

Thinking with Type

Key Phases

-In a traditional printing shop, gridded cases hold fonts of type and spacing material. Capital letters are stored in a drawer above the miniscule letters. Hence the terms “uppercase” and “lowercase” are derived from the physical space of the print shop.

-Responding in 1967 to the rise of electronic communication, the dutch designer Wim Crouwel published designs for a “new alphabet” constructed from straight lines. Rejecting centuries of typographic convention, he designed his letters for optimal display on a video screen (CRT), where curves and angles are rendered with horizontal scan lines. In a brochure promoting his new alphabet, subtitled “An Introduction for a Programmed Typography,” he proposed a design methodology in which decisions are rule-based and systematic.

-In the early 1990s, as digital design tools began supporting the seamless reproduction and integration of media, many designers grew dissatisfied with clean, unsullied surfaces, seeking instead to plunge the letter into the harsh and caustic world of physical processes. Letters, which for centuries had sought perfection in ever more exact technologies, became scratched.

-Typefaces are an essential resource employed by graphic designers, just as glass, stone, steel, and other materials are employed by architects.

-The history of typography reflects a continual tension between the hand and machine, the organic and the geometric, the human body and the abstract system.

-Engraved letters-whose fluid lines are unconstrained by the letterpress’s mechanical grid-offered an apt medium for formal lettering.

Keywords

Calligraphy - Visual art related to writing. It is the design and execution of lettering with a broad tip instrument.

Writing System - Set of visual or tactile signs used to represent language in a systematic way.

Lettera Antica - Classical mode of handwriting with wider, more open forms.

Weight - Heaviness of strokes in a typeface.

“New Alphabet” - Designed by Wim Crouwel; all straight lines; designed for optimal display on a video screen; curves and angles rendered with horizontal scan lines.