop to become even more decorative and extravagant. The emergence of the Punk culture towards the end of the decade rejected the decadent and extravagant nature of fashion, visual arts and music in favour of the disposable and the shocking.

**1985**
Developed by James R. Von Ehr, this software allowed for the manipulation of existing fonts as well as the creation of new ones.

**Fontographer**
1985

**Apple Mac**
Apple makes the personal computer accessible to the masses and thus typeface design migrated away from professional typesetters towards designers of all genres. Low-res computer displays resulted in 'pixelated' font styles.
The Future
Massive growth of a multimedia driven society placed new demands on letterforms - letters had to be legible on screen, on mobile phones and on paper. Experimentation with free-form fonts and deconstructed typefaces.

Contemporary typeface design is only limited to one’s imagination and ranges from the conservative and traditionally principle driven letters, to the experimental, reinterpreted and image driven fonts.

Scripted
A proposal for a Museum of Typography might see the light of day in South Africa. Being a world first, there is a possibility for the project to be recognised for its innovation and elegance in design execution.