

Text and Design Relationship on Literature Books

abstract

This paper intends to identify functions in book design, as pragmatics and semantics. To explain the idea of a “semantic function” a sketch analysis model was created and tested to analyse the Brazilian edition of Melville’s *Bartleby*, chosen to serve as an example for the understanding of the text-design relationship.

keywords

book design analysis, history, semantics

Introduction

The book, in its whole history, according to Lyons (2011: 7), could perform different functions: registering, managing, worshiping and educating. It is also notable that the design of the book could perform different functions according to the type of book. For instance, Fawcett-Tang (2007: 9) states that design in books of art and architecture are more experimental. Design in literature books is often simple but can present an appealing cover (different from the inside) due to a division of work: usually, but not always, one designer makes the cover and another the inside.

According to Haslam, the book cover could perform two functions, protection and communication (2006: 160). However the function of the inside of the book is mainly pragmatic, as text support, it must, to Warde (Armstrong, 2009) and Tschichold (2007), be legible. It's intriguing to look at a great cover and when you look inside is completely different. In most cases there is no integration with cover and inside, so the idea “don’t judge by the cover” may be true in the design field.

Even if the book seems neutral in the inside, Kinross (1989) argues that typographic choices have its own rhetoric. Haslam (2006: 92-98) also provides similar ideas explaining different typographic approaches in book design. This indicates that typefaces may be connotative, as also Leewen (2005) points out.

In addition to typography, Munari in his *Unreadable books* believes that form and book materials also may be communicative tools. If we accept the idea that typography and form could have semantic levels in a book, it is possible to assume that book design could also perform another function, in addition to the pragmatic one (concerning text support, legibility, reading fluency) that we understand as semantic function, sometimes more or less evident, in its different meaning levels.

There are examples of recent published editions, specially, in Brazil, by Cosac Naify, that cares not only with the editorial quality – that is to say its pragmatic functions –, but

establish a dialogue between design and literary text, challenging and amplifying our conception of book designing. This also challenges us to understand and analyse design semantic function. The semantic function in book design may not exist isolated from its text. The formal book elements can be used regarding a particular text and studied in a dialogue with it.

Because the idea of a semantic function in book design might be controversial, we will analyse an edition of *Bartleby, The Scrivener*, a 1853 short story by Hermann Melville (1819-1891), published in 2005 by Cosac Naify, and explain how book design works not only as a text support, but also performs a semantic function. It is also important to notice that the cover and book interior were made by the same designer: there is an integration between cover and inside.

An analysis model will be proposed to understand and establish the relationship between text and design regarding the literary text searching for the semantics function (levels of meaning), using concepts from Martine Joly (1996) and Gérard Genette. We will also include a brief historical review of approaches in book design over the 20th century.

Historical approaches to book designing

At the beginning of the 20th century, accordingly to Lommen (2012: 275), designers like Bruce Rogers and Stanley Morrison, inspired by William Morris and The Private Press Movement ideas, made books in which "the text played the leading role". Lommen explains that some of these designers may be inspired by Beatrice Warde (Armstrong 2009: 40) who in 1930 wrote the article "The Crystal Goblet", stating that typography in books, the visual configuration of the printed text, should be as transparent as a wine glass. Warde recommends prudence, because of the risk of overshadow the text through design.

A different approach, earlier and during this period, occurs in avant-garde experiments. Lommen (2012: 302) affirms that "This often politically motivated avant-garde – Futurists, Dadaists, Constructivists and others – emphatically rejected traditional aesthetic views". We have here, therefore, a different path from Warde, because there was a desire to test the bounds of what was considered "good taste", destabilizing the book layout function as the text support.

In El Lissitzky's work his approach enabled other ways of reading text, on a non-linear form: "In the books he designed, Lissitzky searched for new way of Reading: "optics not phonetics"". (Lommen 2012: 302). Another important moment for Book Designing was the experiments of Jan Tschichold that, in the 1920s, with the New Typography, "stood for functional, machine-made". Its stylistic characteristics included asymmetry, the machine aesthetic and sans serif letterforms". (Lommen 2012: 302-303).

Another important moment occurred in Bauhaus, that served as base for the International Style, responsible for a systematic and "neutral" standardization. Lommen explains: "In the world of books, it was used on the covers of Penguin paperbacks and more generally in catalogues and books about art and architecture". (LOMMEN, 2012: 357). This modern approach to books was expressed in a functional way, in works that required a discontinuous reading, and not in continuous reading books (prose, mainly).

Although Jan Tschichold (2007: 31) proposed the New Typography in the 1920s, by the 1960s he believed that “the book designer should be a loyal and reliable servant of the printed word. It is his duty to create a model of presentation whose form does not overshadow the content”. According to Tschichold, the function in Book Designing is making the text readable (silent reading servant).

At the end of the 1970s, the Design field went through a profound critique of Modernism, considered neutral and rigid. While some designers explored formal ruptures, others investigated the structure of language, proposing approaches that could establish a relationship between text and design. As an example we can mention the design for an issue of Visible Language called “French Currents of the Letter”, by graduate students at Cranbrook Academy of Art, in a post-modern period. They experimented giving opacity to the printed page, exploring its boundaries, opposing to the idea of text’s transparency. Today it is possible to observe designs that search for a better integration with text, promoting a semantic function, but most of them may be still inspired by the functional approaches, possible to identify recently in Lupton (2006:63) when “one of the most refined design functions is to help readers ‘not to read’”. However, there is an openness to book design. As Bringham (2008: 11) observes, no printed page or a glass is invisible, even when it looks transparent. “The design of books has meaning because it gives visible form to those invisible realities”. In this sense a book designer is an “interpreter, drawing meaning to the surface where its shape can be revealed (2008:12)”.

Analysis Model

After verifying the possibility of a semantic function in book design, we will try to understand it by developing an analytic model and proposing its application. To understand the semantic function in book design it is important also to note its paratextual condition; the design is meaningful related to its content.

We will adopt the concept of editorial paratext, to understand the relationship between design and text, based on Gérard Genette (2009): identification of the importance of auxiliary texts for book interpretation.

The concept of paratext presents texts (verbal and non-verbal) that complement the textual work. Genette privileges textual elements, as epigraphs, forewords, titles, etc. However, he expands his analysis to material elements of the book, such as format, cover, title pages and composition.

The paratext seems to follow the text, whereas graphic design makes it visible. It becomes, in a certain way, inseparable from it, and cannot be analysed in isolation. It has intrinsic relation with the text: the design of a specific book with a specific text is unique. The relationship between text and image has already been studied, especially by Barthes and Joly (1996), within the Advertising field. Despite vast bibliographical references about the book, its history and form, studies on this relation between the text and its form are scarce. In order to develop a preliminary method, we’ll adapt Martine Joly’s method to the analysis of book design.

Joly seeks, from the inaugural work of Barthes in visual language field, to amplify and formalize a method of descriptive analysis to identify aspects of the plastic message (formal aspects); iconic message in its denotative and connotative levels; and the linguistic message of the text, which in the case of Advertising is a caption, a title, etc.

In her analytical model, Joly proposes to analyse first the plastic messages (formal), iconic (representation at the denotative and connotative spheres) and linguistic (text itself). Joly's model first analyses the plastic significant, followed by the iconic and the linguistic ones.

We propose a concomitant analytical model of the three messages, in order to understand the relation of the text and design as shown in the following structure:

- 1. Technical Description
- 2. Plastic Messages (Description of formal elements)
- 3. Message analysis (iconic message at the denotative and connotative fields)
- 4. Establishing an effective relation with the text, pointing passages and references

Bartleby: A Case Study

Using Joly's analytical model, we'll try to understand how *Bartleby, The Scrivener* (Bartleby, o escrivão) published by Cosac Naify (figures 1 and 2) presents design's pragmatic (text support) and semantic functions: meanings concerning design-text relationship.

Bartleby is a short story whose narrator is a rich Wall Street lawyer, owner of an office that works with mortgages and property titles. He briefly presents the office's routine, his inefficient employers, Nippers and Turkey, and describes the arrival of this new employer, Bartleby, presented as a fascinating character.

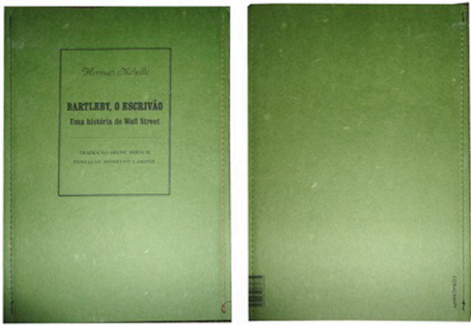
Through the narrative, the enigmatic and monosyllabic employer starts to refuse the requests of his employee, and later starts to live clandestinely at the office. When his employee requires that he gets out, Bartleby refuses to do so. The narrator suffers and becomes annoyed by Bartleby's refusals, and after a long time decides to call the police to expel him. Bartleby is arrested and dies in prison, refusing to eat.

The designer of this book, Elaine Ramos, explains to us in an interview that the design concept is related to the sentence "I prefer not to", the *leitmotiv* of Bartleby, is graphically translated as a metaphor of denial (the book is difficult to open).

Describing the constituent elements of the book, it is possible to verify and establish an effective relationship with the text, as shown in the analytical model table.

Analytical Model

Figure 1.
Cover.

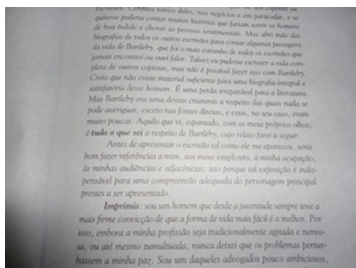


Technical Description	Plastic Message	Message analysis	Text and design relationship
Printing: Offset Format: 167 x 230 mm	Format presented in other books of this publisher.	It may point to a better format use.	—
Bookbinding: Sewn in the side of the spine joining cover and spreads. Sewn in the opposite side making a seal. Book inside is not cut. Fig.2.	The cover is sewn and it is necessary to pull the line in the right side to open it. When the cover is open we verified that the spreads are not cut and require opening the book page by page with a spatula.	The seals that hinder the opening of the book may connote an impossibility or barrier.	Bartleby refuses to do everything, even eating.
Cover paper: VEDPRESS GT 0.4 – (400 mg/m ²). Fig.1	The paper reminds old record-file folder.	The cover paper refers to the office.	Relates to the (archive) office.
Cover Typography: -Clarendon BT Bold Condensed -Clarendon BT Condensed -Goudy Extra Bold -OPTIGoudy Cursive (fig.1)	Text centered in the middle of the page with two different typefaces	Types of the 19th century that refer to that time	Relation to the textual elements of the cover, the same could also refer to "label", which could also refer to this medium: file label
Inside paper: paperperfect 56 g/m ²	Lightweight paper for easy folding, the outer side is printed the image of a concrete wall inside the text	The wall can be understood as a barrier	The character stares at a wall
Spreads Typography : goudy old style italic and roman 10 pt. Print Space: 100 x 191 mm Margins: top 12 mm, down 27 mm, internal side 16 mm, anterior 25 mm), lateral exterior 37 mm. Fig.3	Type in the main text: italic and in the afterword roman	The use of italic in the text reminds cursive handwritten	Bartleby was a scrivener – the shape of the letter refers to stenography.



Figure 2.
Book opening
sequence.

Figure 3 (right).
Italic text.



Departing from this preliminary analytical model, we understand that this example establishes a relationship with this specific literary text through typographic choices, materials and unusual binding. It also fulfils its function of supporting the text because it is pleasant to read, while performs a semantic function.

Conclusion

Today it is possible to verify a preference for functional design based on text support. However, Bringham (2008) argues that there is no transparent page: any designed page have meaning. The analysis model and the choice of this particular book (Bartleby) demonstrate how the design-text relationship works. It is very important, based on this example, to try to understand how graphic elements (layout, colour, typography,) and the print production may interfere and/or complement the text meaning, exercising a semantic function. Another important aspect of this example is that cover and book inside look coherent and were also made by the same designer.

This is an example to think in book design not only as text support, but also as a meaningful paratext. A lesson in Bartleby's case is that the text may suggest creative graphic design solutions.

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