

Typography

Constance Delamadeleine

The term “typography” has covered different meanings over time. It can refer to the work of a typesetter, typographer, type designer, graphic designer, or printer. The voices offered here provide insights into some of its definitions, emphasizing how its development has relied on technological change. They also show how the evolution of typography as a professional activity overlapped with graphic design, turning from an autonomous professional activity in the first half of the 20th century into a subset of graphic design in mid-century, and finally entering a new phase of professionalization in the late 1990s.

In the printing industry until the 1950s, “typography” mainly referred to the activity of the typesetter who composed type manually (typesetting). However, the development and commercialization of a new photographic method of reproduction, phototypesetting, redefined the field of typography and its practice.¹ While some typographers became machine operators, others expanded the creative aspect of their profession.² The career path of Albert Boton, one of the employees of the Studio Hollenstein in Paris, is a case in point. First hired for his typesetting

skills, Boton became a type designer in charge of creating new, home-made fonts to enrich Hollenstein’s catalog. This professional shift occurred when Hollenstein developed a phototypesetting machine named ABM. Through this new technical means, typesetting could also be practiced by graphic designers, not merely by trained typesetters. Consequently, graphic design and typography were no longer seen as opposing activities, for they now interacted at their respective boundaries.

A second phase of technological transformation occurred with the introduction of the desktop computer in the 1980s, and the emergence of the world wide web. The digital era brought about the “dematerialization of type” and announced the end of the mass production of lead typefaces, a process that had begun with phototypesetting.³ The processes of creation, production, and commercialization of typefaces became simplified and were transferred to designers who produced fonts on a smaller scale.⁴ Designers were then directly connected to their working environment, with no layers of mediation in between.⁵ Unlike traditional methods, the new digital tools facilitated access to typography and allowed designers to produce typefaces within a short timeframe. Consequently, the number of type designers increased, along with the number of typefaces. A font could be produced solely for a specific commission or experimental project.

In the late 1990s, some Swiss designers established their own digital foundries in parallel with their independent graphic design studios. Graphic design and typography emerged as separate enterprises again. This was the case with the foundry Optimo. Originally founded in 1998 at ECAL as a bachelor project by Gilles Gavillet and Stéphane Delgado with the help of teaching assistant David Rust, this foundry was first conceived as a “digital agency” selling different items: clothes, images, music, and typefaces.⁶ Over the years, the project became more commercial and focused mainly on a library of classic typefaces. In 2001, Gavillet and Rust established a graphic design studio brand with a different name (Gavillet & Rust) in parallel with this activity. Like Lineto, another Swiss digital foundry launched online in the same period (1998) by Stephan Müller and Cornel Windlin, Optimo emerged as a new economic

model that redefined the boundaries between graphic design and typography, and announced a new phase of professionalization of typography.⁷

This selection of voices expands on the observations formulated by previous professionals—from Jan Tschichold onwards—concerning the impact of technology on the practice of typography. It reveals, for example, how the profession of the typesetter operated first as a separate practice that was progressively incorporated within graphic design. With the advent of phototypesetting, a new field emerged at the intersection of type and graphic design, which has become the generally accepted definition of “typography.” Today, designers still cross the boundaries between type and graphics. Whether we consider typography today as an autonomous profession or a subset of graphic design, those who practice it have entered a new phase of professionalization.

1 Paradis 2013: 100.

2 Dipede 2015: 131.

3 Malsy & Langer 2009: 36.

4 Rappo 2014: 278.

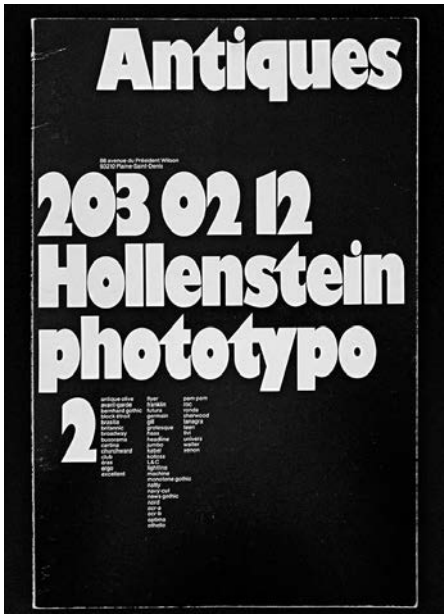
5 Lupton 2016.

6 Berthod 2019a: 172.

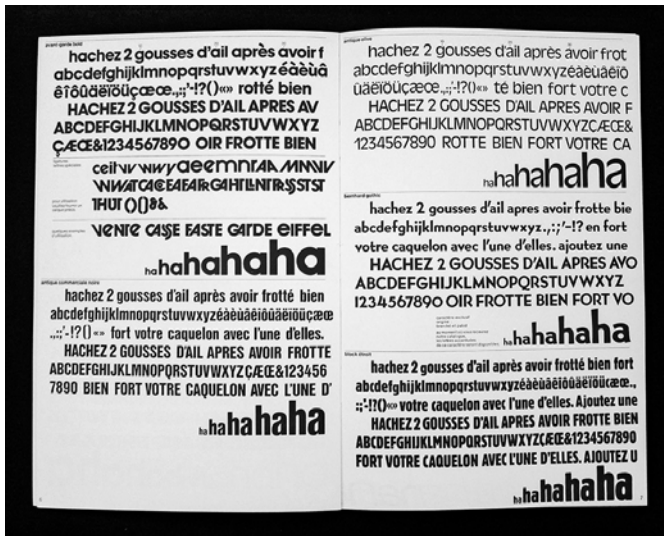
7 Rappo 2014: 282.

Evert Endt

Conversation with Constance Delamadeleine, Paris, Oct. 4, 2018.



Figs. 39, 40
Studio Hollenstein, ca. 1970. Cover and spread from a phototypesetting catalog of the Studio Hollenstein, Albert Hollenstein archive, Ville de Paris, Bibliothèque Forney.



EE Les différents caractères typographiques suisses proposés par Hollenstein et notamment l'Univers créé par Frutiger étaient un atout pour le besoin de typographie à la Compagnie d'esthétique industrielle. [Figs. 39–40]

EE The various Swiss typefaces offered by Hollenstein, and in particular Univers designed by Frutiger, were an asset for the typography needed at the Compagnie d'esthétique industrielle. [Figs. 39–40]

Hans-Peter Kaeser

Conversation with Sarah Klein, St. Gallen, Nov. 29, 2012.

HPK Spitzfeder ist für mich Tabu. Mit der Spitzfeder wird nicht geschrieben, sondern gezeichnet. Spitzfederschriften wie die Anglaise sind keine Schriften. Das dürfen Sie so zitieren.

HPK The pointed nib pen is taboo for me. You don't write with the pointed nib pen, you draw with it. Typefaces based on pointed nib pens, like Anglaise, are not typefaces. You can quote me on this.

Albert Boton

Conversation with Constance Delamadeleine, Vernon, Sep. 8, 2017.

AB Tous les gens pointus en typographie allaient chez Hollenstein. Les directeurs artistiques des agences de publicité étaient sensibles à la typographie. Hollenstein proposait la qualité [...].

Je travaillais sur la typographie Eras. Hermann Zapf, le typographe allemand, est venu à l'atelier. Il est venu

s'entretenir avec Albert. Il avait toujours son aspect de banquier. Hollenstein avait mis un costard ce jour-là. C'est Zapf qui l'a présenté à ITC à New York. ITC a remarqué le caractère Eras et Aaron Burns a demandé à Hollenstein de dessiner les autres graisses. Une fois que j'ai dessiné toutes les séries, ITC l'a mis en matrice. Dans la publicité des films américains, on voyait des logos en Eras [...].

François Richaudeau et Albert Hollenstein avaient mis au point la machine ABM. C'est comme un agrandisseur. On pouvait régler soit la hauteur de la ligne soit le corps. [La machine était] composée de matrice films que l'on posait sur un composteur aspirant. C'est la seule machine développée par Richaudeau sur une idée d'Hollenstein pour ne plus composer les textes en bromure découpé. On pouvait régler soit la hauteur du corps, soit la longueur de la ligne. À Paris, il n'y avait que l'ABM à disposition à cette époque pour le phototirage. Cette machine s'est intégrée au catalogue qu'il y avait déjà. À partir de l'intégration de l'ABM, je me suis consacré uniquement au dessin de lettres pour le catalogue Hollenstein. [...] L'investissement d'Hollenstein dans de nouvelles technologies telles que la Phototype a contribué à diffuser les typographies suisses telles que la Haas.

AB All the smart typographers went to Hollenstein. The artistic directors of the advertising agencies were sensitive to typography. Hollenstein offered quality [...].

I was working on the Eras typeface. Hermann Zapf, the German typographer, came to the workshop. He came to talk to Albert. He always looked like a banker. Hollenstein had put on a suit that day. It was Zapf who presented Hollenstein to ITC in New York. ITC noticed the Eras font and Aaron Burns asked Hollenstein to draw the other weights. After I drew all the series, ITC put it in matrix. In the advertising of American films, we saw logos in Eras [...].

François Richaudeau and Albert Hollenstein had developed the ABM machine. It's like an enlarger. You could adjust

either the line height or the body. [The machine was] made with matrix films that you put on a suction composing stick. It was the only machine developed by Richaudeau based on an idea of Hollenstein, that let you avoid having to typeset the texts in cut bromide. You could adjust either the height of the body or the length of the line. In Paris, the ABM was the only machine available at the time for photo-lettering. This machine became embedded in the catalog that was already there. From the moment when the ABM was integrated, I devoted myself exclusively to drawing letters for the Hollenstein catalog [...]. Hollenstein's investment in new technologies such as "Photo-type" helped to spread Swiss typefaces such as Haas.

Gilles Gavillet

Conversation with Jonas Berthod, Geneva, Apr. 6, 2017.

GG Quand on doit formuler notre sujet de diplôme [à l'ECAL en 1998] – à l'époque je collaborais beaucoup avec Stéphane [Delgado] [...] – on découvre Fontographer, qui nous apparaît comme un outil magique au potentiel à découvrir. Cela nous motive à proposer une fonderie digitale. [...] Le projet de base, aussi nourri de notre expérience dans le magazine [Welcomex], souhaite réunir nos intérêts autour d'une plateforme digitale qui édite de la typographie, du son et de la photographie.

JB Comme une agence.

GG Exactement. Et nous contactons un ou deux photographes de cette nouvelle génération, et cela s'arrêtera à un ou deux je crois [rires]. Il nous semble cohérent de vendre aussi de l'image à côté de la typo, ainsi que des sons qu'on peut produire. [...] Il y a déjà des fonderies en ligne, notamment Hoefler avec typography.com, ou FontShop, mais à l'époque ils

représentent une position typographique que l'on considère comme extrêmement dogmatique. [...] On est davantage intéressés par la possibilité offerte de créer et diffuser des signes, par leur immédiateté, et puis aussi par une vraie rupture de langage visuel. Dans ce contexte, le rôle de M/M (Paris) fut significatif à travers les workshops menés avec Cornel [Windlin, à l'ECAL en 1997]. [...] M/M propose un rapport à la typographie très spécifique et le mélange des deux perspectives nous propose de renouveler notre regard et notre manière de pratiquer le design graphique. Donc par la fonderie, nous n'entendons pas un modèle tel que FontShop, qui fonctionne à l'époque avec Thesis, Scala, des caractères que l'on juge extrêmement ... [rires] de manière extrêmement critique. [...] En parallèle, nous découvrons le logiciel AfterEffects, puis Flash qui offrent la possibilité soudaine d'animer des formes ... Et on pense qu'il est intéressant d'explorer ces technologies autour d'une plateforme digitale telle qu'une fonderie. On développe initialement l'idée avec Stéphane Delgado, puis David [Rust] qui est assistant, s'intéresse au projet et s'y implique. Puis nous poursuivons le projet après le Bachelor. [...]

JB Il y avait un nouveau langage – techno, technique – lié aux outils de production comme Fontographer.

GG Complètement. Il y a une fascination pour l'outil numérique, et pour nous c'est cohérent – quand je réfléchis au diplôme – cela me paraît logique de présenter la typographie avec du son et des images. Il y a quelque chose en lien avec les années 1990, la culture techno. [...]

JB Et si on revient à Optimo. Au début il y a cette idée d'agence, puis ça devient un modèle commercial plus classique. Est-ce qu'au début il y avait déjà l'idée de publier des fontes d'autres designers ou est-ce que ce n'était que les vôtres?

GG Non, au début on pense publier uniquement notre propre production typographique. On dessine les capitales, parfois des bas de casses, des chiffres, bref le minimum requis. Et quand une commande par fax arrive, on termine le set de caractères [rires]. Puis en 2003, on travaille sur une plateforme plus autonome et fonctionnelle qui correspond au développement de notre travail éditorial. C'est à ce moment que nous commençons à collaborer avec François Rappo, qui s'est aussi mis à dessiner et avec qui nous partageons régulièrement nos idées sur des projets appliqués. Il commence à dessiner des projets très conséquents, comme le Didot Elder, que j'adopte pour l'identité de JRP Ringier. À ce moment, l'idée d'utiliser la fonderie comme une plateforme de publication pour des designers dont nous partageons les intérêts fait son chemin. [...] C'est donc en 2003 que le premier site, qui était un projet de nature plus expérimentale, devient une plateforme avec un shop qui s'inscrit dans une logique professionnelle. Depuis, la typographie numérique n'a cessé d'évoluer de même que ses enjeux, tant en termes de création que de production.

GG When we had to decide on our diploma subject [at ECAL in 1998]—at that time I worked a lot with Stéphane [Delgado] [...]—we discovered Fontographer, which seemed to us to be a magical tool with potential to be discovered. This motivated us to propose a digital foundry. [...] The basic project, also based on our experience with the magazine [Welcomex], was to bring together our interests around a digital platform that published typography, sound, and photography.

JB Like an agency.

GG Exactly. And we contacted one or two photographers from that new generation, and we stopped after one or two, I think [laughs]. It seemed sensible to us to also sell images alongside the type, as well as the sounds that we could produce. [...] There were already online foundries such as Hoefler, with

typography.com, or FontShop, but at that time they represented a typographic stance that was considered extremely dogmatic. [...] We were more interested in the possibility of creating and distributing signs, in their immediacy, and also in a real break in visual language. In this context, the role of M/M (Paris) was significant through the workshops with Cornel [Windlin at ECAL in 1997] [...] M/M proposed a very specific relationship to typography, and the mixing of the two perspectives promised to renew our vision and our way of practicing graphic design. So with the foundry, we did not mean a model such as FontShop, which at the time worked with Thesis, Scala, typefaces that we approached extremely ... [*laughs*] extremely critically. [...] At the same time, we discovered the AfterEffects software, then Flash, which suddenly offered the possibility of animating shapes ... And we thought it would be interesting to explore those technologies around a digital platform such as a foundry. We initially developed the idea with Stéphane Delgado, then David [Rust], who was an assistant, was interested in the project, and got involved. Then we continued the project after our Bachelor degree. [...]

JB There was a new language—techno, technical—linked to production tools like Fontographer.

GG Exactly. There was a fascination for digital tools, and for us it was consistent—when I think about our diploma—it seemed logical to me to present typography with sound and images. That was something to do with the 1990s, the techno culture. [...]

JB Let's get back to Optimo. At first there was this idea of an agency, then it became a more classical business model. Was there already an idea to publish other designers' fonts, or was it just yours?

GG No, in the beginning we thought of publishing only our own type production. We drew the uppercase, sometimes the lowercase, numbers—in short, the minimum required. And when a fax order came in, we finished the set [*laughs*]. Then in 2003, we started working on a more autonomous, functional platform that corresponded to the development of our editorial work. That's when we started collaborating with François Rappo, who also started drawing typefaces and with whom we regularly shared our ideas on applied projects. He started to draw very sizable projects, such as Didot Elder, which I adopted for the identity of JRP Ringier. At that point, the idea of using the foundry as a publishing platform for designers whose interests we shared was gaining ground. [...] So it was in 2003 that the first site, which was a more experimental project, became a platform with a shop that had a professional logic. Since then, digital typography has continued to evolve, as have its challenges, both in terms of creation and production.