



Typography and Diversity

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# GLOCAL CONTEXTUALISATION OF 'TYPOTECTURE'

Situating the type in a built form

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**Abstract:** Architecture has had many chronicles of typographical exploration and experimentation. Typefaces have been influenced by architectural styles and movements. The realms of typography and architecture share many design values - user driven, experience centric, significance of visual elements and legibility of outcome. Further, typefaces get integrated to the built form catering to varied functions like signages and environmental typography, there by engaging in a dialogue with the spatial world, crafting and moulding it in many diverse ways. The type gets built in architecture quite literally!

In both design spheres, diversity has played a pivotal role. The context with global and local influences which situates them is also a common cognizance. The paper documents and analyses the occurrence of diversity owing to the 'Glocal Contextualisation' of 'Typotecture' [*Confluence of Typography + Architecture*] in India, where a font situated in a built form results in a multitude of identities for the type as well as the architecture that is hosting it. The conglomeration of typography and architecture is expounded and extrapolated through a frame work that categories and transcribes this multi-layered network seeking the directions that this confluence is heading to where type extends beyond being a written expression into becoming a constructed feature.

**Key words:** *Critical Regionalism, Glocal Context, Built word, Typotecture, Environmental typography, Architectural signage, Design identities.*

## 1. Introduction

Albert Einstein, defined science through diversity as, "Science is the attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense-experience correspond to a logically uniform system of

thought”. Although the concept of diversity has etymologically emerged from the notion of ‘turning aside’ in Latin (Fig1), its current populist association is with culture and ethnicities as being embracing and inclusive. Diversity is now an established existential catchphrase that situates itself as a multi-layered phenomenon through design, culture, community identities and social preferences.

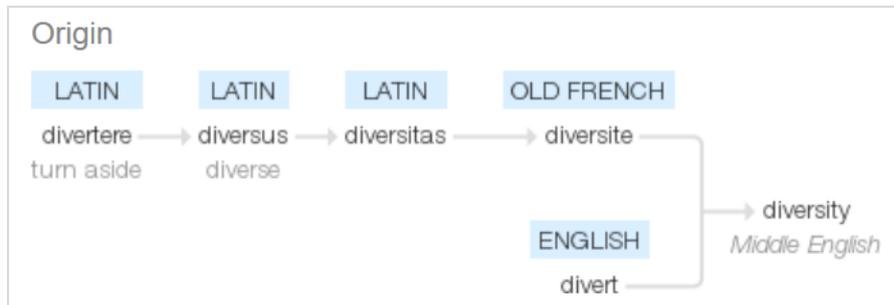


Figure.1 Etymology of the word ‘Diversity’

‘Diversity’ gained presence from 1940s in the intelligentsia when post modernism set in as a reject of a modern utopian uniformist identity when re-establishment of individual cultural identities was considered (Fig 2).

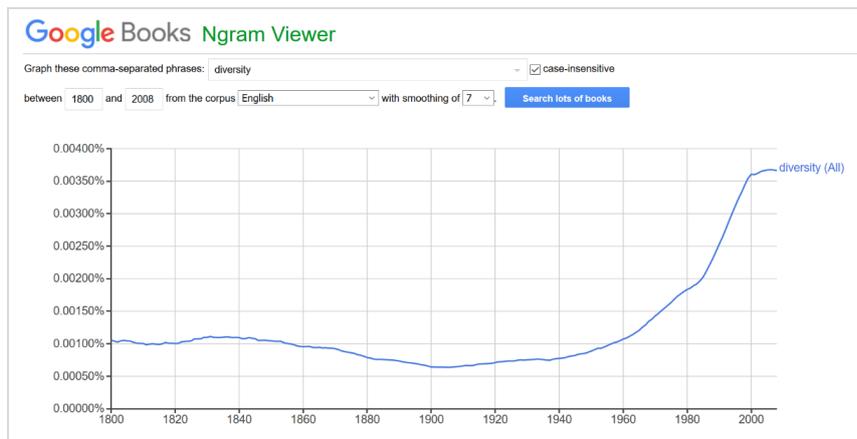


Figure.2 Ngram Viewer on Diversity

Post 1980s, amidst the globalised perspective backed by corporate will and consumeristic marketing, which reduced local identities and culture into a generalised stereotypical token strategy, a new social narrative ‘GLOCAL’ developed that was characterized by both local and global considerations (Fig 3).

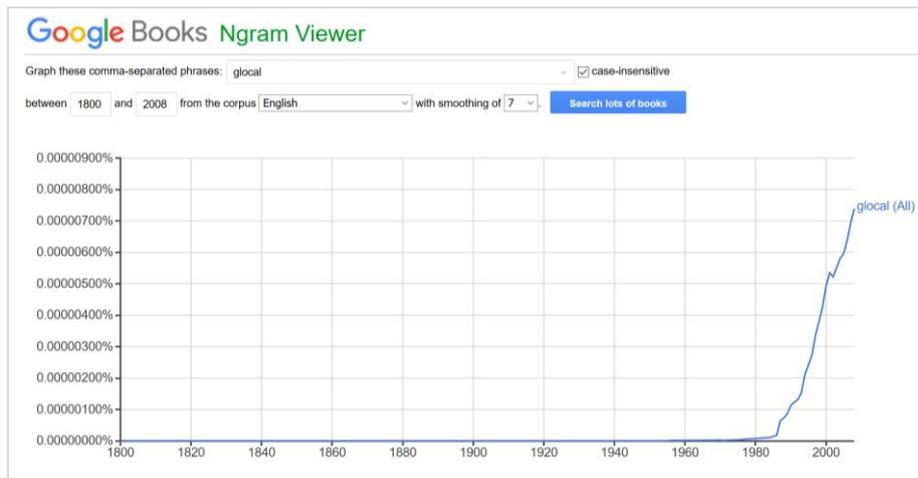


Figure.3 Ngram Viewer on Glocal

The network of associations for ‘diversity’ expanded many folds post the millennium and with a glocal contextual flair, diversity now has distinct global considerations while reflecting the regionalist impetus of the local. The ‘placelessness’ of being global is countered with an acknowledgement of a contextualised local response.

## 2. Glocal Contextualisation

### 2.1 Architecture

In ‘The necessity of architecture’ (2012), John Hendrix notes: Throughout history, architecture has played a key role in the expression and communication of the ideas, beliefs and values of a culture or society. Buildings functioned as texts, as compositions of signifiers, symbols and allegories of religious, philosophical, historical and political structures of knowledge. The wide dissemination of the printed word gradually replaced architecture as the primary medium of communication of epistemological systems and structures which represented the identity of culture. As a result, architecture became more self-referential, and more formalistic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Architects became more disengaged from the core expression of the identity of culture. Modernist formalist compositions sought to express universal ideas rather than cultural epistemologies, claiming to represent a utopian agenda in the development of a universal language.

The intellectual movement of Modernism was all about rationality, logic and efficiency. Diversity in architecture was rejected. The modern Austrian architect Adolf Loos in 1910 stated ‘ornament as a crime’ rejecting all sorts of local identities making way for the

modern global influx. He propounded, “As far as I am concerned, and this goes for all cultivated people, ornament does not give zest to life. The man from the fifteenth century will not understand me. But all modern people will.”

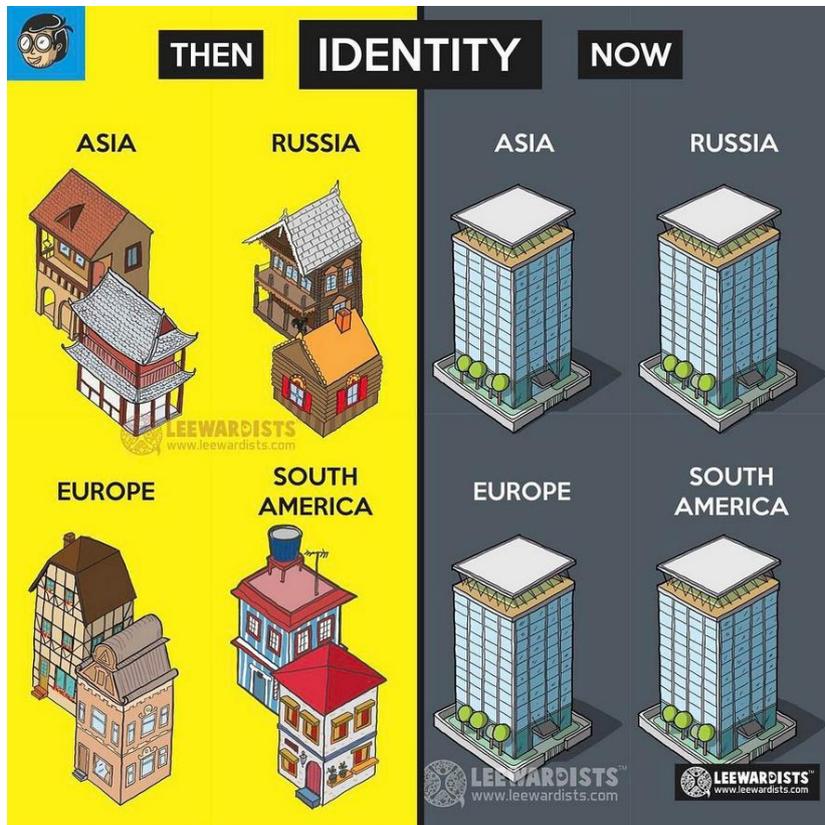


Figure.4 Comic on Architectural Identity in Modern Style by Leewardists

Postmodernism became more popular when people began to realize that the modernist buildings were rational, identity-less and extremely boring. People also began to realize that the crazy chaotic postmodern buildings were often extremely tacky. And so a third school of thought emerged: Critical Regionalism. The basic goal was to find a middle ground between these two extremes. While the modernists strived to create a place-less "universal" architecture with the International Style, critical regionalists insisted that the building must reflect the culture and tradition of its region through its design and materials. While the postmodernists celebrated ornamentation for its own sake, critical regionalists insisted that stylistic flourishes must only be applied in a measured and meaningful way. (Chanowitz,Max, 2015)

Popular as Kenneth Frampton’s Critical Regionalism, it offered a progressive approach to design that mediated between the global and the local architectural languages. In India,

post-Independence, the search for an appropriate architectural identity which reflected the free spirit of a new country while resonating its cultural ethos was primordial. While some architects sought the Indo-European model, some went revivalist of vernacular traditions. (Bahga, Sarbjit, 1993). It was critical regionalism that offered “Indianness” to architecture favoured by the vast diversity that it interpreted.

## 2.2 Typography

Presently, glocal contextualisation has influenced typography too like acknowledgment of Hinglish or Kanglish in linguistics, names of civic importance having a local dialect flavour like Namma Metro (Fig 5), development of fonts like Modak, a combination of Devanagari and Latin typeface by Ek Type (Fig 6). Most kannada language films having a regional film name but with an English sub title reflecting the cosmopolitanism of the audience along with an aspiration of the film to become glocal (Fig 7).



Figure.5 Logo of Namma Metro



Figure.6 Modak Font by ektype

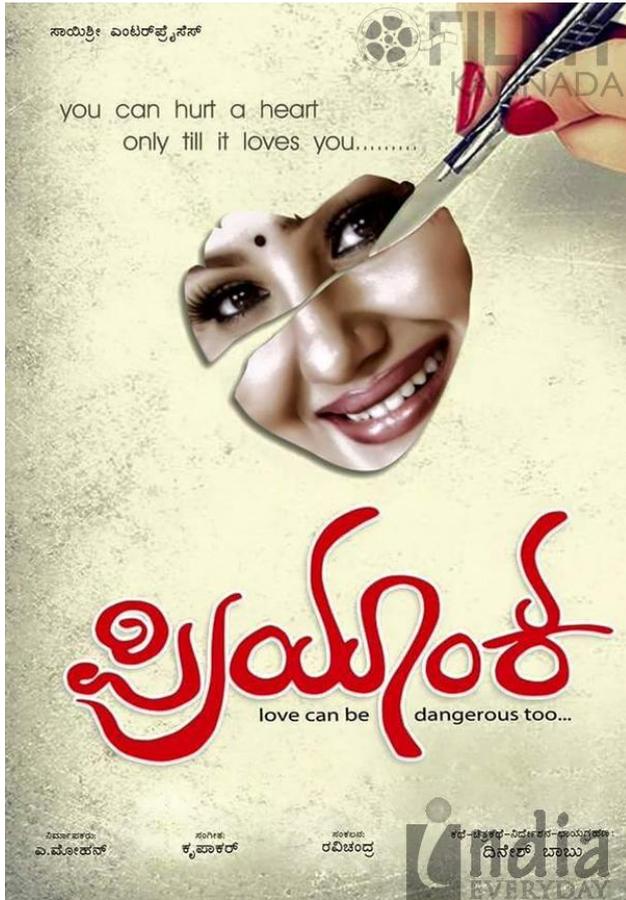


Figure.7 Poster of a Kannada [Regional] Film with bilingual titles

### 2.3 Typotecture

Diversity of response plays a pivotal role in both spheres of Typography and Architecture. Architecture has had many chronicles of typographical exploration and experimentation. Typefaces have been influenced by architectural styles and movements. The realms of Typography and Architecture share many design values - user driven, experience centric, significance of visual elements and legibility of outcome [Space/ Type]. The global context is a common cognizance to both these design disciplines.

Further, typefaces get integrated to the built form catering to varied functions like signage and environmental typography, there by engaging in a dialogue with the spatial world, crafting and moulding it in many diverse ways. The type gets built in architecture quite literally!

The occurrence of diversity in the ‘Glocal Contextualisation’ of ‘Typotecture’ [*Confluence of Typography + Architecture*] (Fig 8) is when a font is situated in a built form resulting in a framework of identities for the type as well as the architecture that is hosting it.

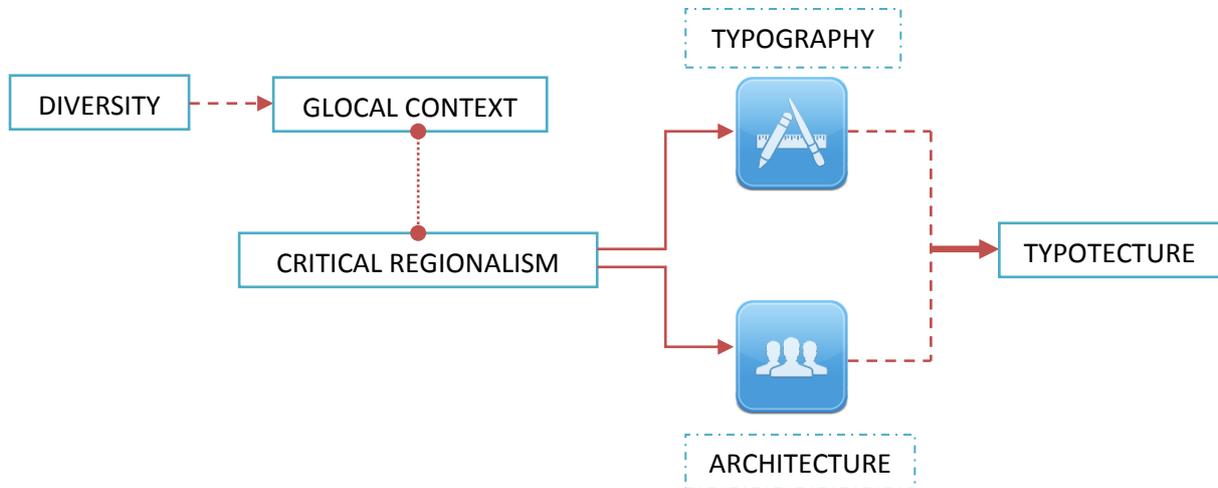


Figure.8 Glocal contextualisation of Typotecture

### 3. Expressions of Typotecture

#### 3.1 Premise

The expression of the ‘built-type’ is a reflection of the societal preferences, material culture of the region and the technological advancement witnessed in the time period. The juxtaposition of the font in a built form results in a framework of design identities where type extends beyond being a written expression into becoming a constructed feature.

For example in the Caryatid Porch of the Erechtheion, Athens, 421-407 BC (Fig 9), a caryatid which was the sculpted female figure, served the role of a column and as an element of visual identity. In the Minnaert building, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands, 1997 (Fig 10), the built font plays the role of structure and visual identity. Both these examples are similar in a way yet very different and telling of the times and the societal, material and visual culture that they belong to.



Figure.9 The Caryatid Porch of the Erechtheion, Athens



Figure.10 Minnaert Building, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands.

### 3.2 Framework

While the built environment proliferates through its varied forms and functions, the diversity with which it responds to the font type is integral to its identity. The diverse network of identities that emerge from the glocal contextualisation of *typotecture*, where the type is situated in a built form, is evaluated, analysed and illustrated here through a framework with various examples of type in built form.

Architecture receives and situates type as a 2D planar element or the type is constructed as a 3D spatial object. As a planar element, the type renders itself as a visual experience and when built, the type behaves as a tactile entity (Fig 11). The resulting perception network is also dependent on the tones of the context in which the typotecture is situated, whether it is with local or global or 'Glocal'. All the examples analysed here are

in India. These come largely under the classification of Environmental Graphics, Building Signage and Wayfinding Signage.

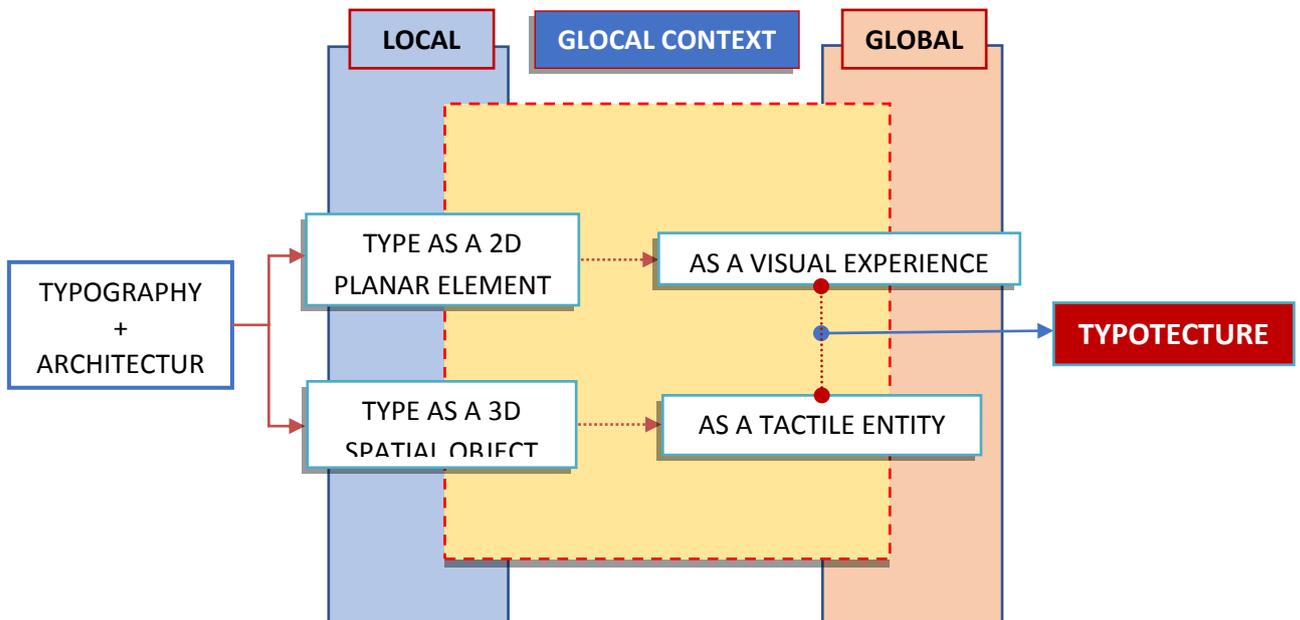


Figure.11 Framework of Typotecture

#### 4. Multitude of Identities

##### 4.1 Font as a brand construct

A. Popularly seen in the hospitality typology of the built, the name of the hotel as a construct of the brand situates itself over the built, detached and in front of the built or on top the built, as a separate discreet layer of visual identity (Fig 12). The font and built may not coagulate in their aesthetics, often the type image overshadowing that of the built. The building behaves merely as a surface to situate the type and not as an object to reckon with. IBIS Hotel, Bloomrooms and Keys Hotel - all in Bengaluru, India are cited here as examples demonstrating these conditions (Fig 13, 14 & 15).

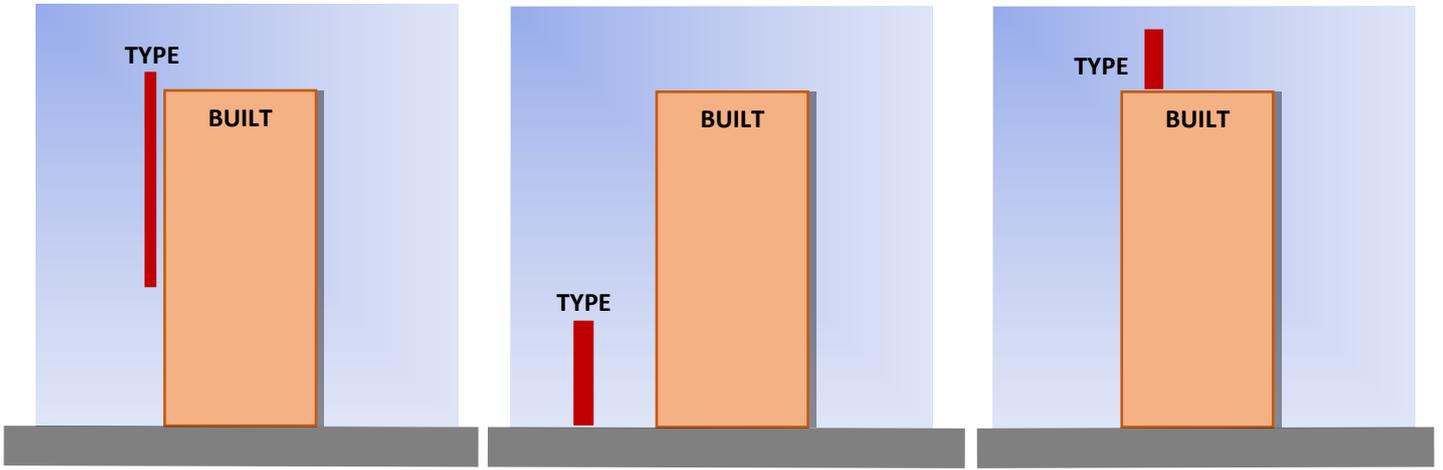


Figure.12 Typotecture : Font as a brand construct



Figure.13 IBIS Hotel, Bengaluru, India



Figure.14 Bloomrooms, Bengaluru, India



Figure.15 Keys Hotel, Bengaluru, India

B. Another typology where font plays a vital brand construct role is in retail design of stores. Here the type generally merges with built from out to in often synchronous of the overall visual imagery (Fig 16). The type positions itself on the façade of the built and permeates into the interiors through indoor branding elements. The font and its built host exude the brand perception in tandem especially in glocal brands like Good Earth and Spices of India (Fig 17,18 & 19).

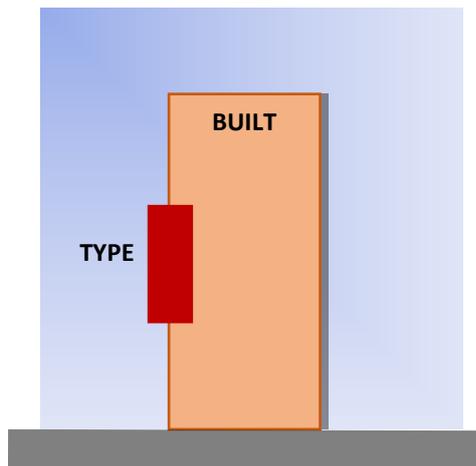


Figure.16 Typotecture : Font as a brand construct from out to in of built



Figure.17 Good Earth Store, Bengaluru, India



Figure.18 Façade of Store - Spices of India, Kochi, India



Figure.19 Interiors of Store - Spices of India, Kochi, India

## 4.2 Font as a philosophy construct

At times, the philosophy of an enterprise finds its expressions as a built construct either locating as a detached distinct layer or on the façade as a feature exemplifying the ethos that drive the company (Fig 20). Asten realtors office building in Kochi, India demonstrates the former condition. These builders believe in delivering buildings that is 'full of life'. This motto is constructed as the compound wall of their office. While behaving as a boundary indicator, it also becomes the philosophy construct of the office (Fig 21).

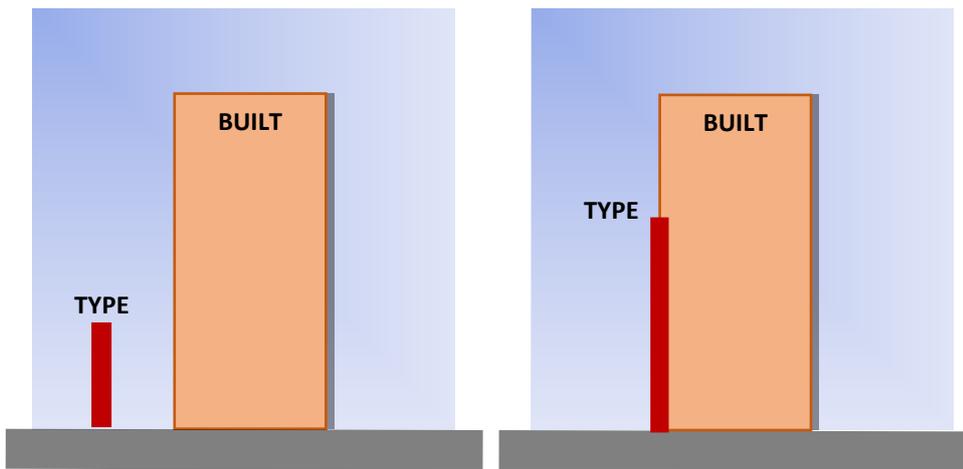


Figure.20 Typotecture : Font as a philosophy construct



Fig 21 : Asten Realtors Office Building, Kochi, India

Betweenlines, an architectural firm in Bengaluru, India sought inspiration from the Nandi [Bull] as a local nostalgic icon of the city to root their practise (Fig 22). They translated it into an abstract which was executed through twisted ferro concrete strips in the façade in a manner that when light filters through it, the silhouette of the Nandi is perceived (Fig 23). Their practice ethos - 'the contemporalities of the local' is denoted in the façade with the name of the firm painted next to this construct in an unassuming manner.



Figure.22 Nandi [Bull] as an inspiration for the facade imagery

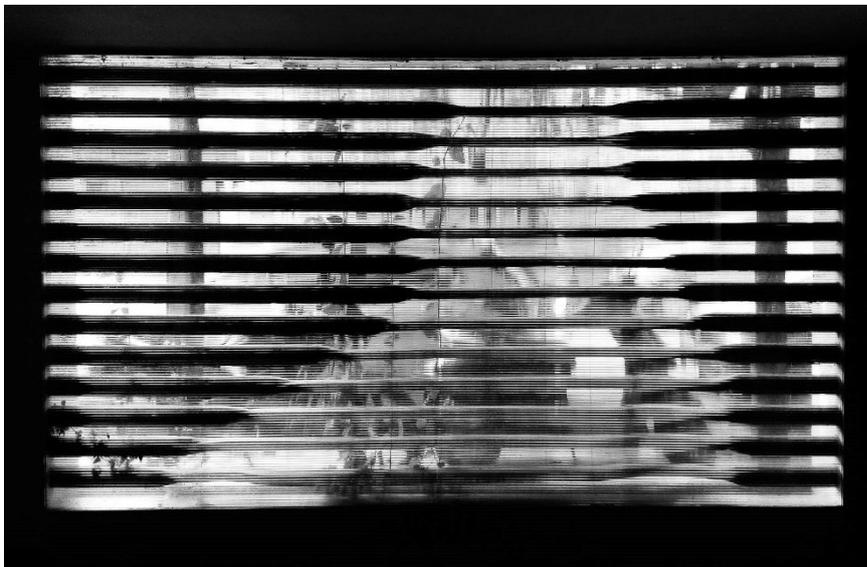


Figure.23 Façade and logo of 'Between lines' Architects Office, Bengaluru, India

### 4.3 Font as a skin façade

Visual imageries in architecture has become primordial with some architects consciously making a choice that the image of the built is more vital than the meaning of the built. Choosing to stand out in the context they are situated in, these architects are opting for fonts as a skin condition of the façade (Fig 24). Employed as an embellishment, the font becomes the visual identity of the built here. Although the font is a 3D construct, it is perceived mostly as a 2D image initially and reveals itself as a 3D on approaching it.

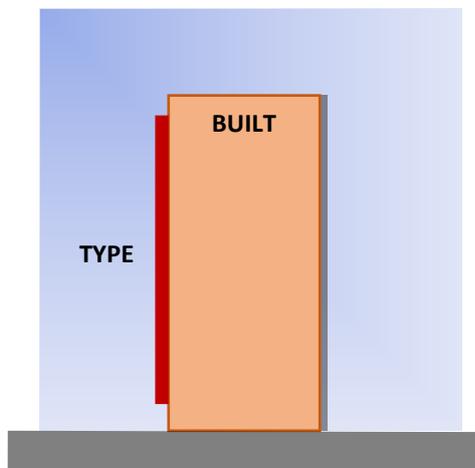


Figure.24 Typotecture : Font as a skin façade

Casatta primary school in Bengaluru designed by Cadence has rounded lettering forms in the façade which frames the windows as well. This font façade is the only visible aspect of the edifice as it sits in a compact site of a residential neighbourhood. The constructed font is a decorative frieze on the facade where the negative spaces of letters like 'e' and 'o' allows for windows to be situated (Fig 25 & 26).

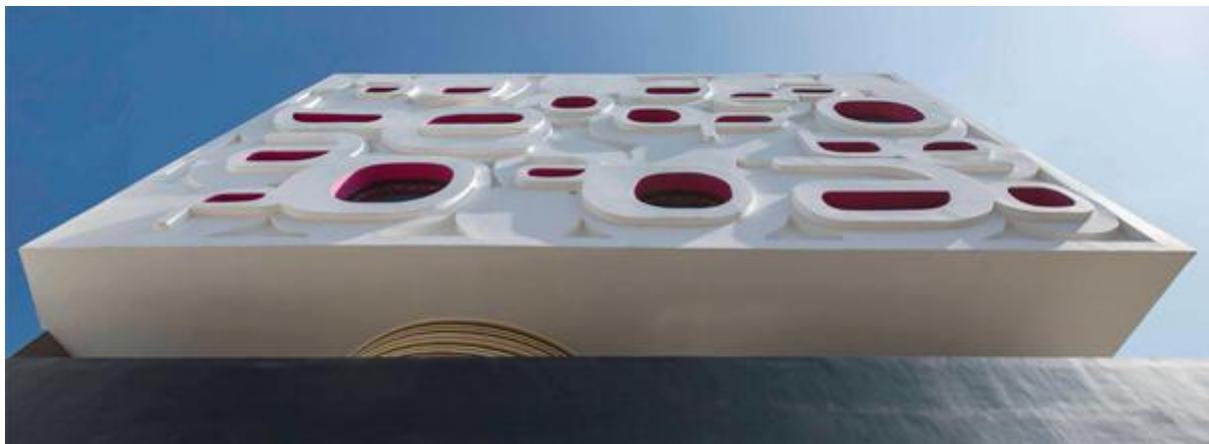


Figure.25 Entrance of Casatta Primary School, Bengaluru, India



Figure.25 Font façade of Casatta primary school by Cadence in Bengaluru, India

The Newtown School, Kolkata designed by Abin Design Studio has a similar approach (Fig 26 & 27). Familiar shapes and symbols are used as a bespoke stencil screen around the building mass to create a play of light and shadow. The façade not only shades the classrooms from the harsh sun but also lends the school a distinct identity.



Figure.26 Font façade of The Newtown School by Abin Design Studio in Kolkata, India



Figure.27 Stenciled font façade of The Newtown School in Kolkata, India

Nazrul Thirtha in Kolkata is a museum and research centre which pays tribute to Kazi Nazrul Islam, the great rebellious and transformative poet of Bengal (Fig 28 & 29). Choosing to reflect his philosophy and ideals, the design shifts away from the conventional

through a bold sculptural form with the Bengali font screen rooting it to the poet and the land it is situated in.



Figure.28 Nazrul Thirtha in Kolkata, India

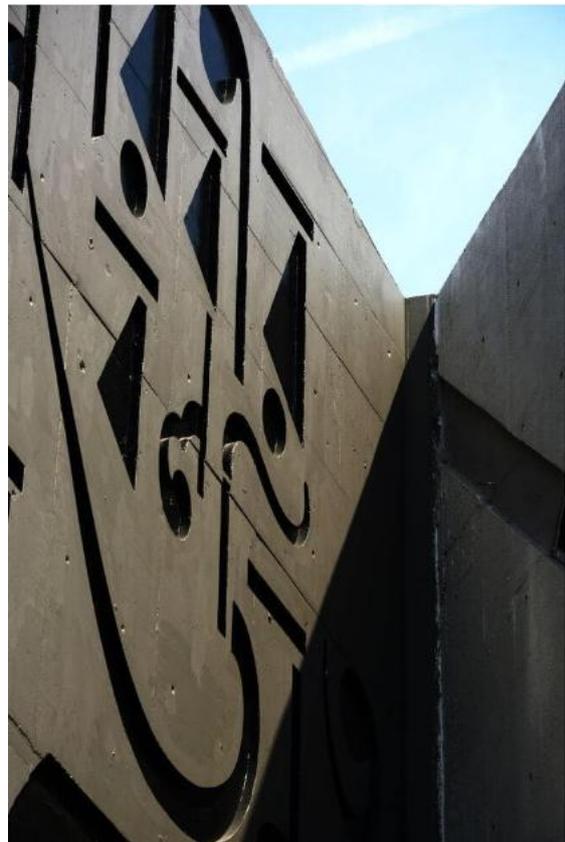


Figure.29 Bengali font screen façade at Nazrul Thirtha in Kolkata, India

#### 4.4 Font as a space delineator

Extending visual imageries to the interiors from the built facades, font as an internal construct delineates spaces in architecture. It could be in the form of screens or entrances or backdrops to spaces (Fig 30). In all these instances, the font behaves as a 3D element bifurcating spaces while being a distinct 2D focal point of the interiors as well. Bihar state pavilion at IITF 2015 by TOD innovations in New Delhi, Heritage boutique store by RMDK Architects in New Delhi and Tower Kitchen by Khosla Associates in Bengaluru are examples of this (Fig 31,32 & 33).

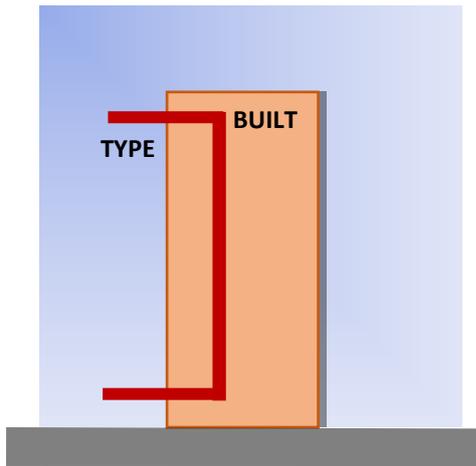


Figure.30 Typotecture : Font as a space delineator

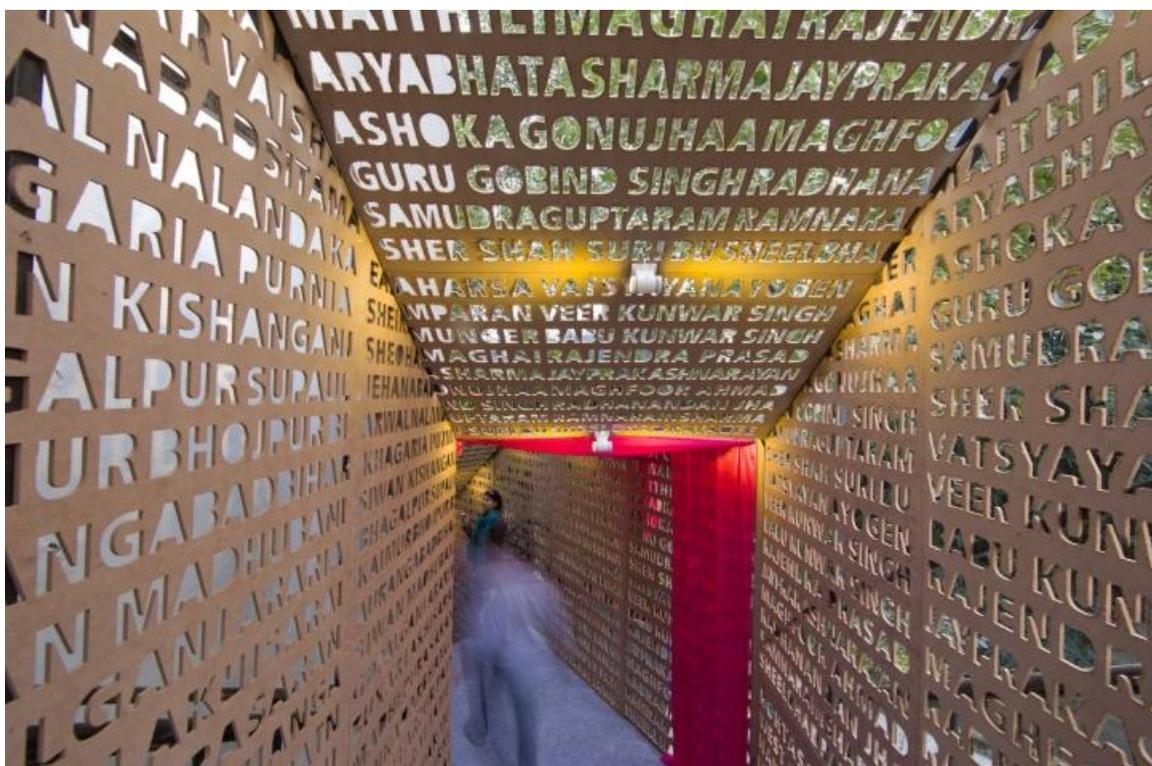


Figure.31 Bihar state pavilion at IITF 2015 by TOD innovations, New Delhi, India



Figure.32 Heritage boutique store by RMDK Architects, New Delhi, India



Figure.33 Tower Kitchen by Khosla Associates, Bengaluru, India

## 5. Mismatched Identities

For many of the government buildings especially the ones that were commissioned prior to 1980s, the 'name board' of the building was a matter-of-fact statement - the only typographical intervention with architecture. Most of the times it remained on top of the built with its primary goal being to disseminate information to public making it important to be visible from long distances (Fig 34). Often the type on the name board were standardised but the architecture hoisting it was not. As an identity, the type and the built were complete strangers exulting their own agenda to the public.

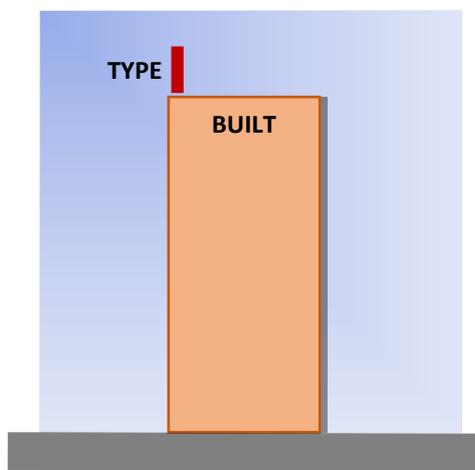


Figure.34 Typotecture : Font as a 'matter-of-fact' add on

Some of the examples listed here are the Satyagraha Soudha in Madduru (Fig 35), Chowdaiah Memorial Hall in Bengaluru (Fig 36) and Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad (Fig 37). All these government buildings have non-committal, non-descript name boards. The insipid type stating the name of the place behaved as the emblem of power declaring the government patronage that it received.

Interestingly, some of the recent commissions like the new secretariat building in Chennai serving now as a hospital (Fig 38) or National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) building in Bengaluru (Fig 39 & 40), have the same matter of fact name boards. Although the architecture has evolved to becoming glocal, its engagement with typography is still void retaining the bureaucratic feel in its boards. A holistic engagement with the public is still amiss.



Figure.35 Satyagraha Soudha in Madduru, India



Figure.36 Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bengaluru, India



Figure.37 Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad, India



Figure.38 Secretariat Building in Chennai, India serving as multi-specialty hospital

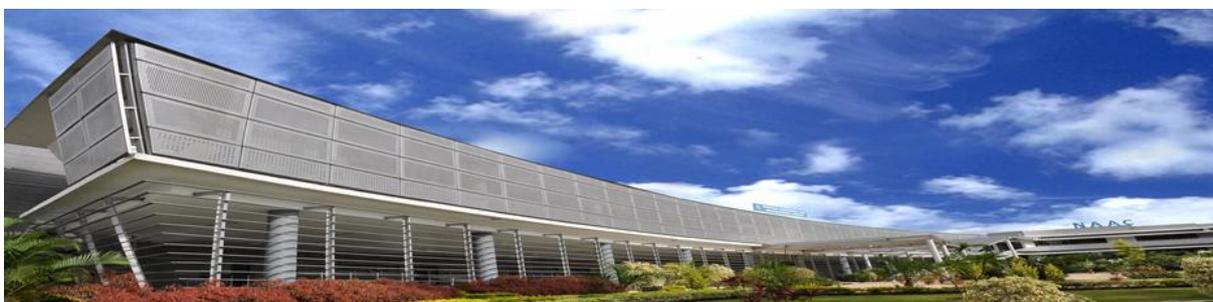


Figure.39 Façade of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) Building, Bengaluru, India



Figure.40 National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) Building, Bengaluru, India

## 6. Tangible Construct of a social narrative

Most Indian cities are multi layered today with the nexus of the old and new adjusting, appropriating or even erasing each other. Each of these cities has so much to offer, that having a one point take away from the city becomes difficult. *I love the city's name* has surfaced as the global trend to show one's appreciation of a city. These slogans as a construct now make the emotional connect with the city, a palpable icon (Fig 41 & 42). Interestingly, these built types of the catchphrases have no architectural reference.



Figure.41 I love Bangalore, Bengaluru, India  
Typoday 2017



Figure.42 I love Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

## 7. Inferences

The association between architecture and typography is multi layered and diverse. An evaluation of all these possibilities have led to the following aspects

- The identity of the font in a built environment is mutually inclusive although it attempts to be exclusive at times.
- The type cannot establish its identity independent of the architecture that is hosting it while the built structure becomes complete in its identity with the built word.
- This intertwined identity of the typotecture results in diversity arising from a combination of global and local flavours becoming the perceived essence of these typotectural endeavours.

## 8. Conclusions

The diversity of the responses in typography when it situates itself in architecture has had strong global and local influences. Typography has been the substance and at times just an applied skin to the form in spatial systems. The identity of the built word on occasions has even remained unstated. Type has either remained subservient to the built or dominates it to an extent that the building seems like a visual mirage. Else type is delinked with the spatial and temporal dimensions of human interference in the built structure completely.

Interestingly in the glocal context, instances of the conscious coexistence of the two design realms which add value and flavour to their collaborative identity makes them typotectural accomplishments.

The categories for classifying the typotectural examples applied here are

- Multitude of Identities
  - Font as a brand construct
  - Font as a philosophy construct
  - Font as a skin façade
  - Font as a space delineator
- Mismatched Identities
- Tangible Construct of a social narrative

In a land of pluralism like India, many directions of design coexist. After Critical Regionalism was forged as a design conscious in 1980s, many iterations of this approach have evolved. From the typotectural studies undertaken here, three distinct approaches can be mapped: **Performism, Glocalism and Regionalism.**

**Performism** rejects critical regionalism and believes in belonging to a bold global practice where the design is individualistic and self-referential. These designs are often sculptural with heavy tectonic approach where the design is the means and method to itself. It seeks no other meanings. Context and local influences have no implication. Technology and materialism drives their designs. The category of mismatched identities are examples of this.

**Glocalism** absorbs the global and local influences and locates itself contextually by belonging yet stating its identity in the place uniquely. Diverse flavours emerge in a sustained manner from this approach. The design is often interdisciplinary and it seeks to retain the flavour of the region with a global appeal. The category of multitude of identities exemplifies this.

**Regionalism** is revivalist seeking an alternate practise with only local elements while rejecting everything global. It is anti-modernism to a large extent. It even tends to become ancient at the extreme. Reinstating regional methods to design while evoking tradition and culture is the strong basis of this approach. Nothing matters beyond

belonging to the place and its context. Examples under the tangible construct of a social narrative demonstrate this.

All three design approaches co-occur in the nexus of typographical and architectural expressions seeking to conglomerate technological practices with that of culturally specific ideas and identities, as a reassertion of glocal contextualisation. These directions are represented as a diagram in Fig 43.

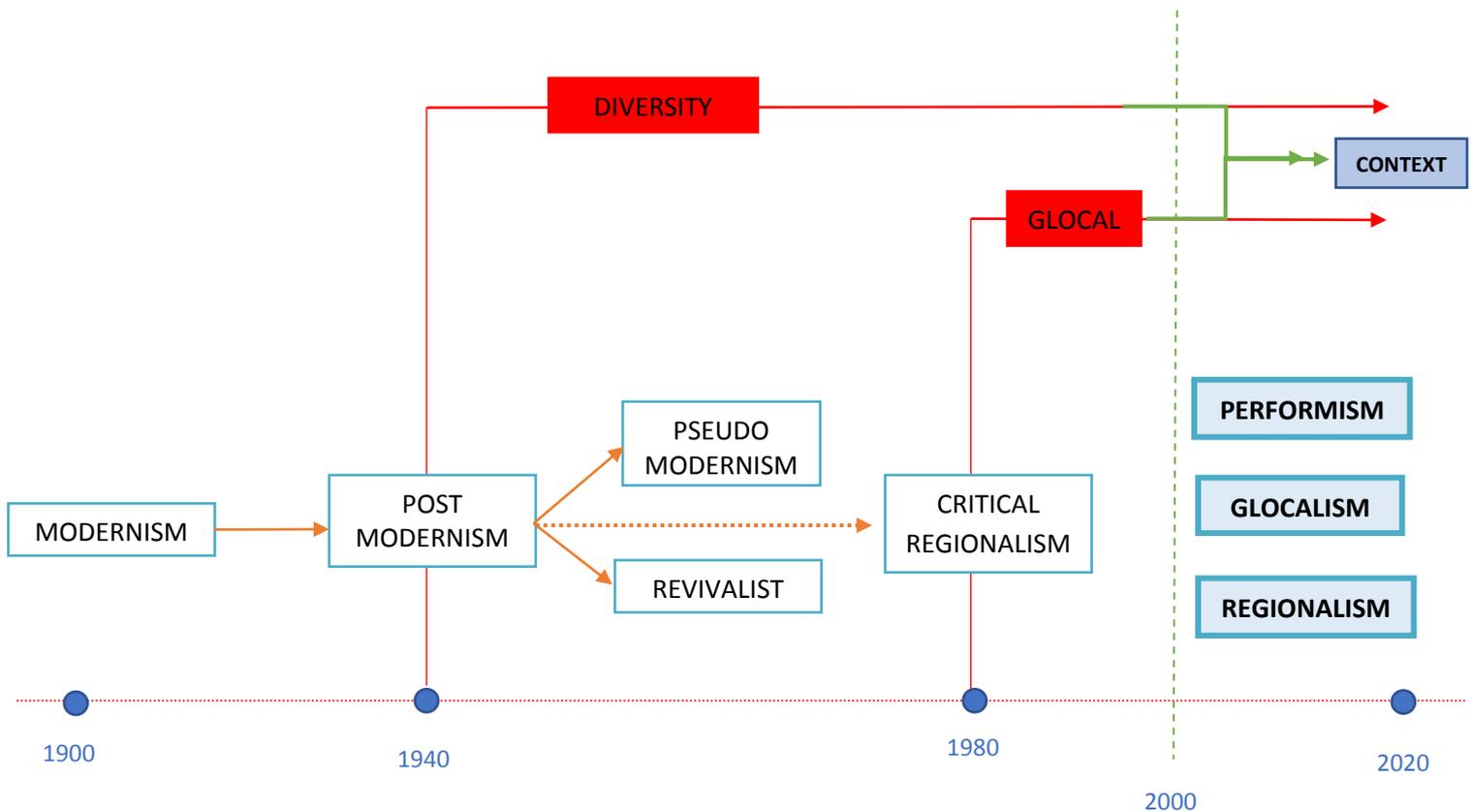


Figure.43 Directions of typotecture

The comprehension of these design approaches especially the glocalised ones, will augment the work of cultural renewal not just as an act of resuscitation but rather of reinterpreting cultural practices which will render diversity in design identities.

These mappings and analyses are to be furthered for an in-depth understanding of typotecture as an ‘interdisciplinary activity’ rather than that of an autonomous technical expression with no reference to anything outside itself. The discipline of *typotecture* needs to develop more metaphorical representations and continue to expand as a form of human expression instead of myopic individualistic statements of the two professions.

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