*

a design without referents

And it could be… like for me that's… like at the end its undecidable, and that's also not really the point, for me it's why it's such an interesting image is that both possibilities are somehow present in the image, hey it's undecidable, for me the kind of creates this this this uhm, like a moment in which like two things that are mutually exclusive are present at the same time, so it's either A… normally in daily life something is A or B, uhm or its A or or non-A, and here this is somehow all these possibilities of how the images is produced are actually present, so its A and non-A… ….so for me thussis this is what's really, this is what hesitation is about, that you have this moment in which several possibilities, several potentialities are present at the same time.
– Sjoerd Westbroek, *Exercising Hesitation.*

Text by Joost Vullings
Supervision: Annie Goodner
Design: Joost Vullings
Set in Caslon Buch BQ

contents.

P. 7. always, everywhere. an introduction on our visual culture.
P. 13. chapter one. the non-cutted edge.
P. 31. chapter two. doubt.
P. 43. chapter three. meta-grammar.
P. 55. in conclusion.

always, everywhere. an introduction on our visual culture.

We spend our lives surrounded by information. All day and night, both online and offline, our daily surroundings confront us with hundreds of images; images to inform, to direct, to propose and to convince. Publicity, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Google, Netflix, YouTube, television, newspapers, magazines, ads, neon, books, the list is virtually endless. We are the public to a show we didn't choose to visit, the audience to a monologue we cannot choose to leave. In their explicit meaning, all these images may vary, but, as John Berger states in *Ways of Seeing,* all together they form an environment in which every image confirms and enhances every other, constituting a language that makes just one single proposal: 'It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more'.[1.] Where one ad for example might elude us with the sight of a holiday on a tropical beach, the

other with the newest car, and an Instagram post might stick our eyes out with the latest greatest party we didn't attend, they all allude to something we lack in the present moment, and propose having or doing more as the solution. This lack, or longing, that these images capitalize on is, as Theodor Adorno states in his essay *Free Time*, often something that is already within us, but our longing gets functionalized, extended and reproduced by business: 'what they want is forced upon them once again'.[2.] The better an image plays in upon this lack, the more effective it will be.[3.] We, on the receiving end of this one-way communication, have hardly any agency in what we see and don't see. The images just appear before us, and whereas a piece of text has to be read through, an image needs hardly more than a glance to transmit its message.

Both Berger's as Adorno's text speaks of the publicity image, the publicity image however, isn't merely the billboard around the corner, it makes up the vast amount of the images around us. Almost every piece of visual communication out there: book cover, record cover, poster, Instagram-post, event announcement, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, is aimed at getting us to buy or do something —may it be buying, may it be liking, may it be attending— and will make use of the tactics of the publicity image to do so.

In the fifty years since these texts were published, the way that images function has hardly changed, and with the advance of technology our contemporary image environment has become even more invasive

and all-encompassing. Big data collection and targeted advertising find ever more intrusive ways into our inner desires. And social media posts, that almost always display nothing but the successes and grandeur, never the boring and the mundane, don't tell us merely to transform our lives by buying something more, but moreover to transform our lives by *being* something more.

Somehow, the intrusiveness of images is considered completely normal, we've accepted them as a natural part of our surroundings, and even consider the amount of information they provide to offer us choice, options. But how is it freedom to consider an option when this option is forced upon you? How is it freedom to consider whether or not you want to spend your holiday at sea, whilst before you saw that beach-picture on Instagram, holiday wasn't even the question? What's reified in the sum of images around us, is not freedom, but the assumption that we always need to do more, have more, be faster, more efficient and more successful. It reifies a capitalist mentality in which doing nothing is considered a negative trait and in which standstill is considered decline. The problem with this image environment that proposes nothing but different shades of more and better, is not that we don't get to say 'no' to one specific option; to a specific car, jeans or holiday. The problem is that we don't get to say 'no' to getting more options, that we don't get to say no the constant bombardment with the message that we're falling short in what we have and falling short in what we are.

Is there a way to somehow ignore, or hold off, the appeals made upon us by all these images? There's a famous figure in literature who lived in full negation of every appeal made upon him. Bartleby, the object of Herman Melville's novella Bartleby the Scrivener, a Story of Wall-Street responds to all requests his boss makes upon him with the phrase: 'I would prefer not to'.[4.] Giorgio Agamben, in his book *Potentialities*, analyses this phrase as occupying a third space in between Yes and No, not consenting, neither refusing, but ultimately negating the question.[5.] Gilles Deleuze defined the answer as *agrammatical*,[6.] replying in the questions language but not playing by its grammar: by using a divergent sentence structure that is both affirmative and negative at the same time, while leaving unspecified what exactly is not affirmed or declined, the response negates the framework that the proposal set up for him, a framework that asked for a yes or a no, and thereby escapes punishment by the rules of this framework as well: the boss remains baffled, unable to come up with a reaction towards Bartleby's full negation.

If anything, Bartleby was undetermined, undefined by the options presented to him, neither by consenting nor by declining, he was neither about success nor about failure, he resided in a space that was devoid of all value judgements as a whole. A space that's not so much about effect, but about process, not about convincement, but about consideration, not about more, but about less, and not about speed, but about slowness.

Could Bartleby's non-response fulfil a role in disrupting the appeals made upon us constantly by the images surrounding us? For agrammaticality to distort visual communication, it would have to be a visual agrammaticality, so, could visual agrammaticality exist? And is it possible to design in an agrammatical manner? Graphic design is classically considered a problem-solving discipline, the aim of which is to effectively communicate a message to the target-audience. To do this it visualizes (a part of) its content in a form that is relatable for its audience and therefor it will almost always assert to certain clichés in the audience's visual grammar. A lot of punk record covers for example, display the same clichés of cut-up or sketchy type, torn edges, rebellious pictures, or bright colours, so that the viewer immediately understands it's a punk record, and can take it or leave

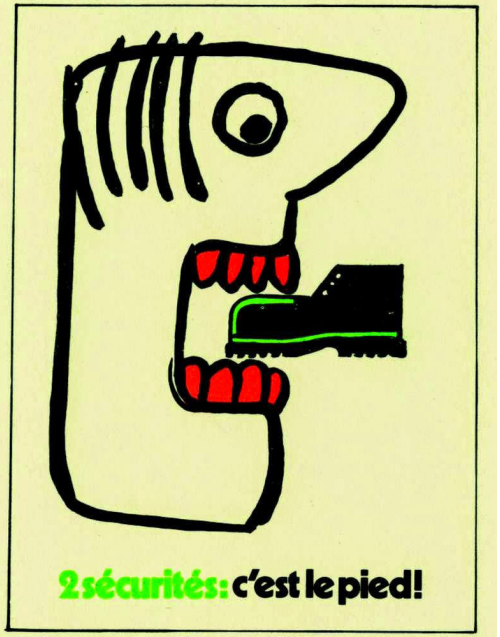
it according to his/her taste in music. This strive for effectiveness of visual communication is what makes it so intrusive. It makes an immediate impression that doesn't need any second thought of the viewer, thus constituting a message that's hard to ignore.

Agrammatical design would do the opposite, not delivering a univocal message that is clear the moment the viewer lays eyes on it, but moreover, delivering a diffuse message that makes the viewer stop, think and hesitate. Like Bartleby that was able to ignore everything around him, undetermined and undefined, standing still in the midst of Wall Street, the heart of capitalism, an agrammatical image would be undefinable and undetermined. Ungraspable for the viewer and so disrupting the effectiveness and intrusiveness of visual communication.

Could visual agrammaticality exist? And if so, could it have an effect on the intrusiveness of our image environment?

I'll explore this question by looking at specific examples and non-specific hypotheticals. I cannot claim to cover all possible forms that visual agrammaticality might take, but I'll explore multiple directions and the effects that they may have. I'll cover roughly three forms of visual agrammaticality, that all confuse their intended meaning in a different way: design that exceeds its intended meaning; design that is undecided about what it wants its meaning to be; and design that shows how it *establishes* its meaning.

chapter one.
the non-cutted edge.



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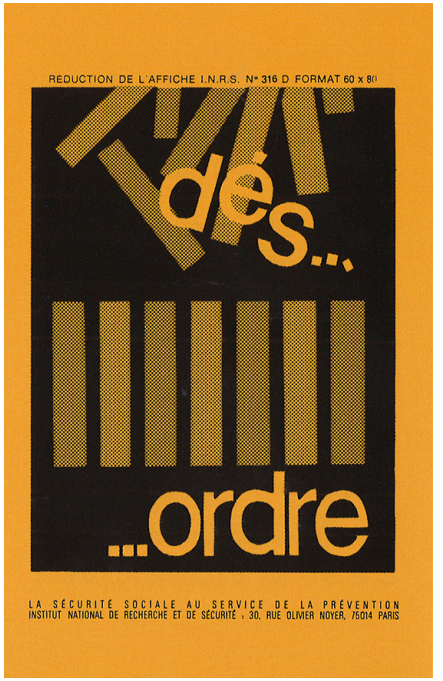
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A hand-drawn face seen from the side, jaws cracked open, teeth bleeding red. Wide open eyes and dilated pupils stare in agony at the black leather safety boot that's shoved down the wide-open mouth. "two certainties: it's a foot, and it's great!".

Seven rectangles, perfectly aligned, stand next to each other in the centre of an orange poster. In stark juxtaposition, seven other rectangles lie loosely scrambled around above them. "des…", typeset in a jingly manner, floats on top of the scrambled rectangles. "…ordre" it states neatly typeset below the row below. "of the order."

Both posters were designed by French graphic designer Bernard Chadebec. From 1965 up until 2005, Chadebec worked for the National Research and Safety Institute of France, designing posters to aid in the prevention of occupational hazards.

Chadebec's posters stand in stark contrast to the formality and clarity of the usual warning sign: they're hand-drawn, from image to type, which gives them a generous dollop of personal feel and warmth; they're extremely colourful, and their compositional balance through asymmetry is reminiscent more of cubist paintings than of warning signs. Walking into one of Chadebec's posters in your workplace would probably feel more as if you'd taken a wrong turn somewhere and accidentally landed in an art gallery —a number of his posters he even signed.

Because of their expressive and personal style, the message they're supposed to communicate doesn't immediately land. Instead, for a brief moment the viewer might be taken in by the style of drawing, the colours, and compositional choices, and might see the image for what it is in itself, not for its intended message. For this tiny moment, its informational function is on hold, and meaning isn't forced nor necessary, but the viewer might feel the presence of a latent meaning, one that stems from the image in itself, and is created in interaction with the viewer.

In *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag makes a case for seeing artworks for what they are, for their form, their style, their appearance, and the inexplainable meaning that these constitute. In her vision, there's no such thing as a separation between form and content. The content of a work of art is in its form, on its form and around its form. Stripping down the form and dissecting a work to reveal some kind of 'deeper' meaning, diminishes the artwork to a mere cover for a supposed content

inside, 'By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting that, one tames the work of art. Interpretation makes art manageable, conformable.'[7] It's precisely this diminishment through interpretation that Chadebec takes, reverses, and turns back onto itself. Where the art critics so loathed by Sontag reduced a work of art to a message that can be put into words, Chadebec turns a poster that is supposed to communicate a message that can be put into words into something more. By working with so much style and expressiveness, way more than is expected from the designer of a warning sign, he puts himself in the poster. He rises over the intended univocal message, and brings in meaning of his own. One that is not easily understandable and conformable, but one that resides truly in the realm of visual communication, where the visual is not a mere placeholder for the linguistic message that follows, but where the visual is the meaning.

At first, it may seem odd that such work was created within the context of a security agency, the manufacturer of usually mundane warning signs, certainly not the place where you'd expect to find avant-garde graphic design. But it's precisely this context which allows Chadebec's work to function agrammatically. Would it have been created within the spheres of high-end graphic design, where the goal of the design is not merely to communicate a message, but far more, to amaze and show the designers skills, originality and creativity, it would have done exactly what it was asked to do. It would have hung in a museum or form the content of a

publication. People would encounter it in the context of art and therefore its artistry and expressiveness would not have been agrammatical, but, on the contrary, be fully in line with the grammar of the art scene. It would have stated 'art', loud and clear.

Similarly, would these posters have been pasted in the streets, they probably would have been perceived as protest posters: Chadebec's use of colour, style of drawing, and especially his usage of hand drawn type, brings up connotations with the visual language of the 60's and 70's protest movements. The violence of a boot shoved down someone's face and the fear in the adjacent eyes, would probably bring up the connotation of power, oppression and protesting some form of injustice. The message it sends wouldn't the intended one at all, but it would send this unintended message so effective, that it wouldn't confuse the viewer and slow down the speed of information.

It's precisely the context of security signs, of which the aim is to be very straightforward and clear, and in which out of the ordinary expressiveness serves no clear function, in which Chadebec's work seems out of place and therefor functions agrammatical. It's his abundance, which no one had asked for, that creates the potential for more than just a clear-cut security warning. Maybe it's this abundance, that allows the few seconds of latency to the viewer. Jan Verwoert, in 'Exhaustion and Exuberance', way to defy the pressure tvo perform', brings up the possibility of an 'Exuberant I Can': By giving so much, way more than what is asked for, the

word 'yes', or, 'I can', is no longer a confirmation. It responds to a request, but with so much passion that it turns this response into an initiative of one's own, one that defines its own terms of action.[8.] It's this autonomous agency that is so apparent in Chadebec's work, and which we encounter in the surplus of abstract meaning that it has.

It's telling of Chadebec's artistry that his work, now, a decade after he made his last poster, made its way into the high-end graphic design world. Designer Urs Lehni, together with students of HfG Karlsruhe, designed and published a publication comprising Chadebec's career. In this book, his designs have lastly fully lost their function as warning signs and been turned into the body of work of an autonomous artist. Although fully justified considering their artistry and also beautifully designed, it ironically can never catch the magic that the signs must have had in their original context. Since the act of labelling them as artworks and not as warning signs, ultimately numbs the aspect of disinterested exuberance that made them so interesting in the first place.

ATTENTION AU FEU

A strong wind picks up the small flame of a freshly lit match, it jumps, and a raging fire sweeps through the forest. The dark silhouette of a dense tree looms in the background, standing tall in face of the sudden fire. The flames are coloured in a bright cadmium red, and are interspersed with orange yellow spots, which appear so lively that the fire seems to be moving. "No open fire."

There's a sense of naiveté in the expressiveness of the traffic sign I encountered in the Vosges, a forest on the border of Germany and France (I didn't make a picture unfortunately, the one I walked into was slightly different, but this one capture its mood quite well). It forbids open flames in order to prevent forest fires, but, like Chadebec's designs, it bypasses by far what was asked of it for purely informational purposes. It is as if the (unknown) designer had no clue about the visual discourse of traffic signs, and just went at it with all s/he had, in her/his own personal take on a traffic sign.

Naiveté has a negative ring, but it's this selfless effort of making truly nice looking public information, which makes the traffic sign so pure and joyous to look at. It's cutting-edge design that doesn't aim to be cutting-edge, it's original as the by-product of the sheer joy of making and doesn't expect anything in return. And it's this disinterestedness that constitutes its power to break open the sphere of effectiveness, of results and clarity of a capitalist society. Public information is intended to be extremely clear and universal, to inform us without slowing us down in our everlasting haste to get from a to b. This traffic sign however, steps out of this clarity obsessed logic: elements like the huge flame, the illustrative tree and the risoprint colours are there without a clear objective, but for the mere sake of the taste of the designer. In her essay 'Precarisation, Indebtedness, Giving Time. Interlacing Lines across Maria Eichorn's 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours', Isabel Lorey states that: 'To give time means to expand the present.'[9] In this

essay she explores ways to regain time in a neo-liberal society that doesn't let you have any. With the shift from manual to cognitive labour, she writes, work time has the tendency to 'encompass all social doing'.[10.] We're no longer working only from nine to five, but all the time, and everywhere. An increasing amount of precarious jobs like internships, flex work and temporary contracts create a dynamic in which we constantly have to be on the top of our game, due to the pressure to secure ourselves some financial security. In such a society, following Lorey, to spend time and effort for someone else without expecting anything in return, expands the present of the receiver, gives him/her time. And this is what happens when we look at a traffic sign in which the maker seemed just as concerned with making something beautiful as communicating an intended message. It both literally slows us down in the speed at which we move through public space, and it shows us that working time can also be spend for the sake of joy through working, and that not every action needs to have a clear gain or quantifiable result. And by setting the example, it gifts us the permission to do so as well. It expands the present of the viewer —if only by mere seconds— beyond the dynamic of speed, effect and result.

It's much like what Rick Poynor in his essay 'Future Imperfect' names 'flawed mastery' or 'imperfect design': design that (probably) by accident diverges from its visual discourse —either by a lack of awareness of the visual grammar of its context, or by just not caring about it at all— and thereby instigates

wonder.[11.] These 'flaws' in design oppose a purely rational design logic that's only concerned with effectiveness. A logic that doesn't allow for confusion about a message, because either the one who sends it wants to be heard, seen and understood by as many people as possible, or because a society that's always in a hurry can't allow for unclear communication to slow us down.

These (un)intended 'flaws' are so delightful to look at precisely because they don't make sense. They don't serve any logic of money, speed or effect. They are there either because of some incomprehensible logic, or 'just' for their sheer beauty. They are there and allow for an abstract and latent meaning, they are there and allow us to be confused, allow us to slow down. They are there and allow us not make sense ourselves as well.

chapter two.
doubt.

No graphic design expresses doubt. A design might be more or less effective, more or less convincing, or more or less ambiguous, but the designer is never undecided about whether or not s/he actually wants to say what s/he's saying. There might be —if not always— a process of doubt leading up to it, but once the printer spits out its job, the website is online, or the video is rendered, there will be no doubt about it, I have something to say, and I'm not afraid to say it. Also works like the ones from Chadebec, that might instigate doubt about their meaning in the viewer, don't contain any doubt from their maker. On the contrary, their ambiguity stems from a maker who's very convinced and expressive about what he has to say. A stance of doubt to begin with, that's just impossible to come by.

Considering the classic role of graphic design as an applied discipline that solves communication issues, it makes sense that there's no role for doubt, since it only further complicates matters. But even with the progression of graphic design from an applied discipline to a more autonomous practice, it hasn't ceased its aim to convince. Both museum-based works as well as self-initiated books or films from graphic designers are mostly still communication artefacts that serve to convey a message. These works might deal with more complex issues than conventional graphic design, but they dont necessarily show doubt. Like the Drone Survival Guide by Ruben Pater for example. This drone-spotting guide displays the silhouettes of different sorts of drones, so one can spot them against a clear sky with opposing sunlight,

and is printed on reflective paper so that it can be used to confuse a drone's vision by reflecting sunlight. Although Pater plays with functional aspects in his design, playing with it being actually of use as a defense mechanism, these aspects are there less for

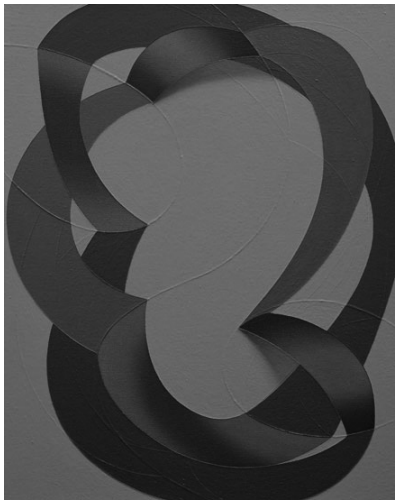
their function, and more to add a feel of urgency to it's message about the dangers of drones. To make its message of a higher compact. It's a good example of what autonomous design tends to entail: reflections and statements on societal topics, that, although they don't serve a client that want's to reach as big as an audience as possible, still don't easily allow for the display of doubt. Because apparently we all feel that we need to be- or come over as, sure before we make a statement. If not to stand out in the vast seas of information surrounding us, then at least to be taken seriously. As if showing doubt about a subject is not especially a sign of taking your message very, very seriously. Isn't it highly peculiar, that we only then step in to the public realm when we know what we want to say? Or at least can pretend so? Doubt is only expressed in reaction to a question, or in personal matters. Doubt is always considered something negative, and something temporary, a state of mind that we wish to— and will, resolve in the future.

Could we however, start openly doubting again? Not asked for by others or wished for by ourselves, not for the sake of resolving it, but for the pure notion of its existence. And in doing so also interrupt an information environment that only expresses certainties and only informs to convince? To change the role of doubt from always being in response, to acting on own initiative? And how would we give form to such an initiative?

In the art-realm, showing doubt is less obscure, partly probably because personal expression is more common in the art-world, which leaves more room

for doubt than a societal statement. Besides that, in museums there's not so much a competition between images, whereas in the public space every visual message has to be even more clear than the other to stand out. But, for doubt to disrupt our common image environment and regain a bit of agency, it has to be *in* this environment. Museums though, intended as oases of consideration and contemplation, are precisely the places that lie outside this.

How then, might doubt within our common image environment look? What form might doubt take in graphic design? A first pointer in this could be in the works of painter Tomma Abts, whose abstract paintings, as Jan Verwoert describes in 'Choosing to Choose, on the paintings of Tomma Abts' disclose layers and layers of paint preceding the final seemingly tight surface, through which she



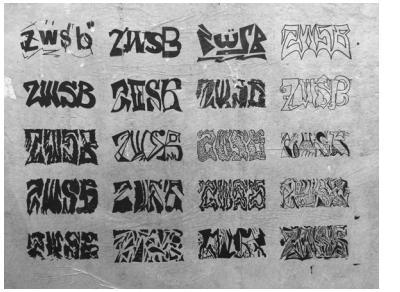
'proposes a very particular model of agency: a model of how time can be spent making decisions in relation to what you want something to be.'[12.] Both the boundaries and possibilities of paint are that you cannot erase it, which makes it very fit to capture a span of time in a still image, to capture multiple stages in the conception of a work, and thereby the doubt inherent to this conception. For drawing goes the same. The primary media of graphic design, however, printers, computers, internet and video, all almost inherently will not show any moment in time before the FinalFinalFinal…000123NowREallyTruly.pdf. All previous states of the work are lost in a void of command-Z's, and only the file title might reveal that the design didn't shoot up out of thin air. The very letters you're looking at while reading this for instance, probably took years to design (I recall the type-designer Martin Majoor once mentioning that it takes him about 5 years to design 1 typeface, and Mads Wildgaard mentioned in a lecture he had over 700 files of his typeface *Lars* at the moment he first exhibited it), the letters in this text however, only show the very final form of *Caslon Buch BQ*, not the search and process leading up to it. The importance of the choice of medium in establishing meaning, is further underlined by Sjoerd Westbroek in his research proposal for his residency at the Jan van Eyck Academy, herein he states that he doesn't 'see a fundamental separation between content and method,'[13.] This sounds rather vague, but when we think with Marshall McLuhan that every medium, every form of communication, constitutes a different

relationship between those involved, then the fast media of the digital age almost certainly determine a relationship defined by speed, which doesn't leave room for doubt or hesitation, whereas older media like the pencil would rather determine slowness and time for consideration.

However, it's both unlikely that the whole society will reside from using computers and the internet and turn back to the pencil as means of communication, and I also think it's undesirable to flee in conservatism as answer to developments in technology. But the way paint can show different moments in the conception of a work, a design can also be assembled by not deleting the old version, by adding new ideas on to them, thus showing its development through time. And where one can change the font of a whole book with just one mouse click, one can also decide to change the font of just one section, and so show the multiple ideas that came up in the design process. We may, in short, take note of the qualities of analogue tools and explore how similar qualities can be fed back into the media of our times.

When she was young, my roommate designed an invitation card for her birthday. Only, she didn't feel like celebrating her birthday. Forced by her parents however, she did throw a party and invited her friends by sending them an invitation card. Failing however, to mention on her invitation the place and time where the party would take place.

A second direction which doubt within graphic design might take, lies in the back and forward motion of hesitation. One step forth and one step back at the same time. It's a bit complicated to envision what this would look like, but a poster I encountered outside the Zurcher Hochschule der Kunste, can give some direction. This poster, showing twenty iterations of graffiti designs of the letters ZWSB, was put on display in the bike park just outside the school. But hung at a weirdly low position, it's most of the times obstructed by bikes that are parked half in front of it. I've spent hours trying to pinpoint what it is in this poster that caught my attention (whereas I mostly walk by every spray-painted tag without giving it much notice) and what confuses me so much. I was inclined to think that the poster expresses doubt in what to show, since it shows twenty versions of a similar design. But every



individual version is way too perfect, had very likely a process of doubt of its own, a process that remains absent on the poster. Let's think of the birthday card though, doubt, or hesitation, entails a certain back

and forward motion, and it's this that seems to seep through the funky letters in the bike park.

The poster states graffiti, and with that it represents a culture of illegality, anti-establishment and self-promotion. Halfway this is also what it wants to be. It's illegally bill posted on a wall in public space, and showcases the skills of the designer. But then again, it also not like that at all, the small grey paper is posted in a place where few people will probably notice it, hidden behind bikes and in between zillion posters surrounding it. It's a very humble position, not screaming for attention at all. And with the time the paper will fade out, change colour under beams of sunlight and wash away in the rain. And although it is illegal to bill post, it's done outside an art school, a place so filled with posters that it's basically a free space. So, while in what it shows the poster sets one step forward, with its choice of both medium and position, it immediately steps back. Insecure of what it wants to be, it lingers in between boldness and shyness.

How to translate this to Graphic Design? The graffiti poster shows that not only the image itself, but also its medium and the way that it's displayed establish its meaning. And indeed, choice of medium and presentation are ever returning subjects in —at least my— graphic design education. But whereas common practice prescribes these three (form, medium and presentation) to be in line, and complement each other in order to establish a clear message, we could also make them deliberately contradictory. Setting one step forward in form,

one back in medium and one sideways in presentation. Forming together a shy, hesitant meaning, ever flittering around in infinite indecisiveness.

And this I think, is what it really boils down to, all those moments in a design process where the designer makes some clear 'design decisions' to establish a univocal design and cuts down on useless clutter, can also be moments to not make any decision at all, to add clutter on clutter on clutter. Not with the aim to convince the viewer of how complex the subject really is, but to show the viewer how real doubt really is.

chapter three.
meta-grammar.

* due to privacy issues, I won't display the here described image, which I stumbled upon on my instagram-feed.

Leaning her head on her right hand, she stares slightly down at me, her eyes showing that played kind of surprise when someone looks at you in a condescending way that questions your abilities to do what you're threatening to do and says: 'Pfff'. Her head is captured in a grey rectangle that reads Photo Booth, and which floats on top of an Apple-desktop that contains so many screenshot files that they start piling up on each other. The whole composition is displayed on Instagram, which is framed by the black frame of my MacBook Pro. All and all it looks a lot like a selfie.*

Our social media feeds function very similar to publicity. Most ads are designed to be easily relatable to their target-audience and so make a quick impression. To further narrow down their public, ads are issued in a context where they are expected to

reach as big a part of their target-audience as possible —a magazine about cars features different ads than a reader's digest. The advance of big data has enabled social media to perfect this strategy and set it in overdrive. The algorithms that determine which posts you get to see on your feed are programmed to serve you only relatable posts. Since any information that challenges your worldview too much, would slow down the speed by which you scroll and swipe, like or not like, and so provide them with data.[14.] Data which are then fed back into the algorithm to further perfect its capability to target your interests. The feed is thus literally a feed, serving us easy digestible baby food, that keeps us gazing in full attention but without critical reflection.

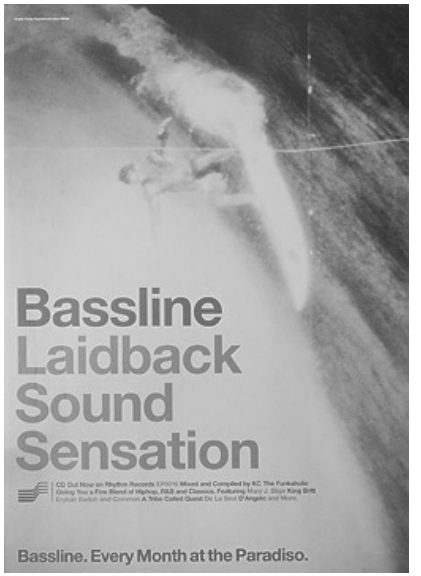
The selfie that confronts the viewer with the camera that took the picture, might be one of those moments that diverge just enough to slow down the speed at which we roll through the images in front of us. The image isn't highly different from what we mostly see in selfie culture, a lot of selfies feature the smartphone that took it, when people photograph themselves in a mirror for example. But the slight change in this setting by deliberately posting a screenshot of yourself in your Photo Booth camera, instead of the picture that Photo Booth took, takes just this next step to be more than the 99th selfie passing by. By not only showing the image, but also the medium that took it, the image refocuses the viewers gaze from the image itself to its framework and its modes of production. Herewith it stands in a long tradition, think for example of Magritte's *The*

Treachery of Images, that with the words 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' reveals itself as painting, and not as a pipe. It forms a distinction between what an image shows and what an image is.

And what the image is, is in this case a selfie made with Photo Booth on my Instagram-feed. The moment the viewer becomes aware of the medium with which the image was created, it's a small step to also become aware of the medium in which it is presented: the Instagram-feed. It snaps our focus out of staring into our feed and towards looking at our feed. It presents us not anymore with pictures to like or dislike, it presents us with the very fact that we are either liking or disliking pictures, making us thus aware of a third option, that we can also decide to stop with either liking or disliking images as a whole, that we can shut down the browser and the arrays of images passing us by.

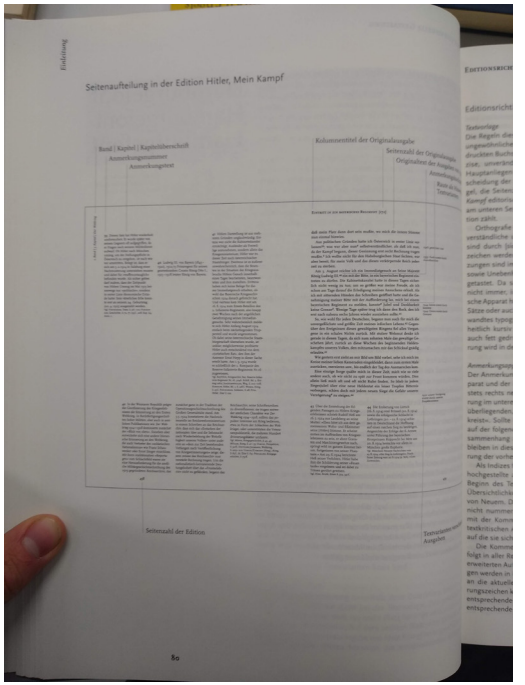
The notion of an image not only displaying itself, but also how it's been constructed, is something that Experimental Jetset has been exploring for a long time. By incorporating elements like folds, cuts and Helvetica —which in their view refers to nothing but itself and graphic design as a whole, as a

medium— they aim to refer to the designs materiality, to its construct. To thus go against a market-logic that only tries to reflect its target-audience to get as much attention as possible.[15.] The use of Helvetica for this might be disputable,[16.] but in the following poster, announcing the release of a Bassline-cd (Bassline was a clubnight in Paradiso), the fold might break the surface of the design just enough to, along with notifying us of a cd and a clubnight, also notify us of the fact that we're looking at a piece of paper that's been made to get us to go and buy a cd. It steps out



of the logic that merely wants as much attention for its message as possible and reroutes the attention of the viewer to the way the message has been constructed.

So, in the same way as the selfie can make us aware of the feed that scrolls by before us, we can also become aware of the ads, posters, neon, traffic signs etc., that pass us by in the analogue world. The moment that we see these images not merely for their message, but also as a construct, built to send us this message. This moment the non-stop flow of information coming towards us comes to a hold for a short moment, enables us to reflect on it, and for this tiny moment, we stand outside its reach.



Einleitung

Seitenaufteilung in der Edition Hitler, Mein Kampf

Band | Kapitel | Kapitelüberschrift
Anmerkungsnummer
Anmerkungstext

Kolumnentitel der Originalausgabe
Seitenzahl der Originalausgabe
Originaltext der Ausgabe

Seitenzahl der Edition

Textvarianten der Ausgaben

80

Editionsrichtlinien

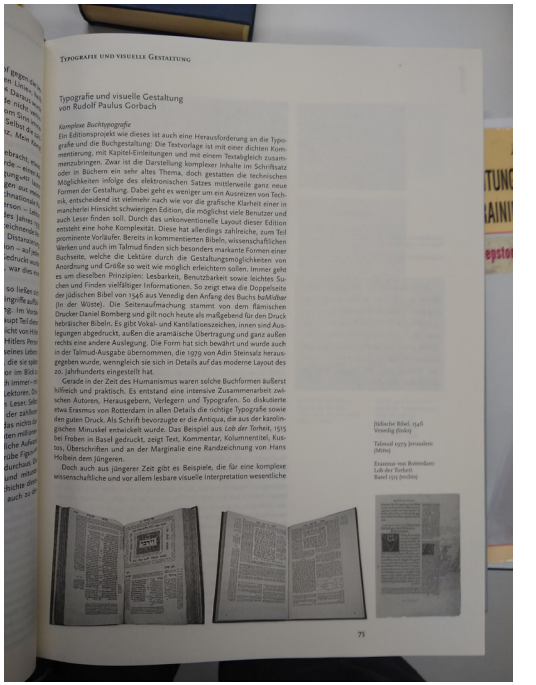
Textvorlage
Die Regeln dieser ungewöhnlichen Edition sind durch den gedruckten Buchtext [illegible] zise, unverändert Hauptvarianten [illegible] schedung des [illegible] gel, die Seiten [illegible] Kampf editorisch [illegible] am unteren Sa[illegible] tion zählt.

Orthografie
verständliche [illegible] sind durch [illegible] zeichen wenig [illegible] zungen sind im [illegible] sowie Unebenheiten getastet. Da [illegible] nicht immer, [illegible] sche Apparat [illegible] Sätze oder aus [illegible] wandtes typog[illegible] heitlich kursiv [illegible] auch fett gedr[illegible] rung wird in de[illegible]

Anmerkungen
Der Anmerkun[illegible] parat und den [illegible] stets rechts n[illegible] rung im unter[illegible] überlegenden [illegible] kreist». Sollte [illegible] auf der folgen[illegible] sammenhang [illegible] bleiben in dies[illegible] rung der vorhe[illegible]

Als Indizes [illegible] hochgestellte [illegible] Beginn des Te[illegible] Übersichtlichk[illegible] von Neuem. D[illegible] nicht nummer[illegible] mit der Kommi[illegible] textkritischen [illegible] auf die sie sich [illegible]

Die Kommen[illegible] folgt in aller Re[illegible] erweiterten Au[illegible] gen werden in [illegible] an die aktuelle [illegible] rungszeichen [illegible] entsprechende [illegible] entsprechende [illegible]



Typografie und visuelle Gestaltung

Typografie und visuelle Gestaltung
von Rudolf Paulus Gorbach

Komplexe Buchtypografie

Ein Editionsprojekt wie dieses ist auch eine Herausforderung an die Typografie und die Buchgestaltung: Die Textvorlage ist mit einer dichten Kommentierung, mit Kapitel-Einleitungen und mit einem Textabgleich zusammenzubringen. Zwar ist die Darstellung komplexer Inhalte im Schriftsatz oder in Büchern ein sehr altes Thema, doch gestatten die technischen Möglichkeiten infolge des elektronischen Satzes mittlerweile ganz neue Formen der Gestaltung. Dabei geht es weniger um ein Ausreizen von Technik, entscheidend ist vielmehr nach wie vor die grafische Klarheit einer in mancherlei Hinsicht schwierigen Edition, die möglichst viele Benutzer und auch Leser finden soll. Durch das unkonventionelle Layout dieser Edition entsteht eine hohe Komplexität. Diese hat allerdings zahlreiche, zum Teil prominente Vorläufer. Bereits in kommentierten Bibeln, wissenschaftlichen Werken und auch im Talmud finden sich besonders markante Formen einer Buchseite, welche die Lektüre durch die Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten von Anordnung und Größe so weit wie möglich erleichtern sollen. Immer geht es um dieselben Prinzipien: Lesbarkeit, Benutzbarkeit sowie leichtes Suchen und Finden vielfältiger Informationen. So zeigt etwa die Doppelseite der jüdischen Bibel von 1546 aus Venedig den Anfang des Buchs *baMidbar* (In der Wüste). Die Seitenaufmachung stammt von dem flämischen Drucker Daniel Bomberg und gilt noch heute als maßgebend für den Druck hebräischer Bibeln. Es gibt Vokal- und Kantillationszeichen, innen sind Auslegungen abgedruckt, außen die aramäische Übertragung und ganz außen rechts eine andere Auslegung. Die Form hat sich bewährt und wurde auch in der Talmud-Ausgabe übernommen, die 1979 von Adin Steinsalz herausgegeben wurde, wenngleich sie sich in Details auf das moderne Layout des 20. Jahrhunderts eingestellt hat.

Gerade in der Zeit des Humanismus waren solche Buchformen äußerst hilfreich und praktisch. Es entstand eine intensive Zusammenarbeit zwischen Autoren, Herausgebern, Verlegern und Typografen. So diskutierte etwa Erasmus von Rotterdam in allen Details die richtige Typografie sowie den guten Druck. Als Schrift bevorzugte er die Antiqua, die aus der karolingischen Minuskel entwickelt wurde. Das Beispiel aus *Lob der Torheit*, 1515 bei Froben in Basel gedruckt, zeigt Text, Kommentar, Kolumnentitel, Kustos, Überschriften und an der Marginalie eine Randzeichnung von Hans Holbein dem Jüngeren.

Doch auch aus jüngerer Zeit gibt es Beispiele, die für eine komplexe wissenschaftliche und vor allem lesbare visuelle Interpretation wesentliche

Jüdische Bibel, 1546
Venedig (links)

Talmud 1979 Jerusalem
(Mitte)

Erasmus von Rotterdam:
Lob der Torheit
Basel 1515 (rechts)

75

Hitler, Mein Kampf. A critical Edition. is a new edition of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, produced and published by the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. Published in 2016, it was made with the intention to deal with the end of the copyright on the original edition, which was due on the 31st of December 2015, after which it would be freely available on the internet despite the ban on selling the original in Germany. This new edition displays the pages of the original Mein Kampf on pretty much actual size, accompanied and surrounded by explanatory footnotes and comments. By applying it of contextual information, commentary and footnotes, the critical edition aims to change the function of the book: from propaganda, to information about this propaganda. Although also highly criticized —not in the least because of its monumental size that doesn't seem to fit such a despicable book— the attempt to deconstruct and thereby defuse the message of Hitler might be a realistic way to deal with content that can't be kept out of the public. The discussion about this can fill an entire paper though, so I here want to focus on the design.

The design that, just like the content contextualizes Mein Kampf, contextualizes itself. The first part of the book contains a detailed explanation of how the layout functions, breaking the whole grid down into separate parts and explaining every part's informational function. It informs the reader on the choice of typeface, and contains an informational section on complex book typography. This informational part on the typography functions much as the camera in the selfie picture, it's design that's not merely presenting you with information, but also shows you *how* it presents you with information. This transparency is little seen in the design world. A big part of this thesis has been about graphic design that consists of single images that aim to make an immediate impression, a big part of design though, also concerns itself with the structuring and ordering of information, and guiding the reader/viewer through it. This is the case with books, but also websites, signage in exhibitions, catalogues etc. An ever-returning commercial idea on this kind of design is that it should be 'invisible': websites should give a smooth user experience, signage in an exhibition should be clear and easy to follow, and typography should structure and present its content clearly. In all of which the aim is to keep the layer of design unnoticeable, so it doesn't obstruct in receiving the content. Of course, it's convenient for the reader/viewer to not all by him/herself make sense out of a bulk of information, to be informed about where is what in an exhibition, and to not lose time staring at unclear typography. But not only does this in

the end only serve the high pace that life takes in modern western society, the high pace that visual agrammaticality aims to disrupt. It also takes away all the agency from the reader/viewer in how s/he perceives the content. It steers the reader/viewer in how and in what order s/he obtains information, and thereby also influences what meaning is derived from it, and thus influences the viewer's viewpoint on the information at hand.

The design of the critical edition of Mein Kampf deludes this function of design as a steering instrument, simply by informing the reader/viewer about the way it steers her/him through the content of the book. This is maybe not as disrupting for the speed in which the information is obtained, but it does give back agency to the reader/viewer in assessing the way the information is presented, and if s/he agrees with this presentation and the interpretation of its meaning that this creates.

Both the selfie, Experimental Jetset's poster, and the critical edition of Mein Kampf are instances of how a design can alongside informing us, also inform us of the fact that— and how, we are being informed. And show us how design can concern itself with more than just communicating a message, it can take an ethical stance in *how* it communicates this message.

in conclusion.

The images that comprise the three parts of this paper all had a different intended meaning and function. What they meant for me however, was in one way very similar: the moment I laid eyes on them I came to a halt in whatever I was doing. Sometimes amazed, sometimes confused, sometimes intrigued. But always in wonder.

It's this halt, this wonder which is so often absent in the images around us. Effectiveness seems to almost always be the one and only goal of visual communication. From traffic signs to artist's books, to advertisements, to Instagram-posts, all images have been carefully designed to effectively communicate their message and serve nothing but their intended function. And this doesn't merely reflect a society and culture obsessed with effect, speed, and success, it also actively supports it by being the means of

transportation for a conglomeration of images whose main, underlying message often is that we need to have more, do more, and be more.

What I've been looking for in visual agrammaticality, is some kind of dysfunctionality, which may sound negative, but definitely isn't, for dysfunctionality is what's missing in a culture obsessed with effect. And it's this dysfunctionality that distorts, for one tiny moment, the stream of images making appeals upon us every day.

The variety of designs and images in this paper, that all dysfunction in a different way, show that there's not one formula for an agrammatical image. The context in which it exists is incredibly important, where the agrammaticality of a traffic sign stems from it confusing the context of expected clarity, the agrammaticality of a graffiti poster stems from it confusing the context of self-promotion. This means that there's no recipe of deliberate weirdness: adding a dash of illegibility here and a pinch of vagueness there. Once being off becomes the design's intention, being off is no longer dysfunctional.

What ties these images together, is thus not their specific look, but far more the approach with which they were created. An approach that's not solely concerned with delivering what was asked and communicating the intended message (either self-initiated or of a client), but an approach that shows a belief about what design should be and do, no matter its intended message or function. This approach may show a disinterested exuberance, it may show a nonsensical touch, it may show doubt

and hesitation, or it may show its very way of showing. But it always shows that graphic design can, besides communicating a message, be aware of how it communicates this message, and that this doesn't have to be in the most effective way possible.

It's an approach like Bartleby, undetermined by any appeal or any convention. For no matter what the question is, it answers on its own terms, and not on those of the one who asks.

And it's that approach that leads to those tiny details that throw you off. Not so much that it becomes utterly incomprehensible, or so extreme that it becomes a statement. It's that slight weirdness in which we encounter this agrammatical approach. That slows information down. That shows that there is more than what has been laid out for you. That lets you stand in wonder, lets time goes by and lets meaning waiting. Waiting and waiting and waiting, while you're searching for that word that lays on the tip of your tongue but you just cannot grasp.

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14. Felix Stalder, "How machines think. I: Cybernetics." (lecture series at the ZhdK, 2019)

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1. Chaos UK, *Short Sharp Shock*, 1984, Designer unknown.
2. Bernard Chadebec, *2 Securites, c’est le pied*, 1977
3. Bernard Chadebec, *des... ...ordre,* year unknown.
4. Traffic sign encountered in the Vosges, close to the border of Germany and France, year and designer unknown.
5. Ruben Pater, *Drone Survival Guide*, 2013.
6. Tomma Abts, *Ert*, 2003.
7. Poster found on a wall outside of the Zhdk in Zurich, designer, title and year unknow
8. Rene Magrite, *The Treachery of Images,* 1929.
9. Experimental Jetset, *Bassline poster 3*, 1998
10. Rudolf Paulus Gorbach, Dagmar Nathalie Gorbach - Büro Gorbach, *Hitler, mein Kampf. Eine kritische Edition*, 2016

I look out the window and I wonder at it all,
Staring at the symbols that decorate the wall,
And everybody's calling to come and join them all,
But I can't go with no one till I understand the call.
— Zounds, *Demystification*.

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