

NEW DIMENSION OF OLD TYPOGRAPHY

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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The dissertation raises selected issues concerning the history of books. The study does not focus on the abundance of possible definitions and context of the book, but examines the very narrowed concept of typography.

The practical part consists of a series of ten designs of title pages and spreads of old books from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

The objective of the dissertation is to analyse selected issues related to the typographic tradition, which is why the designs were chosen and varied in such a manner as to track changes and contrasts appearing in the field of typography throughout history.

FUNCTIONAL AND ARTISTIC CONTEXT

I focus the attention on two contexts in which the phenomenon of typography can be analysed: artistic – connected with the visual form of the book, and functional – interpreted, owing to communicative functions, with the organization of elements in order to absorb the content.

In the case of the book typography, all designed elements should be subordinated to clarity, which is of key importance. I believe, however, that aesthetic qualities of typography are equally important and are an elementary value of each book.

I place my own work on the border between art and design. On the one hand, I recognize the fundamental, practical aspect of typography, on the other hand – I treat typography design as a formal field, an opportunity for personal artistic expression, in which there is a significant element of artistic creation.

Artworks do not have a commercial dimension. I intentionally and consistently placed my work outside the context of the book market. The completed designs can probably be categorized as some kind of bibliophilic phenomenon, where the beauty of the book and the method of making are as important as the substantive content.

ROLE OF TRADITION

The book typography, in its basic assumptions and construction, for centuries has been an area, which in many respects remains unchanged. The spirit of modernity, contemporary dimension of typography can manifest itself in different design assumptions: the form of typefaces used, the text composition methods and the treatment of illustrative material.

My search for links between tradition and modernity is expressed in the intentional combining of different classical typographic techniques and styles while observing the current phenomena in the area of art and design.

Knowledge of old typography and awareness of its values were preserved thanks to the interests and activities of the artists of the early twentieth century. Therefore, in the theoretical part of the dissertation, I list and describe the work of, among others, William Morris, Edward Johnston and Frederic Goudy. On the other hand, modernism and functional typography (attitude of such persons as Jan Tschichold, Emil Ruder and Beatrice Warde) – through negation – allow development of a new, alternative look at tradition. This, in turn, makes it possible to distance oneself from excessive care for the beauty of forms, warns against unnecessary eclecticism, excessive decorations, triumph of form over content. It was not until I compared and investigated the two opposing attitudes, that I was able to create adequate intellectual base and necessary references. It helped in finding the right balance while drawing inspiration from the past and present.

I believe the same assumptions that I used in my designs, can be referred to books created today. Relying on the traditional solutions serves the reader and supports the reading process as well as teaches moderation and prudence in designing.

To efficiently and consciously work with type, one should get to know achievements of early, significant artists and the greatest masters of the art of printing. With

the knowledge of issues relating to the development of the book over the centuries, one can not only get to know another historical transformation of typography, but also profoundly understand its today's form.

Old books are a model for me, a kind of creative signpost. Despite the archaic or even primitive – for today's possibilities – methods, which were formerly available, the created works were harmonious, balanced and incredibly carefully designed. I believe that conscious looking back helps to maintain a high level of craftsmanship today.

DESIGN GOALS

For my studies I chose a variety of formats depending on the nature of the content, dimensions and number of pages of the original work.

The proportions of individual pages have been precisely defined and refer to the proportions known mostly from the Renaissance period.

I tried to use knowledge and experience gained to date, examine and explore the potential of all methods of page building that are available nowadays. Based on historical examples and old books I create layouts to obtain the most sophisticated yet comprehensive and functional compositions.

One of the major objectives was to select such modern typefaces – designed in the last fifteen years – that refer to historical models. I tried to choose typefaces referring to tradition in a fresh and innovative manner.

In addition, I was looking for typefaces, which would allow me to use a range of traditional visual elements known in the history of literature and printing, such as decorative ornaments and ligatures, engraved and shaded letters, and typefaces with optical size variations.

In designing books, I particularly value the work on the detail. I treat a letter – its shape, form, construction – as an important means of expression in all activities related to graphic design. This work is an attempt to clarify and articulate my own artistic language, which involves parallel combining traditional and contemporary forms. My work arose from the desire to create typographic designs of noble, pure and simple, yet visually rich character. This is a quest for

order, an expression of love for pedantic typography, every smallest detail of which is touched up.

BIBLIOLOGICAL GOALS

In the collections of digital libraries there are many age-old titles, which – read today – take on a new meaning. I believe that these books, if properly used and distributed, may fascinate subsequent readers.

Owing to their historic form or content old books are often perceived by the modern reader as strange and incomprehensible, but intriguing and interesting at the same time. They can be seen in the category of literary curiosities. My intention was to make sure that the selected titles would be this kind of matter.

The titles I used are important in the scientific and historic context, they focus on diverse topics and refer to various fields of human activity. Equally important was to select titles that are interesting in the editorial context and diverse in terms of the time of creation, size, number of pages and structure. These books also provide some insight into the history of Polish printing; some of them originate from workshops of such printers as Florian Ungler, Łazarz Andrysowicz or Michał Gröll.

Antique books require appropriate preparation in the textual layer; linguistic modernization of Old Polish texts is necessary. Therefore, it was necessary to find ready transcriptions of selected titles and unify them, so as to maintain orthographic, stylistic and punctuation consistency throughout the entire work.

Marcin Podlaski took it upon himself to standardize and proofread selected fragments of the works.