

Gail Anderson: VERSATILE TYPOPHILE

BY ALLAN HALEY

Gail Anderson is passionate about type—some might even say she is obsessed. To her, it is alive, vibrant—even sensual. Anderson's love of type knows no bounds. Commercial fonts, lettering, old advertising posters, vintage signage, pages from antique specimen books—all spark her impassioned typographic emotions.

Many of us know Anderson's work from her days at *Rolling Stone* magazine, where she served as senior art director for 15 years, from 1987–2002. Her pages were typographic tours-de-force that not only won award after award but also inspired many of us to be better designers and typographers. Today, if you are not attuned to the theater world, you may be missing out on her current work.

CHANGE OF VENUE

Anderson is now creative director of design at SpotCo, a New York City-based design studio and agency specializing in creating artwork and campaigns for Broadway theater. Asked why she left *Rolling Stone*, Anderson says, "It was time for a big change, and when Drew Hodges [SpotCo owner and a former SVA classmate] called, it seemed like a nice segue from making editorial pages that were poster wannabes to making actual posters."

SpotCo produces advertising content for about half of the shows on Broadway—as well as for the Manhattan Theater Club, the Roundabout, the New York Botanical Gardens and the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. The company is made up of writers, account managers, print and broadcast producers, a production department, as well as finance and bookkeeping. "We do advertising, design, web, TV, radio—you name it," says Anderson. "There's even talk of building a sound booth here, so we can start doing more elaborate work in-house."

LEARNING CURVE

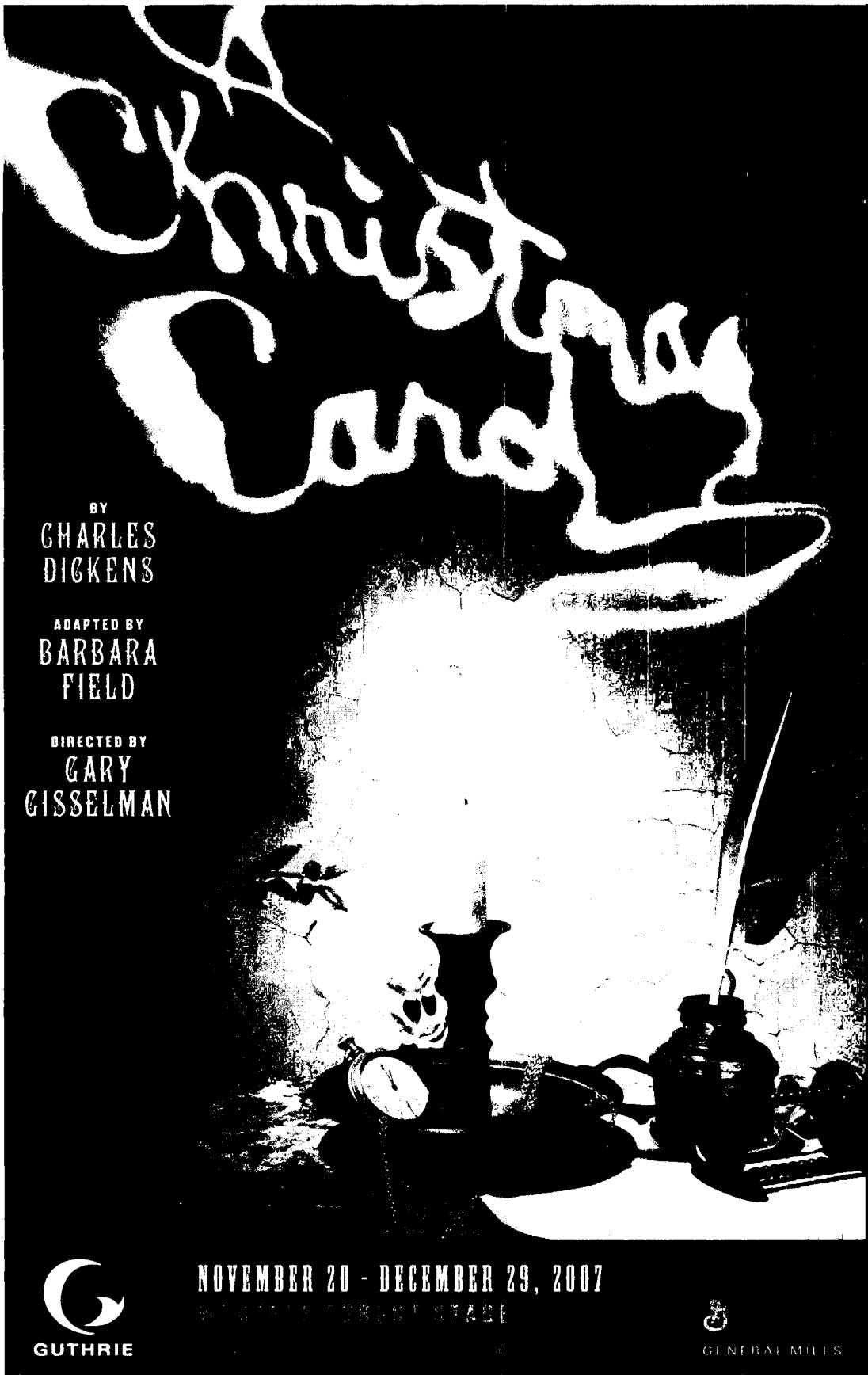
Making the change from publication design to the world of advertising design, however, was not as easy as Anderson had hoped. "It took a while to get my footing in the theater world—and, more importantly, in the 'working-with-clients' world. I knew how to work with editors, but working with clients and account managers definitely threw me for a loop."

"Another big issue," she continues, "was learning to deal with the numerous rounds of meetings to review proposals." At *Rolling Stone*, Anderson worked under tight, biweekly deadlines that provided little opportunity for experimentation with design solutions. Although her work at SpotCo is also deadline-driven, Anderson's design team usually presents 6–12 different solutions for the key art for each new show. "Sometimes there are just a few—but big shows like *Sbrek* or *9 to 5* will generate piles of ideas," she says. The initial presentation is followed by an elimination round and then by a "tweaking" round. The process, although tedious at times, has taught Anderson that experimentation can produce better results. "I've learned through trial and error that your first three or four ideas are not always your best. Who knew?"

On Friday afternoons Anderson leaves her day job in midtown a little early to teach in the MFA Designer as Author program at the School of Visual Arts in lower Manhattan. She also rides an orange fold-up Brompton bicycle to work every day. Which, typical of her self-effacing manner, she says is "probably the most interesting thing about me."

TYPOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

Although it is rare to get the opportunity to do an all-type design for a Broadway show, Anderson and her team have created a number of tasty type-heavy pieces for shows in other locales. "We've designed fun posters for the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis this season: *Peer Gynt*, which relies on a pretty straightforward title broken up with an antler, and *A Christmas Carol*, with its lovely smoky letters wafting from the candle." Marian Bantjes collaborated with SpotCo to create a fancy doily for the title on a poster for *The Glass Menagerie*. Art for the latter is a striking example of Anderson's use of "non-font" typography, which brings a dimension to her designs that commercial fonts cannot.



BY
**CHARLES
DICKENS**

ADAPTED BY
**BARBARA
FIELD**

DIRECTED BY
**GARY
GISSELMAN**

NOVEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 29, 2007

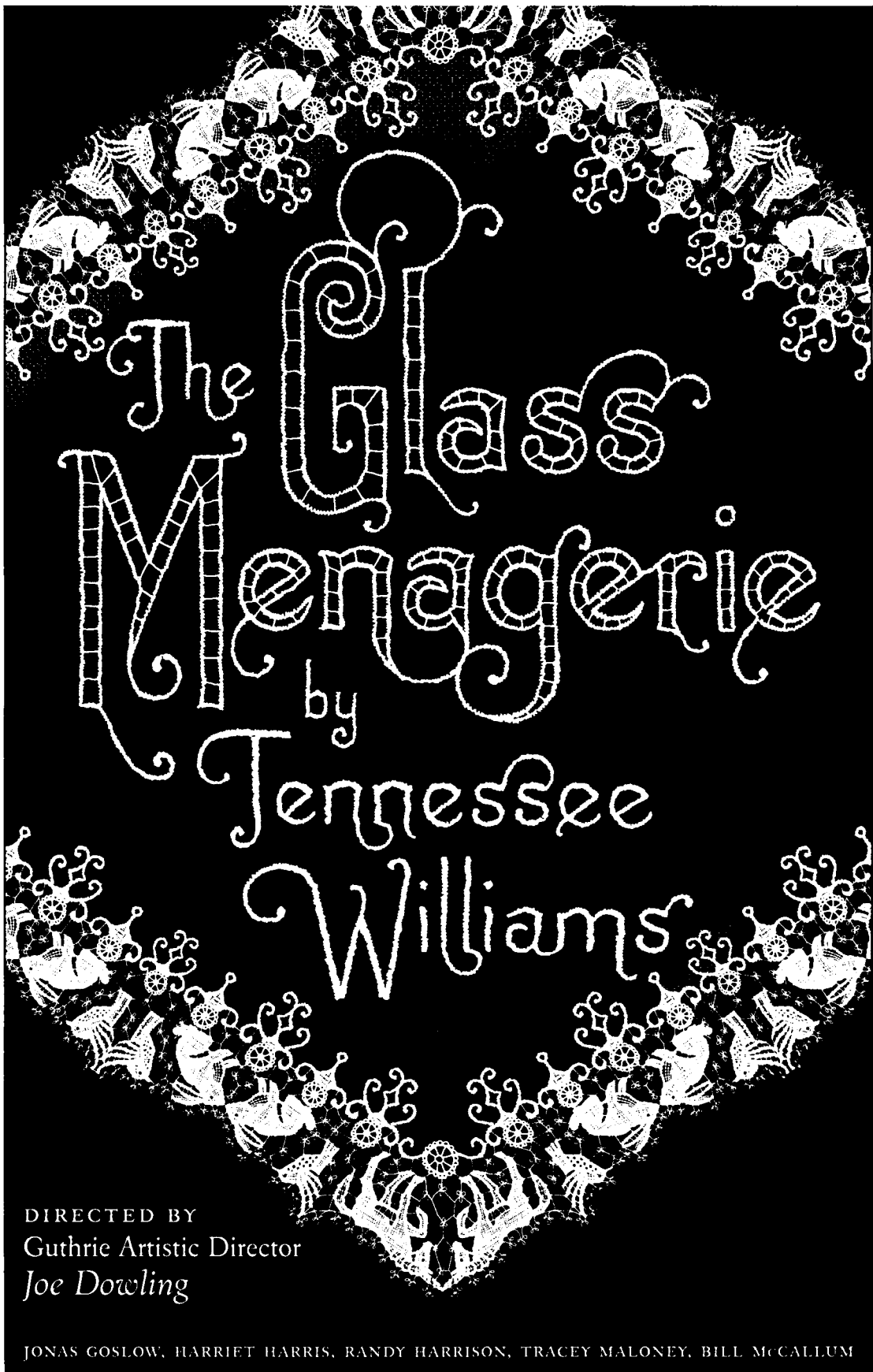


GUTHRIE



GENERAL MILLS

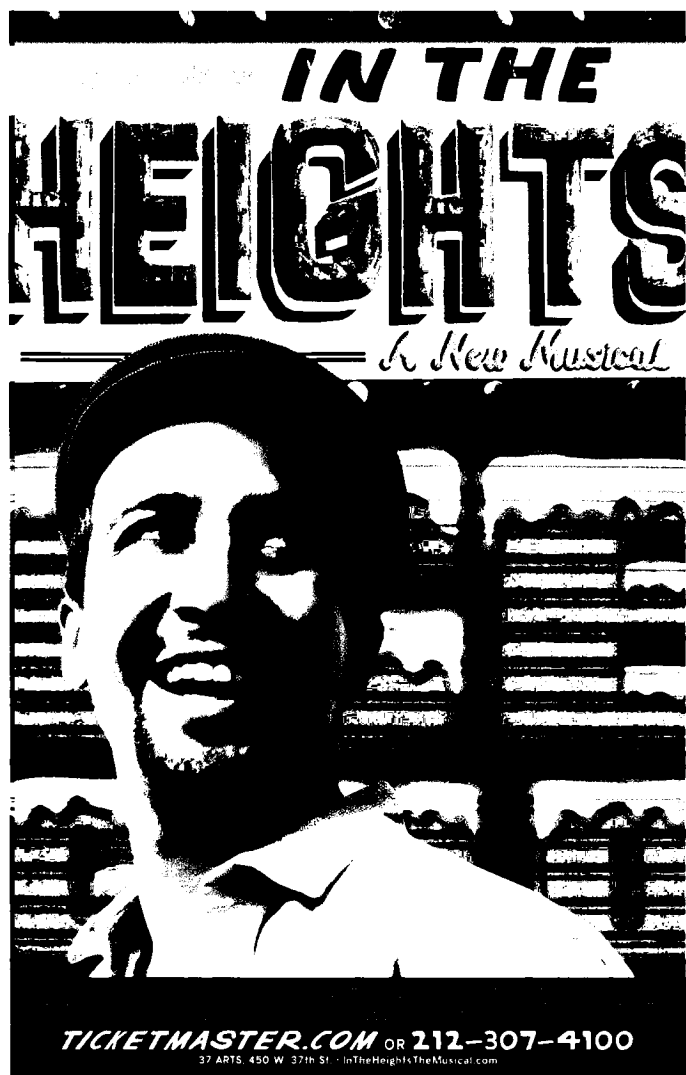
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
DESIGNED BY CAIL ANDERSON
SET DESIGNER FRANK CARCIULLO
PHOTOGRAPHER: KEN SCHLES



THE GLASS MENAGERIE
CREATIVE DIRECTOR: GAIL ANDERSON
DESIGNERS: JESSICA DISBROW, MARIAN BANTJES

DIRECTED BY
Guthrie Artistic Director
Joe Dowling

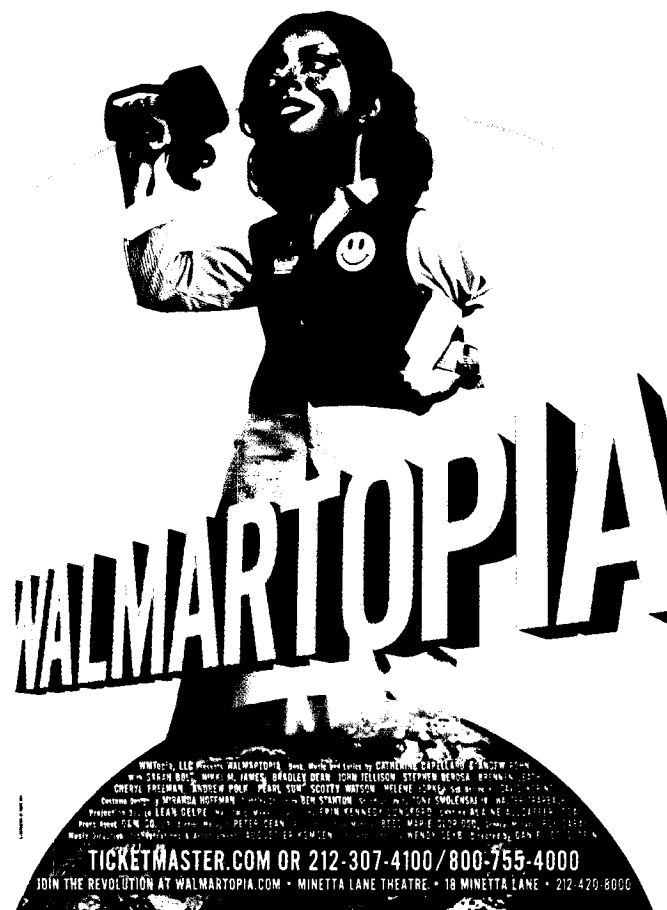
JONAS GOSLOW, HARRIET HARRIS, RANDY HARRISON, TRACEY MALONEY, BILL McCALLUM



IN THE HEIGHTS
 CREATIVE DIRECTOR: GAIL ANDERSON
 DESIGNER: DARREN COX
 PHOTOGRAPHER: MIKE MCGREGOR

Anderson and her team's typographic treatments are also diverse: Their *Walmartopia* poster is a wonderful send-up of the happy-go-lucky typography of the 1950s, while the National Poetry Month poster echoes the strong typographic statements of Swiss posters from the 1970s.

Anderson has also coauthored, with Steven Heller, several books, including *Graphic Wit*, *The Savage Mirror*, *American Type-play* and their most recent, *New Vintage Type*. The latest book is a critical survey of how current design can take advantage of old type. Organized by historical period into five sections, the book features hundreds of lively examples that suggest "retro is the new new." In addition to collaborating with Heller on gathering visual examples and writing insightful and entertaining essays that accompany each section, Anderson also designed the delightful double-page spreads that introduce them. These alone are worth the price of the book.

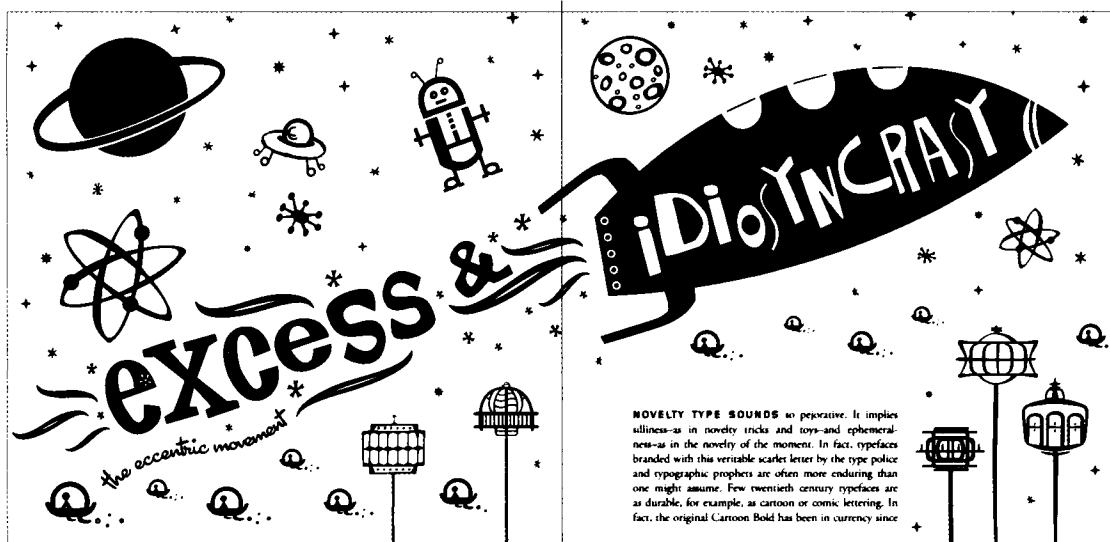
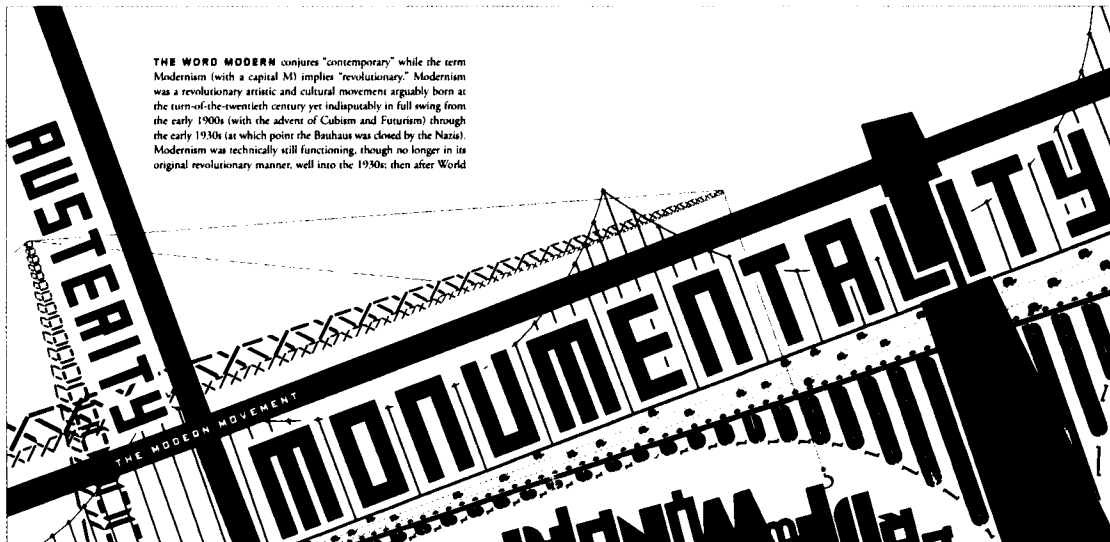


WALMARTOPIA
 CREATIVE DIRECTOR: GAIL ANDERSON
 DESIGNERS: AMANDA SPIELMAN, HAN-YI LEE
 ILLUSTRATOR: EDDIE GUY

IT'S ABOUT PROCESS

One would think that someone as creative with type as Anderson would have a pretty well-defined typographic philosophy. Not so. According to her, "I'd like to think I have some grand philosophy on working with type, but I really don't. In my MFA Design class, I preach that the process has to be fun, and that you need to be willing to step outside your comfort zone. Working with letterforms and words must be an enjoyable—and integral—part of the design process and not an afterthought." She also suggests that taking risks every once in while is a good idea. "I find that when people say they want to keep it 'clean,' more often than not they're just a little afraid of taking a chance."

Coming of age in an era when type choices were limited to what was on the Typositor was propitious for Anderson. "It forced me to open up the Dover books," she says, "to find the right type. Then I had to photostat the individual letters and spray-mount them on illustration board. By comparison, almost any font you can imagine has been digitized, so there's very little heavy lifting involved.



NEW VINTAGE TYPE, BY STEVE HELLER, GAIL ANDERSON (WATSON-GUPTILL)
 DESIGNERS: GAIL ANDERSON, JESSICA DISBROW

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VOLUME 24 NUMBER 3

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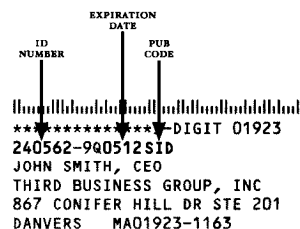
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