

Statement

Architecture in public spaces is the material embodiment of the social relations it facilitates (Petrescu and Trogal, 2017). Focusing on the fundamental element of typography, I adapt architectural structures from public spaces into the anatomy of letterforms, recontextualising types as two-dimensional translations of three-dimensional spaces, in which social relations of the analogue world are generated and sustained. These architectural features are abstracted into modular components distributed through a grid system to form new glyphs, proposing letterforms as composite structures formed from flexible segments shaped by, and continuously interacting with, the spatial and material conditions of their surroundings.

By linking architectural and typographic structures, my central question is: can letterforms, similar to architectures, function as public infrastructures in which collective dignity within urban environments is produced and reproduced?

Written Response

*From the course reading list*¹

"Graphic design history has yet to undertake the task of understanding its social context, understood as a range of effects: from the reproduction of cultural values through the work of graphic design to the shifting nature of consumption and reception, both conspicuous and symbolic, by audiences."

Graphic design, beyond aesthetic purposes, participates in the reproduction of cultural values and shapes how the public consumes and interprets meaning (Blauvelt, 1994). Adopting this perspective, the project positions graphic design as a mechanism through which cultural values are articulated within contemporary society.

It draws a connection between the functions of public space and the role of typography in public experience. Public spaces are often designed to fulfil social needs prioritised by their users, while letterforms are shaped to accommodate the reading habits favoured by dominant groups. By designing letterforms whose components are derived from the space's physical characteristics, the project translates public space into a two-dimensional system through which urban cultures are expressed. Letterforms are thus positioned as visual translations of physical environments, proposing an alternative mode of experiencing social realities.

Blauvelt, A. (1994)

'An opening: graphic design's discursive spaces', *Visible Language*, 28(3), pp. 205–217.

Written Response

From the course reading list ²

"In digitization, by the nature of the process, letters become fragmented."

Through a close analysis of typographic history, Modernity after modernism proposes a perspective that reimagines typography beyond a parade of typeface styles, but as an intricate web of social, technical, and material processes. With digitisation, letters are reconceived as decomposable units, or data bits, rather than fixed and completed shapes (Kinross, 2004).

This project builds on this concept by fragmenting letterforms into modular components composed of variable shapes, organised through a grid system. These shapes and grids function analogously to data bits in the digital domain. The resulting letterforms, inspired by shared environments and applied within public communication, reflect how typography participates in the network described by Kinross—one in which letterforms continually interact with and respond to the social, technical, and material conditions of their surroundings.

Written Response

In relation to topic

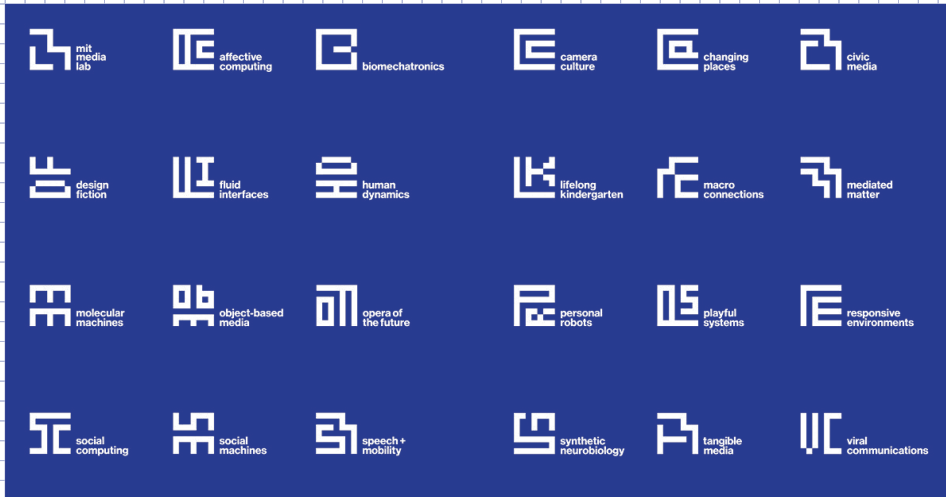
"The individual letters of a text should not be regarded as building blocks to be arranged in a row but as complicated segments combining in endlessly new ways to form units in which they are largely absorbed."

In this statement, Gerstner (1974) argues that letterforms, rather than fixed and isolated units, should be understood as composite structures formed through the combination of smaller, flexible segments.

In response to this framework, I developed an approach that dissects the English alphabet into smaller segments using grids and reconstructs them through modular patterns. This approach embraces variability, enabling the continuous generation of multiple outcomes for the same letterform. By organising these alphabets that share identical components but differ in overall appearance, the resulting text draws attention to structural details often overlooked in conventional typography practice, thereby reemphasising Gerstner's concept of letters as complex unities.

Written Response

In relation to medium/method



The re-branding of MIT Media Lab (Pentagram, 2015) relates to my project in its method. In this project, the designer adopted a 7x7 grid as a rule system to generate logos for the 23 research groups in the institute, resulting in an interrelated system of glyphs that holds diverse appearance yet maintains a unified identity.

The MIT Media Lab identity demonstrates a parallel methodological structure to my own, as both employ predefined systems to produce visual outcomes. While the Media Lab identity operates at the level of modular identity design, my project introduces the generative system within the letterforms themselves. Instead of fixed appearances, each letter can exist in multiple structured variations. Both projects aim to maintain a cohesive visual identity through the structural relationships between outputs rather than through uniform form.

Written Response

Demonstration of critical position ¹

"Typography is the art of making a whole out of predetermined parts. The typographer "sets." He sets individual letters into words, words into sentences."

According to Gerstner (2019), typography operates as a system of variables. Meaning is constructed through the relationships between elements rather than from individual letters in isolation. Rather than focusing on single typographic components, the typographer defines a coherent set of rules that governs how elements interact. Gerstner introduces the concept of "integral typography", in which typography communicates meaning through the structured arrangement of variables (e.g. typeface, layout, size... etc.) following a defined and consistent set of parameters.

In alignment with Gerstner's critical position, I develop a system in this project that establishes a set of conditions defining how elements—including grids, shapes and colours—are incorporated and interact as they merge to form a letter. I internalised the concept of "integral typography" within typeface design, demonstrating that the letter, as a fundamental unit of typography, is itself a whole composed of independent parts that designers are allowed to continuously reassemble to generate new meanings.

Written Response

Demonstration of critical position ^{2 (Wild Card)}

"'Public' [space], in this instance, is understood to mean common ground, an open and shared zone of collective dignity. It is related to democracy, in that it is not dictatorial or pre-determined from above, but produced by the people who comprise it...The concrete manifestation sits at the intersection of complex social and cultural systems. It is architecture which allows these factors to be embodied in space, and to be reproduced over time."

Public space is a shared and collective space grounded in the complex social and cultural systems by the people who inhabit it, materially expressed through architecture (Petrescu and Trogal, 2017). Architecture functions as an embodiment of the social relations it facilitates, allowing these relations to be carried out and reproduced over time.

By adapting the spatial structures of public spaces into typographic modules, this project positions typography as a critical design practice involving the construction of two-dimensional spaces in which social relations are reconfigured, intersect, and are reproduced. Designing a digital typeface dependent of architectural elements is then recontextualised as an act of morphing physical connections into virtual forms. The resulting typeface can thus be understood as a digital visualisation of the social network founded in, and sustained by, the analogue world.

References

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Petrescu, D. and Trogal, K. (eds.) (2017) *The Social (Re)Production of Architecture: Politics, Values and Actions in Contemporary Practice*. London: Routledge.

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