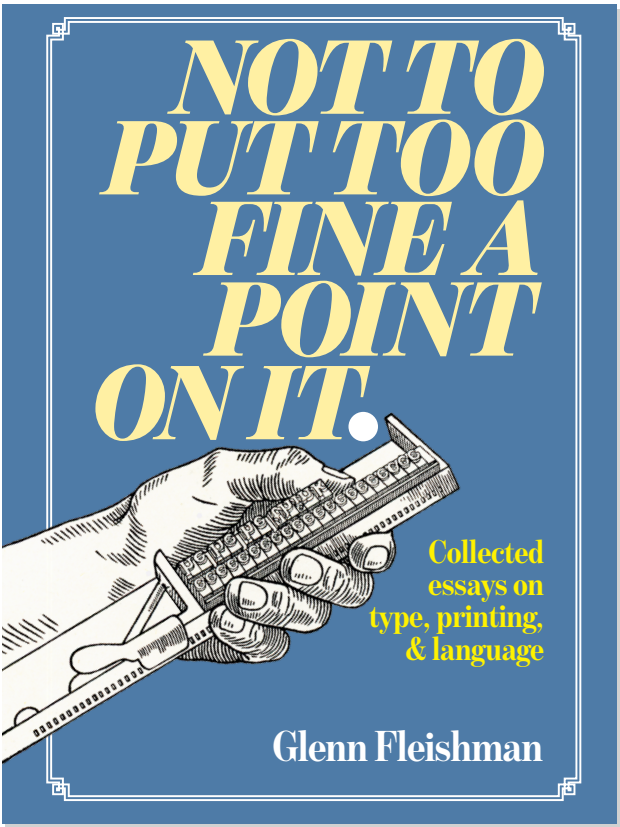


A SAMPLE FROM

Not To Put Too Fine a Point on It

These 20 pages are excerpts from the book: the preface, the contents, the openings of five chapters, and a few spreads of the pictures inside. Use the bookmarks to jump between them.

Get the whole book in print or as an ebook at
aperiodical.net/finepoint

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WHY WOULD A TECHNOLOGY REPORTER make a letterpress-printed book in 2017? Did I take leave of my senses? To me, it's eminently sensible. I've been in love with type since my teens, worked as a typesetter in the 1980s, and studied graphic design in college.

But I found my voice as a writer. And while I've made posters, books, websites, the invitation to my wedding, and much more, this book is a coming home for me. It brought me back to art classes and classmates and mentors, and to putting my hands directly on the medium in which I'm working. I found a community online and in person to share with and from which to draw strength.

My original thought was to focus on the writing and design and leave the printing to others. But when Jenny Wilkson offered me the position as designer in residence to pursue the book and other projects at the School of Visual Concepts, I leapt for it.

Spending months exploring the boundaries of letterpress craft as it intersects with digital techniques through the lens of my study and practice of typography and design has been an incredible way to finish out the first half century of my life. Thank you for being part of it.

— GLENN FLEISHMAN, SEATTLE, 2017

NOTES ON THE SECOND EDITION: Nearly a decade later, I find myself revisiting this book to update and expand it. This made me realize how much the making of it changed my life. Freelance writing mostly evaporated during the early part of the pandemic, but readers wanted good-looking printed books. I now mostly write and publish titles on printing and comics, and edit and help produce other people's books.

This edition is largely the original text, though major changes have happened to many companies, people, organizations, and projects. I've marked updates with notes throughout where appropriate.

— GLENN, 2026

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When blank pages contradict themselves.

2 *CAPITAL CRIMES* 11
It's an uppercase notion to shout with letters.

3 *Ten-Millennium Safe* 23
The time-traveling adventures of an archived site.

4 *The Quibble with Online Quotes* 33
Typewriters and typesetters battle in the margins.

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A typeface could help preserve cultures.

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1

Nothing Is Lacking

The long history of intentionally blank pages

YOU'VE SEEN THIS PHRASE your entire adult life in manuals for printers, in PDFs in which it makes little sense, and, if you're a real wonk, in budget reports and financial documents: "This page intentionally left blank." It's ironic, as it's literally false, a Cretan's paradox of document production, or perhaps a Magritte-inspired goof.

You can easily intuit the reason: for printed documents, a page that's entirely blank could be seen as an error when there's a reason

three. Even if they didn't MEAN TO SHOUT, you certainly HEAR IT AS SHOUTING INSIDE YOUR HEAD. Unintentional caps denote cluelessness; if intentional, jerkiness.

The National Weather Service (NWS) paid homage to this recently, noting on April 11, 2015: "LISTEN UP! BEGINNING ON MAY 11, NOAA'S NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE FORECASTS WILL STOP YELLING AT YOU." The use of only uppercase letters by the NWS dates back to 1928, with the installation of teleprinters that could be remotely controlled to type out news reports. The NWS finally retired the last vestiges of these elder systems, allowing it to switch to mixed case.

Previous articles on this subject—such as a previously definitive short at the *New Republic*—trace the explicit association of capitals with yelling (as opposed to mere emphasis) to 1984, with inferences a few decades previous.

I'm here to BLOW THIS OUT OF THE WATER, with a series of citations that date back to 1856. People have been uppercase shouting intentionally for a century more than recollected. And, as with so many things, longtime Internet users want to claim credit, when they really just passed on and popularized an existing practice.

I suspected a longer history because I'm a recovering typesetter, a one-time member of a now nearly defunct profession of compositing type in lines and on a page, whether in metal, wood, or bits. I was trained in the 1980s, among the very last in a line stretching back to not long after Gutenberg. I studied graphic design and its history in college and have read extensively on the subject since.

In all my typographic reading, I'd never come across an explicit connection between all capitals and *yelling*, but I knew two things: First, capitals and lowercase developed not in lockstep but from different methods of inscribing or writing; second, uppercase letters have been used for millennia for emphasis and importance.



Sue Walker, the director of collections and archives in typography at the University of Reading, England, found an apposite description in *The Compleat English Schoolmaster* (1674) by Elisha Coles, who wrote that a whole word in capitals "is alwa[y]es more than ordinarily remarkable; as some signal name, Title, Inscription, or the like..."

But surely, I thought, there must be some more direct correlation out there—not just an insinuation or a practice, but writers (or fictional characters) explaining it to a reader.

AND, YES, THERE IS. But let's start with the reveal before diving into the full history and a novel theory I have about shouty caps' disappearance and re-emergence.

Small pox in small caps

The first clear citation I can find is in the *Evening Star*, a Washington, DC, newspaper. It appears on February 28, 1856, and was syndicated to other papers around the same time. In a "hilarious" dialect story about a "Dutchman" (a corruption of Deutsch man, or a German) who seems to be disease-ridden, this wonderful sentence appears:



The Sun.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, APRIL 1, 1909.—Copyright, 1909, by the Sun Printing and Publishing Association.

THE SHANLEYS.
Their Own Which May
welve Stories.
n within three months
ive story building at
, between Forty-sixth
treets, which Shanley
g to erect. The plan
taurant on the ground
a balcony. There
rooms and possibly
apartments on the
ast night that as the
ompleted he was not
many stories would
new building. He
any event the foun-
f modern steel con-
sufficient strength to
ory structure. Car-
the architects, are
ns, although it has
decided that they are
d the new theatre
ns are building just
be occupied by the
l it is planned to have

PRIEST OWES $1,504,141.64

FATHER M'MAHON BANKRUPT AFTER MIXUP WITH KEIRAN.

Pastor of St. Bridget's, in Cleveland, First Went Into Scheme to Borrow Money for Church at 3 Per Cent. Through Head of Fidelity Funding Co.

CLEVELAND, March 31.—The Rev. William McMahon, pastor of St. Bridget's Church and editor of the *Catholic Universe*, late this afternoon filed a petition in voluntary bankruptcy. The liabilities are put at $1,504,141.64 and the assets at $75,267.08.

The bankruptcy was brought about by Father McMahon indorsing notes for P. J. Keiran of the defunct Fidelity Funding Company of New York to a total of close to $1,500,000. The exact amount of the notes he has indorsed is not known. Father McMahon was in New York today

MILITARY PRISON BURNS.

All Buildings at Fort Leavenworth in Danger—Prisoners in a Panic.

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan., March 31.—The military prison here caught fire shortly before 11 o'clock to-night and by midnight there was great danger of the entire group of buildings being destroyed.

The water pressure was weak and at midnight arrangements were under way to clock the fire by blowing up several buildings with dynamite. All the buildings inside the walls were old and those that caught fire burned rapidly.

The fire started in some rubbish left in the paint and carpenter shop. This was a three story building and it made a great blaze. The second building destroyed was the power house.

Up to midnight none of the cell houses where the 750 prisoners were housed had caught fire. When the fire started intense confusion set in around the prison. The prisoners yelled to be taken from the cell house. Finally Col. Loughborough came to the prison and he quickly issued orders putting the Thirteenth Infantry under arms. The companies

WOMEN GET SUBWAY CARS

PLAN TRIED IN HUDSON TUBES; INTERBOROUGH GIVES IN.

Rear Cars of Trains to and From Hoboken Were Barred to Men in Rush Hours—Some Women Prefer to Ride Where Men Are—McAdoo Pleased With Plan.

Every train from Hoboken between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock in the Hudson tunnels yesterday morning and every train from Twenty-third street between 4.30 o'clock and 7 o'clock in the evening carried a rear car exclusively for women and children. Nearly 2,000 women coming over to Manhattan in the morning and nearly 2,500 going back in the afternoon availed themselves of the privilege. President McAdoo was much pleased with the way the plan worked out on the first day and most of the women seemed to be pleased also.

After the Women's Municipal League

MISS HARNEL
Suit Against E.
Re
RENO, Nev., Mar
of Virginia Harne
came up to-day.
Mrs. Sothern's
the Nevada statu
with when the
served on the act
sitions are necessa
All the evidence to
depositions.

TRYING TO B
This Time Some
Shavings Int
Somebody went
Fernleigh Hall, a
house at 51 West
afternoon, stuffed
ings into a dumbw
afire. Then he ga
shot the dumbwait
John Scheuffle, th

Headlines in The Sun, *1909, were all yelling.*

and graphical sheet music formatter, if you must know)," and to his recollection, he picked up these definitions during his time at CWRU, not in high school.

The most significant preceding mention comes indirectly in 1982, when Steven McGeady posted "A Plea" in the net.general group:

> *At the risk of sounding like I am flaming, let me state a simple fact:* MODERN MAILERS WILL NOT HANDLE PATHNAMES AND SITENAMES WHICH CONTAIN CASE DISTINCTIONS. MANY SITES CANNOT REPLY TO SITES WHO HAVE UPPER-CASE NAMES.

(McGeady was at Tektronix at the time and is well known for a later stint at Intel, when he was a key witness against Microsoft in its antitrust lawsuit.)



FOR QUALITY READ
The New York Age
THE HOME PAPER

The New York Age

WHEN YOU SEE IT IN
The Age
YOU CAN DEPEND UPON IT
Be Guided by That Information

VOLUME 33. NO 37. THE NATIONAL NEGRO WEEKLY NEW YORK, N. Y., SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 1920 BEST EDITED-BEST KNOWN PRICE FIVE CENTS

Many Graduates From Colleges and Schools of Country; Dining Car Employes Meet in N. Y.--Form Organization

Atlanta Gives Welcome To Meeting of N. A. A. C. P.

First of Eleven Annual Sessions To Be Held in a Southern City Is One of Most Successful.

The Mayor Gives Greeting

Both Races Unite With Cordial Cooperation To Attain Object of the Advancement Society.

(By Telegraph to The New York Age.)

ATLANTA, GA.—The spirit of southern hospitality was extended to the reception given the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which held its eleventh annual conference at Bethel A. M. E. Church, corner Auburn Avenue and

Dining Car Men Organize A National Brotherhood

Body Formed at Session Held in New York City May 25 to 28—J. Frank Nickens is First President.

As a result of the meeting held in New York, May 25 to 28 of railway dining car employes from all sections of the country, there has been organized the Brotherhood of Dining Car Employes, a national organization comprising the colored men serving the various railroad companies of the country as cooks and waiters in the dining car service. The representatives present were the guests of the New York Dining Car Cooks' and Waiters' Association, of which George W. Griffin is president, and which has its headquarters on the floor of the New York Urban League at 2305 Seventh avenue.

The first annual convention was a gala affair. President Griffin of the local body acted as toastmaster, the delegates being welcomed by the national president and by representatives of the various civic and fraternal organizations. Then came the business sessions, which were held at the New York Urban League. Hon. Aldermen Roberts, Fred R. Moore of The Age, E. K. Jones of the National Urban League, G. P. Mc-Know, E. S. Randolph of Boston, B.

HEADWAITER MCLANE

MOTON CO. ACQUIRES 139TH STREET HOUSES

39th Commencement At Tuskegee Institute

Bishop Hurst, of Baltimore, President King, of Oberlin, Speakers

Other Schools Close

A. & T. College, Morgan College, St. Paul N. & I. School, and Many Others, End Year's Work.

By 1920, this front page has a more typical mixed case.

After Decot's post, I found a few interesting citations. Another from March 1984, in response to a post by well-known programmer and tech writer Randall Schwartz defending his copyright, complains, "Schwartz is really looking to be argumentative and shouting, terminal-style, a lot." (This is also a good early case of tone policing.)

In July 1984, in alt.flame:

> *am i getting carried away here, or will maybe all of this ranting and jumping up and down (if it's in caps i'm trying to YELL!) will knock some sense into some people.*

And in November 1984, someone asks, "Do all the CAPITALS suggest that you are trying to shout?" in net.abortion.

4

The Quibble with Online Quotes

Will a typographic refinement survive its exposure online?

THE TROUBLE WITH BEING A former typesetter is that every day online is a new adventure in torture. Take the shape of quotation marks. These humble symbols are a dagger in my eye when a straight pair appears in the midst of what is often otherwise typographic beauty. It's a small, infuriating difference: "this" versus “this.”

Many aspects of website design have improved to the point that nuances and flourishes formerly reserved for the printed page are fea-

I have heard the mermaids quoting

I've been online in some form since 1979, when I used an Ohio Scientific Inc. (OSI) C1P paired with a 110-baud modem to dial up local bulletin board systems. I used Usenet indirectly — it was a store and forward system that percolated posts among nodes — and would have been active during the period that indents switched to quotes, and I have zero recollection as well.

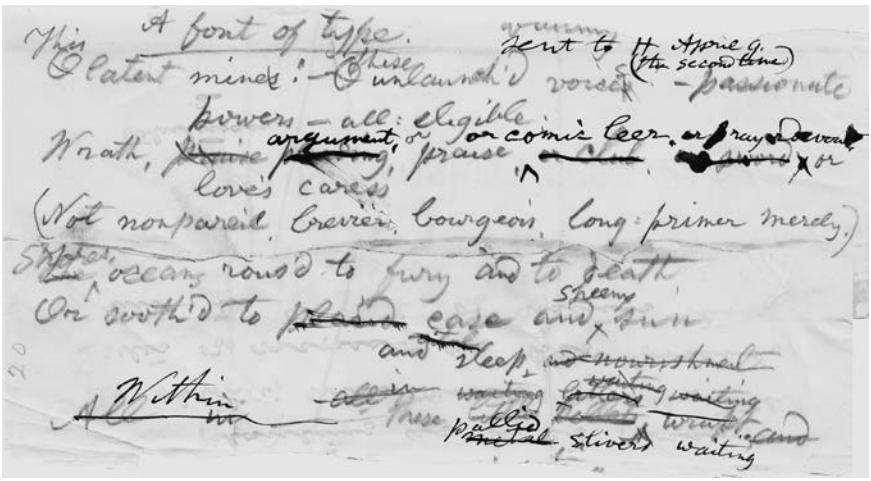
It's true that not all history can be known, but I feel that there's a little bit more to this story yet to come.

8

A Font of Type

Whitman swam in a sea of letters.

WALT WHITMAN WAS A PRINTER before he was a poet. In the early 1830s, at age 12, he apprenticed at a Long Island "political sheet" (short newspaper) and then in a Brooklyn printing office. That wasn't an unusually young age at that time, and by age 16 he'd reached journey man status. His first poem appeared in a book of writing by "practical printers," *Voices from the Press* (1850), in which his biography describes him as a printer, an editor, and a radical democratic reformer.



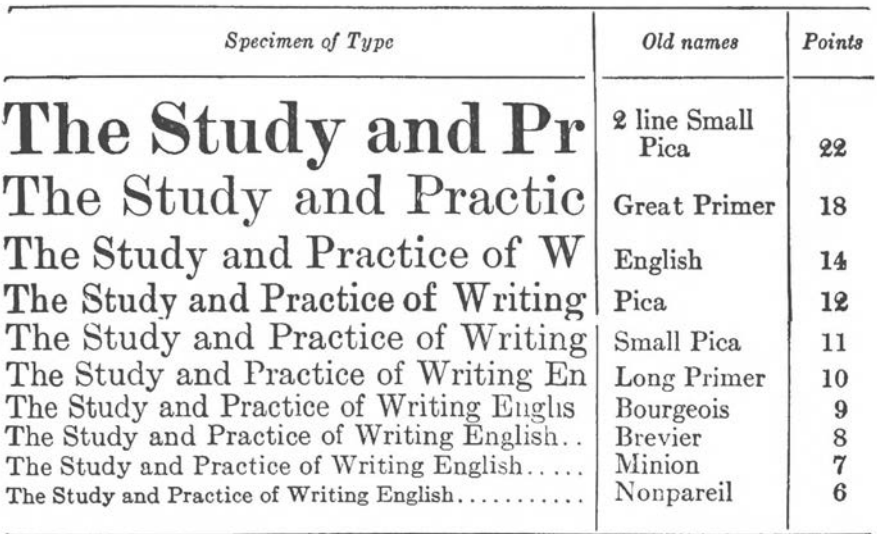
Whitman's original manuscript of the poem with his emendations

"A Font of Type" in *November Boughs*

A FONT OF TYPE.
This latent mine—these unlaunch'd voices—passionate powers,
Wrath, argument, or praise, or comic leer, or prayer devout,
(Not nonpareil, brevier, bourgeois, long primer merely,)
These ocean waves arousable to fury and to death,
Or sooth'd to ease and sheeny sun and sleep,
Within the pallid slivers slumbering.

What's in a font?

"A Font of Type" refers prosaically to a tray or "case" of lead amalgam: letters, numbers, and punctuation, known as sorts, divided into compartments from which typesetters drew the elements of their craft. In



Specimen of Type	*Old names*	*Points*
The Study and Pr	2 line Small Pica	22
The Study and Practic	Great Primer	18
The Study and Practice of W	English	14
The Study and Practice of Writing	Pica	12
The Study and Practice of Writing	Small Pica	11
The Study and Practice of Writing En	Long Primer	10
The Study and Practice of Writing Englis	Bourgeois	9
The Study and Practice of Writing English..	Brevier	8
The Study and Practice of Writing English.....	Minion	7
The Study and Practice of Writing English.....	Nonpareil	6

Type sizes by relative size, historic name, and modern points

Whitman's day, a font generally referred to a collection of characters in a particular design (a typeface), style (like bold), and at a given size.

Until the 1880s, all type was set painstakingly by hand, one metal character at a time, whether for newspapers, job work, or books. Hot metal machine-driven typesetting machines appeared only at the end of Whitman's life, when they could form letters from molten lead as needed, and which were melted down after their use.

Whitman seems to think of these cases of type as a "latent mine" from which any emotion or subject can be drawn, because that was what he and other compositors did: pulled letters from the "mine" of a case. He often set his poems in type after writing them in manuscript, pulling proofs and correcting them, much like someone today might compose on a computer, print it out, and mark it up.

Sometimes, his poetry came literally out of that figurative mine, writing as he set type. "Whitman probably never composed a line of poetry without, in his mind's eye, putting it on a composing stick," wrote University of Iowa professor Ed Folsom in 2005.

Both modern readers and his contemporary ones would find the line "(Not nonpareil, brevier, bourgeois, long primer merely,)" poetic but obscure. In fact, it was a descriptive list of type sizes, which then had names instead of numbers. Nonpareil, brevier, bourgeois, and long primer were about 6, 8, 9, and 10 points.

The slivers would slumber when put back in their case, as type was distributed — returned to each appropriate cubbyhole — after a project was complete. In the case of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, his friend's shop had little enough type, because his work didn't require that much and type was expensive and took up substantial space.

It's likely that Whitman and the shop set type to fill a single side of a press sheet (a signature) that, after printing was folded twice and cut to produce eight finished pages in a book, or an octavo. They would have distributed type after both sides of each sheet was printed, returning them to their sleep, in order to have enough type to set the next signature.

9

What a Relief

The digitally driven resuscitation of the craft of letterpress printing

LETTERPRESS HAD A PROBLEM. As a printing method that involves inking metal and wood type and pressing it into paper, it nearly faded completely away within a few decades, starting around 1960. The industrial ecosystem that supported letterpress for 500 years collapsed. The perfection of photographic processes brought cheaper, better, and faster typesetting and printing — and involved vastly

employees. Right now, that's primarily silkscreening, but it's involved letterpress in the past with photopolymer and lasercut wood type, and Boms is itching to break the press back out again. The labs also have Risograph printers, a kind of color mimeograph for the digital age.

"Through the use of computers and technology, we're able to remain focused on the physical and tactile," Bennett says. Classes fill up fast, and Boms says of employees, "They want a taste of it. There's some thing satisfying of making something with their hands." But it forces those used to digital perfection to give up something, too. "You're never going to get two prints, at least if you're pulling them by hand, identical, even with the automated version of that," Boms says.

The comeback of letterpress stems in part from a desire to forego digital perfection in favor of the variability that analog materials used in crafts provide. "It takes some training to wean yourself off the absolute digital idea of perfection," says Boms, but it opens their eyes, too.

Hands: the original digital technology

In the inaccurately named SoDo region of Seattle—South of a Dome imploded almost 20 years ago—across the street from both Paul Allen's Living Computers Museum and Labs and Starbucks headquarters, I stand at a computer in Glowforge's offices manipulating an SVG vector-image file in a Web browser.[10]

I've imported it, and I'm dragging it in place over a picture from a camera in the interior of the company's 2D laser cutter, also called a Glowforge. The firm raised almost $30 million in a 30-day crowd funding campaign in 2015, and began shipping production models to its backers in summer 2017. Glowforge has dubbed its device a "3D laser printer," as it engraves in relief as well as cuts.



Cutting large numbers on a Glowforge. GLENN FLEISHMAN

What I'm working on during this session is cutting large numbers out of a piece of ⅛-inch maple plywood. These numbers, from a typeface called Rockwell, are what I plan to use in a letterpress book I printed as the chapter openers. I'd wanted to integrate something other than photopolymer into the book, and colleagues at Glowforge gave me access to work on their gear.

To cut these numbers, I composed them in Adobe Illustrator, saved the results as a Scalable Vector Graphics file, which the Glowforge app can read directly. After I position them relative to the wood in the bed of the cutter, I tap an onscreen Print button, wait a moment, and then press a big glowing button on the Glowforge itself.

A few minutes later, I pull out perfectly laser-cut letters that I later mount on ¾-inch MDF (medium-density fiberboard), add chipboard and mylar to bring up to type high, and print my chapter numbers.

Glowforge is poised to ship several thousand units this year, in what feels like a recapitulation of the combination of desktop pub-

lishing and the Apple LaserWriter in the mid-1980s: it has the ease of DTP and leverages all the same factors that brought digital typesetting and output into the fore.[11] But instead of being paired with a device that uses a laser to fuse toner to paper, this laser transforms material, burning away a layer or cutting right through it.

Some think the next few years could have an impact on a hoary craft as big as hot-metal typesetting did 130 years ago, reducing the boundary and duration between conception and creation, and increasing interest ever further as the born-digital crowd gets sucked in. The signs certainly point that way.

Jim Moran still expresses some caution about whether the future will sweep on by. When he took his director's job nearly a decade ago,

he spoke with a curator at another museum, wondering, "Are we on the bubble of this, or is the bubble already receding?" Moran says, "We didn't truly know, and I still don't!"

10

A Crank Turns a Letterpress

A winter & spring of furious training & design and a summer of printing.

IN THE 1970S AND 1980S, *the practitioners of photocomposition and offset printing were, like Gutenberg, engaged in a simultaneously innovative and imitative act. But they were not imitating writing; they were imitating printing.*

— Warren Chappell and Robert Bringhurst,
A Short History of the Printed Word (2000, 2nd edition)

Why we use CAPITAL LETTERS to mean we're SHOUTING!

Walt Whitman swam in a sea of fonts, metal, and paper.

How an indigenous Northwest language found a future in fonts.

The website that archived itself for 10,000 years.

The surprising origin of "this page intentionally left blank."

Why "curly quotes" need protection from "typewriter quotes."

My year of letterpress, and the resurgence of craft printing.

And more tales of type, language, & history.

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