

Usage of experimental typography of book cover design in digital age

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Abstract

Hamish Muir says that, " Every type job is experiment" (P,Bil'ak, www.typotheque.com). Designers are using experimental approaches to book covers which is one of the many graphic design areas where we encounter with fonts and they are trying to keep their designs alive and different via innovative solutions. Typographic approaches are changing with today's technological developments and experimental researches affects book covers too. Developments in software regarding design enable using many applications simultaneously. Experimental researches, discoveries and interpretation of typography and images in an unexpected way empower communication. Different is always appealing. Therefore designers choose to do attractive and marketable designs and lay the foundation of new on this path which started as experimental.

Definition of typography, common application areas and book covers which is one of these areas will be examined within this study and analyzes about usage of experimental typography will be conducted. Experimental approach process, its result and affects will be investigated and findings about necessity of experimental typography will be tried to find.

Keywords: experimental typography, digital age, book cover design.

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1. Introduction

Book design is an autonomous area of graphic design literature. One of the most important design units in this area is typography. With transition to digital age, changes caused by technological developments affected design area too and this situation inspired many designers to move out of the traditional understanding in typography and verge into different experimental approaches. Experimental typography on book covers is discussed and explained with examples within this study.

2. Development Of Experimental Typography

Publishers, writers, typographers and designers have conducted experimental studies about lettering's image on paper since the invention of printing. 18th century writer Lawrance Sterne was using typography in order to see how much he can change raw shape of the book (Themlow, p.86). Letters and words were designed out of the traditional in order to catch readers' attention. As we see in Sterne's book (**Fig .1**), worlds were inserted freely and this created a different visual effect for each page in itself.

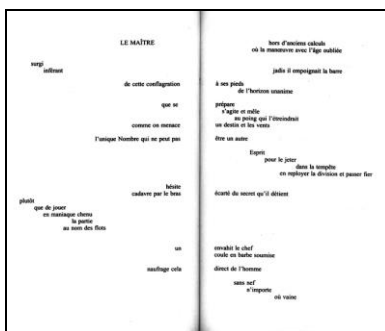


Fig .1. Stéphane Mallarmé, Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard

Almost all of the avant-garde movements were introducing their actions via manifests, banners and other printed materials in the first half of 20th century and putting their philosophies on paper by this way. Printed statement formed as a result of these created an experimental typography vocabulary that designers use and contribute to and this creation is continuous (Twemlow, p.86)

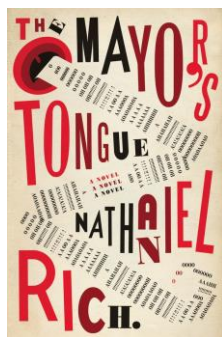


Fig.2. The Mayor's Tongue, Book Cover: Jonathan Gray

Experimental typography is one of the most contributing art movements for development of modern graphic design and important developments had been seen in it. Free typographic studies within this movement have affected modern designs too. A new and pictorial quality typographic design was born with “futurism” under the names “free typography” and “liberated words” (Özkurt, 2011, p.11). One of the earliest examples of experimental typographic book covers is the cover of the book “The Mayor’s Tongue” designed by Jonathan Grey in which letters were formed as words coming out of a mouth (Fig.2). Names of the book and author were in an open and dynamic composition, which was created by using different sizes and colors.



Fig. 3. Dada Phone, Book Design: Francis Picabia

Francis Picabia, one of the Dada pioneers in early 20th century designed a cover for Dada Phone where words were placed around a spiral image via lateral and vertical arrangements and created a visual result (Fig. 3). Cover of the book published in 1970 “Letter and Image” by French graphic designer Robert Massin is a successful example of experimental typography (Fig 4). We see letters moving away from each other around an axis, established figure-text relationships, page layouts created with big/small, positive/negative effects in Massin’s designs. Massin who is acknowledged with his experimental works in typography and its arrangements is also known as a scientist of design history (<http://www.designersandbooks.com>, 2015).



Fig 4. Letter and Image (La Lettre et l’Image)

In 1970’s with photomontage, storing and arranging characters in an magnetic memory by reflecting to a light sensitive paper and film form screen via cathode ray in writing processes. This process helped creating dot-matrix and digital typography (Harris and Ambrose, 2012, p.34).

“In the field of graphic design and typography, experiment as a noun has been used to signify anything new, unconventional, defying easy categorization, or confounding expectations. As a verb, ‘to experiment’ is often synonymous with the design process itself, which may not exactly be helpful, considering that all design is a result of the design process. The term experiment can also have the connotation of an implicit disclaimer; it suggests not taking responsibility for the result” (Bilak, 2005).

Experimental typography opposes monotony and uniformity. According to this, concept should be handled as arranging lettering with a more artistic and unusual approach. Experimental typography is a rich design totality with different application methods and usage of different techniques such as illustration, abstraction, collage, size effect and hand writing (Özkurt, 2011).

Even though it can be ignored on readability aspect, emotion can also affect the works. Apart from traditional methods typography started to be seen as one of the digital art forms with time. Harris and Ambrose says that, with digital age typography became a discipline that font production processes accelerated, get easier and became more and more experimental and evolved with computer technologies (2012).

In our day a new dimension started in experimental typography applications with developing technology. Positive development in computer technologies allows producing experimental typography faster than traditional methods. Computers provide endless opportunities for designers for playing with letter sizes or negative-positive relationships. David Carson, whose name was mentioned frequently especially in 1990’s, argues that “nature of the experiment is in innovation of the result” with his words “experimental is something you have not experienced before.... Something had never been heard or seen.” According to Peter BILAK, (Bilak, 2005), a project is only experimental during creative stage. When it is done, it becomes a part of the whole aimed to be challenged.

Today, typography found a new raw material with experimental typography. Simple round fonts representing modern life and free, complicated and rough typographic designs creates and develops today's typographic understanding (Evren, 2014).

3. Applications of Experimental Typography

There are many graphic design objects that experimental typography is applied. It is seen in banners, flyers, magazine covers, page layouts, web designs, info graphics and packaging designs. There are three dimensional expressions on facades, pavements, plazas and similar public areas (Twemlow, 2011).

Multidisciplinary Boamistura team whose origins came from graffiti, designed a slum area in order to distinguish narrow and tortuous roads and solve spatial complexity by writing white transcripts such as love, pride, affection, scheme etc. in neon colors ((Fig. 5).



Fig 5. Boamistura

Conceptual artist Jenny Holzer presents most of her works in public places by writing quotes about social responsibility from famous writer and poems in led lights or by reflecting them with a projection device to a building, to a street or etc (**Fig. 6**).



Fig. 6. Projections, Jenny Holzer

4. Usage of Experimental Typography on Book Covers

While preparing a hand written book required to much time and lots of people, with our modern world technologies publishing books are much less time consuming and much more economic. Book covers is the first surface presented to reader in this process. Cover is an important tool for making the book bought and read. A successful book cover has the characteristic of being the summary of the book. It should be designed in a way that states content of the book in correct and efficient way. Delivering the message of the book and correct application of design principles which is the visual language of this message should have an efficient role during design of the cover. Richness in design is possible with correct usage of these principles. Unique expression of the artist and correct and high quality materials by publisher are also effective in high quality presentation of book designs. Also, it is evaluated that cover designs integrates with content has positive effects on readers.

Cover design should consider target reader groups cultural level and values. Designer should complete the cover of the book working parallel with the cultural and social structure of the age she/he is living in. Because the cover of the book is a product which can reach the biggest target, a right outcome is only possible when these values and applications are together.

While preparing the cover which has a significant role of books marketing designer should choose the most suitable design method for the publishing type. Designer can use illustrations, photographs or typography during analysis process. Typographic solutions are primary because of their functionality during book design and principles of both modern and classic typography – in which data from other sciences or life applications are internalized – should be considered (Sarıkavak).

Experimental approaches in typographic analysis are not a new thing as discussed in the first section. Positive developments especially in experimental typography is placing “typographic book covers” perception in design area. Accordingly experimental typography application on book covers can create one of the innovative headlines in the literature. Today, book and book cover design is understood as packaging of a good (this good is eligible knowledge which is covered with letters and words) in graphic design and therefore outside of the book, the cover design, is considered more important (Sarıkavak).

Various movements and schools (cults) affected book typography and concept become its modernist form today. During this process, an increase has been seen in number of designers that practice typography in book design. David Corson, who is known as most innovative designer in America and a leading experimental typography practitioner, had surprised people with his different experiments in typesetting applications and design standards.

David Carson broke traditional typography rules such as grid forms, consistent layout and knowledge hierarchy in his works and composed them with skew and shattered print formats almost in a non-readable and not-understandable way. He also got out traditional sketches by showing lettering in different arrangements, created compositions that creates freedom sense and brought a new understanding to design of 1990's (Fig.7).

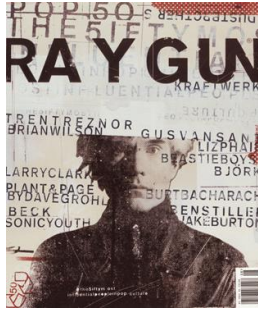


Fig.7. Cover Design for Raygun by David CARSON

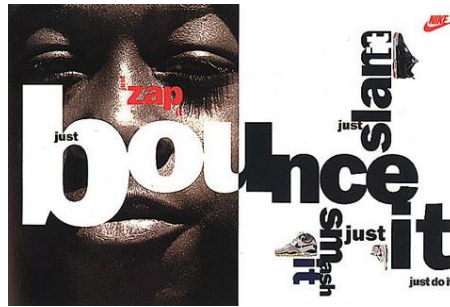


Fig. 8. Brand Strategy for Nike by Neville Brody, 1988

English artist Neville Brody is a graphic designer who uses typography in various areas. By using negative-positive combination of colors in his banner for Nike on horizontal and vertical planes (up to the right and down to the left) he reflected Nike's advertisement campaigns different aspects on typographic layout (Fig. 8).

Milton Glaser's 1997 logo which he created to promote tourism in New York is a successful example which created a huge impact worldwide and was copied a lot (Fig.9).



Fig. 9. Logo for New York City by Milton Glaser

Sofia Clause is another graphic designer who works on book designs and works in Nike as brand designer since 2014. On the book she designed for city of Chicago she corrupted words by the influence of reflections of 10 buildings around Cloud Gate statue and included them on page layout (Fig.10-11).



Fig. 10. Cloud Gate



Fig.11. “Chichago” Book Design by Sofia Clause

Technology is used as an experimental suggestion for the future of book covers (**Fig. 12**). This means experiments can be conducted with different techniques and equipment. In following example we can see the cover applied with a 3D printer for Korean author Chang-rae Lee’s futuristic novel *On Such a Full Sea* and its typographic content. Designer said he wanted to remind that the book is an art object while designing the cover in an interview.



Fig. 12. 3D Book Cover Design by MakerBot

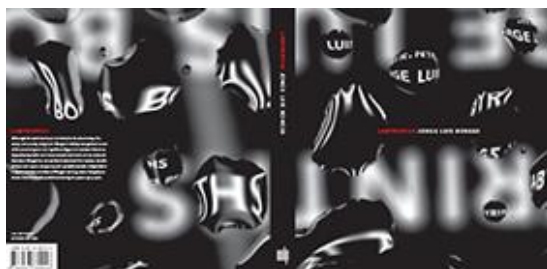


Fig. 13. Labyrinths Book Cover by Anne Jordan

Designer Anne Jordan creates her designs by searching junction points between objects and words on book cover designs (**Fig. 13**). As we can see in the example, used water drops falling on a surface and corrupted words according to their reflections from water for a typographic layout. Artist Jorge Luis Borges created a chaotic environment by using negative-positive affect of colors for his study called *The Maze* and made a reference to books content. Choice of the color red in this work is evaluated as bringing the name of the book into forefront and to manipulate readers.



Fig. 14. "Everything is Illuminated" by Jonathan Gray, 2002

Jonathan Grey is working with the biggest publishing houses for last 12 years and works with a freelance system called "Gray318". Gray has created the cover for the book called "Everything is Illuminated" which is considered one of the top ten book covers for all times (**Fig. 14**). "There has been a revival for hand draw covers for last ten years" he says (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>, 2012) and explains that this style gives clues of individualism.

5. Result

Even though books prepared in digital environments with technological developments have changed form, classic book form is still very important. It does not affect the importance of book cover whether the book is prepared in digital environment or with classical understanding. Book covers are like identities of books. This feature should be designed in a way that reflects the content of the book in marketing and supply-demand contexts.

Importance of book covers canalized designers to various experimental researches. Digital age brought convenient application techniques and decreased time consumption for book covers. We started to see modern design examples where colors in typography changes rapidly, anatomy of

letters can be broken in a typographic order, 3D designs can be applied and also designs which integrates with content and affects readers in a positive way.

Today, with the opportunities brought by developing technologies, experimental typographic studies using different techniques and materials are enhancing diversity of book covers and this helps to break classical design understanding.

Experimental typography can be used in many different areas along side with book covers and always will be an area where innovations are tried on digital age.

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