Response

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I will try to respond, if only briefly in this context, to the penetrating comments on my piece 'Type spaces'. But first I must express regret that what I said may be interpreted as a declaration of war on Gerrit Noordzij. That was very far from my intention.

That worrisome 1.5
...or, if you wish, that three twenty-fourths of an Aldine em quadrat. Printed images of spaces of such a width appear several times in the Seneca of 1522. An interval one twelfth-part of the em space is surprising enough. Casting a space of one twenty-fourth of the em quad would probably have been beyond reach of the technology of the day, to say nothing of being immeasurable when combined with others of different width between the thumb and forefinger (which, as Ted Harrison, teacher and compositor, will tell you, has always been the compositor's way of doing his sums accurately). But, as Richard Southall says, an interval of 1.5 twelfths provides a theoretical 24×24 unit em space. Interestingly, the em quad of the octavo classics series was 7.5 times the submodular twelfth of the Lascaris mould, and could conceivably have had its body-sizing component gauged by reference to a combination of one Lascaris 1.5 unit space and one Lascaris en space (6 units), a total of 7.5 Lascaris twelfths. (Incidentally, the half-unit that appears when the x-height of the character set is gauged at five twelfths of the em, is a consequence of the traditional typefounding practice of centring the x-height on the body in order to check horizontal alignment by inversion. When a 4-unit x-height is centred on the body, then of course no half-units appear.)

Incidental variables
Variables in the printing of text by letterpress, such as paper shrinkage and cockle, and ink-squash, are usually given about 2 per cent allowance by bibliographers in pursuit of their own specialist passions. That aside, as a typographer, my main concern has not been a search for absolutes, but for primary ratios in the construction of texts, as these impinge on the retina of the reader. In that regard, incidentals are irrelevant. I hold that the typographic system of mensuration is/was an intrinsic attribute of the production process, not something to be bolted on, or imposed by 'Madame Guillotine', or by other would-be rulers, such as a manufacturer of mechanically engineered composing systems, or some rule-of-the-thumb practice made standard for their own purposes by a local guild of metal-workers.

Did Aldus invent the Aldine in-house norms?

My guess is that these norms had been in place, in one form or another, since Gutenberg sorted mechanized blackletter into subsets by reference to character-image width – probably only five or six groupings in all – and then constructed a set of moulds to suit. If so, then the spaces cast from such moulds would be in one-to-one relationship with the subsets of character-image width (a printing type being a rectangular space with a letter on top). It is notable that Gutenberg's mechanical-looking letters require almost no side-bearings to set one letter off from its neighbour, in the context of a word. I suspect that the laterally variable mould was a solution to such problems as the casting of bi-graphs and tri-graphs, and such-like combinations, on a common body. I guess this would have been done, principally, because of distortion problems in casting separate letters when a diagonal line is required to pass (or appear to pass) from the bottom right of one character to the top left of the following letter, in imitation of a cursive hand. The fine connecting line could become bent out of *diagonal* alignment, when released from the mould. Horizontal junctions do not have this problem. (See Griffo's Greek types and his italic.) Be that as it may, casting combined letterforms on a common body would probably save time and increase dexterity in the founding and in the composing.[1] It seems unreasonable to suppose that the laterally adjustable mould came into the world fully fledged with no close relative in Renaissance or late-medieval technology. This is not to suggest that Aldus was the father. What matters about the *structure* of Aldine in-house norms is the use to which their combinatorial potential was exploited by Aldus and Griffo in the construction of Aldine image carriers. Typography, the visible mode of language, is intrinsically a discrete combinatorial system of construction functioning at different levels of order – a generative grammar, as Noam Chomsky has it – not simply a pretty face or a follow-my-leader string of events, mechanistically generated in one-dimensional time.

'What was in it for the reader?' asks Paul Stiff of the efforts of Aldus. A rational system of navigation at all levels of production and use? The assuaging by Aldus of a life-long passion for structural order, as in the use of Latin for the literature of the ancients? Note Aldus's rationalization of the marks of punctuation; and note too the advice of language teachers – writing masters – to their charges, to follow the example of Manutius in his isomorphic use of differently sized intervals in the construction of his texts. (Rather as Leopold Mozart is reputed to have advised his son: take care of the intervals and the notes will take care of themselves.) And then there was a print-run four times the norm – which must say something about workshop practices.

Griffo's grid

This term does not refer to a rectangular template for filling with closely textured grey matter, done in imitation of some abstract work of art, or in response to the formalistic strictures of a Stanley Morison. But it refers to a concept – an aid – for charting the forms of character sets with hand-held tools; in steel; in reverse; at real size; with minimal optical aids; and with the eyes of a man of fifty years. In short: as a help

1. My friend and colleague Alan May is exploring problems in early mould making. See his first report: 'Making Moxon's mould', *Printing Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 40, 1995/6, pp. 15–23.

in making the letters which Erasmus said were the neatest in the world. A grid is not necessarily a thing, but can be implied.

Richard says: what you see is what you get. I say (with Humpty Dumpty): what you get is what the rule-makers, the system boys and girls, decide to give you. Paul says: reverse engineering is called for. Yes *please*, says Ernest from afar.