

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Why Graphic Design Matters to Linguistics

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Charles University

Prague · 5/11/2019

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
Social Practice

- Terminological **basics/definitions**: *typography, design, multimodality*
- **Functions** of text design/typography
- (Typo-)graphic variation as **social practice** – examples of sociolinguistic functions

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- **Functions** of text design/typography
- (Typo-)graphic variation as **social practice** – examples of sociolinguistic functions

Etymology: Greek τύπος (*týpos* = 'letter, sign')

× γράφειν (*gráphein* = 'to scratch, to write')

Original (strict) meaning: Production of a printed work by means of a specific technical procedure, namely printing press with re-usable, movable (metal) letters.

⇔ Lithography, Xylography, etc.

Modern Definition: "the style and appearance of printed matter" (Oxford English Dictionary)

⇒ Including style and appearance of written language *on screen*.

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

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Outline

Concepts & Terms

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(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



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Figure 1: Hand Composition



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Figure 2: Printing Plate



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Figure 3: Letter Press

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

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Outline

Concepts & Terms

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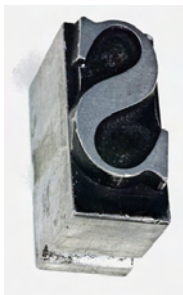


Figure 4: Letters and Clichés

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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
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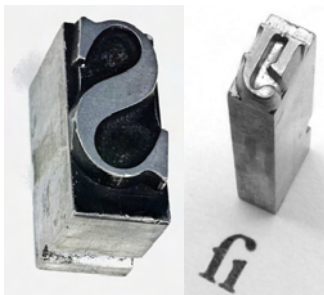


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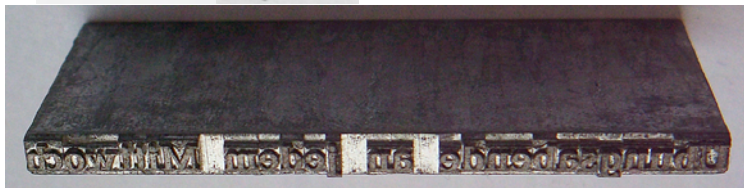
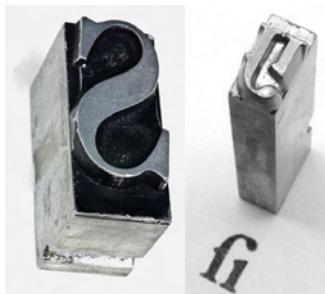
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
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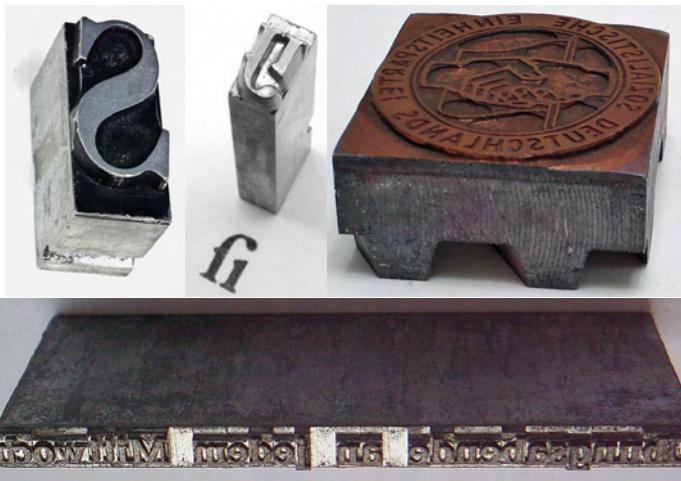


Figure 4: Letters and Clichés

Xylography



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Figure 5: Xylography

Other (Traditional) Printing Techniques

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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text Design

(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice

Xylography



Figure 5: Xylography

Lithography



Figure 6: Lithography

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Macrotypography: Overall design of a printed matter and the composition of letters on the page

- Selection of printing material (paper etc.), selection of type faces, visual composition of the page (*layout, type area*), setting of type sizes and distances, page breaks, visual layout of the document as a whole.

Microtypography: Composition and design of script in a line

- Composition of letters to words, emphasis (= bold face, italics, small capitals, underlining, tracking, mixing of type faces, etc.), letter distance (*running width* and *kerning*), distance of words (*justification*), hyphenation, alignment, line distance (*leading*); a wide definition also include design of type faces.

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Typographic Levels

Linguistic Differentiation as Proposed by Stöckl (2005)

Microtypography: “the design of fonts and individual graphic signs”

- type face, type size, type style, color of type

Mesotypography: “the configuration of graphic signs in lines and text blocks”

- letter fit, word spacing, line spacing (leading), amount of print on page, alignment of type (type composition), position/direction of lines, mixing of fonts

Macrotypography: “the graphic structure of the overall document”

- indentations and paragraphing, caps and initials, typographic emphasis, ornamentation devices, assembling text and graphics [image]

Paratypography: “materials, instruments and techniques of graphic sign-making”

- material quality of medium (paper quality) practices of signing [specific production technique]

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Hartmut Stöckl. 2005. Typography: body and dress of a text – a signing mode between language and image. *Visual Communication* 4(2). 204–214. quot.: 210.

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Blackletter variants:

Textura
Rotunda
Bastarda
Schwabacher
Fraktur

(Some) Roman variants:

Humanist
Modern Serif
Sans Serif
Slab Serif

Basic Classification/Terminology

(selective)

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

Latin-Alphabet Typefaces

Terminology

Script

Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
Social Practice

Font/Fount: Material entity as distributed by a type producer (*type foundry*)

- E. g., computer file with glyphs and metrics of a type family or a type shape
- In earlier times: (wooden) box with metal letters

(selective)

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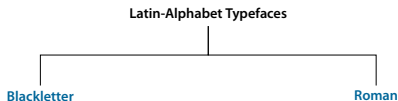
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
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A Sociolinguistics of Typography

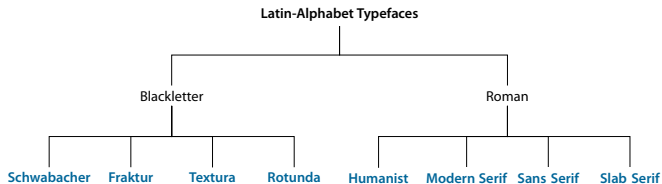
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
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Social Practice



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A Sociolinguistics
of Typography

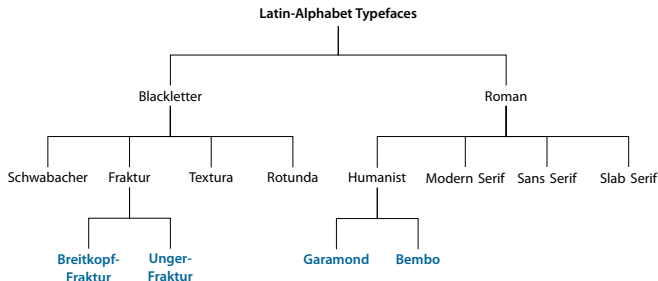
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
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A Sociolinguistics of Typography

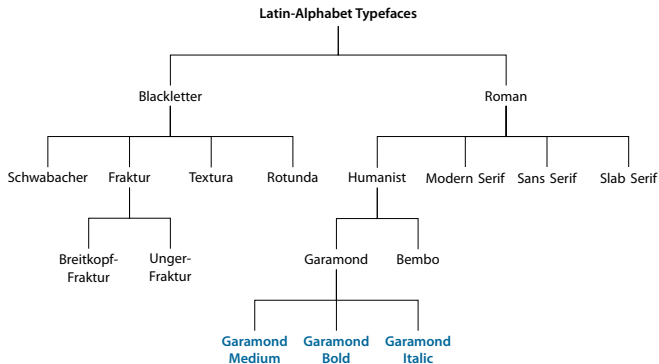
Jürgen Spitzmüller

Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text Design

(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



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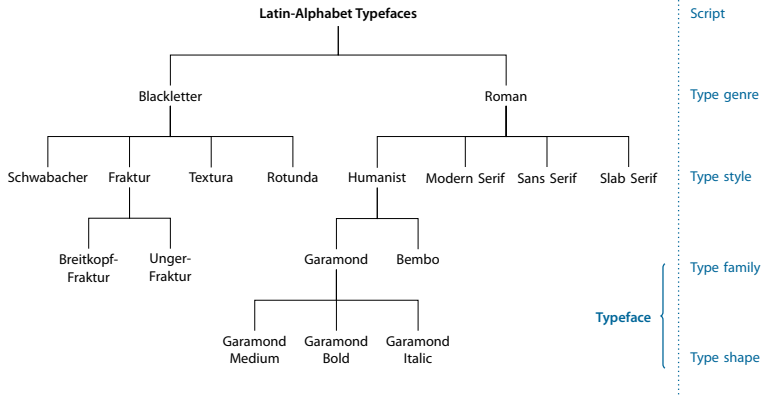
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text Design

(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



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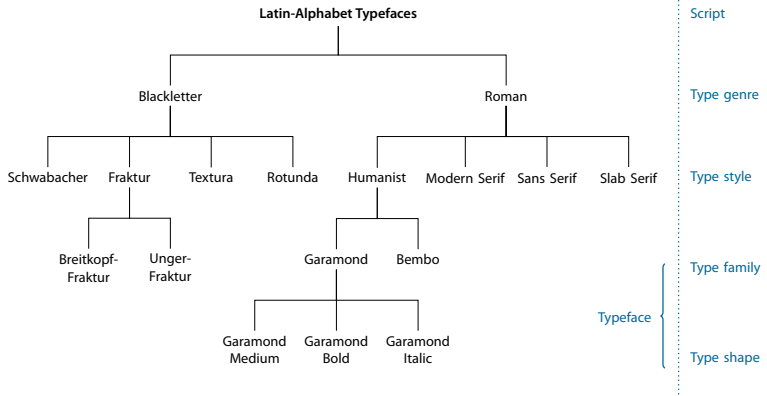
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Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
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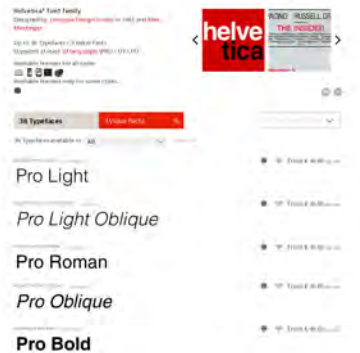


Figure 7: Digital Font

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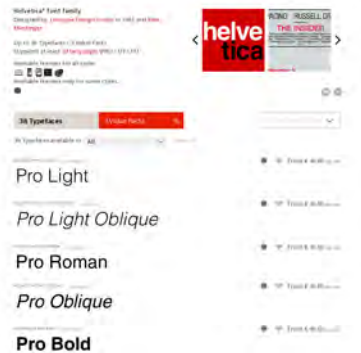


Figure 7: Digital Font



Figure 8: Metal Font

“Document design is the act of bringing together prose, graphics, illustration, photography and typography for purposes of instruction, information, or persuasion.”

.....
[Karen A. Schriver. 1997. *Dynamics in document design: Creating texts for readers*. New York et al.: Wiley. 10.](#)

“Designs are (uses of) semiotic resources, in all semiotic modes and combinations of semiotic modes.”

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A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text Design

(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



Gunther Kress (1940–2019)



Theo van Leeuwen (*1947)

“We have defined multimodality as the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined [...].”

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“Modes are semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action.”

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"All texts are multimodal. Language always has to be realized through, and comes in the company of, other semiotic modes. When we speak, we articulate our message not just with words, but through a complex interplay of speech-sound, of rhythm, of intonation; accompanied by facial expression, gesture and posture. When we write, our message is expressed not only linguistically, but also through a visual arrangement of marks on a page. Any form of text analysis which ignores this will not be able to account for all the meanings expressed in texts."

Gunther Kress & Theo van Leeuwen. 1998. Front pages: (the critical) analysis of newspaper layout. In Allan Bell & Peter Garret (eds.), *Approaches to media discourse*, 186–219. Oxford: Blackwell. quot.: 186.

1. **Text organization:** How are texts *structured* and readers are *guided* by means of graphic design?
2. **Text styling:** How does graphic design influence to the *interpretation* of texts?

Questions:

- How do specific typographic elements help to organize a text (e. g., emphasis, selection of type faces, page layout, combination of text and image, footnotes, headings, paragraph alignments)?
- How does graphic design influence the 'readability' of texts?

Fields of Research:

- textual comprehensibility research, text linguistics, media linguistics

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Cf. Jürgen Spitzmüller. 2017. Schematizing information: The macrotypographic framing of text. In Colleen Cotter & Daniel Perrin (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language and media*, 475–488. London & New York: Routledge.

Text Organization: Dictionaries

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

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Concepts & Terms

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(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



Figure 9: Orthographic Dictionary of German (Duden)

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Questions:

- How does text design frame/influence interpretation?
- To which degree does design evoke genre expectations?
- To which degree do graphical elements signal group membership?
- Which emotions and appeals are evoked by design elements?

Fields of Research:

- Linguistic stylistics, social semiotics, linguistic research in advertising
- Language historiography (esp. Historical Sociolinguistics)

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Cf. Jürgen Spitzmüller. 2012a. Floating ideologies: Metamorphoses of graphic "Germanness". In Alexandra Jaffe, Jannis Androutsopoulos, Mark Sebba & Sally Johnson (eds.), *Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power* (Language and Social Processes 3), 255–288. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

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Jürgen Spitzmüller

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(Typo)graphic
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Social Practice



Figure 10:

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Figure 10: Obituary

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Jürgen Spitzmüller

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Concepts & Terms

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(Typo)graphic
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Social Practice



Figure 10: Obituary?

In Liebe geboren.
In Liebe gelebt.
In Geld gestorben.
Fußball.

* 24. Oktober 1857

† 26. Februar 2016

Deine Kraft brachte uns Reichtum.

Wir verkauften Dich.

Dich tragen wir zu Grabe.

Salman bin Ibrahim Al Chalifa

+ Giovanni Infantino

Jack Warner und Sepp Blatter

mit Jeffrey Webb, José Maria

Marin und allen Angehörigen,

Freunden und Gönnern

8044 Zürich, FIFA-Strasse 20

Unser besonderer Dank gilt allen Bankangestellten der Cayman Islands, Adidas, Coca-Cola und den Fernsehanstalten weltweit.

Die Beisetzung findet im Zimmer des Hinterzimmers statt.

Von Verträgen bitten wir Abstand zu nehmen.

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- Which emotions and appeals are evoked by design elements?

Fields of Research:

- Linguistic stylistics, social semiotics, linguistic research in advertising
- Language historiography (esp. Historical Sociolinguistics)

Cf. [Jürgen Spitzmüller. 2012a](#). Floating ideologies: Metamorphoses of graphic “Germanness”. In Alexandra Jaffe, Jannis Androutsopoulos, Mark Sebba & Sally Johnson (eds.), *Orthography as social action: Scripts, spelling, identity and power* (Language and Social Processes 3), 255–288. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

“Style is a means to increase social visibility.”

.....
[Aleida Assmann](#). 1986. ‘Opting in’ und ‘opting out’: Konformität und Individualität in den poetologischen Debatten der englischen Aufklärung. In Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (ed.), *Stil: Geschichten und Funktionen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements* (stw 633), 127–143. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp. quot.: 127, my translation.

“In general, we can say that **every difference in language can be turned into difference in social value** [...].”

.....
Jan Blommaert. 2005. *Discourse: A critical introduction*. (Key Topics in Sociolinguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 69.

“[...] there are in fact many points within writing systems where variation can occur, and **where there is variation, there is in practice always social meaning.**”

.....
Mark Sebba. 2009. Sociolinguistic approaches to writing systems research. *Writing Systems Research* 1(1). 35–49. quot.: 39.

“In general, we can say that **every difference in language can be turned into difference in social value** [...].”

.....
[Jan Blommaert](#). 2005. *Discourse: A critical introduction*. (Key Topics in Sociolinguistics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 69.

“[...] there are in fact many points within writing systems where variation can occur, and **where there is variation, there is in practice always social meaning**.”

.....
[Mark Sebba](#). 2009. Sociolinguistic approaches to writing systems research. *Writing Systems Research* 1(1). 35–49. quot.: 39.

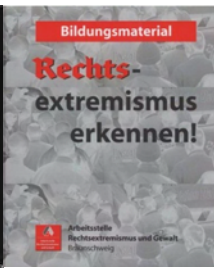


Figure 11: Black Letter as Stigma I

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

Outline

Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text Design

(Typo)graphic Variation as Social Practice



Figure 12: Pop-Cultural Scenes



.....
<https://www.comicsanscriminal.com> <31/10/2019>

The only
**APPROPRIATE USES FOR
COMIC SANS**

WHEN YOUR AUDIENCE IS UNDER 11 YEARS OLD

WRITING TO THEIR PARENTS IN COMIC SANS DOES NOT COUNT

WHEN YOU'RE DESIGNING A COMIC

ALTHOUGH BETTER, FREELY AVAILABLE COMIC BOOK FONTS
ARE AVAILABLE ON COMICSANSCRIMINAL.COM

**WHEN YOUR AUDIENCE IS DYSLEXIC & HAS
STATED THAT THEY PREFER COMIC SANS**

COMIC SANS IS KNOWN FOR BEING EASY TO READ FOR
DYSLEXICS, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF OTHER FONTS MANY
DYSLEXICS PREFER THAT MAY SUIT YOUR CONTENT BETTER.

That's it!

.....
<https://www.comicsanscriminal.com> <31/10/2019>

"I received a letter from a representative of the [German] designer association inviting me to join a committee.

The letter had been set in 10 point Avant Garde, justified, very long lines, huge white space between words, no leading. I rejected immediately."

.....
Hans Peter Willberg & Friedrich Forssman. 2001 [1999]. *Erste Hilfe in Typographie: Ratgeber für Gestaltung mit Schrift*. 3rd edn. Mainz: Hermann Schmidt Verlag. [Orig. Mainz: Hermann Schmidt Verlag]. 78, my translation.

A Sociolinguistics
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Concepts & Terms

Functions of Text
Design(Typo)graphic
Variation as
Social Practice

"[...] the use of the word knowledge (*savoir*) [...] refers to all procedures and all effects of knowledge [better translation: understanding; J. S.] (*connaissance*) that are **acceptable at a given point in time and in a specific domain.**"

.....

Michel Foucault. 1997 [1990]. What is critique? Transl. by Lysa Hochroth & Catherine Porter. With an intro. by John Rajchmann. In Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *The politics of truth*, 41–82. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e). [Fr. orig. Qu'est-ce que la critique? (Critique et Aufklärung). In *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 84/2 (1990), 35–63]. quot.: 60.

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

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Design

(Typo)graphic
Variation as
Social Practice

“Sets of beliefs concerning the use and ‘meaning’ of graphic elements which are held to be ‘given’ – or are ‘acceptable’ **Foucault (1997 [1990]: 60)** – by a specific social group (at a specific point in time) under specific communicative conditions.”

.....
Jürgen Spitzmüller. 2013. *Graphische Variation als soziale Praxis: Eine soziolinguistische Theorie skripturaler ‘Sichtbarkeit’*. (Linguistik – Impulse & Tendenzen 56). Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.
[= Habilitation thesis, University of Zurich 2012]. 203, my translation.

Fig. 1: Hand composition in a US-American state press.

<http://www.typografie.info/3/wiki.html/b/bleisatz-r32/> <26/10/2017>

Fig. 2: Printing plate.

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:2009-04-18-noerdlingen-rr-05.jpg>
<26/10/2017>

Fig. 3: Manual jobbing press, 1811.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Handtiegelpresse_von_1811.jpg
<26/10/2017>

Fig. 4: Letters and Clichés <28/10/2017>:

1. Single letter. <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~acl52/652/printing.html> (rotated)
2. Multi-graph letter (Ligature <fi>). http://www.fontblog.de/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Garamond_type_fi-ligature_2.jpeg
3. Linotype hot metal line. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Linotype_Gusszeile_-_Type_Slug.jpg (cropped)
4. Book print cliché. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Klischees.jpg> (cropped)

Fig. 5: Xylography (printing plate, Southern Germany 1470–75).

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woodcut_Saint_Sebastian_woodblock_BM.jpg <26/10/2017>

Figure Credits (cont.)

Fig. 6: Lithography (Printing plate for champagne label).

https://www.picclickimg.com/d/l400/pict/162680738241_/antike-Druckplatte-Hoehl-Sekt-Lithographiestein-Steinplatte-Lithostein.jpg
<26/10/2017>

Fig. 7: Font (Digital). <https://www.linotype.com/1308886/helvetica-family.html>

<30/10/2019>

Fig. 8: Font (Metal). <https://www.amazon.com/Pryor-TPFH100-Interchangeable-Complete-Holder/dp/B019OKL4RY>

[Pryor-TPFH100-Interchangeable-Complete-Holder/dp/B019OKL4RY](https://www.amazon.com/Pryor-TPFH100-Interchangeable-Complete-Holder/dp/B019OKL4RY)
<30/10/2019>

Fig. 9: Orthographic Dictionary *Duden Deutsche Rechtschreibung*. 24th edn. 2006.

http://fmytypografie.de/bi_duden1-35691.html <26/10/2017>

Fig. 10: Obituary?

<https://schottischefurcheblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/06/r-i-p-fussball/>
<26/10/2017>

Fig. 11: Black letter as stigma I

1. *Herde – Hirte – Vater – Land*. Zurich main station, December 2007.
2. *Fremdenhass muss aufhören*. Banner of the Social Democratic Party Schorndorf, October 2008.
<http://www.spd-schorndorf.de/index.php?nr=12286> <16/12/2008>
3. *Mode, die wir nie mehr sehen wollen!* Flyer announcing the "Nacht gegen das Vergessen" (night against oblivion) on occasion of the 70th anniversary of the national socialist pogrom in November 1938, *Zentrum David Zurich*, October 2008.

Figure Credits (cont.)

A Sociolinguistics of Typography

Jürgen Spitzmüller

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<http://www.kjoe.at/article.php?story=20070911093944695> <16/12/2008>
6. *St. Pauli Fans gegen Rechts* (sticker of German football fans against right-wing fans).
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/7691374@No7/1137347397/> <19/04/2010>

Fig. 12: Pop-cultural scenes

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A Sociolinguistics of Typography

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Figures

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