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Letterforms and their hidden geometry: modularity in the context of contemporary type design

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Type design is a technologically driven, conservative discipline, one which has typically been closed to all but specialists possessing the required knowledge of history and craft lore to enter. However, as history creates the system in which type exists and uses to move forward a working knowledge of the history of letterforms, coupled with a developed understanding of their underlying geometry, can empower visual communicators of all backgrounds to craft their own one-off letterforms or cohesive typographic designs for branding, or innovative typeface designs for setting impactful headlines, posters, and packaging. Likewise, as the means of graphic production and visual communication have become more democratized than ever, graphic designers, as opposed to only specialist type designers, are now empowered to create unique letterforms that leverage contemporary design technologies laser cutters, CNC routers, Adobe Illustrator plug-ins to create chromatic typefaces for screen use or modular letterforms for everything from signage to letterpress printing. This workshop presents a concise history of the Latin alphabet and its evolution from lettering into type and explores the underlying geometric systems of the alphabet's design that are exploited by type designers to create new type designs. By working by hand from existing typographic specimens, participants learn how to expand on found letterforms, and by exploiting the underlying geometry of letterforms, how to create modular designs that can be reproduced both digitally and materially.

Biography

Bradley J Coulter worked as a Graphic Designer, Fine Press Printer, and Design Educator in Seattle, Washington for 10 years before returning to the Midwest to pursue graduate studies, receiving MA and MFA degrees in Design from the University of Iowa. He is currently an Associate Professor of Graphic Design and Typography at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has presented on type history, type design, and the intersection of typography and literary theory, served as an editor for respected journals, and shown his design work in juried exhibitions across the US. His research is focused on exploring the psychological components of type design and use, and integrating those findings into a cognitive application of type to the page and the screen.

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