

The typography of indexes

In contrast to the continuous text matter of the body of a book, the index has certain special features that make it a subject of interest to the typographer. The material of indexes is non-continuous and takes the form of a list. One reads both vertically and (within entries) horizontally. The language of indexes is compressed, and abbreviations are much employed. These things give the text matter of indexes their characteristic complexity. And one may see this complexity of content as placing demands, to which the editorial and typographic form of the index must correspond.

Another kind of demand is made by the reader of the book. The nature of this demand will be indicated when one says that most indexes are not read but used – flipped through and scanned. The time spent by the reader in thus using the index becomes a factor for consideration – as it is not in the usual reading process. Again, the typographic and editorial form of the index must be adequate to these demands, in doing what can be done to assist – or, at least, not to impede – the reader.

In addition to meeting the requirements and constraints of the production process (which will be touched on at the end of this article), the index may therefore be seen as having to satisfy two sets of demands: those made by its content and those made by its readers. But this distinction is hard to maintain in consideration of any specific example. Thus, one may ask 'is this system of alphabetization appropriate?', or 'should the subheadings have been broken off rather than run on?' But these questions can only be answered by a reader (or by the reader imagined by those making the index), and will therefore be decided in readers' terms, rather than in the illusory terms of 'what the content demands'.

Here one should mention another set of demands on an index – those made by the publisher. The limits on the space allowed to the index, and on the time and money allowed to the indexer, will have their effect on the final product. Such constraints need not be disadvantageous to the quality of the product. But whatever the outcome of these external pressures, in that they are unrelated to

MALMAISON. *See* Napoleon.
MALMESBURY, Lord, xiii. 317.
MALONE, Edmond, Chatterton (g.v.);
Life of Reynolds, xvi. 182; also ref. to,
iii. 184; xi. 220, [358].
MALTA, English occupation of, i. 99;
xiv. 163, 189, 190, 194, 196, 198;
importance denied, i. 101; Knights
Hospitallers (g.v.); Napoleon (g.v.);
also ref. to, iii. 173, 175.
MALTHUS, Thomas Robert:
American tribes, on the, i. 298.
'amorous complexion,' i. 242.
answer to, vii. 221.
argument summarised, i. 205.
authors studied by, i. 189.
character of (*The Sp. of the Age*), xi.
103–14.
Cobbett's apostrophe to, vii. 351.
'cockney,' a, i. 288.
Condorcet (g.v.).
corn, on the monopoly of, i. 363.
cultivation, on (quoted), i. 213.
doctrines examined, vii. 332–7.
Edinburgh Review, encouraged by, xi.
129.
equality of man, argument against
(quoted), i. 208.
errors, two capital, i. 219.

- 1 The 'General index', compiled by James Thornton, to *The complete works of William Hazlitt*, Dent, 1934.

the essential issues of the typography of indexes, they need not be considered further here. One can simply notice that the publisher's typical demands on the index serve to add further complications to the process of making this most complex part of the book.

These special demands may lead to the suggestion that typographic form may make some difference to the ease with which a reader is able to use an index. The complexity of the material, and the reader's demands of speed and ease of discovery, suggest that appearance and configuration of material might be factors of significant importance to the process of use – as they do not seem to be in the case of simple continuous text matter. The question of what typography could do for an index will not however be addressed directly here. Rather, what will be considered are these necessary prior questions: is it possible to consider the typography of an index separately from its contents (that is, what the indexer gen-

erates)? what happens if these two things, typographic form and the content, are considered separately? if – as will be suggested – the form and content of an index are inseparable, then what part could a typographer play in the making of an index?

Figure 1 indicates the impossibility of treating as separate the content and the typographic form of an index. The details of typography – the system of punctuation and of capitalization, the use of italics, for example – are coincidental with, and follow from, the generation of the matter of the index. That subheadings in important entries are broken off rather than run on, for example, can only be described as a decision of editorial-design policy.

This index was produced before the specialized 'typographic designer' had begun to play much part in book production. And such a typographer might now question the decision to justify the lines (that is, where possible, to set lines of equal length), or the use of full points at the end of entries. But such reservations do not affect our judgement of this index as exemplary in its typography. And this high quality seems to stem largely from the standard of the editorial and indexing work. This is just one example of a body of model indexes that are well-designed in the widest sense – products of a particular (British) tradition of serious publishing.

Another example may help to show the soundness of conventional index typography. Looking at the index to *Hart's rules* (figure 2) one sees nothing remarkable. But consider this in relation to the contents pages list in the same book (figure 3). The contents pages functions as a preliminary index, giving the user an outline of the matter of the book. The typography of these pages, whereby page references are pushed to the right of the page, certainly discourages the reader from connecting heading and page number. Though, one might argue that this arrangement gives the page numbers an emphasis that they do not enjoy in the index. Both this emphasis and an easier horizontal connection could however be obtained by setting page numbers to the left of headings. But this would destroy the symmetry of the page. And this aim of symmetry and balance is, one suspects, the main consideration behind the convention adopted. When nowadays type is not set by hand in rectangular 'chases' (frames), the argument that this arrangement arises naturally in production no longer applies.

† and ‡, use of, 102

Scientific work generally, 52 ff.

abbreviations for units, 53

abbreviations in metric system, 5–6

chemical names, 55

degrees of temperature, 4

displayed formulae, 54, 55

italic for theorems, 23

italic or roman for symbols, 53

numbers above 9999 to be spaced, 55

omit rule from square-root sign, 54

preparation of copy, 52–3

punctuation of formulae and equations, 55

reduction of handwork, 53–5

references to footnotes, 18

symbols easily confused, 52–3

text references to symbols in plates, 12

titles of papers, how to print, 49

Scripture references, 6–7, 50

Semicolon, 38–9

Shakespeare's plays, references to, 50

Signs for reference indices, 18

special, 57

Singular forms with plural numbers, 67

Slang terms, quotation marks for, 42

Slavonic languages, *see under* Russian language

Small capitals, accented in French, 85

when to use, 12

Spacing generally, 56

in abbreviated titles of books, 56

in abbreviations of honours, etc., 56

in French, 92, 95–6

in Greek and Latin, 107

in Italian, 108–9.

letter-spacing in Russian, 112, 113, 117, 118–19, 121

of German words for emphasis, 101

of Greek words for emphasis, 107

of last line of paragraph, 56

of poetry, 56

of references, 56

Spanish language, works in the, 122–4

accent, 122–3

2 *Hart's rules for compositors for compositors and readers*, 37th edn, Oxford University Press, 1967.

Punctuation marks and references to footnotes	47
Points in title-pages, headlines, etc.	47
Quotations	47
References to Printed and Manuscript Sources	48
Printed works	48
MS. and unpublished sources	52
Government and official papers	52
Scientific Work	52
Spacing	56
Special Signs and Symbols	57
Thorn, Eth, Wyn, Yogh	57
Vowel-Ligatures (Æ and Œ)	58

SPELLINGS

Alternative and Difficult Spellings	59
Doubling Consonants with Suffixes	63
Fifteenth- to Seventeenth-Century Works	65
Formation of Plurals in English	65
Words ending in -e and -y	65
Words ending in -o	66
Compounds	66
Formation of Plurals in Words of Foreign Origin	67
Hyphenated and Non-Hyphenated Words	70
Words ending in -able	75
Words ending in -ible	78
Words ending in -ize, -ise, and -yse	78
Words ending in -ment	79
DECIMAL CURRENCY	80

RULES FOR SETTING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French	81
Abbreviations	82
Accented capitals	84
Awkward divisions: abbreviated words and large numbers expressed in figures	85
Capital and lower case	85
Division of words	89
Grave and acute accents	90
Hyphens	91
Italic and roman type	91
Metal-rules	92
Numerals	92
Punctuation	93
Quotation marks	93
Reference figures	95
Spacing	95

- 3 *Hart's rules for compositors for compositors and readers*, 37th edn, Oxford University Press, 1967.

Curried meat balls	53	Fried sprats	128
Custard sauce	76	Fritters: Bacon fritters	160
		Brain fritters	55
Dab: Fish fillets in cheese sauce	51	Fritter batter	55
Dandelion salad	214	Ham fritters	160
Desserts: see Puddings and desserts		Normandy apple fritters	110
Devised chicken legs	144	Split pea fritters	99
Dried fruits	19	Fudge, chocolate	226
Dumplings: Boiled potato dumplings			
73		Gammon	18; Baked gammon
Claudia's dumplings	115	Stuffed gammon rolls	129
		Garbure	158
Egg: Bacon and egg flan	45	Garlic soup	120
Baked eggs	207	Gazpacho	165
Chinese egg drop soup	121	Gingerbread men	224
Eggs baked in potatoes	132	Gingerbread, Orkney oatmeal	224

- 4 *Jocasta Innes, The pauper's cookbook*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971.

The different typographic treatment of the essentially similar material of index and contents page suggests that indexes have been comparatively free from the purely formal considerations of symmetry and balance – the 'display' values usually unrelated to use or to meaning. This may, it is suggested, be connected with the peculiar characteristics of indexes noted at the start of this article – their unusual clarity of function. This is something that is harder to attribute to a contents page list or, say, a list of illustrations. Such parts of a book simply do not have to meet the kind of demands made on an index. And one might go on to wonder whether indexers (and editors), having been left to get on with their work without much interference from book designers, have not thus been at an advantage, in being able quietly and unselfconsciously to develop conventions firmly based on the reader's needs.

It is suggested then that it has been characteristic of index typography (more so than the typography of other parts of a book) to employ conventions that best suit the reader – rather than, say, the designer or the printer. The effect that certain typographic practices, outside the indexer's sphere of influence, can have on an index is shown in figure 4. In this index to a cookery book the majority of entries relate to only one page reference – recipes being the only

- 5 *photopolymer* 222
pica – about 12-point: as 12-point, used as a unit of typographical measurement – 34
Pickering, William 90 100
pitch-line – line across bed of press to show how far printing-surface can extend without fouling grippers – 235–6
planographic – see *surface processes*
Plantin, Christophe 84: *Plantin* (type) 84–5 401–7, x-height of 73, & paper 74, & Times 106, proportions of 110, & verse 124, examples 132 136–7 154
plastic stereotypes 220
plate – illustration printed separately from text – 321–3, numbering of 143 282, & list of illustrations 194, & colophon 203, & paper 300 304 310 365, & imposition 318, folding 323, & estimating 367, & proofs 374–5, & tenacity 375: *plate-glazing* – method of smoothing paper surface – 298–9 302: see also *albumen plate*, *duplicate plate*
platen press – press which brings paper and printing-surface together as plane surfaces – 233 236
plays 109 124 128 255
pochoir – stencil process – 252
poetry – see *verse*
- 5 Hugh Williamson, *Methods of book design*, 2nd edn, Oxford University Press, 1965.
 6 Marjorie Plant, *The English book trade*, 2nd edn, Allen and Unwin, 1965.

items indexed. This fact perhaps encouraged the decision to set an em space between heading and page reference, rather than the conventional comma and word space. However, the printer's decision to justify has meant that – while this em space is consistently maintained – the spaces elsewhere will not be of fixed dimensions. To squeeze 'Gammon 18; Baked gammon 183' into a line, the compositor had to set '18;Baked' without intervening space. And thus the dislocation occurs, whereby one groups page reference ('18') and entry ('Baked gammon') wrongly. This unfortunate incident illustrates the fundamental objection to justification of lines: the variation of word space entailed introduces an arbitrary element into

- 6 *Seasons, The*, copyright, 119–20, 420
 Secondary occupations, 95–7
 Senefelder, invention of lithography, 306
 Seres, patents, 101, 103
 Series, publishers', 432
 Service books, early editions, 24–5
 patent for, 101, 106–7
 prices, 240
 Sewing, 345
 machine, 350
 Shares in books, 110, 225–6, 429–30
 Sheepskin, 213, 342, 354
 cost, 212, 243
 fines for using, 207
 See also Parchment
 Size, of books, 95, 418
 of the edition, 92–5, 300, 331, 404, 412, 414, 416
 of the firm, 86–8, 356–9
 of binderies, 348
 of the industry, 80–86, 449
 Skiver, patent for, 213
 Soap, ingredient of ink, 323
 Social conditions, 150–3, 367–72
 Socialism among printers, 381–2
 Society for the Encouragement of Learning, 223–4
 Solaces, 146, 158–9
 Sørensen's composing machine, 283
 Specialisation, by apprentices, 367
 in manuscript production, 24
 of demand, 448
 of production and distribution, 59–79
 due to shortage of type, 175
 effect on costs, 407
 encouraged by patents, 109
 Spilman, 192–4
 Stalls, 82, 254, 415, 432
 Stanhope, press, 271–2, 287
 stereotype process, 301
 Star Chamber decrees regarding bookselling, 255–6
 importation of books, 261
 licensing, 31, 33
 number of apprentices, 133–4
 number of presses, 86–7, 171
 number of printers, 83
 provincial printing, 81
 type-founding, 62
 unemployment, 154

the system of words and space that constitutes text matter.¹ In normal continuous text matter this may not be of great concern. But in the more complex configurations of an index, where horizontal space carries more precise meanings, justification begins to become a significant factor and, one would suggest, an unhelpful one. The conventional narrowness of width of the lines of an index contributes to the problems attendant on justification. The mistake of figure 4 could have been avoided by setting equal spaces between words and by carrying whole items over on to new lines. But in any case, whether justified or not, the more conventional, watertight system of punctuation and normal word space would prevent such misreading.

Objections, similar to those made against the example of figure 4, could be applied to the index shown in figure 5, where lines are justified and an unconventional system of space and punctuation is employed. But, though the risk of confusion is there, in practice the composition avoids the dislocations of figure 4. This index is an interesting example of the kind of typographic innovations that are possible in indexes – given the particular needs of a particular index. That such innovations were carried out in this case, and that this index seems to be good and useful, may follow from the fact that author, indexer and typographer were one man. The inclusion here of definitions of terms (between en dashes) is an example of an author's involvement with the index. Some of the practices adopted seem uncomfortable: for example, the use of a colon to mark a conclusion, where one is used rather to connect items on either side of this mark. But, taken as a whole, this index is a good instance of the unity of typography and indexing, and it is a good argument for indexing done with full awareness of typographic possibilities.

That indexes are a peculiar and distinct part of a book is again suggested by the next example (figure 6). The width of indentation of the vertically aligned sub-headings is determined by the natural length of words in the main heading. In this feature, therefore, the content of the heading and subheading (before the point of indentation) determines its visual or typographic form. This is

1. James Hartley & Peter Burnhill, 'Experiments with unjustified text', *Visible Language*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1971, pp. 265–78.

something that has often been the aim of self-consciously radical typographers, but it is achieved here (unselfconsciously, one supposes) in a book that is elsewhere traditional in appearance. This system does of course use more space than the traditional narrow column setting; on the other hand, the reader may find a readier access through it. However one judges this, the point that may be made here is that this typographic innovation derives (one supposes) from the author-indexer considering the nature of her material – and not from any considerations of the designers or producers of the book; for elsewhere in the book the typographic configurations are imposed on, rather than derived from, the content.

One should make clear however that the 'content' here referred to is the apparent or surface content of the words, as against the deeper content of the meaning of the material – its hierarchies and system of internal relationship. The visual patterns which the surface content produces depend merely on how much space the words occupy, and, in that words have no intrinsic relationship with the things that they denote, the visual patterns of words are arbitrary. In order to carry the deeper content of the material, a non-arbitrary visual system (of indentation, word-space, line space, punctuation, capitalization, and so on) must be devised – one that provides a suitable coding system for the material, rather than an attempt at literal representation of it. But this non-arbitrary system of visual coding is, couched in theoretical language, no more than the aim of any serious index.

Examples such as those of figure 5 and (perhaps) figure 6 would seem to confirm the suggestion that the peculiar demands of content of an index encourage clear (and fresh) thinking about typographic form. For, as well as exhibiting a body of sound typographic convention, indexes also show a capacity to innovate and experiment in response to the needs of the occasion. Figure 7 is included here as a warning against the acceptance of such a suggestion without qualification. It is taken from an index with which almost everything is wrong, in its construction and in its typography. One may mention the lack of system and indentation, punctuation, capitalization, and the separation of headings and page references that necessitates the use of 'leaders'. Such an example summarizes all the possible sins of making indexes. But, though a counter example,

Liberty of the Press	180	— by airship	244
Libel, What is?	181	— agencies, various	115
Libelling the dead	183	— and Press photographers	115
Libelling a thing	181	— pictures, How to find	170
Libel, Criminal	181	— must tell a story	170
Libel insurance	216	— service, Building up the	133
Library, Journalist's reference	33	— story, Reporting a great	133
Lifting terms, Meaning of the term	86	N-E-W-S	138
Line block, How to make a	173	Newseditor and news organisation	130
"Live" copy, How to produce	61	— scope of his activity	130
Local touches, Some dangers of	153	— backbone of a paper	131
— personalities, News value of	66	— Cool direction essential in	132
— journalism, Personal element in	119	Newspaper, What is a?	180
— journal a link with home	130	— technique, Acquiring a know-	34
— Politics on the	120	— ledge of	63
— M.P.'s speeches in Parliament	121	— work, Absorbing nature of	61
— Bills in Parliament	121	— a reflex of life	87, 83
— Government enquiries	121	— types most generally used	139
— news, subbing	121	— What makes a great?	137
Looking up, Meaning of the term	55	— works organisation	180
Lofty ideals	141, 148	Newspaper, Legal definition of a	173
London and Provincial Journalism,	160	— illustrations, Proper handling of	213
— The difference between	180	Newspaper manager, The	213
— London sets the pace, How	180	— Duties of	213
— the centre of the British Press	235	— Office and staff control	213
— representation	235	— Accounts	215

7 Low Warren, *Journalism from A to Z*, 3rd edn, Herbert Joseph, 1935.

it does serve to support a thesis of this article – that the content of an index and its typographic form are related intimately and organically. Typographic disorder inevitably follows from disorder in construction; and, equally, typography by itself (if it could be 'by itself') cannot be effective with bad copy.

These examples may suggest the diversity and the particularity of each index. As every indexer knows, there are limits to the application of rules and conventions – there will always be awkward decisions to be made. For this reason one may be suspicious of the prospects of empirical research supplying useful advice on making indexes. The attempt to apply such research seems to rest on the fallacy that one can draw general conclusions from particular (and often rather strange) instances. And, given the typical complexity of an index, it seems unlikely that much can be learned from the necessarily simplified indexes that supply the test pieces for experiments.

Also, empirical research isolates factors for evaluation, hoping to report on the effectiveness of certain conventions. This isolation of features denies the essential unity of form and content in an

index. One cannot discuss, or test, the effectiveness of, say, letter-by-letter alphabetization or bold type without considering the function of such conventions in a particular case. And this consideration will bring in all the issues that relate to the decision about alphabetization or bold type.

This brief investigation of the typography of indexes has suggested that the content of an index and its typographic form are organically related. The stress laid on this may have implied that a typographer can contribute nothing to index making. Such a suggestion would be misleading. For although much of the typographic form will be generated by the indexer and editor, decisions that they take in this work of generation could, and should, be significantly affected by advice from someone with specialist typographic knowledge. Coding conventions such as the use of bold or italic or small capitals, or the use of special signs, depend on the facilities offered by the system of composition used. A thorough understanding of typographic possibilities may, as the case of figure 5 indicated, help to meet the special demands of a particular index.

This function for the typographer of supplying advice concerning composition becomes especially important with the demise of hot-metal composition. Such systems (Monotype, Linotype and Intertype) have been the traditional means for setting books; Monotype, as the most complex composition system, has been able to provide rich possibilities for typographic coding. The use of much less sophisticated systems in book production introduces different sets of typographic conventions. Indexes to be set on a machine that cannot supply italic, say, need to be designed to allow for this – designed, that is, from the point when the indexer starts work. And with the growing practice of printing books set on the typist's (or author's, or indexer's) own typewriter, this need to incorporate design considerations at an early stage becomes even more acute.

One might suggest then that indexers would benefit from an education in typography. Equally, it will be clear that typographers must understand the procedures of indexing – for even the more purely typographic decisions, such as the determination of line length or space between lines, will proceed from an appreciation of the nature of the copy. The work of indexing and of typography forms a unity that is ideally taken on by one person. It would not

be realistic, however, to see the indexer-typographer as more than the rare exception. But one may say that the indexer and the typographer should certainly get to know each other better.

The Indexer, vol. 4, no. 4, 1977

Deriving from an informal and extra-curricular talk given in the Department of Typography at the University of Reading, the text bears the marks of this origin: spoken delivery, with the discussion focusing on a succession of examples, shown originally as slides. The Society of Indexers, in whose journal this piece was published, provided a forum of some interest to me at that time: they were concerned with editorial procedures and with meaning. Thanks again to L. M. Harrod, the editor who accepted this piece.

Stages of the modern