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04.23.15
Integrative Project Thesis

The Light of Hidden Flowers

The amazing advances in technology that have taken place over the last few decades have resulted in cheaper, faster innovative ways of information dissemination and entertainment, which have only shortened people's estimates of print's lifespan. On the other hand, print lovers adamantly and confidently declare that print is here to stay. Because of its tactile nature, print is able to open up literature in ways that are inaccessible to digital and audio platforms. My integrative project is a series of print publications that explore and demonstrate how the qualities and opportunities that are unique to print as a tactile medium shape a reader's experience. These pieces contain the same content, Pablo Neruda's "Sonnet XVII", but are designed and presented in different ways to provide the reader with a distinctly different experience from the last. The aim of this project is to showcase the boundless variety that is possible in print, as well as highlight the numerous opportunities and advantages that this medium has to offer designers. Consequently, this project hopes to revitalize print as a primary source of information dissemination and entertainment (as compared to other medias).

One of the great philosophers of the 20th century, Marshall McLuhan, contextualizes information within media. In his essay, "The Medium is the Message", he argues just that—the medium is the message. Essentially he proclaims that information is shaped by the platform it is presented on. In relation to print, this philosophy says that the way in which the textual content is printed, designed, and presented "shapes and controls" the way in which the reader experiences the content (McLuhan 203). For instance, one will experience a story that has been

illustrated as a comic much differently than they would that story in a pop-up book and again in a new light in a novel format. Print designers should become aware of these distinctions and use this knowledge and their design talent as powerful tools to influence the way in which their audience receives the messages that they are presenting.

A great example of a designer who realized the richness that print could offer for the interpretation of a poem is Eric Kindel. Kindel's design and presentation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" takes a form that is unorthodox for Poe's work, or poems in general. The piece is oversized—scaling over a foot and a half in length and over eight inches in width—and substantially heavy due to its thick metal covers. It unfolds in a horizontal accordion that demands to be laid across numerous tables because of its extensive length. The inside papers contrast, but perfectly complement, the smooth surface of the covers, having an almost velvety texture that begs to be touched. Juxtaposed with the lines of the poem are illustrations of graphic elements, figures, and newspaper articles that relate to the content of the poem. All of these elements, as well as the color choice, the typographical treatment, and the printing method, influence how readers, including myself, experience Poe's work.

The ability to interact with Kindel's piece—feeling its weight, unfolding it, and stroking its materials—is the principal aspect that exemplifies the essence and uniqueness of the print medium. The tactile nature of print media allows for physical interaction with the information; it is exactly this that sets aside print from any other form of media. While other platforms may be able to add their own flare on the content, such as audio bytes, video clips, and digital interactions, it is these same aspects that leave a print lover feeling unsatisfied. These platforms, having no component of tactility, seem more fleeting, ephemeral, and, consequently, unmemorable.

Before the mass production of books, poetry was traditionally presented orally. Still today, people attend poetry slams both to recite and listen to literature. The telling of poetry by mouth has the ability to take on a life of its own; by use of inflection and tone, one can read prose to give certain words or phrases emphasis while undermining other parts. In this form, the interpretation of the poem by the audience is highly influenced by the intermediary—the performer. Not unlike an oral performer, designers act as interpreters for the content that they design. The design possibilities of a piece are unlimited. Therefore, it is up to the designer—often in collaboration with the author or publisher—to decide what the literature is trying to convey and translate that into a visual design. By the careful usage of color, typography, and materials used, among many other factors of print design, a designer has the power to create imagery, a mood, or a feeling that shapes the way a reader experiences or interprets the textual content. In addition to the growing quantitative data that shows reading on paper has more intellectual advantages in comparison to nonphysical mediums, a lot can be said for the physiological and emotional rewards of reading in a printed format. One example of an emotional reward that is commonly referenced by print lovers is that of how the smell of a book has the ability to transport a person to a different time and place, recalling memories of where they were or the state of their life during the time they were reading that particular work.

With the rise of mass print production, the amount of poetry that is preserved in traditional bounded books is enormous. Typically, poems are presented as collections of a sole poet's work or curated around a particular theme or even style of writing. The design style tends to be bare, consisting of the title, the author's name, and the stanzas of poetry, lacking many design elements (if any at all) that can help bring to life the essence of the piece. An attempt—although feeble—at giving some life and mood to poetry is illustrated in literature textbooks; in

these types of books poems tend to be paired with a generic photograph, or maybe even a reproduction of an artwork. The feeling or mood of the photograph pervades the tone of the poem it is juxtaposed with and vice versa. This, too, is true of the way Pablo Neruda's work is generally displayed. Finding poetry designed as thoughtfully and beautifully as Kindel's work is rare and deserves to be coveted as the special work of art it is.

This is where my integrative project comes in to play. Every choice—from the materials used for the construction of a piece, the typographical techniques implemented, the way the piece is bound (or not), the method by which it was printed and produced, and the various book arts techniques that are applied—has the ability to influence the experience the audience has with the work. By carefully considering and implementing these elements, it is the artist or designer who has the ultimate power to shape the messages they are presenting and, in turn, the way a reader receives and interprets that information. Jack Cheng, in the article “Why Printed Books Will Never Die”, beautifully sums this up when saying, “the story is still the main thing you're there for, but the choices around it—the paper stock, the way the book is typeset, the selection of fonts—they add their own subtle flavors to the experience of that story.” (Catone)

I chose to design Pablo Neruda's “Sonnet XVII” because of the beautiful, eloquent way in which he writes about love. Neruda isn't direct in his poems, but rather uses relatable metaphors and imagery to convey those feelings about such an elevated, ephemeral concept. The decision to design an individual sonnet, rather than a collection of them, stems from the richness of the poem itself; adding more poetry would take away from the delicacy and lushness that each line in “Sonnet XVII” possesses. This, too, is the reason behind designing such ornate pieces—to give it the attention and appreciation it demands and deserves.

In realizing the sonnet necessitates gentle intimacy, I began brainstorming the different ways in which I could give physical form to Neruda's words of overflowing romance. During my research for forms that could relay this aspect, I discovered a packaging design that resembles a flower bud when closed and has the functionality to open into a flower-like form. In lines 5 & 6, Neruda relates the way he loves by saying, "I love you as the plant that never blooms, / But carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;" To convey the message that Neruda is trying to send in these lines, I implemented minimal design on the outside of the piece; I silkscreened a continuous rose illustration in a deep charcoal so it appeared subtle against the black paper. Because Neruda relates love as something that is to be coveted in private, "between the shadow and the soul" (4), I designed the inside of the form to contrast with the plainness of the outside to play to the secret beauty that is "the light of hidden flowers" (6). On the inside of the flower I printed a more intricate version of the flower illustration in a lighter gray to contrast with the darkness of the paper. On top of that, I overlaid the sonnet lines in a spiral design—the font size decreasing as it gets nearer the center of the piece. This feature lends to the intimate nature of the poem because the smaller text draws the reader in, closer to the work. At the conclusion of the text, lying at the very center of the piece, is a delicate paper representation of a flower inspired by traditional paper-folding practice and which is constructed of silver and white tissue paper. This shimmering flower symbolizes the secret light of love that remains hidden in the dark shadows of the unbloomed flower, which represents the soul (Neruda 4–6).

While the first piece focuses on the very intimate nature of love and Neruda's portrayal of it, the second piece attempts to give physicality to the light that is a strong essence throughout the sonnet. This piece takes the form of a poster-like accordion. Rather than expanding the piece horizontally, it is designed to open vertically from its closed, resting position to hang on a hook a

few feet up. In doing this, the reader reveals 40 inches of pink to orange gradient paper, on which roses have been silkscreened in grayscale and on top of that the lines of “Sonnet XVII” have been printed in a shimmery, copper ink. Neruda references light several times in his poem; first, in lines 3 & 4, “I love you as certain dark things are to be loved, / In secret, between the shadow and the soul.”, and again in lines 5 & 6, “I love you as the plant that never blooms / But carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;” I convey this shifting light in two ways. First, with the gradient of the pink paper to orange paper, which are colors that tend to be associated with romance. Second, by the use of the accordion form; the folds of the accordion panels create two planes, and therefore, both a shade and a tint of the same color are perceived. This effect highlights—literally—some of the lines and words of the sonnet, meanwhile keeping others hidden in the shadows—literally. Additionally, because of the glimmering characteristic of the metallic ink, some lines are immediately recognizable whereas others are harder to perceive and, thus, force the reader to change their position in relation to the poster, drawing them closer into the piece. This interaction between the individual and the work ties back to the sonnet’s aspect of intimacy, making it obvious in the physicality of the piece; the warmth (of light), intimacy, and touch that the piece requires are all essential aspects of the love Neruda expresses in the sonnet. These pieces demonstrate how the choices of a designer can translate, emphasize, or even alter the essence of a work of literature into something more or different by applying their design knowledge and talents.

For me, this project was an exploration of the endless possibilities and opportunities that are available in print design. These two print publications—not exactly defined as books, or even artist books, and not quite considered a broadside—are just a glimpse at the potential for print

designers. They are a demonstration and a call to designers to take advantage of and explore the light that is hidden within the tactile nature of the print medium.

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