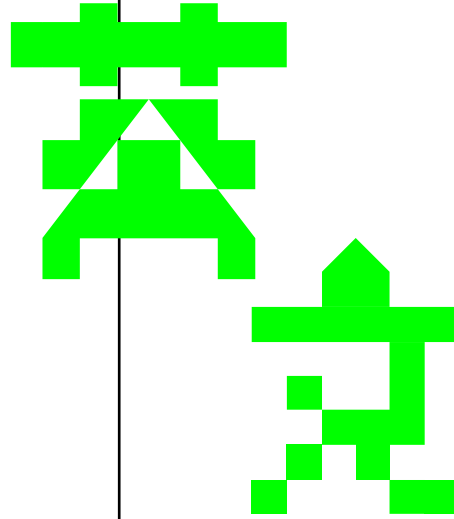
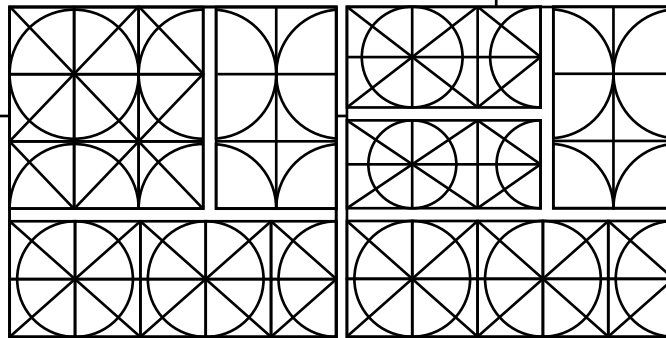


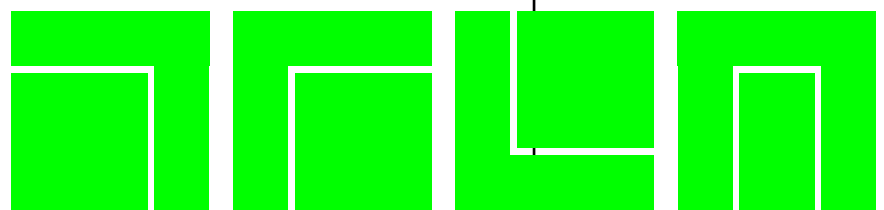
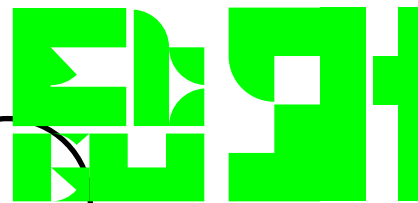
Positions through Contextualising



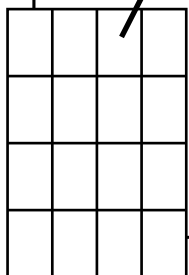
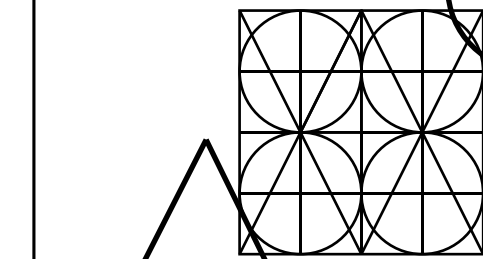
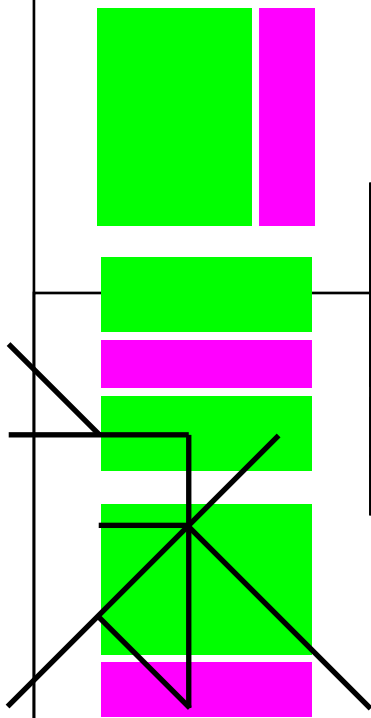
MAGCD
Unit 2



Gwen
Yun
Rong
Phoo

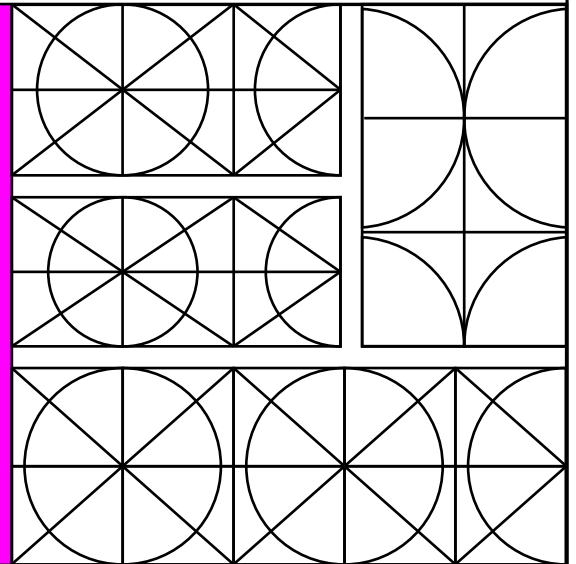


ENGLISH



“By ‘harmonization’, we mean that the basic weights and alignments of disparate alphabets are regularized and tuned to work together, so that their inessential differences are minimized, but their essential, meaningful differences preserved. In this way, the ‘noise’ of insignificant design artefacts and historical accidents is filtered out, leaving the ‘signal’ of significant character features amplified in comparison.”

Bigelow, C. and Holmes, K. (1993) ‘The design of a Unicode font’, *Electronic Publishing*, 6(3), pp. 289–305.



Charles Bigelow and Kris Holmes (1993) propose harmonisation as a design strategy intended to resolve visual inconsistency in their commissioned multi-lingual typeface for Microsoft's Lucida Sans Unicode. It is a technical solution that provides a standardised set of glyphs that could be used as default core font for different operating systems and languages in one, visually unified design. Methodologically, it filters out what the designer classifies as insignificant "noise" while retaining what they identify as significant "signal" of each alphabet.

Harmonisation significantly challenged my understanding of typography by pointing out how visual consistency in typeface design is historically achieved through constant acts of removal based on subjective decisions. In Bigelow and Holme's writing, the distinction between "noise" and "signal" remains largely ambiguous, raising critical questions as to whether the approximation of a complicated feature by a simpler structure justifies the original forms of the alphabet, as well as the histories and cultures they represent.

Overall, their argument exposed how harmonisation operates less as a process of negotiation and more as a form of manipulation, prompting me to critically reconsider the presumed neutrality of existing design systems within typeface design.

“The fact remains that harmonisation overwhelmingly takes characteristics, concepts, proportions and aesthetic notions of the Latin typographic world for granted, and seeks to adapt other scripts to these existing paradigms.”

**Nemeth, T. (2017)
‘Harmonised type design’ revisited.**

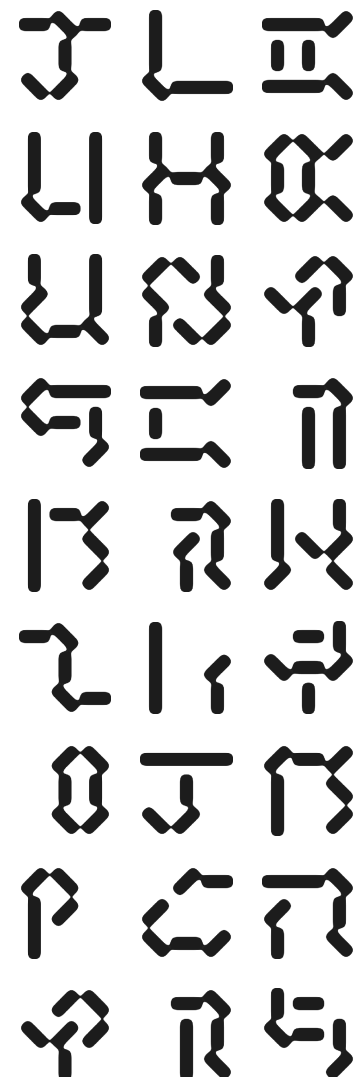
Available at:

<https://tntypography.eu/resources-list/harmonised-type-design-revisited/>

(Accessed: 5 May 2026).

In this writing, Nemeth critically interrogates the ideological framework of harmonisation in typeface design proposed by Bigelow and Holmes in 1993. While harmonisation was originally introduced as a technical solution intended to improve legibility and consistency across multilingual settings, Nemeth argues that its tendency to render scripts of diverse origins into standardised forms ambiguates their distinct characteristics, potentially leading to homogenisation. Thus, harmonisation is reframed as a design ideology shaped by modernist ideals of universality based on asymmetrical globalisation.

Nemeth's analysis of harmonisation suggests that standardisation in type design often comes at the cost of script-specific integrity, situating type design within a field of cultural and political justification, recognising types as visual representations of linguistic hierarchy. This critique challenges my initial methodology of achieving visual harmony between scripts through a shared modular system based on Latin principles, and raises a critical question of whether the pursuit of visual equivalence across writing systems remains the best design strategy if it is supported by the suppression, reduction, or distortion of one script's characteristics.

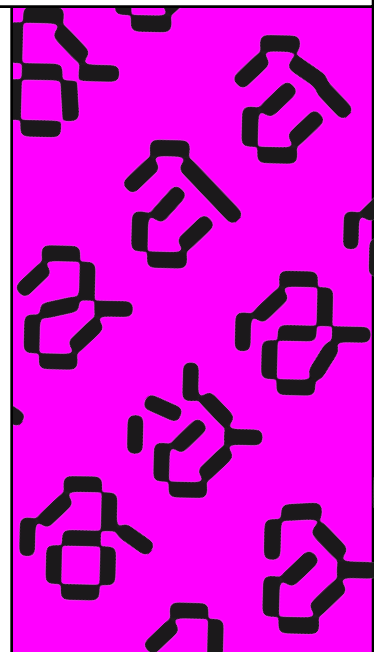


“This process of cultural ‘transculturation’ occurs in such a way as to produce, as it were, a ‘third space’ - a ‘native’ or indigenous vernacular space, marked by the fusion of cultural elements drawn from all originating cultures, but resulting in a configuration in which these elements, though never equal, can no longer be disaggregated or restored to their originary forms, since they no longer exist in a ‘pure’ state but have been permanently ‘translated’.”

Gutiérrez Rodríguez, E. and Tate, S.A. (eds.) (2015) Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

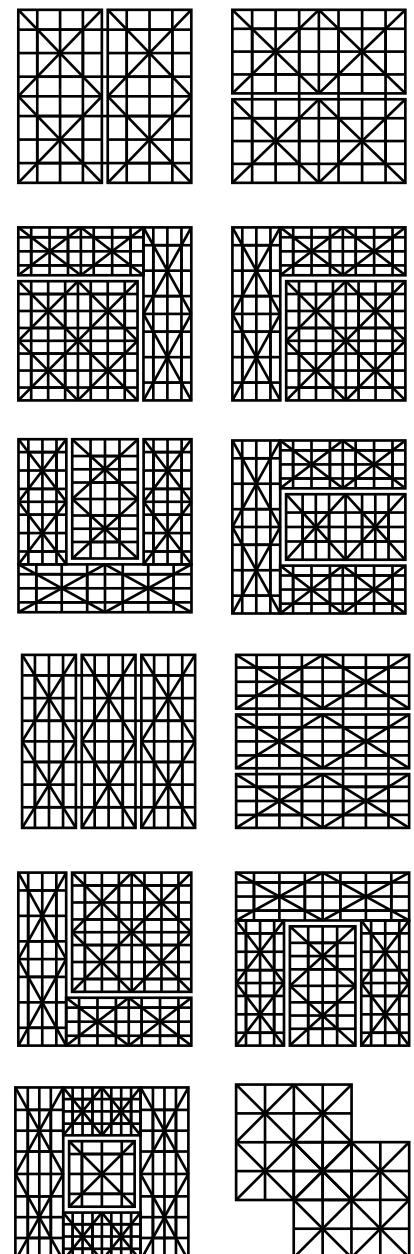
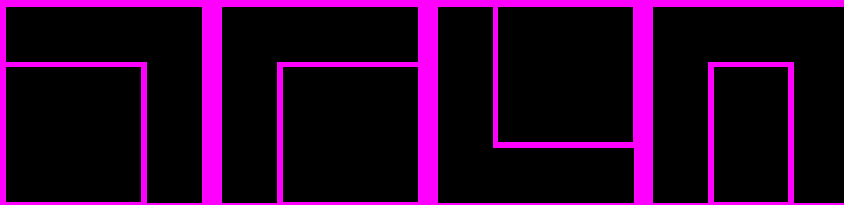
Creolisation is a process of cultural and linguistic mixing arising from the entanglement of multiple cultures within the same social space, fostered primarily by histories of slavery, colonisation, and plantation economies. Since these historical conditions compelled disparate communities to communicate in order to survive in the newly imposed environment, creolisation is inevitably marked by inequality. The process results in the formation of a “creole”, a vernacular form of language spoken in the subjugated community that emerge through the fusion of dominant and subordinated languages.

As Encarnación Rodríguez and Shirley Tate (2015) state, creole is referred to as a third space in which the mixed cultural elements become permanently translated and can no longer be restored to their original forms. This concept repositions my understanding of the glyphs produced in my initial iteration, generated through a 3x3 grid with rectangular modules, as products of creolisation within typography. The contemporary typography industry remains heavily shaped by Western influences while disregarding the necessary conditions for non-Latin scripts to be authentically designed. Non-Latin alphabets are forced to adapt to square or rectangular forms to survive in the typographic environment constructed according to Western design principles, resulting in typefaces that eliminates visual and cultural histories of non-Latin scripts, reflecting a typographic form of creolisation in which Latin structures are privileged and the rest are pressured to assimilate towards them.



“The interpretative acts that become encoded in graphical formats may disappear from final view in the process, but they are the persistent ghosts in the visual scheme, rhetorical elements of generative artifacts.”

**Drucker, J. (2014)
Graphesis: Visual
Forms of Knowledge
Production.
Cambridge, MA:
Harvard University
Press.**

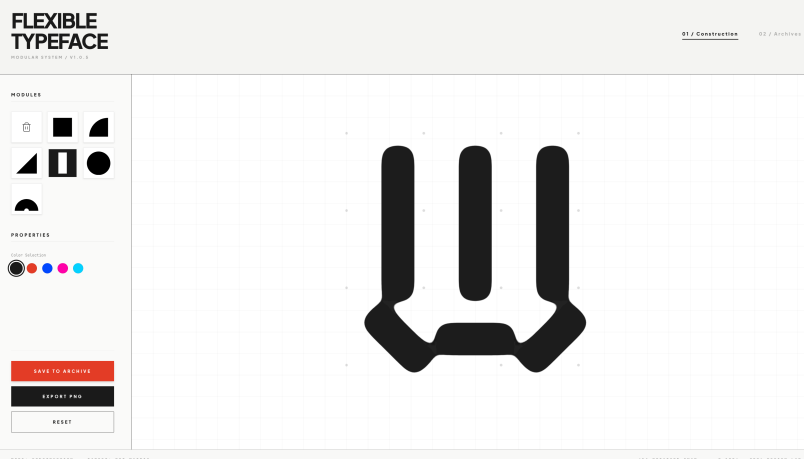


Typography, as a form of graphic communication design, encodes a reading of content much like graphs encode a reading of data. When a reader encounters a design, typographic choices—typeface, layout, spacing—recede from conscious attention. Yet these decisions actively guide the reading experience, shaping how content is interpreted. The designer’s situated perspective is reflected in these choices, even when it is not explicitly perceived.

This reference expanded my understanding of letterforms from passive carriers of languages to an epistemic practice that actively participates in the construction of knowledge. Adopting Drucker’s perspective, letterforms are products of accumulated design decisions shaped by historical, political, and cultural conditions. By analysing letterforms through their basic components, including composition, frame, and pattern, this reference enabled me to reexamine the function of letterform from a global perspective, and critically reflect on how typographic systems communicate the ideological positions of their designers.

“Avoid arbitrary randomness. Difference should have a reason.”

Maurer, L., Edo Paulus, Puckey, J. and Roel Wouters (2013). Conditional design workbook. Amsterdam: Valiz.



In Conditional Design, constraints are understood to generate creativity, with process itself constituting the outcome (Maurer et al., 2013). The term opens new ground for design practices, accentuating the complex experimentation, collaboration, and process-based research often neglected in conventional methodologies. Through the establishment of systems, designers remain grounded within a coherent logical framework while embracing unpredictable variations.

My project demonstrates the core principles of conditional design through the development of, originally, a modular system and subsequently a grid system that both impose clear and logical conditions for the construction of letters. Both systems confine the generation of letters within predetermined spaces, minimising arbitrary randomness from taking place, requiring the designer to respond adaptively to the given settings. This project therefore repositions typeface design as a practice of conditional design, shifting the role of the designer from one who designs outcomes to one who defines, tests, and refines the logic of the system through which those outcomes are produced.



“Graphic design history has yet to undertake the task of understanding its social context, understood as a range of effects: from the reproduction of cultural values through the work of graphic design to the shifting nature of consumption and reception, both conspicuous and symbolic, by audiences.”

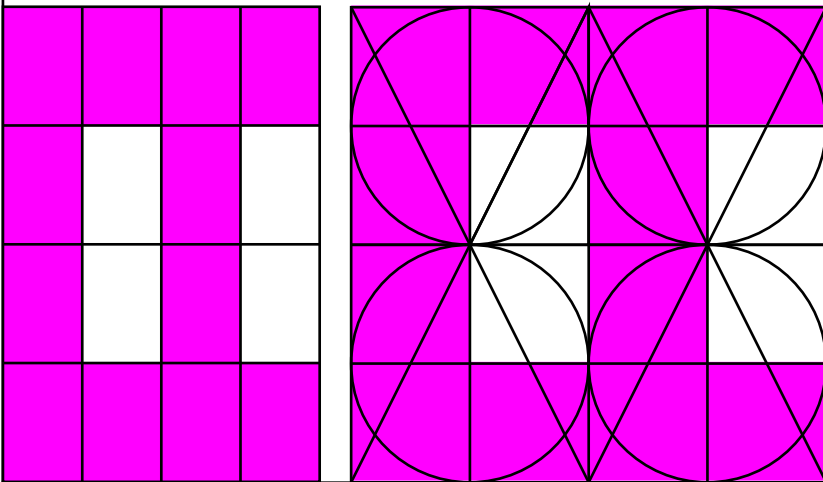
Blauvelt, A. (1994) ‘An opening: graphic design’s discursive spaces’, *Visible Language*, 28(3), pp. 205–217.

As referenced in *Positions through Iterating*, Andrew Blauvelt proposes that graphic design should be examined as a discursive space in which cultural values and power relations are continuously reproduced, positioning graphic design as a social practice through which ideologies are constructed and circulated through visual means (1994).

Blauvelt's discussion remains relevant to my work in *Positions through Contextualising*. Through their perspective, my knowledge of visual elements such as patterns and grids is reinforced as configurations in typography that reflect specific social conditions shaped by global relations. Their emphasis on reception and symbolic consumption propelled me to further challenge existing typographic systems and critically reexamine the political intentions behind their presumed functions.

“In digitization, by the nature of the process, letters become fragmented.”

Kinross, R. (2004) ‘Modernity after modernism’, in Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History. London: Hyphen Press, pp. 158–182.



As referenced in *Positions through Iterating*, Robin Kinross examines the relationship between modernism and digital typography, arguing that the transition from mechanical to digital production fundamentally transformed both the material and conceptual structure of letterforms (2004).

My understanding of Kinross’s argument has further developed in this project. Through this statement, Kinross suggests that digitisation fragments typography into divisible, programmable units, reframing it into a digital system manipulated by computational logic and technological mediation. Although their discussion is grounded within the context of digital production, the contradictory effect resulting from processes of fragmentation can also be observed throughout the history of non-Latin typography. For instance, one of the scripts explored in my project—the Greek alphabet—underwent multiple stages of simplification by European type cutters from the fifteenth century onwards, as early Latin-based type cutters were incapable of reproducing the complexity and cursive structures of Greek writing.

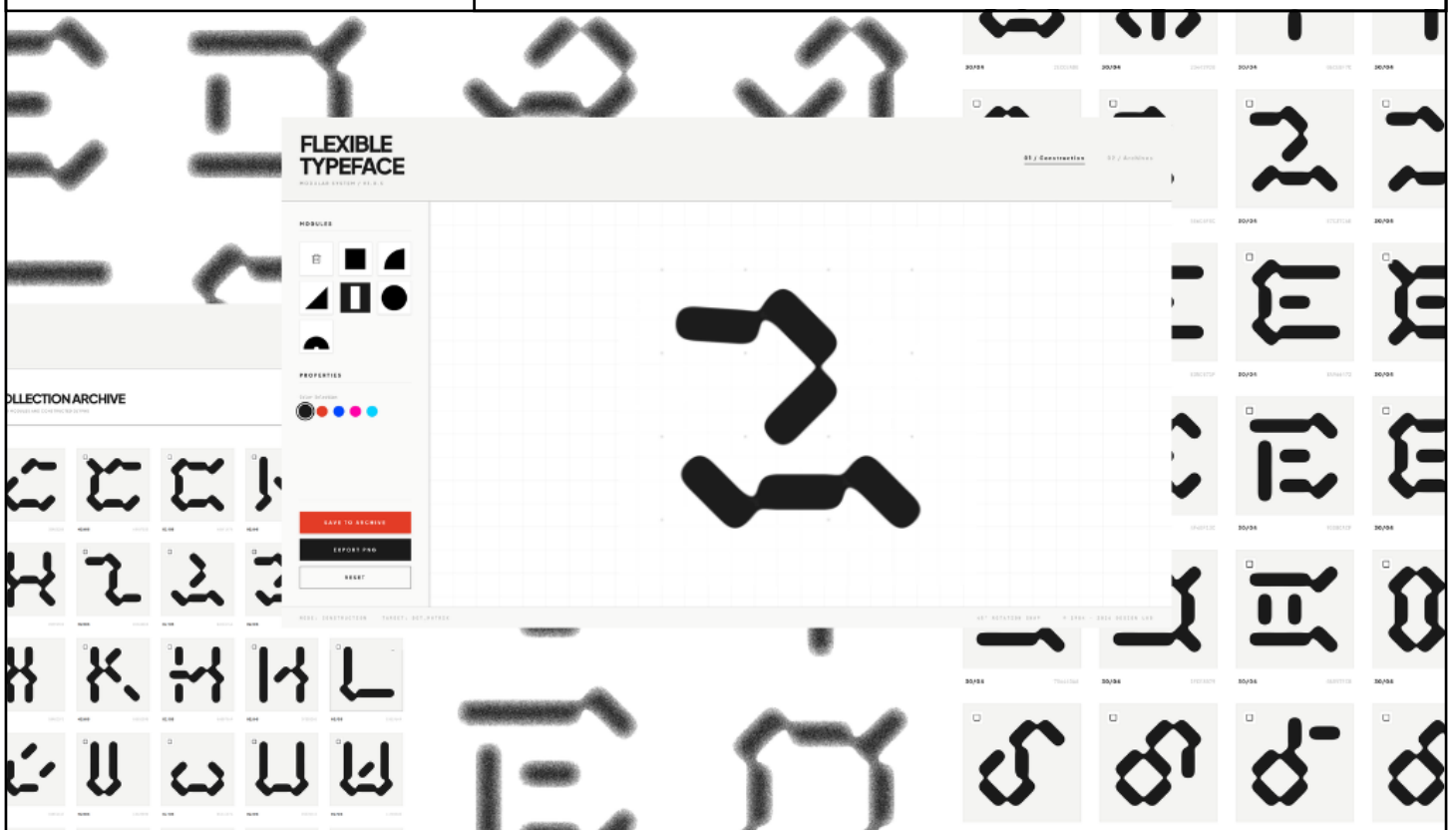
Kinross's argument therefore highlights the ongoing threat technological advancement poses to existing writing systems, enhancing my understanding that the historical development of typography has, from long ago, relied on compelling writing systems of diverse origins to conform to uniform geometric frameworks that conflict with their historical characteristics.

“The individual letters of a text should not be regarded as building blocks to be arranged in a row but as complicated segments combining in endlessly new ways to form units in which they are largely absorbed.”

**Gerstner, K. (1974)
Compendium for Literates: A System of Writing.
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.**

As referenced in Positions through Iterating, Karl Gerstner (1974) reframes typeface design as the construction of flexible systems that organise modular segments into multiple combinations through deliberate spatial calculation.

Gerstner’s framework remains highly relevant to the development of my work in Position through Contextualising, particularly in relation to constructing letterforms through system-based approaches. Gerstner’s methodology reinforced my understanding of typography as a combinatory structure in which letterforms can be assembled, transformed, and reproduced through procedural logic, strongly informing the development of my own glyph-generation systems. In response, my project positions typeface design as the construction of conditional systems that enable diverse typographic structures to coexist within shared constraints while maintaining their structural authenticity.

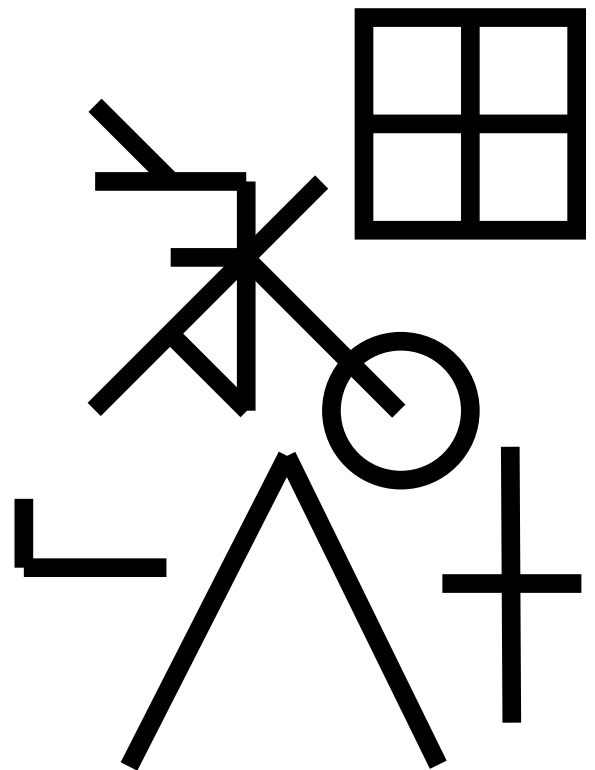


“Typography is the art of making a whole out of predetermined parts. The typographer “sets.” He sets individual letters into words, words into sentences.”

**Gerstner, K. (2019)
Designing
Programmes:
Programme as
Typeface,
Typography, Picture,
Method. Baden: Lars
Müller Publishers.**

Karl Gerstner’s proposed concept of “integral typography”, which emphasises the assembly of wholes from predetermined parts, remains highly relevant to the development of my project in Positions through Contextualising.

Moving beyond the acknowledgement of individual letterforms as forms of integral typography in which letters are constructed from independent modules, Gerstner’s methodology directly informed my approach to inspecting writing systems as visual structures completed with interconnected configurations including various compositions, frames, patterns. Adopting Gerstner’s position allowed me to acknowledge scripts as constructed systems in which the visual identities of typefaces emerge from relationships between multiple formal components.



Cottier, N. (2021) Letterform Variations. Karlsruhe: Slanted Publishers.

In *Letterform Variations*, Nigel Cottier investigates the capacity of grid-based systems to generate large quantities of typographic outcomes through modular and algorithmic steps. The system led to the production of 19, 840 letterforms, achieving extensive formal diversity through rules and constraints. Cottier positions letterforms as an expandable system governed by transformation, variation and computational logic, reframing type design as an open-ended generative process in which grids and modules are employed as active mechanisms for visual production.

This conceptual position is reinforced through the repetitive organisation of the contents inside the publication. Thousands of systematically varied glyphs are sequenced according to their order of production, highlighting the generative capacity of the modular system instead of the uniqueness of individual letterforms. The dense accumulation of resulting glyphs intentionally directs the audience to read them as decorative patterning as the repeated modules interact, before deciphering them as representations of the English language. This decision brings forward the structures of the letters as the primary subject, significantly reducing the audience's attention from the meanings contained within the displayed letters.

Cottier's perspective reinforces my understanding of letters beyond tools for functional communication, but modular structures that could be constantly assembled and disassembled, as explored in *Positions through Iterating*. Moreover, it blurs the boundaries between typography

and image-making, proposing an alternative perspective of type as decorative ornament that happens to hold linguistic meanings. This experimental approach initiated the exploration of my line of inquiry, encouraging me to view alphabets as independent graphics sharing similar structures and components.

As an initial exploration of my line of inquiry, I intended to create a set of glyphs in which each form can be interpreted as either a Greek or English letter, depending on the audience's language. Adopting Cottier's methodology, I generated the glyphs through an interface featuring a 3x3 grid and rectangular modules. The modular system proved effective in generating formally diverse glyphs while maintaining structural consistency.

However, as the project further developed, I noticed the inherent flaw in optimising a rectangular, square-based system for generating non-Latin alphabets. The coexistence of Greek and English letterforms within my generated glyphs relied heavily on the interpolation of both writing systems, achieved primarily through the reduction or elimination of the cursive characteristics of Greek letterforms. This raised a critical question regarding whether interpolation is the rightful solution for a typeface intended to function as a shared ground between languages if such coexistence is achieved through the visual compromise of one script over another.

Although Cottier's methodology is of central importance in shaping the conceptual and procedural foundation of this project, it also exposes the unquestioned dominance of rectangular grids in modern typeface design, despite their apparent incompatibility with non-Latin writing systems. My initial assumption that this method is capable of reproducing the Greek alphabet perfectly demonstrates how Western typographic frameworks are frequently presumed to be

universally applicable across global writing systems. Recognising this limitation prompted me to reconsider the structural assumptions within grid-based modular typeface design and the power dynamics it reflects in the international typography industry, redirecting me to explore alternative methodologies that are more inclusive of and responsive to non-Latin scripts.

Jung, R.S.D. (2021) ‘The Interlocality of Typography’, *Futures*, 4 August.

Available at:
<https://futures.org/stories/the-interlocality-of-typography/>

(Accessed: 7 May 2026).

“If globalism was based on a late 20th century imperialist ideology in which the non-Western world followed the Western influence while excluding their own local identity, then an inter-local perspective acknowledges that the Western method is not the only way to solve problems.”

In the interview published by So Dam Jung, designer Yu Jiwon argues that typography is not neutral or purely technical. Rather, it reflects political, historical, and cultural assumptions about what constitutes the "standard" form of communication within graphic design. Yu critiques the on-going visual conformity in harmonised typeface design and proposes "interlocality" as a counteract to contemporary multi-script typography practices. Instead of harmonising scripts according to Latin, or Western in the broader sense, parameters, interlocality seeks to preserve and celebrate the local, cultural, and regional diversity of marginalised scripts (Jung, 2021).

This position is reinforced through the structure and rhetoric of the interview. The conversation repeatedly contrasts Latin with Hangul, Chinese, Devanagari, and Arabic, emphasising the various interpretations of space across languages, thereby accentuating the unsuitability of Latin's typographic knowledge in global typeface design. By foregrounding the spatial and structural logic of Hangul, the interview demonstrates how non-Latin scripts operate according to fundamentally different typographic principles.

The concept of interlocality challenges my existing understanding of “Typography is a grid” (Froshaug, 1967), which positions the rectangular grid as a fundamental principle of modernist graphic design, reframing visual consistency and legibility achieved through harmonisation as cultural and political discrimination. While modernist design often prioritises universality and functional clarity, this unification erases cultural specificity, challenging me to question globalisation as a disguise for manipulation and graphic communication as a system that reinforces global inequality and underrepresentation.

Yu’s understanding of globalisation coincides with the concept of creolisation, a

process of transculturation in which a subjugated linguistic community is forced to adopt the linguistic behaviours of a dominant language, resulting in a vernacular language that cannot be fully recovered to their originated forms (Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Tate, 2015). In this sense, the adaptation of non-Latin scripts to Latin-derived typographic conventions can be viewed as a phase of creolisation within graphic design. As marginalised scripts increasingly sacrifice visual forms for functional compatibility, they risk gradual transformation away from their historical structures, potentially leading to new typographic expressions that may retain linguistic meaning but are no longer visually identical to their local cultures.

Interlocality advances my line of inquiry by suggesting how the erasure of cultural and historical identities of letterforms could be avoided. Its objective of urging cooperation between different writing systems encourages me to reconsider the limitations of rectangular grids and instead create alternative grid structures informed by both the historical anatomy of Latin and non-Latin alphabets. The grid itself becomes a public space where the visual needs of both alphabets are equally acknowledged; an open and shared zone accommodating scripts of diverse backgrounds, allowing letterforms to exchange, collaborate and produce.

This methodology subsequently expands into broader visual research that modifies the visual weight of overlapping grids to critique and subvert notions of global majority and authority within typeface design. Letterforms therefore shift from public spaces characterised by equilibrium to spaces defined by tension, contestation, and territorial sovereignty, ultimately challenging the overlooked political relations in typographic environments.

