

Discussion after Urban Alphabets Workshop in Liverpool- Workshop 3 (Saturday) (Interview with 1 participant)

Type: individual interview

Place: FACT – Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, 88 Wood Street, Liverpool L11DO

Time: 12:00-12:30pm

Length: 27:28 min (almost full length is recorded- maybe few min in the beginning missing)

Interviewer: Suse Miessner

Interviewees: 1 workshop participant

Abbreviations: P: participant

Formatting: [...] added comments to understand discussion better
text *gestures, expressions from the group*

P: ... the different way that we drew letters and then they merge them all together. So the others kind of...

Suse: Ah. They kind of equalize.

P: Yeah. Kind of average. An average letter. So I wonder what the Y is going to look.

Suse: You know what it's called?

P: Handwriting - Average Handwriting Project *[searching]*

Suse: The Universal Typeface Project?

P: Oh yeah. Look at that one. There is a website with quite an interactive part, quite useful... That might be the name of it... Maybe try that. They've had big a sponsor.

Suse: It's funny how these brands are doing advertising these days *[Universal Typeface Project is sponsored by Bic]*.

P: Yeah.

Suse: This summer there was this project ... Smart, the car, was doing a campaign, I think in Lisbon. They transformed the traffic lights. Basically it was an interactive traffic light. So while you are waiting... There was like a booth filming people and they would dance and while there was the red light on, the red light would be transformed.

P: So the red light was dancing?

Suse: Exactly, just as the person inside the booth was dancing.

P: So. This is quite interesting *[The Universal Typeface Project <http://theuniversal-typeface.com/home>]*. What I was just thinking about was to accumulate a font from a city or within proximity.

Suse: Would be interesting.

P: Laying same letters over and getting a picture. Probably it wouldn't be fantastic...

Suse: Yeah, it depends very much. Because this *[the Universal Typeface Project]* is very much on this black on white whereas in my case there would be tons of colors.

P: Yeah.

Suse: But it's still interesting as a reference project. To kind of like...

P: You can also have both and see the average and see the individual letters. *[On their website]*

Suse: It is interesting.

P: Yeah it is. Because once you start... especially, you know, the more complex letters. Probably the R would be a good one. Just interestingly that "Q", the one that your mouse is on, is very different but it's just how the person has interpreted ... then a lowercase Q is gone into it...

Suse: Because it's kind of like. If you don't see the outcome first... I would be writing lowercase letters probably.

P: Yeah.

Suse: So it's much more common to use those.

P: I suppose it depends on the person, does it? Because I personally would generally write all lowercase joined up so if I was forced to write single letters individually ...

reference:
Universal
Typeface
Project

future idea:
analyze +
compare images

Suse: It's true.

P: I might still be inclined to use lowercase but... Without knowing the concept.

Suse: So you know. It's totally not the same but... I think what's quite funny is looking at what letter do we want to select? It's loading now... So basically this kind of shows... You can look at all B's. *[Looking at the B's on the website]* Look at all B's at the same time. It's quite interesting how different it can actually be. But then it's not just the form; it's also the colors and the context. I think that's interesting about this project. This was crazy. So it's not just one user uploading the same B all over. We have seen in one workshop with one of the Helsinki schools the B was in such a prominent place in where we were doing the workshop... we did it in this 70s outdoor shopping area, because they were second-graders and we couldn't just send them out by themselves. So the B was in such a prominent place that almost all of them, maybe 5 out of 6 groups had that B.

P: That's quite interesting. Because in itself it's not that new B. If you kind of constrain a certain group of people to a certain area, it would say something about how they are drawn to commonalities and how people are drawn to follow the crowd and go for the obvious and compared to how people instinctively come and go and find obscure things....

Suse: Like there are.

P: What's that thing, that's come up?

Suse: This is kind of... I left it there... It's been uploaded from here I think. Over there, there is a magnetic board where I put up magnets from all the different cities I have been to as different alphabets and then there is the iPad for people to just test out the app. And this is what they do: They just take a photo of one of the magnets. So this is basically the first time that the app was reviewed by Apple. Because before something goes to the store, Apple looks at it. So it was funny to see... so suddenly you know where they are, where they are reviewing your stuff. Lately I had another one that was reviewed in California.

P: More expected...

Suse: Actually, this was expected for me totally...

P: North India? The geographic location was expected... That's the geographic location, California, so you assume that they do something from there... So you are saying... So that's maybe same person doing it again? So it's the same person... *[Wondering about a certain B]*

P: Is it the same? It's gold with black background...

Suse: Well, it's not exactly the same photo but the same letter...

P: That's why I'm wondering. Yeah, this is gold. So probably it is the same place...

Suse: Or the branding is like that....

P: The other thing that's interested me for a long time is how graphic designers or sign writers, people making logos and signs for shops and businesses, how common certain typefaces actually are... It's probably quite hard to extrapolate, but it would be quite interesting...

Suse: I remember I've been doing a typography project in 2nd semester of studies or something where I ended up choosing "Helvetica Neue", just one font, then around in the city that I studied in and looked for which shops are using it and in which way and for what reason and what it represents.

P: Yeah.

Suse: That was quite interesting also... I don't know where I would have it right now but it was interesting to look at... mainly it was banks and then there were some other exceptions, like shops, but ... kind of what you can express with a certain typeface. Because that's what I think the people who made the signs ... or make the branding because it probably goes from there... That's probably what they analyze: What can it express? Which colors can it express what?

P: It has a lot to do with authority... there is books written about it... how typefaces connect... you know, age, wisdom, reliability...

Suse: But then I'm still surprised that we don't really have the Mc Donald's M's too much.

P: 2-3- 4- 5... maybe 5

Suse: And then we have this. This is quite interesting. Because I can still see where it comes

future point of
analysis: group
behavior

spaces of rep-
resentation:
looking closely
at the website

from. But the one that actually like everyone in Finland would recognize is this one... and it's there probably just as often or even more as the Mc Donald's M.

P: So what's that?

Suse: So it's the Tesco of Finland. We have two big ones: It's like S-Market. And everyone knows the S of the S market because there is K-Market, K-Market. So they have quite same name and it's super-common in Finland. S-Market, K-Market. That's how the emphasis is actually on the S and on the K. The rest doesn't matter so much... And then this is also super-Finnish: Suomalainen Kirjakauppa is the Finnish Bookstore.

P: Yeah.

Suse: You know it's like a book. It works. It's quite nice.

P: Yeah.

Suse: It took me a while to figure out that it actually works...

P: Contrastingly. Is there as many of the K's as of the S'?

Suse: I don't think so... But it might be that,... especially with the kids' workshops it might be that there was a S-Market in that area and not a K-Market. That's the K' there is 1-2-3-4-5.

P: That's still few... Is that all?

Suse: Yeah. So that is interesting.

P: Quickly aside: There is a lot of emphasis on graphic design in the UK. There is a lot more dependency on it. So all of the supermarkets in the UK are still kind of feel like progressed in some way over the years, whereas to me this feels quite 90s, 80s almost.

Suse: It's probably from that time. Quite sure. It's probably been the same forever.

P: And it's never been changed. It's been there, we've got no need to change it.

Suse: I guess, no. There is not so much competition... The country is maybe small enough not to care so much.

P: Yeah. That's probably it.

Suse: But I feel that smaller shops put more emphasis on graphic design than in other countries. So there is a lot of quite generic somethings in many countries. These kinds of whatever letters they might be. That's I feel is a bit better in Finland, that you feel like someone thought about this and not just put it up.

P: Yeah. I think that's about size of the business and how much they want to stand out.

Suse: Yeah. In general there is quite a big emphasis on graphic design in Finland also. But maybe not in the big business level so much... But then, well look at Nokia, they have done a lot of really great stuff, not just technology-wise but also interface wise at some point. And then they kind of forgot innovating and then they died.

P: Yeah. True.

Suse: Pretty much died. I mean now they are only doing cameras. I think it's kind of a different emphasis on where you put your energy.

P: So they do cameras? They only do cameras in Finland?

Suse: They still sell some phones, but Microsoft bought them, so they still have ... so Microsoft is now producing the phones that have Nokia on it.

P: But they made cameras as well?

Suse: The only patent that they are still owning is actually on some camera-thing, some special camera-something for mobile phones....

P: Oh, really? All right.

Suse: And then of course then there is what they used to do. They used to be a rubber-boot company. It's now a different company, but that what they still do in Finland... Other than that they're doing nothing. It's really funny... So, what else? Let's look at the Liverpool alphabet. It's now going to be your alphabet. [<http://www.ualphabets.com/CityAlphabetLiverpool.php>]

P: Oh, it is?

Suse: So it is based on geolocation I'm then generating these city alphabets and those change over time. I think that's really nice. It's always the latest letter from that city. Latest A uploaded from Liverpool is always going to be in the alphabet. Then I always make these videos about how the alphabet of one city developed over time. Maybe we take the Helsinki one... [<https://vimeo.com/104302308>] It changes more over time. So basically just afterwards I'm generating this video of how people uploaded stuff. I find it super-fascinating. I could look at it forever... That's now the B-time...

90s design of K + S market logos > outsider's perspective on representation of space

P: Yeah. And the S is in competition with the bookstore and the supermarket.

Suse: Then there is the R, which is like R-Kioski, like a small market.

P: Convenience store.

Suse: I guess something like that. That's also very common... And then this one is Finnish Post.

P: *(laughing)* dot?

Suse: It's like Posti or Post, and it actually has the dot on the letterboxes. So that usually just has that box and nothing else...

P: That's amazing that a brand can rely on just a dot.

Suse: It's about the color combination really.

P: Oh yeah.

Suse: So if the dot would have any other color you wouldn't see it as Posti, but...

P: Yeah, but still just to rely on, that's how I understand.

Suse: It's so strange. But it works. And then there is the international Parking P. Then we took a workshop with first graders, so we just took them to the yard and explained a bit about contrast... and then they just did that... And this is a special class of boys that are socially... I don't know what to say. They were really nice guys when we were there... And the A is also super-Finnish, that's Alko, where you get your alcohol.

P: All right yeah.

Suse: And then I did some walking tour in the evening. And then you start thinking that it becomes much more metropolitan than it actually is...

P: There is a lot lit up signs...

Suse: We had to go to the shopping area basically.

P: Yeah.

Suse: Then you see all of that... and it's like: What? This is not Helsinki to me, really *(laughing)* But it's what it becomes then for a short while...

P: Yeah the B is in the wrong place...

Suse: Yeah, sometimes people just upload stuff in wrong places. That's where I try to clean the database daily but really if I have a few hundred uploads, like after a workshop, going through every and each and looking if it's right... I think that's something on the website that you can actually scroll through the city alphabet over time...
[Going through City Alphabets]

P: You have written the code or something to generate them by itself?

Suse: Yeah.

P: Does it update by itself?

Suse: No. It's a video. It's done once it's done. It's a video after all... But I should just implement a slider on the website where you see this, where you could actually go back...

P: That must be possible...

Suse: It's not hard. I just need to do it... It should be quite easy, it's more about how many images you load, because as you see the website sometimes loads quite slow if you have slow internet connection... or rather slow because it's always 40 images that you are loading and even though you are loading them optimized in small sizes it's still 40 images... So that's something that's technically not so easy and I'm not the super-great, super-awesome programmer, who has learned it like proper computer scientists, but I just make things work.

P: Hm. Yeah I never really looked into....

Suse: But if you are doing typography and graphic design, are you doing web or are you doing print?

P: Oh well, in my current job I tend to do very much websites and certainly my knowledge of code is pretty limited, so my job itself doesn't really need it, so I haven't really developed it myself. I've learned what I need to but...

Suse: Exactly. It doesn't make sense to kind of... I'm never like: I'm going to learn a new programming language.

P: Yeah. I want to go on to courses... university courses or so...

Suse: I think places like FACT or there is this hacker space here... I met them yesterday. I think those guys are probably running some kind of courses. And FACT is also kind of trying to re-figure out what they should be in future, because just having exhibitions is not enough and having workshops is great but these simple-coding-intro-workshops.

interesting re-
alization about
video: letter
competition

dark + lit up
letters =
metropolitan:
space of repre-
sentation

That's I think cities actually need... We have quite a bit of that in Helsinki, for free.

P: Right. I think that's the issue when it comes to code is that there is very little teaching to be funded.

Suse: Yeah. That's a problem. I think we have enough people who are just like: "I know this. I can teach you this."

P: Yeah.

Suse: They might teach you like the really rough intro. Like 5x 2h or so. They just try to teach you some introduction to Processing or one of those platforms for creative coding... But I think it's great really. That's how someone can learn and you feel like you have contributed to something. Because that is what this whole open-coding-scene is about. You are sharing the knowledge you have. And I'm also starting to be active in these kinds of forums where people ask "I need to fix this, in this and this language, what would be the best way?". I think it's just great if you know... because when I started I was totally relying on that. And I'm still relying on it when I do iOS programming. I still need help in certain things. So that kind of community is quite developed, I'd say. It's just making these people run those courses for no money isn't always easy... but yeah, one of our teachers is now teaching HTML/CSS once a month for free. It's really really basic, but it's good to start with. From there you can go on.

P: Yeah. You need a basis.

Suse: And then it only makes sense when you have a project. When you have a project... you know...

P: Yeah. What's the forum you rely on most?

Suse: Stackoverflow.

P: Ah, ok.

Suse: Especially with iOS. Actually with iOS Stackoverflow. Then I do OpenFrameworks, it's a C++ creative coding-framework. They have their own forum. Processing I'm not sure what they're using at this point.

P: Is your gallery that with the screen?

Suse: Yes.

P: So where does that come from?

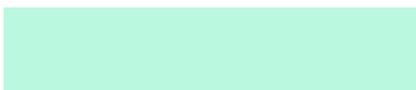
Suse: It's not in the gallery but where we were in the beginning. We can go and have a look actually.

[Some more talk about Processing]

[Giving out the survey]

[Going through exhibition space]

Legend:

changes in space: perception, action,...	
future development possibilities	
usability	
user types	
urban postcards	
other important	
specificity of a city?	
reference	
types of letters	

spaces of representation:
looking closely
at the website

interesting realization about
video: letter
competition

reference:
Universal
Typeface
Project

future idea:
analyze +
compare images

90s design of K
+ S market logos > outsider's
perspective on
representation
of space

future point of
analysis: group
behavior

dark + lit up
letters =
metropolitan:
space of representation