Case Report

LABORATORY PRACTICES APPLIED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL PROJECT

Práticas laboratoriais aplicadas no desenvolvimento de um projeto editorial independente

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ABSTRACT

Technological advances and overwhelming presence of digital tools in our day-to-day lives, necessarily have an impact on the practice of design, where we can increasingly find preference for the instantaneous and ephemeral communication channels, in detriment of manual or conventional reproduction techniques. Concerning teaching practices, and particularly in the areas of design, there is an increasing hunger for training based on digital tools, where the student is faced with the need to present an answer to a certain problem, using almost exclusively known graphic software's. This article aims to demonstrate, through a practical example, how students can be encouraged to look for graphic solutions through laboratory practices, using analogue tools, where the results presented were often shaped by this practice and not just a standard solution proposed by a software.

The example presented in this paper is based on the extracurricular editorial project, i.E. Magazine, that students of the Degree in Design and Graphic Arts Technology (DGAT) of the Polytechnic Institute of Tomar (PIT) have developed in recent years, with the objective of contributing to learning outside the classroom, encouraging the use of equipment and materials provided by the printing labs of this institution. This magazine is owned by DGAT students and has served as a platform for exploring the PIT printing laboratories, but also as a way for students to express themselves, without the commitment to respond to an exercise, program or problem placed in the classroom. The students that embrace this project are responsible for the choice of all the written content, for the external request for articles, for the collection or production of images and illustrations, for the design and layout, for the choice of materials and means of production, for the printing and finishing and for the distribution. In the first part of this paper, we pretend to address mainly issues related to independent publication – the term is used here, not as a closed and definitive characterization, but only in order to distinguish an area of editing, apart from the traditional means of creation,

RESUMO

Os avanços tecnológicos e a presença esmagadora de ferramentas digitais no nosso dia-a-dia, têm necessariamente um impacto na prática do design, onde podemos encontrar cada vez mais preferência pelos canais de comunicação instantâneos e efémeros, em detrimento das técnicas de reprodução manual ou convencional. No que diz respeito às práticas pedagógicas, e particularmente nas áreas do design, há uma fome crescente de formação baseada em ferramentas digitais, onde o aluno se vê confrontado com a necessidade de apresentar uma resposta a um determinado problema, utilizando quase exclusivamente software gráfico conhecido. Este artigo visa demonstrar, através de um exemplo prático, como os estudantes podem ser encorajados a procurar soluções gráficas através de práticas laboratoriais, utilizando ferramentas analógicas, onde os resultados apresentados foram muitas vezes moldados por esta prática e não apenas uma solução padrão proposta por um software.

O exemplo apresentado neste artigo baseia-se no projeto editorial extracurricular, i.E. Magazine, que os estudantes da Licenciatura em Design e Tecnologia Gráfica (DGAT) do Instituto Politécnico de Tomar (PIT) desenvolveram nos últimos anos, com o objetivo de contribuir para a aprendizagem fora da sala de aula, incentivando a utilização de equipamento e materiais fornecidos pelos laboratórios de impressão desta instituição. Esta revista é propriedade dos estudantes da DGAT e tem servido como plataforma para explorar os laboratórios de impressão do PIT, mas também como uma forma de os estudantes se expressarem, sem o compromisso de responder a um exercício, programa ou problema colocado na sala de aula. Os estudantes que abraçam este projeto são responsáveis pela escolha de todo o conteúdo escrito, pelo pedido externo de artigos, pela recolha ou produção de imagens e ilustrações, pelo design e layout, pela escolha de materiais e meios de produção, pela impressão e acabamento e pela distribuição.

Na primeira parte deste artigo, pretendemos abordar principalmente questões relacionadas com a publicação

production, dissemination and distribution – in order to understand its context and recognize how this kind of light-hearted edition, without resources and, almost always, without a commercial objective can influence the choice of tools, materials and resources, as a mean to produce a graphic object.

In a second part we will try to explore how the experimentation and exploration of traditional production techniques in a workshop context can lead the student to unexpected results, often imposed by technical, laboratory or time-based limitations related to the use of almost artisanal production techniques.

For a third part of this paper, we will present the approaches taken in the production of the sixth edition of the i.E. Magazine that usually starts with a set of limitations presented by the editor and that the students plan to solve as they explore the different solutions that laboratory practices allow. For each of the issues of this magazine it is essential to use the laboratory spaces offered by PIT, making the student conscious of a much wider reality that those they can found on the computer, on digital tools, or even within a traditional classroom.

With this article we hope to accomplish that having access to other, more experimental learning methods, allows amplifying the student's creative vision and makes it possible to improve the learning processes. The collaborative methodologies used in the context of a workshop are relevant in the practices of graphic and editorial design, placing the designer also as an author, collaborator and producer, capable of dictating high-value content and practical solutions. The review of creative processes and tools used, transforms the designer as an author, into a more informed and conscious professional, allowing the approach to traditional technologies and contributing to their recognition and applicability in a professional context.

independente - o termo é aqui utilizado, não como uma caracterização fechada e definitiva, mas apenas para distinguir uma área de edição, para além dos meios tradicionais de criação, produção, divulgação e distribuição - a fim de compreender o seu contexto e reconhecer como este tipo de edição leve, sem recursos e, quase sempre, sem um objetivo comercial pode influenciar a escolha de ferramentas, materiais e recursos, como meio de produzir um objeto gráfico. Numa segunda parte, tentaremos explorar como a experimentação e exploração de técnicas de produção tradicionais num contexto de oficina pode levar o estudante a resultados inesperados, muitas vezes impostos por limitações técnicas, laboratoriais ou temporais relacionadas com a utilização de técnicas de produção quase artesanal.

Para uma terceira parte deste trabalho, apresentaremos as abordagens adotadas na produção da sexta edição da revista i.E., que normalmente começa com um conjunto de limitações apresentadas pelo editor e que os estudantes pretendem resolver à medida que exploram as diferentes soluções que as práticas laboratoriais permitem. Para cada uma das edições desta revista é essencial utilizar os espaços laboratoriais oferecidos pela PIT, tornando o aluno consciente de uma realidade muito mais ampla que aqueles que pode encontrar no computador, em ferramentas digitais, ou mesmo dentro de uma sala de aula tradicional.

Com este artigo esperamos conseguir que o acesso a outros métodos de aprendizagem mais experimentais permita amplificar a visão criativa do aluno e torne possível melhorar os processos de aprendizagem. As metodologias colaborativas utilizadas no contexto de um workshop são relevantes nas práticas de design gráfico e editorial, colocando o designer também como autor, colaborador e produtor, capaz de ditar conteúdos de alto valor e soluções práticas. A revisão dos processos e ferramentas criativas utilizadas, transforma o designer enquanto autor, num profissional mais informado e consciente, permitindo a abordagem às tecnologias tradicionais e contribuindo para o seu reconhecimento e aplicabilidade num contexto profissional.

KEYWORDS

Independent Publication, Laboratory Practices, Workshop Production, Pedagogical Project

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Publicação Independente, Práticas Laboratoriais, Produção de Workshops, Projeto Pedagógico

1. INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING

Today the graphic designer presents himself with a different role, detached from the principles presented to us by the history of design, as it often comes up with the role of producer / editor of content and / or solutions. This feature is deeply explored by Lupton [1] or Margolin [2] and was named by Heller [3] like "designer as authorpreneur", in a junction of the words author and entrepreneur. This event can find its peak when we talk about self-publishing, independent publishing, author editing or fanzines, channels increasingly used by designers, illustrators and photographers to share their work or stating a conviction or orientation towards a particular and restricted set of readers.

The origin of this kind of self-published publications – often produced in a do-it-yourself approach and distributed in underground circuits – may be traced back to the 1920-30s with the appearance of the first fanzines [4]. These publications were basic, handcrafted, low-cost, limited-diffusion, and circuit-restricted objects, often associated with science fiction fans. Only later, in the 1950-60s, this sort of publication reach its peak when they became the main vehicle for the dissemination of the punk and comic scene [5]. However, the production of this type of independent publications does not seem to have ceased in the last decades and, even in Portugal, there is a growing interest in this communication vehicle, which is evident in the number of existing editions, the number of events and exhibitions devoted to this topic, or even to the scientific research that has been devoted to it.
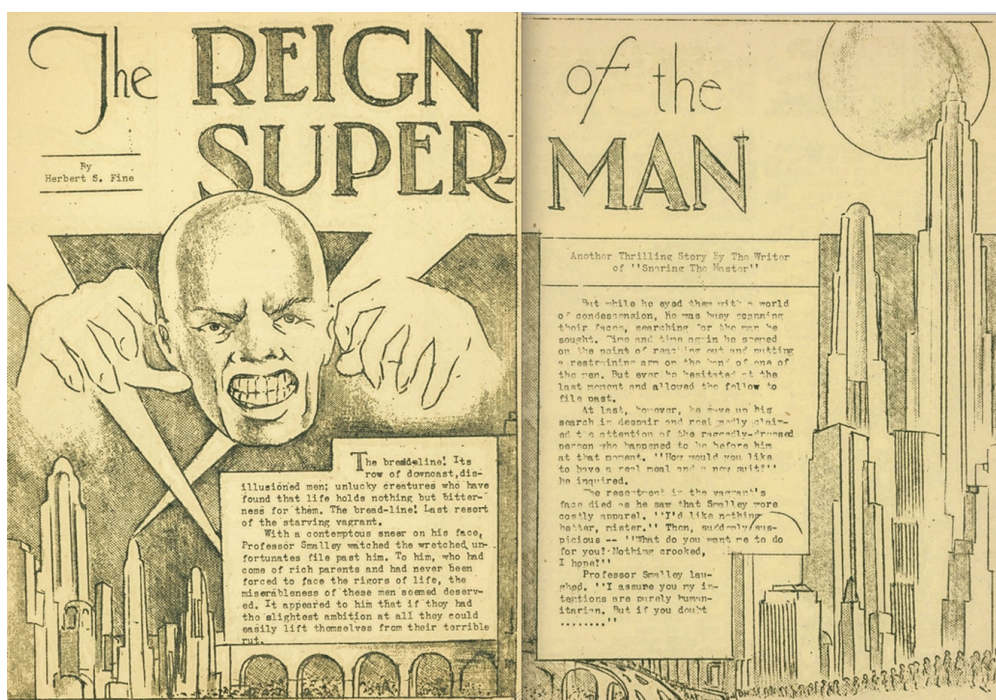

Fig.1
«The Reign of the Superman» a short story from the 1933 zine "Science Fiction: The Advance Guard of Future Civilization"
Source: the author's archive

As a reflection of today's society, with the emergence of the internet and the easy access to desktop publishing tools, many of these publications also take the form of online editions – complementary or not to a print edition – thus increasing the reach and distribution of these titles to then confined to a very restricted group [6]. These technological transformations will allow the arrival of a new generation of "publishers" who will produce their own content, design and print the publication without the need for great technical knowledge. The growing concepts such as printing-on-demand or web-to-print further enhances the ease

of producing self-edited or independent publications without the burden of high printing investment, as it becomes possible to print at a small cost [7].

But, despite this increasingly use of new information technologies in the context of self-publishing, there is also a growing commitment to return to the craft, underground, or do-it-yourself context, mainly associated with publications born in creative circles – where many titles proliferate – with a high aesthetic care visible either in design or in the choice of printing materials and techniques. Bártolo [8] states that this growing "enthusiasm for publishing" is also reflected in the spread of spaces dedicated to the distribution, sale and dissemination of this type of publication, as well as dedicated events and exhibitions.

However, as opposed to the producers of fanzines of the 1920s-30s, "by definition, self-taught amateurs without specific graphic or editorial learning" [6], now the publisher's profile has high level skills of graphic and editorial design. Thus this type of publications become increasingly bold graphically, selective in what materials and reproduction techniques to use, turning them often in hybrid objects or in so-called big books. This evolution occurs because design as a discipline is no longer dependent only on an external customer, but increasingly becomes a self-conscious discipline with its own audience [9].

2. PRODUCTION IN WORKSHOP CONTEXT

As described earlier, the designer integrated into a mainstream universe follows a different path from the designer who puts himself at the center of the creative and productive process of a given project, when stimulated by the desire to create and publish his own content. In this case, motivation may, in many situations, depend on a social or political context. But the familiarity with production spaces, as in the project presented below, can increase the skills to solve problems. The school, as a place of learning but simultaneously as a space for experimental production, will decisively enhance the creativity of the future designer. In laboratories or workshops, it is intended "to show the importance of teaching graphic design in the use of experimentation methods in which students are led to 'get their hands dirty'" [10].

These spaces dedicated to practical exploration have a particular profile when implanted in an academic context. Their users do not have a specific or definitive role and they must be prepared to adapt to the unforeseen during the printing process, but they should also be willing to cooperate and share their experience. "The workshop is an active space, with bridges to other contexts, industrial and traditional, collaborative in essence, with congenital predisposition to the spread, in which we participate. This is the nature of the impression and the workshop, to make an idea multiply and spread through contact." [11].

Fig.2
Example of the workshop space, equipment and materials available at Polytechnic letterpress lab *Source: the author*

This is how designers can most easily become authors and producers, not merely projecting themselves as someone who solves a communication problem, but often as the author of that problem and the producer of a solution. Lupton [1] describes this new professional as a "maker of content and shaper of experiences", a designer willing to get his hands dirty, face production problems that may occur while undertaking a project, prepared above all to find solutions and provide the final product. The collaborative and experimental character of these spaces in an educational context allows the student to explore their ability to design solutions that meet existing workshop conditions, preparing them for the possibility that the end result might not be the one originally intended. It is thus possible to explore the materiality of the end product as well, sometimes by taking advantage of chance or trial and error approaches, as well as combining the production resources in order to create new solutions to traditional problems.

3. I.E. MAGAZINE #6 CASE

The act of publishing something is still understood by many publishers as making an idea, opinion or point of view public. "To publish is to put yourself out there, by proclaiming that you have content that is worth sharing with other people. (…) Most publishing ventures, however, are not so much motivated by profit as by the universal human desire to share ideas through permanent, reproducible, exchangeable media." [12]. It was in this context of willingness to share that in 1998 a group of students came together to create a magazine whose content, design and production could be entirely from their responsibility, using only the tools and resources provided by the printing laboratories of the school.

Thus arose the Magazine i.E., as a vehicle for learning, experimentation and dissemination of what could be produced by students in a workshop context, independently, without having to answer to a teacher or customer. In 1998 and 1999 the numbers 0 and 1 were edited, but the fact that this was a project exclusively produced by the students dictated its non-continuity. However, this experience was not forgotten and the teachers themselves used this publication as an example of good practice. Thus, in 2013 re-emerged a group of students willing to give life to this publication, and to ensure the continuity of the project, now the publication has an editor (teacher) that will bridging the gap between students from different years of the Design Degree as well as Master students. Since then, nine more issues have been edited.

For each number of the magazine the editor usually create a set of technical or financial limitations, which the students should be able to solve. In the specific case of the sixth edition, used in this paper as a model, there was the premise of producing 500 different covers without using digital printing techniques. The students involved understood this limitation as a challenge and set out to explore the techniques of letterpress and silkscreen printing in articulation, in order to solve the problem presented. Using the typographic collection available at our lab – mostly made up of lead and wood letterpress type – different specimens were printed, photographed and then digitally treated to create a typographic composition for the magazine cover. Once this composition was created, it was time to use silkscreen printing in order to simulate a personalization for each cover. This was achieved because at each print was added a different colour, thus ensuring that each time a copy was printed, the ink was mixed differently. Cover printing paper – Fedrigoni Sirio Sabbia E20 290grs – has been selected to simulate the texture of the letterpress print.

Fig. 4
Overview of the variety of
covers created using silkscreen
printing techniques
Source: the author

In addition to the fact that the magazine's production reflect the exploration of different materials, technologies and equipment available in our lab, this project also tries to encourage type design. All typefaces used in the magazine are designed by students or alumni. In the issue five, it was launched in partnership with Adobe, a typeface design competition whose results were published in edition number six.

Fig. 5
Screen printing matrix used in
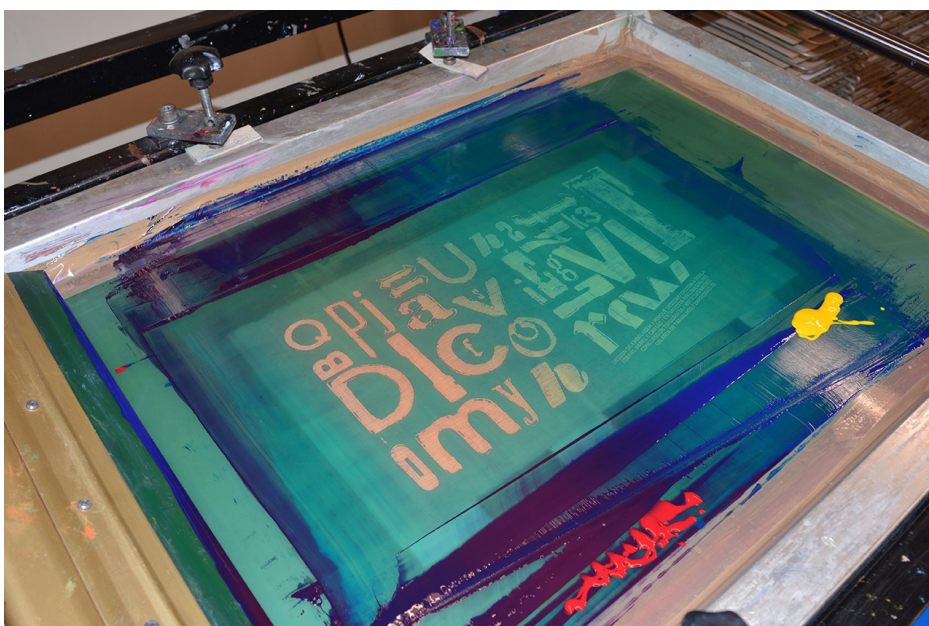magazine cover production
Source: the author

4. CONCLUSION

In current graphic production, the do-it-yourself practices have been assuming increasing importance, revealing themselves as privileged spaces of expression and artistic and personal experimentation. Indeed, if this kind of magazines have tended to be known only in restricted media, now there is a growing consumer interest in this kind of self-produced, independent an rudimentary produced.

In the specific case presented – i.E. Magazine # 6 – it was essential to use the laboratories where traditional letterpress or silkscreen printing could be experienced, making the student aware of a much broader reality beyond what they find on the computer, digital tools, or even within a traditional classroom. Having access to more experimental learning methods allows us to amplify the student's creative vision and is able to improve learning processes. The collaborative methodologies used in the context of a workshop are relevant in graphic design and editorial practices, placing the designer also as author, collaborator and producer, able to dictate content and practical solutions of high value. The improvement of the creative processes and the tools used, makes the designer as author, a more informed and conscious professional, allowing the approach to the technologies and contributing to their recognition and applicability in a professional context.

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