ABSTRACT

Historically, much critical discussion, particularly among typographers, has centered on the role typographic form plays in conveying meaning. Beatrice Ward's image of the crystal goblet, evoked in a 1932 essay of the same name created a framework for considering the ways in which value and meaning are assigned to a text based not only on what is written, but how it was written. While Ward was primarily concerned with the dynamics of letterform and legibility, this essay attempts to extend her metaphor into the realm of social difference by exploring the myriad ways in which spaces of cultural inclusion and exclusion are mediated via typographic form. Within such an argument, qualities of transparency and lightness attributed to the crystal goblet operate as agents of invisibility for non-standard speakers, or a whole host of "others" that fall outside of the normalizing boundaries of linguistic standardization supported by Ward's image of an undifferentiated typographic surface.

The discussion begins by tracing historical precedents for the marking of social difference through distinctions in typographic form. Typefaces from *Jim Crow* to *Tiki Magic* demonstrate how the "display" of otherness relies on the historicizing mechanics of cultural standardization. Similarly, an analysis of pictorial trademarks developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century reveal how fractured letterforms served as the visual equivalent to the "broken" English of a growing immigrant population. Finally, a connection is made to the ways in which contemporary software, through specified feature sets and "default settings," supports a long tradition of representational standardization.

SURROGATE MULTIPLICITIES: TYPOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF INVISIBILITY

Katie Salen

Katie Salen is an associate professor of Design at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on utilizing a broad design practice to investigate ideas about the dynamic relationship between cultural identities and their expression through visual language. In addition to serving as editor and designer of the design journal Zed, she is currently writing a book for MIT Press, Game + Design, with Eric Zimmerman, which uses games as a model of study for interactive design. In addition, she is working as a designer and animator for Flat Black Films, and is a founding member of Condu1t, (a digital film and gaming engine).

University of Texas
Austin, Texas 78712
Visible Language 35.2
Katie Salen, 132-153
zed@mail.utexas.edu

Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

I wonder about the way in which class often overdetermines our relationship to design.

Bell Hooks

1

TRACING THE INVISIBLE

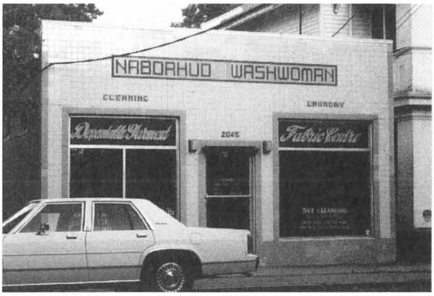
Beatrice Ward's 1932 incantation "The Crystal Goblet" invokes the images of transparency and lightness as purveyors of an enlightened typographic project. Utilizing a form calculated to reveal rather than hide "the beautiful thing which it was meant to contain," the typographic crystal goblet proposed by Ward was not only functional but virtuous as well, implying an inherent, although hardly unproblematic connection between form and the moral sphere. Historically, much critical discussion, particularly among typographers, has centered on the role typographic form plays in conveying meaning, as Ward's valorization of transparency as a means of semantic revelation no doubt demonstrates. Far less attention, however, has been given to an analysis of transparency and lightness as agents of invisibility for non-standard speakers, or those who fall outside of the frame of "the beautiful thing" Ward's crystal goblet was meant to contain.

One way of thinking about this concept of *invisibility* is to consider the phenomena of the typographic visual "voice-over," which constitutes a national symbolic environment, as well as the organic process by which a standard "voice" is generalized across an entire range of cultural expression. [Template Gothic, Univers, Century Schoolbook] The standard typographic voices we are accustomed to are utopian, belonging nowhere, regionless, without accent. [Helvetica, Bell Gothic, Interstate] Seemingly transparent, these forms offer up representations of the generic, the symbolic, the superficial and the stereotypical. [Citizen, Democratica, Frathouse] In the case of the visual voice-over, language not only marks (or unmarks) identity, but functions as a kind of cultural border as well. As Dick Hebdige notes,"...there can no longer be any absolute distinction between these two terms (form and content) and the primary recognition that the ways in which things are said – the narrative structures employed – impose quite rigid limitations on what can be said."[1] Taking Hebdige's narrative structures to include both syntactic and semantic elements of the written word, an analysis of the systems of subjectivity at play within typographic discourse can reveal the myriad ways in which visual form supports structures of cultural standardization, marking exclusionary distinctions between standard and non-standard speakers.

In order to discuss typography as a system that marks social difference, it is important to remember that from earliest times the inscription of language by human hands involved practices in which value and meaning were assigned not to just *what* was written but *how* it was written.[2] In second century Rome, for example, three formal writing systems existed for the inscription of texts. Monumental capitals *(capitalis monumentalis)* were used for architectural inscriptions celebrating imperial accomplishments and conquests. Rustic capitals *(capitalis rustica)*, an extremely condensed version used to conserve space on pages of costly papyrus, were used on political campaign material and outdoor advertising, while a third writing form, cursive or the uncial form,[3] was used "by the people" for ephemeral, day-to-day forms of written exchange. Thus, within this complex, yet clearly politicized hierarchy, the value of the text, and hence the status of the speaker, was marked by the shape of its letterforms.

This tradition of marking social difference through distinctions in typographic form continues today, and is particularly apparent in the case of environmental signage (*figure 1*), where we make immediate judgments about social class, ethnicity, regional background and a host of other social characteristics based on the sign's typographic design. Variations in syntax – either through exaggeration or "error" – immediately place the formalized (and hence politicized) sign in opposition to a correct or standardized version aptly characterized by the qualities of neutrality intrinsic to Ward's crystal cup. Forms eschewing this prized cultural transparency are labeled – by designers, most often – as forms of "visual

Figure 1



New Orleans, Louisiana. Photo by Lauren Sanders, 1998

ALL AMERICAN

Austin, Texas. Photo by Patricia Ramos, 1999 dialect," and can frequently be found clustered together under the undifferentiated heading *vernacular*.[4] Simple distinctions between "high" and "low" aside, this categorization of form is one based primarily on the concept of deviance, although linguistically speaking, dialects are not considered deviant forms of language at all, but simply different systems, with distinct subsets of form.[5]

Yet unlike standard dialects, which are largely defined by an *absence* of socially stigmatizing elements, vernacular varieties seem to be *characterized* by the presence of these same structures. As a result, language structures that fall outside of generic, prescriptive norms offer an affront to standardized taste; vernacular forms not only represent a kind of stigmatized visual *faux pas*, but tend to call into question the quality of the crystal from which Ward's unblemished cup was cast.

Further, because notions concerning the sanctity of language are intimately bound up with ideas of social order, typographic forms that deviate from a prescriptive discourse often incite suspicion on the part of those who wish to keep the boundaries of standardization intact. This should come as no surprise for violations of authorized codes – in this case typographic ones – through which the social world is organized and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb. As Levi-Strauss has noted, "...in certain primitive myths, the mispronunciation of words and the misuse of language are classified along with incest as horrendous aberrations capable of 'unleashing storm and tempest'."[6] Perhaps the classification of non-standard forms as *vernacular* is simply an attempt to avoid unleashing our own storm and tempest on the typographic front.

In street and alley what strange tongues are loud, accents of menace alien to our air, Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew.

Thomas Bailey Aldrichm "Unguarded Gates," 1895

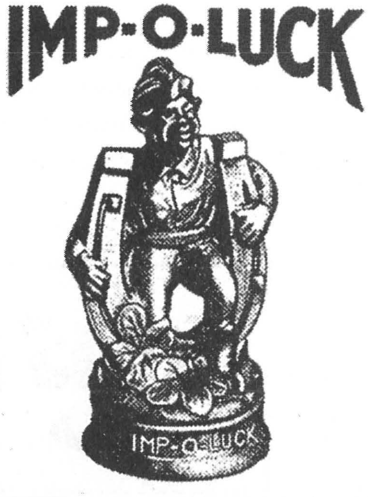
2

AGENTS OF STANDARDIZATION: WRITING THE OTHER

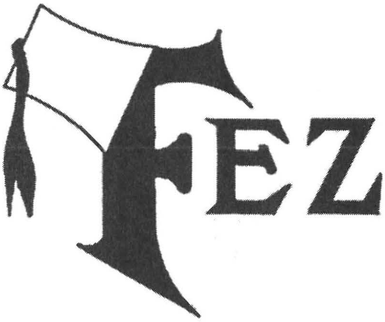
Demands for linguistic standardization had been made from the earliest days of printing, which made variations more obvious by distributing them more widely. These demands became particularly insistent in the nineteenth century, when decorum of all kinds was highly prized.[7] The flood of books and articles published in the 1880s called for "a process of more or less conscious, planned and centralized regulation of language" in which "new elements threatening to enter the language are limited, and...variants within the language are hierarchized and sometimes eliminated."[8] Between the 1880s and the 1920s, urbanization and mass emigration brought together a range of languages, dialects and idiolects previously separated through both geographic space and social difference. Linguistic criticism, spurred on, in part, by the publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED),[9] became a way of checking social mobility and racial progress. As Michael North notes in *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth Century Literature,* "...the true purpose of the standard language movement was to focus attention on the alien, both foreign and domestic, and to provide a means of discriminating where other methods were beginning to fail. Even today, criticism of speech is often, if not always, a way of expressing other social prejudices that polite discourse overtly disavows."[10]

Yet while linguistic borders were being fiercely defended against the forces of immigration and class mobility, visual representations of non-standard speakers flourished, albeit within the narrowly defined borders of the "exotic" or "abbreviated" other. Trademarks from the early twentieth century[11] offer an excellent example of the use of non-standard forms (or forms that deviate from accepted convention) to mark social, racial and ethnic difference, operating as forms of visual shorthand for specific cultural categories. In addition to the use of highly stylized imagery denoting entire immigrant groups (the slightly drunk, impish leprechaun for the Irish; the bold fez for groups of Middle Eastern origin (*figure 2*), the typography appears to revel in its distance from conventionalized notions of beauty and legibility popularized by typefaces such as *Bodoni*, *Caslon*, and *Baskerville*. This distance is created through the use of the "broken" syntax of letterforms or speech ("Navajo," "African Pie," "Meri-kan") (*figure 3*) or through some "exotic" embellishment, such as the design of letters that evoke the calligraphic brushstrokes of Asian[12] or Arabic writing (*figure 4*). In these examples we can see how the "wild motley throng" that crowds in through the "unguarded gates" of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's 1895 poem are given representation through a literal cracking of Ward's crystal cup.

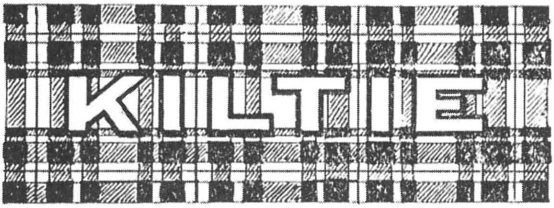
Figure 2


IMP-O-LUCK
IMP-O-LUCK

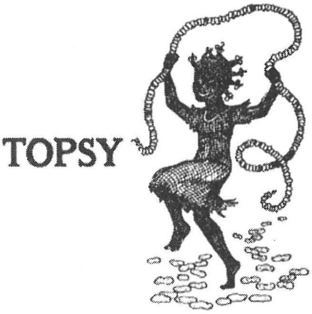
Fire extinguishing compound, May 5, 1925



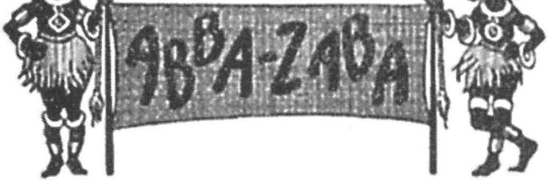
Men's shirts, July 17, 1923



Fresh lemons, May 4, 1920



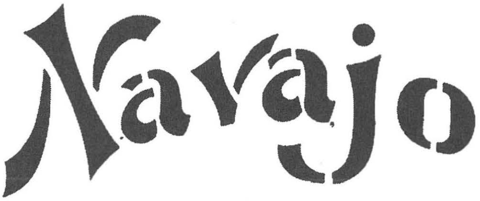
Peanuts, May 4, 1920



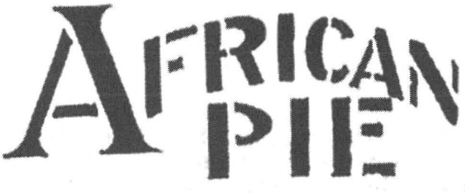
Candy, January 27, 1925

Figure 3

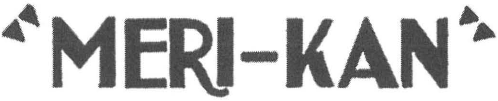
Fractured letterforms serve as the visual equivalent to the "broken" English of a growing immigrant population. The eye dialect at play in the "Meri-Kan" trademark indicates another popular device used to mark racial difference in non-standard speakers.



Textile, May 25, 1926



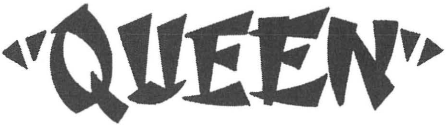
Watermelon sections, February 27, 1923



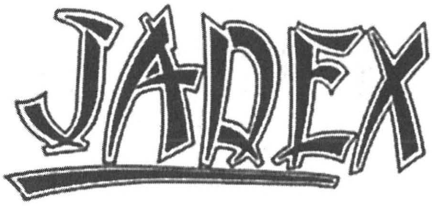
Women's dresses, May, 1926

Figure 4

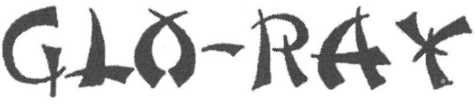
Pseudo-Asian type: a popularized and repeated convention of representation. Note the range of products and the consistency of the "exotic" embellishment.



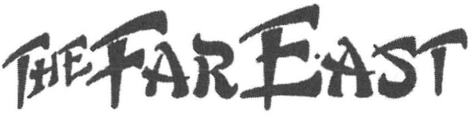
Mops, July 24, 1923



Lamps, December 17, 1929



Silk fabrics, May 25, 1926



Chinese Mission Society Monthly Magazine, December 10, 1929

In addition to the iconographic and pictorial representations of advertising display, a number of alphabets developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth-century were those designed and named to represent various "others" on the basis of stereotypical or non-Western forms.[14] It is not too much of a stretch to consider such culturally thematic alphabets as the visual equivalent of accented spoken English, or forms of visual dialects[15] imbued with socially stigmatizing form. In fact, the introductory text to a popular type specimen catalog – *Morgan Press, Linotype and Ludlow Specimens, 1917* – reads: "In our specimen catalog you will find the modern types along with the pioneers. Here are the light-lines, black letters, shaded, extreme ornamentals, scripts, cursives, bizarre, condensed or extended letters, and the gothics all making a United Nations of types that may do some uncomfortable squirming when packed together so closely." Notable fonts include *Chinese Wong*, *Japanesque*, *Samoa*, *Hobo*, and *Jim Crow*. Fonts such as *Law Italic* and *Society Script* present the oppositional standard (in this case, white, upper-middle class) against which the typographic "otherness" of the non-standard speakers was measured (*figure 5*).

English speaking foreign alphabets – these designs, used with appropriate copy, are highly successful in establishing national identity. If you can't speak a foreign language you can at least get the thrill of writing one (in good old English). Photo-Lettering's *One Line Manual of Style*, 1960-1988[13]

It is, of course, easy to dismiss these examples as historical artifacts of a time and place that had much to learn about issues of cultural representation. In fact, Ward's model of transparency alludes to a form of visual discourse that, for all intent and purpose, erased difference through a formalized homogeneity. Yet, surprisingly despite a radical critique of nineteenth century practices and a cultural reevaluation of modernism, today examples of culturally thematic alphabets abound, albeit, covertly disguised through parody and pastiche. But first, a bit of history.

In the 1990s postmodern typographic critics reveled in the demolition of Ward's metaphor, literally turning the transparent surface of the argument inside out in an attempt to reveal the fluidity of the relationships between form and meaning. Privileging context, or point of view, as the ultimate barometer of sense-making, these critics proposed a typographic model embracing opacity and anti-mastery, yielding forms which denied the existence of any archetypal letter, whether crystal, gold or glitter encrusted. Barry Deck's *Template Gothic*, P. Scott Makela's *Dead History* and Zuzana Licko's *Citizen*, for example, were all attempts to imbue typographic with social and narrative histories. What is surprising to note, however, is that while these designers situated their practice in opposition to Ward's crystal model by becoming involved in issues of representation – on the surface at least – their work failed to challenge the inherent quality of *invisibility* found in Ward's standardized model.

A heady claim, to be sure, but an examination of the typefaces sold by two popular contemporary font houses (House Industries and Emigre) not only supports the argument, but embellishes it as well. We begin with House Industries' class (un)conscious font collection "Bad Neighborhood," "nine fonts from the bad side of the tracks," including *Poorhouse*, *Condemdhouse*, and the racially encrypted *Crackhouse*. And then there is "Scrawl," another House Industries box set (with t-shirt!) delivering *Ashyhouse* and *Nastyhouse* straight from their suburban ghetto to yours, all for the special price of $179. Two recent additions, the font kits *Tiki* and *Hardcore*, extend the practice of visualizing the exotic through the addition of a clip art library that can be used as shorthand for entire subcultures. Sadly, the nineteenth-century representation of the pickaninny seems less than a distant cousin here.[16] (*figure 6*)

Emigre's font catalog, on the other hand, while avoiding the questionable ghetto pastiche of House Industries, presents an exclusionary narrative of a different sort, reveling in the mythology of the Fall of Western Civilization. Read: *Citizen, Dead History, Democratica, Dogma, Emperor, Missionary, Senator, Suburban, Universal.* In the face of this postmodern foundry's post-colonial positioning, the story of a united white front may begin to cloud the virtuous clarity of Ward's crystal vessel.

Thus, the opaque and highly discursive spaces created by these typographers presents a model of representation equally transparent and damning in its pursuit of invisibility of the other. This practice, dramatized by contemporary type designers' love affair with appropriation and reinscription of subcultural forms, has rendered the term *vernacular* both formally vacuous and semantically vacant. Formalized as slang-like riffs on a now familiar alternaculture, typefaces like *Crackhouse* and *Malfunction* merely give the appearance of inclusion; they are culturally irrelevant beyond the thinly veiled message of urban-suburban commodification presented.

Figure 5

CHINESE WONG

JAPANESQUE

Samoa

HOBO CAP

JIM CROW

Law Italic

LAW ITALIC

Society Script

Figure 6

POORHOUSE

Condemdhouse

CRAcKhouse

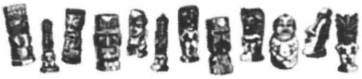
TIKI HUT

TIKI PALMS

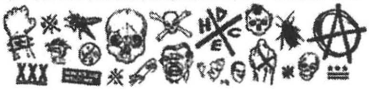
VAnDALisM

Malfunction

NATIVE ART



HARDCORE CLIP ART



It was perceived that in thus abbreviating a name one narrowed and subtly altered its meaning, by cutting out most of the associations that would otherwise cling to it ... the associations called up by a word like "Minitrue" are fewer and more controllable than those called up by "Ministry of Truth." This accounted not only for the habit of abbreviating whenever possible, but also for the almost exaggerated care that was taken to make every word easily pronounceable.

George Orwell, *1984*

3

IDEOLOGY IN TYPOGRAPHY: SYSTEMS OF SUBJECTIVITY

Popular and prevailing usages, as surely as imposed elite usages, reflect an ideology or a manipulation of ideas and symbols for social or political gain. Overt representations of "otherness," as seen in culturally thematic alphabets like *Jim Crow* and *Chinese Lap Song*, present obvious examples of typography's claim to subjectivity. But there also exist more covert, and perhaps more powerful, instances of the written word's ability to mark ideology through typography. One such example focuses on the practice of non-capitalization to signify the historical weakness of a minority group. In standard English usage, the proper names of national and religious groups are traditionally marked with a capital letter. To deny a capital letter to the name of an ethnic group "symbolically diminishes the social status of the group...by the word magic of diminishing the initial letter. To deny, say, *Jew* the capital initial is clearly a slur...".[17] The user concedes the pronunciation and the spelling, but in print the dignity of the name is taken away.

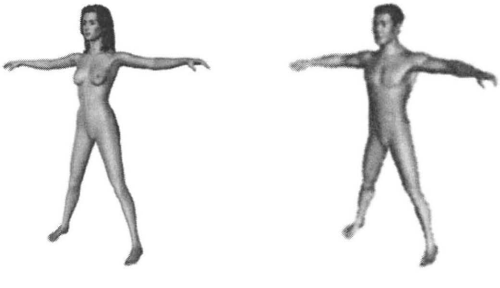
In Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to Wasp, Irving Lewis Allen recounts the story of the most famous case for non-capitalization in American English: that of the term *Negro*. I quote him at length:

> The name began its centuries-long career with a lower-case initial but after Reconstruction aspired to a capital initial. In the decades around 1900, *colored* competed with *negro* for the preferred, proper name for the group. *Afro-American*, first recorded in 1853, was seriously proposed in 1880, but it was not taken up, and it was to be eighty years or more before it was to gain a measure of use. Finally, *negro* emerged as the proper name preferred by many blacks and by white liberals. Settling on the name was not to be the end of it. Soon, a campaign began for capitalizing the initial, and the debate turned on ideology as much as anything. A side debate was over whether *negro* was a relative color description, like *fair*, *dark*, or for that matter *black* and *white*, and hence had no claim on capitalization. Or was *negro*, in effect, a national name, like Englishman, German, or Spaniard, or a group name, like *Jew*, and so should be capitalized?[18]

Allen points out that the struggle for capitalization signifies the changing status of historically oppressed groups. He explains that non-capitalization has tended to signify the historical weakness of a minority group and the decapitalization has sometimes signified efforts to repress competing groups. Allen even makes a case for the dangers of typographic asymmetry, where one name, say *White*, is capitalized, while the other, *black*, is not. While symmetry is benign – whether or not both names are capitalized is a trivial matter – any attempt to capitalize one name and not the other implies a political gesture or ideology in typography.[19]

Figure 7

Figure 8



Ideal Female

Ideal Male

African-American Male

Asian-American Male

4
STANDARD FEATURES

The diversity of characters included in later versions of the software were based on the recognition of a business opportunity...the decision for different races was probably motivated more by the feeling that it would sell well, than by any sort of noble racial equality feeling.

Director of Sales, MetaCreations, developers of Poser

At this point, something of a radical departure is in order as a means of supporting an argument against transparency and lightness as a formalized language of representation. As we have seen, the marking of social difference through distinctions in typographic form has historical precedent; typefaces from *Jim Crow* to *Tiki Magic* demonstrate how the "display" of otherness relies on the historicizing mechanics of cultural standardization. Yet these forms of representation are rather overt, and certainly require no great effort on our part to identify and decode. We are then left to consider whether other, more subtle spaces of representation exist that parallel the typographic agents of standardization so far discussed.

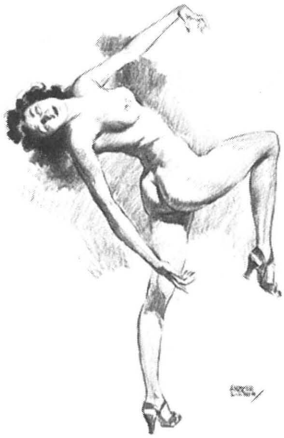
One such space can be found in the "default settings" of the software we use to create forms of visual communication, from general use products such as Microsoft Word, to highly specialized graphics programs such as Poser, which allows users to design and animate human figures. The term "default settings" refers here to the set of representational constraints and conditions imposed by the software itself – a set of invisible assumptions rarely noted by users. Microsoft Word, for example, assumes upon opening that users wish to write on a page 8.5 by 11 inches in measurement, with one inch margins on three sides, flush left ragged right alignment, font Times Roman. Netscape, on the other hand, assumes that "home" is always in the same place (nomadic living is not encouraged), and Poser, the 3D animation and rendering software referenced above, assumes that the "ideal adult" is male and that his genitalia are optional (*figure 7*). The significance of these assumptions are often negligible – page size or margin increments hardly matter – but in the case of imaging software, or software that packages representations of the human body, the neutralizing quality of the visual voice-over is profoundly evident.

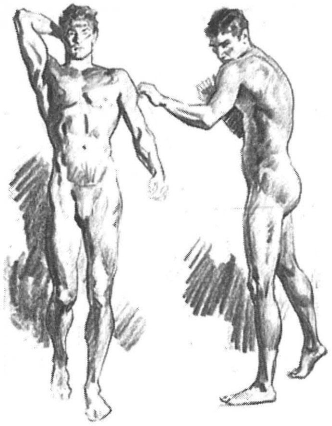
In order to understand how Poser limits representation through the codification of human figures found in its libraries of predesigned models, we can begin by asking a few simple questions. First, how does Poser define the visual grammar of human form? For example, what did the designers of the software consider a visual "ideal," an important concern since several of the models are named using this convention. Second, how did they define "male" and "female" in the language of their figures; third, was race considered or assumed? (*figure 8*) A lengthy correspondence with the designers and animators of Poser's original figure sets revealed a very specific group of visual source materials and references. Andrew Loomis' 1943 book *Figure Drawing for All It's Worth* and Preston Blair's work in animation were cited as important resources (*figure 9*).[20] Moreover, the designers were quick to include comic books and pin-up calendars as secondary sources of inspiration, citing a special interest in representations of "heroic," "pin-up" and "classical" figures. Owing a heady debt to these limited forms of representation – forms which offer extremely prescriptive visual norms – the resulting Poser source universe is one inhabited by an inordinate percentage of overtly generic Caucasian models.

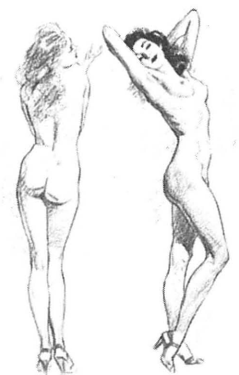
Despite several of the designers' vehement claims to the contrary, a standard grammar has clearly been established by the body sets selected for inclusion in the software's library of pre-fabricated geometries. Specifically, in Poser, standard bodies are Caucasian, twenty-something, bald and beautiful, a formula embracing the prized transparency of the generic and utopian fantasy articulated by the typographic crystal goblet previously discussed. As a result, all bodies included in the so-called "add-on" collections (these include added nationalities, elderly and overweight people, as well as an alien), are automatically perceived as non-standard, as "other," and always in direct opposition to the standard Caucasian, twenty-something, bald and beautiful form (*figure 10*).

In addition, an analysis of the underlying wire-frame architecture of the African-American and Asian-American models reveals an absence of unique geometry; in other words, the design of the African- and Asian-American figures were created through a cursory manip-

Figure 9



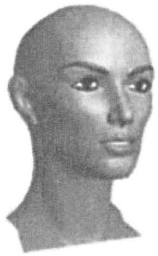




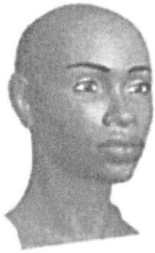
ulation of the spatial and volumetric coordinates of the software's original Caucasian models. Like the visual dialects discussed in the context of nineteenth-century linguistic standardization, these figures owe their non-standard positioning (and subsequent transparency) to their distance from a universal norm, reinforcing a representational practice predicated on a visually explicit form of cultural abbreviation.

Yet it is not only forms themselves that set up this structure of difference. A critical reading of the language used within the software libraries to categorize its forms reveals that the simple constraint of naming has profound implications. We can begin with the add-on collection titled "18 Perfect People," which muddies up the field by confusing race (Asian Woman) and nationality (African-American Woman). Moving on to the most recent collection of male and female characters, we quickly see that men are identified by their occupations or attitudes (race car driver, golfer, rebel man, tough male) and women, most often, by their appearance (full-figured woman, casual woman, businesswoman). Moreover, female figures are not assigned occupations or hobbies in the same way that male figures are: the men in the collection aspire to be golfers, workmen, crewmen and race car drivers, while the *one* role assigned to a female figure beyond that of businesswoman is that of Mother Nature. Issues of class are hinted at in the selection of dress and occupation, and casual references to sexual preference surface on the rarest of occasion. In the case of both male and female models, then, representation has been limited through the language of naming, a constraint often overlooked by users of the software.

Figure 10

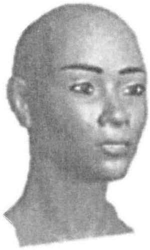


Standard Female



Non-standard Females

Businessman



Non-standard Females

Workman

Spandex Man

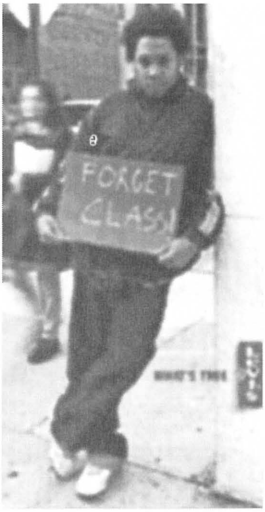
5

BORDERS OF THE CORPORATE VOCODER

> *As we have already seen in the case of the word "free," words which had once borne a heretical meaning were sometimes retained for the sake of convenience, but only with the undesirable meanings purged out of them. Countless other words, such as honor, justice, morality, internationalism, democracy, science, and religion had simply ceased to exist. A few blanket words covered them, and, in covering them, abolished them.*
>
> George Orwell, 1984

Now let's return for a moment to the ideas of transparency and lightness previously discussed. When Ward proposed a parallel between the crystalline cup and the neutrality of the typographic surface she was, no doubt, neatly side-stepping issues of power, agency and mediation by now overly familiar. Recent design discourse, in fact, has recast transparency as the worst form of cultural conformity; this, despite the fact that the territory of once marginalized visual outposts has been wholly mined by a predatory design mainstream. From digital font houses such as Plazm, House Industries or Garage Fonts, to the imagery of M & Co., Pentagram or Reverb, the "look" of the marginalized other is everywhere.

Yet nowhere has this predilection for erasure been more apparent than in the corporate "voice-over" constituted by Levi's newest print ad campaign, "What's True?," where twenty-something types are pictured holding red placards on which they have been given the directive to inscribe their "own truth." With truths ranging from "I want to be



happy," to "Forget Class," to "Conformity breeds mediocrity," the campaign relies on personal revelation as a form of corporate rhetoric: the language of the tribe broadcast by text and image back to the population, this time having been run through a corporate vocoder. Perhaps not surprisingly, the use of self-captioning in the context of a corporate ad campaign like this one fails to separate typographic subjectivity from the vice-like grip of corporate invisibility. By failing to make a distinction between individual truth and a commodified representation of that truth, Levi's erases the very individuality it purportedly supports. In the end, the device of self-captioning does little more than provide an illusion of empowered, non-standard speech, as it is impossible to escape the frame when Levis has positioned the speaker squarely in its center.

6
SURFACING

Typographic and other forms of visual representation that fail to meet the requirements of normative expression pose a challenge to the neutralizing forces of the visual voice-over, calling into question the validity of a form of discourse that marks exclusionary distinctions between standard and non-standard speakers. Certainly any such challenge to prevailing norms of standardization can be quite startling, as forms of deviation – whether linguistic, typographic or otherwise – tend to expose the arbitrary nature of the codes which underlie and shape all forms of discourse.[13] As Stuart Hall has written (here in the context of explicitly political deviance): "New...developments which are both dramatic and 'meaningless' within consensually validated norms, pose a challenge to the normative world. They render problematic not only how the world is defined, but how it ought to be. They *breach our expectations...*" In addition, non-standard forms that refute normative codes negate the surface of cultural invisibility through a *rewriting* of standardized boundaries. By refusing containment within the transparent glare of the generic text, non-standard forms claim their own space, on their own terms. Thus, within the boundaries and orientations expressed by Ward's metaphor lies the suggestion that the perfection of the crystal goblet is only an illusion. With some practice we can learn to draw small lessons from unsuspected sources [type specimen catalogs, street signage, default settings] as a way to breach our own expectations about typographic transparency and the boundaries of *invisibility.*

NOTES

1 Hebdige, Dick. 1987. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style.* London: Routledge, 118.

2 Kim, Sojin and Somi Kim. 1993. "Typecast: Meaning, Culture, and Identity in the Alphabetic Omelet," *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the Quote Unquote Vernacular.* Barbara Glauber, editor. New York: The Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, 31.

3 The term uncial was derived from a derogatory statement made by St. Jerome in the fourth century when he condemned the use of excessively large, inch-high, letters in the writing of manuscripts, claiming it made them clumsy and unfit for use. Drucker, Johanna. 1995. *The Alphabetic Labyrinth, The Letter in History and Imagination.* London: Thames and Hudson, 94.

4 In *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the Quote Unquote Vernacular*, Ellen Lupton writes, "The term 'vernacular' has become the common parlance in the design community, referring to a natural, unschooled sensibility free from the self-censorship of modernism...A 'vernacular' is simply a dialect, and every subculture has its dialects, including the subculture of 'high culture.'" *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the Quote Unquote Vernacular*, Barbara Glauber, editor. New York: The Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, 5.

5 Wolfram, Walt. 1991. *Dialects and American English.* New York: Prentice Hall, 4.

6 Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* 118.

7 North, Michael. 1994. *The Dialect of Modernism.* New York: Oxford University Press, 12.

8 North, *The Dialect of Modernism,* 13.

9 The 1858 proposal for the OED dictionary rules out of consideration of dialect words more recent than the Reformation, and, in so doing, provides what the OED itself cites as the first recorded use of the phrase "standard language." North, *The Dialect of Modernism,* 12.

10 North, *The Dialect of Modernism,* 13.

11 All trademarks shown come from the *Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office*, a weekly publication issued by the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Patent Office, Washington, D.C.

12 Around 1885, a font called Japanese appeared in England, perhaps the first font to allude directly to Japanese or other East Asian writing. Despite the visual integrity and ingenuity of many of these alphabets, Western letterers' mimicry of calligraphic strokes used by other writing traditions inevitably fails to refer correctly to the ductus, or order and direction of strokes, of the different traditions. Kim, Sojin and Somi Kim. "Typecast: Meaning, Culture, and Identity in the Alphabetic Omelet," *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the Quote Unquote Vernacular.* Barbara Glauber, editor. New York: The Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, 1993. p32.

13 As Soji and Somi Kim discovered, the text of one line samples in type specimen books reflect cultural stereotypes: "Squaw better paddle her own canoe" (Apache); "Oliental alphabet VELY GOOD" (Bartuska Nisei); "Mosques sultans harems" (Papirtis Shisk-Ka-Bob); "One quart of Russian Vodka" (Papirtis Kremlin). Conti, Gene. 1988. Photo-Lettering's *One Line Manual of Style,* 1960-1988. New York: Photolettering, Inc., 377-379.

14 Conti, Photo-Lettering's *One Line Manual of Style,* 1960-1988, 31.

15 Another type of variation that the resources of English writing make possible is what has traditionally been called eye dialect. This is the spelling of a familiar word in a non-standard form, while maintaining the standard pronunciation. Recurrent examples include *wimmin, sez, bisnes,* and *enuf.* Such eye dialect spellings...serve to hint that the overall tone of speech should be interpreted as different from the tone of conventional speech, usually in the direction of rustic and uneducated. Eye dialect spellings deliberately overstate the ignorance or illiteracy of a character. Weber, Rose-Marie. 1986. "Variations in Spelling and the Special Case of Colloquial Contractions." *Visible Language* 20.4.

16 Perhaps it is appropriate to consider culturally thematic alphabets as a form of visual euphemism? A euphemism is defined as a word that is used to avoid another word thought to be too direct, blunt, harsh or offensive. Significantly, the *Second Barnhart Dictionary of New English* (1980) points out that "a paradoxical feature of euphemisms is that when the character or meaning of what they describe catches up with the euphemism itself they loose their character as substitutes and come to denote the very same unpleasant fact or reality they were meant to disguise." Allen, Irving Lewis. 1990. *Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to WASP*. New York: Bergin & Garvey, 74.

17 Allen, *Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to WASP,* 69.

18 Allen, *Unkind Words: Ethnic Labeling from Redskin to WASP,* 69.

19 The Nazi resurrection of Fraktur type offers another historically important example of ideology in typography. Fraktur, a typeface initially prized by the Nazis for its "German-ness," symbolized a totalitarian politics that valued style over content. Not surprisingly, once early victories "encouraged them to look beyond Germany's borders, the Nazis, quickly recognized the usefulness of a plainer, more 'European' style, banned Fraktur on 3 January 1941 as a 'Jewish invention." Ray, Robert. 1988. "The ABCs of Visual Theory." *Visible Language* 22.4, 430.

20 Loomis, Andrew. 1943. *Figure Drawing for All It's Worth.* New York: Viking Press. Blair, Preston. 1994. *Cartoon Animation.* California: W. Foster Publications.

21 Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style,* 91.

ETHNOGRAPHIC REFLECTIONS

Nadia Maryniak

Nadia Maryniak received a masters degree in graphic design from the Rhode Island School of Design before traveling the world. In recent email correspondence she quotes Mercy Oduyoye, a contemporary Ghanaian writer: "There is one earth, but many worlds."

Visible Language 35.2
Nadia Maryniak, 154-163

Rhode Island School of Design
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

you the anonymous
you who are nameless
identity constructed
these people
the Other
OTHER
different
you the exotic
allow me to
allow me to
allow me to take
to take your picture
to take your image
to make your image
I will take your picture
capture your image
I will take your images
you the voiceless
you without voice
you have no say
no speak
nothing to speak of
you the silent
you the beautiful
you the fascinating and compelling
you the PHOTOGENIC
you make a great subject
you are the subject
you are subject

you are my object
your image – my object
your object – my treasure
your treasure – my souvenir
my beautiful image
permit me to take
your permission to take
my right to take
your permission to keep
I wish to keep
I keep as I wish
I take images from life
I suck images from life
I collect images
I preserve images
I am constructed of images
life's a series of images
you the strange and the wondrous
you give me a thrill
stimulate my senses
my visual sensors
my shutters start snapping
my image receptors happy
hungry, happy, needy, exacting
I do want your image
your image not words
your image not voice
your image not thoughts
your image not needs

I don't want your needs
transaction transacted
encounter enacted
exchanged exchanged
commodity collected
I will borrow without returning
take without repaying
promise without fulfilling
assume without inquiring
impose without replying
collect without owning
judge without trying
I ignore what's not of mine
how can we relate
how can we connect
what voices do we hear
what voices can we share
what do we really know?
you exist as image on film
you are preserved on celluloid
your image is salvaged
your image is more precious than life
more real than real life
you the illiterate
you the speechless
the unalphabetized
what is your name?
your name is a sound
your name is a voice

not an image, an utterance
you are not a text
you cannot write your name
your identification is
your identity your mark
your identity is my image
how do I image you
how do I identify you
how to identify with you
what is your identity?
what is your story?
try to tell me the story
who is your author
who is your voice
who is obliged to you
who is committed
who is responsible
what are your views
where are your views
where are you looking
what do you see?
you are not me
me looking at you
who then am I
who am I
to represent you
who am I
to speak for you
who am I

to know who are you
how to make contact
how to reach you
I have no business here
what am I doing here
who the hell am I here

have I the right to be here?
I have the right
I am the right
I am you are
I am you are
other

I am you're other
I am your other
you must believe
believe you me
I mean no harm
I need to look
I need to see
I have the right
believe you me
I need to look
I must fulfill
my need to look

you have the right
to remain unnamed
you have the right
to remain silent

you have the right
to have a voice

you are to me
revealed to me
you are the accomplice

okay now...pose!
that's it
c'mon now...smile
come visit the land of–
a thousand smiles
a thousand gazes
a thousand snapshots
a thousand pictures with zero words
a thousand wordless pictures
a thousand frames per second
the decisive moment
"frame your subject"
children are others too
cute, innocent, easy targets
shoot frame crop target

film is a witness to its own act over time:
photography acts in the moment.

the camera is a statement
it says...
it says...
it aims
it shoots -click-

the camera is a symbol of power and superiority
a wielded weapon
photography is an act of power and domination
photography is a violent act.

does physical distance define otherness?
(you're getting warmer...)
shoot/frame/crop/target
the telephoto, zoom, macro –
all medium-range weaponry.

photography is –
secrecy – stealth – silent invasion
an act of keeping-the-gaze
keeping,
looking for keeps.
photography is –
an act of .....
reframing repossessing retaking recording
redefining renaming remembering replacing
representing
reality.

finally photography is futile.

second voice:

hey you others way down there!
can I take your picture?

does physical distance define otherness?
(you're getting warmer...)

the telephoto, zoom, macro –
all medium-range weaponry.

secrecy – stealth – silent invasion

do all friends count as others?
are all others my friends – ?

it took me a long time to get over my shyness;
to master it and finally disown it. I guess I'm a pretty
tentative photographer...I'm comfortable taking pictures
of subjects that don't move – like the taj mahal.

mute, inanimate, immobile
insentient

I like my audiences captive and my subjects unaware.
it absolves my conscience and authenticates my product.

the desire – the drive – the impulse
to purge, to transcend this other-consciousness
to redefine the term "significant other"

truisms, myths, and mistakes

I confess.

this is not art photography
do not judge.
this is not about craft, originality, or style
its about re
about reflexivity in
representation.

I confess I get off on photography.
this is not art photography

do not judge.
this is not about craft, originality, or style
its about re–
about reflexivity in
representation.

I confess I get off on photography.

this is a cry to be alive
this is a primal scream
this is a need to live beyond look

do all friends count as others
or are all others my friends – ?

it took me a long time to get over my shyness;
to master it and finally disown it. I guess I'm a pretty
tentative photographer...I'm comfortable taking pictures
of subjects that don't move – like the taj mahal.

mute, inanimate, immobile
insentient

I like my audiences captive and my subjects unaware
it absolves my conscience and authenticates my product.

the desire – the drive – the impulse
to purge, to transcend this other-consciousness
to redefine the term "significant other"

otherness is – a seductive aura of magic
or a barren internal exile.

truisms, myths, and mistakes
I confess.