TYPINGLOT

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ABSTRACT

TypingLot is an ongoing project about urban typography. Project consists of a collection of type photographs showcased online at http://typinglot.com and a software which allows its users to typeset by using the letters in this collection. There are more than thousand type photographs in the collection taken in urban environments mostly in the New York and New Jersey area. New Orleans, San Francisco, Helsinki, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are some other cities happen to be presented with a small number of types in this collection. TypingLot enrolls amateur type design in a serious manner, thus acknowledging that society's visual and material culture is not solely the product of professional design activity. Also, at an ideological level street is beautiful. What makes the typographic life on the street more beautiful than a designer or typographer's screen are the transformations of type due to material being used, or the texture, or mis-applications, implementations by the crafts man. More specifically about this project, slight bulges caused by the photographic distortions are also added to these imperfections.

ON TYPINGLOT

Typologic and photographic surveys in typography research are very common practices. In fact, often times in design research photography is used as an observation tool to define a problem rather than a formal documentation or exploration. However in a field like typography which is often 2D and very compositional, photography can be a major tool not only for documentation but also formal investigations and categorizations. One can ask why represent something 2D on a 2D plane and the question would be quite legitimate if the discussion was about publication typography. In the case of TypingLot subject matter is urbanscape and the types documented are rarely on a reproducible surface. The only way to represent those types seems like photographing.

In the history of photography, especially in the U.S. there are inspiring works by William Eggleston, John Margolies and Lee Friedlander which displays types in the photographic medium. Eggleston's mature work is characterized by its ordinary subject-matter. As Eudora Welty noted in her introduction to The Democratic Forest, an Eggleston photograph might include "old tyres, Dr Pepper machines, discarded air-conditioners, vending machines, empty and dirty Coca-Cola bottles, torn posters, power poles and power wires, street barricades, one-way signs, detour signs, No Parking signs, parking meters and palm trees crowding the same curb." So, often times even if he did not mean to document solely type, he could not escape the appearance of type in his photographs. Similarly John Margolies' Roadside America, road side signs are a very important aspect of his Americana landscape. Still Margolies' focus is very suburban and too wide to isolate type. Urban scale is more reflected in Lee Frielander's work which includes shop-window reflections, posters and signs, which tend to compress

spatial depth, however he is always very much more interested in the character and this is an overriding factor to recognize type in his work.

In the urban scale, it is hard to find a well rounded collection rather than scattered bits and pieces of photographs of certain types. However Paul Shaw's urban lettering walks which are day tours, dedicated to seeking out beautiful, odd and intriguing examples of lettering in the streetscapes of a single city are the example of this kind of an endeavor one of a kind. In his body of work the traces of his urban research is seen apparently. Also he documents types, color, kerning, texture, composition… almost all typographic concepts can be studied on his photographs. His research areas encompass a wide range of different materials such as gravestones to store signs, from urban way showers to commercial publications. Obviously his work is an important evidence to justify the efforts of TypingLot in the research realm.

TypingLot enrolls amateur type design in a serious manner, thus acknowledging that society's visual and material culture is not solely the product of professional design activity. Also, at an ideological level street is beautiful. What makes the typographic life on the street more beautiful than a designer or typographer's screen are the transformations of type due to material being used, or the texture, or mis-applications, implementations by the crafts man. More specifically about this project, slight bulges caused by the photographic distortions are also added to these imperfections.

TypingLot started in January 2012 on Instagram, a photo sharing platform for mobile media. Visual style of Instagram with its rigid square format and color correction filters which streamlines the light on various photographs implies a typologic depository. This was one of the inspirations for a typologic typographic

survey. In the case of general use of Instagram, the main purpose of this formatting should be about streamlining photographs sent from various different social contexts. However the use of Instagram did not have anything to do with social publicizing of these types which are shot on the streets but it was more about geographically tagging and instantly cropping them to a square format. In TypingLot the type is isolated so not only the context but also even not the kerning can be observed.

In the future, project may evolve into a more participative phase in which TypingLot may serve as a global tag for typophilies around the world and the collection can be opened to participation of masses. Metadata such as time, location , etc., that these digital photographs contain, would be the key strength of this database. Over the time, various other interfaces may be designed in terms of timeline or geographic distribution of the types to serve to typography researchers from all over the world.