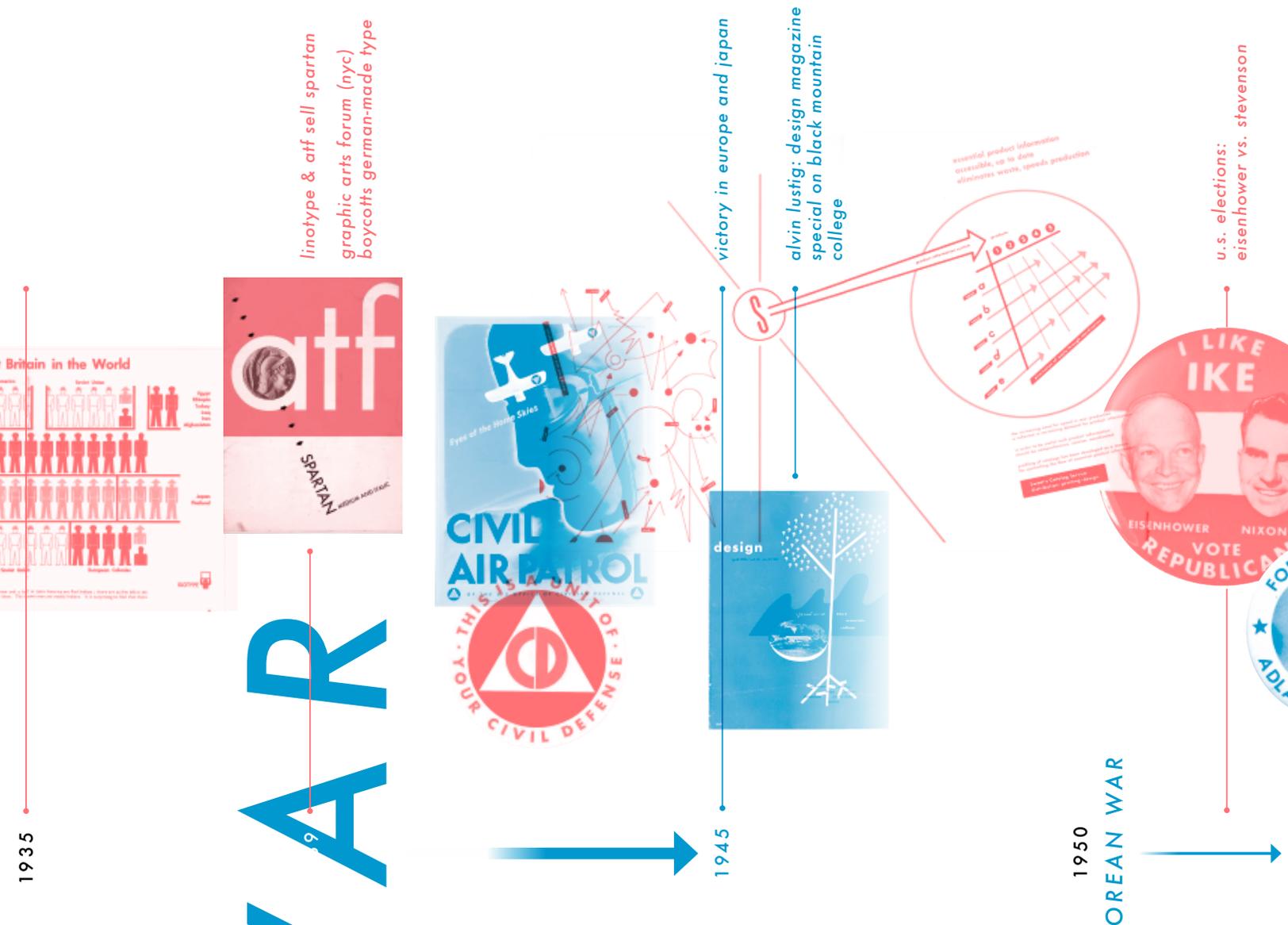


NEVER USE FUTURA

GRADUATE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT GRANT APPLICATION

15 February 2016



PROPOSAL

DOUGLAS THOMAS GD MFA 2016

OVERALL PROJECT

My MICA MFA thesis project is a book and exhibition that recounts and interprets the life of Futura, one of the most important typefaces of the last century. First created in 1927 by German designer Paul Renner, Futura's design and extraordinarily diverse uses epitomize the values of 20th-century modernism. Since then, it has become one of the foundational typefaces of modern graphic design. However, the story of Futura is more than a story of an idealistic type designer, his perfect geometric shapes, and aesthetic echoes of the Bauhaus—it is a history of the aspirations of modern public life.

My book, entitled *Never Use Futura*, chronicles the cultural history witnessed (and recorded) by the typeface Futura from its avant-garde beginnings to its mid-century triumph. In it, I investigate its historical uses, by nearly every work-a-day mid-century American printer and corner store, to commercial and government giants like NASA, Nike, and the German Communist Party. By the 1980s, modern artists Barbara Kruger and the Guerilla Girls harnessed used Futura's familiarity to shout their open and pointed subversions of the authority of modern consumerism. For better or worse, countless current designers use Futura in a mix of nostalgic, critical, and forward-looking uses. Yet, even now, Futura remains the iconic typeface of tomorrow.

Based on an initial proposal and two chapters this book project has been accepted by Princeton Architectural Press for publication in Fall 2017. This semester, I am working on completing the additional five to six chapters for the entire book. The book's title plays off the advice typically given to student designers in spite of its predominance in modern visual life.

RESEARCH GRANT

Funding from the Graduate Research Development Grant would facilitate a research trip to New York City to help me gather visual and historical information for two new book chapters. The first is the contemporary digital copies of Futura and the many current geometric typefaces it

inspired. The second is the story of Futura's early adoption of New York designers as a manifestation of Modernism in the United States.

For the first of these chapters, I will be comparing Futura to modern sans serif typefaces such as Gotham, Graphik, Neutraface, Brandon Grotesque, and Sharp Sans, all of which use Futura as a point of departure. I have arranged interviews with the designers of these typefaces to discuss their process and thinking about Futura and their designs. I currently have confirmed an interview with Christian Swartz, principal at Commercial Type, and am in conversations with Tobias Frere-Jones about a formal interview as well. (I have already interviewed others, such as Lucas Sharp of Village Type, and Tal Leming, owner of Type Supply here in Baltimore.)

Secondly, I will visit several New York City archives which hold crucial and rare documents on the history of Futura. These include Columbia University (which houses the collection of the former American Type Founders Library & Museum) the Cooper Hewitt, the MOMA, and the Herb Lubalin Collection at Cooper Union. In each of these cases, only a fraction (if any) of the relevant Futura documents are available online, and digital scanning loses important typographic details, small type (4pt and smaller), and images on the reverse of pages.

In addition to this research, I have already conducted essential research at the Newberry (Chicago), Regenstein (University of Chicago), Library of Congress, National Air & Space Museum, National Archives, and Eisenhower (Johns Hopkins) Libraries as part of my overall project.

Grant funding would help cover travel, accommodation, and supplies fare for two nights in New York City, to maximize time at research libraries over a three-day span. It would also give flexibility scheduling interviews with two type designers and give me enough time to travel from archive to archive across the city. The budget also reflects needed supplies, such as a basic macro camera lens to fit an iPhone, as well as reproduction and licensing fees in the NYPL and Columbia archives for images still under copyright.

BUDGET

DOUGLAS THOMAS GD MFA 2016

TRAVEL & ACCOMMODATION

| | | |
|---|----|-----|
| Balto-NYC Bus Fare | \$ | 40 |
| Per diem (2 days @ \$69 GSA rate for NYC) | \$ | 138 |
| Hotel, 2 nights near Cooper Union | \$ | 438 |
| MetroCard trips (approx. \$3/trip) | \$ | 18 |

SUPPLIES

| | | |
|--|----|----|
| ATF Spartan Type Specimen | \$ | 24 |
| Linotype's Spartan Series Specimen | \$ | 66 |
| Oloclip 10x and 15x Macro lens clip for iPhone 6 | \$ | 80 |

SERVICES

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| Archive Reproduction Fees/Academic Image Licensing Fees (Fees range from \$20-100 per image, based on archive rules) | \$ | 250 |
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TOTAL \$ 1,054

* Budget Funds outside of the proposed \$500 MICA Research Development Grant will be covered through external grants and awards and personal expenditures.



ink small.
out of gas, it's easy to push.