

Zin Nagao

March 21, 2024

DHWANI GARG

Could you share a bit about your background and what drew you to experimental type design?

ZIN NAGAO

I was born in the countryside, in Saga Prefecture. I studied design in high school and vocational school, but it was mainly in vocational school that I started experimental type design. I was sad when my teacher was strict with me in typography class, and at the same time I thought, “I want to get better at typeface production!” I wanted to get better at typeface creation. From there, I started creating typefaces every day.

DG

What aspect of experimental type captivated you more rather than traditional type design?

ZN

I really wanted to learn traditional type design, but it was too specialized and difficult, and there was no one around who could teach it. At first, I experimented with typefaces as if I was doing a puzzle. When a typeface design conference was held in Tokyo, I went to show the typefaces I had created as a portfolio to the typeface designers. The Japanese typeface designers did not praise me because they said, “You have to take a long time to create a high-quality typeface,” but the foreign typeface designers said, “There are not many people who can create this way. You can go on more.” This gave me confidence.

DG

What do you like most and least about experimental type?

ZN

What I like is that it can be made in a short time, and what I dislike is that it requires a lot of ingenuity.

DG

I am very much intrigued by the details ZNVT8 (Fig. I) typeface. Could you share your process and how challenging was it to design the punctuation?

ZN

At that time, I was mainly using a grid to create typefaces, so I thought I could create typefaces by creating a format and subtracting from it. A mere square wasn't that interesting, so I created a parallelogram by combining a large square and a small square.

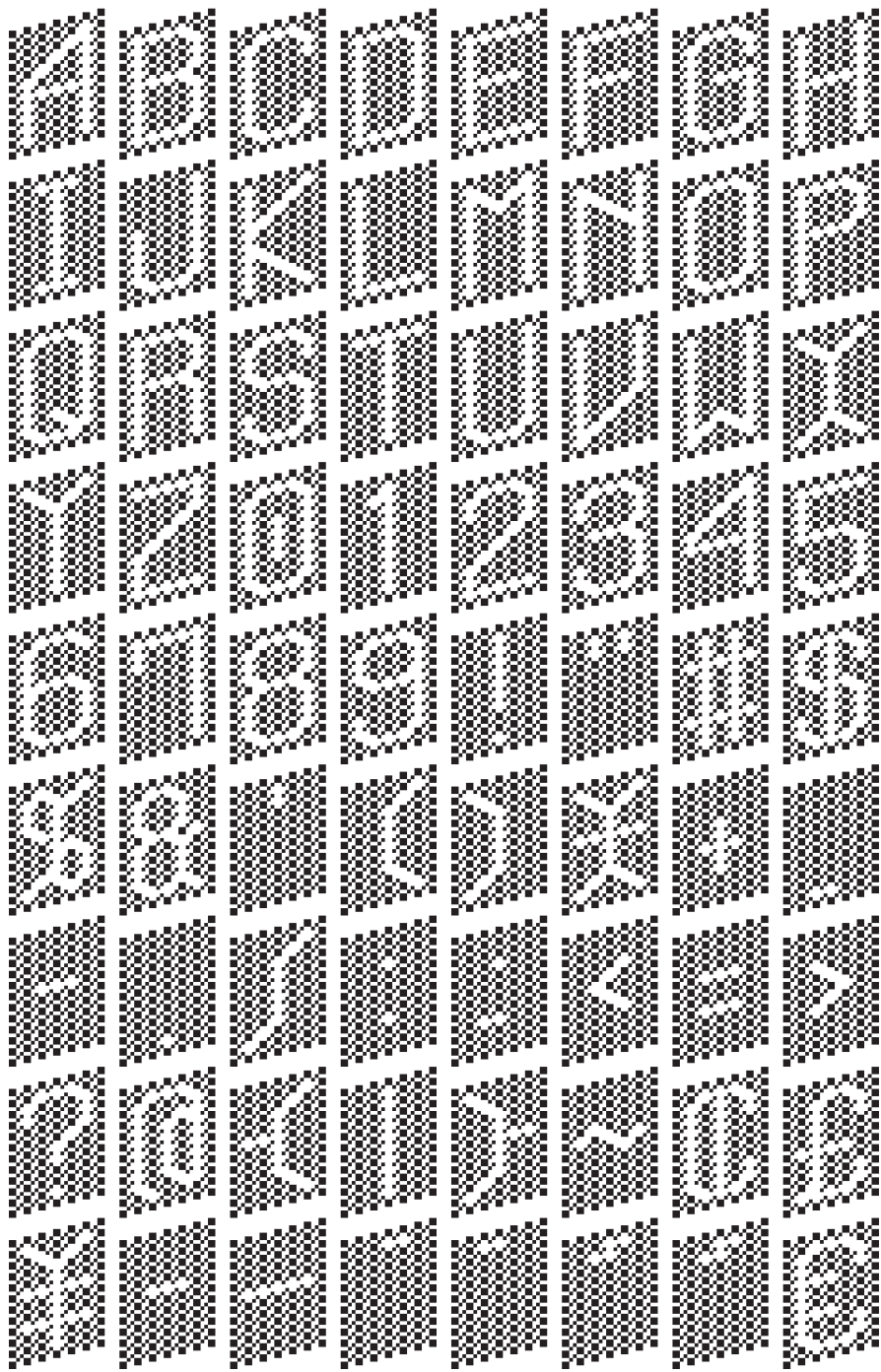


FIG. I: ZNVT8 Typeface

- DG How long did it take for you to begin the ZNVT8 (Fig. I) typeface and finish the publish version?
- ZN I think it was about 2 hours.
- DG I am fascinated by your color type diary series (Fig. II). Would you like to share the tools you use and what inspired you to start this series?
- ZN Mainly Glyphs; sometimes I create the original shapes in Adobe Illustrator and paste them into Glyphs to make adjustments.
- DG In your color type diary series, it's evident that you draw inspiration from daily life events. How do you intertwine these inspirations, and what methods do you employ to narrate the story through your work?
- ZN No matter what I am doing, I always feel inspired to create something. When I am walking outside, I look at the grass, flowers, ground, road fences, signs, etc. and always take notes, thinking, "It would be interesting to make something like this." If I get an idea while reading a book or watching a video at home, I immediately take out my PC and experiment. I also love Dutch and French design and have been collecting art books and typeface samples since I was a student. I have seen these designs that I love, and I think that my desire to create lots of interesting things like those people has inspired me to create interesting letters as well. Also, I have always loved retro games, and I am probably quite influenced by that when it comes to graphics and colors.
- When I actually create a typeface, I move my brain to my hands and let my hands do the thinking. This may sound strange, but it goes something like this.
- DG Following up with my previous question how long does it take to finish one color type diary (Fig. II)?
- ZN On average, it takes me about 6-8 hours. It takes me a lot of time because I have to be very clever not only with the colors, but also with the layering order and layout.

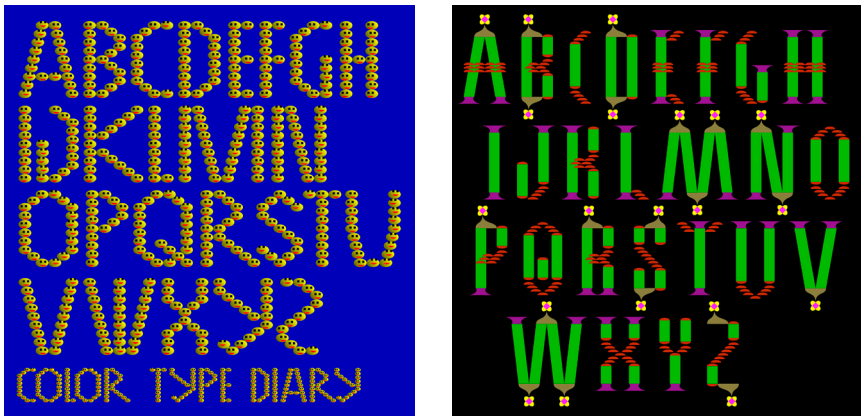
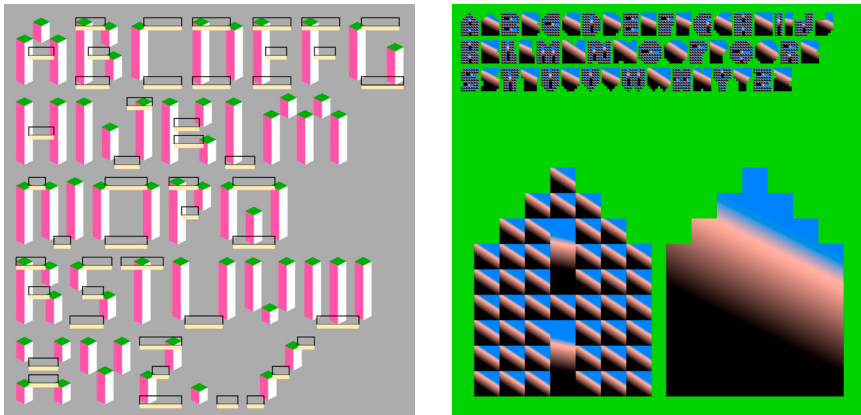


FIG. II Color Type Diary Series

DG When designing an experimental typeface, there is more freedom in creative space compared to designing a conventional typeface. How do you perceive this difference impacting the design process, and what advantages do you find in experimental typeface?

ZN I think experimental typeface design is very close to the realm of graphic design. It is freeing for the creator of the typeface, but when it comes to using it, I think many of them are difficult to use because they are often pulled into the image of a typeface with a strong authorial style. I honestly don't know what the advantages are, but I really enjoy creating them. I feel comfortable in the act of creating new typefaces. And it is a great pleasure to have someone who wants to use the experimental typefaces I have created.

DG The MVMNT (Fig. III) typeface comprises three weights, and I'm impressed by its remarkable consistency. Could you shed some light on your process and how you ensured such consistency throughout the typeface?

ZN Thank you very much! I created it with halftone as my inspiration. Basically, the weight of the typeface is the thickness of the lines, but I thought that just adding more dots could be a weight, and I was happy to demonstrate it and create a typeface with a very new feel.

DG You've launched your own experimental type foundry. How do you envision your typefaces being utilized in various projects? Are there specific types of projects you would particularly like to see your typefaces used in, and what motivates these preferences?



FIG. III: MVMNT Typeface

ZN Recently I have been getting emails from people who contact me for permission to use a typeface, and when they do, I often ask them to show me when it is actually used, and they often show me when the project is finished. That makes me very happy, because the fact that I created the typeface has become an opportunity for me to connect with the world. I don't have any expectations about how it will be used, and I want people to use it as they like. Of course, you can use it without a license, and I am happy no matter what it is used for. For one thing, I was happy to see the typeface "ZNVT23" (Fig. IV) used for "Oblivion" (Fig. V), a two-part film and theater performance at a Korean theater.

DG What would you recommend as a few critical factors for designers to consider when working on a experimental type?

ZN I think it is to not be limited by traditional typeface design. I am sure there are other designers who create experimental typefaces besides myself, so please ask them as well.

DG If you could give your younger self a piece of advice when starting out as a type designer, what would it be? Do you have any resources or any inspiring stories you are willing to share with me?

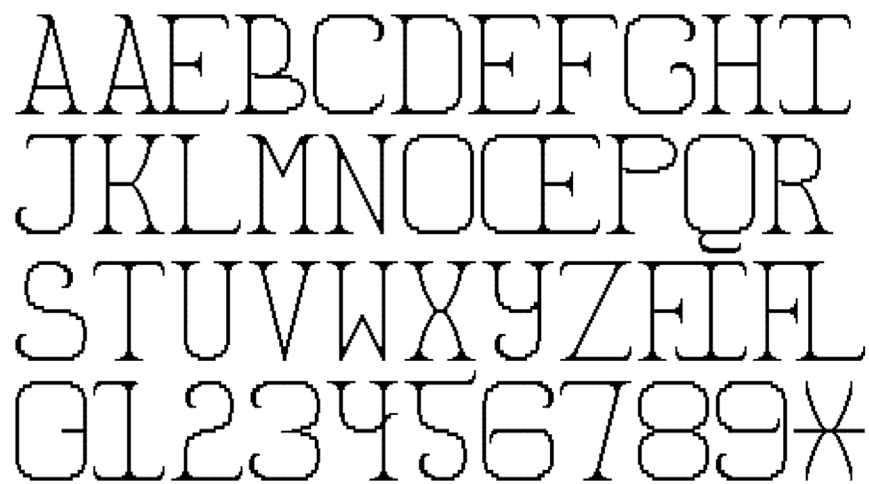


FIG. IV: ZNVT23 Typeface

ZN My strict typography teacher in technical school was just scary and the class was hard. But considering that he was that serious about teaching me, maybe I didn't need to be so scared. Whatever the case, it was thanks to that teacher that I came to continue making typefaces. Now the environment at my school has changed a bit, and it seems that it has become more difficult for teachers to be strict with their students. Of course, a demanding environment is not the only thing that produces excellent students, but it is a good opportunity to be a barrier for students to grow. I would like to repay the school and its teachers by working harder. Anyway, "It's important to keep my hands and brain moving!" is what I will keep saying to myself from now on, since I was a student.

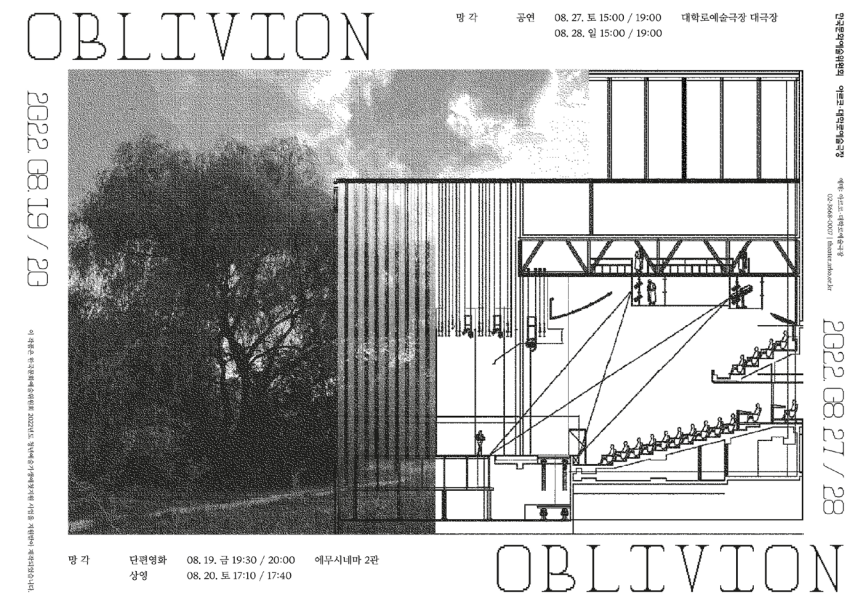


FIG. V: Oblivion, Producer (Soyoung Lee), Concept (Junghyun Nam), Lighting (Daewon Jeong), Sound (Jinsung Jang) Graphic Design (Yoona Yang) Movie: Emu Performance: Arko Art Center