

Mutable Imagination: Typography and Textual Space in Print and Digital Layouts


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Abstract. The paper aims to investigate the issue of mediality in terms of typography and textual space. The adopted approach is that of phenomenology, which allows for existential considerations concerning the appearance and perceptual significance of the sign. The idiosyncrasies of digital and print layouts are explored with the help of examples chosen to highlight how the sign as a graphic character can manifest its self-referentiality depending on the medium it is intertwined with. The different directions textual design can take depending on the medium becomes apparent by way of the respective characteristics and possibilities. Divergent modes of experiencing time and emphasis on different facets of self-manifestation mark the graphic layout in virtual and print versions, with the unavoidable phenomenality of the sign invariably becoming apparent and insightful to the viewers.

Sign, Perception, Interpretation

Whenever an issue of typography or textual space is to be considered, the sense and significance of the sign as such is also reckoned with, even if this does not become explicit. Typography makes it apparent that the sign is not merely a reference to something else, it can refer back to itself in the particularities of its manifestation. Jean-Gérard Lapacherie elaborates the equivocal status of the sign as the typographic character.

Typographic signs [...] are signs in the ancient sense of the word “aliquid pro alique” [one thing which stands for another]. They lack autonomy since they represent the letters of the alphabet, thus corresponding to the phonetic uses of the language. [...] But these signs are not transparent as is a pane of glass which the eye crosses without noticing [...]. In other words, they are not mere referential signs, nor empty ones [...]. Characters are indeed drawings, sometimes beautiful unto themselves. (Lapacherie, 1994, p. 64)

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Typographic characters can refer back to themselves, i.e., they can become “eminent” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 248) signs in the specificities of their appearance: in the way they are construed as typefaces and in the manner they relate to other graphic shapes within the textual layout. This also means that typographic characters have to be seen before they are read, for they are created as graphic images. “Understanding an image presupposes visual shapes (gestalts) and integrating them to create meaningful signs [...]” (Stöckl, 2009, p. 208) Potentially self-referential graphic relations build the typeface as a collection of shapes associated with the letters of the alphabet, but not restricted to their representation. As graphic images, characters can stand for letters but they can also become self-sufficient phenomena. “Typographic characters are [...] signs which are contiguous to their object. Characters are superposed on letters; they cover them up without making them disappear [...]” (Lapacherie, 1994, p. 65) The typographic character presents itself to perception in its graphic correlations, making referential and self-referential interpretations equally possible.

How do these possibilities of interpretation come about, though? What makes a sign self-referential if it was designed to be referential only? In what does its dual nature lie? To make an attempt at unfurling this issue, the sign has to be considered from a phenomenological perspective, as phenomenology allows one to explore the various existential modalities of the sign itself, functionality being only one of these. As Günter Figal formulates it, “[...] das einzelne Zeichen [läßt] einen Zusammenhang kenntlich werden.”¹ The correlations inherent in a sign reveal themselves on more than one horizon. The perceptually constituted relations of the sign as an assortment of graphic characteristics is the very modality by way of which it can create associations. “Understanding an image presupposes seeing visual shapes (gestalts) and integrating them to create meaningful signs.” (Stöckl, 2009, p. 208) The sign unfolds itself in its perceptual relations, hence opening up other relations of perception and those of sense in their various existential facets. “Zeichen [...] selbst [*bilden*] einen Zusammenhang; nur so *schließen* sie einen Zusammenhang *auf*.”² Signs orient one in the everyday facets of existence in this way, thus “geben sie die Möglichkeit, sich auf den Zusammenhang, in dem man sich vorher bewegte, zu *beziehen*.”³ Inasmuch as graphic signs refer to something, they also manifest themselves,

1. “[...] [t]he single sign allow[s] for a correlation to reveal itself.” (Figal, 2018, p. 246) [When not indicated otherwise, translations of quotations from German-language texts are mine.—D. V.]

2. “[S]igns [...] *constitute* correlations in themselves, only thus can they *reveal* correlations.” (ibid., p. 246) [Italics mine.—D. V.]

3. “provid[ing] the possibility to *relate* to the context in which one was oriented earlier.” (ibid., p. 247) [Italics in the original.]

thus also becoming capable of revealing their own existence. All appearances available to perception can become signs of something and signs of themselves, i.e., phenomena. “Alles, was in der Lebenswelt begegnet, läßt sich selbst als Zeichen nehmen.”⁴ Whether the sign manifests itself in its referential or self-referential modality bears significance with respect to its existential character.

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger makes the following distinction pertaining to the existential modalities of the “appearance”:

[T]he expression ‘appearance’ itself can have a double signification: first, *appearing*, in the sense of announcing itself, as not-showing-itself; and next, that which does the announcing [das Meldende selbst]—that which in its showing-itself indicates something which does not show itself. And finally one can use ‘appearing’ as a term for the genuine sense of ‘phenomenon’ as showing-itself. (Heidegger, 2001, p. 53) [*Italics in the original—D. V.*]

The first two modalities elaborated upon by Heidegger are further exemplified by the symptom and the index respectively. While the symptom *stands for* something other than itself, the index *refers to* something other than itself. This distinction is fundamental when the ontological status of the sign is considered. Symptomatic appearances *standing for* something other than themselves involve a metonymic relation to their referents. One may also say that the sign is part of, or is directly related to the referent itself. Indices are metaphorical in their relation to their referents, not being directly related to them, but associated with them mostly by way of conceptual relations. The sign, as a self-referential graphic character, is neither merely metonymic in its visual appearance, nor only metaphorical in the conceptual relation to its referent—the letter. Its existential modality may also be that of the phenomenon, casting the idea of mere association with something else and thus becoming self-referential in its perceptual relations as an assortment of graphic characteristics. The sign as a phenomenon is symbolic. It refers back to itself *as* it partakes of the appearance of its referent and/or as it is associated with its referent conceptually, but it is not restricted to these functions. Differently put, the sign is symbolic in the way it presents its referent, and the manner of its presentation becomes self-presentation hence. According to Gadamer, “[d]as Symbolische verweist nicht nur auf Bedeutung, sondern läßt sie gegenwärtig sein: es repräsentiert Bedeutung. [...] Das Repräsentierte ist [...] selber da und so, wie es überhaupt da sein kann.”⁵ A national flag is a symbol inasmuch as it partakes of the concept of the nation in the way it displays its visual characteristics.

4. “Everything we meet in everyday life can become a sign.” (ibid., p. 247).

5. “[t]he symbolic does not merely refer to meaning, but grants it presence; it represents meaning. [...] The represented is [...] present in itself, and in a way in which it can be present as such.” (Gadamer, 1993, p. 46)

Ein Symbol also verweist nicht nur, sondern es stellt dar, indem es vertritt. Vertreten aber heißt, etwas gegenwärtig sein lassen, was nicht anwesend ist. So vertritt das Symbol, indem es repräsentiert, das heißt, etwas unmittelbar gegenwärtig sein läßt. [...]. Symbole wie das religiöse Symbol, die Fahne, die Uniform, sind so sehr stellvertretend für das Verehrte, daß es in ihnen da ist.⁶ (Gadamer, 1993, S. 159)

The typeface is symbolic of a letter of the alphabet. It directs attention to its own characteristics as a sign insofar as it grants presence to the letter. Such self-manifestation of the sign as a symbol is not independent of its mediality.

According to Wilhelm Dilthey, it is not conceptual abstraction the aesthetic experience necessitates, but the medium itself, which is the primary experience of all aesthetic reception (Kulcsár-Szabó, 2004, p. 19). Correspondingly, the futurists and the Dadaists sought to reinforce “the physiological perception of typography” (Hausmann and Cullars, 1998, p. 72). In their works they sought to foreground the phenomenality of the graphic character in this way.

The futurists and especially the Dadaists recognized that reading [...] could only be effected visually. It was in certain typographical pages produced around 1919 that this physio-optical principle was realized for the first time in a coherent fashion. One reason for the invention of the phonetic poem was supported by an optical typography of a new kind. (ibid., p. 72)

Works of such art presented defamiliarizing relations not in terms of sense relations only, but also in the manner graphic characters presented themselves on the page. Type was not to be ignored anymore as the mere transmitter of sense, but was to be reinterpreted as an entity of visually conceived relations which make sense in themselves as an image.

By refusing congeniality, Tzara ‘desyndicalize[s]’ typography. He takes away its conventional significations. What is important is not the codified meaning of typography, or even the text to be printed, but the type in itself, as a form, its design, thickness, height, pure graphic signifiers [...]. (Lapacherie, 1994, p. 71)

The possibilities of visual manifestation inherent in a typeface or a single graphic character is invariably determined by the modality of the “medium” it is entwined with. Type in print involves different possibilities of manifestation than type in digital layouts due to the characteristics of the respective media. It is common to both modes of visual

6. “The symbol hence does not only refer to, but also presents something else, inasmuch as it stands for it. Standing for something, in turn, means granting presence to something that is absent. In this way does the symbol stand for something, when it represents it, that is, it grants immediate presence to this thing. [...] Symbols, such as the religious symbol, the flag, the uniform stand for the object of reverence so much so that it is present in them.”

design, however, that the graphic character is arranged, situated and associated with other characters within a shared, jointly shaped textual space. "The physical fact of the text, with its spatial appearance on the page, requires visual apprehension: a text can be seen, must be seen, in a process which is essentially different from the perception of speech" (Bernhardt, 1986, p. 66). The space of writing which we orient ourselves in throughout the process of reading is the visual surface of textual space itself. Dieter Breuer elaborates the spatial or visual facet of the literary text as encompassing all the following relations:

Schriftart, Schriftgrad, Buchstabenabstand, Mittel der Wortabtrennung, Zeichensetzung in engerem Sinne, Zeilenabstand, Zeilenanordnung (Zeilenblock, Strophenschemata), Seitenspiegel, farbliche Mittel, Randleisten, Vignetten, Papierart, Papierfaltung, Einbandart u. ä. Visuelles Wirkmittel im engeren Sinne ist das sogenannte 'Bild' [...].⁷ (Breuer, 1990, S. 124)

The image of graphic space created by characters in a layout is the space of the text itself. Although a work of literature may appear in various editions with different typography, typesetting, page size and binding, it invariably creates a textual space of letters, lines and punctuation marks (or the lack of the latter), the visual paths of which the reader explores so as to uncover the diverse strains of speech, to trace the links of contextual correlations, and to discover the various potential threads of sense. The space of the text can thus be marked by its conspicuous, written locations of sense as it is shaped by textual relations and terrains in which the interpretive process orients the reader visually. It is not by chance that one cannot point out a particular location of the text easily if one is not familiar with its layout, i.e., with the typesetting of the text presented in a specific edition. A different layout exposes the textual space of the work itself differently from that we are familiar with, so that we have to adapt our perception to this difference of textual space in order to find the specific location we are searching for. Our knowledge of textual space develops throughout the process of (re)reading and yields a map of textual paths and locations which (re)orient us visually within the fabric of sign and sense. Günter Figal elaborates on this aspect of the literary work of art in the following way:

Daß Bücher Orte sind, wird nicht zuletzt deutlich, wenn man, eine Stelle in einem literarischen Werk meinend, auf das Buch weist: Hier steht es. [...] Mit der Ausgabe, auf die man sich bezieht [...] hat [man] sich für sie und ihre Einrichtung des Werkes entschieden, weil sie das Werk auf eine bestimmte Weise sich zeigen läßt. [...]

7. "Font type, font size, letter spacing, segmentation, punctuation in a narrow sense, spacing of lines, arrangement of lines (block of lines, strophe schemes), page size, colouring devices, margins, book covers, paper type, manner of folding, binding, etc. Visual devices in the narrow sense comprise the so-called 'image' [...]."

Die phänomenalen Räume, die Kunstwerke sich zeigen lassen, sind im allgemeinen mehrfach bestimmt: als optische, akustische und hermeneutische Räume [...]. [...] [L]etztlich hat jedes Kunstwerk seinen eigenen Raum [...]. Das dieser Raum zum Kunstwerk selbst gehört, läßt vermuten, daß ein Kunstwerk nicht nur einen Raum einräumt, sondern selbst in sich räumlich ist.⁸
(Figal, 2010, S. 249–250)

As the work of art manifests itself in its genuine self-referentiality, the graphic character is also awarded the possibility to assert its phenomenal nature. However, the phenomenality of the graphic character is not restricted to art. Digitally conceived and functional layouts may also reveal that the typographic character, as an assortment of graphic relations, bears significance in its own appearance. Printed and digital surfaces manifest the self-referentiality of the sign in different modalities and manners, which underscores the versatility of their perceptual options in making sense. Digital layouts offer the possibility for characters to become variable within the same design, besides allowing for motion and interactivity within a virtual space of three dimensions. Without these options, digital design can only be the mere reproduction of print layouts on a screen. In print, characters are fixed within the design, their space is non-virtual and not interactive in a perceptual manner. The layout in print invests the page with an order of conceptual irregularities inherent in framed, fixed groups of signs. The reader is hence called upon by the design to unfurl its variability and its possible correlations without facilitating a virtually interactive relation or the changing appearance of graphic characters. In other words, readers must adapt themselves to a static design in an unchangeable frame, so that they may surpass their preconceived ideas and familiar conceptions, gaining hitherto unexperienced insight thereby. The printed page rules, and by ruling shapes the perception and the thinking of the reader, who must make an effort at finding sense in a layout that questions them, but provides no conclusive answer. Digital layouts display their genuine characteristics inasmuch as they allow the readers themselves to shape the design, to change it and interact with it, gaining insight by way of their own modifications of type in a virtually conceived textual space. In terms of digital layouts, then, readers are urged to put questions, but the answers also have to be provided by them in the course of their di-

8. "Not least does it become clear that books are locations when one, referring to a textual location in a literary work, points at the book: Here it is. [...] With the edition one opts for [...], [one] has already decided in favour of it and its layout of the work, since it allows for the self-manifestation of the work in a specific manner [...]."

The phenomenal spaces exposed by works of art are generally determined in multiple ways: they are both visual, acoustic, and hermeneutic spaces [...]. [...] [A]fter all, every work of art has its own space. [...] That this space belongs to the work of art itself instigates the supposition that a work of art does not only organize space, but is in itself spatial."

ologue with virtual type. Thus, while print design requires a mutable imagination for making sense of it, digital layouts necessitate a mutable imagination for virtual perception. In the coming two sections, the paper aims to explore the diverse facets and manners the different kinds of layouts may manifest themselves in in terms of typography and textual space, and the significance this may bear on the principles of perception.

Transition, Motion, Interaction

The idiosyncratic facets of digital typography and textual space unfold themselves in terms of virtual graphetics. Virtual graphetics can be considered visual graphetics determined by the digital medium it is entwined with. “Visual graphetics investigates the graphic design features of written signs, including the geometric shapes of which they are composed [...]” (Coulmas, 2006, p. 177). Virtual graphetics encompasses the digitally available design options inherent in the possibilities unfurled by visual graphetics. It involves size, scaling and orientation options of type unavailable in print design, as the latter is restricted to the static representation of the three dimensions. Accordingly, virtual typography not only allows for, but also requires more flexible and dynamically adjustable typefaces, as these must adapt themselves to the volatility of the screen environment. Screen-based communication “encompasses computer screens and television screens, but also less obvious devices such as mobile telephones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and car navigation systems” (Hillner, 2009, p. 36). Facilitating many different purposes and available in various sizes, the digital screen necessitates the virtual (re)presentation of movement, which is also one of the signalling features of virtual typography and the corresponding textual space. The virtual (re)presentation of movement allows for the creative realization of motion typography and transitional typography. While motion typography constitutes moving type, transitional typography presents gradually changing characters.⁹ As we shall see, in most cases, transitional typography also involves movement, thus these two aspects will be considered jointly.

The television title sequence *Profile*, created by the Why Not Associates design group¹⁰ exemplifies how motion and transitional typography can be fused on the screen. “The animation, produced for BBC4 in 2002, uses the rotary motion of typographic fragments to achieve its visually intriguing effect” (ibid., p. 107). Various typographic fragments rotate while moving on the screen and via this rotational motion

9. This distinction is drawn by Matthias Hillner (2009, p. 36).

10. This example is described and illustrated by Matthias Hillner (ibid., pp. 106–107).

assemble themselves into legible characters constituting the title “Profile” itself. Thus, while rotating, the fragments gradually become type. The pieces move, and while moving, transition into something they simultaneously are and are not. In this case, it is not an artistic installation which makes typography conspicuous by nature of its inherent self-referentiality, but a commercial design which calls attention to the mediality of type by way of motion and transition. Differently put, the typographic elements become capable of referring back to themselves solely on account of the digitally construed characteristics of their virtual design. Graphic characters can also undergo changes in their appearance however, if their location is fixed on the screen. Even without movement within its own textual space, transitional type allows for change in the way it manifests itself. All the more so, as transition may be the very aesthetic principle which allows for a typeface to become self-referential. Tomi Vollauchek and the FL@33 design agency created an animated typeface called *Unfolded* in 1999, which constitutes virtually animated transition from geometrical shapes into graphic characters and the other way round. “The type evolves from diamond-shaped graphic elements which virtually unfold into squares, then into lines, and finally into letter shapes. The end result is a simple pixel font” (Hillner, 2009, p. 41). This pixel font recedes back into the geometrical shapes it unfurled from as soon as it manifests itself in its entirety.¹¹ The self-referentiality of *Unfolded* is also rooted in a virtual design principle of the digital medium itself indeed. The typeface constitutes the transition from non-typographical shapes into graphic characters, revealing and revelling in the versatility and mutability of its appearance.

Besides transition and motion, digital type also allows for virtual interaction with the viewers, thus enabling them to shape textual space on the screen in an idiosyncratic, continuously changing manner.

‘The whole’ remains unchanged when people look at static typography because the relationship between the typographic elements remains static. With virtual typography, ‘the whole’ changes constantly. The need for the continuous reinterpretation of the changing information requires the viewer to constantly adjust the mode of perception. (ibid., pp. 64–65)

As viewers are called upon to adjust their mode of perception to the changing relations of textual space and the varying appearance of typefaces, the peculiar mediality of typography in screen design also becomes noticeable. John Maeda and his Aesthetics & Computation Group were among the first to seek the possibilities of virtual typography in the light of programming, which also allowed for exploring potential

11. To view the animation, visit the homepage of FL@33 at <https://www.flat33.com/> and navigate to AAT—Animated, Acoustic Typefaces within the Typography category.

interaction with the screen. Maeda's work entitled *Flying Letters* (1996) offers the viewer the chance to create diverse, but always temporary typographic arrangements in nine possible layouts on the computer screen by way of moving the cursor (Maeda, 1996). In this manner, the virtually conceived textual space of graphic characters is in continuous evolution, shaped by the viewers themselves and thus explored. Type becomes a mutable phenomenon, revealing its versatile mediality on the digital screen, and manifesting its capability to bend the relations of its ever-transforming space. Viewers shape the spaces of the text by moving the cursor, but they also become entangled in the spaces they create thereby. This dynamic interaction yields the self-referentiality of virtual type in Maeda's work. The graphic characters assume volatile appearance and exhibit changeable spatial relations simultaneously, enabling the screen environment to demonstrate the perceptual uniqueness of type that surfaces in a textual space of an essentially undefinable order. Hence does Maeda's work offer the aesthetic experience of graphic characters on the screen.

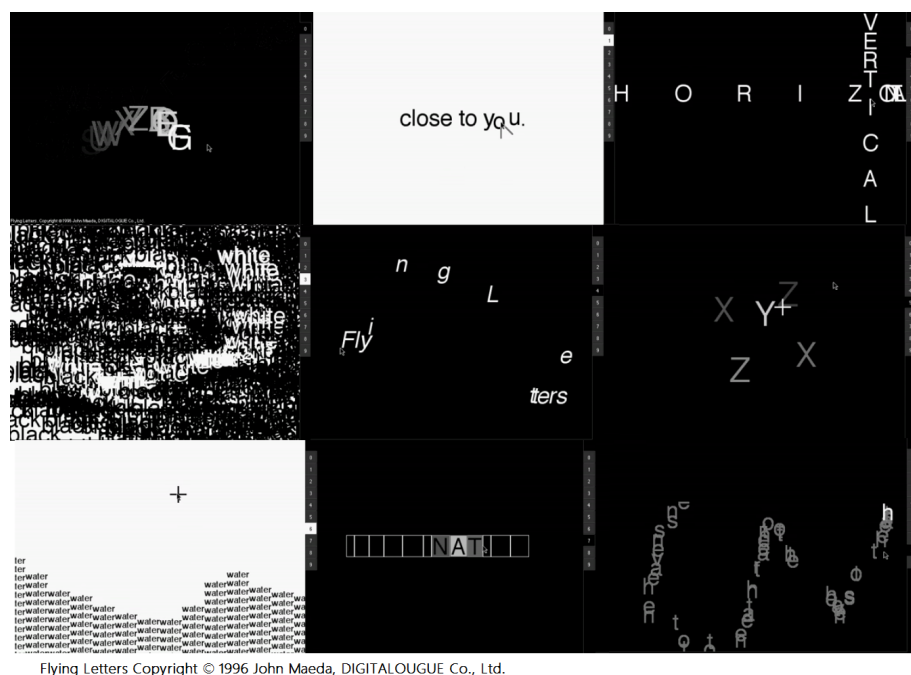


FIGURE 1. Nine screenshots from *Flying Letters* by John Maeda (A video demonstration of interacting with *Flying Letters* was retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/37550568> on 29 July 2020).

The interactive exploration of the three dimensions in terms of the virtual space of the text is yet another mode of experience only the digital surface of the screen can offer the viewers. David Small's 1999 *Talmud Project* exposes these spatial dimensions of texts' virtual terrains by a software which allows the viewer to spatially relate passages from the Torah and the Talmud in English and French translations.¹² "The blocks of text can be arranged interactively to shape walls through which the reader can navigate. Different text connections can be made according to the reader's preference" (Hillner, 2009, p. 44). The introduction of sacral texts to the digital screen reveals the potential for incorporating further sense relations into their interpretation by construing additional perceptual orders with the help of the three virtual dimensions. In such a digital environment, readers can establish virtual terrains of the text which may bear potential meaning and significance only to them. In this manner, it is not only the sacredness of the holy text which calls attention to itself, but also the spatial dimensions in which its passages can be arranged to reveal meaningful relations hitherto unthought of. Textual space refers back to itself by way of its virtual extension to three dimensions within the framework of a digital design.

Virtual type demonstrates the perceptual versatility inherent in typographic layouts designed for the screen. Transitional and motion type, interactivity and the changeable dimensions of textual space offer design options with inherent mutability and variability. The graphic character, thus, manifest itself as a phenomenon on account of the unique medial characteristics it exposes. Screen design demonstrates that the medium is inseparable from the sign and that the typeface does not merely stand for something else, but can also stand for itself, necessitating the viewers' mutable imagination to live up to the volatility of its perceptual relations.

Structure, Gesture, Dialogue

The layout of the printed page does not offer the virtual variability of type and textual space in the manner digital surfaces do, and interacts with the reader differently than virtual design does. Type in print is static from a perceptual point of view, but this also allows for the creation of visual structures and textures which can be explored by the reader *over time*. The time the interpretation of the perceptual and sense relations involved in a piece of print design takes is not determined by the time of motion, but by the sensibility of readers. As such, type in

12. The City. Tian' Thesis Project. Spring 2013. Parsons MFA Design and Technology. Retrieved from <https://tianxiethesis.wordpress.com/2013/03/06/reference-talmud-project/> on 29 July 2020.

print can never be confined to the (re)presentation of motion as is often the case with transitional and motion typography. Print design is a static perceptual structure manifesting its order in a fixed frame. Accordingly, it can refer back to itself by virtue of its statically conspicuous typographical arrangements and the diverse inherent relations of sense. Differently put, it is in the perceptual relations between graphic characters and the potential interpretations embedded into these relations that the self-referential character of typography manifests itself in print. Entwined with the print medium, type can reveal what else it might be besides a referential sign over the time of interpreting its fixed perceptual relations on the page. The digital screen can and must overstep the confines of the printed page in order to reveal the essential character of virtual typography, and its imaginative complexity reveals facets different from the ones characteristic of fixed, print design layouts. While print design does not aspire to become virtual, digital layouts are not merely virtual recreations of printed pages. As pointed out before, in art, the particular manner in which typography draws attention to its visual idiosyncrasies can become apparent, for the sign is not restricted to its referential status. Literature as poetry allows for the self-manifestation of typographic specificities both in verse and in prose. Visual poetry can create shapes of words in verse, but it is not confined to picture poems. The textual space of the printed novel may also involve visual cues and arrays which divert attention to the layout, to type and to thus, to the page itself. The visual ordering of text in a layout of prose thus may also allow for print to become a phenomenon.

In Laurence Sterne's novel entitled *Tristram Shandy* (1760–1767), the placement of typographic characters within a spread and the orders of textual space allow for the sign to call attention to itself as a written symbol. By way of the self-referential state of specific signs, the space of the text can engage the reader in a different manner from a layout that is designed merely for the sake of making a text accessible. Sterne “saw that [the] printed page implied a visual rhetoric” (Holtz, 1970, p. 81). The printed page addresses the reader with its visually self-referential cues of typography, its spatial arrangements of text and its non-textual elements. In Sterne's work, one “is confronted with pages that are black, or mottled, or blank, and is constantly jerked to attention by a pointing finger [...]” (Iser, 2008, p. 63). Apart from these visual phenomena and self-referential cues, typographic markers such as varying numbers of asterisks, dashes of diverse length, brackets of diverse types and sizes, changes in typeface, and non-textual elements such as “wiggly lines” (Holtz, 1970, p. 84) of different kinds appear on the spreads of the book. According to William V. Holtz, “in the word *gesture* we seem to come closest to understanding the visual and kinaesthetic effect of Sterne's dash and some of his other devices” (ibid., p. 84) [*Italics in the original—D. V.*]. In fact, all visual constructions in *Tristram Shandy* serve as gestures

to call attention to unconventional horizons of sense, and, simultaneously, refer back to themselves as the visual manifestations which give rise to these horizons. Sterne weaves symbols into the text while creating the text itself as a symbol, and thus allows for the page and for type to be foregrounded in its printed characteristics.

The design of print layouts is oriented on the spread when books are concerned, and the significance of the spread manifests itself in terms of typography and textual space. The sections entitled “Slawkenbergius’s Tale” and “Excommunicatio” manifest peculiar layouts in the sense that they are printed in Latin and English versions on facing pages. In this way, the pages seem to mirror each other in terms of the narrative, but in a typographical sense, they constitute divergent sets of graphic characters and paragraphs of different lengths. In addition, “Slawkenbergius’s Tale”—the curious story of a gentleman with an enormous nose—renders the Latin version of the text in *italics*, while the corresponding English “translation” is presented to the reader in Roman type. Such an unconventional textual order calls attention to the significance of typographical self-manifestations in the course of interpreting the narrative. The reader oscillates between the facing pages, tracing relations and potential differences of sense between the two versions on the basis of typographical cues and arrangements of the layout. The Latin version of the religious excommunication in the eleventh chapter of Book 2 is not rendered in italics, but manifests conspicuous leading, as recurring characters and syllables are interpolated between the lines, above specific words. In addition, the passages in English attributed to the characters themselves are not rendered on the facing pages in Latin. Omitting unholy remarks and prosaic digressions, the reader must face blanks in the Latin version text of the excommunication, which is an undeniable source of Shandean humour.

In both of the mentioned sections, therefore, the reader has to make sense of the idiosyncrasies of type and textual space to be able to interpret the narrative. Spreads frame the spatial orders of the facing pages, confining the oscillatory movement of perception and interpretation to a visually fixed field of print. It is no wonder thus, that the Gutenberg Project version—rendering the text in HTML format—provides lengthy explanations for changes in layout as compared to the print version. In this HTML layout, character speech in English is not “mirrored” by blanks in the Latin version of the excommunication, neither is it preserved within the boundaries of the page. The narration and utterances of characters are extended typographically over the entire length of the screen, overreaching the “parallel columns”¹³ which replace the facing

13. The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, by Laurence Sterne. Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39270/39270-h/39270-h.htm> on 12 August 2020.

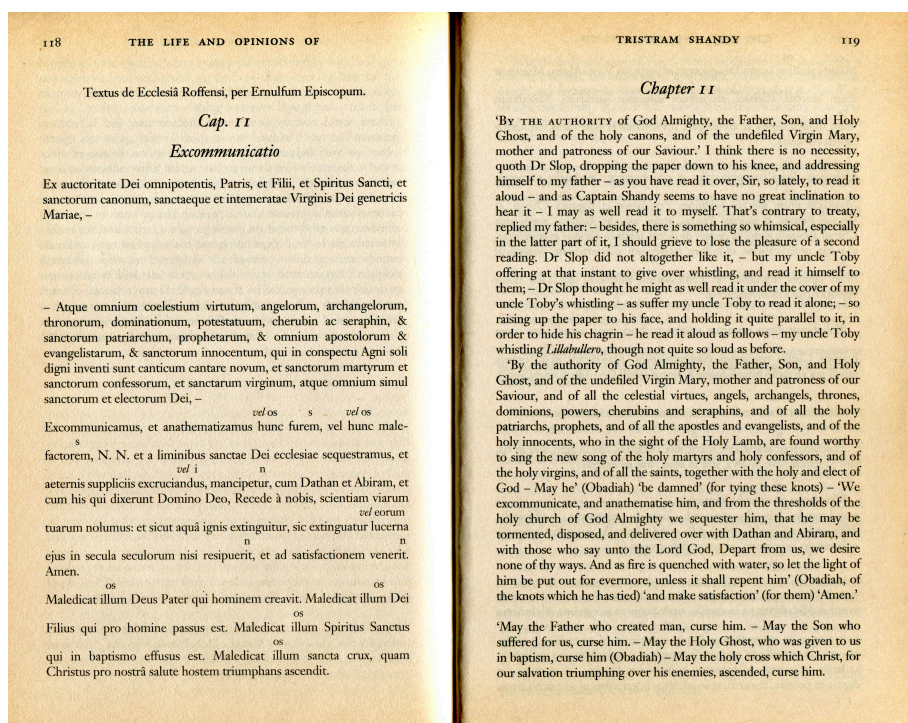


FIGURE 2. The first spread of the “Excommunicatio” (Sterne, 1996, pp. 118–119)

pages. Blanks in the Latin text standing for the untranslated passages within the print layout and the framing role of spreads disappear, while the irregular leading and the columns replacing the facing pages create new, narratively unaccountable blanks in the English HTML version layout. The disruption of the printed order illuminates the significance of the spread: it orients the reader within the textual space of the print layout, framing two pages, but also allowing for irregularities in typesetting and typography to manifest themselves in their self-referentiality by localizing them for the eye within a raster grid spanning an area of equal proportions. This also makes it apparent once again that print type and textual space cannot and do not seek to manifest themselves in a manner of perceptual mutability, like virtual design does. The print layout calls upon readers to create and recreate complex associative relations within the statically perceptual order of print. In this ever-developing process of interpretation, the typeface is not only a sign but also a phenomenon, a perceptual location of self-reference yielding invisible associations that extend and transform imaginative horizons in many possible directions.

The same principle of visual orientation winds through Sterne's work, sometimes on a smaller scale, but with all the more frequent manifestations. Besides the asterisks, dashes and brackets referred to before, Gothic type also surfaces in the text of *Tristram Shandy*. This typeface calls attention to itself and its graphic characteristics as it appears five times within a spread of a marriage contract, and hence recalls the ancient word of the law in mockingly associative terms. Small capitals of more than two lines also segment several pages within the book, often highlighting some seemingly insignificant thought, banality, or emphasizing a particular, potentially recurring verbal formulation. In this way, small capitals not only give relevance to the inconsequential and the erratic, as food for thought, but also manifest the importance of typographic phenomena in the order of the textual structure.

The visual idiosyncrasies of textual space reach beyond the possibilities of typography in *Tristram Shandy*, however, when "the impulse toward gesture surges beyond the bounds of punctuation" (Holtz, 1970, p. 85). The aforementioned "wiggly lines" illustrate the manners of conscious digression in Tristram's narrative. Elsewhere, corporal Trim's flourish made with his stick is meant to demonstrate the freedom of bachelorhood.

The pointing finger is yet another non-textual element besides the "wiggly lines" (and the linear line on the facing page below) that directs attention to the spatiality of the graphic structure merely by way of its appearance. Non-textual elements establish perceptually orienting and implicitly associative relations with the text, thus foregrounding the framing page in itself. That is, these elements offer the insight that reading occurs in terms of the visual as such and its various markers like the framing page and the spread. Non-textual elements also refer back to the sense and significance of their own visual appearance and the relations they create with and within the page, shedding light to the way in which a *typographic* layout can incorporate "merely" *graphic* shapes into its design. The interaction of the textual and the non-textual in *Tristram Shandy* reveals how the statically complex perceptual relations of a fixed print design create multiple, mutable relations and horizons of sense. Thus, already in the second half of the 18th century, Laurence Sterne recognized the possibilities inherent in the print medium. Type and textual space in Sterne's terms are not mere tools to present narrative and its relations of sense, but bear significance in the way they are arranged, ordered and appear on the page. In this way do they become self-referential symbols of hitherto unimagined possibilities of insight.

"Whether printed or running across the screen, writing itself possesses a visual dimension, which the German term *Schriftbild* aptly captures" (Stöckl, 2009, p. 208). Stöckl's formulation highlights that the written character has a visual facet, which allows for the sign to become a phenomenon in some typesetting designs and is merely referential in

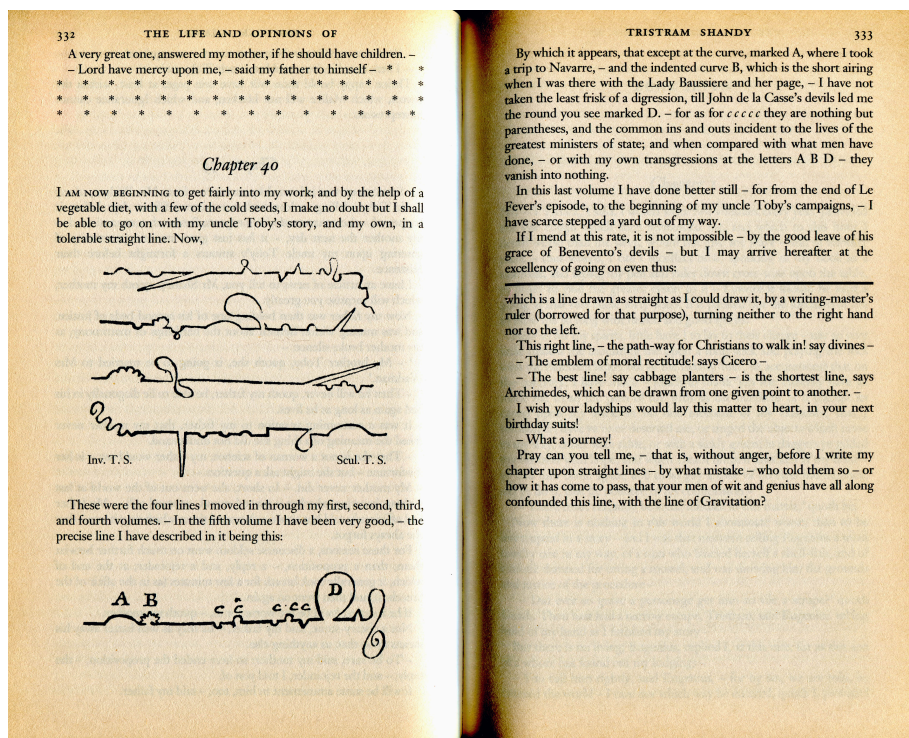


FIGURE 3. The paths of narrative in *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1996, pp. 332–333)

others. Even if the employed typefaces and the textual space of a particular layout are restricted to the mere referentiality of the sign, the potential is always inherent in them to become self-referential and thus to manifest their phenomenal character. The digital screen and print layouts present different directions in foregrounding the visual facet of typography and textual space. The digital screen relies on virtually construable transition and movement to reveal how the appearance of the graphic character is intertwined with its medium, while print design can only resort to a fixed perceptual order, which does not expose time in the way it appears, but in the way it unfurls the potentially inherent relations of sense and horizons of interpretation. Thus, the fixed perceptual order of print design is unique in the way it calls upon the reader to make perceptual associations and associations of sense within the static layout of shapes and graphic characters. Whichever mode of mediality the viewers or readers encounter, it is invariably the sign which orients them in its characteristic mode of appearance and by its interaction with the surface of the particular layout. “Signs mark the texture

in diverse respects, in varied thickness and make thus clear the interrelatedness of motifs and connections. [...] The thickness of the texture is structured by the sign; the texture is *articulated*, so that one can traverse it in a particular manner" (Figal, 2010, p. 248) [italics in the original—D.V.].

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