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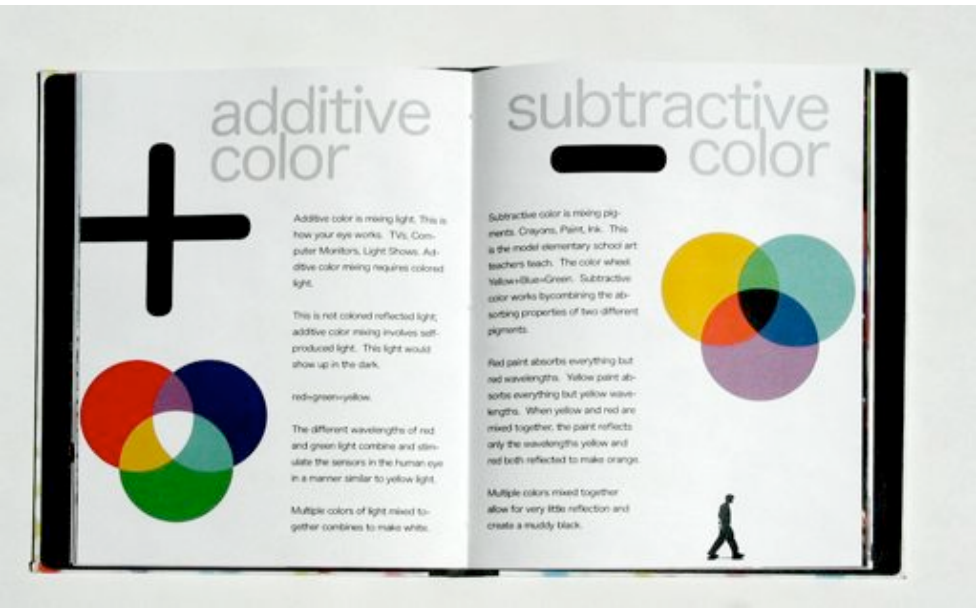
KWLC identity

A graphic identity for a college radio station. It is designed to be reinterpreted, cross-mashed, and remixed each semester by a new batch of DJ's. KWLC is characterized by its fresh music lineup and a commitment to reinvention at a reckless pace. This identity provides a structure to KWLC's ongoing evolution.



Color book

A book that explores the myths, misconceptions, and misinformation that form our understanding of color. It focuses on the human dimensions of color and how culture, biology, history, and psychology contribute to our conceptualization of color.

IN TYPE WE TRUST

Typography and National Identity in the Age of International Style and Globalization

Ben Matheson | Luther College | Advisor - Sook Young-Lee

Typography

Definitions

Typography is a system that bridges abstract language with concrete letterforms. The physical act of writing illustrates the "symbolic action" of language. Typography translates visual language for human sight and links letters to a set of rules that organize and contextualize the abstract forms. Bringhurst (2002, p.15) wrote that "a writing system is built of a set of symbols, a set of definitions for the symbols (that is, a graphic lexicon), and rules for their use (graphic syntax). The symbols are realized as glyphs, which are visible, repeatable marks and shapes, constrained by the propensities and limits of the human hand and eye.

Meaning is created only through collective agreement among users of letters, and the meaning exists only within the framework of its syntax. Letters do not acquire meaning directly from their visual characteristics.

A **typeface** is defined as complete set of characters (letters, numbers, and punctuation marks) that share a stylistic origin and consistency.

National Identity

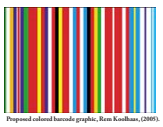
Definitions

Benedict Anderson (1983) characterized nations as "imagined political communities" (p. 6). A nation is a fluid and internalized concept that is open to reinterpretation and reinvention. **National identity** refers to a collective embodiment of national attachment, which can be based on common geography, language, religion, or other unifying factors. National identities begin as conceptual and intangible, but individuals and institutions solidify national identities by using language, both discursive and non-discursive.

A nation-state will position itself in regional and global contexts by employing a carefully crafted set of symbols. Flags, slogans, spokespeople, and songs all are used rhetorically by nation-states and other social institutions. Language and symbols are not just representative of an identity, but are an active tool in creating, reinforcing, and transforming national identification.

Global Identities

Nation-states are not the sole institutions of social and cultural association. New forms of social organization have replaced the nation-state's traditional role as gatekeeper of culture, security, and economic stability. Social institutions characterized by their transnational, international, or non-national qualities can carry out the social and political functions of nation-states.



Proposed colored barcode graphic, Rem Koolhaas, (2005).

Flag of Europe (1955)

Two visual represenations of the EU

Typographic Functions of National Identity

German Blackletter

Blackletter first became associated with the Reformation movement of Martin Luther. Latin type was linked to the Roman Catholic Church and its political and social oppression. Proponents of the Reformation enlisted blackletter and the German language as symbols of the struggle against the church. Hundreds of years later, the Nazi party embraced blackletter as the essential visual representation of the German people and used it extensively in its propaganda.

Hitler abruptly switched course in 1941 and denounced blackletter as "Schwarbacher Jew-letters." For the 40 years following the war, blackletter retained strong impressions of Nazism, and Germans refrained from its use, choosing instead "neutral" typefaces. Individuals associated with gothic and death metal music adopted blackletter typography.

INTERNATIONAL STYLE

Influenced heavily by the art and philosophy of the Bauhaus, the International movement gained momentum in Switzerland in the aftermath of World War II. Aggressive and destructive nationalism was reinforced in art and design that emphasized ethnic particulars, cultural and geographic specificity, and ideological fundamentalism. To promote neutrality, designers and artists began to create with the express purpose of post-national unification. Type designers stripped letters of the ornamentation thought to refer to ethnic or national roots.

International Style typography is characterized by its absence of serifs, a mechanical rhythm, and its geometric balance. The letters feature bold and invariant strokes. The International Style pursued absolute visual neutrality and sought a function of unbiased and efficient communication. Content should determine a printed word's message, not its stylistic allusions to ethnicity, empire, or nation. The International Style's visual references were not to be based in any location, language, or people.

International Style New York Subway Signage Massimo Vignelli.

Case Study - Aeroportal Norway's National Typeface

Background and Rhetorical Situation

In 2005, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) decided to rebrand itself with a new visual identity to be used in its international communication. Norway attempted to build a comprehensive portal to itself as a government, nation, and culture.

The MFA decided that an original Norwegian typeface should be a central part of Norway's new international brand. The typeface is named Aeroportal and was designed by APT Designs of Oslo.

Criticism

Aeroportal is characterized by its sans-serif minimalist style that is typical of Scandinavia. Aeroportal's rounded shapes border on the voluptuous and reference warm humanist letters. Its letterforms are built with a relatively light stroke is distinguished from the thick slabs of International Style type. The design strips away ascenders and descenders, leading to the effect of further abstracted letterforms.

Discussion

Norway's visual identity represents a new generation of typography that is a descendant of International Style. The first generation of Swiss type designers embraced the mechanical efficiency of uniform sans-serif type and lived in a world that was busy rebuilding factories, machinery, and autobahns. Aeroportal came out of time dominated by computers, whereas the first generation of International Style grew out of an age of diesel engines and assembly lines.

Instead of relying on references to ethnicity, language, or religion, Norway appeals to a concept of technological internationalism that is rooted in globalization. This international identity should not be understood as a lack of identity; it is a specifically international identity. This identity is created, marketed, and manipulated to serve Norway's national agenda. Norway's use of Aeroportal as a light, harmonious, and technological typeface points to its branding goals. Norway seeks to be an entirely inclusionary and adaptable player with its typographic identity. It presents itself as a nation of technology, friendliness, dynamicism, and openness. The Norwegian government sees an interest in promoting a globalized worldview that encourages openness, standardization, friendliness, and informality.

Globalization is characterized by the increased flow of goods, information, ideas, and people across national borders. People with access to the tools of globalization are able to interact and collaborate with people from all parts of the planet. Individuals are less tied to the limits of a single national citizenship and are able to interact with people and institutions thousands of miles away.

Discussion continued...

Co-national, international, and non-national identities are products of workplaces and social environments that are not limited by national restrictions. Individuals can create personal identities using a diverse palette of national and cultural associations.

States that are served best by globalization will promote their globalized worldview in their visual rhetoric. Norway will succeed in a world characterized by international collaboration instead of international confrontation. Norway discourages unilateral military action while prizing dialogue, consensus, and collaboration.

Norway's rebranding forms part its national strategy to position itself as a collaborative and non-threatening participant in the global economy and balance of power. Norway, however, does not concede in this international identity to being a powerless or ineffective participant.

Part of Norway's national strategy is grounded in its ambiguity and generality. The neutrality of International Style type allows other nations to project their own goals and ambitions on Norway. Norway is whatever you want it to be.

Conclusions

As typographic style and technology have evolved over time, so have national identities adapted to shifting social and political environments. National identities are never static; they are constantly being reinvented, corrected, and reinforced. Nation-states see a clear incentive in sculpting effective and powerful national identities. States can mobilize the language and symbols of national identities to establish social realities and political order. The rise of international identities highlights the changing economic and political realities of a globalized world. Some nations-states see their best interest in an international national identity that is defined by its neutrality and flexibility. As long as we inhabit a planet with limited space and resources, we will use symbols to create, defend, and negotiate our place in the world.

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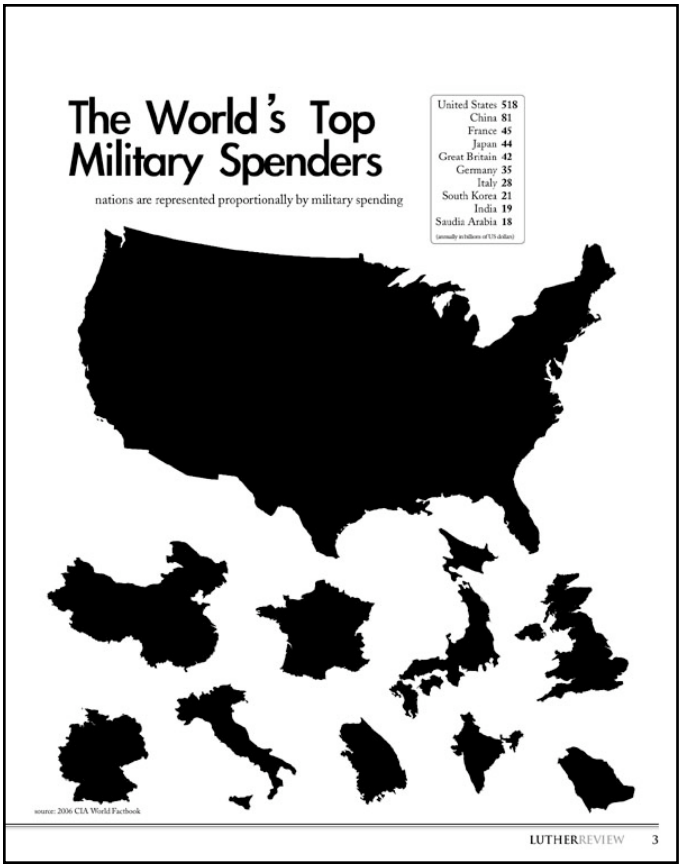
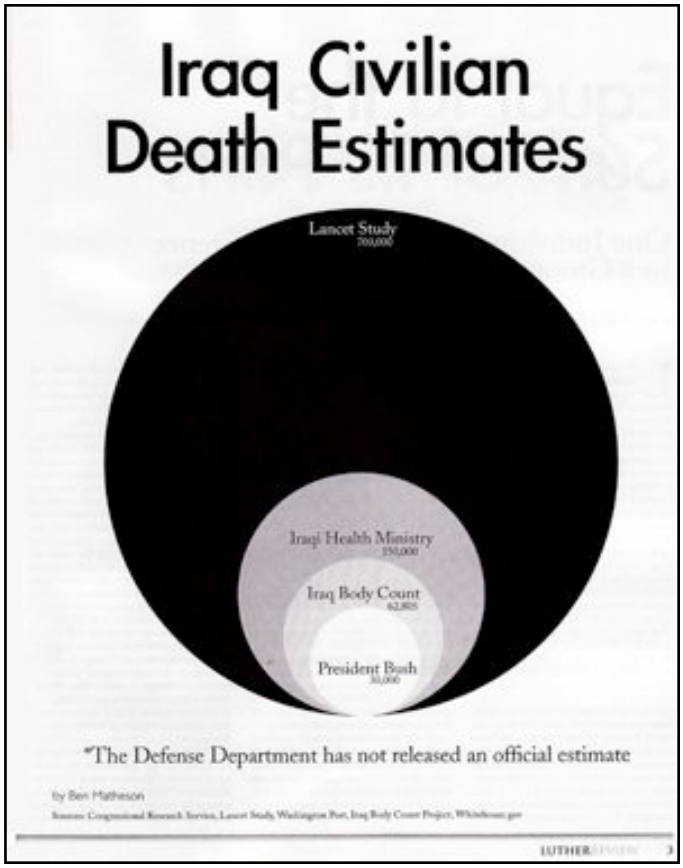
Presentation poster for the paper

IN TYPE WE TRUST:

Senior thesis that explored the intersection of typography and national identity. It examines the role of International Style typography in the visual presentation of national identity in the 20th and 21st centuries. It features an extensive case study of a Norwegian "national" typeface. It was presented at the 2009 National Conference on Undergraduate Research.



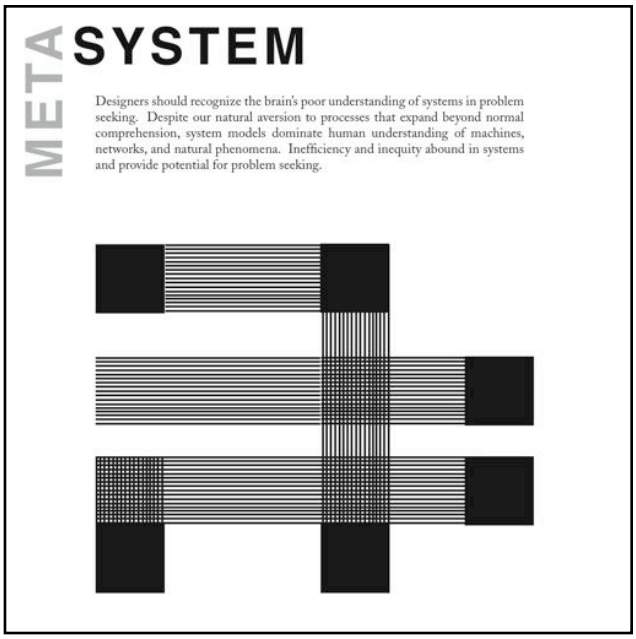


REVIS

Information design editorial graphic.
Published monthly in the Luther Review.

BMATH BREW

Bottle labels for home brewed beer.



META:

META is a problem-seeking utility for designers. It provides a structure for designers to identify and analyze problems and opportunties. It emphasizies simultaneous consideration of individual and environmental factors.

RIPPED TO SHREDDS

Ripped to Shredds

A graphic identity for a personal training service.

OFFSET Poster

An experimental poster for a printing, biking, and brewing festival. 38” x 18”.