

New School University
Parsons School of Design
Communication Design Department

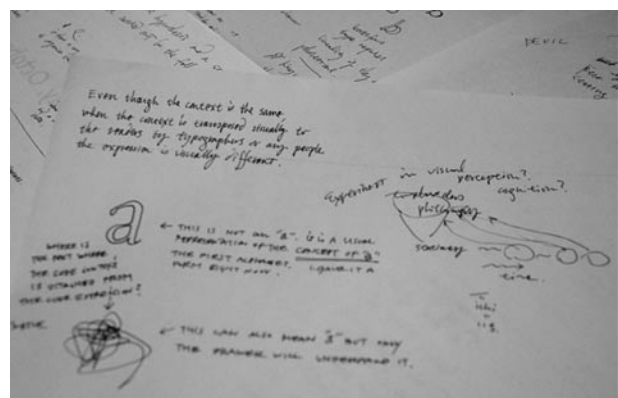
Experimental Typography: Process Documentation 1

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First Proposal

Despite a very unstable start of this semester, on 4th of October, the students were able to present many diverse experiments to the class. After the first assignment – counting the number of typefaces in the world – and also during the process, I was trying to think and scribble down my thoughts on typography. When Christian and I was brain storming to put together a conclusion for the first assignment, many interesting views and problems arose. The process and conclusion is documented and discussed in our papers. (“Experimental Typography: Number of Typefaces, Research Analysis and Interpretation”, Schmidt, C. and Okada, T. Parsons School of Design, Communication Design Department, September 2001.) Our view about the number that we came up with was that “The numbers conceived by our experimentation are meaningless and arbitrary. They do not relate to each other, overlap in content and are not based on any common criteria.” And we stated that “The reason for the impossibility of a manual count, and for the varying resulting group findings, is the decentralized nature of all forms of art, including type design. The invention of the desktop computer, which essentially provided a platform for individual type creation, resulted in the modern abundance of typefaces and accelerated decentralization.” However, the process yielded me an insight to the subject. After scribbling down my thoughts on papers I came up with a thought on typography and tried to write a paper. This is documented as “Experimental Typography: Experiment Proposal, Typographic Semiotics”, (Okada, T. Parsons School of Design, Communication Design Department, September 2001). In the paper I stated a question: “Would typefaces, typesetting, layout and all other components of typography affect the meaning of the context and communicate different messages to the reader? If the context is modified, is this an appropriate method of

communication? A larger part of this question is: “Is typography a mean of reproduction or a mean of expression?” This question has always been in the back of my head and I thought that there should be a possible experiment around this area. However, as I was trying to form my thoughts into words and coming up with a defined experiment, I found that the idea was too vague and abstract. This did not yield me any meaningful experiment. Initially, I thought that I can form some kind of a study / experiment group and gather people who are not so aware of typography, but as it was pointed out in a class discussion, it seemed impossible to conduct that kind of experiments. I thought that it will be very helpful if I could get some kind of a response from the class.



Scribbling down my thoughts on papers.

Week 2, Class Discussion

The discussion became about the level to which the non-designer public is conscious of typography and changes in typography, and what variables cause people to read type as an artform and its own entity rather than as a transparent container of information.

An experiment was proposed that would measure a control group's experience of type examples, with the anticipated problem of isolating variables (format of presentation, the people chosen, the setting). This was likened to the experiments that are used to test the functionality of road signs, where all other driving variables are eliminated and subjects are negotiated through a landscape of signage tests. The idea was troubleshot by the class, and the topic was left in the realm of a broader concept of the reader's interaction with typography. (from the second week's class notes)

As the class progressed and numerous interesting experiment proposals were presented. Amelia's proposal / thoughts on digital revivals of metal typefaces inspired me. (Please refer to her paper, "Experimental Typography: Origin?", Grohman, A. Parsons School of Design, September 2001) Below is the class notes on her proposal.

Discussion centered around the proposal to follow a typeface through its various technological stages and evolutions, issues related to type digitization and revivals, and obsolete typographic technology. Issues raised:

- 1. Bad translations into new formats, such as the redrawing of Bembo from metal type.*
 - 2. Decisions that must be made when reviving a typeface, about what version (printed, original drawings, etc) contains the elements that are most worthy of resurrection.*
 - 3. Decisions about preserving idiosyncrasies, and when they revert to accidents.*
 - 4. The mighty retrofitted pantograph.*
- (from the second week's class notes)*

After the class, I was in a vague area. There was a possibility that I can conduct a joint experiment with Amelia, but I was not sure what I really wanted to get out of revival and the technology around typography. So, before thinking about what to do, I thought that I should simply start researching about revivals and metal type.

Starting the Research

I was extremely lucky, because my former teacher, Dmitry Krasny, was working on retouching and fixing the digital Bembo by looking at a type specimen of Monotype Bembo set by Michael and Winifred Bixler. I scanned these letter forms and started to compare them with the digital version.

THE MODERN REVIVAL of fifteenth-century Italian types occurred as part of a broader printing movement, in both Europe and the United States. William Morris became greatly excited about printing. He decided in 1888 to set up a printing office where he could make books in the spirit of those of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As a model, Morris selected a type of the Venetian somewhat heavier version of a Nicolas Jenson type. Morris intended to use it for his first book. The finished type, cut by the skilled punchcutter Edward Matthews, was original, but tended, as Morris later wrote, "rather more to the original design—Golden type—was intended for an edition of *The Golden Age* by Morris' Kelmscott Press. The highly successful Kelmscott Press was the first to enter the field of printing. Additional private types appeared in the late nineteenth century, including *bold romans which set up into the virile, black pages Morris favored. I House Press, and Merrymount font produced for Daniel B. Updike*

8 point Monotype Bembo set by the Bixlers. Approximately actual size.



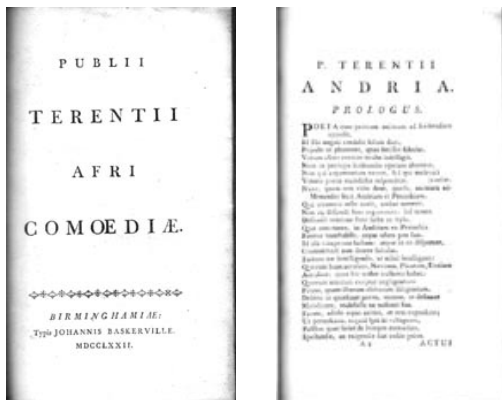
8 point Monotype Bembo enlarged up to approximately 72 point and compared with a 72 point digital Bembo.

ag ag

36 point Monotype Bembo enlarged up to approximately 158 point and compared with a 158 point digital Bembo. Note the difference of the actual shape, weight, blackness, curves, effect of ink squeeze and length of the descender of g. When you compare metal type, which was cut differently for each sizes, the differences in shapes are significant. (look at the 8 point Monotype Bembo.) On the other hand a single master digital Bembo has, obviously no differences between different sizes.

During this research, I have put together another paper. This was a different experiment proposal (although there is no experiment proposed in the paper!) "Experimental Typography: Experiment Proposal, Reviving the Meaning of Type", (Okada, T. Parsons School of Design, Communication Design Department, October 2001). In the paper, you will see that I am still concerned about the "feeling" and "meaning" of typefaces. However, I had decided a direction, and the direction seemed to be a more solid and definitive one compared to the one before.

In addition to comparing Bembo's, an encounter to a book that was printed by John Baskerville in 1772 was a great source of inspiration. And this book yielded me a small experiment in reviving.



"Terentii Afri Comoediae". Printed in 1772 by John Baskerville. Title page and the first page from the book.

First Experiment?

After seeing this magnificent book, I was wondering how a typographer can interpret the face that was being used in this book. I started the experiment by first, looking at the original Baskerville printing carefully with a loop. Then scanning it and blowing it up. After this process, I looked at the digitized version of Baskerville and started to compare the two. (ITC New Baskerville, and for a reference, Mrs Eaves by Zuzana Licko)

Nova figura oris.
Nova figura oris.

Baskerville's original printing (enlarged) compared with ITC New Baskerville.

I choose 2 characters – an fi ligature and a "g" – and started tracing the letter forms. First by actually tracing the outline of the printed letter forms and second by interpreting the printed form to "mimic" ink squeeze and texture made by metal type.

fig fig fig
fig fig fig
fig fig fig

Left to right, ITC New Baskerville, ink squeeze mimic and traced letter forms from the original source.

Takaaki also made an important comment about the best revivals, which are not only technically attentive to detail but also interpret an old typeface based on its social and historical context, as well as what really draws us to the original usages of the typeface in our own time and place.

The following advice and commentary followed this presentation.

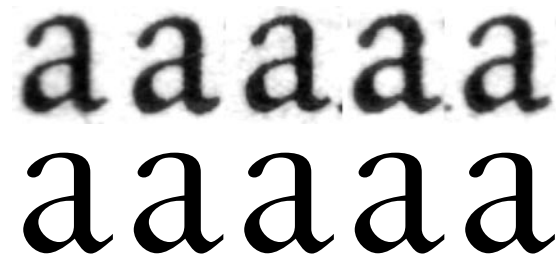
- Takaaki's making of multiple masters is very important. Robert Slimbach is one of the best revivalist, in part because he is so concerned with this factor and does not chintz on details on any drawing. A revivalist thrives when its letters, enlarged greatly, retains their integrity.
- In order to really show rendering of type, it is necessary to make 1200 or at least 600 dpi prints.
- Do not only concentrate on letter forms themselves, but also the spacing between them and the way they used to be set. That is the great trick to pulling off an effective revival. An assignment for the sophomores is to take a book printed in the 1700s and try and recreate the typesetting. This always yields admirably bouncing baselines, but never quite the real effect.
- The salvation of revivals is indeed their analysis of what truly makes a typeface great. Is it the letterspacing, or that it is set in Latin? The size and rarity of books, the politics of its creation and use; all contribute to the thought process of a revival.
- The Gift Comment: The big deal with revivals since 1984 is that they are being done with cubic and quadratic splines, ie. Bezier curves. Even little bitmap fonts come from outlines drawn in Fontographer. However, very few people can actually make a good drawing in Illustrator. For almost everyone, there is something insane about using it. We are always trying to figure out what little thing we can do to make this wacky tool mimic hand skills, and be as elegant as good hand drawings and printed material. But does Slimbach sit around and push Bezier points all day?

(from the forth week's class notes)

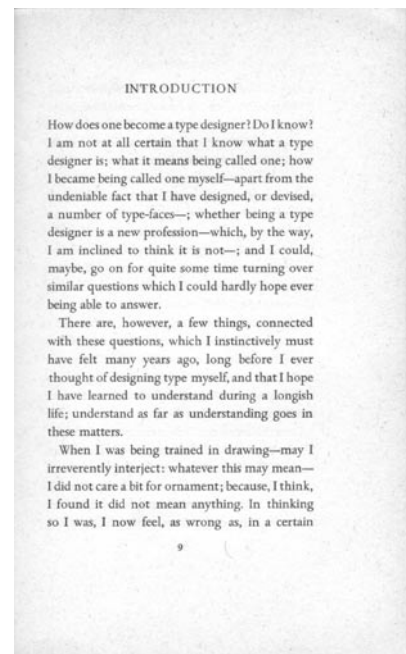
These comments and advises helped me tremendously to set my path. I have decided to continue my research further on.

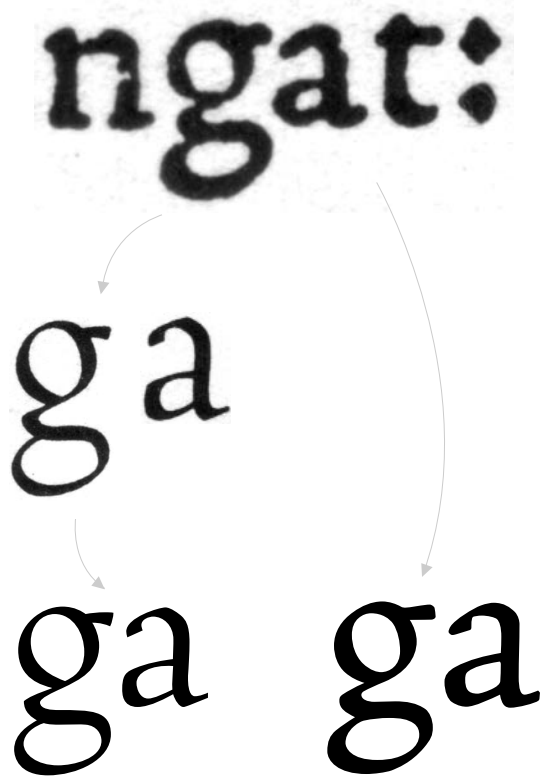
More Research and Realization

More research was done at the Cooper Union's Library. I tried to find as many metal type set books and see how they feel, what they do et cetera. And I found few more factors that makes metal printing unique, apart from the ones that I have been discussing before, such as: Variation in each letter form. Every "a" is not exactly the same, because of the impression of metal type and ink squeeze.



Variations in each "a"s from an introduction page of Jan van Krimpen's book (title, year, etc.) Typeface: Spectrum and Spectrum MT (digital).





From top, original Nicholas Jenson type, Centaur (metal). The bottom two are digitized Centaur (left) and Adobe Jenson (right).

After the research I had a vague idea of what metal type was. How they look. What kind of social meaning it has. But, why do we revive typefaces. Above, shows different interpretations of Nicholas Jenson's Roman. Why do designers go back to this classical model? Nicholas Jenson's first roman has been an inspiration and model for many typefaces such as Bruce Rogers' Centaur, Robert Slimbach's Adobe Jenson, Morris Benton's Cloister, William Morrison's Golden Type, Emery Walker's Doves Roman, George Jone's Venezia, Ernst Detterer's Eusebius, George Abrams' Venetian, Ronald Arnholm's Legacy, . Is it necessarily a conservative act? For nostalgia? Or is it giving type a new life, just like a performance of Mozart or Bach's music? I have come up with many questions about reviving and ran into somewhere too deep that I could not find any answers to these questions. Am I going back to my first proposal's chaos and confusions? Research, reading about people who revived typefaces (Jonathan Hoefler, Robert Slimbach, Zuzana Licko,

Stanley Morrison and the Monotype reviving project et cetera), asking a type designer about his revival (Mr. Nix's El Dorado / Nix Rift), ideas and philosophical questioning was very valid until this point, but I felt that I am really missing something.

As I was walking towards school for this class, I had a realization that clearly set a path to all the chaos and confusion.

"How am I to understand revivals unless I experience reviving a typeface?"

Reviving Romulus Sans Serif

When I was researching metal type, I encountered one typeface that interested me. It was in a book that was put out by the Typophiles in 1957. (Typophile Chap Books: XXXII, On Designing and Devising Type, Krimpen, J., printed in the Netherlands) The book was written by Jan van Krimpen (1892–1958). A dutch type designer who designed faces such as Spectrum, Haarlemer and Romaneé. I was surprised to find out that his only sans serif face was called Romulus sans serif and that it was the first sans serif face as a true companion to a serif face. This idea was adapted later on by faces such as Summer Stone's Stone family, Otl Aicher's Rotis, Martin Majoor's Scala and Fred Smijers' Quadraat. The face was experimentally cut by hand in only one size and in four weights. My surprise was that the face had a feature of a humanist sans serif. A category famous for faces such as Eric Gill's Gill Sans, Hermann Zapf's Optima and Hans Eduard Meier's Syntax. Since I assumed that from Gill's Gill Sans in 1927 and W. A. Dwiggins' Metro (geometric, humanist sans serif) until Syntax in 1967 that no true humanist sans serif existed during those two designs. I have researched if the face was digitized and contacted the Dutch Type Library, who revived most of Jan van Krimpen's faces, and found out that the face has not been digitized yet. I thought that even that alone was a good reason to "experimentally" revive this face.

—Takaaki Okada

ROMULUS SANS SERIF

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P
Q R S T U V W X Y Z

Irascimini, et nolite peccare: quæ dicitis in
cordibus vestris, in cubilibus vestris com-
pungimini. Sacrificate sacrificium iustitiæ;
et sperate in Domino. Multi dicunt: Quis
ostendit nobis bona? Signatum est super
nos lumen vultus tui Domine: dedisti læti-
tiam in corde meo. A fructu frumenti, vini,
et olei sui multiplicati sunt. In pace in idip-
sum dormiam, et requiescam; Quoniam tu
Domine singulariter in spe constituisti me.

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A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P
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