

Design Models of the Early Postkommunist Bulgarian Press

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Summary

The article studies the typographic trends in Bulgarian post communist press by the end of 1989 to the end of the twentieth century. To be clarified on typographic preferences for design of the titles of the Bulgarian daily editions were tested 12 newspaper: „24 chasa“, „Trud“, „Standart“, „Noshten trud“, „Kontinent“, „Demokrazija“, „Duma“, „Pari“, „Novinar“, „Zemja“, „7 dni sport“, „Bulgarska armija“. Specially developed for the survey matrix includes most used in Bulgarian practice typographic variants and is a original frequency dictionary, showing the extent of the use of typographic key words in Bulgarian newspaper typographical speech. This methodology helped us to bring out as the most important trend in contemporary Bulgarian typographical press serious supremacy of sans serif variants in the graphical design of headings.

Keywords: graphic design, editorial design, newspaper design, typography, communication, Bulgarian press, post totalitarian press

In the first years after the political change in 1989 Bulgarian design of traditional media is evolving in a completely new direction. The liberalization of the press, the penetration therein of news and sensations, the private nature of the papers and the competition between them lay reverberation on the design. The new print media parted with the boredom, the tranquility and the droning graphics solutions, or imitation techniques different from those in a totalitarian, non-free press. Technological transfer also resulted in substantial changes in typographic design. Important is a professional reflection and aspiration to free, different, qualitatively new appearances in design too. Targeting questin a high degree of individuality and uniqueness of the selected style, uniqueness of the approach and composition variations conduct as well to good design and successful models, as to loss of accents and tacky graphics solutions.

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The weak continuity between the graphic styles of the newspapers from different eras – the main feature of newspaper design in Bulgarian- is the most obvious and unambiguous evidence in the transition from a totalitarian to a post-totalitarian press. Long lasting existence (renamed or not) newspapers dramatically changed its graphic design under the influence of new social, cultural, economic, technological conditions: „Duma“, „Zemedelsko zname“, „Zemja“, „Bulgarska armia“, „Otechestven vestnik“, „Trud“, „Vecherni novini“, „Anteni“, „Pogled“, „Spektur“, „Televizija i radio“ etc. The emerging daily newspapers found it necessary to release with a design quite different from the style of totalitarian papers: „24 chasa“, „Standart“, „Kontinent“, „Demokrazija“, „Bulgaria“, „Denjat“, „Express“, „Vrabec“, „Vecheren sport“, „Noshten trud“, „Pari“, „Sega“, „Novinar“, „Monitor“, „Dnevnik“.

The multidirectional searches and the experimentation of graphic models running in the press in post-totalitarian years, are found in a new design philosophy, a collection of relatively close design concepts. Its characteristic is:

- contrasting, solid tonality of pages (creating of black titles, lines, short texts, and at the end of the 1990s the abundance of color and large photographs);
- the choice of sans serif fonts for the typographic style of the daily press in dense weight and with completely filling the page width;
- a clear structuring of the territory of the page in a clean-cut, stressed horizontal hierarchical fields - 3-4 on page, built originally by the vertical alignment of a few titles;
- a large degree of constancy even in the smaller volume of papers;
- strong unification the typographic styles, absence of typographical surprise;
- difficult differentiation of graphically individual comment, entertainment, special pages;
- categorical contrasts the typographic „mixes“ - for example in the shaping of the floors of the title complex, but also in the text design as a manifestation of the pursuit of visual harshness, straightforward, brightness of Bulgarian periodicals;
- prevalence of excessively narrow columns in the daily newspapers – as expression and means of their information nature and dynamic design.

The post-totalitarian period is not static. There are various stages in the short period covered and especially in such a dynamic area as a newspaper design.

The most obvious difference is in the original diversity of styles and in the later relative repeatability of styles. Regarding this new graphics unification the Bulgarian newspapers in 1996 look more like the papers in 1986 than those in 1992. The preservation of this form in a significant repetitive design styles of the Bulgarian newspapers in the middle of the Decade was overcome hard. The development of other, alternative concepts has gained visibility only at the end of the century. According to the visual representation of the fastest communicative typographic composite part in the newspaper – the titles, Bulgarian editions are closer to the style of the mass media, rather than to the quality press. The birth of the new periodicals from the very beginning led to a deepening of the sensationalism as a graphic line of the daily editions. The pendency of the newspaper market and the volatility of the economic circulation, the wars between the editors and the distributors, as well as a number of social and cultural factors delayed the imposition of a serious type of press journalism in Bulgaria in the earliest post-totalitarian years. Even some imitations of European quality daily papers do not have the desired results. For instance „*Kontinent*“ who tried to follow the style of British publicistic demanding daily papers (especially of the „*Independent*“), managed to sell an insignificant even for Bulgaria circulation and adopted the proven format and a more „democratic“ design according to his graphics editors (1996). And other central dailies (to a greater or lesser extent) chose the typographic language of an affordable, mass press: „*Noshten trud*“, „*Novinar*“, „*24 tchasa*“, „*Trud*“, „*Demokrazija*“ (to July 1996), „*Denjat*“, „*Bulgaria*“ etc. Something more: it was to involve a number of specialized weeklies, even magazines.

The „negotiable“, „market“ newspaper design established itself due to the fact that the visual codes of the press were deciphered in the most adequate for *the time* (1990s) and *the place* (Bulgaria) way:

- democratic, readable - as an antipode of the boring and dehumanized press from the recent past;
- an objective, an undisguised - as an antipode of the totalitarian manipulative code newspaper, using a 60-point font only for „exceptional“ cases - party congress, plenum, but not for war, a nuclear accident, etc;
- news, information, sensational - in contrast to the ideological, propagandistic style;
- aggressive and sassy - in contrast to the quiet, boring, flat, grey tone of the totalitarian press;

□ **non-traditional, modern, attractive** - as the antipode of the archaic patterns, clichés and decorativeness, hard to overcome in Bulgarian newspapers up to 60s-70s.

The message of the typographic language and the overall design is „translated“ in a manner dependent on the various social, cultural conditions and certain „rules of competence and interpretation“ⁱ. Observation and analysis of post-communist press show endemic diversity of codes of the Bulgarians, their heteroclit, singularity, distortion. They seem to be subject to further extension due to the nearby historic traumatic of the totalitarian journalism and propaganda. Some empirical and intuitive, others as a result of the dramatic confrontations with the market, Bulgarian newspapers are trying to find the code that is closest to the audience and respects her understanding. I cannot claim the message encoded so slang. It is rather a „prescribed“ by the practice in accordance with our „clinical“ picture. So as the antipode of „wooden“ language and dull media from the time of totalitarianism comes „democratic“, clear language. In place of roughly ideological discourse of the graphic design of the recent past comes „objective, an undisguised“ discourse. News, sensational language replaced the unwieldy propaganda visual language, aggressiveness and audacity – the greyness, unconventionality – the boredom and archaism.

The codes of the Bulgarians for reliance on the „quality“ and „yellow“ press are distorted from the time when the communist press actively recommended for publicistic demanding and „qualitative“ and for propaganda antipode served approaches of the yellow press. Since then, „yellow“ for Bulgarian citizens means not so as rude-thrilling, false, but rather as a free download. The frequency typographic „dictionary“ on the basis of specially developed for this study matrix shows the apparent preference of central dailies and weekly editions to sans serif fonts for headlines design. The research work on observations from 1997 but the typographic design is generally steady, the status quo is maintained since 1991 despite frequent changes in styles, stopping the media and the emergence of new newspapers. They striving to differentiate themselves from each other through the design, to demonstrate, to individualize lead (in the early post-totalitarian period) to the continuous search of new, unknown font styles, some of which -quite unsuited for newspaper titles.

Basic typographic style of the headlines in most of Bulgarian newspapers in the last decade of 20. century are the sans serif fonts in black weights. This orientation is on the one hand the typographic adequacy of the newspaper „newspeak“- the brutality language - as if naive, daily, folklore, undisciplined looking like undisciplined forms and design - non-ideological, unrecognized, rejected, „poor quality“. On the other hand, this typographic choice is a result of the universal striving for visual legibility and strength of the Bulgarian editions. The dense tonalities, that are preferred by the political morning dailies, coupled with a general large sizes, make the title a very strong design component. Reached the final limits of ranges, the editions resorting to complex ways of reproduction of the title complexes. Highly limited font selection within an edition, from one side overcomes the excessive variegation of pages from the recent past. On the other hand, this significant typographical unification is not a retardation of the design or its freak: due largely to the relatively strong uniformity in terms of expression, genre, styles of writing and presenting texts; the monolingualism of Bulgarian editions. Categorical contrasts with typographic „mixes“ - for example in designing over-and subheadings and their differentiation, are one of the most characteristic traits of the Bulgarian design style. In almost all dailies prefer the versions of all the clear opposition — through different font, ductus, slope, width, with additional lines and a drastic size difference. This dominance of the sharp contrast in the design of the title complex to the softer solutions is yet another proof of the pursuit of visual harshness, straightforward, distinctness, brightness of Bulgarian periodicals.

The initial amateur appearance of much of the Bulgarian post-totalitarian editions gradually gives way to a professionally built design, striving to be an individual, albeit in contoured typographic paradigm. Another significant transformation undergoes the Bulgarian daily newspaper in the 90s years. Until recently, our press was a classic typographic phenomenon. Due to the unsatisfactory quality of the images in conventional printing technology the Bulgarian newspapers has traditionally spent their image on the basis of the typographyⁱⁱ. The font is a major carrier of information, on the „arrangement and the effect of the font“ⁱⁱⁱ is based and aesthetics, and communication of the pages. The pure, high quality reproduced photograph or drawing are something relatively new for us press, entered in it with the transition to offset printing, and with the advent of computer technology for prepress.

The same applies to the color in the newspapers. The main means of visual text (especially in terms of the constant competition of the press with television, video, film), the photographs, the color, the info-graphics and the active graphical elements such as lines, frames, backgrounds, textures etc. recently expanded its perimeter and among Bulgarian daily editions. Bulgarian dailies are increasingly orienting themselves towards building a vibrant centres of visual attraction in a different location on the page, as have big color pictures, vivid negative headlines and solid frames. The optical power of the territory further escalated by the inclusion in the general design concept of the attractive info-graphics, self representing illustrations and dominant designed standart typography: headings and logos of the special pages and sections. Active content quotation is already normal visibility, not only for the front pages of daily newspapers, but for their latest pages, which often „go” reading, and with it the tenders, transfers, self promoting.

The new graphic concepts of the newspaper, the communication design, the consciousness about the possibilities of the info-union between the pictures, graphics and text found confirmation in Bulgarian editorial practices. Increasingly they negate the predominated close a decade typographical doctrine about hierarchical layered style of visual space through large, descending evanescent titles, aligned in a vertical layout and separating small font zones in the almost complete absence of photographs and illustrations. The Bulgarian press also has its archetypes, builds its own visual conventions - models, formed by social, cultural, geopolitical, technological factors, by the peculiarities of the national character and the extreme conditions in the development of Bulgarian press. A number of sustainable features, general specifications impose as elements of the general graphic style of Bulgarian periodicals, going through divergence of different typographic stages. Traditional influences on the Bulgarian national graphic design style (for example, by the German, French, Russian graphic schools) are increasingly displaced by the American model of structure and graphic design of the papers. „The Universal is an American”-americanization is an indisputable fact, and the most obvious manifestation of his is now completely internationalized design of mass press in Europe. Their prototype is the American high circulation „yellow paper”. Tired of the almost semi-centennial stiffness and ideologized discourse Bulgarian post-communist periodicals seek first a visual representation, similar to the style of the infamous press - more daily, more accessible, more mass.

ⁱ Eco, Umberto. Whether the audience is damage to the TV? In: Contemporary journalism, 1988, no. 1, with. 164. (Еко, Умберто. Дали публиката вреди на телевизията? В: Съвременна журналистика, 1988, № 1, с. 164.)

ⁱⁱ Valkanova, Vesselina. Historical development of the Bulgarian newspaper graphics. In: Yearbook of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". Faculty of journalism and mass communication. "Volume 7, 2000, Sofia, Publisher of Sofia University" St. Kliment Ohridski ", p. 263-294. (Вълканова, Веселина. Историческо развитие на българската вестникарска графика. В: "Годишник на Софийския университет "Св. Климент Охридски". Факултет по журналистика и масова комуникация." Том 7, 2000, София, Издателство на СУ "Св. Климент Охридски", стр. 263 – 294.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Moen, Daryl R. Newspaper Layout and Design. 3-rd Ed., Ames, Iowa, Iowa State University Press, 1995, p. 224.