Bilingual typography considered from the standpoint of Bakhtin's dialogism

Soheil Ashrafi

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Bilingual typography considered from the standpoint of Bakhtin's dialogism

Soheil Ashrafi

School of Visual Arts and Design, Raffles College of Design and Commerce, Parramatta, Australia

ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the issue of *formal-material relation* across bilingual letterforms with reference to Bakhtin's dialogism to which the notion of polyphonic form is central. It is commonly held that bilingual typography consists in the coexistence of two linguistically distinct sets of letterforms. Under close observation, this crude definition proves defective for two reasons. First, it does not recognize the characteristic distinction between typographic and written bilingualism. To work out this problem the paper draws a distinction between two categories of properties constitutive of letterforms: linguistic content and formal-material structure. Of these the latter is valorized as the primary object of typography, be it monolingual or bilingual. Second, it takes no account of dialogic quiddity of bilingualism. The coexistence as a relation of simultaneity and contiguity constitutes the necessary but in no way the sufficient condition for bilingualism. This is further elaborated through the analysis of a number of experimental practices taking as their working material two sets of letterforms. The paper concludes that bilingual typography both in theory and practice still stands in need of greater development towards which it is reasoned an exposition of the fundamental structure of letterforms is the necessary point of departure.

Introduction

Consider 'Federation Bells' in Birrarung Marr, a city park in Melbourne. This computer-controlled public art installation by Anton Hasell and Neil McLachlan was built in 2001 to celebrate the centenary of Australia's federation (see Figure 1). The installation consists of 39 upturned bells of varying shapes, sizes and sounds that can be found in certain Asian and European bell-making traditions. Computer-controlled hammers programmed to play MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) strike the bells twice a day. Most of the bells are harmonic but seven are polytonal tuned to play more than one pitch with each strike (Federationbells.com.au 2014). The musical pieces are created by local and international composers using an interactive website that provides technical support.

The work embodies an intercultural combination of signs interfacing outside of their original cultural contexts. Such a combination brings about a perception of pluralism,

---

Figure 1. Hasell and McLachlan, *Federation Bells*. 2001, public installation, Melbourne (Federationbells. com.au 2014) (with kind permission of the Federation Bells).

multi-voicedness and mutual differences to members of the public who themselves may belong to different ethnic groupings.

In a culturally diverse society such as Australia's, which includes various languages, religions, traditions and value systems, the Federation Bells creates an intercultural space for a certain kind of dialogue. This dialogue results from the semiotic structure of the work. On the one hand, the sound of each bell, alongside its formal and material properties symbolically signifies the culture in which the given bell was made. On the other hand, the sound is in harmony with those of the other bells within melodic lines. Apart from their spatial contiguity the bells are brought together and function as an integrated system of signs in melodic lines.

Nevertheless each bell retains its characteristic distinctiveness, communicating its own cultural and historical values while contributing to melodic lines. In short, as independent and distinctive signs unified within an integrated system of melodic lines, the bells demonstrate a formal-material analogue of polyphony, a harmonious unification of independent voices (von Helmholtz 2007, 244).

The polyphonic unity of the bells is characteristic of a dialogic interaction of the kind elaborated in the works of the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). Although the defining features of polyphony concerning dialogue remain equivocal in Bakhtin's observation (Morson and Emerson 1990, 231–234), his analogy of polyphony (1984[1929], 22) as counterpoints of interdependent voices provides a formal framework for understanding dialogic interactions of this kind.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin sets out to analyze the formal design of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novels, which he characterizes as: '*[a] plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels*' (1984, 6, emphasis in original). By '*independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses*' Bakhtin means the autonomous ideological positions of characters vis-à-vis the authorial position of Dostoevsky rendered by the polyphonic form of novel.

For Bakhtin the polyphonic form creates an axiological space in which the artistic distinctiveness of an aesthetic object lies in its moral values, such as independent and equally valid social voices that 'co-exist,' 'interact' (Bakhtin 1993, 28), and more importantly are mutually 'consummated' while taking part within the higher unity of the novel (Bakhtin 1990), as do the bells co-exist beyond their individual distinctiveness within the Federation Bells.

Although Bakhtin's notion of dialogism was developed in the context of literature with specific reference to Dostoevsky's works, it has provided a fecund theoretical framework for the exploration and understanding of dialogic interactions in contexts where diverse sociocultural voices are present and differences are of a particular value. In addition to providing a key to works such as the 'Federation Bells,' the methodological application of Bakhtin's dialogism can be found in a wide range of fields including the study of sociocultural ideologies in contemporary Marxist theory (Bernard-Donals 1994; Clark and Holquist 1984; Emerson 1997; Morson and Emerson 1990); social work practices (Irving and Young 2002); the relationship between therapists and clients (Garbutt 1996; Gonçalves and Guilfoyle 2006); the interaction between the message and its surroundings and a viewer in advertising (Karimova 2011); narrative studies (Owen 2011); the dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen and van Loonet 1992); diversity and multiculturalism (Evans 1998; Sidorkin 2002); and the philosophy of education (Chen Johnsson 2013; Matusov 2007).

This paper deals with the issue of *formal-material relation* across bilingual letterforms with reference to Bakhtin's dialogism to which the notion of polyphonic form is central. It is commonly held that bilingual typography consists in the coexistence of two linguistically distinct sets of letterforms. Under close observation, this crude definition proves defective for two reasons. First, it does not recognize the characteristic distinction between typographic and written bilingualism. To work out this problem the paper draws a distinction between two categories of properties constitutive of letterforms: linguistic content and formal-material structure. Of these the latter is valorized as the primary object of typography, be it monolingual or bilingual. Second, it takes no account of dialogic character of bilingualism. The coexistence as a relation of simultaneity and contiguity constitutes the necessary but in no way the sufficient condition for bilingualism. This is further elaborated through the analysis of a number of experimental practices taking as their working material two sets of letterforms. The paper concludes that bilingual typography both in theory and practice still stands in need of greater development towards which it is reasoned an exposition of the fundamental structure of letterforms is the necessary point of departure.

Problematization of the theoretical literature of typographic bilingualism

Whether engraved on a Mesopotamian clay tablet or displayed on a digital screen of an international flight, written and typographic bilingualism can be understood in terms of two unified categories of discursive value, which I characterize as 'linguistic content' and 'formal-material structure.' Linguistic content refers to the primary, *invariable* reference of letterforms to speech signs, to constitutive elements of the orthographic image of words. Formal-material structure refers to the *variable* morphological and physical properties by which letterforms are instantiated – calligraphy and typography are two variations of the formal-material structure of letterforms (see Figure 2.1).

That which is instantiated by the formal-material structure is the abstract prototypical image (Rosch and Lloyd 1978) of letterforms that furnishes the necessary code for deciphering

Figure 2.1. Letter A in its typographic (1) and calligraphic (2) variations.

the linguistic content across the formal-material variations. The decipherability of a figure *qua* letterform is determined by the extent to which its formal-material structure conforms to a letterform's prototypical image. There is an indivisible, psychological union between the linguistic content and prototypical image of letterforms; the two determinants indissolubly operate conjointly, not one without the other or before the other. Toward the prototypical image of letterforms and the question concerning the fundamental structure of its concrete counterpart scholarship has widely been heedless to date.

The inference of linguistic content is not only always bound up with the presence of formal-material structure, but also objectively conditioned, as the point of departure, by its variability and its meaning potential far beyond the linguistic content that is always already given. One never discovers the linguistic content but the formal-material structure. Hence, the commonly identifying of a figure *qua* letterform with the elicited abstract linguistic content casts a shadow on the objective foundation of such mental impression, *on the point of encounter that comes forth within the bounds of formal-material structure.*

Linguistic content is brought forth by and determines the validity of formal-material structure at once. This fluid relation has raised confusion in distinguishing the theoretical frameworks of two distinctive entities, namely, 'written' and 'typographic' discourse and their bilingual variations. The former, written discourse, refers to the textual experience of discourse in terms of linguistic content (semantic, syntactic, stylistic organizations) and sociocultural context of text; the latter, typographic discourse, refers to the sensory experience of discourse in terms of perceptible aspects of text (e.g. visual, tactile), which primarily arise from the formal-material structure of letterforms. The former tends to perceive letterforms within an orthographic image of words and extend its officially and socially regulatory character to the latter, whereas the latter always begins with the formal-material structure of letterforms and more often than not appears in the form of divergent, experimental ventures into the former.

Hence, the question of polyphonic form and dialogue within the framework of written bilingualism and typographic bilingualism is to be explored and resolved by reference to the linguistic content and formal-material structure of letterforms respectively. Nevertheless,

the theoretical literature of typographic bilingualism has been largely preoccupied with the discursive value of linguistic content at the expense of formal-material structure.

One prevailing approach can be found in studies published in two special issues (1987, No. 1; 1993, No. 1–2) of the journal *Visible Language* (an independent scholarly journal published continuously since 1967 with a focus on typography in conjunction with social and human sciences) devoted to bilingualism. The first issue focuses on the sociopolitical tensions and the problem of typeface design in bilingual context of communication that can include the bilingual typography in Welsh and English in Wales; in English and French in Canada; and in English and Spanish in the United States (Crawford 1987; Hodgson and Sarkonak 1987). In the second issue, in 'Seeing in-Depth: The Practice of Bilingual Writing' Sarkonak (1993) examines the stylistic form of bilingualism in literary texts and the issue of bilingual readership. These studies are evidently preoccupied with the linguistic content of written bilingualism and the issues of readership and production associated with linguistically disparate scripts.

More recently, the Multilingual Typography Research Group in Geneva in Koexistenz der Zeichen – Multilinguale Typografie (The Co-Existence of Signs – Multilingual Typography) (Baur et al. 2012) presented a series of studies on the coexistence of typographic signs. The research project provides a descriptive framework for the study of the formal-material structure of bilingual letterforms. Among the authors Tam offers an important schematic account for the graphic and spatial attributes of English and Chinese letterforms in the bilingual context of Hong Kong. In his analysis of typographic bilingualism he gives a concise picture of three modes of typographic bilingualism, which include 'parallel,' 'code-mixing' and 'code-switching' (40, see Figure 2.2).
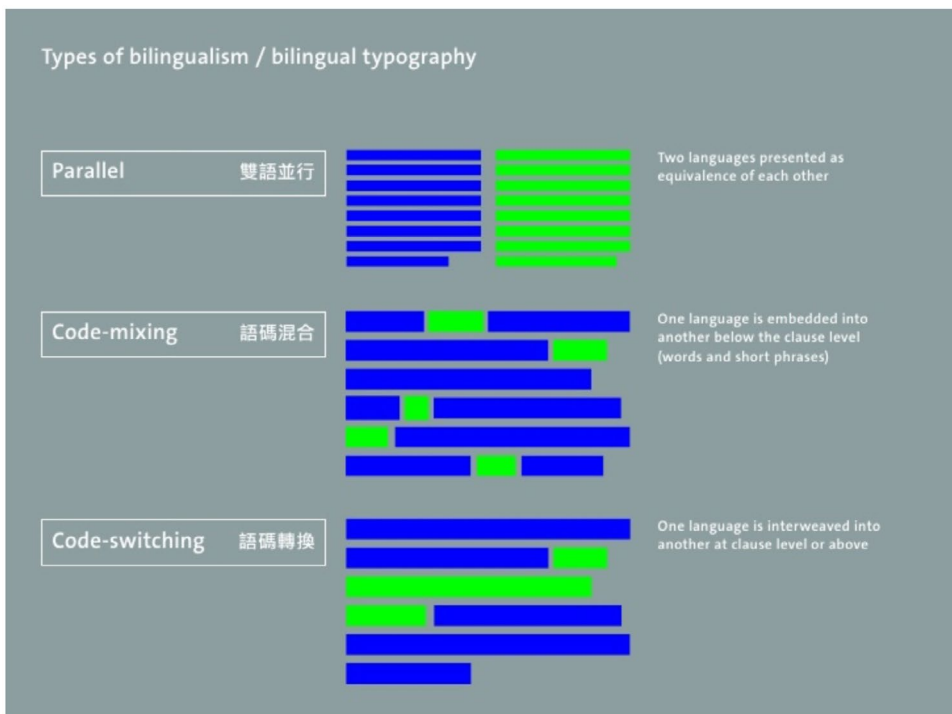

Figure 2.2. Tam, *Bilingual typography: Hong Kong Case Studies*. 2012 (Slideshare.net).

This apparently formal-material account of typographic bilingualism is grounded in the formal structure of stylistic devices of bilingualism that Grutman (1993, 210) refers to as 'allusion,' 'translation' and 'commentary.' To illustrate the stylistic underpinning of Tam's schematic modes Grutman's descriptions of the stylistic devices are helpful.

These stylistic devices, as Grutman argues, are used by the writers who intend to communicate within the confines of a monolingual readership (1993, 210). Grutman speaks of an allusion 'when the language of the narrated "story" (i.e., what really happened) does not reach the more explicit level of the literary "discourse" (i.e., the text we read)' (1993, 210). It is a minor deviation from the reader's monolingual competency. The code-mixing mode of typographic bilingualism is only another term for the stylistic device of allusion; indeed, they are one and the same since formal-material structure of letterforms is entirely outside of the stylistic form of the bilingual text.

In the stylistic device of translation the text gives the reader freedom of choice either to read or block out the second language. Translation has been a common stylistic form in the history of bilingualism. The Rosetta Stone and Thomas More's *Utopia* (published in 1,516) are two well-known examples of translation in which two or more writing systems appear on the same material support without any didactic theme. The schematic mode of parallel in Tam's analysis is equivalent to translation.

The third device termed by Grutman as 'commentary' lies beyond referential meaning and rests upon cultural connotations, metalinguistic potential, of the utterances in the second language (1993, 211). Much like code-mixing and allusion, code-switching is simply another term for stylistic device of commentary. In Tam's analysis the terms parallel, code-mixing and code-switching only indicate the presence of bilingual letterforms but do not account for the formal-material structure of letterforms, the very characteristic distinctiveness of letterforms vis-à-vis speech signs and their discursive contribution to the bilingual text. In short, Tam's account of typographic bilingualism is essentially a schematic rearrangement of Grutman's stylistic account.

A closer observation of the formal attributes of written bilingualism highlights the need for a different approach. The presence of two languages, or 'polyglot nature of a given work,' Grutman (1993, 212) argues, can create the illusion of bilingualism, for 'the polyglot nature of a given work is not so much a matter of quantity as of quality.' The characters in Grutman's extracts communicate with one another in the predominantly monolingual context of authorial discourse. There is no bilingual exchange taking place, and these stylistic devices, as Grutman (1993, 224) maintains, merely represent 'a kind of double monolingualism.' The juxtaposition of two languages in a textual space in the form of stylistic devices does not necessarily produce a bilingual text. In terms of Bakhtin's model, it can be argued that true bilingualism lies in the polyphonic form of discourse in the dialogic unity of bilingual characters and not in the mere presence of two languages. In terms of letterforms the mere presence of two languages in one and the same textual space falls within the category of linguistic content (two languages) and not formal-material structure, as the dialogic character of the Federation Bells lies in the polyphonic form of the melodic lines and not in their spatial contiguity.

In his analysis, Grutman addresses the question of bilingualism by referring to a twelfth-century poem *Domna, tant vos ai preiada* (published in 1,190) composed by Raimbaut de Vaqueiras. In the poem a romantic conversation takes place between a Provençal minstrel and a Genoese countrywoman. The conversation is a bilingual interaction, for the characters

speak their respective languages, which 'are deemed to be mutually comprehensible to the speakers' (Forster 1970, cited in Grutman 1993, 215). Two autonomous bilingual voices are hence combined into a single system and produce a dialogic counterpoint. Here bilingualism is not defined in terms of an arrangement of two languages in a uniform direction of one single voice but rather in a polyphonic direction of two responsive voices.

As Grutman's study demonstrates, there is stylistic evidence of polyphonic bilingualism in which two languages are not merely juxtaposed in the lines of a discourse; rather they represent an axiological space in which two social voices semantically respond to, and complement, each other.

In the movie *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) directed by Theo Angelopoulos, a spoken manifestation of this stylistic counterpoint of two languages within the unity of a dramatic event is found when the protagonist, a Greek-American filmmaker, named 'A,' meets his friend Nikos in Belgrade. 'A' speaks in English and Nikos replies in Greek, notably, when they recall their past dreams and intellectual life while wandering through streets.

Such a formal account of bilingualism further challenges Tam's schematic account of typographic bilingualism. None of the schematic modes refer to a bilingualism of this kind, but rather a double monolingualism for, as Grutman observes (1993, 224), 'each language holds its ground with little contamination' and the reader can pass over the redundant second language. Such a model of bilingualism is not only rooted in the linguistic content but also found in the fully independent formal-material structure of bilingual letterforms in the schematic modes of parallel, code-mixing, and code-switching. That is, bilingual letterforms lack any formal-material unity and remain, as it were, indifferent toward one another; in other words, their connection depends solely on the fact that they share the same material support.

In theory typographic bilingualism is thus deeply attached to written discourse of bilingualism, is stylistically oriented in its propositions. There exists no formal-material structure equivalent to the polyphonic form of written bilingualism. The schematic modes draw their bilingual character solely from the spatial contiguity of two languages and, as such, at best reproduce double monolingualism. By definition they fall short of generating or actualizing polyphonic bilingualism.

Polyphonic bilingualism can be achieved by a coding system that creates a space in which despite their likely linguistic barrier the reader finds the foreign code as an integral part of her own native code. The formal-material structure of letterforms serves as a counterpoint in which their mutually consummating co-existence becomes essential to the understanding of their linguistic content. In other words, dialogism appears to be the only possible mode of bilingual communication.

Analysis of the experimental practices presenting two sets of letterforms

Here I will begin to analyze the formal-material structures of typographic works that draw on close interactions between two sets of letterforms. This analysis will be carried out within the following experimental categories: two-dimensional monolingual; two-dimensional bilingual; three-dimensional monolingual; and three-dimensional bilingual works. The analytical criteria are the polyphonic principles of dialogism: the consummated unity of the observed object's parts of which the *observer's spatial-temporal* involvement is integral. The presence of the observer can be grasped in respect of the fact that the mutual consummation of parts is grounded in the observer's spatial position and involvement. But being in space is

always grounded in time, since space and time are ineluctably interwoven (Bakhtin 1981, 84). The experience of the one is not only coupled with but also conditioned by that of the other such that the observer's participation through the mutual consummation is always spatially-temporally directed.

The reader would note two points in this section. First, the chosen case studies submitted to analysis are all of experimental character, as non-experimental works such as official documents or public signs fall under the same categories (i.e. parallel, code-mixing and code-switching) examined in the foregoing section of theoretical literature. Second, although the focus of this paper is centered around bilingual typography, from the standpoint of formal-material structure letterforms are seen as formal-material objects stripped of their linguistic content. Seen in this regard, here any two sets of letterforms, be they within or across letterform systems, can therefore be studied as relevant cases. The works that require the observer's participation are studied, as they, too, fall close to the polyphonic principles.

Two-dimensional monolingual works

Ambigrams 'light is wave/particle' and 'False/True:'

A dialogic co-existence of letterforms comes closer in the 'ambigram,' a term coined by Douglas Hofstadter (1987). Seckel (2004, 138) defines an ambigram as a visually elaborate written word that allows readers to read the word in more than one way, or from more than a single vantage point such as right side up or upside down. Here I focus on a particular mode of ambigram involving so-called perceptual shift – also called oscillation (Prokhorov 2013, 35) – that stands close to the objects of perceptual ambiguity.

'Light is WAVE/particle' (2001) is a perceptual shift ambigram designed by Douglas Hofstadter that references quantum level duality of particles (see Figure 3.1). The words 'WAVE' and 'particle' are merged into one word by sharing the same elements constitutive of their letterforms. In other words, the two words are unified insofar as one without the other is seemingly impossible. But on closer observation it becomes evident that the letters of 'particle' are independent of those of 'wave.' In fact, the perceptual combinations of the letters of 'particle' give rise to those of 'WAVE;' the letters of 'wave' are the product of modified
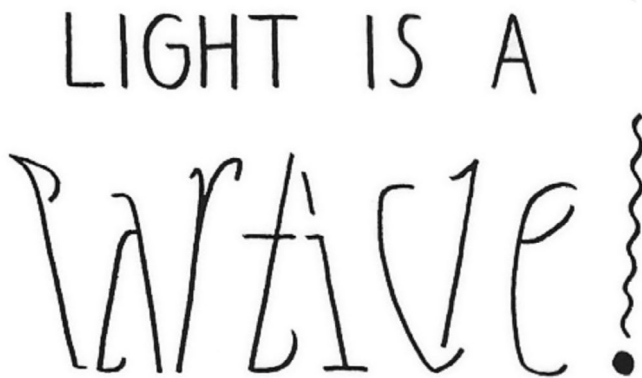

Figure 3.1. Hofstadter, *Light is a wave/particle*. 2001 (Introspections.org 2008) (with kind permission of Hofstadter).

tracking (letter-spacing) of those of 'particle' and therefore the ambigram only achieves a one-sided or monological relationship between the words.

Similarly, in the 'FALSE/true' (1981) ambigram by Scott Kim, 'true' appears in red lowercase and 'FALSE' in black uppercase (see Figure 3.2). The word 'true' constitutes a part of the 'FALSE' to the extent that the elimination of 'true' renders 'FALSE' illegible, but not vice versa. In other words, there is a unilateral relationship between the words.

In conclusion, although the ambigrams 'WAVE/particle' and 'FALSE/true' have a polyphonic form, they fall short of dialogicality, since only one set of letterforms functions as an essential part of the other, but not vice versa.

Two-dimensional bilingual works

Bilingual ambigrams 'Elise Esther Diamond,' 'origami' and 'CNN Arabic logo:'
Bilingual ambigrams stand closest to the objectives of the present thesis since they present two closely related sets of letterforms within the unity of one formal-material structure and yet communicate two sets of linguistic contents.

In designing the logo 'Elise Esther Diamond' (the logo was commissioned by Kim's mother in honor of the Bat Mitzvah of Elise Diamond, a piano student of Kim's mother (Kim 1997)) Kim placed the Hebrew word 'Esther' (רתסא) inside the English word 'DIAMOND' (see Figure 3.3). As the logo shows the Hebrew letters of the word 'Esther' harmonically represent both

Figure 3.2. Kim, *FALSE/true*. 1981 (Seckel 2004, 140) (with kind permission of Kim).

Figure 3.3. Kim, *Elise Esther Diamond*. 1997 (Kim 1997) (with kind permission of Kim).

the word 'Esther' and four English letters 'A, M, O, N' of the word 'DIAMOND,' although an extra stroke has been added in the middle of Hebrew letter 'ת' (Taw) to the 'M.'

Despite its bilingual organization the logo is quite similar to 'FALSE/true' where there is a unilateral relationship between the words. That is, the Hebrew word 'Esther' is self-contained and remains legible and independent of the word 'DIAMOND' if it is removed from the logo, whereas 'Diamond' becomes illegible.

In a similar project, Kim was commissioned to design a logotype for 'origami' in both English and Japanese (Kim 1997). The outcome is a vaguely Chinese-looking English logotype that contains Chinese characters presented by the letters RIGA in the word 'origami' (see Figure 3.4). In terms of the architectonic relationship between bilingual words 'origami' is no different from 'Elise Esther Diamond.'

Both 'Elise Esther Diamond' and 'origami' are oscillatory bilingual ambigrams and in both cases the second languages, Hebrew and Chinese, are self-contained and independent of English.

In the internationally renowned CNN Arabic logo, developed by TBWA/RAAD Middle East/ Dubai under the supervision of James Rammal (Blankenship 2003, 62) CNN constitutes the second part (بيه) of the Arabic word 'العربيه' ('Al-Arabia'), despite the reversed directions of English and Arabic.[1]

However, similar to the Hebrew and Chinese words in 'Elise Esther Diamond' and 'origami' CNN is independent of the word of which it is a part. Thus, the removal of the CNN logo has no effect on its self-contained formal-material structure. In summary, the three designs discussed in this section only realize a kind of monologism since in all cases one of the two encountering words continues to retain its formal-material autonomy while functioning as part of the other. In order to be dialogically integrated the formal-material structures of two sets of letterforms must be interdependent such that removing one would render them mutually illegible.

The inertia of letterforms in print can change into interactive digital screens wherein letterforms are animated and organized in the form of moving pixels. Yet the principles of dialogicality can still apply and explain the formal-material relations of letterforms in motion.

Digital interactive arts: 'Third Person'

In recent years interactive digital artworks have produced new opportunities for dialogical encounters. A wide range of texts, images and sounds can be deployed and transformed into one another in every computer-mediated interaction. For instance, Hemmer's high-definition interactive display, 'Third Person,' featured all the verbs of the dictionary (Bitforms.com 2006) (see Figure 3.5). The display reflected the viewer's shadow as a silhouette constructed out

Figure 3.4. Kim, *Origami*. 1988(Kim 1988) (with kind permission of Kim).

Figure 3.5. Lozano-Hemmer, *Third Person*. 2006 (Lozano-Hemmer.com 2006) (with kind permission of Lozano-Hemmer).

of hundreds of tiny verbs of the dictionary that were conjugated in 'Third Person' (Lozano-Hemmer.com 2006). The viewer was free to choose and display the verbs in English, French or Spanish, or even a combination of the three languages at once. Sandra Ban (ARTnews 2007, 137) described 'Third Person' as a miscellaneous combination of words, emphasizing the significance of language in shaping human experience and perception.

'Third Person' has a polyphonic character in that it projects multilingual signs that constitute the image of the viewer's face. At a distance, they are perceived as light dots and collectively constitute an image of the viewer's face at the expense of their linguistic contents. The words can only be read in close proximity (for this reason 'Third Person' can be considered as a digital interactive version of 'concrete poetry,' which is an iconic composition of words that exerts influence on the textual meaning). Although they are simultaneous and spatially congruous, the words are and remain independent of each other. In their visual function

they lose their linguistic content and in their linguistic function they are most likely to be sequentially read as separate signs. Hence, 'Third Person' presents an organized juxtaposition of independent words by a digital interface but does not constitute a dialogic encounter according to the aesthetic principles of dialogicality.

Three-dimensional monolingual works

Anamorphic typography 'It's a point of view:'

Three-dimensional works highlight the second aesthetic principle of dialogicality: the spatial and temporal involvement of the observing subject. An observing subject is able to relate to the work from various perspectives, which stresses the spatial and temporal aspect of experience.

In an anamorphic experiment entitled 'It's a point of view' Joseph Egan and Hunter Thomson (designboom | architecture & design magazine 2010) explored the existing and possible relationship between text and architecture through anamorphism (see Figure 3.6). Egan and Hunter's work encouraged the viewer to walk into and around the text, resulting in a spatial experience of reading in contrast to the conventional relationship of reader with print (2010). From any location except for the one privileged vantage point (see Figure 3.6–3) the text would appear as distorted or abstracted forms.

Such architectural presentations alter the observer's understanding of space. The physical fragmentation and instability of the text or what Readings (1991, 19) describes as 'radical heterogeneity of quality, a different kind of seeing at the margin of vision' render anamorphism double forms of the reading of space, of the 'co-presence of curved and geometric space.' In other words, the double forms of reading are a dialectical polyphony caused by the contradiction between the observer's two senses of place (i.e. the spatiality of the architecture and the illusive flatness of the text when seen from the privileged vantage point). The dialectical polyphony is reinforced by the synthesis of the scattered parts into the higher unity of the text. But, although the parts constitute the text, they lack any element of consummation within their

Figure 3.6. Egan and Thomson, *It's a point of view*. 2010 (designboom | architecture & design magazine 2010) (with kind permission of Egan and Thomson).

formal-material relations; the parts are and continue to remain what they are irrespective of one another.

Three-dimensional bilingual works

Typographic matchmaking in the city:

Synchronization and homogenization of glyphic and geometric features are often conceived as a solution to bridge the gap between formally disparate written languages such as English and Arabic. The Khatt Foundation in Amsterdam, for example, has set out to advance Arabic typography in a cross-cultural network of communication and dialogue. In 2009 the Foundation introduced an experimental program titled 'Typographic Matchmaking in the City.' The program was a partnership between Dutch and Arabic designers to relate Latin and Arabic types harmoniously (AbiFarès 2010). One of their projects 'StoryLine' (2009) illustrates the prevalent trend of bilingual synchronization. This project included two-dimensional and three-dimensional renderings of type design, which I consider here together.

Max Kisman, Naji El Mir and Hisham Youssef worked together to make a harmonious distribution of black and white spaces between Latin and Arabic types by giving the two types equal size and weight (see Figure 3.7).

The experience of dialogue through the glyphic-geometric synchronization of two sets of letterforms is vague since the principles of dialogue and more importantly the correlation between dialogue and glyphic-geometric synchronization of the letterforms is unclear. In
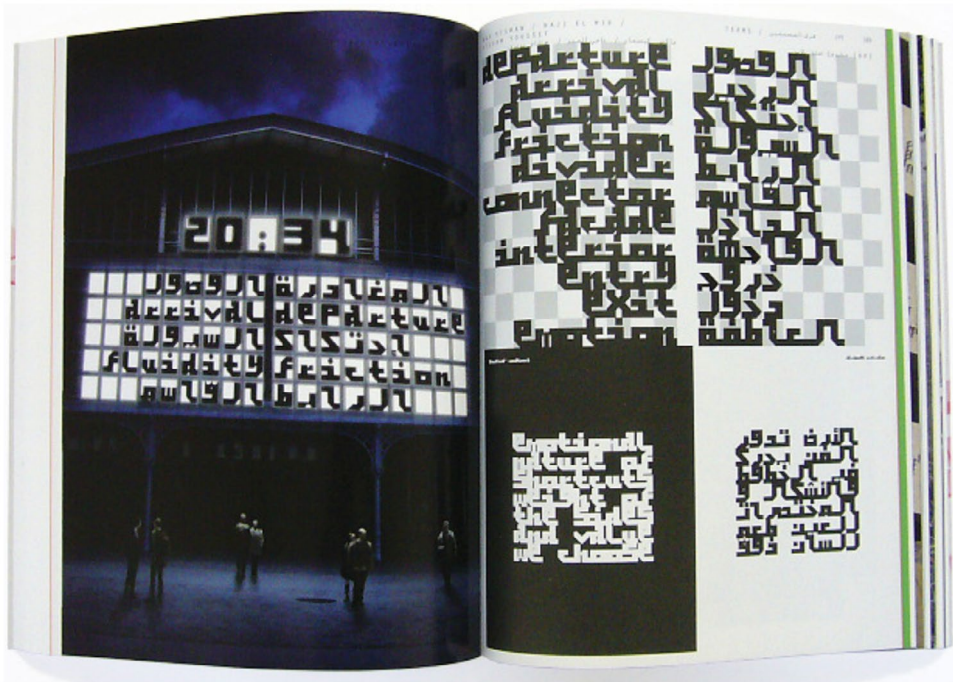

Figure 3.7. Kisman, El Mir and Youssef, *StoryLine*. 2010 (Najielmir.com 2014) (with kind permission of Khatt Foundation).

'StoryLine' the glyphic-geometric resemblance of the Latin and Arabic types might draw one's attention from one to the other. This does evoke typographic bilingualism in some measure but does not amount to a polyphonic form since the autonomous operation of one's own language can shut the other language out. There is no formal-material responsiveness between the languages' constituent parts; they are fully self-contained and independent of each other.

The glyphic-geometric synchronization of bilingual letterforms can also be seen in the typeface design projects 'Frutiger Arabic' and 'Neue Helevetica Arabic' by Nadine Chahine, 'Insan Fonts' by Ihsan Al-Hammouri (Khatt.net, n.d.) and 'Miresal typeface' by Rana Abou Rjeily (Rjeily 2011). These typefaces focus on the harmonious co-existence of letterforms in order to serve the aesthetic ends of bilingual publications, or to resolve the issue of legibility associated with the calligraphic orientation of Arabic, rather resulting in the Latinization of Arabic letterforms.

'In The Shade' a three-dimensional demonstration in a public area created an interactive space in which observers could physically approach large blocks set up to communicate the glyphic-geometric features of the letters designed in 'StoryLine' (see Figure 3.8). Nevertheless, the formal-material correlation between the two sets of letterforms remains at issue from the standpoint of dialogism as their spatial contiguity lacks internal unity. There are two sets of letterforms designed according to the same glyphic-geometric rules and their separation does not result in the loss or alteration of their linguistic contents.

Figure 3.8. Kisman, El Mir and Youssef, *In The Shade*. 2010 (Najielmir.com 2015). The English words 'in the shade' can be seen in the farther blocks, and the Arabic words 'فى الظل' (the Arabic translation of 'in the shade') in the closer blocks in the image (with kind permission of Khatt Foundation).

Concluding discussion

The paper broached the question of the formal-material structure of letterforms as the true vehicle of typographic expression of languages and, by the same token, of the formal-material relation across bilingual letterforms with reference to Bakhtinian dialogism. Despite a wide range of practices, alongside an expanding intellectual framework and an increasing determination to tackle the issue of multilingual communication, bilingual typography, in principle, remains situated within the boundaries of monological systems. Much like the theory of typographic bilingualism that derives its propositions from written bilingualism and represents merely double monolingualism, managing the graphic collision or contact between two letterform systems, whether triggered by communicative necessity or the creative impulse of a designer, has led as yet only to the design of more compatible typefaces or to a modified rendering of monolingualism.

The mere presence of two letterform systems (two languages) per se in a shared textual space does not mean bilingualism. Coexistence is the necessary but in no way the sufficient condition for bilingualism. The theoretical literature has only been concerned with the self-evident coexistence of two sets of letterforms. The same position toward the issue of bilingualism is discernible throughout the experimental practices preoccupied with the manipulation of letterforms at the outward, glyphic level, while the real kernel of bilingualism has remained closed to them. Neither from a theoretical nor an experimental point of view typography has ever grasped the dialogic foundation of true bilingualism: the relational quality of coexistence, of simultaneity and contiguity, that lies behind any glyphic manipulations. Dialogue springs forth from a relation of mutual consummation, from the dynamic coexistence of two sets of letterforms as the expression of their *Discordia Concors* whose experience effects a 'dialogic moment.'

Prior to the question of shared typographic features (evident in Khatt Foundation's practices), at the more fundamental level dialogism calls for a formal-material system through which a letterform moves outward from its concrete, self-contained set of properties, and enters a dynamic relationship where it completes and is completed by another letterform. The mutual dependency of the prototypical image and its concrete counterpart manifested through the formal-material structure of a given letterform extends toward that of a foreign letterform. Could two letterform systems, say, Farsi and English, be integrated in such a way that one cannot be read without the other? More specifically, could a formal-material system be generated through which readers of both languages experience a 'dialogic moment?' In such a dialogic system every letterform would be incomplete in-itself and could only be completed and expressed through another letterform. Bakhtin's notion of dialogism furnishes a conceptual framework in which the coexistence of two letterforms, double monolingualism, where '[….] parts are contiguous and touch each other, but in themselves they remain alien to each other' (Bakhtin 1990, 1) can turn into a formal-material relation of mutual consummation while continuing to retain their 'characteristic distinctiveness.' In a dialogic encounter, in Bakhtin's observation (1986, 7), two bodies retain their unities and characteristic distinctivenesses and do not renounce themselves – 'forget nothing' – while they effloresce into a mutually enriching relationship.

By the extension of dialogism to the domain of letterform systems questions arise as to the seemingly pronounced yet recondite structure and attributes of letterforms. First, which formal-material attributes, or elements, constitute the characteristic distinctiveness, say, of

English letterform systems? Second, a mutually consummated unity between two sets of letterforms through the observer's participation presupposes an understanding of the elements of integration across letterform systems. In other words, what are the primary units or 'morphological primitives' that constitute the fundamental structure of letterform systems? Are the characteristic distinctiveness and fundamental structure of letterform systems one and the same? These intriguing questions call for an exposition of the fundamental structure of letterforms as *a necessary point of departure* toward bilingual typography proper and, by extension, toward a dialogic moment. Such exposition determines the morphological grounds of dialogue across letterforms, *a terminus a quo* of mutual consummation.

Note

1. The image of CNN Arabic logo has been removed due to CNN copyright policy. The logo can be seen at the following link: http://arabic.cnn.com/.

Notes on contributor

Soheil Ashrafi received his PhD in design studies from UNSW Art and Design, Australia, and is currently appointed senior lecture of design theories at Raffles College of Design and Commerce, Australia. His primary research interest lies at the intersection of philosophy, including both analytic and continental, and design theories/practices. He has exhibited and published both in Australia and internationally.

References

AbiFarès, Hoda, ed. 2010. *Typographic Matchmaking in the City*. Amsterdam: Khatt Books.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984[1929]. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated and edited by C. Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1986. In *Speech genres and other late essays*, edited by M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Translated by V. McGee, Austin: University of Texas Press.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1993. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, edited by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Translated by V. Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by M. Holquist. Translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1990. *Art and Answerability*. Translated and edited by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Ban, Sandra. 2007. "Rafael Lozano-Hemmer." *ARTnews* 106 (1): 137.
Baur, Ruedi, Ulrike Felsing, Nathalie Bao-Götsch, Jeannine Moser, Jie Wu, Keith Tam, and Roman Wilhelm. 2012. "Koexistenz der Zeichen - Multilingale Typografie , [Coexistence of Signs - Multilingual Typography]," *Swiss Typographic Magazine* (4/5/2012): 1–120.
Bernard-Donals, Michael F. 1994. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bitforms.com. 2006. *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer 2006 Press Release | Bitforms Gallery*. Accessed March 7, 2015. http://www.bitforms.com/exhibitions/rafael-lozano-hemmer-2006/press-release
Blankenship, Sherry. 2003. "Cultural considerations: Arabic calligraphy and Latin typography." *Design Issues* 19 (2): 60–63.
Chen Johnsson, Mary. 2013. "Practitioner Meets Philosopher: Bakhtinian Musings on Learning with Paul." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 45 (12): 1252–1263.
Clark, Katrina, and Michael Holquist. 1984. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Crawford, Alistair. 1987. "Bilingual Typography." *Visible Language* 21 (1): 42–65.

Designboom | architecture & design magazine. 2010. *Joseph Egan + Hunter Thomson: Anamorphic Typography*. Accessed March 7, 2015. http://www.designboom.com/design/joseph-egan-hunter-thomson-anamorphic-typography/

Emerson, Caryl. 1997. *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Evans, Fred. 1998. "Bakhtin, Communication, and the Politics of Multiculturalism." *Blackwell Publishers* 5 (3): 403–423.

Federationbells.com.au.. 2014. *Federation Bells*. Accessed July 19, 2014. http://federationbells.com.au/

Forster, Leonard. 1970. *The Poet's Tongues: Multilingualism in Literature*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Garbutt, Michael. 1996. *Figure Talk: Reported Speech and Thought in the Discourse of Psychotherapy*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Macquarie University.

Gonçalves, Miguel, and Michael Guilfoyle. 2006. "Dialogism and Psychotherapy: Therapists' and Clients' Beliefs Supporting Monologism." *Journal of Constructivist Psychology* 19 (3): 251–271.

Grutman, Rainier. 1993. "Mono Vs. Stereo: Bilingualism's Double Face." *Visible Language* 27 (1–2): 206–227.

Hermans, Hubert J. M., Harry J. G. Kempen, and R. J. P. Van Loon. 1992. "The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism." *American Psychologist* 47 (1): 23–33.

Hodgson, Richard, and Ralph Sarkonak. 1987. "Graphic Collisions: Languages in Contact." *Visible Language* 21 (1): 18–41.

Hofstadter, Douglas. 1987. *Ambigrammi*. Firenze: Hopeful Monster.

Introspections.org 2008. *The ambigrams of Douglas Hofstadter | Introspections*. Accessed 1 Feb 2016. http://www.introspections.org/2008/07/22/the-ambigrams-of-douglas-hofstadter/

Irving, Allan, and Tom Young. 2002. "Paradigm for Pluralism: Mikhail Bakhtin and Social Work Practice." *Social Work* 47 (1): 19–29.

Karimova, Gulnara Z. 2011. "Literary Criticism and Interactive Advertising: Bakhtinian Perspective on Interactivity." *Communications* 36 (4).

Kim, Scott. 1997. *Elise Diamond*. Scottkim.com.previewc40.carrierzone.com. Accessed July 19, 2014. http://www.scottkim.com.previewc40.carrierzone.com/inversions/gallery/elis.html

Kim, Scott. 1988. *Origami (English/Japanese)*. Scottkim.com.previewc40.carrierzone.com. Accessed July 19, 2014. http://www.scottkim.com.previewc40.carrierzone.com/inversions/gallery/origami bilingual.html.

Lozano-hemmer.com. 2006. *Rafael Lozano-Hemmer - Project "Third Person"*. Accessed March 7, 2015. http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/third_person.php

Matusov, Eugene. 2007. "Applying Bakhtin Scholarship on Discourse in Education: A Critical Review Essay." *Educational Theory* 57 (2): 215–237.

Morson, Gary Saul, and Caryl Emerson. 1990. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

Najielmir.com. 2015. *Typographic Matchmaking in the City - Najielmir*. Accessed March 7, 2015. http://www.najielmir.com/Typographic-Matchmaking-in-the-City

Owen, Hana M. 2011. "Bakhtinian Thought and the Defense of Narrative: Overcoming Universalism and Relativism." *The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 7 (2): 136–156.

Prokhorov, Nikita. 2013. *Ambigrams Revealed*. [S.l.]: New Riders.

Readings, Bill. 1991. *Introducing Lyotard*. London: Routledge.

Rjeily, Rana Abou. 2011. *Cultural Connectives*. New York, NY: Mark Batty Publisher.

Rosch, Eleanor, and Barbara Lloyd. 1978. *Cognition and Categorization*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.

Sarkonak, Ralph. 1993. "Seeing in-Depth: The Practice of Bilingual Writing." *Visible Language* 27 (1–2): 6–39.

Seckel, Al. 2004. *Masters of Deception*. New York, NY: Sterling Pub. Co.

Sidorkin, Alexander. 2002. "Lyotard and Bakhtin: Engaged Diversity in Education." *Interchange* 33 (1): 85–97.

Tam, Keith. 2012. *Bilingual Typography: Hong Kong Case Studies*. Slideshare.net. Accessed July 19, 2014. http://www.slideshare.net/infodesignlab/bilingual-typography-hong-kong-case-studies

Von Helmholtz, Herman L. F. 2007. *On the Sensations of Tone*. New York, NY: Cosimo Classics.