Concepts and Realities: *Marian*

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The *Marian* font family created by Paul Barnes recreates the classical canon of roman and italic typefaces from the 16th to the 19th century with a single blackletter typeface thrown in for good measure. In this essay, Paul Barnes reflects on the typographic heritage that informs *Marian*: the process that led from the letters of antiquity over classic print typefaces to the reduction of complexity in the 20th century and finally digital type.

The revolution in typography of the early twentieth century left an enduring legacy on the appearance of printed material. The concept of reduction and simplification central to the 'new typography' are evident throughout both the printed and now screen world. Could we imagine a mobile phone interface as a 19th century experience design? No, of course, but we could as something that the Bauhaus or the Ulm schools might have designed. In the design of letterforms it is harder to see this influence; whilst the revolution in layout occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, the revolution in letterform had occurred significantly earlier: In the early part of the nineteenth century, symmetry typography dominated and the serif book typeface had lost
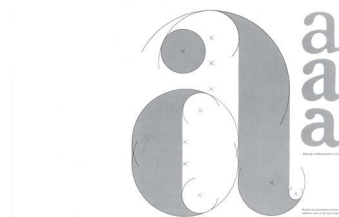

Top: Study of *Bayer-Type* 1930/2 by Herbert Bayer.

Bottom: From specimen of *Bayer-Type*, Berthold 1933.

As shown in Bayer &al *1982.*

its monopoly. The layouts of the 'new' typography introduced by Jan Tschichold around 1925 use the sans serif typefaces that had been re-introduced in the previous century, but had existed since ancient Greece. Experiments in geometric only typefaces, such as those by Herbert Bayer, Max Burchartz and
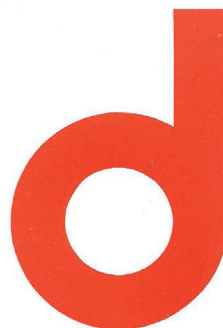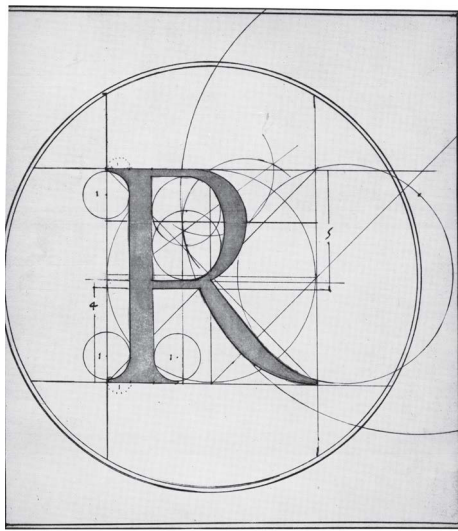

HERBERT BAYER: Abb. 1. Alfabet „g" und „k" sind noch als unfertig zu betrachten

Beispiel eines Zeichens in größerem Maßstab Präzise optische Wirkung

Geometric alphabet, Herbert Bayer, 1926 as shown in *Offset* no. 7, 1926

G. B. Palatino, design for a constructed inscriptional capital (c. 1550). Berlin, Kunstmuseum. As shown in Trajan Revived by James Mosley. *Alphabet*, Volume One, 1964
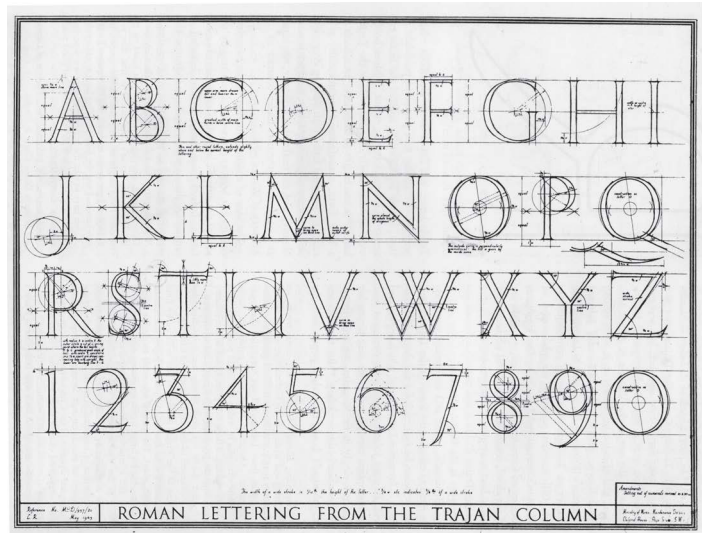
Alphabet sheet issued as a guide to signwriters by the ministry of Public Building and Works in Britain, 1949. As shown in Trajan Revived by James Mosley. *Alphabet*, Volume One, 1964

Jan Tschichold, remained just that: experiments. Bayer's later seriffed typeface, *Bayer-typeface* for Berthold (1933) was the only example that made it into production. The typefaces that did reflect these ideals such as *Futura* are geometric in idea, but not in reality.

Conceptually, geometry may appear to make sense to apply to lettering, but it has a tendency to make letterforms that are stiff and forced. The guides from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, such as those by Cresci, Palatino and Dürer, allow a certain amount of interpretation where geometry could not be applied; serif endings and the bases of serifs are not perfectly rendered. To make an improved letter requires a greater amount of instructions, to a point where to construct them becomes a chore. The image of the construction is more beguiling

FIG. 1. Letters engraved on copper in 1695 *above* (reduced), compared with the first punches cut by Grandjean in 1699 *below* (enlarged)

The letters (reduced) engraved on copper in 1695 for the Académie des Sciences compared to the first punches (enlarged) cut by Grandjean in 1599.

As shown in Académisme et Typographie, the making of the Romain du Roi, André Jammes. *Journal of the Printing Historical Society,* no. 1 1965.

than any letter constructed by the method; it is in itself a work of art, not a producer of art. The Roman du Roi, which is perhaps the conceptual letter par excellence was perfectly rendered in geometry, but the resulting typeface by Grandjean is something different. It shows the tension between the conceptual and the realities of type design and manufacture.

The notion of construction made by formulas remains popular where letters cannot be applied from a pre-existing source. For non-professionals throughout the twentieth century, geometry offered a guide to making letters, which allowed a greater consistency and quality than the hand and eye alone. But these rules make stiff forms, which should be viewed with some caution when manufacturing type.

What we gain from these experiments is the approach of reduction; to try and remove all superfluous 'ornament' and to find the most basic elements. In the case of the modernist experiments, this was to create a sans serif letterform, but there is no reason one couldn't apply this to another form and try to reduce it to its most basic element. In the case of *Marian*, a series of hairline serif typefaces based on forms of the sixteenth to nineteenth century, it is a removal of all stress and terminal forms. The letters are reduced to skeletal lines of almost mono linear weight. The variation between thick and thin strokes can be seen as a trace of how letters were originally formed: by the broad nibbed pen, the stroke of a brush. That variation is the flesh

upon the skeleton of the letter; by removing the stress, the basic and simple letterform is revealed. This forces the designer and user to re examine the forms afresh; for the designer this is to understand what is the most important factors in the letter, and for the user to remove the letters from the notion that they are 'antiquated' or 'old fashioned'.
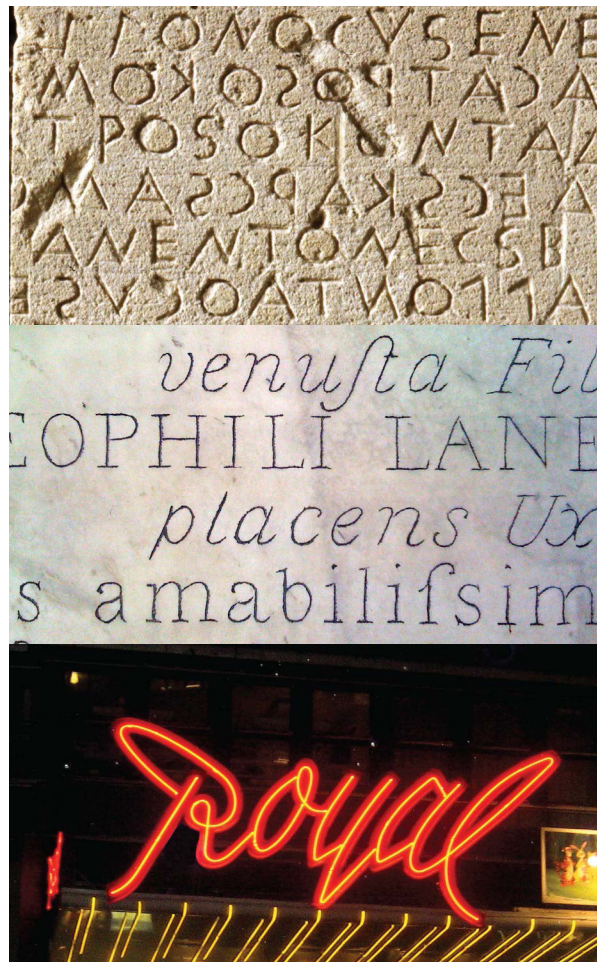
In reducing the letter, the designer has to make decisions: what is it that constitutes the most important parts of the form, and which elements can be removed. The modernists saw that the sans is the simplest letter form; but a sans derived from a serif is not a simple transformation, nor are the results necessarily desirable or new. A simple removal of serifs creates a form that is not unfamiliar; it is rather like *Optima*, or experiments by Matthew Carter and Jan Tschichold. Equally a sans serif version of a hairline weight is attractive, but not a new form. The roman form can be created with a certain amount of ease, whereas the italic poses many questions. The *Granjon* style italic relies on the strokes that begin and end each form in lower case. It seems that even if we remove stress, the

letterforms still need the tails and serifs to form the complete letters. When the originals were created these serifs were seen as integral parts of the form, and the loss of them is greater than the loss of the stress. In the 1980s Alan Meeks created *Claude*, a sans derived from the classic *Garamond* (or rather *Jannon*) model that had been revived in the early part of the twentieth century. The serifs had been removed, but he did not remove the tails in the lower case; the reduction had only been taken so far.

THE TOOLS OF PRODUCTION

Letters used to reflect the tools of production and the material they were applied to. The brush, the broad-nibbed pen, the copperplate nib or the stonemasons chisel would all form certain kinds of letters. When printing arrived, the first typefaces made were no longer formed by the pen, but an engraving tool making marks on the tip of a metal punch; the form of the letter could be anything, depending on size and the quality of the punch-cutter. Its form merely imitated what had come before; only gradually did the printed letter become different from the written one, though the traces remained of the handwritten. By the end

of the nineteenth century and the invention of the pantograph, letters were made simply as drawings which could be scaled to any size. The drawing could be a form that was originally made by any tool.

The form of a single thin almost mono line stroke letterform such as *Marian* is not a modern style, though it may appear so. The earliest Greek inscriptions, of which the Gortyn Code in Crete (c. 5th century BC) is a mono line sans serif form. The tool that made it, probably a simple chisel, and the material it was cutting into, mean that a simple letterform with no variation in stroke width was the easiest and speediest to produce. The v-cut is relatively shallow, compared to the depth of the chiseled seriffed form of the Imperial Roman age. The 18th century letter from England shows the effect of the material more than the tool. Cutting into marble presents tremendous challenges for a stone cutter. The cut made into the stone is almost just a scratch; to create a wide thick stroke typical of the seriffed form would be too much of a challenge; attempts to make deeper cut letters in marble are generally much cruder than a letter cut in slate. The infilling of the cut gives the letter definition as without it, it would be hardly noticeable.

In our own time the mono line letter is the natural form for certain tools and materials. Neon for example forms a simple mono line form. A visit to any cold climate in winter will show many examples of this. Most typically, though, they are not seriffed forms, but script and sans serif. The challenge of adding serifs to a letterform involves bending the tube many more times. Of course in the case of say a seriffed logo, this challenge cannot be avoided; this example in Stockholm is based upon the typeface *Dante*.

Until the development of the computer as tool for all designers, most layouts were produced by hand, and technical pens such as the Rotring Rapidograph will form a line that is near mono line. To give a letter any weight at text size would be achieved by a thicker pen. It would be possible to make a more accurate representation of a seriffed letter, but it would take significantly longer (the pen needs to make more strokes), and the level of consistency would be much harder. A biro or fibre tip pen will give a similar style of letter, but without the fineness nor the accuracy.

Much closer to Marian's conception is the reflection of the single weight stroke that Illustrator will draw: whereas type is a filled in shape, Illustrator draws a line that is itself the shape. The version of Courier that was installed with the first postscript printers was not an outline with a filled form, but just a stroke. The heavier the weight the greater the stroke. In Adobe Illustrator, a letterform made as stroke as opposed to shape is much easier to work with when using the multiple number of effects or renderings. Marian comes from experimentation with a simple mono line copperplate-like script. It is easier to use step and repeat effects than if the letter were simply a shape. A single stroke can be rendered in many ways, such as dots, which would be impossible with a normal typeface.

THINNESS

Marian's thinness of weight comes both from necessity, but also the desire for the stylistic qualities of such thinness. Letters that are based on single stroke weights work most successfully when thinner. As the stroke becomes heavier, so the letter begins to deform as the eye perceives that the vertical stroke is lighter than the horizontal stroke. When two strokes meet it appears to the eye as a much bolder part of the letter. As these original seriffed forms are considered 'elegant', conceptually it would seem sensible that Marian tries to reflect this.

During the fashion for constructed geometric sans serif during the nineteen twenties, perhaps the most successful and elegant solution is Jan Tschichold's designs from 1926-1930. In form it is very light, and this lightness makes it more successful formally than the other designs of its time. Herbert Bayer's design of 1926 which is much heavier in weight in comparison suffers from the problems of increased universal weight. One does not notice where strokes join in the Tschichold design, yet they become very prominent in Bayer's design. In *Futura*, we can see how the problem is solved. A variation in stroke is made between the vertical and horizontal strokes to optically correct, so the weight seems even. As the weight increases towards the boldest weights, the change is clearly noticeable. Where two strokes meet, the horizontal stroke and vertical strokes narrow to give the appearance of uniform weight. In the lighter weights the variation in stroke is needed less and less, though optically still the horizontal stroke must be lighter than the vertical.

Left: Svenska Missionskyrkan neon sign. Original logo is in *Dante*

Right: *Marian* family as rendered in neon, showing how a single tube renders the entire word. *Thieves like us show*, October 2011, New York. Commercial Type and Dino Sanchez.

ed through his letterbox or confronts him every-where out doors. At first the printing of today differed from that of previous times, less in form than in quantity. But as the quantity increased the form also changed; the speed with which today's consumer of printing has to absorb it means that the form of printing must also adapt itself to the conditions of

Hand rendered type drawn with a Rotring Rapidograph. Author, 1992

Love Love Love

Marian 1554 as rendered as a single line weight , by the author, 2011

Marian

Copperplate script developments by the author, 2003-

Fine, light typefaces are not a new phenomenon. In the nineteenth century a reaction against the heavier display typefaces saw a vogue for hairline or skeletal forms. These, it would seem, were mainly cut at text sizes. Greater skill in engraving allowed a very light *Clarendon* (not unlike a typewriter typeface) with little variation in weight to be cut. Whilst common in specimens, where printing standards were high and could be maintained, they were less common in trade printing. They were hard to print and the type was easily worn and damaged. Maintaining such standards in letterpress requires care whereas contemporary lithographic printing allows greater detail with higher and easier to maintain standards. Now of course typefaces are

no longer limited to paper; they can exist in other mediums, on screen, in signs, etc.

REVIVAL AND INTERPRETATIONS

The past in typography and in type design is almost unavoidable; either it is embraced in some way or we try to escape and deny it, though this seems an impossibility since we use the same basic alphabet. The issue must be how we deal with it. Traditionally revivals go from reissues of the original (as in the *Caslon* revival by the Chiswick press in the 1840s), revivals that attempt to recreate the original and then to the other extreme, an interpretation of the original. This can vary from being quite close to the

abcdɛfghijklmnopqrstuvwx
yz¨´

Geometric alphabet, Jan Tschichold, 1926–1930 as shown in *Typographische Mitteilungen*, no. 3, 1930

a a a a a a

a a a a
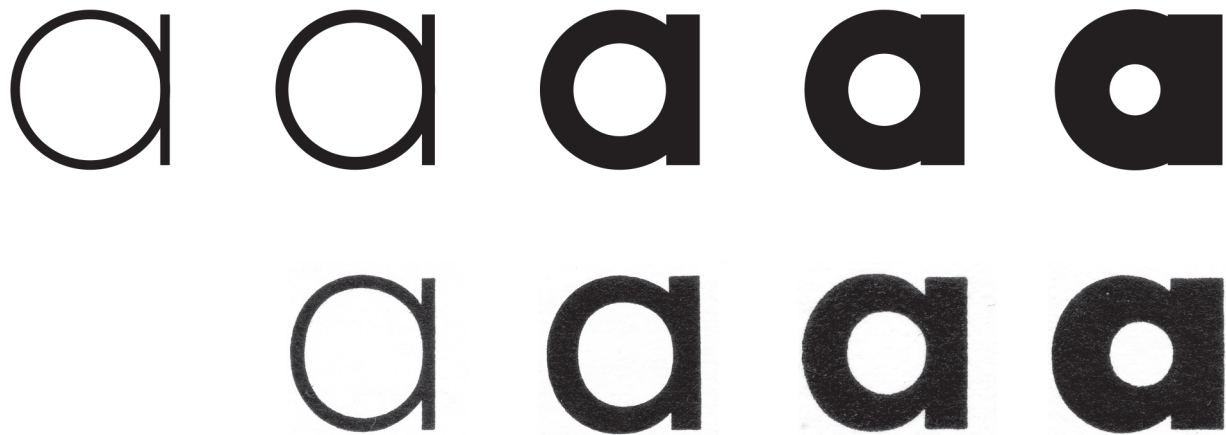
Top row, designs based on Tschichold's alphabet to match *Futura* weights, bottom row *Futura Mager, Halbfett, Dreiviertelfett, Fett*, from *Futura* specimen, Bauersche Giesserei, Frankfurt am Main, Barcelona, New York. Issued c.1932

original to something that might only share the name of the original (how many *Garamonds* have that much to do with Garamond?).

Making faithful revivals would be worthwhile where the original has not been revived, but that pool is getting smaller and smaller. Often interpretations can lose sight of the qualities of the original. *Marian* treats the process of revival and interpretation in a different way; it is both a highly accurate revival, yet is utterly unfaithful to the original and is a highly personal interpretation. If one considers the original not as one defined design, but rather a musical score or a script, then one is making something faithful, but a new interpretation. So the concept is of a faithful revival of these classics, but rendered

Non-pareil hairline from *Specimen of Printing Types* by Blake & Stephenson. (Successors to Mr W. Caslon of London. Letter-Founders) Sheffield. 1839
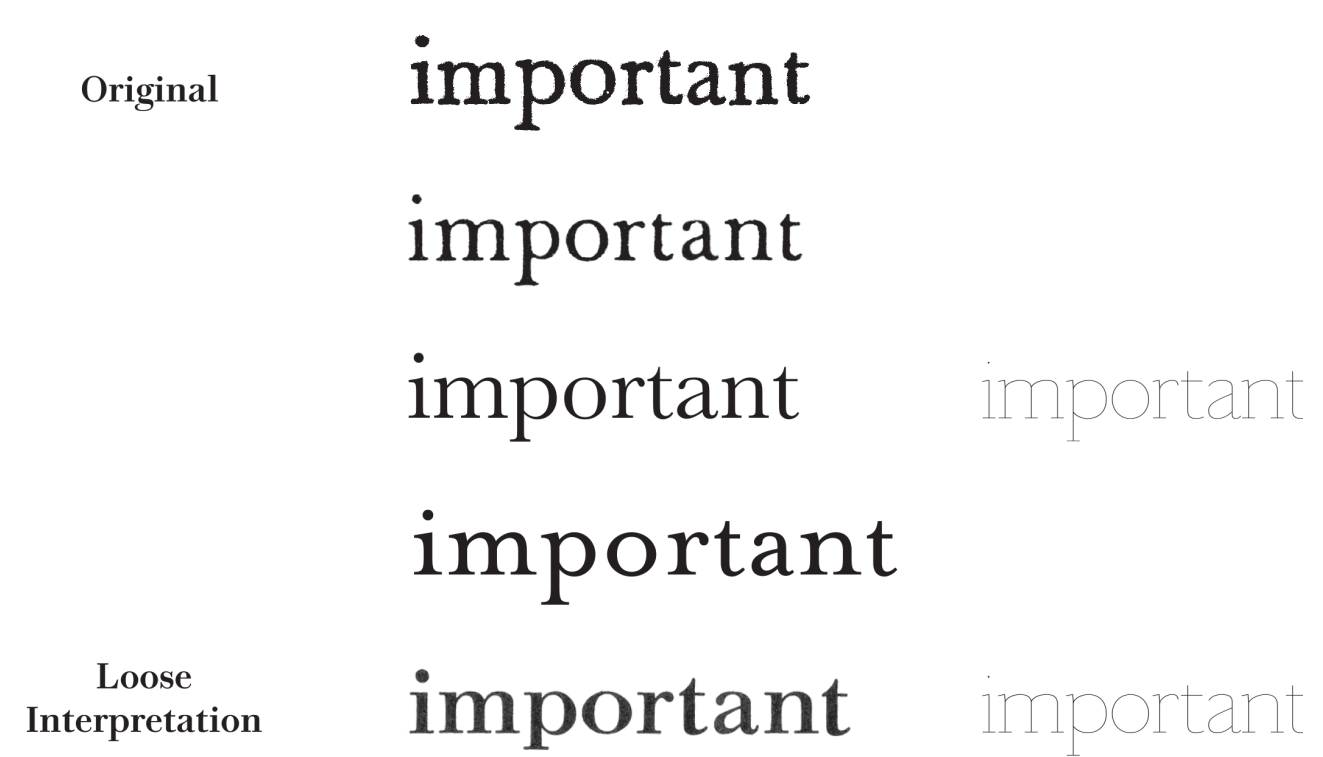
Detail and actual size, (reproduced with kind permission of St Bride Printing Library)

lever with unceasing
te of Time's destructiv
eat progenitor! be thin
e, where all thy worth
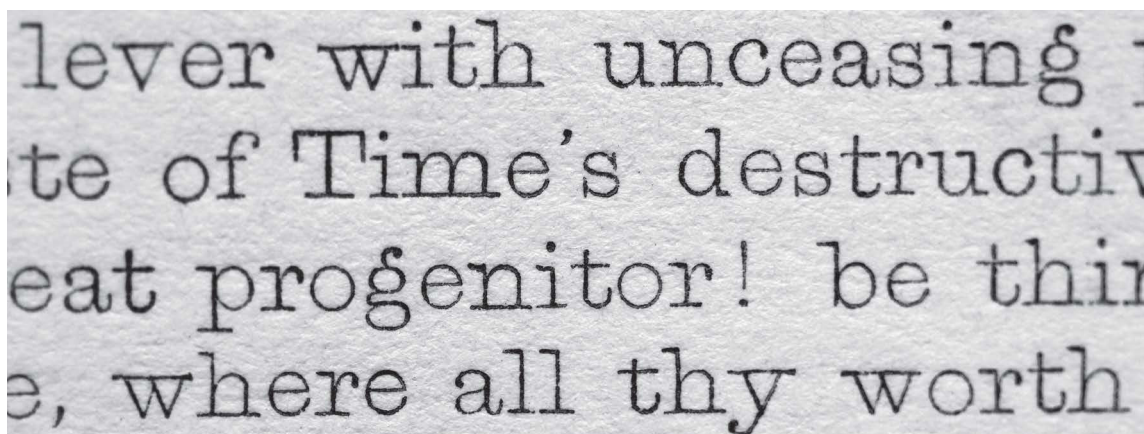
Baskerville and its influence. From top first column; *Baskerville* original type as printed in France, c.1780, *Baskerville* as issued by Deberney & Peignot, from the original matrices. Monotype digital *Baskerville*, based on *Monotype Baskerville*, 1923. *Mrs Eaves* by Zuzana Licko, as issued by *Emigré*, 1996. *Baskerville* as issued by the Bauersche Giesserei, designed by Henrish Jost, 1924.

Marian 1755 is shown in the far column. It is both faithful, but is also a radical interpreation of the original

Original   **important**

important

important   *important*

important

Loose
Interpretation   **important**   *important*

in a totally new way. Sol le Witt's original essay on conceptual art suggested that the concept was the most important part and that the manufacture was almost a secondary part of the process. In type design, the idea is still the most important part of the process, but the manufacturing is vital to the end result. Type is not something that can be quickly defined and easily made. Despite all the technical advances, type manufacturing is still a highly manual process. With *Marian* it is further complicated by defining where the line of the letter should go; if one reduces the stroke to a thin line, what is the best representation of the form? It is not simply the average or the middle of the letter, nor the outside, nor the inside. In the end it will be the eye and not a preconceived idea that determines how the letters must look.

THE CONCEPT OF CONCEPT
Marian is made from several sources dating from the sixteenth to the beginnings of the nineteenth century. These typefaces are considered 'classics',

whether it be the italics of Granjon, the modern of Bodoni or the rococo of Fournier.

Marian version	Italic progenitor	Roman progenitor
Marian 1554	Granjon	Garamond
Marian 1565	Granjon	Garamond*
Marian 1571	Granjon	Granjon
Marian 1650	Kis	Kis
Marian 1740	Fournier	Fournier
Marian 1742	Fleischmann	Fleischmann
Marian 1755	Baskerville	Baskerville
Marian 1800	Bodoni	Bodoni
Marian 1812	Austin**	Austin**

They are limited to the period when book seriffed typefaces were the dominant form; after this new letterforms dominate: sans serifs, fat faces, Clarendons, Egyptian, Italians, etc. Some of these can be described in hairline form; *Marian 1812* is not dissimilar from a Clarendon form, but others like fat face would be harder to define; it would appear

Three different lines interpreting *Baskerville* and *Marian 1755*; the top follows the external line, the middle follows the centre of the character and the bottom the internal line

important

important

important

important

to be just an extended modern, but how would one describe the weight of the balls? Later models of 'classic' seriffed typefaces from the twentieth century such as *Cheltenham*, *Times New Roman*, *Perpetua* and *Goudy Old Style* exist, but these are typefaces that are not 'extinct', they have never disappeared from usage.

Conceptually if we have considered these series of typefaces as classic songs or 'standards,' we can see that the collection becomes an 'album' of

songs or 'cover versions'. The designer like a singer becomes an interpreter of the standard. *Marian* may be likened to Bryan Ferry's 1973 solo album *These Foolish Things* or perhaps Walter/Wendy Carlos' *Switched-On Bach* (1968), an album of classical compositions rendered on one of the first Moog synthesizers. Such an outlook supports the view that *Marian* is conceptually the mixing of the old in a modern style; recreating the past in the present.

Nobody should forget that typography is the least free of all the arts. None other serves to

Top and middle: *Isambard* fat face designed by the author as interpreted as a hairline, 2011

Bottom: *Times New Roman* as interepreted as a hairline by the author, 2011

Marian

Marian

Marian

such a degree. It cannot free itself without losing its purpose. It is more strongly bound than any other art to meaningful conventions and the more typographers heed these the better their work will be.

Jan Tschichold: Typographie ist eine Kunst für sich. In Typographische Monatsblätter, *no. 4, April 1973 (as quoted in Burke, 2007: 307).*

Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach

Sol Lewitt (1969)

Tschichold's quote emphasis the limitations that typography and type design has to deal with; Lewitt's the lack of limitations he perceived for conceptual artists. *Marian* as a typeface has to respect the 'conservative' nature of type design, yet at the same time by taking the classics and remodeling them takes an audacious step. It is faithful, yet bends them to the same rule reduction to an almost disappearing line. It is where concept and reality meet.

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