

Typographic Literacies

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Abstract. This paper develops themes introduced in my paper *Teaching typography in the 21st century: Reviewing the fundamentals of typography in a post-modern design culture*, delivered at the AGRAFA International design education conference in Katowice, Poland in December 2007.

The paper will identify and consider emerging issues in the teaching of typography at degree level. It considers the view that while a typographic education remains fundamental to a designer's visual literacy, its parameters and precepts need to be re-examined in the light of the post-modern conditions of the twenty-first century.

The paper contrasts the modernist perception of typography as a practical organizational discipline with the postmodern development of typography as an interrogatory or interpretative medium, and considers the nature of contextual and theoretical teaching required to complement and support intelligent and informed typographic practice. The paper maps the emergence of typography as a medium of cultural awareness, an expression of response to language, and a medium for exploration of ideas and meanings.

The paper will conclude that the postmodern condition requires a different kind of typographic literacy, that the education of a typographer extends beyond the mechanics of process into the exploration of culture; and that in order to ensure that students develop the necessary typographic literacies to function effectively, we must ensure an awareness of the culture of typography.

These questions will be explored through reference to the author's own research and teaching and to sources including David Crystal, Gunnar Swanson, Robert Bringhurst, Ellen Lupton, Rick Poyner, Hrant Papazian.

Typographic Literacies.

This paper will consider the current position of typography within graphic design education. It will identify key areas of recent change in the cultural status of the subject, and the changes brought about by mass accessibility of specialist media, alongside changes in critical perspective. It will then look at how far current educational methods equip students for informed and intelligent practice in this subject; identifying some apparent divergences between educational perspectives and cultural conditions. Finally, it will propose areas of development necessary for constructive curriculum design.

As the digital era prompts increasing media convergence, it is sometimes suggested that it is no longer appropriate or relevant to define typography as a subject at all. An increasing number of successful professionals make regular use of type and typographic tools without any typographic training at all.

David Jury has suggested that in one sense 'everyone is a typographer now'. Robert Harland has suggested that the term 'typography' may be redundant and unnecessary. In this paper I will argue the opposite position; that current conditions make a typographic education more necessary than ever, and that it has in fact become necessary to a larger constituency of users, but that its parameters and precepts need to be re-examined in the light of the post-modern conditions of the twenty-first century. The paper will explore the proposition that the practice of typography been radically altered by technological change, and that conditions of postmodernity have altered our understanding of type; that type has shifted its philosophical 'centre of gravity' in ways which have not been adequately assimilated into methodologies of teaching.

The paper examines some current perceptions of typography, and will argue for a contextual and syntactically based approach, designed to bridge or assimilate conflicting modernist and post-modernist viewpoints.

The current position of typography within graphic design curricula. At undergraduate level, typography is generally understood to be a sub-specialism within graphic design, and suffers from increasing pressures on graphic design degree curricula, as the subject of graphic design is expected to encompass additional disciplines: the moving image, web design, etc.

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So what is happening to the traditional design curriculum in light of the infusion of computers and other technologies? It is being squeezed.

Lorraine Justice

The mutability of type in the digital environment allows the student a greater visual scope than ever before, but also creates greater opportunities for unexamined excess and visual incoherence.

The extent to which digital design has removed intermediate reprographic skills between designer and printer, means that students actually need more of this knowledge than in the pre-digital era, when reprographic technicians mediated between the design process and the practical considerations of print. A narrow conception of 'educating for employability' places these considerations in opposition to substantial and profound learning.

Under these conditions, the teaching of typography is squeezed.

see comment above and for all subsequent extended quotations.

Before computers, faculty may have had a full semester to teach a beginning typography course. Now, they have a full semester to teach typography and the several software packages students will need to complete the typography projects

Lorraine Justice

We have more students, less teaching time, and more typefaces.

within a few years, designers had created the same number of new typefaces as they had done in the whole 500-year history of typography

Of these faces, a very small proportion can lay any claim to total originality (itself a problematic concept in type design) while the overwhelming majority involve the revisiting (whether consciously or unconsciously) of existing stylistic and idiomatic codes and references. This point is fundamental to this paper, and crucial to a crisis of understanding, which has not been constructively addressed.

Characteristically sited in the first year of a graphic design degree, introductions to typography have in many cases remained simplistic, viewed as a 'basic' but also as a competence to be established –like the working knowledge of a computer programme. The scope for exploration of the contextual hinterland of the subject is limited. The scope for reflecting typography, or even graphic design, in critical and contextual programmes is severely constrained.

While media convergence has been paralleled by a divergence of critical perspectives, it is arguable how effectively postmodern developments in graphic design have been absorbed into design education. In discussion with undergraduates over a number of years at a number of UK Universities (UWE Bristol, University of Brighton, Ravensbourne, Portsmouth, Norwich School of Art) it became clear that there was a widespread perception that the term 'typography' denoted a discipline defined by rules and orthodoxies. A typical comment would be 'I enjoy graphic design but typography is too technical/too dry/too exacting' In a field defined by ideas of individual creativity and visual innovation, students continue to view typography in terms of 'correct' or 'incorrect' practice; concepts which I suspect they would seldom apply to photography or painting.

Until twenty years ago, decisions over typeface choice were largely confined to professional practice. They are now part of everyday life. As a consequence, we see an increasing number of instances where other visual practitioners are making typographic decisions: in web design and interactive media, but also increasingly within illustration, fine art, sculpture and film. As convergence of media 'liberates' the practitioner from the need to seek 'professional' typographic input, the amount of typographic work undertaken by non-specialists has proliferated.

The flexibility and diverse stylistic range of current typographic tools, requires considerable sophistication in the understanding of contextual origin and connotative meaning. Students now have easy access to an almost unlimited variety of typefaces; downloading not only a worrying spectrum of quality, but faces in every conceivable style and genre. Students are thus faced with unprecedented choice, but are usually woefully lacking in the critical tools necessary for informed selectivity; often equipped with only the most subjective and circumstantial understanding of the origins and cultural resonances of the type-forms they select and use.

The student deliberating between Adobe Jenson and HTF Didot is not simply choosing between the functionality of two outwardly comparable pieces of software, but between opposed cultural origins. They are choosing, in effect, between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, between autography and geometry, between religion and science. Furthermore, the technologies of type production are now accessible at student level, with an increasing number of undergraduates attempting font design projects. Structured approaches to teaching typography are often based in the reductive

ideologies of modernism, and thus date from a period when typeface choice was severely limited, not only by the modernist ethos but by the practical limitations of metal or photo set types.

The dominant conventions of typographic order originate in a brief period of the 20th century when it was assumed that design could be detached from its history and approached as a wholly functional form of 'engineering'. Jonathan Hoefler has described the idea that design could exist outside the historical continuum as 'a twentieth century conceit.' As I've observed, modernist typography has a lasting appeal for design educators because it is so teachable. Consequently modernist habits remain, long after their ideological basis has departed. At worst, didactic teaching encourages unexamined practice and in turn generates formulaic design, based upon habit rather than analysis.

Regrettably, this language of structural geometry has often resulted in a sameness of form that is more the look of function than truly communicative function—an emphasis on formal purity rather than content

Katherine McCoy

This situation makes it difficult for students to unravel fact from opinion, to distinguish between practical information and ideology. In teaching, and in the proliferation of instructional books on the subject, there is a tendency for typographic specialists to present personal preferences as universal truths. Practical knowledge conveyed in this way exacts a price from the student: the absorption of ideological position as fact. While students confront unprecedented levels of stylistic choice, critical analysis and pedagogy have tended to sidestep questions of style, associative and connotative value, with the consequence that these attributes are consigned to the realm of 'intuitive' talent and subjective interpretations.

Conversations with students confirmed a continuing preconception that if they are to make a commitment to typography as an identified specialist route or an identified enthusiasm, it is assumed that they are buying-in to a modernist aesthetic; the perception of an organizational discipline governed by some cherished orthodoxies, which distinguish professional maturity from uninformed practice. In several cases I have seen talented students expressing their developing understanding of typographic disciplines through a move from expressionistic subjectivity to a 'mature style' emerging as born-again modernists. At the same time commercial practice increasingly reduces the attributes of modernist design to a set of design mannerisms; just another one in a range of stylistic options.

By comparison, the developments of post-modern typography are less easily reducible to a taught method, and are all too often used as justification for unreasoned eclecticism, arbitrary structures and gratuitous 'rule-breaking'. These approaches are seen as more 'creative'; a problematic term in the field of functional design. I would argue that the reason much of the innovatory spirit of mid 80s-90s postmodernist experiment got dumbed-down so quickly into a transitory 'style' (now out of favour) was the fact that the design profession, and design education, so often lacked the critical engagement to see it as anything more. At present an uneasy impasse exists, where the outward attributes of postmodern typography are seen as appropriate to display

typography and what I will call self-referential practice, while modernist conventions provide the default setting for practical design and the organization of text.

Self-referential typography -typography as content and medium- is a profound and complex subject in its own right, but not one from which to draw inferences that can be applied across typography as a whole. Typography is seldom its own subject; it is rather the process by which an external, pre-existing content is visually articulated. The enthusiasm of some design educators (myself included) for experimental typographies, for typography as the expression of personal imperatives, risks creating a distorted set of typographic values. The lessons of expressive form are of limited value in developing students' understanding of type as a tool of language. And it is largely in this context that they will use type in their professional careers. Too often the alternative is the comfort zone of a formulaic modernism, stripped of any connotative engagement.

Typography: Some questions and definitions. How do we view typography within an educational context? What position does it occupy? Is it a skill, a medium, a craft, or an ongoing context of study? It is of course all of the above, but these descriptions carry different cultural weightings and imply varying limits and boundaries.

I frequently see course documents identifying typography as a basic 'skill'; usually taught during the first year. I'm uneasy with the term 'skill' -though not through any wish to denigrate skill, or indeed craft. The term 'medium' is equally problematic in different ways -suggesting an analogy with tools and materials (paint and canvas?) emphasizing its expressive capacity. If type were as culturally neutral a tool as this suggests, the problems I am addressing in this paper would not arise. (It would be unusually obsessive to base painterly practice upon a historical and cultural study of canvas and pigment.)

But type is characterized by connotative association, and graphic design is characterized by the knowing use, or indeed manipulation, of such associations. As the range of choice becomes ever greater, the exercise of choice becomes increasingly central to our practice.

Michael Worthington introduces these issues in "Computers don't speak, type does:"

Typography's 'voice' is apparent in the letters themselves. The variations allowed within the limits of legibility give room for some emotive form, some 'reading' of the font itself: a secondary signifier (the primary signifier being the representation of a mental image conjured up by the sound of the word)

A 'dog' for example can be a happy tailwagging dog in Keedy Sans, a vicious dog in Crackhouse, a mongrel in Dead History, or a thoroughbred in Unifers. Suddenly, the words have character; they are read visually as well as literally.

This is a relatively simplistic reading based within a very limited and modish framework; (three ostentatiously post modern faces and one modernist classic) Ian Chilvers from Atelier Works; quoted by David Jury, says:

Every word has graphic potential so the marriage of the right word with the right typeface is where we expend our effort. Examining our subconscious relationship with words and interpreting this by drawing upon five centuries of evolving letterforms defines us as a profession

I would contend that it is only by systematic reference to design history that students can be equipped to make informed use of the choices they now face.

Typographic History in Design Curricula. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it, and designers who neglect type history remain typographically illiterate, at best dependent upon a repertoire of tested formulae; default choices that continue to 'work' for reasons, which remain unquestioned. Historically informed typography explores the links between type use and developments in culture, literature and philosophy, in the history not only of design but also of ideas. This contextualization provides the designer with a hugely enhanced analytical capability to respond to diverse challenges, and the graphic vocabulary to do it with.

We could take as a useful example the working career of Jan Tschichold. Too often seen as a pre-war period of modernist integrity followed by a problematic post-war revisionism, Tschichold's apparent ideological volte-face, actually marks a development from a singular, didactic position to a pluralistic and inclusive one. (even, as Jeffrey Keedy has suggested, a post modern one) Most significant is the fact that his stylistic palette expanded to engage with a wide span of typographic history, reflected both in his work as book designer and as typeface designer. His career demonstrates and embodies both the limitations of modernism and the manner in which they can be transcended.

I would take the view that is impossible to develop as a thinking designer without a background knowledge of design history in general, and of typographic history in particular, and a corresponding knowledge of critical debate within one's own practice. These are fundamental tools of reflective practice.

Lupton and Abbott Miller assert that:

Graphic design is an act of cultural interpretation; it is a form of reading, writing and editing using words, pictures, symbols, materials and technologies.

Without a background knowledge with which to contextualize stylistic choice, we have no real knowledge of the tools we are working with, and do not in fact 'know what we are doing'.

Victor Margolin states that:

Although design history is a central practice for design students, I have argued for its inclusion within a wider field of research because I believe that history, if brought into relation with other disciplines, can contribute much to the study of design in contemporary culture as well as to its role in the culture of the past

Michael Vanderbyl responds to the question '*What did you learn in design school?*'

Among other things, six semesters of art history. More and more, I am convinced of the importance of understanding classical origins, the academy, the renaissance. Its something I refer to in my work every day I also learned that Helvetica was not just a typeface but a lifestyle. It has implications beyond the page.'

Yet provision for the teaching of graphic design history and the inclusion of typography within critical studies at undergraduate level, is inconsistent at best.

This is also a legacy of modernism, of Hoefler's 'Twentieth Century conceit': a notion of graphic design and typography as a transparent, non-referential practice that can operate independent of contextual knowledge. Too often, typographic teaching cuts its coat to suit this very sparse piece of modernist cloth. It places the subject, in all its color and diversity, upon the Procrustean bed of modernist reductivism. This in turn has left graphic design courses vulnerable to the rationalization and streamlining of critical and contextual studies programs.

The rejection of history is a characteristic modernist stance; a contributory factor in the current situation, in which so many graphic design students are short-changed by critical studies. There is an increasingly widespread tendency, in the UK at least, for art schools to provide general programs of theoretical and contextual study common to a range of diverse disciplines.

Jury defined the emerging norms of teaching hours in 1998

Finally two hours for complementary studies, usually delivered as a program of lectures to three or four specialist groups at a time ensuring the lecture theatre is filled to capacity'

The same lectures and seminars are presumed to meet the needs of fine artists, graphic designers, fashion designers, multimedia specialists. The principle is of course an expedient one; requiring fewer specialist lecturers and allowing for delivery to larger numbers. Usually based in critical theory, film or media studies and ideas of 'visual culture', these programmes are frequently unsympathetic to the idea that graphic design has a legitimate critical history at all.

The first graphic design history conference, held also in 1983 at Rochester Institute of Technology, drew attention to the idea that graphic design had a history. A revelation.

Katherine McCoy

While a few schools have moved towards a more dynamic principle of integrated practice, it remains a commonplace that for many students critical study exists as an autonomous 'parallel universe', which students visit on the premise that it is academically necessary to do so, but without any sense of its practical relevance for their own development as designers.

As Rick Poynor noted in his paper *The Time for Being Against*, critical writing in and around graphic design is a nascent phenomenon, sustained largely by designers with an inclination toward theory. Similarly, I have noted in a number of graphic design

departments that the most relevant contextual learning (by which I mean learning related to graphic design, both by historical context or current critical debate) took place in the studio, rather than the lecture theatre.

Correspondence with several lecturers on UK degree courses have confirmed that the only type design or indeed graphic design history their students receive is introduced within studio projects, rather than being seen as an aspect of critical or contextual study. I'd suggest that this is not in itself a bad thing; echoing as it does the conditions Poyner has identified. It opens up the possibility of introducing historical and contextual knowledge through practical activity. It is however no substitute for the development of systematic understanding and delivery of graphic design history; a principle jeopardized, neglected or abandoned or in many institutions.

McCoy has made the telling observation that:

A field without a formalized body of history and a community of academic historians could hardly be called a profession.

Each time they access the fonts folder, students are using loaded cultural tools with the safety-catch off. It's not surprising that so many shoot themselves in the foot. The alternative seems to be a remedial culture of typographic 'health and safety' tending towards the conventions of modernism and the comfort zone of supposed 'rules' and typographic probity. At risk of mixing metaphors, the modernist grid can serve as a safety net, where it might better be used as a trampoline.

Any thoughtful analysis of typography quickly reaches the conclusion that actual 'rules' are very few, but the notion that typographic conventions are self-evident or 'common sense' assumes a level of linguistic competence that can no longer be taken for granted. This brings us to the second aspect of concern: the design student's relationship to language.

Typography and Reading (The Typographer as Reader). Technological access has prompted questioning of the traditional divides between design and authorship. In *Re:word*, the introduction to 'Graphic Design and Reading', Gunnar Swanson asks:

Is graphic design about words—focusing on the writer's work—or rewording—a process of both restructuring and editing meaning? The answer I believe is neither and both

The lack of any conclusive answer should not invalidate the important work done by Swanson in identifying these two opposing definitions. He goes on to say

We recontextualize the words and images we use in our design and, thus, in some sense, reword them

This serves to define some divergent positions on the relationship of the designer to content: are we authors; interpreters, passive conduits of linguistic 'content'? I'd suggest, all of the above, at different times in different circumstances.

Michael Twyman, in the interim report of the Working Party on Typographic Teaching in 1968, stated that

In the first place, the typographer must be capable of analyzing 'copy' and if need be, re-ordering its structure. A thorough understanding of the use of English is essential for him to handle efficiently any material given to him.

Lupton and Abbot Miller's definition of graphic design extends the term 'reading' to encompass both literally and metaphorical usage

Graphic design...is a form of reading, writing and editing using words, pictures, symbols, materials and technologies.

McCoy develops the argument:

We hear a continuing debate as to whether this profession should lean towards art or toward science. The most recent influences add a third contender to the art-science debate. Literary theorists see design as a language to be read – that graphic design might be considered a form of visual literature.

Each of these statements serves to confirm that it is fundamentally important for the graphic designer and typographer to explore and engage with language. It is self-evident that intelligent typography depends upon intelligent reading, but this fact exposes a fault line that runs through our education system and indeed across our culture: the contradistinction of 'academic' language-based study against 'creative' visual study. It does not require a modernist conception of function to recognize that type operates in the service of language. It is in the analysis of language that one finds the functional basis for typographic differentiation; for those attributes of variety and colour which energize the design of the page or screen, as well as clarifying the navigation of content and meaning.

A recurrent problem in teaching graphic design at first year level is the students' perception of 'design' as an additive process; that the designer's role consists in adding graphic gestures and mannerisms onto the surface of an inert text; leaving the mark that signals 'a designer was here'. I'd suggest that a key function of the teaching process is to replace this misconception with a different dynamic: using analysis of the text to determine those areas where typographic variation can actually make it more readily understandable. The deeper and more perceptive a student's reading of a text, the less necessary it should become to define good typographic practice in terms of 'rules', a counterintuitive concept which diminishes the involvement of the student in the learning process.

Educational convention places the linguistic and the visual in opposition. The pupil with a developed linguistic awareness is likely to be encouraged towards 'academic' studies, and may indeed encounter some resistance in seeking to pursue the study of visual communication; a field still tacitly thought to provide for the 'creative' individual who characteristically 'isn't good with words'. For the typographer, 'not being good with words' is a pretty serious impediment, and is an area in which graphic design degree courses often have to address the limitations of the education their students have received at secondary level.

The complaint that students don't read enough, is a cliché of academic life, but for the student of typography it has particular implications. Swanson gave to his book 'Graphic Design and Reading', the subtitle 'explorations of an uneasy relationship' On a bad day, the relationship seems not so much uneasy as dysfunctional. Part of the problem is simply that so few design students read for pleasure, or for the exploration of ideas, or indeed read at all unless required to. I would suggest that language should be a key focus of study for the typographer. Much as we would expect a narrative illustrator to maintain a practice of observational drawing, we should expect intelligent analytical reading to be a key element of a typographer's learning; a 'basic', to be studied and understood alongside understanding of the point system and the grid.

I'd suggest further that familiarity with accurate and effective writing creates a developed linguistic sensibility, and that this in turn develops a typographer's sensitivity to the nuances and structure of language. In an era where editorial/structural decisions increasingly take place within the design process, (and where the mediating presence of the sub-editor can no longer be assumed) it is particularly important that students learn to treat language with as much care, reverence and attention to detail as they bring to typographic form and composition. In the past it may have been credible to expect these issues to have been addressed outside the course. Don Roum, in 'Students who don't read', relates that

Christopher Bradshaw once advocated that nobody should be accepted onto a typography course unless he or she has a University degree in classics.

While taking a less proscriptive view, Roum asserts that 'those who are not keen on written communication, no matter how talented visually, should never be enrolled on typographic design courses'

Much of the delivery of theory/history and the assessment of written work in degree courses, still rests on unexamined assumptions of literacy and academic awareness, no longer appropriate to current student profiles and the diversity of intake (at all but the most privileged institutions). While it is tradition of the art school to take a sentimental pride in allowing visual aptitude to override academic shortcomings at admissions level, few address the resulting situation very constructively. As a consequence we admit students to a system which sets them up to fail, relying on the specious notion that they will somehow assimilate the values and skills necessary to academic practice.

I have noted a familiar pattern in which a student's studio practice shows marked development and a steep upward learning curve, while conventional essays follow a steady state determined by their pre-existing academic profile; culminating in essays that are too often a reluctant chore rather than a complementary study, and dissertations that are seen as an unwelcome distraction from the final degree project—a view unfortunately shared by some studio staff. Some of the most vital developments in late twentieth century graphic design have been prompted by ideas originating in literary criticism. However, the fact that in so many cases these have been imperfectly grasped, testifies to deficiencies in educational method. The fact that so many undergraduates (and professionals) lacked the intellectual tools to make of poststructuralist theory any more than a new set of mannerisms, is symptomatic of some significant shortcomings in graphic design education.

Yet, even as postmodernism spread quickly throughout all the arts... poststructuralist critical theories, including deconstruction, began to find their way out of literary criticism and into several of the more theoretical and experimental US graphic design programs. Coming largely out of French literary theory, the emphasis here is not on the author/creator (as in new wave) or the scientific construction of the design solution itself (as in functional modernism) but rather on the reader/viewer and the possibility of multiple interpretations. applications of these theories offer the opportunity for other, more subjective and personal layers of meaning.

Katherine McCoy

As I've noted earlier, the conventional design/typographic education in the UK seldom equips students with the informed vocabulary to explore these possibilities (as anything beyond 'style') As a consequence theories of unstable meaning (a good and interesting thing) become the justification for unstable design... (a Bad Thing)

David Crystal, in his ATypi Lecture; 'Towards a typographical linguistics' at Reading in 1997 defined the relationship of disciplines thus:

It seems to me that the explication of printed language needs the expertise of both typographers and linguists, in order to provide a complete description of its forms and structures and a satisfactory explanation of its forms and effects.

He goes on to say that;

if our two subjects are to come closer together, then, there seem to be only two ways of doing so. One is for linguists to become more interested in the properties of graphic substance, either in the form of individual typefaces or in the way the cumulative effects of using a particular typeface result in judgments about its effect. The other is for typographers to become more interested in the linguistic properties of printed language.

Way Forward. In the light of the issues I have identified, I would suggest that the possibilities of a postmodern condition, and the realities of a digital culture, require that we develop different models of typographic literacy. Among widely differing interpretations of the term, it's generally accepted that post-modernist practice is characterized by inclusiveness and pluralism, a concern for recognizing difference and cultural identity, and crucially, an interrogatory relationship to history. In 'History with Attitude' Ellen Mazur Thompson quotes Raphael Samuel's 'Theatres of Memory'

History is an argument about the past, as well as the record of it, and its terms are forever changing, sometimes under the influence of developments in adjacent fields of thought. sometimes as a result of politics.

I'd suggest that the expression of such an argumentative or interrogatory sensibility requires a more diverse typographic vocabulary than the stripped-down modernist ideal. (These are perhaps not ideas that can be best expressed in Helvetica).

Where these issues are recognized, the solution is perceived in terms of integrated practice; a student experience in which historical, contextual and critical knowledge inform the practice of graphic design. Many of us aspire to this ideal this but how do we create the conditions to stimulate it?

The challenge to educators is to get students to apply contextual and linguistic knowledge to the practice of graphic design, and to develop and extend that knowledge through their work.

Ways forward: 1. Graphic Design and typographic history. I'd suggest first that design tutors need to engage in debate around the development of appropriate critical and contextual curricula. It is vital to repair the institutional schism between theory and practice, still prevalent in many art and design departments.

The extent of separation, and the minimal or arbitrary level of dialogue between 'theory' and 'practice' staff in many institutions is quite extreme, but it would be inappropriate to lay the blame with the 'theorists'. A significant root cause is a culture of studio teaching that is distrustful of theory and critical abstraction or anything 'outside' the practice -and unwilling to engage with the development of appropriate curricula, while all too ready to question the relevance of theoretical and critical study.

We must ensure that where delivery of critical studies operates autonomously, critical studies staff are made aware of the need to include critical, historical and theoretical content appropriate to graphic design. Speaking as a studio lecturer (now also increasingly involved in lecturing on aspects of graphic and typographic history), I believe that we can only meet this challenge by stepping up to it.

As McCoy has noted, the idea that graphic design even has a legitimate critical history is a relatively new one, and in practical terms there aren't enough graphic design historians to go round. It is still the case –and a very positive state of affairs –that as Poyner has observed, the majority of critical commentary within the subject both in the UK and the US comes from those practitioners and practice-based educators with an enthusiasm for developing critical perspectives and deepening historical knowledge of their subject.

We need to progress, as Andrew Blauvelt argues, 'towards a theory of practice' He notes that:

First and foremost, graphic design is a practice, as such it seems destined to oppose theory...the challenge is to both theory and practice. For theory, it means engaging in the making of graphic design, not simply as a means for critical reflection about work, but a critical intervention in work. For practice, it means rethinking the very definitions and limitations of graphic design, not simply to add a little intellectual glamour...but to finally understand graphic design as a form of social practice.

It is increasingly necessary to protect or reinstate the role of type history in contextual and critical curricula—a field increasingly dominated by the methodologies of fine art critical theory, film and media studies.

Given the fact that typeface choice has become a de-specialized and universal issue, I would argue the case that the study of typography is as valid an instrument or model for the development of critical thought as, say, the analysis of film.

To return to Margolin's comment about design history, he states that

I believe that history, if brought into relation with other disciplines, can contribute much to the study of design in contemporary culture as well as to its role in the culture of the past.

Type is a significant and illuminating cultural artifact, in which it is possible to read different philosophical perspectives, responses to language and culture, and affinities with the wider history of ideas. This is illustrated particularly well in Robert Bringhurst's *Elements of Typographic Style*, in which the author applies a personal taxonomy designed to align typographic genre with concurrent developments in arts and philosophy. Bringhurst substitutes categories such as Baroque, Rationalist in place of Vox classifications or their equivalent.

It is only by positive dialogue between the individuals we define as 'subject specialists' and those we describe as 'theorists' that the ideal of integrated practice can be achieved.

Ways forward: 2. Type and language. As a designer, and a tutor primarily concerned with studio practice, I believe there are affinities between considered writing and effective design, which remain largely unexplored.

Ellen Lupton puts an eloquent case for this in 'The Designer as Producer'

Language is a raw material. Enhance students' verbal literacy, to give them the confidence to work with and as editors without forcing them to become writers. Theory is a practice. Foster literacy by integrating the humanities into the studio. Infuse the act of making with the act of thinking. Writing is a tool. Casual writing encourages students to use writing as a device for "prototyping" to be employed alongside sketching, diagramming and other forms of conceptualization.

Sustained critical writing can usefully be viewed as a design process, a medium for original thought, critical reflection and reasoned development of ideas. In all these characteristics it is analogous to the kind of selectivity and critical development necessary to any intelligent piece of design.

Paula Curran in 'Designing with self-authored text', makes the point that:

The process of writing is similar to the design process in that writing involves research, creative thinking, writing drafts and refinement

Similarly, I'd suggest that the understanding of form, sequence and hierarchy fundamental to any sustained work of graphic design, is a 'transferable skill' applicable to writing.

Curiously I have never, ever heard a lecturer suggest this to a student, either in the context of studio practice or in relation to an essay or dissertation.

I'd suggest that in order to move the debate forward, it is necessary to reclaim syntactic principles from the framework of modernist design. The modernist icon Massimo Vignelli, listed among the qualities he required of his work, that it should be 'semantically appropriate'. This should be self-evident across all but the most argumentative design. However, the theorizing of modernism, and in particular the marketing of modernist principles to the business community, has led to a perception that semantic reasoning is inherently modernist –indeed that modernism has a kind of monopoly upon linguistic order

On the meeting of practices proposed by David Crystal I find myself on uncertain ground. I am not a linguist and have no theoretical grounding, but as a typographer intimately involved with language for a while, I find that I have often arrived empirically at conclusions that turn out to be shared by systematic academic disciplines. This serves to underline that design can be a medium of enquiry and analysis –rather than simply the means by which conclusions and outcomes are articulated.

To this end, I believe graphic design education can develop this capacity to investigate language critically.. through typographic projects in which typography is used to explore and develop linguistic awareness. If we can find ways to incorporate linguistic analysis into practical projects, this should benefit students' structural perception of language. This would develop the status of type as a medium of linguistic analysis, and identify the study of language as the means through which both practical and expressionistic typography gains sophistication and focus

Conclusion. Having considered the value of history and language as fundamentals of typographic education, I would suggest that we might deepen investigation of this relationship by inverting some standard assumptions. The idea that the study of history and language provide a contextual background for informed type use, is a sound and indeed indispensable one, but might be viewed from a different angle: As typography becomes de-specialized, and typographic decisions extend into a wide variety of art and non-art practice, it may be valuable to look beyond the idea of 'using' history to illuminate our understanding of type and rather, consider the ways in which the study of type can deepen our understanding of history.

Similarly, beyond using the study of language to inform the use of type, we may consider the use of typography as a medium to interrogate language. These studies are not merely contextual 'service providers', but the core of the development of a mature and complex culture of critical practice and scholarship: the very qualities which McCoy has identified as crucial to our status as a profession. Both these strategies serve to affirm the cultural resonance of typographic form.

Jean-Francois Porchez defines type design as a cultural act -and thus positions type as a cultural artefact, while Lupton and Abbot Miller define graphic design an act of cultural interpretation. There is a widespread consensus that typography and graphic design are primarily a cultural activity. But there is an undeveloped climate of cultural study within which to contextualize and position this activity.

The Twenty-First Century designer operates in a world of typographic multiplicity. With ready access to every aspect of typographic history, able to apply an increasingly fluid and interactive conception of typographic form, the designer needs not only the technological awareness but above all the critical tools to make meaningful use of a developing palette of possibility. Type is a medium of cultural awareness, an expression of response to language, and a medium for exploration of ideas and meanings. The education of a typographer must therefore extend beyond the mechanics of process, into the exploration of culture. In order to ensure that students develop the necessary typographic literacies to function effectively, we must ensure that they develop an awareness of the culture of typography. By doing this we provide them not only with the criteria for informed and analytical practice, but also the tools to build the typographic culture of the future.

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