

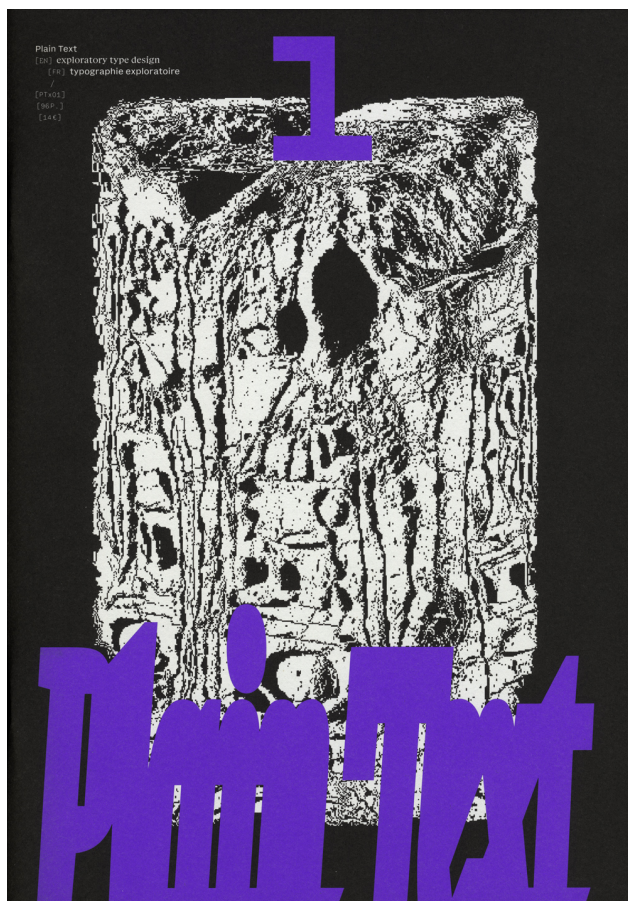
[Press kit] - Plain Text 1

Printed

A PUBLICATION FOR EXPLORATORY TYPE DESIGN

Plain Text is a semi-annual publication for contemporary type design, created by type foundry Plain Form. It aims at exploring typographic imaginaries, moving beyond a strictly historical and technical framework. Each issue features diverse content — essays, interviews, portfolios, re-publications, fiction as well as visual works — to satiate both type design experts, with contributions from or about recognized practitioners just as well as recent students, and the generally curious, with insights valuable to anyone interested in language and communication. We defend a poetic vision of type design and aim for Plain Text to be a space where letters are free from utilitarian expectations, allowing designers, writers, and typography enthusiasts to share trials, doubts, successes, and failures, contributing to a theory of type design that is poetic, eclectic and federated.

INFORMATIONS



This first issue explores typography from a poetic and theoretical perspective, addressing themes such as unconventional type families, the boundary between text and image, the ancient magic of writing, and questions about experimental practices and their impact on our relationship with reading.

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LUCAS DESCROIX — [FRANCE]

Family Business

This article uses parables to explore innovative approaches to type design and the creation of type families, focusing on experimentation and challenging norms. When some parables highlight how typefaces can unite diverse styles into cohesive systems, offering designers pre-made combinations for creative use, others illustrate reinterpretation through filters and algorithms, blending historical references with technology to produce new, dynamic typefaces, emphasizing type design as a balance of tradition and innovation, encouraging designers to rethink how styles interact within a family.

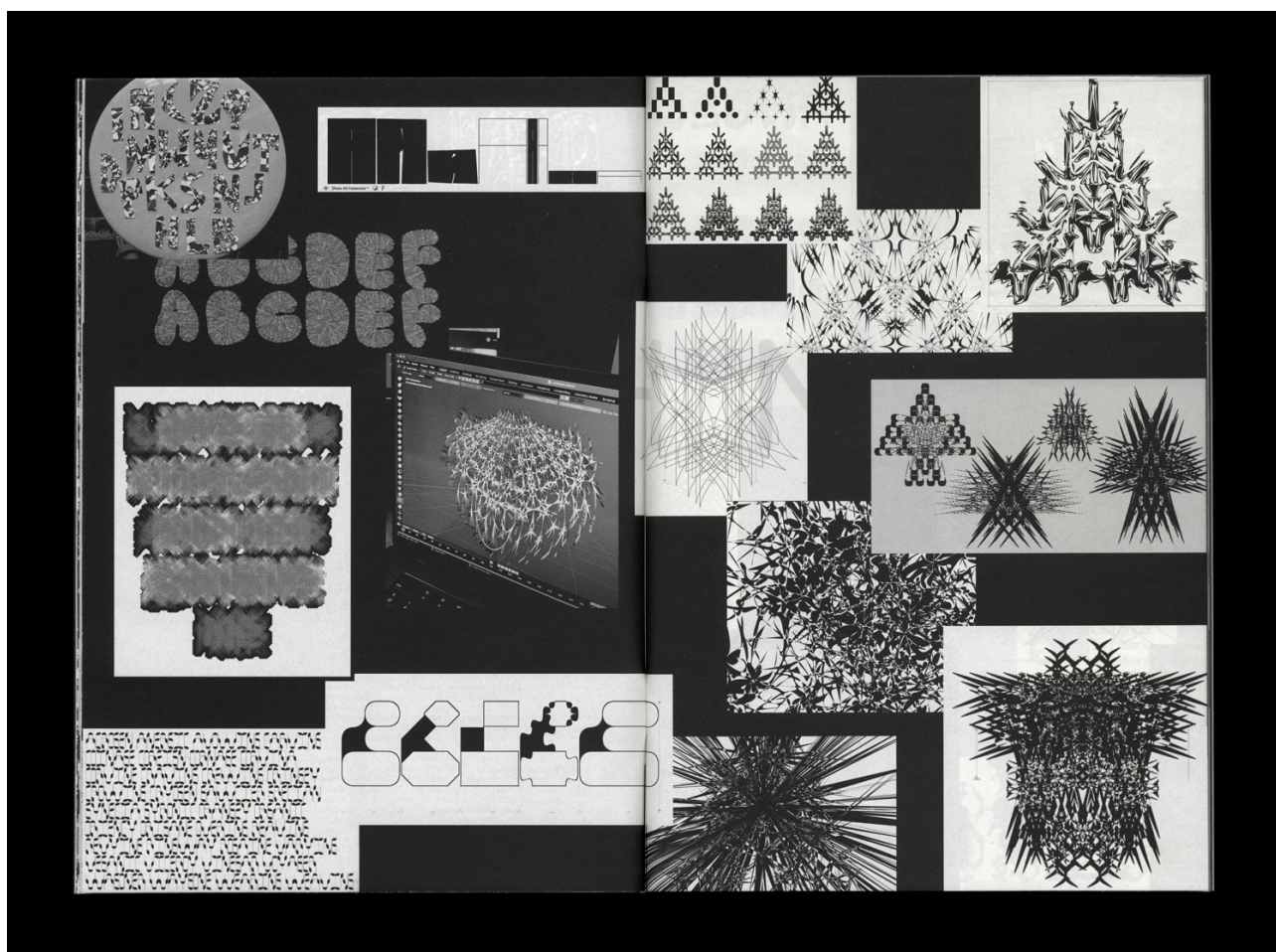
The text also delves into the interplay between control and chaos, celebrating the unpredictable creativity of machine-driven processes, but also the unifying power of strict logic, even among contrasting styles. Together, these concepts advocate for pushing boundaries in type design, treating type families as experiments in cohesion, creativity, and redefined relationships between form and function.



ANNE-DAUPHINE BORIONE — [FRANCE]

Trust the Process

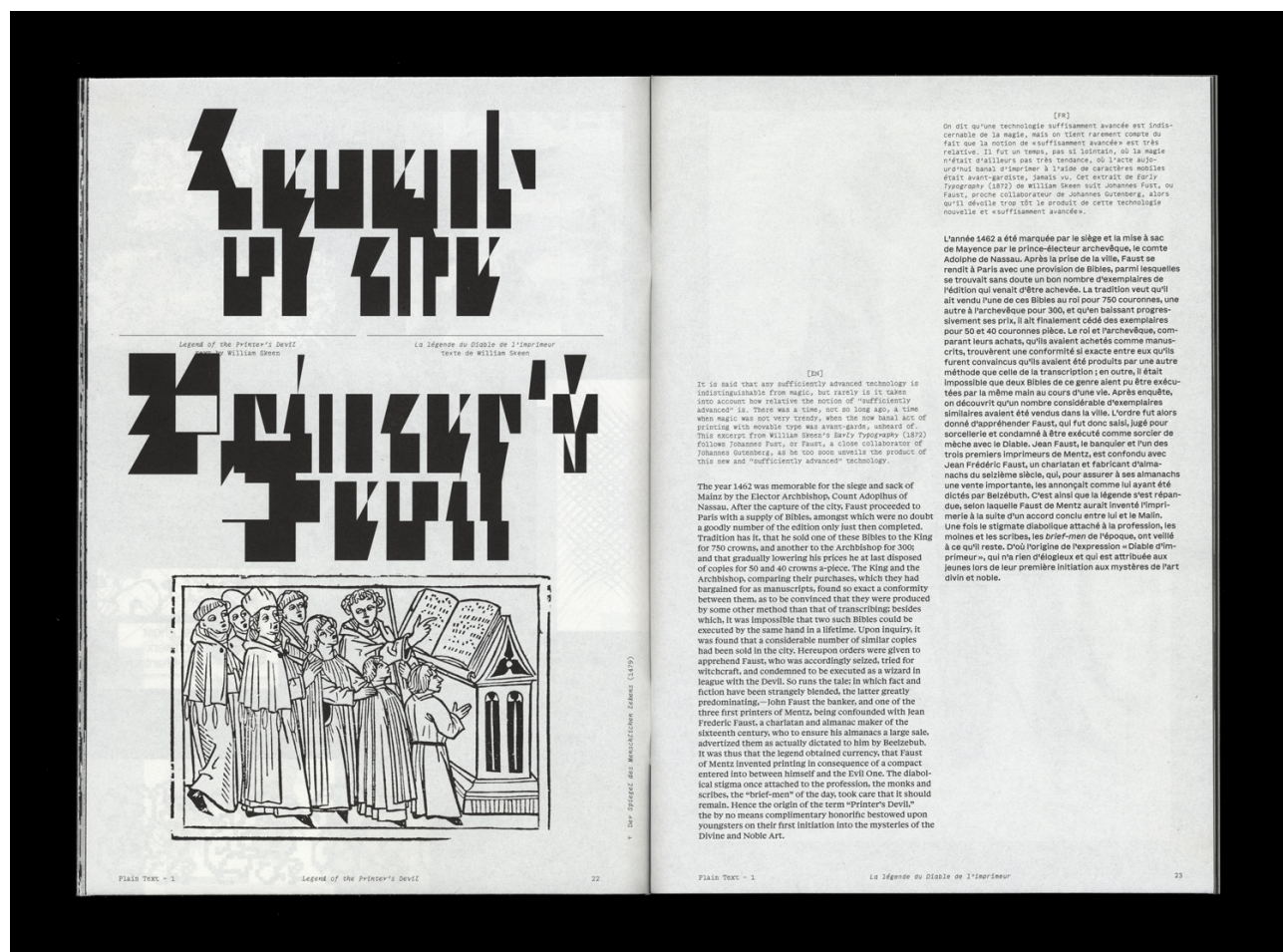
Anne-Dauphine Borione alias Daytona Mess is a type designer from France who loves mixing her passion for fantasy with letterforms. She is an active user of social networks where she makes visible her quick-paced and seemingly chaotic creative process, from first sketches to careful detail revisions and even beyond, distorted her own letterforms with digital textures or 3D softwares. It is fascinating, after following here for a few years, to witness how various ideas and experiments pop up, how they are seized or discarded, how they are pushed to all sorts of limits, and how, often, they influence each other, findings and mistakes sprouting new stems. The next few pages show a selection of images created by Daytona Mess, highlighting the richness of her type design process.



WILLIAM SKEEN — [ENGLAND]

Legend of the Printer's Devil

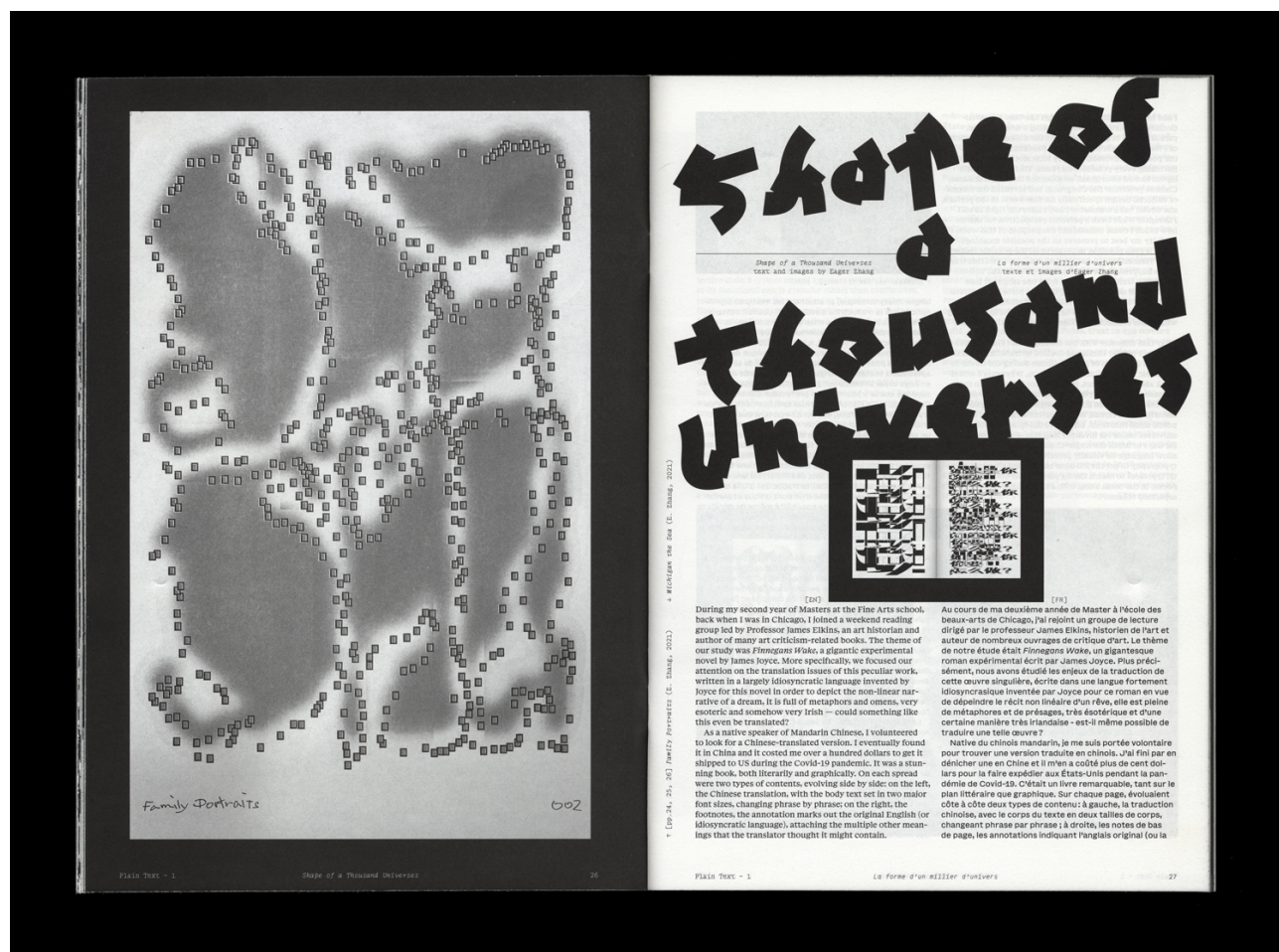
John Faust, one of the first printers, traveled to Paris with a supply of Bibles, likely including recently completed editions. After selling copies to the King and the Archbishop, suspicions arose about their production method. Unable to accept such precision as anything but supernatural, authorities accused Faust of witchcraft. This anecdote led to the legend that printing itself was the result of a pact with the Devil, fueling superstitions spread by monks and scribes threatened by the new technology. Though rooted in myth, this story reflects the tension between innovation and fear of change during the advent of printing.



EAGER ZHANG — [CHINA / USA]

Shape of a Thousand Universes

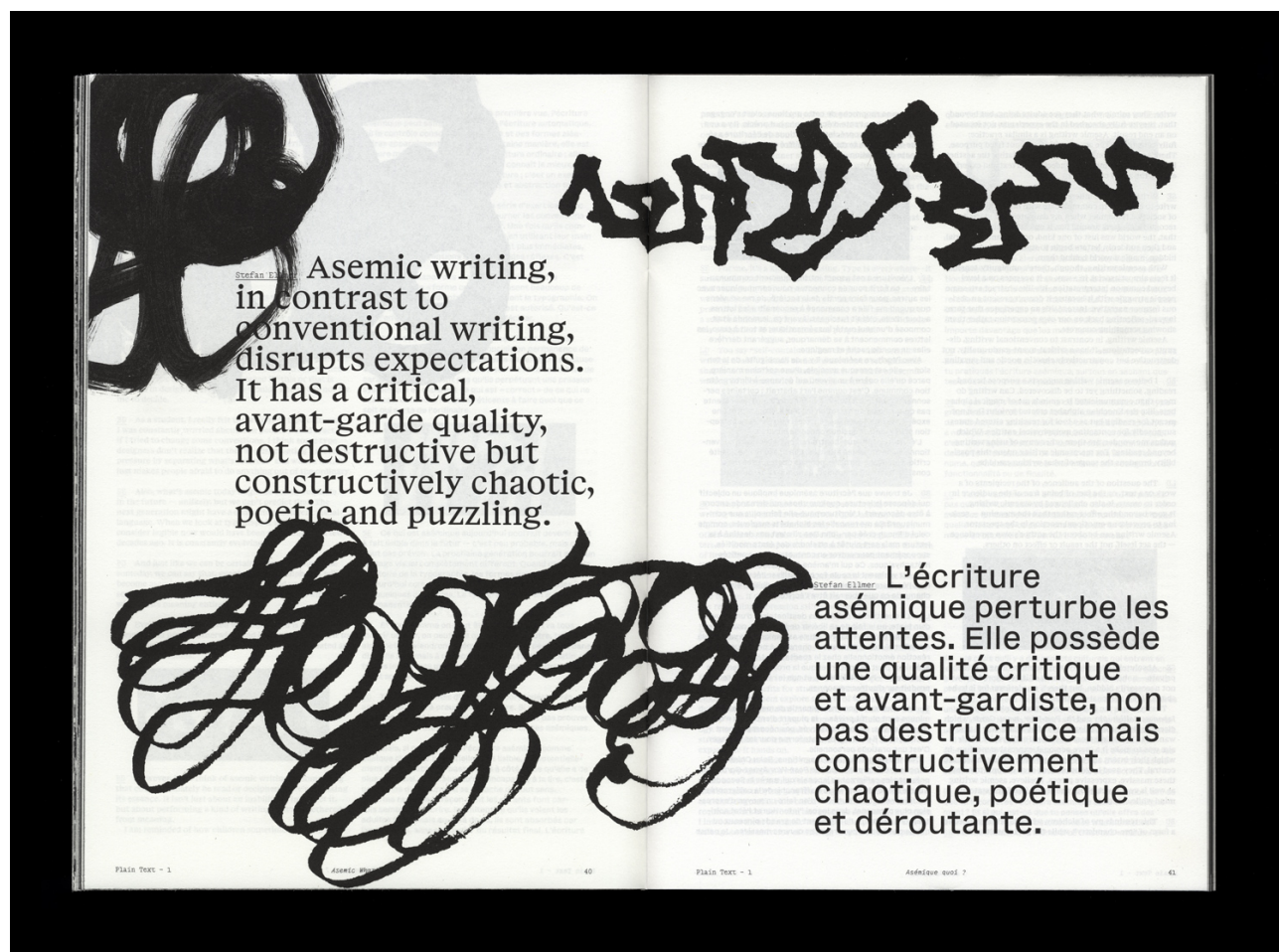
This article by designer and teacher Eager Zhang examines the relationship between language, translation, and typography, highlighting how meaning evolves and fragments when crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries. Translation is framed as a creative process filled with inevitable ambiguities, which can open up new possibilities for interpretation. Typography is presented as a medium capable of breaking away from linear, functional reading, instead offering non-linear, multi-layered narratives. This approach emphasizes the visual and conceptual potential of language, suggesting that type can go beyond facilitating reading to become a tool for slowing down perception and fostering deeper reflection. Ultimately, Eager Zhang advocates for a broader view of typography as a means to explore alternative modes of communication and representation.



STEFAN ELLMER — [AUSTRIA]

Asemic What?

In this conversation with Plain Text editors Lucas Descroix and Benjamin Dumond, type designer and teacher Stefan Ellmer, founder of The Pyte Foundry, discusses his project *Asemic, Between Drawing and Writing*, where he explores asemic writing—a form of expression that resembles script but lacks semantic meaning. Drawing on his background in type design, he explains that asemic writing challenges conventional notions of communication, offering new ways to explore form and expression. Ellmer reflects on its historical roots, from ancient Chinese calligraphy to modern artists like Henri Michaux, and its potential to inspire innovation in fields like typography, emphasizing the importance of questioning the boundaries between writing, art, and meaning.



AYASHA KHAN — [FRANCE]

Emomania

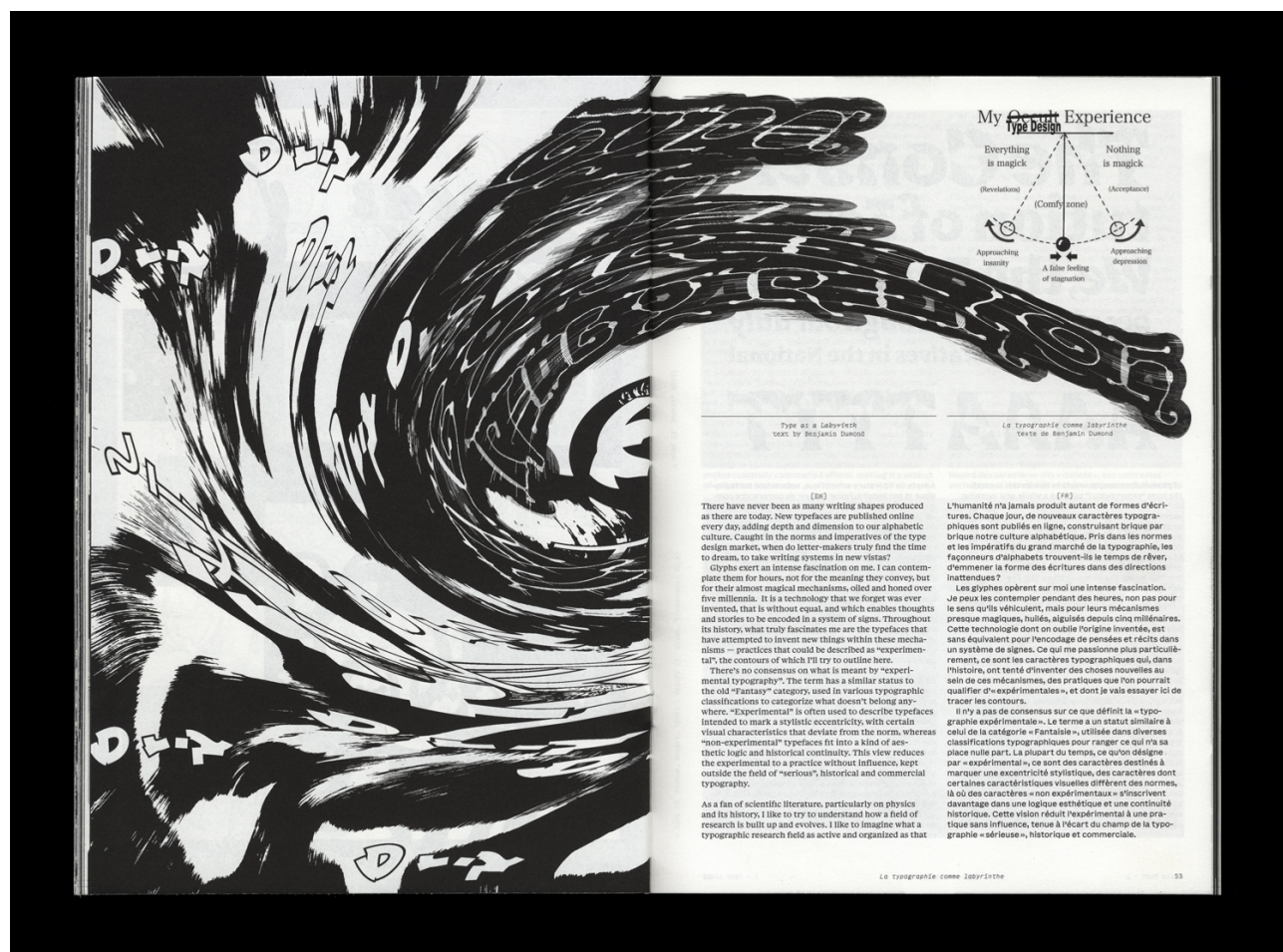
Ayasha Khan is a French graphic and type designer based in London, whose clean designs explore the evolution of information, from medieval scripts to modern emojis. A recent graduate of École de Recherche Graphique, her work examines the frustrations of typography, questioning how text can convey emotion and how we identify with symbols and images.



BENJAMIN DUMOND — [FRANCE]

Type as a Labyrinth

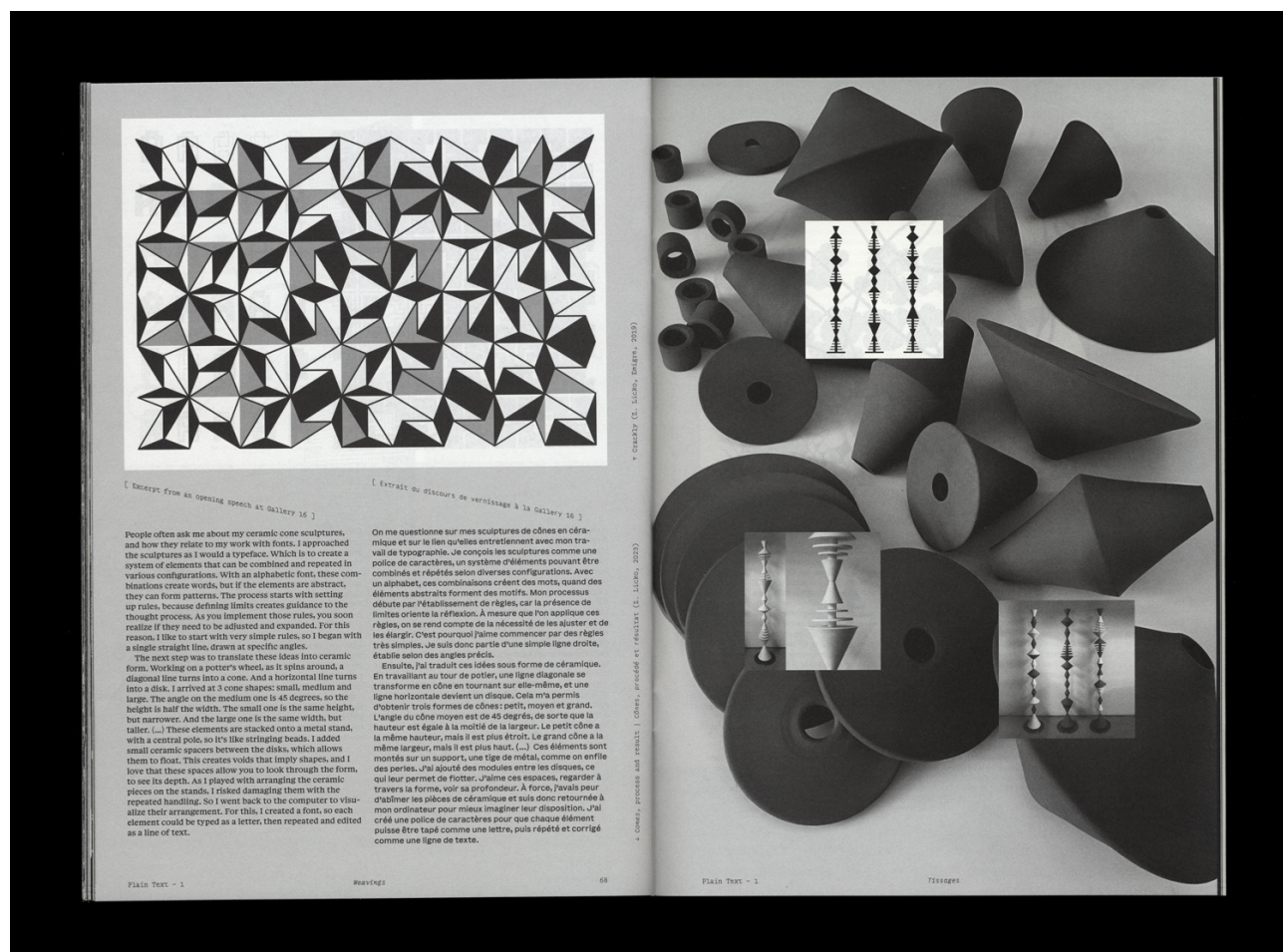
Benjamin Dumond's article explores experimental typography, challenging the view of it as merely eccentric or decorative. He argues that experimental typefaces, such as Tezco Suzuki's Groq and Berton Hasebe's Alda, are valuable research tools that explore new typographic possibilities. Dumond advocates for a deeper understanding of these typefaces as part of a larger exploration of typographic theory. He emphasizes the need to articulate the ideas behind experimental work to prevent it from becoming isolated and calls for a shift in the field toward greater collaboration and experimentation. Dumond envisions a future where such innovations shape new writing standards and influence how we read and write.



ZUZANA LICKO — [USA]

Weavings

Zuzana Licko, pioneer of digital type design and co-founder of the Emigre foundry and magazine, never wrote a text entitled Weavings. This article is rather, in Zuzana Licko's words, a series of "enhanced captions", a weaving together of several of her writings highlighting the role that typography, and even more so its underlying mechanisms, play in her creations, whether or not they contain letters. A perspective through the prism of type design that enables a particular take on reality, which in turn influences the typographic work, in a dialogue where words and patterns, forms and counter-forms, analogue and digital come together. For us at Plain Text, Emigre's work and approach have been major inspirations in our education and vision of typographic design. It is therefore with great pleasure that we present this weaving, created with the kind permission and feedback of Zuzana Licko.



VERSO WURM, ARMAN MOHTADJI — [FRANCE]

One Last Request

This darkly comedic short story, written by Verso Wurm and illustrated by Arman Mohtadji, follows a type designer who, disillusioned with his monotonous career and desperate for a spark of creativity, unintentionally unleashes a catastrophic black hole. As he creates an absurdly heavy typeface, pushing boundaries in a desperate moment of inspiration, his creation seems to warp reality itself, turning into a destructive force. The narrative is a clever meditation on the futility of striving for recognition and the unintended consequences of breaking away from convention. The protagonist's mix of apathy, guilt, and dark humor as he watches the disaster unfold paints a poignant portrait of existential confusion. With its quirky premise and absurd humor, the story delivers an entertaining, thought-provoking exploration of ambition, responsibility, and the unexpected weight of artistic decisions.



"When it all goes really bad before it goes well again" (p.79)

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"Quand tout va très mal avant d'aller très bien." (p.79)

I hurried downstairs to the Vietnamese restaurant, fearing the news might have pushed them to close early. In a panic, they had apparently not heard of it yet. I ordered a medium-size Bún Chả giò to go and considered adding a couple of sweet sesame balls as dessert. I usually never did, seemed a bit unreasonable, but I figured, could be the end of the world so, time to live a little. Sesame balls it was! I could see the cooks in the back had stopped working and were now staring at their phones. I could not understand what they were saying but the tone was clearly that of growing terror. I was out again with, wrapped in several layers of plastic bags, what presumably was the very last dish this restaurant would ever serve. Although maybe only the office building would fall into the emptiness, maybe just the street, worst case the city district. Here and there I saw a growing number of people looking at their phones in dismay, a few packing up their car with a sense of urgency. But perhaps was it because of football scores and last-minute holiday planning, not necessarily a reality-threatening phenomenon.

I walked toward a hillside park which I knew had a splendid view over the city. On my way I stopped in a convenience store to grab an overpriced bottle of sparkling water. The cashier was fully absorbed in the images coming from the TV – the unforeseen result of my afternoon's work was now the size of a small tornado, devouring cars, trees and entire houses. The inside was pure black, a bottomless pit in which its victims vanished, and the outline was a peculiar mix of RGB glitches and that distorted blurriness created by hot air. The scenes shown on screen resembled that of a superhero movie, when it all goes really bad before it goes well again. A pale moderator, holding back tears, struggling not to completely freak out: "Experts now confirm that we are looking at a form of black hole." An anguished pause. "It seems like its expansion will not stop. Could it – could it be a matter of time for the people of Earth?" I paled and left, catching a few more

J'ai couru au restaurant vietnamien, craignant que la nouvelle ne les pousse à fermer, dans la panique. Mais ils ne savaient apparemment encore rien. J'ai commandé un Bún Chả giò à emporter en taille medium et j'ai envisagé d'ajouter comme dessert quelques boules de sésame. D'habitude, je ne le faisais pas, ce n'était pas raisonnable, mais toute cette histoire sentait la fin du monde, était donc temps de vivre un peu. Alors, des boules de sésame! Les cuisiniers avaient arrêté de travailler et regardaient maintenant leur téléphone. Je ne comprenais pas ce qu'ils disaient, mais pouvait lire leur terreur grandissante. J'étais de nouveau dehors avec, enveloppé dans plusieurs sacs plastiques, le tout dernier plat que ce restaurant servirait jamais. Peut-être que seul l'immeuble du bureau avait sombré dans le néant, peut-être juste la rue, ou au pire le quartier. Ici et là, je voyais des gens affolés, penchés sur leur téléphone, quelques-uns remplissant à la hâte le coffre de leur voiture. Mais peut-être était-ce à cause de résultats de foot et de préparatifs de vacances de dernière minute, pas forcément d'un incident menaçant notre réalité.

Je me suis dirigé vers un parc sur la colline, qui offrait une vue splendide sur la ville. En chemin, je me suis arrêté dans une supérette pour acheter une bouteille d'eau gazeuse hors de prix. La caissière était absorbée par la télévision – le résultat imprévu de mon travail avait maintenant la taille d'une petite tornade, dévorant voitures, arbres et maisons. L'intérieur était d'un noir pur, un puits sans fond dans lequel disparaissaient ses victimes, le contour, un mélange étrange de glitches RGB et de cet effet flou créé par l'air chaud. Les scènes à l'écran ressemblaient à celles d'un film de super-héros, quand tout va très mal avant d'aller très bien. Un présentateur pâle, au bord des larmes et de la panique: «Les experts confirment maintenant qu'il s'agit d'une forme de trou noir.» Une pause pleine d'angoisse. «Il semble que son expansion ne s'arrête pas. Serait-ce une question de temps pour les habitants de la Terre?» J'ai pâyé et suis parti, saisissant au passage

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KIRSTEN D. DZWIZA — [GERMANY]

Ancient Mysteries of Writing

Kirsten D. Dzwiza's article examines the mystical significance of writing in ancient Egyptian and Graeco-Egyptian magic, where symbols were seen as embodiments of divine power. In Egypt, hieroglyphs were believed to have inherent power, connecting the divine and physical worlds through rituals, while Graeco-Egyptian magic viewed Greek letters as tools to channel divine powers through specific rituals. Dzwiza also discusses the evolution of "charaktères," magical signs that resemble letters but serve as independent symbols of divine power. The article highlights how writing was not just a communication tool but a means to interact with the divine, offering deep insights into the spiritual role of script in ancient cultures.



PLAIN TEAM — [FRANCE]

Express Exegesis

Exegesis is a method of analysis that goes beyond the stated purpose of an object or its author, extrapolating and multiplying interpretations in the hope of revealing hidden meanings. Applied to typography, exegesis becomes a thought experiment that helps us to identify what attracts us to certain atypical typefaces and to conceptualize what they might express. The aim is to expand the typographic imagination and inspire future typefaces.



Contributors

LUCAS DESCROIX

Lucas Descroix is a French type designer and founder of the independent type foundry Plain Form, established in 2022. He creates custom and retail typefaces and is known for his exploration of eclectic type families, blending abstraction with recognizable letterforms. As a founding member of Bonjour Monde, he likes to experiment with alternative tools and processes.

ANNE-DAUPHINE BORIONE

Anne-Dauphine Borione, known as Daytona Mess or Ando, is a French type designer celebrated for her playful and artistic approach. Fueled by fantasy, video games and pop music, Ando's work is characterized by a passion for display type, where she embraces letters without the constraints of functionality. She graduated from Type & Media in 2024.

WILLIAM SKEEN

William Skeen was the government printer for Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) during the 19th century. He played a key role in advancing printing in the region and authored *Early Typography*, a notable work that explored the history and development of printing techniques.

EAGER ZHANG

Eager Zhang (b. 1997, China) is a visual artist and graphic designer based in Los Angeles. Growing up multilingual and trained in coding, she explores reading behavior, language and poetry. Her work often relies on metaphorical narratives through letter-making, using experimental layouts and tools. She teaches at Otis College of Art and Design.

STEFAN ELLMER

Stefan Ellmer is an Austrian type designer based in Norway. After studying in Vienna, Arnhem, and Leipzig he established The Pyte Foundry in 2015 and released a display font every week of 2016, celebrating 19th-century typographic diversity. His work balances functionality and idiosyncrasy, emphasizing word manipulation and a playful approach to heritage in design.

AYASHA KHAN

Ayasha Khan is a French graphic and type designer based in London, whose clean designs explore the evolution of information, from medieval scripts to modern emojis. A recent graduate of École de Recherche Graphique, her work examines the frustrations of typography, questioning how text can convey emotion and how we identify with symbols and images.

BENJAMIN DUMOND

Benjamin Dumond is a graphic designer, developer and thinker based in Lyon, France. Founder of Grifi, he explores textual potentials through essays, fictions, tools, thought experiments and typefaces. His approach to type design is uninhibited and unconventional, with little amount of drawing, a whole lot of distortion and a sprinkle of occult.

ZUZANA LICKO

Zuzana Licko is a Slovak-born American type designer and co-founder of Emigre Graphics, known for her pioneering digital fonts. She developed influential typefaces like Citizen and Matrix. Emigre served as a platform for experimental and innovative type design, shaping the visual identity of the digital age. Zuzana Licko also creates ceramic sculptures and jacquard weavings.

VERSO WURM, ARMAN MOHTADJI

Verso Wurm enjoys frosty mornings, the crippling, indescribable vertigo of simply being, as well as long walks on the beach. Arman Mohtadji is a UK based illustrator and comic writer with a strong interest in free / open source software. Sometimes these two worlds collide. Former member of Bonjour Monde, he built many scripts and tools to manipulate shapes and vectors, to be used on illustrations as well as typefaces.

KIRSTEN D. DZWIZA

Kirsten D. Dzwiza is an archaeologist specializing in ancient magic, with over 15 years of experience studying artifacts and ritual manuals at universities in Germany. Her PhD focused on inscribed magical artifacts from the Egyptian and Greek papyri. She is preparing comprehensive works on ancient magic signs.

INFORMATION

Plain Form operates without a distributor, however Plain Text can be found in a number of selected stores. If you run a bookstore or cultural institution and would like to see some Plain Text on your shelves, feel free to get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

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