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## Face Value: Integrative Project Thesis

*“Most typefaces mean absolutely nothing.”*

The phrase shot out of Ellen Lupton’s mouth and blindsided me, disrupting my relaxed train of thought while leaning back in the theatre chair of the weekly guest lecture series. Her experience with typography as a renowned author and teacher peaked my interest before I even she had even spoken a word due to my studies in design, but this statement forced me to relate back to my current Integrative Project thought process, something I thought I had escaped from for the time being. After a few moments of contemplation, I realized the gaping hole in Ms. Lupton’s assertion. *Most* typefaces mean nothing. Not all. There was an asterisk right there on that word, and it was there for me to harness and use to my advantage. This was an opportunity for inspiration, and being an emotional individual by *most* male standards, I wasn’t going to let her tell me the typefaces I love cannot love me back. To me, this was nothing short of an all-out challenge, as well as my first moment of unadulterated clarity in IP.

Now, before the aforementioned phrase lit a path for any conceptual development, there was a brief period of unease; a time at the beginning of the year where I was somewhat clueless as to the direction in which my project was headed. One of my original ideas for the integrative project surrounded subject-based type design, because the creating of original letterforms was one discipline I wanted the chance to tackle. The general thought was that I would interview a certain amount of people who were interconnected in some way, and turn

each of them into a typeface. Of course instead of seeing the light realizing right away just how much work is actually involved in designing type from scratch, my naivety would just go down slightly after each group meeting. At first I wanted to create type for every individual involved in the School of Art and Design. Considering some typographers spend their entire career on a single typeface, it would seem to be nothing short of an impossible undertaking in the time frame of two semesters. I needed to restrict myself further and further, as my group of subjects shrank from just the Senior class, to a select group of the Senior class, up until I was floating around ten or so as a realistic number. At this point my project was looking less unimaginably absurd and more in the range ridiculously ambitious, and this was also the point where I was inspired by Ellen Lupton's eye-opening phrase as previously described.

Inspiration hit, and the challenge of evoking emotion in type had legs. It quickly became clear that in order to be able to successfully evoke such feelings, I needed to delve inward. My subjects needed to be representative of relationships I know well enough to even begin contemplating how they can be represented in inanimate letterforms. This thought process led me to the decision of dividing the project into four different subjects which would become these expressive typefaces. Each significant individual not only represents a gained personal relationship for me, but convincingly represent a corresponding year of my academic career here at the University of Michigan.

When it comes to type design, credibility is established by designing characters which have slightly different shapes for improved clarity and, above all, artistic consistency. This was the idea behind typefaces of the Modern movement of typography, was diminished in the Postmodern era, and has returned in the overtly-digital age. Although beyond the Modern type ideology which defined neutral clarity, my designs resonate more visceral and unique qualities while keeping the traditional constituencies and readability of the roman alphabet. Utilizing

these consistent traits and molding them to convey the handwriting and personality traits as well that define each subject, my typefaces would not only grant me this ethos of design, but would also convincingly define the personal nature of my project as well.

How, though, am I to gather the necessary information to actually design these typefaces? The logical answer, again, was the simple use of the subjects' handwriting. Although the study of graphology, or handwriting analysis was a first go-to solution, it does not fit the emotional subjectivity of this project. Due to the endless assumptions of what different writing styles actually mean, skeptics both in science and design brush off the study and practice of graphology. However, the effects these relationships have had in my personal development transcend any of these analytical studies. Therefore, I am relying fully on my familiarity with their handwriting (especially my own) to distinguish exactly what traits must be present in the process of refining their handwriting into consistent, formal letterforms that, as I stated before, define each person. This refinement begins as an analysis of writing examples and the rough scans I acquire from them, and refining of the forms from there. While one typeface keeps it's small, precise yet bold forms, another keeps its proud yet whimsical forms, and so on. The evidence, of course, lies within the final designs.

*6316*

As I sat there with my new roommate, Chris, the unfamiliar freedom we were now experiencing on our first night of college life spread multiple feelings over us. The excitement of liberation turned to the fear of the unknown. Leaving the dorm room was a big step that night, and although everything became more familiar over time, we experienced different levels of the same feelings throughout the year. We could not have been more of a mismatched pair, but we got along perfectly right from the start. Even though we did enjoy finding the differences

both in our studies and personalities, the underlying cause for the success of our relationship as roommates stemmed from going through the same fear, excitement, and overall awe of pure freedom that goes along with entering the college experience.

The typeface is reminiscent of these emotional reactions to new beginnings through his small, incredibly precise and neat, yet bold handwriting. From the notes he would leave on my desk and on the door, to the course work from his notebooks that would be scattered around the room, his influence is clearly kept intact to those that are familiar with him as a person and his personal style. The print is a representation of multiple moments in time within our room, 6316. Upon glancing up from my own work, these were the three most vivid physical positions he would be in; moments occurring amongst the scattered engineering notes along the dorm room floor.

### *Frazzle*

After a full year of college, my sophomore return brought forth much more familiarity and comfort in both my physical as well as social surroundings. The reacquisition of freedom brought forth not the fear of before, but true liberation and the opportunity to pursue more mature interactions and relationships. One such relationship came almost immediately as the year began, and to this day it still remains a powerful influence in my romantic endeavors. Kate and I clicked immediately, and it was that same comfort and familiarity in everything about her that brought about emotions that can only be described as love. Whenever I was in a good mood that year, whether directly or indirectly, it could most likely be attributed to her. The extremely trusting, dedicated, and overall healthy relationship could only be described as rare in any circumstance, especially within a college context.

The name Frazzle comes straight from her personality, and although hard to define with

extreme clarity, has to do with how she carries herself in multiple situations, and also the physical presence of her characteristic curly hair. There is, of course, the influence of her handwriting, in which her personality shows. My refinements, however, are meant to enhance the written traits even more that evoke her efforts towards a display of sophistication and overachieving, which become immediately overshadowed by her witty, goofy, and incredibly affectionate nature underneath. Her typographic print is split into two layers, the first being a portrait of her in an expression held only for when she was around me. The second layer consists of lines from a poem she wrote me on a whim; words which still have so much levity.

### *Direction*

Eventually, every college student has to choose a path, one which his or her studies surround and reflect an eventual profession of choice. For students in Art and Design, the third year was this time, and having finished remedial courses with fundamental skills behind me, I needed to find that path. At this point I was well aware of my interest in graphic design, but it was not until a professor I now hold in high regard, Dwayne Overmyer, observed my strong interest in, yet overall struggle with formal typography in his design course. He made a list of names completely foreign to me at the time, and suggested I go to the library and research some of the masters of typography. To this I begrudgingly agreed, and ended up spending all night in the library enveloped in a wonderful sea of typography. I had found the door to my path. Not since my first time drawing for a friend or watching a baseball game had a passion like this ignited inside of me. Tschichold, Ruder, Weingart, Kunz, and the other masters I encountered over this night blew my view of graphic design wide open, and every simple or complex solution in which the letterforms were placed immediately made me set a goal to strive for their level someday.

Direction, my third typeface, reflects my own personality and inspiration through my natural handwriting. Although I did learn much from Dwayne as a guide in helping me find my passion for graphic design and typography, it was truly myself that kept pushing to find out why I was in college, and why my subconscious latched on to typographic design. Only through my own realizations was I able to make my Junior year one of intelligibility and discovery of who I want to be. Not only that, but creating my own typeface opens doors to the other three in terms of the possible conversational graphic aspects I will go over. The graphic print is an homage the night of my inspiration. The central typographic focal point is an appropriation to the cover art of Emil Ruder's book "Typographie". In the place of Helvetica is Direction, with the strong red referencing the inspiration emanating from the books surrounding the image of myself.

### *Low Dog*

For the fourth typeface, I had to think very deeply about where to go, and who to go to for my Senior year inspiration. Considering this decision had to be made while in my Senior year, my subjects were limited, and I thought more into what could possibly represent the last year in my undergraduate career. There is fear of the unknown arising within an imminent freedom of post-graduation, and for myself, everything pointed to an all-encompassing subject who I know will be a constant inspiration from this point forward.

In choosing my late father as a subject, emotionally, it outweighs the other three put together by a wide margin. My current emotional state revolves around the questions I have about my life beyond college; the lessons learned here and in life that will keep me optimistic towards the future. There is no other subject that can fill this position than Michael Fagerburg. Although he passed away near the end of my freshman year, his influence has stayed with me as reference to every situation I have come across during my maturation. Although not perfect

in all of his ways, his confidence in my times of uncertainty always kept me strong, and that effect on the way I handle questions and decisions will last until I am gone as well.

Low Dog is the most natural, scripted-resembling typeface in the group, as I have hoped to keep as much of his original style intact while simplifying each letterform to a level of clarity that I deem appropriate. Again, my refinements lie purely in the consistent traits which are the most evocative of his style. Although I had little to work with (I had only two old letters he had sent to my sister while she attended summer camp) compared to the other subjects, I was able to fill in the gaps and keep each consistency true to his classy and charming nature that has unavoidable imperfections as well. The name “Low Dog” is the title his closest college friends dubbed him. Although the actual meaning or story behind the name remains a mystery, I prefer to keep it that way, as for some reason it does somehow define him. The print is very image heavy, as the graphics of our first and last meeting (before his sickness changed him) speak for themselves. Near the bottom is written with Low Dog “Good men...are hard to find,” which is one of the last things he ever said to me in an email, and it describes his goal to make me one of those good men by learning from everything he had to offer.

To support miss Ellen Lupton’s statement, yes, most typefaces have absolutely no meaning outside of being a tool designed for printed information and graphic usage. *Most*. The asterisk is still there, and I’ve blown it up into what is, in essence, my Integrative Project. Emotion is subjective; just as is art, and letterforms are some of the oldest, useful, and arguably the most overlooked forms of art. These relationships have greatly aided in my personal development as both a young man and designer, and with my digital paintbrush in hand and these powerful influences in mind, my goal is for these relationships are justifiably expressed in the shapes and strokes of these type designs. In the end, the efforts put into my project prove emotion is possible within four exceptional cases of significant personal value.

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