

Multilingual typography / Koexistenz der Zeichen / La cohabitation des caractères

We would like to introduce you a research project by the HEAD Geneva University of Art and Design, Switzerland. It is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia. General lead: Prof. Ruedi Baur.

Part 1: The coexistence of Chinese and Latin characters. (May 2010 – April 2012)

Part 2: The coexistence of Chinese and Western visual cultures. (October 2012 – September 2015)

Part 3: The coexistence of Arabic and Latin characters. (in application process for April 2014 – March 2017)

The knowledge gained in the research will be in the future extended to other writing systems and visual cultures: Hindi, Cyrillic, Japanese, Korean, among others.

In a globalized world, where goods, people and knowledge travel more than ever, characters and symbols of Asian, Western and Arabic origin increasingly appear next to one another. As cultural codes mesh, the coexistence of various different signs is progressively influencing the visual language of our urban environment, be it in the context of universities, trade fairs, airports or international institutions, as well as whole urban districts. This new multilingual background is currently about to change the foundations of visual communication, and with it the means we use in our design practice every day. The presence of characters of different cultural origins in a single medium is an issue that has not really been comprehensively explored yet. This is where the Multilingual Typography Research Group, led by well-known communication designer Ruedi Baur, sets off their newest investigations.

Started in 2012, this international design research project explores the usage and development of visual signs in different cultural contexts, addressing questions such as how signs can be juxtaposed, or how they relate to one another. What are the visual references for the organization of signs in respect of their specific cultural and semiotic context? What constitutes the methodology behind Latin and Chinese type pairing? This project is an extension to a preliminary study funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), and documented in a special issue of the Swiss Typographic Magazine (TM).

Our research is confined to the following main questions: what practices, knowledge, interdisciplinary and transcultural skills are necessary to help communication designers manage to create adequate and differentiated solutions in a globalized world? How can we simultaneously present information, structures and designs from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and still let these systems equally coexist?

Our aim is the development and presentation of new forms of visual interaction whilst incorporating features of different cultures: typography, images, diagrams, drawings and information graphics from the digital world, symbolic representations of any kind... This deeply innovative approach aims to foster intercultural exchange and promote balance in the presentation of information where languages cohabitate, removed from

prejudice and civilization-related hierarchies. Thereby we help to build bridges between different cultures and give a contribution to mutual understanding between cultures, with the desire to build a more humane global system based on sustainable development.

After finishing the first phase of our research (2010–2012), which was focused mainly on multilingual typography and issues in designing with Chinese and Latin type simultaneously, we just launched the second phase, shifting our focus on the transcultural potential of graphics, diagrams and images from China, the Arabic World and the West. In our search for research objects, Ming Dynasty image encyclopedia “San Cai Tu Hui” immediately caught our attention. A collection of diagrams and illustrations on diverse aspects of China’s traditional perception of their own empire, society and culture as well as the world around them, this comprehensive book proved a rich source of graphic clues on China’s genuine view of the World before the advent of the foreigner on the shores of the Middle Kingdom. Our research aims at the understanding and explanation of this unique perspective through the means of multilingual typography and intercultural design methods. Therefore, the exhibited fragments represent not mere results, but also the research process in its whole complexity.

To get an impression what we have done, you can download a digital version of our research publication (first phase) the «Swiss typographic magazine»:

http://multilingual-typography.com/exchange/ulrike/TM_Koexistenz_Baur_Felsing_Moser_Wilhelm.pdf

Contact:

Ruedi Baur: silent@ruedi-baur.eu

Ulrike Felsing: ulrike.felsing@multilingual-typography.com

Roman Wilhelm: wilhelm@inside-a.com

Marco Maione: marco@marcomaione.com

CIVIC DESIGN – HEAD

HAUTE ÉCOLE D’ART ET DE DESIGN GENÈVE

GENEVA UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN

WWW.HESGE.CH/HEAD