

Typography and Education

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Orthodoxy & Heterodoxy in Typography

Making & Breaking The Rules.

Nupur, Banerjee, Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology, nupur.banerjee@live.com

Abstract: For decades now, academic instruction in typography continues to depend on the basic tenets of typographic form as determined in the Roman alphabets. The pedagogy of typographical history continues to be viewed largely through the 'isms', typographical terms, terminologies etcetera, as determined in Europe and the U.S. The intent of this paper is to extend the possibilities of the myriad ways in which methods in typographical pedagogy can continue to evolve while being inclusive in its approach. The word, "Heterodox" or "other teaching" is the opposite of "Orthodox" or "right teaching", signifying experimentative and open methods alongside rigour in typographic pedagogy. In this endeavour, the paper aims to create enquiries to encourage continuous reflective experimentation, paving possible new ways in typographic pedagogy and practice. While old ideas feed new ones, enabling, encouraging and fostering heuristic attitudes with wider interest in the enquiry of vernacular typography would open possible ways of untold multifariousness in visual communication via typography.

Key words: *typography, vernacular, communication, pedagogy.*

1. Introduction

Typography in its multiple avatars is a creative visual intervention and interaction with language. In its experimentative and expressive form it adds to the non-verbal communication, as a signifier, through the ways in which it is employed in visual communication. It offers designers and typographers endless possibilities of interpretation, exploration and experimentation. There are 6,909 distinct languages across the world out of which 780 languages are spoken in India, along with 86 scripts. Given this, it could be

assumed that vernacular typography is being included and its exploration facilitated in the study of design in India to create ways of more varied interaction with typography on the whole. However, basic introduction in a course in Typography with students of design at an introductory level continues to include, among many other elements and aspects, the Anatomy of Type, always worked with Roman alphabets from the English language. If one has to browse through the variety of interpretations and explanations for the Anatomy of Type, a single Google search takes 0.39 seconds to show up 14,50,00,000 results on the web for the search, "Anatomy of Type". In fact Google Search undertaken for most aspects in Typography follows a similar trend in the number of results that it shows up. What can facilitators include to create elements of renewed interest in the basic, intermediate and advanced study of typography? In what ways could vernacular typography be included in this learning process? When encouraging students to use vernacular languages in typographical explorations, does one generally go down the path of creating an equivalent replica of the Anatomy of Type for vernacular languages? Or would exploring their cultural context and connotation possibly create ways for a different, perhaps an altogether new approach? It could be said that it is inconsequential whether one is learning Vedic math or generic math, one must know the basic numbers, the sequence in which they appear along with the basic ways in which combinations of numbers can be used for further Mathematical exploration. However, the heterodoxical inquiry in the context of the instruction and learning of typography would be: are there other, alternate ways to facilitate this?

2.1 The Basic Tenets

In a recently concluded M.F.A. program with Savannah College of Art & Design (2012-2015), for my course in typography, I had to re-visit the basic rules before moving ahead with further explorations. My initial assignments included identifying the parts of letterforms, glyph deconstruction and working with text. The interaction also encouraged liberal art components where written reflections through specific identified readings in typography were included. The interaction re-enforced my attention to the details involved in typography and the possibilities in reflective writing with elements of typography. It brought my attention to how we largely worked with the English language. It also opened my mind to the fact that vernacular typography is almost never included in the learning process and how its inclusion, its history, legacy and evolution would enrich the overall learning experience and outcome. (Fig 1-4).



Figure.1 Study of Glyph Construction. SCAD. Fall Semester 2012.

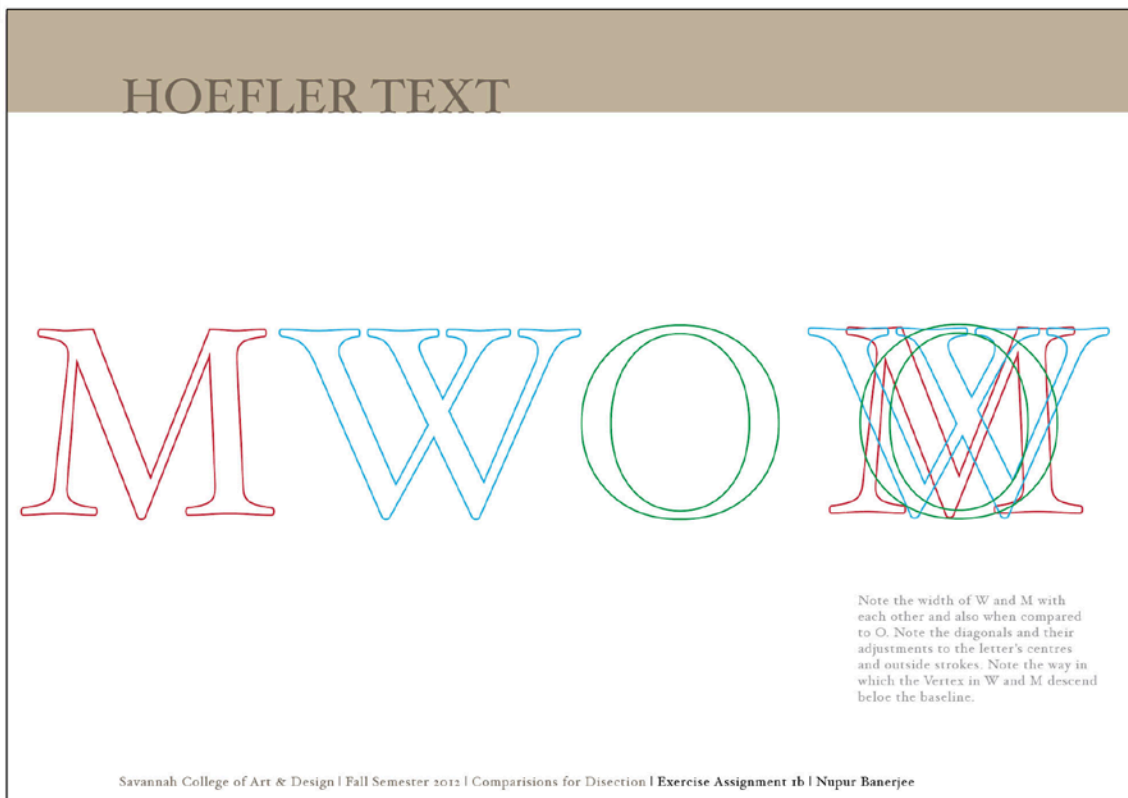


Figure.2 Comparisons for Dissection. SCAD. Fall Semester 2012.

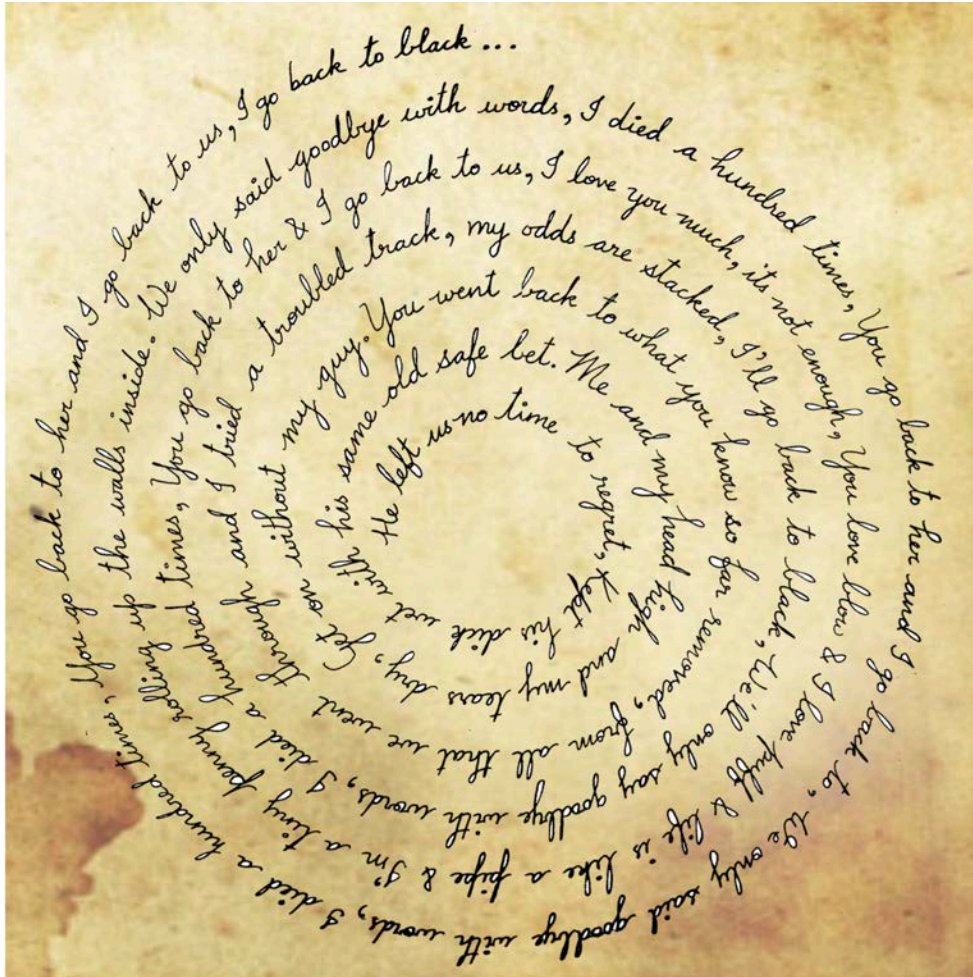


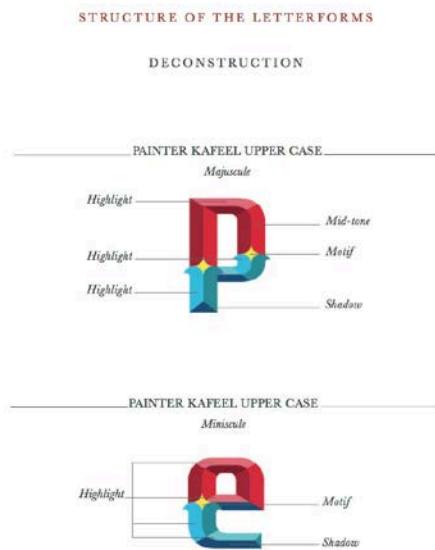
Figure.3 Singer Songwriter Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2012.



Figure.4 The Interview Magazine Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2012.

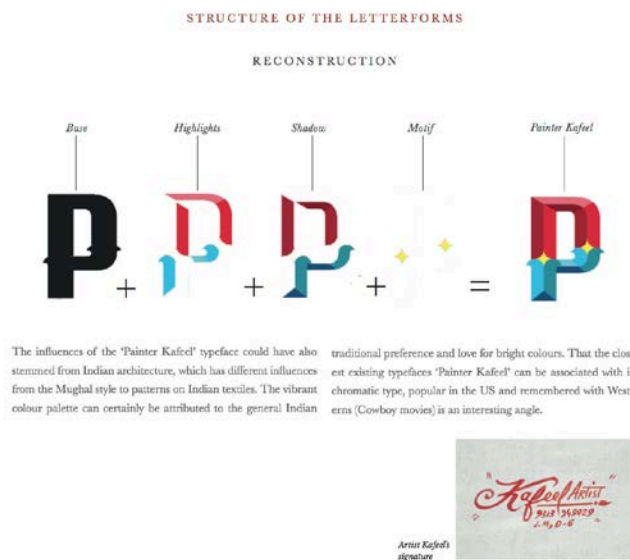
In the process of progression in learning typography, a SCAD assignment in Typography included creating a typographical book, where a particular kind of chosen letterform is

broken down and analysed in its parts that makes its whole form. I chose to work with the letterforms from Hanif Khureshi's project, Handpainted Type. (Fig 5-7).



25 | Indian Handpainted Type

Figure.5 Typographic Book Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2013.

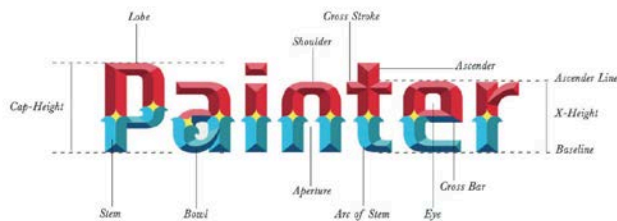


27 | Indian Handpainted Type

Figure.6 Typographic Book Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2013.

STRUCTURE OF THE LETTERFORMS

DECONSTRUCTION



India's Handwritten Type | 25

Figure.7 Typographic Book Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2013.

This is when I began to think about how vernacular letterforms, whether inspired by a local culture in India or any other place, when broken down, use the same terms and terminology as used for Roman alphabets, irrespective. A one size fits all formula. Would it not be possible to bring in a whole new dimension of typographical interaction if inclusive approaches in typography were fluid, taking into account the cultural and geographical origins of the type?

2.2 Experimental Approaches

While specific answers may be elusive, revealing itself over a period of time, experimental approaches for typographical pedagogy in both Roman and vernacular languages do contribute in many ways to new creative approaches. Possibilities to innovate methods of facilitation with learning processes in Typography would likely emerge from the exchange of ideas, reflection, thought and direction during student interaction. At the Foundation, Undergraduate and Masters levels, students respond in unexpected ways to the learning process. There are those who skim through the basics, fulfilling just the absolute essentials in the required outcome. There are others who go beyond the requirement of the assignment at different levels of immersion. As students feed off each other's ideas, process and outcome during critique sessions, these help inform student work and their enquiry in the learning process. Time and again, students rise to the challenge, working their way through in surprising directions.



Figure. 8 Student: Furqan Javed. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2014. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Poster based on a poem, Bol ('Speak' in English), by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, written during the Indian freedom struggle against British Rule.



Figure.9 Student: Furqan Javed. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2014. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Bi-lingual Poster based on a poem, Bol ('Speak' in English), by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, written during the Indian freedom struggle against British Rule. Typography inspired by Wim Crowwel.

Dev Valladares is a student at Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. His series of outcomes for the course in Experimental Typography were inspired by the Tibetan script after a visit to Leh, Ladakh in the northern region of India. Dev worked his series of experiments beginning with the Tibetan letterform, Nya, to appreciate and explore its individuality and nuances.



Figure.9 Student: Dev Valladares. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Study of 'Nya' in Tibetan script.



Figure.10 Student: Dev Valladares. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Study of 'Nya' in Tibetan script.

He explored further with the following Tibetan quote, "If one does not realize emptiness, one will not become liberated from cyclic existence,". Dev went on to create a Tibetan inspired English typeface with corresponding upper and lower case alphabets, creating a 2D as well as 3D outcome. For his 3D outcome, he experimented with 3D print technology. Dev created a series of vernacular typographic visual outcome with a vernacular language that he does not understand or speak, establishing connections at a deeper level.



Figure.11 Student: Dev Valladares. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. "If one does not realize emptiness, one will not become liberated from cyclic existence." Tibetan saying.

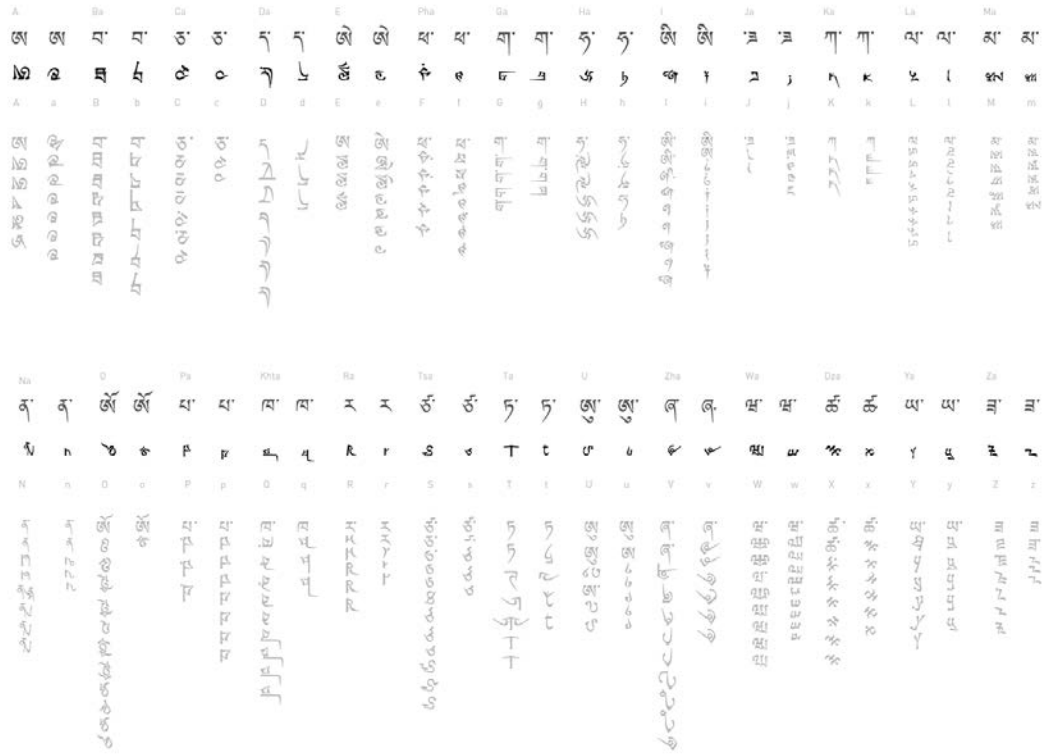


Figure.12 Student: Dev Valladares. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. 2015. Outcome of course in advanced typography. English language typeface, inspired by Tibetan Typography.



Figure.13 Student: Karan Kumar. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Malayalam. Quote, "With combined effort, mountains can be moved. With differences, one would fall."

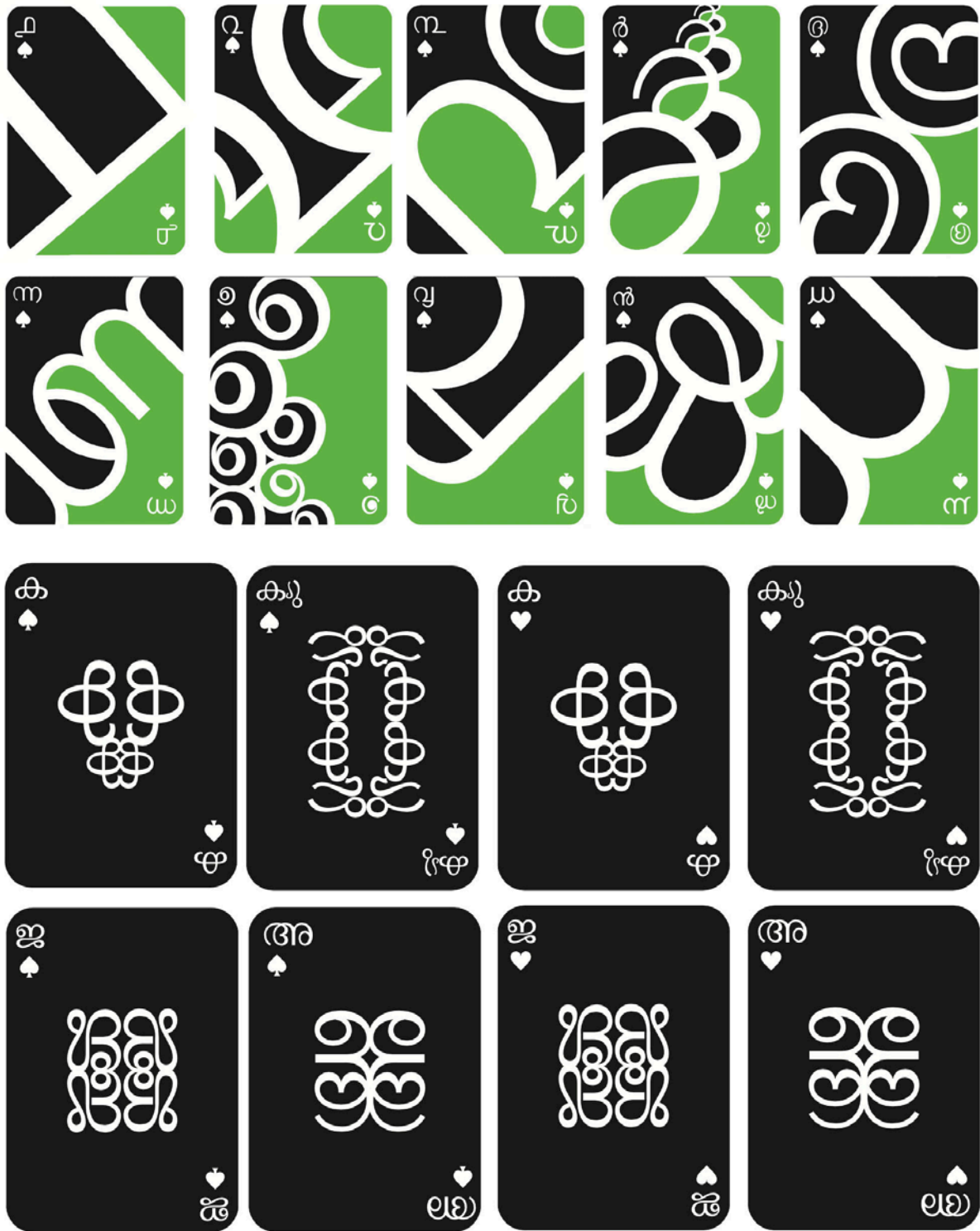


Figure.14 Student: Karan Kumar. Undergraduate. Third Year Student. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Malayalam. Playing cards for his grandfather. Karan worked with Malayalam numbers in the playing cards, which he mentioned aren't used anymore in its written form, having been replaced by English numbers.



Figure.15 Student: Namrata Sehgal. MDes, First year. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. 2015. Outcome of course in typography. Based on Gary Provost's "This Sentence Has Five Words".

At Srishti Institute of Art Design and Technology, students come into these course interactions with varied levels of exposure and skill sets in typography and design. They make obtuse connections from their learning through process and outcome in the sequence of assignments, including critique sessions with their peers and facilitators. When interacting with vernacular typography, there are times when students choose languages that they are unfamiliar with. The interaction then becomes a learning process at different levels, not restricted to typography alone. This in turn informs their work in unforeseen ways. Some choose the regional language of the place that they are now living in: Kannada in Karnataka, though they may have originally come from Uttar Pradesh, for

example. The reasons that they have cited for doing this are so that they further their sense of familiarity with their current place of residence through this interaction in vernacular typography. Some students choose their regional mother tongue. There have been numerous instances when the student is not familiar with their mother tongue, using this opportunity to familiarize themselves with the language and script. What begins as a simple choice of vernacular language to begin a series of assignments in experimenting with vernacular typography ends up becoming a journey in self-discovery.

2.3 Relationship With Patterns

Although we prefer to exercise our individuality in our interactions, we are also creatures of habit. When students initially interact visually with letterforms, instead of exploring and experimenting with the pure shape and form of the individual alphabets, they tend to create repetitive patterns, where subsequent explorations and iterations move towards creating images that veer towards an illustrative interpretation. To appreciate the nuances of a single letterform, whether Roman or vernacular, initially seems futile to the students. They join the dots with progressive connections as a larger picture emerges through the series of assignments. Patterns of learning are made and broken in the process of typographical explorations. For example, students initially resist certain scaffoldings that are introduced at the beginning of the assignments: example, all assignments must be in black and white. After completing a few assignments in the series, when these scaffoldings are removed and there is complete freedom in the following sections, by and large students tend to hold on to the scaffoldings finding it difficult to let go of the comfort of rules: for example, giving the students the criteria that the assignments can now be whatever the student chooses with no restrictions on choice of colour or black and white etc. They become set in their ways, initially finding it difficult to break out of the mould. Eventually, critique sessions and reflections help them break the rules, re-defining and re-discovering the different aspects of typography through their experimental engagement.

After an interaction with experimental vernacular typography, students share their experiences, commenting that their work with vernacular typography opens up a whole new world of possibilities. They have commented that the different vernacular languages and their varied forms are comparatively more engaging to work with than working with Roman alphabets alone.

3 Interacting With Science & Technology

Typography, on the whole, continues to evolve in different ways alongside emerging technology. Including student interaction with typography via different media results in engaging experimental interactions. When given a choice, students bring their individual preferences to the fore when it comes to an option of working with different media. There are many who prefer to work with their hands and prefer hand-drawn type. (Figure 16). There are others who come to the fore, being comfortable with technology, creating apps, games, kinetic typography, web, among others. (Figure 18). When students are given the opportunity to work with different media in typographical expression and experimentation, some view this more as a constraint than an opportunity, preferring to continue explorations with hand-drawn type. This is largely evident in students who are significantly more comfortable working with illustrative techniques or those who are inclined towards the fine arts. Yet, technological interaction opens up multifarious possibilities of engaging with typography. 3D printing, and now 4D print technology have possibilities of exploration with typography. (Figure 17). Pedagogical engagement with emerging technology would broaden learning perspectives.



Figure.16 Student: Ushoshi Shyam. Undergraduate. Third year. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. 2015. Outcome of course in Researching The Practice. Visually Documenting the History of Graphic Design. Hand-drawn typography + illustration.

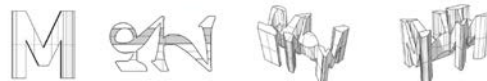
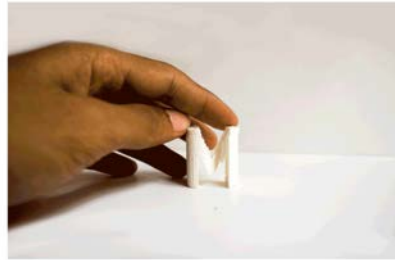
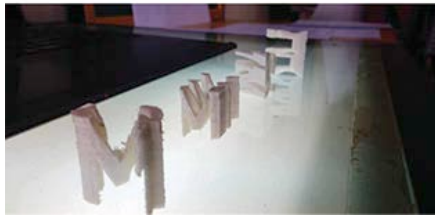


Figure.17 Student: Dev Valladares. Undergraduate. Third year. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. 2015. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Taking forward his work with Tibetan letterforms to 3D type using 3D Printing, going beyond the requirement of the assignment to experiment with Tibetan + English letterforms combined.

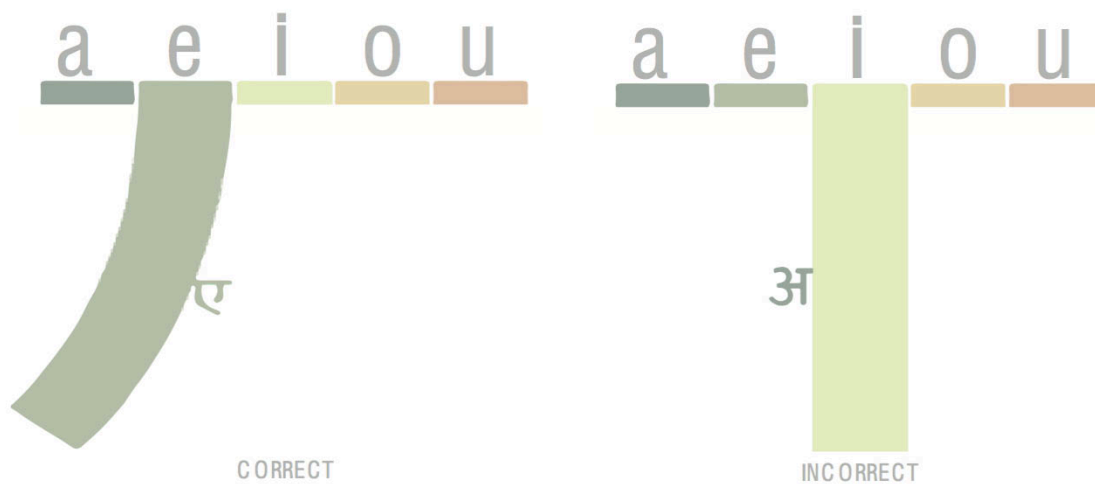


Figure.18 Student: Pragma Gupta. Undergraduate. Third year. 2015. Srishti Institute of Art Design & Technology. 2015. Outcome of course in advanced typography. Typographical app based on an existing game. Pragma included the element of learning through a typographical game using the corresponding vowels in the English language to match the corresponding sounds of letterforms in Devanagiri.

Typography, in the form of a living, flourishing being, working and exploring with the chemical, atomeal and biological aspects and its endless possibilities results in new ways of typographical interaction: especially with the largely unexplored areas in vernacular typography. Engaging in technology of the past like the letterpress or the fast disappearing skill of screen-printing would present equally interesting opportunities of exploration in typography along with technology of the present and the future. While in the West there is a revival of letterpress, screen-printing and hand-drawn type among other techniques of the yesteryears, in India there is a cultural overhaul as old letterpress units, mostly engaged in vernacular press have been shutting down and are being replaced by digital printing: a quick, inexpensive, less time consuming alternative. A heterodoxical enquiry in the learning and experimentation of typography should include the past, present and the future of science and technology, enhancing the possibilities in the richness of experience with student interaction and outcome.

4. The Visual Voice of Typography

In one of my subsequent courses in Typography at Savannah College of Art & Design, during my M.F.A. Program in Graphic Design, we were asked to work with existing quotes by artists and designers, specifically given to us. We had to re-contextualise the quote without tying ourselves to the artist and/or his/her work. Out of the choices given, I

worked with Land Artist, Robert Smithson's quote, "Language should find itself in the physical world and not end up locked in an idea in somebody's head."



Figure.19 Type Installation Project. SCAD. Fall Semester 2013.

After going through an exhaustive iterative process, I arrived at re-contextualising the quote being an analogy for the many things we leave unsaid within the four walls of our homes, the compromises that we make in our choices due to internal and external factors, pre-mediated or otherwise, in our society. I divided the quote into three parts and used three different rooms of a home to express the ways in which we suppress our thoughts for various reasons. Things that are left unsaid, because we are afraid of its repercussions. It opened my mind to the opportunities that exist through typography to express oneself in more ways than one as a creative practitioner, and not confine ourselves to fit within an expected mould or fit within current trends of the design industry. The visual voice of typography, both vernacular and otherwise, can lend itself in more ways than has been currently explored.

5. Conclusion

An endeavor to write an academic paper almost always ends up being introspective, giving rise to more questions stemming from the initial enquiry. While there are no immediate answers, it opens doors for further possibilities. Indian vernacular typography, for instance, is more than the now familiar kitch, brightly hand-drawn type on the familiar goods-trucks that ply our highways across the country. In view of the existing mediums of technology available to us today to express ourselves using typography, it seems rather limiting that we still fallback on the orthodox learning methods and available information for student courses in typography when facilitating courses about its basics. In its continuance, we continue to use similar methods to approach the final outcome, leaving out a plethora of possibilities, uninvestigated. Given the numerous ways of exploration and experimentation available in typography today, especially the still largely unexplored area of vernacular typography, its foundational pedagogy needs a new collective vision.

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