

BUILDING MODULARITY

ABSTRACT

1. Schlosser, Gerhard, Wagner, Günter P. *Modularity in Development and Evolution*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

2. Aoife Mooney, "Modularity: An Elemental Approach to Type Design," (master's thesis, University of Reading, 2014), 9.

3. Blauvelt, Andrew, Ellen Lupton, and Rob Giampietro. *Graphic design: now in production*. (Minneapolis, MN: Walker Art Center, 2011), 132.

Modularity exists across all disciplines and aspects of life. Whether in engineering, creative fields, or the sciences, modularity allows for streamlined processes and easy experimentation. Within the discipline of biology, evolution encourages modularity. On a cellular level, independent modules allow for effortless evolutionary changes over generations, making the organism more flexible and adaptable.¹ This sentiment can be easily adapted to modularity in typographic experimentation. Within type design, the idea of modularity is nothing new. In fact, it can be argued that the first letterforms created were modular.² For centuries, typographers have been studying how letterforms relate to one another and the boundaries of individual letterforms.

The stencil created in this critical making research study offers a chance to postulate visually what a letter should look like. This study had several objectives: to experiment with the boundaries of typographic form, to better understand the base architecture of letterforms and discover commonalities across multiple Latin and non-Latin scripts. Several observations were made throughout the process of producing this product and the subsequent letterforms. First, it is easier to experiment with your native language. Because of familiarity, users were able to better visualize the boundaries of a letterform's possibilities. When creating foreign letterforms, the stencil was used more as a way to understand the construction of the letter, while experimentation became secondary. The last observation made can be applicable to every endeavor within the design field: the longer you create iterations of the same letterform, the more surprising they become. Users tended to choose conventional solutions, then branched out into unknown territory as they continued.

Peter Bil'ak analyzes whether, within the type design field, "experimentation is a method of working which is contrary to production-oriented design, where the aim of the process is not to create something new but to achieve an already known, pre-formulated result."³ In *Building Modularity*, the goal is free experimentation without fear. This study offers a tool with which to explore, experiment, and learn new forms across multiple writing systems.