Typographic Dialogues: Local-Global

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A typographic dialogue: local-global

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Abstract: This article discusses how the area of typography relates to both local and global concepts. Based on the experience gained through the process of working with students on international projects, this paper explores the process of transition from local to global.

Key words: *typographic dialogue, education, experimental typography, international research.*

1. Introduction

The meaning of the term 'local' usually relates to or is restricted to a particular area. Despite the growing interest in typography around the world (which can be deemed a global phenomenon) the context of a place, its history, current local problems, and finally the features of a given language, not only in visual but also semantic terms, seems to remain important in the process of building messages (communication in general).

Typography is becoming a global issue and is currently considered a crucial tool in communication. Even in the context of the term 'local', typography theoretically does not constitute any restrictions, for example, when we talk about the availability of typographic elements such as fonts that are available to everyone, regardless of the place and even of the profession. In the publication *Type & Typography*, the authors indicate that type design has now become global and its use is by no means restricted to 'professional designers'. Indeed, thanks to the variety of means of expression, it appears that we can communicate without any limitations, both locally and globally. To be precise, the language we use, theoretically, does not constitute a barrier that would prevent the smoothness of our communication. Paradoxically, however, the modern world seems to be increasingly divided both socially and religiously. If we then assume that communication is one of the most important aspects of our survival, we should think about the ways in which this communication can be improved in the both areas, local and global.

2. From a Polish perspective

2.1 A short introduction

The history of Polish visual culture and typographic experience is a broad issue, still affecting the youngest designers and students. To introduce these, it is worth mentioning several examples such as: the study of specificity of Polish lettering made by Adam Półtawski (*Antykwa Półtawskiego* [Półtawski's Antiqua]; 1923—1928), the search for an authoritarian system of communication and avant-garde experiments (*Komunikat*, designed by Władysław Strzemiński,1930), research on the coexistence of word and image (*Zelek*, by Bronisław Zelek,1972), a combination of typography and the experience of a specific place, region, history (*Silesiana*, 2006), and *Lato* [Summer] by Łukasz Dziedzic 2010, shared under an open license, currently one of the most popular typefaces in the world. These examples indicate that Polish typographers do not avoid surprising sources of inspiration and experiments, often combining local experiences with the global context.

2.2 Educational experiences between global and local

While working with students in Poland (Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology in Warsaw) I have often encountered the use of local aspects (landscape, Polish-specific characters or language structures, materials, sounds, or the use of own writing). In this way, many works that constitute interesting juxtaposition were created:

for example, placing a poem in a local landscape and giving it a new context (Fig.1), a collection of hand-written letters by the local community, in order to search for universal answers: individuality vs. technology (Fig. 2). Students also found that typography can explore not only local problems but those very individual. For example, one of the students who had problems with his own writing (individual problem) and was criticized for his careless writing. After becoming familiar with Wolfgang Weingart's experiments, he adopted them and created a game (Fig. 3) with letters which studied the phenomenon of readability and illegibility of the text (global).

Along with my students, I have been participating in the *Type Unite* international project since 2017. The main objectives and aims of *Type Unite* are described below. While working on this project, many local threads appeared, however the main message of the project is communication in an international, global aspect. Through working on the project, I noted that, at first, students try to use the resources such as fonts already available on their computers. However, through the process of experimentation, the students switched to designing their own letters, often using everyday, local materials (such as threads, feathers, bread, price labels, bills, local newspapers, or plants), (Fig. 4).

Figure. 1 Author: Aleksandra Danielewicz,
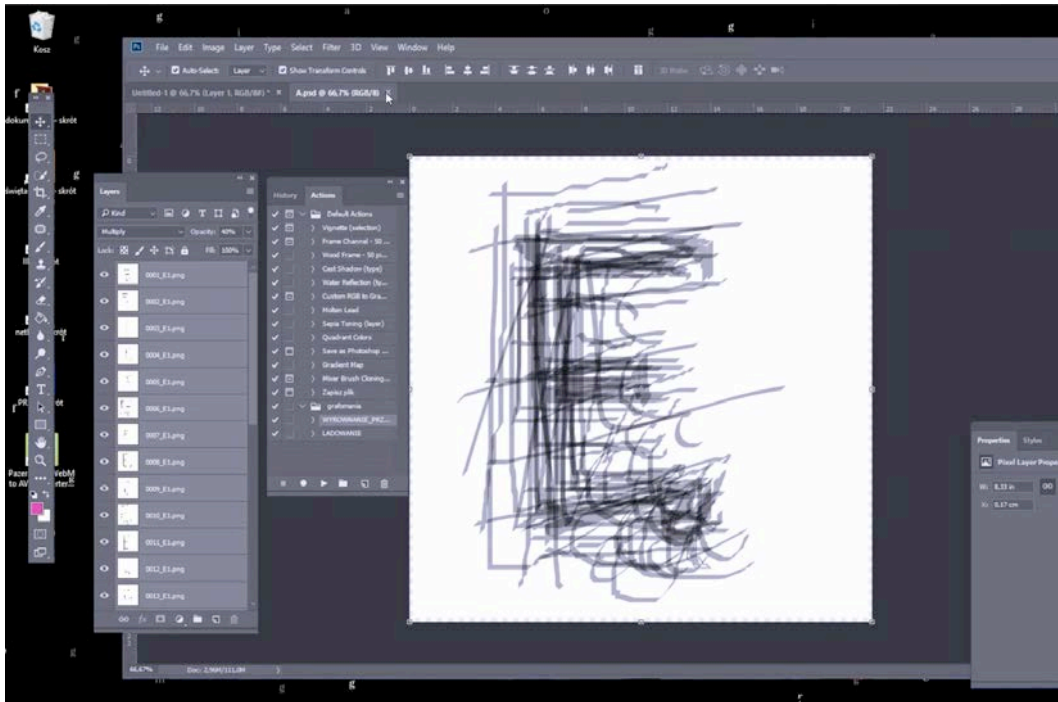Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Warsaw, Poland.

Figure. 2, Author: Adrianna Malinowska,
Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Warsaw, Poland.

Figure. 3, Author: Igor Rams,
Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Warsaw, Poland.

Figure. 4, Authors: Karolina Kwiek, Agnieszka Chudzik, Anna Jurczak, Katarzyna Oknińska, Anna Hynowska, Monika Szarek, Yennhi DoDuc, Maja Wisz, Palina Harelikava, Anna Ignaciuk. Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology, Warsaw, Poland.

3. Text Message. Between Local and Global

The *Text Message* project (2016) raised questions regarding the area of communication in the field of graphic design, the search for mutual understanding and the possibility of a dialogue in the modern world. These issues triggered a discussion between Polish and French students and were the beginning of a journey into the area of communication between Poland and France, between the objective and the relative, and finally between the word and the image. More than 100 students from three Polish and French universities took part in all stages of the project. Firstly, students of the Typography Studio at the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology (PJAIT) in Warsaw recorded short video messages, which were later shown to their French counterparts. French students (from École intuit.lab in Paris and Aix-en-Provence) responded to those messages in a form of a typographic poster. Next, a different group of Polish students from PJAIT in Warsaw analyzed those artistic interactions and summarized their chosen one in a form of a graphic work. The students created varied, often surprising interpretations of the same message and the graphic creativity proved to be diverse despite the limitations of the fonts and colors, which were set out in the project*. Text Message* also allowed for consideration of various interesting issues, which altogether led to the conclusion that what is 'between' should always serve as a link and connect rather than divide.

4. Type Unite. Intercultural Communication: Local to Global

Type Unite is an international initiative, which brings together typography departments from different universities. Every year the professors from universities participating in the project prepare a brief, which sets out a specific topic. The students from all participating universities execute the poster design brief. Finally, the ten best projects from each university are exhibited and published in a catalogue with an aim to initiate a dialogue regarding the different approaches to the same topic. The resulting design ideas vary between the individuals but also often between the countries. For example in the *Language Relations* edition, the students from Korea focused on using Hangul whereas European students resorted to English in their designs. Each of the participating countries uses a different language. Despite this potential obstacle, students identified many common areas to use in their works, which reflected the themes that have been taken by the *Type Unite* so far; aspects that are comprehensible beyond languages and cultures.

5. Conclusions

The *Text Message* as well as *Type Unite* projects are a research and artistic activities. The main area of these projects research is typography. Through the projects students were looking for a visual equivalent of given phrases in terms of language differences and similarities: characteristic features such as: language transcript or specific characters. When implementing the projects, students noticed that language relations are not only connected with the relationship between languages in terms of their understanding, but also with formal features such as: construction of individual characters, origin of language or cultural conditions that influenced the formation of languages. The features that have an impact on the fact that we are able to recognize a given language, even without understanding the content recorded, turned out to be extremely important.
Many students raised the issue of creating an experimental language that could somehow combine different characteristics into one cohesive, legible system (global).
This is how we started the discussion on universal languages such as Esperanto (Esperanto comes from Western European, Slavic languages, has a lot to do with analytical languages, which include, among others, Chinese and agglutinative languages, such as Japanese, Swahili or Turkish).

This raised another question: can systems (including the transcript of the language) develop a kind of universe, a kind of auxiliary language that would be understandable to everyone?

Although there are still more questions than answers in the field of systems and the search for universal structures, we all are looking for mutual agreement in this regard.

No matter what language we use, it is always the basis of communication.

Thus, typography emerges to be what Rob Carter called a 'Typographic Journey'; a chance to cross borders, not only the geographical but also our own.

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