THE GRAPHIE LATINE MOVEMENT
AND THE FRENCH TYPOGRAPHY
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Pour citer cet article
**Introduction**

Most works dealing with the history of typography, many of Anglo-Saxon authors, reflect the period covered by the two decades after World War II practically dominated by neogrotesque typefaces. However, there were some reactions against this predominance, mainly from traditionalist positions that are rarely studied.

The main objective of this research is thus to reveal the particular case of France, where there was widespread opposition to linear typefaces, which results into different manifestations in the field of national typography.

This research wants therefore to situate the French typographical thought (which partially reflected the traditionalism of British typographical reformism led by Stanley Morison\(^1\)) within the history of European typography, and in a context dominated by the modern proposals arising mainly from Switzerland.

This French thought is mostly shown in a considerable number of articles published in various specialist and professional press media, which perfectly reflected the general French atmosphere. Based on all those texts, as documentary references, this research thus focuses on the critical analysis of them in order to try to draw the whys of the French typographers position, against the tide of the guidelines set by the Swiss modern design, as well as revealing what were the alternatives proposed.

Even tough this research is an excerpt from a much broader PhD thesis\(^2\), the intention is not to establish a comparison with other territories and the European context of the time, even with other anti-modern manifestations,

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1. Stanley Morison (1889–1967) was an English typographer, scholar, and historian of printing. Presumed as the designer of the famous typeface for *The Times, Times New Roman* (1932), typographic adviser of the Monotype Corporation, and author of the very influential writing *First Principles of Typography* (1936), among other works and books about typography.

but only to highlight what was the environment that produced this French typographic though during the 1950s and 1960s.

Within graphic design and typography, it is well known that the models that reigned in Europe after the Second World War were those fostered by Modernism, an heir basically of the New Typography and the teachings of schools such as the Bauhaus in the inter-war period. Indeed, all manuals and texts on the history of design depict an European scenario between the 1950s and the 1960s dominated by sans-serif typefaces (without terminals at the end of the strokes, thicker than the traditional ones) and compositions on grid, under the denomination of International Typographic Style. It is also then that took place the separation between art and design, particularly championed by the ideals of the Swiss Style and the teachings of the Ulm Hochschule für Gestaltung, founded in 1953, with Max Bill as its first rector.

However, in spite of the fact that the International Style success was widely accepted in many countries, there were some opposing reactions and even national-wide alternatives. Together with the continuity line of the British typographic reformism —led by Stanley Morison and heirs of the private presses movement—, the most significant and not very well known case might be France. The many factors influencing the definition of type creation in France after the Second World War include the defence of some specific models even by opposing parties —mainly between those advocating for lineals and their detractors—, the problems and challenges of photocomposition, the debate between current typefaces and those in fashion, the complex balance between supply and demand in the French typographic market in the post-war period, legibility, historicist or traditionalist arguments, and even the definition of what Maximilien Vox called Graphie Latine.

3 The so-called New Typography movement advocated formal synthesis in the graphic compositions, looking for the greatest functionality and the maximum clarity, rejecting the traditional typefaces and arrangement of the page.

4 Also called Swiss Style, emerges in the early 1950s in Switzerland and Germany, joining the early Modernism, the New Typography, and the Bauhaus ideas.

5 The Hochschule für Gestaltung of the German city of Ulm, was an internationally recognized college of design with a multidisciplinary approach, inheriting the premises of the Bauhaus but integrating various disciplines of an anthropological nature with aesthetics and technology. Max Bill (1908–1994), his first rector and cofounder, was a Swiss architect, artist, painter, typeface designer, industrial and graphic designer, and a former student at the Bauhaus in Dessau.

6 Also called phototypesetting, it’s a method of typographic setting based on photographic processes to generate type columns on a photosensitive film for printing reproduction.

7 Pseudonym of Samuel William Théodore Monod (1894–1974), draughtsman, illustrator, woodcut engraver, editor, typographer, and one of the main figures of French typographic thought in
The very conservative milieu of the French printing industry was mainly dominated by a sheer fear towards anything that was not a part of its traditions and routines, clinging to a glorious past. Thus, the two major threats feared by the French professionals of the mid-twentieth century were the disappearance of the legacy of more than four centuries of traditional typography endangered by the advent of photocomposition, and the triumph of foreign sans-serif models, which might relegate classic typefaces such as *Garamond* or *Didot*. 

We must also mention the position of French type founders, who did not deem it necessary to change the models in their catalogues, much of which still included a large amount of nineteenth-century typefaces. In fact, they even came to think that, after ‘the great success of Futura typefaces and their derivatives […] they could assign to the mechanic composition the rights of exploitation of the text typefaces coming from their workshops’. This resulted in the fact that they practically did not develop new text typefaces, considering that the existing classic ones covered that need perfectly well, and would continue to do so.

However, it was the foreign companies with branches in France that supplied text typefaces to French printers, essentially because those were the typefaces distributed along with the composition machines they sold —mainly Linotype and Monotype. Indeed, thanks to this equipment, they succeeded in dominating this market niche. Moreover, the fear of investigating and developing new text typefaces, which could not guarantee them a success in sales, pushed the French foundries to the more lucrative business in the short term of creating
new designs for advertising and for the specific French local market. That ‘immediately excluded them’ from international competition.\textsuperscript{13}

The fields of scripts and display typefaces (for large sizes as headlines or posters) were therefore the only ones remaining for French foundries, and this for two reasons: because they were the models demanded by advertising edition for immediate consumption, and because they had no capacity to react in the field of text typefaces. This last issue is essentially due to the mentioned supply of foreign companies such as the British Monotype.

**The Role of Maximilien Vox and the École de Lure**

Maximilien Vox is famous for the typographic classification\textsuperscript{14} that bears his name and that he published for the first time in July 1954\textsuperscript{15}, before the Association Typographique Internationale (ATypI) adopted it as its own in 1962; he was the catalyst of this scenario.

In the mid-twentieth century French typography, Vox is a key figure, since he became the main promoter of traditionalist ideas through the great amount of articles he published in the French professional press, and from his position as the founder and editor of one of the most influential magazines for the French profession —*Caractère* and its annual supplement *Caractère Noël*—, as well as the co-founder and ‘Chancellor in perpetuity’ of the *Rencontres de Lure* in 1952.

During these annual typographic meetings, which are considered as the oldest ones in the world and are still ongoing today, Vox acted as the charismatic leader of a large and representative group of professionals of the French typography, edition and graphic design industries, whose members grouped in turn under the names of École de Lure or *Compagnons de Lure*. The main goal of these encounters was to comfort the whole profession concerning its fear for photocomposition and its rejection of foreign sans-serif typefaces. *Lure* served also as a forum, which endeavoured to find its own solutions in accordance with the French esprit.

In the field of typographic creations, those for advertising did not particularly interest the French typographic line of thinking forged at the École de Lure, at least during the Vox era —between 1952 and 1963. This is mainly due to the facts

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Like many other typographers of the time, in the early 1950s Vox laid siege to the need to create a typographic classification that would include the classical types as well as the creations of his time. Its nine initial groups are called (in the original French): manuaires, humaines, garaldes, réales, didones, mécanes, linéales, incises, and scriptes.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} M. Vox, “Un projet français de nomenclature des caractères typographiques: La classification ‘VOX’”. *Caractère: revue mensuelle des industries graphiques*, 1954, 7, p. 85–90.
\end{itemize}
that its members were engaged in restoring dignity to the book and ordinary typography, and that they were mostly concerned with the development of models, facing which they considered not in line with the French esprit, such as geometric and neo-grotesque lineals. In this sense, we must highlight that lineals were then almost exclusively considered as typefaces for headings and advertising. Hence, French typographers never intended to use them for reading texts since, as we will see later, they considered them illegible.

For the École de Lure typographers, the classic models were perennial and should remain the reference for any new designs. In fact, authors such as the French historian Charles Higounet maintained that ‘Garamond and Didot are still the canons of modern typography’\textsuperscript{16} in 1955. That is, the two most symbolic models of classicism and French typographic tradition should be the guideline for mid-twentieth century type design.

Meanwhile, Vox, in his regulatory zeal and his wish to establish canons for typographic composition, maintained the very same idea that the typefaces commonly used in ordinary text manual composition would ever prevail. It was not necessary to change the model —which in France was the garaldes\textsuperscript{17}—, but just to create a standard that would be in turn assumed by photocomposition.

### The Lineals Issue

The rejection of lineals by French typography was related to a confrontation with the Germanic \textit{New Typography}, which precisely upheld the universality of sans-serif typefaces and were linked to the vanguards’ artistic abstract creation. From their traditionalist position, as advocates for classic canons, the French conservatives also showed an openly chauvinist attitude, if not bluntly anti-german\textsuperscript{18}.

Vox, as many other authors, qualified sans-serif typefaces as cold, sterile, monotonous, impersonal and primitive\textsuperscript{19}. But the main arguments put forward by French typographers were that they were not suitable to compose texts in a Latin language such as French —since they considered them to have a Germanic origin—, that they had a limited use —and were not meant for common reading texts—, that they were dehumanised letters —arguing that they had been

\begin{enumerate}
\item The garaldes’ group of the Vox-AtypI classification includes all the classic types of the European Renaissance. They are also known in France as elzévirs, even if this denomination is larger than garaldes.
\item R. Chatelain, \textit{La Typographie suisse du Bauhaus à Paris}, Lausanne, Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2008, p. 43.
\end{enumerate}
designed with ruler and compass, not by hand—, that were only a typographic model in fashion and, basically, that they were illegible.

The debate on legibility during those years in France thus mainly focused on sans-serif typefaces. Among other things because it was one of the main issues held against lineals, which had gathered attention during the inter-war period and had emerged in the context of Germanic modernism and the New Typography. Except for very specific cases, criticisms concerning the presumed illegibility of lineals lacked any scientific basis and related only to the typographers’ personal experience and the knowledge transmitted from one generation to the next\textsuperscript{20}.

However, the École de Lure’s milieu, and all those who were closer to Vox, ignored those studies and analyses and defended the traditionalist position that upheld the illegibility of lineals and their unsuitability for continued reading texts, especially if the language was French.

Among them, the typographer and poster artist Raymond Gid declared to be openly opposed to \textit{Futura}—which in France was distributed by Deberny & Peignot\textsuperscript{21} under the commercial name \textit{Europe}—and all the typefaces that emerged in its wake, since he considered geometric lineals as mediocre and illegible typefaces that were not at all in line with the presumed rationalism based on which they were said to be created\textsuperscript{22}.

Another argument used by the École de Lure members, such as printer and publisher Henri Jonquières, was solely based on the use convention that determined that lineals should be exclusively used in the advertising field. This argument also served him to state ‘therefore that the use of \textit{antiques}\textsuperscript{23} is no sign of modernity’ and that its use in magazines ‘may be inspired by a trend


\textsuperscript{21} Deberny & Peignot was the most important type-foundry in France during the 20th century, where leading graphic designers like Cassandre and Adrian Frutiger began their career as type designers. Charles Peignot was therefore a key reference in the French typography of the last century. His relationship with Maximilien Vox formed a fundamental partnership. When Peignot was the artistic director of the foundry, from its foundation in 1923 until 1939, he solicited Vox to conceive a catalogue of calligraphic typefaces in 1927. Thereafter, Vox worked as a consultant for Deberny & Peignot until 1934, up to become part of the board of the directors. At the same time, Vox directed and designed the five issues of the \textit{Divertissements typographiques} (a publication with advertising purposes, which intended to be serial but which finally had an irregular periodicity, between 1928 and 1933). Also at Vox’s behest, Charles Peignot acquired in 1929 the copyrights of the Futura from the German type-foundry Bauer, for all French-speaking countries. Cassandre, Charles Peignot and Maximilien Vox were members of the Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM).


\textsuperscript{23} The traditional name in France of sans-serif typefaces.
coming from Switzerland or Germany, but it results in an extremely exhausting reading.\textsuperscript{24}

Vox voiced the same opinion but with a sarcastic tone—linking lineals to illiterates—, again basing his arguments on the defence of ordinary typography—for reading—, with the book as the ultimate and privileged realm of the letter on top of any other, either advertising or magazines. For Vox, this editorial field did not have the same value as the book, and lineals were therefore unsuitable for book composition, since they did not encourage authentic reading.\textsuperscript{25}

The bottom issue was that Vox and his people did not consider lineals as a ‘French-based’ solution, but rather thought that the French profession had ‘come across it after everybody else, without spontaneity’\textsuperscript{26}, due to which their implementation in France seemed weird, up to the point of considering them completely unsuitable.

Thus, in the minds of French typographers recurrently emerged the idea that lineals were not appropriate for their country, since they were a foreign Germanic invention. Their use during those years was for them merely a fleeting fashion that had emerged due to the influence of magazines and other kinds of European publications that used them in reading text composition.

But in Vox’s and the École de Lure’s ideals, the course of the drawn letter—that is, the one that comes from the drawing of the hand by any direct means (pen, pencil, paint brush or chisel) in classic typefaces as opposed to the one built with ruler and compass in modern geometric typefaces— did not specifically seek a commercial path, but an ideological one that confronted that ‘authentically modern typeface’, that according to Vox should ‘emerge from a succession of sketches more than from a refined design’\textsuperscript{27}, to the ones geometrically designed. Once more he thus highlighted the importance of manual drawing to reach the construction of the typographic letter, as opposed to the cold and mathematical design they associated to Swiss-Germanic lineals.

That is, the typeface of the new technological era should follow some criteria that would draw it away from the threat of monotony that they associated to Germanic lineal typefaces; it should be instead more expressive and in line with the Latin spirit and follow the criteria set forth by tradition and classic models.

However, there was another idea which was quite common in the Lure environment: that lineals were a necessary evil in order to purify typography—also the French one—and pave the way for new models after the creative chaos of

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
the six first decades of the twentieth century. The definition of any alternative had thus two requirements: designing a refined contemporaneous model based on the classic canons, and preserving the humanist spirit of Latin typography.

**The French Alternative to Lineals**

In that sense, Gérard Blanchard asserted the need to define an archetype to build the typeface of the time, considering that it should be a lineal or at least start from that idea of typeface bareness to be able to build over it. The issue was thus ‘humanising’ lineals by following the parameters of the classic Letter, since the sans-serif letter was considered an aseptic degradation of such archetype, up to the point of rendering it illegible²⁸.

Earlier, Raymond Gid considered that the Western alphabet, in its typographic evolution, had taken the wrong path when it followed the one set by the lineals’ abstraction. He claimed then the humanisation of typefaces as opposed to the illegible and depersonalised refinement that geometric models such as *Europe-Futura* had started to spread and, in his opinion, that betrayed the typographic principles themselves, of a humanist nature²⁹.

However, traditionalists from the École de Lure did not uphold the mere formulation of the drawing, nor the synthesis conveyed by the serif letter, but the preservation of the legibility evidenced by the variations of lineals which follow (interpreting, modifying, seeking) the classic conventions set by models such as *Garamond*. The question was not so much to set some specific Latin typographic models, but to define a series of parameters that would connect classic typography with the typography yet to come, in opposition to modern Germanic typefaces.

Vox defended however that the new model would not be a derivation of the lineal typeface, but a Latin typeface tending towards the lineal typeface. Thus, the reference would be the *latines* typefaces —a typical French model popularised during the nineteenth century— with triangular serifs, filtered by the hand of the designer that modifies their shape upon redrawing the end of the strokes, due to which they end up resembling a lineal, without becoming one. According to Vox, this new way of designing was evidenced in the works of

Enric Crous-Vidal\textsuperscript{30} and Marcel Jacno\textsuperscript{31}, among others\textsuperscript{32}. For those new typefaces, Vox created the category of the incises (glyphic) into his famous classification. The Lure consensus was precisely that ‘the future is in lineals’\textsuperscript{33}, but through a humanist reformulation, which would make them tend to incised typefaces. The type designer René Ponot also considered that the incises were the typefaces of the future, but specifying that the process of recovery of grotesque typefaces that was taking place with typefaces such as Univers, could only be viable if their refinement could be hybridised with the sensitivity that was already in the latines model, predecessor of the mid-century incised\textsuperscript{34}.

Henri Jonquières defended that the trend of lineals towards the incised was something necessary, due to a factor of legibility adapted to the cultural requirements of ‘our intellectual and social climate’, of Latin origin. In his opinion, that would be the only argument that could justify the investigation in search of new expressive typefaces based on lineals\textsuperscript{35}.

José Mendoza\textsuperscript{36} stance gathered all the previous positions, but extrapolated to his own neo-latine incised that the Dutch foundry Amsterdam had just launched: Pascal\textsuperscript{37}. This typeface emerged from the unfinished project of his father (Guillermo de Mendoza), of which only the uppercase is known and that his son took as a model in 1953.

René Ponot tried to justify that the new lineal model had to be based on non-calligraphic incised, as Vox maintained, based on his investigation of old Greek and Roman epigraphic letters, to prove that the model of the original alphabetic letter was the lineal one. However, it was a particular lineal model: modulated and with slightly triangular ends, very far away from modern geometrics but also apart from models with serifs, which were not derived from calligraphic but from lapidary letters\textsuperscript{38}.

\textsuperscript{30} Enric Crous-Vidal (1908–1987), Spanish artist, exiled to France after the Civil War, was a type designer and became artistic director of the Fonderie Typographique Française (the third most important French type foundry in the mid-20th century). Together with Maximilien Vox, he is the other architect of the Graphie Latine movement.

\textsuperscript{31} Marcel Jacno (1904–1989) was a French graphic and type designer that collaborated with the Deberny et Peignot foundry in Paris.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 56.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} José Mendoza y Almeida (1926–2018) was a French graphic and type designer, which worked with Maximilien Vox at the early 1950s, and was assistant of a well known French type designer Roger Excoffon.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 58.

Ponot argued that the first lineal characters were the Phoenicians, highlighting that Phoenicians were the power that spread writing all across the Mediterranean basin. He meant by this that credit must be given to the Mediterranean people for the start of alphabetic writing, including the invention of lineals, in spite of the fact that it was the Germans who spread them during the first half of the twentieth century.

All in all, we must remember that the rejection of lineals was rooted firstly in the fear that triggered photocomposition in the French typographers. The alternative of the incised emerged therefore not only from such rejection, but as an answer to the problem of photographic composition, since the École de Lure members considered that lineals became deformed due to a technical flaw in photocomposition upon reproduction.

However, some type designers that were close to the École de Lure even questioned that the incised solution was really original or even appropriate, precisely due to the fact that it was a subterfuge to escape from lineals. In this sense, Marcel Jacno thought that the tendency towards the incised related solely to technical reasons and not to the search for a model with some relation to nineteenth-century *latin* typefaces, and that, at best, they were an interpretation of lineals meant for solving those technical problems.

Adrian Frutiger had the exact same opinion that the incised were but an artificial invention arising from the need of technical correction. For Frutiger, the resource of adding small triangular serifs at the end angles of character strokes could only be justified for technical reasons, in order to compensate photographic process reproduction flaws. In his opinion, this did not justify in itself the definition of a new style like of the *incises*.

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39 The Phoenician alphabet (c. 1200 BC) is considered the oldest one. The angular and straight forms are due to the fact that the letters were engraved in stone.


42 Adrian Frutiger (1928–2015) was one of the most remarkable and influent type designer of the 20th century. He created famous typefaces as Univers in 1957 (a milestone on sans-serif typefaces) and Roissy in 1971 (a typeface commissioned for the Parisian Charles de Gaulle airport signage), among about thirty more. Although born and trained Swiss, he began his professional career in Paris at the Deberny et Peignot foundry in 1952, and attended several of the first editions of the Lure encounters, but did not become a member of the restricted École de Lure.

43 Ibid., p. 60.
Conclusions
French typography after the Second World War had to face therefore an international scenario in which the use of lineals was settling, relying on the technological shift towards photocomposition. However, instead of opening the door to the novelties and influences coming from abroad, the French professionals fell back on tradition and the national classic models that they believed perpetual.

In a protectionist reaction, the French traditionalists rejected the international advancement of neo-grotesque lineals with cliché arguments lacking any scientific basis, since they considered it as a model that was not in line with the humanist nature of Latin countries’ typography. The alternative they put forward was a hybrid and quite artificial theoretical proposal, based on the classic models, to try to fuse them with lineals, even through the review of a nineteenth-century and purely French model, such as the latines typefaces.

Although the effects of this attitude were limited then to the restricted scope of the École de Lure, from which little has transpired, the traditionalist position prevailed in France for at least two decades. However, French typography did not confine itself to following the dictates of tradition, since it was finally influenced by the international currents of the time such as the Swiss Style against which the Graphie Latine movement opposed, and was forced to assume the dictates of the new corporate design of the time. Nevertheless, the Graphie Latine movement laid the foundations for a specific line of French typographic thought that could be found in some French type designers such as Franck Jalleau, Jean-François Porchez, Xavier Dupré or Thierry Puyfoulhoux.

Fig. 1. «Europe et le Studio», Les divertissements typographiques: recueil de modèles et d’exemples à l’usage des imprimeurs, Paris, Deberny et Peignot, spring 1931, 4, n.p.

Fig. 2. «Europe et le Studio», Les divertissements typographiques: recueil de modèles et d’exemples à l’usage des imprimeurs, Paris, Deberny et Peignot, spring 1931, 4, n.p.
Fig. 3. Maximilien Vox, “Un projet français de nomenclature des caractères typographiques: La classification ‘VOX’”, Caractère: revue mensuelle des industries graphiques, Paris, Compagnie française d’éditions, 1954, year 5, 7, p. 87.

Fig. 4. Caractère: le magazine de l’imprimé, Paris, Industries et Techniques Graphiques et Papetières, July 1949, year 1, 2. Cover designed by Marcel Jacno.
Fig. 5. Caractère Noël 52: numéro spécial d’art graphique français, Paris, Compagnie française d’éditions, 1952. Cover designed by Enric Crous-Vidal.

Fig. 7 «L’École de Lure», Caractère Noël 55: numéro spécial d’art graphique français, Paris, Compagnie française d’éditions, 1955, n.p. Aldo Novarese, Maximilian Vox and Jean Garcia at the Rencontres de Lure in 1955.

Fig. 8 «Le rendez-vous de Lure», Caractère Noël 55: numéro spécial d’art graphique français, Paris, Compagnie française d’éditions, 1955, n.p.
Fig. 9. Jacno typeface specimen, Deberny et Peignot, 1951.

Fig. 11. Enric Crous-Vidal, «Paris» (advertisement), Caractère Noël 53: numéro spécial d’art graphique français, Paris, Compagnie française d’éditions, 1953, n.p.
