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Title: Challenges of teaching typography to the students of today's era, who are overexposed to information.

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Abstract: This paper will briefly discuss the challenges of teaching typography to the students of today's era, who are overexposed to information and share the solution I have arrived to after a couple of years in teaching.

Today's students belong to the technological driven Google generation. They have too many distractions to deal with. Apart from their work they have a huge global social circle they cannot escape. In this continues process of disturbance it is the teacher's task to keep the students occupied in the class for around six hours. Typography is a very technical subject; it's more to do with grids, size and scale. The objective is to give the students something interesting which will make them understand the subject as well as it should not become boring.
The assignment discussed here shows how serendipity affects design and how it can improve and change design and typography. The aim of this exercise was to encourage students to break out of the regular references they use for design and use different methods to come up with new ideas for layout.

Key words: Typography, pedagogy, layout, space, form, innovative

1. Introduction

When a reader looks upon a beautifully designed page, he is drawn, almost without even thinking about it, to read the words. He takes them in, unfolding the narrative in his mind, and he asks questions about the text, the space, the form itself. This engagement, this interplay between the reader and the words, is beautiful interaction design. An intelligent, caring typographer carefully chooses typefaces, line lengths, margins, etc. that allow the users to enter a conversation with the content, to engage with the words before them. It is not merely good usability or legibility that the typographer creates; it is an experience. It is dialogue. It is co-creative narrative. Its transparency only underlines its importance: without it, this delicate relationship between reader and words would be lost. The mystery of this design is that it is so delicate, and yet so very important and strong. It is, in no small way, a foundation of our very culture.

Typography should perform these services for the reader:

• invite the reader into the text;

• reveal the mood and meaning of the text;

• clarify the structure and the order of the text;

• link the text with other existing elements;

• should create a relaxed state of mind which will help the reader.

Visual impact is the most basic device for getting attention, the grammar of style is something which is always changing. Today typography is a vital element in making print or electronic communications effective and more efficient.

A full understanding of typography will serve to direct the designer in choosing an appropriate typeface with which to express and communicate any message. Each typeface has its own aesthetic, expressive qualities, which help us identify that particular font. It is the character of that font. It is important for a designer to know the basic classifications of typefaces, for the reason that each type category has individual, functional qualities. Within any category, each typeface has its own individual identity because of different proportions and a variety of line weights, widths, mass, structure, stress and so on. These individual qualities clearly determine that each typeface demonstrates a different use and purpose in design. A well-combined variety of typeface , other elements and space bring variations of expression and harmony to the design. Awareness of these classifications is an essential tool in developing a designer's ability to enhance any layout.

Today's students belong to the technological driven generation. They are masters of multitasking. The opportunities a student had in the 1990s and the end of millennium were little compared to today's students. They had only the library and their teacher for any guidance. They had to go through the trial and error method before arriving to any solution. Today there is Google, Facebook, Instagram, Pintrest, Twitter, and the whole internet apart from library and teachers. As soon as any assignment is given in a class the students reach out to the internet instead of trying something on their own first.

The problems today's teacher has to face to deal with this busy generation are

- Too much information from the internet which need not necessarily be the source of the right kind of knowledge about typography.
- Inducing the importance of unlearning to today's students. It's very easy to learn from scratch but it's a difficult task to unlearn.
- To deal with plagiarism. The practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own. Make the students realise the difference between inspiration and copy.
- Lack of time.
- Less attention span.

A modern teacher has to help a student find their own talent. The suggestion is teachers should design assignments which are innovative and which can keep the students engaged for a long time. Assignments should be entertaining as well as informative. Things one learns effortlessly are the things one remembers forever.

The assignment discussed here was conducted in the Third Year B.F.A Applied Art in the year 2013 with fourteen elective typography students of Rachana Sansad College of Applied Art and craft.

This assignment shows how serendipity affects design and how it can improve and change the way one looks at composition, design and typography. The aim of this exercise was to encourage students to break out of the regular references they use for design and use different methods to come up with new ideas for layout. Rigidity in layouts makes design very boring and dull. The result as well as the process that leads to that particular result should be interesting and engaging for the student was the motto. The exercise shows that inspiration and ideas can come out of the most unexpected places. Dried snacks were used as inspiration to create unconventional typographic layouts. The Shapes, weight, texture and colour of the food help give inspiration for the letters and words. The most

important thing was the innovation in the layouts but still maintaining design as well as readability.

This class assignment binds together the thought that design and creativity can come from anywhere as long as one is ready to experiment. The Assignment was carried out in 5 stages, each one being a surprise to the students.
Material required: dried snacks, coloured paper, rough papers, pencils, camera and laptop.

2.Process

2.1 Task one: Smell, taste & scatter

The task given to the students was very simple. They were asked to lay the dry snacks out on the coloured paper. Students were allowed to break, spread, squash or mix the snacks. Any combination was allowed as long as the food created interesting layouts.
The Idea was not to have a plan, though some of them tried to make more definite layouts like faces, shapes etc. The focus was on playing with form and texture of the food and space on paper, without thinking about the layout.

Figure.1 Photographs of scattered food on colour paper.

Then they were asked to photograph these compositions. The compositions looked very arty. The only task told was the composition should look balanced. There was only form, colour and texture of the food on paper. No Typography yet.

2.2 Task two: We need words to create Typography.

The students were asked to write down whatever came to their mind when they looked at the food scattered on paper. It could be the thought that was running in their mind while

they performed the act of scattering food on paper or anything that occurred to them at that particular time and space. It was a nice rainy day and the students were in the best of their mood. Some came up with poems about love some just wrote about what they saw on paper, and one student wrote a gujrati/hindi poem.

2.3 Task three: let there be typography.

The students were asked to combine and design the text they had just written on the photograph of the food layout picture. The photographs were original. There was no reference used from anywhere to make the layout. So the outcome was a different and original layout.

Figure.2 Photographs showing a combination of task one and copy for a layout.

One thing was to be kept in mind that both the picture and the paragraph had to look like they synced well together, though they were executed in different parts. The synergy of both was to be maintained in the layout. The balance that already existed in the picture when photographed would now be altered with the addition of text and still should look balanced. Here they had to use their knowledge of size, scale and grid to fit type and make a balanced layout.

2.4 Task four: Replace

Each student had a unique and different photograph just clicked by them.
Now they had to use the photograph they had clicked as a reference image to create a pure typographical layout using random letters by replacing the food with type.

Figure.3 Replacing type with food to study weight of type.

They were asked to make the selection of letters based on the weight and size of the form of food in the photo.
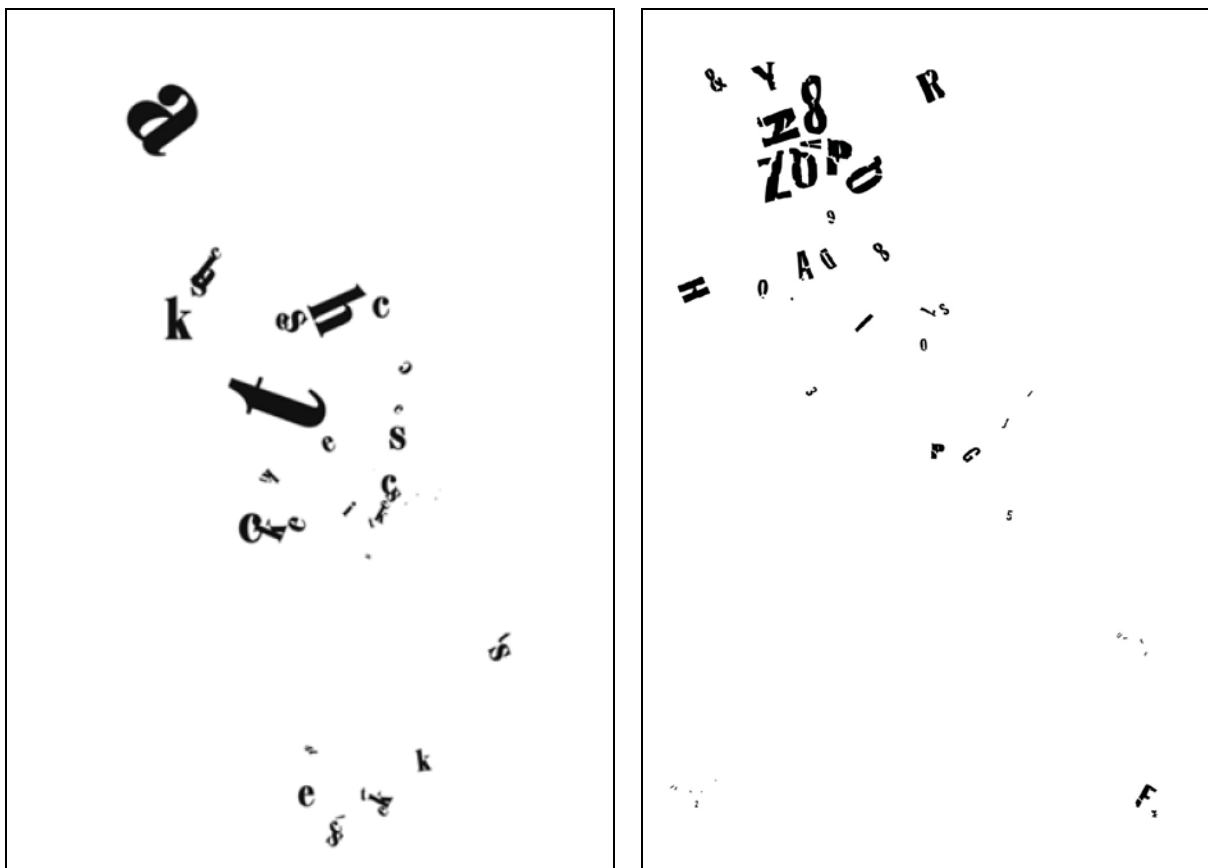

Figure.4

During this process the students learned about weight of the font and its importance in balancing a layout. The results now had a sophisticated look and such result was not possible if they hadn't gone through the process of this particular assignment.

2.5 Task five: Grand finale

Using the image from task 4 as a reference once again they had to create a typographic layout with copy they wrote this time. The sentences came from the paragraph they had written in task 2. The only brief was to experiment the layout, but make it readable.
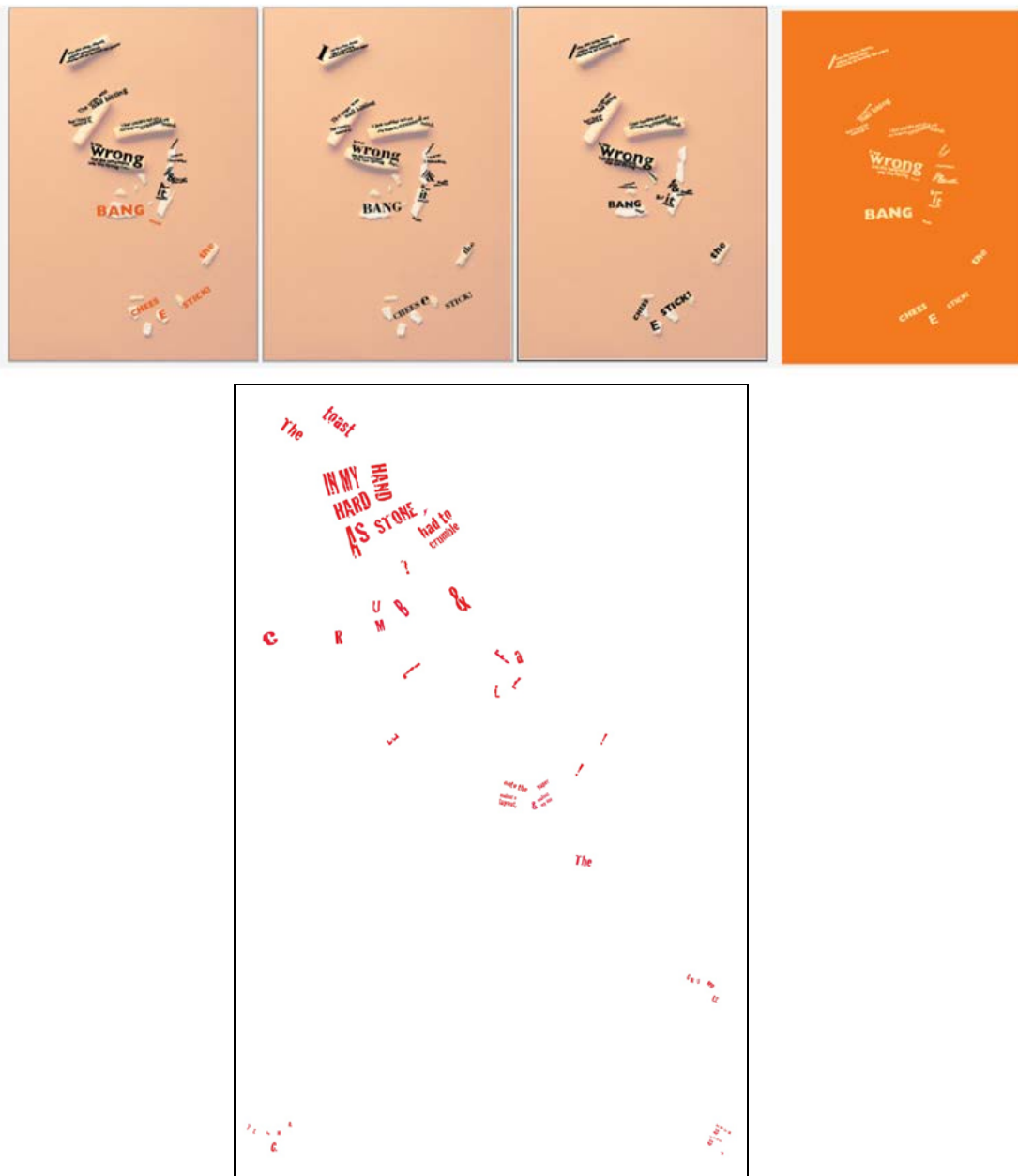

Figure.5 The final typographic layout.

The objective was to create unconventional layouts and break away from the rule that sentences can be read only when placed in lines, or when placed in systematic grid. Here is a student's view: Urvi Shah "It was experiment that no one knew the outcome to. In the true sense the layout of the food decided the fate of our typography. We learnt to let go of rigidity in our layouts. It's hard to imagine letters flying around a page and it actually forming a layout that makes sense and is understandable. Generally when creating a layout one pays attention to readability and expression, here we had to only follow the lines or shapes that the food objects had created. No addition of expression or other objectives were to be kept in mind. Thus we were able to create layouts that were nowhere close to layouts that we generally see. The sentences had meaning but no flow or set order of reading.

It helped to break the rigidity in layouts and actually letting sentences have a meaning without it being read in a straight line. The order of reading could be emphasized by placement, direction, Importance to a specific word or sentence, etc. The balance could be maintained by changing the point sizes of letters or breaking the direction of the sentence. "

Figure.6 Students works displayed in class for discussion.

3. Conclusions

The exercise was to experiment the results of serendipity on layout. Two things were explored during this whole process, form and space. The use of typography is the primary means of presenting ideas and messages for any layout. In this case, typography has a dual role: to represent a concept, and to do so in a visual form. This interplay of meaning and form brings a balanced harmony into the stage both in terms of function and expression. Displaying type as a form provides a sense of a letterform's unique characteristics and abstract presentation. When a typeface is perceived as form, it no longer reads as a letter because it has been manipulated by distortion, texture, enlargement, and has been extruded into a space. Space becomes an active live stage and brings anew dimension to our visual environment.

The space of a visual environment is limitless. Throughout space, we sense light, dark, direction, distance, balance and depth. Space appears to us as a physical reality, as a thing that exists separately from our own bodies. Space can be flat or deep, and can be viewed from a two-dimensional or three-dimensional perspective. To perceive a visual object in two-dimensional space, a spatial structure must include such elements as points, lines, planes and volumes.

Also, it was an exercise to show proximity and the visual hierarchy of the elements. It was one of the exercises to break the grid. Here, I would like to add that simply breaking the grid is not going to give us a aesthetically beautiful solution for layout but knowing the basics of grid and then breaking it deliberately will definitely lead us to a desired solution. These layouts happened because of a random action of scattering food on paper. But as we all know design cannot be random, it is a well thought process. Though these layouts look random there is a thorough practice of two years behind every students understanding of typography and layout. You might say that all the solutions are looking quite similar. I will not disagree. But considering it was a class assignment it was planned that way. So that the students get to understand that there are many ways of designing an original layout. The most exciting part of the assignment was that it was a surprise at every stage for every one of us.
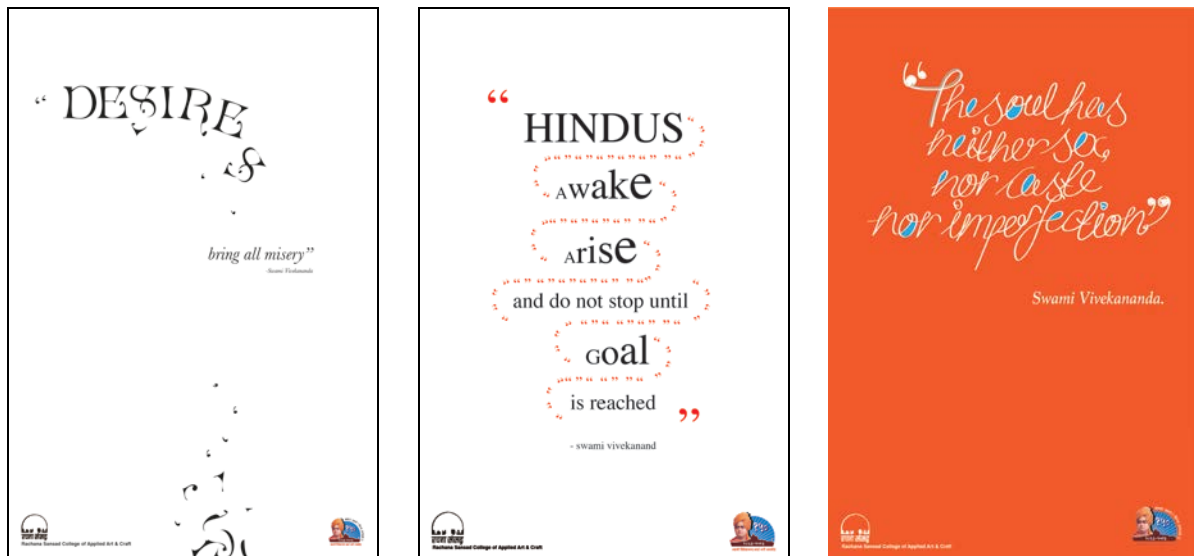
Figure.7 Impact of the food for thought assignment on other assignments.

Figure. 7 shows that how the student's understanding of space and layout changed forever. It was a swift drift from static to an asymmetrical yet balanced layout. They started looking at space from a different point of view. Space which is an element of design in theory gradually became practical for everyone. Emphasise was more on dividing the given space in an interesting way. After this exercise no one got straight solutions for any layout problem.

Acknowledgements

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