

the window

An experimental short film about a man who lives his life in darkness

This thesis is submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts (Art and Design) in the year 2005 by Priti Jain

Attestation of Authorship

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material, which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or any other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements."

Priti Jain

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Table of contents

• Abstract	Page 7
• Introduction	Page 8
• Methodology	Page 12
• Type as narration	Page 19
• Conclusion	Page 29

Appendix One:

• Synopsis	Page 31
• Character's notes	Page 32
• Director's / Producer's notes	Page 33
• Post - Production	Page 34
• Cast	Page 35

Appendix Two:

• The original story	Page 36
• The film's story	Page 38
• Dialogue list	Page 40
• References	Page 42
• Exhibition images (Exhibition held on Aug 15 th 2005 in WA Gallery 2)	Page 43

Typography is the art and technique of creating and composing type in order to convey a message. The term 'type' includes the design and function of alphabetic and analphabetic symbols to represent language (Woolman & Bellantoni, 2000, p.1).

Abstract

This thesis explores the potential of typography as a significant visual element in the narration of a short film. The project specifically considers the visual and paralinguistic nature of typography and its discourse with moving image.

A creative consideration of these issues is then synthesized into the short film,

the window.

Introduction

As designers probing the creative parameters of this new technology (new media), our goal may be less to digitise than to dramatise. Indeed, there is a theatrical component that I am convinced is essential to this new thinking. Of what value are typographic choices—bold and italics, for example—when words can dance across the screen, dissolve, or disappear altogether (Helfand, 2001, p.1).

Typography may be seen as the design of letterforms that create forms, characters, meaning, and supporting images. The formal character of a typeface differentiates letters and words from others, giving communication a particular personality. Typography may be seen as a basic grammar of graphic design; it can be altered sequentially to engage a viewer's attention in order to convey the narrative sequence in the story. Graphic designers also reposition type as a communicative element by sometimes using it not simply as primary text, but also as an element of expansion. This engagement of type's spatial, graphic and temporal proportions gives the written word a voice and personality beyond the simple graphic translation of sound.

Woolman & Bellantoni (2000) say,

Distortion transforms letters and words from symbols into images. Visual effects can be effective, but if overused will be perceived as mere surface treatment or veneer, designed simply to please the eye, regardless of underlying meaning (p.1).

It is this concern with exposing and expressing underlying meaning that is a consideration of this project. The typographical treatments in the short film *the window* engage with this idea of transforming type into images and forming

relationships between these images and the narrative and graphic treatment of the story.

Traditional use of typography has changed from impermanent type to type that you can feel; from designing substantial things to designing actions and contexts. Because *moving type* is dependent on time, it is important for designers to create an impression and “expressive affection”¹ with their message.

Woolman & Bellantoni (2000) argue that,

to make an impression and emotional attachment without losing sight of intent, the designer must strive to balance the semantic (meaning), syntactic (form), and pragmatic (function) concerns of the situation at hand. If form overwhelms the message, all is lost except temporary stimulation for the eyes (p. 6).

In this project *moving type* is about letters that transform, change, replicate, blur, and through this process, communicate. The work is not designed specifically as film title, television, or internet design, as each of these mediums contains its own technical restrictions and distinctions that fall outside of the discourse of the project.

In this film type is a narrative voice that responds to the cultural² and diegetic³ world in which the story unfolds. The central characters are not shown in the film except as

¹ Expressive affection is a term used by (Woolman & Bellantoni, 2000, p.6) to mean an emotional attachment to the type used.

² The cultural position of this project is one located between worlds. Like the director/designer, the central characters are Indian but living in a world that may not be that of their upbringing. References to their Hindi language appear as complete words and also as typographical considerations in the structure of letterforms in English sentences. This approach is influenced by the fact that the original inspiration for this film comes from a story I remember as a child, watching an Indian television drama in Mumbai. The story has traveled with me between worlds and this movement across cultural borders has influenced the design of its diegesis and method of discourse. It is a remembered story, sometimes indistinct and sometimes speaking in a typographical voice that bridges my Indian origins and current western context.

indistinct moving forms. Each of those people are introduced with type that suggests their character.

This project not only looks at typographic letterforms, and their discourse with the moving image but it also examines how this dialogue between image and typography might be used effectively in the narration of a short film.

It uses a simple linear narrative about two victims whose worlds are connected then separated by their hospitalisation and one of their eventual deaths. In the film there is no audible discourse between characters, but a narrator relates developments “silently” through moving type.

The purpose of the exegesis in this project is to contextualise and explain the design of the film. The exegesis constitutes approximately 20% of the research weighting because the primary site of experimentation and development occurs within the production of the creative text (*the window*).

The exegesis is divided into four sections. Following this introduction, chapter two considers the methodology employed in the development of the project. It discusses the specific profile of heuristics and relates it directly to issues and data treatments emerging during the project’s progress.

The third chapter considers the role of type in narration and focuses specifically on and its distinctive application in *the window*. In this regard it discusses types, paralinguistic nature⁴ and its application as a narrative voice.

³ By diegetic I mean the world of the story. Mc Donnel (1998) suggests that this includes events, spaces and actions that are presumed to have occurred, as well as events we witness.

⁴ I use the word paralinguistic in this exegesis to define the emotional and gestural nature of type. Kita (2004) defines paralinguistic as “the nonverbal elements of the verbal code, including tone of voice, loudness, and stress”. She suggests if a person speaks softly, that might indicate

The main body of the exegesis then concludes with a reflection. Two appendices support the exegesis. The first contains pre-production details and a synopsis. The second appendix contains the story that inspired the film and a final dialogue list.

that what he/she is saying is intended to be a secret. If a person yells, it may indicate anger or fear. Putting more stress on a word can also communicate. It can be used to indicate what the most significant word in a sentence is".

Methodology

A purpose of this project is to utilise the potentiality of type as a significant narrative element. This project employs a heuristic model of research that enables divergent approaches to be taken to data gathering and processing. Heuristics may be defined as a qualitative method⁵ in which no pre-established formula exists. Heuristics uses informal means or experience, and utilises forms of trial and error. Heuristics relies on the researcher identifying information, discovering similarities, through frequent questioning [*this can be done by asking questions of the potential of diverse data one is collecting*] or guesswork. In other words, this methodology emphasises the flexible application of tacit knowledge⁶ rather than the application of pre-existing methods, for solving the problem.

Heuristics often involves using knowledge that is gained by experience. Its involvement in the testing of bodies of work through methods of questioning was appropriate in this project because I was seeking creative potentials rather than proof.

Wood (2004) suggests that,

"Heuristics is Concerned with discovery, rather than with proof" (p.2).

Although heuristics is used in science, social science and education, it is useful to this present project because of its flexible nature. The research uses tacit knowledge and the

⁵ Qualitative research refers to research where one is not using fixed formulas. The opposite of qualitative method is quantitative research where one is involved in surveys, test, formulas and graphs and the use of pre-existing techniques.

⁶ Tacit Knowledge may be described as knowledge the researcher already possesses. Polyani (1967) describes it as personal knowledge rooted in individual experience, and involving personal belief, perspective and values. It can be contrasted with explicit (formal or recorded) knowledge. As a graphic designer for six years, I have built up a range of abilities and critical facilities that are helpful in evaluating creative experiments made in the development of this project.

approach is essentially subjective,⁷ employing insight and intuition and methods of drawing connections between data. In this project most of the judgements occurred as a result of acting on feeling and intuitions.

To enable an effective application of heuristics the research employs four rules developed by Kleining and Witt. In their essay, *Qualitative heuristics: a methodology for discovery in psychology and the social sciences* (2000) they suggest

“The research person should be open to new concepts and change his/her preconceptions if the data are not in agreement with them” (p.2).

A designer should be open for new ideas. New ideas can lead to different directions and give one more opportunities for growth. The designer cannot be constrained by her/his own formulas as these may restrict her/his ability to think in more creative ways. Her/his new ideas should be new, open pathways. In this project I broke many patterns of research I had employed as a professional designer. An example of this is the location of the film. Initially, I storyboarded the short film and selected a traditional hospital room as location. However, when such a site became unprocurable, instead of building the set to reflect what I had designed, I considered a very different approach to the

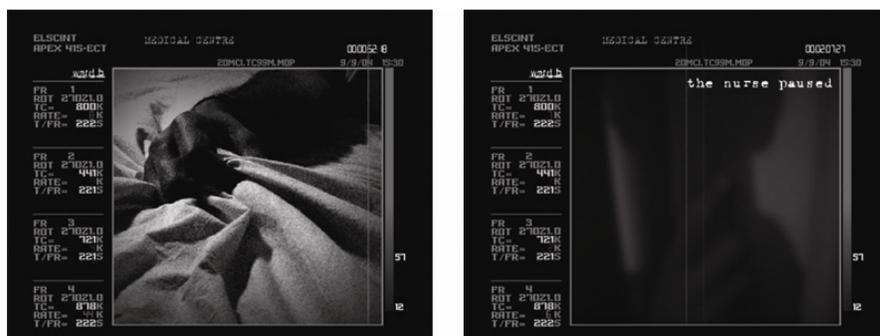


Fig. 1: Close up shots of the stranger, blind man and the nurse. These images create the atmosphere of the hospital through their attention to detail rather than their emphasis on the surrounding environment.

⁷ The Princeton cognitive science website defines subjective as: “taking place within the mind and modified by individual bias”. <http://www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn>

visual narrative. Using a very modern hospital, I utilised the higher level of light to help texture a range of very close-up shots. Thus the story is told not through wide, establishing images of empty corridors and lonely rooms, but through intimate, almost claustrophobic⁸ images of details. *See fig. 1.*

Kleining and Witt's (2000) second rule for heightening the potential of a heuristic methodology is ensuring that the

"topic of research is preliminary and may change during the research process. It is only fully known after being successfully explored" (p.2).



Fig.2: Still shot from the short film 'Routine Life' 2003. It uses a clock as a conventional marker of passing time.

While working on this project, it often happened during the research process that my focus was changed from the original question. This research grew out of earlier work that considered graphic and typographical devices, and how they illustrated movements in time in short film experiments. In *fig.2:* from my earlier work I used a simple clock to show the passing of time. However, as the research progressed in this project, simple literal approaches to the depiction of time were rejected. In the final treatment of the film, I showed written

words reflecting time and used lines and wipeouts to depict the monotonous regularity of time in a hospital environment. I was not concerned only with the linear progression of time but also with its feeling when one is trapped in a hospital. Thus the initial concern with translating time into graphic form was altered as the focus of the project changed.

See fig.3.

⁸ This sense of claustrophobia is increased by enclosing these shots inside an ECG (Electrocardiogram) monitor. As with the eventual treatment of the hospital, this use of enclosed narrative was not part of the initial concept. It occurred because I remained open to new concepts and change in the development of the project.

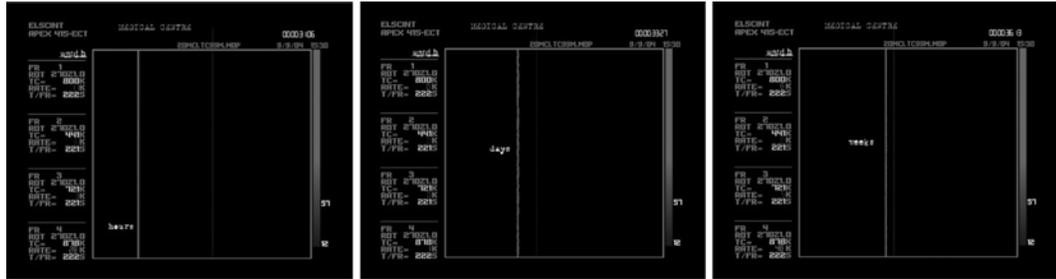


Fig.3: Using type to reflect time in this project. Time is a series of words that flicker across the frame. Lines move from left to right in the same space and the words are small and insignificant in the encompassing darkness. In the film, the passing of the time is also subtly referenced in changes to the ECG graphics surrounding the narrative.

Originally, the project sought to extend this idea by using only the animated written word only. However as I began moving letterforms, I was confronted by emerging the paralinguistic⁹ nature of what was happening.

Kleining and Witt (2000) state a third method of ensuring richness of data when working heuristically. They suggest,

“Data should be collected under the paradigm of maximum structural variation of perspectives” (p.2).

They argue that research should be constantly questioning its own methods and perspectives. This is so that a greater breadth of information can be gathered and a greater range of perspectives considered. This process avoids one-sidedness of representation and leaves the creative practitioner open to importing a wide range of variables into her/his research as the final film text begins to emerge. In terms of *the window* this meant being prepared to replace traditional practices in developing the work.

⁹ I was interested in how the look and movement of type might more effectively express ideas like loneliness, fear, memory and culture. In the pursuit of these emotions, type sought to capture the subtle gestural qualities of the spoken word.

This included altering the type of media used and exploring new, working patterns and environments.

the window was a narrative taken from a story I remembered watching on Indian television. It remained in my memory for many years. Perhaps because of this, my initial approach to this narrative was relatively cinematic. I intended to tell the story as an outside observer, detached from the vision and confinements of the main characters. However, heuristics requires that one challenges established formulas and approaches. As a result, I approached disruptions to my original treatment as potentials for alternative (and potentially richer) ways of "telling" the story. Financial limitations meant that I could not return to specific locations and some compiled footage could not be extended. Therefore I had to rework and simplify certain graphic approaches that might initially have been considered, as a simple linear progression from storyboard, to filmed artifact. Thus the making of the film became a journey of disruption and alternation. I had to approach, and reproach the narrative from many angles to enable me to bring it into a single, well-integrated text. Had I not been open to multiple variations of perspective the baseline of alternatives could not have been explored to maximum effect.

Kleining and Witt's (2000) final method for heightening the potential of a heuristic methodology is to ensure that

"the analysis is directed toward discovery of similarities" (p.2).

This idea essentially deals with the observation of patterns and harmonies between bodies of information. In a short film like *the window* this rule is concerned with how one might find similarities and connections between sound, light, texture, narrative, character etc. All of these areas need to be designed so they relate to each other in a cohesive manner.

An example of this is the relationship between music and image. When the short film begins we hear the sound of a car crash. This is followed by the appearance of ethnic script. Across the film, these two very different elements needed to be woven together. To do this I concentrated on the potential of the audio track. I used a piece of music with both western and Indian cultural influences. The first piece of music uses a piano. This is used in order to represent the western hospital. At this point only the type has suggested any cultural disruption to our preconceptions of a western story. However as the film progresses we hear the Santoor (an Indian musical instrument) begin to surface in the soundtrack. Thus similarities are established not only in image but also across sound, timing, and space. Images move in patterns similar to the sound that accompanies them. The sense of "hospital" influences many elements of the film's style. Similarly the fragmentation and instability of the type, forms a pattern similar to the instability and sometimes-unclear nature of the imagery.

Within the structure of the film these patterns also overlap at various places with the tone of the music. The film combines these fusions to create harmonies. Just as music and sound overlap, so do images and segments of the film. The flowers in the representation of the garden can be seen as visual parallels of audio patterns occurring with in the text. See *fig.4*.

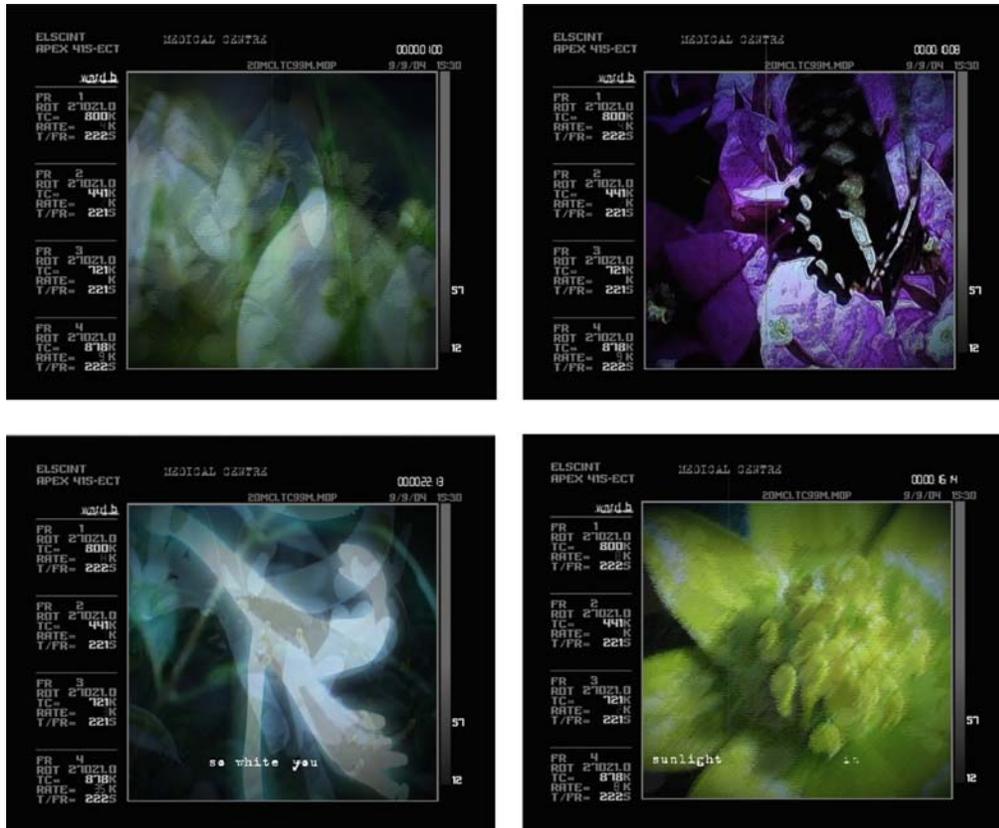


Fig.4: Images creating patterns by overlapping and fading

In summation therefore, this project employs a heuristic methodology because it embraces tacit knowledge and the subjectivity required from me as a designer with cultural connections to the elements of the story.¹⁰ The challenges of this methodology enabled me to operate with higher level of flexibility on the project than I would have, if I was completing a design for a client in a professional context. I was able to work with unknown and disruptive elements and creatively accommodate them as they occurred in the development of this project.

¹⁰ This subjectivity allows me to draw creatively on my position as an Indian woman in a western environment. The film's characters and typographical voices parallel this position and it is from this tension that the film gathers its distinctiveness

Type as Narration

Narration that explored the potential of the paralinguistic nature of type was influenced in the early sixties by designers like Saul Bass. While his concern was essentially with film title sequence design, his use of type suggested a broad potential for its ability to ‘talk’ as it moved through space and time. Later designers like Kyle Cooper built upon this inspiration. Cooper has designed the title sequence for films like *Wild Wild West* (1999), *Mission Impossible* (1996), *the Island of Doctor Moreau* (1996), *Se7en* (1995) and *Mimic* (1997).

Woolman & Bellantoni, (1999) note that the title treatment of *Se7en* references

“a meticulous serial killer and his relationship with two detectives who are trying to catch him. The replacement of the V with the numeral 7 creates an identity that exists seamlessly between word and image: SE7EN” (p.39).

The backlit type, morbid images and quick-cuts suggest the obsessive madness of the serial killer. This technique of using distressed, gritty type used in conjunction with sharp objects and obsessive behavior creates a feeling of troubling instability. See *fig.5*.



Fig.5: Gritty type, morbid images and quick cut images from the title sequence design for the movie *se7en*.

One senses madness both in the imagery and in the disturbed way that a hand-rendered and distressed typography flickers across these pictures. This title design for *Se7en* quickly established Cooper as one of the leading designers in this field in the 1990s and

did much to influence the subsequent use of type as a paralinguistic form in moving-image story telling.

Unlike Cooper, in the development of the '*the window*', I used techniques like backlighting in order to show moving shadows. The narrative uses type as a narrative voice rather than a presenter of information about the production. The opening sequence of the short film shows the image of a blurred window signifying a hidden truth that is revealed as the narrative progresses. The type used for the title '*the window*'¹¹ is distressed. It is rough and broken and suggests forms of disconnection. My aim with the film's title was to create something that in its sense of distortion and irregularity referenced the distortion and weight of imagery used in the film.

Meggs (1989) suggests that,

"Type can bind an image to a specific meaning" (p. 41).

In this regard both typographical treatments in the film and its claustrophobic imagery, work together to emphasise the disabilities and visions of the two central characters. The paralinguistic treatment of type can enhance the sense of emotion for a viewer. When a word is read, a mental image is created and a physical existence is seen. In the previous chapter I referred to the idea of paralinguistic type. At this point therefore, it is useful to discuss the relationship between the idea and its application to my project. Stuart Mealing has discussed Paralinguistic type in his essay *Value - added text: Where graphic design meets paralinguistics* (2003). He suggests that

¹¹ The type used for the title was '3thehardway RMX. (released in March 2004 by fenotype)

Paralinguistic mappings exploit and extend the traditional vocabulary of typography. Much that can be communicated in human-to-human language is lost in its transfer to text but paralinguistics-which studies the features of communication that accompany, or substitute for, the bare words used-offers a gateway to an enriched presentation of text (p. 1).

He argues that a consideration of the paralinguistic nature of type can replace some of the richness of verbal communication¹², which is lost in its translation into the written words. Although symbolic representations available in front packages like exclamation marks, asterisks and the use of block capitals and italicisation, can restore emphasis, it is the ability to exploit the potential of color, fluctuating proportion and movement, that brings type closest to restoring the lost emphasis and personality evident in the spoken word.

Expressions of words can be heard, but when we write, these are often lost. In my work, dialogue is not spoken, but written about. By adding visual effects, I am able to enhance the communicative potential of different voices with in the film. Both time and emotion become part of this typographical "speech".

Mealing (2003) suggest that many emphases applied to letterforms

can also be applied to marks in general, both on a surface and in three-dimensional space. Lines can be heavy or light, wide or thin, smooth or angular, widely or closely spaced. They can also be regular or erratic, mechanical in character or autographic (thus revealing of the person making the mark). Gestures too could be said to have

¹² Mealing (2003) suggests, "In direct communication between humans, the words spoken are supplement by, or on occasion replaced by, a range of paralinguistic features such as body language, expression, gesture intonation, volume, etc. These serve to qualify the basic material of the message". (p.1)

similar characteristics. Rules for the application of marks-variables such as these could be applied equally to the elements of typographic or iconic text and to ancillary features such as dynamic background (p.4).

In the film *'the window'* both type and surface treatments as continuity devices of the space, are distressed. I often incorporate lines to add texture or emphasise movement or emotion. Scenes like the opening car crash use overlapping, thick and thin lines that become congested and panicked. These lines help to create a dynamic relationship between images and words. They produce patterns that either heighten the tension in the narrative or reflect the emotions of one of the characters. See *fig. 6*.

These lines sometimes interface with typographical treatments where both the image-based narrative and the typographical narration help to bring a stylistic cohesion to the film. The use of this typographical treatment helps to convey a transition from an exterior scene of explosive violence to the tense, but quite different environment of the hospital. To achieve continuous flow in the film, thick and thin lines can therefore be seen as graphic elements that operate as connections that link one scene to another. *Figures 6 and 7* demonstrate this transition. In this sequence one can read type, see line and hear audio. The gritty edges on the lines that move within the frame are similar to the lines used in the letterforms in the title sequence. These in turn parallel the distressed audio track.



Fig. 6: The opening of the car crash uses overlapping lines followed by the introduction of the words 'a short film'. This is followed by name of the designer into two languages as the finer lines thicken and lead the story.

In this sequence line performs a major role by introducing new sequences.

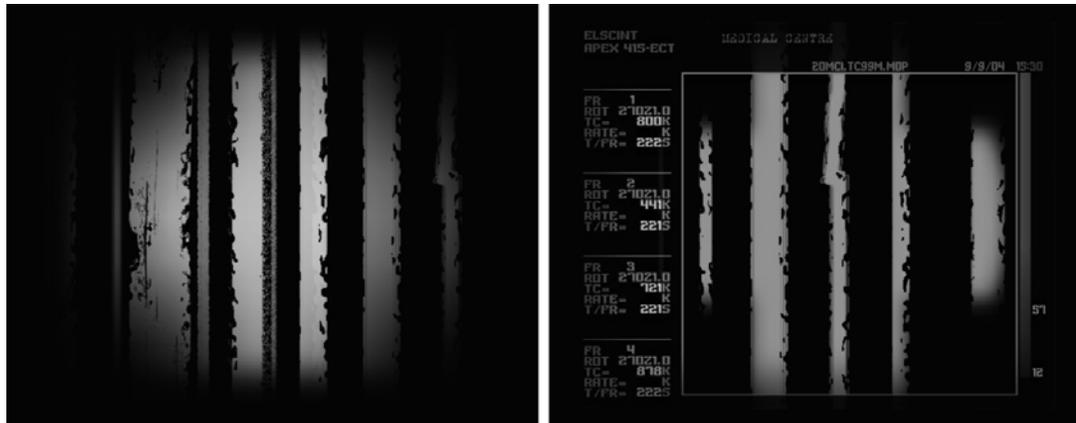


Fig.7: In this sequence type, line and audio play a very important role.

The line is the dominant element. The type and audio operate as supportive elements.

Without the line as an element' the emerging of an ECG monitors wouldn't have created a pattern.

This was a visual discovery in the project.

The texture of the type becomes the texture of the information contained in the ECG monitor. Lines move, the viewer sees a hand that is struggling to find a glass of water. From this point, in fragmented episodes, the relationship between the two main characters begins to unfold.

The use of an ECG monitor is symbolic of the hospital environment. In this project the pace of type and surface treatments of space work with the idea of hospital monitoring, to communicate a distinctive notion of passing time. In this world both characters are pitted against time: they may leave healed and well, or be subdued by illness and have all time stop. Type and surface treatments work together to suggest time that does not progress mechanically forward in absolute rhythm, but emerges and dissolves in the shadows. Long hours, days, weeks, all take on a less defined sense of proportion. They are wiped off the frame by passing lines or fade in and out of the blackness. Things become disconnected but always contained with the darkness. The narrator tells us a story, but it is stilted and slightly stumbling; it is in fragments held together by a sense of order.¹³

¹³ This order is the flow of the narrative. If we read the dialogue list (appendix two) we engage with a text that is almost poetic. Sometimes it speaks in sentences and sometimes only in single

Lines of different shape and sizes, thick and thin were created in *Adobe Photoshop*, using effects and adding 'noise' so that I could get gritty edges. They were later imported in *Adobe After Effects* overlapping the ECG monitor. In the above left sequence applying masking, and using feather effects gave a smooth round edge to the border of the lines. In the above right I was able to design a sequence where as the lines faded out and an ECG monitor appears. This was done by decreasing and increasing the opacity of the respective layers.

Personality and letterform.

As my research developed the main challenge was to portray emotion through variation in letterforms. I experimented with different letterforms in an attempt to emphasise the moods and personalities of the characters.

In *the window* there are only two main players 'the stranger' and 'the blind man'. To introduce blind man as a character, I changed the luminosity of the type and created a dark surrounding to the font, this helped to support the idea of his damaged sense of sight.



Fig.8: Each letterform is different from those that precede or follow it
Movement and differing letterforms reflect the nature of each character

words. This describes the story in a linear progression not in a fluid rhythm. The words pause in unusual places; condense large spaces of time in a sentence and then fragment other periods of time into jilting lists of words.

The blind man has a type treatment with compacted kerning. The type is the same face but made unstable by the distressing of the letterforms. It is claustrophobic and afraid. The gestures of the blind man in the movie, the dark surrounding and his roommate's kindness to help him to communicate the sense of blindness.¹⁴ On the other hand the typographical treatment of the stranger is eclectic; it is made up of different pieces of different fonts. They find harmony in the word form through more open kerning but we see a lesser level of, anxiety in the words. See *fig. 8*.

The blind man is depicted as someone trying to feel things in dark. He is disconnected, disoriented and depressed and I often use type to reflect this. The stranger is presented as a man who is probably more 'centred' and spiritual. The images of him reading the holy book in the hospital bed and his portrayal of the garden reflect a noticeable difference between the characters¹⁵.

Type as an indicator of culture.

In *'the window'* type also narrates as a voice familiar with two languages and cultures. Often we see a word translated in the film so it draws on the spirit of both of these cultures. I have tried not to overstate this in the film, as this is essentially a story located in confusion and dislocation¹⁶; however the references to this are evident. Graphically this is illustrated in the transparent layers of imagery that make up the description of

¹⁴ His blindness has to do both with his physical sight (or lack of it) and also with the deeper sense of blindness; that of not knowing; of being afraid of what you can't see.

¹⁵ However, I have been careful to treat the sequence of the garden in such a way that it is not clear whose perception of it we are seeing; the blind man's or the strangers. This helps to maintain the sense of poetic mystery in the film.

¹⁶ This dislocation appears in the confusion of blindness, terminal illness and a foreign space (the hospital). The men and objects in the film are often dislocated from each other and trying to make contact. The glass misses the table and breaks, the men communicate in fragments, with fragmented stories and long periods of blank time separate these contacts. Time has no regular sense of movement - beyond drifting relentlessly forward.

Indian motifs and flower print¹⁷. This sequence borrows and distorts iconography, layering and dissolving it into a new design. The images existed before¹⁸ but are recontextualised.

Mealing (2003) suggests that mapping the paralinguistic nature of type onto animates form

can be abstract, symbolic, representational or mimetic and either or kinetic. Their application can readily borrow the grammar, syntax and vocabularies of art, design, film, theatre and existing sign languages subject to cultural variations and familiarity (p.2).

In this short film I not only use various western letterforms, but I also use Hindi typefaces to reflect the displaced culture of the two people in the hospital room. These Hindi typefaces are used as images in relation to particular words. The main title '*the window*' appears the same in Hindi but is read as '*Khidki*'.

In accordance with culture being a backdrop of the film, I, as a narrator, used the Hindi type to convey a sense of culture, as well as a bonding between the two characters. In the movie there is considerable anonymity between the two characters, as they are patients in a hospital. However, I have tried to use the language as bridging between them. Again as earlier, type is not used as mere translation, but for expansion and as means of expressing underlying meaning. Working with images, type builds a sense of a story and characters that are located between a western and eastern world.

¹⁷ The design of this sequence was inspired by the Indian flower prints called bandhani. The tying of cloth with thread and then dyeing it is the simplest and perhaps the oldest form of creating patterns on a plain piece of cloth. This method of dyeing the cloth can be seen on http://www.4to40.com/discoverindia/index.asp?article=discoverindia_bandhani

¹⁸ Some of these images were taken from the environment of television, specifically from T.V documentaries like the BBC's the Private Life of Plants by David Attenborough (1995).

In this chapter, I have briefly described the techniques and the reasoning behind using type in distinctive ways in the film 'the window'. I have also clarified the reasoning behind these decisions and explained how they are used to enhance specific thematic strands within the film including dislocation, anxiety, disturbed time and cultural belonging.

Conclusion

Mealing (2003) suggests that

While typographic text has inherent visual qualities, there are arenas for its use in which the visual qualities are paramount (p.2).

In this research project the visual qualities became a significant concern. In this research my own difficulties with translating ideas from formal academic English into Hindi, served to strengthen my use of both languages. In crossing the bridge between these languages, ideas and emphasis altered. Terms like paralinguistics and heuristics are ones I learnt as an academic in an English speaking institution, but they are ideas that are familiar to me in my daily work.

The aim of this project was to expose and express the underlying meaning of a story and to portray it on the screen, using a limited range of resources. However, working within the boundaries of time and resources, there was ample scope for exploratory learning. One of the main objectives before the onset of the project was to develop characters without showing their faces. I also wanted to experiment with type and its surface environment as a method of communication. This created an interesting form of story telling. The next challenge was to try and avoid being too explicit with conveying meaning. I wanted to create a text that still contained a level of subtlety and atmosphere because it did not endeavour to present a smooth flow of time and rhythm. I wanted the film to 'feel' like damaged sight and dislocated time; to be uncertain yet to hold on relentlessly to a single linear narrative.

Apart from the personal learning aspect, I feel that though not revolutionary, my work has been a contribution to ways of considering the potential 'voice' of type. The project like its title is '*the window*'. Through it we see a glimpse of something much wider, a

potential for pushing the potential of type as something more than letterforms or graceful movements through time and space. Like the garden in the film, type is something capable of flowering in unique and highly individual ways.

Appendix One:

Synopsis - the window is the story of a blind man and a stranger whose friendship is connected by a glass of water. There is a secret involving a window in the hospital room where they find themselves; a secret that is revealed only after one of them dies.

Character Notes -

The blind man -

The blind man is in his 40's and living alone. He has lost his daughter and his wife. There is some nostalgic footage of his daughter playing. In the car accident, this man loses his eyesight and there is no one to take care of him. He is hospitalised and disoriented.

He spends his time navigating his blindness. He senses things, feels the light and unfocussed movement. He is dependent and helpless.

The stranger -

The stranger is a gentle, religious man but suffering from a non-specified disease. He is a very spiritual person, reading his holy book, believing in god, and his given life. Some fragments of his past are shown in the movie. His poetic view of life transcends the sterility and darkness of the hospital.

The Nurse -

The Nurse works in the ward. Her world is one of practicality and routine. She is non-descript, aware of the relationship between the blind man and the stranger, but unaware of the dream shared between them. She unwittingly destroys the illusion of the garden outside the window when she reveals the man's death and the myth of his description.

Director's / Producer's notes –

This short film seeks to explore the impairment of sight, the disconnection of time and thought, and the ability for an alternative narrative voice to operate as type. The film has no audible dialogue. However, type appears as voices and thoughts. Experiments with typography are employed to capture the sense of impaired sight and dislocation.

The narrative is framed by an ECG (Electrocardiograph) monitor. Inside this graphic element the story of the two main characters develops.

This film uses a limited palette to create continuity between disparate parts of the narrative: these include the accident, the intangible nature of time in the hospital, and the diverse memories and visions shared by the two men.

I am interested in iconography and atmosphere of hospitals and how these may be imported into, and trialed against the developing narrative and diegesis of the film. Type, sound and the audio track help to divide sections of the narrative and reference the cultural environment in which it unfolds. The film references typographical voices in both my Hindi and European cultures.

This film was shot on Sony DV camera (esi00) and edited using *Adobe Premiere version 6.0*, *Adobe After Effects version 6.0*, *Adobe Photoshop version 6.0* and *Sony Sound Forge 7.0*. It was then formatted in *Beta SP (PAL)*, and *DVD* formats for projection and home use.

Some sequences in the film contain reconstituted imagery. This is a visual reference to memory and to the Indian practice of combining motifs on printed fabric. This technique is especially evident in the sequence of the garden outside *the window*.

Post - Production

Sound and Music Edited by Priti Jain and Meghdutt Brahmachari

Titles and type by Priti Jain

Direction of photography Priti Jain

Written, designed, produced and directed by Priti Jain

Location Southern Cross Hospital, Epsom Auckland. New Zealand

Cast

the blind man - Meghdutt Brahmachari

the stranger - Pritesh Panchal

the nurse - Priti Jain

child artist - Rohini Contractor

Appendix Two:

The original story -

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit-up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, where they had been on vacation. Every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window.

The man in the other bed began to live, for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside. The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm amidst flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance. As the man by the window described all this in exquisite detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the picturesque scene. One warm afternoon the man by the window described a parade passing by. Although the other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it. In his mind's eye as the gentleman by the window portrayed it with descriptive words.

Days and weeks passed. One morning, the day nurse arrived to bring water for their baths only to find the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.

As soon as it seemed appropriate, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone.

Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself. He strained to slowly turn to look out the window beside the bed”.

It faced a blank wall.

The man asked the nurse what could have compelled his deceased roommate who had described such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse responded that the man was blind and could not even see the wall. She said, "Perhaps he just wanted to encourage you"¹⁹.

¹⁹ Accessed from <http://www.storybin.com/sponsor/sponsor147.shtml> (February 2003)

The film's story -

The window is a story I remember from watching Indian television as a child. It has remained in my memory for many years. However my story, while referencing the core narrative, approaches the work very differently.

Late one night, driving home, exhausted and sleepy, a man loses control of his car. In a sudden accident his vehicle crashes and he is rendered unconscious. The next day when he awakes he finds himself lying on a hospital bed, sightless.

In the darkness he turns to get a glass of water, knocks it, and the container smashes on the floor.

A stranger, while reading his book, watches the blind man struggle to get water. He closes his book, gets up and gives him another glass. After drinking the water the blind man is thankful. The stranger is a patient sharing the same room, lying next to blind man's bed. He is suffering from a terminal disease.

As time passes the men become good friends. The stranger starts taking care of the blind man and they share memories of their past. The blind man describes his daughter. The stranger is a kind, generous person whose memories focus on his religion. As they talk, the blind man asks about the darkness, about the light, and about the room. The stranger being a compassionate man describes the day outside the window to him. The blind man imagines the picturesque scene in beautiful images, sensing color as something one can feel.

Time passes and then one night the stranger dies.

Unaware of what has happened, the blind man asks the duty nurse about the stranger. The nurse informs him of his friend's death. For days the stranger's bed lies empty, the room becomes hollow with loss. Everyday the nurse fills blind man's glass but his world becomes smaller and smaller.

One day the man asks the nurse to describe the day outside the window. A little surprised, she replies that there is no window in the room.

The blind man's dream is broken.

Dialogue list

Lying on a hospital bed sightless

On the next bed his

sight intact

lay a stranger

A glass of water everyday bound their friendship

In the dark they shared memories

The blind man asked the stranger about the room, about the day outside he could see

Outside there is a day in shades of violet and green

Flowers are blooming in sunlight

Colours so white you can touch them

Hour's

days

weeks

passed by...

And then suddenly one night the stranger died

The next day the blind man asked the nurse where is my room mate?

he died came a reply

the room was hollow with loss and his world became smaller and smaller

The nurse visited daily..

and daily

and daily

finally...

please tell me what do you see outside the window the blind man asked

the nurse paused window

there is no window in this room.

“Nothing”

darkness begins

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Exhibition images

Exhibition held on Aug 15th 2005 in WA Gallery 2



Image 1: Presskit, CD Cover and Thesis



Image 2: Close up shots from the short film



Image 3: Close up shots from the short film



Image 4: Still Images from the short film