How about those typographic virtues: do they still make sense?

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somehow we turned sounds into speech into language
and after that it may have started with writing in the sand
followed by painting on cave walls
or maybe carving symbols in wood
and figuring out some writing system
that made it possible to chisel thoughts in stone
and eventually putting blobs on paper
that we somehow managed to map onto pixels
but


typesetting only happened very lately
In the process • mankind optimized the basic shapes (to suit the language) • and kept inventing new symbols • more and more automated typesetting and rendering and printing • and of course this went with all kind of silly arguments think of this: • for ages scribes were the only way to get high end arabic typesetting • and now we can do this mostly automatic (in good and bad ways) • so we endangered yet another craft
But eventually
• new interfaces will bring new ways of reading (how about leap motion)
• and we'll go from manual to visual (glasses, look at gaming)
• so information will be pushed more or less directly into our brain
• while high quality rendering moves to the arts department
• and in the end probably not much gets printed any more
• so we will share, stare at and discuss books no longer the way we do now
• just look at how kids deal with information nowadays
Targeting paper

• we kept trying to save space by combining shapes and using umlauts and accents
• we can make it look better, using ligatures, alternative shapes
• color comes cheap, as does mixing fonts
• went from left to right and vice versa and top to bottom and mixed all this
• papers and magazines squeezed more into columns (in fact, we get less newspapers and magazines, but more advertising, so for a while there's as much print but more of dubious quality)
• and we even optimized the art of unreadability as in anti-smoke warnings
• thanks to software we can tweak fonts, mess with kerning, fool ourselves with expansion and protrusion
• we mess around with margins, aspect ratios, scaling, rotating, and justification
• and yes, we introduced conventions but also entered endless debates
Towards displays

• nowadays we can fake the old stuff on the screen and simulate paper
• we have weird user interfaces as we still want to recognize the old e.g. funny borders and strange buttons
• and we’re told how less pixels are actually needed to keep us happy
• while we stare at ourselves on those mirroring and radiating displays
• lack of detail gets nicely compensated with special reading compensation programs at school
• and still progress is hampered by copyrighting trivial properties and inventions that anyone can come up with given the machinery
The state of affairs

• we already lost (or maybe never reached) optimal quality
• it looks like ragged right won the battle
• and messing with fonts beyond what designers had in mind is okay
• the users start controlling the layout by scaling, rotating and setting properties

so
• why do we texies still bother about typography, hobyism apart
• does paying so much attention and trying to be original still fit into rapidly changing times
• we're not alone: the same is true for programs, apps, operating systems, etc
Subtle kerning, partial substitution, different shapes: take your choice. Can texies really claim that their ffi looks the best? Just stare at it for a while.
Of course there are some conventions, but given that designs are... well, designs... it's never going to be okay for all of us.
Intercharacter spacing, interglyph spacing, tightening symbols: why bother any longer: let's play safe and from now on advice to use monospaced ragged right.
• you always need a way to escape formatting directives
• so texies have the backslash and a few more special characters
• coding in xml seems to be too complex and awkward for most users
• but ascii based quick and dirty formatting becomes a fashion (\*doc\)
• of course influencing the makeup and making things nice involves even nastier escapes
• and in the process we eventually lose quality
• but
• it fits nicely into quick and dirty often one-time markup
• and real markup, maybe targeted at reuse, becomes a speciality, craft, hobby or disappears
• there is no reason why what we do now stays . . . we have no copying monks left either
Endangered features

• ebooks are mostly single sided
• but somehow we still care about pages (or can't look beyond them)
• there is no longer room and need for multi-columns
• and also no need for footnotes as we can have roll-overs
• paper size can still be different but can swap to landscape
• floats become cumbersome compared to paper books, so no floats
• margins, they waste space and we already have hardware margins
• a proper tables of contents still make some sense
• indices can be replaced but searching in most cases
• bibliographies can become pop-ups

• readers are encouraged to choose and scale fonts so the design has limitations
• and why even bother optimizing the look and feel
The future of TEX

• as it happens: these are all mechanisms that complicate the TEX machinery and workflow
• and removing the need for them might as well remove the need for TEX
• but still, for a long time ConTEXt MkIV can fulfill the needs as demands probably only become more simple
• and I can start working on a simple version: twittertex™, monospaced, one paragraph fat most 140 characters, no pages, no structure, maybe random generated content, etc.
• or maybe first make some intermediate version: markuptex™, geared at ebooks in some kind of xml format
• and Luigi will make livetex, a dna based typesetting plugin that connects to our already built-
• however,
• looking at the still active TEX crowd we will stay around for a while
• given that we manage to advocate the virtues of typographical traditions
• and for that, we might need to reinvent ourselves (a nice theme for a conference)