

One Day About Typographic Histories

Seminar

Friday 19 October 2018

9.30–16.00

Konstfack, LM Ericssons väg 14, Stockholm

Room: Mandelgren

Language: English

History is frequently referred to as something definite – *the* history – as if history writing were synonymous with past realities. In the case of visual communication and graphic design, “the” history of typography is recurrently used as a didactic model in which students and professionals anchor their design practice. With this mindset, history is often looked upon as an authority of rules, conventions and values. Experiencing typographic history in narrative form has always played a significant role in the rite of passage through which an apprentice or student was admitted to the trade. Such an approach to history may be well-suited for technical and aesthetic instruction intended for professional ability. However, what is usually overlooked or dismissed is a critical discussion of the political and ethical issues activated by typographic practice. Ideals of universality and neutrality, for example, are often left unproblematized.

Attempting to challenge this instrumental and closed attitude to history, this seminar sets out to investigate typographic history beyond its traditional boundaries. Four ongoing research projects will be presented in which typographic history is displaced and decentralized from its dominant narratives. What all projects have in common is the interest in typographic design from ideological, political and economic perspectives. How sociopolitical and technological factors have affected the discursive and visual expressions of typographic practice is a central question. A key interest is also the working conditions and the material cultures of typography and printing which form the historical basis for contemporary practice.

By presenting these projects together and discussing them in relation to the role of historiography in educational contexts, we wish to emphasize the need of coexisting and sometimes conflicting *histories*, and encourage more historical and theoretical research about typography in which a wider range of interests may be included.

All attendants are recommended to read the essay “Masks on hire: In search of typographic histories” by Gérard Mermoz, originally published in *Visible Language*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1994), reprinted in *Graphic design: History in the writing 1983–2011*, ed. Sara De Bondt and Catherine de Smet (Occasional Papers, 2012).

Schedule

9.30 Registration and refreshments

10.00 Welcome
Rikard Heberling

10.10–10.30 Introduction
Johanna Lewengard

10.30–11.15 “Typography and politics: The political impact of typography in newspapers from Romania during the Communist time (1948–1989)”
Arina Stoenescu

11.15–12.00 “Facit AB–Z: Globalism, localism and identity”
Jens Schildt (Our Polite Society)

12.00–13.00 Lunch

13.00–13.45 “The single case alphabet”
Rikard Heberling

13.45–14.30 “Natural enemies of books: A choir”
Sara Kaaman (MMS)

14.30–15.00 Break

15.00–15.45 Panel: “The role of history in typographic education and practice”
Arina Stoenescu, Bart Manders, Jens Schildt, Jiri Adamik-Novak, Parasto Backman
Moderator: Sara Teleman

15.45–16.00 Concluding remarks
Moa Matthis

Abstracts

“Typography and politics: The political impact of typography in newspapers from Romania during the Communist time (1948–1989)”
Arina Stoenescu

Arina Stoenescu’s research focuses on the connections between typography and politics with a special interest in how typography influences the perception of the political message. Her interest lies in how the political system contributes in the shaping of different typographical landscapes. The research takes a closer look at

how typography influenced the political message in Romanian newspapers during the Communist period as well as how the political system interacted with two professions related to typography: the technical editor and the typographer.

“Facit AB–Z: Globalism, localism and identity”
Our Polite Society (Jens Schildt and Matthias Kreutzer)

The project departs from Facit, a no longer existing industrial corporation and manufacturer of office products. Åtvidaberg, the hometown of Facit, is also the hometown of Jens Schildt. Born in 1977, Jens grew up when Facit still played an important role in the local community, employing a large part of the population and shaping social life. The Facit story has often been told from a business perspective: the world’s third-biggest typewriter company after IBM and Olivetti, which also manufactured office furniture and calculating machines. Facit rose to fame in the 1930s, peaked internationally around 1970 and then slowly disappeared into obscurity due to missed technological developments and fierce competition. From today’s perspective, Facit is often used as an example of a failed business model. In this project, however, Facit is discussed from a design perspective: as a story of the 20th century told through the lens of design.

“The single case alphabet”
Rikard Heberling

The single case alphabet is a history of 20th-century initiatives to reform the latin alphabet – with its double set of large and small letters – so that it would only consist of one set of small letters. The convention of having two letters, for example A and a, representing the same sound was regarded by the reform’s proponents as superfluous and irrational for several reasons. The presentation departs from two Swedish articles on the subject: “Are capitals necessary?” (1907) by the typographer Einar Håkansson, and “Large and small letters or the single case alphabet” (1933) by the printer Hugo Lagerström. These articles are compared with similar international examples and discussed in relation to problems of language reforms, standardization and the division of labour within the printing industry as well as aesthetic influences from modernist architecture and literature.

“Natural enemies of books: A choir”
MMS (Maryam Fanni, Matilda Flodmark and Sara Kaaman)

The book *Bookmaking on the Distaff Side* was published in San Francisco in 1937 by a group called The Distaff Side. It was meant as a call to women in the printing industry, proposing a feminist rewriting of history. A number of bookmakers, printers, typographers, illustrators and writers contributed with historical, satirical

and critical essays, poems, drawings and typographical experiments. MMS has used *Bookmaking on the Distaff Side* as a recipe book for a couple of years. In this presentation they will combine the voices of the book and other voices from their research with contemporary makers, thinkers and colleagues.

Contributors

Arina Stoenescu is a graphic designer and currently a PhD student at the Division of Book History, Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University.

Bart Manders is a graphic designer currently studying in the MFA Visual Communication programme at Konstfack.

Jiri Adamik-Novak is a graphic designer and Senior Lecturer in Graphic Design at Konstfack.

Johanna Lewengard is a graphic designer and Professor of Graphic Design at Konstfack.

MMS consists of graphic designers Maryam Fanni, Matilda Flodmark and Sara Kaaman. They have collaborated since 2012, studying and writing about graphic design, feminism and historiography. Sara Kaaman is a Senior Lecturer in Graphic Design at Konstfack.

Moa Matthis is a literature critic, author and currently Visiting Lecturer in History, Theory, Context at Konstfack.

Our Polite Society is a graphic design studio based in Amsterdam and Stockholm, formed in 2008 by Jens Schildt and Matthias Kreutzer.

Parasto Backman is a graphic designer and Senior Lecturer in Graphic Design at Konstfack.

Rikard Heberling is a graphic designer currently working on the research project “A Swedish Typeface 1897–1930” at Konstfack.

Sara Teleman is an illustrator, writer and Professor of Illustration at Konstfack.

One Day About is a new seminar series organized by
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