Experimental Typography
Experimental Typography in the process of Learning
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Title of the paper:
Typographic experiments as an important element in the education of graphic design students from art schools in Poland.

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Abstract of the paper:
Experimental Typography in the process of Learning

Typographic experiments as an important element in the education of graphic design students from art schools in Poland. While teaching in basic level of the Graphic Design, I believe that one of the important elements in educating young designers is the conscious use of TYPOGRAPHY in building visual messages.
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1. Introduction

Conducting classes in Graphic Design Basics I believe that one of the important elements in educating young designers is the conscious use of TYPOGRAPHY in building visual messages.

Bearing this aspect in mind, I shape the curriculum so that there are tasks that require students to take a creative approach to typography. This makes them aware of how they can move in this matter. I have to point out here that the primary aspect I put emphasis on is building understandable visual messages, so typography itself is often their complement. That’s why some of the tasks are focused on visual message and other exclusively on experimenting with the letter only.

In the course of their classes, students carry out various tasks in which they have to use typography, sometimes treated in an experimental way.

These tasks are constructed in such a way that they touch different issues in typographic matter, cause and force the use of different methods of realization.

The tasks and works that I am presenting in this text were carried out with students of the first and second year of undergraduate studies. I present works of fantastic students from three universities, where I taught the basics of graphic design;

- Faculty of Art, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, www.uwm.edu.pl
- Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, Faculty of Graphic Design
- Koszalin University of Technology, Institute of Design.

The level of difficulty of the tasks was adjusted to the current knowledge and advancement of the students with whom I worked.
2. Visual message i.e. Picture & Typography

As the subject I teach is the Basics of Graphic Design, I have prepared a program for students that includes a variety of issues from the area of graphic design. These include aesthetics, simplification, composition, intelligibility of visual message and typography. Typography in this aspect occurs as one of the elements important in shaping visual communication. In visual messages there are two types of information - visual and text - verbal. They carry with them two types of meanings, for which you have to have different skills to decode and understand them.

Therefore, an important aspect of didactic practice is to make students aware of how the viewer can understand their messages.

Contemporary designers create a variety of visual messages, often using typography as one of the elements building the meaning of the message. Such carriers of information in which, in addition to a visual message, there may also be a verbal message in the form of typography include: visual identification, posters, animations, press advertisements, billboards, newspapers, books, catalogues, leaflets, websites. Also logotypes and packaging and so on.

While carrying out such tasks, the designer has to solve various problems appearing at the interface between image and typography. When these two information carriers meet, it is worth to make sure that they complement each other, create synergy, so that the information contained in words is dressed in such a visual formula that will complete and strengthen the message.

Students during the course perform various tasks, in which they have to use typography treated classically as a verbal material adding meaning to the image, and in some of the tasks typography treated completely in an experimental way.

These tasks are constructed in such a way that they touch various typographic issues, cause and force the use of different methods of realization. It is also important that the tasks that are carried out are not boring. They are attractive to students and at the same time set new and more difficult requirements for them.

3. Personal self-portrait

One of the first tasks that I give to the students of the first year is the realization of self-portrait, which must include the name of the author.

Students working with their own self-portrait are to give it an individual style and character using graphic means. All means are allowed, to express themselves. The essence of the task is to find and give individual character to one’s own image. The difficulty lies in moving away from standardized selfie images. Such sweet photos, of which you can find hundreds, thousands on Internet profiles and in social media.

What is important in this task from the typography side is that the project should have an individual and legible signature (usually the name of the author). This is an introduction to the conscious use of typography. The location of the inscription, its size, colour, font type selection should be carefully considered. The typography is to correspond with the character of the whole work. And the whole work should correspond with the personality of the author!
This quite simple task has a fantastic feature. It is important not only for the recipient but also for the creator, the sender of the message, in this case the student. For young people, shaping their image is very important in these times of the triumph of narcissism culture. This makes students aware that graphic design is necessary and important for both sides. For me, as the original recipient of these messages, it is also very important.

Why? During the first classes, and sometimes until the end of the semester, I cannot remember the all names of the students. It is shame but I still make mistakes with names after a few months.

That’s why this task is so important. Helps me. And it helps them to get out of the crowd. It helps them to become recognizable, remembered. It is useful and necessary. It performs an important function, helps to remember specific people. This task visualizes and makes them aware of what graphic design is needed in practice, in everyday life.

An interesting aspect is the fact that the most difficult element I observe during the realization of this topic is the problem of proper font selection for signing the image. Creating one’s own, attractive, intriguing self-portrait is often laborious but in fact quite simple. On the other hand, choosing the right form of signature for it often becomes highly problematic. I have an impression that project decisions are often made in a random way.

Similar problems are practically encountered later during the whole process of studying: That is, how to choose the right form of typography, which will complete and strengthen the whole message.

The result of this task are often fantastic projects from illustrative where self-portrait and signature are painted by hand. Some works using photography with the use of typography created from computer fonts. Often the works are created that resemble album covers.

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Figure 1. Task: Personal selfie.
Author: Emilia Kamińska.
In this work Emilia used various letters cut out of newspapers and then pasted into the work to create the inscription. On the one hand the fonts are computer, on the other hand they have personal touch of the athor. They are hand-cut from newspapers, magazines and books.
Typography in Aleksandra’s work perfectly complements the whole picture. Despite the use of typography from a computer, the inscription enters into a relationship with a self-portrait. The positive, joyful pronunciation of this work does not exist without a visual form of typography. Its shape and skillful fit into the image is ideally placed and multilevel.

Andrijej introduced a dozen or so signatures to his work. He used handmade typography, which looks like scratched on a wall.
In all the works presented here, the authors searched for relations between the image - self-portrait and typography, their signature. Typography becomes an integral part of the whole visual message. It complements the image in various ways, on many levels of information shaping.

4. Typo-abstraction

The next task I would like to discuss in this analysis is the task of building an abstract typographic image: „Typographic landscape” or „Typo-abstraction”. Students are to create a visually attractive image using letters. ONLY LETTERS. Letters can be used from databases available in graphic programs. Students can build them from his own fonts. They can do whatever they want to do with letters.

Through conscious use and choice of font type, letter size, composition and rhythm you should create an interesting, intriguing, surprising and purely visual image. Generally, in this task students used fonts from databases available on computers. In this task, the letter was detached from its basic task, i.e. providing textual information. It became an ornament, a base, an element to build intriguing images. This way of treating the letter as a visual motif caused that the students had an opportunity to take a close look at various fonts. This allowed them to appreciate their shape and beauty. Suddenly they discovered that letters from different fonts are different. They have their own special character. Savings in the use of various fonts, colouring is the key to solving this task.

Why do I think this task is important? In the task with self-portrait number 1, I noticed that students lacked a sensibility for choosing the right fonts to match the character of the image. Therefore, by introducing this task I wanted them to devote more time to working with the letter shape itself.

Figure 4. Task: Typo-abstraction. Author: Roża Ilek

Rożą built an extensive spatial composition out of simple fonts. Excellent choice of colours and simplicity of composition at the same time, give an excellent visual effect.
In this task, the students were to reflect on the visual form of the works. Treating letters as a reason for purely aesthetic visual deliberations, clean, elegant compositions were often created. Sometimes they were able to extract visual sense and harmony from the apparent chaos and excess. Colour, composition, shape - these are the aspects that need to be emphasized when creating such compositions.

Magdalena decided to create her work through a more complicated creative process than in the case of projects created using computer programs. She printed and then cut out letters from paper. Then she built a spatial composition of cut letters. The final effect was photographed.
3. Tangible Typography / Materialized Typography

This task is carried out in the second year of undergraduate studies. The task is based on an experimental approach and is based on a variety of experiments that can be observed in designers such as Stefan Sagmeister. I wanted to enrich the skills and imagination of students with non-standard ways of creating typographic messages.

Not only through using a computer graphic design programs. Not only through manual text painting. But also about building subtitles from various materials. This is a proposal to leave the computer for a moment. Too often I observe designers searching computer fonts databases quite mechanically in search of a font that will be the right one.

Designing at such moments begins to resemble mechanical, or technical work. It is a denial of being a Creator! The aim of this task is to return to being the author, the creator of the full meaning. Those task was to illustrate a given slogan by using materialized typography. The idea was that the main motif of the project should be an inscription reflecting the visual meaning of the subject - the meaning of the created word. The final work should correspond visually with the given topic. The limitation is that a computer fonts cannot be used.

Therefore, typography is to be treated here in two ways:
- as a graphic-colour element that builds the space and meaning of the image in detachment from its basic function
- as an element carrying specific meaning contained in the word - the leading slogan

Thanks to this construction of the task, in the final works there is a synergy between meaning and image. An additional, second part of this task is to transfer the static image, the graphic form to the film medium. The final effect should be recorded in the form of short animation or film as a gif or other similar format.

Thus, two types of works are created: a) Poster and b) short film form.

Unlike the poster form, the film form turned out to be much easier for students to make. The graphic and poster form uses only one image. Those only one image contains both a riddle and an answer, surprise and suspense.

The film, animation, on the other hand, is a linear story, set in time. A short film story contains all the aforementioned elements but spread over time. Man is accustomed to a linear, chronological storytelling. Condensation of these elements in the form of ONE comprehensible image becomes a very difficult task. Therefore, the poster form turns out to be more difficult to create than a film. An additional difficulty are the slogans themselves; unspecific, very poetic and emotional, for example;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polish word</th>
<th>English version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bezruch</td>
<td>Immobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwiewny</td>
<td>Airy / Aeolian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwałtowny</td>
<td>Violent / Rapidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KrUCHOŚĆ</td>
<td>Fragility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bezwład</td>
<td>Inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadmiar</td>
<td>Excess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milczenie</td>
<td>Silence / Quietness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This task can be carried out by students in Polish or English.
In order to do this work, the author had to face the manual creation of the inscription, which she cut out of thick cardboard. Slowly pouring paint over slogan, creates a visual form of inertia. I must admit that the final effect is more intriguing in the film, through the film effects of jamming and suspension attracts the viewer’s attention.

The student visualized the word „airiness” by using scattered flour in the arranged shape of the word. By introducing an element of destruction in the structure of letters, by blowing off part of the flour, she obtained the desired impression of lightness. Eventually, a visually attractive image came out. However, the effect is not very intriguing. It is too obvious. It does not attract the viewer’s attention and does not become memorable.
The key to this task is the selection of passwords to illustrate. Some of them seem to be easy to implement. It1s gave a nice, visually attractive projects, but quite obvious all in all. On the other hand, some slogans are difficult to illustrate. As a result, several poetic and visually non-obvious works have been created.

Thanks to such a surprising effect of non-obviousness, sometimes internal contradiction of the image, it makes the viewer think about the message.
6. Conclusions

The typography exercises and experiments that I presented in this text and that I conducted with students of Graphic Design are a small part of the knowledge that they should get to know.

What is important is that students should look for new solutions. They are supposed to break down their habits and the standard ways they used before.

They are to boldly search for new visual forms and ways to reach the viewer with the created messages. They don’t always get visually attractive projects, sometimes they are strong, sometimes simply unsuccessful. It is important that they look for new ways and use different ways to build understandable visual messages.

An important aspect that I want to instill in them is respect for the viewer. A kind of empathy that we should always think about the other side to which we direct our messages. How our message can be received and understood. Because very often it turns out that the recipient receives what we direct to him/her differently than it seems to us.

It is also very important for the students to come into contact with such tasks, thanks to which they will build their basic designer’s workshop. They will gain appropriate basics and knowledge on the basis of which they will be able to efficiently build messages that are understandable to the recipient. On the other hand, I would like them to experiment as much as possible with the form, ways of shaping the image and message. Study time is also the time for experimentation, even the unsuccessful one.

Later, in the course of professional practice there will not be so much time for experimentation. Then comes the time to use all the experiences that were gained during the course of studies.

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