

ABSTRACT

Stereotypes in typography at first sight can be explained with the example of “Asian style fonts”, like for instance those typefaces on Chinese restaurant’s signs or printed on products packaging exported out from China. Fonts in which the Latin script seems not enough to express the Asian origin and they need a visual features that somehow refers to the Chinese culture (often the brush stroke) in order to attract Western consumers. A first example of this particular font style in use appeared on a poster from a French bicycle company (Clément bicycle) around the 1906 Fig.1. Obviously the Asian example is not the only one, different script from Latin are stereotypically latinized in the Sixties, it’s a real *cultural appropriation*.

Speaking about stereotypes in typography there’s also the enormous field of *visual appropriation* or decorative typography. With *visual appropriation* I mean the act of translating a specific characteristic of an object into a typographic feature. How a fonts for Emmental¹ cheese looks like Fig.2? And what about a typeface for a metal chains factory? In the Sixties typography has changed greatly in this sense, thanks to photocomposition and transfer-lettering techniques. The biggest part of type designers and graphic designers, who handle and make use of typography, remained in a state of distressing conformity. According to Jean Larcher² the principal reason for this lack of immagination is so-called leggibility.

To complete the circle, there’s also the *expressive appropriation*, that has an important role in this stereotypical overviews of typography. In general terms typography is a meaningful arrangement of letters, expressive typography add a new layer over the existing meaning to accentuate the purpose and the function, it can be made through the design of the font or through a creative arrangement of letters. How a font that has to express something broken should look like? Regarding the expressive typography, the onomatopeia in comic books Fig.3 are considered part of this field because the letters shape must express a sound or a particular noise.

I personally see a sort of stereotype system even into the *standardization of logotypes*. To be more clear, nowadays, brands that started their business straddle XX and XXI century such as Google, Spotify, Airbnb and many more (all technology based, offering a digital solution to differents fields) are changing their logos using an anonymous Grotesk typeface Fig.4. The same is happening in fashion magazines, all following the same line using a Didot/Bodoni like typeface.

These are the four sections that will drives my research (*Cultural appropriation, visual appropriation, expressive appropriation* and *standardization*). To conclude, this research is about stereotypes and appropriations in the field of typography, investigating solutions and techniques used for comunicate something more than a simple message through letters. Often these typefaces are considered as bad examples of type design, therefore where’s the border line between good and bad, professional and amateur in graphic and type design? This topic is connected to DIY design, usually made by amateur graphic designers, that are producing flyers and poster for small festivals and parties.

¹ Emmental Swiss cheese with holes.

² Jean Larcher French lettering artist and calligrapher (1947—2015).



Fig.1 Cultural appropriation.
Clement Cycles — Poster (1906).

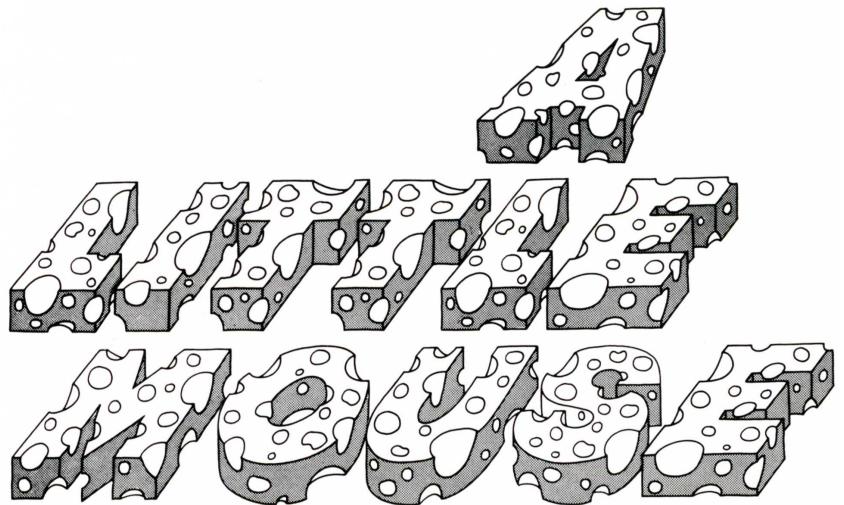


Fig.2 Visual Appropriation.
Cheese lettering — Fantastic
Alphabets, Jean Larcher.



Fig.3 Expressive appropriation.
Onomatopeia — Asterix Comics.

Google *airbnb* Spotify

Google *airbnb* Spotify®

Fig.4 Standardization.
Everybody fall in line article.
<http://ohnotype.co/blog>