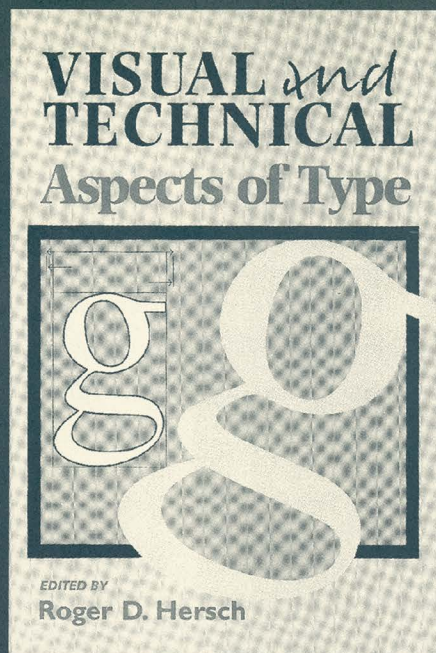




Visual and Technical Aspects of Type

edited by Roger D Hersch.

1993. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 204pp., hard cover, illustrated, R225.

Reviewed by Tersia van Rensen

Since the advent of desktop publishing a large volume of bad typography in print has become apparent. Many graphic designers, as well as visually unskilled computer operators have gained access to the technical means for type manipulation. Highly professional software programmes provide endless options that allow type transformations which more often

than not result in unacceptable mutations of once beautiful, expressive, legible and readable typefaces. 'The computer-does-it-all' work is churned out and printed and few pay attention to the fine subtleties and basic requirements of good typography.

To develop a feeling for and achieve excellence in typography, students, designers and DTP operators need to be aware of the delicate relationships between the design of the typeface, the line spacing, word spacing and letter spacing. It is therefore crucial to develop a discerning eye and be able to perceive subtle differences in the appearance and effect of type on the printed page. An excellent basic text, mainly concerned with typesetting, which covers these aspects is *Better Type* by B Binns (1989).

Visual and Technical Aspects of Type is more technical in its approach and is a study on the form, fundamentals and functions of type. The editor claims a diverse potential readership which includes people less versed in the visual and aesthetic aspects of typographic presentation. The content is based on lectures from the First European Summer School in Digital Typography, held in Lausanne in September 1991, with contributions by both type design professionals and computer scientists. An important intention is to present and make explicit how digital type is at the intersection of several disciplines like the mathematics of shape, visual perception and aesthetics.

The book has been divided into three sections. The first part discusses the evolution of letterforms in their historical and cultural context, outlines visual communication

systems and details the rules governing typeface design. It is interesting and to the point. Students, graphic designers and DTP operators should find the chapter *Visual Aspects of Type* particularly helpful.

The second part deals with the technical aspects of type and focuses on the design and production of computer generated type covering digital type, font metrics, font rasterization, outline fonts and curve techniques. As a graphic designer I found this section far too technical, but anyone who wishes to attempt the daunting task of designing a typeface on computer would probably find this information invaluable.

The third part of the book, which considers the broader typographic context, will be of particular interest to researchers and educators. Two contributions provide an insight into the development of the design of the typefaces Barbedor and Syndor, as well as an historical overview of the evolution of typographic page layout throughout the centuries.

The book is clearly laid out and well illustrated throughout. A more original and visually appealing cover design would have done justice to the interesting and valuable content and attracted a wider readership.

The book succeeds in conveying the visual, aesthetic and technical fundamentals of type which are essential for understanding, using and designing desktop systems. It should be of great benefit to anyone who needs to develop and enhance their knowledge, visual perception and use of typography.