
EP-odds and ends

Call for Foundation of a ‘Sir Francis Drake Society’

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Among people, there are more copies than originals.

Pablo Picasso

... the same applies to typefaces.

Author’s note

It’s high time to establish a ‘Sir Francis Drake Society’. A contemporary of Claude Garamond, Sir Francis Drake lived from 1540 to 1596. He already has many devoted followers and admirers in the graphics industry. Large software companies and type designers in the digital era will welcome Sir Francis Drake as their patron. In 1581 Queen Elizabeth knighted him for his achievements and later he was elected a member of Parliament.

Let’s bring Sir Francis Drake’s life back to the minds of those not familiar with his daring deeds. In the 16th century, Francis Drake was a relentless pirate who took everything he desired. Aren’t we—living in the 20th century—confronted with similar actions in the field of type design, owing to the fact that type designers in all countries suffer from a lack of copyright protection for their work and their property? There are a number of pirates raising the Jolly Roger everywhere, but when ashore they attend large-scale conferences where they claim to devote themselves to the colours of honourable shipping companies.

Something happened in September 1993 in the harbour city of Antwerp. The Association Typographique Internationale held a conference and talked about an ‘Anti-Piracy Campaign’. Some firms had become angry about the illegal copies of their software; a loss of income of millions. Mac and PC users should buy only original software and not cheap copies. Such software fonts are alphabets, which means the creative work of type designers. These designers also feel that originals should be sold, and not copies.

Recently, in addition to the other existing copies of my Palatino font sold under obscure names, a new copy was made, named ‘Book Antiqua’ and sold to a software firm. They used their own copyright on the diskettes and claimed ‘All rights reserved’. What rights are left to the originator? The designer had no information, no possibility to make corrections, and of course he received not a cent for royalties. Software companies should have the best Palatino for their customers; not a copy.

The firm producing this ‘Book Antiqua’ was a speaker of the ‘Anti-Piracy Campaign’. This caused me to resign in Antwerp as a founding member of ATypI after 36 years. This organization was established in 1957 by Charles Peignot to protect internationally the creative work of type designers and type founders. Great names had been connected with ATypI in its history—personalities like Beatrice Warde, Stanley Morison, Giovanni Mardersteig, Willem Ovink, Roger Excoffon, Georg Trump, etc.

A picture taken with a cheap camera by an amateur in 1/1000 of a second has at once the backing of the international copyright. Nobody would copy a record of Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* and sell it under another copyright. Similarly nobody can make a reprint of a work of literature under a new title by changing the author's name.

A typeface is sometimes the result of developments lasting years—for example Optima was developed from 1952 to 1958—and at the end is the creative work of a designer without any protection against copying. But a logo made up of a few letters of an existing alphabet has the backing of a trademark or copyright like 'expo67' for the exhibition in Montreal in Optima. Or take the IBM logo—three letters of Georg Trump's typeface 'City Bold'. On the other hand, the complete alphabet has no international protection at all.

The manipulations of original drawings of artists will become a common procedure more frequently, and some will wake up when such people discover that their own work was used or copied to fill someone else's pocket.

Some contemporaries expect a type designer to work for nothing—as a crusader or pioneer in the battle against illiteracy—with all his simple heart in a social engagement—but at the end to feed big companies. In short this is making profit with the intellectual property of others.

Copyists have no risk in the manufacturing and promotion of a successful typeface. It is so easy under the existing laws to take creative artwork for nothing, without authorization, not mentioning the source. It looks to the user as he buys the developments that he is compensating the firm's investment in research and development.

We have a profusion of alphabets these days—a lot of new and fresh ideas but also many bad designs. Too many, you may say. But you can be sure the acceptance of some of these creations will be corrected by the market. As in the past, only the good designs will stand. Many of these ephemera will soon be forgotten and, no question, nobody will copy those alphabets.

Type reflects trends and developments like any other artistic activity. It follows fashion. This is not so much in text faces, for our eyes are still the same as in Gutenberg's time. But in display type, the design must be attractive enough to catch the attention of the reader of an ad. This is still an interesting field for new ideas.

The danger for the future is the endless possibility of manipulating existing alphabets and to sell them as one's own creations. In a few years we will have a complete bastardization. It will be hard to identify what is an original alphabet and what is a modified and miserable botch for the ordinary reader—and yes, even for the so-called experts—who don't see the tiny little differences in the small reading sizes.

COMMENTARY BY CHARLES BIGELOW

Hermann Zapf is the designer of more than one hundred typefaces, including Optima, Palatino, Zapf Chancery, and Zapf Dingbats. A renowned book artist, calligrapher and teacher, as well as type designer, Professor Zapf is the recipient of many honours, including the Gutenberg Prize, The Frederic W. Goudy Award, and the Robert H. Middleton Award.

Many professional typeface designers agree with Professor Zapf's views, and fear that the continued rampant piracy and plagiarism of typefaces will inevitably extinguish the profession of typeface design. Not only will mature designers lose their livelihoods, but young designers just entering the field will be unable to earn a living. In this scenario, professional type designers will become extinct and, apart from a few amateur designers

who do not need to earn a living from their design work, the field will contain only pirates and plagiarists who will continue to debase the price and quality of fonts in their desperate attempts to survive in a business that lacks basic protection of intellectual property.

Already in the past few years, several once-great type foundaries have become bankrupt and closed their doors, and many designers have lost their jobs. Most surviving font firms have also reduced their size. In what should be a golden age of typography, where mass marketing of typographic technology has brought the beauty and fascination of typefaces to millions of computer users, we see instead a grim portent, that the art of typeface design may be dying out as a professional occupation, and may not survive into the 21st century.