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## Expressive Typography as a Visualisation of Ideas

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### Abstract

Typography is the designed form where the transfer of ideas and information with the help of signs is done. Typography invites to read the text, reveals the meaning of the text, links the text to other visual elements and creates appropriate reading conditions. In addition to communicating information and messages through an understandable form language, it also carries the claim of being an element expressed as a style, personality, and visual language. In this sense, it is important to arrange the typographical characters, such as font, form, colour, space in the media, in an effective way of conveying the message. Typography influences the pleasure of gazing than reading, which is carried out as a visual communication tool not only in the function of reading but also in form. In this context, expressive typography is an art form where text is highly visual or type becomes an image. Letters are not just abstract symbols, carriers of meaning; they are also real, physical shapes. In this paper, the chosen quotes show the main idea with some limitations. It is allowed to use any kind of typeface, just black/white colour in three pages. The comparison of qualitative research methods of students' results shows the effects of expressive typography on the visualisation of the words as a result of this research.

Keywords: Typography, expressive typography, graphic design, visual communication.

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## 1. Introduction

The terms 'typography', a combination of two words from Greek, 'typos' as form and 'graphein' as writing and drawing, has a meaning like 'writing in letter symbols' or 'typing in block letters' (Bigelow, Hayden & Gentry, 1989). Typography was used to define the printing technique using metal letters developed by Gutenberg by means of semantic extension, and is qualified as an area of expertise respecting artistic design-based features of writing and punctuation marks. When we describe the main function of writing as transfer of ideas and knowledge through symbols, typography is beyond that, and in one respect, the dimension of 'performing art/design through typing'. Typography purports to the transmission of information and message in a comprehensible form-language and to a component presented as a manner, a character, a visual language, and a distinctive image (Ucar, 2004). Philip Meggs (1989) states that the word which Ludwig Mies van der Rohe used in mentioning architecture, 'God is in the detail', is also valid for typography so as to emphasise its current role, and asserts that it is an exact art of message and form, measurement and proportion.

Among common problems of typographic communication is the co-organisation of visual and functional order ranging from font choices to letter sizes, from planning blanks to its position on the surface of writing. In this sense, it is crucial to arrange the typographic elements over the media of exhibition, such as font, format, colour, and blank, in an accurate and effective transmission of a message into a receiver. The term of typography takes place not only on the printed designed graphic products but also in the motion displays including the film, video and animation produced using computer, and its semantics quite extends because of the variety of today's application areas.

## 2. Typography as a form of Communication

Human being is in a continuous communication and interaction with his or her surrounding people to meet his or her daily needs. In the actual communication process, he or she uses speech to make his or her ideas reach large audiences and writing to consistently transmit them into future generations. In this context, making the text readable is the primary function of typography that is one of the most effective and indispensable components of visual communication. In typographic design, it is a priority to transmit a message into a receiver in an accurate, quick and effective way using such elements as font, format, colour, and blank. 'Having more universal characteristics than a good deal of art branches, typography has a function to exchange information with a reader in line with a specific purpose' (Becer, 1999, p. 185). As a communication tool, typology should be able to make viewers feel delighted and affected along with reading, its basic function. Only then typography separating from writing would be able to conduct its duty not only in reading function but also in being a visual communication channel formally viewed. A typographic message read is either verbally stated or visually imagined.

'Typography is an objective channel of informative channel, yet its standards/principles can be impaired with the fiddled forms, the new implications given and typographic experimentations. These modifications would redefine the concepts of readability and functionality' (Carter, Day & Meggs, 1985, p. 89). Throughout the history of graphics, quite a few designers have performed experimental design analyses to investigate the fundamental concepts of typography. They have designed the letters of different sizes in a sophisticated order in a variety of thicknesses, directions and colours on paper with various impairments in a grammatical and syntactic structure. Thus, visual typographic design approach has been actualised especially in free typography or freeing words. By means of futurists, typography has become an expressionistic visual language as well as a verbal one. In one of art movements making quite large contributions to the improvement of modern graphic design, futurism has aimed to create expressive forms using typography. Many artists of the era have advocated the typographic reform in particular, opposing to the tradition, accurate grammar and writing. The works of Marinetti and Massin, out of the designers combining textual expressions with kinetic typographic designs, are significant in this sense. Filippo Marinetti's first book, *Zang Tumb*

Tumb, which was made to celebrate the battle of Tripoli in which he was enlisted as a military volunteer 'with its explosive layout, would become a masterpiece in this field' (Scudiero, 2004). In order to describe the battle sounds and the variety of rumble, using them on paper in the form of typographic extension of sounds constitutes the most distinct character of the design. According to Marinetti, 'words and letters could be used as visual images in their own right' (Hollis, 1994, p. 38).

Another figure in the era, Robert Massin, made his mark with the book that he designed for the theatre play called 'Bald Soprano'. The emotional concepts such as quarrel, tension, and yelling taking place in dialogues in the content of play were expressed in typographic visuality. The typographic arrangements are very compelling, using the fonts and words selected in consistent with the personality of the dominant and recessive characters. In Massin's design, white paper was chosen in the pages including the scripts of artists while the whole black papers were used for the incipit and closure of the book just like theatre curtain.

### 3. Experimental & Expressive Typography

In scientific terms, the word of experiment defines a series of actions performed to test an idea, to reject or accept a hypothesis under controlled circumstances. As regards with graphic design and typography field, experiment is used for a phrase of every non-traditional or new trial to challenge classic classifications and surprise expectations (Bilak, 2005). According to this, the definition of experimental typography is 'the structuralised visual games catching reader's attention into visual motion of the page and whose words offering indefinite possibilities to create meaning and make rearrangement' in Alice Twemlow's (2008) book named 'What is Graphic Design for?'

Kurt Schwitters' words 'do it in a way no one has ever done it before' was fundamental of new approach of typography in his time ninety years ago and in his works put forward his thought (Bilak, 2005). In this way, astonishing compositions in typographic arrangement and different solutions to enhance design idea have always led designers to new quests. Experimental typography is of the outcomes of searching alternative for arrangement styles learnt by use of collage and photosetting before and by facilities provided by computers. Stunning results of experimental typographic arrangements were obtained in many graphic design products ranging from institutional identities to poster designs, from press releases to magazine page designs. Contemporarily, typographic illustrations formed by use of small or capital letters, illustrative sizing compositions of letters, figurative typographic designs, kinetic typography and organic typography can be categorised under experimental typography.

New Yorker graphic designers produced the first effective examples of experimental typographic approach with their interest in figurative typography. This inclination appeared in various ways and sometimes transformed letters into objective forms or converted the objects into letter shapes. Seymour Chwast's brochure cover design, IMPACT, is one of the typical examples of figurative typography that a word is presented with a new typographic aesthetics abiding by its meaning. In such arrangements, typography was used in the way of scratching, tearing, bending and even vibrating for an expression of concept or to attract astonishment (Bektas, 1992). Designs are made today with changes in the letter forms to intensify the meaning of the word based on this piece in a large number of typographic layouts.

Herb Lubalin, another important character in the same era, adopted an expressionist approach to typography, neglecting the standardised rules of readability and the classic proportions of letters. Lubalin examined the alphabetical characters in two respects, such as the components of visual form and message transmission. Imaging with words and letters began to replace since he fell apart the tradition of using writing and imaging separately, and then he made use of design to lay a concept or a message on the visual form. The sector has gained dynamism along with his innovative compositions in magazine page designs. He has advocated the necessity of deciding font choices by the content of word and designing by its visual form. Lubalin transformed words into ideographic typograms known

as a signal respecting a word, idea or concept as in his pieces of work such as ‘Families’ and ‘Mother & Child’ using his clever and powerful skill of message transmission by working his magic in typography. ‘Lubalin stated that it is necessary to compromise on readability sometimes so as to draw attention, and his experimental approach, extraordinary sensitivity to details and sensibility of words inspired many colleagues of his to create innovations’ (Meggs, 1998).

The most effective examples of experimental typography were in the limelight with the figures such as Neville Brody, David Carson, etc., in the 1980s and 1990s. Neville Brody performed impressive works in publishing design of experimental typography with the album cover designs before and the pieces that he worked for Face Magazine in which he undertook art editing and designing afterwards. Since his font characters were constantly imitated, free-hand typographic layouts have increasingly collapsed the visuality of clean page texts. David Carson resisted to the grid system, the traditional and conservative order, the readability rules, and the visual hierarchy in his own page designs. Readers were forced to decode the cipher with the layouts, fractures and forms of all sizes used in the designs that he created. ‘The font characters chosen by Carson for the texts are generally inconsistent with the readability criteria and pushing the writing out of its basic function using overlapping type blocks and condensed line spacing. Carson created his own readability rules by embedding the texts into ovals, trapezoids, and various shapes and gouging white big letters out of their interior parts’ (Kelesoglu, 2008, s. 30). At present, names such as Stefan Sagmeister, Carin Goldberg, Reza Abedini, Veronika Licakova, Niklaus Troxler, Peter Bilak, Christopher Lee Sauve, Acapulco Warsaw, Atelier, Martino & Jana, Sabri Akin, Max Kuwertz, Sarp Sozdinler and Erman Yilmaz (Figure 1), who have been successful in the field of expressive typography, are just a few of the many successful designers.



**Figure 1. (Left to right) posters from Carin Goldberg, Sarp Sozdinler, Erman Yilmaz, Atelier Martino & Jana, Acapulco Warsaw**

[Source: Karin Goldberg (<http://www.aiga.org/medalist-caringoldberg>), Sarp Sozdinler (<http://www.sarpsozdinler.com/>), Erman Yilmaz (<https://www.typographicposters.com/erman-yilmaz>), Atelier Martino and Jana (<https://www.typographicposters.com/atelier-martino-jana>), and Acapulco Warsaw (<https://www.typographicposters.com/acapulco>)]

Organic typography, which is often preferred in today’s typographic designs, is an experimental typographic approach in which a significant portion of the characters are created by hand-crafted letters, whose purpose is to inspire various emotions in the audience. One of these examples is the experimental graffiti project of Anna Garforth with the title of ‘Mossenger’ and she rendered a poem of the poet Elly Stevens with her layout on the wall using the letters formed by mosses. The designer explains with this project to try to highlight how city life ruptured man from nature and people went far from biosphere in which we live by dominating the nature (Okur, 2009). Another experimental typographic example is an organic typography work (Figure 2) with the title of ‘Melting Words’ on which the alphabet used is produced using manual techniques. In the work, the photograph artist, Kotama Bouabane, created the cliché sentences regarding separation such as ‘it’s over’, ‘just let it go’ using icy letters and completed with a photographic embedding for which he used some visual details from the life as background.



**Figure 2. Kotama Bouabane's melting words photographic typography project**

[Source: Bouabane, K. (<http://beautifuldecay.com/2009/07/09/kotama-bouabane/>)]

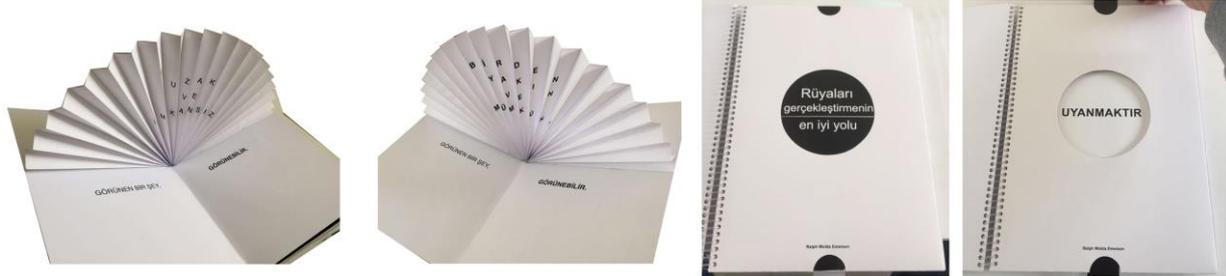
#### **4. Expressive Typographic Book Project**

In this part of the research, expressive typographic works designed by third and fourth grade students of Gazi University Fine Arts Faculty Visual Communication Design for about seven years are examined. The application project, in which the works are presented together, is produced in book format. Under the project, it has been required from the students to create typographic expressions on paper under specific limitations using the words belonging to the figures such as philosopher, artist, scientist, etc., who left their mark in history, selected by themselves. Each student has only four pages to do the project and would produce as many copies as the number of classmates. He or she is free in making decision of how many pages and which way he or she will use. In idea visualisation, any activities such as folding, bending, cutting, and stretching are permitted. Font character can be freely chosen for the design, and any paper can be preferred providing that it has any fibre suitable for copy and unless any colour except black/white is used. The works that each student has completed and copied will be collected into a book. At the end of the project, a specific book including all the works of the class will be produced for each student.

In the preparation stage of the project, students should make research about the words belonging to the persons such as philosophers, artists and scientists, and hand in the related opinion drafts. The proposals for ten words found by each student are co-examined one by one how a word may have an outcome when designed with the expressive typographic approach. In this way, the cooperation in exchange of ideas is applied on which words will be selected in consistency with the project and which ones will be eliminated in accordance with design constraints despite its stronger semantics. After the interviews, the word groups are deducted into three and the minified model is made with the true proportions of the project explaining how the opinion will be typographically visualised and the final decision is settled. Students are allowed to make the trials and sketches for how visualisation will have to be done and the improvement of opinions and hence the elimination of similar ones of the class is made.

In the image of the project of Ruya Tasdelen (Figure 3), the words 'Uzak ve imkansız gorunen bir sey, birden yakin ve mumkun gorunebilir (something that seems remote and impossible seems suddenly close and possible)' was typographically visualised. The meaning of the word was rendered as 'bakis acisina gore durumun degiskenlik gosterebilecegi' and arranged with a simple typography on paper folded in a fanlike way. This layout is glued with two reciprocal pages and invisible in the closed format but when it is opened either it is surprising or allows for different readings according to reader's viewpoints. In the typographic layout of Ayse Aksoy (Figure 3), the words 'Ruyalari gercelestirmenin en iyi yolu uyanmaktir (the best way to make dreams come true is to wake up)' was designed. In this work, a secret mechanism was created and first it would let a reader to read the word that is attractively presented in the oval form on the black ground. Then the reader may read another word 'uyanmak' containing the primary opinion in the way that it can interactively come out as soon as he or she pulls from two flaps of the upper/lower edges of the page. Thus, a typographic arrangement is combined with an experimental design. Beyza Zararsizsoy's work (Figure 4) including the word 'Gercegi arayin o bulunmak ister (look for the truth it wants to be found)' was formed in a way that reader may discover every step of the design. The designer leads reader to discover

'bulunmak isteneni (The thing desired to find)' by pulling/pursuing by chance using arrow symbols drawn on the small acetate flaps. Being acetate of the paper used in the slots cut on the page does not directly manipulate to the design, thanks to its transparency and can easily work by means of its trouble-free structure as well. As for Burcu Bayin's work (Figure 4) named 'Gurultu için akordu bozmak yeterlidir (it is enough to disturb the acoustics for the noise)', the word group of 'making out of tune' is expressed with the visualisation displaying the disorder in the typographic layout. Furthermore, papers were very finely sliced and hence the component of sound made through the open/close action was added into the design.



**Figure 3. Ruya Tasdelen (left) and Ayse Aksoy (right) book projects details**  
[Source: Photographed by Özden Pektaş Turgut, personal archives]



**Figure 4: Beyza Zararsızsoy (left) and Burcu Bayin (right) book projects details**  
[Source: Photographed by Özden Pektaş Turgut, personal archives]

The works given as examples above are just only a few of numerous good solutions. In this sense, such a work style is a sound practice with respect to the skill of which a student can develop his or her intelligence for design under the required constraints and visualise a word in a typographic manner. Over the years, some of the outcomes from students' work are as follows: Students make efforts in the typographic visualisation of each word in the word group, which is an easier method. The essential and harder one is to comprehend the semantics of word group and reflect a holistic approach of conceptual analysis. This creative process makes great contributions to the contemplative practices in design for students. In addition, among the most usual cases, the visual usage prohibited under the required constraints is insistently chosen to use in the works by students in some symbolic pictograms or typographic forms that they form using letters. Once the visual usage that is the most effective component of design in transmitting ideas was prohibited, too challenging solutions were offered in deeper, denser contemplative expression. Moreover, these solutions are the most primary indicator of how much it would be harder and more contemplative to visualise an idea using mere typographic elements. In my years of studentship, I worked on and learnt a project under auspices of Prof. T. Fikret Ucar and it has always been a fruitful and surprising experience for me to assign this project to the students who have a distinctive skill of design and intelligence and co-analyse the outcomes over the years. The contributions of this and similar applications towards the discipline of design are undisputable so that younger designers would produce innovative, original and creative solutions. As a result, laying such features as behaviour and motion, typography can be transformed into a tool which audiences can watch beyond reading and wander inside and thus obtain an idea or information.

Using typography as a movable element can not only make it attractive but also enrich its content. With the approximation of written to spoken language, it can be more effectively emphasised.

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