Material Literacy: Alphabets, Bodies, and Consumer Culture

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Material Literacy: Alphabets, Bodies, and Consumer Culture

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Doctor of Philosophy

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This dissertation posits that a new form of material literacy emerged in the United States between 1890 and 1925, in tandem with the modern advertising profession. A nation recalibrating the way it valued economic and cultural mass consumption demanded, among other things, new signage – new ways to announce, and through those announcements, to produce its commitment to consumer society. What I call material literacy emerged as a set of interpretive skills wielded by both the creators and audiences of advertising material, whose paths crossed via representations of goods. These historically situated ways of reading and writing not only invited Americans to interpret a world full of representations of products, but also to understand – to read – themselves within that context.

Commercial texts became sites for posing questions about reading behavior more generally, and they connected members of a various professions who stood to benefit from that knowledge. In this dissertation, I explore how reading and consumption converged for advertising experts, printers, typographers, and experimental psychologists. Despite their different occupational vantage points, their work intersected around efforts to understand how modern Americans decoded printed texts, and how this behavior might be known and guided. To establish their professional reputations, the authors I study positioned themselves as being uniquely capable of observing and interpreting the behavior of readers. The body served as a key site, and metaphor, for their inquiries – a means of making both literacy and legibility material.
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For my parents, Barbara and Michael
Introduction

In the early twentieth century, Americans faced a tangle of choices about what and how to read. “You who buy the magazine buy it primarily to read the stories and articles that it contains and to look at the pictures,” Earnest Elmo Calkins speculated in his 1915 book *The Business of Advertising*. But audiences who selected *Ladies’ Home Journal, McClure’s*, and other popular weeklies received an additional set of texts with their purchase, namely, the advertisements composed by Calkins and his peers. Published to subsidize their vehicles’ low cover prices, these, too, demanded magazine readers’ attention. “You do not think particularly of the stories that are written by the advertising man or the pictures that are drawn by what are called the ‘commercial’ artists, but before you get through with the magazine you undoubtedly look over these pages and are attracted by some of these advertisements, either by means of the picture, or the story, or both.”

Even those readers who knowingly consulted advertisements were apt to be led in unexpected directions. Calkins imagined that a housewife might begin scouring a magazine for recommendations about enameled ice boxes and, along the way, add everything from Worcestershire Sauce to a new automobile to her mental shopping list. Plans for a holiday in Bermuda might hatch while checking the paper for show times at the Hippodrome. “That is the way advertising is working all the time,” he explained – an unembellished but not understated assessment of its power.

Publicity material greeted its moving targets in virtually every setting, from billboards that marked the countryside to the interior spaces of urban transit. “You take a

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seat in a street car, and on account of not having a newspaper to read and because nobody
happens to be hanging to a strap in front of you, you learn that you have not taken a box
of candy home to your wife for a year,” Calkins explained. Whereas his other scenarios
suggest a bait-and-switch (Looking for a refrigerator? Here’s a car!) or a meandering trail
leading shoppers far from their initial points of interest (a trip to the Hippodrome
downtown, but via Bermuda), this single-sentence paragraph transports the reader back
home, physically and imaginatively. It also asserts the author’s belief in the capacity for
advertising to instruct. Calkins could easily have attached another verb to the streetcar
rider to describe a subject who “sees” an advertisement, “purchases” a box of candy, or
“gives” his wife a present, rather than one who “learns.” Yet learning is the point here,
overriding or incorporating those other unmentioned acts.

Just what does the husband learn, and how does he learn it? The information the
ad imparts to him seems to have less to do with any advertised product than with the
rider’s own family and behavior, subjects with which he was already intimately familiar.
Assuming that Calkins’s rider reacted positively to the ad card rather than deciding to
leave his wife candyless for another year, a daily commute and minor marketplace
transaction would become filled with and fueled by sentiment. The author did not
describe the card in any detail to his readers, but given its placement in the narrow cabin
of a streetcar, it could not have contained much text. Maybe a question or slogan jogged
the memory of the under-doting husband, or maybe an image of the label did the trick.
All specifics are left to the reader’s imagination.

3 Anthropologist Daniel Miller explores the intersections between consumption and care in A Theory of
4 A standard car card measured twenty-one by eleven inches; a double, forty-two by eleven.
If this passage refuses to provide details about what the husband sees on his ride home, neither does it say much about how he sees it. Instead, it depicts his lesson as the spontaneous result of two kinds of absence. The first missing item is a newspaper; lacking one, the rider has nothing toward which to direct his sustained attention. The other absent object in this scenario is human: no stranger’s body blocks his view of the ad card or prompts him to look away to avoid an awkward encounter. Wilmot Lippincott offered a complementary account of streetcar commuters in his 1923 book *Outdoor Advertising*: “Their minds are unoccupied at the beginning or close of the day, and many times the bright car cards offer a relief from gazing into the faces of fellow passengers.”

Without competing words or faces in front of him, Calkins’s rider is able to glance up at the curved surface between the wall and ceiling of the streetcar, and, in a seeming instant, learns what he must accomplish before returning home.

Calkins related this episode as a cause-and-effect hop, from an empty car and missing newspaper on the one hand to the husband’s lesson learned on the other. Despite its brevity and its omissions, however, this paragraph contains meaningful arrangements of bodies and texts that served as cues for contemporary readers of *The Business of Advertising*, and which can also guide our approach to the passage a century later. For instance, we do not know where the husband’s trip began, but his solitary ride home

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6 Several of the primary documents I examine in this Introduction either belong within or reference streetcars. This is fitting, in part, because streetcars provided the setting for innumerable everyday acts of reading between the 1890s and 1920s. Electric street rail networks were developed in the final decades of the nineteenth century and quickly replaced horsecars in large American cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Usually privately owned, streetcar routes operated as franchises under terms that investors negotiated with local governments, sometimes with additional financial ties to real estate and electric power companies looking to develop suburban neighborhoods. Both ridership and profits peaked in the early twentieth century, yet without public investment, the streetcar industry struggled to remain profitable after World War I. Most companies abandoned service during the Great Depression. See David W. Jones, *Mass Motorization and Mass Transit: An American History and Policy Analysis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 31-39.
could suggest the physical and professional mobility of a commuter, who we also know is at least an occasional newspaper reader. The passage also supports the claim Calkins makes in the preceding sentence, that “advertising is working all the time.” Finally, if the ad is successful, it likely succeeds by representing the purchase of a box of candy as an act of spousal care, not as evidence of a deliberate campaign to generate profits for a paying client.

Calkins’s causal hop is therefore not empty at all, but full of undocumented acts and expectations. The inferences I make above draw on knowledge produced within, about, and beyond the text: from lessons Calkins offered elsewhere in *The Business of Advertising*; from *The Business of Advertising*’s status as an object, specifically, a vocational manual; and from many assumptions about human behavior and its social contexts, which Calkins may have neglected to describe but nevertheless needed in place for his text to be understood by readers. Whatever the husband “learns” on his streetcar ride engages these different forms of knowledge, and his depicted lesson reveals how they might be transferred and transformed between one person and the next. These forms of knowledge coalesce around reading – the process that linked Calkins to his audience of aspiring ad men and both the author and his readers to the hypothetical streetcar rider.

**Material Literacy**

In this dissertation I posit that a new form of literacy emerged in the United States between 1890 and 1910, in tandem with the modern advertising profession. A nation recalibrating the way it valued economic and cultural mass consumption demanded, among other things, new signage – new ways to announce, and through those
announcements, to produce its commitment to consumer society. Printed advertisements were a powerful tool for this twofold task, and while they continued to operate through familiar avenues that had brought people and goods together in the nineteenth century, new forms entered the mix in the approach to the twentieth. Released from the back pages of magazines, commercial notices circulated in more prominent and attractive displays, and periodical advertising convened Americans separated by geography as imagined communities of readers on a weekly or monthly basis. In the daily newspapers, retailers experimented with arrangements and typefaces to draw readers’ attention to their stock. Advertisements also adapted to reach audiences who were increasingly on the move into and around urban spaces, and appeared – not without opposition – inside train cars and outside on billboards. In this period, acts of consuming written and printed texts and acts of consuming mass produced, nationally distributed goods became more doggedly intertwined than would have been possible a few decades before.

Commercial growth also provided ways to recognize and mediate American’s expanding ethnic diversity, as literature scholar Susan Mizruchi has shown. Mizruchi argues that in the second half of the nineteenth century, American business values helped to turn the United States into a self-consciously multicultural society. This process depended upon acts of reading and writing. While authors of serialized realist novels became preoccupied with the reader’s role as a consumer, magazine advertising offered “new conceptions of reading (as shopping), as well as new categories for classifying

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7 See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991), especially chapters 2-4. Anderson argues that national consciousness developed from interactions between print technology, written language, and capitalism. He identifies newspapers as the key vehicles for building bonds around nationhood during the American Revolution and in the Early Republic. Other scholars have adapted Anderson’s work to analyze the communities constructed through other media and at different historical moments.
social experience, fresh areas of need (clean teeth, disposable tissues, carpet cleaners), and trademarked items to satisfy them (*Colgate* ribbon toothpaste, *Kleenex*, and *Scourene*)." The activities of authors, advertisers, and publishers became closely tied, and while Mizruchi acknowledges that the body of literature they created trafficked in demeaning stereotypes, it also produced more hopeful and creative stories of a multiethnic America.

Mizruchi’s examination of magazine advertising privileges images, first, because she believes they create “immediate community” more readily than written text, and second, because she suggests that visual forms “tend to address us subliminally, to speak to a ‘sixth sense’ in all of us… a cultural sense.” The growth of advertising imagery is undeniable from the 1890s onward, yet while I do analyze images in the chapters that follow, my focus remains largely on words and letters. Implicit in some scholarship about the representational work of engravings, lithographic prints, and halftone photography is a sense that the corresponding role of an advertisement’s text was limited to transmitting narrative content. It is tempting, in other words, to analyze words solely for their arguments while limiting discussions of an ad’s appearance to its arrangement and imagery. In an effort to challenge this binary, my approach stresses the decorative role of typed and hand-drawn letters and seeks to understand the “cultural sense” of written and printed texts.

Although fundamentally committed to profit, advertising demanded more than the crude ability to connect brands to goods and to remember these connections when faced with a choice between similar products for sale. It operated more imaginatively than that,

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by creating shared spaces of consumer potential among advertisers, agents, writers, designers, printers, and audiences. What I call material literacy emerged in service of these connections as a set of interpretive skills wielded by both the creators and audiences of advertising material, whose paths crossed via representations of goods. These historically situated ways of reading and writing not only invited Americans to interpret a world full of representations of products, but also to understand – to read – themselves within that context. As Richard Ohmann puts it: “Audiences learned these new configurations of signs, and reimagined their identities in terms of such signs – doubtless at times with reservations, resistance, or irony, rather than bland acceptance; but still, the new discourse, made by unseen experts without the consent of the audience, lodged itself in the latter’s semiotic world.”

The desire to understand how audiences engaged with advertising material was not only important to those whose work directly depended on selling goods. Commercial texts became a site for posing questions about reading behavior more generally, and they connected members of various professions who stood to benefit from that knowledge. This dissertation explores how reading and consumption converged for advertisers, printers, type designers, and psychologists. These mainly white, American-born men interacted with the public and with one another from positions of varying technical, economic, and cultural authority. Despite their different professional investments, their work intersected around efforts to understand how modern Americans decoded printed texts, and how this behavior might be known and guided. Some authors cited understanding readers’ behaviors and preferences as their explicit mission; for others, this

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10 Richard Ohmann, Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century (London: Verso, 1996), 347-348. Ohmann’s work focuses on the development of middle-class magazines and with the socio-economic class of urban Americans who were its creators and targets.
work was a means to some other profitable, scientific, or aesthetic end. Both deliberately and inadvertently, this cohort left behind a variety of evidence about the ways literacy operated through regular encounters with commercial texts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To establish their professional reputations, the authors I study positioned themselves as being uniquely capable of observing and decoding the behavior of readers. The body served as a key site, and metaphor, for their inquiries—a means of making both literacy and legibility material. These writers therefore approached readers’ bodies (occasionally their own) as texts that they had the authority to interpret. Reciprocally, they often compared written texts to living organisms. In Calkins’s streetcar scenario, the doubled absence of a newspaper and a fellow rider establishes a connection between reading faces and reading print that reappears frequently in this project. In other examples, written messages are carried upon human billboards, alphabetic letters are used to represent body parts, and typographic designs are endowed with family histories. While the organic body helped to make literacy material, however, its observable movements and features also revealed the limit of the body as a source of knowledge about reading, a process that remained largely invisible to its researchers. Under these constraints, accounts produced by advertisers, designers, and psychologists in the early twentieth century are valuable not so much for what they say about how reading worked, but rather for how they reveal their authors’ assumptions and hypotheses about what reading might be.11

11 “Advertisers,” here and throughout, conforms to period usage to refer to the manufacturers and retailers who commissioned advertising material, customers of increasingly sophisticated agencies who produced the ads themselves. At times, I use “ad men” as an umbrella term to represent both the commissioners and the creators of publicity at the turn of the twentieth century, a period of growth and reorganization in which
Historicizing Literacy

Definitions and Usage

The word *literacy* has particular ties to the historical period covered by this study. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it emerged in print during the 1880s to label “the quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read and write.”\(^\text{12}\) *Literate* had already been in circulation for several hundred years, initially used to describe someone as being generally “acquainted with letters or literature; erudite, learned, lettered,” and, since the mid-seventeenth century, specifically signaling the ability to read and write.\(^\text{13}\) By comparison, the noun *literacy* claims a much shorter and more derivative history. The *OED* notes that *literacy* originated “as an antithesis to illiteracy,”\(^\text{14}\) a term that had also already been in use for at least a century to describe an “ignorance of letters.”\(^\text{15}\) Preceded by and dependent upon these two related terms – *literate* and *illiteracy* – literacy as a “state of being” is an invention of the late nineteenth century.

The *OED’s* earliest cited reference for *literacy* comes from “The Contributor’s Club,” published in the November 1880 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. The selection reads, “It is not illiteracy I want to prevent, but literacy!” Introduced in 1877, The Contributor’s Club was a popular feature of *The Atlantic* that invited writers to gripe


\(^{14}\) “literacy, n.,” OED Online (accessed July 7, 2015).

anonymously about a variety of social and artistic subjects. (In announcing the new format, editor William Dean Howells welcomed “the expression of intellectual grudges of every sort.”)\textsuperscript{16} Topics relating to language and literature appeared frequently in these pages. In the same column quoted by the \textit{OED}, one Club member listed all of the grammatical errors found in William Hurrell Mallock’s novel \textit{The New Republic}; another author deconstructed baby talk. The contributor responsible for introducing \textit{literacy} began his entry:

I have had a pamphlet sent to me entitled \textit{The Legal Prevention of Illiteracy}. I dare say it is a very able pamphlet, but I have not read it; it is not illiteracy I want to prevent, but literacy!… Above all, I should like a legal penalty imposed on every one who sends a “first effort” to me. It is an equal “effort” and by no means my “first” for me to read their poetry, and for them to write it.\textsuperscript{17}

For this author, literacy resulted chiefly in a flood of poor quality writing that nevertheless demanded his or her attention. In response, the poet exerted the choice not to read the pamphlet, which, even if it had been ably produced, was of no interest to its literate recipient. The discarded pamphlet, meanwhile, embodied the inverse relationship between literacy and choice, without any of \textit{The Atlantic}’s ironic tone. Published in 1878, \textit{The Legal Prevention of Illiteracy} reprinted a report given by the Secretary of the Connecticut Board of Education on the subject of mandatory public schooling. In this document, “laws for prevention of illiteracy” are another name for compulsory education: illiteracy is not the opposite of literacy, or even of education, but of attendance.\textsuperscript{18}

Schooling was now the state’s choice, not the parent’s or employer’s (a choice, the report stressed, that had strong public support due to Connecticut’s long history of public

\textsuperscript{17}The Atlantic Monthly, The Contributors’ Club, November 1880, 722.
\textsuperscript{18}Birdsey Grant Northrop, \textit{The Legal Prevention of Illiteracy} (New York: E. Steiger, 1878), 1.
education). In their Connecticut classrooms, students could learn how to write pieces that would later infuriate members of *The Atlantic*’s Contributors’ Club.

The *OED*’s second definition for *literacy* designates it as “the ability to ‘read’ a specified subject or medium; competence of knowledge in a particular area.” “Read,” here set off in quotation marks, opens up new interpretive possibilities that loosen *literacy*’s ties to the page, or to any other expressly linguistic medium. This expanded application is traced to a reference to “economic literacy” that appeared in *The American Magazine* in 1943. Succeeding decades would bring a new set of terms, including *musical literacy, computer literacy, emotional literacy*, and, a product of the 1980s culture wars, E.D. Hirsch’s notion of *cultural literacy*. In the *OED*, though, *literacy* remains a singular noun. The plural *literacies*, which has circulated among scholars for more than a decade, is absent from the dictionary, whose second definition nevertheless acknowledges the term’s multiplicity.

Current usage of *literacy* oscillates between the two definitions provided by the *OED*, in some cases referencing the ability to produce and interpret written language, and in others, suggesting a competence for “reading” other subjects and media. In their 2003 book *Literacy and Literacies*, James Collins and Richard Blot emphasize the tension between these, arguing that that the term *literacy* “in the current era … refers loosely to any body of systematic knowledge. This plurality of senses is, however, countered by a contrary pressure to determine… which practices, which ways with text, legitimately fall under the rubric ‘literacy’; or, more colloquially, to ask what ‘real literacy’ is.”

This search for these real “ways with text” sustains literacy’s link to forms of privilege made

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evident in the 1880 *Atlantic Monthly*: the power to deem a text as “very able” or “trash,” and to choose either to recognize or discard it.

Collins and Blot work among a group of scholars who seek to refine our understanding of literacy by inspecting how the concept operates in specific social and historical settings. The *OED*’s two dated definitions for literacy suggest that around 1880 in the United States, it became necessary not just to be able to describe an individual or a society as “literate,” as it already had been possible to do in the English language for several hundred years, but to speak and write of literacy as a distinct human “state of being.” By the mid-twentieth century, it would seem that literacy was a far more portable term, and that to be “learned” was not necessarily to be “lettered,” as its Latin etymology suggested. One could expertly read any number of other metaphorical languages, not just those “marked or inscribed with letters.”

Between the 1880s and 1940s, however, “the ability to read and write” and “the quality, condition, or state of being literate” served as literacy’s primary referents. It is the relation between these two halves of the *OED*’s definition – especially, their overlap – that interests me most.

This study approaches literacy as the skilled negotiation of meaning through symbols (usually letters); but, rather than taken to be a static or universal state, examined as it comes to be performed in particular settings. I ask: how did literacy operate as particular condition of being for printers, copywriters, and psychologists who, in different

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21 While wholly convinced of literacy’s multiplicity, I remain attached to using the singular noun. *Literacies*, while it expands literacy’s range to encompass different identifications and experiences, to me seems also to invite cataloging those varieties as derivatives (e.g., visual literacy, health literacy) while leaving unqualified literacy unquestioned. I do not seek to shore up “real” literacy while illuminating something more obscure or tangential. Instead, I hope to understand the coexistence of acts and efforts within a variety of reading experiences, including those that may appear to engage literacy in traditional or straightforward ways.
ways, claimed to be experts in reading? What different experiences contributed to their understandings of literacy? In the writings of Calkins and his contemporaries, I seek evidence of the ways that reading and writing historically informed and intersected with other practices, some of which were immediately and materially related to printed texts (e.g., setting pieces of metal type, operating a press), and others seemingly much farther afield (e.g., riding the train, buying candy, establishing a sense one’s identity as a member of a family, a profession, or a nation). I consider the methodological challenge to be examining historical scenes full of moving parts: teachers working in both formal and extracurricular settings, and texts offering persistent – which is not to say uniform – lessons to readers. Approaching primary documents as potential sources for a history of literacy does not necessarily support the idea that the transition from illiteracy to literacy (often described as static “states”) is unidirectional or absolute. Rather, it draws attention to the ways subjects become and rebecome readers constantly, and the ways “learning” to read continues long after the work of interpreting written texts becomes so quick and unencumbered that it seems natural.

**Literacy, Nationalism, and Exclusion**

In spite of the work done by Collins, Blot, and many other scholars who have treated literacy as a nuanced concept, it remains important to acknowledge the ways that the literacy/illiteracy divide has been reified in the United States, and how the label “illiterate” is tied to a history of racial exclusion. During the period between the end of the Civil War and America’s entry into World War I, the question of whether and how a population with diverse ethnic, class, and regional identities could coexist in the newly reconstituted United States steered the national conversation on a variety of fronts.
Historian Cecilia O’Leary begins her study of modern patriotic culture by identifying the postbellum decades as the moment when the U.S. emerged as both an industrial nation-state and an imperial power. In these years, disparate performances of Americanness contributed to a nationalist discourse that sustained contradictory philosophies. Regarding immigration, for instance, some native-born Americans maintained faith in immigrants’ ability to contribute to the progress of the nation, while others viewed their ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences as irreconcilable threats to the nation.

Since the Immigrant Naturalization Act of 1790, the route to citizenship had been open to white men after a period of U.S. residence. Matthew Frye Jacobson argues that this law’s logic depended upon the contrast between whiteness and nonwhiteness, which held relatively unchallenged through the 1840s, in part because of the relatively slow influx of (free, western European) immigrants. Under the strain of a new wave of immigration in the mid-nineteenth century, however, whiteness as a unified concept became fragmented and hierarchized. New laws and new scientific practices helped to formalize distinctions between populations that would have formerly been seen as “white,” so that Slavs, Celts, Mediterraneans, and others were now regarded as members of separate, biologically determined races. In 1882, the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act represented the first legislation to bar a group of immigrants based on race. By this time, the nature of European immigration was also shifting, with many more new immigrants arriving from countries in the south and east and settling into ethnically and religiously autonomous communities. Although they responded to different fears, native-born whites from different classes coalesced in holding new immigrants accountable for a

range of social and economic problems.

By 1917, the conversation regarding immigration had hardened along political lines. The dominant demands for assimilation and allegiance effectively negated any distinction between conforming to Anglo-American ideals and participating in the American national project. O’Leary notes the specific importance of print culture within this broader narrative. She writes, “Oratory had formed the most important medium for communicating nationalist ideology throughout the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, but with the Civil War, the locus of communication shifted from individual speakers addressing local communities to mass newspapers and magazines.”

Expanded access to capital, advances in printing technology, and the new national markets for both goods and advertisers all helped to see that the national conversation shifted decidedly from the podium to the page.

The idea of imposing a literacy test appealed to many nativists who viewed immigration as a foreign threat, for “they assumed that testing literacy would be the easiest and most effective pretext for distinguishing between ‘new immigrants’ likely to be assimilated to American life and those who would find assimilation almost impossible.” Founded in the mid-1890s, the Boston-based Immigration Restriction League advocated for such a requirement, and the group found an important ally in Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Lodge introduced the first bill to Congress to propose restricting immigration by means of a literacy test in 1895. Although the bill passed Congress in 1896, it was vetoed by three presidents before it finally passed, over

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Woodrow Wilson’s veto, in 1917.

Historian Jeanne Petit argues that while other criteria for discriminating among immigrants – including their status as political radicals, paupers, physically or mentally handicapped, and recent migrants – were either adopted or rejected with little ado, the literacy test was a particularly contentious proposal that “came to dominate the ways Progressive Era Americans talked about restriction.” Although Petit and other scholars refer to the “literacy test,” both the League and Senator Lodge wrote exclusively in negative terms, of the threats posed by “illiterates” and the “illiteracy test” that would identify these individuals by testing for their failure, rather than their ability. The U.S. Census Bureau moved in the opposite direction at this same moment, asking in 1880 “Can the person not read?” and “Can the person not write?” From 1890 on, these questions were posed in the affirmative.

Interestingly, arguments both in favor and opposing the measure often ignored questions of what constituted literacy or its value. While the League had strenuously recommended that Congress adopt a literacy test as a measure of aspiring immigrants’ worthiness, it had little to say about the value of literacy per se. Instead, racial logic predominated: “A considerable portion of immigrants now coming are from races and countries… which have not progressed, but have been backward, downtrodden, and relatively useless for centuries,” wrote League President Prescott Hall to the Dillingham Commission in 1910. Illiteracy’s open substitution for race also invited opportunities to


argue against the testing measure, as President Cleveland did in his 1897 veto. Cleveland reasoned that the best justification for radically restricting immigration was to prevent “degeneration” and to protect “our national peace and quiet.” If this was the case, then illiteracy was hardly the problem: “If any particular element of our illiterate immigration is to be feared for other causes than illiteracy, these causes should be dealt with directly, instead of making illiteracy the pretext for exclusion.” For Cleveland, the real problem was not the illiterate worker but rather the literate radical “who can not only read and write, but delights in arousing by inflammatory speech the illiterate and peacefully inclined to discontent and tumult.”

In its final form, the Immigration Act of 1917 contained several key changes to existing policies. By establishing the Asiatic Barred Zone, it extended the reach of the Chinese Exclusion Act to all of Asia, excepting Japan and the U.S. colony of the Philippines. The act also banned the “mentally and physically defective,” polygamists, anarchists, prostitutes, and others feared to be morally or physically contagious. Finally, it imposed a literacy test upon those over the age of sixteen and deemed “physically capable of reading.” The reading test was administered in one of two ways. In most cases, immigration officers presented subjects “slips of uniform size… containing not less than thirty nor more than forty words in ordinary use, printed in plainly legible type in some of the various languages or dialects of immigrants.” For this “general method” of testing, quotations were taken from the King James Bible. The general test was ambiguously

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the effects of immigration, the Commission concluded in 1911 that immigration posed a serious threat to national health and once again recommended enacting a literacy test to restrict the inflow of new immigrants.


enforced, so that some subjects passed by virtue of their correct pronunciation or even because they were holding a newspaper in their hand as they met the inspector, while others failed because they were unfamiliar with the phrases and idioms of the King James translation. A second, “special” method, was put in place to account for circumstances when translators were unavailable, or, more vaguely, “because for any other reason it is impracticable to adopt said general method.” This version of the test asked subjects to perform physical acts, like putting their palms down on the table, as dictated on printed instruction cards. The tests were repeatedly challenged in court, both for being religiously biased and for their inconsistent assessment of what counted as literacy, yet they remained in place until 1952.30

While the literacy test remained a contentious feature of immigration activism on the federal level, states exerted their own rights to define and assess literacy in the Jim Crow south. Mississippi was the first to rewrite its constitution to include a literacy test in 1890. As Edward Ayers explains, the challenge for many white Mississippian Democrats was to construct obstacles to black voting that would not also disenfranchise poor whites in the process. An educational measure that threatened to disqualify white voters, or which ran flagrantly afoul of the Fifteenth Amendment, would be counterproductive, so delegates in southern states embedded several strategies into their states’ new constitutions. In 1898, Louisiana’s Grandfather Clause was the first to extend the vote to any man whose grandfather could have claimed the same right in 1867; this lineage excluded men whose ancestors had been held in slavery. The Mississippi constitution’s Understanding Clause also maintained the clear purpose of limiting suffrage to whites,

30 See Oh, Struggles over Immigrants’ Language, especially chapter 2.
but its logic engaged more directly with expectations about what it meant to read. Aspirant voters needed to prove their fitness by either reading a section of the state constitution or demonstrating that they could understand “or give a reasonable interpretation” of a section that was read aloud to them.\textsuperscript{31} Judgments of comprehension reflected the uncurbed discretion of local registrars who set impossible criteria for African Americans, as well as the inequality of racially segregated education. By the mid-twentieth century, one legal scholar writes that “literacy tests were the last remaining, most prevalent, and most effective mechanism of political exclusion, and their eradication required significant and controversial congressional action,” which permanently prohibited them only in 1975.\textsuperscript{32}

Theoretical Approaches to Literacy

“Literacy is a tricky concept,” David Henkin asserts at the beginning of City Reading, his study of antebellum New York audiences and reading practices.\textsuperscript{33} Henkin cautions historians against trying to sidestep this trickiness by appealing to quantitative data, pointing out that efforts to chart literacy rates often depend on faulty indexes (like the individual signature, whose presence cannot stand as proof of someone’s ability to write any words beyond those found in his or her own name, and whose absence does not eliminate the possibility of the non-writer being a proficient reader). Even more importantly, perhaps, the drive to produce statistically valid indexes sets rigid limits that

define literacy too simply “as a skill people either possess or lack” and “blur distinctions among radically different kinds of reading communities and practices.”  

Instead, by analyzing documents like building murals, handbills, and paper money, Henkin usefully displaces “the” nineteenth-century reader, singular and therefore countable, with an account of how New York itself came to be legible social text for a city of readers who restlessly negotiated geography and authority through an array of public signage. Yet, by launching his account with the provision that “we should not get too bogged down in the narrow question of literacy as such,” Henkin empties “literacy as such” of precisely the trickiness that makes it an interesting analytic. While a broader conception of reading may better suit his inquiry, one of the recurrent themes of my dissertation is how reading everyday commercial texts worked to instruct, and literacy, in this context, remains a useful framework.

To be sure, literacy rates are only one means of approaching the ways and historical populations have been taught to read, write, and relate through writing. The variances of literacy have been closely studied since at least the 1980s, when work by a cohort of social scientists including Brian V. Street and Shirley Brice Heath began to

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34 Henkin, City Reading, 20.
35 Literacy statistics do index something. The troubling impulse, it seems to me, is to accept the data simultaneously as an index of too many things, as when literacy is conflated with something like economic mobility, and too few, as when we fail to consider that among the primary elements the data records is a desire to collect it in the first place. Harvey J. Graff, author of the path breaking social history The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Academic Press, 1979) recently admitted that he regards his quantitative analysis as “the most problematic aspect of the book,” which argues that nineteenth-century Catholic immigrants to North American cities had been wrongfully characterized as uneducated, and that literacy did not determine social mobility or counteract economic disadvantages linked to ethnicity and sex. “To put it squarely: for statistical purposes, the numbers are weak, albeit suggestive,” he wrote in 2010, while also acknowledging that some portion of the book’s reputation was derived from that same data: “The presence of numbers in such a quantity of tables and graphs by itself sufficed to persuade more than a few readers” (Harvey J. Graff, “The Literacy Myth at Thirty,” Journal of Social History 43, no. 3 [Spring 2010]: 646).
coalesce into the field of New Literacy Studies. Although Street’s writings challenge the binary thinking that would confidently file literacy and illiteracy as opposites, he sketches a valuable dichotomy of his own in the opening pages of *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, between an “autonomous” conception of literacy and his own “ideological” model. The former, strongly associated with the work of anthropologist Jack Goody, relies on a faith in the concrete distinction between spoken and written or printed communication. Alphabetic literacy, so it goes, enables humans to sever their

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37 Jack Goody and Ian Watt framed their influential and controversial 1963 essay “The Consequences of Literacy” in response to recent scholarship questioning the distinction between “primitive” and “civilized” societies and, in the process, between the domains of the anthropology and sociology (*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5, no. 3 [April 1963]: 304-345). While granting the ethnocentrism of the “great divide” schema in its original guise, Goody and Watt proposed an alternate dichotomy, between oral and literate peoples. They argued that within non-literate societies, cultural transmission depends on memory, proceeding as “a long chain of interlocking conversations” that assimilate people into groups and encourage stasis. On the other hand, “true writing systems” based on phonetic alphabets engender new social relations. In particular, the ability to produce and examine documentary evidence of events promotes the skepticism, individualism, and modes of truth-seeking necessary for history itself (306, 312).

Several scholars whose work builds on this are worth mentioning here for the ways they, too, have historicized literacy. Psychologist David Olson applied some of Goody and Watt’s work to human cognition, and he opened his 1977 article with a bold proposition: “Speech makes us human and literacy makes us civilized (“From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Writing and Speech,” *Harvard Educational Review* 47, no. 3 [August 1977]: 257). Olson hypothesized that culturally and developmentally, the adoption of phonetic alphabets concretizes sound, creates models for language, and, in brief, paves the way for scientific thought and procedure. Meaning, for him, is located in the text, rather than in the immediate context of the utterance. For a summary and critique of Olson’s early articles, see John Halverson, “Olson on Literacy,” *Language and Society* 20, no.4 (December 1991): 619-640.

Historian Elizabeth L. Eisenstein examined print technologies in a 1968 article that laid important groundwork for later book-length studies of the printing press in Europe. Writing, she argued here, needs to be viewed in opposition not only to speech, but also to print. She contrasted the stability of published texts to what she regarded as the comparatively ephemeral nature of manuscripts, and proposed that the fixity of print over the writing hand was crucial to the rise of several powerful phenomena, including: authorial fame (as opposed to scribes’ anonymity), the legal conception of copyright, the codification of language, and the atomization of Christianity (“Some Conjectures about the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report,” *Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 1 [March 1968]: 1-56). Jacques Derrida disagreed with Eisenstein in his critique of Heidegger’s appreciation of *Handwerk*: “When we write ‘by hand’ we are not in the time before technology; there is already instrumentality, regular reproduction, mechanical iterability. So it is not legitimate to contrast writing by hand and ‘mechanical’ writing, like a pretechnological craft as opposed to technology. And then on the other side what we call ‘typed’ writing is also ‘manual’” (Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005], 20).

Other scholars who have explored literacy in relation to different media include Marshall McLuhan and his mentee, Walter Ong. Ong’s 1982 work *Orality and Literacy* upholds a division between...
understanding of an object from its immediate, utterable presence, to create representational surrogates, which printing in turn reproduces and circulates among rational, democratic, commercial publics. Per Marshall McLuhan: “Only the phonetic alphabet makes a break between the eye and ear, between semantic meaning and visual code; and thus only phonetic writing has the power to translate man from the tribal to the civilized sphere, to give him an eye for an ear.”\(^\text{38}\) The particular conditions across centuries and geographies may differ, but McLuhan’s and other autonomous accounts have been justifiably criticized for the ways they obscure these differences with “grand sweeps of culture and history” that represent literacy as a portable set of uniform skills.\(^\text{39}\) These skills are problematically accepted as tautological evidence, considered both prerequisites for and reliable indexes of economic, political, and cognitive

the title’s two keywords, but it also traces the influences they exert on one another at different points in history. Writing does violence to speech in the transition from oral to literate culture, as it “consumes its own oral antecedents and, unless it is carefully monitored, even destroys their memory” (Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [Reprint edition, New York: Routledge, 2002], 15). And yet, in Ong’s account speech is never completely decimated by writing. It persists, first, through a theoretical independence: while spoken language can exist unrepresented by any kind of script, alphabetic literacy cannot operate in isolation from the speech sounds referenced by its characters. (Derrida interrogated this presumed privilege and the thought it has fostered in *Of Grammatology.*) In addition, Ong proposed a “secondary orality,” historically situated in the electronic era of telephones, televisions, and radios, which owes its existence to print and yet represents a return to oral forms of sociality.

This is a fleeting review of works by many authors (and many more works by these authors) that unite loosely to perpetuate what has been called “the literacy thesis.” In brief, the literacy thesis takes Street’s autonomous model of literacy and attaches a motor. Summarized by anthropologists James Collins and Richard Blot, it holds that: “writing is a technology that transforms human thinking, relations to language, and representation to tradition, a technology that also enables a coordination of social action in unprecedented precision and scale, thus enabling the development of unique social and institutional complexity” (Collins and Blot, *Literacy and Literacies*, 17).


Were the methods Henkin cites of collecting literacy rates to be perfected, we might imagine them generating accurate statistical distributions of these skills among different populations. What they would leave untouched is the nature of reading experiences.

Challenging the inclination to regard literacy as a stable and discrete diagnostic, other scholars have focused on “historically and culturally variable practices with texts” to present literacy as situated, diverse, and ideological. Street, Heath, and other proponents of the no longer new New Literacy Studies have critiqued the notion of literacy as universal set of competencies for being both inadequate and ethnocentric. Working within what Street has labeled the “ideological model,” they argue instead that literacy can only exist embedded within economic, social, and cultural contexts. In the process, these researchers have effectively replaced an emphasis on literacy in the singular with an attention to its multiple forms. Among the most significant contributions of their ethnographies have been the challenges they pose to the assumed value of formal schooling and to the classroom as the privileged site for literacy instruction. These studies suggest, rather, that schools that operate in particular communities to foster particular forms of literacy, which circulate alongside or in contrast to alternatives. Moreover, some of the skills promoted by conventional schools offer students fewer real-world advantages than those they might gain through informal modes of teaching. The importance of extracurricular literacy training informs my study, as does the notion that in the United States, the public school served as one of many venues for literacy

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40 See Graff, *Literacy Myth* and “Literacy Myth at Thirty.”
acquisition, only ever able to instill a fraction of the skills wielded by a heterogeneous American public.\textsuperscript{42}

I find the autonomous/ideological schema to be a useful starting point, but not a solution, for framing historical questions about literacy. Most literature reviews present the models in the order they appear above (sometimes to end with a discussion of the new forms of literacy enabled by film, television, and digital media), likely because it reflects the publication dates of touchstone works in both camps. But adopting this order without also reflecting upon it creates a shadow narrative of scholarly progress that mimics, even as it questions, the logic of a sure transition from illiteracy to literacy. In caricature: techno-determinist Eurocentrics seek evidence of literacy via narrow research criteria, and conveniently find it thriving within their own genealogies and schools; they are later are called to task by second group of scholars who possess a savvier and more sympathetic grasp of cultural difference.

For this project, each approach has its promises, as well its shortcomings. Faithfully applied, I believe the autonomous model equips us to trace a single tributary of

\textsuperscript{42} As with the autonomous model, a much fuller roster exists of scholars who have mobilized ideological conceptions of literacy. I signal just a few here, but for a rich review of the many works that have established, critiqued, and updated the field of literacy studies, see James Collins, “Literacy and Literacies.”

Out of the ethnographic work he conducted in Iran during the early 1970s, Brian Street proposed that some villagers wielded a form of “commercial” literacy, specifically attuned to the needs and economics of their communities. This commercial literacy, he observed, stood in contrast to the “school” literacy offered through the state, instead sharing certain similarities to “maktab” literacy developed through religious training. In settings where these three forms of literacy coincided, it was commercial literacy that enabled some villagers to capitalize on new economic opportunities that were opened up by increased oil production in the region. School literacy, meanwhile, prepared youth for urban jobs in modern sectors but was little help for the profitable village venture of selling fruit. See Street, \textit{Literacy in Theory and Practice}, section 2.

Working around the same moment with the Vai in Liberia, psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole also identified a trio of literacies in circulation. Their study challenges the notion that English proficiency acquired in formal school settings resulted in deep long-term cognitive improvements over literacies based on Vai or Arabic script. Rather, English literacy signaled proficiency in specific tasks valued, and therefore measured, by the education system in place. See Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, \textit{The Psychology of Literacy} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
reading, and to acknowledge the historical significance of the written markings scholars both inspect and produce. But reading, even when defined within the narrowest of limits (e.g., decoding the printed symbols of a phonetic alphabet), takes place across a range of moments and places. It is easy to believe that Calkins’s streetcar rider would not have purchased the same box of candy had he been born fifty years earlier, or lived fifty miles further from the city. But would he have understood the ad in the same way? Would that ad have looked and read the same? Here is where casting literacy as autonomous fails us. Belief in its stability and singularity – its knowability – provides no real way to account for the historically, geographically, and institutionally varied contexts in which people read and write, or for individual experiences with texts.

Conversely, the ideological model’s methodologies enable scholars to recognize a range of literate practices, from the grassroots to the global, which circulate through different communities and different media. Ethnographic and comparative work may challenge the assumption of a singular, uniform literacy, however, without ever challenging the assumption that literacy would be somehow knowable in summation, if we could only account for all its forms. Furthermore, describing literacy’s variations does not in itself unravel historical narratives that grant civilizing agency to the printed word, or to civic policies that reward some forms of literacy and not others. Consequently, I remain cautious about pursuing specificity at the expense of a broader concern for the

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43 Brian V. Street expresses valid concerns about both “multiple literacies” and “multi-literacies” He writes: “In characterizing literacy as multiple, it is very easy to slip into then assuming that there is a single literacy associated with a single culture,” splintering the singular, autonomous conception of literacy only in order to reconstitute it in narrower form. Multi-literacies, on the other hand, use literacy “as a metaphor for competence,” which is equally unhelpful for this project. The material literacy I identify at work in the early twentieth century is firmly unmetaphorical. It calls explicitly on forms of expertise with letters. See “Literacy Events and Literacy Practices: Theory and Practice in the New Literacy Studies,” in Multilingual Literacies: Reading and Writing in Different Worlds, ed. Marilyn Martin-Jones and Kathryn Jones (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing, 2000).
historical functions of reading. What messages, besides the imperative to buy candy, were communicated in the ad that Calkins, himself a commuting husband, failed to describe? And what, besides another box of candy sold and given, was at stake in the advertising copy and advice he offered to his own readers?

Works by contemporary literacy scholars including James Collins, Richard Blot, and James Paul Gee offer valuable suggestions for pursuing these questions. Responding to five decades of social scientific research on literacy, Collins and Blot propose “a way out of the universalist/particularist impasse” by examining how literacy narratives engage questions of text, identity, and power. As anthropologists, they argue that foregrounding these three themes enables researchers to account for tendencies that appear across individual case studies while eschewing grand, predetermined claims about literacy’s import.\(^{44}\) I accept their prompt, not as a wholesale solution for the field of literacy studies but as a fruitful way to frame close readings and to put them into conversation with histories of education, labor, and design.

In his 1990 book *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, James Paul Gee traces the theoretical transformation of literacy into an array of intersecting texts and practices: “Literacy surely means nothing unless it has something to do with the ability to read. ‘Read’ is a transitive verb. So literacy must have something to do with being able to read *something*. This something will always be a text of a certain type.” From poems to textbooks to advertisements, these types become intelligible through skills acquired in social settings: “One always and only learns how to interpret texts of a certain type in

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\(^{44}\) Collins and Blot, *Literacy and Literacies*, 5.
certain ways through having access to, and ample experience in, social settings where texts of that type are read in those ways.”

Key for Gee are what he terms “Discourses,” ways of using language that embed subjects in, or, alternately, exclude them from, social networks. Gee cites Foucault’s lower-case-d discourse as a “related (though not identical)” concept. Elsewhere, he connects these Discourses to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Gee’s upper-case Discourse seems, if not identical to either of these notions, then at least in sync with them. Rather than beginning with an autonomous subject whose literacy skills enable him or her to interpret independent texts, it insists upon the generative capacity of structures, habits, and rules to produce reading subjects. A Discourse resists auto-critique because it establishes the position from which we communicate. However, because we inhabit several Discourses simultaneously, it remains possible to analyze them from positions once removed. Literacies attach to Discourses as fluencies that grant membership in various communities and identities, e.g., “birdwatcher,” “young,” “American.”

Gee describes the differences between primary Discourses, which establish our early learning patterns within intimate settings (usually the family), and the secondary Discourses we develop later, through associations with social institutions and groups of relative strangers. He incorporates the latter into his working definition of literacy: “If one wanted to be rather pedantic and literalistic, then we could define ‘literacy’ as:

45 James Paul Gee, Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses (Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press, 1990), 42, 45. Emphasis is original. I imagine the many intersections between texts and operations as a crossing of two enormous pitchforks whose prongs, with delicate shifts in angle, snag one another to interlock at various heights of both implements. Context remains important, however, as we wield our pitchforks very differently as exhibitors at the 4-H fair than we do as browsing customers in an urban farming boutique.
mastery of, or fluent control over, secondary Discourses involving print (which is almost all of them in a modern society).” He then clarifies: “But I see no gain from the addition of the phrase ‘involving print,’ other than to assuage the feelings of people committed (as I am not) to reading and writing as decontextualized and isolable skills.”

In contrast to Gee, I do find merit in the addendum “involving print,” and would argue that it can be employed to establish context, as well as to negate it. Secondary Discourses engender a variety of fluencies that include but exceed printed and written communication. However, the particular secondary Discourses this project explores – Discourses that a set of early twentieth-century American professionals worked diligently both to inhabit and to explain to others – depended heavily on the technologies and economies of print. Combining aspects Gee’s approach with Collins and Blot’s to steer consumer literacy though the text-identity-power triad, moreover, demonstrates how often these secondary Discourses converged, first, around the design and arrangement of the alphabet; and second, around the ability to read the human body. I explore each of Collins and Blot’s three key terms below, relating them to work by Calkins and his contemporaries in order to illustrate these important connections.

Texts, Identities, and Power

Texts

This project engages a range of sources that put consumption and reading in direct conversation. These include advertising notices, instructional materials, memoirs, printers’ catalogs, trade journals, and studies on topics like visual perception and graphic design. Among all these forms, I am especially interested in works that divulge

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information about their design and means of production. Job printers’ ads and type
founders’ catalogs, for instance, were created using the same equipment and services they
were designed to promote. Printedness was explicitly part of the advertised product. The
choices these advertisers made about typeface and design represented their businesses
differently than identical selections made to promote a piano retailer or brand of shoe. I
am also drawn to didactic examples: advertisements selected by authors as examples
either to emulate or to avoid. Paired with commentary, these ads not only represent
specific products but also offer a perspective on the profession and its principles.

Many of these texts trouble the linguistic-pictorial binary W.J.T. Mitchell
historicizes in his books Iconology and Picture Theory. “We imagine the gulf between
words and images to be as wide as the one between words and things, between (in the
largest sense) culture and nature,” he writes in the former.49 A deep and longstanding
investment in this distinction means that a “debate of poetry and painting is never just a
contest between two kinds of signs, but a struggle between body and soul, world and
mind, nature and culture” – high stakes indeed.50 Mitchell opens Picture Theory by
interrogating one manifestation of this rift, “the problem of ‘Word and Image’” that the
National Endowment for the Humanities presented in a 1988 report authored by Lynne
Cheney. This report reaffirms a belief in the fundamental difference between books and
television, which Mitchell correctly points out is not simply about form (many books
have images; words appear frequently on television screens). The assumed division
between word image deserves to be theorized, rather, because of the economic and

50 Mitchell, Iconology, 49. We might heighten them further by following Elizabeth Grosz to insert
“maleness and femaleness” at the top of the list: Elizabeth Grosz, Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal
Feminism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).
symbolic weight it is endowed by an agency like the NEH, a federal arbiter of culture, and the ease with which this particular boundary is transposed to legitimate other distinctions. Readership and spectatorship are thus very different activities to the NEH, as are the audiences who prefer to engage in one over the other. On the level of individual subject, we are left with a powerful gap between “the (speaking) self and the (seen) other.”  

For political reasons as much as formal ones Mitchell rejects this, contending that “all media are mixed media” and pursuing moments of verbal-visual contact in which viewers become readers and vice versa. These intersections, which he locates in photographic essays and comics, among other works, are also a feature of advertising material produced in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thanks in part to a series of newly-invented and perfected technologies. A scan through a popular national magazine like The Saturday Evening Post seems to evince the increasing dominance of imagery over copy. Yet, according to Richard Ohmann, this was also a time of textual excess, with writers producing “millions of throwaway words daily – ad copy that… flashed past the public eye and was gone for good.” Mitchell discourages easy comparisons: “The real question to ask when confronted with these kinds of image-text relations is not ‘what is the difference (or similarity) between the

52 Mitchell, Picture Theory, 95.
53 In the 1870s, oil-based chromolithography introduced vibrant illustration to trade cards distributed by manufacturers and merchants. Inventions of the 1880s like Ottmar Mergenthaler’s linotype machine and Linn Boyd Benton’s punch cutter allowed metal type to be cast with more speed and flexibility and in more shapes and sizes. By the turn of the century, photoengraving and halftone screening invited photographic images into both non-periodical and newspaper advertising. Works that have been particularly useful to me in their focus on one or another of these technologies include Laird, Advertising Progress and Patricia A, Cost, The Bentons: How an American Father and Son Changed the Printing Industry (Rochester, NY: RIT Cary Graphic Arts Press, 2011).
54 Ohmann, Selling Culture, 102.
words and the images?‘ but ‘what difference do the differences (and similarities) make?’
That is, why does it matter how words and images are juxtaposed, blended, or
separated?“55 In this study, advertising specimens serve as sites of inquiry for that
relation, while other texts, like trade manuals and scientific papers, help to address
another: what difference did these authors think the difference between words and images
made, and how did they encourage consumers to engage that difference?

Identities

Accepting the instruction and opinion offered by “experts” like Earnest Elmo
Calkins has limitations, the most serious of which may be the barrier it seems to place on
accessing the reading practices of historical subjects.56 How are we to appreciate the
experiences of everyday Americans by focusing on the producers, rather than the
consumers, of texts? Studying historical readers and acts of reading is a challenge; yet in
this context, I want to underscore the fact that writers were readers and vice versa.
Especially before 1900, advertising work as a not-quite-classifiable enterprise meant that
it was open to improvised participation by Calkins and many others who “lent their
voices to a blizzard of exchanges in the burgeoning trade press, where advertising’s
professional identity and principles began to emerge from an inchoate mass of options

56 For contrast, I would point to historian Ellen Gruber Garvey’s rich descriptions of trade card scrapbooks
and advertising and makes the relevant argument that magazines, in overtaking trade cards as the primary
vehicle for advertising goods to a national market, “developed an institutional interest in training the
attention of readers on advertising” (51). This training is one manifestation of material literacy, but I see
this project diverging from Garvey’s in two main ways. First, I do not privilege magazines as the site for
this training, or the relationship between the admen and child or female consumers. Instead, I work
predominantly with a set of texts written by and for the various professionals (mostly male) who might
seem to occupy the position of “trainer.” In some ways, it is the development of that training, and the
authority to train, more than the lessons themselves, that interests me.
and opinions." In many ways, the distinction between producers and consumers, like that between Mitchell’s notion of visual imagery versus verbal texts, was more fluid than solid. As a vocational manual, a book like *The Business of Advertising* depended on this fluidity.

Although Calkins offered readers of *The Business of Advertising* no information about what provoked “you” to return home with a box of candy, “you” the reader were likely able to connect this passage to other familiar, related reading experiences. Calkins built upon this assumed literacy when he presented a scenario that he expected his 1915 audience to be able both to imagine and comprehend. The particular language of “you” and “yours” had become a regular feature of printed advertisements in recent years. In *Selling Culture*, Ohmann notes that “already, in 1900, a fair number of ads made a place for the viewer in their imaginary spaces.” He attaches this comment to an ad for Quaker Oats that appeared in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1899, reflecting “you” the magazine reader in a mirror as the eponymous Quaker.

Through his own rhetorical “you” Calkins created a similar space for his audience, blurring the line between addressing them as future professionals and addressing them as everyday consumers. Prospective ad men who picked up a copy of *The Business of Advertising* were members of, or aspiring toward, what Ohmann has termed the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC): a growing social class composed predominantly

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of urban men who worked in management and other forms of “mental labor.” Many among the PMC made their livelihoods by reading and writing, including hopeful ad men. As consumers themselves, Calkins’s readers were targets of the same cultural forces they hoped to master. This becomes clear in the series of addresses to “you,” where Calkins aligned their perspective with that of the buying public. He advised his students on a variety of practical topics, like selecting an effective and easily pronounceable brand name, using differently vocabulary to advertise the same product to men and women, and balancing copy with white space and illustrations. Equally importantly, Calkins’s readers needed to learn how to understand themselves in relation to the consumers whose behavior they hoped to influence. In addition to the history and operations of their chosen profession, Calkins offered his readers important lessons about their identity and place within the growing U.S. consumer economy – how to read and write “you” into the ads they would create.

The ability to read “you” and to write as “I” is considered by many to be literacy’s most meaningful reward. Philosopher Brian Rotman has examined the impact of writing systems on subjectivity and argues that acts of self-enunciation are medium-specific, so that there exist as many versions of “I” as there do media to host them: a spoken “I,” a filmed “I,” a gestural “I,” etc. Rotman’s characterization of the written “I” is particularly provocative. Like Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and others, he proposes that the use of phonetic alphabets – building words out of abstract sound units – marks a break from both spoken and pictorial forms of communication. For Rotman, though, the key consequence of this break is that the alphabet introduces the theoretical possibility for a completely disembodied subject, an author devoid of emotion. He claims that the written

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60 Ohmann, Selling Culture, 118-119.
word excels at conveying meaning but struggles to capture tone, since there are no letters capable of representing the undulations and emphases of human speech: “Unable to notate sonic effects beyond syllables, the alphabet is deaf to all that tone furnishes – not the least the agency and affecting presence of the body.” As a consequence of this inability, “the medium of alphabetic inscription facilitates the possibility of imagining an un-embodied and affectless communicating agency. A possibility able to be realized in the writing of ‘I.’”

To compensate for the idea that “writing knows nothing of the body,” the phonetic alphabet is constantly being (re-)animated by its users. The process of endowing letters with voices and organic features is on display throughout this dissertation. Although the written word might seem to reject the emotional qualities of images and live speech, these other forms of communication return to haunt alphabetic texts and the subjects who create and consume them. Rotman suggests that literature becomes the infrastructure for reintroducing tone to writing. For him, the “virtual affect induced by lettered gestures” in a moving piece of prose or verse is a ghostly surrogate for the absent breaths and movements of a living speaker. Similarly, while the alphabet “eschews the pictorial” logic of hieroglyphs, it does this only incompletely: “the sonic marks – letters – have always carried some visually informed meaning, first through handwriting and later through typefaces and graphic design.” The standardization of Roman script during the Renaissance did not cast the animate body out of writing, but

61 Brian Rotman, “Gesture and the ‘I’ Fold,” Parallax 15, no. 4 (2009): 75. Rotman’s discussion focuses on the evolution of the Greek and Hebrew alphabets, and his claims, which privilege Roman alphabetic literacy, cannot be applied to all writing systems. Still, many of his points are relevant to a study of American readers schooled in the Roman alphabet.
invited the ideals of its proportion and expression to be applied to letterforms. As a result, typography’s vocabulary is full of human features: letters with “faces,” “feet,” and “waistlines” that combine to form “body copy.”

Power

In the preceding pages, I have tried to contextualize Calkins’s fleeting depiction of an early twentieth-century streetcar rider through the lenses of text and identity. In the following section, I use Collins and Blot’s final term, power, as a way to approach literacy via technology and the body. As one of the many forms of advertising in circulation at this moment, streetcar cards contributed to a commercial landscape that included campaigns in national periodicals but also one-off notices in local newspapers, electric signs, murals, lithographed posters, and more. Streetcars were characterized by a tension between mobility and containment, and this makes them compelling sites for introducing questions about attention, design, and reception.

Historian David Nye writes that beginning with their first public demonstrations in the 1880s, electric lighting and railways both altered what it meant for individuals and communities to be connected to one another. In many American cities, electrification became a matter of civic pride and a symbol of progress; it also helped to tie smaller communities to national markets and a national culture. In the era following David Henkin’s focus in City Reading, the city-as-text demanded different literacy practices for its new mobile and illuminated messages. On the streetcar, Nye suggests that passengers did not have “a passive experience, but one that offered a complex bundle of perspectives. Riding created a new experience of urban space and a new idea of

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community, as the streetcar redefined its surroundings for passengers and onlookers alike. It was a mobile text that interwove casual encounters with strangers, new visions, of the city, and several kinds of advertisements. It was a stage for human relationships.”

Under electric lights, city streets became spaces of both glittering, blinking confusion, and of finely controlled movement. Lighted advertising signs, originally run by human operators, became more complexly choreographed by machines. “With this technology well-developed by 1900, it was possible not only to spell words, but the change the words within a space by shifting letters either suddenly or by fading from one to the other. Careful organization of the sequence could give the illusion of motion; the persistence of human vision that film also relies upon would create the appearance of movement.”

Although reading and literacy are not among his chief concerns, Nye notes the extent to which these technologies worked to alter language and perception. People became “electrified” when they were excited and “recharged” themselves to relax. They could “make connections” or “get their wires crossed.” Media historian Lisa Gitelman builds on Nye’s work, and she pays more explicit attention to the ways that technological possibility infused late nineteenth-century literacy practices. Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines, her study of Thomas Edison’s phonograph and other “language machines,” forwards several arguments that I consider vital to this project. First, Gitelman rejects technological determinism in favor of a more dispersed technological ambiance that permeates the subjects of her study. She writes, “Americans struggled to orient themselves within a world and climate of representation that they understood as

67 Nye, Electrifying America, 51.
68 Nye, Electrifying America, 19.
importantly technological….The sources of such orientation included new technologies and practices of communication, transportation, and inscription, as well as a powerful sense of technological potentiality.69 This approach invites her to highlight not only Edison’s successes – most notably, the 1877 debut of his phonograph – but also his misconceptions (e.g., his belief that the phonograph would be used primarily to record and store speech, rather than music) and his fantasies (e.g., his unelaborated ideas for “color music” and “ink for the blind”). Gitelman places the phonograph in a broader inscriptive context, wherein shorthand writing systems, phonetics, and spelling reform all addressed a similar preoccupation: reconciling the ephemeral, idiosyncratic nature of spoken language with the written word, its stable and visible equivalent.

In Gitelman’s analysis, phonography and shorthand represent “modest, local, and often competitive embodiments of the way people wrote, read, and interacted over the perceived characteristics of writing and reading,” rather than a unified theory of language.70 In spite of this variety, however, she acknowledges that as certain preferences coalesced into norms, they exerted economic and social force and rewarded compliance. For instance, as the standardization of the layout of QWERTY keyboards in the 1890s became economically significant for typewriter manufacturers, it also offered emotional rewards to consumers who knew how to operate them. “These rewards follow the collective accedence to any standard, the individual acquisition of any skill,” Gitelman writes. “But they also accrue to any able participation in literacy practices, which interpenetrate the broader power relations of a literate society.”71 These power relations

70 Gitelman, Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines, 4.
71 Gitelman, Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines, 41.
infuse literacy practices, endowing some users with a sense of mastery and authority and, simultaneously, marking others as uneducated, careless, or otherwise transgressive.

Another aspect of Gitelman’s approach that I consider important for this project is the ambivalent role she ascribes to the human body, capable of producing language through both oral and written symbols, but incapable of guaranteeing that one form corresponds exactly to the other. The new technologies she studies demonstrated the persistent ideal of an “experienced core of unity between aural and visual sense – the common but rather intricately held belief that written words were the graphic representations of speech.” Authors of shorthand manuals, for instance, each claimed to develop a sign system that was more rational, more natural, and less arbitrary than their competitors’. Yet, Gitelman notes, humans repeatedly got in the way: “Inculcated in each new system was an uneasy sense of bodily imperfection, ears not sure enough and hands not quick enough” to ensure the exact equivalence between what was spoken and what was preserved in the written record.\(^\text{72}\) Attempts to unify orality, aurality, and visuality thus often demonstrated the inverse, that different forms of communication might be incommensurable and resist translation.\(^\text{73}\)

These different strands come together in Gitelman’s discussion of roughly 20,000 “idea letters” that members of the public sent to Thomas Edison, urging him to design inventions they had conceived. She suggests that this response to Edison’s celebrity constitutes an accidental genre of writing that deserves analysis not for what its authors

\(^{72}\) Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, 26, 57.

actually imagined to be scientifically possible (their grasp of technology was often misguided and wacky), but for how it registered a collective theory of language. Gitelman argues that these letter writers “were absorbed in matters of message transcription and inscription” and driven by “a desire to produce legibility from orality.” These were motivations they shared with Edison, the authors of shorthand manuals, and many others. Amongst suggestions that anticipated future inventions like answering machines and videophones, Edison’s correspondents registered an even more popular shared desire: a tool to help streetcar riders understand their shifting location within the city. As electric trolleys quickly replaced horse carriages, passengers worried that the vehicles designed to help them reach their desired locations would instead result in dislocation and disorientation.⁷⁴ Edison consequently received many suggestions for devices that would register the city’s streets and then either announce or display upcoming stops and cross streets. Whether the information was transmitted through vocal recordings or signs seems to have mattered less than the mission to replace human conductors with machines that could read the city’s landscape for the rider.

In part because it is so difficult to define or isolate, literacy fuels many different conversations about the operations of language. Gee’s Discourses and Collins and Blot’s text-identity-power schema both help to uncover the diverse forces that shaped turn-of-the-twentieth century literacy practices. Literary scholar Patricia Crain also offers a valuable explanation of the way literacy encapsulates, but also exceeds, the ability to read and write. “One might say, in fact, that ‘literacy’ expresses everything that is left out when one speaks solely of reading and writing,” she writes. Within this excess, we can

⁷⁴ Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, 83, 86, 89.
find “ideology, culture, identity, power, pleasure, aspiration, and historical context.”75 By focusing on what I have termed the “material” aspects of literacy, this dissertation argues that an ascendant consumer culture informed what it meant to know how to read and write in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that for various groups of new professional workers, the human body offered the means to study and guide readers as consumers of both the printed word and the mass-produced goods it represented.

Chapter Outline

My first chapter turns to life and work of Earnest Elmo Calkins (1868-1964), who published two memoirs in addition to The Business of Advertising and his other professional writings. Calkins constructed several identities for himself in his autobiographical pieces: as a student, a reader, a printer, an ad man, and a deaf man. Each of these accounts emphasizes reading as a way of interacting with language physically. Attending to these personal stories further historicizes the term literacy by analyzing the very different ways that one man became “literate” throughout his life.

Calkins’s autobiographical episodes illustrate the two senses of the word literacy provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, as well as the relationship between them. In fact, the earliest quotations for both of the OED’s definitions of literacy derive from American periodicals published during his lifetime. Calkins was twelve years old when its first cited use of the word appeared in The Atlantic, a magazine to which he would later contribute dozens of articles. By the time a reference to “economic literacy” appeared in The American Magazine in 1943, he was on the other side of a successful

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career as an ad man, having retired from the profession roughly a decade earlier. After the death of his agency partner Ralph Holden in 1926, Calkins’s deafness had made it increasingly difficult for him to work in an industry that was becoming less visual, dominated by radio rather than the magazine.\textsuperscript{76} He exited from Calkins & Holden in 1932, but remained an active author and bibliophile until his death in 1964, (according to a friend, at age ninety-six “he could still write a witty letter on his own typewriter”).\textsuperscript{77} Throughout his adult life, Calkins chronicled his education, his appreciation for the craft of printing, and his struggles to communicate with strangers. Created from his unique point of view as a deaf man and an ad man, his memoirs are evidence of the variety of the experiences that produced literacy as a “condition of being” in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States.

Chapters 2 and 3 both examine how the goals of advertising professionals intersected with those of printers and experimental psychologists in the 1890s and early 1900s. In chapter 2, I contrast representations of living advertisements, including men who wore sandwich boards and carried other forms of signage on their bodies, to ads created by job printers and newspaper compositors.\textsuperscript{78} Several of the embodied advertisements depict publicity strategies that failed because of acts of mischievous or negligent misspelling, and I suggest that these served as warnings to advertisers. As


\textsuperscript{78} Job printers were commercial printers who produced work on contract, often in small runs. Their products included letterhead, calendars, and in some cases, advertisements that would be placed in periodicals. Much of their work, however, was never intended for publication, as Lisa Gitelman explores in her recent book \textit{Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014). Compositors, on the other hand, were workers who arranged types for press, character by character, from handwritten manuscripts. Most worked for newspapers and book publishers. Large newspapers would employ over 100 compositors to set up their issues.
sandwich men rearranged themselves to rewrite an advertisers’ message, for instance, they demonstrated the risks that proprietors assumed when they trusted strangers to deliver their messages to the public. Although print offered a more stable medium – one in which letters could not be easily moved once the type was set – printers also took pleasure in creating texts that experimented with spelling and arrangement in ways that made them difficult to read. In the context of these uncertain advertising vehicles, copywriters, especially those employed by ad agencies, stepped in to exert greater control over advertisers’ messages. In doing so, these writers advocated for a new relationship to the alphabet: it was to be a tool for transmitting the ideas they composed as advertising’s “brains,” not a playful tool of printers, who were classified as inferior “hands.” Analyzing these professional relationships offers a way to understand how, as consumers encountered advertisements that put letters and bodies together on display, they were simultaneously reading about the power dynamics among advertising’s diverse workforce, for whom letters and bodies also intertwined.

Chapter 3 continues my discussion of letters, bodies, and professionalism by putting advertising authorities into conversation with experimental psychologists, another group looking to establish its reputation and carve out its arena of expertise at the turn of the twentieth century. Understanding how people processed printed texts was a key project for both sets of workers. While psychologists wrestled with questions of how to measure eye movements and reaction times, advertisers searched for ways to persuade audiences who, in their view, were prone to making irrational decisions. I examine how their research dovetailed in the earliest efforts to develop a new psychology of advertising. This chapter also returns to the figure of the streetcar rider, and to the
experiences of reading while riding, to demonstrate how both in the laboratory and out in the world, readers’ behavior reflected the dislocation, saturation of stimuli, and competition for attention that characterized other facets of turn-of-the-century life.

My final chapter tells the story of a typeface. When looking through advertising and printing manuals of the early twentieth century, it is hard to escape the Cheltenham name. Though virtually forgotten today, Cheltenham was one of the most prominent type designs to be created and sold in the United States, and it was especially well adapted to advertising work. Yet, from the onset, it received mixed reactions from designers. As its popularity grew, largely due to advertising, the critiques only became more forceful. Cheltenham, however, was never a single face of type. It thrived as an advertising face because type founders quickly adapted it into a full “family,” which included italics, bolds, and dozens of other varieties. This chapter examines how the family metaphor in typography drew from contemporary concerns regarding the racial and ethnic makeup of the United States, and it traces how Cheltenham came to be the most numerous, widely used, and colorfully disdained American typeface of its time.
Writing in his mid-fifties, Earnest Elmo Calkins recognized childhood literacy to be both personally and socially significant, yet he questioned how the two roles aligned. “Could learning his letters be called the turning-point in any boy’s life,” he wondered, “or is it just part of the common lot, like teething, or long pants, or marriage?” If Calkins was uncertain about literacy’s role in the fate of “any boy,” he could nevertheless write with confidence about the ways it had shaped his own. He continued: “At any rate, the mystery of the alphabet exercised a profound influence on this boy’s destiny. For it gave him his job, which was printing, and his hobby, which was reading.”79 For Calkins, a child descended from the “prairie pilgrims” who had established the first white schools and churches in Illinois, learning to read had been an expected accomplishment – as developmentally predictable as teeth and as banal as wearing pants.80 He could appreciate that learning the alphabet was an experience he shared with many other boys raised in similar circumstances. As an adult, his work as an advertising specialist depended on this connection – not only to male readers, but increasingly to the women who consumed his messages and the products they represented. Even as he made a living by communicating to strangers in print, however, Calkins maintained an intense personal commitment to the letters he learned as a child. His marriage quip captures this relationship well: literacy could be commonplace and emotionally laden.

Calkins’s regard for the alphabet and for reading reflected the way he experienced his near-complete deafness, another distinguishing aspect of his identity with roots in his childhood. He had contracted measles at age six, and once the illness subsided, its permanent damage went undiagnosed for several years while he lost more and more of his hearing. “He was at least ten years old before his condition was realized, even by himself,” he later wrote (Calkins presented nearly all of his childhood memories in the third person). Although Calkins had learned to read before falling sick, his deafness and his interest in print developed hand-in-hand in the period before anyone recognized his condition. By then, he already experienced the two as being closely related:

Here was… a boy who had acquired in the first ten years of his life a liking for books – not merely for reading, but for books, their writing, printing, and binding; who had somehow found within himself a strange affinity for print, for the alphabet, for words, their history and meanings; all this emphasized later on by contact with the types, presses, bookbinder’s tools. Growing deafness drove him more and more to substitute books for life, as sources of information, as resources of amusement, and all his inclination pulled that way. Parents and teachers mistook Calkins’s difficulty with hearing for dullness, distraction, and lack of motivation. Diagnosing his true condition did not initially bring much practical relief, though, and he recalled his time as a student as especially lonely. He struggled through school, and then college, unable to hear much of what transpired either inside or outside the classroom, and “doggedly maintained a position of being in his world, if not of it.” In adulthood he continued to represent himself as a kind of half-participant in society, neither fully hearing nor fully deaf, but his outlook was now more

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81 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 52.  
82 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 52. In Louder Please, Calkins adapted this passage to describe himself as a twenty-three-year-old rather than a ten-year-old “boy,” and substituted “the putting of ideas graphically on the page” for his interest in “words, their history and meanings.” See Earnest Elmo Calkins, “Louder Please!” The Autobiography of a Deaf Man (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1924), 120.  
83 Calkins, Louder Please, 109.
doggedly optimistic, stamped with his particular brand of humor. He maintained, for instance, that deafness brought him extra leisure time and excused him from hours of uninteresting chit-chat. With only fifteen percent of his hearing remaining, he wrote to a friend with some defiance, “I shall continue not only to be deaf but contentedly deaf.” Unsurprisingly, “books” topped his list of interests and pastimes.

As a deaf man who made his career in advertising just prior to the radio era, printed communication was both a passion and a necessity for Calkins. It is not surprising, then, that reading and deafness take center stage in his personal writings. Drawing mainly from autobiographical texts and personal correspondence, this chapter examines the various contexts in which Calkins “learned his letters” in order to understand how literacy and deafness intersected for him at different points in his life. Calkins, it should be noted, did not use the word literacy anywhere in these writings, but consuming and producing printed documents was a central preoccupation of his from boyhood through retirement.

After accounting for the ways other writers have treated Calkins and his work, this chapter analyzes his efforts to identify, interpret, and create alphabetic texts. It highlights moments where he received instruction in some aspect or form of reading and the ways he reacted to assessments of competence or failure. For Calkins, I suggest that these experiences converged to establish his identity as a deaf man and his career as an ad man through the printed word.

84 Earnest Elmo Calkins to Andrew F. Gillette, 9 November 1925, Box 8, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. In this letter, Calkins wrote that a test with Western Electric’s new audiometer indicated that he still possessed fourteen percent of his hearing. In Louder Please, published the year before, he gave the figure of fifteen percent, and this number would be cited elsewhere (235).
86 The nearest he came was in his first memoir, Louder Please, which included this portrait of his paternal grandparents: “He was illiterate, seldom sober, and his wife smoked a cob pipe” (11). Calkins rewrote the description of his grandfather for his second memoir, And Hearing Not, where the equivalent paragraph omitted this sentence and any mention of illiteracy, alcohol, or his grandmother.
Calkins’s devotion to making advertising more artistic and more reliable – the work he is best remembered for – stemmed his early contact with the material possibilities of the alphabet. He received different lessons about reading at home, in the schoolroom, and at the print shop, and in each of these settings, he became invested in the idea that he could mediate the space between himself and the outside world via the printed word. Although Calkins appreciated the alphabet’s flexibility and enjoyed playing with letters from a young age, he also desired the alphabet to be a singular, secure technology. He therefore resisted, and even resented, alternative systems like phonetics and sign language. While Calkins reveled in being a loner, he also sought personal connections through print and readily accepted appreciation from his readers. Calkins’s deafness cemented his interest in writing and printing at a young age, yet as an adult, his deaf peers challenged his self-imposed isolation and the ways he valorized the written word.

Calkins’s story is important to my larger project in several ways. His memoirs illustrate literacy’s variability, even within the life of an individual whose strong ties to printed text might suggest a narrow interpretation of the word literacy. As Calkins’s work appears throughout this dissertation, he also serves as something of a guiding figure, one whose literate experiences were unique in many ways but also resonated with both lay and trade audiences. Reading and deafness take center stage in his autobiographical writings, and these provide a rare opportunity to interpret the work of a professional ad man through his memories of learning to interact with physical language.
Calkins and the Advertising Profession

Today, Calkins is remembered more for his commitment to advertising aesthetics than for his appreciation for “the mystery of the alphabet.” In 1924, *The Atlantic Monthly* identified him as “a master of the advertising art,” a description that carried a double resonance. Calkins had described advertising itself as an art on many occasions. Perhaps the first of these was a rather outrageous editorial he contributed to his college newspaper, the Knox College *Coup d’Etat. Printers’ Ink*, a relatively new advertising journal, had sent complimentary issues to the *Coup*. As editor, Calkins reciprocated by declaring, “Newspaper advertising is the best thing in the world and the paper that would be its exponent should elevate it to an art and reduce it to a science in order to speak as one having authority. ‘Printers’ Ink’ is the Messiah.” He later welcomed *Printers’ Ink* more measuredly, as the first publication dedicated to “the new science, or art, of advertising.” In these contexts, art betokened “skillful play” and emotional pull, while reliability was a feature of “exact science.” Understanding that this reliability was crucial to boosting both profits and professional legitimacy, Calkins and his fellow “so-called experts” worked to eliminate waste and uncertainty from advertising in the early 1900s in the hopes of nudging it “from an art to a science – or, at least, to a profession worthy of the ambition and energy of trained minds.”

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89 The paper owed its name to two students who had attended Knox a decade before Calkins, Samuel Sidney McClure and John Sanborn Phillips, who founded *McClure’s Magazine*.
90 Editorial, *Coup d’Etat*, April 8, 1891.
Before that moment arrived, however, Calkins spent years working with advertising material that he considered both ineffective and ugly. After college, he moved from Illinois to New York, where he found work editing and writing copy for The Butchers’ Gazette and Sausage Journal. His gig at the meat paper was miserable and short-lived – he was fired after replying to an ad for his own job, which both he and his boss had apparently been eager for him to vacate. Humbled by his experience in the city, he returned to Galesburg and to The Evening Mail, another paper for which he had previously worked. Advertising was becoming a larger component of The Mail’s operations, and Calkins found it to be the most compelling part of his new job. “As I put into type the crude, hackneyed advertisements,” he recalled, “I felt in a dim way the poverty of ideas that characterized them, their lack of anything approaching attractive physical form, and I tried with unskillful hands to give them some measure of interest by means of type. I even rewrote them in my mind, embroidering the meager and uninspired facts with my own fancies.”

As he fantasized about editing the form and content of the ads he set for The Mail, Calkins also established his own agency to serve local merchants. He justified his early successes by deriding the general state of retail advertising at the time: “I could hardly have been able to make it worse.”

In 1896, Calkins created an ad for one of his Galesburg clients that effectively relaunched his career in New York. The notice he designed for G.B. Churchill’s hardware store won a contest sponsored by Bissell carpet cleaners, selected from amongst 1,433 entries. Soon after, Calkins accepted a job offer from Charles Austin Bates, a respected copywriter who headed his own New York agency, wrote a regular column for Printers’

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94 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 144. This passage also appears in Louder Please, 177, where it is written in the third person.
95 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 146.
Ink, and had served as one of the judges for the Bissell contest. Calkins established a reputation as a successful copywriter working under Bates, and he expanded the contours of his role as an advertising agent when he and his colleague Ralph Holden ventured to start their own firm in 1902. In contrast to his contemporaries who employed precise and sometimes technical language in their ads, Calkins preferred to appeal to consumers’ emotions over their logic. His appreciation for evocative copy and imagery translated into an approach that became known as the “soft sell.” Foregrounding the appearance of both products and advertisements was an essential part of his strategy. One of Calkins & Holden’s earliest campaigns, for instance, introduced the public to the fictional figure of Phoebe Snow, a young woman who travelled on the Lackawanna Railroad. Calkins chronicled Phoebe’s adventures in dozens of rhyming jingles that accompanied gentle visual scenes. He even hired a live model to portray Phoebe in front of journalists, photographers, and fans.

In addition to mastering the advertising art, Calkins championed the use of artwork, photography, and thoughtful arrangement to improve advertising’s design and appeal. Advertising historian Roland Marchand has described him as “the profession’s foremost spokesman for beauty in advertising.”

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96 For Calkins’s account of his work with Calkins & Holden, see And Hearing Not, 195-287.
97 Rob Schorman contrasts Calkins’s approach to one of his peer’s in “Claude Hopkins, Earnest Calkins, Bissell Carpet Sweepers and the Birth of Modern Advertising.” In The Mirror Makers: A History of American Advertising and Its Creators (1984; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), Stephen Fox argues that hard-sell and soft-sell advertising operated cyclically: as taste in one approach waned, the other was revived because it seemed to offer something different.
appreciation for art – and particularly for modern design – shortly after arriving in New York, when he attended an exhibition of student work at the Pratt Institute. Years later, Calkins recalled the display of book covers, wallpaper, and furniture as being “very ordinary,” but at the time, he found them both personally and professionally inspiring: “Here was what advertising needed and lacked: form, visualization, the attractiveness of color and design to strengthen its appeal to the eye!” Eventually, he would credit advertising with being flexible and progressive enough to return the favor, adopting the colors and angles of modern art in advance of the goods themselves, and inspiring industry to follow suit. “What marked Calkins as so enormously influential,” writes historian Jennifer Scanlon, “was his ability to convince clients to invest in artwork not as a luxury but as an essential element” of their publicity campaigns. Taking a cue from Bates, whose agency was among the first to incorporate a distinct art department, Calkins & Holden engaged several artists with expertise in lettering, engraving, and silhouette drawing. They also hired a man named Benjamin Sherbow as one of their copywriters. Sherbow quickly turned his attention to typography, legibility, and arrangement. Together, he and Calkins introduced the advertising industry to the idea of an in-house expert in typography.

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100 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 169. This quotation appears in a slightly different form in Louder Please, 165.
101 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 239.
103 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 234-236. I discuss the ramifications of transferring work from job printers to in-house designers more in chapter 2.
An expanded range of services and the corresponding specialization of employee talents became the norm for advertising agencies in the first decade of the twentieth century. Calkins & Holden adopted this new paradigm, and historian Jackson Lears notes that the firm even “claimed to be ‘the first full-service agency,’ offering copywriting and design as well as space brokerage and media selection.”\(^{104}\) Calkins puffed his agency as a pioneer and “the yeast that was leavening the whole lump” of turn-of-the-century advertising. Yet, looking back, he also acknowledged that the firm’s identity reflected the times, as much as it did his or Holden’s talents: “It started at the psychological moment when business had begun to outgrow the primitive service afforded by the then existing agencies and demand something a little more scientific and exact, advertising aimed at a definite target instead of being fired at random in the air.”\(^{105}\) Here, Calkins invoked the influential modern language of psychology to describe a historical shift in the advertising profession.\(^{106}\) In order to be more profitable and, ironically, more scientific, advertising needed also to become more artistic.

For Calkins, the ideals of business, science, and aesthetics aligned so that each made progress by reinforcing the other. “Progress,” in this case, meant making selling more predictable. He was certainly not unique in this aspiration; the title of his 1928 book *Business, The Civilizer* echoes Lears’s contention that even earlier in the century, “the equation between civilization and the elimination of chance typified the managerial worldview, joining advertising executives with social scientists and other professionals in

\(^{105}\) Calkins, *And Hearing Not*, 242, 233.
\(^{106}\) I discuss the confluence of the psychology and advertising professions in chapter 3.
a search for systematic control of their environment.” Rationalization and civilization directly overlapped.

Late in his career, Calkins embraced the idea that it was not just products, but consumers, that the marketplace needed to mass produce. In the early 1930s, he coined the term *consumer engineering*. This “new business science” would help manufacturers and advertising agencies struggling for business during the Depression by convincing the public to consume more goods. “Obsoletism,” or “artificial obsolescence,” was a key piece of his vision to stimulate demand, for it promised to make products new by updating their aesthetics, even when their function remained the same. Calkins justified this deliberate attempt to manipulate consumer behavior in part by claiming that these new designs would educate public taste and counter the ugliness of the modern machine age. When scientifically managed, advertising could simultaneously produce beauty and profits.  

Deaf Education and Deaf Identity

Calkins’s contributions to the advertising profession have been well documented by historians and design experts, several of whom have noted his deafness in their assessments of his career. In *The Mirror Makers*, for instance, historian Stephen Fox writes that “his deafness, bookish habits, and early experience all reinforced a lifelong

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affinity for words in print.” Similarly, art historian Michele Bogart traces Calkins’s appreciation for both art and advertising back to the “personal tragedy” of his childhood measles. Bogart suggests that the relationship was not simply reinforcing, but compensatory: “Advertising and its images offered the bookish young man the challenge of communicating without hearing or speech…. In short, advertising offered Calkins opportunities to test his capacities to overcome his disability.” That deafness bolstered his connection to the printed page is clear – from these accounts as well as from Calkins’s own explanation of his career choices. Yet, how it intertwined with his “bookishness,” the condition foregrounded by these authors, is not self-evident. Because their attentions lie elsewhere, neither of these writers explore how Calkins understood his condition, or how that understanding manifested itself in his approach to the texts he read, wrote, and printed throughout his life.

Historian Douglas Baynton has identified the 1860s and 70s – the decades in which Calkins was born and learned to read – as pivotal for assessing Americans’ shifting attitudes toward deafness, deaf education, and sign language. Manual communication had been recognized as an indispensable tool for teaching deaf children since 1817, when Thomas Gallaudet opened The American Asylum for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Fifty years later, hearing educators began an aggressive campaign to forbid its use in schools for the deaf, and to replace all means of signed communication with training in speech and lip reading. While the oralist cause never fully triumphed over signing, the

109 Fox, Mirror Makers, 41. See also Schorman, “Claude Hopkins, Earnest Calkins, Bissell Carpet Sweepers and the Birth of Modern Advertising,” 187.
trend Baynton documents from the late nineteenth century through the 1920s is stark. By 1899, he writes, “nearly 40 percent of American deaf students now sat in classrooms from which sign language had been banished. Within twenty years it would be 80 percent.”

In 1911, Nebraska’s legislature banned the use of manual alphabets and sign language from its state-run school for deaf children. Virginia and New Jersey instituted similar restrictions, fired deaf teachers, and dissolved deaf publications.

Oralism did not simply promote lessons in speech and lip reading; it demanded expunging sign language from American culture entirely. Unsurprisingly, this campaign was infused with assumptions about race, language, and national identity. Deaf historians trace the divide to the mid-seventeenth century, when English and German schools began stressing oral and lip reading instruction. The French, meanwhile, favored signing, and it was their pedagogical model that Gallaudet had imported to Hartford. In practice, oral and manual methods coexisted in American schools for the deaf until the late nineteenth century, when oralist advocates, most famously Alexander Graham Bell, began calling for deaf students to become fluent and exclusive users of English. In the *Volta Review*, one mother described teaching her deaf daughter to read “just as I would have with a little foreigner.”

This cause dovetailed with the spelling reform movement, which also

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114 Bertha L. Bartlett, “How a Mother Taught Herself to Train her Deaf Child,” *Volta Review* 23, no. 5 (May 1921): 200. The *Volta Review* was the journal of American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf, whose first president was Alexander Graham Bell.
sought rational, efficient ways to assimilate “foreigners.” Much like urban immigrants, the deaf were regarded by the native-born hearing community as a population that needed to be removed from their linguistic enclaves and mainstreamed into American society.

English was not the only concern of oralists, however (if it had been, they might not have objected to practices like finger spelling). Manual communication raised fundamental questions about human nature, and here, the oralist mission was bolstered by several strains of popular scientific thought. Bell, whose mother and wife were both deaf, feared that “intermarriage of congenital deaf-mutes through a number of successive generations should result in the formation of a deaf variety of the human race.” While he did not call for sterilization or legal bans on marriage, he targeted residential schools and sign education as a means of forestalling deaf families. Evolutionary theory also led to speculation that humans had relied on gestures before developing spoken communication: “Not only was speech the mark of the human, but sign language was increasingly the mark of the brute,” Baynton writes. Facial expressions were likewise demoted from meaningful and distinctly human ways of sharing emotion to “a mere vestige of our animal past.” In this context, oralist and manualist arguments channeled concerns about the nature of humanity and civilization.

“The speech versus sign debate provided the foundation for the modern distinction between two deaf identities: deaf and Deaf, respectively,” writes disability

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117 Baynton, Forbidden Signs, 52-53.
studies scholar Mara Mills.\footnote{Mara Mills, “Deafness,” in \textit{Keywords in Sound}, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015): 47.} Mills and others distinguish between Deafness, capitalized, as a cultural and linguistic identity, and lower-cased deafness as an audiological condition.\footnote{Harlan Lane provides a concise discussion of deafness (within a framework of disability) and Deafness (as a linguistic identity) in “Construction of Deafness,” in \textit{The Disability Studies Reader}, edited by Lennard J. Davis, 79-92 (New York: Routledge, 2006).} In her introduction to \textit{Signs of Resistance}, her history of American Deaf culture, Susan Burch clarifies her own usage of the terms: deafness is a physical state, while Deaf culture belongs “to a particular group of people who share American Sign Language (ASL) as a primary means of communication.”\footnote{Burch, \textit{Signs of Resistance}, 2. In this chapter, I adopt Burch’s capitalized Deaf to refer to the community who used ASL and who identified themselves as culturally deaf. For me, though, one of the purposes of highlighting Calkins’s story is to demonstrate that lower-cased deafness refers to more than a threshold or measurement.} This binary informs the way scholars have approached both contemporary and historical subjects, including Calkins. However, the alignment of speech-oralism-deafness on one side, opposed to sign-manualism-Deafness on the other, is necessarily imprecise, and Calkins’s writings and experiences complicate such a simple schematic.

In \textit{Signs of Resistance}, Susan Burch briefly considers Calkins’s place within debates about deaf education and communication. To Burch, he represents a writer who achieved mainstream success by positioning himself against Deaf identity, specifically by objecting to sign language. Though hardly an activist, he was recognized as a supporter of oralist education, and Burch writes that “leaders [of the Deaf community] vilified Calkins for his oralist position.”\footnote{Burch, \textit{Signs of Resistance}, 148. In 1922, Vice President Calvin Coolidge invited him to serve on the advisory board of the Clarke School for the Deaf, the first permanent oral school in the country; Calkins later donated to the John Tracy Clinic, founded by Louise Tracy, wife of actor Spencer Tracy, to assist other families deaf children. See “Correspondence about Deafness,” Box 8, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.} For instance, \textit{The Frat}, a journal published the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, charged Calkins with “wanting to dig deeper the
imaginary gulf between the deaf and the deafened” in order to distance himself from the former. In truth, Calkins was caught between worlds and labels. He introduced himself in the opening section of his essay “On the Technique of Being Deaf”: “I have been for fifty years what Mr. Nitchie’s School of Lip-Reading prefers to call ‘deafened’ – to distinguish us from mutes. The census says there are 70,000 deaf in this country; but that count did not include me.” Unlike Mr. Nitchie, however, Calkins embraced the label “deaf” for himself, preferring it to “deafened” or “hard of hearing,” either of which would have claimed a more secure place for him across the “imaginary gulf” of deafness. While Calkins was not born deaf, and was never educated alongside other deaf children, his experience also differed from those who lost their hearing as adults. In letters to people who became deaf later in life, he openly admitted that he considered it an advantage to have had years to adjust to his condition. One of his Deaf contemporaries summarized the tension well: “His experience of deafness from childhood has been quite similar to many of us,” but, having been born able to hear, he would never be able to completely grasp the challenges of being deaf. “Mr. Calkins represents a type of deaf person wholly apart from those who have been deaf from birth, and who are not at all worried about their deafness: their main concern is the acquisition of language and speech without the aid of previous hearing.”

*The Frat* also mocked Calkins for overvaluing the fifteen percent of his hearing that remained, and accused him of clinging to the figure as proof that he did not belong

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122 ERI, “Wise and Otherwise,” *The Frat* 27, no. 11 (May 1930): 4. While this may have been an unsolicited submission, an editorial comment that followed it expressed support for the author’s “wise” observations.
124 See, for example, Earnest Elmo Calkins to Edna Hassinger Miller, 12 February 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
125 Thomas F. Fox, “Mr. Calkins’ Attitude,” *Jewish Deaf* 1, no. 5 (December 1930).
among the inferior race of the deaf: “Some day someone will tell him that the deaf do not get their talkative fingers and ornamental ears the same way that an Ethiopian gets thick lips and a black skin and it will give him the shock of his life…. He simply could not survive after all these years of serene confidence that his fifteen per cent forever barred him from the lowly company of the sign-makers.”

The Frat’s denigration of Calkins relied on the “Ethiopian” to exemplify a truly inferior race.

Calkins was a sign-maker for a living, but he was devoted to signs written in English and printed on paper, not to manual communication using ASL. The author in The Frat was correct to recognize Calkin’s self-imposed distance from Deaf society, and not entirely off base to cast it in terms of race. In his second memoir, Calkins clarified that his experiences did not have “anything to do with the totally or congenitally deaf, or deaf mutes, as they are incorrectly called” and he adopted a familiar metaphor to emphasize that distance: “The totally deaf live in a world of their own; their visits to our world are as foreigners’.” Still, it is not necessarily accurate to read this as evidence that Calkins considered deafness as an immutable trait – the equivalent of lips and skin, whose biological truth The Frat did not question.

Calkins’s own experience was more ambiguous, for he believed that his deafness was the combined result of accident and heredity. While measles had been the precipitating factor for his hearing loss, “there was undoubtedly a predisposition,” he wrote to his life insurance company in 1926. When giving a statement of his health history, he made a tally: “my grandfather and father both became deaf; also my father’s sister. I have two brothers who are deaf, one slightly in one ear, and the other more

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127 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 301-302.
seriously. My mother also became deaf in life.”

Although deafness afflicted him more severely and earlier in life than many of his relatives, Calkins considered his adult condition practically inevitable.

Calkins certainly dissociated himself from Deaf culture, but *The Frat* and Burch both neglect to put this in the context of his tendency to avoid personal interaction of any kind. He explained his position to Carolyn Wells Houghton, a fellow deaf author: “I am not very enthusiastic about these deaf people and these workers among the deaf, who believe in association and throwing deaf people with each other to create a sort of artificial social life. My practice is to avoid the deaf, especially in groups, and to make very slight use of other social contacts, and to build up and create in myself my own amusements and entertainments.” Calkins’s suggestion that Deaf society was “artificial” might have been demeaning, but it also contradicted the notion that he viewed the Deaf as a race of inborn “sign-makers.” He avoided the foreign world of the “totally deaf” because he saw it as an unnatural, invented one.

For Calkins, avoiding social interactions dated back to childhood, where he struggled as a non-hearing student in traditional aurally-based teaching settings. Eventually, he contented himself with an intimate circle of personal contacts and a range of hobbies, many of them based in print. This was one of the criticisms raised of Calkins in the pages of *The Jewish Deaf*, where his treatment was more extensive and nuanced than in *The Frat*. When the journal reprinted his essay “On the Technique of Being Deaf,”

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128 Earnest Elmo Calkins to The Equitable Life Assurance Society, 26 April 1926, Box 8, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.

129 A biographical sketch published in *The Volta Review* even claimed, “He has no children because he did not wish to be the father of a deaf child. The tendency to deafness in his family is strongly hereditary, there being eleven partially deaf individuals in three generations.” See Laura A. Davies, “Successful Deaf People of Today,” *Volta Review* 25, no. 1 (January 1923): 4.

130 Earnest Elmo Calkins to Carolyn Wells Houghton, 19 August 1923, Box 8, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
editor Marcus Kenner praised Calkins’s optimism and frankness, but not without some reservation. “Plainly, he asks the ultra-oralists to come off their high perch and face the facts as they are…. No mention, however, is made of the sign language as a medium of expression. This comforting boon, acknowledged by thousands of the educated deaf, is evidently disregarded by Mr. Calkins who prefers to retire into his own shell hole.”  

Kenner’s introductory comments suggest that while Calkins rejected sign language and the Deaf community, neither was he promoting the oralist ideal of assimilation. He seemed, rather, to find greatest pleasure in solitude and books. Another author made a similar point in a later issue of The Jewish Deaf. “Taking asylum in the Church of Letters — alas, that’s a road barred to most,” wrote James Fuchs, who estimated that Calkins’s sanguine approach to his own deafness would only be relevant to the small fraction of the deaf population who had both the means and the disposition to live their lives as happy introverts.  

Fuchs, in The Jewish Deaf, called Calkins “both annoying and annoyed” — an understandable characterization, for his views ran contrary both to the dominant mode of oralism and to the ethos of Deafness. As a child, he might have regarded his hearing loss as a straightforward handicap, but by middle age, deafness, like advertising, had become an art for Calkins. “People are no more born with it than they are born bachelors,” he insisted. “A bachelor is something more than a man who has failed of marrying; and the art of being deaf is something more than loss of hearing.”  

To Calkins, that “something more” was a matter of perspective and performance, both of which he firmly believed were under the control of the individual. He suggested, for instance, that his own  

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132 James Fuchs, “Mr. Calkins and the Better Way,” Jewish Deaf 1, no. 5 (December 1930).  
deafness was not a permanent state, but intermittent: it only existed when there was something worth hearing that he could not hear. Calkins estimated this was true only two or three hours per day, since during the remaining time he was either asleep or busy with his work and hobbies. To live happily through those few deafened hours, he had devised a series of tricks that covered everything from ordering meals in restaurants to purchasing train tickets. In sum, he argued that “the deafened are happiest, once they renounce the innocent pose of hearing, and proceed to accept all the drawbacks, but also all the benefits, of being deaf.” The possibility that deafness would bring “benefits” is what drew the most attention to the essay, and the most ire from his critics.

Although not Deaf in the sense that Burch cites, Calkins did not regard deafness as anything so simple as the inability to hear. It meant far more to him than the fifteen percent registered by Western Electric’s audiometer. Here, Douglas Baynton’s explanation might be more helpful than Burch’s, as he considers deafness (he does not capitalize the term) to be simultaneously a physical and a cultural phenomenon. Although the deaf are often considered “disabled,” Baynton notes two features that differentiate them from other groups placed in that category. These both relate directly to Calkins’s experience, and I believe they help to explain his identity as a man who did identified as “deaf,” but was not “Deaf.” First, Baynton writes that the deaf “make up the only cultural group where cultural information and language has been predominantly passed down from child to child rather than from adult to child.” Calkins was not only educated in a common school alongside children who could hear, but was deeply invested in educational structures whereby knowledge was passed to children by their elders,

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135 Baynton, Forbidden Signs, 2. Emphasis is original.
especially parents and teachers. This, as will become more evident in later sections of this chapter, was not merely acquiescence to adult power; for Calkins, it granted opportunities to perform his competence, and, occasionally, to protest the lessons being taught to him.

The second characteristic that Baynton identifies is that deaf people, unlike most “disabled” minorities, “have the propensity to invent languages and cultures distinct from those of the hearing societies surrounding them.”\footnote{Baynton, Forbidden Signs, 3.} Calkins had no interest in such inventions, having learned to speak and read while he could still hear. If anything, deafness drew him further into the world of books, written and printed in the dominant language of a hearing society.

**Autobiographical Writings**

Having situated Calkins within the histories of advertising and deaf identity, the remainder of this chapter considers his autobiographical writings and the lessons they present about literacy, printing, and deafness. In particular, I engage with three essays that he wrote for *The Atlantic Monthly* and the correspondence he both wrote and received following their publication. Since it covers a later period of his life, “On the Technique of Being Deaf” is the last one I consider, though it was the first to appear in print. By the time “Technique” was published in the January 1923 issue of *The Atlantic*, Calkins had already authored three advertising manuals and many articles for *Printers’ Ink* and other trade journals, but this was his first and most influential piece written for a general audience.\footnote{By the time “On the Technique of Being Deaf” appeared in *The Atlantic*, Calkins had already contributed widely to the advertising trade press. He also notes that while working for Bates, he was responsible for penning much of the advice that appeared under his boss’s name in *Printers’ Ink* column.} Replying to an early request for reprints, he wrote, “It is the intention
to print my piece in book form, but only after I have written some more to go with it. The publisher says there isn’t enough to make a book.”

Calkins had intended to expand “Technique” into a study of famous deaf individuals, but this piece never appeared in the form he envisioned. Instead, he was urged to continue telling his own story: “I have been switched off into writing a sort of autobiography, which seems to be more popular, at least with the editor of The Atlantic, than my attempt to write an encyclopedia of deafness.”

“Technique,” meanwhile, was reprinted in several magazines that targeted deaf readers, including The Silent Worker, The Jewish Deaf, and Digest of the Deaf.

Two more essays soon followed for The Atlantic, and these had a new focus on his childhood. “A Small Boy’s Reading,” published in July of 1923, related Calkins’s earliest experiences with the alphabet and books, as both literature and material objects. “At the Central Primary” came out the following April, and it concentrated on the events – in particular, the disappointments – of his formal primary education. Together, these three Atlantic pieces, published in the space of nine months, formed the kernel of Calkins’s two full-length memoirs. He edited them only slightly for “Louder Please!”: The Autobiography of a Deaf Man (1924), supplementing them with chapters that chronicled the first half of his career. The book concluded with a reprint of “Technique.”

Calkins’s second autobiography, “And Hearing Not—”: Annals of an Adman (1946), expanded his story into retirement. Its chapters, which Calkins noted could be read or

“Charles Austin Bates’ Criticisms” (And Hearing Not, 174). Several publishers and editors replied to Calkins following the publication of “Technique” with requests for new articles.

Earnest Elmo Calkins to Thomson DeSerisy, 14 February 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. Calkins and his wife did privately press 200 copies of the essay to send to their friends for Christmas.

Earnest Elmo Calkins to Maud Gregg Campbell, 19 April 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. A version of this article did appear a few years later as “The Lives of the Deafened” in The Volta Review 28, nos. 1 and 3 (January and March 1926): 7-11, 114-117.

The Jewish Deaf and The Silent Worker published “Technique” in April of 1923; it appeared in in Digest of the Deaf much later, in February of 1940.
ignored individually, were roughly organized to cover his family background and education; his early struggles and later successes working in advertising; and his social life and hobbies.\textsuperscript{141}

Calkins’s appreciation for art’s ability to inspire feeling, over any duty to faithfully mimic its object, carried over into his approach to memoir: “It is difficult for a self-portrait to be a good likeness. We are seldom so lucky (or unlucky) to see ourselves as others see us. This is particularly true of the hard of hearing.” But he still believed that “a self-portrait without achieving a good likeness may yet be a revealing one.”\textsuperscript{142} For Calkins, a memoir was more than a portrait or story, though; it was a printed, saleable object. In the foreword to \textit{And Hearing Not}, he not only introduced the book’s content, but anticipated its eventual commodified form: “You may have noticed in old-fashioned books that the introduction or preface is sometimes headed ‘Advertisement’…. This one belongs in that category, and might just as well be printed on the book-jacket, and maybe it will be.” The excerpt was indeed reproduced on the back cover of his second memoir to advertise the contents within:

\textsuperscript{141} The references I provide in this chapter point the earliest published work in which the passage appears in the exact form I quote. Many selections appeared first in \textit{The Atlantic}, then in \textit{Louder Please}, and, finally, in \textit{And Hearing Not} without any changes. I have tried to note all instances where Calkins’s language was edited between editions, or when a passage I quote from an earlier source is omitted from future publications.

\textsuperscript{142} Calkins, \textit{And Hearing Not}, viii.
While Calkins wrote that he had “reverted” to his previous life as an ad man to introduce his book, he reverted even further, to his work as young printer, to introduce himself. Immediately following this “advertisement,” he wrote: “I cannot help by feel as I ruefully scan its pages, that it is fortunate it can be put into type on machines that cast letters as needed, for there would not be enough Capital I sorts in the old-fashioned upper case from which I learned my trade to set it up.” This admission encapsulates the way that Calkins identified himself as a writer, printer, and subject: in the physical letter I, his personal story and the means of producing that story coincided. Whereas Calkins was born and came of age in the days of handset type, his memoir owes its existence to

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143 Calkins, *And Hearing Not*, x. I discuss hot metal type casting and machine setting in chapter 4.
modern hot metal casting, which could easily produce enough Is for even the most self-absorbed author.144

Focusing on Calkins’s autobiographical material expands the scholarly conversation regarding him and his work in several ways. First, it inserts childhood experiences into the professional narrative of one of twentieth-century advertising’s prolific and respected tastemakers. Calkins grasped his letters at an early age, both as a reader and as an admirer of the different physical forms they might take, from the alphabet blocks he played with as a toddler to the metal type he set as a young printer. He also quickly learned of the alphabet’s malleability. In these memoirs, he recollects episodes that demonstrate how redesigning and rearranging letters could bring him both visceral pleasure and distress.

Calkins’s personal writings also reveal how deafness informed his fascination with the printed word. His childhood impulse “to substitute books for life” was not so much about content – that is, favoring the stories in books over the story of real life – as it was about the nature of communication – processing information and forming connections. Media historian Lisa Gitelman explains that in nineteenth-century America, “aural experience was tenaciously multiple and inseparable from visual experience…. Hearing almost always came with seeing.” One manifestation of this tie was “the common but rather intricately held belief that words were the graphic representations of speech.”145 As new technologies like the telephone and phonograph isolated sound from sight, they complicated the assumed overlap of aural and visual knowledge. Many of the

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144 As early as 1898, one paper claimed that “the old-fashioned printer is a fast disappearing type” thanks to modern typesetting machines. This pun, much like Calkins’s comment about casting the letter I, again aligns the printer’s identity with the means of producing letters. See Typographical Journal, Notes and Comments, (July 1898): 62.
145 Gitelman, Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines, 26.
authors and inventors Gitelman studies were concerned that speech was an unstable and unreliable mode of communication when untethered from the written word. Calkins, I suggest, was also preoccupied with reconciling language’s apparent instability with an ideal that merged beauty, clarity, and consistency on the page.

Coming of age in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Calkins embodied the anxious relationship between orality and writing. He learned to speak and read before contracting measles, but the illness recast his relationship to spoken and written communication. As hearing loss made conversation fugitive, he became increasingly dependent upon words spelled out in metal, wood, and ink. Yet, part of his “technique of being deaf” was to deny this as a disability and instead to inhabit it as a position of privilege. As he wrote to his friend Andrew Gillette, “When it comes to writing I think we deaf ones have a little advantage over our hearing fellow men…. most of us are in the habit of expressing ourselves with the written word, and there can be no question about being understood, which is the doubt that hovers over most spoken conversation.” He valued Gillette’s correspondence, in turn, because it corroborated his own act of writing: “I am glad that you took me at my word and wrote me again, because only in this way do I know that any written thing of mine has reached a mark.”\footnote{Earnest Elmo Calkins to Andrew F. Gillette, 9 November 1925.} For Calkins, deafness was thus a source of phonological uncertainty \textit{and} a means of claiming a secure and intimate connection to the written word.

In his correspondence and memoirs, Calkins also offered thoughts about the relationship between the written and printed word. At age ninety-one, he summarized his career choices to Benjamin Schowe, a deaf labor economist who was interested in expanding vocational opportunities for other deaf workers. “Printing was associated with

\footnote{Earnest Elmo Calkins to Andrew F. Gillette, 9 November 1925.}
writing which appealed to me,” Calkins wrote, with a crispness he often manifested when strangers asked him for professional advice. “I learned the trade of printing because I realized that it was an occupation that required the minimum of hearing.”147 This letter suggests that Calkins’s primary attachment was to the act of writing, and that printing offered a way to transform that interest into a viable occupation. Other texts offer a different assessment of that relationship. In And Hearing Not, Calkins described his time as a student at Knox College, and here, he depicted printing as what drew him to write in the first place. After finding most extracurricular avenues closed to him because of his deafness, Calkins discovered a comfortable role for himself as a writer for the Coup d’Etat: “The Boy cannot remember a time when he did not write, nor when he was not trying to write – and that meant writing for print.”148 By his final year of college, Calkins was not only editing and writing for The Coup; he was also preparing its issues for press. “It was thus he acquired the knack of putting his contributions directly into type without the necessity of first writing them out. This practice made for brevity, and also strengthened the bond which already existed between his mind and the printed page.”149 In this context, printing was not a derivative of writing, but instead gave writing purpose. Calkins suggested, moreover, that “writing” by means of handling un-inked metal types was more natural for him than writing in pen, reversing the typical order of journalistic production. With experience, he came to regard his own ideas as being structured according to the order of the type case and the proportions of the printing chase. This self-understanding may not have directly resulted from his deafness, but it demonstrates

148 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 102.
149 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 104.
how Calkins saw the machinery of print as a model for his thoughts, as well as the means to communicate them in silence.

Physical Attachments to Print in “A Small Boy’s Reading”

Following the success of “On the Technique of Being Deaf” and in response to *The Atlantic*’s request for more autobiographical work, Calkins quickly produced “A Small Boy’s Reading,” an essay that memorialized different aspects of his relationship to print literacy. Like “Technique,” it was written as a series of interrelated vignettes, and a friend of Calkins’s remarked upon its lack of resolution: “At the very end I was conscious that you hurried to a close like some speaker who has suddenly glanced at his watch and realized his time is up. I wish you had…gone on quite indefinitely.” If, for reasons of space or haste, the pieces of “A Small Boy’s Reading” refuse to coalesce, however, the essay itself is evidence of the importance Calkins ascribed to literacy: when tasked with telling his life story, he began with his earliest experiences as a reader. I turn to these episodes to ask: what early lessons did Calkins receive at home about how and what to read? Returning to the opening questions of this chapter, what personal significance did learning to read hold for Calkins, and how did his experience relate to those of his peers? What is the connection between “a boy,” “the Boy,” and Calkins himself? And, finally, how did sight and sound inform his experiences as a reader?

One of the more salient themes of “A Small Boy’s Reading” is memory – in particular, memory of one’s childhood. Calkins may have considered learning his letters to be a turning point in his life, but, like many adults, he did not actually recall the experience. The opening line of the essay depicts this struggle to look back. From the  

150 T.H. to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 2 July 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
distance of middle age, he seemed to squint as he wrote, “I can just see the Boy at the other end of fifty years, looking quite small and far-off, as if through the wrong end of an opera glass, reading his first book.” All of “A Small Boy’s Reading” and “At the Central Primary” followed suit, written in the third person, as did the corresponding sections of his full-length memoirs, where he finally explained the choice to refer to himself as “the Boy”: “I have spoken of him and his adventures as I really see them, objectively, as disconnected experiences with long misty spaces between.”\(^{151}\) Of course, Calkins was not speaking at all, but writing, and by this point in his life, hearing and speaking were not his preferred tools for communication. “Do not be misled by my use of the verb ‘to hear,’” he cautioned his readers in the preface to _And Hearing Not_. “That was poetic license…. in any case I did not get much from what I heard with my ears, but did, I hope, get a great deal from what I saw with my eyes.”\(^{152}\) The first-person “I” of adulthood relied on sight, while childhood, made miniature and misty with time, was only accessible as the visually-compromised “Boy.”

Accordingly, Calkins introduced his earliest contact with the alphabet with vagueness: “The Boy learned to read; but the details antedate recorded history and depend on tradition.” He could, of course, assert that he _had_ learned to read, but the experience was only accessible to him because it had been preserved and shared with him orally by other members of his family. Not everything had disappeared from Calkins’s memory, though: “He had a set of blocks. He remembers the blocks.” They were wooden and rectangular, like bricks, and each one displayed a letter of the alphabet in both its upper- and lower-case forms. “Tradition says that before he could walk the Boy would

\(^{151}\) Calkins, _Louder Please_, 121.  
\(^{152}\) Calkins, _And Hearing Not_, x.
select an easy morsel of learning and creep with it to his mother, and call off its name, ‘O-o,’ giving a different inflection to the majuscule to distinguish it from its inferior neighbor, the miniscule.” Even as a young child, Calkins undoubtedly knew that upper-and lower-case letters shared a sound and a name. It was not the name of the letter, though, that he enjoyed announcing to his mother, but the name of the block – the physical “morsel of learning” – labeled by its pair of letters. Even if the capital O and lower-case o shared the same shape, he sought a way to register their mismatch in size, and transformed their visible difference into an audible one. Once Calkins could recognize the letters on his blocks, he searched for them “on the printed page, especially the large type in the advertisements, and announced the fact to all within call.” Again, this early memory combined sight (finding letters on the page) with sound (performing his knowledge, once he had found them).  

As Calkins’s education progressed from identifying letters to spelling complete words, his old set of alphabet blocks proved troublesome. “The results were unsatisfying,” he complained, describing his first attempts to build words out of the letters he had now mastered. “Dd-Oo-Gg was no way to spell ‘dog,’ though it might conceivably be an economical way to spell two dogs.” As before, Calkins was unable, or maybe unwilling, to ignore the blocks’ duplication – to not read both of the letters each one displayed. The minor comfort of having spelled “dog” twice required imagining those upper- and lower-case letters being severed from one another and then reconstituted into two proper dogs. As tools for learning, Calkins’s wooden blocks fell out of favor because of the inflexible and idiosyncratic way they presented letters. He found a more resilient medium in the newspaper, which could be rearranged physically, not just imaginatively: “He cut out the

large letters from the local weekly paper and pasted them together to form words.” Ads also offered letters in a wide variety of forms, which he diligently copied by hand.154

Calkins was not alone in enlisting ads for instructional purposes; printed, and later, radio, advertisements served as an important tool for other language learners, both native- and foreign-born. Following the publication of “A Small Boy’s Reading, a reader from Chicago wrote to Calkins to share his own story, which similarly depended on the memories of his elders: “I also learned to read between the age of three and four at which time family history states a demand was made at the table as to the definition of EPPSSCOOA. A unanimous verdict of ‘no such word’ being rendered, a copy of Harper’s was triumphantly produced with Mr. Epps’s well-known (at that time) beverage on the back cover.”155 Calkins was likewise a child who enjoyed performing his knowledge for his parents and teachers, particularly when that knowledge was based in the certainty of the printed word. For him, though, advertising’s value extended beyond confirming his vocabulary. From the moment it superseded his rigid wooden blocks, it gave him the opportunity to create new texts, and that is where it became a truly formative device.

Calkins devoted much of the remainder of “A Small Boy’s Reading” to recollecting his family’s modest home library. Among the titles, Line upon Line stood “like a peak in the beginning of Memory” as the first book Calkins could recall reading to himself, as a boy of four.156 The volume was an abridged and illustrated collection of Bible stories published by the American Tract Society. Fifty years of hindsight had

154 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 45.
155 P.S. Bartlett to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 4 July 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
156 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 43.
rendered Calkins impatient with *Line upon Line*’s patronizing moral tone, but he admitted that as a child, he had regarded it as being as enthralling as the romantic fiction his mother forbade him to read. The book’s most memorable story was of Joseph’s betrayal by his brothers, and for Calkins, the tale was inextricable from the experience of reading it. He vividly remembered the distress of being interrupted by his mother’s declaration of bedtime: “At this moment of greatest suspense the Boy’s mother intervened. It was bedtime….The tears already flowing in sympathy with Joseph’s hard lot were now augmented in his own behalf. Go to bed, and leave Joseph in the pit all night!” In spite of its heavy-handed didacticism, the primary lesson that a four-year-old Calkins learned from *Line upon Line* was how to be a reader of serialized stories. Years later, “the tragedy of that first ‘to be continued’” stood out to him more clearly than anything about Joseph’s fate in the Bible. Calkins admitted that he did not remember ever finishing the story, though he was sure he did so because his other lasting memory of *Line upon Line* was of standing before his father to answer the series of questions printed in the back of the book.\(^{157}\)

More than anything, what comes across in Calkins’s descriptions of *Line upon Line* and the titles that soon followed are his memories of tangible and environmental details, like the shape and location of the family’s bookcase and his small red reading chair. He was an avid reader not only of stories, but of their accompanying biographical notes and footnotes, all set in “blinding” small types. He appreciated illustrations and bindings, and remembered the contents of different volumes of Johnson’s *New Universal Cyclopaedia* by developing a rhythmic chant according to their spine labels: “‘A-to-Cam, Cam-to-Eli, Eli-to-Gon, Gon-to-Lab,’ and so on…. When, later, Johnson was found to be

\(^{157}\) Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 44.
a treasure-house of raw material for school ‘Essays,’ he was always spoken of as ‘Old Gon-to-Lab.’” Calkins’s “scrapbook mind” did not seem to distinguish between text, paratext, and packaging as it collected and saved fragments of his experiences as a reader.

Calkins’s physical attachment to his favorite childhood texts was pronounced, yet, he came to realize, not entirely unique. Following the initial publication of“A Small Boy’s Reading,” at least a dozen *Atlantic* readers wrote to offer him their personal copies of George MacDonald’s *A Double Story* (he had made passing reference of his desire to reread it); several others simply mailed him the book. He referred to the readers who sent or offered to send their books as “unknown friends,” and the relationship was reciprocated. Many responded to his description of the titles in the Calkins family library with their own, sometimes nearly identical, recollections. Miss Susan Ross Dodge wrote with a similar combination of details remembered and details forgotten: “I don’t know just when I began to enjoy reading, but for my sixth birthday I was given a *set* of books in a *box*. I recall the thrill, and doubt if I have ever had a sensation to compare with it since. Not a *book*, but a *set*. Small and red with gilt lettering. I am sorry I don’t remember all three titles.”

Although some *Atlantic* readers contacted Calkins with memories of stories and characters, they more often connected over the material and graphic elements of their childhood reading material. One woman who shared Calkins’s love of *A Child’s History*
of England wrote, “With me as with you all my English history since has been linked to those colored prints. Do you remember the dreadful executioner or Lady Jane Grey and Richard the Lion Hearted with his wife sucking his wound?”

Fellow ad man J. George Frederick also wrote to Calkins, solely to chime in on his discussion of The Royal Path of Life: “I thought I had been the only one! I never met anyone else who ever read this big book with its green cover.” Among his correspondents, though, Calkins related the most to Mrs. Henry Clarkson Scott of St. Louis, who explained to him, “I think I must have come into the century about four years ahead of you and that it is why it is Peep of Day itself instead of Line Upon Line, that I still cherish in my father’s walnut book case — but like yourself, I have lost the Child’s History of England (mine was green.)” In his reply to Mrs. Scott, Calkins warmly noted their commonalities, with a tone of slight surprise: “You cannot imagine what a thrill it gives me to realize that my own literary adventures were not unique — that not only you, but others, our contemporaries, were reading the same books and storing up the same memories.”

As he dashed to the close of “A Small Boy’s Reading,” Calkins gestured to where his early toils with the alphabet had taken him. Some twenty years after his first experiments rearranging advertisements from the local newspaper, Calkins won the

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162 Mrs. W. E. Robertson to Earnest Elmo Calkins, undated, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
163 J. George Frederick to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 7 July 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. Frederick had worked for J. Walter Thompson, Printers’ Ink, and Advertising and Selling before establishing his own market research firm, The Business Bourse. He was married to Christine Frederick, who is better remembered today than her husband. She made her reputation as a home economist and consultant in marketing to women through her writings in Good Housekeeping and Selling Mrs. Consumer, which was published by The Business Bourse in 1929. From the fact that Frederick misaddressed his letter to “Ernest Elius” Calkins, I gather that he was not a close friend. For more about both Christine and J. George Frederick, see Janice Williams Rutherford, Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).
164 Mrs. Henry Clarkson Scott to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 25 November 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
165 Earnest Elmo Calkins to Mrs. Henry Clarkson Scott, 4 December 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
Bissell carpet cleaners’ ad contest with an entry he both wrote and designed. Calkins concluded the essay with this victory, speculating in his final sentence that “the prize advertisement completed the work of destiny begun when the Boy cut the letters of the alphabet from announcements in the town weekly, and pasted them together in new forms.” He had come full circle, and was now fully in control of the letters he arranged into advertising material. In *Louder Please*, Calkins made the stakes of this achievement more explicit, adding several more lines to his reminiscence of the prizewinning advertisement. Arguably, the Bissell contest constituted a more significant turning point than “learning his letters,” the one that began his journey. “At this time the boy was turned over to me,” he wrote, finally able to transition to a first-person narrator. “From now on I will speak of him as myself.” For Calkins, learning his letters had initiated a lifetime of working and playing with printed texts. Two decades later, his first nationally recognized advertisement had invited him into adulthood and granted him a creative identity as an ad man.

Sites of Formal and Informal Literacy Education

In 1925, as journalist Mark Sullivan prepared to write *Our Times*, his six-volume history of the United States from 1900-1925, he contacted Calkins for advice. Venturing that “one of the outstanding conditions of the past twenty-five years has been the rise of advertising,” he hoped Calkins could recommend some reading material that would help him address the topic in his manuscript. Calkins obliged with several pages of

166 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 53.
168 Mark Sullivan to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 10 February 1925, Box 10, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
annotated suggestions, beginning with his own publications. Two years later, following the publication of the second volume of *Our Times*, Calkins wrote to Sullivan again, this time not in regards to Sullivan’s treatment of advertising, but specifically about his chapters on education. These chapters had aimed to survey “The American Mind,” beginning with the formation of “the average American’s stock of ideas, so far as those ideas came to him through his early education.” Sullivan reasoned that in order to tell a story focused on the period from 1900 through 1925, he needed to reach back a few decades, to explain how the current generation of American adults had been educated in common schools. Sullivan spent considerable space discussing William H. McGuffey and his famous series of readers, and even claimed McGuffey to be “really [the] most popular, in the sense of being [the] most affectionately remembered,” figure of the second half of the nineteenth century. He used quotations from clergymen, senators, Supreme Court justices, and Henry Ford to cement America’s affection for McGuffey’s textbooks and their moral influence, which, “in a country prone to change… had permanence for a strikingly long time.”

Calkins, who had received much of his education in the one-room school of Galesburg, Illinois, identified strongly with Sullivan’s account. As with “A Small Boy’s Reading,” he did not foresee how similar his experience had been to those of his peers. “The surprise comes from learning that so many things that were peculiar to my early life were so general. Surely no such history of American education was ever written before.” Yet, in spite of acknowledging the pleasures of recognition, and in spite of having

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contributed to Sullivan’s research on advertising (one of his Phoebe Snow ads was even featured in the volume), Calkins admitted that he was disappointed not to have been asked to contribute his educational history, “as so many people evidently did, as I flatter myself I could have added some new slants.” To remedy this oversight of Sullivan’s, Calkins sent him a copy of Louder, Please and signaled the chapters where he described his own education, including his experiences with the McGuffey readers. “You will see how all this alleged education which you have reproduced so vividly affected me.”172 It is not entirely clear how Calkins would have contributed to Sullivan’s superlative account of McGuffey, had he been asked to do so. On one hand, he reveled in connecting his schoolboy experiences to students who studied across the nation in similar settings with similar texts. Even as he identified with these passages, though, Calkins maintained a far more critical stance toward primary education than the one Sullivan had presented in Our Times.

Calkins had offered his particular “slant” on the common school experience in “At the Central Primary,” his third essay for The Atlantic. His formal education began at age six, two years after his first memory of reading Line upon Line and at the same age that measles took much of his hearing. His eagerness to enter school had been based on the assumption that he would prove an impressive student: “No one at that school, teacher or pupil, realized how very much he already knew, and they were in for a big surprise. He could already read and spell and write – or at least ‘print’ – and so, although no one was aware of it, he was going to school primarily to display the stores of

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172 Earnest Elmo Calkins to Mark Sullivan, 1 November 1927, Box 10, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
knowledge already accumulated.”¹⁷³ The fantasy of performing his knowledge, and the esteem that Calkins believed literacy would bring him, were both quashed by his teacher, who failed to recognize his talents and subjected him to the same lessons in reading, geography, math as his peers. Under these circumstances, education became painful for Calkins for the first time – in fact, he came to regard pain as a vital part of the Central Primary’s mission, and feared it was indispensable to learning in all forms. His glum conclusion: “School was a delusion and a snare.”¹⁷⁴

Amidst the traumas of primary school, Calkins found geography to be a pleasant surprise, and he wrote that “maps left an impression on his mind second only to that of the alphabet.”¹⁷⁵ For Calkins, geographic and alphabetic texts inspired similar concerns about both representation and belonging. As a child, Calkins had difficulty reconciling the discrepancies he identified between the world around him, which he saw firsthand, and the world in symbols, presented to him on the page. For instance, he began school knowing the world to be round, but there was no globe at the Central Primary, only the flat and square Mercator-projection map. Mercator’s world did not only fail Calkins by its shape, but also by its scale: the school map didn’t represent his house, his yard, his town, or anything he had actually seen in the world. “The Boy’s problem (and after fifty

¹⁷⁴ Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 496. This sentence was included in *Louder Please* but omitted from *And Hearing Not*. Later, for a year or two (he couldn’t quite remember how long), Calkins attended “The School That Was Like Play.” This informal, short-lived school had no set hours or classroom, and was run by the father of one of his friends. Calkins fondly recalled his lessons, which took the seemingly radical approach of building upon the boys’ natural interests and included treats like making fireworks for the fourth of July (“chemistry”) and cracking open rocks with hammers (“geology”). This is recounted in *Louder Please*, 80-87.
¹⁷⁵ Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 502.
years still a problem) was to establish a working relationship between himself and the universe,” he wrote, recalling his efforts to locate himself on the map.176

The finest degree of detail that Mercator offered was to identify the state of Illinois, and even this was a false representation: “By great good fortune Illinois in the geography was green, and it was green in the world also, as he knew from such bits of it as he saw just outside the town. But when he was taken across the Mississippi… he was greatly disturbed to find that Iowa was green, too, and not pink as shown in the book.”177 He quickly realized that it was design, not nature, that had determined the states’ different colors. Understanding these conventions and how to manipulate them would be essential for Calkins’s future career as an ad man. For his Atlantic audience, the anecdote served as a reminder of that many aspects of reading maps and other texts that seemed intuitive had, at some point, needed explanation.

Calkins’s instruction in reading brought far more disappointment than geography. Entering school in the early 1870s, he was poised to receive lessons about aurality and visuality circulating from various “expert” sources. In 1866, the St. Louis schools had started teaching children to read using a phonetic system developed by a man named Edwin Leigh. By replacing the “word method,” which was based on memorization, with his own modified alphabet, Leigh claimed he could reduce the time it took for students to learn to read by half. Leigh’s system was embraced by William Torrey Harris, the superintendent of the St. Louis public schools, and later, head of the federal Office of Education. Harris promoted Leigh’s system in the pages of Illinois Teacher, where he reported that it had indeed helped his students learn to read more quickly. As an added

176 Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 499.
177 Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 501.
benefit, he noted, “the traces of foreign accent seemed to be removed effectually by this method.” By 1871, at least five different elementary primers were adapted and published using Leigh’s alphabet – including McGuffey’s. Leigh’s edition of the first McGuffey reader was the one that a young Calkins would be assigned in school a few years later.

In *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines*, Lisa Gitelman discusses the spelling reformers and linguists who developed new systems for reading and writing in the late nineteenth century. Although she does not address Leigh specifically, he fits comfortably within the cohort of authors whose work, she argues, “sought to broker similar transactions between the lasting, material expression of language and its experience as an ephemeral communicative medium, between the visibility and stability of texts and the multifarious sounds of speech.” To this end, Leigh’s alphabet printed letters in slightly different shapes to indicate their different pronunciations. To give a few examples: there were six variations of the letter *A*; a soft *C* contained an *S* inside it, while a hard *C* contained a *K*; and silent letters were printed in lighter type. Even as it stabilized the relationship between the look and sound of letters, Leigh’s system was itself intended to be temporary, used only for the first year of school. After that, he asserted that students would easily transition from his modified alphabet and re-learn to read words in their standard spelling. In sum, Leigh’s approach to teaching reading was an exercise in managing difference. It invented new letter forms so that each English phoneme could be represented with a single, consistent graphic symbol. But as a whole, his system could

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not differ so drastically from the traditional alphabet that it would interfere with learning to read and write words in their conventional forms.

By the time Calkins wrote about his encounter with Leigh’s alphabet in 1924, it had proven temporary in another way, having long since fallen out of fashion. From the distance of adulthood, Calkins dismissed it as “one of the educational fads of the time [that] had to be taught, even to those who were so unfortunate as to have already learned their letters.”\textsuperscript{180} As a child, however, he experienced his new primer and its accompanying method as a disappointment and an affront. Six-year-old Calkins was proud of his homegrown ability to read and write, and he had looked forward to starting school, in part, for the opportunity he imagined it would afford him to showcase this knowledge. The realization that he did not know how to read—at least, not in this new alphabet required by his teacher—dealt a blow to his self esteem. It negated the distinction he had assumed existed between himself and his pre-literate classmates. Along with the rest of the class, he trudged through the first volume of McGuffey, written entirely (and, Calkins thought, suspiciously) in single-syllable words that he already knew, but presented in forms that he did not recognize. Leigh’s method, which demanded that students “sound” words instead of spell them, “may have made pronunciation easier but did make reading harder.”\textsuperscript{181}

For Calkins, though, the most upsetting lesson was that Leigh’s alphabet could exist at all. He was astonished that “the alphabet, instead of being one of the verities acquired for a lifetime, was a transient and mutable thing. How many alphabets was one supposed to learn to keep up with this mysterious something called reading! Was nothing

\textsuperscript{180} Calkins, \textit{And Hearing Not}, 44.
\textsuperscript{181} Calkins, \textit{And Hearing Not}, 44.
permanent – not even \( A \ B \ C \)\(^*\)\(^{182}\) Words were like pictures, he explained, and altering their individual letters wrecked the entire unit. Calkins indicated his sadness and disgust using the language of the body. “All, all were gone, the old familiar faces,” he wrote, referring to the typefaces that he met upon opening his new McGuffey reader. In place of his familiar and human-like letters, he found an alphabet that had been deformed and dehumanized. It was “a strange and grotesque thing,” whose letters carried their additional phonetic markings like “monstrous growths” and had been “disfigured like Siamese twins.”\(^{183}\) To his eyes, Leigh and McGuffey’s conspiracy to redesign the alphabet had created a monster, whose most violent offense had been destroying the trust he had placed in his letters as they had been originally learned from his wooden blocks and newspaper ads. It wasn’t until the following year, when he graduated to Monroe’s reader, that Calkins could be reassured that “the original alphabet, the one he learned first, was now sufficient for all the reading he would ever do.”\(^{184}\)

Calkins proceeded unenthusiastically through school and deemed it of little use, but he was fortunate to find alternate means of education in the machinery and business of printing. He was twelve years old when his family moved into a larger house, renting their former residence to an itinerant printer. When their tenant suddenly moved out, he left behind a small hand-operated printing press – in lieu, Calkins supposed, of several months of unpaid rent. It was a sort of graduation present for him: from wooden blocks and cut-up newspaper ads, now “came the blissful day when… his fingers first felt the

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\(^{182}\) Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 495. This quotation appears in *Louder Please*, but was cut from *And Hearing Not*.

\(^{183}\) Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 494. These quotations appear in *Louder Please*, but were cut from *And Hearing Not*.

\(^{184}\) Calkins, “At the Central Primary,” 499.
touch of metal types.” Calkins’s first priority was to acquire a full font of type, which he purchased from the local newspaper office. Instructions on how to operate the press came from Jacob Abbott’s 1855 book *The Harper Establishment, or, How Story Books Are Made*. “And the rest he learned by doing. The type was in the cases. All he had to do was find it.”

This chance inheritance inspired several adolescent printing ventures, one-page newspapers that carried ambitious titles like *The Illinois Globe* but rarely held his interest long enough to inspire a Volume 2. When his parents urged him to pursue a trade, Calkins found his first summer job at the Galesburg *Plaindealer*. His introduction to the printing office paralleled in some ways his first days of school. Again, he was shown how to identify his letters: “Big Sweeney, the foreman, prepared the case by sticking job type in the corner of each box to identify it; a big A in the a box, B in the b box, and so on, which the Boy indignantly snatched out; for did he not already know his case? Indeed he had expected to astound his instructor with his proficiency.” Once again, he failed to impress anyone with his knowledge, but this time, Calkins *did* know his letters, having memorized the layout of his own type case. Their familiar physical forms were now beautiful to him – even though the sharp letters tore his hands, “it was the handling of type that thrilled him and gave him the feeling of being linked to the illustrious line of Plantin and Franklin.” He had succeeding in replacing Leigh’s mangled, semi-human letters with ones that seemed so fundamentally and biologically human that they could connect him to his printing ancestors.

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185 Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 45.
186 Calkins, *Louder Please*, 93.
188 Calkins, *Louder Please*, 105.
Calkins raised this notion of printing lineage several other times in his autobiographies, as well as in professional contexts. Fittingly, it was *Printers’ Ink* that published a 1914 address to the Graphic Arts Club in which he mused, “I was born with printer’s ink in my veins, descended, perhaps, from Plantin, Elzevir, Aldus Manutius or some of those old printers.”\(^{189}\) By claiming this symbolic genealogy, Calkins demonstrated that he did more than appreciate or identify with the printers who had come before him; ink-as-blood indicated a corporeal tie to his mentors through the shared tools of their trade. A decade later, Calkins revised his origin story, dismissing the notion that one could be born with symbolic blood in one’s veins and replacing it with another, conflicting metaphor. He opened a 1924 article for *The Printing Art*: “I was not born a printer, but my interest in printing came so early and lasted so long that printing must have adopted me as a foster child in my early youth.”\(^{190}\)

If in reality Calkins was no more printing’s foster child than he was its offspring, why shift the referent? One answer may be that his deafness provided a model for negotiating an identity that depended both on hereditary tendencies and environmental events. He was, after all, not born deaf but deafened as a young child, and he occasionally wrote about his condition as though it was a companion or chaperone to him. “Deafness supervised my education, selected my job, chose my friends, influenced my choice of wife, and… figured in the making of my final business connection,” he wrote in *Louder Please*, describing his introduction to his future partner, Ralph Holden.\(^{191}\) Much like printing, it had adopted him and helped to determine the course of his life.


\(^{191}\) Calkins, *Louder Please*, 186.
Lessons Given and Received: “On the Technique of Being Deaf”

In contrast to the two essays that followed it, “On the Technique of Being Deaf” situated Calkins firmly in adulthood. Rather than simply sharing memories, Calkins used his personal story as a basis for giving advice. “Perhaps my experience is a real human document, helpful to the deafened, interesting to others,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{192} The lessons he presented in “Technique” had been mostly self-learned, which also led Calkins to adopt a more authoritative, even haughty, tone: “To begin with the first lesson and the hardest, it is imperative to admit that one is deaf – admit it to one’s self, and tell the world, and accept the penalties, as well as the compensations.” Calkins began the essay by stressing the benefits of accepting the reality of one’s deafness, rather than attempting to conceal it. In a somewhat contradictory move, he followed this with a rosy account of the variety of ways he had adapted his behavior to offset his own inability to hear – an adaptation he referred to using the visual metaphor of “defensive coloration or camouflage.”\textsuperscript{193} Calkins asserted that it was possible to be both deaf and happy, an idea that brought many \textit{Atlantic} readers comfort and inspiration. More controversially, he suggested that it was possible to be happy because of one’s deafness.

Although Calkins maintained that “Technique” was not a prescription for how others should live – he denied or evaded many requests for advice that came his way – his confident, positive approach drew an immediate response from readers of \textit{The Atlantic}. By April, he had received dozens of letters from friends, colleagues, and strangers. Calkins organized and coded this correspondence, and the system he devised reveals much about his audience. He categorized the letters according to two criteria:

\textsuperscript{192} Calkins, \textit{And Hearing Not}, 349.
\textsuperscript{193} Calkins, \textit{And Hearing Not}, 348.
whether they had been received by a Stranger or Friend, and whether or not the author
was Deaf or Non-Deaf (all of the terms are his). On a separate chart, he also noted
whether the letter was a request of some sort, or simply an expression of “Appreciation.”
The correspondence broke down as follows: 45 of the 109 letters came from deaf
strangers; 46 came from non-deaf friends; 15 were from non-deaf strangers; and only
three were written by deaf friends. Among the total, he designated 70 as letters of
appreciation.194

It is notable that Calkins (or perhaps Freda Demmler, his secretary) catalogued his
correspondence at all, and the way he elected to do so is even more striking. His system
organized his world via two binaries – stranger versus friend, deaf versus hearing – that
aligned with one another nearly perfectly. The vast majority of his personal friends and
acquaintances were not deaf. One wrote to him immediately after the essay was published
to plead, “Please don’t cut yourself off entirely from your friends. We enjoy hearing you
talk even tho it is hard for you to enjoy us.”195 In contrast to the friends and colleagues
who wrote to Calkins about “Technique,” the strangers who reached out to him were
usually deaf themselves. Among those who weren’t, several mentioned having close deaf
friends and relatives.

Most of the letters Calkins received were complimentary, even effusive, though
several individuals admitted that they could not share his optimism or his penchant for
solitude. He was particularly inattentive to the privileges his gender afforded him, and a
few women noted their objections. “One thing I disagree with,” wrote Agnes L. de

194 Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. The forty-six letters from Non-Deaf
“Friends” include one that Calkins received from his brother.
195 Elizabeth Gallowhur to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 23 January 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers,
Knox College Library.
Chadenede, “is that a deaf person can have more leisure time. On the contrary. But that is of course because I am a housewife and mother in a hearing world.” Edna Hassinger Miller pointed out that Calkins was lucky to have a faithful wife (in his reply, he agreed). In two long letters, Miller shared the dramatic story of how she lost her hearing to illness as an adult, and her husband a few years later: “Always I feared my husband would get tired of having to apologize for a deaf wife, which he evidently did.” Miller explained that after living with her deafness for several years, he had gone to war to escape their domestic and financial hardships. After several of her letters were returned from his army base undelivered, she heard nothing more; eventually, she somehow learned he had moved to Chicago. Her anger was palpable: “I often wonder if he had gone across and come back to me, wounded, crippled, repulsive in my sight perhaps, if I should have been expected to play the game and take care of him.” Miller also challenged Calkins’s ability to retreat into his pastimes. She was grateful to have found work as a secretary, but out of the office, she wrote, “I grow bitter and rebellious….I am like a squirrel in a cage, going found and round, fighting myself to death and getting nowhere.” Calkins, always the champion of solitary, creative hobbies, urged her to find her true interests, but Miller was quick to rebuff some of his more dubious suggestions. Again, she found herself constricted by gender in ways that escaped him. “As to prowling around this quaint city,” she returned, “well, you men have the advantage of me there…..why I don’t think you

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196 Agnes L. De Chadenede to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 24 February 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library. Emphasis is original.
197 Edna Hassinger Miller to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 20 February 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
198 Edna Hassinger Miller to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 5 February 1923, Box 1, Earnest Elmo Calkins Papers, Knox College Library.
could prowl unaccompanied without remark, at least in New Orleans. It just isn’t done.”

Much of my discussion of Calkins’s *Atlantic* articles has emphasized scenes of reading instruction – at home, in school, and in the print shop. “Technique” invites examination of a different type of literacy: lip-reading. Given Calkins’s dislike of crowds, strangers, and most especially crowds of strangers, it is perhaps surprising that “Technique” was first delivered as a speech to an audience of lip-readers. Calkins later admitted that he had written it with the intention of submitting to *The Atlantic*, but it took its original form as a 1921 address to the Nitchie School of Lip-Reading on the subject of “Deafness as an Asset.”

*The Volta Review* printed an account of the lecture that called it “truly an inspiration” and complimented its “constant flow of ready wit.” Most interestingly, though, the journal reported on a misstep: “Mr. Calkins, who is hard of hearing himself, began speaking into his own hearing device thinking that we might be able to understand him better if he should hear his own voice…. At this point the entire assembly indicated that they did not want their view of his lips to be obstructed; from which we gather that lip-readers, even when using hearing devices, depend to a great extent on their eyes.” Given the venue, this was an absurd error. Calkins, who often used an electrical hearing device but was not an expert in lip-reading, seems not to have considered that his audience might use the tools in tandem or rely wholly on lip-reading, either because they preferred it or because no amount of amplification was useful to them.

The same issue of *The Volta Review* that reported on Calkins’s talk contained an article entitled “The Tortures of Lip-Readers,” whose author reviewed the many obstacles to

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199 Edna Hassinger Miller to Earnest Elmo Calkins, 20 February 1923.
201 Mary A. Bell, “Notes from the Nitchie School of Lip-Reading, *Volta Review* 23, no. 5 (May 1921): 255.
interpreting speech by sight, from moustaches to cigars. He concluded, “the most important lesson for our hearing friends, then, is that the lip-reader must see the speaker’s face clearly.” Calkins, who had very little experience communicating with other deaf people in person, had violated this most basic requirement.

While Calkins had in fact taken classes at the Nitchie School, he considered himself to be a mediocre lip-reader. He mentioned lip-reading only briefly in “Technique,” where he called it “a wonderful art” but a difficult one, for “the good Lord has created few people with legible countenances.” He had heard of lip-reading before moving to New York, and after settling in the city (for the second time, once he moved to work for Charles Austin Bates) he sought formal instruction. His first stop, prior to enrolling in the Nitchie School, was the Lexington Avenue Institute for the Deaf. Calkins described his surreal introduction to lip-reading instruction in And Hearing Not. By coincidence, he had arrived at the school at the same time as a group of medical students, who were also there to observe a class in session. While introducing the group of visitors, the teacher paused, pointed to Calkins, and asked, “You are deaf, are you not?” Calkins nodded, puzzled, and only after the class ended did he learn from the instructor what had transpired: “In order to show us what visible speech was like, and also to mystify us a little, he had been speaking without voice, merely shaping the words with his lips…. I had understood him, while the other visitors did not. My face had betrayed me.”

204 This is the name Calkins gives for the school in And Hearing Not, 189. I believe it was the Institution for the Improved Instruction of Deaf-Mutes located on Lexington Avenue (later renamed the Lexington School for the Deaf), which was established in the 1860s as the first oralist school in New York.
205 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 189.
In this moment of initiation to lip-reading, Calkins discovered that he was literate in a way he had not realized: “I had unconsciously been reading the lips all my life, as most deaf people do.” Having spent years reading the lips of everyone around him, he had developed the ability to interpret lips and faces. This fact, however, only became known to him when his own face “betrayed” him by becoming a legible text for his teacher. Until then, Calkins had been equally unaware of his own skill and his own legibility. He responded to the episode by venturing that the spoken word “is like handwriting in that sometimes it is as clear as print.” With print as his standard – for clarity, stability, and beauty – this moment offered the possibility of reading the gestures of the human face, and connecting to those around him, in the way that fonts and faces of type had long united him with the printed word.

Calkins’s three *Atlantic* essays each highlight a different aspect of his literate autobiography. “A Small Boy’s Reading” focuses on his experiences at home, where he built his skills using toy blocks, newspapers, and eventually, the curated selection of books in the family library. The schoolroom, rather than expanding Calkins’s budding appreciation for the alphabet, initially threatened to dismantle his desire to read by challenging the alignment he had sought between the world and the page, as well as his sense of mastery over the printed word. It wasn’t until Calkins was slightly older and had developed a new relationship to literacy in front of the type case and printing press that he was able to create his own texts, and thus to identify fully with the person who had previously gone through life as “the Boy.” As Calkins grew, deafness served as his

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207 Calkins, *And Hearing Not*, 189. His actual statement was that “lip reading is like handwriting,” but I take him to mean speech.
partner, helping to steer him toward success as a writer and an ad man while discouraging him from engaging face-to-face with strangers, especially other deaf people. While Calkins rejected sign language, he developed the inadvertent ability to read lips—a different form of literacy that helped him to camouflage himself within hearing society. For Calkins, though, it was the “inviolable character” of the printed alphabet and his physical appreciation for printed texts that sustained both his personal relationships and his career in advertising.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Calkins, “Small Boy’s Reading,” 495.
Early in 1894, the advertising trade journal *Printers’ Ink* reprinted two cartoons that had recently circulated in popular humor magazines. Both of them depicted advertisements gone awry through the use of human signs. The first appeared in the February 21 issue of *Printers’ Ink*, having originated in *Puck*, a satirical weekly that was published in both English and German (Figure 2). *Printers’ Ink* featured the second cartoon on April 25, three months after it had been printed in *Life* (Figure 3). If the proximity of the reprints is striking, the coincidence of their original publication is even more so: they appeared in the January 17 and January 18 issues of their respective sources.
Figure 2. How a Brilliant Idea Miscarried
Source: *Puck* 34, no. 880 (January 17, 1894): 380-381.
In both cartoons, a merchant sends a group of men to the street, each one of whom uses his body to display a large letter. Together, the procession spells out an advertising message. This was a strategy endorsed by Nathaniel Fowler, a respected ad writer whose columns appeared regularly in *Printers’ Ink* and whose credits included the Rock of Gibraltar trademark still associated with Prudential Insurance. In his 1889 book *About Advertising and Printing*, Fowler suggested an improvement to the well-known “sandwich-men method,” in the form of an “alphabetical procession, consisting of as many men as there are letters in the article advertised, each man carrying a sign upon which is printed one of the letters, the men marching in single file, near enough together so that the word can be easily spelled out.”

This tactic turned around the oft-quoted advice to make outdoor ads short and dramatic enough so that “he who runs may read” by

[^209]: Nathaniel C. Fowler, *About Advertising and Printing: A Concise, Practical, and Original Manual on the Art of Local Advertising* (Boston: L. Barta & Co. Publishers, 1889), 73. This work by Fowler, which preceded his better-known and more comprehensive *Fowler’s Publicity* (New York: Publicity Publishing Company, 1897), focuses mainly on newspaper ads, but it includes a chapter on alternative forms of publicity.
allowing readers to remain stationary as the ad itself walked through their field of vision. 210 Unfortunately for these businessmen, the neat effect Fowler anticipated fell apart, or rather, rewrote itself into two far less persuasive messages.

These cartoon acts of re-writing bespeak the anxiety that surrounded advertising at the turn of the twentieth century. The question of whether to invest in advertising at all lingered for many businesses. Smaller operations often had little to spend on placing announcements, and if their initial efforts failed, owners could easily dismiss advertising as a practice, rather than question the effectiveness of their particular notices. In some cases, entire industries were slow to embrace the practice of paying for publicity. An author writing in 1904 summarized the prevalent view among bankers: “Indeed, is it altogether respectable to want new business, and, if you really do want new business, is it wholly respectable to let that want be made public in any way? And as to advertising in general, is it not in some way inevitably associated with circus posters plastered on a country barn?” 211 This historical tie to traveling entertainments, and to patent medicines, the first brand-name products to be widely advertised, contributed to the poor reputation that Earnest Elmo Calkins attributed to the profession in 1900. 212

Beyond the initial decision to advertise lay a host of other concerns about how best to create and distribute the advertiser’s message. The earliest ad agencies had established themselves in the mid-1800s as traders of newspaper space: agents would purchase the rights to pages from publications and parcel them into smaller ad “cards.”

212 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 232.
which they then re-sold to clients. Some manufacturers resented having to pay the agent’s commission for this transfer, viewing it “as an unjust tax which he is forced to pay to an interloper, a man who stands between him and the publisher.”²¹³ In the 1890s, agencies began offering more sophisticated services, furnishing copy and illustrations and, eventually, full-fledged campaigns to clients in addition to placing their ads. This transfer of creative power from the advertiser’s hands to the agency’s, however, did not put to rest questions about what constituted “good advertising.”²¹⁴

Historians have identified the decades between 1890 and 1910 as crucial in the growth and specialization of the advertising profession. Advertising, which had been practiced in various forms for millennia, coalesced in specific ways during these years, three of which are important to this project. The period is characterized, first, by the rise of the agency and expansion of its duties. While advertisers – that is, businesses that advertised – held the creative reins in the nineteenth century, by the early twentieth, the agency employee was more often recognized as the true “ad man.” Concurrent with the ascent of the agency was the dominance of periodicals as the vehicle for most advertising. Out of an array of printed products like handbills, almanacs, and trade cards, newspapers emerged as a dominant medium for retailers who wanted to reach local audiences quickly with announcements of new stock, while magazines offered brand-name manufacturers access to national audiences who shared a particular interest or identified as members of the same social class. Finally, it was an era of increased influence for copywriters who crafted clients’ messages. Despite the American public’s enthusiasm for images, and the new printing technologies and editorial policies that brought more illustrations into

periodicals, an emergent group of advertising experts still considered an ad’s text to be its most crucial feature. From business men who traded space in the back pages of newspapers, the new model ad man was an agency-employed copywriter who persuaded audiences through text.215

This chapter examines advertisements and works about the evolving advertising profession produced between 1892 and 1917. I follow Roland Marchand’s suggestion that advertisements warrant sustained scholarly attention as texts refracting, if not precisely reflecting, Americans’ cultural values and imaginative lives. His work underscores the ways that advertisements, by the 1920s and 30s, “infused their images and slogans into America’s common discourse,” helping to establish “our frames of reference and perception” through their repeated consumption.216 This chapter focuses on the period a few decades earlier, when this language was still taking physical shape. It concentrates, moreover, not only on the content of advertisements but on representations of the profession itself in order to understand how different workers involved in advertising interacted with one another as they each appealed to the reader-as-consumer.

My narrative and approach owe much to the work of Pamela Walker Laird, who has examined advertising styles hand-in-hand with industry practices over roughly the same time period. Whereas Laird analyzes relationships between printers, advertisers, and agencies through the lens of “progress,” this chapter is more closely focused on advertisements as texts that engage the human body. As representations of material consumer goods, they also represented the (mostly) men who wrote, designed, and

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215 This summary draws from Pamela Walker Laird’s work in Advertising Progress.
216 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, xix.
printed them, sometimes literally displaying their bodies on the page. Ads also connected with readers in material ways through the physical act of reading. “Don’t make a person go through the motions of a slide-trombonist to read a thing,” F.F. Helmer cautioned job printers in 1900. In particular combinations of letters on paper, in and out of order, I seek messages about what and how advertisers hoped their publics would read, as well as debates and anxieties about how best to transform those hopes into reliable profits.

Letters, bodies, and business intersect in the various sets of documents I examine in this chapter. My sources include ad specimens, professional advice and criticism, a short story published in The Saturday Evening Post, and, to begin, a series of satirical cartoons. In these texts, I readily identify the key tensions that according to Jackson Lears infuse American consumer culture, “between the deceptions of the confidence man and the plain speech of the self-made man, between the spontaneous force of consumer desire and the managerial drive for predictability and control.” These distinctions between print and speech, professionalism and embodied, unruly salesmanship, were central to the developing language of modern advertising identified by Marchand. For Lears, they surface most noticeably in verbal and artistic “fables,” overburdened with apparently contradicting drives toward excess and efficiency. This chapter examines how the design and arrangement of letters and words displayed these same tensions. Advertisements that attracted attention through eccentric designs and gimmicks encouraged playful, sometimes subversive, practices of reading, writing, and rewriting. As authority shifted to copywriters, however, the tolerance for such experiments decreased in favor of stricter

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218 Lears, Fables of Abundance, 9.
boundaries between the “brain workers” who composed the ads and the “hands” who produced them.

This chapter opens by analyzing several representations of street advertising, beginning with the Pahloo and *Othello* cartoons introduced above. These texts, along with others representing sandwich men, banner packers, and immigrants, perform the hazards of enlisting untrustworthy bodies as advertising tools. The second part of this chapter turns its attention to print media, a possible solution to the confusion of embodied advertisements. Relying on trade literature for advertisers and printers, I analyze publicity in which letters and bodies converge through the use of unusual type arrangements and rebus techniques. These ads, and the commentary they engendered, inform my discussion of how printers, advertisers, and copywriters understood one another in the early twentieth century. To conclude, I consider an advertising campaign that N.W. Ayer and Son, one of the country’s oldest and largest agencies, designed for the International Correspondence Schools. By incessantly attaching words and letters to the human form, these documents attest to the way literacy was made material at the turn of the twentieth century, tied both to the body and to the world of consumer goods.

Misreading Human Advertisements

Cartoon Mischief: Pahloo and *Othello*

The similarities between the Pahloo and *Othello* cartoons above extend beyond their premises and publication dates to include the labels that accompany each drawing. “A brilliant idea” for the lung remedy salesman and the “great scheme” of the theater manager turn both men into targets of sarcasm and mockery, in addition to failed
advertisers. These bosses were associated with antiquated notions of publicity, suggesting that Fowler’s advice was, by 1894, already considered passé. The Pahloo proprietor in Figure 2 is marked as being from another era by his product; by the 1890s, advertisers and publishers were hard at work to disassociate themselves from lung remedies and other elixirs.²¹⁹ His representation in the first frame of the cartoon only reinforces the unsavory associations with patent medicine: an overweight man, nose, chin, and belly all protruding, applauding his own advertising savvy. The Pahloo salesman is not nearly as well kempt as the orderly men he sends away, each with a cane, hat, and lettered coat. Indeed, he seems fooled by the outward appearance of his hired men, who easily replace one proprietor with another as they enter a nearby bar. The alcohol content of most “remedies” like Pahloo gives this turn of events a certain karmic quality. Figure 5 inverts the men’s props and the classed associations they carry. This alphabetical procession is considerably shabbier than the previous, with men in mismatched coats and hats and walking in a variety of heights and postures. Here, the theater manager has the top hat and cane, at least until he sees his sign bearers upon their return. Lacking an equivalent of the Pahloo cartoon’s second panel, the Othello drawings present a simple before-and-after, with no explanation as to how the original slogan got mutilated. It’s possible that dumb luck rearranged the sign carriers so offensively, but given the nature of their new message, more likely to be a deliberate rebuff directed toward the manager and the playgoers he hoped to attract. Despite their coarse appearance, the sign men have managed to outwit their employer and to undermine his high-class aspirations.

It is significant that the men in Figure 3 promote a performance of Othello. In Highbrow/Lowbrow, historian Lawrence Levine uses Shakespeare as a case study to

²¹⁹ As editor of Ladies’ Home Journal, Edward Bok banned patent medicine ads from his magazine in 1892.
illustrate the separation between “high” and “low” cultural forms that began in the
nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{220} Levine writes that Shakespeare’s work, which once attracted a
broad popular audience, began to lose its associations with mass entertainment and
became marked as a cultural product for the elite. This transformation contained a textual
component that makes it especially relevant here. Part of the shift, Levine argues,
involved the status of the plays themselves. Previously subject to farcical and parodic
revisions, Shakespeare’s work became textually more rigid in the 1850s and 60s. Plays
like \textit{Othello} became closed scripts, no longer open to imaginative reinterpretations, to be
performed as written for the purposes of enlightenment and education rather than mere
entertainment.

The Pahloo and \textit{Othello} cartoons both demonstrate how texts and bodies could be
incorporated, literally turning men into signs. Cultural historians have examined the ways
that nineteenth-century Americans, particularly those in the growing middle class,
struggled to evaluate human character by interpreting outward cues. Dress, behavior, and
facial structure were all thought to provide clues about someone’s true character, but they
were also open to interpretation and manipulation. Deliberately or not, appearances could
deceive and bodies could be misread. Historian Elspeth Brown writes that late
nineteenth-century urbanization helped to produce “a crisis of legibility, the signs of
outward appearance no longer able to be anchored to predictable meanings and positions
within the social order.”\textsuperscript{221} In these cartoons, the alignment of men’s bodies with letters

\textsuperscript{220} Lawrence W. Levine, \textit{Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America}
\textsuperscript{221} Elspeth H. Brown, \textit{The Corporate Eye: Photography and Rationalization of American Commercial
Culture, 1884-1929} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 46. See also Karen Haltunen,
\textit{Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870} (New
means that their failures of character – being untrustworthy employees – created a crisis of legibility for the advertiser. In both cases, the sign carriers destroy their employers’ messages by rearranging their bodies into legible new scripts. The cartoons’ punch lines, moreover, are both based upon initial acts of misreading on the part of the proprietors, who have misjudged their employees’ characters and their willingness to transform themselves into commercial signage. Importantly, it is not just the letter carriers whose identities are tied to printed signs. The advertisers, too, symbolically merge their bodies with textual media. Both merchants appear next to placards that directly mimic their physical shapes. In the case of the Pahloo salesman, a squat, rectangular shop sign hangs above him, announcing the product he represents; a similar one accompanies the bar owner in the following panel. In the Othello cartoon, magazine readers cannot make out the text of the sandwich board that sits beside the theater owner, but in the first panel, his wide-legged stance replicates its triangular tent. This parallel crumbles when his men return, and the manager loses his composure, his props, and control of his dog.

Pahloo and Othello were different products and carried different connotations of social class, but they shared something important: they were both tied to a mid-nineteenth-century America of lung remedies and Shakespeare for the masses, whose most effective and notorious advertising expert was found in the figure of P.T Barnum. Though regarded with skepticism, Pamela Walker Laird writes that through the 1870s, “entertainers and medicine sellers also set the standards for color and liveliness in visual

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222 Frank Presbrey, The History and Development of Advertising (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1929), chapter 25. See also Herbert L. Willett, “The Barnum Principle in Advertising,” Mahin’s Magazine 1, no. 5 (August, 1902): 19-23. Willett coined several terms to commemorate Barnum’s influence on the advertising trade: “The ‘Barnum Principle’ is illustrated whenever a man announces his business in such a way as to purposely deceive the public. Whatever savors of humbug is an application of the ‘Barnumizing’ methods” (20).
style” in advertising. “Conversely, by the end of the century, they set standards against which all advertisers were judged.” 223 Human advertisements had been part of the urban marketplace for centuries, and city goers were accustomed to greetings from street criers and “signs with emblems but no lettering,” two popular ways of announcing one’s trade since antiquity. 224 In the coming years, though, the modern advertising profession would aim to replace these media – spoken words unattached to signs, and signs without words – with a reliance on “printer’s ink,” a common term for printed publicity, especially periodical advertising.

In magazines like *Life* or *Puck*, these cartoons may have generated a quick laugh from everyday readers. When reprinted for a professional audience in *Printers’ Ink*, however, they served both comic and cautionary functions. The trade journal had been established by George P. Rowell just three years before Barnum’s death, and it represented an effort to distance advertising from his legacy. Rowell, an advertising agent in the era of space brokerage, had already made an impact on the profession by helping to reorient agents toward serving advertising clients, rather than publishers. His newspaper directory, established in 1869, aimed to disseminate honest circulation figures, combatting publishers’ tendency to inflate their readerships in order to raise rates. 225 As a trailblazer for other periodicals dedicated to advertising, “The young but precocious *Printers’ Ink* trained its readers in the writing of advertisements, and it told this or that business why it should advertise and how it should go about it.” 226 The magazine included articles about abstract principles as well as examples from specific campaigns;

columns of advice and criticism; questions from readers; reports on trends and events of interest to ad men; and poems, cartoons, and other short pieces.

Through the reprinted Pahloo and Othello cartoons, advertisers were invited to scoff at the two clueless proprietors and their unproductive schemes, but they were also reminded about the uncertainties of their own publicity efforts. The message these cartoons imparted to readers of Printers’ Ink concerned new relationships being forged between men, letters, and advertised products. These hypothetical, laughable campaigns both fell somewhere between door-to-door salesmanship and true mass publicity. As envisioned by Nathaniel Fowler, the alphabetic procession combined the draw of personal contact with the reassuring consistency of the written sign. Oral selling, some argued, was both inefficient and unreliable because it depended on unique connections between individuals. In theory, men marching through the streets with letters attached to their bodies would have engaged more customers than a salesman courting households one at a time. And had they maintained their order, their letters would have merged to offer a unified message, even as their bodies remained distinct. Instead, these sketches demonstrated the challenge of reconciling individual and mass appeals, and the danger of distributing control without also demanding direct accountability. Magazine readers were invited to compare the initial ads to their rewritten forms. Left to their imagination were the intermediate states of complete disorder and illegibility that would have greeted potential customers sharing the street with the drunken and disgruntled human signs.

Sandwich Men

The popularity and status of antiquated advertising practices deteriorated as more merchants and manufacturers turned to print to connect with consumers, but street selling
practices never fell into total disuse. In a recent article in *Advertising & Society Review*, Susan McFarlane-Alvarez analyzes the persistence of “human billboarding,” her term for a range of advertising techniques, from face painting to choreographed public performances, that use the body as a canvas for branding. Below, I examine several turn-of-the-century examples of schemes that similarly “transcend the boundary between human form and advertisement.”

The standard for human billboards had long been the sandwich man, who walked through the streets displaying boards over the front and back of his body. *Printers’ Ink* reported on some deviations, like the “woman sandwich man” from Boston, and Chester, a dog who walked through Baltimore “with dignity, wearing a hat on his head, spectacles on nose, a pipe clenched between his teeth and bearing a large advertising sign on his back.” More often, though, the sandwich man was described as an aesthetically and socially deplorable nuisance, especially by those removed from the business of selling. In 1899, a Chicago police captain declared that “walking ads must go,” objecting to the gaudy dress of sandwich men “and other monstrosities in human shape.” An editorial in *Current Literature* called for a boycott of offensive advertising methods, like painting logos on private houses; it called the use

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228 “A Woman Sandwich Man,” *Printers’ Ink* 28, no. 1 (July 5, 1899): 8. This article originally appeared in the *Worcester Spy*.

229 “A Dog as a Banner Packer,” *Printers’ Ink* 30, no. 12 (March 21, 1900): 45. This article originally appeared in the *Baltimore American*.


of sandwich men “a degradation of humanity as offensive to the conscience as it is to the eye.”

Many advertisers seemed less worried about the poor taste of using sandwich men than with their effectiveness. Two particular concerns surface in the trade literature. First, contrary to the objections cited above, advertisers feared that sandwich men were did not receive enough attention but got lost in the crowd, especially on busy streets like Manhattan’s Broadway. In response to the fear that the traditional sandwich man had become “too tame,” they devised ways to make their sign carriers more aggressively visible. One article in Printers’ Ink included instructions for outfitting a stilt walker who could tower above the crowd and “attract more attention than fifty ‘sandwich men.’” At a county fair he is worth more than a whole page in a newspaper.”

Another common strategy was to put the sign carriers in costumes for characters like the “Indian,” the “Rube,” and Uncle Sam.

This did not guarantee better results than the old-fashioned sandwich man, however. A puzzle by Sam Loyd appeared in newspapers in 1904, turning the chaos of the Pahloo and Othello cartoons into a game for readers who were familiar with the joke of the discombobulated sandwich man. A line of seven bedraggled figures, some seemingly in costume and others drawn as African American and Asian, stand in front of a city skyline. This time, instead of providing both the “before” and “after” arrangements, readers are presented only with the mixed-up message and invited to decode its original

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232 “A Boycott in the Name of Art,” Current Literature 23, no. 5 (May 1898): 388. This article was reprinted in Printers’ Ink.
234 “Chicago Monstrosities,” Printers’ Ink 25, no. 3 (October 19, 1898): 49.
235 Sam Loyd, “Puzzling Sandwich Men,” Indianapolis Journal, February 14, 1904. This puzzle’s racial caricatures would be heightened further when it was adapted for newspapers in 1913, printed in a section called “Something for the Little Ones” with Loyd’s name no longer attached. See “Puzzle of Sandwich Men,” Donaldsonville Chief (Donaldsonville, LA), August 2, 1913.
order. Perhaps to make the puzzle easier to solve, the men carry signs showing pairs of letters, one on top of the other, which can be re-sorted to spell “Big Show Tonight” (Figure 4).

Below the illustration, a note to readers asks: “What are these sandwich men advertising? When they were sent out, they were walking in proper order and the letters spelled a plain announcement. But they got to talking and this is the mixed up result.”

Here, the puzzle articulates a second common fear among advertisers who used sandwich men and other human advertisements in the early 1900s: that they might become unruly when they

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236 Loyd, “Puzzling Sandwich Men,” 2. Emphasis is mine.
associated with one another. They might shed their signs and head to the nearest saloon, as in the Pahloo cartoon, or simply meet on the street and walk together.

The final section of a 1911 cartoon, drawn in a style similar to both Pahloo and *Othello*, displays this risk (Figure 5). It differs from the others by playing with the arrangement of words, rather than letters. The sandwich men are depicted as slovenly and smoking, but their only offense seems to be meeting one another on the street. A side-by-side stroll was enough to undo their manager’s message.

![Figure 5. Scoots’ Scheme Spoiled](image)


Sharing territory and organizing travel routes was a concern for sandwich men, as well as for proprietors. In some cases sandwich men formed unions, though the practice was better established in England than in the United States. American sandwich men
typically organized in less formal ways, mainly to avoid “seriously interfering with one another.” In 1898, the New York Evening Telegram reported on an ad-hoc meeting attended by known characters, including “Irish Pat,” “Sheeny Mike,” and “Dawdling Timothy.” The immediate concern was race: having “patiently” worked alongside “negroes masquerading as American Indians,” the group now rejected an Italian man who had recently taken to the streets, fearing that the entry of more “Oitalians” would suppress wages. The newcomer was treated to jeers and to physical jostling on the streets, but countered cheerfully with a new sign and a new scheme for attracting attention: a large clock attached to his belt so that passersby might check the time on him. His fellow sandwich men regarded this as his final offense and ended the meeting promising to organize a union, though it is unclear whether they pursued that plan.237

Banner Packers

Leading up to 1900, urban advertisers continued to seek ways to make their walking ads more visible and more reliable. Alongside costumed characters and stilt walkers, a more pitiful class of sign holder emerged in the “banner packer.” Referred to in the New York Sun as “human failures who carry signs about the streets,” these men reported to a foreman each morning, who locked them into a cage-like metal vests. The apparatus had a pole extending from the back to display an advertisement above their heads (Figure 6). The foreman sent them off along separate routes with an order: “No talking.”238


238 “Woes of Banner Packers,” Sun (New York), October 22, 1899.
The locked cages were considered necessary to prevent banner packers from shedding their signs as soon as they were out of sight. At mid-day, they reported back to the foreman, who released them from their vests for a lunch break. Up to 1,500 men, mostly middle-aged and older, worked in this type of advertising at the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{239} It was physically taxing, sometimes humiliating work, as described by \textit{The Sun}’s anonymous narrator: “We are outcasts, pariahs. We come from all classes, the highest as well as the lowest, but all of us are united on one common plane, and that is hopeless incompetency. We’re the failures, the social wrecks, whom your business man

\textsuperscript{239} 1,500 is the figure reported in “Woes of Banner Packers” (this article was reprinted in several newspapers and in \textit{Printers’ Ink}). A report published by the American Statistical Association gave a more modest estimate of between 1,000 and 1,200 banner packers, though its author assumes them to be identical to sandwich men. See Sidney A. Sherman, “Advertising in the United States,” \textit{Publications of the American Statistical Association} 7, no. 52 (December 1900): 10.
scans askance and passes on as beyond the pale of commercial recognition.” Banner packers were so deprived of “commercial recognition” that more than one account compared them to prisoners and even chattel slaves.

In 1900, the same year as *The Sun* published its portrait of the abject banner packer, a story written by Constance Cary Harrison for *The Saturday Evening Post* offered a more sympathetic, if still pitiful, representation. Harrison’s protagonist in “The Banner Bearer” is a Confederate Colonel during the Civil War who earned his title “because of an unusually gallant and daring act in the recapture of a certain battle-flag.” From this honorable beginning as a proud banner bearer, Colonel Fleming succumbs first to alcohol, and then, once rehabilitated, to the schemes of a dishonest daughter-in-law. The Virginian eventually finds himself on the streets of New York, where he begins working as a different sort of banner bearer – one who carries advertising on his back. “But why do they lock you in?” the aging Colonel asks a fellow vagabond, who explains to him the hardships of the work: “It ain’t play, carrying that apparatus in a stiff wind, I tell you. The old sandwich board was a forty-dollar overcoat compared to it. But the folks in a crowd sees a sign on the banner lots better than they used to on the boards.” His companion warns him that when secured in the cage and wandering the streets, “you’re as bad as a galley-slave, an’ ‘bout as lonesome.”

“The Banner Bearer” is not so much concerned with reading of textual signs – Harrison only mentions that the Colonel advertises “‘Somebody’s’ shoes” – but with reading people through their outward appearances. The story’s climax comes on the day

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240 “Woes of Banner Packers.”
of a veterans’ parade. Amidst jostles and jeers, Colonel Fleming stops along his route to give the procession an officer’s salute. Being locked into the banner packer’s cage and displaying his gaudy sign, however, the Colonel is no longer someone with the right to make such a gesture. A policeman first orders him to stand back, and then, as further punishment, the crowd attacks him, knocking him out and breaking his collarbone. The Colonel remains suffering and trapped in his cage, and although an empathetic doctor struggles to release him, “the wearer could no more get out of it without the owner’s key than a criminal prisoner can free himself of shackles.” Throughout the ordeal, the only person to remain calm is the stunned Colonel himself.\footnote{Harrison, “The Banner Bearer, Part 2,” 8.}

Unbeknownst to Colonel Fleming, his newlywed granddaughter Jinny and her husband had witnessed both the attack and his painful transfer into the ambulance, having decided to travel to New York for their honeymoon with hopes of tracking him down. Just as the banner packer slid beyond “commercial recognition,” however, he was unrecognizable to his own family in his current state. In fact, in Harrison’s story it is not Jinny who finally identifies her grandfather, but her new husband, Lionel. Haunted by the events he witnessed on the street and especially by the expression on the banner packer’s face, Lionel tells Jinny that he wants to visit the old man in the hospital that night. Jinny readies herself for bed, and “as she now glanced toward him the light from the electric lamp on the table brought out the tired look in her eyes.” This familiar expression is the key to reuniting Jinny and her grandfather, though it depends wholly on Lionel, an outsider, to interpret the family resemblance: “He stopped short in his speech, almost choked by the conviction that overtook him!” Able to read his wife’s face, he understands its correspondence to the Colonel’s, and Lionel is able to bring the family together before
the old man dies. Just before passing, the Colonel directs his final words to Lionel, not Jinny, murmuring about his first experiences as a banner bearer: “That was life!”

“Life,” for the Colonel, was the honor and danger of battle and the opposite of his time walking the streets to promote shoes. In Lionel, he had found an outsider who was able to read beyond his status as an advertising sign, and who had both the will and the authority to reconcile his long-broken family.

Racial Outsiders

In November of 1894, the same year it reprinted the Pahloo and Othello cartoons, Printers’ Ink featured yet another example alphabetical mischief, this time at the expense of a tea seller named “Ching.” Like the Pahloo and Othello sketches printed a few months earlier, Figure 7 reveals the risks to advertisers of sending their messages out into the world unattended. Within minutes, Ching finds his announcement for “Star Tea” converted into an invitation for passers-by to “Eat Rats.”

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244 Harrison, “The Banner Bearer, Part 2,” 8. Emphasis is original.
Despite its similar logic, several elements of this cartoon distinguish it from the previous examples in this chapter. In this case, letters label separate containers of tea rather than separate human beings. Their rearrangement is not orchestrated by a series of men, but by a single intervening trickster: the young “Melican bloy” who, in the first panel looks out at the reader, and in the second, watches Ching as he reacts to his tampered-with sign.

The most pronounced difference between this and the other cartoons, though, lies in the relationship it posits between advertisers, letters, and magazine readers.
The “Star Tea” sketch does not attach letters to men hired to display them. Instead, it associates the trouble caused by letters to a single man, himself marked as ethnically and linguistically different from the prankster, the shopper, and the reader. The small signs that Ching has lodged into his Star Teas appear to be supplementary labels, since each box already displays a distinctive squiggle on its side, representing a character equally indecipherable to English-speaking shoppers and Harper’s magazine readers. True to the phonetic Roman alphabet and unlike Chinese ideograms, the individual letters that spell out “Star Tea” do not seem to bear any inherent relationship to the teas they label (i.e., “S” does not denote any particular kind of tea). Instead, they represent Ching’s attempt to translate his business as a whole to prospective “Melican” shoppers. As a mediator between Chinese teas and American consumers, however, they fail definitively.

Ching’s trouble stems in part from the tempting anagram he provides as raw material; this much, he shares with the peddlers of Pahloo and Othello. But his particular misadventures depend far more on his status as a racial outsider – one whose character is not misrepresented, but rather, the cartoon argues, represented perfectly through the mangled advertising message. While the stout Pahloo and wide-legged Othello advertisers both bear a certain physical resemblance to their stationary signboards, Ching’s identity merges with his tea labels through a different set of associations. His posture does not need to reference the physical shape of his signage, in part because Ching is already, through his clothing and hairstyle, a signboard himself, easily legible as non-American. Comparing him to the fourth sandwich man in Sam Loyd’s puzzle confirms his status as a caricature.
The cartoon cements Ching’s status as an outsider by including his verbal narrative of events, something that the authors of the Pahloo and Othello sketches both found unnecessary. The quotes below each illustration demonstrate Ching’s failure to communicate even more persuasively than the rearranged placards. Even when his words are faithfully represented (as the bizarre phonetics imply), they are barely intelligible. Though Ching hopes to “avlertisee alleee samee Melicans,” it becomes clear that literacy, represented by his initial, correct arrangement of letters of “Star Tea,” will not grant him access to the economic or social benefits of citizenship. The American boy does not so much “spoilee advlertisement” as reveal Ching’s English literacy as a sham, not only because it can be so easily dismantled but because, the cartoon suggests, it did not accurately represent him and his words to begin with. Ching, whose messages are already and necessarily misspelled and misspoken, embodies everything that true print advertising is not.

The message contrasting Ching’s work to print advertising was reinforced further by this cartoon’s position in the pages of Harper’s Weekly. Placed in the top left corner of a page otherwise filled with advertising material, it prefaced the notices that followed, if one were to read from left to right and top to bottom. This inverted the before-and-after logic of the cartoon itself: first, readers would encounter Ching and his misfortunes, and then they would see what real advertisements, for recognizable brand products like Royal Baking Powder and W.L. Douglas’s shoes, looked like.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ This placement distinguishes “Star Tea” from the other cartoons reprinted by Printers’ Ink. In Puck, the Pahloo sequence was also printed amidst advertisements, though to different effect. Its first two images appeared in the center of page 380, flanked by smaller ads, but readers found the final panel at the bottom of the following page. This placement (central, yet broken) encouraged audiences to skip much of the advertising material to reach the punch line – in keeping with Puck’s sartorial bent, and undermining thorough, linear consumption of the paper’s ad section. The Othello cartoon in Life was displayed more curiously: detached from the magazine’s advertisements, it appeared alongside other jokes and vignettes but
Prioritizing Print

Growth of Periodicals

Pamela Walker Laird identifies the 1870s as the decade of street selling’s last hurrah, but she writes that until the 1890s, the advertising landscape remained largely up for grabs, with no one medium poised to dominate. Shortly thereafter, advertising’s momentum began shifting to favor periodical media and agency control. In the 1890s, articles written for both advertisers and general audiences commented upon this trend. The New York Times, for instance, claimed that replacing personal selling with printed advertisements was the secret to success in the world of patent medicines: “A pot of printer’s ink is better than the greatest gold mine ever discovered.” The Times also printed a short poem recounting the trials of a merchant new to advertising. After first turning to handbills, circulars, and a street crier who only served to drive customers away, the narrator finally found his “Road to Success” in the daily newspaper: “At last I tried the papers / The Times, Post, Herald too / The ad. men came and wrote me up— / They taught me something new.” A 1900 report of the American Statistical Association (ASA) confirmed the growing popularity of newspapers and magazines for ads, noting on its first page that “the periodical press overshadows all over mediums of advertising.”

was printed vertically, so that readers had to turn the page ninety degrees in order to read it. Harper’s Weekly, in contrast, not only placed “Star Tea” among printed advertisements, but arranged the page in a manner that I would argue offered printed advertising as a potential solution to the chaos of salesmanship more deliberately than either the Pahloo or Othello cartoons.

Rapid growth in both the number and coverage of periodicals in the late 1800s meant that they would serve as advertising’s primary vehicles well into the twentieth century. Newspapers specialized in local, timely offerings, while magazines, with the help of second-class postage rates, could offer wider geographic access for national campaigns. The price drop of three popular monthlies in 1893 ensured that many households could now afford to purchase one or more titles offered at ten cents per issue. It also meant that middle-class magazines, including Munsey’s, McClure’s, and Ladies’ Home Journal, depended on ad revenues to support their low cover prices. As a result, the proportion of advertising to editorial material increased dramatically. The ASA included some figures in its 1900 report. Harper’s Monthly had introduced just over three pages of advertising (eleven ads total) in its July 1864 issue. From this debut, the amount of paid publicity in Harper’s grew to over eleven pages (62 ads) by 1885, and to 110 pages (294 ads) by 1900. Sidney Sherman, author of the ASA report, did not decry the trend but wrote instead, “The advertising pages have become as attractive as the literary portion. It is a commonplace, not much exaggerating the fact, that ‘everybody reads the advertisements first.’”

As periodical advertising expanded in the last years of the nineteenth century, it also significantly changed form. Advances in printing technology made it easier both to reproduce images and to integrate them with type. While the options remained more limited for newspapers, magazines invited larger and more decorative notices that broke the rigid grid of editorial copy. In February of 1894, the Curtis Publishing Company announced that its most popular magazine, Ladies’ Home Journal, would discontinue its

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small “reading notices” and henceforth accept only display advertising. To create of these larger and more sophisticated ads, agencies hired new specialists in graphic design and courted artists who had previously rejected advertising work. Earnest Elmo Calkins was one of the most vocal ad men regarding the legitimacy of commercial art. With the newly-refined process of printing halftones, photography also “invaded” the ad pages of magazines. Once excluded altogether or relegated to unobtrusive spaces at the bottom of editorial columns and the back of issues, advertisements became aesthetically more prominent in ways that mirrored their financial pull.

Printed Salesmanship

Securing words in print offered advertisers far greater reach than sandwich men or any other form of human advertisement. Surprisingly, perhaps, it also promised closer ties between producers and consumers. Manufacturers, whose previous communication with customers had been mediated by wholesalers, distributors, and retailers, were eager to rid those connections of middle men. Traveling drummers could be disorganized and unreliable, and the jobbers who distributed goods to retailers had few qualms about substituting one company’s product for another’s. To succeed in selling their brand-name products in consumer-sized packages, rather than generic goods in bulk, manufacturers needed consumers to be able to recognize, and demand, their specific brands. Graphic logos became one important tool for building this trust.

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251 Brown, Corporate Eye, 163. Other works that focus on the design and illustration of advertisements in this era include Bogart, Advertising and the Borders of Art and Thomson, Origins of Graphic Design in America.
copy likewise played a key role in building relationships between customers and products. “Only the printer's ink can bridge the distance, and bring the producer and consumer into relations of intimacy,” wrote a columnist for *The Inland Printer* in 1890.\(^{254}\)

Printed advertising, then, aspired toward competing ideals, on the one hand offering more possibilities for standardization than oral selling, and on the other, promising to build intimacy between customers and firms. The ideal of a message that could convey its author’s thoughts without betraying any personality of its own was one that print seemed poised to offer, but, for better or worse, repeatedly failed to deliver. In their 1915 advertising textbook, for instance, Harry Tipper and his co-authors argued that the public was rightfully suspicious of older methods of oral publicity, which could be “influenced by personal idiosyncrasies, and the fluctuating value which accrues from contact with an individual in a personal way.” “Personal” is the watchword here: quirks jeopardized sales revenues. By contrast, they maintained that “the first impression of any written or printed word is that it speaks truthfully,” its meaning “not altered or influenced by inflections and intonations.”\(^{255}\) They made no distinction between letters printed from type and those drawn by hand. Both could be endlessly copied through electrotypes, and both presumably reached consumers in ways less personal than the salesman.

Even as Tipper announced his trust in the authority of print, however, he attributed several human characteristics to published texts. The first was the ability to

\(^{254}\) E.F. Harris, “Random Thoughts on Trade and Advertising,” *Inland Printer* 8, no.3 (December 1890): 202.

\(^{255}\) Tipper et al., *Principles of Advertising*, 13-14. Hereafter, I refer to “Tipper,” as he is listed as the book’s lead author. As a textbook, *The Principles of Advertising* certainly depended upon printed text’s ability to transfer its author’s message without interference. Though intended primarily for classroom use, it also lent itself for individual study. The 1920 edition contained an appendix of review questions; the appendix was removed for the 1925 edition, but each of its thirty-three chapters ended with a hands-on assignment or experiment to be completed by the student.
make a good “first impression.” These impressions worked physically and visually, on both paper and people: letters were stamped, or impressed upon the page, and audiences were impressed by the texts they encountered. Back in 1892, John Wanamaker’s advertising manager Manly Gillam had similarly written that a good ad “dents the reader’s mind with the idea.” 256 According to Tipper, the very existence of an idea in print was enough to establish a sense of trust, which readers then had to work to displace: “The tendency of the public, in general, is to credit the printed word with almost a full measure of belief. It is only after considerable reasoning that suspicion may enter in and change this condition.” 257 Initial beliefs could be changed, then, but only through active effort. “Personal idiosyncrasies” now belonged not to the salesman, but to those readers who possessed the time and will to analyze an ad with care. In most cases, initial assumptions about the integrity of the printed word would go unchallenged, and therefore help to sell goods.

In addition to their visual impact, printed advertisements gained another, invisible sort of vitality through the voices writers imagined them to carry. Good first impressions maintained their pull by presenting ads that “spoke” in sincere but neutral tones. In 1891, an article in Printers’ Ink offered the following advice to advertisers who wished to write their own copy: “To be universally understood you must talk plainly, lucidly, simply, and you should write your advertisements in the same way — you are talking still though printers’ ink.” 258 Charles Austin Bates also believed that “an advertisement should be a solidified ‘talk.’” 259 This was the ideal of “salesmanship in print,” the idea that the

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printed advertisement served as a proxy for the absent salesman. One ad “writer” took the idea so far as to dictate all of his copy to a stenographer or phonograph so that it could present “an unadulterated, undiluted version of him.” When voices turned into letters, the size and style of advertising print ideally matched its author’s intended tone and volume of address. “Our words on paper,” wrote another author in 1914, “must look as natural and as sincere as these same words sound when spoken with all warmth and expression of the voice.” Interestingly, the voice-to-page transcription worked both ways for Charles Austin Bates, who also used the language of print to describe his own speech: “If I saw a man on the street to whom I wished to talk I would call to him in at least a two-line pica tone of voice, and after I had him by the button-hole, I would say what I had to say, clearly and distinctly, in plain pica old-style.” The goal of all of these substitutions, from voices to letters and occasionally back again, was to produce a reliable appeal that captured some elements of the older advertising talk while exerting control over the style in which it was delivered.

Most writers and designers preferred their ads to display some liveliness, but at least before 1920, it was well-written copy that gave most ads their “excuse for living.”

This kind of biological language continually crept into discussions of advertising,

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260 Brown, Corporate Eye, 165.
263 Bates, “The Value of Display,” 603. “Pica” is a standard unit of type measurement equal to 1/6 of an inch, or twelve points. “Old-style” referred to Roman type. Distinguished from modern Roman faces like Bodoni, the letterforms of old-style Romans were made up of strokes of relatively uniform width, and possessed angled serifs that resembled those of hand-drawn calligraphy. Translated into the language of modern desktop publishing, this quote from Bates goes something like: “I would call to him in at least a twenty-four-point voice, and, after I had him by the button-hole, would say what I had to say, using twelve-point Times New Roman.”
endowing ads with animated, and sometimes unsettling, qualities. In the first decade of
the twentieth century, psychologist Walter Dill Scott observed that “advertisements are
sometimes spoken of as the nervous system of the business world”; he called the page
itself “a living force.” While some ad men anthropomorphized their work with evident
pleasure, others did so to convey a sense of discomfort or disorder. As the first
advertising manager for The Texas Company (known after 1959 as Texaco), Harry
Tipper did not celebrate the organic properties of ads as much as he acknowledged and
hoped to contain them. He seemed aware that the draw of a trustworthy first impression
and a friendly voice could backfire when the design of a printed ad conveyed too much
“personality” of its own. “Every word that goes into print is a representative of the
advertiser, just as much as the salesman,” wrote one Printers’ Ink editor in 1895, as he
cautioned advertisers to select their words with the same care they applied to selecting
their workforce. Regarding the appearance of those words, another writer compared
typography to the salesman’s stature and wardrobe: “A manufacturer should not send out
a little boy to represent him, but a man of commanding presence.”

When critics attacked ads for their modes of expression, they often cast them as
still animate but sub-human. The flipside to Tipper’s neutral, sincere voice was the
“freakish” ad that accosted readers with “shrieky arrangements” and “screeching
typography.” Instead of delivering the writer’s message clearly, these designs distorted

265 Walter Dill Scott, The Psychology of Advertising: A Simple Exposition of the Basic Problems of
Psychology in their Relation to Successful Advertising (Boston, M.A.: Small, Maynard, and Company,
1903), 72, 226-227. The “nervous system” metaphor gained a broader audience when reprinted in The
Atlantic Monthly in January 1904.
266 Walter W. Brett, “Magazine and Trade Paper Advertising,” Printers’ Ink 12, no. 6 (February 6, 1895):
56.
268 Farrar, Typography of Advertisements that Pay, 249; Henry Lewis Bullein, “The Psychology of Printing
the individual voice into a scream by displaying it in an ostentatious typeface, or else buried it within “a crowd in which one-fourth of the people are trying to speak at once.”269 In her book Sideshow U.S.A., Rachel Adams argues that while freak shows assume freakishness to be an inherent quality, it is, rather, historically resonant and variable, a form of performance that depends on gesture, costume, and other visual cues. These performances repeatedly refuse to reveal their interior truth. Yet, “while the components of freakishness change with time, the centrality of the body remains a constant and determining feature.”270 Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century freak shows relied on sensational advertising to draw customers to view the bodies on display. Advertising’s “freaks,” meanwhile, were the bodies themselves, built from outrageous designs that alienated readers. They not only unraveled the message of a given writer or client, but punctured the authority of printed advertising as a whole, revealing its appearance to be no more trustworthy than that of the cartoon sandwich men.

(Printers’ Ink)

Human forms and human voices, along with their freakish distortions, regularly made their way into the pages of Printers’ Ink, particularly in the journal’s early years. In the summer of 1894 – following Pahloo and Othello but before the appearance of the Star Teas cartoon – Printers’ Ink published two ads that fashioned human forms out of pieces of metal type rather than a single illustrated cut. A reader named E.D. Underwood sent in the notice in Figure 8, which depicts a doctor from Harris, Missouri using punctuation, rules, and the ubiquitous pointing hand (waning in popularity, but certainly still owned by many commercial print shops). In his adjoining note, Underwood asked the editors, “Can

269 Farrar, Typography of Advertisements that Pay, 247.
you find [an ad card] more inappropriate?” Their only response was a cheeky headline: “Better than some testimonial pictures.” Just three weeks later, Charles Austin Bates presented another ad from *The Chicago Times* in his column “Advertising for Retailers.” Bates considered the notice in Figure 9 a useful example for merchants who wanted to place eye-catching ads in newspapers that permitted no display (so useful, in fact, that he included it in his 1896 book *Good Advertising*). The reprinted advertisement solved this problem by creating a graphic figure entirely through text. Though not a new strategy, this layout undoubtedly attracted attention via its contrast to surrounding blocks of copy. Meanwhile, the chosen shape (of a man wearing a top hat) sent readers classed and gendered cues about the sort of customer this retailer (a piano store) hoped to attract.

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Both of these newspaper ads cobbled together letters, spaces, and punctuation marks to create words and male figures (Figure 8 represented the advertiser, Figure 9 the customer). The different reception to the two ads might be explained by the ways they called upon type to perform this double representational duty. In Figure 8, letters spell out the name, address, and services offered by the advertiser, but the physician’s body is constructed through ornaments, parentheses, and other non-lettered type. Even if derived from the same font, the text and figure remain conceptually separate, made up of letters and non-letters, respectively. By contrast, the ad in Figure 9 integrates completely its illustrative and narrative content. The very first line of text merges its roles with perfection: as “A MAN” introduces the argument for readers to visit Lyon & Healy’s piano store, it also labels the figure underneath. And despite the ad’s unusual appearance, it uses most type conventionally: letters spell words and the punctuation marks divide
them. In fact, the pieces of type that performed the most radical and decorative work in this ad were blank. Usually found at the end of a line of text, type slugs were redistributed here to encase the text in white space. Without leaving any mark on the page, this rearrangement of blank type allowed the copy to appear as a male silhouette.

*Printers’ Ink* also presented texts that played with spelling and layout, using type to create unusual arrangements that were, with any luck, still readable. Early in 1892, the journal published a poem by H.C. Dodge called “The Drummer.” Dodge sprinkled capital letters throughout his rhyme, which took aim at the old-fashioned salesman, annoying but unflappable:

> You say you don’t want NE thing;
> No PT he displays,
> Then, getting mad, say UL fling
> Him out in KC stays.\(^{273}\)

The letters of this poem represent its human subject as explicitly as the two previous ads described above. In this case, they do so not by lending physical shape to the text, but by calling attention to their own names, as distinct from their phonic equivalents. The capitalized pairs of letters demand to be read by name, rather than for the sounds they denote. Alphabetic reading had been a popular method of instruction from the seventeenth century through the 1820s, when hornbooks and primers taught children to spell letters by name (“a-y” for A, “b-e-e” for B, and so on). For Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, though, the names and spellings of letters had become far less important than their sounds. These readers had to actively decode Dodge’s verses, and quite possibly read the capitalized letters, or even the whole poem, out loud. Such a strategy would have invited *Printers’ Ink*’s readers to process orally a text that, in theory,

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should have been able to communicate silently – ironically mimicking the methods of the drummer who served as Dodge’s target, and whose work they hoped to replace.

From the 1890s through the 1910s, writers and readers of *Printers’ Ink* continually debated the appropriate use of letters, punctuation symbols, and imagery. In general, though, the period saw advertising men grow increasingly leery of visual experiments with text and type. Volumes published in the early 1890s frequently featured attention-getting tactics like phonetic spelling, unusual layouts, and reader puzzles. Even in the journal’s early years, authors generally discouraged what they called “type-torturing,” but they also featured examples that they considered successful exceptions to the rule.274 An 1892 article noted that the rebus form, while “not exactly new,” was experiencing “a considerable vogue of late,” and gave advice for those advertisers who might wish to try such a strategy. The author qualified that these puzzles were popular in “a certain class of publications,” which could be interpreted as an attempt to distance *Printers’ Ink* from such gimmicks, were its own pages not full of examples (Figures 10-11).275 Like the piano and physician ads above, these notices use letters to represent body parts and vice versa. Faces and eyes were especially popular, perhaps because “eye” for “I,” and “nose” for “knows” made such convenient substitutions. Whatever their guiding logic, these examples indicate the willingness of some advertisers to infuse their notices with bodily verve. Letters, like eyes and noses, functioned as parts of a larger whole that gave them meaning, and in the 1890s, ad designers regularly invited linguistic and corporeal elements to swap roles.

275 “Rebus Advertising,” *Printers’ Ink* 6, no. 23 (June 8, 1892): 752.
Over the next two decades, the puzzles and rebuses in *Printers’ Ink* were replaced with advertising that required less work from the reader, and editors discouraged adventurous layouts with far more conviction. Phonetic spellings continued to surface in ads and editorial copy from time to time, validated perhaps by endorsements from men as prominent as Samuel Clemens, Henry Holt, and Theodore Roosevelt. Other peculiarities of text and type, however, came under new critical fire. “Freak” and “freakish” were labels attached with frequency and vehemence to the offending ads. In the autumn of 1906, Harry C. Webster, publisher of the Utica, Missouri *Herald*, wrote to the “Ready-Made” department at *Printers’ Ink*. To his letter, Webster attached a “freak” ad from the St. Louis *Republic*:
Figure 12: Boehmer’s
Source: *Printers’ Ink* 57, no. 7 (November 14, 1906): 46.

While the notice reads from left to right, most of its individual words are spelled backward, requiring them to be read from right to left. The only exceptions are the name of the retailer, its address, and the phrase “See them to-day at” (“them” referred to gentlemen’s shoes, or “eohs rof nemeltneg”). In his letter, Webster called the ad “about the worst yet.” The editor’s response attacked not only the ad, which it called “freakish” and “clownish,” but also Webster for being so diplomatic: “‘About the worst yet’ hardly does justice to the case. Why ‘about’?”

Even in the 1890s, it would be unusual for the writers of *Printers’ Ink* to endorse a ploy like backward spelling. An ad from an Oklahoma grocer, its text set in four different directions, met this response in 1895: “The only good thing about this ad is that it is likely to provoke a smile. I should not think it was calculated to sell goods.” Yet this critic was willing to grant that “in a small town such an advertisement might create some little comment.”

The 1895 notice was silly and ineffective, in other words, but still not the offensive “freak” submitted by Webster roughly ten years later.

The commentary on the ad in Figure 12 did not place direct blame on the printer, but still critiqued his work, and especially his point of view. Most of the words in this

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276 “Ready Made Advertisements,” *Printers’ Ink* 57 no. 7 (November 14, 1906): 46. Emphasis is original.
notice are spelled backward, which both Webster and the unnamed *Printers’ Ink* critic found “freakish.” For compositors who set lines of type by hand, however, backward was their approach to text. In order to print properly, letters needed to be placed in the composing stick in reverse order. Words spelled backward, then, were effectively more “correct” for the typesetter, and experienced printers were practiced in reading letters, words, even entire blocks of type both backward and upside down. The ad Webster mailed to *Printers’ Ink* plays with this ability, and it invites lay readers to adopt a perspective that approximates the printer’s. That both Webster and *Printers’ Ink* responded to suggestion with dismay might indicate that this ad’s offense went beyond its inability to sell shoes, to the work and standpoint of printers themselves.

**Printers’ Advertising Efforts**

Harry Webster might have identified the worst ad yet in 1906, but the staff of *Printers’ Ink* found plenty of other specimens to critique in the years that followed. The journal’s editors generally supported Harry Tipper’s ideal of an ad “spoke” plainly. Advertisements did not “speak” spontaneously, though, and when experiments with typography and arrangement were met with disapproval, it usually came at the printer’s expense. As some of these *Printers’ Ink* specimens suggest, the turn of the twentieth century brought new tensions in relations between the workers responsible for writing advertisements and those who physically produced them. This was due, in large part, to the expanding responsibilities of the advertising agency and the increased value ascribed to copy. Under the business model that had dominated much of the nineteenth century, the authority to endorse a product derived from firsthand knowledge of how it had been

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278 While the St. Louis *Republic* did own a Linotype machine by 1906, its operator, presumably the creator of this ad, would almost certainly have been a skilled hand compositor.
made. Manufacturers created their ads in-house, with company owners often writing their own notices. A printer then produced the ad, and an advertising agent arranged for its placement. Laird describes relations under these conditions as “symbiotic,” since “advertisers’ dependence on printers to produce their messages mirrored the printers’ dependence on them.”

In fact, she argues that the period between 1870 and 1890 saw increased collaboration between advertisers and the job printers who created a diversity of advertising materials for them, including circulars, handbills, and pamphlets. So long as advertising agencies worked primarily as space brokers, printers continued to serve as de facto advisers on both copy and design. As agencies began to coordinate larger, costlier campaigns for manufacturers who sought national recognition, however, they challenged the formerly close ties between printers and their advertising clients.

The printing trade also began to fracture in the late 1800s, partially due to increased competition for advertising contracts. Job printers continued to create commissioned work for clients, usually on a small scale, and some began specializing in color lithography and lavish poster work. Periodical publishers, meanwhile, drew advertisers by arguing that ads placed in their newspapers and magazines were ones that the public wished to see, because they shared space with editorial material readers had already selected. By contrast, the handbills and circulars produced by job printers were unsolicited and sometimes unwelcome. Publishers also promised contact with much larger audiences than job printers could hope to reach, aided by the invention of Ottmar Mergenthaler’s Linotype machine. The Linotype effectively replaced the cumbersome

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279 Laird, Advertising Progress, 71.
280 Laird, Advertising Progress, 260.
work of setting type by hand by casting entire “lines of type” with just a few keystrokes. Once printed, the metal slugs could be melted down and recast, eliminating the need to keep cases upon cases of type on hand.\(^{282}\) The Linotype made its debut in the printing office of *The New York Tribune* in 1886. Criticized by some for its print quality and feared by others for its uncanny ability to eliminate skilled workers, it nevertheless became an essential tool for the newspaper industry, just as the printing of most advertising material shifted hands from independent job printers to the publishers of periodical literature.

Printers frequently came under fire in the pages of *Printers’ Ink*, with authors often failing to distinguish between the different types of print shops and the different workers within them. Instead, the generic “printer” became a target of disdain from a new group of “ad men” who were employed by agencies to conceive premises and write copy. Writers and readers of *Printers’ Ink* were particularly critical of the advertisements that printers composed for themselves, complaining that they used too many different styles of type and lacked any narrative or argument. An 1895 column began by stating that “some of the funniest advertisements are those of printers.”\(^{283}\) Another piece, entitled simply “What is the Matter with the Printer?” called their ad work “undoubtedly the worst ever…. usually a feat of fancy rule-work, with some vaudeville skit for argument.”\(^{284}\) This author’s quip betrays how some attacks merged a sense of class superiority with something more visceral: vaudeville’s live burlesques and buffooneries

\(^{282}\) Another invention of the 1880s, Tolbert Lanston’s Monotype machine, also allowed type to be cast on site. Book publishers came to favor the Monotype, which, while less efficient than the Linotype, allowed for easier editing and could print non-Roman alphabets. For more on the impact of the Linotype and Monotype machines, see chapter 4.

\(^{283}\) “Retail Advertising.” 39.

\(^{284}\) “What is the Matter with the Printer?” *Printers’ Ink* 57, no. 13 (December 26, 1906): 3.
strayed far from the transparent ideal of printed salesmanship. Critiques of printers’ unsophisticated arguments and aesthetically reprehensible designs regularly constructed them as copywriters’ grotesque other halves. The magazine’s “Ready-Made” department issued this backhanded defense of the profession to an angry copywriter in 1907: “I don’t think any more of printers than you do, but every now and then you do find one with almost human intelligence.” Just as a layout might be “freakish,” the worker responsible for its creation could be something less than fully human.

There were several reasons for the communication gap that existed between copywriters and printers. Given their history of serving as advisors to advertisers, some printers had trouble regarding advertising as a profession distinct from their own. In The Inland Printer, the leading trade journal for printers, one author wrote in 1892, “I know a great many printers will laugh at their having to ‘learn’ anything about advertising…. They are surprised to find that advertising may be considered very a complicated and exact art, or perhaps one might almost say exact science.” Stressing the close historical bond between printers and advertisers, the author ended his article with a plea to his colleagues: “study advertising.” Another writer urged his fellow printers to approach advertisements with deference, and even a bit of fear, “for when he advertises, he is bound to drive his business — one way or the other. He will either give it a good push onward, or he will drive it into the ground. Advertising is a power, be careful with it. Treat it with as much respect as you do a dynamo.”

Printers, however, particularly those who ran their own shops, resisted advertising’s aura and the idea that professional ad men had much to offer them. Many

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285 “Ready-Made Advertisements,” Printers’ Ink 59, no. 5 (May 1, 1907): 44. Emphasis is original.
did not seek the services of a copywriter, or even write their own copy, per se. Instead, they treated advertising space like a severely abridged catalog, filling the page with the variety of types, ornaments, and inks they could offer clients. Printers proudly valued their ability to produce their own publicity, rather than turning their work over to outsiders, as a copywriter was required to do. “There is a certain gratification to the printer when he can plan and print his own advertising,” wrote an Inland Printer columnist in 1900, responding to a printer who boasted of his own success as an advertiser.²⁸⁸

Printers also maintained a different relationship to the written word – as a representative of their services – than did writers, account managers, and other agency employees. Someone selling shoes or soap might struggle to select the right words and images to represent their product, which physically existed somewhere off the page and out of sight of the reader. A printer’s advertisement, by contrast, stood as its own specimen. It was not the advertised product, any more than the advertised shoe or soap was the actual object for sale, but it shared the means of production, and possibly even the material form, of the work it was designed to solicit. When read by prospective clients, it instantly became an ad for another ad – one that the reader could commission. This future product might even use the same letters and ornaments currently displayed for them on the page. Like the Pahloo men who rechristened themselves “Hoopla,” or Ching’s sign, which came to label him as a rat eater, advertising printers offered – by definition, not prank or accident – to rearrange their work into something new. After an electrotype was made of the original advertisement, its letters could be removed and reset in future designs. If no permanent plate was created, the original work would be lost –

²⁸⁸ A. Printer, “Advertising for Printers,” Inland Printer 24, no. 3 (January 1900): 603.
dismembered and recirculated to form new texts (though also with the possibility of being rebuilt, if the printer repeated his labor).

This physical yet temporary attachment to advertising represented a wholly different approach to letters than that of the copywriter. Professional ad writers, Harry Tipper suggested, distinguished their work from the cartoon sign-holders and the drummer of Mr. Dodge’s poem by valuing print for its efficiency and reliability. Their goal was not to draw attention to individual letters, but rather to encourage them to disappear before the reader in favor of the agent’s message, which could then “speak truthfully” about the advertised product or service. The printer who directly handled types, on the other hand, was “more than likely to be carried away by his appreciation of the mechanical effects accompanying certain kinds of typography,” according to F.J. Trezise, an instructor for the Inland Printer Technical School. By calling attention to letters as the decorative units of their trade, printers revealed Tipper’s fantasy of print as a simple and perfect conduit as bogus. The formal elements of their own ads served a different symbolic function: instead of transferring meaning to some other advertised item, letters retained their status as letters to refer to themselves. After all, those very same pieces of metal type might be used to create a new ad on behalf of the reader. For those copywriters who aimed to carry readers’ thoughts off the page and toward a new pair of shoes or bar of soap, the printer’s ad, which never escaped its own printedness, was understandably foreign.

“It is difficult for one who enjoys a good bit of printing for the printing’s sake to know just how the average man is going to treat a given specimen of printing,” wrote one

Inland Printer columnist in 1900.\textsuperscript{290} Seemingly aware of how many printers’ publicity strategies alienated rather than attracted outsiders to the profession, the journal began in the 1890s to devote regular attention to the topic. In 1895, The Inland Printer published a “Short Dissertation on Advertising,” which advised printers to adopt the copywriter’s method: “Tell them rather something about what you have to sell – tell them why it is to their interest to buy. In short, when you advertise, say something.”\textsuperscript{291} A recommendation to “say something” might have struck other aspiring advertisers as obvious, but it responded to the needs and habits of printers who might have otherwise treated ad pages simply as spaces for exhibition. These instructions encouraged fellow printers to claim a voice, but through a bizarre kind of ventriloquism: using their own type, they had to describe and persuade, rather than simply display. They had to talk like ad men.

Not all advice was delivered, or indeed received, so humbly by readers of The Inland Printer. In 1899, the journal debuted a regular column called “Advertising for Printers,” which, like Printers’ Ink, invited readers to mail in samples of their own work for comment. In response, A.L. Stonecypher of Omaha, Nebraska submitted “a bundle of house advertising I have ‘perpetrated’” along with this introduction: “I am one of that class of printers – and business men – who boast that they ‘write their own ads.’ And I imagine that if other men had written their own ads, as well, that there would have been fewer bankruptcies during the last few years.” If Mr. Stonecypher seemed (genuinely?) tentative about his status as a “writer,” which he placed in quotation marks, he was nevertheless confident about his financial success, achieved in part through effective

\textsuperscript{290} F.F. Helmer, “Advertising for Printers,” Inland Printer 26, no. 3 (December 1900): 488. Emphasis is original.
\textsuperscript{291} “A Short Dissertation on Advertising,” Inland Printer 16, no.1 (October, 1895): 119. Emphasis is original.
advertising. The *Inland Printer* columnist agreed that that the ads were good, but “with
the one fault of saying a little too much.” Stonecypher apparently followed the
magazine’s dissertation on advertising to excess, demonstrating the difficulty of striking
the right balance in sales copy. Whether reluctant to say something or prone to saying too
much, turn-of-the-century printers struggled to speak comfortably in print.

**Class Divisions: Mechanics and Brain Workers**

While printers received advice about how to promote their business through
metaphors of immaterial speech, ad writers were correspondingly coached to better
understand the physical aspects of the texts they composed. An article in the inaugural
issue of *Profitable Advertising*, published in 1891, still maintained that an advertising
agent could be a “middle man” who “simply follows definite instructions. He does not
originate schemes, he does not write advertisements, but simply does what he is told.” In
sum: “not an architect, but a mechanic.” By the time Gilbert Farrar published his 1917
manual *The Typography of Advertisements that Pay*, the model of the agent as simple
broker had receded in favor of one in which ad men exerted considerable power over
their clients’ publicity. The players in this architectural metaphor rearranged their classed
positions accordingly: it was now the printer who occupied the mechanical middle
ground between writer and text. Farrar repeated the well-worn judgment that “as a class,
the printer is the poorest advertiser known today.” For him, this was a simple matter of
fact, which he followed with a challenge for his audience rather than an extended
critique: “How, then, can advertising men expect him to be able to get 100% perfect
display on any proposition without outside help – trained sales-producing brains?”

293 “Advertising Agents’ Commission,” *Profitable Advertising* 1, no. 1 (1891): 5-6, quoted in Laird,
*Advertising Progress*, 175.
Writers may have possessed the “brains,” but they still relied upon the printer’s labor to execute their designs. Recognizing this, Farrar put the burden of communication largely upon his readers. “The printer is, first of all, a mechanic,” he wrote, and “practically all architects can ‘talk shop’ with every mechanic on the job.” The same could not be said for the creators of printed advertisements, who often disparaged the printers’ work without fully understanding it. If ad men were to claim the status of architects, Farrar suggested, they would need to develop a command of the mechanics’ vocabulary.

In the case of print advertising, this was the vocabulary of letters: meanings and associations that attached to symbols on paper. Most self-study manuals included sections about typography and layout in order to familiarize aspiring ad men with the tools of their chosen trade. Nevertheless, Farrar identified a serious gap in knowledge, which he described using the language of brains versus builders, arranged in a definite but dependent hierarchy. Distinctions like his, between heads and hands, thoughts and metal, worked to position these various workers in relation to one another vis-à-vis the texts they created together. Farrar’s “brains” were not simply gifted, or even very mysterious; he was, after all, writing a manual that promised to help men make brains of themselves. They were, rather, formed through print, and with the same pieces of type that, when handled by the printer, marked him as a subordinate “mechanic.” Account managers and copywriters, moreover, depended upon the printer-as-mechanic to deliver their appeals into homes, street cars, and other receptive spaces. Harry Tipper and others might have insisted that writers’ messages worked most effectively when they transcended the page to “dent the reader’s mind,” but they could do this only after first being cast into plates, locked in metal chases, and inked onto paper by members of the printing trade.

294 Gilbert Farrar, Typography of Advertisements that Pay, 130; 3-4.
“Sales-producing brains” could direct but never fully control the production of either advertisements or advertising expertise, and experienced printers occasionally took the cadre of new professionals to task. An 1899 column in *The Inland Printer* came to the defense of the printing trade and especially “the compositor, who has come to be regarded merely as a machine to execute the desires of the so-called advertising ‘doctor,’ ‘expert’ or ‘schoolmaster.’” The author’s quotes draw deliberate, sarcastic attention to the authority that ad men derived and sustained by reducing printers to pieces of metonymic metal (not even mechanics, claimed this writer, but machines themselves). Denying that “the way an ad. looks and the way it sounds amount to very little compared to what it actually says,” he insisted instead that the work of securing readers’ attention was vital in an age where cheap literature and commercial appeals met the public at every moment. At the turn of the twentieth century, before large artwork came to dominate the ad pages of periodicals, printers offered precisely this service. The problem was that their knowledge, built through hours of physical labor in the print shop, failed to translate into professional authority. “When an ‘expert’… disparages the value of typography he invites a controversy as to the relative value of printing knowledge and ‘expert’ theory.” In this debate, the *Inland Printer* columnist insisted that true value lied in, and was therefore produced by, the compositor.

**Conclusion: “Printers Learn Advertising”**

In the early 1890s, as the era of sandwich men, street criers and other human billboards waned, it was still unclear which group of workers – job printers, publishers,

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or agency employees – would have the strongest influence on how future advertising material would be created. Despite strong evidence of printers’ pride in their craft, it was becoming evident by the first years of the twentieth century that agencies would steer the business of advertising. By 1900, job printing had also declined in its importance relative to periodical publishing, which was now itself equipped to circulate images through halftones and other technologies. “By the late 1920s,” writes Elspeth Brown, “the illustration clearly trumped the written word.”296 For the moment, though, “printed salesmanship” still favored the copy as the conduit of the seller’s message to consumers. Slowly and not without some resistance, “printers came to terms with their declining influence with advertisers as copywriters ascended.”297 “The ad. man wants simplicity,” cautioned Louis Fuchs to his fellow printers in 1910. “It is not within his province to present the beauties of typography — rather the message he has to convey…. He aims to stop your eye by display, and then talk himself into your pocketbook.” Writers, meanwhile, continued to rely on printers “to give ‘life’ to their plans,” even as they cast them as subservient interpreters of their vision.298

This chapter concludes by examining several ads created by the prominent agency N.W. Ayer & Son for the International Correspondence Schools (ICS). N.W. Ayer & Son was among the country’s largest agencies, the first both to hire a full-time copywriter and to establish a copy department. To serve its own printing needs, it had established an in-house print shop in 1875.299 Elements of the other primary texts analyzed in this chapter coalesce in designs for the ICS that circulated in *The Saturday Evening Post, Munsey’s,*

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296 Brown, *Corporate Eye,* 168.
299 Ohmann, *Selling Culture,* 103-104.
Physical Culture, and dozens of other magazines targeting working- and middle-class audiences in the early 1900s. While they comprise only a small subset of N.W. Ayer & Son’s full campaign, these ads share certain similarities with many others created for the ICS, and even a few that were circulated by rival correspondence schools, like the National Correspondence Institute and Intercontinental Correspondence University, whose programs, like their ads, mimicked those of the ICS.

Based in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the ICS had grown out of an advice column in the trade journal Colliery Engineer and Metal Miner in 1891. By the first decade of the twentieth century, it had become the largest and most profitable correspondence institute in the country. Although open to anyone able to read and write in English and pay its fees (in installments, if necessary), the school predominantly served native-born white men, whom its programs promised to help secure safer and better-paying jobs as managers, foremen, and office workers.300 Founder Thomas Foster explained in 1906 that his goal was not only to produce “skilled brain workers” but to remove the “careless off the street corners, out of salons, pool rooms, and bowling alleys.”301 Advertising was one of thirty-one programs that he established to meet these aims. The fact that some of Foster’s “brain workers” would be ad men makes the ICS’s printed publicity especially interesting to consider here. These ads were invested in creating consumer desire for, among other things, the advertising profession itself.

301 Thomas J. Foster, “Instruction by Correspondence – The International Correspondence Schools; Something of their Origin and the Methods of their Management,” American Machinist 29 (November 1, 1906): 589. This is a reprint of an address Foster gave in honor of the ICS’s fifteenth anniversary.
Thomas Foster firmly believed in the power of printed ads to attract students to his business, especially through imagery: “The advertising is made effective by illustrations that catch the attention of the indifferent, untrained mechanic, make him realize his unfortunate position and suggest to him that he can improve his condition by mastering the theory of his trade.”

“Theory,” for him, was not opposed to practical knowledge, and could be readily grasped through a series of mail-order lessons. Underlying Foster’s enterprise was an assumption that any “untrained mechanic” could become a “skilled brain worker.” Given that his program of self-transformation relied exclusively upon written study materials, it is fitting that many of the ICS’s attention-catching illustrations tied people to the printed word.

In the series reproduced below, “brains” are created by positioning workers in and around letters. Figure 13, the oldest in the set, was possibly created in-house before Ayer took control of the ICS campaign; their proof sheets indicate that in 1901, copyright belonged to Foster’s Colliery Engineer Company. The ad features white display text on a blackened “hand” and “head” that jut from the borders. Its copy reinforces the notion that knowledge is the missing link between the shop hand and the department head: “He is paid for knowing, you are paid for doing.” The manager’s knowledge, however, is easily gained, along with the tangible reward of better pay as well as the promise of travelling from one synecdochic body part to the other: “If you can read and write, we can make you a ‘head.’”

Print – the medium of both the ad and the course materials it peddled – could redefine the person. The ICS could supply the lesson plans and certificates to indicate that the qualified student had been a potential “head” all along. Other ads, primarily for the ICS stenography course, targeted women precisely as hands rather than

302 Foster, “Instruction by Correspondence,” 584.
offering to qualify them as “heads.” Figure 14, also from 1901, completely erases the individual female subject. Instead of addressing “you,” it boasts that “We qualify women at home” through a catalog called “How Women Can Learn to Earn.”

Several later ads created by N.W. Ayer & Son merged “heads,” bent down in study or well-compensated work, with the school’s easily recognizable initials (Figure 15). Whereas the ad in Figure 13 places its largest text within dismembered body parts, this one, from 1907, uses letters to frame full human bodies. These images recall, but do not replicate, the sandwich men cartoons in which the physical movement of letters and
men results in disorder. Pinned to the page, the ICS figures cannot wander off to create cartoon hell or hoopla. Stationary, calm, and engaged, they invite (white, male) readers to imagine themselves moving up intellectual and financial registers, not parading sideways around city streets. Instead of wearing or carrying their letters, these subjects inhabit them. In Figure 15, directed at railroad workers, each figure’s posture replicates that of the letter which serves as his prop or window. The outline of the I completely bounds its subject, cutting off his hands and feet as he sits at a desk. The C and S, by contrast, stage a look between a draftsman and surveyor, who are not constrained in the same way as the man inside the I. These workers lean on, and beyond, the letters that helped them secure their jobs, and which put them in professional conversation.
It is interesting that Thomas Foster would seek the services of outside professionals to advertise his school, given that one of its own programs claimed to provide instruction in advertising that was “without equal” (Figure 16). This last specimen, created for the ICS in 1910, addressed itself directly to printers. It opens by claiming that “every live printer can learn to be a live advertising man.” The vitality
written into this first line of copy contrasts with the ad’s illustrations, all of which depict inanimate objects. In this case, a large letter S, not part of any word or acronym, is intersected by a pencil, tool of the desk worker, to create a dollar sign (the pencil in Figure 14, by contrast, spookily disappears into the woman’s hand). There are no heads, hands, or other body parts in 1910 notice. Instead, scenes of the ICS administration and instruction buildings fill the letter’s empty spaces. Perhaps the inclusion of buildings, rather than people, allowed the ad’s creators to avoid greeting themselves face-to-face in the letter-cum-dollar-sign that invited newcomers into their profession. The copy predictably explains that “this is the one course for you,” as it covers the entire range of topics related to advertising work. Printing was actually among the lessons included in the ICS’s 1910 *Advertiser’s Handbook*.\(^{303}\) In this ad, though, printers’ knowledge is represented as mere potential – the basis for their interest in advertising – rather than something to value on its own. The ad’s headline, “Printers Learn Advertising,” is not only a description of how ICS’s product hoped to transform its users, but a command: Printers, advance yourselves and become advertising “brains."

The documents I have examined in this chapter provide access – albeit nodal and incomplete access – to the practices of reading and composing printed advertisements at the turn of the twentieth century. Advertisers, copywriters, and printers created and interpreted the textual world they inhabited, and in this way, they were not different from other readers of their historical moment. The financial stakes in producing ads and encouraging certain kinds of reading did not ultimately separate them from other readers

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– even as they worked hard to claim the expertise that would build income from such a separation. By incessantly tying words and letters to the human form, the texts they produced demonstrate how social and embodied acts of reading helped to construct the commercial landscape of the early twentieth century.
As a child in the 1870s, Earnest Elmo Calkins appropriated advertisements as tools for building his literacy skills. Upon learning the alphabet, he delighted in calling out the names of the large letters he recognized in advertising pages to all of the members of the household within earshot. Slightly later, he encountered a different ad medium in the painted wooden fences that bounded the farms near his home in rural Illinois. With his alphabet now securely memorized, Calkins practiced his new reading skills out of doors, and in silence:

On those six-inch boards extending lengthwise from post to post with spaces between them, local merchants were accustomed to paint brief advertisements. The boards were weathered to a charming gray, the paint nearly always red or yellow, so the color scheme while strong was not unpleasing. When I rode in the family phaeton, sitting on the bodkin seat between my father and mother, whose conversation seldom interested me even if I heard it, I exercised upon those fence advertisements my newly acquired ability to read. 304

These trips past the bright fences of Galesburg, Illinois did not teach Calkins how to read per se, but they did encourage him to read in new ways, applying his skills to texts that would appear and then disappear at the speed of a horse-drawn carriage. Like exterior building murals and later, highway billboards, the fence ads were specifically designed to be consumed by audiences on the move. More stable media than the broadsides posted in town, they assumed another sort of transience based on the shifting position of the reader.

Americans living in urban areas would likewise have been familiar with the experience of transient reading. According to David Henkin, portable signage was a

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304 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 232-233. Unlike most of his childhood memories, Calkins wrote this in the first person. The passage is included in a chapter about “The State of Advertising in 1900” that touches only briefly on his youth and focuses mainly on the time that Calkins & Holden was founded.
feature of city life by the early 1860s, whether it took the form of handbills and circulars passed between individuals or, “in the cause of commercial promotion, the written word [that] began to appear on wagons, personal accessories, clothing, and, most dramatically, sandwich boards.” In *Buyways*, historian Catherine Gudis describes the visual transformation of New York City inspired by elevated railways of the late 1860s: “As fast as the pillars for tracks and risers for stairways went up, they were slathered in paper and paste. The platforms helped bring advertisements to new heights, as bill posters scrambled to cover chimneys and church steeples with bills to be seen from the ‘el.’ Not all riders might see such ads, though, since after the tops, sides, and interiors of the trains were filled with advertising signs, the windows began to be covered with them, too.”

Outside those obstructed windows, the landscape shifted overnight with ruthless and competitive bill posters pasting over one another’s work as quickly as possible. In one instance reported in a late edition of the New York *Evening World*, a horse that had dropped dead on Third Avenue was found the next morning “almost covered in posters.”

In the late 1800s, new networks of electric street cars also invited riders to engage with advertising messages. Calkins and Holden presented two examples of car cards in their 1905 textbook *Modern Advertising*, and they shared distinct similarities in design:

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305 Henkin, *City Reading*, 76. In *The Origins of Graphic Design in America*, Ellen Mazur Thomson also notes that “outdoor advertising in the form of cigar store figures, barber poles, window signs, and painted signs on fences, barns, and boulders were common by the mid-nineteenth century” (9).


307 “Dead Horse Bill-Board,” *Evening World*, October 17, 1894. Gudis makes note of a similar case that took place just two weeks later, when the carcass of horse in Pittsburgh became a signboard “while the body was still warm” (“A Horsey Tale,” *Billboard Advertising* [November 1, 1895], quoted in Gudis, *Buyways*, 12). Yet another example of this was reported in Chicago a few years later and reprinted in *Printers’ Ink*. See “Dead Horse as Billboard,” *Printers’ Ink* 28, no. 13 (September 27, 1899): 13.
Like the fence ads that Calkins encountered as a child, these two card designs convey movement through time and space by stretching advertised products to their limits. Both of these ads pull the brand name apart so that it is no longer associated with a single design element but breaks into a series of nearly identical objects, presented one after another in quick succession. Sapolio soap functions as a weekly planner in Figure 17. One might wonder about the relationship between “Monday” or “Tuesday” and the letters in “Sapolio” before reading the message printed below, which clarifies that every day is characterized by washing, and therefore by Sapolio, except Sunday. In Figure 18, the letters of “O’Sullivans” unite with the rubber heels being advertised. Instead of illustrating a single shoe, this ad presents a strip of shoes that appears to move at the same pace as the reader’s gaze.
Psychologist Raymond Dodge argued that the research on vision he and his colleagues pursued had important practical applications for the traveling public. While most of Dodge’s writings appeared in scientific journals, his 1902 article addressed the more general audience of *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*. “In these days of rapid transit and weakened eye muscles,” he warned, “no one can afford to neglect” recent scientific findings on the nature of eye movements, perception, and visual fatigue. Dodge paid particular attention to the new modes of transportation that had entered American cities and suburbs. He declared: “Street cars with seats along the sides, so that the attention is constantly directed towards outside objects directly opposite, are menaces to the public health. They will be prohibited some time by public opinion, if not by law. The sooner the better! Meanwhile, if we value our eyes and our general vitality, we will keep our attention inside moving cars.”

Even this, Dodge cautioned, was not entirely safe; bumpy rides prevented newspaper reading from being a wise choice. Psychologist Walter Dill Scott agreed with Dodge on this point, and because his own interests concentrated on advertising, he also noted that due to the physical conditions of riding, “many a passenger is compelled to turn his gaze on the placards which adorn the sides of the car.” Once again, riders were encouraged to spend their travel time reading advertisements.

This chapter examines how advertisers and experimental psychologists constructed readers and the reading process as subjects of study in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the name of science and commerce, these actors sought concrete answers to the question of how people read, but their efforts revealed that reading was not a singular or uniform practice that people performed under ideal conditions.

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conditions. Instead, reading was comprised of many smaller behaviors and perceptual acts, and these were influenced by external factors that included the movements and distractions of modernity. The work of psychologists and advertising professionals suggests that these movements and distractions were an essential part of what it meant to read in the early 1900s.

My discussion begins in the 1870s, when Earnest Elmo Calkins was still a child using newspapers and fences to practice his reading skills, and before any psychology laboratories had been established in American universities. By 1910, Calkins was running his own advertising agency in New York. The intervening years had brought not only the rise of professional advertising, as discussed in chapter 2, but also the advent of experimental psychology. Walter Dill Scott, born one year after Calkins in Cooksville, Illinois, a town 100 miles away from Galesburg, became a professor of psychology at Northwestern University in 1900. The following year, he began to study psychology’s applications to advertising. Raymond Dodge was also a contemporary of Calkins and, like Scott, a professor of psychology. His 1902 article in Harper’s Monthly included two large images depicting the equipment in his lab at Wesleyan University, one of a photographic apparatus that recorded eye movements and the other of a tachitoscope, a device used to test subjects’ reaction times. Similar technology was already being used to study how readers encountered advertising material.

This chapter does not specifically revolve around the work of Calkins, Scott, or Dodge, but rather the intersections between early psychological approaches to reading and advertising. Calkins used the “soft sell” to move consumers to buy products; Scott believed in the powers of suggestion and command to direct that buying behavior; and
Dodge never directly addressed advertising in his research on eye movements. Yet, these three men, and others who worked alongside them, were deeply interested in understanding how reading worked and how readers responded to the texts put before them.

Some of these connections are already suggested by the passage from Calkins quoted in the opening to this chapter. First, the gaps he notes between the fence boards, while they may appear as an absence rather than a presence of media, are crucial to the architecture of reading. In laboratories, this absence would be produced using equipment like rotating drums and tachitoscopes, which cut up texts and displayed them to subjects in isolated fragments. These devices, invented to test the speed at which subjects could respond to visual stimuli, depended on the contrast between a blank field of vision and then the sudden, brief presence of a figure, often an alphabetical letter. Media historian Charles Acland considers the tachitoscope – whose name translates literally to mean “swift view” – as more than a single instrument, and rather as a set of ideas that engage “a fascination with the rapid arrival and departure of texts and an epistemological tension between perceptual fragmentation and synthesis.” While these ideas took full form in turn-of-the-century psychology labs, Calkins’s account similarly depends upon movement and the variation between letters and the gaps between them.

Calkins’s assessment of the “not unpleasing” contrast between the grayed wooden boards and their colorful messages was one that psychologists would also try to duplicate

in the laboratory with tests that varied texts by color and background. Working in Leipzig, Germany the mid-1880s, James McKeen Cattell had determined orange and yellow to be the colors that required the shortest exposure time to be correctly identified, while violet required the longest. A decade later, professor Harlow Gale at the University of Minnesota applied the study of color to advertising. Although his methods and findings, like those of many early psychologists, were later criticized, Gale concluded that men were most attracted to black text printed on white background and to green text printed on black, while women favored red and green text under the same conditions. Walter Dill Scott subsequently referenced Gale’s findings in the first book published about the psychology of advertising.

Finally, as Calkins describes the carriage rides taken with his parents, it becomes clear that his reading-while-riding depended on a range of sensory experiences, not only vision. In particular, he was deprived of his hearing and the ability to move his body, and both of these conditions helped to determine the way he encountered the fence ads. Deafness excluded him from the conversations taking place directly above his head, and he understandably favored the more accessible and more attractive visual landscape. Sandwiched between his parents, Calkins was also physically immobilized, with his eyes but not his body free to wander outside of the carriage. In scientific contexts, researchers worked to limit subjects’ sensation and mobility in similar ways when they studied phenomena like eye movements during reading. In describing his new exposure apparatus in 1907, Raymond Dodge outlined the ideal conditions for assessing visual perception,

311 James McKeen Cattell, “The Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” Brain 8 (October 1885): 302.  
313 Scott, Theory of Advertising, 14. Scott, however, collapsed differences between background color and gender to report simply that red was the color with the greatest attention value.
where “the exposed object simply appears for an instant in place of the primary fixation mark and disappears as suddenly as it came, without noise or any other disturbance.”

To this end, subjects were tested in darkened rooms and made stationary using head rests and mouthpieces in order to eliminate as much sensory competition as possible.

Aligning Psychology and Advertising

There are compelling historical reasons to consider advertising and experimental psychology side by side. In his 1972 article “An American Courtship: Psychologists and Advertising Theory in Progressive America,” A. Michael Mahon argues that a shared desire for social control helped to align the missions of advertising professionals and social scientists, both of whom came to see the American public as irrational and easily manipulated. While Mahon and others have focused on the first decades of the twentieth century, however, psychologist Ludy T. Benjamin notes that the link between psychology and advertising was established several years prior. Before World War I, and even before the development of an explicitly “applied” psychology, psychologists offered their services to the business world, and advertising served as their point of entry. The two fields of experimental psychology and advertising have thus been intertwined since at least the 1890s, and their parallel patterns of development extend still further back.

America’s first advertising agencies were established before the Civil War, and the forerunners of experimental psychology can be traced to the same period in Europe.

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Historian Deborah Coon cites the work of two German scientists, Gustav Fechner and Hermann von Helmholtz, as particularly important for later efforts to establish psychology as a field distinct from physics and philosophy. Fechner was primarily concerned with the relationship between mind and body, which he saw as directly dependent on one another. His psychophysical research aimed to show that a subjective sensation was mathematically dependent upon the intensity of an external stimulus. Hermann von Helmholtz’s discovery that nervous transmission was not instantaneous but took time, and therefore could be measured, was equally influential. His work inspired a wave of experiments to determine response times, including the color tests by James McKeen Cattell cited above.

Building on the groundbreaking work of Fechner and Helmholtz, the firm beginnings of experimental psychology are generally traced to Harvard professor William James, who offered his first courses in experimental psychology during the 1875-86 academic year, and to Wilhelm Wundt, who established his laboratory at the University of Leipzig in 1879. Both men originally trained as physicians, and Wundt later studied physiology and physics under Helmholtz. James’s interests alternated between medicine, religion, philosophy, and psychology, yet he remained relatively uninterested in laboratory experimentation. Wundt, by contrast, is credited with introducing experimental methods to psychology, and his activities focused on measuring sensation, perception, and the speed of mental operations.

Beginning in the 1880s, about thirty American graduate students travelled to Leipzig to train under Wundt, and several went on to found psychology labs in American universities upon their return to the United States. James McKeen Cattell, who designed early experiments on perception and legibility, spent three years as Wundt’s assistant, receiving his degree in 1886. Literacy historian Richard Venezky identifies Cattell, rather than Wundt, as the figure who led the study of reading at Leipzig.\(^{319}\) Cattell established the psychology lab at the University of Pennsylvania in 1887 and then one at Columbia three years later, where he would mentor the next generation of researchers invested in reading. Slightly younger than Cattell, Walter Dill Scott completed his Ph.D. under Wundt in 1900 and returned to Illinois to teach at Northwestern, an institution he would eventually serve as president.\(^{320}\) By the turn of the century, Venezky and Coon both argue that the epicenter of experimental psychology had shifted from European laboratories to those housed in American universities.\(^{321}\)

Like the founding of advertising agencies, the proliferation of laboratories provided physical space and institutional support to those practicing the nascent discipline of experimental psychology in the 1890s. The two fields also shared the need to establish their professional identity and credibility. For advertisers, Earnest Elmo Calkins characterized the period around 1900 as one of both disorder and possibility: many smaller agencies did not yet have specialized departments or services, and a sense of suspicion hung over agents who were regarded as either unscrupulous or unnecessary.

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“Advertising existed, but it was in bad repute,” Calkins recalled. “It had started off on the wrong foot. Those who were the first to see its possibilities and employ it abundantly were engaging in public confidence – patent medicines, wildcat securities, and fakes and frauds.” As a result of these associations, many Americans, even manufacturers and retailers who advertised, considered it a “sub-normal occupation,” and those men like Calkins who wrote ad copy inherited a reputation for “being of the substratum of literary workers.”

Researchers committed to establishing psychology as a science on par with physics, chemistry, and physiology faced similar professional insecurities. Coon writes, “It is not overdramatizing to say that they were self-consciously engaged in a battle for intellectual and disciplinary survival.” First, experimental psychologists needed to articulate how their approach differed from the established fields of physics and physiology. They did this, following Fechner, by searching for clues about invisible mental phenomena in external, measurable events, like detecting the color of a flashing light. By applying scientific methods and instruments to complex questions like “How do we see the world?” these researchers hoped to render legible mental processes that had previously remained hidden.

In addition to carving out a disciplinary space separate from philosophy and other “hard” sciences, experimental psychologists faced a challenge to their credibility that mirrored the association of ad men with hucksters. The American public regularly conflated psychological and psychic phenomena – indeed, the words psychical and

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325 Coon, “Testing the Limits of Sense and Science,” 145.
psychological were used interchangeably to characterize human mental processes and the belief that spiritual forces could alter mental and physical events. A nineteenth-century spiritualist tradition melded science and religion to explore the prospect of contacting the dead and communicating telepathically with the living. Although some, including James, were open-minded to such possibilities, Coon explains that quickly, most American psychologists shifted their mission to proving the fraudulence of psychic claims in order to dissociate themselves from the supernatural and to craft their identities as true scientists.

Finally, experimental psychologists and advertising professionals were both motivated by a desire to understand, and control, human behavior under the changing conditions of modernity. Echoing Raymond Dodge’s concerns regarding rapid movement and visual fatigue, scholars have characterized the period between the 1870s and early 1900s as one of perceptual fragmentation, dispersal, and distraction. For art historian Jonathan Crary, however, this moment is less about distraction and the disruption of vision than a new reciprocal relationship between distraction and attention, and “the emergence of attention as a model of how a subject maintains a coherent and practical sense of the world.” Crary identifies a shift in the early nineteenth century, from a belief that vision worked by objectively reflecting objects in the outside world to the viewer to an understanding of perception as a subjective and often unreliable set of acts that belonged to the body. The logic of capital ensured the rapid production of new sensory inputs. Attention, in turn, became a means of managing perception and producing stable, productive, and predictable subjects.\textsuperscript{326} As a preeminent researcher in human perception,

\textsuperscript{326}Crary, \textit{Suspensions of Perception}, 1, 4, 11-14. Crary traces the tradition of writing about visual fragmentation and distraction back to Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of
Cattell represented psychologists at the International Congress of Arts and Science held during the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair, where he spoke to this goal. Psychology, he suggested, was most important not in its theoretical guise but in its practical application to human conduct. “Control of the physical world is secondary to the control of ourselves and our fellow men,” he stated, and twice in his address, he described psychology as “the application of systematized knowledge to the control of human nature.”

Advertising presented itself as a promising arena for such application, as both agencies and their clients had a investment in managing consumers’ attention and behavior. One early advocate for psychology’s importance to business asked, “As advertising is simply an attempt to influence the human mind, what could be more practical than the study of how the human mind can be most easily influenced?” In Printers’ Ink, however, writers greeted psychology with more ambivalence. The first mention of the subject appeared in the journal in 1895, in an article by Oscar Herzberg. Herzberg argued that effective copywriters owed their success to their understanding of “human nature,” and he saw a clear place for psychology in the future of the advertising profession: “Probably, when we are a little more enlightened, the ad writer, like the teacher, will study psychology. For, however diverse their occupations may at first sight appear, the ad writer and the teacher have one great object in common — to influence the human mind.” Two years later, though, Herzberg published another article, and there,
he suggested that the ability to manipulate psychological forces on behalf of advertising was an instinctual, inborn talent, a “hidden force” that could not be learned, as he had previously implied.\footnote{330}

Like Herzberg, other Printers’ Ink authors vacillated between acknowledging the importance of psychology and downplaying the contributions of psychologists and their methods. A 1903 editorial comment, printed inside a box to set it off from the surrounding text, clarified for any of the journal’s doubters: “Printers’ Ink fully comprehends the importance of psychology and its relation to advertising, but believes it will take care of itself, and that the attempt to reduce its influence to a science is futile.”\footnote{331} Mahin’s Magazine, which sponsored Water Dill Scott’s early work, responded by deriding the position taken by its “mother” journal, as well as the style in which it displayed its announcement: “P.I. Seems to be afraid of psychology, and the enclosing rule may have been used to keep the cabalistic word within bounds, for fear it might exert some psychic influence over the other items appearing on the same page.”\footnote{332} Mahin’s accused Printers’ Ink of not understanding the distinction between psychological and psychic or spiritualist thought. By 1908, however, Scott wrote that the older journal had shifted perspectives and was publishing pieces more sympathetic to the young field of advertising psychology.\footnote{333} Profitable Advertising, another respected trade publication,
also advocated that ad men shift from being implicit psychologists driven by “horse sense” to valuing the research of men like Scott: “Instead of finding out by cut-and-dry methods, wouldn’t it pay to listen to the college professor’s say-so on such subjects as attention, interest, association, desire, and all the other things that bear directly upon the success of advertising copy?”

Psychological Approaches to Reading

Richard Venezky has called the period between the late 1880s and 1910 the “golden years” of reading research, a time when the project of understanding reading drove experimental psychology. In European, and, later, American labs, researchers investigated the mechanics of perception: how quickly letters and words could be seen; the “eye-voice span,” or gap in time between perceiving an object and naming it aloud; the role played by connections and associations; and many other problems related to how people consume written texts. All of these studies were performed on small sets of subjects (typically including the experimenter and his colleagues or graduate students), and by today’s standards, they are not considered either thorough or reliable. Nevertheless, Venezky writes that together, they “constitute the most creative analysis of reading processes ever undertaken.” Shortly following this heyday, the behaviorist zeitgeist drew American psychologists away from research on perception and mental processes. Led by John Broadus Watson, new studies abandoned the concern for ideas like will, attention, and perception to focus on observable actions. Reading, in turn,

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became the domain of educational psychologists, who were increasingly preoccupied with conducting school studies and intelligence tests. As a result, by the late 1950s, scientific knowledge about reading processes looked much as it had forty years earlier.\footnote{Venezky, “History of Reading Research,” 12.}

As research on reading thrived during the “golden years” at the turn of the twentieth century, most psychologists seem to have shared Raymond Dodge’s anxiety for conditions brought by the age of rapid transit and weakened eyes, and their writings touched on many similar concerns. To start, there was a belief that reading was an unnatural or artificial activity for humans, one to which our eyes and minds were evolutionarily unsuited.\footnote{Edmund Burke Huey, \textit{The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading} (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1908), 8-9. See also G. Stanley Hall, \textit{Educational Problems}, vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1911), 443-444.} This explained the prevalence of headaches, nearsightedness, and a vaguely-defined “fatigue” associated with reading, especially works printed in small or decorative types.\footnote{Harold Griffing and Shepherd Ivory Franz, “On the Conditions of Fatigue in Reading,” \textit{Psychological Review} 3, no. 5 (September 1896): 513-530.} On the flipside, its artificial nature contributed to the sense that reading was both a distinctly human ability and a marker of refinement. As librarian and printing scholar Harry Lyman Koopman summarized it, “Modern society submits with an ill grace to the nuisance of spectacles, but flatters itself that after all they afford a measure of civilization.”\footnote{Harry Lyman Koopman, “Scientific Tests of Type,” \textit{Printing Art} 13, no. 2 (April 1909): 81.}

Reading was also seen as an important, even mandatory, part of modern life. Two researchers opened their 1896 study of reading fatigue by declaring, “The increasing part played by reading in the life of civilized man is a striking characteristic of modern culture. In fact, the man of to-day might be defined as a reading animal.”\footnote{Griffing and Franz, “On the Conditions of Fatigue in Reading,” 513.} Other psychologists, including James McKeen Cattell and Edmund Burke Huey, agreed that

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\item \footnote{Griffing and Franz, “On the Conditions of Fatigue in Reading,” 513.}
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reading, while “artificial,” was an inescapable part of modern life.³⁴¹ Huey described the proliferation of printed material that brought this about: “Printed matter has been so diffused, and all that we do is so concerned with it, that a very considerable proportion of most people’s waking time is taken up with the contemplation of reading symbols. This applies, of course, not merely to the reading of books and papers; but in the car on the driveway, in the street or at the railway station, advertisements, signs, notices – what-not of printed matter – keep one reading.”³⁴² Huey believed that this proliferation had turned reading into not only a conscious habit, but an involuntary reflex – an automatic response to moving through a world full of printed stimuli.

With the ubiquity, even excess, of written messages to be consumed, psychologists of reading brought a new sense of scale to their work. Earlier research by Fechner and Helmholtz had shown that individual perceptions could be measured for their intensity and duration. Toward the end of the century, the focus shifted to aggregate, or social, effects. Edmund Clark Sanford, after conducting several tests to measure the relative legibility of different letters of the lower-case alphabet, lamented that “by a strange bit of perversity several of the worst letters fall in the number of those most frequently used.”³⁴³ For example, the small e and o, among the most common letters in the English language, were judged to be two of the most difficult for readers to identify when tested for both distance and time. Tracing a direct line from the printed page to the eye, and then to the brain, Sanford and others wondered how improvements in spelling, type design, and arrangement could alter patterns of thought, especially to make them

³⁴¹ Cattell, “The Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” 306.
³⁴² Huey, Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, 8.
more efficient. Huey hoped that the efforts to develop railroads, which had greatly improved travel, could be replicated on the page to make reading similarly more efficient and comfortable.  

Cattell, Reaction Times, and the Limits of Attention

Although he was a key figure in early reading research, James McKeen Cattell was not motivated by the desire to understand reading at all. Instead, he was interested in measuring the mental differences between individuals. Cattell, who later worked with the eugenicist Francis Galton, was invested in Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s idea that acquired traits could become hereditary. Cattell applied Galton’s search for physical standards like height and weight to the psychological realm to test things like human intelligence. One of his concerns was that damage done to the body by the artificial act of reading could be passed from one generation to the next: “The large percentage of children who become shortsighted and weak-eyed, and suffer from headaches, gives us sharp warning, and puts us on our guard, lest these diseases become hereditary. Considering the immense tension put of necessity upon eye and brain, it is of the most vital importance to relieve them by using the printed symbols which can be read with the least effort and strain.”

Walter Dearborn, an educational psychologist who studied under Cattell, later credited his mentor with being the first to provide concrete evidence that people read by recognizing whole words rather than letters.

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344 Huey, Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, 421.
346 Cattell, “Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” 306.
In his 1885 article “The Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” Cattell enumerated the physical dangers posed by text that was difficult to see, and therefore to read. Alphabets varied in their ease of perception, Latin letters taking less time to identify than ones printed in German fractur type. Even at the level of the letter, Cattell insisted that these differences mattered. Having found that subjects could identify the capital letter \( W \) in the least amount of time, while \( E \) took the most, he complained, “If I should give the probable time wasted each day through a single letter as \( E \) being needlessly illegible, it would be almost incredible; and if we could calculate the unnecessary strain put upon eye and brain, it would be still more appalling.”\(^\text{348}\) Cattell wished to redesign the Latin alphabet to eliminate several letters he considered useless, like \( c \) and \( x \). He proposed other changes to printing conventions, including eliminating the dot above the lower case \( i \). For punctuation, he suggested replacing commas and periods with spaces whose length represented the length of the intended pause. This was a grammatical analogy to phonetic alphabets, as it took speech as its standard and demanded that the marks and gaps on the page reflected how words were spoken. “Such a method of indicating to the eye the pauses in the sense would not only make reading easier,” he wrote, “but would teach us to think more clearly.”\(^\text{349}\)

These recommendations and conclusions were based on a series of experiments Cattell had conducted to measure, first, the speed at which subjects could identify letters and other objects, and second, the number of objects that a person was capable of identifying in a single controlled glance. Working in Wundt’s lab, Cattell first used a revolving drum, or kymograph, to measure the speed at which subjects could recognize

\(^{348}\) Cattell, “Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” 308.
\(^{349}\) Cattell, “Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” 307.
and name the objects that passed into their view. He conceded that timing mental
processes directly was an impossible task. He could only measure the period between the
exposure and the registered physical response; what happened in the middle remained a
mystery. In “The Time It Takes to See and Name Objects,” the objects in question were
letters, displayed both individually and as words. Cattell used an adjustable slit to control
the length of time these objects remained on screen for his subjects. When the slit was
narrow, he found that it took roughly half a second to see and name a letter of the
alphabet. Widening the opening so that two letters were visible at once decreased the
time required to name each. To Cattell, this indicated that the processes of seeing and
naming overlapped – that while the subject was naming one letter, he was already able to
see the next, decreasing the total time needed.

Cattell also used groups of letters as “objects” for the next stage of his experiment.
With the same apparatus, he found that it took twice as long for subjects to read
unconnected words as it did for them to read words that followed each other logically to
form sentences. The same principle held for letters, which were recognized more quickly
when combined into real words. Finally, he briefly summarized his findings from
applying this method to colors and pictures, which both took longer to name than letters
and words. Cattell believed that this was not because they took longer to see, but rather
that the process of naming them was more difficult because it required mentally
translating an unwritten stimulus into its spoken word equivalent.\(^{350}\)

Cattell revised these findings slightly in “The Inertia of the Eye and Brain,” which
reported that words actually took less time than letters to be identified. This was because

\(^{350}\) James McKeen Cattell, “The Time it Takes to See and Name Objects,” *Mind* 11, no. 41 (January 1886): 63-65. This English translation is a condensed version of Cattell’s first scientific publication, which appeared in Wundt’s journal *Philosophische Studien* in 1885.
readers knew letters primarily by their sounds, not their names. Recalling the name thus
required more work – not as much as it did to report on a color or a drawing of an object,
but more than reading a word aloud, since the word represented itself exactly. Using a
gravity-driven tachitoscope, Cattell also measured how many objects his subjects were
capable of paying attention to at once. He found the limit to be four numbers or letters,
two short words, and even one short sentence. The fact that subjects could report reading
an entire sentence seen during a brief exposure suggested that sense was a more
important factor than the size of the object. These two main observations – that we
perceive words as wholes as easily as we identify individual letters and that we can attend
to more things at once if they are somehow related – would later serve as valuable
information for advertisers.

By the 1910s, behaviorism prompted a new generation of psychologists trained in
American universities to align themselves with business.351 In some ways, Cattell’s
reaction time tests were the prototypes for the behaviorists’ stimulus-response
experiments, as they favored observable responses over introspective thought.352 Even
before the behaviorist strain came to dominate American psychology, though, the work
pursued by Cattell and his colleagues in the 1880s and 1890s was reflected in the earliest
psychological studies of advertising and the first attempts to apply laboratory research to
business.

351 See, for example, Harry Hollingworth, Advertising and Selling: Principles of Appeal and Response
(New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1913). Hollingworth was one Cattell’s students at Columbia. His
first corporate support came in 1911 from the Coca Cola Company, which asked him to conduct research
on their behalf after they were charged with violating the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act for manufacturing
a drink with caffeine.
Huey and the Study of Eye Movements

Unlike Cattell, Edmund Burke Huey was explicitly invested in reading, in part because he believed that understanding the reading process was the key to unlocking other psychological questions. In 1908, he published the most detailed and far-reaching review of scientific work on reading to date. In contrast to many other experimental psychologists, Huey was interested in both the historical and performative aspects of reading, an activity that he characterized alternately as a habit, a mystery, and, “as a psycho-physiological process… almost as good as a miracle.”353 While Cattell had urged Huey to complete his graduate work under him at Columbia, Huey, who had also wished to go to Germany, finally decided to study at Clark University with G. Stanley Hall.354

The preliminary reports of Huey’s research at Clark offer few hints to the ambitious project he would present a decade later as The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, a book that not only offered a comprehensive review of the experiments conducted in Europe and America since the late 1870s, but also long discussions about the history of the alphabet and the different methods used in school classrooms.355 In Psychology and Pedagogy, Huey was also unique in articulating what experimental psychologists had to gain from the study of reading. While most researchers described their goals and methods in concrete terms, Huey, in synthesizing their work, looked more broadly to its stakes. “To completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be

353 Huey, Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, 5.
354 Douglas K. Hartman and David H. Davis, “Edmund Burke Huey: The Formative Years of a Scholar and Field,” in 57th Yearbook of the National Reading Conference Yearbook, ed. Youb Kim and Victoria J. Risko (Oak Creek, WI: National Reading Conference, 2008), 46. Edmund Clark Sanford was also a professor of psychology at Clark at this time, and he served as one of Huey’s subjects.
the acme of a psychologist’s achievements,” he wrote, “for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind, as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most specific performance that civilization has learned in all its history.”

To begin his own attempt to unravel the reading process, Huey turned to the human eye. As Venezky explains, the nature of eye movements during reading was one of the first issues to inspire intense debate among experimental psychologists. Some subjects insisted that they could read several lines of print without moving their eyes at all; others thought their eyes scanned the page evenly. But in a footnote to an article published in 1879, French ophthalmologist Louis Émile Javal introduced the idea that while reading, the eye moved by jumps, or saccades, rather than in a steady fashion.

Javal had begun to study the visual processes involved in reading in the late 1870s. The question of whether it was he who first studied eye movements has received attention from recent scholars, but for the purposes of this chapter, attribution is less important than the paths such research took and the questions it posed. First among these was: how can one track the eye as it moves? Javal considered several strategies, like attaching feathers and mirrors to the eyeball, but the first recording of saccades in his lab depended on something quite different. Javal’s colleague Lamare attached rubber tubes to create a

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356 Huey, Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, 6.
kind of stethoscope, which he used to hear the eye as it moved. Each pause of the eye would register as an audible thump, which was loudest when the reader came to the end of the line. Rather than observing another’s eyes with his own, then, Lamare elected to listen to them. By counting the thumps, he could estimate how many times the eye paused in a given line of text. One of his more unexpected findings was that the eye’s distance from the page, and therefore the angle of reading, did not seem to affect the number of pauses the reader took.

Building on Javal and Lamare’s reports, American psychologists Edmund Burke Huey and Raymond Dodge both sought to learn more about the nature of saccades, and each devised a new apparatus to trace the eye’s movements. Importantly, both men stepped away from Lamare’s early practice of listening to the eye during reading. Huey began his work in 1897 by observing readers’ eyes directly, but soon wanted a more precise way to register their pauses and movements, as he noted that the difficulty of tracking another person’s eyes when your own are also in constant motion. August Ahrens lent Huey the idea to attach an ivory cup to the eyeball for this purpose, and Huey eventually made use of a new, more flexible version designed by Edmund Delabarre of Brown University. The design was for a thinly sanded plaster of Paris eye cup that adhered to the reader’s cornea. A small hole in the cup allowed the subject to see, and the cup itself was attached to an aluminum pointer that moved along with the eyeball. Using smoked paper, a rotating drum, and a sparking mechanism, the pointer traced a record that revealed when the eye paused and when it was in motion. Subjects were given either

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359 M. Lamare, “Des Mouvements des Yeux dans la Lecture,” Bulletins et Mémoires de la Société Française d’Ophamologie 10 (1892): 357. This article, published thirteen years after Javal’s first report of saccades, describes the experiments Lamare conducted in his lab.

360 For a description of these eye cups, see E. B. Delabarre, “A Method of Recording Eye-Movements,” The American Journal of Psychology 9, no. 4 (July 1898): 572-574.
cocaine or holocain to relieve discomfort, and they bit into mouthpieces that prevented them from moving their heads as they silently read passages from magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Munsey’s*. Huey’s initial experiments were performed only on himself and his colleague Professor Hodge, as he admitted that “it has been difficult to get subjects” who would agree to participate in his set up.\(^{361}\)

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**Figure 19. Edmund Burke Huey’s Eye Cup Apparatus**


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\(^{361}\) Huey, “Preliminary Experiments,” 586.
In effect, Huey’s experiments produced texts that were written by eyes. He would then interpret these in an attempt to unlock the mysteries of reading. The record reproduced as Figure 20, for instance, revealed several things about the printed passage used in this experiment and the way it had been consumed. In this image, the unbroken curved lines represent the path of the eye as it moved from one line of text to the next; the small dots along these lines, or sometimes appearing alone, were produced by the sparking mechanism and are separated from one another by .0068 second, effectively serving as timekeepers for the eye when in steady motion. The larger white marks represent fixation points where the eye was stationary. Before and after reading the sample passage, the subject swept his eyes back and forth along the line twice without stopping. These four sweeps only reveal pauses at the start and end of the lines. In contrast, the middle portion of the image reveals that the subject moved his eyes back and
forth along six lines of text, usually pausing three or four times while reading from left to right. The return sweeps show the quick travel of the eyes to the beginning of the next line, where they stopped again.

Finally, this record reveals information about where on the page the reader focused his eyes. For another early experiment, Huey had cut each word of a forty-three-line passage in half and asked readers to read a selection while able to see only the first or the second part of each word. He found that readers were able to read passages displaying the first halves of words significantly faster than ones where they relied on their endings. The results of this experiment suggested that certain parts of words were more important than others for reading. Huey’s eye cup mechanism provided further indication that readers did not process texts by methodically passing their eyes from one letter to the next. In Figure 20 above, the curves recorded for the four uninterrupted sweeps are longer than those produced while the subject read the six lines of text, indicating that his eyes paused some distance into the line, not necessarily before the start of the first word. The indentations on the right were even greater, meaning that the reader did not wait for his eyes to reach the end of one line of type before proceeding to the next. To Huey, this indicated again that readers gave priority to the first portion of the line, just as they did to the first half of any given word. Huey aspired for his research to replicate “ordinary” reading conditions. Further experiments demonstrated that difficult content, smaller

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typefaces, and texts in a foreign language all required readers’ eyes to pause more often than the passages taken from general interest magazines.\(^{364}\)

Beyond refining the factors contributing to the number and lengths of pauses the eyes took while reading, there lay other pressing questions for psychologists: What did the pauses and movements indicate? Was it possible to read while your eyes were moving, or did motion inhibit processing? Cattell and others initially held that it was possible for the eyes to take in information while moving, but that view was later overturned by Raymond Dodge.\(^{365}\) While studying in Germany with Benno Erdmann, Dodge attempted “to explain the meaning of those strangely rhythmic pauses of the eye in reading every page of printed matter.”\(^{366}\) Erdmann and Dodge pointed out that while it was possible to see another person’s eyes move, no one had ever observed their own doing so in a mirror. Dodge built on this research at Wesleyan. He was critical of Huey’s eye cups for being both error-prone and invasive, and soon developed an apparatus that combined a tachistoscope with a camera. After photographing the eyes of readers, Dodge concluded that their rapid movements were involuntary; they were affected by fatigue, but not by will. Furthermore, those movements were too fast to allow for objects to be perceived, meaning that reading effectively took place only when the eye was paused. By exposing these fallacies, Dodge destabilized the belief that the rate of eye movements and the perception of visual stimuli were both under the reader’s conscious control.

\(^{364}\) For an exploration of these differences, see Walter F. Dearborn, “The Psychology of Reading: An Experimental Study of the Reading Pauses and Movements of the Eye” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1906).

\(^{365}\) Cattell reversed his view on this matter in “On the Relations of Time and Space in Vision,” *Psychological Review* 7, no. 4 (July 1900): 325.

Dodge summarized his findings for readers of *Harper’s Monthly*: “This means that every one is practically blind to all that occurs about him for no inconsiderable fraction of the time when he believes he sees best.” This is an interesting sensory correlate to Calkins’s experience of his deafness, as explored in chapter 1. Calkins claimed that in spite of the near complete loss of his hearing, he was only truly deaf for a small fraction of his life, as most activities did not require him to hear, and many that did were not important to him anyway. Dodge, in contrast, revealed that accurate vision was an “illusion,” both of consciousness and of the eye. Like Calkins, Dodge suggested that the failures were to our benefit. Being able to perceive printed text while the eyes were in rapid motion would result only in gray bands, not in distinct words and letters. And if it were possible to slow down one’s eyes, the result would be overwhelming, a repeated onslaught of our whole field of vision with each movement. “Practical blindness” was therefore both natural and necessary.

**Psychological Approaches to Advertising**

At the turn of the twentieth century, having amassed more than two decades’ worth of research findings, the new science of psychology seemed ready to offer advertisers advice about how to make their written appeals more compelling to consumers. As intellectual historian Merle Curti explains, however, practitioners of advertising were not necessarily searching for, or eager to welcome, this expertise from outside “theorists.” In 1895, just few years before he became Earnest Elmo Calkins’s

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boss, Charles Austin Bates expressed a complete lack of concern for the principles that guided both the creation and the consumption of advertising material. He explained to readers of his regular column in *Printers’ Ink*, “An advertisement that sells goods is a good advertisement. An advertisement that does not sell goods is a bad advertisement. I don’t care what it looks like, or what it reads like, or anything else about it.”

George Kissam, head of a Minneapolis agency, likewise stressed the bottom line when he asked potential clients, “Do you see the advertising cards in the street cars? Of course you do. All people who ride in the cars see them. They *read* and *heed* them too. How do you know? By results.” For Bates and Kissam, there was no mystery to be solved. What made an ad “good,” what made consumers read and heed it, were all able to be discovered by looking at how many products they sold.

For others, though, larger questions loomed: Did this ad sell as many goods as it should have? Could another design or message have generated more business? How did a successful advertisement steer the reader to buy? Some advertisers turned to straightforward “reason-why” advertising to resolve these questions in their favor, arguing that factual, neutral copy was the most effective tool at their disposal. Proponents of the reason-why approach insisted that irrelevant flourishes of rhetoric and design did little to sway the average reader, who, while no intellectual, still made rational decisions. Other advertising specialists came to favor the power of “suggestion” and appealed to the emotional, irrational tendencies of consumers, particularly women. While Curti suggests that reason-why dominated before 1910, and suggestive or impressionistic approaches

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took precedence between 1910 and 1930, it is important to acknowledge that these approaches coexisted and competed with one another throughout these years.  

Historian Charles McGovern writes, “It would be impossible to understand the history of mass consumption fully without acknowledging the centrality of men writing to women.” By the turn of the twentieth century, advertisers readily acknowledged that they needed to appeal to female consumers, whom they estimated were responsible for eighty-five percent of all purchases. “Don’t Aim Too High,” read the headline for an 1894 ad for The Ladies’ World, which urged advertisers to address female readers instead of “shooting for fun” at men. Reason-why advocates viewed female consumers as busy, practical, and thrifty, but it was the concept of suggestion that resonated most strongly with preconceived notions of feminine behavior as irrational and driven by emotion. As Ellen Gruber Garvey explains, “the disturbing irrationality of the consumer at large was quickly translated into already existing stereotypes of the capricious woman.” One especially vigorous and demeaning account of women’s importance as consumers stated, “Woman undoubtedly has – in scientific books, at least – less brain than man, yet she rules him; she has no single grain of the faculty called reason, yet she takes his reasoning into hand.” Walter Dill Scott, the advertising psychologist who popularized the concept of suggestion, plainly stated that women read more advertisements than men did and that they were more suggestible. All the same, Scott conducted his studies using male subjects, and simply inferred that women performed an

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exaggerated version of the behaviors he witnessed in men. While suggestion cut across gender lines, stereotypes of women as impulsive, emotional, and artistic strengthened the association of consumption with femininity.

Science, in particular psychology, represented a path to understanding how best to persuade irrational readers, rather than simply inform them. In order to make use of psychological tools, moreover, ad men to distinguish themselves from the readers whose business they courted. Employing the verbal and visual language of “you” was one way that creators tried to separate themselves from their audiences. Appealing to “you” gave advertisements a more personalized feel than the neutral, generic approach of reason-why ads. The vocabulary of “you” also encouraged consumers to see, and to read, themselves into the advertisements they encountered.

Figures 21-23 present three streetcar cards created by Ward & Gow, a firm that controlled more than half of the advertising space on American streetcars in 1900. They resemble the examples of streetcar cards that Calkins and Holden presented in Modern Advertising, but here, the letters of the atomized brand names are associated with human figures rather than inanimate objects:

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379 Ward & Gow, “Looking Backward and Looking Forward – One Year’s Experience,” Fame: A Journal for Advertisers 9, no. 3 (March 1900): 113. Artemas Ward was the longtime advertising manager of Sapolio as well as the editor of Fame.
Figure 21 invites “you” to discover a thousand different uses for Sapolio soap. Its claim, while likely hyperbolic, borrows its logic from the alphabet – another tool with a proportionately immense set of applications. The link between the soap and the alphabet is constructed through the series of men and women who scrub inside and around the brand name, one body entwined in each letter to illustrate another use. The two Os, though not identical, are similarly posed as the only two figures who face the reader. In
this text, *I* is not a symbol of self-enunciation; the letter belongs to the product name, helping the advertiser to enunciate *it*. “You” the consumer are the woman associated with the *I*, or any other figure/letter of the soap’s name, holding your brush or rag. Most of “you” appear to be female.

Within the firm’s first year of existence, Ward & Gow produced several other designs that shared the structure of this Sapolio card, segmenting and reconstituting a product’s name and associating letters with people. Figure 22, for SH&M clothing tape, depicts one of these. In addition, this card directly references the experience of riding a streetcar to its readers, who would have consumed it while riding themselves. It portrays a version of the world outside, with trees and hills in the distance. Unlike the fences that Calkins rode by as a child, though, the fence belonging to the SH&M ad never passes out of view. It moves along with the streetcar riders, offering them opposing perspectives. First, there is the promise of looking outward, beyond the walls of the vehicle, and even beyond the fence that displays “SH&M” as openings carved into its wooden pickets, to see the world outside. But there are also layers of barriers that mediate access to that environment, including the actual wall of the streetcar; the paper ad card pasted onto that wall; the tall fence the ad depicts, which restricts the view of most of what lies behind it and serves as the surface for displaying the brand name; and, finally, the figures who look in through the lettered openings. Riders are enclosed in a space that invites them to imagine the world beyond these layers but prevents them from fully reaching it, at least until they exit the car. The faces situated within the letters *S*, *H*, and *M* look back directly at “you” to call you as a consumer, and they are also the final layer of signage demanding to be read.
In *Fables of Abundance*, Jackson Lears describes the desire for authority that motivated the creation of “you” the consumer. “Like other managerial-professional groups of the era,” he writes, “advertising executives participated in the regnant fantasy that ‘we’ (the managerial elite in question) had acquired the capacity to predict and control ‘them’ (the consumers) through ‘social science.’” Below, I examine some of the earliest efforts to apply the social science of psychology to the question of how readers consumed advertising material. Research conducted by Harlow Gale in the late 1890s, and by Walter Dill Scott beginning in 1901, indicated that “you” the reader and consumer exhibited gendered preferences, and furthermore, that most of “your” final decisions to purchase an item were driven by suggestion rather than reason.

**Gale’s Early Advertising Tests**

Harlow Stearns Gale was among the first cohort of American students to study with Wundt in Leipzig, and after completing his doctorate in 1894, he accepted a position at the University of Minnesota. Gale pursued research on a variety of psychological topics early in his career, always seeking to connect his work in the lab to the outside world. In 1895, he designed and circulated what is thought to be the first advertising survey, in which he asked 200 agencies to name and rank the methods they used to attract attention and to induce customers to buy their products. He received only about twenty replies, but even from these few, Gale concluded that he had vastly underestimated the number of existing advertising media. Newspapers, magazines, handbills, posters, shop windows, and painted signs had already been on his radar, but the full landscape impressed him in its variety. His purpose derived from this abundance: “In the midst of

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the intense competition of this flood of advertising material the first question is as to the comparative attention-power of the different means.”381 The following year, Gale began a series of experiments using students in his advanced classes to ascertain what drew readers’ attention to an advertisement.

In spite of acknowledging the diversity of advertising media, Gale elected to perform his attention studies using magazine ads, reasoning that they were the most popular among all forms. Adopting the tachitoscopic principle, his subjects sat in a darkened room, two feet away from an advertising sample held in a frame. An electric light briefly illuminated the page, and viewers were asked to report which phrase or image they saw (if they saw more than one item, they reported the one they noticed first). The short exposure time was meant to replicate the experience of flipping through a magazine, and Gale began his tests using real ads clipped from Harper’s, Century, and Cosmopolitan. However, he soon found that his subjects’ familiarity with some brand names influenced their perception, so in later experiments he cut and pasted together specimens to create his own fictional appeals. He tested whether images or text were more readily noticed by subjects, and whether “relevant” information, which referred directly to the advertised article, was more easily seen than “irrelevant” content, which was unrelated to the specific product. He also attempted to determine which colors and which parts of the page viewers favored. Finally, Gale tested the effectiveness of different samples of advertising copy. After presenting subjects with six different texts advertising the same general item (e.g., soap, pianos), he asked them to rank the order in which they would select from the six fictional products and to explain which attributes

imparted by the ads (e.g., the age of the firm, the price of the item) had influenced their choices.

Gale’s tests do not meet the standards for contemporary social science research, and even in the early 1900s, his methods were criticized for failing to mimic the true conditions under which people read magazine ads.¹³⁸ Yet, these studies represent an early attempt to study reading in context. They differ from Cattell’s earlier attention tests, which treated letters and words as abstract “objects,” as well as from Huey’s attempts to understand reading under generic “ordinary” conditions, by foregrounding the purpose of the texts used as stimuli. Gale did not seek to explain reading processes in some idealized universal form, but was interested specifically in how readers interacted with advertisements. “An inclination to watch very live and very real psychology when often weary with the dead or artificial book psychology leads me to the queries respecting people’s commercial actions as influenced by street car and magazine advertising,” he wrote in the preface to his 1900 volume Psychological Studies.¹³⁹ Although Gale pursued his research without corporate sponsorship, he did thank members of the industry like J. Walter Thompson and George Kissam for their counsel and for responding to his survey. Historian Loren Baritz has argued that “the very first application of professional psychology to the world of business and industry was in advertising.”¹³⁴ In the years to come, Gale’s belief in the value of “live” and “real” psychology would tie psychologists’

³⁸³ Harlow Gale, “Preface,” Psychological Studies 1 (July 1900). This appears to have been the only issue he published.
work to other areas of business, like the testing and matching of job applicants.\textsuperscript{385}

Gale’s work also represents an important first step in organizing information about subjects’ responses to printed advertisements. Advertising scholars John Eighmey and Sela Sar identify him as the first researcher “to create his own mock-up of advertising stimuli to better isolate the precise nature of the concepts he wished to test” – a practice later replicated by Daniel Starch, Harry Hollingworth, and other psychologists.\textsuperscript{386} By testing the attention-getting value of different colors, sizes of type, and page layouts, Gale identified these to be the features of print advertising worthy of scientific study. Having tested eight men and four women, he also decided to report many results by gender, the only category by which he distinguished his subjects. Gale wrote in his summary that “female observers were attracted proportionately more than males by [image] cuts and irrelevancy.”\textsuperscript{387} By contrast, men favored advertisements dominated by text that made logical connections to the product. His work thus made an early suggestion for how to categorize both advertising texts and their consumers.

When Gale’s experiments turned from reporting on attention to describing more complex ways subjects responded to printed advertisements, these neat categories disintegrated. Figure 23 presents the results of his tests of advertising copy, illustrating the reasons subjects gave for favoring one fictional product over another.

\textsuperscript{385} Such work was pursued by Hugo Münsterberg in \textit{Psychology and Industrial Efficiency} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913) and also by Walter Dill Scott on behalf of American Tobacco, Western Electric, and other corporations. See Friedman, \textit{Birth of a Salesman}, 180.
\textsuperscript{387} Gale, “On the Psychology of Advertising,” 68.
Here, Gale combined the results for men and women, who ranked the factors they considered by their importance. The distance along the vertical axis indicates the proportion of subjects who selected each reason. He concluded that a firm’s age and reliability were two of the most compelling pieces of information to include in advertising copy. More than anything, though, this chaotic graph illustrates how difficult

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Gale found it to represent consumers’ patterns of reasoning. The dotted and dashed line labeled “Good Ad.” was especially problematic to him, as it represented the “general or indescribable” way readers were attracted to some advertisements over others. It was easy for him to understand that a firm’s reputation, or even the style or price of an item, could sway customers, but he considered their assessments of a good ad to be “unanalyzable.” Although troubled by this vagueness, Gale still understood “goodness” to be a powerful factor in consumer decisions, and so rather than eliminating or attempting to clarify the choice, he justified it: “The good ad. category has been kept in the diagram as showing how unconsciously many people reason, and cannot indeed give the real reason when they try.”

Amidst pages of concrete data, this sentence hints at how much remained unresolved for Gale about the ways readers processed advertising copy.

In the final paragraphs of his study, Gale tried to resolve the tension between what he could measure – the attention value of different texts – with what he could not – their choices. He mused about “the unconscious effect” of repeated exposure to advertisers’ products: “Having the simple name constantly forced before one’s indirect vision is enough to make many people sufficiently react to get the article.” Gale struggled to describe this decision-making process: first, he reduced it to a sensory-motor reaction, a physical response to a visual stimulus; then, he compared it to hypnotism and called it a form of “suggestion.” In either case, the final decision to make a purchase was involuntary, and unable to be accessed by any of the experiments he had conducted. Yet, Gale refused to end his article on this unresolved note, and he began his last paragraph by

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reinstating his belief in rational forces: “But if an advertiser wants to reason with his public, then a simple statement of his age and experience… seem the best means of supplying the buyer’s desire.”\(^{391}\) Although he clung to the logic of reason-why copy, Gale had already, along the way, introduced the concept of suggestion to the psychology of advertising. Gale did not publish any more studies of advertising psychology, and within a few years, the University of Minnesota fired him for being an outspoken critic of American imperialism. By then, his colleague Walter Dill Scott, another of Wundt’s students, was bringing academics and advertisers into direct conversation around the topic of suggestion.

Scott: Commanding Attention and Inducing Action

Walter Dill Scott’s early ventures into advertising psychology revealed not only the reticence of some advertisers to take advice from academia, but also a corresponding desire among experimental psychologists to keep their research untainted by business concerns. Early in his career, Scott had twice been reprimanded for his interest in conducting research for the benefit of business. It was with some hesitation, then, that he accepted an invitation to speak at the 1901 annual banquet of the Agate Club of Chicago. Several other psychologists had already declined the advertising club’s request. Scott’s address, “The Psychology of Involuntary Attention as Applied to Advertising,” was well received by the banquet’s attendees, and especially impressive to John Lee Mahin, head of one of Chicago’s leading advertising agencies. Mahin was so inspired by Scott’s ideas that he proposed to establish a new magazine if Scott would contribute a series of articles that expanded on his talk. Scott agreed, and over the next few years he contributed

twenty-six articles to *Mahin’s Magazine*. These were compiled into his books *The Theory of Advertising* (1903) and *The Psychology of Advertising* (1908). \(^{392}\)

Scott began his address to the Agate Club by establishing common ground amongst his audience of businessmen. Regardless of their differences, he insisted that advertisers shared a common goal of attracting attention. Of specific interest to Scott was “involuntary” attention, which worked on magazine readers without their knowledge or even their consent: “What must be the characteristics of an advertisement to force it into the attention of the possible customer?” \(^{393}\) Scott’s approach placed control in the hands of ad creators, and by extension it “portrayed the consumer as a nonrational, suggestible creature under the hypnotic influence of the advertising writer,” in the words of psychologist David Kuna. \(^{394}\)

At the time he delivered his 1901 talk, however, Scott lacked solid scientific evidence for his belief that advertisers could control the involuntary attention of consumers. He had performed a few preliminary experiments but acknowledged that a full investigation of attention had yet to be conducted. He thus prefaced remainder of his talk with a prediction that “with its complete analysis, the following six principles will appear.” \(^{395}\) Scott then elaborated on the factors that he believed influenced the ability of an advertisement to attract a viewer’s attention. These included repetition, intensity, and the presence of competing stimuli.

Scott cited Gale’s and Cattell’s studies directly in his talk, and his other evidence suggests that he was also familiar with the work of Huey and Dodge. Scott’s discussion


\(^{394}\) Kuna, “Concept of Suggestion,” 353.

\(^{395}\) Scott, “Psychology of Involuntary Attention,” 7. Emphasis is mine.
indicates that he thought it was important to control the amount of text that readers were exposed to, and he replicated Cattell’s finding that subjects could identify four “objects” (like Cattell, he used letters) at a time. From this, Scott reasoned that as a given magazine page became crowded with more text, the likelihood of readers seeing any given advertisement decreased proportionately. He therefore recommended that advertisers invest in placing full-page notices to ensure they garnered attention from readers. Unlike Cattell, Dodge, and others, though, Scott did not express any concern about fatigue, caused either by an excess of visual stimulation or by movement. On the contrary, he wrote that motion was the most effective way to direct readers’ attention: “Our eyes are so constructed that we can distinguish a movement of an object before we are able to distinguish an object itself. Movements please and attract us in whatever form they may be presented.” The goal for advertisers, then, was to simulate motion as well as possible, for “it attracts our attention in much the same way that actual movements do.” The printed advertisement should be as dynamic as a live animal in a store window, he insisted.⁴⁹⁶

Scott’s talk eventually became the second chapter of The Theory of Advertising, but for him, as for Gale, attention was only the first aim of a good advertisement. The second was to induce consumers to act, and this happened through suggestion. Gale had raised the idea of suggestion at the end of his 1900 study, but then retreated to reaffirm the importance of straightforward informational copy. Scott, in contrast, focused on the need to get consumers to respond to the ads they read, and he doubted that appealing to rationality was the most effective way to do this: “Man has been called the reasoning animal, but he could be with greater truthfulness be called the creature of suggestion. He

⁴⁹⁶ Scott, Theory of Advertising, 75.
is reasonable, but he is to a greater extent suggestible.”397 Suggestion, according to Scott, revealed men’s desire to be obedient, but it only worked when they were unaware that they had surrendered control to an outside authority. The ways that advertisers directed consumer behavior therefore needed to remain hidden from readers, who would resist perceived attempts at manipulation.

One of the most effective tools for suggestion was the direct command, most often issued in the headline of an advertisement. Scott cautioned advertisers to choose their words carefully to avoid being jarringly bossy on the one hand, and too passive or too vague on the other. (“Let The Gold Dust Twins Do Your Work” was one that he endorsed.) The feeling behind these direct commands was the most important factor for Scott, who believed that the printed word could be as expressive as a human speaker. “A command in good display type at the beginning of an advertisement may express in a few words the intent of the entire advertisement. It expresses it in such a living, moving, manner that it attracts our attention and makes us feel sympathy with it, so that we feel like doing what is suggested at once.”398 A “good” typeface helped to draw attention, but it had to be used to display text that moved readers emotionally.

Shortly after Scott published his writings on the theory of suggestion, the direct appeal, and other related topics as his first book, Printers’ Ink responded to his work. The journal’s unsigned review claimed that The Theory of Advertising simply reiterated what practicing advertisers already knew from experience: “It must be confessed that the book contains nothing particularly new. Advertisers have reached all of the Professor’s basic laws by the very serviceable kind of psychology called ‘horse sense,’ and his principles,

397 Scott, Theory of Advertising, 59.
398 Scott, Theory of Advertising, 75.
while reduced to scientific fact, are all drawn from actual advertisements.” The reviewer issued no precise criticism of Scott’s findings, but instead dismissed his work as altogether unnecessary, restating the belief of the journal’s editors that “the psychology of advertising takes care of itself to a great extent.” While Mahin’s accused *Printers’ Ink* of adhering to an old-fashioned, superstitious view of psychology, there is another explanation for the older journal’s lukewarm response to Scott’s work: it laid bare advertisers’ desire to manipulate their audiences. Scott himself acknowledged that he was not inventing new techniques in *The Theory of Advertising*, but rather attempting to illustrate the principles some successful advertisers were already employing. Business historians have argued that Scott’s main contribution was to describe and justify the ongoing shift from reason-why advertisements to more emotionally-driven appeals. He plainly explained that while people were driven to make irrational choices, those choices could be understood, and influenced, using rational scientific methods, demystifying the ways that advertisers could turn readers into consumers.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, men working in the fields of experimental psychology and advertising understood reading to be a crucial aspect of human behavior. For psychologists, reading was a ubiquitous but “artificial” act, and many researchers hoped that their work would help to reduce “the excessive burden put upon the eyes by the demands of modern life.” While men like James McKeen Cattell and Edmund Burke Huey were troubled by the inefficiencies of wasted time and fatigued eyes, advertisers fretted about wasting their money on appeals that failed to attract

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399 *Printers’ Ink* 45, no. 11 (December 9, 1903): 34.
401 Koopman, Harry Lyman, “Types and Eyes,” *Printing Art* 12, no. 6 (February 1909): 359.
consumers or to convince them to buy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, these professions converged, driven to refine what one Chicago railroad advertiser called “the art of forcing an idea on others through the eye.”

By timing and tracking subjects’ reactions to printed letters, psychologists came to understand the eye as an elusive and finicky organ whose movement was often not under the reader’s conscious control. Advertisers, meanwhile, looked to psychology to help steer the irrational, impulsive choices made by readers whose eyes and brains they attempted to reach through printed media. Together, these two groups of emerging professionals proposed a model of reading that was not particularly contemplative or even subject to the individual’s will. Rather, it reflected the contrasting lurches and pauses of modern life and the profusion of signs constantly demanding consumers’ attention.

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Chapter 4
Popular, Ugly, and Pure American:
Developing the Cheltenham Family of Typefaces

Something new and decidedly different, Cheltenham took hold with a grip. Its selection amounted to a rage; the universal order, seemingly, was “When in doubt, use Cheltenham.”
Julius Leroy Frazier, 1925

One type seems to stand above all the rest as the embodiment in type design that is thoroughly American. Cheltenham.
Alexander Lawson, 1990

Almost no one admits to liking the design.
Allan Haley, 1990

In January of 1903, the American Typefounders Company (ATF) debuted its newest product in the pages of the trade journal American Printer. With a four-page insert, the nation’s largest type foundry introduced printers to Cheltenham Oldstyle, a design that would become one of the most widely used typefaces of the twentieth century. The ATF’s advertisement in American Printer ended with “a prophecy” that by the end of the year, Cheltenham would prove itself as the typeface of choice for both job printers and book publishers. The first part of this prophecy came true; the second did not. Although Cheltenham Oldstyle had been conceived for book publishing, it generated far greater demand as a display type for advertising. By 1912, the ATF quickly expanded Cheltenham into the largest type “family” of the era, whose members included

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403 Although they are often used interchangeably today, “typeface” refers to a design of type, while a “font” comprises all of the characters (not only letters, but numbers, ornaments, and spaces) in a single size of any given design.
404 American Type Founders Company, advertisement, American Printer 35, no. 5 (January 1903).
not only the original Oldstyle and its italic (also released in 1903), but sixteen further varieties.405

_American Printer_ lent its editorial voice to the ATF’s ad campaign by announcing in the same January 1903 issue: “Cheltenham is another of those distinctive American type designs which will immediately become popular on account of its readable qualities, added to just enough individuality to impart to any piece of printing the quality of attractiveness.”406 This chapter probes the claims of this early endorsement. What made the design distinctively American? What made it readable? What was “just enough individuality” to be attractive? Finally, how did Cheltenham Oldstyle become “the daddy of the family,” in the words of _Inland Printer_ editor J.L. Frazier – a family so dominant that throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, “the magazines and the newspapers were full of it and its lusty offspring?”407

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405 American Type Founders Company, _American Specimen Book of Type Styles_ (Jersey City, NJ, 1912), 225. A “family” refers to a group of typefaces based upon a “parent” design, which differ from the original by being stretched, condensed, italicized, or otherwise altered in proportion or color. Edmund G. Gress referred to Cheltenham as “the most numerous family known to typefounding” in _The Art and Practice of Typography_ (New York: Oswald Publishing Company, 1917), 180.


407 Frazier, J.L. _Type Lore: Popular Fonts of Today; Their Origin and Use_ (Chicago: Published by the Author, 1925), 89.
Figure 24. The Cheltenham Family, 1912
Source: American Type Founders Company, *American Specimen Book of Type Styles* (Jersey City, NY, 1912), 225.
This chapter investigates how alphabetic letters have been conceived in corporeal
terms, and, focusing on Cheltenham, it argues that this immensely popular early
twentieth-century typeface participated in contemporary discourses of the body. I am
specifically concerned with typography and the ways that the design, production, and use
of letterforms came to be described, and in turn came to describe, human anatomy and
heredity. By aligning type faces with men’s faces, and type families with the various
racial and ethnic groups that made their homes in the United States, members of the
printing trades engaged with insecurities surrounding white men’s identity and authority.
As type founders, printers, and designers collaborated to produce graphic symbols on the
page, they both borrowed from and contributed to beliefs about biological progress and
national belonging, displaying these ideologies for readers on the page.

Below, I consider the historical connections between typography and the body
before recounting the story of Cheltenham’s development and reception in more detail.
Whereas the first half of this chapter focuses on typographic discourse, the second half is
dedicated to Cheltenham’s material forms, in metal and ink, and how they illustrate and
engage those ideas. Challenges facing the type founding industry, along with those facing
printers, fueled the demand for families of type, and Cheltenham became the most
successful tool for meeting that demand. I argue that Cheltenham emerged as an
attractive solution to the perceived problems of printing’s arrangement and taste,
especially as these came to carry broader social and racial connotations. Finally, I situate
the Cheltenham family within contemporaneous discourses of family, difference, and
beauty to demonstrate the deep ideological work performed by this successful advertising
typeface.
Historicizing Typography

Type as Signifier

“Typography is what language looks like,” Ellen Lupton writes to open her 1994 book *Thinking With Type*.\(^{408}\) It comprises both the design of letters – specifically, sets of identically-shaped letters that are reproduced on the page – and the arrangement of those letters into lines of text.\(^{409}\) In short, typography renders language visible. Yet, despite designers’ and design historians’ interest in type designs, typography, on the whole, has escaped treatment by other humanities scholars, even those dedicated to analyzing visual primary sources. This erasure reflects a widely-held expectation that “good” typography is paradoxically invisible, drawing little attention to itself and instead serving as a vehicle for the author’s ideas. Although my work challenges this notion, it is nevertheless helpful to trace the ways that other writers have both given and denied typography a presence. In the early twentieth-century era of “printed salesmanship,” advertisers valued typographic arrangements that “spoke” clearly and truthfully to readers – the visual equivalent of the accent-free voice of a native-born salesman. Typography was a conduit, and needed to be treated with care so as not to distract from the advertiser’s message. “An advertisement may be typographically so ingenious that the reader’s attention is entirely absorbed by its mechanical features, to the exclusion of the information it contains,” warned *Printers’ Ink* in 1907.\(^{410}\) In 1930, Beatrice Warde introduced a powerful metaphor that idealized type as a “crystal goblet” that could contain and offer perfect translucent access to an author’s

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thoughts.\textsuperscript{411} And more recently, Robert Bringhurst has insisted in \textit{The Elements of Typographic Style} that “typography exists to honor content,” to obediently deliver the author’s message in the spirit he or she intended.\textsuperscript{412} In various ways, “what language looks like” has been devalued in comparison to what it “says.”

The dynamics among writing, thought, and speech were theorized in the early 1900s by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure conceived language as a system of arbitrary signs whose meanings were not inherently bound to the objects or ideas they referenced. Instead, he theorized that meaning was relational, produced through the difference between one sign and another. Saussure separated linguistic signs into signifieds (concepts) and signifiers (their “sound images”), and in doing so, visual theorist Johanna Drucker argues that he opened up space to consider the material nature of phonemes and letters as signifiers, and the ways this materiality helps to produce meaning.\textsuperscript{413}

For Saussure, speech constituted language’s true object; writing was a second, subservient system of signs that existed only to translate and preserve the spoken word. His work reinforced a tradition that cast writing as an unnatural means of communication. Whereas all human societies are thought to have developed some spoken language, he argued, many have historically not used any form of writing. Children also learn to speak in their native languages without much effort, while reading and writing need to be taught, usually in school. Finally, speech needs no physical accessories besides the human body,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{411} Beatrice Warde, “The Crystal Goblet, or Printing Should be Invisible,” in \textit{Graphic Design and Reading: Explorations of an Uneasy Relationship}, ed. Gunnar Swanson (New York: Allworth Press, 2000), 91-96. First delivered as an address to the British Typographers’ Guild on October 7, 1930.
\item \textsuperscript{412} Robert Bringhurst, \textit{The Elements of Typographic Style} (Roberts Point, WA: Hartley and Marks, 2004), 19.
\end{itemize}
while writing depends upon access to external tools. Saussure drew on all of these distinctions to solidify the natural, authoritative character of speech and to contrast it to the manufactured technology of writing.

Whereas Saussure celebrated the linguistic arbitrariness of speech – the absence of any intrinsic relationship between signifiers and signifieds – he did not grant writing systems the same flexibility. To fulfill its mission, written language could not tolerate phonetic variation; it needed to derive directly from speech. Yet, in practice, sounds and letters often do not coincide. Alphabets borrowed across cultures and etymological traditions produce inconsistent and irrational spellings that do not faithfully represent the spoken word. For instance, the vowels in the words thought, caught, and cot are pronounced identically but spelled with different letters, while thought and bough, which both feature the combination ough, are pronounced differently. To Saussure, such idiosyncrasies indicated that writing was not only a copy of speech, but a flawed one.

“If writing is but a copy of spoken language, typography is a mode of representation even farther removed from the principal source of meaning in the mind of the author,” write Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller.\(^{414}\) These design scholars turn not to Saussure but to the poststructuralists who followed him in order to understand how typographic systems not only represent thought, but create meanings of their own vis-à-vis the body. In developing his theory of grammatology, Jacques Derrida rejected Saussure’s construction of writing as servant to the spoken word, arguing instead that writing’s apparent failures were in fact symptomatic of all language, including speech. Derrida challenged the structuralist devaluation of writing and insisted that speech held no privileged relation to reality. In fact, he argued that the seeming naturalness of speech,

\(^{414}\) Lupton and Miller, Design Writing Research, 5.
and its connection to thought, derived from its ongoing opposition to writing. Speech had long been linked to the body, with writing viewed as an external, artificial technology that required special equipment and education. Following Derrida, Lupton and Miller upend this assumption to ask, “What if one were to see writing as an extension of the body, no different in essence from an artificial limb or contact lens?” Or maybe even as a bodily product akin to sweat, spit, or semen?415

By blurring the boundary between the written word and the body, Lupton and Miller open up the opportunity to view typography, too, as a bodily technology. They suggest that typography functions “at the edges of writing” by determining the shapes and spaces on the page.416 The ways typography has done so and the printed alphabet’s relation to the body have changed over time. Lupton writes that “the history of typography reflects the continual tension between the hand and the machine, the organic and the geometric, the human body and the abstract system.”417 The earliest moveable types designed by Johannes Gutenberg were intimately tied to the body: his fonts included several versions of the same letter to mimic handwriting’s variations. In the early sixteenth century, letterforms began to veer away from the calligraphic ideal, with “humanist” designs based on geometric relationships and the proportions of the body rather than on the order of strokes of the pen. King Louis XIV established a committee in 1693 that developed model grids for the design of future roman and italic types, turning typography into a matter of royal bureaucracy. At the turn of the nineteenth century, two artists, the Italian Giambattista Bodoni and the Frenchman Firmin Didot, further severed typography from calligraphy with new designs that came to be labeled “modern.” While

415 Lupton and Miller, Design Writing Research, 50.
416 Lupton and Miller, Design Writing Research, 14. Emphasis is original.
417 Lupton, Thinking with Type, 13.
letters made by the pen were relatively uniform in thickness, these new modern designs featured dramatic contrasts between fine and bold lines. They also had perpendicular, thin serifs (the short strokes found at the ends of letters). These delicate modern serifs were visually unlike the stubby older ones that had been designed to resemble the marks of a metal pen nib; printers also soon found that they were prone to breaking because they were so thin.

The modern regime abandoned the notion of perfect, transcendent letterforms. As an adjunct to this, the relationships between letters in a font grew in importance. There was no longer an essential, individual A to aspire toward, but instead a desire to build fonts whose letters proved compatible – legible – in combination. Lupton argues that Bodoni and Didot’s types replaced older corporeal ideals with a structuralist system of factors (e.g., variable stroke thickness, or “weight”) that lacked inherent meaning and, like Saussure’s signifiers, produced meaning through difference. Her evocative conclusion is that this new approach to typography “created a monster: an abstract and dehumanized approach to the design of letters.”418

The reconception of type as a system of elemental differences inspired designers to experiment with new styles and uses for printed letters, and these experiments made their most dramatic impact on packaging and publicity, fields both in their infancy in the early nineteenth century. Advertisers thus became the primary beneficiaries of both the modern approach to typography and the technological innovations in printing. The early 1800s saw the first types made specifically for display purposes, rather than for setting blocks of text, as well as new designs that aimed to catch the reader’s attention. These

418 Lupton, Thinking with Type, 21.
included sans-serifs, called “grotesques,” heavy slab-serifs, shaded types, and letters so ornate that they could barely be read.

In *Alphabets to Order*, printer and scholar Alastair Johnston suggests that these types in new designs and sizes warrant attention because “their introduction led, in turn, to changes in reading, not only in scale and pace, but in readers’ understanding of emphasis through type weight & colour.” In other words, in addition to their impact upon the practitioners of type founding and printing, the diversity of type designs taught the reading public new skills. Lay readers learned how to consume texts that featured more complex designs, and that conveyed their meanings specifically through typography. “New types, as they came into play, altered the way we look at words, hear, and think about them.” They did this not only through readily perceptible differences in design, but also in the ways those differences accumulated associations – new meanings created through use.419

Below, I explore several metaphors that writers attached to typography in the years that the advertising profession came into its own. These advertising and printing experts inherited the typographical abundance that Johnston locates in the early part of the nineteenth century, as well as the versatile system that Lupton characterizes as abstract and dehumanized. Discourses about clothing, freaks, racialized faces, and gendered bodies reflect a desire to control the population of designs, to put letters to efficient use, and to associate types of letters with types of people via the body.

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Typographic Discourses

A writer for *The Inland Printer* summarized advertisers’ unique demand for effective typography: “It puts type in the position of having to produce results…. Presumably all type is intended to be read, wherever it is used. A book is printed to be read, but if the book does not sell, rarely is the type blamed for the apathy.”420 Publicity material, on the other hand, was instantly judged for its appearance. Advertisers had driven printers’ appetite for new typefaces since the early 1800s, and as the advertising profession coalesced at the turn of the twentieth century, clients demanded designs that were not just different, but persuasive. As advertising specialists began exploring the power of design to influence consumers’ decisions, they put new effort into understanding layout and typography. Writers, designers, and printers all sought ways to communicate with each other about newly emerging principles of graphic design that promised to make the printed word more attractive and more compelling, especially for advertising purposes.

In the era of printed salesmanship, roughly 1890-1910, clothing emerged as a common metaphor for both faces of type and their arrangement. With printed ads intended to substitute for live salesmen, typography made an important first impression. A contributor to a July 1899 issue of *Printers’ Ink* linked the appearance of an ad to the salesman’s costume, counseling, “A tailor should not send out a representative dressed in ill-fitting garments of old style. Let the advertisement be set up in good form and use the latest ideas and designs.”421 In 1903, the year Cheltenham type first appeared, Ingalls Kimball of the Cheltenham Press warned job printers that “the ridiculousness of the man

in mixed clothing – is no more absurd than the lack of arrangement, the lack of typographic harmony, or the rampant tawdriness of color” characteristic of some of their presswork. Writing in *The Printing Art*, Kimball was mainly addressing those printers who produced small runs of pamphlets, or advertising “books.” *Printers’ Ink* applied the same metaphor to periodical advertising: “Type is the advertiser’s dress for his message, and it is just as important for the advertisement to be properly dressed as for the salesman,” instructed the “Little Schoolmaster” in 1911. In the years to follow, many other professional advice-givers treated typography as textual costume – closely related to the human body, but not organic itself.

Authorities also offered visceral descriptions that depicted aberrant typed letters as monstrous, freakish, and misshapen. Saussure called writing’s phonetic imprecision an “orthographic monstrosity,” he and mused about how such malformed words came into being. “Phonetic distortions do indeed belong to the language but they are not the result of its natural evolution,” he insisted. “They are cases of abnormal development.” As discussed in chapter 2, authors in *Printers’ Ink* often cast outlandish ads as “freaks.” Sometimes, this referred to their content, like in this criticism of an ad placed in *The New York Herald* for a new real estate development: “Our friend the adwriter is not skilled in the art of attracting attention in a natural way. He has to resort to freak phrases and odd verbiage to effect his purpose.” On matters of display, writers also criticized freakish fonts and layouts that produced what one author described as “a typographical crazy-

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quilt.” These designs merged the two late nineteenth-century uses of the word *freak* outlined in the *OED*: they were both “abnormally developed” freaks of nature and, in a sense less commonly used today, flecks or streaks of color upon the page. In the twentieth century, modern ad design increasingly called upon typefaces to convey clarity and restraint. Freakish types – ornate designs commonly associated with Victorian-era circus posters – and scareheads – large, sensational headlines – both threatened to puncture the authority of the printed advertisement, and they were cast off by the new corps of advertising professionals for being illegible and unrefined.

Another way of understanding typography drew powerful connections to reading bodies, especially faces, for information about their essential character. In *The Corporate Eye*, Elspeth Brown examines the rise of “character analysis” as a tool for managing the workforce between 1913 and the late 1920s. Trained analysts determined employee fitness by reading photographs of job applicants and interpreting their physical features as indications of their natural aptitude and fitness for certain types of work. Character analysis insisted upon the correspondence between mental capacity and physical characteristics of the individual, applying the logic of scientific racism to the Taylorist drive for workplace efficiency and fragmentation.

In these same years, typography specialists wrote in similar terms, linking letters’ physical properties to their uses and bestowing them with distinct “personalities.” In 1914,

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Henry Lewis Bullen, librarian and PR man for the ATF, urged advertisers to appreciate that “printing types have as much range of expression and as much individuality as we find in human eyes. From the beginning of printing, types have been invested with a personality not conceded to any other things made by men. This is shown from the terms used from the beginning to describe the parts of types – body, face, shoulder, beard, and feet.” J.L. Frazier wrote in very similar fashion, “Faces of type are like men’s faces. They have their own expression; their complexion and the peculiar twists and turns of lines identify them immediately to friends, to whom each is full of individuality. One who has worked with letters long enough to merit the title of printer remembers a type face as an ordinary man remembers a man’s face.”

Although Bullen and Frazier stressed the “individuality” of different typefaces, it is important to note that they also grouped designs into broad categories, which they both constructed in explicitly racial terms. Bullen drew a sharp division between “Asiatic” and roman letters. Those in the first category followed the form of the calligraphy brush, and while they could be beautiful, they offered little opportunity for the designer: “seemingly fluid, they are actually unyielding. They fitly typify the oriental civilizations.” Roman types, in contrast, appeared to be rigid and geometric, but in practice they afforded more flexibility to designers, making them “more expressive” and “exactly typical of the ever-changing, ever-progressing occidental civilization.” Bullen argued that letterforms both corresponded to and worked to shape the psychic characters of nations. He therefore predicted that Germany, in the quest for modernity, would soon “emancipate” its people from fraktur (a dark, calligraphic style) in favor of roman types. He noted also that prior

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430 Henry Lewis Bullen, “The Importance to Advertisers of the Study of Type Design,” Graphic Arts 7, no. 1 (July 1914): 11.
431 Frazier, Type Lore, 9. Emphasis is original.
to declaring their independence in 1912, Albanians had demanded to substitute Latin letters for Arabic script, “probably the first occasion in history in which a nation has declared itself to be oppressed collectively by a form of written or printed characters.” However, Bullen denied the Chinese the same possibility of transition. Their huge set of “memory taxing ideographs” remained bound to calligraphic forms that resisted typographical and national progress.432

Writing roughly a decade later, J.L. Frazier ignored Bullen’s oriental-occidental binary and instead focused exclusively on designs of European and American origin. He classified types into five categories, distinguishing the black-letter Gothics inspired by Johannes Gutenberg from Roman faces later designed by Nicolas Jenson and William Caslon, and both of these from italics, sans-serif block letters, and scripts.433 Frazier’s scheme was also explicitly racial. “As we have divisions of mankind, so we also have similar divisions among letters,” he explained, and particular type designs exist as variants within these categories: “As we set the Italians apart from the Swedes by recognizing their broad racial characteristics, so we distinguish one Italian from another by his individual features.”434

This overlap of men’s faces with typefaces testifies to the ways that printer’s types could function as analogues for racial types for Frazier, Bullen, and their contemporaries. In an Inland Printer article published the same year as Frazier’s Type Lore, a type designer and advertising manager named A. Raymond Hopper depicted his dreamlike experience of flipping through the pages of a type catalog one evening. In his

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432 Bullen, “Psychology of Printing Types,” 270-271. Emphasis is original.
434 Frazier, Type Lore, 9.
living room, the type specimens became animated: “This book was still a collection of faces — no, it wasn’t a book, after all — how had I come into this quaint assemblage? — faces all around me, not type faces, but surely typical faces; they appeared so familiar, too, both men and women.” Hopper, like Frazier, cataloged different alphabetic designs by tying the physical features of their faces to ethnic origin stories. Of the Bodoni type family, he wrote that “the father was a typical temperamental Italian gentleman, of dark complexion, an exquisite refinement, but with now and then a glint of cruel hardness.” Meanwhile, Miss Goudy Old Style was a modern, athletic type of girl, except when presented in italics that rendered her too fussy, “like a spoiled child.” Shortly after this encounter with Miss Goudy, Hopper’s reverie was interrupted by his wife, who urged him to put down his work and come to bed.435

The invented Miss Goudy and the real Mrs. Hopper demonstrate how, in addition to reifying divisions of race and nation, the language writers applied to typography engaged concerns about gendered behavior in the early twentieth century. In 1892, printer Theodore Low De Vinne delivered a speech to the United Typothetae of America entitled “Masculine Printing.” De Vinne’s address reflected anxieties about white male identity and authority that Gail Bederman has analyzed in Manliness and Civilization. Bederman traces the rise of “masculinity,” which stressed strength and “natural” male power in contradistinction to an older ideal of “manliness,” which, until roughly the 1890s, prized male self-restraint and character. Manliness, and later, masculinity, informed a discourse

of civilization that intertwined racial and sexual differentiation to place white men at the top of the evolutionary scale.\footnote{Gail Bederman, \textit{Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).}

De Vinne opened his talk by clarifying his decision “to give sex to printing” by distinguishing between masculine and feminine work. He defined masculine printing as “all printing that is noticeable for its readability, for its strength and absence of useless ornament.” Masculine printing aimed to instruct; it was built from “plain” types, black inks, and austere arrangements. It also erased its own traces of artistry: “That printer does the best work who is most successful in getting the thought of the author before the reader, without the offensive suggestion of his agency as an intermediate. So done, his work must be simple, direct, manly or masculine.” De Vinne estimated that more than half of the book and job printing in the country deviated from this ideal to become feminine; book printing in particular had become “thoroughly emasculated.” This weak work featured sharp, thin lines and aspired for delicacy rather than readability. Although he did not directly approach the topic of race, De Vinne opposed the strong, blackened appearance of masculine printing to “the grayness and feebleness” of many modern books, which were being printed on cheap, glossy paper that could not absorb black ink, and, as a result, failed to produce visual contrast.\footnote{Theodore L. De Vinne, “Masculine Printing,” \textit{American Bookmaker} 15 (November 1892): 140-144.}

Hopper, who wrote more than thirty years after De Vinne, maintained some of the same preferences and criticisms in his magical trip through the type specimen book. His description of the Italian Bodonis, for instance, reflected not only the reality of recent waves of Catholic immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, but an apprehension about virile masculinity. While Hopper seemed to respect Mr. Bodoni’s occasional
severity, he viewed the Bodoni Book type (the “son” of the family) with disdain: “A visit to the doctor might help him. He was anemic and flat-chested. Probably indoors too much.” This damning description of a delicate, light-faced type channeled concerns that Bederman and others have noted regarding the apparent strength of white men. In Building a Better Race, historian Wendy Kline identifies several factors that fed the rise of American eugenics. These included a newly corporatized, bureaucratic economy that removed many middle-class workers from the products of their labor and apparent challenges to white male dominance from African Americans and immigrants. These both contributed to the new medical diagnosis for neurasthenia, “a lack of nerve force” symptomized by fragility and exhaustion. Hopper’s description of a typeface that needed to visit the doctor after spending too much time indoors, like De Vinne’s earlier critique of feeble printing, connected contemporary social concerns to the appearance of the printed word.

Bederman’s discourse of civilization permeated commercial printing in broader ways, too. Typeface catalogs of the 1890s and early twentieth century embraced printing’s heritage and contribution to western thought. The first page of 1903 catalog debut of Cheltenham Oldstyle, for instance, referenced Gutenberg, as well as the fifteenth-century French printer and type designer Nicolas Jenson and the Roycrofts, a family of seventeenth-century London bookmakers. At the same time that printers and type founders honored their past, the new field of graphic design suggested ways that the printed page could be further improved, and words and arrangements made more beautiful, efficient, and profitable. This orientation toward the future also made its way

into the type specimen books. One example of the trend can be seen in the ATF catalog for 1912, which used the following text to display its Cheltenham Medium face: “The glory and power of Printing is not in the past. Its influence at the present time makes it a powerful conservator of all human acts and progress. It is the handmaiden of all the arts, industries, and sciences, and the most energetic worker in the world’s shop to polish and refine the civilization of this age and the future.”

This belief in printing’s ability to “polish and refine” civilization connects with the eugenic projects that Kline explores, which were based on a conviction that “through intelligent procreation would come a better, more prosperous race of human beings.”

For printing, advertising, and type founding, I argue that these drives came together most powerfully in the concept of the type family. Printing historian Patricia Cost defines a type family as “a group of types closely related to a ‘parent’ design but expanded, condensed, or otherwise varied from the original face.” Alastair Johnston’s account of the rapid expansion of type designs in the early 1800s hints at what would become, in the next century, a far more complex system for producing and marketing typefaces. The ATF’s 1900 *Desk Book of Type Specimens, Borders, Ornaments, Brass Rules and Cuts* made no mention of families; instead, the different sizes of a given face were identified as belonging to a “series.” Two decades later, the language of the type family was well established, and by 1924, Henry Lewis Bullen was writing that ATF president Robert Nelson “moves his type families as generals move their divisions, not haphazardly, but with deliberation. The design announced today was placed two or three years before to support a further advance.” With his militaristic comparison, Bullen stressed not only

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efficiency and management but the compatibility of designs. He concluded that the type family “makes for a saving in time by securing harmonious effects automatically.”

These two benefits of the type family, efficiency and harmony, appear throughout the advertising and printing trade literature of the early 1900s. An author for The Inland Printer explained in 1912 that the purpose of the family was “to make type harmony automatic – to simplify the compositor’s work in trying to find harmony between unrelated type-faces, by producing related type-faces varying only in density and widths.”

A few writers clarified that by “harmony,” they did not mean to eliminate all typographic difference. Instead, they aspired to manage that difference by limiting the ways printers combined types on the page. “A certain amount of contrast is desirable,” Edmund Gress explained in 1917. J.L. Frazier connected this desire directly to color and faces, writing in 1920 that “the family relationship brings… bold and light face types into harmony.” If Frazier’s rhetoric of harmonious families and faces seems limited to the tools of printing, it should be remembered that five years later, he explicitly linked those tools to society by stating, “Faces of type are like men’s faces.”

Given the historical connections between typography and gendered and raced bodies, these family relationships and the way they aimed to produce harmony efficiently and automatically should be considered for their resonances off the page. Historian Laura Lovett writes in Conceiving the Future that in the decades surrounding the turn of the

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445 Gress, Art and Practice of Typography, 43.
446 J.L. Frazier, Modern Type Display: A Manual in the Selection and Use of Type and Ornament for Printers and Advertisers (Chicago: Published by the Author, 1920), 22.
twentieth century, many considered the American family – nostalgically profiled as white and rural – to be in a state of crisis.⁴⁴⁷ Edward A Ross coined the term “race suicide” in 1901 and worried that the “distinct American type” was being threatened by the closing of the frontier and by immigration – “the inrush from the lesser breeds.”⁴⁴⁸

In their essay entitled “A Natural History of Typography,” Lupton and Miller tie the abstract relationships of modern typography initiated by Bodoni and Didot to genetics and breeding: “A canon of ideally proportioned letterforms has yielded to a flexible genetic code capable of breeding an infinity of new species.” Lupton and Miller also write that the ATF “encourage[d] printers and their clients to use genetically related characters rather than combining fonts of mixed heritage.”⁴⁴⁹ Their language recalls that of the era’s printers and type founders. De Vinne and Frazier both wrote of “mongrel” typefaces,⁴⁵⁰ while the ATF praised Cheltenham Oldstyle as “a thoroughbred design” that they had expanded into a harmonious and victorious family.⁴⁵¹ In the context of twentieth-century immigration and immigration restrictions, miscegenation fears, and eugenic applications of Gregor Mendel’s theory of genetic inheritance, these were not neutral metaphors.

⁴⁵¹ American Type Founders Company, advertisement, Inland Printer 40, no. 6 (March 1908): 836.
The Cheltenham Type Family

The Type Business

By all accounts, type founding – the business of producing pieces of movable metal type for use by printers – was in difficult straits following the Civil War, mostly due to overproduction. Precise figures vary, but in the 1880s some two dozen firms created and distributed printing types in the United States, mostly concentrated along the eastern seaboard. As they automated different aspects of the complex process of making type, foundries flooded the market with their products. Overproduction and its resulting price wars threatened the livelihoods of many established printers. The foundries’ aggressive attempts to generate business by lowering the prices of fonts inspired many new printers to set up shop at a fraction of the cost borne by their predecessors. Older customers, meanwhile, suffered as their own capital investments rapidly deflated in value. To add insult to injury, foundries denied their existing customers the discounts and generous credit made available to their new competitors.

The challenges posed by overproduction were compounded by a tradition of incompatible designs. Different foundries produced types that carried the same name but varied in shape, size, and quality. Designs circulated without copyright protection, which meant that a font produced by one foundry could simply be an electrotyped copy of the types produced by another. Foundries also used different standards for the widths,

453 Pankow, “Rise and Fall of ATF,” 4-5.
heights, and baselines of their types, and cast them in metal alloys that ranged in
durability. These idiosyncrasies generally discouraged printers from mixing fonts from
different sources. Baselines, for instance, determined the vertical location of a letter
within a piece of type; using multiple fonts meant that rows of printed text might fail to
align. Smaller printing outfits, however, often found themselves “out of sorts,” or without
enough stock of a given letter, which made it necessary to substitute one face for another.
When they did so, typesetters like the young Earnest Elmo Calkins struggled with letters
“theoretically the same body, but with slight variations, forever getting into the wrong
case and dropping out when the form was lifted.” For the most part, though, printers
were tied to the foundries from which they purchased their original stock, and, in turn, to
their ruinous pricing policies.

Several individuals attempted to standardize and simplify the type landscape to
aid both foundries and their customers, the printing houses. When John Marder rebuilt his
type founding business following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, for instance, he
adopted a new system of type sizing created by Nelson Crocker Hawks. Hawks’s model
replaced the older convention of assigning names like Pica, Diamond, and Long Primer
to different sizes of type with a point system based on numerical measurements: six
picas, or seventy-two points, equaled one inch. Although it promised to simplify matters
for the printer, other foundries hesitated to adopt the point system as it necessitated
recasting their existing stock. Patricia Cost writes that in the mid-1880s, “the majority of
American type founders still referred to the sizes of their type bodies using the ‘grand old

455 Calkins, And Hearing Not, 95.
These names, moreover, did not always guarantee identical measurements: one foundry’s Pica differed slightly from another’s. Finally, in an effort to bring order to competing products, the “American System of Interchangeable Bodies” was formally adopted as a standard by the U.S. Typefounders’ Association in 1886. The Association, whose primary mission was to regulate printing equipment, disbanded just two years later.

In addition to production excesses and the chaos of rival standards, a dramatic threat to the type founding business came in the form of the machines developed for hot metal casting, especially Ottmar Mergenthaler’s Linotype, which made its public debut in 1886. Writing about Mergenthaler’s “cheap, fast alphabets,” printing historian William Sonn argues that “his hot-metal type was the last and arguably the most important innovation in the century-long transformation of the printed word into a mass medium.” For decades, inventors had worked to address the bottleneck that faced all printers of lengthy texts: arranging pages took much longer than running them through the presses. Between 1870 and 1900, Sonn writes, inventors filed 1,500 patents for 127 different composing machines. Only three of these ever sold more than three units. By contrast, the Linotype became an essential piece of equipment for newspaper publishers, whom it served for nearly a century (The New York Times produced its final issue on the

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456 Cost, The Bentons, 46. This paragraph draws from chapter 4 of Cost’s work, where she describes not only the efforts to standardize the height of types, but Linn Boyd Benton’s invention of “self-spacing type.”
457 William Sonn, Paradigms Lost: The Life and Death of the Printed Word (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 182.
458 Sonn, Paradigms Lost, 139.
Linotype on July 2, 1978). By operating a keyboard to cast and set type, Linotype operators could work five times faster than hand compositors.

The success of the Linotype (and, to follow shortly, the Monotype) was due to a complementary invention, Linn Boyd Benton’s 1885 punch-cutting machine. Benton, head of a Milwaukee foundry, had previously developed the concept of “self-spacing” type, another attempt to speed the process of setting type by reducing the number of possible letter widths in a font, from 190 to just nine. In 1882, Benton turned his efforts to inventing a composing machine, and a few years later, he patented a device for producing type matrices in various sizes. Prior to this, type founders relied on punches carved by hand. These punches, each of which held the design of a single letter (in reverse), were struck into other pieces of metal to create the matrices, or molds, from which individual pieces of type could be cast. Talented punch-cutters were rarely capable of producing more than one punch per day, and, importantly, a single punch could only be used to produce pieces of type in that fixed size. Issuing a font of larger or smaller type therefore necessitated a whole new set of punches and matrices. The true innovation of Benton’s new machine was that it allowed for designs to be scaled, extended, and condensed. In much the same way that the pantograph-router had expanded the availability of wooden type designs in the 1830s, Benton’s invention granted new flexibility to makers of metal type.

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460 A Linotype operator set roughly 5,000 ems per hour, versus the 1,000 ems expected from handset type. See Mergenthaler Linotype Company, *Linotype Bulletin* 3 no. 1 (Oct-Nov-Dec 1906): 2.
461 Benton had created two previous models of his machine but it was his third version, patented in 1885, that “revolutionized the typefounding business.” See John Allen Murphy, “Morris Benton: Type Designer-Executive,” *Inland Printer* 96 no. 6 (March 1936): 34.
Benton, still invested in selling his self-spacing types to newspapers, worked on his punch cutter unaware of Mergenthaler’s new composing machine. In a few short years, though, the Linotype had proven itself in operation, but with one critical handicap: it demanded more matrices than could readily be provided to customers. Benton’s punch cutter offered a solution to this problem threatening the machine’s viability. He leased his first punch cutter to the Mergenthaler Printing Company in 1889, and delivered one to Tolbert Lanston for use by the Monotype Type Machine Company a year later. “Thus,” wrote one of Benton’s colleagues, “an invention to the aid of the typefounder became the greatest ally of a machine which at the time was expected to destroy the typefounding industry.”

This rather melodramatic outlook stemmed from the fact that the Linotype and Monotype, in addition to transforming the practice of typesetting, also transformed the nature of type founding. The machines both cast and set type, and in doing so, they effectively transformed printers their own type founders. Rather than stocking fonts of type purchased from outside foundries, they could create what they needed on site. Publishing houses, especially, began to question whether it was practical to purchase handset types when these new machines, aided by Benton’s invention, could both produce and set body type far more efficiently. Because newspaper and book publishers needed to set far more copy than job printers, they were the ones most likely to turn to the Linotype and Monotype machines, respectively. To many, it seemed as though

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464 “Body type” refers to the size and design of lettering used for the majority of the text in a given document, usually a distinct choice from the faces used for headlines, footnotes, and other auxiliary text.
the four-hundred-year-old market for handset types would be handily subsumed by machine casting.

Against this background, twenty-three of the country’s remaining foundries banded together in 1892 to create the American Type Founders Company (ATF). Although concerns about the new “type trust” floated through the trade press, the combine was predominantly recognized as a necessary move, and stabilizing prices was its first goal.\(^{465}\) It took several years for the regional foundries, most of whom had subsisted by selling types to local newspapers in the pre-Linotype era, to fully shed their identities. After several general managers failed to streamline the ATF’s operations, Robert W. Nelson took charge in 1894 and instituted some important changes. He ordered old shop signs to be removed and replaced with ones displaying the name of the new company. Type production was streamlined as well: in 1895, the twelve remaining member foundries issued a common specimen book stamped with the ATF name. By 1900, there were only six foundries left. Then, in 1903, Nelson, by then ATF’s president, oversaw the construction of a new centralized factory and moved all production, as well as the company’s headquarters, to Jersey City, New Jersey.\(^{466}\)

Steve Watts, a longtime ATF employee, has explained that in 1903, ATF “was mopping up and consolidating its position,” both financially and stylistically.\(^{467}\) Along with the difficult mandate to control prices, curator and printing historian David Pankow writes that the newly-formed ATF “was urged to tackle a growing problem: typeface


\(^{467}\) Steve L. Watts, “The Famous Cheltenham Type Advertising Story of the Early Nineteen Hundreds” (offprint), Type Specimen Pamphlet Collection, Rochester Institute of Technology.
design.” The company inherited “a glut of freak faces, but relatively few that seemed to meet the demands of changing taste.”468 Indeed, the late nineteenth century, in addition to being known as a troubled moment for the type business, has been widely cast as an unfortunate era in type aesthetics. Recalling that period, George French wrote in his 1903 book *Printing in Relation to Graphic Art*, “Until quite recently a very large proportion of the new faces had no warrant for existence. They were abortions.”469 Designer Douglas McMurtrie similarly declared, “This was the age of types abnormal in every particular, of the decorated monstrosities that made printing in general, and display composition especially, so hideous.”470 As the ornate Victorian typefaces that had been popular for posters and other job work fell out of favor, the ATF looked to replace them with both revived classics and new designs that aspired toward beauty, legibility, and, above all, financial profit. Their new “American Lining System” also encouraged printers to purchase different sizes and faces of type with a promise that they could be easily combined on the page.

Linn Boyd Benton, whose own foundry joined the ATF in 1892, served on its first board of directors and as chief technical advisor. His punch-cutting machine, while already introduced to the Linotype and Monotype manufacturers, had never been used by another maker of handset type, and it became a valuable asset to the new company. Equally important in 1896 was arrival of Benton’s son, fresh out of Cornell. Morris Fuller Benton was hired to assist his father, and one of his first tasks at the ATF was to standardize the baseline alignments of types originating from its twenty-three member

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468 Pankow, “Rise and Fall of ATF,” 5.
469 George French, *Printing in Relation to Graphic Art* (Cleveland: The Imperial Press, 1903), 37.
Eventually, the younger Benton ventured away from his father’s engineering work and toward design, working as the ATF’s chief type designer alongside Joseph Phinney, head of the type department. Phinney and Benton seem to have collaborated on the initial task of eliminating duplicate designs and selecting ones to produce under the ATF name. This was a project of considerable scale. Upon its formation in 1892, the ATF’s member foundries advertised 750 different typefaces in their catalogs; the consolidated specimen book of 1906 offered only 225. According to Watts, it was Phinney who “dinged out hundreds of stray cats and dogs, despite wails of anguish from the member foundries which had cherished them.” Writing for *The Inland Printer*, however, John Allen Murphy credited the young Benton with “coördinating the heterogeneous line taken over from the twenty-three typefounders.” Whatever his precise role, Benton proved himself as an authority on type design while working for Phinney. His next large assignment would be to develop the Cheltenham typeface for production.

Under the various pressures of foundry consolidation, new technology, and a demand for modern designs, ATF president Robert Nelson discerned a new niche for his company. Publicity types, that is, types primarily used for advertising, had previously taken a backseat to body types, which foundries had sold to publishers in much greater volume. As the Linotype cannibalized the market for fonts of body type, however, Nelson recognized that the future of handset type would increasingly depend on meeting advertisers’ needs. The Linotype could only cast letters up to fourteen points in size, and this also left the market for larger display types untouched. Writing in 1924, Henry Lewis

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471 Pankow, “Rise and Fall of ATF,” 7.
Bullen lauded Nelson for recognizing the opportunity to tie the fate of type founding to that of advertising: “Undeniably, the greater effectiveness of printing in advertising, the greater is the demand for printing. This is the basic idea in Nelson’s policy: to increase the demand for types by increasing the demand for printing.” Typefaces that helped to sell goods would, in the process, help to sell themselves.

Developing the Cheltenham Designs

According to most sources, architect Bertram Grovesnor Goodhue drew the original sketches for the Cheltenham typeface in 1896, commissioned by Ingalls Kimball of the Cheltenham Press. Goodhue had previously created one other typeface, an Arts and Crafts design called Merrymount, which Daniel Berkeley Updike used to publish a church altar book for his Merrymount Press. Unlike Updike, Kimball did not hold onto Goodhue’s Cheltenham designs for his exclusive use, but sold the rights to both the ATF and to the Mergenthaler Linotype Company. The details of this story remain vague, however, and conflicting reports regarding the genesis of the Cheltenham design date back to the early twentieth century. In 1905, the Mergenthaler Corporation issued a pamphlet whose title pronounced Cheltenham Old Style to be “a Body Letter Originated for the Linotype,” rather than for Kimball’s Cheltenham Press. The company claimed to be the ones who approached Kimball to create the face in 1898; they made no mention of Goodhue, to whom virtually every other source gives credit for the original design.

It is likewise not entirely clear how both Mergenthaler and the ATF came both to possess the right to release the Cheltenham typeface. Steve Watts wrote that Kimball sold

\[475\] Bullen, “Effect of Composing Machines,” 595.

\[476\] Mergenthaler Linotype Company, The Designing of this Face of Type: Being an Account of the Progress from a New Basic Idea to the Finished Matrix of Cheltenham Old Style, a Body Letter Originated for the Linotype (New York: Mergenthaler Linotype Co., 1905).
Goodhue’s design to Mergenthaler for the Linotype but retained rights to the foundry version, which he then sold separately to the ATF.\footnote{477} James Eckman, another printing expert, maintained yet a different story, where Goodhue (or Kimball) granted Mergenthaler rights to produce Cheltenham in the sizes that could be composed on the Linotype, while the ATF was given the rights to sell the design in larger fonts. “But it is said that the American Type Founders Company proceeded to cut all sizes of the Cheltenham design, from six points upward, and I believe the Mergenthaler organization regarded this occurrence as an act of piracy.”\footnote{478}

Whatever the precise trajectory, Cheltenham became the first type to be set by both humans and machines. The ATF began cutting trial versions of the face in 1899 and had completed work on the Oldstyle and Italic by 1902; Mergenthaler’s Cheltenham came out in late 1905.\footnote{479} In both cases, the designs veered significantly from Goodhue’s drawings. I trace the development of each company’s version of Cheltenham below, focusing first upon Mergenthaler’s release of the typeface and then turning to the ATF.

Mergenthaler’s origin story for Cheltenham was persistently scientific. Their 1905 pamphlet expressed their desire for a design that was “sturdy, full of color, and above all, legible,” and summarized the research they pursued to produce such a type. First, Mergenthaler conducted a set of experiments that demonstrated the importance of leading.\footnote{480} Leading refers to blank strips of type, typically two points in height, that

\footnote{477} Steve L. Watts, “‘Chelt’ Really Got Around,” \textit{Printing Magazine} 81, no.5 (May 1957): 78.  
\footnote{478} James Eckman to David L. Ritter, 24 March 1965, Linn Boyd and Morris Fuller Benton Collection, Rochester Institute of Technology Library.  
\footnote{479} Mac McGrew, \textit{American Metal Typefaces of the Twentieth Century}, Preliminary edition (New Rochelle, NY: The Myriade Press, 1986), 89. For what I believe to be Mergenthaler’s debut of Cheltenham, see Mergenthaler Linotype Company, \textit{Linotype Bulletin} 2, no. 1 (Oct/Nov 1905): 5. Cheltenham was not included in the type specimen book Mergenthaler released in 1905, but the ten- and twelve-point matrices were completed by February 1906.  
\footnote{480} Mergenthaler Linotype Company, \textit{Designing of this Face of Type}, 7.
increase the vertical spacing between rows of printed text. Mergenthaler found that increasing leading made documents more readable.\footnote{Although some early twentieth-century sources conflate the terms, legibility is defined as the quality of being decipherable or recognizable, and it belongs to letters themselves. Readability, on the other hand, impacts the comprehension of a text as well as the amount of time it takes to be comfortably read, and it is a function of design choices beyond the shape of letters. See Walter Tracy, \textit{Letters of Credit: A View of Type Design} (Boston: David Godine, 1986), 30-32.\footnote{Frazier, \textit{Type Lore}, 91.}} Leading, however, added to printers’ work and expense; what appeared to the reader as blank space on the page needed to be created using pieces of non-type metal. The goal therefore became to find a way to build white space into page arrangements while eliminating the need for metal leads. Cheltenham’s extended vertical design answered this call, and it allowed compositors to fit roughly twenty percent more ems of type per page than other body fonts.\footnote{Mergenthaler Linotype Company, \textit{Designing of this Face of Type}, 12.} This fact eventually led union compositors to charge more for setting text in Cheltenham.\footnote{Frazier, \textit{Type Lore}, 91.}

In addition to demonstrating the importance of leading and white space, Mergenthaler’s research also yielded insights about the design of letters themselves. Earlier experiments (likely those conducted in the 1880s by Javal or Cattell, though Mergenthaler did not cite either) had demonstrated the importance of word forms: when reading in a familiar language, readers identified the words by overall shape rather than processing them letter by letter. Only when faced with new words did readers “sound out” text. From these findings, Mergenthaler concluded that a typeface designed to emphasize word shape would make reading easier. Borrowing another of Javal’s findings, the Linotype company stressed the importance of the top half of a line of printed text. Readers were shown to identify words primarily by focusing attention above what is...
called the x-height (literally, the height most lower-case letters, measured specifically at the top of the x).

Figure 25. Legibility and Word Shape

Mergenthaler’s combined desire to emphasize word shape and to accentuate the top halves of letters led the company to seek a design that was compact and possessed tall
ascenders (parts of letters that extend upward, as do the stems of the letters h and t). Descenders belonging to lower-case letters like p, y, and j, meanwhile, were made compact, as they were deemed less important for word identification. The Printing Art lauded Cheltenham as representative of a new scientific movement in type design that aspired for legibility, and as “an excellent example of the results of this experimentation.” In the decades to come, psychologists would confirm Cheltenham’s status as being among the most legible faces of type. Designer Edmund Gress, however, took a mocking tone toward these decisions: “Because the eye, as a rule, gives less attention to the lower part of a line of reading matter, the descenders were cut off almost entirely in the designing of Cheltenham. It would be as reasonable, because the eye usually sees only the upper part of a man, to amputate his legs.” Yet, Gress was generous enough to write that Cheltenham, because it recalled the older Jenson and Caslon designs, was not an absolute “freak.”

The ATF’s first version of Cheltenham was likewise the product of intense experimentation, mainly at the hands of Morris Fuller Benton. Again, it is likely that Joseph Phinney, as head of the type department, exerted an early influence on the design. “Hardly a man is now alive who knows that Cheltenham was first named ‘Boston Oldstyle,’” wrote Steve Watts, who named Phinney, a Bostonian, as the source of that label. It was Benton, though, who executed the assignment “to steer the drawings through the mechanical maze through which all drawings must pass before they

486 Gress, Art and Practice of Typography, 180-181.
487 Watts, “‘Chelt’ Really Got Around,” 78.
materialize into actual type. According to Watts, in March of 1899 eleven-point Cheltenham became the ATF’s first complete font to be produced on Linn Boyd Benton’s matrix engraver. Cheltenham was a notable result of the combined talents of the Benton father-and-son team: while the elder Benton’s invention made producing types in many sizes and variations technically feasible, the younger Benton was the designer responsible for translating Goodhue’s drawings into their final production-ready forms. The ATF “Day Book,” most likely completed by Morris Fuller Benton, records the different settings on his father’s machine used to create the Cheltenham Oldstyle fonts ranging from six to seventy-two points:

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488 Murphy, “Morris Benton, Part 2,” 42.
When the ATF released their first version of Cheltenham Oldstyle in 1903, they also drew attention to face’s legibility, though this was never the sole focus of their advertising efforts. The first page of their 1903 insert in *American Printer*, for instance, introduced the type by drawing comparisons to Jenson Oldstyle, which had been
developed a decade earlier by Phinney and became a top seller for the ATF. Another full page of the ad related the history of Cheltenham, England, an apparent attempt to lend the new product an air of Anglo-Saxon lineage. (Despite the name, most American printers stripped it of its British roots by referring to it as “Chelt.”) Only the last page of the insert made reference to Cheltenham’s legibility and its benefits to readers. Following the conventions of type specimen books, the ATF displayed the different sizes of Cheltenham Oldstyle using different sample texts.\(^{490}\) The smallest eight-point type announced in all caps, “CHELTENHAM SHOWS TYPOGRAPHICAL EXCELLENCE.” Other sizes advertised the face by offering “Correctness Mechanically and Artistically” (fourteen point); “Handsome Cheltenham Character” (eighteen point); “LEGGIBLE FIGURE” (thirty point); and “Useful Letters” (forty-eight point).

Later in 1903, the company released its *Specimen Book of American Line Type Faces*, whose pages displayed Cheltenham using many phrases identical to those of the earlier advertisement. The texts in smaller fonts were entirely reset, however, and the new ten-point text declared: READING IS MADE REAL PLEASURE IF THE CHELTENHAM OLDSTYLE TYPE IS / The means used to convey the favorite author’s impressions or thoughts to the mind of the reader because of its legibility which enables him to concentrate his thought on the subject” (Figure 27).\(^{491}\)

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\(^{490}\) Alastair Johnston analyzes nineteenth-century type specimen books as poetic texts in *Alphabets to Order*.

\(^{491}\) American Type Founders Company, *Specimen Book of American Line Type Faces* (Jersey City, NJ, 1903), 14.
Figure 27. Cheltenham Oldstyle
Here, the ATF promised that Cheltenham’s legible design would draw readers into the content of the text without calling attention to itself. The largest display of Cheltenham, the word “SCARE” in the seventy-two-point font, offered a very different use from the smaller body types, however. Cheltenham, especially in its bold and bold condensed varieties, would become a popular choice for newspaper headlines in the years to come. 492 But ATF librarian Henry Lewis Bullen was wary of readers’ tendency to pay attention to “scareheads.” “In the United States we suspect that the extravagant use of scareheads and screeching heading types has had, and continues to have, a degrading influence on the average citizen,” Bullen wrote in 1912. The tendency to be informed by headlines rather than thoughtful articles, he continued, helped to create “that superficial cocksureness which is so prevalent that it has already been classified as a national trait of character.” 493 While it is unlikely that Bullen would have accused Cheltenham of falling into the category of types that made such a negative impact on American thought and character, the appearance of “SCARE” in this display suggests an early link between the typeface and the headline-reading behavior he condemned.

Cheltenham’s Early Reception

For its 1903 release, the ATF promoted Cheltenham Oldstyle as an ambidextrous typeface. It could do anything, the company touted, from refined book work to eye-catching publicity. Almost immediately, however, the Cheltenham family of designs became firmly associated with advertising work, both for the Linotype and in handset

composition. In March of 1906, only a few months after Mergenthaler began manufacturing Cheltenham matrices, *The Berkeley Gazette* announced the arrival of its new Linotype to readers: “The machine will set the ordinary body type of the paper and besides it will set a twelve-point Cheltenham face. Cheltenham is the very latest thing in type, and the acquisition of this type on the machine will be of great benefit to advertisers as the use of this type in advertisements will add much to their attractiveness.” The ATF’s versions were likewise coveted for advertising purposes. In 1909, the Curtis Publishing Company had declared Cheltenham as its top choice for popular titles like *The Saturday Evening Post*: “The only type, both display and body, which we encourage is Cheltenham. It appears to us as a beautiful type, with enough members of the Cheltenham family to give ample opportunity for varied display.”

Cheltenham was well represented in trade journals targeting both advertisers and printers. A *Printers’ Ink* author advised, “striking displays are characterized by simplicity and harmony. In many good advertisements only one ‘family’ of type is used.” An example featuring Cheltenham illustrated this principle. Even more convincing was the fact that an *actual* advertisement appeared on the same page as this advice. It, too, was set in varieties of Cheltenham type. In the nation’s most respected advertising journal, the family was thus represented both in theory and by example.

Cheltenham’s presence in *The Inland Printer* was also inescapable. Starting in the late 1890s, the journal held regular “Contests in Typographical Arrangement and Composition.” For these competitions, *The Inland Printer* provided invited printers with sample copy and asked them to arrange it however they found most effective and

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495 “The Basis of Good Advertisements,” *Printing Art* 12, no. 6 (February 1909): 374.
496 “Little Schoolmaster’s Classroom,” 87.
appealing. Quickly after Cheltenham’s release, the face and its variations came to dominate the designs selected as winners of these contests.

Figure 28. Harry Haime’s winning entry for Inland Printer’s 26th ad-setting contest
Source: Inland Printer 43, no. 3 (June 1909): 416.

An American Family

The success of Cheltenham clearly derived from its status as a family. The idea of the type family, in turn, owed its success to a real family, the father-and-son pair of Bentons. While the younger Morris Fuller Benton took the reins in designing types for the ATF, his father’s punch cutter was an essential tool for producing them. In The Bentons, Patricia Cost notes that at least two late nineteenth-century faces, De Vinne and Philadelphia Lining Gothic, had preceded Cheltenham as early examples of type families, but she credits the ATF, and specifically Morris Fuller Benton, with developing the family idea and seeing it specifically blossom with Cheltenham.497

After translating Goodhue’s oldstyle and italic designs for their release in 1903, Morris Fuller Benton went to work on creating new variations, beginning with his Cheltenham Bold, which was first produced only a year later and eventually outsold its parent design. The ATF’s promotion of different family members directly mimicked the

birth notices for human children. A 1904 ad announced, “It’s a boy this time, Master Cheltenham Bold, and a good, stout, healthy one…. Last month there was a girl, and such a girl, too. A typical American (line) girl: Miss Cheltenham Italic. What a form, what curves, what color.”

Morris Benton had completed twenty-one different members of the Cheltenham family by 1915, helping it to become “in all probability, the most widely known type designed in the United States.” Other companies followed suit: Mergenthaler developed ten variations of the face, and fifteen were produced for the Monotype. The Intertype Corporation released a dozen more designs under the name “Cheltonian,” and by 1920, Alexander Lawson writes that “every American supplier of printing types was producing Cheltenham. It was inevitable that its style would dominate the period’s typography.”

Early twentieth-century authors nearly always cited Cheltenham as an example when they introduced the concept of the type family, especially in advertising textbooks aimed at readers who lacked a printing background. “The Cheltenham family probably provides the greatest variety of harmonizing faces,” wrote Gress.

In their 1926 *Introduction to Retail Advertising*, Arthur Judson Brewster and Henry Hall Palmer provided descriptions of several old-style typefaces, and took the further step of having those descriptions composed in the faces they described. They depicted Caslon as a clean-cut type and French Old Style as feminine, dainty, and cheerful. In contrast to these

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individual faces, the authors presented Cheltenham as a family, using ten varieties display the sentence “Cheltenham is much used.”

![Cheltenham is a good, all-around type, giving the impression of honesty and sincerity. It is cut in a variety of shapes, giving a large range of choice, as:

- Cheltenham Old Style—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Old Style Italic—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Wide—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Wide Italic—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Bold—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Bold Italic—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Bold Condensed—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Bold Condensed Italic—Cheltenham is much used.
- Cheltenham Bold Extra Condensed—Cheltenham is much used.

Figure 29. “Cheltenham is much used”

A. Raymond Hopper also described the Cheltenham types as related his dreamlike trip through the specimen book. They appeared to him as “a group that seemed all of one family, and every one Irish, if face could be relied upon. And true to the Celtic strain, each looked as if he could play hod-carrier or gentleman equally well. These persons seemed more industrial than businesslike — do I make myself clear? — Without any great refinement, but strong in native worth.” The only individual member of the Irish family who stood out to Hopper was Cheltenham Bold, whom he cast in raw, masculine

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terms as “a primitive, meat-eating type, rather brutal and leonine….He was just a machine, a Titan, a monster.” Hopper was unable to decide on a metaphor for Cheltenham Bold – is he monster, man, or machine? What comes across most forcefully is his strength, whether mechanical or biological in origin. The family as a whole, meanwhile, seemed to be defined most in terms of ethnicity and class. Although able to “play” both hod-carrier and gentleman, the Irish Cheltenhams were, for Hopper, a working family. Frazier went further, challenging Hopper’s claim that the Cheltenhams were suitable for sophisticated printing jobs: “The Cheltenham face does not possess the grace and refinement suggestive of the most polite society.”

Henry Lewis Bullen declared in 1924 that under the direction of Morris Fuller Benton, the Cheltenham family had become the best-selling type in history. Yet, as Frazier’s words show, commercial popularity did not translate into respect from all printers. Those who aspired toward artistic printing and were driven by the Arts and Crafts movement had particularly harsh words for the type. Lawson calls Cheltenham “a most controversial typeface,” and he writes that even in its heyday, “Cheltenham was always questioned by those designers seeking a reputation for typographic savoir-faire.”

Perhaps its most surprising and significant critic was Bertram Goodhue, creator of the original Cheltenham designs. Following the publication of Daniel Berkeley Updike’s two-volume *Printing Types* in 1922, Goodhue contacted Updike and thanked him for his kinds words for Merrymount, the face Goodhue had designed for Updike more than

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503 Frazier, *Type Lore*, 94.
504 Bullen, “Effect of Composing Machines,” 595.
twenty years earlier. Updike had omitted any mention of Cheltenham, Goodhue’s only other typeface, from Printing Types, however, and Goodhue wrote to him with a combination of self-deprecation and pride about his neglected design: “Thank you for all the pretty things you said about me though I do regret you didn’t yourself set up a page of Cheltenham to show just how bad it is. Parents are always fond of their children, even when they are ugly, misbegotten, hump-backed, and so forth and I don’t think that ‘little Chelt’ has ever had a fair chance.”506 Whereas Cheltenham Oldstyle was “parent” of the typographical family, Goodhue claimed another form of parent status: he was the type’s father as its original designer. His “ugly, misbegotten, hump-backed” child had become a commercial hit, but in artistic circles, it was a deformed creature.

“Cheltenham has no ardent advocate,” the ATF’s Steve Watts lamented in the 1950s, and “various highly respectable authorities regard Cheltenham with the embarrassed disdain that a newrich social climber shows for a tacky country cousin.”507 By the 1920s, fonts of Cheltenham were stocked in print shops across the country, but tastes were changing and many advertisers came to see it as an old-fashioned and rugged design. Even as the status of Cheltenham declined among advertising agencies and other tastemakers, though, small-town newspapers and job printers remained loyal users. “With all the fancy competition” from new advertising faces, Lawson writes that “Cheltenham’s plain-Jane features stood little chance, and it became fashionable to relegate Chelt to the country printshop.”508 These modest operations were conservative type buyers, and

506 Bertram Grovesnor Goodhue to Daniel Berkeley Updike, 2 October 1922, Daniel Berkeley Updike Collection, Providence Public Library, Providence, RI.
507 Watts, “Famous Cheltenham Type,” 21-22. See also Watts, “‘Chelt’ Really Got Around,” 78.
508 Lawson, Anatomy of a Typeface, 255.
having already invested in fonts of Cheltenham, they extended its longevity by continuing to use the designs long after Madison Avenue had moved on.

Several writers, most not fans of Cheltenham, have argued that it was an expressly American typeface. In 1927, Douglas McMurtrie insisted that “the appearance of most commercial or magazine printing will be improved by the simple expedient of denying any variants of the Cheltenham design to the compositors,” yet he was willing to acknowledge its significance as “the most widely known type of distinctly American creation,” as well as “the ramifications of its family tree” for American typography more generally.\textsuperscript{509} In 1950, by which time the face had fallen out of style, Stanly Hlasta wrote in his typography textbook that Cheltenham was “the most widely known pure American type face.”\textsuperscript{510}

While “distinctly” and “pure” American could refer to the nationality of Cheltenham’s designer, or to the fact that the face was not a revival of an older European type, I want to suggest that Cheltenham acquired its American character through its ubiquitous application, especially in advertising.\textsuperscript{511} Having been cast by various authors as efficient, rugged, Celtic, and ugly, the typeface built associations through use. Initially, many designers and printers welcomed it. Mergenthaler mobilized scientific legibility studies to market Cheltenham as a modern and practical face. The ATF also nodded to the ways Cheltenham made for easy reading, but it was the design’s fecundity – the many variations it spawned, thanks mostly to the Bentons – that made it a success and helped to ensure that handset type would continue to serve the needs of advertisers. Within a few decades, “Chelt” and its derivatives had saturated the market and the now too-familiar

\textsuperscript{509} McMurtrie, \textit{Type Design}, 41-42.
\textsuperscript{511} Lewis Blackwell makes a similar case in \textit{Twentieth-Century Type} (New York, Rizzoli, 1992), 24.
face no longer signified a modern American aesthetic. Instead, it represented a provincial sensibility associated with the mundane, uninspired design work of the country newspaper. With more and more vehemence, designers criticized Cheltenham for being tired, bland, and relentlessly commercial.

Despite its and ebbs and flows in popularity, throughout the first half of the twentieth century Cheltenham’s most saliently “American” identity was not as an individual of any particular background, but as a group whose members possessed both similarities and differences that allowed them to function in harmony. This carefully controlled variation was the most important feature of the modern American type family.
Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, advocates of consumer culture called upon American readers to decode texts that merged letters, the smallest representative units of printed language, with representations of the human body and its own constituent parts. My close readings of advertising specimens, trade literature, memoir, laboratory reports, and other printed texts have provided examples of what this material brand of literacy entailed. Below, I explore several themes that connect across the preceding chapters to explain what these practices offered to their users. The technologies and economies of late nineteenth-century printing helped to produce new regimes of knowledge that are important both to the history of American commerce and to the study of literacy. Building on Patricia Crain’s astute suggestion that “literacy” denotes surplus – all that lies beyond the acts of reading and writing – I conclude by taking a broader look at the way material literacy connected reading to Americans’ relationships to consumer goods and to one another.

In addition to works cited throughout this dissertation, my conclusion relies on one other primary source. In 1909, Francis Bellamy, Christian socialist and author of the Pledge of Allegiance, published *Effective Magazine Advertising: 508 Essays About 111 Advertisements*. The volume derived from a contest held two years prior in *Everybody’s Magazine*, a middle-class monthly that had been founded by department store magnate John Wanamaker. The magazine’s editors invited readers to submit essays that answered the question, “Which is the most effective advertisement in this November issue of
“Everybody’s Magazine – and why?” Of the 250 ads in that November 1907 issue, readers selected 135 about which to write. Roughly half of the 950 entries received ended up in Bellamy’s publication (others were excluded, he explained, not because they were of poor quality, but because their arguments matched those of the ones he had selected). Although Bellamy, in his preface, flattered the contestants by repeatedly insisting that they were all more intelligent and discriminating than most Americans, this compendium is a valuable source for understanding how readers of a magazine that appealed to “everybody” responded to its advertisements. While the bulk of my dissertation has focused on different groups of “professionals,” Effective Magazine Advertising provides testimonials from consumers themselves.

Material literacy did not rely exclusively on vision, but engaged the human senses in combination. Some psychologists categorized readers as either “eye-minded” “visual types” or “ear-minded” “auditory types,” but even this sensory binary is insufficient. In many circumstances, acts of reading and writing depended not only on the eye and ear, but the whole body: the skin to feel, hands and feet to manipulate and move, and even unseen internal organs like brains and blood vessels. Even in cases where the eye and vision seemed to be determining factors, they were never capable of containing or fully explaining relationships to the printed word. It would be easy, for instance, to categorize Earnest Elmo Calkins as “eye-minded” because of his deafness, but his childhood experiences complicate such a move. Calkins learned to read before he lost his hearing –

a fact that both he and other deaf writers believed aligned him more closely with hearing society rather than with the Deaf. Calkins’s relationship to the printed word was also based significantly on touch. His childhood alphabet blocks failed him when he tried to arrange them to build words. Because their concurrent display of capital and lower-case letters made this impossible, he quickly replaced them with newspapers and scissors, which allowed him to cut and paste together his own texts. In the print shop, where sharp-edged metal types sliced his fingers and the lye used to clean them burned off his skin, he imagined himself tied by blood to the printers who had come before him.

Experimental psychologists also privileged the eye in their early efforts to study reading, yet they employed several non-visual tools to record the eye’s movements. It is significant that the first successful attempts to track subjects’ eyes during reading involved an experimenter who listened, rather than saw, their saccades. Other researchers confirmed the presence of saccades with touch: by placing a finger on one eyelid while reading with the other eye open, the eye’s movements and pauses could easily be felt. Indeed, one result of the effort to understand reading by viewing it was the conclusion, in the words of Raymond Dodge, that clear vision during reading was itself an “illusion” and that readers were “practically blind.”

Chapter 2 introduced several figures who wrote, or rewrote, texts using their entire bodies, rearranging words and letters to edit advertisers’ intended messages. The brutal physical restrictions enforced on banner packers responded to the tendency for sign men to wander and socialize, literally locking their bodies to the texts they were being paid to display. Meanwhile, printers who handled metal type developed a their own expertise in reading letters upside down and backwards, and they experimented with
spellings and arrangements in ways that invited readers of periodicals to do the same. Typesetters “wrote” with their hands, and many were even skilled in identifying letters by running their fingers over pieces of type to feel their raised designs.

Consumers of magazines, newspapers, and other media did, of course, rely heavily on their vision to perceive advertising material. But, just as an ad man aspired to “say his say” in print, readers responded with accounts of how advertisements “spoke” to them and “touched” them, transforming their visual experiences to ones that involved their other senses. These reactions were exactly what advertisers hoped to induce because they placed consumers within rich imaginary worlds where their relationships to products became personal and animated. In *Effective Magazine Advertising*, one writer offered that a Domino sugar design “spoke plainly” to him, while a woman from New Orleans opened her praise of a Packard Motor Car ad by writing, “This advertisement is so fully personal. It speaks to you. It does more. It comes up to you and gives you a hearty handshake.”

Of course, because this was a contest, these readers were telling the editors of *Everybody’s Magazine* what they thought they wanted to hear. In performing their praise for these advertisements, lay readers proved that they were very aware of advertisers’ desires and strategies. Perhaps the most salient example of this came from a man named Charles Fletcher, who nominated an ad for George H. Powell’s correspondence school (appropriately, the ad was for a course in advertising). Fletcher was first taken by the portrait of Powell in the upper left corner of the ad that preceded its length copy: “I

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517 Susan Mizruchi also makes this point in *Rise of Multicultural America*, 155.
see the face of the man who has hailed me. I find myself saying, ‘Ah! Yes, good morning, Mr. Powell. What was it you were saying to me?’” Fletcher insisted that whatever it was, he was receptive. “When a man has something to say to me, I want to hear it.” He even evinced an appreciation of the typographical difference between large headline types and the smaller letters in the body of the text, writing, “By the use of the long primer type, Mr. Powell is saying to me: ‘Mr. Fletcher, I want to explain this matter to you more fully than can be done in display type.’” This is perhaps an extreme example of the magazine reader adopting the ad man’s posture, but it attests to the ways that in advertising texts, the printed word did more than convey the ad writer’s ideas. It offered the promise of transforming written relations into ones mediated by the human voice and a handshake. Readers responded by also invoking sound and touch.

This dissertation has also explored how literacy became a project of understanding “types,” in several senses of the word. “Literate” versus “illiterate” is only one way of organizing human beings by their relationship to written texts, and it is not the scheme that best applies to this work. In fact, this project adopted what might be seen as a conservative view of literacy by stressing the appearance and arrangement of printed words. It has focused on the activities and products of people – overwhelmingly white men – who would be placed firmly on the “literate” side of the literate/illiterate binary. Yet, even within these seemingly narrow limits, and even from the perspectives of so many “experts,” I have found that material literacy invoked, and subsequently tried to

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518 “Long Primer” was the older name for ten-point type.
519 Bellamy, Effective Magazine Advertising, 242.
manage, many forms of difference. Americans simultaneously arranged people and texts into “types,” distinct groups whose members shared certain physical characteristics.

Throughout the chapters, individuals and groups struggled to distinguish themselves from one another, and they used printed letters to do so. Calkins presents a dramatic example of someone who relied on the printed word not only for his livelihood, but for his sense of self. Through print, Calkins learned how to communicate to different groups of people – students training to be ad men; consumers of the brands that advertised with Calkins & Holden; readers of The Atlantic – even as he remained relatively isolated from them. His fellow deaf and Deaf Americans proved in some ways to be the most difficult people to reach, even in print.

Calkins found security in writing, maintaining that it was a clearer form of communication than speech even for those who could hear. However, he also learned some hard lessons about the instability and variations of the alphabet at an early age. The horror of his first McGuffey reader was based on the fact that it shattered his assumption that “the” alphabet was something solid and singular. Calkins’s classmates who could not yet read used Edwin Leigh’s phonetic alphabet as a stepping stone, and thus they learned, from the beginning, that alphabets could take temporary forms, that one could be replaced by another. Calkins, in contrast, already had a handle on the traditional alphabet, and he had also developed a faith in the alphabet as a self-contained tool. Letters could come in different sizes and designs, but there were limits to those deviations, and Mr. Leigh’s monstrosities fell far out of bounds.

This same principle helped typographers to build and work within type families at the turn of the twentieth century. Family “harmony” did not mean visual monotony,
especially in advertising, where texts needed to stand out to attract readers’ attention. But neither could harmony allow for disorder and discord. Instead, by building groups of related typefaces, the American Type Founders Company was able to market their products as members of a larger compatible set, with just the right amount of variation built in. Mixing and matching types from within the Cheltenham family was fine; they were all of the same “clan.” But when printers, or worse, inexperienced advertisers, ventured to combine types of different origins, they risked creating grotesque printed “freaks.” The Bodoni face, whom A. Raymond Hopper described as a refined Italian gentleman, could never share space with Cheltenham Bold, his primitive, meat-eating Celt. Both personalities had a place in American commercial printing, but because of their distinct ethnic characters and blood lines, their coexistence needed to be carefully monitored.

When advertising authorities spurned printers as “hands” and printers’ designs as “freaks,” they, too, used printed letters to create and distinguish between hierarchies of people. Repeated references to copywriters as advertising’s “brains” pinned the authority to create advertisements to the writer. However, because few copywriters understood or appreciated how an ad was physically produced, they relied on the “hands” in the print shop, and these creative actors were often less concerned with advertising text being easily consumed. Job printers did not fear technical complexity, but rather enjoyed creating ads with complicated designs that were more artistic than readable. Compositors working in newspaper offices also represented the final step in ad production, and on many occasions they used their position to create vibrant experimental arrangements that the advertising experts, in turn, condemned as “freaks.”
Like those who worked in various branches of advertising, experimental psychologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were also fighting to establish their professional identities – in their case, as distinct from other scientists and philosophers. Reading processes, and specifically eye movements, offered these researchers a way to separate themselves from others who studied and theorized about the human mind. And advertising offered an ideal opportunity to apply their data to practical situations, especially the problem of influencing the behavior of impulsive and irrational consumers. Authors like Walter Dill Scott worked to convince ad men that they were different (smarter, more reasonable) from the masses to whom they appealed, and that by mastering a handful of psychological principles, they could use printed advertisements to connect to these irrational readers and influence their decisions.

Readers were not just irrational, the psychologists contended, but also in constant motion. Their eyes were weakened by poorly designed texts and their bodies jostled on the streetcars that Dodge decried as menaces to public health. In some ways, then, literacy involved dislocation and fatigue. Through printed advertisements, however, it simultaneously offered the solution to dislocation and fatigue, as evidenced by readers’ commentary in Effective Magazine Advertising. The Grape-Nuts ad in Figure 30 was one of the most “effective” designs as determined by readers: out of the 250 notices in the magazine, Bellamy listed it as the tenth most popular. Readers appreciated how little copy the ad contained and they focused most of their remarks on its image and headline. For nearly all whose comments were published, the ad’s most compelling feature was its representation of (white) manliness as a combination of strength and balance. The
headline, “Steadies a Man,” hinted at the instabilities of the world outside, which also threatened “steady nerves and a keen, clear brain.” Several readers noted how steadiness, or balance, was also evident in the ad’s design: “well-balanced, well-spaced, clean-cut, and not crowded.” Its form, which employed lots of white space, was as clear as its message.

Figure 30. Grape-Nuts

Bellamy, Effective Magazine Advertising, 236.
This ad depicted “perfect manhood,” according to one female reader, but this manhood was graphically represented by two separate bodies.\textsuperscript{521} They complemented one another: readers thought the figure in the foreground suggested alertness, steadiness, confidence, and vigor, while the one behind was more muscular and sturdy, holding a firm grip on his partner. No one seemed perturbed at all by the fact that one of these figures was not fully human. One reader glossed over the nature of their difference by stating, “There is a strong contrast between the two men in the illustration.” Only in next paragraph did she clarify that one of them was actually a printed cereal box with arms and legs.\textsuperscript{522} Another reader insisted, “none of the features are grotesque or overdone.”\textsuperscript{523} In other words, the readers who found this ad effective had no trouble reconciling its split personality, half flesh-and-business-suit, half flesh-and-cereal-box.

What is more, readers did not condemn the man in the suit as weak or pathetic for needing support from his other half. Instead, several people interpreted him as a symbol of reason and strong will. “The man supported has an expression of resolution and force and not of semi-prostration,” explained one male reader. The gladiator-sandaled Grape-Nuts creature was not fully separate from the man dressed as a member of the PMC, but instead represented his inner strength and reason. One reader claimed that the ad’s copy impressed her for being “logical and possible,” echoing the ad’s claim that “There’s a reason” for Grape-Nuts. On the whole, this ad reinvigorated the modern American man by representing him as tied both to a printed commercial package and to naked muscular brawn.

\textsuperscript{521} Bellamy, \textit{Effective Magazine Advertising}, 239.
\textsuperscript{522} Bellamy, \textit{Effective Magazine Advertising}, 237.
\textsuperscript{523} Bellamy, \textit{Effective Magazine Advertising}, 238.
This project has interpreted the variety of ways that printed letters and human figures interacted in texts produced by a growing consumer society. I have explored literacy in a way that focuses on the particulars of alphabetic letters, but also extends well beyond the page to explore the norms and desires that determined how those letters were designed, organized, and presented for readers to consume. In this way, my study revises the scholarship on the history of literacy and the history of American advertising by insisting that the acts of interpreting printed texts and interpreting human bodies directly overlapped, and that the operations of consumer culture depended upon the ability to both build and decipher connections between letters, faces, eyes, hands, and blood.
Appendix


You who buy the magazine buy it primarily to read the stories and articles that it contains and to look at the pictures. When you think of stories and articles you think of those that are written at the request of an editor, or at least accepted by him, and the pictures that are drawn by artists paid by him. You do not think particularly of the stories that are written by the advertising man or the pictures that are drawn by what are called the “commercial” artists, but before you get through with the magazine you undoubtedly look over these pages and are attracted by some of these advertisements, either by means of the picture, or the story, or both. Or you may definitely know that you expect to buy very soon a white-tiled, glass-lined, siphon-system refrigerator, and you turn over the pages of the magazine to see if anyone wants to sell a porcelain-tiled refrigerator with glass shelves. In that case you look only at refrigerator advertisements. While you are doing this you may see an advertisement which you think is an advertisement for a refrigerator, and it may turn out to be an advertisement of Worcestershire Sauce, but before it is too late to rectify the mistake, you have made up your mind that you want some Worcestershire Sauce if it is really as good as Mr. Worcestershire says it is. So you make a note in that corner of your mind where you keep your mental shopping list, to ask for Worcestershire Sauce the next time you go to the grocery store. Possibly by this time you have forgotten that you started out to find an enameled refrigerator, and see a picture of a very happy party riding in an automobile that can be bought for the small sum of nine hundred dollars, so you turn down a leaf at that page to show to your husband, who has hinted from time to time that if he could get an automobile cheap enough that would work easily and wouldn’t require a chauffeur to run it, and if he wouldn’t have to pay several hundred dollars for keep and a large sum for repairs, he would buy one next summer. So you see how Mr. Worcestershire and the automobile man have both advertised and reached your attention when you really meant to look at nothing but refrigerator advertisements. That is the way advertising is working all the time.

You take a seat in a street car, and on account of not having a newspaper to read and because nobody happens to be hanging to the strap in front of you, you learn that you have not taken a box of candy home to your wife for a year.

You are looking over your newspaper to see what time the curtain goes up at the Hippodrome, and you notice that on account of the lateness of the season you can get passage to Bermuda for as little as twenty-five dollars. You may never go to Bermuda for twenty-five dollars, but nevertheless you may go to Bermuda some time and pay more, for the attractive picture of the St. George Hotel lingers in your mind.
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