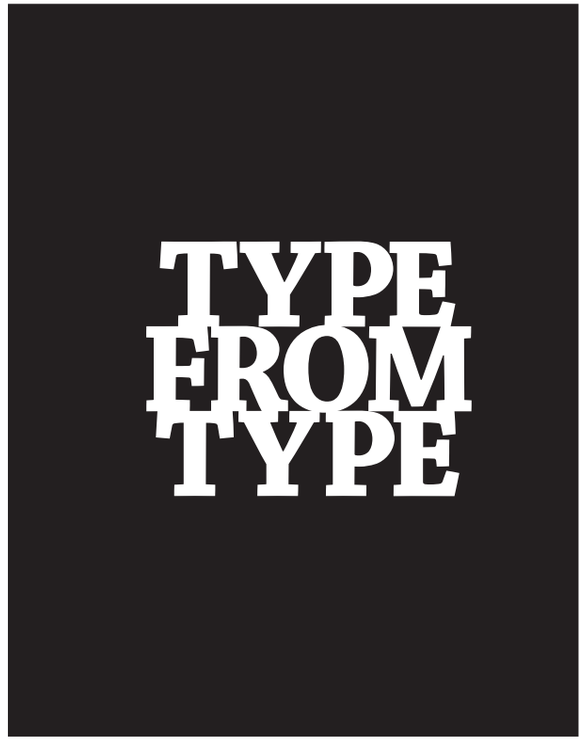
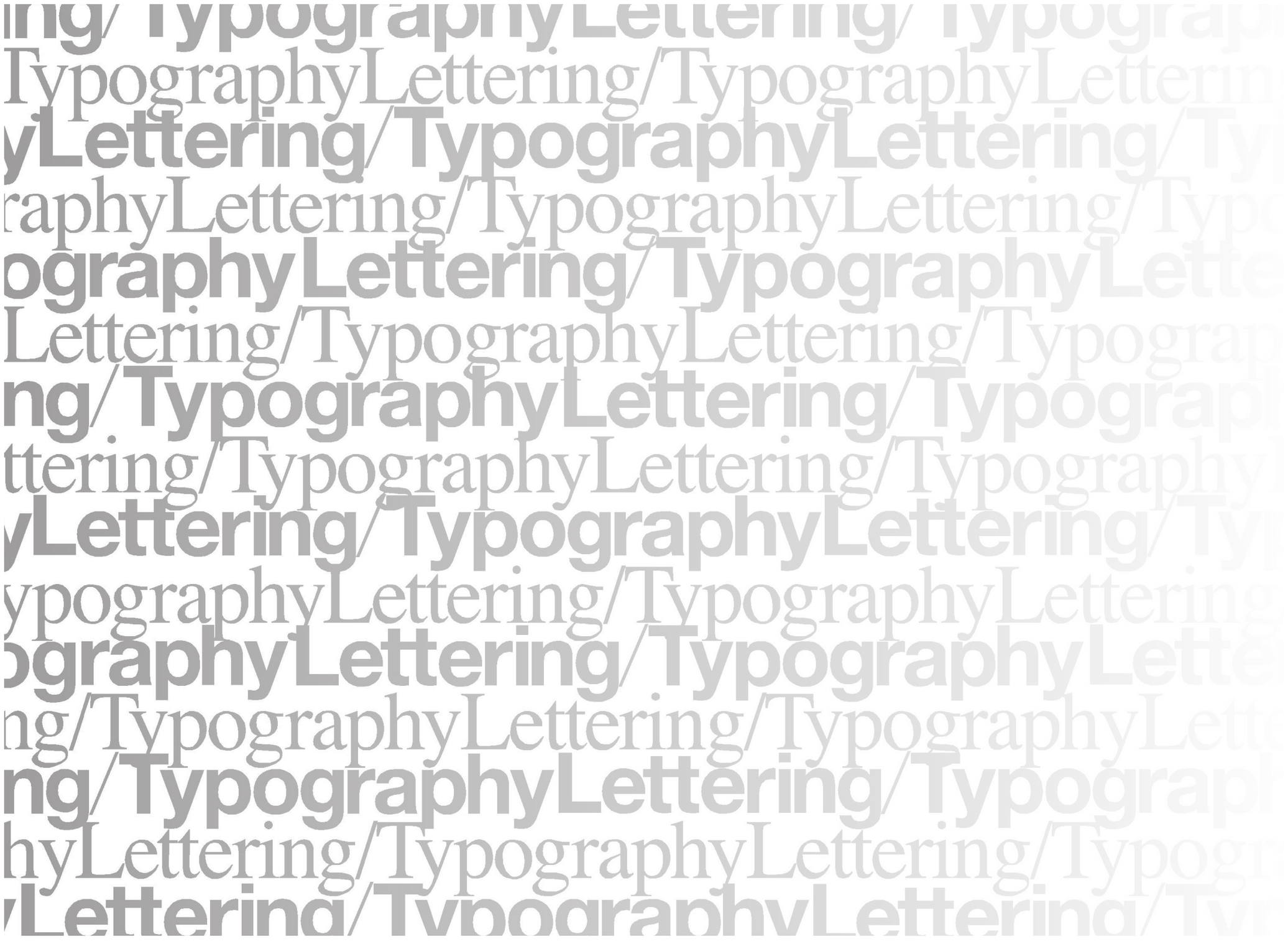
A Master of Arts thesis by Warren E. Smith

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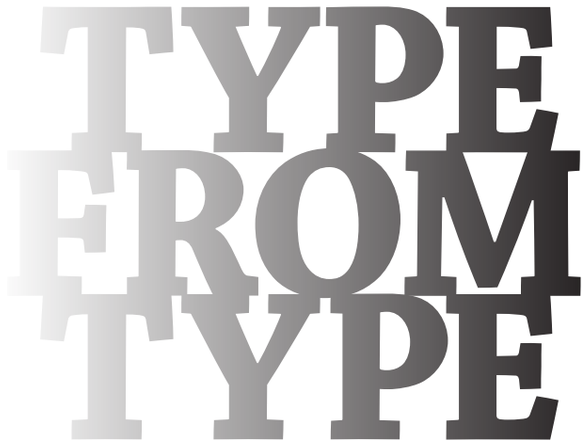

The use, and mis-use, of Letraset – the brand of dry transfer self adhesive type made popular in the 1960s – could result in unexpected effects – and led to the question…"is it possible to create new type forms from those sometimes accidental, sometimes deliberate outcomes?"

How might a contemporary type designer create new type faces that reflect the nature of Letraset dry transfer lettering, referencing its historical context, its use as part of the practice of its era, and some of the the idiosyncracies of its physical properties?

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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 award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed.

Warren E. Smith
October 15, 2009

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank both my primary supervisor Laurent Antonczak and my secondary supervisor Associate Professor Welby Ings (both of Auckland University of Technology) for their interest and support, and their continuing combination of rigor and nurture.

I wish to thank my Head of Department, Peter Gilderdale, for finding me the time to study during a full-time teaching timetable, and for his sage advice. And I also wish to thank the School of Art & Design for supporting me through the course this project.

And last, but certainly not least, I wish to thank my wife Anne for her consistent encouragement and belief.

Ethics approval

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This research was subject to AUT ethics approval granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee [AUTEC] on the 10th of October 2008, number 08/186.

Abstract

The locus of this project is in the field of type face design, with the origins of the project based on an appreciation of the Letraset brand[1] dry transfer system (instant lettering and other elements included in the system) and the way they were used and/or mis-used.

The project investigates the autographic 'craft' nature of the use of Letraset, the fact that if used carelessly it could create accidental applications and that these accidental applications could lead to serendipitous effects.

The project explains how reflection on these effects led in turn to some users of Letraset devising their own unconventional techniques for its use and it proposes that it is possible to replicate some of these effects and to use them as the inspiration for new type face concepts.

It further proposes that it is possible to use Letraset elements (rules, dots and squares for example) in ways other than originally intended as the raw material of the basic structure of new type face designs.

The methodology used in the project combines narrative inquiry, self inquiry and the generation of ideas through creative reflection and the use of 'tacit knowledge'.

Methodology

Introduction

This thesis may be described as research by 'creative practice' (Scrivener, 2000). In this kind of project, reviews of knowledge, interviews and data processing support a sustained, self-reflexive engagement with my own work.

When describing research design it is useful to differentiate between methodology and method. Essentially a methodology is the overarching approach taken to the project. It is normally determined by issues of objectivity/subjectivity, context and purpose.

Methods are those devices one employs as a researcher in data gathering and processing as the project develops.

The research methodology designed for this project may be described as a subjective, multi-method inquiry based primarily on reflection on recalled narratives.

These narratives are those of a group of graphic design practitioners, a manager and a retailer[2] who were working at the time Letraset was introduced and grew in popularity.

The methods employed in this research inquiry include the following:

A selective review of knowledge

In traditional academic research a selective review of knowledge might be conceived as a literature review. As such it would be a body of text that seeks to review current knowledge regarding a particular topic.
However, traditionally such reviews deal with secondary sources only (Dellinger & Leech, 2007).

In this project I have made an extensive search of authoritative reference works. These include: Baines & Haslam (2002) Type & Typography; Hollis (1994), Graphic Design. A Concise History. The academic journals Fleuron; Journal of Typography and Design and Typographica: a journal of typography.

I have also consulted a number of professional magazines including Communication Arts; IdN (International Designers' Network), and newsletters and web sites.

This said, secondary data relating to the project has been relatively scarce.

Accordingly, I sought out the knowledge and recollections of graphic design practitioners whose engagement with Letraset might augment or verify the small amount of existing material available in publication.

The process I used for this was what is known as a narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry

A narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling. It is useful as a way of accessing very rich bodies of information from people's worlds, much of which they may not have been considered on previous occasions. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) suggest that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of these lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and create narratives of these experiences.

A narrative inquiry may therefore be understood as two narratives, one being the participant's and the other being the researcher's.

These two narratives are seen as a conversation on the same subject.

In this project, where possible the participant's responses were audio-recorded using a voice activated recording device and transcribed[3]. These sessions were not necessarily formal; often very rich data was gained by recording shared discussions with participants.

The participants were all contacted by telephone or email and invited to participate in the project, which at that time was described in the broadest possible terms.

None declined, and a number recommended others who might offer additional perspectives[4].

Self inquiry

Although the term self inquiry is traditionally associated with a practice designed to bring about spiritual enlightenment, in this project I use the term to describe a process where one utilises one's past professional/creative experiences of/with Letraset as a means of adding personal narrative recollections to those of fellow practitioners.

Some of this self inquiry was recalled through discussion, but I also had access to work of the period sent to me by a contemporary designer/business partner.

And I had a personal archive of work which I could refer to.

In addition to the sometimes extended discussions with the practitioners, a review of these archived works mentioned above helped me to recall the practices of the day and encouraged me to revisit some of the type design experiments that I began in the 1960s and 1970s.

Creative reflection and generation of ideas

As a consequence of the collected reflective narratives and my own recollections as a practicing designer of the period I have produced a body of typographic work that reflects upon certain historical/professional and idiosyncratic aspects of the product and its use.

In doing this I have employed an essentially self-reflexive practice where ideas are generated, evaluated and refined in an evolutionary process. This process may be likened to Schön's (1983) reflective practice paradigm[5] in which the designer acts as the researcher.

Schön's (1983) conceptualisation of reflection on practice [action] provides a way of understanding investigations I employed in the development of the twenty-six type faces that constitute the body of my creative practice from which fifteen faces were selected for exhibition.

Reflection-in-action is described by Schön as the ability of designers to "think what they are doing while they are doing it" (p. 27).

He argues that the only way to manage the 'indeterminate zones of (professional) practice' (ibid.), is by 'thinking on your feet' and applying previous knowledge/experience.

Thus reflection-on-action is the kind of critical and intuitive process, used by professional designers, that occurs whilst a problem is being dealt with. The kinds of projects it is most usefully employed in are those where the designer does not know what the solution will look like. Schön suggests that although the thinking process used by the designer is at least to some degree conscious, it may not be easily verbalised.

In a project like mine he suggests that the problem may not be initially understood. I did not begin the thesis by assuming I would design typefaces. Instead I began with a number of personal recollections about Letraset, and reflected upon the narratives of professional colleagues who had also been involved with the product. As I became increasingly aware of the impact of the 'creative mis-use' of Letraset my research direction changed and I began a parallel creative reflection upon the potential of this 'mis-use' in the design of a body of typographic work. Schön discusses this movement in research as a process of 'setting and framing a problem'.

He regards experimentation as a pathway for discovery, that is manifested as "action[s] undertaken only to see what follows" (p. 145).

In developing the work produced in this project I began by thinking about the specific properties of Letraset – most significantly, its historic/professional context and the potential for its idiosyncratic use – and began experimenting with the possibilities of the creation of new typefaces inspired by those considerations.

Among the outcomes of these ongoing experiments were the twenty-six type faces listed in this exigesis, fifteen of which have been selected to form the content of the exhibited body of work.

Introduction

Prior to the advent of the computer for the preparation of advertising and graphic design art work, Letraset was a brand name that was known and used around the globe.

In the 1960s and 1970s, at the height of its poularity, some advertising and graphic practitioners used Letraset in ways that were other than those recommended by Letraset.

My experience in the advertising and design industries, and my use of Letraset during that time lead me to believe that Letraset could be used as the raw material for the later stages of the type face design process and I began a series of experiments to assess those possibilities.

My practice for this project has been to take those experimental concepts and with the back-ground of their application in mind, to refine and redraw them for the computer.

The guiding principle in this process has been to replicate the results that were apparent when Letraset was used and mis-used.

In the course of my research for this project, during interviews with design practitioners active during and subsequent to the late 1960s (Transcript; group meeting, Ian Munro, p.80 and p.84), I found that many of us had shared similar experiences with Letraset – however none of them have reflected on those experiences, realised some of the potential inherant in them and proceded to use them to develop new type faces in the way that I have.

It is those innovative uses which lead to the experiments which are the basis of this project.

The hypothesis for this project is that it is possible to design and create type faces in ways other than the traditional process.

This is why this project discusses the possiblities of producing type face designs by methods other than the traditional process of conceptualising a design, drawing it up on paper, finalising the design by a sequence of tracings and drawn variations and then preparing final art work in an inked rendering.

In the first part of the project I will define what Letraset is and what are the key components of its success. I will also link my practice to these key elements.

In the second part I will discuss the use of Letraset dry transfer lettering, the fact that it could create accidental applications, and that these accidental applications could lead to serendipitous effects, which could in turn lead to experiments concerning type face design.

I will give an explanation of what Letraset is and how it was used, to put what follows into context. And I will also draw the connection between the use and mis-use of Letraset and my experiments.

A. Letraset dry transfer lettering and graphic design elements.

Before I discuss the the use of Letraset (Fig. 1) dry transfer lettering, the fact that it could create accidental applications, and that some of these accidental applications could lead to serendipitous effects (which in turn could lead to experiments concerning type face design), an explanation of what Letraset is and how and where it was used is necessary to put what follows into context.

Letraset is the brand of a comprehensive range of art and design studio products which began with dry transfer self-adhesive decals (sometimes called 'rub-ons' or 'rubdowns', due to the method of application) which can be applied to a selected surface without the use of water or any other solvent.

The decal itself is printed with its adhesive side down on the back of a carrier material such as paper or plastic sheeting.

The carrier sheet is placed decal adhesive side down on the surface it is to be transferred to, and then applied by firmly rubbing over the image with a stylus, a ballpoint pen or similar smooth-faced object to ensure that the character is firmly adhered to the surface (Fig. 2).

Prior to the advent of the computer and the WYSIWYG screen for the preparation of advertising and graphic design art work, Letraset was the brand name for a range of products that were used around the globe.

Letraset dry transfer lettering and the wider Letraset product range[6] became so popular and so widely accepted that it was the best known product name/brand in its field during the period between 1962 and 1982.

Discussing its popularity, Mr. Mike Travers, a long time employee, now a director and one of the current owners of Letraset, said at a meeting in Auckland in July 2009, "At the height of its popularity we were printing over 12 million sheets of instant lettering per annum, and we were sending them all over the world!"

Letraset dry transfer lettering was therefore a brand which was well known and much used[7].

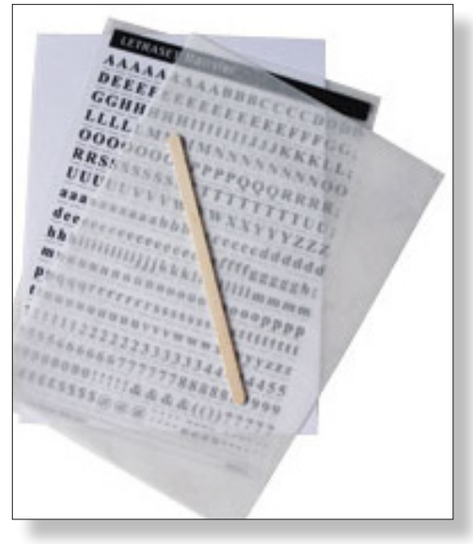


Fig. 1.
The basic components of dry-transfer lettering… from the back – the paper/card to which the lettering is to be applied.
Next the dry-transfer sheet.
On top of that, the backing sheet (which should be on the other side of the lettering sheet to prevent accidental transfer), and finally… a wooden burnisher to rub the type down as required.

Source: Wikipedia

Fig. 2.
The dry-transfer system in use; a pencil is being used as a burnisher.
The sheet is one of custom-printed retail words and phrases.

Source: Wikipedia

My investigation has lead me to identify at least seven primary reasons for Letraset's success and those reasons are inextricably linked to why it became an inspiration for those graphic designers who saw in it some potential as the raw material for the development of new type faces.

1. It was a consistently high quality product.

Until the invention of Letraset most modern typefaces began as hand drawn characters, retouched and refined until the designers were happy with the forms. These forms were then cut as metal masters and cast in metal as required for use (a system basically unchanged since its invention by Gutenberg in 1445).

The quality of these metal forms degraded with use over time, with consequent loss of quality of the printed pulls taken from them.

Letraset's method of production eliminated the poor quality of such type pulls, even at larger sizes (the individual characters were hand cut with a special knife, five times larger than their final size, on to Rubylith film)[8].

This, and the very high quality of the Letraset printing system, meant that since each individual character was a fresh, unused image, it was always sharp.

2. It was applicable.

It was designed to meet specific (type setting, drawing and draughting) needs for advertising, graphic design, architectural and commercial art studios[9].

Those needs were: faster, more efficient production of set type and other elements; more type face choices; individual control over the process of type setting; economical set-up and operation.

It met these requirements very well and these attributes and functionality were later applied to other products developed to answer needs in other industries.

The underlying principle for these products was that almost anything which had to be done in a drawing office or studio of any kind could be done to a higher standard and with greater consistency with a Letraset product.

This principle was the driving force behind the letraset range expanding from its orignial focus on advertising and design studios into architecture, engineering, landscaping, signwriting, model making and others.

3. It was functional.

Letraset worked… and it worked for anyone. It worked as it was intended… but many who used it found other uses and other ways to make it work – e.g. as a resist to create negative lettering on layouts, or as detailed in this project, as the raw material to create new letter forms.

It could be combined with drawn forms or photography; it could be integrated into layouts; it could be used anywhere type was required and could be used without using the services of a specialised supplier.

This functionality is at the heart of why Letraset lettering and other elements were so applicable as the basic building blocks of new type face forms.

4. It was simple and easy to use.

Anyone of any age and from any background could use it, and they did. They could easily see how it worked and try it for themselves – Letraset's instructions were designed to be models of clarity (Fig. 3.), which gave people the confidence to try it. You did not have to be trained to use it. You did not need any special skills to use it… with minimal practice most users could use it efficiently enough.

With repeated use skills were acquired and efficiency improved but these skills were not a prerequisite to its use.

Accountants named and numbered files; office girls and secretaries applied it to report covers and coffee cups which were sealed with a little clear nail polish – (personal observation); shop owners used it for minor signage (opening hours and after hours phone numbers etc) on windows and doors; engineers and carpenters and electricians used it to identify their tools and their tool boxes, and mothers personalised children's lunch boxes and homework folders.

That it was so simple was another key factor in encouraging experimentation

5. It was forgiving.

Although Letraset was developed to be a high-quality type setting system that could be used by anybody, and it came with clear concise instructions to help achieve good results, it was possible to mis-use it, either by accident or on purpose. The very simplicity of its application meant that mistakes could be corrected as simply as they were made; in the instructions for their dry transfer products Letraset acknowledged that mistakes could be made and gave instructions as to how to correct them quickly

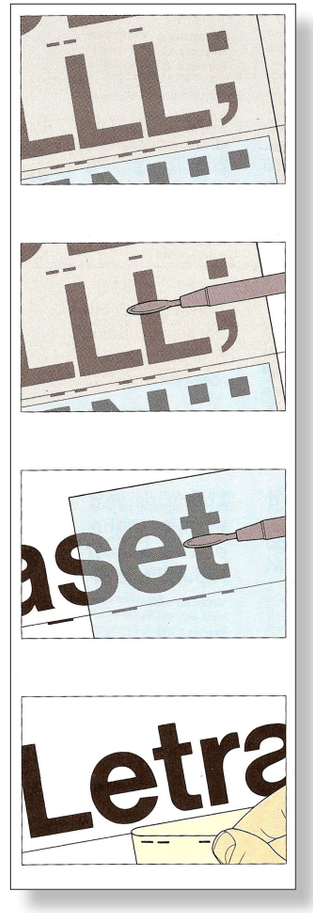


Fig. 3.
Select a sheet of the type face and point size you require.
Draw a very light pencil line on the art surface to align the small spacing bars under each letter.
Remove the blue backing sheet from your sheet of lettering.
Position the sheet on the drawn line before transferring and lightly press the letter selected into contact with the art surface.
Then go over the letter with a few widely spaced strokes with a burnisher.
Remove any spacing bars that have adhered to the art work with self-adhesive tape.

Instructions from Letraset catalogue 2003.

Fig. 4.
The symbol and logotype for one of New Zealand's best known products – a combination of drawn form and Letraset and an example of the tight letter spacing possible with Letraset.

Warren E. Smith, circa 1964

Fig. 5.
The symbol and logotype for a South Island construction company; lettering with typical tight spacing of the period and the symbol made from Letraset rule sections.

Warren E. Smith, circa 1965

and simply when they occured.

This meant that when one was experimenting errors could be corrected quickly and the process could continue without altering the integrity of the concept, or lessening one's enthusiasm for experimentation.

6. It was flexible.

Because it was not restricted to the limitations inherent to hot metal setting, Letraset could be placed anywhere and at any angle; it could be set with minimum letter spacing (Fig. 4; Fig. 5); it could set around corners; it could be set on curved baselines. Even in photosetting, this last was not easy to do, but with Letraset it was relatively easily – many of the people I worked with drew the curved baseline and placed the characters direct from the top sheet (my personal observation), whereas I prefered to draw the baseline, cut the characters from the top sheet with a scalpel and position them individually, with continual adjustment – usually with tweezers – until the letters were aligned as required (Fig. 6), all of which gave better control over the alignment and spacing.

Nicely balanced, centered text could be created the same way.

Fig. 6.
T-shirt graphic artwork showing Letraset set to curved lines above and below.
The top line is spaced as described in the text above.

Source: Warren E. Smith, circa 1979

7. It was affordable.

Whether they were purchasing multiple sheets more or less regularly for an advertising agency studio or buying single sheets for individual use, at least for the end user there was no investment in machinery/plant or expensive or dangerous consumables (the hot-metal setting equipment required for hot metal typefaces; or for photo setting machines, photo paper and/or chemicals/acids).

So with access to Letraset an artist or designer, secretary, or teacher could set a head-line, a heading, or a name or a drop-initial for around one tenth of the cost of the same task if it was sent to a specialist type bureau.

And for commercial use the relatively small outlay could be charged to client job costs if the studio staff were well organised and the cost recovery systems were appropriately robust.

In the experience of the writer, the Letraset sheets used for experimentation for the develop-ment of new type faces were those which were reaching the end of their useful life (Fig. 7) and as a result had only a few useful elements left on them and had probably been written off the books anyway.

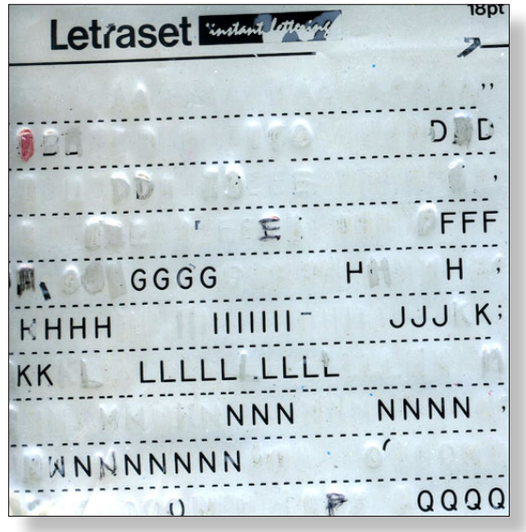


Fig. 7.
Typical of the well used Letraset sheets which were the raw material for much of the early work for this project.

Warren E. Smith, 2008

B. Practice. Letraset in use.

One of the properties of dry transfer lettering that allowed designers the freedom to use letter forms in ways that were outside the traditional typographic limitations, and which made it so popular was its ease of use if the instructions were followed – and Letraset did their best to make sure that the instructions were clear and unequivocal.

From my own experience, and from comments made during the interviews with the practitioners whom I involved in this project, the success of the application of Letraset dry transfer material was dependant on the blue protective backing sheet which came with each of the printed carrier sheets.

The images to be transfered were printed on the underside of the main carrier sheets (by the silk screen method, using a very fine mesh screen for maximum resolution and accuracy) using a dense black ink, the recipie for which included a specially formulated adhesive. This unique ink/adhesive gave each element (and indeed every element on every sheet – headings; rules; trade mark registration and copyright text; sheet numbers – it was all useable) the property of being able to stick to the carrier sheet until it was required, and then, with a little pressure applied through the carrier sheet it could be transfered and stuck to the surface it was destined for.

The purpose of the blue backing sheet was to act as a protective sheet while in storage and to prevent the elements transfering themselves to adjacent random surfaces unexpectedly while applying required elements.

Regular users of Letraset quickly developed the practice of placing the protective backing sheet just below the area they were working on to prevent any accidental transfer to other surfaces or to other areas of the work in progress where it was not required.

Even so, accidental transfer could still occur, especially with new sheets, when the adhesive quality of the ink was at its optimum.

And since those elements which were transfered accidentally were not applied with any care they were often distorted, cracked, split or torn. It was this accidental transfer which lead some practioners to contemplate other ways that the product could be used.

Driven by expediency (when makeshift vowels had to be constructed to replace those missing on partly used sheets – as described below) or simply curiosity, studio artists and designers began to literally attack Letraset to achieve consciously conceived results. The main

carrier sheet could be turned over and the element images could be worked on directly if that was desired.

While the areas of the sheet that were not to be worked on were protected by the blue backing sheet individual elements could be cut or scratched with scalpels or any sharp object, distorted or abraded lightly (with sandpaper for example).

The ability to modify the the printable elements in these ways was most commonly used as a last resort by studio staff to improvise and create missing letters from other elements.

For example when all available e's on a Helvetica sheet had been used and time did not permit the purchase of a new sheet to complete the work within an imminent deadline, replacements could be created by carefully cutting and joining o's and straight rules (Fig. 8), or making a capital T or L out of two i's or straight rules of the appropriate thickness. (Transcript: Group meeting. p.63)

The resulting form would not necessarily please critical typographers, but as an expedient way to complete a presentation visual for example, it was a procedure that could avert a crisis and perhaps delay the purchase of new sheet until it

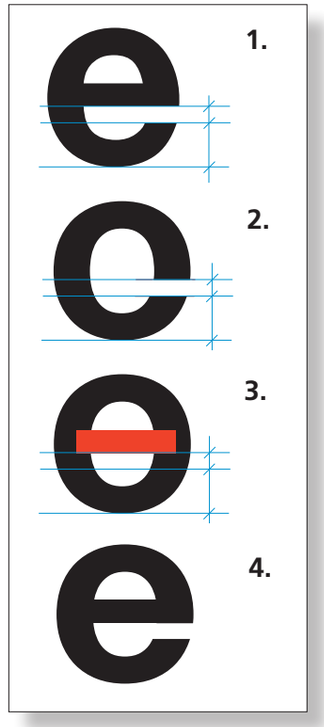


Fig. 8.

To create an 'e' out of other elements on the same Letraset sheet (or other sheets if necessary)…

1.
Measure an existing 'e' to establish the levels required for the bar and the terminal.

2.
Take a lower case 'o' (as the nearest basic form), and cut through the right side of the character to match the exposed terminal and the lower level of the stroke that forms the bowl of the 'e'.
Remove the material between the two cuts…

3.
Apply a section of black rule of appropriate thickness to create the horizontal stroke of the 'e'…

4.
Rub down gently to secure the character to the art work.

Warren E. Smith, 2009

Fig. 9.

The Microsoft® logotype is an example of the principle of the 'cut and remove' technique (the cut out of the 'o' to give the logotype a subtle, unique, registerable form) making its way into graphic design practice of the 1980's.

http://www.microsoft.com/

was absolutely necessary.

Since much of the work in studios was done after hours there were times when these techniques were used simply to keep the work progressing when it was not possible to purchase new sheets.

These makeshift characters were rarely used in final art; they were most often resorted to in the preparation of visuals prepared for new business or new campaign presentations.

This selective 'cutting and removing unwanted pieces' technique was something that I realised could be put to more extensive use [10]. If it could be used to fill some gaps in a type face, or as a way to create logos/brands with slight alterations to the lettering to create a registerable difference (Fig. 9), why not create a whole new type face using this technique?

This question was the begining of my exploration of the use of Letraset in innovative ways and the starting point for my practice of type face design and many of the Serendipity series of type faces presented here.

To begin, I kept closely to the 'cut and remove' model, and experimented with a series of simple surgical techniques.

Suitable strong, legible type face sheets were selected from the Letraset range and were turned over and the back of the exposed elements subjected to a series of scalpel cuts done with a guiding principle in mind for each type face (e.g. cut the letters diagonally at a consistant angle and remove the material on the left of the cut. Or cut along a line at (say) 20% of the height of the letter and remove all the material below the cut).

The typefaces resulting from these explorations (starting with an existing Letraset type face and 'operating' on it to create a new form) are the 'cut' series that make up the early part of my practice and are shown in the gallery section at the end of this thesis.

From this relatively simple begining within my practice I began to explore more complex methods of letter construction (Fig. 10; Fig. 11) and found that by adapting these techniques – sometimes on their own and sometimes in association with additional drawing – and where necessary, with the addition of some of the elements from Letraset sheets [e.g. rules or dots], it is possible to create new forms for individual logos or brands. It is only a short step from that realisation to seeing the possibility of designing completely new type faces using Letraset elements as the raw material or with the effects of accidentaly applied 'distressed' Letraset lettering as the guiding concepts.

My practice for this project has been to take these experimental concepts and to refine and redraw them on my computer. The guiding principle in this process has been to replicate the way Letraset was used and mis-used.

Because of the nature of the raw material and the craft nature of the methods used to create new type faces from existing Letraset elements, many of the designs produced so far are most suited to display, as opposed to text faces.

To date the forms produced have tended to be heavy and in some cases the desire to produce a face of more individual character or impact has taken priority over readability.

However as my exploration of the use of Letraset elements continues I am addressing this in my current practice with more focus on lighter faces, with caps, lower case, numerals and punctuation forms and with larger counters and lower case 'x' height, more suited to use in text setting.

I am doing this in two ways:

First, by designing lighter versions of some

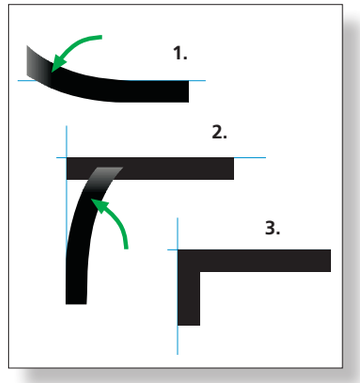


Fig. 10.

To create basic shapes from Letraset elements – in this case Letraset rules…

1.
Lightly rule guide lines to define the shape required (horizontals and verticals)

2.
Lay the element (rule) along them for both horizontal and vertical strokes…

3.
Cut as required to ensure that the corners are clean and true and rub down.

Warren E. Smith, 2009

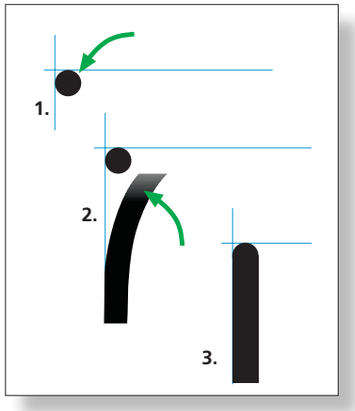


Fig. 11.

To create rounded terminals for letter forms from Letraset elements…

1.
Lightly rule guidelines to indicate the position of the terminal and place a Letraset dot of an appropriate diameter in the required position…

2.
Lay a rule of a width to match the dot along the guide line…

3.
Cut as required to ensure that the end of the rule is on the diameter of the dot and that the join is clean and true.

Warren E. Smith, 2009

of the display faces I have designed previously. (My type face family 'Rigor Mortis' illustrates this approach).

And second, by using lighter structural elements to design new forms specifically as text faces. My type face 'Jetstream' (Fig. 12) for example takes an existing text face (Letraset sheet IL2661, Helvetica Extra Light) and alters it with the addition of repetitive elements taken from another Letraset sheet (IL4274, rules) to create the a decorative accent and a pattern which accentuates the horizontal direction of reading used in the Roman based text of the western world.

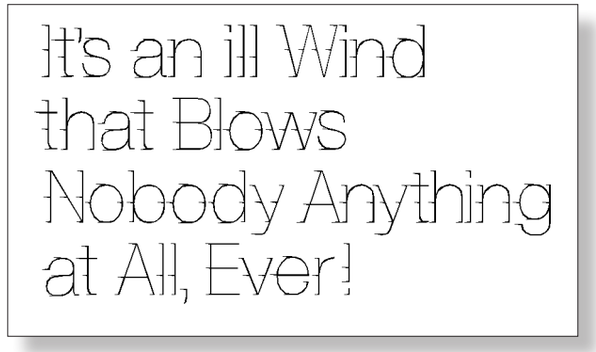


Fig. 12.

An example of text setting in Jetstream Light, which has been designed specifically for setting of this nature.

Warren E. Smith, 2009

C. Deliberate and accidental outcomes.

I have already described the way that some designers and art studio personnel found that they could use Letraset creatively and that it was possible, with some effort, to create some substitute characters if they were required.

Those were actions which were taken as a series of conscious decisions to address the matter of missing characters, but they were not the same as those situations which occured when a designer or studio artist noticed the effects caused by accidental application of letters, and wondered if the distorted letter could still be used.

Accidental applications were most often the result of poor or careless use of the backing sheet. Unless the backing sheet was properly alligned under the carrier sheet, the pressure of a hand resting on the surface of the art work was usually sufficient to cause the transfer of characters – sometimes this was on to other areas of the work in progress and sometimes it was on to other surfaces – the desk top or other nearby material for example.

Sheets that were not required for immediate use and were put away without their backing sheets or with backing sheets mis-aligned were subject to accidental application – in these cases from the back of one sheet to the front of another. When this occured (Fig. 13) there was the potential not only for individual characters to be transfered but for several characters from one sheet to adhere to the other and attempts to seperate them could cause additional damage to the characters/elements on the back of (usually) the upper sheet.

I observed that it was in these situations that 'interesting effects' could occur and might sometimes lead to a process of reflection on the potential to make use of these otherwise wasted outcomes.

This process was very much a case of the enquiring mind looking at the distortion(s) created accidentaly and asking the timeless question, in different permutations, "What if?"

"What if I used that effect as the basis of an alphabet?"

"What if I combined that effect with an existing form?

"What if I used that effect but exagerated it somehow?"

"What if I used that element as the basis of a new form?"

Fig. 13.

The result of bad storage – here at least three sheets have been stuck together because the blue backing sheets have been omitted when the sheets have been put away between use.

Warren E. Smith, 2009

So for this practitioner at least, the process of question and answer as new designs evolved and matters of form, legibility, character, compatability and overall practicality were considered, led to experimentation and development with decisions being made by what might be called ‘intuition’.

This in turn lead to questions about the nature of intuition and the belief that in this context intuition was probably a combination of many years of curiosity and passion about the nature of type and typography and of the appreciation and use of type faces.

More recently there has been the realisation that ‘Tacit Knowledge’ as described by Michael Polyani[11] is a good description of the sum total of the influences involved in the decision-making process fundamental to my practice.

Conclusion

For all the reasons mentioned above – Letraset was produced to consistently high quality; it was functional, simple and easy to apply; it was forgiving; it was flexible and it was affordable – if one was interested in the possibility of developing new type faces the Letraset system was an encouraging medium to work in.

Experiments lead to outcomes in a way that is at once immediate and clean and it is then a relatively simple task to replicate them (or approximate them) on a computer.

The autographic nature of the process gave one a sense of hands-on involvement where the usual practice of drawing/draughting and painting was replaced by the crisp solid elements available on the Letraset sheets. One was not dealing with pencils, ink, pens, brushes and draughting instruments in the way that traditional type face designers did (and still do in most cases, at least to conceptualise a new type face before it is digitised).

While there were some limitations (curved flowing forms are difficult to achieve whereas squares, circles and straight forms, and angular junctions are natural to the medium), the process is definitely practical and can lead to interesting creative results.

Having recognised the potential inherent in the effects of accidental application, it was possible to plan the use and mis-use of various Letraset elements with the aim of producing new letter forms utilising both the correct methods of use, other 'subversive' methods, and other media as required.

The practice that forms part of this project shows that this is not only possible, but that it can generate a variety of designs that can be produced using appropriate contemporary technology. And further, that it is possible to design completely new type faces using the basic principles underlying the type faces designed with Letraset elements as the basic inspiration/starting point:

An awareness of the fundamentals of Letraset application and how they could guide experiments with regard to other uses…

An awareness of the creative possibilities inherent in accidental applications and a willingness to experiment to replicate or exaggerate those effects…

A willingness to look for ways to replicate the use of Letraset elements as the basic media for new faces), but without using the Letraset elements as the raw material…

In those cases the faces are conceptualised on the basis of an intimate understanding of the usage of Letraset and then executed on a computer drawing programme.

Letraset was not only a practical aid to advertising and graphic design production but was, and still is, a source of inspiration for this practitioner's continuing new type face designs.

As well, in the course of this project an important question has been raised:

If Letraset was a type setting system so widely used and so well known, why is it so rarely mentioned in histories of typography and graphic design?

Gallery
The Serendipity series of type faces

A. Introduction

The following pages show some of the type faces I have designed based on the use and mis-use of Letraset, as I have described in the body of this thesis. They are prepared for this presentation by computer, but they originated in experiments that I first began in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s, using Letraset 'elements' (rules, circles, squares, corners etc as the basic forms), a scalpel, and occasionally with the addition of drawn elements or painted in-fill to create new letter forms evolving from the serendipitous process described… hence the collective name of this group.

The collection represents some type face designs which are outcomes of earlier experiments brought to fruition during my current practice, and some typeface designs which have been inspired and created during my current practice.

(My practice includes other type face designs which have been inspired by the explorations based on considerations of the use of Letraset, but since they are not based specifically on the use of Letraset products or associated techniques it is not appropriate that they appear in this thesis).

The type faces presented in this series, on the following pages, are not 'Full Set' type faces, including every character necessary to be a fully commercially acceptable international type face[12].

They are 'proof of concept' designs which in most cases include all the characters of the full standard keyboard – capitals, lower case, numerals, punctuation, and some of the shift and/or command key options.

Gallery
B. Examples of my practice:

The type face designs are:

1. Cut Left (Fig. 14)

One of the earliest experimental series which explored the creation of new faces with a single 'cut and removal' of a section of the original letter.
Cut Left is a text or display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Letraset sheet IL723) with the letters cut across their upper left hand corner on a consistant angle.
The bold is best suited to use as a display face for headings; it is intended that there will be a lighter weight that can be used as a text face.

2. Cut Right (Fig. 15)

Another of the earliest experimental series which explored the creation of new faces with a single 'cut and removal' of a section of the original letter.
Cut Right is a text or display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Letraset sheet IL723) but with the letters away vertically on the right hand side.
The bold is best suited to use as a display face for headings; it is intended that there will be a lighter weight that can be used as a text face.

3. Cut Base (Fig. 16)

A development from the early experiments, devised to use the 'cut and remove' technique to test the principle that the readability of letters is determined more by their upper half than their lower half… this seems to be true, at least as far as Cut Base is concerned, because it is surprisingly readable when set into text.

4. Fault Line (Fig. 17)

Another in the series of experiments based on the principle of the use of a scalpel to surgically modify the form. In this case the work of emulating the original cut and move process is done in a drawing programme using a computer face (Britania) as the starting point.
Each letter is cut through diagonally at a consistant angle and the upper part of the character is moved to the right and down the slope of the lower part (as in the movement of tectonic plates over a fault line – hence the name).
When set into words Fault Line creates the perception that it is an italic face.

5. New Western (Fig. 18)

The third of the earliest experimental series, this time with multiple excisions of sections of the original letter.
New Western is a display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Sheet IL723) but with the terminals cut away and with a consistant 'v' removed to create something of the decorative terminals seen in many of the type faces used in North America in the early 1800's.

6. LetraStencil Circular (Fig. 19)

LetraStencil Circular is a contemporary display face which is a new take on the traditional 'stencil' form in response to the question "Why are stencil faces invariably bold, heavy forms – why can't there be a light stencil face?"
Circular Stencil is constructed of segments of Letraset corners (Sheet LT805) and rules (Sheet IL2825), none of which actually touch/join to create a new variation on the traditional 'stencil' forms.

7. Scratched (Fig. 20)

Scratched is a display face based on an existing letter form but with the forms degraded as if attacked by scalpel or compass point or accidental abrasion.

8. Pickets (Fig. 21)

Pickets is a display face based on an existing letter form but with the letters reformed with a regular rounded fenestration in the lower half to form a continuous pattern when set together.

9. Printed Circuitry (Fig. 22)

Printed Circuitry is a display face created from elements sourced from different Letraset sheets augmented with additional drawn forms to create a face which reflects the increasing complexity of modern technology.

10. Fracture (Fig. 23)

Fracture is a text and display face based on an existing letter form (Akzidenz Grotesk) but with the letters cut across their form just below mid-height to create the effect of a fracture in the material.
The fracture-effect designed to form an almost continuous line through the body of the setting.

The Rigor Mortis Family

	Introduction	(Fig. 24)
11.	Rigor Mortis	Pale (Fig. 25)
12.	Rigor Mortis	Light (Fig. 26)
13.		Light & Soft (Fig. 27)
14.	Rigor Mortis	Medium (Fig. 28)
15.		Medium & Soft (Fig. 29)
16.	Rigor Mortis	Solid (Fig. 30)
17.		Solid & Soft (Fig. 31)

Rigor Mortis is a text and display face family constructed of straight rules (Letraset sheet LT803), cut and placed/joined to form the letter shapes, with either square (Rigor Mortis) or with rounded ends and corners (Rigor Mortis Soft) created by adding round dots (Letraset sheet IL556) to the terminals.

18. Model Railway Light (Fig. 32)

Model Railway is a text and display face constructed of straight rules (Letraset sheet IL4276) and segments of rounded corners (Letraset sheet IL4286), cut and placed/joined to form the shapes, with square or rounded ends.

19. Morse (Fig. 33)

Morse is a display face constructed of Flex-a-tape (product number 3030) and dots (Letraset sheet IL2839), either as single dots or in multiple-dot groups, cut and placed/joined to form the shapes, with rounded ends.

20. Studs (Fig. 34)

A display face construction originally based on an adapted basic form with the addition of Letraset white squares and rectangular sections of white rules (Letraset sheet Il4276) and square dots (Letraset sheet LT857) cut into the shape.

21. 1972 (Fig. 35)

1972 is a computer produced design (begun in August 2008) based on one of two faces submitted for the Letraset International Type Face Design competiton held in 1972.
The original was created with segments of Letraset circles (Letraset sheet IL4280) for the rounded corners which were joined with ruled lines to create outlines which were then inked in.
It is suitable for display only and although it was originally intended to be caps and small caps only I have recently added a set of the lower case and keystroke options.

22. Megalith (Fig. 36)

Megalith (noun; Archaeology. A large stone that forms a prehistoric monument (e.g., a menhir) or part of one) was designed using drawn basic shapes to which black and white squares (Letraset sheet IL3249) were added to amplify/amend/distort the starting form.
It is designed to read best in the context of a line of setting and is suitable for display face use only.

23. Jetstream (Fig. 37)

Jetstream is designed as a face eminently suitable for text setting. It is based on Helvetica Extra Light (Letraset sheet IL2661) and Helvetica Medium (Letraset sheet IL 723) to which exaggerated multiple serifs have been added to accentuate a horizontal reading flow and to evoke an impression of speed and movement, as seen in comics of the 1960s.

24. Prizm (Fig. 38)

Another early experimental work which explored the creation of new faces, again with multiple 'excisions' of sections of the original letter, Prizm is a display face constructed of straight rules (Sheet LT803), cut and placed or joined to form shapes with consistant 45° angles and with 45° ends and corners.

25. Al Capone (Fig. 39)

A later development based on an early experiment in which existing letters were distorted (roughened on the edges) and small Letraset dots (Letraset sheet IL2839, white) were added to create a pattern as if created by machine gun fire.
It is designed to continue the pattern as the letters are set into words.
In the process of transfering this design to the computer a small line surround (jagged edges) was added to all the 'bullet holes'.

26. Zen Blocks (Fig. 40)

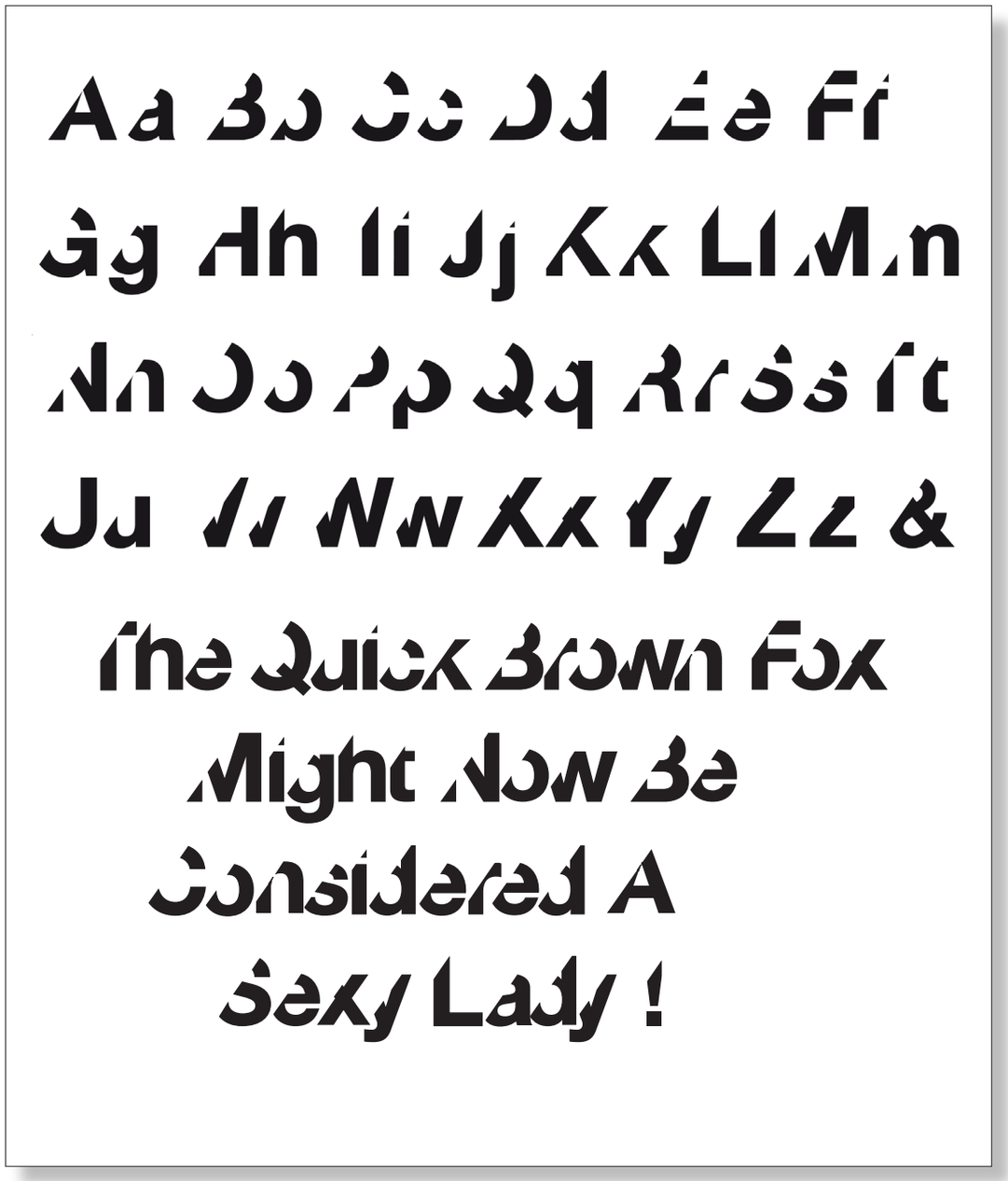
Possibly the most abstract and most experimental of the type faces derived from the use of letraset elements, Zen Blocks was developed from some experiments using the minimum number of elements – in this case drawn squares to which Letraset white straight rules (Letraset sheet IL4278) have been added.
This is definately not a text face but is intended as a display face which in most cases can best be deciphered/read taking its context into account.

Fig. 14. Cut Left

One of the earliest experimental series of type faces which explored the creation of new forms with a single ‘cut-and-removal’ of a section of the original letter with a scalpel.

Cut Left is a text or display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Letraset sheet IL723) with the letters cut across their upper left hand corner on a consistant angle.

The bold is best suited to use as a display face for headings.
It is intended that there will be a lighter weight which could be used as a text face; it is currently a work in progress.



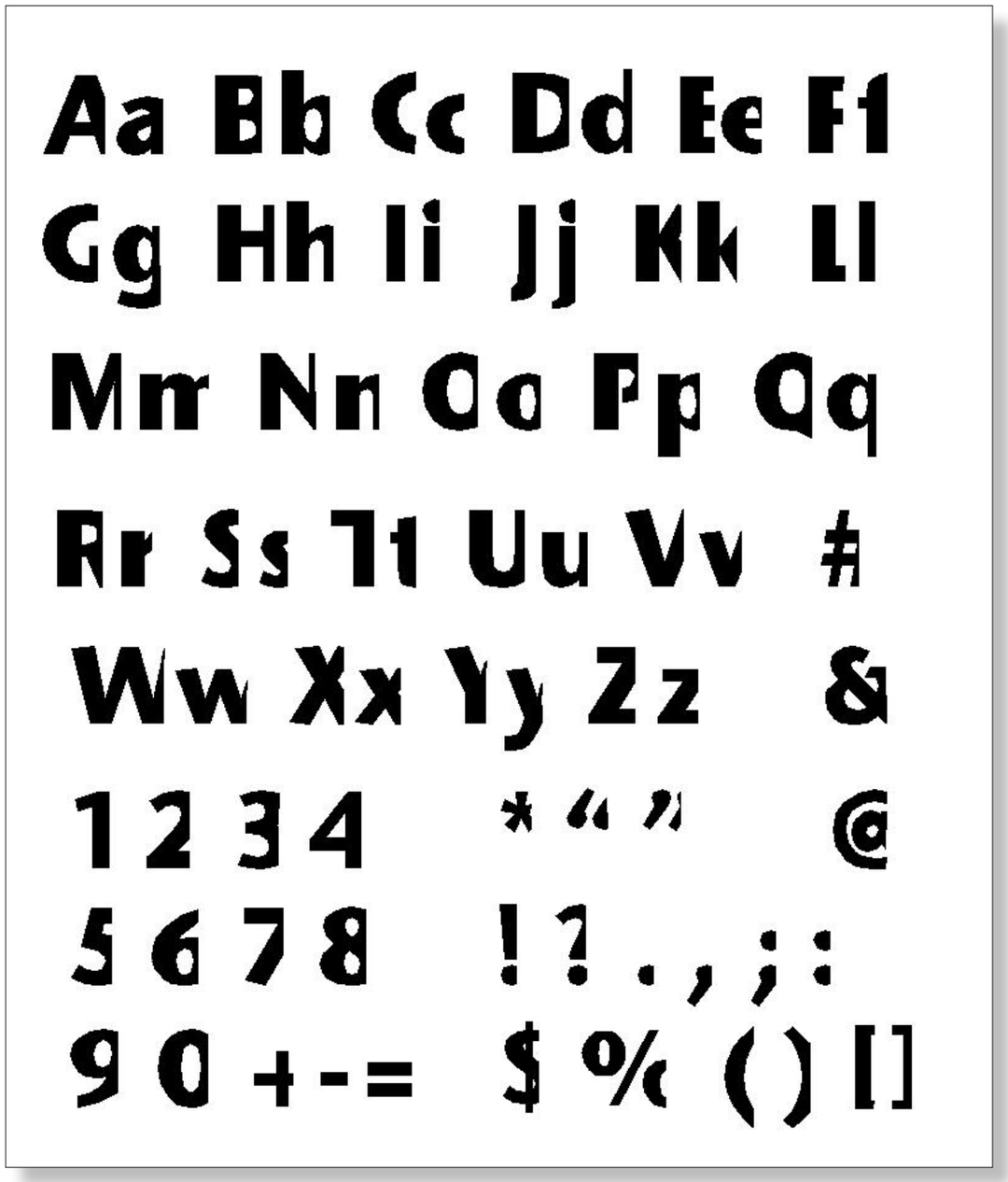


Fig. 15. Cut Right

Another of the earliest experimental series which explored the creation of new faces with a single ‘cut-and-removal’ of a section of the original letter, Cut Right was designed to be set with minimal letter spacing, emulating one of the common practices when using Letraset.

Cut Right is a text or display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Letraset sheet IL723) but with the letters cut away vertically on the right hand side.

The bold is best suited to use as a display face for headings.
It is intended that there will be a lighter weight which could be used as a text face; it is currently a work in progress.

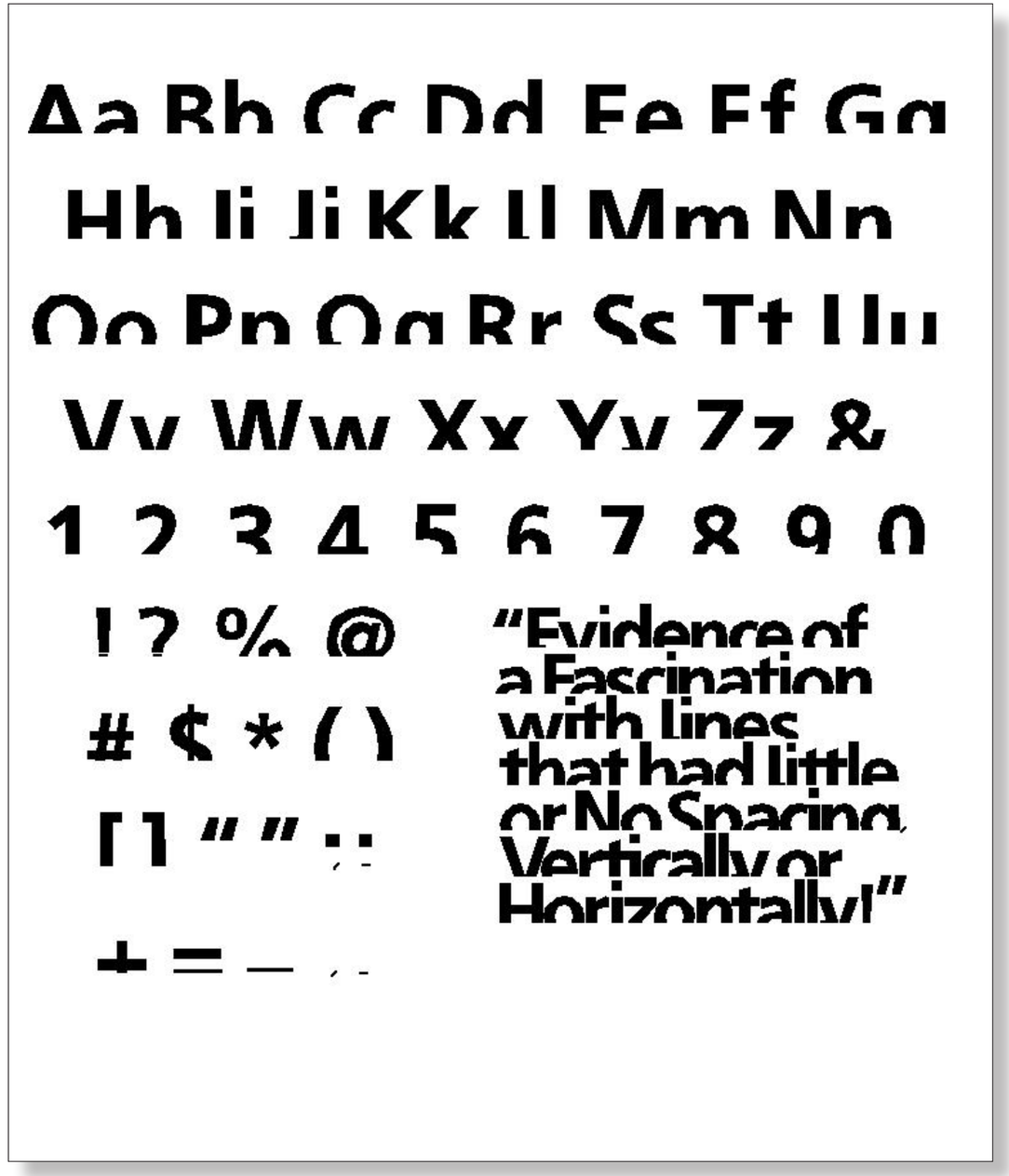
Aa Bb Cc Dd

The Big Cold Shoulder

Fig. 16. Cut Base

Another of the earliest experimental series which explored the creation of new faces with a single, straight 'cut-and-removal' of a section of the original letter, in this case the cut was made consistantly about one quarter of the 'x' height up from the base line and the material below the cut was removed.
It was designed to acknowledge the principle that the readability of letters is determined more by their upper half than their lower half.
It is best suited to use as a display face for headings.

It is intended that there will be a lighter weight which could be used as a text face; it is currently a work in progress.



The Legibility of lettering Depends on the Tops of the Forms Far More than on the Bottoms.

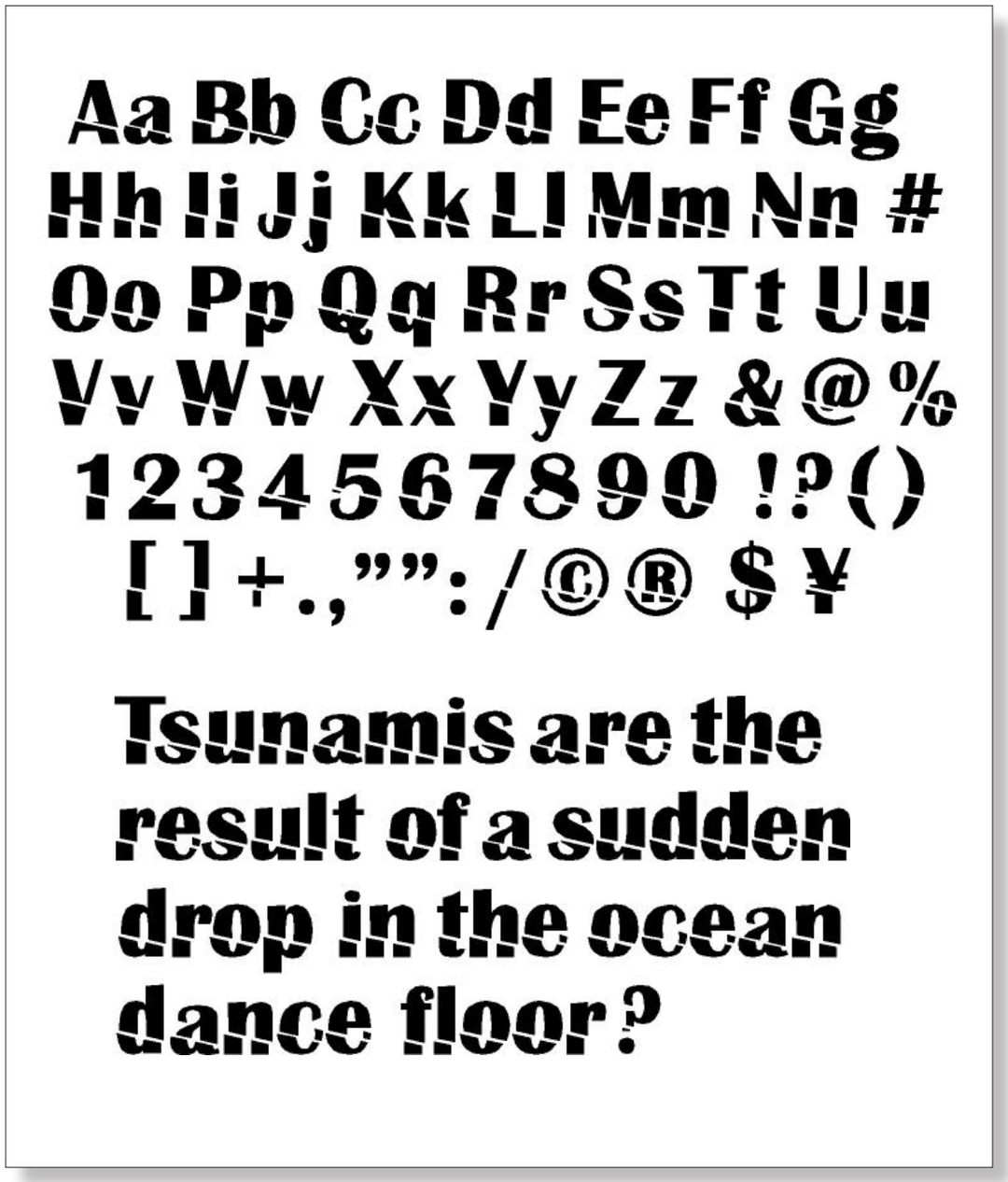


Fig. 17. Fault Line

Another in the series of experiments based on the principle of the use of a scalpel to surgically modify the form; in this case the work is done in a drawing programme using a computer face (Britania) as the starting point.
Each letter has been cut diagonally at the same level and at a consistant angle.
The upper part of the character is moved to the right away and down from down the slope of the lower part – as in the movement of tectonic plates over a fault line, hence the name.

This type face was begun in early 2009, but remained as a concept only until my interest in it was re-kindled with the recent tsunami in Samoa, which began with the movement of the sea bed on a Pacific fault line.

Fig. 18. New Western

The third of the earliest experimental series, this time with multiple excisions of sections of the original letter.
New Western is a display face based on an existing letter form (Helvetica; Sheet IL723) but with the terminals cut away and with a ‘v’ section removed to create something similat to the decorative terminals seen in many of the type faces used in Europe and North America in the early 1800’s.

New Western is best suited to use as a display face for headings.
It is intended that this range will be supplimented with small-caps at a later date.

Why don’t
SHEEP
SHRINK
when it rains?

Fig. 19. LetraStencil Circular

Another of the ‘cut and remove’ series, this time with the cutting being done to create individual pieces which can then be combined into letter forms – in this case to form a light stencil face.
LetraStencil circular is primarily a display face, although it can be set as text.
It was designed in response to a question regarding traditional forms of stencil alphabets
“Why are stencil faces almost invariably bold, heavy forms?”

Circular Stencil is constructed of segments of Letraset corners (Sheet LT805) and rules (Sheet IL2825), none of which actually touch/join to create a new variation on the traditional
‘stencil’ forms.

Fig. 20. Scratched

With careless handling the back of the Letraset carrier sheet could come into contact with hard objects which would erode or scarify the sensitive surface; debris from this action was sometimes left on the backing sheet indicating the direction of the surface disturbance.
The original experiments for Scratched were prepared using Franklin Gothic Condensed (Letraset sheet IL1810) but this computer rendering is based on Bell Gothic.

Scratched reads surprisingly well when set as text but is definately best as a display face.

Fig. 21. Pickets

Not a text face by any stretch of the imagination but a decrative display face that uses a trick favoured by many a designer – the power of a repetitive pattern to create a visual rhythm.

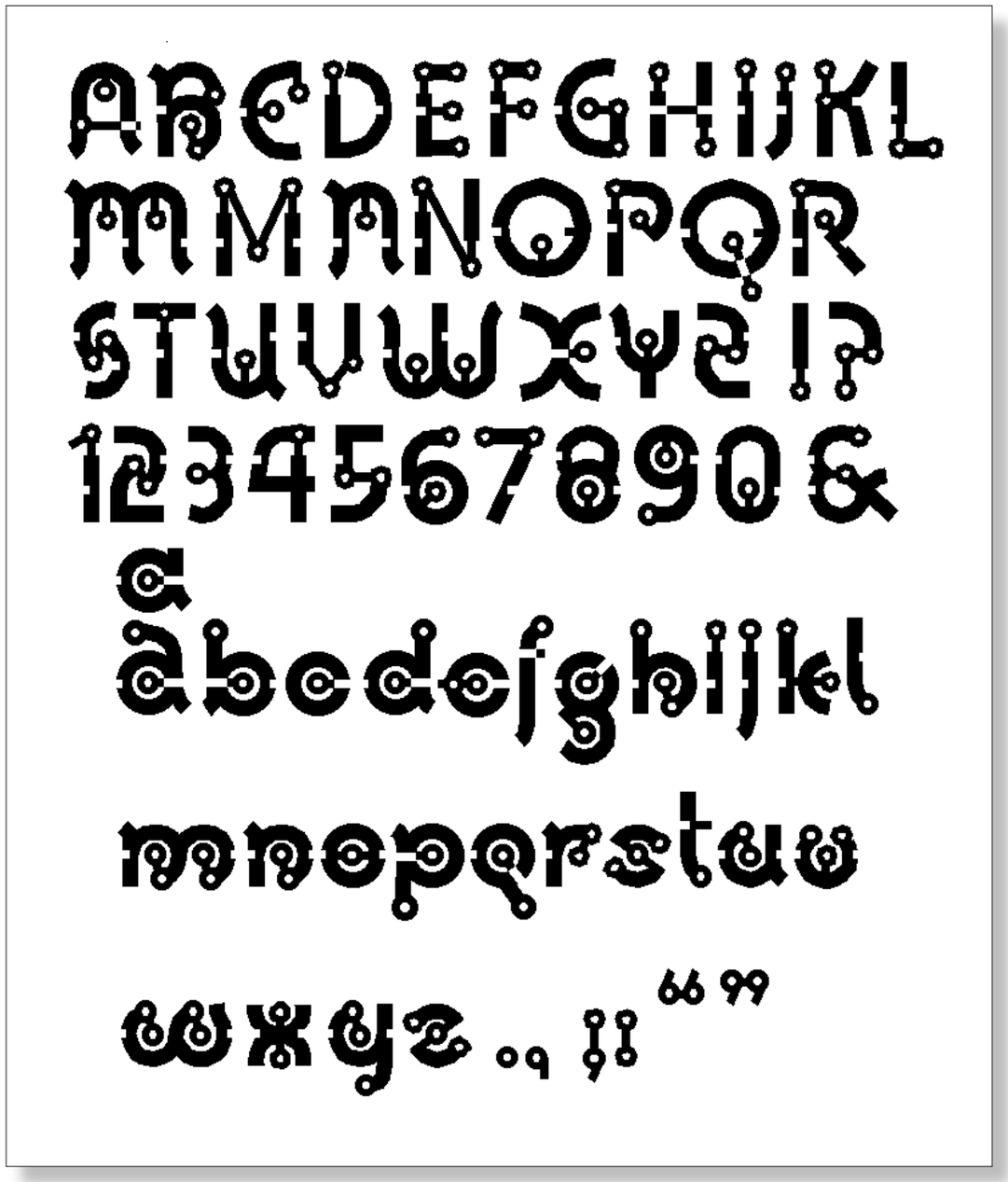
Pickets is designed so that when set with tight spacing the 'picket fence' effect is continued unbroken along the length of thr word.
Originally devised by overlaying one or two letters of an existing type face with Letraset white rules and circles (Sheets IL2825; IL3250).
This face is only available it the weight shown.

Fig. 22. Printed Circuitry

One of my very early clients as a free lance designer in the 1960's was Printed Circuits Limited, who asked me to design a corporate identity for them.
The symbol I designed as part of that assignment used Letraset elements to shape the form and I wondered then whether it would be possible to create a whole alphabet in the same way.
Printed Circuitry is the result of much later exploration of that possibility, this time using a limited range of elements based on Letraset but generated by the computer.

This is definately a specialised display face.

Remember the Paperless Society?



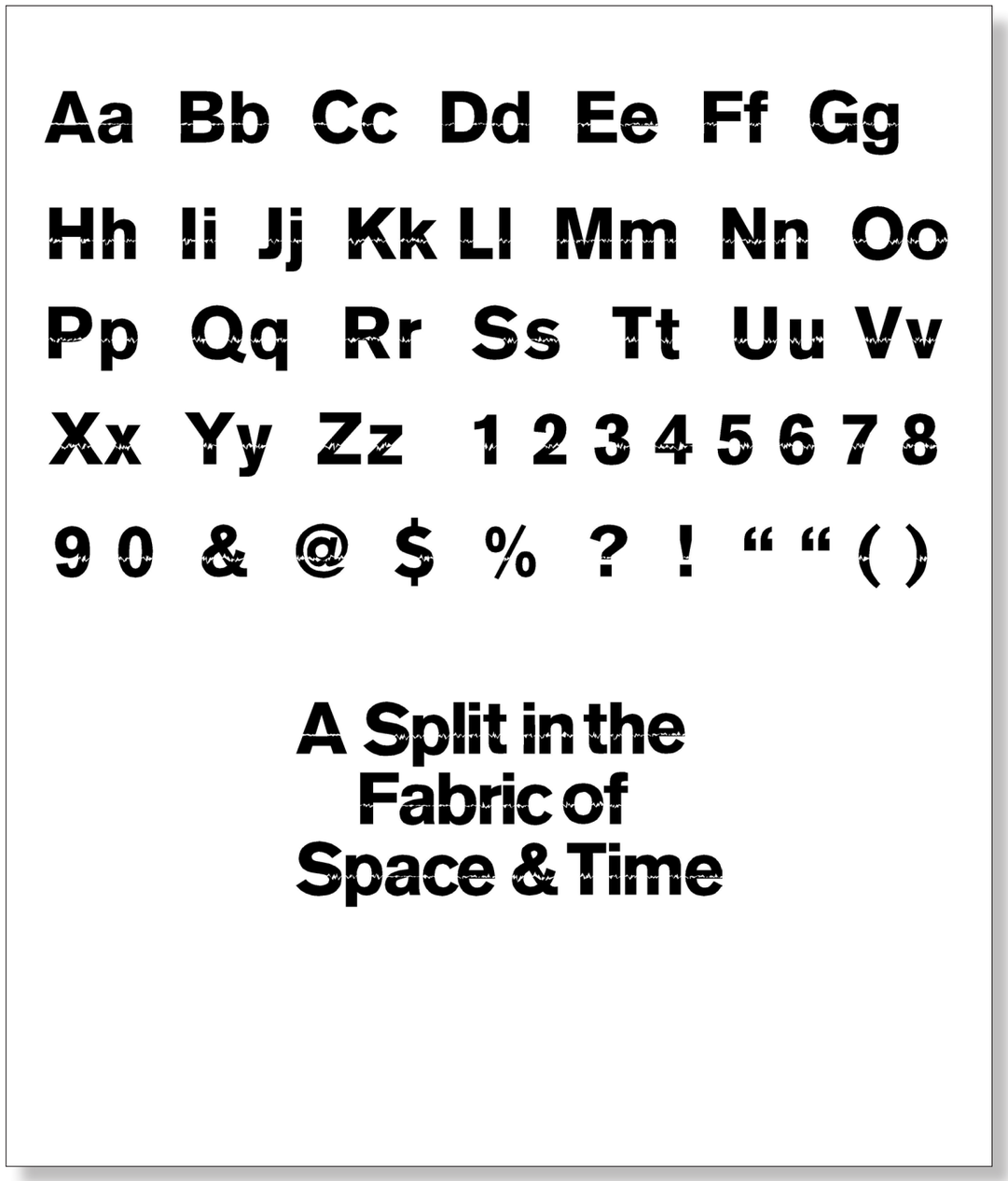


Fig. 23. Fractured

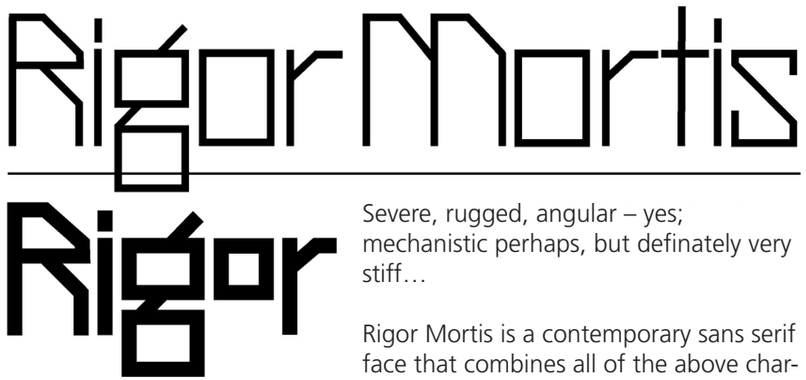
Another of the designs based on the principle of surgically altering the form of an existing letter, in this case Akzidenz Grotesk, to create new characters in which the line of fracture forms a linking feature between the letters.

It is intended that there will be a lighter weight which could be used as a text face.
It is a work in progress.

Fig. 24. Rigor Mortis Family

The Rigor Mortis family of faces was begun very early in my experiments with the use of Letraset elements to create new type faces.
The construction method determined the form of each letter (each stroke was laid down with a Letraset straight black rule – sheets IL4278; IL2825; LT802; LT 803 – depending on the weight of face being designed, cut and joined carefully to form square corners and joins).
The resulting form is hard, angular and mechanistic but it can be used as a display or text face.

Transferring the work to the computer has enabled me to widen the family to include several weights and variations and work is continuing on further variations, such as italics.



Severe, rugged, angular – yes; mechanistic perhaps, but definately very stiff…

Rigor Mortis is a contemporary sans serif face that combines all of the above characteristics with good readability. Its large ‘x’ height to cap height proportion, large counters and some optional characters all add up to make this face a hard worker.

It is one of a series of type faces designed with Letraset dry transfer technology as a starting point, in this case the ability to use Letraset straight rules cut and assembled to create new letter forms.

Currently it is available in several weights and as a slightly softer form with rounded terminals.
Italic versions of each are included in the work in progress.

Fig. 25. Rigor Mortis Pale

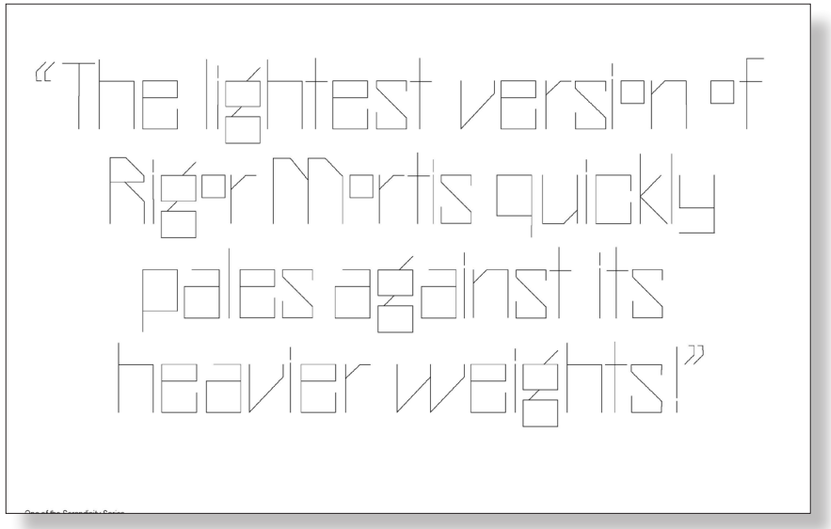


Fig. 26. Rigor Mortis Light

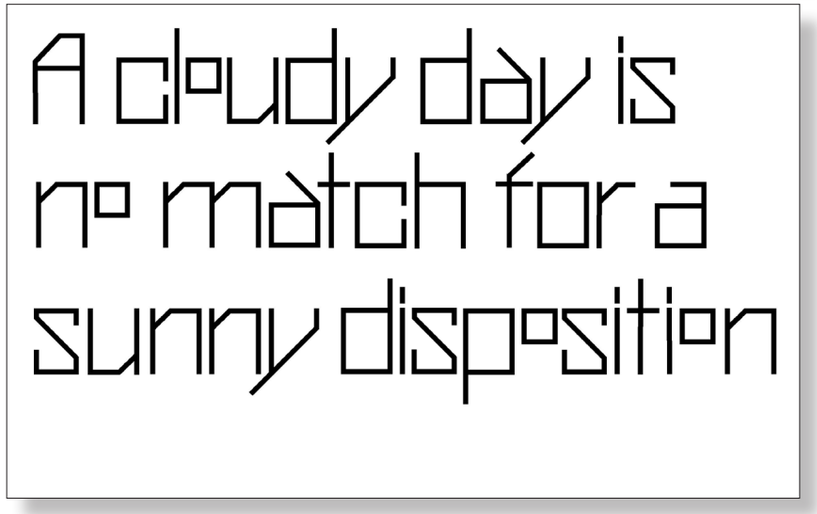
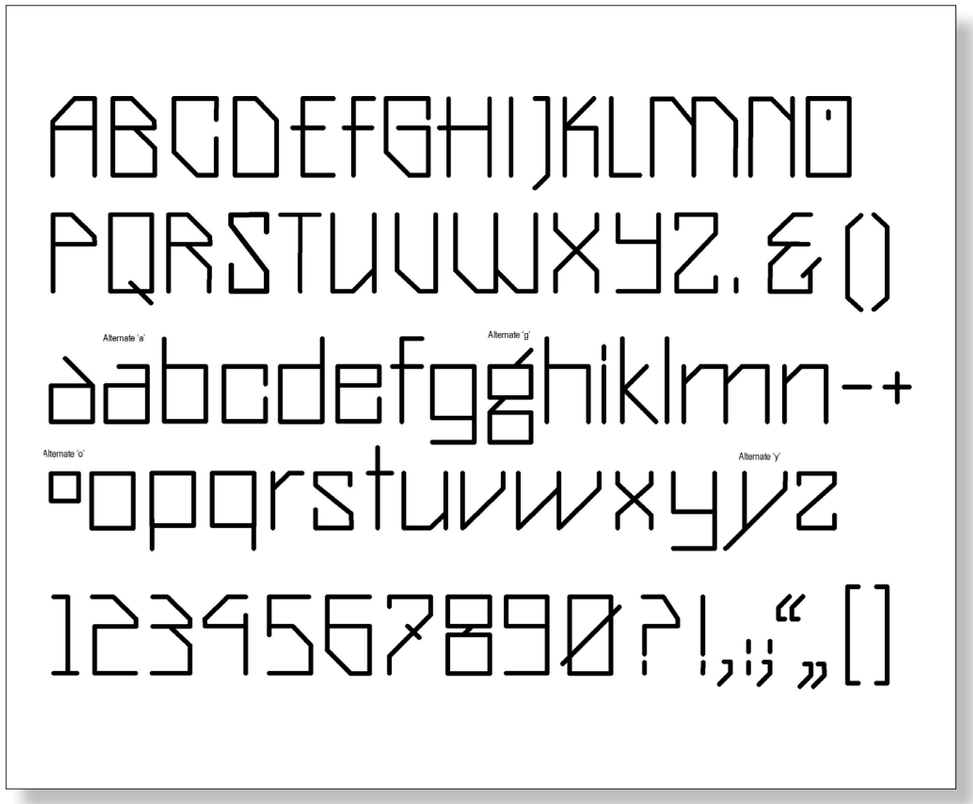


Fig. 27. Rigor Mortis Light & Soft



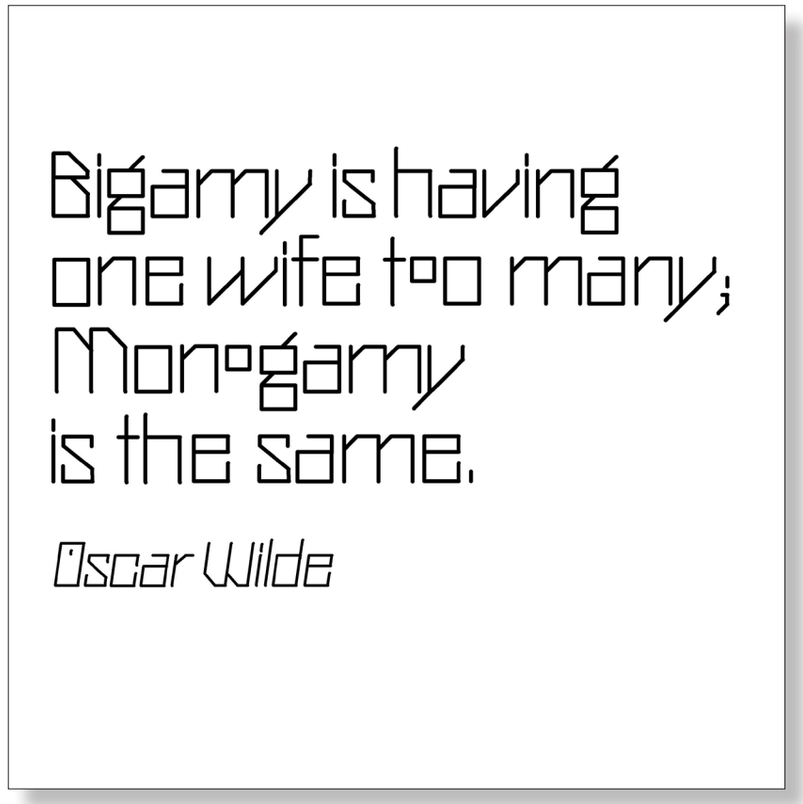
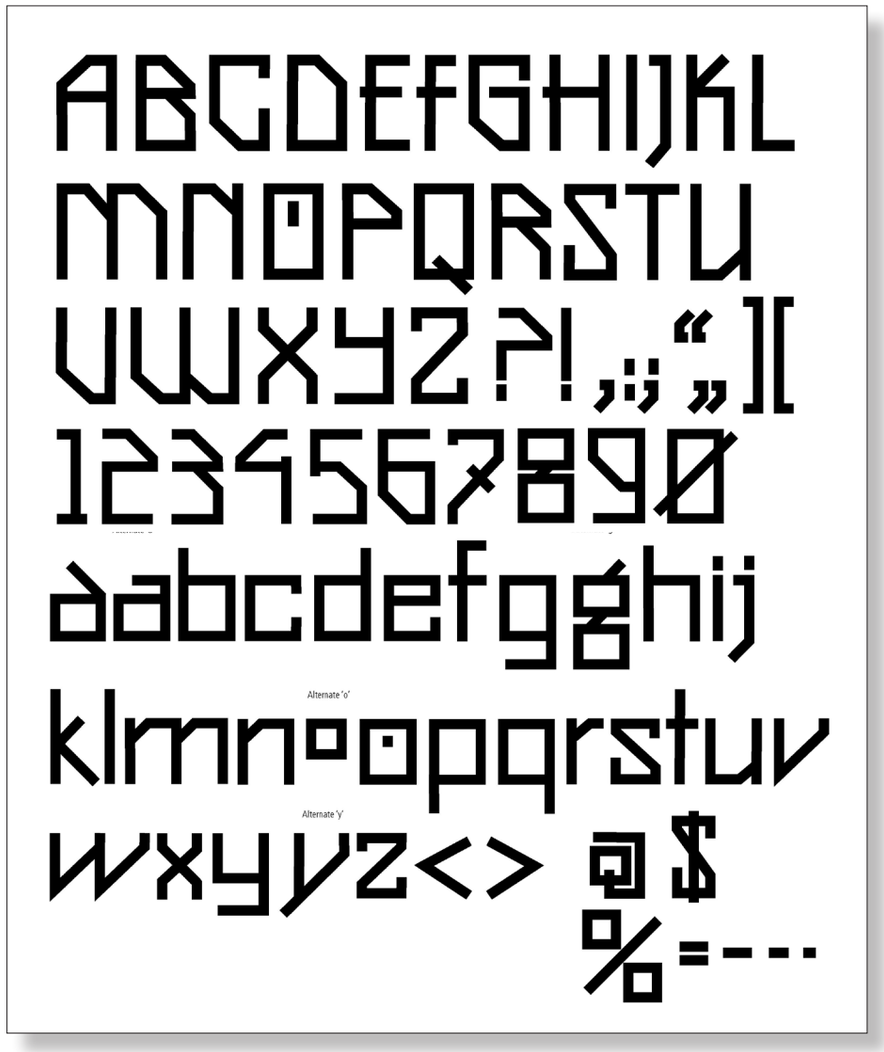


Fig. 28. Rigor Mortis Medium



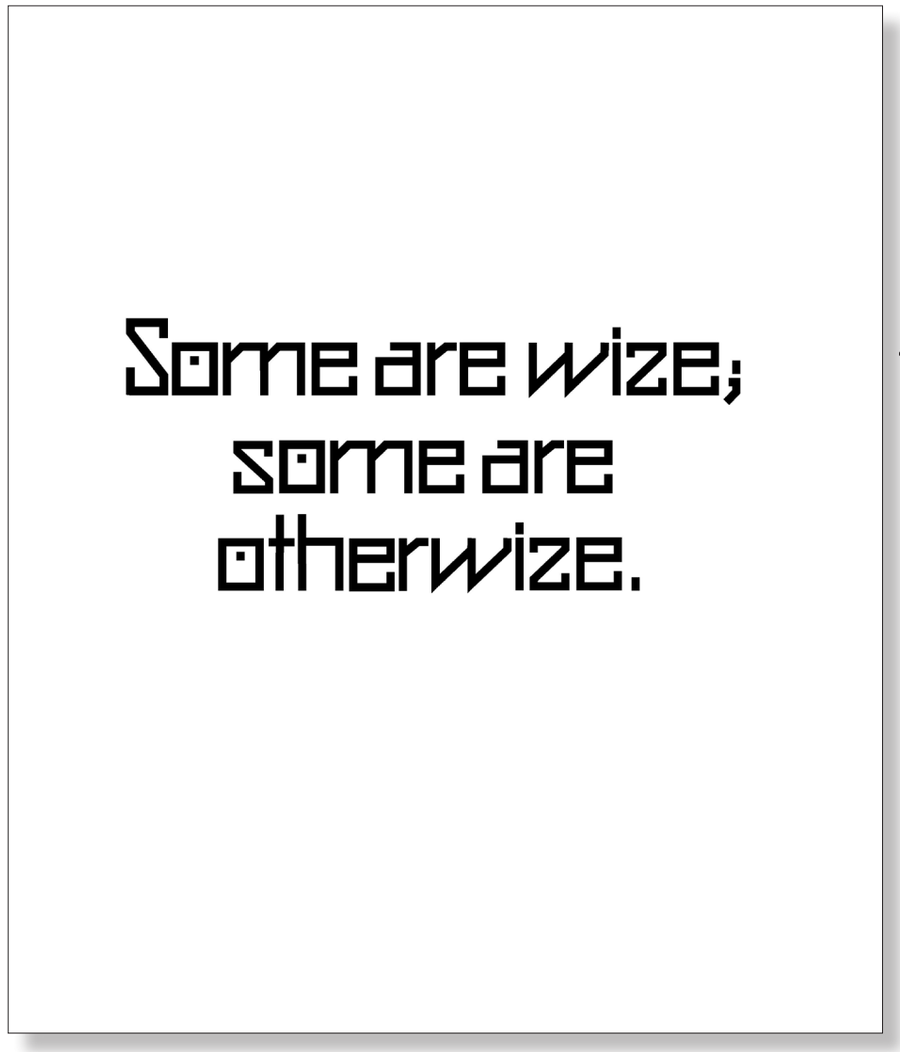


Fig. 29. Rigor Mortis Medium & Soft

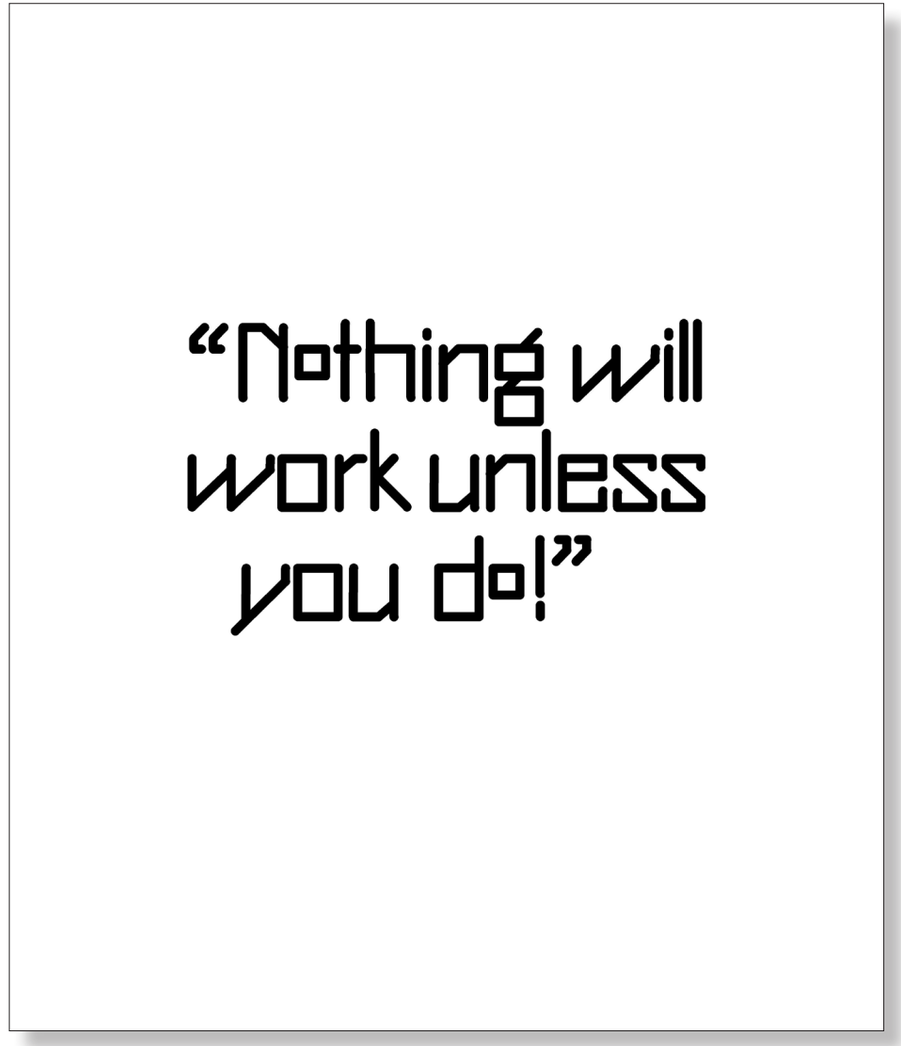


Fig. 30. Rigor Mortis Solid

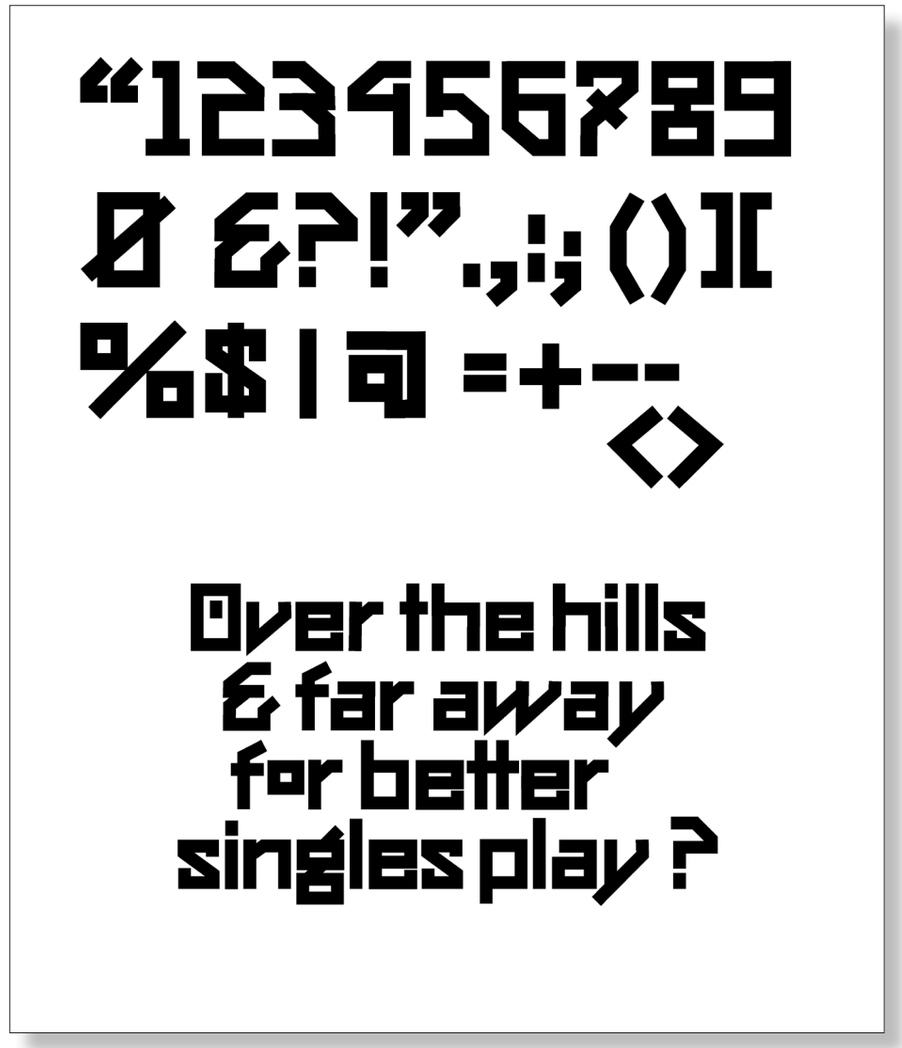


Fig. 31. Rigor Mortis Solid but Soft

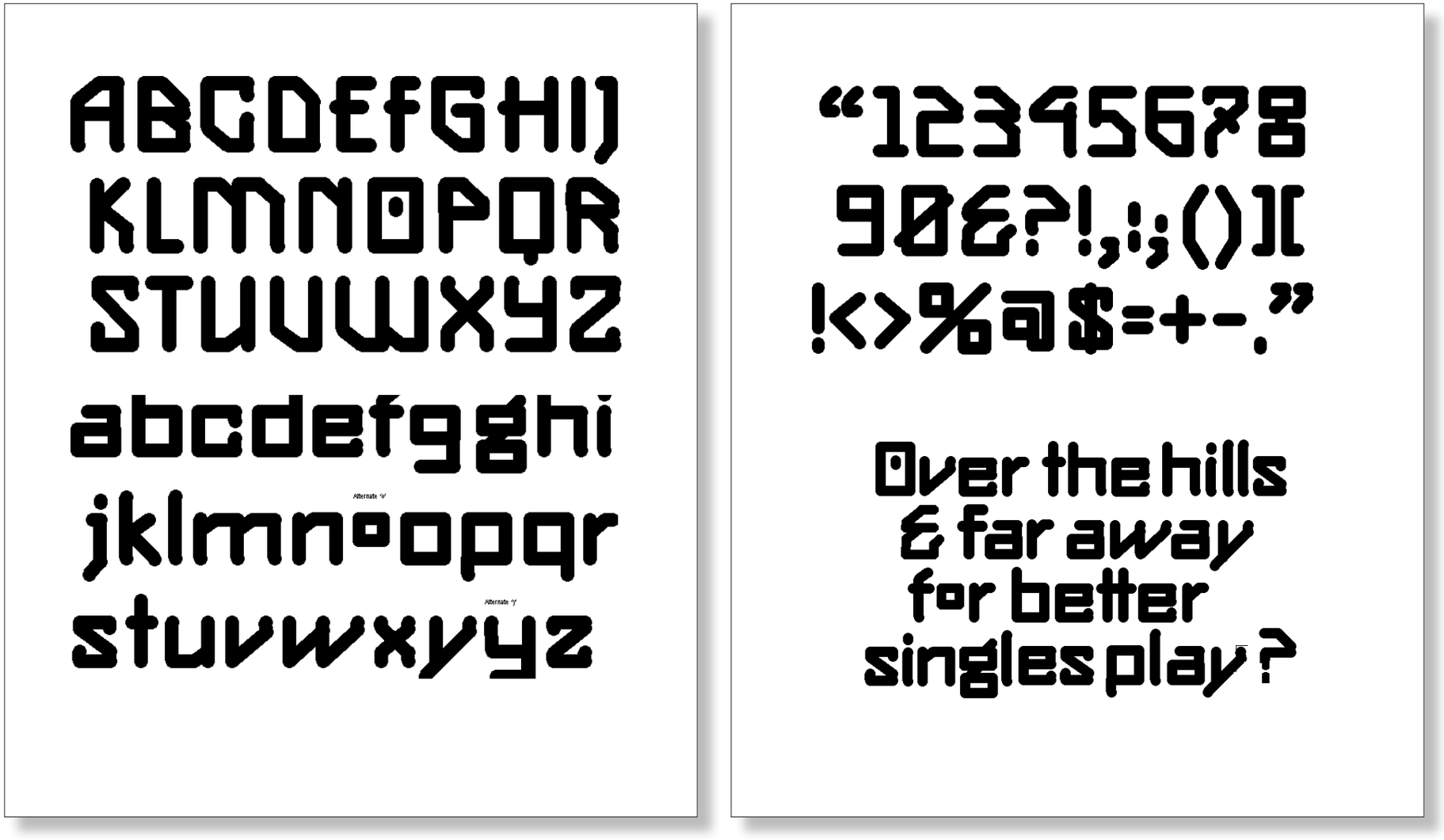


Fig. 32. Model Railway Light

Model Railway was derived from Letraset straight rules and corner elements (sheets IL557; 558) with the aim of creating an extended text face in the manner of 'Eurostyle'.
Some time after the design was initiated it was realised that the forms (generous corners and smooth oblique junctions) were similar to the layout drawings for model railways.

It is intended that there will be some heavier weights to make for a more useful family – these are currently works in progress.

Big Wheels
keep on
turning

Fig. 33. Morse Medium

Morse came from the desire to use up some of the Letraset sheets of dots that I had left over from other experiments – and also to answer the question "Why do I always design in black?"
It was constructed on a framework of lightly draughted lines to which were added straight and curved strokes made from cut Letraset rules to which dots have been added to create rounded terminals, and of course, the dots.

Morse is designed as a disply face and is available as capitals only at this time.
It is intended to complete the punctuation set and to add small capitals at a later date.

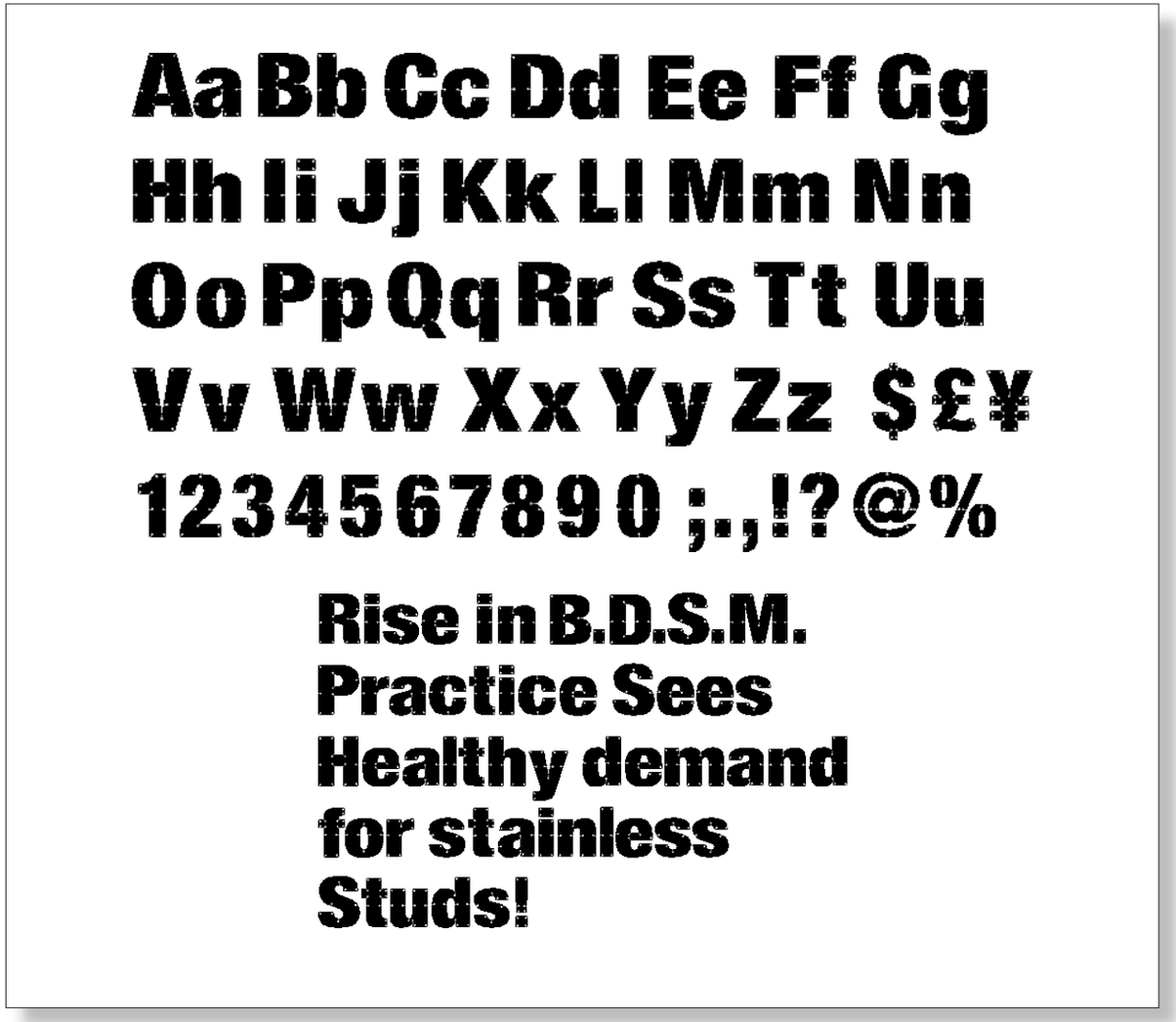


Fig. 34. Studs

Many typefaces are designed with exaggerated white spaces at the junctions of strokes so that when printed the white spaces do not fill in,
either optically or with ink, as could happen with letterpress printing. Traditionally this was done with great subtlety so that readers were not aware of the technique. These features are particularly noticeable when type made using this technique is considerably enlarged.
Studs on the other hand overtly draws attention to these areas and has additional matching elements which form a horizontal linking pattern to give it an even more individual look.

It is designed primarily as a display face, although it sets well in small blocks.

Fig. 35. 1972

1972 is a computer produced version of one of two faces submitted for the Letraset International Type Face Design competiton held in 1972.
The original was created with segments of Letraset circles (sheet IL4280) for the rounded corners which were joined with ruled lines to create outlines which were then inked in.
At the time of the original experiments Letraset's 'Compacta" (various sheets) was one of the most condensed faces available. 1972 was to be a more compact face that would set even darker.

It is suitable for display only and although it was originally intended to be caps and small caps only I have recently added a set of the lower case and options.

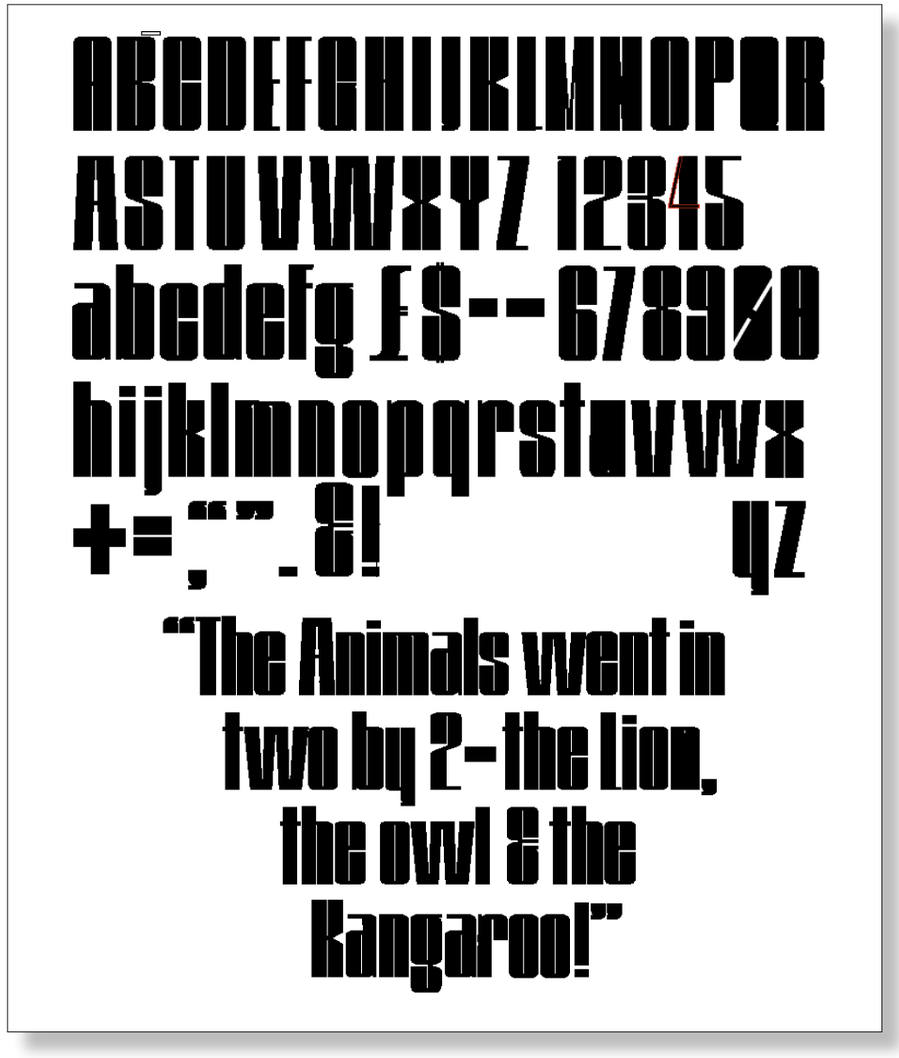


Fig. 36. Megalith

Megaliths are large stones that form prehistoric monuments (e.g., a menhir) or part of one, and at the time work on this face began I was just discovering Asterix The Gaul comics and I wondered what sort of type face would have typified his era?

Megalith was designed and produced using drawn basic shapes to which black and white squares (Letraset sheet IL3249) were added to amplify/amend/distort the starting form.

It is designed to read best in the context of a line of setting and is suitable for display face use only.

Fig. 37. Jetstream

Jetstream is designed as a text face in two weights.
It is based on Helvetica Extra Light (Letraset sheet IL2661) and Helvetica Medium (Letraset sheet IL 723) to which exaggerated serifs and additional decorative elements have been added.
These are meant to accentuate a horizontal reading flow and to evoke an impression of speed and movement (as portrayed in comics), and to add a unique decorative element with
an Art Deco feel.

Jetstream sets well as a text face.
Only the light version is shown here…
the medium weight is still ‘work in progress’.

It's an ill Wind
that Blows
Nobody Anything
at All, Ever!

Fig. 38. Prizm

Prism is another face derived from experiments using Letraset straight rules cut and laid down to a strict grid which limits the angles of terminals and junctions. The grid was also planned with the objective of creating a strong central design element to visually link characters together and to add a horizontal emphasis to the forms.

It has some visual similarities with the lettering used in electronic read-outs and alarm clocks but this was not intended when the design was being developed.

Fig. 39. Al Capone

Al Capone is designed to use Letraset dots as a decorative element to create a linking pattern that continues as the characters are placed as text.
It evokes the pattern of the bullet pattern left on the garage wall at the scene of the Al Capone gang's Valentine's day massacre in Chicago.
This face is unusual in that it uses both the integral spaces of the letters and the spaces between them as design fields to reinforce the linking pattern effect.

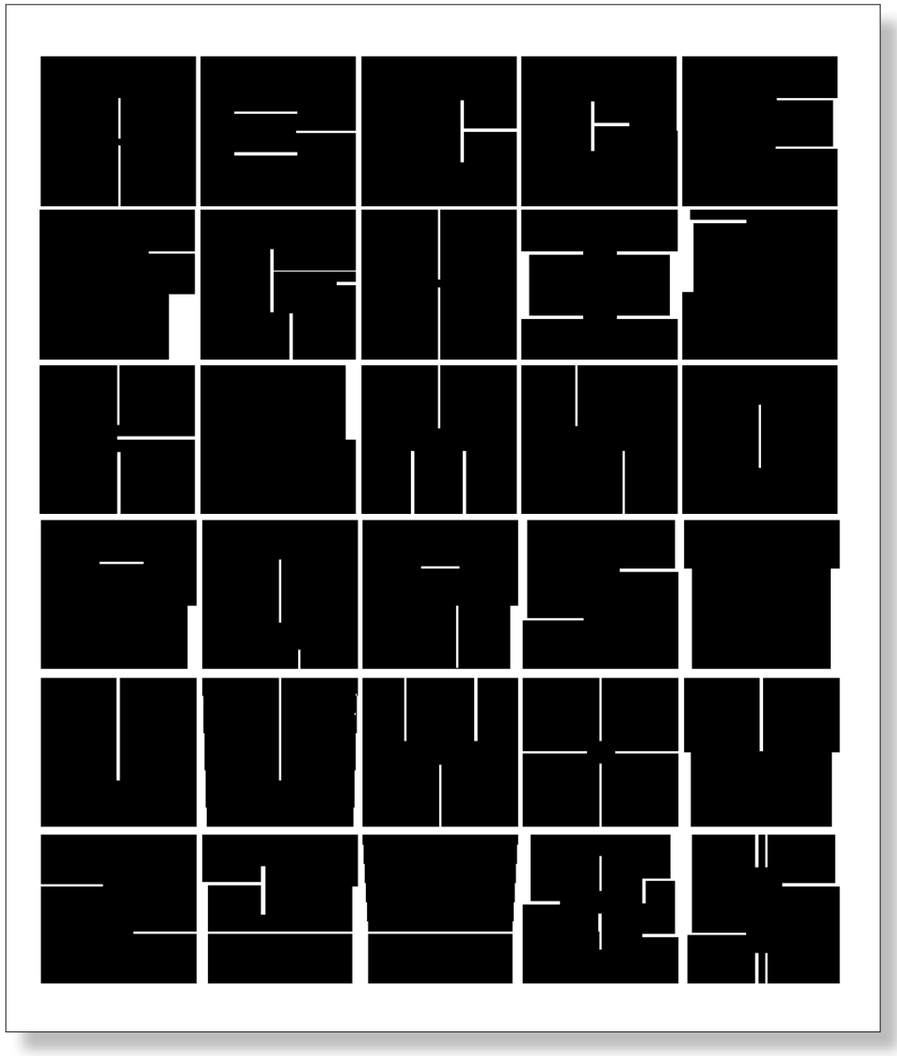
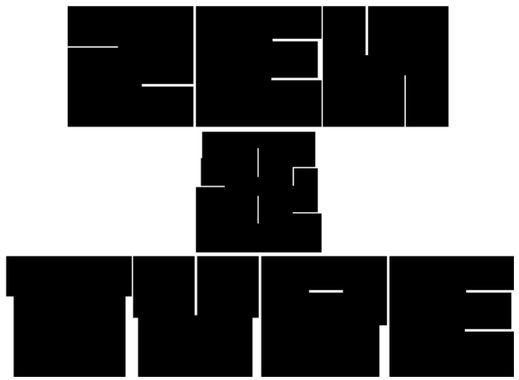


Fig. 40. Zen Blocks

Zen Blocks was developed from experiments to evaluate type faces designed using the minimum number of elements – in this case drawn squares to which Letraset white straight rules (sheet IL4278) have been added.
Various permutations were tried but it was decided that a fixed width face would have some benefits in terms of pattern and block effects where the letter form is only suggested rather than being clearly defined and words can be best deciphered once they can be referenced to their context.

This is definately experimental, and radical, and not a practical text face; it is a display face.



C. The Exhibition

Fig. 41. Concept.

To exhibit my practice I have chosen a selection of my type face designs to be displayed in a flexible environment based on a loose arrangement of five identical triangular free-standing pillars showing type face designs printed on A3 sheets.

Each face of each pillar will display at least one type face at a comfortable reading height; this may involve a 'stacked' display of more than one A3 sheet where weight variations are shown for example.

Dependant on the area finally allocated one of the pillar faces may be used for a 'Serendipity Series' poster.
This poster will be the 'nominal' introduction to the display and it will be placed adjacent to and facing the most likely approach path, although it is not intended that there will be a specific order to view the display.

Or…
posters will be placed/hung adjacent to the approach areas and will also be used as an announcement prior to the exhibition.

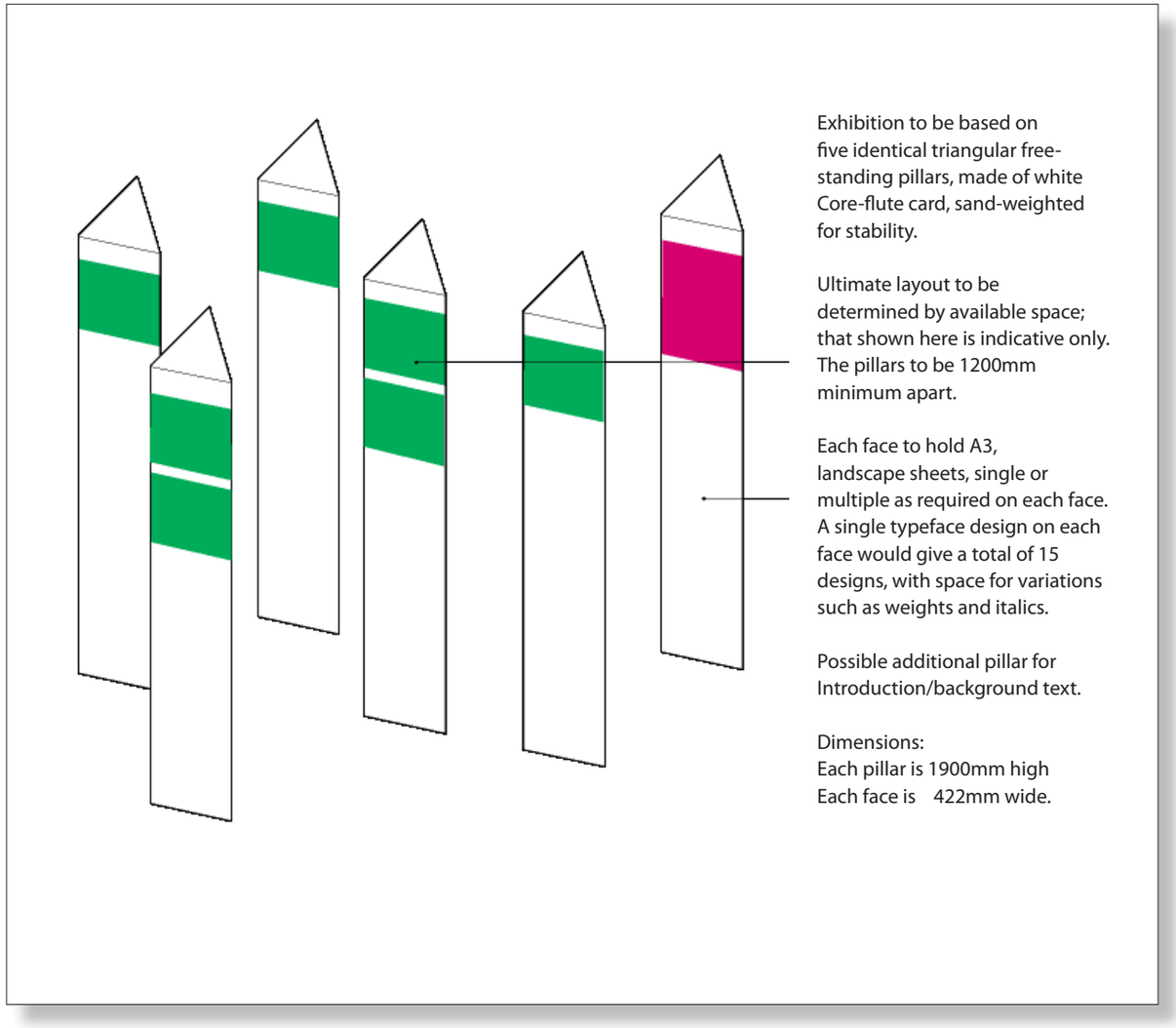


Fig. 42. Announcement poster

The Announcement poster was printed on A3 and used as both a promotional piece and as an introduction placed adjacent to the exhibition.

It was also sent to interested parties in the form of a pdf file with a covering note and invitation to view.

Fig. 43, 44. On site

The final display in situ.
A selection of views taken during the positioning of the pillars and later, when the display was ready for viewing in WE building, level five .

The exhibit was later placed in the Art School St Paul Street entry foyer and remained there until academic week 11 of 2010.

Although there was no specific order in which to view the display, the 'That's all folks…" pillar was the only one with a preferred position.

It was placed on the side of the display considered to be farthest from the most likely approach direction.

The display was mounted in the first instance in the entry foyer of level five, WE building (these shots), and then in the entry foyer of the building on level three.

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Glossary

Arcane:
Understood by few; mysterious or secret.

Artwork:
Prior to the advent of computers, digital files and desk-top publishing, material that was destined to be printed (on paper) had to be prepared by hand.

In both advertising agencies and design offices this work was done by 'finished artists' who prepared boards, ruled to define print areas, including instructions for illustrative material (illustration or photography) placement, and on to which would be attached type pulls (specified and obtained from specialist suppliers), hand lettering if required, any general instructions, protective overlays and secure covers.

This gathering together of all the elements required for a specific job was the 'artwork' of the commercial world, which would then be passed on to a 'process house' to be used to prepare plates for a printer. In the context of this thesis, this traditional 'artwork' was where dry-transfer lettering was applied.

Warren E. Smith

Autographic:
Something written or made with one's own hand… an original manuscript or a work of art.

Miriam Webster Dictionary

CMYK Colour:
"The secondary colours of transmitted light – cyan (process blue), magenta (reddish purple), and yellow are the ones printers use to produce colour work…

The colours of pigments or printing inks are subtractive – in theory all the colours added together should produce black, but in practice printing ink, like school paint, never does produce a pure enough black.

So a fourth colour – black – is added to deepen the dark areas and increase contrast… in print jargon black is referred to as 'key', so the system is known as CMYK."

Pipes A.
Production for Graphic designers. p.93

Graphic Design:
"Graphic design is the business of of making or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface to convey an idea."

Hollis R.
Graphic design. A Concise History. p.7

"Graphic design is the most universal of all the arts. It is all around us, explaining, decorating, identifying: imposing meaning on the world. It is in the streets, in everything we read… it is on our bodies.

We engage with graphic design in road signs, advertisements, magazines, cigarette packets, headache pills, the logo on our t-shirt, the washing label on our jacket.

It is not just a modern or capitalistic phenomenon – streets full of signs, emblems, prices, sales offers, official pronouncements and news would have all been just as familiar to ancient Egyptians, medieval Italians or the people of Soviet Russia…

Rather than a frivolous extra, the uses and purposes of graphic design are so integral to our modern world – civilisation – that Marshal McLuhan named us 'Typographic Man'."

Newark Q.
What is Graphic Design. p 6

"The father of the term 'graphic design' was an American, William Addison Dwiggins, a very successful designer who produced advertising material in the form of posters, pamphlets and adverts in newspapers and periodicals.

In 1922 he wrote: "In the matter of layout forget art at the start and use horse-sense.

The designer's whole duty is to make a clear presentation of the message – to get the important statements forward and the minor parts placed so that they will not be overlooked.

This calls for an exercise of common sense and a faculty for analysis rather than for art."
… the initial ingredients of graphic design were thought to be… type (letters), white spaces, decorations, borders and such accessories

and pictures."

Newark Q.
What is Graphic Design. p 10

One view of graphic design is that it is "… essentially a functional activity, with the needs of the paying client foremost.

The opposing view regards design as too significant to be seen in such terms, and that it ought to be used in ways that emphasise and explore its expressive potential: function versus aesthetic possibility.

These two ideas are always grinding against one another, both within the field of graphic design and within each graphic designer. Graphic designers constantly struggle with these two models – the model of the artist, and the model of the artisan.

The model of the artist is: an individual whose work is concerned with self discovery… only the artist knows when a piece of art is complete, or what the materials or subject matter for each new piece are to be.

Set against this is the model of the artisan: an individual who represents a craft. The artisan is fashioning an object – a book, a bench, an inscription – that must work and be successful, or he or she will not be paid.

The artisan needs to develop methods that are repeatable and reliable. The process is purposeful, the aesthetic style expressive within the terms of the purpose…communication is focussed within the terms of the commission."

Meynell F. quoted by Newark Q.
What is Graphic Design. p.11

Is graphic design an art, science, business, craft, or language? Graphic design is a very new design expression, a phenomena of the last hundred years.

A spontaneous response to the communication needs of the industrial revolution, graphic design was invented to sell the fruits of mass production to growing societies in Europe and North America in the late ninteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Heller S. & Ballance G.
Graphic Design History. p 3.

Ligature:

• noun, 1, a thing used for tying something tightly. 2, a cord used in surgery, especially to tie up a bleeding artery. 3, Music, a slur or tie. 4, Printing a character consisting of two or more joined letters, e.g. it æ;.

• verb, bind or connect with a ligature.
ORIGIN Latin ligatura, from ligare 'to tie'.

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English

In typography faces are often designed with letters (usually pairs) joined together, originally to cause metal type to recreate the pen-strokes of scribes lettering and to create a

Fig. 45.
The original masthead designed by Herb Lubelin for Avant Garde magazine. From this design he developed the type face Avant Garde which featured a great many ligatures.
ITC http://www.itcfonts.com/

more even flow of the set text.

More common in old faces – Gutenberg had to design over 300 characters for his metal type because of the great number of ligatures he had to design to have his type replicate the calligraphic nuances of the day.

One modern design, Avant Garde [Fig. 44.] includes 17 ligatures for capitals alone.

Warren E.Smith.

Logo(s):

1. Short for 'Logotype', which in itself is derived from the name given in some type setting businesses to one line of metal type held in a composing stick ready to be placed in the printing forme/frame for letterpress printing (Fig. 45); it was a 'Stick' or a 'Log of type'.

2. From the Greek 'Logos', meaning 'word', 'account' or 'reason'.

Warren E.Smith.

Typography:

Typography (as in "trade") n. : the craft of composing type and printing from it typography (as in "printing") n. : art and technique of printing with movable type.

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English

The art or craft and practice of choosing and using type; the choice of letter forms and the use of those letter forms in a manner appropriate to a specific task (to communicate, to inform, to entertain, to stimulate) and typically, although not exclusively, for use on a specific medium – paper for example.

Warren E.Smith.

The art, or skill, of designing printed matter, especially printed words – has a history stretching back five hundred years.

Ever since its invention in the fifteeth century printing has been based on the use of moveable types and this this technology has conditioned the design of everything…

McLean R.

The T&H Manual of Typography

WYSIWYG Screen:

What You See Is What You Get.

Prior to the introduction of this technology computer users had to have at least a basic understanding of codes and layout commands.

WYSIWYG (screens) created a user interface that allows the user to view something very similar to the end result while the document is being created.

In general WYSIWYG implies the ability to directly manipulate the layout of a document without having to type or remember names of layout commands.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WYSIWYG

Retrieved June 2009.

Fig. 46.
Metal type for letterpress printing – the individual metal letters placed as lines on a composing stick ready to be placed in the forme for printing.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Composing_stick

1. Three major brands of dry transfer lettering were available from the mid 1960's. They were: Letraset, from the UK, marketed aggressively world-wide; Mecanorma, from France, marketed primarily in Europe and with limited access in other markets, and Chart Pak and Presstype, from the USA, marketed primarily in the USA and with limited access in other markets.

In most markets it was not long before 'minor' competitive brands appeared as local entrepreneurs tried to compete with the Letraset brand phenomonon.

2. The practitioners are three designers who were my contemporaries during the 1960's and 1970's in Christchurch, and who are still practicing, and one other designer from the same era who is now retired.

The manager is Mr Mike Travers, an owner and current Marketing Director of Letraset UK.

The retailer is Graeme Harris, owner and Managing Director of Gordon Harris, The Art & Graphic Store, which has been operating since 1975 and is still owned and operated by the Harris family.

3. Where audio-recording was not possible field notes were taken.

4. All participants signed consent forms as part of the AUT Ethics Approval process.

5. Donald Schön (1930 – 1997). Graduated from Yale (in 1951) where he studied philosophy.

Schön's work challenged practitioners to reconsider the role of technical knowledge versus "artistry" in the development of professional excellence.

His work significantly affected studies of design, teacher education, and health.

6. Transcript: group meeting; I.M. p.59 & p.62

7. In 1988 (at the end of Letraset's market dominance) the Letraset catalogue offered the following product range:

Lettering and numerals:

The Standard type face range; Letragraphica and Premier Letragraphica; Non-latin alphabets; Hellenic typefaces; Hebrew typefaces; Bodytype.

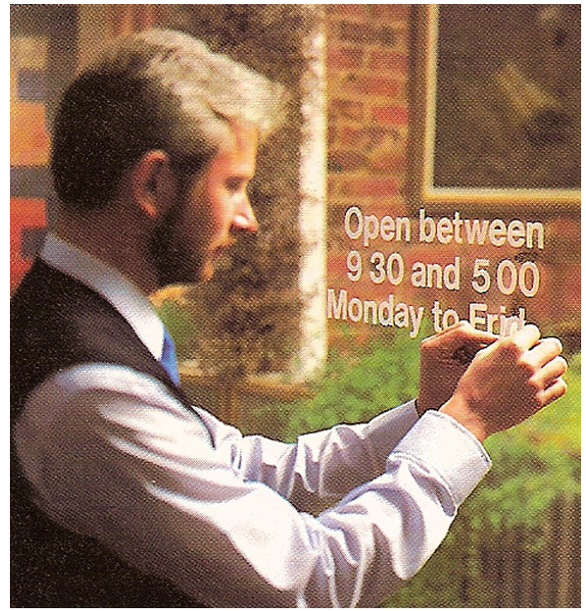

Fig. 47.
Letrasign; self adhesive, pre-cut lettering designed for small signage that could be done by business operators.
Letraset 1988 catalogue

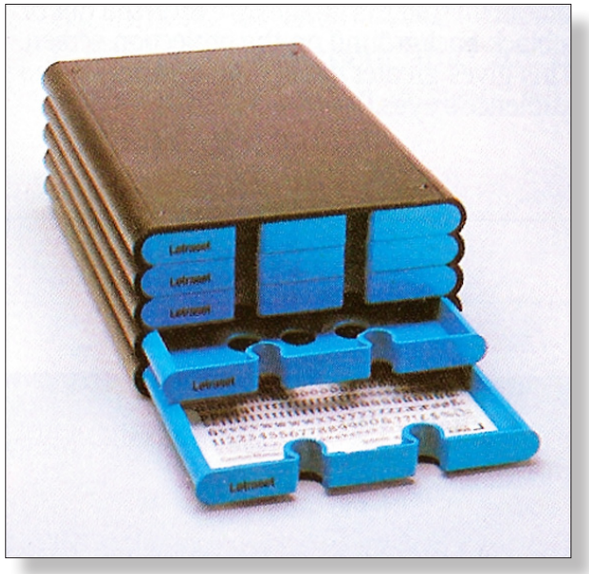

Fig. 48.
The basic Letraset modular interlocking plastic storage units.
Letraset 1988 catalogue

Rules; borders and symbols.
Illustrations; architectural symbols; scientific symbols; technical art sheets.
Tone and texture: Letratone; Instantex.
Tapes: Letraline.
Colour products: Pantone specifiers.
Pens and Markers.
Paper; Colour key papers.
Overlay film.
Audio-visual products: letravision pens; markers and film.
Letrasign (Fig. 46).
Letratrim (paper cutters).
Letrafile (filing system).
Custom graphics.
Laminating products and laminating system.
Sprays: Protective coatings.
Adhesives: Sprays and 'tack' sheets.
Knives; blades; burnishers.
Omnicrom colour transfer system.
Storage units (Fig. 47).
Papers and boards: Art boards; Illustration boards; drawing and sketch pads.
Letraset 1988 catalogue

8. After some early difficulties (lack of funds and technical difficulties with the ink and adhesive mixtures for example) and a bit of luck (Letraset benefitted from a printers strike in May and June of 1959, just as they were starting to demonstrate and sell their new product), Letraset began to make an impression with its target market groups.
"All over the country, people searching for an alternative to letterpress typesetting discovered Letraset and once they had used it, recognised it as a valuable tool, not just a substitute…"
Chudley J. (1974)
Letraset: A Lesson in Growth. p.7
Century. 1974

"The unexpected boost from the fall-out of the printers strike boosted the cash flow and set the struggling company on its way. It was at this time (early in 1961) that Letraset made its first foray into exports.

Business men from Canada, Holland and Australia were eager to be involved with the product, but the United States were a more difficult proposition.

"In early 1961 Dai Davies (the inventor of Letraset) made a couple of visits to the USA to look at the market for our product and during the second trip he discovered the thing we most feared – another company had produced a dry transfer similar in some ways to the one we had

been keeping under wraps for some time. It was poor quality but it worked and was on sale…

Dai promised the Americans production samples within two months and full stock within six months, and the Americans agreed to pay… within ten days of delivery.

The order was enormous… $25,000 with a further $25,000 to follow…

Ten years and two Queen's Awards for Exports later, exports were over £3,500,000 a year."
Chudley J. (1974).
Letraset: A Lesson in Growth. p.12
Century.

9. "Rubylith was a plastic film developed as part of the process required to produce offset and Litho printing plates.

It was a clear film covered with a coloured (Ruby) membrane into which shapes could be cut and removed as required.
… as a result of a method of production developed by Gary Gillette, a South African working for Letraset… he developed a system for cutting art work for letters on Rubylith.

So it was entirely his idea; he got sheets of Rubylith, which we used to use at Letraset for masking, and he developed a knife that would cut out characters in the Rubylith… which gave an absolutely perfect edge, so that when you photographed it and enlarged it, it always presented a perfect edge."
Alan Meeks interview.

9. "It is interesting to note that Letraset was launched as a product specifically aimed at advertising industry Creative Directors and Art Directors, as a way to give them more control over their use of type and as a way to do that more economically than the other systems of the day, those systems being traditional metal-setting and the new photo setting."
Chudley J. (1974)
Letraset: A Lesson in Growth. p.72
Century.

10. "The manipulation of type has become increasingly important in graphic design… designers are constantly discovering new ways of using basic technology, including hand techniques, to manipulate type for specific designs.

Sources of type for manipulation include film-setting, dry transfer letters… letter forms thus obtained can be altered by hand using tools such as mechanical pens and brushes, or they can be dissected with the scalpel and reassembled as a paste-up."
Neuenschwander B. (1993. Reprinted 2004).
Letterwork. Creative Letterforms in Graphic Design. 4 p.107
Phaidon. London.

"Of all the branches of graphic design, type is always among the first to become involved with new technology.

Type is a tool and not an end product, so type designers must behave as engineers as well as designers.

Drawing a font implies being able to reproduce it mechanically somewhere else, so a change in the technical environment always has a profound impact on the type community.

With the introduction of copperplate engraving, lithography, wood type, and phototype, graphic designers were suddenly allowed to create forms and systems that were previously impossible.

At each new stage of history, another set of constraints was lifted, and with varying degrees of seriousness, designers would investigate the potential of new media…

Phototype studios of the sixties and seventies took advantage of the flexibility of spacing allowed by film and designs with interlocking characters and exuberant swashes,

finials, ligatures and biform alternates were added to type catalogues…
the tyranny of lead was officially over, and designers had a field day. (Fig. 48.)

A new technology had arrived and with it a new age of experimentation… at each point in history, designers and manufacturers have exploited what is specific to the new technology."
Tobias Frere-Jones (1997. Originally published in Zed 1994).
Looking Closer 2. p.16 – 18.
Edited by Bierut M. Drenttel W. Heller S. & Holland D.
Allworth Press.

11. Central to Michael Polanyi's thinking was the belief that creative acts (especially acts of discovery) are shot-through or charged with strong personal feelings and commitments (hence the title of his most famous work 'Personal Knowledge').

Arguing against the then dominant position that science was somehow value-free, Michael Polanyi sought to bring into creative tension a concern with reasoned and critical interrogation with other, more 'tacit', forms of knowing.

Polanyi's argument was that the informed guesses, hunches and imaginings that are part of exploratory acts are motivated by what he describes as 'passions'. They might well be aimed at discovering 'truth', but they are not necessarily in a form that can be stated in propositional or formal terms.

As Michael Polanyi (1967: 4) wrote in The Tacit Dimension, we should start from the fact that 'we can know more than we can tell'. He termed this pre-logical phase of knowing as 'tacit knowledge'.

Tacit knowledge comprises a range of conceptual and sensory information and images that can be brought to bear in an attempt to make sense of something (see Hodgkin 1991). Many bits of tacit knowledge can be brought together to help form a new model or theory. This inevitably led him to explore connoisseurship and the process of discovery…

We must conclude that the paradigmatic case of scientific knowledge, in which all faculties that are necessary for finding and holding scientific knowledge are fully developed, is the knowledge of approaching discovery.

To hold such knowledge is an act deeply committed to the conviction that there is something there to be discovered.

It is personal, in the sense of involving the personality of him who holds it, and also in the

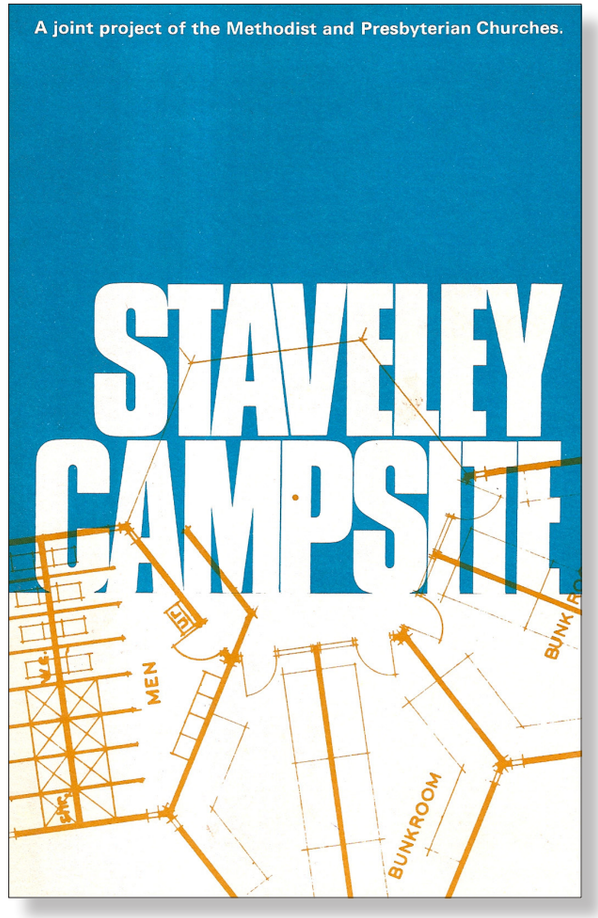

Fig. 49.
Brochure cover design showing the tight letter and line spacing popular in the 1970's. First photosetting and then to an even greater degree Letraset made this possible.
Warren E. Smith

sense of being, as a rule, solitary; but there is no trace in it of self-indulgence.

The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His act of knowing exercises a personal judgement in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend. (Polanyi M. 1967: 24-5)

12. The International Typeface Corporation, one of the worlds leading type foundries (and the company that Letraset bought into in the late 1970's), specifies that if designs are submitted for consideration for commercial use they must contain 225 characters (Fig. 49).

They also specify that "If you have designed an uppercase-only typeface, ITC may require certain additional characters, such as small capitals, ornaments or alternate letterforms which can be placed in lowercase positions.

If appropriate, these characters will be determined by (the designer) and ITC.
ITC http://www.itcfonts.com/

Further to the above, Alan Meeks, the English type designer interviewed in 2007, said:

"Well, when I design type faces the complete set that I do is 206 characters…but when I say that, it's not actually designing characters, because you've got accents – you've got 'A' with five accents; you've got 'E' with five accents; and then a lower case 'a'… so that's what you do when you do a complete character count… but when you design a font, you've got to put everything in there… I think the actual character count is something like 118 characters that have to be designed."
Alan Meeks interview.

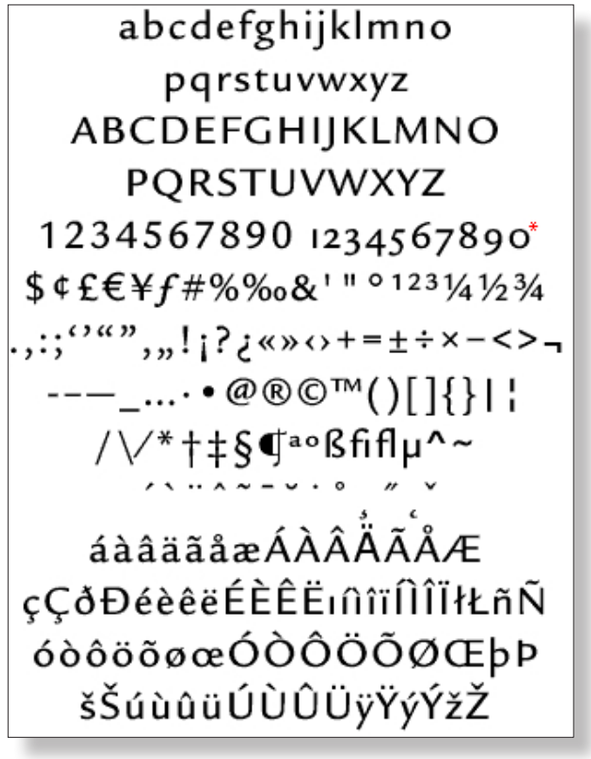

Fig. 50.
The full set of characters required for a commercially viable type face design includes all those shown on this specification sheet issued by the International Typeface Corporation.
ITC http://www.itcfonts.com/

Interviewees

The following are the people who were interviewed for this project:

Alan Meeks.

Born in London in 1951; went straight from school in 1970 to join Graphic Systems as a trainee, artist, typographer and typeface designer.

In 1975 he joined Letraset as senior designer and as chiefly responsible, along with Colin Brignall in making Letraset into a serious font source (foundry).

In 1984 Alan left Letraset to set up his own studio whilst still producing typefaces for Letraset and ITC.

With his own studio Alan started to do more work in corporate identity and packaging, designing logos (for Tesco, Rolls-Royce and Champions League and also corporate typefaces for Somerfield, Cathay Pacific, Tarmac and others).

In 2004 he set up his own foundry, AlanMeeks.com to produce a range of mainly modern text and sub text designs.
Source: www.identifont.com/show?1Q2.
Retrieved May 2007

Ian Munro.

Graduated from Canterbury University in 1964 and applied for work in an advertising agency (Claude and Associates) as a copywriter – got the job, and later progressed to another advertising agency (Urlwin and Associates) for about a year… from there he went to the art department of Bascands the Printers, a large production house dealing in major work, both locally and overseas.

He was offered the chance to start his own business and took over the position of Peter Calcott (then a well known Christchurch Graphic Designer), continuing working with Renzie Hanham and Les Taylor in the front office of DesignPrint Press Limited, in Worcester Street, Christchurch.

After several years he re-established himself as a free-lance graphic designer in Montreal Street, Christchurch, this time in conjunction with a group called 'Liase-on Print', where he worked until he retired.

Gordon Mins.

Arrived in New Zealand in the 1960's from the UK and has spent most of his career working in advertising agencies, as a free-lance designer and in education.

He is currently head of the graphic design department of The City Art College, Christchurch.

Renzie Hannam.

Is a free-lance designer who was a partner in DesignPrint Press Limited and has been working in Christchurch for some 30 years.

Nigel Humphries.

Began working as an assembly artist in advertising agency studios in the late 1950s and moved on to become an advertising agency studio manager. He now practices as a free-lance designer in Christchurch.

The following are people who had ‘informal discussions’ about this project.

Graeme Harris.
Owner/Managing Director of Gordon Harris studio and art supplies retailer, Auckland and throughout New Zealand.

Mike Travers
One of the owners and currently Marketing Director of Letraset Limited, Ashford. UK.

Transcripts
from interviews & field notes

Interview with Mr Alan Meeks,
at Little Chalfont, Buckinghamshire, England
Monday September 10, 2007.
WES: The author (Warren E. Smith)
AM: Alan Meeks

WES: So, Alan, how did you get involved in Letraset?

AM: Well, when I was at school… I never went to art school… but I was good at… I was very good at art… and for some reason… I don't know why, but I really loved lettering.

And I think it probably came from my dad – because my dad was very (?); he was an accountant and his books were beautiful, and he had (a) lovely… copperplate writing hand… nothing spectacular but very beautifully neat and rounded cursive letters.

So he wrote beautifully and he was always very keen on people writing nicely.

And if you see his books – they were a work of art in themselves. He used to work for the News of the World… so, he was a book keeper for the News of the World … and I'll bet if you could look into the archives of the News of the World and see my dad's books… absolutely beautiful; all colour coded – red ink; blue ink; whichever… so – so I suspect I got it from him, because he was really… he was (?)…

So I was good at art and I used to do a lot of lettering, 'cos I loved lettering. So I left school and I joined a firm called Graphic Systems. Graphic Systems was a firm that had been set up by about five or six people who had left Letraset – you may have come across their name – a guy called Gary Gillette was the name… he is a bit of an unsung hero in the Letraset history. As far as I'm concerned he was the most important person there.

He's still around – he doesn't live very far away but I haven't seen him for about seven or eight years – but he was – I'll try and give you the history of it.

Gary… because he was my most influential person in my life I should think… he's a coloured guy, a South African, and he came over to this country and he got a job on Letraset – he was a graphic artist – and he was a brilliant artist… and had an absolute love of lettering. And he was at Letraset for a number of years and then he left there and he and four or five other guys started this firm called Graphic Systems; so I went for an interview and Gary gave me the job working there.

Gary had developed – an art work system; up till he came along all the art work had been done 'pen and ink"… he developed a system for cutting art work on Rubylith.

So it was entirely his idea; he got sheets of Rubylith, which we used to use at Letraset for masking, and he developed a knife that would cut out characters in the Rubylith… which gave an absolutely perfect edge, so that when you photographed it (and enlarged it), it always presented a perfect edge.

He developed this system and of course it just got taken up by Letraset and got used as a matter of course really, 'cos he was an employee. And when he left there, he left because he thought type setting (at that time) was really poor quality, and he thought that if he could take this system of art and get it working, he could re-cut all the fonts that were around (which were pretty rubbish; the old Stephenson Blake faces were all worked-out, with soft corners and

everything) – so what he wanted to do was re-cut every type face and set up a type setting company… the same as Letraset, but the idea was to re-cut every type face and set up a type setting company where the type would be absolutely beautiful and crisp; really perfect lettering, and he set up this company called Graphic Systems, which is what I joined – but I kind of struggled.
It was an awful lot of work, for, little respect nowadays – who the hell cared?

WES: I was just about to say, was there a healthy demand for that amount of precision?

AM: Well, there was a kind of demand: everybody wanted it – but who the hell noticed it?
So we had a response and they (Graphic Systems) tried to re-cut every font!
They started of with the basics; the Helvetica and the Times, and they tried to gradually over the years to cut everything fresh, so you had these fonts which were absolutely beautiful; perfectly cut, re-drawn and everything.
But it was an ideal – but not commercially viable.
So – I stayed there for a number of years – and I worked with Colin Brignall; I met Colin there and we worked together for about four or five years and it wasn't really going anywhere – we weren't earning much money so we both… an offer came up from Letraset, so we both left and joined Letraset.

'Course the other thing we were doing was designing decent type faces. Now, Letraset didn't have a decent design team, they couldn't for some unknown reason, I don't know why that was – they couldn't design decent type faces and they really struggled… anyway Letraset had a design problem and its way of overcoming the problem was to employ a… they set up Letragraphica.
Letragraphica was going to be their new design policy (leader), and they set up a team to – they invited everybody from everywhere to send in type face designs and they set up a panel which consisted of probably the world's best typographers and type designers (mumbles several names; ends with "… Colin Forbes"; anyway, the world's best – a panel of six people.")
And for some unknown reason they chose absolute crap!
I could never really understand, but I suspect that letraset didn't tell them that they were looking for 'text faces'; they thought Letraset wanted 'character-full' display faces.

WES: People at the (other) end of the system used to wait with baited breath for the next issue (of Letragraphica)…

AM: I know! I know! It all came out as a big issue.
The panel got together. They got put up in a top London hotel and they were the big panel meeting and they would choose something like eight faces, wouldn't they, and those eight faces would be the next Letragraphica issue.
But the faces they chose were absolute rubbish.

WES: Well, they weren't all rubbish, but I know what you mean… they were very limited.

AM: Well, no, they weren't all rubbish; that's a bit unfair – but they were – I don't know what happened here… because their criteria – I think – I mean look at (name muffled; Zapf I think?); a genius; a brilliant designer, and he designed fantastic type faces, but when he got on the Letraset panel he chose rubbish and I think what it was – was that they were pandering to a commercial market, or they thought they were.

They thought they (the public) didn't want their high-falutin' brilliant designs – they thought the public … they thought of Letraset (and rightly so as it turned out) as a product that was going to be bought by the masses, not by graphic designers.

So this went on for a number of years and Letraset were aware that something was going very wrong because they were being seen as a joke typographic company, so they decided that what they would have to do was get some in-house designers – so they advertised… me and Colin answered the ad… and we became their design team; just the two of us.

We had about seven or eight people working there… who were already working there… and they were our staff, but we were the two designers who would start designing 'serious' (type faces) because Letraset wanted to be seen to be 'serious' as a typographic company and not as a joke lettering company.

WES: And had you been… were you involved in lettering before that?

AM: Well, with that company, Graphic Systems, yes.

But I was very young; I was only about twenty-two at the time, but I'd designed a few type faces of my own which were fairly OK, so I suppose… I'd met Colin at work for Letraset previously, so had a bit of a pedigree.

And we started designing.

Then the Letraset panel was semi-packaged (?) at this stage, so I attended one or two meetings with them and I realised that these people really just wanted to chose the trendy designs that were never going to have any lasting… they had no sort of typographic appeal really.

They were fashionable – there were only a few of them might be used, but they were never going to be taken seriously.

So we managed to persuade management that they should disband the panel and from then on Colin and me just did what we liked.

WES: So which one of you designed "Aachen"?

AM: Colin.

WES: And that was about that period?

AM: It would have been, yes.

WES: Because that was a Letraset face originally wasn't it?

AM: Yes. It was one of the early ones.

WES: It's the only one that comes to mind at this moment – first on the list!

AM: Yes. First on the list!

WES: One of the reasons I'm doing this book (discussed briefly before the interview began), 'A Chronological History of Type' it's called – 'When was that type face born?'.
I'm up to 72 pages so far – it's just an alphabetical list – it's a tall, vertical format thing and I realised shortly after I started that it would never be finished because people are continually flooding the market with type face designs – but one of the questions that's often asked of me is "How do people name type faces?"
And I say, "God; who knows!"
How do you know that you're not picking a name that somebody hasn't already picked?
So I said "Well, OK, if I produce a book which is a list of all the type faces, with the dates and who designed them, within itself, from its very structure, it will tell you where the gaps are in the alphabetical range for the names.
And I think it is already obvious to me that 'S' (I think it is), and two other letters of the alphabet are where there are enormous numbers of type faces named with those initials.

AM: I know Colin named Aachen for no other reason than to get two 'a's in there.

WES: So when you were designing, at this stage, OK, you were designing 'serious' type faces?

AM: Yes. Well, I think fairly serious.
We were not into text faces, but we were into headline faces; but not headline faces that were joke headline faces – which – OK – there is a market for that.

WES: So who designed Watusi Bold? My favourite…

AM: I don't know.

WES: Whenever I'm explaining to the students about when you're picking a type face for text you never use ridiculous type faces that are not designed right (for text), like Watusi Bold.
And they all rush off to look it up – I'm sure it was a Letraset face.

AM: Not in my day!

WES: It was a back slant with bulbous bottom strokes.
Probably came out in the sixties – flower power and all that.

AM: Yeah. Well, there's a few of them.
One called 'Bottleneck' which was a bit like that.

WES: Remember there was a Letraset type face competition?

AM: Well, the competition was what gave me my job, because that was a disaster.

WES: I entered two designs for that. I was bitterly disappointed when they weren't accepted; I thought they were great!
You won't remember this of course, but I sent in a type face called 'Chippolata Bold' which was big and fat and very rounded.
I thought "What can I do that, not so much has never been done before, but which would be very difficult to use, because it seemed to me that a lot of type faces were designed very perversely and they would be of very little use, and still are.

AM: Well, it was the competition that really got me my job, because the winners of that competition… I think the winner itself (?) was a kind of sans serif with a shadow and all in outline… I don't think I've ever seen it used… I mean it was unbelievably poor.

WES: It was too complex?

AM: The complexity wasn't the problem. Even complex designs can be used, but as a piece of typography it was completely irrelevant.
In a million jobs there might be a use for it, but as a competition winner it made Letraset look stupid.
And they realised they'd really got to change… it's quite an interesting story actually because when I got there, there were still ramifications from the dreadful competition.
The guy that ran it – a guy called Tony – who became a good friend of mine – he said the competition was… "horrendous", and Bombere, the winner, was designed by an American girl who seemed to think she had designed something fairly spectacular.
And I suppose she'd won the competition… she was entitled to… but the thing was… they'd done a royalty agreement with her and the royalty agreement said, as all Letraset royalty agreements do, that 'you will get two pence (or whatever the amount was) for every Letraset sheet sold'… right… so that's fine, you'd think she'd be quite happy with that.
She then obviously gave it to a lawyer who realised that the wording said you got two pence for every sheet of Letraset sold, because she said "every sheet of Letraset you sell, regardless of what type face is used, you should be paying me royalties!"
Whether it got to court or not I don't know… eventually they gave her a pay-off because I think if it had gone to court… it was obviously a (?) error… but she tried it on because she wasn't going to make 2p very often on the sheets of Bombaire!

WES: And did any – I don't remember specifically – but did any of the typefaces that were entered actually become best sellers?

AM: No!
I can't remember… they weren't… when I got there one of my jobs was to go through every type face that was sent in, which was quite entertaining… I quite enjoyed it… because we got stuff from all over the world, because we were world famous, and most of it – 99% of it – was complete and utter rubbish.
I mean people drawing outlines of letters on a piece of toilet paper and they sent it in!

WES: And I suppose most of the people would have only designed part alphabets, like a part font; they wouldn't have designed punctuation and the whole bit?

AM: No.
We had to that ourselves, but you are right, they just did the basic A to Z.

WES: Yes. Because in education, every year, you get people who say "I want to design a type face", and you say "Why?"
There's over 4,000 out there already! You know… who needs another one?
And they say "Well I think I can…"
So you say "OK. Do you realise how many characters you've got to design?"
"The alphabet?"
"No, no, no! You've got to do punctuation – you've got to do options – and you've got to do… "
And they say "Oh really, god – it's quite difficult isn't it!"

AM: Well, when I design type faces the complete set that I do is 206 characters… but when I say that, it's not actually designing characters because you've got accents – you've got 'A' with five accents; you've got 'E' with five accents.
And then a lower case 'a'… so that's what you do when you do a complete character count… but when you design a font, you've got to put everything in there… I think the actual character count is something like 118 characters that have to be designed; and then double up; and then…

WES: I asked because I've designed, and still do, a few type faces, but I've never taken them forward – and I always stop because I think I can't be bothered with all the rest of it – I want to move on…

AM: Yes… it's so boring! I know.

WES: Now – when you started at Letraset they wanted you to be serious; when I read the book (about the invention and development of the product), it was obvious that Dai Davies was aiming at the advertising industry and the commercial world… and… did anybody really understand how wide it would spread in its use?

AM: No. I don't think they did at all.
I mean, Dai Davies was a little bit before me… I hadn't met the guy. But he kind of moved on… and made a lot of money… so by the time I joined, even though it was still a relatively new product, the sort of initiaters had all moved on… they'd taken their money and retired hadn't they.
But I don't think any of them forsaw the impact they'd have.
They obviously thought they'd got a good product, and they thought they'd make a bit of money, but none of them thought about how big they were.

WES: I'm just trying to think of the name of the guy who was the

accountant who wrote the book… it was a good little book…

AM: There is apparently another guy who I know who works for a guy called Dave Farey… he's trying to write another book… nothing's really been written since that first book – which was purely a business book and a background to how much money had been made… which kind of destroyed the company.

WES: But they were lucky weren't they, because there was a printers strike – very early on in the development…

AM: Yeah, there was a printers strike and it meant that the advertising agencies in particular could continue to do work without having to go to the type setters… it's (the book) not particularly interesting to someone like me who's interested in the design side of it, but it does give an insight into how it was.

WES: One of the things that I grew up as a designer with… this … what I guess is a sort of a myth about Letraset… and the myth was that there were three friends who decided that they would like to be able to make some money out of the advertising world and they thought the way to do it would be to make it easy to do good type setting and they all put £500 in, and they used that up fairly quickly, and they all put another £500 in and they used that up fairly quickly… and that there was a man called Dai Davies who perservered and was just about to crack the problem when the money ran out again and the other two guys said "No. That's it. Not going to invest any more."

And he said "I'm going to put another couple of hundred pounds in, and he cracked it!

So I read the book not from a business perspective but because I really wanted to find out whether I had the right story or not.

AM: I've heard that story too, and I'm sure it's absolutely true.

WES: So… life after Letraset… you're still a full time type designer?

AM: Yes I am, although a lot of my business now is designing 'corporate' type faces for logos and for use in 'corporate' documents and signage and so on.

I'm still selling digital faces from my web site… I set myself up as a type face 'retailer' and it's going well.

Interview ends. ■

Transcript
A taped narrative from Mr Ian Munro,
Christchurch, New Zealand
Wednesday December 10, 2008

"In 1959 I won a scholarship to the Ilam Art School… I was about 22 and took the general course from 1960 to 1963… and went to training college in Auckland in 1964.

I came back down to Christchurch in 1965 expecting to be a teacher, but there were no art teacher jobs available in the Canterbury area at that time. Having been married and with a baby on the way I had to start looking for a job and got one at Shirwin Advertising, owned by Jack Urlwin.

I learned a lot there.

In 1969 I started my own business, sharing a premises (in East Christchurch) with the photographer Lloyd Park.

The business world is really quite tough unless you have the enthusiasm and the drive to keep at it and you have to put up with things that you perhaps normally wouldn't.

The first time I came across Letraset was, of course during my agency days and I used it for a number of years in the preparation of design and art work and it became a standard procedure to use Letraset, especially for initial letters, headings and sub headings and while the other bits and pieces that came with Letraset, like arrows and asterisks and small illustrations of various things – they were all available and it was very helpful in the preparation of artwork for print.

I'd like to talk a little bit about Letraset and my introduction to it; at the beginning, when I went into the agencies a lot of hand-lettering was done and some of this was quite outstanding because the people that were there had been trained over the years to do the various typefaces and it was very impressive for me.

Around about 1962, when Letraset became available, it very quickly established itself and it became the norm for Letra-setting headings… and body copy and things like that."

Thursday December 11:

"I think I first became aware of Letraset in around 1962, while I was a copywriter at Claude and Associates. I used to go into their art room and see them using this new technique of putting letters down 'the Letraset way' and creating various sorts of compositions and it was quite intriguing for me.

But as I was a copywriter I didn't have the opportunity to use it.

Later as I changed my places of work I did get the opportunity… to create Letraset headings and sub-headings for the type of work that we were doing, which was mainly for newspaper and occasionally something more exciting like an annual report or a four colour brochure of some sort. It actually changed things in a way that people became more focussed on type and what type they used – although Helvetica, in all the weights that it was available was used probably the most, I and a number of others tended to use the more 'classical' faces – Times; Caslon; Goudy; Garamond – and that sort of type because they were considered to add 'classicity' to some of the jobs that we worked on.

I think Letraset's biggest advantage was that it was quick and easy and you really didn't have to spend time when you were specifying type; you could allow yourself the freedom to add headings and sub-headings after you had got the type set.

I think the biggest disadvantage was that you often got caught out through the lack of letters – you might require three capital 'C's' or three

capital ‘D’s’ in a particular heading and you only had two to work with, so you had to get another sheet and it could become quite frustrating if you had a big job of several pages that required headings to be done in Letraset… but it was one of those things, and quite often we would spend half an hour or so going round to places to get the Letraset and waste a certain amount of time at places like Drawing Office Supplies picking up things and learning more of what was available in Letraset.

It was particularly expensive buying this stuff because each sheet was… I can’t remember the dollar cost, but I recall I thought it was quite expensive and if you had a lot of work to do you really had to buy several of these sheets – and they weren’t always available either.

What did Letraset do for me as a practicing graphic designer?

It gave me the ability to look at type and use type in the way that I really wanted to use it.

It gave me a better understanding of what type was about and in fact, as the years went by, I came to think of (Letraset and) type as a single identity, in as much as I grew to love it and what it meant and how it was used – it allowed you to space letters; it allowed you to connect letters; it allowed you to group letters in a certain way to create a little ‘identity’ sometimes and the fact that you could have borders or arrows or asterisks or all these attendant little illustrations made it quite a useful… tool, added to what we otherwise used.

When we used Letraset we invariably ended up with sheets which would have a minimal number of letters or numbers on them and of course these were just stored.

Eventually designers of that time would buy storage containers with Letraset boxes within them and we would just leave these excess sheets with one or two letters on them in the boxes and just add to – put more of them on top as they became less useful.

Everybody had a selection of Letraset, perhaps up to maybe fifteen – sixteen – up to twenty boxes to accommodate everything that they wanted to use because there was such a wide variety of Letraset faces and rules and numbers and everything else that you really needed it on hand; a lot of work in those days was very urgent and often had to be turned around overnight.

Letraset was very helpful in that regard.

And it was great fun to use.

I was basically in the advertising industry as a copywriter to begin with; later I shifted to publishing when I went to Bascands and I really enjoyed that side of what I was doing.

Later of course I started up my own studio and considered myself to be a bit of a designer at that point – hopefully it was a move upwards…

Did I think of Letraset as a serious typographic system?

Yes I did…. it wasn’t the sort of thing you would use to any extent for body type but it was of particular interest (and used as described) and for the occasional border, underline etc.

What sort of work did I use it for?

I used it mostly on newspaper work and booklets and brochures and leaflets; it became used fairly broadly for those types of work but quite often we would not use it at all if it was expedient that we specify type and get the whole ‘whatever we were doing’ set up in type.

The use of Letraset… is sometimes a little bit over-emphasised;

when it first came out I think
we all believed it was the answer to so many of our problems, and for a while it was, but the life of Letraset actually faded very much in the late eighties and early nineties as the computer came in and we were able to do just about everything on the computer.

It (Letraset) was a wondeful system… being able to make things look very smart, the way we wanted it… and apart from the frustrations of not having enough letters… or those (storage) problems that came up with Letraset.

It really, I don't think, had a major effect on graphics as such… in the advertising world, I think typesetting dominated even while Letraset was available and a lot of people prefered to actually set type from the… type setters who actually developed their computers slightly before computers actually came in as full time designers units."

Friday December 12:

"When I reflected on my previous comments I think Letraset had a much bigger effect on me than I was aware of and I'd just like to perhaps explain that…

I think the use of Letraset and particularly the identity of different letter forms and type faces, and the variety and the choice available taught me to appreciate type.

It also taught me about letterspacing, and that little system that we used to use, whether we were using capitals or lower case that we used to group… after we'd Letraset a word or a group of words we'd look at it again through half-closed eyes and group each letter in a set of three and move through the word or the heading and try and have the letters equally spaced visually so that it looked more 'comfortable' and more 'easy to look at' I guess…

It also taught me the advantages of using all caps and the use of caps and lower case – the advantages of one over the other. The use of caps of course made it (text) ever so slightly more difficult to read and the use of caps and lower case made word recognition and reading that much easier and better for the people who were to look at it.

The recognition of letter forms… in lower case was so much better and that little thing we used to use where we blocked off the bottom half of a line of lower case and we could still read what the letters were…

I also learned from using Letraset the dramatic effect of letters… the typeface weight when you were using light and heavy faces together, one emphasising itself over the other and how it made the less dramatic typeface just that much less important.

And Italics; the way italics could emphasise something or make it look more attractive, or could be used in such a way that it added to the article that you were preparing.

I guess it really taught me how to choose between a serif and a sans serif face for a certain job.

(In the) early days when we started off bothering about type we invariably used Helvetica or a sans serif face and we used them in Heavy, Medium and Light but it was the 'done thing' that the effect of the Bauhaus and those schools of thought, particularly from Germany, that sans serif faces were 'the thing'.
But then it became… rather interesting to use serif faces and particularly

the classical faces that I've mentioned earlier; using them in such a way as to give a particular job… a more classical look and a more refined look – although you could get refinement with a sans serif too. I guess at the beginning the sans serif faces dominated and then as people got sick of using them they chose serif faces and there were some lovely designs that were developed one, two and three hundred years ago.…

I guess when I think about it the layout of pages in press and magazine ads and things like annual reports… lettering taught us the use of white space. If you could have some lettering in the middle of no other article it really did make the lettering stand out – it emphasised what you were trying to say.

The use of grids was a way of… without too much effort… getting a regular look to a page and the repeat of that look through a grid system was very effective when you were working on booklets or annual reports which had thirtysix and sometimes fourty eight pages.

It had its effects too when laying out two page spreads… you could actually use the type over two pages in such a way that it connected the two pages together as a unit… it actually made a double page spread a single unit and added drama and cohesiveness to the layout that you were doing… I think when you're using typography it has a way of unifying a publication; the visual continuity of page after page is enhanced with good typesetting and particularly Letraset headings and the way that the graphic image comes through.

In later times when the use of computers had developed this became much easier and Letraset started to 'decay' in use and we were able to actually prepare headings and the layouts and the typesetting and the illustrations altogether in this one computer unit and gradually the use of Letraset died away … but I think it had a large effect on the way… it developed our love for typesetting and… the particular character and the way we used it in those early days was… something I'll never regret learning.

Even today I feel excited on seeing good typesetting and the use of lettering in an appropriate way to advertise a product and get the maximum effect through advertising in a typographical sense…what a wonderful learning (process) in such a surreptitious way … just the benefits of typesetting…and read and understand things and how quickly we can recognise words and the meaning of words when we see it outside… on signage and that sort of thing."

Narrative ends. ■

Copy of a letter from Mr Ian Munro,
Christchurch, New Zealand
December 12, 2008

I hope that what I've done for you here helps you understand the effect that 'Letraset' had in my career as a designer.

Now, having reflected on its use all those many years ago I believe it probably had a more marked effect on me than I realise.

It certainly taught me typeface appreciation i.e. the merits of one typeface over another, and made me aware of the 'character' of one 'face' over another!

Those early days of sans serif typefaces, particularly those like Helvetica, Gill and Univers… all in their different weights and sizes. Then, there gradually grew an appreciation of the earlier classical serif faces. And I can remember conversations with you and Don (Hatcher), in those halcyon days when you both lived here, about their choice and use; the sheer beauty of particular letters within a given alphabet, the reading advantages of using a type with a greater 'x' height than another.

As you listen to my rather staccato efforts to embrace audio and to hesitatingly explain to you my reasons for using Letraset those forty-odd years ago, I hope there is enough 'material' in it for you to use in some way! If you have any further questions Warren please let me know.

Letter ends. ■

Group Meeting Field Notes:
Summary of a meeting between Gordon Mins (GM), Nigel Humphries (NH), Renzie Hanham (RH), Ian Munro (IM) and Warren Smith (WS).
Christchurch, New Zealand.
Thursday September 7, 2008

GM: To get things started Warren, why not tell us what you want us to do?

WS: Well, mainly I'd like you to tell me what you recall of using Letraset and what you were doing when it was launched… and just generally how important do you think it was to you as a graphic designer.

RH: I thought it was dammned important! It was a powerful influence on the way I worked. I wasn't much into all the weird faces, but it certainly gave you enormous choice – and it always looked really sharp when printed.

GM: And it wasn't just the lettering – their whole product range was great; there was always new stuff in their catalogues, as well as the additions to the lettering range.

NH: I remember the frustration of running out of characters and having to race off to Drawing Office Supplies to 'top up' the pile of sheets I already had.

RH: Once or twice when that happened I experimented with cutting up characters that were left – and making 'e's out of 'o's for example.

WS: I used to do that quite a bit; making 'e's; E's; T's and so on.

IM: That was frustrating wasn't it; I used to get annoyed at the number of partly used sheets that I accumulated – it took so long to go through them to find a couple of vowels – I often couldn't be both ered. Sometimes I had to cut letters up to make up characters I was missing; not always successfully I must say.
But it was great. I used it all the time – just about every job I did had some Letraset on it somewhere!

NH: I had what I thought was a pretty good system – I kept each set of type face sheets in order; most used sheets on the top so I always

came to the sheets that were about to expire first.
But even so, it meant that my stock of Helvetica for example always had a big pile of sheets waiting to be used.

WS: I tried to do that too but I didn't have the will power to stick to it!

RH: I liked Letraset because it was simple to use and you could stick it to almost anything!
I labelled my files with it.

IM: Me too! I used it for all those sort of housekeeping/labelling jobs around the studio.
I was always impressed with the samples of work they showed in their catalogues to illustrate the way the various products could be used. There was some fantastic stuff there, which I found could be quite inspirational.

GM: I enjoyed the effects of being able to space lettering differently… and to position it differently… vertical; angled; you could do whatever you wanted.

IM: You could see work in overseas magazines like 'Design' from the UK or 'Communication Arts' where the main lettering was obviously done with Letraset – the spacing was so different – and then when Avant Garde was available that trend became even more obvious.

RH: There's no doubt Letraset influenced a lot of us in the way we Thought about letter spacing; at that time it we all seemed to be trying to set it tighter and tighter.

WS: That's right – I remember doing that, especially when it came to creating logos for clients; you could make a brand or a company logo look really strong and give it real character if you squeezed the spacing out of them.

NH: You had to be careful putting it down though. If you weren't, you could get random letters stuck to parts of the art work where you hadn't planned them!

WS: I used to use the last few letters (or other bits) off a sheet that was about to be rubbished to try and create other sorts of lettering – other type faces… but that was not aways successful either!

Group meeting ends. ■

Production Notes

Thesis	Setting:	Headings and text: Frutiger black; bold; light. Captions: Frutiger bold. Page numbers: Helvetica Neue ultra light
	Printing:	Pageworks Wairau Road, Glenfield, North Shore City
	Binding:	Design Bind Enterprise Street,Birkenhead, North Shore City
Exhibit	Setting:	Headings and text Frutiger Bold, Regular, Light. Captions Frutiger Bold
	Structure & Printing:	Benefitz Constellation Drive, Mairangi Bay, North Shore City