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2D environmental/spatial typography practice for graphic design students

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Abstract

In typography education for graphic design students, one of the featured points is that the students are supposed to assimilate typographic elements as shapes. One of the most innovative approaches is the 2D spatial typography projects, meaning 2D typographic applications on architectural surfaces like walls, ceilings, stairways etc. This feature is also relevant with environmental typography; that is signage, exhibition graphics and architectural branding design issues. Applying the text on architectural surfaces needs to concentrate and think about many design aspects. As a result, students experience the typographic elements, letters, punctuation marks as images/shapes by experimenting the new form of medium. This brings out that students are no longer identify the types only on printed documents or tv/video screen. After underscoring the 2D environmental/spatial typography and benefits for the design students, examples from an applied 2D environmental/spatial typography practice will be analyzed in the paper. Analyzing the final projects will emphasize the outcomes.

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1. Introduction

Typography education is one of the most important features in graphic design education. At a typography class, assimilating typographic elements as images or/and shapes is one of the educative missions. There are many practices are considered and carried out during the class. 2D Spatial/Environmental Typography Practice i.e. meaning 2D typographic applications on architectural surfaces like walls, ceilings, stairways etc., are one of the most innovative approaches through this mission. This approach is also beneficial for understanding and experiencing the aspects of environmental design such as signage design, exhibition graphics and corporate identity applications. Students are supposed to experience the architectural surfaces as well as assimilate typographic elements (like the letters, punctuation marks etc). as images or/and shapes.

Typography education is/must aim to give the basis of conceptual typographic thinking by original and innovative projects, to graphic design students; it has to be aimed that, typography is more than a technical design issue. The projects that have different setting plans, mediums and criteria, are tend to be reinforce the students' design senses to perceive typography is not only a 'text' but is one of the most powerful element of the whole design project.

2. Typography Education and 2D Environmental and Spatial Typography

Typography is first used to define the technical issues based on printing, after Gutenberg's movable type. In 19th century, it is discussed as a conceptual approach in graphic design. "Contemporary art takes typography from a technical process and a craftsmanship to a conceptual attitude depending on the idea of traditional and classical approaches couldn't meet the requirements of the era. Thus, it can be seen that 'Modernism' deal with typography as an attitude, a behavior and an aspect of design language." (Sarıkavak, 2004). Modernists' experimental typography, brings out that typography is one of the featuring characteristics of communicational design process. Particularly, beginning from Bauhaus, it is regarded as the main feature of design education. "German Bauhaus Design School is the centre of modernist typography, with reference to Constructivism and Destijl movements." (Meggs, 2001). Disciplined typography education given by Swiss International Typographic Style pioneers such as Armin Hoffman, Emil Ruder and Wolfgang Weingart, at Kunstgewerbeschule in Basel and the typography lessons that Weingart gives at several universities in USA (weingart, 1972) helped typography education manner to develop and pass through the USA and then spread all over the world as an educational issue. Today, typography education is still developing by the innovative approaches based on contemporary communicational technologies, mediums and design philosophies.

Beside the main features such as historical development process, letters' anatomy, type design and techniques, using type in a creative and proper way, type setting and typographic composition, features based on assimilating typographic elements as images and/or forms are another important manners in typography education. In other words, students are supposed to learn and experience the features like anatomy of the letters, compositing, type design and setting; but further more, seeing the typographic elements as shapes, analyzing the structural features and correlating and resolving the references for developing approaches to innovative and creative design solutions is aimed. As mentioned above, there are many projects for students to experience the formal sense of typography.

2D Environmental and Spatial Typography projects are one of these innovative approaches. 2D Environmental and Spatial Typography are the two dimensional typographic extensional compositions applied on the architectural surfaces like walls, floors, ceilings, stairways, corners etc. These consists of not only the informational designs, signage designs, exhibition graphics and branding design issues, and also the conceptual, experimental and artistic designs.



Figure 1. Scandinavian DesignLab, corporate identity design for Norrebro Theatre, 2009.



Figure 2. Yoshimaru Takahashi (Kokokumanu Inc.), conceptual typography for Osaka University 2009.

2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project include many design aspects in order to accomplish the final project, such as; conceptual references between the text and the space; typographic choices in the text related to the conceptual manner; deciding the application techniques. After brainstorming about the references and concept, students enter in the typographic composition design process. They experiment about the 2 dimensional relations between the typographic elements and conveying the concept through the composition while having choosing the

fonts and the font family in the process. What is important at this point is the presenting the 2D typographic composition into a specific 3D space regarding the conceptual relationship in a creative and original way. 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project has many gains. Working with 3D space is a practice that is intended for giving the students totally different point of view in graphic design profession, rather than designing for the medium of printed material or screen. On the other hand, students experiences the application process that starts with the designing process in the digital world, at the screen, then practicing the actual size in real world. So, he/she has an active role in the whole design process. Particularly using very big-scaled typography needs a great attention because of the seeing-reading distance and the angle of the spectator. “Especially with regard to typography, graphic elements that are enlarged to unusual and extreme dimensions bring up completely different issues than what are encountered when the same fonts are used small.” (Stone, 2005). Big-scaled typographic elements are no longer only a readable text, but they are forms with indents-outdents (ascenders-descenders, arms-legs, cross bars etc.), extensions (decorational characteristics, serifs, barbs, beaks, finials, etc.), negative spaces (counters, bowls) (Kane, 2002). And these forms have to be designed in different angles, perspectives and scales. These detailed structural features and arranging proportions helps students to internalize typographic elements.

A student of Plymouth School of Art and Design, Charlie Mitchell’s 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project named “Anamorphic Helvetica” (can be seen in Figure 3) is a successfully accomplish project concerning the criterias mentioned above. He applied big-scaled word “Helvetica” on to a multi-angular cornered wall, depending on a concept that regards spectators’ point of view and perspective.



Figure 3. Charlie Mitchell, “Anamorphic Helvetica”, 2009.

3. 2D Environmental and Spatial Typography Project Practice

At this part of the essay, practices had done in the class is going to be analyzed for understanding the process and the outcomes. In Hacettepe University, FFA, Department of Graphics, 2D Environmental/Spatial Projects practiced at the GRA343 Typography class instructed by Associate Professor Namık Kemal Sarıkavak and assisted by Research Assistant Dr. Ekin Kılıç, since 2006. Two of the practices selected for the case study; the one is from 2006 Fall and the other one is from 2011 Fall Semester. First, a project paper defining project expectations and limitations was given to students. Visualizing an individual concern about a specific location in the faculty building and only using typographic elements are some of criteria. After a short presentation on Environmental and Spatial Typography, class took a walk in the faculty building; the space and typography relations were discussed as an entrance to brainstorming process. In the following two weeks, students first came up with some ideas about the individual design concerns and sketches; reviewing the architectural surfaces, creating a concept that express their own design personalities, compositing a typographic work. Then they worked on the designing process on computer-based software and got criticized by instructors. Commentary sessions are the most expressive and educatory part in the project. By discussing, criticizing, guiding each one of the students’ sketch, the design aspects and process are more understood and appreciated.

Two of the students' project is selected to discuss the conceptual development and experiencing the application problems for this paper.



Figure 4. Türkan Kalbiyeva, “Signage design for HU, FFA, Department of Graphics”, 2006.

Türkan Kalbiyeva's 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project named “Signage Design for HU, FFA, Department of Graphics” (can be seen in Figure 4) is one of the projects that encounters the expected experiences for the students. In 2006, HU, FFA, Department of Graphics is placed in the Faculty of Letters building which is a large building holding a lot of departments, classes in it. Kalbiyeva concern about the lack of the guide signs at the hallway where the department is placed. She aimed to define the directions and significant locations by a creative typographic solution and apply the composition on the floor at the entrance of the department where most people ask about the directions.

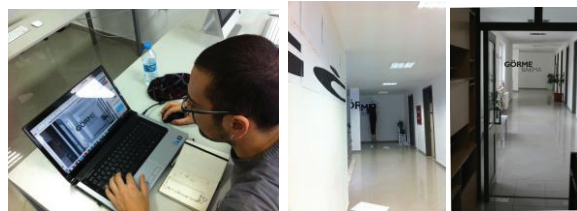


Figure 5. Burak Kaleli, “Görme/Bakma” (To look/To See), 2011.

Burak Kaleli's 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project named “Bakma/Görme”(To look /To See) (can be seen in Figure 5) is another project that encounters the expected experiences for the students. Kaleli first came up with his own concern about the relation between the students and educational system in the department. He aimed to express the ideological tension among the acts: to look and to see (that he believes, these are the basis of graphic design education). He decided to place the words on the wall, in the hall way of the department where most of the students passes by; and he wants to catch attention of the spectator by a perspective play; while the spectator walks in the hallway, he just see the word ‘Bakmak’ (To Look) but in a certain view, spectator can see the other word ‘Görmek’ (To See), so he can understand the different between to look and to see which Kaleli thinks it's the basis of Graphic Design.

4. A Typography Project and the Outcomes

Reviewing the outcomes of 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography project, depending on the experiences and problems that students have, helps to analyze the project. In the two examples mentioned below, the outcomes are varied depending on the concepts, application and compositions. In the first project, Kalbiyeva's signage design, the biggest problem is the designing process; to many information has to be organized in a proper, readable, hierarchical way that the viewers can reach the information quickly. Kalbiyeva had the decision on having the final project application in foil print and then she applied her design on to the floor by using these prints (Figure 4). She had worked on her prjeoct on her computer till the final submission day, she didn't have a test print done; when she got her prints applied on the floor, she realized that her compositions were too small for that print technique, so that during the application/sticking on the floor, the forms of the letters became deformed. That experience showed her

to make a test print before the finalizing the design work. Because Kalbiyeva didn't have any test prints and never paste them on the floor; she couldn't have predicted that the sighting distance and angle was not sufficient and suitable for spectators to read the text. And that experience showed her to consider the spectators sight features and its relation to the designed work.

In the second project, Kaleli's conceptual typography design, contrary to Kalbiyeva, Kaleli applied his composition on to the wall digitally in a software program; so that he could experiment the placement of the composition and spectator's sight on the computer. Then he had the test prints and paste them on the wall, so he could discuss the problems before he got the final submission. He had seen the applicational problems; the unpredicted incompatibility issues based on working on wrong angles on the computer. Then he fixed the views, had his final print and the project was successfully done. The only problem at the end was, he worked so hard on technical issues, he got lost in it and the final project was not expressively creative although his original concept was quite exciting.

5. Conclusion

There cannot be ignored that classical typography education is beneficial for graphic design students. But regarding to technological developments affecting media mediums and design philosophies, there must be creative and innovative projects given to students to make them gain experiences on different design issues. As mentioned below, 2D Environmental/Spatial Typography projects aimed to help students assimilating typographic elements as images/shapes; so that they use typography more effectively in their further careers. In addition, by this project besides the typographic design aspects, students experience the production process after designing. By getting involve in the whole process, from beginning to finalizing the work, They can comprehend the designing sense of a professional designer.

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