Frances Butler

New Demotic Typography: The Search for New Indices

Frances Butler is a former textile designer and producer, Goodstuffs Handprinted Fabrics, 1969-79, a former professor of design at the University of California at Davis, 1970-1994 and an ongoing writer, illustrator, designer, printer and publisher of books on visual culture through Poltroon Press, which she has operated with her press partner Alastair Johnston since 1975. She now lives and works in France and California.

During the last fifteen years the nature of the cognitive practices needed for rapid access into information and for creative thought has changed. Linear thought is now too slow. In the effort to devise short cuts, so that disparate information widely separated can be joined by metaphoric juxtaposition, or lateral thinking, designers of type and image are searching for ways with which to represent the fluid fields of type and image that will induce reverie, often a pre-condition for metaphoric, non-linear thought. One of the paths taken in the search for a new mnemonics of free visualization, the fusing of the "widely separated" typical of lateral thinking, is the reinvestigation of syntactic devices used before printing with moveable type codified punctuation, including many devices once in use among quasi-literate populations. This reinvestigation of the origins of punctuation, including indices, in the search for ideational guidance and creativity within new technology parallels research in medicine or nutrition, where reinvestigation of original plant and animal species, rather than their later hybrids, has proved useful.

During the last fifteen years the shape of the cognitive system needed for rapid access into information and its use for creative thought has changed. Linear thought is now too slow for searches through the mass of material available, especially on the CD-ROM In their effort to devise short cuts to activate a much faster ideational trajectory through excess information by metaphoric juxtaposition (which joins widely separated and disparate information and invites lateral thinking), some designers of type and image have freed the field of the structures which supported linear thought, traditional punctuation and page layout. They are searching for ways with which to represent and access that which has hardly been described, much less indexed, lateral thinking. Often they produce a visibly nonlinear field, which read in any direction by small-scale decisions, a state of mental activity inducing reverie, a condition encouraging metaphoric, nonlinear thought. In their search for both non-hierarchical fields for the presentation of information, and for devices to highlight information without predetermining its position in ideation, typographic designers are reinvestigating syntactic devices used before printing with moveable type codified punctuation, including those once in use among quasi-literate populations.

With the expansion of the "immediately retrievable" to the scale of information available on the CD-ROM has come a need for indices to that information which escape the linear logic of traditional indices and the excessive real-time of computer search. Linear thinking is now too circumnavigational for creative thinking within this massive display of information. This expansion of information retrievability has been underway for decades and for perhaps fifteen years typographic designers have been searching for new visible structures to represent, to access and to control the informational morass. Working inside and outside of academic institutions, but having a wider range of cognitive techniques regularly available than standard academic logocentrism, they have always used visual metaphor as a primary component of communication. Designers are familiar with the nonlinear thought process called lateral thinking, and are in an excellent position

to attempt representation of the primal visual flux in which lateral thinking can occur, or even to represent diagrams of lateral thinking as a short-cut to fluid ideation.

Visual metaphor, the operative process within lateral thinking, has not had a "good name," being associated with popular culture, the unschooled, or illiterate, the primitive and the female. Graphic designers have always addressed the popular audience. Nineteenth-century popular graphics were a wonderland of idiosyncratic metaphor, and early in the twentieth century graphic designers fully assimilated the folk metaphor of Giorgio de Chirico, misnamed surrealism, into their vocabulary. They have never entirely ceased using metaphoric image and logic, lateral thinking, in their designs, even in the era of the dominance of the Swiss grid. Thus they had in place tools for the invention of a new visual structure to literacy even before the arrival of the effective universality of digital production, with the arrival of the Macintosh™ computer in the 1980s. But within the last decade designers have increased their efforts to both produce fluid fields of image supporting lateral thinking, and their efforts to create marks and layout for the punctuation and indexing of that field. In so doing they have reused both old attitudes towards punctuation and layout and old marks that were once *demotic*, and are now the foundation of what I am calling "new demotic typography."

New Demotic Typography: A Social Definition

What does demotic mean? Demotic script, historically the most popular of the three forms of the Egyptian hieroglyph, after the most representational and very carefully made (the hieroglyph), became ever more quickly, or cursively, fashioned, less skillfully made, and progressively more abstract. The trajectory of abstraction through the hieroglyph to the hieratic script to the demotic script can be seen in a chart in I.J. Gelb's *A Study of Writing (figure 1)*.

The hieroglyph was used to record the doings of gods and kings. Hieratic and demotic characters were used for day-to-

HIEROGLYPHIC						HIEROGLYPHIC BOOK-SCRIPT	HIERATIC			DEMOTIC
500 - 800 B.C.	2700 - 2600 B.C.	2000 - 1800 B.C.	c. 1500 B.C.	500 - 100 B.C.	c. 1500 B.C.	c. 1900 B.C.	c. 1300 B.C.	c. 200 B.C.	400 - 100 B.C.

Figure 1
I.J. Gelb. 1952. *A Study of Writing.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 76.

day written communications for *popular* activities. Although the word demotic has the same root in Indo-European as does democracy, that is, *demos*, the common, the popular, the vulgar, the word demotic is only relatively democratic, being connected to an elite practice, reading and writing. Some contemporary typographic practices are examples of a new demotic mode exactly because they come out of the same relative loosening of skill that produced the original demotic written scripts. The computer, like many new technologies, reduces traditional skill to ground zero and invokes both formal and epistemological restructuring. New demotic typography shares the same ambiguous relationship to social power as did the original demotic script; its design components were generated by those schooled in educational institutions, but are now used in the service of more popular projects.

The Representation of Linear Thought

While lateral thinking had escaped most earlier efforts at two-dimensional representation, there were some attempts to represent it in dada publications during and immediately after World War I in Switzerland and Germany. These beginnings were soon swamped by the previously important graphic punctuation system, one that represented linear thought at its

most precise, the grid system. This system had been developing throughout the nineteenth century and reached perfection in the hands of the Swiss after World War II. The grid system is an example of tight surface control, in which place has meaning. It is supported by a simple formula, a narrow range of options and continued control of the options through a manual which defines parameters into the future. Since the layout skeleton is so easily recognized, information can be applied to the grid with full confidence that every position on the page can be quickly seen as an information-bearing point. The grid system is still being used by institutions because their communication is usually `quantitative`, analytical and easily reduced to positives or negatives.

Early Experiments in Typographic `Nonlinearity`

Some experimental constructions that preceded new demotic typography can be found in the work by those designers who shaped the Swiss grid, Armin Hofmann and Emil Ruder. Later designers, Wolfgang Weingart, who taught at the `Basel` School of Design and whose ideas influenced a generation of designers, or Karl Gerstner, whose *Compendium for Literates* is a catalogue of possible components of the typographic page, are responsible for developing these early hints. In the United States, one of the first pioneers of new demotic typography was Cindy Marsh, whose classes at the Women's Center in Los Angeles influenced many typographers, including Sheila Levrant de Bretteville. Another post-Weingart but pre-Mac practitioner of new demotic typography, Neville Brody, working in London, began creating images of flux and its fusing in the 1970s, and continues to influence a worldwide graphic design audience, while Rudy VanderLans and Zuzana Licko and their magazine *Emigré* made their subject matter out of the computer and its early, "low-rez" output.

Once reinforced by technological opportunity, new demotic typography expanded from the early, bare, diagrammatic examinations of the nature of page layout favored by Weingart, or the German designer Willi Kunz, into a mix of

old and new letterforms, type and script, changing letter direc-
tion, overprinted images, changes of scale and ambiguous
syntax. April Greiman, a celebrated practitioner who added
density to this skeleton, calls her style "hybrid imaging."
David Carson, latest heir to many innovators, now moves
through their devices with ease, as a user of this canon.
This is not a fad.

Construction of the Fluid Field

A formal description of the space of the new demotic page
begins with a surface onto which information is packed so
fully that much of the surface becomes invisible. Layering
of text and image fills the framing spaces traditionally held to
be necessary for the isolation of meaning, swamping any posi-
tioning of information on a vertical/horizontal grid. Instead,
in a new demotics layout, the reader encounters meaning
somewhere on a shaded path, a blurred field of spatial implica-
tions, through a reading process that is closer to that used to
understand the abstract gathering shapes that serve as musical
notation for composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen or John
Cage than to that involving the actual presence or absence of
marks traditionally indicating meaning. Neville Brody has
continued to lead the pack with his fluid field illustrations for
Fuse (figure 2). Many European music magazines, especially
from Germany, have sequences of double page spreads which
can only be described as formless. On the contents page for
`Wired,` a magazine about digital media, numbers and text are
usually reversed out from a swirling image, an approximation
of indexing flux. In the search for the visible shapes `that`
`will suggest or aid` nonlinear reading and thinking, many
older types of gathering marks and shapes are being given
prominence, beginning with the enlarged parentheses much
used in publications from Cranbrook Academy of Art and the
California Institute for the Arts in the 1980s, and continuing
through the reuse of enlarged brackets in magazines such as
Raygun and *Metropolis* `in 1994` *(figure 3)*.

Figure 2
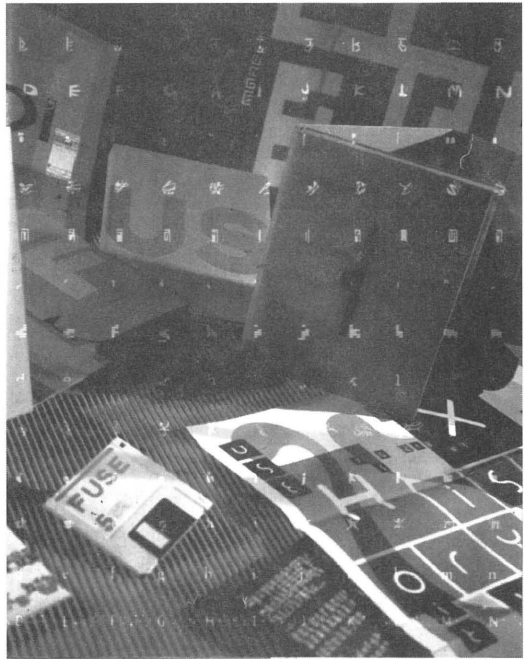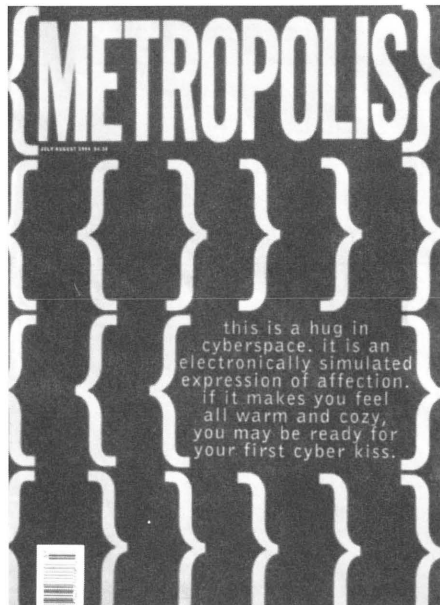Neville Brody. c. early 1990s. Promotion for *Fuse. Wired,*

Figure 3
Metropolis. July/August, 1994. Cover.

E-mail has had an impact on the reinvestigation of old punc-
tuation marks. In the effort to inject vocal tone into their
communication, e-mail users have equated brackets with
messages of warmth and affection, and all-caps with shouting.
This is another indication that sound is now considered an
important component of cognition, and efforts are being
made to represent it. This has led to contemporary
reuse of old punctuation, devised when marks served to indi-
cate the length of pauses, the intonation and rhythm of phrases
needed for reading *out loud,* the main style of reading until the
fifteenth century. Punctuation was a guide to aural rhetoric in
a time when the impact of oral framing on the shaping of
information into sense was fully understood. It is significant
that a history of punctuation, *Pause and Effect: Punctuation
in the West,* by M.B. Parkes, was published in 1993. It is also
significant that this is a period in which cataloged subtleties
of sound, from speech to dolphin song, are recorded and
available for review to a majority of the people in the techno-
logical world.

This preoccupation with both the micro-subtleties of sound
and with the interstices of traditional two-dimensional
communication is an effort to project an outward record of
the cognitive process used for generating both memory and
new ideas described by its investigators as parallel cognitive
processing.[1] This cognitive structure involves the brain and the
total body in constant small-scale decisions in time and space,
a series of minute decisions that reconstructs knowledge,
generates new understanding and underlies the process of
creative reverie. Creative reverie comes about exactly through
the process of making many small, stress-free decisions, and is
supported traditionally by projects for which there is perhaps
an overall design, but in which no individual step is critical,
like gardening or some kinds of craft (e.g., woodcarving,
embroidery). It is this evocation of creative reverie, with its
invitation to lateral thinking, not linear textual decoding, that
supports new demotic typography.

1
Rummelhart, David E. and
James L. McClelland. 1986.
*Parallel Distributed
Processing: Explorations in
the Microstructure of
Cognition.* Cambridge, MA:
MIT Press.

Reuse of Pre-literate Devices: Implied Meaning and Parataxis

All of this manipulation of the type and spacing of the page buries syntax. Invisible or dissolved syntax allows the viewer to choose the order in which texts or images are read. Such reader-syntaxing, with its opening into stress-less reverie, uses the practices of a pre-industrial, pre-institutional and pre-international past, when texts and images were used to recall *implied* meaning, not as bearers of explicit instruction. Implied meaning is supported by the social habits of the polity that uses it, in deeply rooted habits having to do with the need for group cooperation in the interests of achieving large projects necessary to life and death: crop harvesting or house, road and fort building. Illiterate societies train their members in the production of food or the construction of houses by example, not with written explanations, and when they do have texts, these do not educate, but remind. In fact, literacy was not necessary to use these texts. The information in each of these images, including images of text, was often reader-syntaxed, since no starting place, upper-right or the middle left, necessarily contained a *first* segment of meaning, and often enough, the text turned itself from left reading to right reading. The density of folk prints, like the Russian *lubok* that El Lissitzky and Kasimir Malevitch used for inspiration, was not made up from layers of semi-transparent over-printing as are the new demotic texts. Their density lay in the juxtaposition of elements by position, large and important or small and inconsequential according to the spaces left over by the simple expedient of assigning most space to the most important rhetorical component.

The structure of these compositions offers a visual parallel to the cognitive habit called *parataxis*. Parataxis is the gathering of ideas, spaces, objects or actions into a unit, whose sense is determined only by temporal (in the order thought) or spatial (in the remembrance of spatial sequence) enumeration of parts, not by a logical or hierarchical relationship of ideas. Parataxis is a practice that can occur at every scale of education or endeavor. A. R. Luria recorded paratactic speech in the illiterate villagers of Eastern Russia in the late thirties:

"Everyone knows what a car is. It has chairs in front for people to sit on, a roof for shade and an engine. If you get in a car and go for a drive, you'll know what it is."[2] Today, worldwide, there are still many groups of the *demos* — peasants and wandering laborers — who both think and use texts and images paratactically, without access to literacy. But I recently recorded a college-educated artist speaking in the paratactic mode: "I just love Nietzsche. I don't remember much about his work, but he was very contradictory. He was very contradictory. And he had a big mustache which I drew." This was a female, recalling another of the prejudices long held against such additive and freely recombinative thought. But today parataxis is being re-evaluated because it is one cognitive mode that predisposes one to the creativity of lateral thinking. And new demotic typography has made parataxis visible.

Responsibility and Legibility

The debate about the legibility of new demotic typography, initiated by Massimo Vignelli, in an interview with Ed Benguiat in *Print* magazine in the fall of 1991, who called this "illegible" typography an "aberration of culture," continues.[3] April Greiman believes the style exists as an expression of revolt by the unrepresented when she says that "they can't force us to read their way anymore." And she is right, although the "they" are not socially or politically retrograde, as she contends. "They" are not, as yet, aware of the difficulty of thinking creatively within a field of excess information, perhaps because creative thinking, a specialty afterall, is not necessary to "them." But the real change is a shift in the cognitive needs of the audience. This is the celebrated paradigm shift noticed since Thomas Kuhn wrote the *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in 1962, and reflected in publications whose very titles imply change: *Atlas, Boundary, Borderline, Emigré, Offramp, output, Shift, Wired* or *Fast Forward*.

As we who are "global villagers" know, the traditional community which uses the representation of implied meaning

2
Luria, A.R. 1976. *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 87.

3
1991. "Massimo Vignelli vs. Ed Benguiat (Sort of)," *Print.* XLV:V, 91.

to remind them of common sense, has changed its social and geographic location. Although some active traditional cultures still exist, there are now more mediated "communities without propinquity" which share assumptions based on institutional education. It is now the members of traditional cultures who are forced to become international nomads, "unskilled laborers" who, belonging to no group at all, become an *isolato* (as Herman Melville named the international crew members of whaling vessels in the nineteenth century). The *isolati,* whether Turks, Laotians or Iowans, need explicit instructions to operate in implicit, mediated culture. Cities and states, worldwide, have had to devise explicit texts to help them, to keep them from falling onto subway tracks, for example. These texts are clearly structured, with wide letter, word and paragraph spacing, often using the grid system.

Massimo Vignelli, who has spent his life producing subway maps and other signs that will quickly inform the international nomad of vital information says: "One should not confuse freedom with [lack of] responsibility. They show no responsibility. It's just like freaking out, in a sense. The kind of expansion of the mind that they're doing is totally uncultural...."[4] He does not understand that new demotic typography and its `paratactic` text is responsible to an audience which needs to better understand cognitive mapping, not to be kept from falling off subway platforms.

Marginal Reuse in the Service of New Indices

Why does this cognitive preference exist now? I have found a suggestive proposal in the writings of Alois Riegl, who addressed questions of visual preferences and the styles they supported in two books written around the turn of the century, one of them, *Stillfragen,* recently translated and published in English as *Problems of Style*. Riegl defined two modes of control of the representational surface, the haptic and the optic. The haptic mode was `one based on the` `visibility of` all of the surface, and assumed the possibility of imagining how that surface was made, with what tools and

4
"Massimo Vignelli vs. Ed Benguiat (Sort of)," 91.

with what material. The haptic mode implied tight visual control of a surface as well as such physical care in the finishing of the surface that incursions into it were minimal. The haptic mode thus contained clearly delineated, and somewhat reduced, information. It also implied strong institutional support, that is, a corps of highly trained and skilled carvers, and an attentive audience, with common understanding of how the images were made.

The optic mode, on the other hand, was defined as having a rich surface which was loosely controlled both optically and in terms of workmanship. The material tended to be more abruptly invaded by the carving, with much deeper incisions, so that much of the area was no longer visible, being cast into shadow. The undercutting generated excess surface that could not be seen, with the excess itself implying loosened control, even declining skill. Riegl was interested in separating this style of work from the pejorative concept of decline, substituting the idea that such shifts from the production of haptic to optic works indicated a societal preference for one type of visual control over the other.

I cite Riegl's theories here because they provide a notion of two modes of visual control, one tight, one weak, as an explanation for the new layout or punctuation system that I am calling new demotic typography. Obviously, Riegl's concern with the third dimension is only relevant to represented space within new demotic typography, and Riegl's belief in a pendulum movement between social use of the two modes is not valid: today both modes coexist. In fact, I believe that these two modes of visual control of information have always coexisted, the haptic based on high speed retrieval of specific information needed for action, the optic based on low speed retrieval of information implicit within that system, but ripe for questions. I believe that today the two modes serve the same audience at different times. The tightly controlled surface of the grid system serves newspaper readers and those searching for a competition entry deadline. The loosely controlled system, a visual fuzz of partly invisible implied meaning, serves those who are longing for self-defini-

tion through creative interaction with a range of indefinite but charged options. This audience is searching for self-definition within the infinitely expanded information resources promised to all, delivered to a few, by the "information superhighway," the informational support for holistic practices. They are not worried by the lack of indexing that makes this real-time treasury difficult to think with. This new audience insists on creating its own categories and the trajectories connecting them, the index, through the vast information array.

The first stage in the devising of new categories is the baring of the devices of the old, and the reinvestigation of rejected options. Parataxis and its visible trace, demotic typography, are rejected options now being reconsidered as less constraining categories of the process of thought and its representation with which to form useful indices of the seemingly infinite expanse of information before us. Since the latest discoveries about the workings of the brain give equal value to the visual, verbal, spatial and tactile cognitive processes, it is timely that the new demotic typography blends two of these processes, the verbal and the visual, with density and intimacy.

It is no more surprising that the organizational devices (indices, punctuation, layout) being researched for visual guides to lateral thinking are archaic than it is that much contemporary nutritional research concerns the gene pools of marginal plant or animal species, like the Peruvian potato or the Red Poll cow. This is a period when marginal inversion is a useful research concept. But the theory of marginal inversion recalls the *ourobouros*, or the snake biting its tail, and that ancient mark of gathering recalls the infinity symbol, and opens this essay to lateral shortcutting, so it is now time to let this tale go.

Appendix: Early Punctuation Marks and New Demotic Reuse

From the time of the Greeks and Romans to the fifteenth century, most cultures were oral, and, when writing was used, it was used as an aid for those reproducing speech for listeners, not readers. Even those who were literate read out loud, and

it was only in the `fifteenth` century that reading became silent, and punctuation served to indicate unformed sounds, unspoken emphases. Punctuation was either expressed by differing the amount of space between the words, or by varying the size or the number of dots or dashes, and these variations differed from scribe to scribe. These vague early punctuation markings included different kinds of dots and dashes, boxes, framed and filled letters and space-fillers, including abstract ornament, grotesqueries or didactic images, to insure that all lines ended at the same place on the page, making what we now call justified columns. The page itself was also used as a textual divider, being differently structured to indicate different types of logic. Columns, two, three or four to a page, were used to activate the repetitive power of list-intoning. Introductory pages could indicate beginning by being entirely taken up with one word, or could slide into a beginning with the use of the *diminuendo*, a gradual decrease in the size of letters as the new chapter progressed. The paragraph as such did not exist and new thoughts were usually indicated by larger letters, often in another, older, hand than the one used for the main text. After the `eighth` century, with the development of religious scriptoria, much of this punctuated writing ended up being for the church, and was thus employed in texts about the ultimate values in life and death. Those church fathers who oversaw text production were aware of how easily the inflections of reading could change interpretation, and sought to control both sense and emotion through consistent punctuation, but it was not until the spread of printing from movable type that punctuation became uniform.

The new demotic typographer has reexamined the freedom resulting from use of these earlier punctuation devices, sometimes explicitly, often by substituting idiosyncratic devices: pictures of space, new forms of boxes, arrows, maps, diagrams, "backward" letters and expanded typographic color, especially the use of many different typefaces, weights and widths within one word or text. Some of the specific tactics used in the fluid new palette include large scale charts and diagrams reminiscent

Figure 4
Advertisement for AT&T in *Wired*. 1:1, Winter, 1993.
(detail)

of the memory-theater diagrams popularized by the philoso-
pher-orators of the sixteenth century, like Raymond Lull.
The inaugural issue of *Wired* includes an illustration of a hand,
fingers divided into digits, each with a specific memory aid,
exactly like the mnemonic devices used by medieval orators
(figure 4). Other publications overlay images or texts with
suggestions of geographic control (maps) or numerical control
(charts) as does *output,* a student publication from schools
including the Herron School of Art, Cranbrook and the
University of Texas at Austin done in the early 1990s, or an
advertisement in *Wired*, from 1994 *(figure 5)*.

Many new demotic typographers like to add extra color and
emphasis within a sentence or paragraph by boxing some of
the text, either with rule or with color *(figure 6)*. Sentences
dotted with boxed words suggest musical notation, where
shape and color convey emphasis and duration. The computer,

Figure 5
Advertisement for Z-Code Software in *Wired*. June, 1994.

Figure 6
Studio Dumbar. Poster for the *Holland Festival*. Den Haag, The Netherlands. 1988.

Figure 7
Zakglobe. Linotype/Hell. *Face to Face*. 1994.

with its repertory of ready-to-use textures and shapes encourages layout color. Jacques Bertin, in *Semiology of Graphics: Diagrams, Networks, Maps* (1983), catalogued typographic color and assigned `quantitative` significance to it. Edward Tufte, on the other hand, in *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* (1983), and *Envisioning Information* (1990), found such type and page color confusing and called it "chart junk." Some contemporary designers have already developed a counter-chaos movement which controls images and text by centering them in layers of boxes, for example, Jennifer Curtis of *Industry* in San Francisco.

As part of an imagery of flux or fusion, letters ornamented into pattern, not to be quickly deciphered, flourish. With the baseline of necessary skill erased by computer type design programs, letter invention is running through the traditional changes of the `nineteenth` century, ornamentation of the traditional shapes and changes of that shape, as demonstrated by the typeface *Zakglobe*, `issued by Linotype/Hell` and shown at the 1994 AtypI Conference *(figure 7)*.

Figure 8
Charles Byrne. *Rolluerown*. Oakland , California, 1992.

The absence of all word separation, typical of early Greek and Roman inscriptions, has also been re-investigated. One California greeting card, by Chuck Byrne, uses equal space set-width letters to announce: "Epistemology police are after you" *(figure 8)*.

The direction of reading, including the direction in which the page or pages are held and turned has been re-investigated, including experiments with an early Greek writing process, *boustrophedon*, in which both words and letters are read one way left to right to the end of the line and then reversed when the next line is read (from right to left), resulting in what we now consider backward letters. The Medieval xylographic print, which fit letters into waving ribbands which often reversed text as it zig-zagged back and forth, also resulted in backwards letters. New demotic typography incorporates many different types of *boustrophedon*, from

simple reversing of the page so that it is read from either end, as in a Capp Street Foundation notice designed by Jennifer Morla in 1991, to April Greiman's self-portrait of the late 1980s with the reversed text *"Live as you can,"* or David Carson's layout on *Nine Inch Nails* in the June/July 1994 issue of *Raygun (figure 9)*.
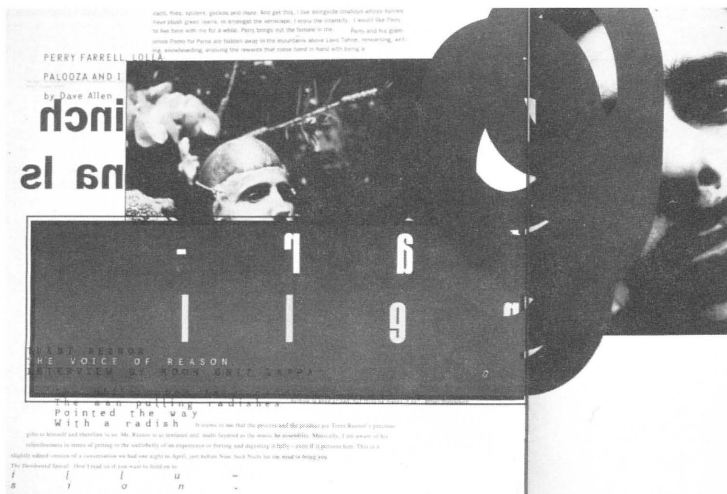

Figure 9
David Carson. *Raygun,*
June/July 1994 (detail).

There are many experiments with new page layouts, some even requiring physical manipulation of the page for legibility. The interweave of sentences, a handwritten annotation practice used by medieval European and Arab readers, and formalized by early printers as interlinear textual commentary, was cast into modern typographic form, without the fluidity of handwriting, by the Swiss designer Armin Hofmann in the '60s, and brought back to the United States by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville in the 1970s. Phil Baines in England used this interlinear text setting in 1985 in his famous *Gutenberg Galaxy* project *(figure 10)* and it is now a worldwide device. Baines also used elaborately shaped paragraphs for texts, a practice of medieval European/Arab scribes, although their shapes did have the fluidity of the handwritten line. The shaped paragraph has always been used by advertising typographers, but the computer programs for automatic text outlines now allow change in every column in a text, as often used in layouts for
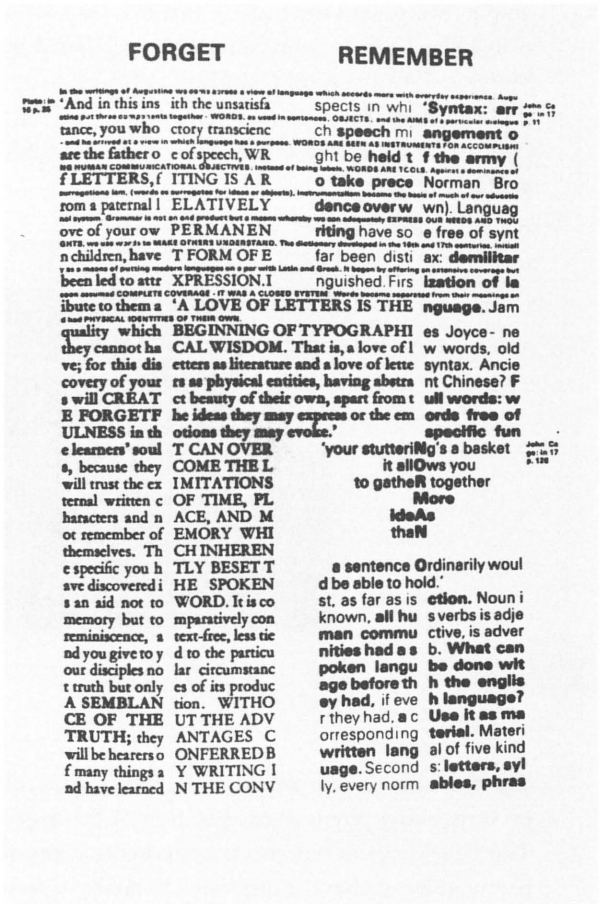
FORGET   **REMEMBER**

Figure 10
Phil Baines. *Guttenberg Galaxy.*
London: Royal College of Art. 1985.

the journal *Now Time,* designed by ReVerb of Los Angeles *(figure 11).* The Adobe program, *Matrix,*™ facilitates interweaving and the ultimate dismembering of the legible edge, a recent fashion for changes in type size and weight within every word, regardless of position.

Excess, not absence, is the primary mode of new demotic typography. Inky overlays of texts and images imply layers of surface on which text can be deposited. Of all of the new uses of punctuation as a visible reproduction of ideational fluidity and abstraction, the overlay is the most archaic. The earliest reproductions of form and space, animals and objects, in the

cave drawings in Spain and France, describe space by overlay-
ing drawings of animals and humans. Overlay of images, and
sometimes of type, had a period of popularity during the first
reaction to the new spatial representation possible through the
use of cinematic film in the 1920s, a reaction incorporated
into the high-prestige product, oil painting, by the cubists.
Overlay by actual transparency has been popular since the
introduction of transparent, offset printing papers.
However, traditional rice papers have long been used, as in
Life in L.A., a portfolio of poetry designed and published by
Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and Susan King in 1983. Films
and plastic are also popular for furthering the illusion of deep
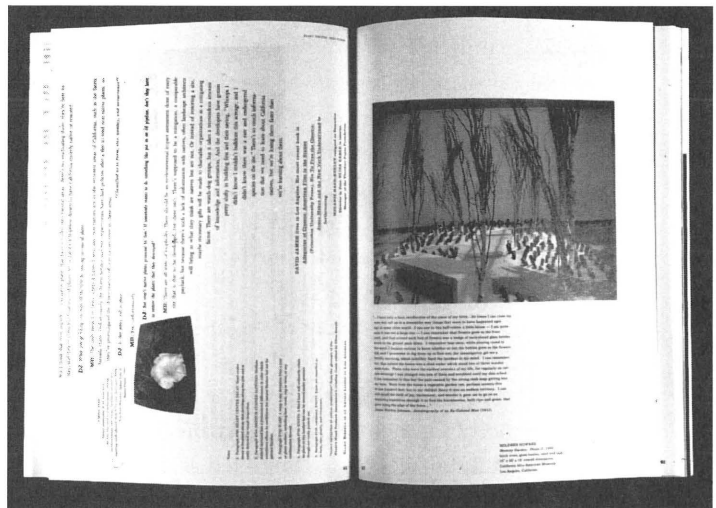space. Such density of surface supports interpretation based on

Figure 11
ReVerb. *Now Time,* No. 2,
Los Angles: Art Press. 1992.

either ambiguity or irony, both a necessary consequence of
our ongoing twentieth-century concern with the *baring of the
device,* and visible irony, wherein the first layer of information
is neither the truth, nor quite a lie, as in *output No. 4* (1993),
a transatlantic collaboration with students at North Carolina
State University and England's Ravensbourne College of
Design and Communication *(figure 12).*

Figure 12
North Carolina State University and
Ravensbourne College of Design and
Communication. *output No. 4.* 1993
(detail).

There are many different ways to indicate such irony or
ambiguity, including juxtaposition. An early appreciation
of the value of juxtaposition of layers of information as an
intellectual project appropriate to the late twentieth century
was the post-war *Independent Group* in England, whose
most famous member was, and is, Eduardo Paolozzi. This
group investigated the nature of generating new ideas out of
information-overload through the juxtaposition of institutional
cultural diagrams, and objects, mostly from consumer culture,
which did not as yet have symbolic readings. They abandoned
the *exquisite corpse* game preferred by the surrealists, wherein
juxtaposition of images was based on minimal information
(marks on each paper fold to connect the next image).
The *Independent Group* members preferred the bulletin board
on which many images were assembled and their possible
connections and effects considered for some while before the
collection was modified. Their assemblages of diagrams and
represented objects was, through the paintings of another
Italian, Lucio del Pozzo, directly linked to Giorgio de Chirico,
who had already explored the intersection of institutional
diagrams and random objects. The *Independent Group*
updated de Chirico's material with the computer boards
admired by Paolozzi. They tried for metaphoric recombina-
tion using proximity, prefiguring new demotic typography
by twenty years.

Another ancient device now used for the representation of ambiguity or irony was the joining of multiple differently-scaled resolutions of the same image, made melodramatic in the 1960s by Antonionni's film, *Blow-Up,* and made mysterious in the 1970s and 1980s by Chuck Close's (pre-computer) digitized photographically-based portraits. April Greiman has exploited the scale blow-up. Some of her posters are simply rhythmic sequences of patches of the same image at different magnifications, connected by the reproduced Macintosh™ scaling icon, a magnifying glass.

Figure 13
Tom Bonauro. Capp Street Projects, 1987-88. San Francisco, 1989.

Finally, the obscuring of information by shadow, threatening obscurity since Platonic times, is popular again. Shadowy imagery was explored in the 1920s and 1930s, when Steichen dissolved fashionable models into shadow produced by multiple carbon arc lamps and Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy camouflaged bodies in sun-cast shadow. Contemporary representation of shadow was used ornamentally by designer Tom Bonauro in many of his designs for Capp Street Foundation in San Francisco *(figure 13)*, Diane Burk for her 1991 journal for the Marin County, Headlands Foundation, or as the point of the piece by Yale designer Janet Zweig in her book *Heinz and Judy,* 1985.

Journal Information

Editorial Correspondence

Manuscripts, inquiries about research and other contributions to the journal should be addressed to the editor. Letters to the editor are welcome. The editor will also relay to the author questions or comments on any article. Your response — and the author's reply — will not be published without your permission and your approval of any editing. If you are interested in submitting an article to the journal and would like a copy of our Notes on the Preparation of a Manuscript, please request this information from the editor. Editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

Prof. Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl
Editor, *Visible Language*
Institute of Design, IIT
10 West 35th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60616
Telephone 312.808.5317
Fax 312.808.5322
E-mail idpoggenpohl@id.iit.edu

If you are interested in serving as guest editor for a special issue devoted to your specific research interest, write to the editor, outlining the general ideas you have in mind and listing a half dozen or so topics and possible authors. If you would rather discuss the idea first, call the editor at: 312.808.5317.

Business Correspondence

Subscriptions, advertising and related matters should be addressed to:

Visible Language
Rhode Island School of Design
Graphic Design Department
2 College Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903
Telephone 401.454.6171