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From
Futura
to future

Letterpress as an artistic medium

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the rise of technology, letterpress usage for commercial purposes has declined, which has provided new opportunities for artists and other cultural practitioners as a new instrument with which to make artworks.

Some artists are attracted by the letterpress: its slow process using historical methods and the time to reflect during the printing process is unique.

These artists are passionate about keeping these practices alive, without much help from modern technology. The letterpress has evolved from pure text printing to the creation of works of art.

How has the fascination of letterpress evolved from the form of printing text to an art form, how are artists and graphic designers nowadays using this artform for their art and expression?

The main sources of information in this thesis has been interviews with Lina Nordenström, Thomas Gravemaker, Katherine Anteney, Olof Sandahl and Antony Harrington, as well as following the online event *United in Isolation* with letterpress workers from around the world.

Key words: letterpress, letterpress printing, craft, analogue, digital, text, types, artwork, collaboration

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Manicula (from Latin "little hand") is an old element in the written and visual culture of the West. In medieval, handwritten manuscripts, one may encounter long squiggly hands, which either emphasize an important passage, or simply wanted to point out a mistake.

The hand-painted hands indicate a human presence. Someone has been here; someone has been reading. And this reader has left not just a fingerprint, but a whole hand.

Manicula evolved with the spread of the printing press. The pointing hand is now become a punctuation mark, used by the author to emphasize something important, much like a footnote.

(Borg, Ulmaja, 2019, 25)

Introduction

In this master's thesis, I will investigate how the letterpress has evolved from text printing to art, dissect the fascination with the letterpress that leads people to still use this old process while the digital era brought so many new techniques that simplifies printing. I will also explain what the letterpress is, how it is used: the procedure of composing and where the process of typesetting text becomes an art piece.

When I started my education in art in the mid-90s, I had the opportunity to learn different printmaking techniques. Some years later when I started to work with letterpress printing, I felt that I

truly found my own way of making art. The combination of images, text and letters, ink, the craft, and the surprising wow moment when every print finally appears. Thrilling! I learnt bookbinding in the mid-90s which really fascinated me. When I read a book, besides enjoying the content, what truly engages my mind is the form, the physical design, the printing technique, and the visual means of expression. After learning this craft and starting to make my own books with blank sheets of paper, I felt the urge to fill these pages with my own content. I am not an author, or a poet and I saw the books more as an object, a work of art.

For a while, I also studied video. But ultimately, I noticed that I conceptualized video as a book format: scrolling pictures as diary notes and filmed movements. That is how I ended up in the letterpress workshop in the Royal University of Fine Art in Stockholm. Everything was always bringing me back to it. The workshop was housed in a 16th century stable in the backyard and provided a unique working environment. I found my place in this printing workshop, you might even call it love. I learnt hand setting and the process of printing, and I combined it with my previous experience of various printmaking techniques and bookbinding. It was so exciting! I could control the whole creative process end to end. I never felt the same using digital technologies. I had no complete understanding of everything that happened, and that led to a certain result, for some reasons beyond my control.

The quality of the paper, the blackness of the ink, the dull sound of the machine and the beautiful shapes of the wood and the lead types, the uniqueness of each print truly cast its spell on me. Somehow all of this provides a feeling of genuineness and authenticity. Whenever an impulsive get breathing space in the process, that is when I set some text, let my thoughts play freely, and create new ways and ideas.

Book printing in Europe was invented by Gutenberg in the 1450s. The process is called Matrix Casting: loose letters are casted then printed. Before that, all books (in Europe) were handwritten, and these were mostly Bibles ordered by wealthy people. Letterpress printing invention allowed to have a larger amount of people having access to books, and not only Bibles: any types of books could finally be printed, easier, faster, and cheaper.

Letterpress methods are several hundred years old, and even if we have other methods today to reach out to the people with our texts and opinions, letterpress remains in use.

On the following pages, I intend to find out what is fascinating with the letterpress and why some of us truly gets hooked by this slow process of printing. I also intend to put in perspective how important these letterpress workshops are. I am myself in the process of starting up a letterpress workshop aiming to build a meeting place for all those around the world interested in printing, whether it be letters, texts, or book projects.

The letterpress is relatively unknown in Finland, but there are quite a lot of letterpress workshops around the world. Especially in the US and UK.

For this thesis, I had several possible tracks to explore, some having evolved over time, but ultimately, I always came back to the same subject: my fascination for letterpress and the artistic process associated with it.

In order to gather relevant and interesting materials, I interviewed professionals who are letterpress printers: some were artists some graphic designers, and some actually make a living of it, while other merely complement it with another profession.

In the letterpress workshop of the Royal University of Fine Arts in Stockholm I had the opportunity to make acquaintance with Lina

Nordenström. She is an artist who runs GG Print studio in Uttersberg, Sweden. I interviewed her about her views of printmaking and letterpress as an art form, as well as how important a physical workshop is: i.e. having a room with presses as well as the collaboration with other artists and visibility of this activity.

Olof Sandahl was my teacher in letterpress printing at the Royal University of Fine Arts. He is now the letterpress workshop Manager of Kretsen Galleri in Södertälje, Sweden as well as an independent artist.

I met Thomas Gravemaker at the Online Letterpress Festival *United in Isolation*, which started during the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring 2020. Gravemaker runs the Letterpress Amsterdam and is a veteran of letterpress printing and has helped countless others in starting up their own workshops. Sharing his knowledge as an ambassador of letterpress, as well as being a mentor to others, has been one of his great contributions to the art of letterpress printing.

Katherine Anteney is a printmaker and letterpress artist that I also had the good fortune to meet at the letterpress festival. She is a co-founder of the Red Hot Press, Southampton's Open Access Print Workshop.

Antony Harrington is a graphic designer that works on digital projects: mostly web based, and apps related, but he also works with branding and printed communication projects. I was thankful to have the opportunity to interview him since he is navigating both the analog and digital world and therefore is able to give additional depth and breadth to my thesis research.

In order to explain what letterpress printing is, I briefly revisit the history, how it has developed as well provide me thoughts and reflections on how it might look like in the future.

I have divided the analysis into three parts. The first part gives an overview of the letterpress history: the foundations, the steps in the working process and how it practically works. The second part focuses on the perspective of the letterpress based on the various interviews I conducted. Finally, the third part is more analytic and lays out the conclusions that I have drawn from my own journey into the letterpress world.

1The letterpress

1:1 The history of letterpress printing in brief

Johannes Gutenberg was named "Man of the Millennium" in 1999. Apart from being the European inventor of the art printing with movable type, he is often seen as the father of the mass media.

Through his invention, between the years 1435-1445, he created a space for intellectuals. The heart of his invention was to make knowledge accessible to anyone: therefore, adding a fundamental and new element in the progress of human communication and language evolution. Although there is a lot of literature about Gutenberg, we do not know much about the man. The only thing he left behind are the books and the Bibles that we assume he printed. However, there is no physical evidence that Gutenberg himself printed these books. (Hellmark, 1997, 111)

Some sources state that Laurence Coster should be entitled to share the brilliant invention alongside Gutenberg. At the time printing processes were entering into a development, both these men were probably only a few among many others working on this. (Cleeton & Pitkin & Cornwell 2006, 128)

Before Gutenberg, texts were mainly reproduced by hand. As of the 8th century, woodcuts were used in East Asia and from the 12th century earthenware's movable types appeared, followed somewhat later by sand-casting technics. With Gutenberg's metallic movable types invention, the setting of various texts became possible to print and spread in the mid-1450s. (Füssel, 2000,7)

With letterpress printing, it was suddenly possible to share thoughts and opinions, and the access to knowledge became available to a large part of the (literate) population, and not just for privileged or wealthy people.(Irving,1968,11).

Printing and mass production were born, thus leading the way to democracy. (Cleeton & Pitkin, Cornwell 2006)

Handwriting a single book takes about three years. When Gutenberg printed B42 (Gutenberg's Bible) it took only five years to print 180 examples of the 1282 pages masterpiece, including everything from casting letters, typesetting, illustrations, printing, and binding. Today, that amount of time may feel like an eternity, but the time saving it represented compared to handwriting was an incredible breakthrough. (Borg & Ulmaja 2019,32)



Picture 3- Gutenberg's Bible, printed and hand colored

Nowadays, we have mass media such as television, radio, social media and highly functional technical devices to distribute our thoughts, opinions and texts very quickly. When offset became popular in the printing houses in 1950-s, most letterpress presses were scrapped, and the metal types ended up being forgotten. The letterpress became an artistic medium that can be found almost exclusively in art schools, artist workshops and universities.

1:2 Typesetting

In a printing house, the main process is typesetting and printing. Setting is when the content of a manuscript is converted into a set text in print. Printing is the step in which the set text is printed on paper.

A printer sets letters: letter by letter, word for word, numbers and characters, all in the composing stick to form words and sentences based on a manuscript. Usually a printer could set between 1700 to 2000 types per hour. The printer do not only set letters, but also the spacings and leadings in order to fill in the spaces between sentences, before and after words and in capital text even between letters.

At the end of 19th century, typesetting machines were taken into use and the speed of setting the text increased considerably.

When it was time for printing, paper and ink would be prepared and the printing form fixed in the press.

It is interesting that when a printer is typesetting a text, it can be noticed that there are for example much more M's or T's in a particular text. The language becomes more present and the design of the words become more apparent. Some words and letters may look beautiful while others may appear disharmonious. This might not be noticed when writing digitally, perhaps due to the fact that there is not much need to think about the process, as it does not take any time to lay down the letters. The types are set upside down, from left to right - mirrored. Between the words small lead rods are inserted without signs – spacings and leadings.

Before printing, spelling errors must be eliminated, as well as making sure that the letter positions are the correct way up. For example, a “d” could be a “b”. It requires a certain mental agility during the type setting process to avoid mistakes and the sub-sequent time-consuming corrections.

After printing, it is time for “undoing”, which means disassembling the text and putting the letters and spacing back in their correct pre-set case wooden-tray compartments for storage.

“The first printers were their own type caster, publishers, and sellers, often also authors of their printed matter. Everyone must therefore be a technician, a scientist and a merchant at the same time” (Nordin, 1881, 9)



Picture 4 Types, with face on the top, “the nick” (the groove of the bottom of the type) is for knowing which way the type should be set. The “type high” in Europe is 23.56 mm (except in the UK)



Picture 5 Hand setting with composing stick, from left to right, upside down.



Picture 8 Impression at paper



Picture 6 Swedish version of a case, a wooden tray with compartments for storage of type. The bigger compartments are for the letters you use most often. In the English version it looks different because you use other letters more often.



Picture 7 Case for larger fonts



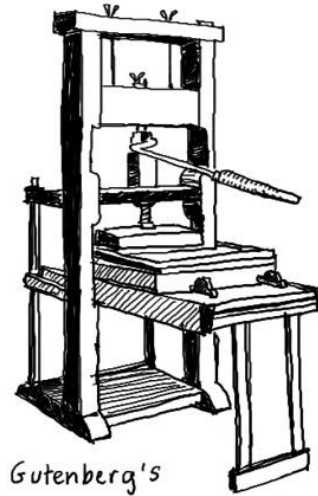
Picture 9 The form in the press

1:4 Something about presses

During Gutenberg's time, simple wooden hand presses were used, probably using the winepress as a template. These were used without major changes until the end of the 18th century.

(Simon, 1968, 54)

The early printers had to use crude wooden hand presses, capable of turning out 300-500 sheets in a day, but they were later replaced with power driven machines which could produce the same amount in a few minutes. This change was developed in the last century, and the first all-metal press was built by the Earl of Stanhope. (Cleeton & Pitkin & Cornwell, 147)



Gutenberg's Press

Today's letterpress workshops are usually equipped with platen presses or/and cylinder presses. They are relatively easy to handle and are available in different brands and variants.

Platen presses have both the type form and the paper on flat surfaces, and in cylinder presses the paper is on a cylinder which rolls over the form.

Letterpress printing is relief printing with types, blocks, and other raised surfaces, as linocuts, woodcuts, and surfaces, locked up in flat bed of a cylinder proofing press. The press produces a printed impression via a roller, onto which a sheet of paper is secured. The cylinder is rolled forward across the inked text or picture, which texts and images have been set or rendered in reverse.



1:5 The development of the types

It is easy to forget that when the letterpress was invented, a fairly large part of the population was against this modern introduction. A mechanical book in the library was something to be ashamed of. The hand writers were losing their jobs with this new invention, which explains why the types looked like handwritten types in the beginning. A handwritten book was valuable, while a mechanical book was not.

At the end of the 1400's, when the printers became proud of and confident in their work, they aimed at making their books more esthetically pleasing. At this stage, the types evolved in two directions: The Roman and the Gothic style.

The roman style, Antiqua, was used in Europe and became a progenitor to the modern types we still use today.

The gothic style was used in England until the 1600's and in Germany until about 1930. At the outset, a printer was also a publisher, a bookseller, and a type maker. Later these functions became separate.

Claude Garamond became the first to specialize on making types in the mid-1500's. Today's Garamond typeface is still immensely popular. A few others well-known are Caslon, Baskerville and Bodoni. (Simon, 1968, 28-31)



Picture 13 A letterpress workshop

2. INTERVIEWS

2:1 Research and methods

When looking for information about the letterpress, you will find an abundance of books about its history, but not much about how it is used today by artists, graphic designers, and printers. The books that do cover the use of the letterpress have mainly been published in the United States and UK, some of which I have ordered for the purpose of my research. These books cover the current interest in letterpress printing, information on how to use printing presses and materials, how to get started with printing, and basic principles for producing beautiful prints. However, I could not find anything published with regards to the artistic aspect of letterpress, even if some beautiful pictures, objects and prints is available in the already published material.

David Jury's book, *Reinventing print, Technology and Craft in Typography*, from 2018 is one of the books I ordered, and Jury writes about how graphic designers are re-evaluating and returning to pre-digital typography. His focus is not on the artistic processes but gives an idea from letterpress to the digital revolution and back to letterpress. Unfortunately, I could not get an example of Jury's book "*The allure of the handmade*", that could have been useful for my investigation.

As the available published content was not sufficiently extensive for basing my research on, I decided to instead interview selected letterpress printers, which in my opinion, have both real hands-on as well as an in-depth academic knowledge of letterpress printing, and which also practice it in an artistic way.

There is no right and wrong in art. Although setting and printing is a precise science, analyzing letterpress printing as an art is far more subjective and difficult to measure. This is one reason to why I

decided to interview some of these artists, in order to gather their thoughts and vision around press printing.

As a consequence of the global Covid-19 pandemic, Andreas Brekke from Norway – a letterpress printer and graphics designer – started an online letterpress festival called *United in Isolation*, with live streaming from different letterpress studios around the world. This event was truly fascinating to follow: it was a veritable '*tour du monde*', from Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, Uruguay to Norway as well as many other countries, each of them recounting their letterpress own adventures and artistic processes. A virtual but nevertheless very real visit of their studios and their material. The goal of the festival was to unite letterpress printers and create a community surrounding the craft. One common trait of the participants soon became obvious: a true passion for this technique. They were proud of their work, the equipment's and the studios they had created really mattered to them, and I was fortunate enough to be able to interview some of them for my thesis.

I am a letterpress printer myself and I have had my own presses and types for about two decades during my time living in Sweden. After moving back to my home country Finland in 2018, I have once again started the process of creating my very own letterpress workshop. Based on my personal experience, it was fairly straightforward to identify how to conduct my interviews. I simply asked questions emanating from my own experience and practices, and I sought out their views and input in order to enrich my understanding of the artistic and creative processes.

The selection of the people I wanted to interview was also equally straightforward. The first interview was with Olof Sandahl, my teacher in letterpress in the Royal University of Fine Art in Stockholm during 1999-2001. He has a very deep knowledge about letterpress printing and has built up many letterpress workshops

across the years. The takeaways from this interview was certainly a great foundation on which to write this thesis.

Lina Nordenström of GG Print was a fellow student together with me at the Royal University of Art in Stockholm. Her work is very inspiring, and I very much looked forward to learning more about her views on letterpress printing.

Thomas Gravemaker who I met at the online festival *United in Isolation* was my third interview, and he was able to really impress on me what good letterpress printing really is all about and was able to make me see yet more interesting angles.

Katherine Anteney was yet another great artist that I met at *United in Isolation*. As I am, she also happens to be a printmaker and bookbinder, and we had the most enthusiastic exchange about letterpress.

The last interview I made was with Antony Harrington, a graphics designer working in both the digital and analogue fields, a man living in two worlds simultaneously.

2:2 Olof Sandahl

2:2:1 The beginning

I met Olof Sandahl at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm in 1999. I was a student in the video department, but I had also applied for a course in the letterpress workshop because it seemed interesting. Unfortunately, I was told that I could not attend the class, since the printmaking students had priority. I chose to anyway discuss this directly with Olof, and finally ended up being accepted to attend the course. I am particularly thankful that he chose to make such an exception, especially when considering that this class truly changed my life.

I called Olof at the beginning of March 2020. He was happy to agree to an interview, and immediately started to tell me about his background. He began studying at the Art and Handicraft school in Gothenburg in 1957, with a focus on painting. However, the painting department was closed after the first year and transformed into teaching design and typography instead, with the idea that graduating students could be employed in the advertising business.

There was a letterpress studio close to the school where he was able to learn about and practice printing techniques. He started to make small booklets and poetry books and he also became an assistant teacher in letterpress printing. After completing his studies in Gothenburg, he continued at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm, where in addition to his studies, he had a few side jobs, including being responsible for the Graphic Society's workshop.

2:2:2 Workshops

Taking care of workshops has become a bit of my lot, Sandahl tells me. He built up Grafikens Hus's letterpress workshop in Mariefred and he sold his presses to the letterpress workshop of Royal university of fine Art to build up a real workshop together with Jordi Arkö, among others. Ten years ago, he added the Kretsen letterpress

workshop in Södertälje. After selling a litho press that was not being used, the construction of a letterpress and printmaking workshop began. They received a proof press and cabinets of types from three different printing houses and a motley collection of fonts. It became a genuinely beautiful place. *“This workshop is almost as my home”*, Sandahl says. Even though he has now turned 82, it is not often that he is not milling about in the workshop, involving himself in new projects and art pieces for exhibitions. In addition to Kretsen's letterpress workshop, Olof also has a studio in Saltskogs: an association and a workplace at home.

2:2:3 Resistance

What fascinates me about the letterpress, apart from the craftsmanship and the combination of wood and linoleum cuts, is that it suits me. That it has the right resistance, Sandahl says.

We talked a bit about the future of letterpress printing and Sandahl thinks it has a safe future. *Within letterpress printing, there is only one commercial printing house left in Sweden: the Norrbacka printing house in Stockholm. Otherwise, there are only a couple of letterpress workshops that belong to different art workshops. The interest is alive and the craft lives on. Old types and styles attract people, and at Kretsen in Södertälje we have had many foreign artists who have come there to work and to print*, Sandahl says.

Anastasia Palmer spent two years printing her book in which she tells page by page about an illness she got in her teens.

The letterpress itself is a special signature to the print itself, says Sandahl. *It's something more than the little embossing, the little odd. - A picture should tell something. It is not enough that it is beautiful or skillfully made.*

Art is communication and as such you want to say something. Of course, that does not stop it from being humorous.

Sandahl is also a member of Stockholm's typographic guild, an association founded in 1938 for those who are seriously interested in letters, letterpress and typography with the aim of influencing manufacturers and buyers of graphic products and thereby benefit and increase the quality of printed matter of various kinds. There are real nerds interested in letterpress.

Sandahl has a very solid knowledge of letterpress printing and there is not much he does not know about types, prints and letterpress. He is a typographer, artist, and an art teacher. Through his artworks he tries to get involved in important society issues. Some political undertones can be seen in many of his artworks. What fascinates me is that Sandahl moves freely between different techniques and changers but remains impassive even to the stormy political climate.

Sandahl said that *Art is communication and as such you want to say something*. Letterpress is one of the inventions that has been important for the language and has reshaped our lives and affected the way we live and communicate. We communicate with other people to create meanings of life. He also said that letterpress has the right resistance, and maybe we need some resistance to get inspiration.



Picture 14 Lina Nordenström

2:3 Lina Nordenström, Grafikverkstan Godsmagasinet

2:3:1 Background

Lina Nordenström was born in Stockholm and is primarily working with prints, drawings, and artists' books, but also with public commissions. She has studied at University of Gothenburg, The College of Printmaking Arts in Stockholm, and the Royal University College of Fine Arts in Stockholm. Since 1995 she has been exhibiting regularly in Sweden as well as internationally and started the studio GG, Grafikverkstan Godsmagasinet about 10 years ago together with her husband, also a printmaker and artist.

I asked Nordenström how she started with letterpress printing and what she likes about this technique. Her first contact with letterpress was in the early 90's. The school where she studied was a 3-years art education with a focus on printmaking techniques. The school had the opportunity to expand the letterpress department, by incorporating equipment from a small printing house in the area, which was just to be closed. Nordenström was immediately fascinated by handwriting lyrics but could not really identify why it appealed to her so strongly.

At that time, she was also working with handwriting and writing-like images in other printmaking techniques, such as dry-needle engraving. But over time, the hand setting of text has gradually taken over.

Now that it has been more than 25 years since she first came in contact with this technic, she realizes that a strong reason for her fascination is that the text, in large parts thanks to the technique, becomes extremely concrete and material, tactile and physically tangible.

It gives me an opportunity in my work to combine the purely sensual / visual qualities in the texts on one hand, and with the literary content on the other. Sometimes the purely pictorial dominates in

abstract typographic compositions - but I also want to say that the hand setting has contributed to the development of my writing. I have consciously strived to find a balance between the visual qualities and the readable, or even to get the image and text to merge, Nordenström says.

2:3:2 The "in between"

Nordenström explains that hand setting involves setting each letter and word as an object - as three-dimensional shapes, and this also applies to the spaces.

The spacing, between words, must be handled with the same care and as careful consideration as the text itself. The composition of the text, the form language - the text as an image - thus becomes part of the "writing act".

All this I think makes handwriting the most optimal technique for concrete poetry (in addition to working on typewriters). It is thus not primarily about the quality you can achieve in print, but about the process behind, to compose my text and / or typographic image.

Perhaps the fact that she herself read very slowly is a contributing reason why she was attracted early on to hand setting.

It is a slow process, which gives room for reflection and care about every word, every consideration and decision. The meditative calm that occurs has to do with this; that nothing can be forced, Nordenström says.

2:3:3 Thoughts for the future

Nordenström says she sees many signs that the interest in printmaking, not least for letterpress printing, has increased in recent years - not only from artists, but also from graphic designers. When it comes to artists, it is probably closely related to an increasing interest in working in book form, with artists' books.

For graphic designers, on the other hand, she believes that a longing for materiality has increased the interest. You are simply tired of the

digital screen world, where anything is possible, but nothing exists other than as an illusion. It provokes a longing for something that is permanent.

She also believes that a contributing factor to the increased interest among artists is that so many ways of working with a combination of digital and analogue technologies have now been developed. She thinks the connection between photography / graphics has also opened for a broader openness to printmaking in the art world in general. It may not even be considered "art prints", even if it is art in the form of graphic print.

2:3:4 A place to work in

I asked Nordenström how important the studio is for her and she tells me that for her personally, it is crucial to have daily access to a letterpress workshop, because it has become such a central part of her art to work with letterpress. The need for daily routines is also related to the fact that she rarely works with large and extensive projects, but constantly let things grow quite intuitively. A book or a booklet can consist of pictorial elements and / or texts that have come into being at completely different times and in different contexts but are finally brought together by unexpected sudden connections.

The idea for a book can thus emerged from different pieces of the puzzle falling into place, while the shape can still be relatively vague, when she starts the work.

It also means that both form and content can change during the work. This way of working presupposes that she has control over all stages of the process - from idea through design and printing to finishing and binding. And then the access to a workshop and a continuity in the workshop work is necessary, she says.

I asked Nordenström if she thinks of the letter or the text as an art piece or when the text becomes an art piece. She thinks it is an overly complex but exciting question and may require philosophical training, something which she is currently not well-versed in.

The important aspect is probably in any case that the function of the

letter / text is not only to convey factual information or a literary content, but also to give an artistic experience in its own right, through its formal properties and aesthetic expressions. I mean, then, that it is possible to distinguish between graphic design (the purpose of which is to give the literary content an adequate form, to emphasize its message) on one hand, and an artistic form where the form itself forms an important part of the content on the other hand - even in cases where the artist has written a text that also has a bearing literary content, she says.

Nordenström says that all aspects of the text then weigh equally heavily and that it is then a matter of the whole being the fruit of the artist's work. Unlike when the designer gives shape to someone else's text. Admittedly, there is nowadays something called "conceptual graphic design", which from what she understands means that the designer has adopted an approach similar to the artist's, when artists work with artists' books. That is, all aspects of the book - format, printing method, paper selection, binding, etc. have the same weight and significance as the text and image content, when it comes to conveying a message or an experience. And it is an interesting development, from the fact that it has previously been a stated goal that graphics design should be "transparent", i.e., be as invisible as possible, so as not to disturb the reading experience. More and more designers want to "stand out" and challenge the reader. This makes the question even harder to answer. A simple answer might be that a letter / text becomes art if it is presented as a work in an art context, Nordenström says.

2:3:5 GG Print Studio

GG Print Studio, the printmaking workshop Grafikverkstan Godsmagasinet, has been a workplace for artists and a meeting place for people interested in visual art since 2009. Artists from Sweden, Ireland, England, China, Kenya, Nigeria, and Germany have come here to work—and some have returned years after years. Others have even acquired their own summer homes in Uttersberg. Nordenström adds that, they have continuously organized artists' presentations,

lectures, film evenings and other kinds of programs which have made GG Print Studio a meeting place of renown—particularly for the inhabitants of Uttersberg.

The guest artists must have enough technical skill to be able to work independently. GG is primarily a workshop for artistic exchange and research, not just a place for printing editions. It is important to provide space for artistic processes which are time-consuming before a finished work can be produced. Another aspect of our kind of organization is that we greatly value the fact that the board members of our non-profit are a varied group of people with diverse backgrounds and different kinds of competences, Nordenström says.

We are able to build our operations on a stable foundation by having a combination of economists, art collectors, gallery owners, artists, and business owners as board members. In the same vein, our organization welcomes artists and people interested in art who would like to support our operations. Thus, we work on two fronts: on one hand we are a workplace for professionals, and on the other we run outreaching programs directed towards the general public.

Our fundamental idea from the start was that the workshop would be a place for artists to exchange experiences and a place for meetings between artists and people interested in art. Presenting art and discussing art—primarily prints and artists' books—in the environment where the work is produced, will hopefully create a deeper understanding of the entire working process and prints as a creative form of expression. Spreading knowledge is the best way to awaken people's interest, Nordenström says.

The fact that artists from many different backgrounds work in the workshop together with poets, graphic designers and publishers has allowed our operations to develop in new directions over time. It is also interesting to see the possibilities of new influences which can

arise when printmaking, the book arts and graphic design intersect in the same workspace.

At GG Print Studio we consider one of our most important goals to be fostering a greater interest in artists' books and broadening their platform, and this is where the international contacts are important. The fact is that artists' books do not have a long history in Sweden or in other Nordic countries. As a consequence, for a very long time it has been difficult for artists interested in artists' books to find any existing forums for their work in Sweden. Previously the art form did not receive the attention that it deserved, neither in art education nor among the art institutions. However, this is beginning to change, Nordenström says.

2:3:6 Transformation

The most crucial thing for us is certainly that the role of printmaking in art is undergoing a transformation process as well, which is exciting to contribute to and to follow from the inside. The interest in analog printing techniques has become so much greater in the digital age we are living in now, Nordenström continues.

The materiality of prints and the slowness of the printing process are things which attract many young artists as well as graphic designers. Working with illustrations or prints in combination with digital imagery and analog printing techniques is common today.

Combining techniques where prints, drawing and painting are used together is also more common.

The use of printmaking techniques in art has developed in a way that does not always make it possible to duplicate images. When artists make choices in terms of techniques and materials which primarily are motivated by whatever form of expression they wish to achieve, then the process of duplication becomes secondary. If it still exists at the end, then this becomes a "happy surprise".

All of the analog printing techniques which were called fine art techniques for a long time, originally developed from the necessity to duplicate images and books as well as newspapers, pamphlets, flyers, posters, etc. Thus, working with artists' books is consistent with the history of printmaking in that respect.

This is where Grafikverkstan Godsmagasinet comes into the picture—as a place for artists, poets, and graphic designers to give and to take, to create and to exchange ideas and develop their artistry through printmaking. By this we mean original prints, artists' books, and publishing—both in terms of text and images—visual poetry and poetic imagery.

To also be able to function as a forum where artists and those interested in art can meet in order to both cultivate and strengthen an interest in printmaking will be a natural facet of our continuing operations. With the support of our new board and a wide circle of contacts, we are looking forward to the many interesting challenges awaiting us, Nordenström says.

The studio GG Print is a role model for how I want my own upcoming studio to be. The interview with Nordenström gave me an additional insight into how valuable the collaborations and meetings with other artists and people are. Both for one's own practice but also as an inspiration and for sharing experiences and thoughts. The network they have created at GG Print is amazing and leads to an understanding of the importance of art in society, where artists and public can meet for discussions and events.

Nordenström also talks about the process, the slowness, and how that gives room for reflection, consideration, and decision.



2:4 Thomas Gravemaker, Letterpress Amsterdam

2:4:1 First impression

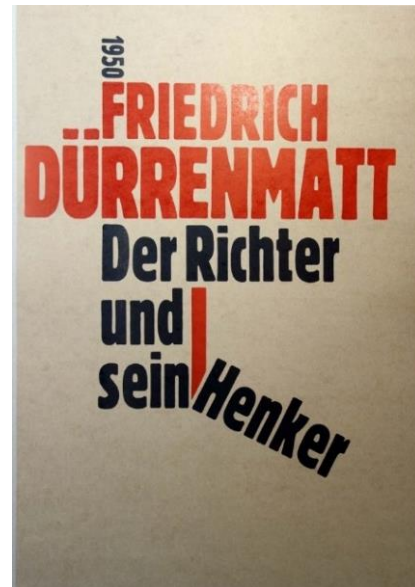
When I followed the online letterpress festival during spring of 2020, I also met Thomas Gravemaker. He immediately came across as someone with a great knowledge of letterpress, and I asked if he had time to discuss it with me.

I asked Gravemaker how he found letterpress printing and he started to tell me how he met Frans de Jong, Bart Boumans and René Treumann in 1970 during an artist manifestation that was being held in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. They created posters on a tabletop Showcard press. He was fascinated by this and spent the entire afternoon looking at it. Frans noticed this and invited him to come along to their studio. That first visit was the beginning of a lasting friendship. Frans took him under his wing and became his mentor and teacher for everything related to letterpress and design.

“What fascinates me in letterpress printing is the way the material (type and spacing material) has not evolved over the centuries. That we still use it the same way, but that this material with its restrictions allows us to create an infinitive number of different things. Sometimes I only use it to set plain texts, other times I use it to construct typographical posters and prints. But every time I discover new possibilities”, Gravemaker says.

2:4:2 Studio

I asked if the studio itself is important and Gravemaker says that working in the studio has become ever more important. For years he worked as a graphic designer, first with metal typesetting, later with photo typesetting techniques, and from the mid-1980s with the computer. He always had a small print studio or a press somewhere, but about 10 years ago, he changed over completely and is so glad that he did so.



Picture 15 Thomas Gravemaker

Picture 16 Letterpress print by Gravemaker

Picture 17 Letterpress print by Gravemaker

Occasionally he still uses the computer, but only if there is no other alternative.

”Working with my hands, using my own selection of typefaces and machines, that I restore and maintain, gives me a lot of satisfaction and obliges me to reflect on all the aspects of the printing process”, he says.

2:4:3 The future

We talked about the future and if letterpress will remain in our digital society. Gravemaker thinks that there is no real ‘commercial’ future for letterpress printing.

Despite the fact that a lot of people are jumping on the bandwagon, I hardly ever see a studio that manages to make a decent living out of letterpress printing. But I definitely see a future when it comes to slowing down and showing that there are other ways to reproduce a text or to transmit an idea, Gravemaker says.

Gravemaker runs Letterpress Amsterdam, a typographic workshop. He tells me that the aim is to offer a studio space in the city center, where people can learn to set type and to print. A place where he offers quality materials, a good choice of type (he has been investing in brand new metal type), a selection of good presses that are well maintained and a tranquil setting to work in. He takes pride in his small studio, enjoy transmitting and sharing the knowledge that he has built up over five decades of involvement with letterpress.

Gravemaker has a point when he says that he hardly sees any studio that manages to a decent living out of letterpress printing, and I think it is sad that people know so little about letterpress and the craft. To know the difference between analog and digital work, to know the difference between original and copy. To be aware of all the work behind an artwork.



Picture 18 Katherine Anteney

2:5 Katherine Anteney, letterpress printer, printmaker, artist

2:5:1 The start

I also met Katherine at the online letterpress festival *United in Isolation*, and I wanted to know how she got involved in letterpress.

Anteney told me that she first became interested in letterpress in around 2005 when she was given an Adana Press and some type. But she did not really start working with it before sometime later. She is a printmaker by training and did not at first see how letterpress would fit with her practice. Also, she was very unsure about HOW to do it. Anteney was weighed down by traditions and the thoughts of doing it wrong. But through the inputs of good friends met at the British Printing Society she gained confidence. Now it is fully imbedded in her practice and she feels confident to call herself a letterpress printer.

“I love letterpress. I love the tradition. Now I am no longer scared. I like the look and feel of it – the little boxes and bits and bobs. I am an avid collector at heart and that aspect of it appeals me. I also value the power of the written words and the impact they can still have”, Anteney says.

Anteney is pleased that letterpress is becoming more popular. She sometimes wishes that the people who were coming to it had the passion to learn some of the old skills in order to make good prints and to use the equipment properly in order to preserve it.

2:5:2 Analogue technique and development from text to art

I asked Anteney about the technique and if the handicraft is important for her in making art.

She said that the analogue is everything. *Digital layout can assist with planning and preparing but it cannot replace the analogue process.* Anteney then changed her mind and said that digital layout CAN replace the analogue.

I think the thing is it HASN'T, not totally. And that's the interesting thing. Why do people want to spend time setting type and struggling with the intricacies of manual kerning and make them ready rather than tapping it out on a keyboard and pressing print, she says.

Yesterday evening I spent over an hour on some make ready for a flyer and still couldn't get it right. Half way through my partner came into the studio and I told him I was going to sell it all up and turn the shed into a summer house. So, letterpress isn't always fun and why we do it remains a total mystery, Anteney laughs.

I'm not a designer so I don't have digital design skills to start with - all the typography I have learnt has been analogue. Therefore, for me there is no question of digital replacing analogue because I have no need for digital design in my life.

Sometimes Anteney makes a leaflet or flyer digitally because it is quicker. *But digital design doesn't really have much soul to my mind, she says*

There is also that thing about people feeling nostalgic. It happens at certain times - often when the world outside is uncertain and there are economic problems. I'm not a fan of the nostalgia that gets dished out to us by governments in order to disguise austerity measures (make do and mend while millionaire hedge funders sit on their yachts) but i recognize there is something that connects us back to the old way. Every day I see new people starting to print by hand. I wonder how many of them will stand the course but it's encouraging to know that the interest is there, Anteney continues. She thinks that slowly we are relearning this and it is great to see more and more people making with their hands.

As a printmaker who studied Fine Art she is well used to this divide between art and craft. Printmaking was always seen as a craft as illustration and it is still difficult to get some people to see it as art. However, it does not keep her awake at night.

I would rather print a piece of impactful text on cheap paper and send out 100s to people who will stick it on their wall than make a piece of art that has to have some deep meaning and be explained, Anteney says. For Anteney the communication is important as well as to take stand. Letterpress has become her way of doing this.

Of course, there are letterpress workers such as David Wolske who are very much producing artworks with moveable type by using letters, numbers, and punctuations to visual poetry. She thinks it is great and the type has become another mean of creating artwork.

2:5:3 Slow process

I asked Anteney how she works, and she tells me that it's slow... she takes a long time to do anything, and she spends a large part of her time teaching so the time available to create can be quite scarce. Sometimes months go by and she has not created anything. She then gets a bit low and wonder why she is doing it. But in the end, she has a spurt of creativity and start producing a lot. The lockdown at least gave her the time to think.

Anteney do quite different types of work. Her linocuts tend to be colored landscapes. These will start from a drawing or perhaps a photo – photos always turn into drawings initially. Then she will draw and paint and draw again and plan colors.

My letterpress work is usually taken from quotes I have found elsewhere in books or speeches. I think my letterpress work might be described as vaguely political or socially aware, Anteney says.

I don't see the point of printing something about drinking tea or whatever. To that end I print under the name of The Campaign against Whimsical Letterpress. It started as a bit of tongue in cheek, but realized that it is something I believe in.

“I admire people like Rick Griffith and those letterpress artists who devote their time to print posters to raise awareness, for people to display and pass a message along”, Anteney says.

2:5:4 The future of letterpress in our digital society

I have every faith in its future. When I started buying type you could pick it up for free. People were giving away tabletop presses, now you have to spend £3-400 on one, I don't think this is good thing by the way, Anteney says.

Letterpress has found its place back in the world. The thing I'm sad about is there are very few places to learn it properly. I think this may lead to a drop in quality as the years pass by. I hope not.

Anteney does not mean we have to stay exactly the same as it has always been and there is always room for people to experiment and discover new ways of doing things. *But you cannot break the rules if you don't know what the rules are, she says.*



Picture 19 Antony Harrington and Hazel

2:6 Antony Harrington, graphic designer, Newland Press

2:6:1 When letterpress came into mind

I see letterpress just as another form of relief printing. Historically it was used specifically for the production of communication, advertising and information design. I think the function of letterpress has moved on now, but I like the idea that we still employ the same tools (antique type...) plus some new techniques such as CNC laser cutting, to create something new. Antony Harrington has a graphics designer background and has worked a lot on digital projects: mostly web and apps, but also on branding and printed communication. I was interested to get some point of views from someone who is not a letterpress printer in the first place.

Antony Harrington tells me that he came in contact with letterpress 2011 when he was a speaker at TypoLondon, a conference on design and type. *My agency was launching an app called London Typographica, which enabled people to take photos of type and lettering in the environment, and post it to a map, so we could record the typographic history of London before it was all pulled down by the developers,* Harrington tells me.

For this, they thought it would be nice to make and give away a poster celebrating the launch, which was produced by letterpress, with the help of their friend and neighbor, Graham Bignall, at the New North Press in London.

This was my first introduction to making something using letterpress. It was a very simple design and printed on Graham's Albion press. I loved it

2:6:2 Process and development

I asked Harrington if the technique or the handicraft is important for making art.

I am really not a purist about the process. I admire the printers that

will set type in the traditional way, locking up with furniture and spacing material, but to me the finished item is important, not necessarily the process.

I do enjoy the fact that once you are committed to something, to turn around is difficult, and time consuming.

I like being able to see all the moving parts of a piece of work. A lot of the assembling is done in the headfirst, then with the hands.

Sometimes I look at my workbench and think that for somebody else, this must look like a mess, but I know exactly where each piece fits together, Harrington says.

We talked a little about the development and that letterpress printers do not necessarily print texts as before, but more creating artworks, the development from text to art.

Harrington says that this is really interesting: *the transition from a process of mass production to creating something of limited appeal. The process of letterpress would have historically been something that a group of people would have worked on, writers, composers, printers. Now it seems a very individualist pursuit. The printer as an artist.*

He thinks that in its original form the process of letterpress helped defined the look of the printed work. Spacing, format, type sizes, arrangement on the page. All defined by the constraints of the means of production, and possibly the constraint of time to get the job done.

I think that has changed now, and letterpress practitioners are allowing themselves to be free from the constraints. The mixing of the traditional practice of using wooden and metal type alongside other techniques, CNC cutting, Lino cutting, and using 3D printing to create forms for print really excites me. It is about creating a new visual language for letterpress, Harrington continues.

2:6:3 The happy accident and the future

When I started, I thought I could design something on the press bed, but it took such a long time, I've resorted to either making very quick pencil sketches, to even working something up in Illustrator first. But I am always excited by the happy accident. The effect of two colors overprinting, you never really know what you are going to get.

I'm always interested more in the way something looks, rather than what it says.

Harrington told me he heard a music producer on a podcast recently, and he made the distinction between music and sound, so *I think I'm more interested in the sound*, he says.

Harrington is working both in the digital and the analog field, and I asked him what he thinks of the future of letterpress in our digital era.

There has obviously been a backlash towards always being on. And I do not think it is exclusively letterpress which has become popular because of this. There are so many craft related practices which have found new audiences I think people want to be more engaged with making, he thinks.

The biggest selling point for letterpress in this digital age is its ability to bring people together in the workshop. Sharing ideas in real life. Collaborating. I think being connected online is great, it is a perfect way to connect with others with a similar interest, but actually working together in a studio on a project is surely better than doing it on screen

For me as an analog letterpress printer the interview with Antony Harrington was a good reminder of how interesting it is to combine or develop old and new techniques together. Harrington tells me about the CNC-laser cutting where the possibilities seems endless combined with letterpress. With a laser cut you can do your own typefaces, types, or 3D-models you can use for letterpress printing.

Harrington said that he is not a purist about the process. He admires the printers that will set type in the traditional way, but to him the finished item is the most important, not necessarily the process. This differs from my idea that the process itself is evolving for the result. But Harrington also says that he is always excited by the happy accident. The effect of two colors overprinting, and the fact you never really know what you are going to get. This is something in the printing process that I find incredibly amazing: when you print several times, changing the paper direction and ending up with the “happy accident” revealing an unexpected beautiful result.



*Picture 20 Circle. A box of 10pt metal type which has sat on the shelf **doing nothing**. Harrington wanted to see if he could make a circular form and fill it with type. It took nearly three days to make!*

Picture 21 Circle, detail of the print.



Picture 22 Frame on the bed in the press before printing.



Picture 23 Bass Licks, a bass line from a text translation. Three sizes of wooden type printed in two colors.

3 The passion of letterpress

3:1 What is special with letterpress

In this chapter I am analyzing how the fascination with letterpress has evolved from the form of printing text to an art form in itself, as well as how artists and graphic designers nowadays are using this art form for their art and expression.

How will it look like in the future? Will people still learn this craft, or will they think it is not worth it?

When I come into a letterpress workshop, I have the same feeling as when I as a child came into a gymnastics hall – you wanted to jump right into it, tumble around, the whole body wanted to be upside down, you want to do something. In a letterpress studio I feel all the opportunities, all the history, the tactility of the material, it engages the whole body. Eyes enjoying the perfection of a typeface, fingertips sensing the quality of the paper, the smell of the ink, ears tuned to the click/clack in the mode of printing, the sound of the inked rollers.

The persons I interviewed described the same feeling. Sandahl called it the light headwind, a situation that makes you put in a little extra effort, something keeping you wide awake and according to Nordenström, we are simply tired of the digital screen world, where anything is possible, but nothing exists other than as an illusion. It stirs a longing for something that can remain permanent.

Through my interviews I noticed that the persons have produced artworks or graphics designs using other techniques before learning about letterpress, but once they started to experiment and use it, it suited their ambition and art language. Letterpress became their tool and a large part of their world.

Galleys, galley cabinets, type cabinets, type cases, type, composing sticks, pica rulers, spacing, leading. These are some of the terms you use in a letterpress studio. Maybe it is something special with the words, a feeling that you are managing something valuable. Such as when Gravemaker said that both the material (type and spacing material) and how we use them have hardly evolved over the centuries. It is stewardship of letterpress history, as well as the new possibilities such as when Harrington says that he likes the idea that we still employ the same tools combined with modern CNC laser cutting techniques to create something new.

3:2 Letterpress as a method for artistic processes

Letterpress as a slow method, requires a certain patience. It is time-consuming and you need a spacious workshop to house your cabinets with typefaces and the presses. You also need the skills to use this method. Letterpress is also more expensive than the digital media because of the processing time and the equipment.

In this chapter I analyze why some people are so fascinated with letterpress, and the differences between analog and digital prints. All the persons I interviewed thought that the future for letterpress is not under threat, but at the same time does not a commercial use. People like the quality, the difference from a digital print. Something that is more outstanding and have a personal touch.

When you use this method for prints, it allows you to be creative in the moment. Thomas Gravemaker said that the material with its restrictions allows us to create an infinitive number of different things and he thinks this somehow make us creative and able to find solutions for new ideas during the process. The slowness and the patience that it requires when you are using a familiar tool increases our creativity.

I talked to Phil Gambrill at Fresh Lemon Print and he told me that for him it is very important that every student of design and print

techniques also experience letterpress and analogue printing in order to learn about the intricacies of typography, starting from letter spacing until selecting the right font for the right job... there is no 'undo' in print!

Also getting 'hands on' experience and working directly with each print, choosing the paper, and mixing the inks adds a whole new dimension to the design process. Working within tight constraints of only having the fonts and inks available to you... you can't just make it larger, or click a button to change the color, you have to work within tight boundaries, which makes the printer/artist focus their designs before committing to print.

One of Gambrill's greatest pleasures is pushing these boundaries and quite often pulling a misprint where the end product isn't how you originally imagined it, but then instead it might take you in a new direction and may often introduce as new meaning to the design.

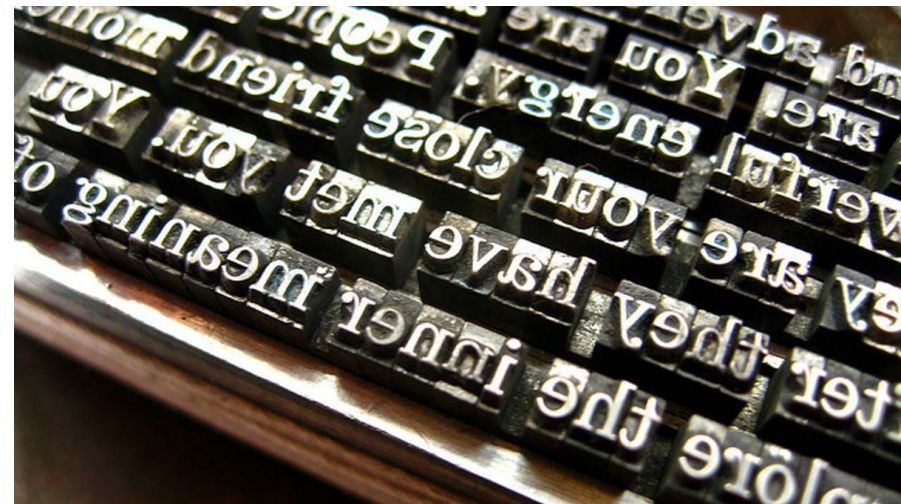
These are processes that you cannot experience digitally.

If you use letterpress you have a range of paper available, from handmade papers to thick and dark papers, papers with a surface area, with different shapes and edges. The gorgeous imprint is created on the paper. With every print you have made, you can look at the print and find it amazing, all while appreciating that the final print is only as good as the printer.

Letterpress has its limitations too. It is time-consuming; you have the size of the press as a frame and the types that are physically stored in your cabinets are the only ones you can choose from. If you choose to print many colors, the paper needs to go through the press as many times as the number of colors: one color at the time is printed. Gravemaker is fascinated with the fact that letterpress printing allows him to create an infinite number of different things and every time he discovers new possibilities. Harrington said that the

transition from a process of mass production to creating something of limited appeal is interesting. The process of letterpress would have historically been something that a group of people would have worked on, writers, compositors, printers. Now it seems a very individualistic pursuit. The printer is both an artist and an artisan.

Phil Gambrill likes to print large format posters using large wooden type. He often starts with a topic in mind, but this soon evolves as the project develops. A lot of his prints are transformed in the cleanup process, where he adds any leftover ink and solvents to the prints to see the interactions that are created. It is completely "hit or miss" and a process that cannot be really controlled, but sometimes it produces wonderful outcomes. This is the creativity you can find when you use a tool you are familiar with, when your mind and hands interact.



3:3 Spacing and leading, digital versus analog

Prints by letterpress and digital prints are not the same. If you use the computer for typesetting the spacing and leading are invisible. There are hidden characters in the software, and as a user you do not

even see it. In a letterpress studio you see the cabinets filled with solid matter filling, the space between words and lines. (Sanders & Chiplis, 2015, 35)

As Nordenström said that, in typesetting you handle every letter and word as an object, and even the spaces in between. Spacing must be handled with the same care and as careful consideration as the text itself. The spacing and leading is half of the work, even if you do not notice it in the print.

In letterpress you can use the pressure and even feel the impression in the paper. You cannot make that impression in some other way, the bite in the paper. Letterpress lays down a much thicker layer of ink. The pigment amount and density are much higher in letterpress inks, and the blackness you get is amazing.

A digital print is available for almost everybody. It is easy to edit and share, it is mobile, searchable, but as Andreas Brekke, the founder of the online letterpress festival, *United in Isolation* said, we need to learn to think before we write, to see the beauty in words and letters. We never run out of digital space, we do not even need to think before we write, and we type away our anger without thinking. In letterpress there are no quick highlights if you want to change a word or just a letter. It takes time, and during that time you may have changed your thoughts or found something new.

By using a computer, we have almost limitless possibilities and the technology have made everybody an amateur designer, making invitations for birthdays, weddings and so on. But it is the limitations of letterpress and the fascination of the physical print that makes an artist love the letterpress.

The effect and feel of the print in letterpress involves a lot of “oohs and aahs”. In digital prints the design and the message are more important than the effect and feel. In letterpress every print is

original and unique and not only a copy of the original, unlike the digital print. The prints in letterpress are usually not printed in large editions and often on cotton or paper made of bamboo. The commercial paper used for books, newspapers and magazines is made from trees, and are chemically treated and the sense of paper is not the same. The quality of the print makes people notice letterpress.

3:4 Methods

Once you have become familiar with the fundamentals and traditional practices of letterpress, you can start thinking of breaking the rules. Remember all the good advice and rules – you need to have a good understanding of them – but they are not laws which must always be obeyed. As Katherine Antoney said, “*you can’t break the rules if you don’t know what the rules are*”.

Earlier letterpress printing was mostly for text, and some pictures for books, newspaper, pamphlets and posters, but nowadays letterpress printers use not only letters but anything relatively flat, which can be brought up to type high and letterpress printed. Materials can be cut out, object as varied as coins, washers, tin cans, vinyl letters, whatever can be printed in the press or used in the picture. Letters can be used upside down, to just get a black spot. The creativity never ends. (Saunders & Chiplin, 2015, 90-91)

Even inkless printing, known as debossing, is used.

When you come into a letterpress studio, pull open the drawers and find a highly ornamented or unusual wooden or metal typeface or a traditional one you are used to, it is difficult not to become enchanted. Setting and printing these beauties fills me of happiness. Letterpress is not only letters on paper, it is something more. It can be Artist books, it can be sculptural, three-dimensional and it is the something where you use your hands, a true craft. And while you

use your hands, you also free your mind. And when your mind is free, you get the creativity.

“When the hand is working, the thoughts can be far away - creative thoughts breaks through and the really good ideas are easily born when the hand is busy with its own” (Lundborg 2011, 96)

Phil Gambrill at *Fresh Lemon Print* thinks that it is a natural evolution for creatives to want to push the medium forward. Letterpress was always about printing the perfect impression and imperfections were discarded. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to replicate a nice print through a digital printer these days.

He personally embraces the tactility of letterpress printing: seeing the imperfections of the 100-year type, the textures within the ink or the new colors produced when overprinting. All of these culminate in a three-dimensional print that can only be described as art!

3:5 From Futura to Future

Letterpress equipment is getting difficult to find, you may find spare parts and it is not cheap. People who have lately got their presses and cabinets filled with types are not willing to sell and take care of it like the history should be taken care of. When something brakes, it is almost impossible to find parts. Most experienced letterpress mechanics are long dead or out of work. You cannot easily just make a phone call and get help if you have trouble with your press. This could also be one reason that letterpress is re-evaluated. You want to keep the knowledge and the opportunity to make your stand.

Like Katherine Anteney told me she got one press and some types, but then it took a while until she learned how to use them. I often wonder how life can be changed just by a small event: be at the right place at the right time. As when I got my first press and types, and then the collection started. What would have been my passion if I did not get my press 20 years ago?

Anteney says that she is an avid collector at heart and that aspect of it appeals her. She also values the power of the written words and the impact that they can still have.

Today everything evolves so fast, and we are not really ready for everything. If a printer from the year 1450 suddenly appeared in a printing studio around the year 1750, he would have instantly recognized the process and would quickly have been able to pick up the work. However, transporting the same printer to a modern printing studio today, would make the printing process totally unrecognizable for him. Everything is different, from the inks, the presses to the paper.

Letterpress today is an art form where one can independently produce printed matter, and it has fortunately been revived after almost disappearing in dust and rust in the scrap yard. Artists have with great bravery taken care of old printing relics and without supervisors used the presses in ways their creators had never imagined or intended.

As I followed the online letterpress festival, I noticed that almost every person who showed around in their studios were quite young people. This shows that letterpress has new practitioners who have been attracted to the technology.

Computers evolved so much in the last 40 year: programs you learned not that long ago already are obsolete and replaced with something unrecognizable. If you created any works digitally as recently as 10 to 20 years ago but did not keep any prints, you may never be able to retrieve them again as the digital formats from that era may no longer be supported by current software. An e-book bought years ago may already have been lost, especially if the company or their devices no longer exist (for example Palm Pilots or Apple Newtons). A printed matter however remains. The letterpress will remain, but not necessarily in the way it was originally intended, but instead as an artistic expression. *Futura will remain in the future.*

Harrington said that the biggest selling point for letterpress in this digital age is its ability to bring people together in the workshop. Sharing ideas in real life. Collaborating. He thinks being connected online is great, it's a perfect way to connect with others with a similar interest, but actually working together in a studio on a project is surely a better way of working than only on a screen.

As Nordenström told how important the workshop is as a place for artists to exchange experiences and a place for meetings between artists and people interested in art. Spreading knowledge is the best way to awaken people's interest.

3:6 Slow print, handicraft, hand, and brain

The internet and the digital revolution of the mid-1990s has had a huge impact on our daily life as well as our culture and communication. We are now used to the web, forums, blogs, videos, social media, and online shopping sites available at any time of the day. We hardly read the newspaper and books on paper anymore as everything is being digitalized. We are adjusting and becoming used to it. Everything goes faster and faster, the time is reduced to a minimum, and we can reach each other in just seconds even if we are located in a different part of the world. Therefore, I have noticed and realized that many people are longing for the slowness, a slow print or a process that takes its good time.

What is the importance of the handicraft, the usage of our hands, for our mind?

Since the 1990s there has been a significant rise of small companies setting up shop and producing letterpress materials. One example of this is Martha Stewart, who started to print wedding invitations in the United States. We can find individuals and studios that have revived the fortunes of letterpress printing. What is behind this enthusiasm? Certainly, there is an aesthetic appeal, but there is also the longing for the analog.

What would happen if we replaced artists, musicians, carpenters, or circus artists with a machine? It would never work, we need the personality, the uniqueness, the real-life impressions, the little extra that a machine cannot give us. Our hands have knowledge and can create opportunities.

With the help of their hands humans learned to develop tools and weapons that facilitated life, and the use of these tools helped the human race to not only survive but to thrive. Our hands have made a more important contribution to our development than our brains. (Lundborg, 2011, 57-58)

Through human civilization, the hand has had a great impact on us. We have learned craftsmanship through generations, through knowledge handed down, creativity, opportunities, and experiences. In today's society, most things are controlled by computers and creative subjects in schools have been cut back. The function of the hand is based on an interaction between muscles, tendons and nerves and without the brain, the hand doesn't work either. If the hand is active, the brain also expands, and the hand can be seen as the extension of the brain, our consciousness and inner space. (Lundborg, 2011, 83-84)

Lundborg describes in his book "*Handen och hjärnan*", that objects and tools can feel like an extension of the hand and be experienced as a part of ourselves, like when we draw, fry pancakes or hammer in nails. We use a tool, that affects the brain's map image and gives it a bodily interpretation. (Lundborg 2011, 130-132)

Letterpress is the tool for printers, and as Nordenström said, she realizes that a strong reason for her fascination is that the text, thanks to its technology, becomes extremely concrete and material, tactile and physically tangible.

CONCLUSIONS

It was actually harder to write this thesis than I imagined, even having chosen a subject that I am familiar with. Diving into books and contacts is a long and difficult process of digestion, and having lots of material, I ultimately found it rather difficult to decide what I should focus on.

Nevertheless, the subject I chose came naturally. I am myself a letterpress printer and in the process of starting up a printing workshop in Finland that will hopefully become a small cultural center in my home town, all while having the ambition to draw in collaborators from across the world. Letterpress remains largely unknown, except for a small crowd of stubborn people like me. I hope that my work will shed light on letterpress printing and show that this technique should not only be a historical artefact, but also a powerful tool for creating art.

Through my interviews and taking part of the *United in isolation* event I realized that, although small, we letterpress printers, are a passionate community. Like Andreas Brekke said about a broken “T” letter he had: the wood type is broken, somebody has tried to fix it, it is still broken but it has not been thrown away. Letterpress printing is our heritage, and as we find new ways of using it, also part of our future.

The letterpress studio has its invisible magic, anybody coming in one gets excited in some way. A love for letterpress, the heavy presses, the smell of the inks, the atmosphere, and the shiny typefaces. The technique is 500 years old, and the process is quite therapeutic. This old form of mass production used for words, sentences, texts but now even for art makes letterpress a valuable craft.

There is no doubt that the computer rules supreme wherever commercial aspects, efficiency and return on investment is important, but for us who are interested in the arts and the crafts, as

well as for many of us who are not digital natives, the act of placing types by hand, looking for the physical pieces of material while composing, touching the quality of paper and being in a historical atmosphere, adds something really important to our lives.

Instead of sitting in front of a computer, you walk across the studio, looking for the right typeface in the cabinets, pull out the heavy cases, pull the strips of lead and readjust the letters. The time it takes is itself a process that you learn to do almost mechanically. And during this slow pace of process and decisions, it becomes a source of inspiration.

While writing this thesis, I became aware of the importance of collaboration. Sharing a workshop with other artists sounds easy, but most of the time many artists work alone. With the letterpress studio I am in the process of starting up, I want to focus on collaboration, for inspiration and possibilities, and to get contacts and new ideas.

My analysis made me conclude that the letterpress is a tool for practitioners using this technique, and as you get more familiar with the tool, you will also discover new solutions. You must have the technical skills to develop new ideas, the knowledge of the process and an understanding of the creative actions.

Letterpress has evolved from the form of text into being used to make works of art. Today it is mostly artists and graphics designers who are using letterpress, while a long time ago, printers and typographers printed matter for a totally different purpose. They were educated, often with knowledge handed down from generation to generation, and did know and followed all the “rules” in order to create an stable level quality of their production, while an artist or a graphic designer that use letterpress today doesn’t necessarily have the same skills but can allow for more experiments and discovery, using the equipment in ways than it was originally intended for.

When you start with an artwork, you are guided by practiced skills, cultural contexts, influences and an emotional need through a connection with the materials and tools you use. The skills of the hand and the inner feeling makes your mind creative and an artwork is born and the tools you are working with are an extension of your thoughts and your hands.

If I would continue my investigation, I think it would be interesting to try to discover and measure the importance of collaborations between artists. How important are the workshops, and how can artists get these contacts if they are used to work mostly alone? Have letterpress workshops and other kind of workshops an important role for collaborations with artists?

Glossary

Bed: the flat table of printing press that holds the form of types.

Cabinet: The support for cases.

Case: A wooden tray with compartments for storage of type.

Cylinder press: in this press, a piece of paper is pressed between a flat surface and the cylinder in which a curved plate or type is attached. The cylinder rolls over the flat surface and produces an impression over the paper.

Composing stick: a handheld tool in which type is placed one line at a time before being transferred to the galley.

Furniture: Wood or metal blocks used to fill up any substantial black spaces in the bed of the press

Galley: a board onto which the type is transferred line by line from the composing stick while it is waiting to be arranged onto pages of text

Leading: in typesetting, thin/thick strips of lead that are inserted to increase spacing between lines of type. Leads are spacing material.

Letterpress printing: letterpress printing is a form of relief printing; a process that utilizes relief printing plates, blocks, or type, where images are raised above the nonprinting areas.

Platen: a flat plate of metal that presses the paper onto the form

Platen press: a press that has a flat surface bearing the paper, which is pressed against the flat-inked plate.

Spacing: spacing materials are used physically to fill in gaps between words, line of type etc.

Type: small blocks of metal or wood with raised letters, figures, or punctuation on them used for printing.

Type high: 23.56 mm in Europe (England excluded)

Typesetting: in letterpress printing, lines of type are set by hand on metal composing sticks. The text is composed one letter at a time using metal sorts that are retrieved from a type case and set into the composing stick. Spacing is also set between words if needed, before and after words. Once a line of type is set, a lead is added, and the next line is ready to be typeset.

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Pictures

Picture 1 Futura https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/QAvsS-v5jTgLwLEWLPOt31Ua4iQ_gpFi6yNu6Vx8Lu3ztObu2MiBodTyLAcCX6uAyEVg42ayWikNaztVc66R81F7amox3nUq6JhIx-hoj50

Picture 2 Manicula, letterpress Camilla Gunnar

Picture 3 Gutenbergs Bible (23.09.2020)
<https://www.bl.uk/TreasuresImages/gutenberg/max/kl1/001.jpg>

Picture 4, types Camilla Gunnar

Picture 5 Handsetting with composing stick
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Picture 6 Case, Swedish version Camilla Gunnar

Picture 7 Case for larger font, Camilla Gunnar

Picture 8 Impression in paper, Camilla Gunnar

Picture 9 The form in the press, Camilla Gunnar

Picture 10 Gutenberg's press (23.09.2020)
https://live.staticflickr.com/6229/6319799633_a494d77bf3.jpg

Picture 11 Vandercook cylinder press
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Picture 12 Heidelberg platen press
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Picture 13 Letterpress workshop with type cabinet
<https://snappygoat.com/b/7143a50eea00e2cce7874405dadd00135fa4d5c9>

Picture 14 Lina Nordenström in GG Print. Photo: Lina Nordenström

Picture 15 Thomas Gravemaker, LetterpressAmsterdam. Photo: ©Carla vermont, 2020

Picture 16 and 17, Prints by Thomas Gravemaker, Photo: Thomas Gravemaker

Picture 18 Katherine Anteney photo: Katherine Anteney

Picture 19 Antony Harrington and Hazel, the dog. Photo: Antony Harrington

Picture 20 – 23, Artworks by Antony Harrington. Photo Antony Harrington

Picture 24 Spacing and leading (05.10.2020)
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