

# LINE SPACING

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The distance from the baseline of one line of type to another is called *line spacing*. It is also called *leading*, in reference to the strips of lead used to separate lines of metal type. The default setting in most layout and imaging software is 120 percent of the type size. Thus 10-pt type is set with 12 pts of line spacing. Designers play with line spacing in order to create distinctive typographic arrangements. Reducing the standard distance creates a denser typographic color, while risking collisions between ascenders and descenders. Expanding the line spacing creates a lighter, more open text block. As leading increases, lines of type become independent graphic elements rather than parts of an overall visual shape and texture.

*different*  
folks  
*different*  
strokes

*different*  
folks  
*different*  
strokes

### TYPE CRIME

*Here, auto spacing yields an uneven effect.*

*Adjusting line spacing with the baseline shift tool helps create an even appearance.*

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A<sub>↑</sub>a

**NERD ALERT:** A *baseline shift* is a manual adjustment of the horizontal position of one or more characters. Baseline shifts are often used when mixing different sizes or styles of type. The baseline shift tool can be found in the Type tool bar of standard software applications.

## VARIATIONS IN LINE SPACING

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6/6 SCALA PRO  
(6 pt type with 6 pts line spacing, or “set solid”)

6/7.2 SCALA PRO  
(Auto spacing; 6 pt type with 7.2 pts line spacing)

6/8 SCALA PRO  
(6 pt type with 8 pts line spacing)

6/12 SCALA PRO  
(6 pt type with 12 pts line spacing)

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Ancient maps of the world

An

when the world was flat

Avid

inform us, concerning the void

Dream

where America was waiting

Of

to be discovered,

Trans-

Here Be Dragons. James Baldwin

for-

O to be a dragon. Marianne Moore

mation Adrienne Kennedy, People Who Get to My Place

MARGO JEFFERSON

DANCE INK: AN AVID DREAM  
OF TRANSFORMATION  
Magazine page, 1992.  
Designer: Abbott Miller.  
Publisher: Patsy Tarr. *The  
extreme line spacing allows two  
strands of text to interweave.*

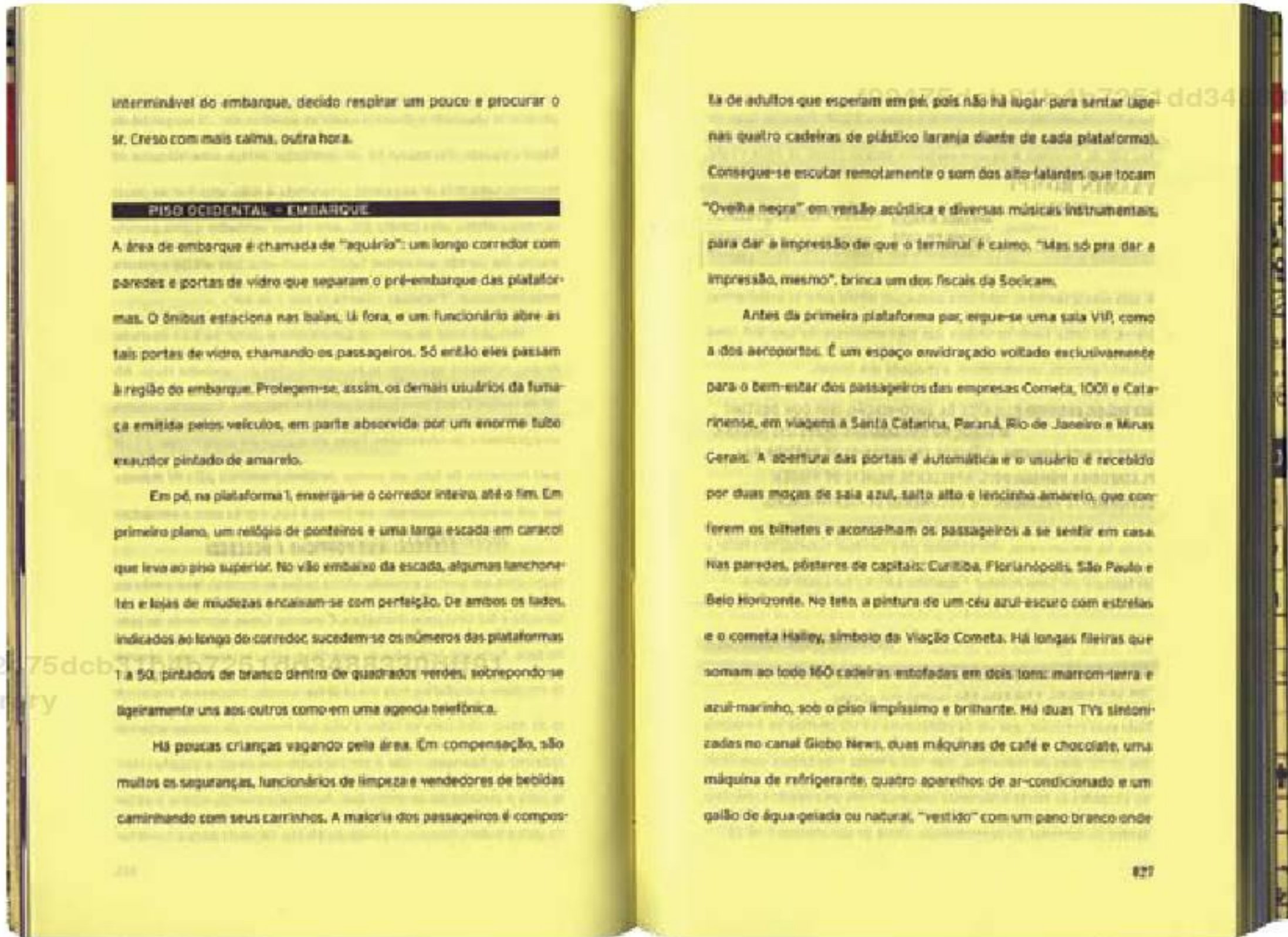
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## LINE SPACING

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Designers experiment with extreme line spacing to create distinctive typographic textures. Open spacing allows designers to play with the space between the lines, while tight spacing creates intriguing, sometimes uncomfortable, collisions.

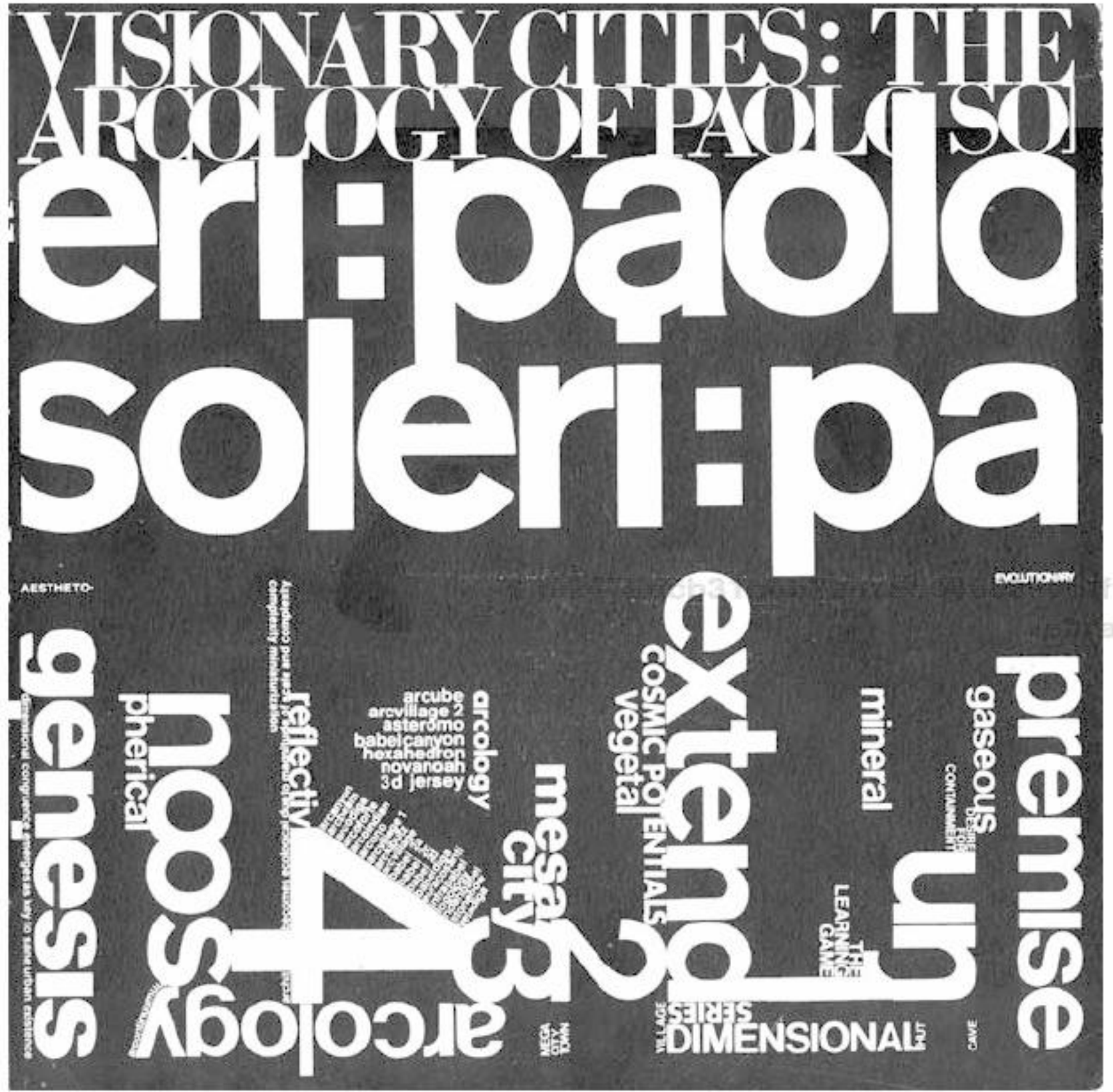


O LIVRO AMARELO DO TERMINAL Book spread, 2008.  
Designer: Vanessa Barbara with Elaine Ramos and Maria Carolina Sampaio. Publisher: Cosac Naify. Here, pages of text are set with loose line spacing and printed on thin paper. The vertical placement of the text block varies from spread to spread, allowing text to show through between the lines.

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VISIONARY CITIES: THE ARCOLOGY OF PAOLO SOLERI Book, 1970. Design: Paolo Soleri. This classic work of postmodern design uses ultra-tight line spacing to create dramatic density on the page. Produced long before the era of digital page layout, this book exploited the possibilities of phototypesetting and dry transfer lettering.





# ALIGNMENT

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Choosing to align text in justified, centered, or ragged columns is a fundamental typographic act. Each mode of alignment carries unique formal qualities, cultural associations, and aesthetic risks.

*Centered* text is symmetrical,  
like the facade of a classical building.

Centered type often appears on  
invitations, title pages, certificates, and tomb stones.

The edges of a centered column  
are often dramatically uneven.

Centered lines should be broken to emphasize a key phrase  
(such as the name of the bride  
or the date of her wedding)

or to allow a new thought to begin on its own line.

Breaking lines in this manner is called  
*breaking for sense*.

*Justified* text, which has even edges on both the left and right sides of the column, has been the norm since the invention of printing with movable type, which enabled the creation of page after page of straight-edged columns. In metal type setting, the printer justifies each line by hand, using small metal spacers to alter the spaces between words and letters and thus make all the lines the same length. Digital typesetting performs the same labor automatically. Justified type makes efficient use of space. It also creates a clean, compact shape on the page. Ugly gaps can occur, however, when the line length is too short in relation to the size of type used. Hyphenation breaks up long words and helps keep the lines of text tightly packed. Designers often use negative tracking to fit additional characters on a line, or positive tracking to even out a line of type that looks too loose.

## CENTERED

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*Lines of uneven length on a central axis*  
Centered text is formal and classical. It invites the designer to break a text for sense and create elegant, organic shapes. Centering is often the simplest and most intuitive way to place a typographic element. Used without care, centered text can look staid and mournful, like a tombstone.

## JUSTIFIED

*Left and right edges are both even*

Justified text makes a clean shape on the page. Its efficient use of space makes it the norm for newspapers and books. Ugly gaps can occur, however, as text is forced into lines of even measure. Avoid this by using a line length that is long enough in relation to the size of type. As type gets smaller, more words will fit on each line.

THIS DREARY SHAPE  
HAS RANDOM LINE  
BREAKS THAT DON'T  
RESPOND TO THE  
RHYTHM OF THE  
WRITTEN TEXT.

**TYPE CRIME**  
**POORLY SHAPED**  
**TEXT BLOCK** *In most  
uses, centered text  
should be broken into  
phrases with a variety  
of long and short lines.*

Ugly gaps appear when  
the designer has made  
the line length too  
short, or the author  
has selected words that  
are too long.

**TYPE CRIME**  
**FULL OF HOLES**  
*A column that is too  
narrow is full of gaps.*

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In *flush left/ragged right* text, the left edge is hard and the right edge soft. Word spaces do not fluctuate, so there are never big holes inside the lines of text. This format, which was used primarily for setting poetry before the twentieth century, respects the flow of language rather than submitting to the law of the box. Despite its advantages, however, the flush left format is fraught with danger. Above all, the designer must work hard to control the appearance of the *rag* that forms along the right edge. A good rag looks pleasantly uneven, with no lines that are excessively long or short, and with hyphenation kept to a minimum. A rag is considered “bad” when it looks too even (or too uneven), or when it begins to form regular shapes, like wedges, moons, or diving boards.

*Flush right/ragged left* is a variant of the more familiar flush left setting. It is common wisdom among typographers that flush right text is hard to read, because it forces the reader’s eye to find a new position at the start of each line. This could be true, or it could be an urban legend. That being said, the flush right setting is rarely employed for long bodies of text. Used in smaller blocks, however, flush right text forms effective marginal notes, sidebars, pull quotes, or other passages that comment on a main body or image. A flush or ragged edge can suggest attraction (or repulsion) between chunks of information.

### FLUSH LEFT/RAGGED RIGHT

*Left edge is hard; right edge is soft*

Flush left text respects the organic flow of language and avoids the uneven spacing that plagues justified type. A bad rag can ruin the relaxed, organic appearance of a flush left column. Designers must strive vigilantly to create the illusion of a random, natural edge without resorting to excessive hyphenation.

### FLUSH RIGHT/RAGGED LEFT

*Right edge is hard; left edge is soft*

Flush right text can be a welcome departure from the familiar. Used for captions, side bars, and other marginalia, it can suggest affinities among elements. Because flush right text is unusual, it can annoy cautious readers. Bad rags threaten flush right text just as they afflict flush left, and punctuation can weaken the hard right edge.

A bad rag will fall into weird shapes along the right edge, instead of looking random.

#### TYPE CRIME

##### BAD RAG

*An ugly wedge shape spoils the ragged edge.*

Lots of punctuation (at the ends of lines) will attack, threaten, and generally weaken the flush right edge.

#### TYPE CRIME

**PUNCTUATION EATS THE EDGE** *Excessive punctuation weakens the right edge.*

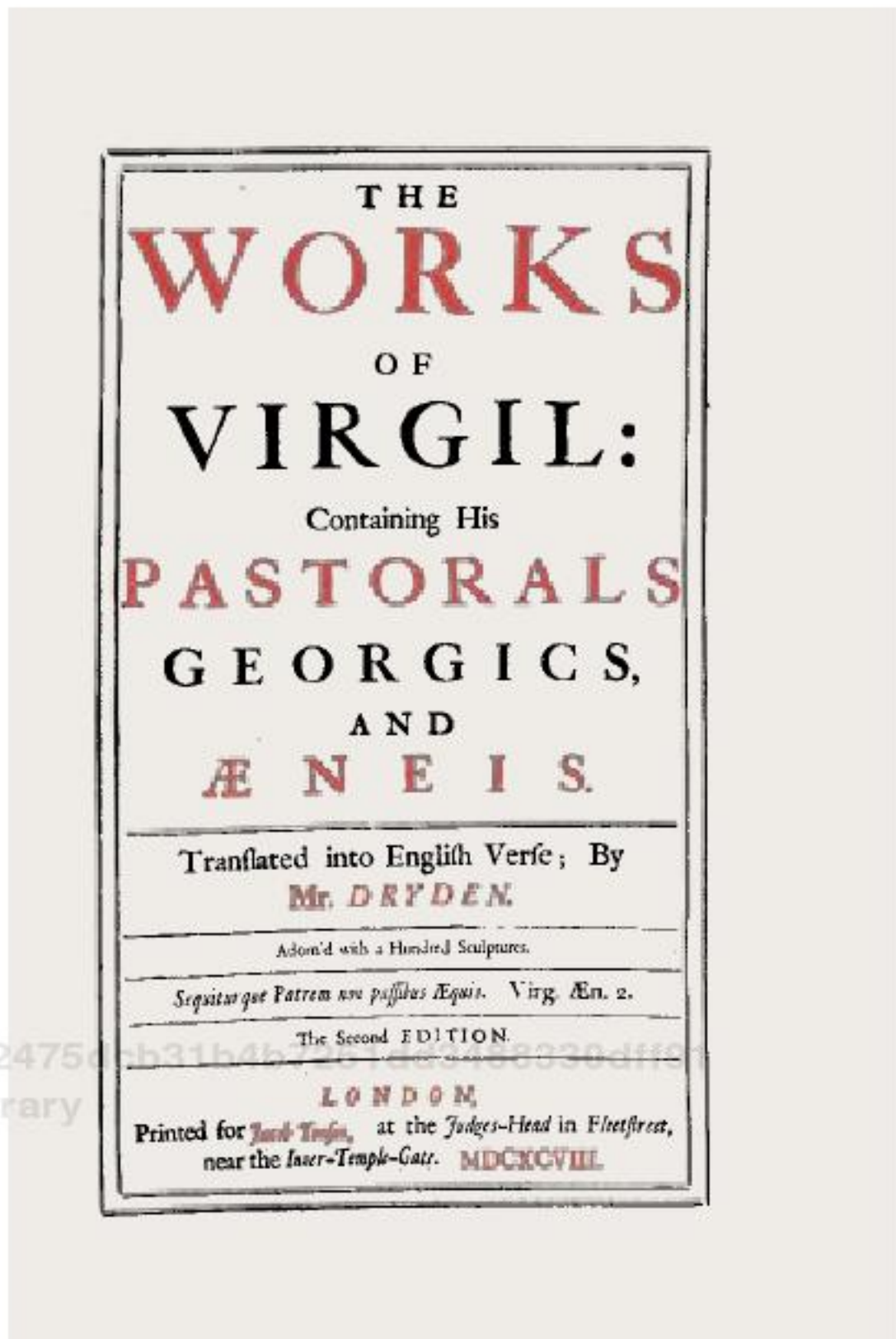


## ALIGNMENT

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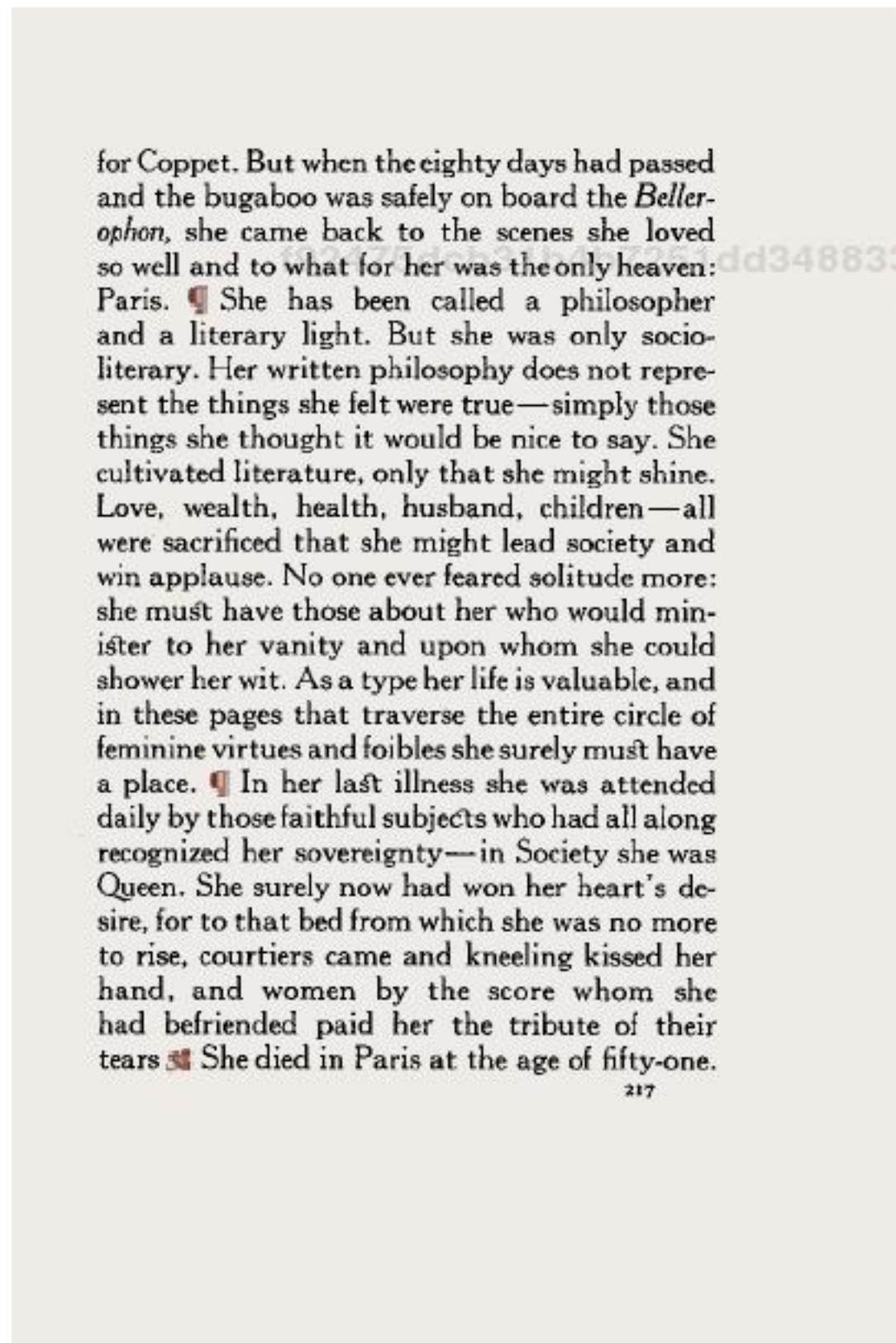
The four modes of alignment (centered, justified, flush left, and flush right) form the basic grammar of typographic composition. Each one has traditional uses that make intuitive sense to readers.

### CENTERED



THE WORKS OF VIRGIL Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1698. Title pages are traditionally set centered. This two-color title page was printed in two passes of the press (note the off-kilter registration of the two colors of ink). Large typefaces were created primarily for use on title pages or in hymn books.

### JUSTIFIED



THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF ELBERT HUBBARD, VOLUME TWO Printed by the Roycroft Shop, 1908. This neo-Renaissance book page harkens back to the first century of printing. Not only is the block of text perfectly justified, but paragraph symbols are used in place of indents and line breaks to preserve the solidity of the page.

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## FLUSH LEFT

## L'ENNEMI

Ma jeunesse ne fut qu'un ténébreux orage,  
Traversé çà et là par de brillants soleils;  
Le tonnerre et la pluie ont fait un tel ravage,  
Qu'il reste en mon jardin bien peu de fruits vermeils.

Voilà que j'ai touché l'automne des idées,  
Et qu'il faut employer la pelle et les râteaux  
Pour rassembler à neuf les terres inondées,  
Où l'eau creuse des trous grands comme des tombeaux.

Et qui sait si les fleurs nouvelles que je rêve  
Trouveront dans ce sol lavé comme une grève  
Le mystique aliment qui ferait leur vigueur?

— O douleur! ô douleur! Le Temps mange la vie,  
Et l'obscur Ennemi qui nous ronge le cœur  
Du sang que nous perdons croît et se fortifie!

17

## FLUSH RIGHT

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## Technique

things that could not have been done at all had he stuck to his original idea.

*No shields* Trade-markery is a country cousin of heraldry; it can claim that kin, but native good taste will keep it from trying to ape its noble relative. I mean that trade-marks in the form of shields are a joke—as comical as those mid-Victorian trade devices surrounded by the Garter. Things like that, in first instances (they are now meaningless survivals), were efforts on the part of Trade to sit in the same pew with Race. Under the modern dispensation, with kings at a discount, the feudal touch may be dispensed with. One makes this comment about shields as trade-marks because a cosmic law operates to convince every expectant proprietor of a new trade-mark that he wants his device in the shape of a shield.

*Flexible* A good trade-mark is the thing that lives inside a boundary line—not the boundary line itself. It should be possible for the device to step outside its circle, or triangle, or what not, and still be the same—an unmistakable emblem. In other words, marks that depend for their individuality upon triangular frames, circles, squares, etc., are weak brethren; they are of a low order of trade-mark vitality.

*Typographic flavor* For the greater number of advertising uses a trade-mark design needs to be given a typographic flavor. It will stand in close relation to type in the usual advertisement and its stance will be more comfortable if it is brought into sympathy with type. This means that the proprietor will have to relax the rigor of his rule and allow his design (originally rendered in soft lithographic grays and stipples) to be redrawn in positive line, with considerable paper showing. It is not necessary to ape the style of a woodcut in this effort after typographic flavor; but it is necessary to echo, to a certain extent, the crisp black lines and

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE/LES FLEURS DU MAL Printed by Bill Lansing, 1945. Traditionally, poetry is set flush left, because the line breaks are an essential element of the literary form. Poetry is not usually set centered, except in greeting cards.

LAYOUT IN ADVERTISING Designed and written by W. A. Dwiggins, 1928. In this classic guide to commercial art practices, Dwiggins has placed callouts or subject cues in the margins. On the left-hand (verso) page shown here, the cues are set flush right, drawing them closer to the content they identify.



## ALIGNMENT

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Designers sometimes use the archetypal modes of alignment in ways that emphasize their visual qualities. Combining different types of alignment can yield dynamic and surprising layouts.



FLUSH LEFT AND FLUSH RIGHT: VAS: AN OPERA IN FLATLAND Book spread, 2002. Designer: Stephen Farrell. Author: Steve Tomasula. In this typographic novel, texts and images align left and right against a series of thin rules. Hanging punctuation and boldface letters emphasize the flush edges.

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**FLUSH LEFT AND FLUSH RIGHT:** *INFORMAL* Book, 2002. Designer: Januzzi Smith. Author: Cecil Balmond. Photograph: Dan Meyers. *This book is a manifesto for an informal approach to structural engineering and architecture. The text columns juxtapose flush right against flush left alignments, creating a tiny but insistent seam or fissure inside the text and irregular rags along the outer edges.*



**JUSTIFIED:** *HELLA JONGERIUS* Book, 2003. Designers: COMA. Photograph: Dan Meyers. *Transparent paper emphasizes the justified text block. Images hang from a consistent horizontal point, creating a throughline that is visible along the edge of the book.*