



***The Legible City: Stories of place told through a typographic lens.***

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Stories of place told through  
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Melbourne Australia 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I would like to acknowledge the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nations on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. I respectfully acknowledge their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

## DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of the work which has been carried out since the official research program; and any editorial work, paid or unpaid carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

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*Stephen Banham*  
16 August 2019

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# *The Legible City:* Stories of place told through a typographic lens.

This research proposes a mode of telling stories of place and history through the eye of the typographer:  
How can the world be made legible through a typographic lens?

This research proposes that the perspective of the typographer – namely the ability to see nuance and pattern – can offer clarity to phenomena beyond conventional letterforms.

Framing the research through Nigel Cross' proposition of a 'designerly way of knowing', I explore how a typographic viewpoint becomes a 'typographic way of knowing'. My research centres on the capacity of this 'typographic lens' to uncover underlying narratives and connections to larger social systems including economics, politics and social history. My investigations seek to contribute new knowledge in developing and articulating the uses of this unique prism.

My research begins with understanding how this 'typographic way of knowing' was initially formed during my pre- and early practice period, and the ways in which it was informed by discourse around concepts of the vernacular and designer authorship. Subsequent reflections map how the observationally-based first decade of my practice gradually transformed into a deeper and more nuanced investigation of how typography can create narratives that reflect, express and critique – especially narratives relating to place.

The typographic way of knowing uses these specific sensitivities to recognise underlying familial relationships between sets, patterns and repetitions. When these are articulated through storytelling they offer a capacity for critical engagement in matters that are often considered outside conventional design discourse.

This process of reflective research has led to a greater understanding of my own practice, specifically its underlying knowledge base, its capacity for storytelling and its critical intentions. My investigations have also uncovered a steady evolution in the articulation of discourses *larger* than my own discipline *through* my own discipline. Whilst the reflection upon practice has continually informed and contextualised my thinking and analysis, it is through the making of projects during the candidature that this evolution has become most evident. An ultimately practical use of my research is that it offers a compelling model in how a typographic way of knowing can be used to develop and disseminate stories that contribute to an understanding of typography's broader cultural significance.

## THE RESEARCH APPROACH

I am undertaking a particular form of practice-based research drawing upon the organisational principles of case-study research. Within this I am undertaking structured reflection (method) demonstrating the skills of ‘self-awareness, description, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation’<sup>1</sup> to articulate what was previously tacit practice knowledge, namely that which can be described as a ‘typographic way of knowing’ (after Nigel Cross).<sup>2</sup>

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This research uses a practice-based approach underpinned by the processes of exploration, reflection and evaluation. It investigates specific lines of reflective enquiry into the cultural and critical capacities of typographic storytelling within my own practice of nearly 30 years. This includes the structured reflection upon design projects undertaken prior to and during the candidature as a mode of analysing the evolutionary trajectories of my practice as well as the contribution it makes to the field.<sup>3</sup>

Christopher Frayling’s three categorical definitions of research in creative practice – research *for*, *into* and *through* practice have been of key significance in understanding practice-based research methodology.<sup>4</sup> Unpacking these elements further, Peter Downton defines research *for* design as research conducted during a design project to support the designing process,<sup>5</sup> whereas research *into* design aims to understand the practice of design more clearly.<sup>6</sup> The proposition of research *through* design argues that the act of design is a knowledge unto itself – the ‘knowing’ of the designer. This dissertation focusses primarily on researching *into* and *through* design.

### PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

The nature of practice-based research, whereby practice is not only embedded in the research process but can also raise questions from the process of practice, is the most fitting of approaches, given that its intent is the enlightenment and enhancement of practice itself.<sup>7</sup>

The use of this research mode is further reinforced by Candy and Edmonds’ observation that new knowledge about practice that informs practice may at times only be obtainable by adopting a practice-based approach.<sup>8</sup> Their further summation of practice-based research as ‘being an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice’ is in parallel to the intentions behind this research inquiry.<sup>9</sup>

### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The method of my research is a structured reflection upon my practice, defined as a ‘process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective’.<sup>10</sup> This reflection emanates from a wider theoretical perspective of contextual observation – of the self, of the works, of the practice, and indeed of the wider world. In understanding the transformations within my practice through my research, such reflection generates a necessary self-awareness of past works in relation to those undertaken during the candidature. Furthermore it lays down the foundations for the description, analysis and synthesising of case studies within my practice in order to establish greater understandings of an underlying knowledge.

Arguing that such professional knowledge is located in what he calls ‘reflection-in-action’, Donald Schön contends that ‘our knowledge is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say our knowing is in our action’.<sup>11</sup> Works I produced prior to candidature are necessarily subject

to reflection-on-action (since they already exist and constitute points along particular trajectories) whilst those undertaken during the course of the research have also been reflected upon in-action (benefitting from the awareness of the research itself).

Central to the framing of my research is Nigel Cross’ principle of ‘designerly ways of knowing’. Cross recognises that the designerly act of tackling ill-defined problems through a constructive series of ‘codes’ translates abstraction into a kind of ‘object language’ and creates its own specific form of knowledge. He also notes that ‘there are forms of knowledge peculiar to the awareness and ability of a designer, just as the other intellectual cultures in the sciences and the arts concentrate on the forms of knowledge peculiar to the scientist or the artist’.<sup>12</sup> Within the specific context of my research I have re-contextualised this underlying ‘designerly way of knowing’ as a ‘typographic way of knowing’ – borne of processes *within* my own discipline and expressed *through* my design projects.

Downton acknowledges the inherently connective nature of design, noting that ‘designing inevitably employs various kinds of knowledge derived both from sources outside of designing and design as well as from sources within the designer’s own discipline’.<sup>13</sup> The intent of this connection is also made clear: ‘design uses knowledge from design and elsewhere and produces new knowledge, while both design and research, like any activities involving the application of skills, require knowing and knowledge to enable their conduct’.<sup>14</sup> Observing further connections, Breslin and Buchanan suggest that framing knowledge within a theoretical perspective ‘can provide opportunities to

grow in one’s practice by exposing previously unseen connections and relationships, as well as providing context for understanding changes that already are happening’.<sup>15</sup>

### DESIGN KNOWLEDGE

Cross’ assertion that ‘design must have its own inner coherence, in the ways that science and the humanities do’<sup>16</sup> reinforces my own findings of reflections upon my own typographic knowledge base, that specific processes and perspectives persist across the breadth of a practice. It acknowledges that a sustained design enquiry over many decades does operate, as Cross would term it, ‘on its own terms’. This encourages a set of habitual processes (such as observation and synthesis) so seemingly instinctually informed by experience as to be rendered virtually invisible within the conscious process of design. It is through reflection upon these tacit processes that the presence of a knowing is made evident.

Cross employs a constructionist epistemological paradigm, one that attests that ‘design practice on its own does not constitute research unless it also involves reflection upon the work and the communication of results’.<sup>17</sup> This constructionist approach to knowledge is, as Blaikie defines, ‘the outcome of people having to make sense of their encounters with the physical world and with other people’.<sup>18</sup>

Cross’ ‘designerly ways of knowing’ organises this knowledge into three key domains: design epistemology (the study of these ways of knowing whereby design is considered a natural human ability, and as such can be learnt and taught by people); design praxiology (the study of processes, tactics, strategies or methodologies in design); and design



phenomenology (the study of the knowledge held within the artefact and its relational contexts). Translated across to my research enquiry, these three domains would centre on: how this 'typographic way of knowing' was learnt, developed and even taught (observation through a typographic lens for example); the ways in which this knowledge was brought into the processes of the practice (bringing connective meaning to sets of phenomena for example); and what design outcomes emerge from projects that manifest that knowledge (design project artefacts for example).

#### CASE STUDY

The use of case studies within my research prompts two immediate questions: firstly, why the study of cases has been used as a mode of enquiry; secondly, what factors influenced the choice of particular projects for study over others (the case selection).

In response to the first question I would refer to Breslin and Buchanan's suggestion that there is a rich history of case studies which explore the space between the world of theory and the experience of practice.<sup>19</sup> This bridging is particularly pertinent when undertaking practice-based research where the analysis and evaluation of specific cases (artefacts) highlight that a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry.<sup>20</sup> My research uses *instrumental* case studies – cases examined mainly to provide insight into an issue and to facilitate our understanding of something else (a practice concern for example).<sup>21</sup>

Robert Stake points out that case studies are not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied.<sup>22</sup> Within my research the choice of what is studied is dictated by

the extent to which that artefact or project instrumentally contributes to an overarching enquiry. Many projects are chosen as comparative counterpoints to highlight specific moments of practice evolution. Examples of these include the projects *Pause Here Then Go* (1995) and *Multistory* (2016) whose relative approaches indicate a shift from didactic to discursive forms of engagement, and in the case of the *Death to Helvetica* (2000) and *Cashcow Oblique* (2017) projects, it is the historical development modes of critique within my practice that is presented as the contrasting focus.

A synthetic approach: visualising the method In exploring the transformative process of externalising tacit knowledge, my research has required me to look both inwards and outwards. As a way of uniting these two perspectives as a holistic vision my research design has been visualised as a form of lens, whose optical structure aptly communicates the cumulative clarification I have experienced during my candidature. This lens metaphor also recognises the multi-levelled nature of this enquiry – beginning with my disposition to observe the world through quasi-typographic relationships (*a typographic seeing*); consolidating into a tacit body of knowledge made explicit (*a typographic knowing*) to engage through cultural narrative (*a typographic storytelling*).

This lens structure has informed the composition of the dissertation. The chapters move inwards from an outlying contextual framing of my early practice (such as the design discourse around the vernacular and design authorship) into a focus on the ways in which my practice has sought to transform typographic observation and knowing into

public engagement through the telling of stories. To achieve this, three distinct (yet often overlapping) practice concerns are identified: the investigation of *place*, the role of familial *sets* and the playful agitation enabling *critique*. Each of these constitute a chapter within the dissertation.

Combining Schönian reflection-on-action and practice-based research paradigms, this research necessitated me spending a lot of time with both past and current design projects. After an initial stage of talking *at* the works I began to talk *through* the works, shifting my reading of the works as individual entities to parts within an ongoing and active continuum of investigation, or as instrumental cases through the study of which more general phenomena could be understood. Through this approach, I identified the connective traits in my work and their relationship to an underlying 'typographic way of knowing'.

The pivotal transition from a design discussion *about* typography to a cultural discussion *through* typography highlights the evolutionary contribution of this reflective model. This shift is mapped across projects within the research, assisting me to understand not only the practice of design but more specifically *my* practice of design and the knowledge held within it. This deeper awareness is precisely the kind facilitated by reflective practice research methods.

Although my practice encompasses design projects, research and teaching, I have focussed in this research upon project work rather than the pedagogical aspects of my practice. However, some specific instances of integrating scholarship within teaching are however referred to within this study.

## FRAMING CONCEPTS

To assist in the framing of this research project I have provided a set of definitions relating to specific words and concepts. Many of these terms are considered ambiguous by some and even contentious by others, so for the purpose of this exegesis, the following definitions have been formulated.

### *Typography*

Although the term typography is conventionally defined as the 'art, or skill, of designing communication by means of the printed word',<sup>1</sup> to bring the definition up to date and make it more relevant to my own practice the additional media of digital and built form should be added to those of the printed word. Within the context of this research I would add Bringhurst's more poetic definition of typography as 'the craft of endowing human language with a durable visual form, and thus with an independent existence',<sup>2</sup> as this draws upon some of the humanist and critical undercurrents within my research. In the spirit of recognising the creative and authorial status of typefaces, all font names are set in an italicised form.

### *Typeface*

A term that refers to a mechanical or digital set of reproducible glyphs. This excludes hand-drawn forms which would be referred to as lettering or hand-lettering.

### *Typographic*

This research purposefully interprets typographic in an expansive sense, referring to elements exhibiting the characteristics of type. This is defined as a set of meaningful symbols unified through a systematic and cohesive relationship to each other. It draws a parallel between elements that are 'glyph-like' in nature, as they represent a set of stylistically unified symbols or marks of meaning.

### *Legibility*

In addition to describing the clarity of single characters that are decipherable and recognisable<sup>3</sup> and exhibit a clearly understood and defined letterform, setting or document, the term legibility is also defined in its metaphoric sense – giving clarity to an idea. Within the context of a critical practice the 'giving of legibility' refers to a critique that 'uncovers' or 'unmasks' and thus brings greater clarity, rendering visible 'relationships of power and influence that may otherwise go unseen'.<sup>4</sup>

### *Critique*

In the context of a reflective practice, Haylock has defined the term critique as 'an interrogative practice, an act of interrogation. It is a practice that casts things into doubt. Critical theory casts into doubt all established structures, truths and systems of value'.<sup>5</sup> The term critical design describes 'design projects and practices that interrogate the status quo in various ways, or which propose variously unorthodox future scenarios. These practices are usually non-commercial and are often characterised by an ethic of social inquiry or activism'.<sup>6</sup>

### *Humanism*

The term humanist has been deliberately avoided in the context of this research due to its possible confusion with the taxonomic category humanist typography.<sup>7</sup> Instead the term humanism has been used in a philosophical rather than descriptive form as 'allowing audiences to appreciate the human foundations and therefore the contingency of power structures that might otherwise seem abstract and universal'.<sup>8</sup>

**SUMMARY CONTEXTUAL REVIEW**

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## SUMMARY CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

In this section I outline the historical precedents, figures, ideas and contributions that have collectively informed my practice. These will also be referred to in greater depth throughout the dissertation.

Reflecting upon over 30 years of typographic projects, this research examines the connections, contexts and motivations through a wide and varied body of work. This process has re-contextualised my work both through a wider critical awareness and an even broader historical continuum. Informed by Nigel Cross' proposition of 'designerly way of knowing', my research has uncovered a lens through which a 'typographic way of knowing' is projected, leading to a greater understanding of its evolution through my practice.

Drawing further upon a metaphoric lens, this research has highlighted the constant shifting perspectives *within* my projects between 'micro' (crafting and detail) and 'macro' (intention and context), allowing me an understand my practice *outside* of individual projects. In using the 'typographic way of knowing' beyond the matters of letterforms, I propose that the unique ability of this conditioned eye and mind can also be used to recognise patterns and relationships with larger cultural phenomena.

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Given that my practice straddles both typographic design commissions and publishing, the most prominent and direct predecessor of influence is Herbert Spencer (1924–2002), editor of the seminal publication *Typographica*. His scholarly perspective in articulating a broad 'outward' view of typography has regularly served as a central precedent for my own practice. As Spencer reflected:

*Typographica* was very much a one-man operation. I wasn't really answerable to anyone. I suppose I just assumed that something that interested me – even if only marginally, at a certain level – would be of interest to others...It was just a sort of enthusiasm for things and the fact that while the enthusiasm lasted I was able to publish something on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

Without overplaying a cross-generational kinship with Spencer, our practices do share many aspects: a blind faith in finding a readership; a relatively isolated working environment; an observational writing style; but above all a focus on exploring the capacity of typography to reflect our lives.

There are also significant differences. Although *Typographica* connected letterforms and their social context, Spencer confined himself to conventional typographic forms (letterforms, usually in printed form). His choice of photography as a preferred medium of documentation tended to limit his observations to that which can be seen. The influence of Spencer is more present in my earlier publishing (the *Qwerty* and *Ampersand* series) which took a documentary approach – the observation of typefaces within landscape – than later works which began

to acknowledge unseen patterns, rhythms, interventions and transformations within the city.

Beyond the central input of Spencer, other figures played a role in influencing the formulation and refinement of a studio structure that would support independent projects of inquiry. The most influential (living) practitioner, whose input occurred during my formative period in 1989, was Erik Spiekermann (1947–). Focussed specifically on the field of typography, Spiekermann's studio model at *Meta Design* (Berlin) showed me that typographic publishing could be both viable and a harmonious element within a practice. His colourful metaphorical writing style, particularly in *Rhyme and Reason: A Typographic Novel* (1987) struck me as immediately engaging 'not simply because it sums up what matters in typography, but also for its meanderings in other areas of our experience'.<sup>2</sup> Fifteen years later my awareness of structuring a 'multiple practice' was further reinforced by Peter Bil'ak (1973–) whose working model suggested to me important attitudinal shifts to integrate the various tangents of practice: studio commissions, writing, teaching and research. Bilak's involvement in the *Dot, Dot, Dot* and *Works that Work* series of publications were also influential to me through their respective fields of enquiry.

The final year of my undergraduate course (1988) coincided with Neville Brody's seminal exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the publishing of the accompanying monograph *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*. The resultant international profile made Brody a figure of admiration and influence beyond the design community.

My strong interest in how writing, critique and design projects could run in parallel has led me towards a community of practice, each of whose members has etched out individual and often critical positions through writing. These practitioners include: Rick Poynor, who offers a scholarly and analytical voice to a broader audience; Alice Tremlow, Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon, Emily King and Anne Burdick all astute academics who translate their insights through both writing and pedagogy; Robin Kinross whose tightly typographic research continues to make great contributions to the field, and Adrian Shaughnessy, whose broader yet thoughtful publishing efforts have illuminated contemporary and historical figures and stories in graphic design.

Historical figures in design whose approaches collectively sculpted many of the aspirations of my own practice are: FHK Henrion (1914–1990) and Ladislav Sutnar (1897–1976) for presenting influential models of informational clarity; Herb Lubalin (1918–1981) & Tom Carnese (1939–) for their deftness in communicating succinct typographic ideas; and Ken Garland (1929–) for providing a model of sharply political engagement in design.

Common to the work of these practitioners is a desire to pull at the edges of conventional graphic design, offering possibilities and insights into how the discipline could be reframed. Most have applied this directly through their design projects with many contributing further through books, articles and essays.

Many others orbiting a sphere of influence include those whose contribution is to make the power of letterforms evident within the world of contemporary art. The key figures in this particular sphere include Ed Ruscha (1937–), Lawrence Weiner (1942–) and Barbara Kruger (1945–).

### NOTE

Although I had amassed a considerable collection of *The Face* magazines (from the era art-directed by Brody) it was his design of *The Andere Blick* (The Other View) produced for The Haus Kulturen der Welt in 1989 that was the most impactful of all his work through its use of materials and composition. I ended up meeting Neville Brody several times, the most entertaining of which was a snowball fight after the 1995 Typo-Berlin conference.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Individuals currently undertaking similar work to my own are typographers and type designers who have developed their own forms of storytelling. The explorations of Tobias Frere-Jones in articulating his own city, New York, certainly carry this spirit, particularly his 2009 poster publication *Alphabet City* which recognised the typographic complexion of urban environments. Frere-Jones notes, ‘Both as cultural indicators and as persuasive features of the environment, letterforms impart a sense of place and identity, like an accent in speech.’<sup>3</sup> Although Frere-Jones’ work and my own share a common interest in articulating ‘found’ urban type, like Spencer his work maintains a tight focus around conventional letterforms rather than any wider reading of pattern and story.

Another New Yorker, Paul Shaw has made significant contributions in mapping typefaces to the surrounding cultures. His various pamphlets, small books and larger published works such as *Helvetica and the New York Subway System* (2011) have made scholarly contributions to the understanding of how typefaces connect to their cultural roots through social histories. The connective sentiment of Shaw’s texts has been a valuable resource and reference to my own approaches to writing.

The pioneering efforts of film-maker Gary Hustwit in articulating the cultural power of typefaces, seen in his feature film *Helvetica* (2007) anticipate many of the sustained arguments put forward by my own practice. His medium of choice – the moving image – offers inspiration as to how I may publicly communicate the power of type into the future.

Within the academic sphere, the efforts of Catherine Dixon and Phil Baines on centring upon letters in public environment, such as in *Signs: Lettering in the Environment* (2003), runs in parallel to much of my own investigations into type in our urban landscape. But whereas Dixon and Baines focus on the recording and documenting of typographic form (such as the Central Lettering Record) my practice uses such observations as a starting point for further exploration through design projects.

Similarly, but within the context of contemporary art, the work of UK-based artist Jake Tilson investigates the unique connections between place, language and typographic expression. Through the work of Tilson, I was introduced to the artist-book culture which proved to be particularly influential in the earlier decades of my work, through projects such as *Qwerty* and *Ampersand*.

*Qwerty* in particular embraced the intimate possibilities of small, independent publishing. Each copy was not only hand-stamped with a sequential number but also packaged with a series of little typographic objects, making each copy unique. Influenced by Tilson, my aim was not so much to make the books collectable as to counter the coldness of desktop publishing by humanising and making very special the experience of reading.

CONCLUSION

Naming this chapter a ‘contextual review’, rather than approaching it as a conventional literature review, indicates that the terrain of my practice is informed by a plethora of inputs and influences broader than theoretical and traditionally academic precedents. It does however follow the spirit of the contextual review in being, as Gray and Malin note, ‘by necessity wide-ranging, ... trying to map ‘continents’ so that more local terrain can be located and understood in relation to them’.

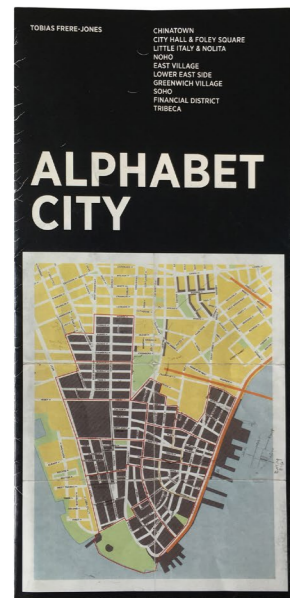
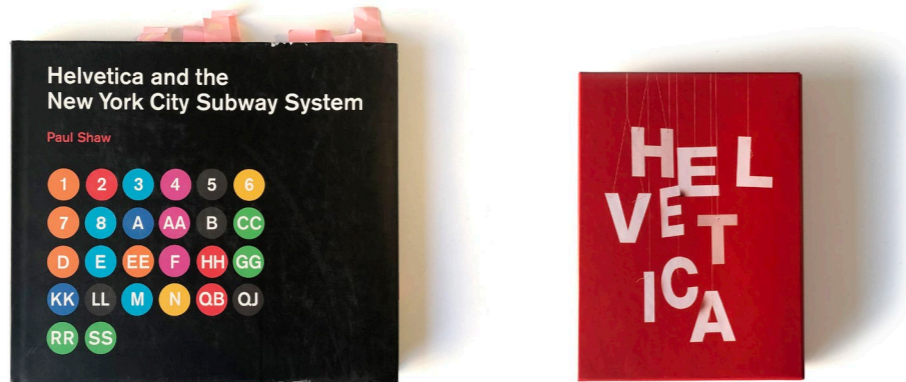
Whilst I had always acknowledged Herbert Spencer as a key figure (indeed a parallel spirit) in applying a typographic way of knowing and seeing, the inclusion of other contributors, both contemporary and historical, highlight the humble position I occupy amongst a broader effort to articulate the letterform as a cultural signifier.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT  
*Helvetica and the New York Subway System*  
Paul Shaw, MIT Press (2011)

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT  
*Helvetica*  
Gary Hustwit (2007)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT  
*Alphabet City*  
Cover  
Tobias Frere-Jones (2009)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT  
*Alphabet City*  
Internal Poster  
Tobias Frere-Jones (2009)



PRE-PRACTICE

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#### PRE-PRACTICE

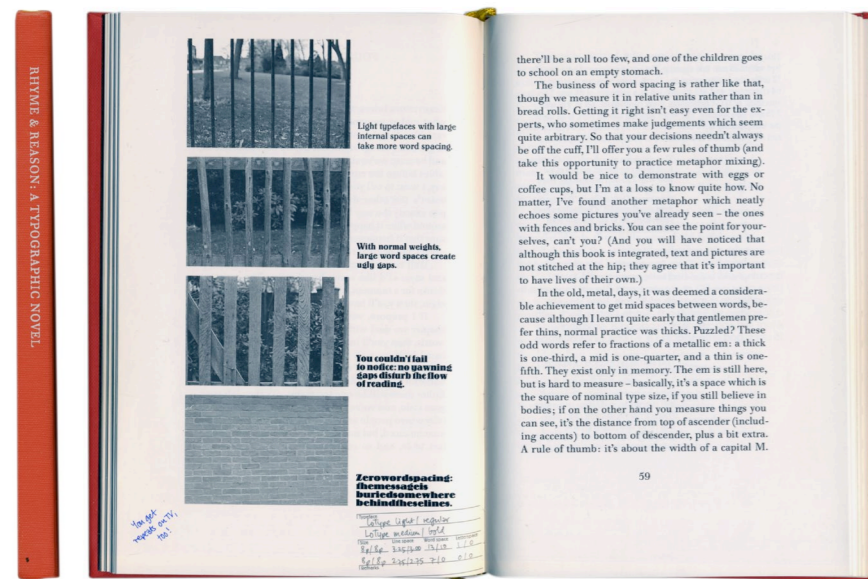
‘As if to greet the new visitors, a bright sun shone upon Berlin, somewhat of a rarity during these bleak autumn days... Cameras were flashing as the tourists posed, chiselling out their own little piece of the Berlin Wall. These once entombing structures seem even more absurd now. An East German border guard accepts a white pot and cup of tea thrown up to him from a kindly spectator. Gift accepted, the crowd gave a huge roar of applause, the guard bows and returns to his ranks behind the wall. This is a good day for Germany’.

PERSONAL DIARY / SATURDAY 11 NOVEMBER 1989



In this chapter, I reflect upon the formative years of my practice.

In particular, I investigate the two most influential discourses during this time – the debates around graphic vernacular and design authorship – and how these played a role in evolving my own public typographic voice through the publishing of the *Qwerty* series (1991–1995). Importantly it frames the early development of a ‘typographic way of knowing’ that was to fundamentally inform my subsequent practice.



PREVIOUS

Author pasting down a poster on the newly breached Berlin Wall. Photo: Sonia Kretchmar (1990)

ABOVE

*Rhyme and Reason: A Typographic Novel*  
Erik Spiekermann  
(1987)

## BERLIN 1989–1990

As an *ausländer* (foreigner) living in Berlin I could only have ever been an observer of the fall of the Wall that stood just below my apartment window. On reflection, these early formative experiences seem to align to form a particular trajectory. What they collectively point to, by either choice or circumstance, is the development of a sharpened sense of observation combined with a drive to try to make sense of what I saw – to make clear to others what may not always be visible or immediately present.

In 1989 a divided Berlin meant that citizens of non-NATO countries (such as Australians) were forbidden to work. As a result, I had no clients, no commissions and no deadlines – in fact no commercial practice at all. Without any means of professional production, the months were instead filled with an almost monastic experimentation, manually kerning photocopied letters from German type catalogues on my kitchen table. Any images required had to be directly photographed and printed at a 24-hour photo lab before being used as elements in my design compositions. This laborious delay made typographic experimentation easier than its image-based alternative. And although the result of these months was a pile of speculative compositions for imaginary clients, the lack of resources encouraged me to use observation as a primary mode of investigation.

Purely by chance, my apartment was situated on the edge of Kreuzberg overlooking the (then) barren wasteland of Potsdamer Platz, one of the main crossing points of the collapsing Berlin Wall. The newly reunited city was electric with hope and excitement.

The witnessing of this seismic shift in political history drove me to create a visual response – a large scale (eight-sheet) poster made of hand-coloured photocopies. It was composed of just two melded words EAST and WEST, the shared ‘ST’ highlighting the metaphoric commonality of the German people. The typeface choice, Neville Brody’s *Insignia* (1989), was photocopied out of a Fontshop catalogue.<sup>1</sup> This not only dates the work but also shows my porous acceptance of influence in this resource-starved environment. My immediate choice of typography as the voice of expression has only become more conspicuous upon reflection since.<sup>2</sup>

Upon arrival in Berlin I had sent out letters of introduction to ten prominent German designers. Only one responded – the typographer Erik Spiekermann. This was fortuitous. From my brief evening visits to Spiekermann’s Berlin studio, *MetaDesign*, I saw first-hand a design practice that allowed itself a deep and sustained specialisation in typography.

Spiekermann’s *Rhyme and Reason: A Typographic Novel* (1987)<sup>3</sup> introduced to me a new language through which typography could be clearly explained to others. Unaware of Herbert Spencer’s *Typographica* series at this point, *Rhyme and Reason* was my first experience of a playful and witty text using observation to explain the otherwise impenetrable principles of typography. Spiekermann’s use of metaphor is particularly powerful – letter spacing is explained by observing the gaps between fence palings or cracked eggs in an egg carton<sup>4</sup>.

The hard-bound chapbook format presented me with a perspective of typography that was both intimate and worldly.<sup>5</sup> Although my direct contact with Spiekermann was brief, the glimpses into *Meta Design* gave me an insight into the possibilities of a typographic practice encompassing commissions, writing and research.

When I returned to Australia in 1990, I set about educating myself in typography, addressing an element sadly lacking in my undergraduate experience. What followed were years of voracious consumption of graphic design and typography books and publications. Much like my fortunately-timed Berlin experience, my eagerness to engage with typography coincided with the establishment of *Eye*, a journal of international graphic design, and with a period of distinct criticality through *Emigré* magazine, produced by the Californian type foundry of the same name. Both periodicals were deeply engaged with two of the key international debates of the time – the embrace of a typographic ‘vernacular’ and the repositioning of the designer as author. These two debates mirrored my own interests. The fascination with the ‘typographic everyday’ reinforced my propensity to observe and document whilst the authorship debate fuelled my interest in articulating these observations in text and print. The confluence of these debates amidst the flourishing of graphic design critique would go on to sculpt the contours of my future practice.

Having seen the 1990–91 economic recession erode the capacity to find employment in the prominent design studios of the time – FHA (Flett, Henderson and Arnold), Cato Design, Rankin Bevers and Cozzolino Ellett amongst others – the decision to start my own practice was as much a survival response as it was an opportunity to explore the idea of a typographic studio (as I had witnessed via Erik Spiekermann) within an Australian context.

During the formation of Letterbox in 1990 I drew my intended studio structure as three overlapping circles. These were labelled ‘Professional Practice’, ‘Education’ and ‘Publishing & Exhibition’. And although these descriptions appear vague by contemporary discourse (practice is now recognised as encapsulating all of these as one endeavour), over the next decade this became the framework of related priorities which respectively informed my early design work for Gas and Fuel Victoria (practice), my acceptance of a sessional teaching position at RMIT (education) and the first issues of *Qwerty* (publishing). Upon reflection, it is the overlapping of these ‘circles of interest’ that represents the most direct suggestion as to the future trajectory of my work.



## THE VERNACULAR

In 1993, graphic design theorist Ellen Lupton summed up the term 'vernacular' as having:

become common parlance in the design community, referring to a natural, unschooled sensibility, free from the stylistic self-censorship of modernism. While the term vernacular commonly refers to an ideally innocent, childlike vision... a vernacular is simply a dialect, and every subculture has its dialects, including the subculture of high culture.<sup>6</sup>

The contradiction of 'high culture' graphic designers adopting the language of 'low culture' became a lightning rod for spirited debate. Design critic Jeffrey Keedy suggested that the vernacular offered a reaction to a prevailing modernism, while its identity was so intrinsically linked with modernism that it could not see outside of that paradigm.<sup>7</sup>

In a subsequent essay 'Zombie Modernism', Keedy continued this attack, arguing: 'Modernism in design went from a radical idea to a liberal ideal only to stagnate as conservative dogma'.<sup>8</sup> Keedy's provocations persuaded me to question the entrenched reliance of graphic design on 'mothership modernism', and instead argue for graphic design to be engaged with a larger world outside its own self-referential history.

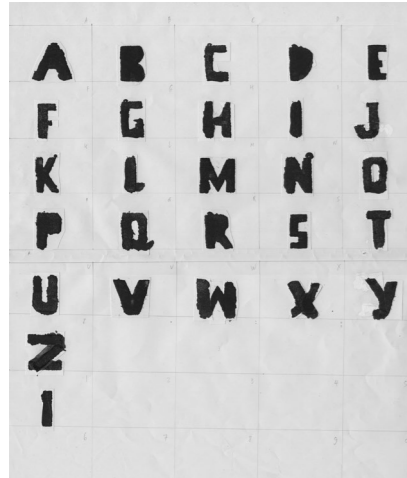
### POLITICISING THE VERNACULAR

Although the appeal of the vernacular lay in a contradictory connection with 'street-level' cultural expression, my embrace of it was a cautious and qualified one. I took from it what I needed (the opportunity to connect social observation with design) whilst rejecting its stylised and often patronising affectations. As Katie Salen notes when observing the plethora of typefaces produced during this period:

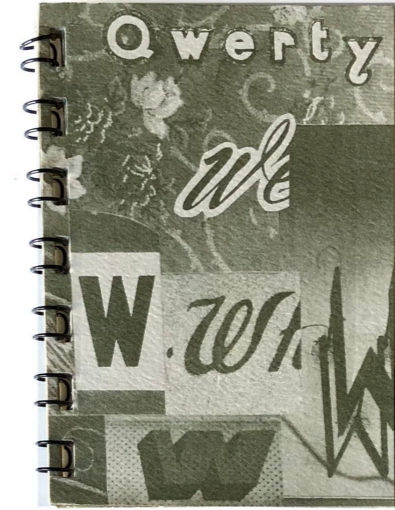
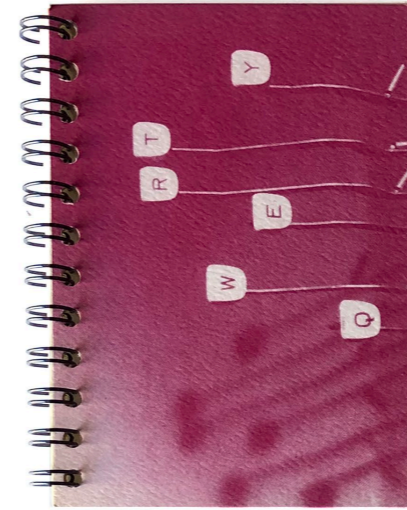
...the opaque and highly discursive spaces created by these typographers presents a model of representation equally transparent and damning in its pursuit of invisibility of the other. This practice, dramatized by contemporary type designers' love affair with appropriation and re-inscription of subcultural forms, has rendered the term vernacular both formally vacuous and semantically vacant.<sup>9</sup>

Aware of its shortcomings, I developed my own perspective by which 'everyday' references could be used to show how graphic design affected public, social and political behaviour. Likewise convinced that the roots of the vernacular were political in nature, Ellen Lupton noted:

Because designers are taught to focus on visual style over social function, we often overlook the relation of design to institutions of power... The heroic aspect of the avant-garde lay in its vision of design as a liberating force. The crisis of modernism lies in the contradictory desire to occupy a place outside of society, while at the same time transforming it; its critical stance must now be relocated as an analysis from within culture, rather than a critique from above.<sup>10</sup>



ABOVE  
Sketches for the typeface  
*Bankrupt Bold* (1993)



### OPPOSITE

TOP LEFT <i>Querty 1</i> (1991)	TOP MIDDLE <i>Querty 2</i> (1993)	TOP RIGHT <i>Querty 3</i> (1993)
BOTTOM LEFT <i>Querty 4</i> (1994)	BOTTOM MIDDLE <i>Querty 5</i> (1995)	BOTTOM RIGHT <i>Querty 6</i> (1996)



# TEMPLATE GOTHIC

AaBbCcDdEeFfGg  
HhIiJjKkLlMmNnOo  
OoPpQqRrSsTtUu  
VvWwXxYyZ\$1989  
The Spirit of the Vernacular

A B C D E F G  
a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 &  
A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
[( \$ £ , . : ; ' - ' ? ! \* ) ]

Emblematic of this complex and contradictory period was the typeface *Template Gothic* (1990) designed by Barry Deck but inspired by his local laundrymat sign. Deck's narrative of typographic discovery fitted perfectly within the 'vernacular' zeitgeist, exemplified by his own recollections: 'The sign was done with lettering templates and it was exquisite. It had obviously been done by someone who was totally naïve'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst we may now wince at such a condescending tone, the resulting typeface became so popular as to be visual shorthand for this period of cultural transference.

Like my guarded response to the wider vernacular movement, I treated Deck's *Template Gothic* with caution. Whilst I enjoyed the opening up of creative inputs to include 'the everyday', the typeface itself seemed to destroy any authenticity of the original. Deck's appropriation of the sign offered a playful sense of imperfection but only through the familiar and problematic pillaging of 'low culture' whilst choosing to ignore any broader implications of this power transfer.

My own typographic response to *Template Gothic* was a text face for the fourth *Qwerty*, the Recession Issue (1994). *Qwerty* (1991–1995) had been my first set of published booklets, each addressing a specific theme: *Qwerty 1* (1991) argued for the reinstatement of humanity and craft into an industry then threatened by desktop publishing; *Qwerty 2* (1992) investigated the Australian vernacular; *Qwerty 3* (1993) celebrated the typographic traces of the economic downturn; *Qwerty 4* (1994) explored typographic traces of the economic downturn; *Qwerty 5* (1995) compiled the largest letters in Australia; and the final issue, *Qwerty 6* (1995) expressed type in a domestic context.

Although diminutive in scale (A7 or 74mm x 105mm) due to economic constraint, this series of six booklets used my observations of type to question what I viewed as a lack of interest within the Australian design industry in reflecting any localised typographic voice.

Like Deck's typeface, the *Bankrupt* typeface that appeared in *Qwerty 4* was based on observation but whereas *Template Gothic* was based on signage, *Bankrupt* was based on non-existent signage, or more specifically the traces of signage left after businesses had failed. The first typeface I produced, *Bankrupt* was both pragmatic and political – built upon the sturdy body of W.A. Dwiggin's *Falcon* (1961) it was also an amalgam of observed signage glue outlines of failed commerce. This early criticality hinted at the political awakenings from my experience of Berlin.

The previous few years (1990–1991) had seen extensive financial failures in Melbourne, including the collapse of the Pyramid Building Society. The political turmoil led to the election of the Kennett Government in 1992 which implemented wide ranging expenditure cuts and privatisation of public assets in order, it was claimed, to rejuvenate the economy.

Reinforcing its thematic connection with the economic and political climate, the recession issue of *Qwerty* featured a tipped-in letterpress spread stating 'For Lease'. The choice of titling type was deliberately political, taken directly from the signage remnants of the public Jess McPherson Community Hospital<sup>12</sup> just before its demolition as a newly-privatised asset.

My experience with the vernacular highlighted the subjectivity of observation – that the observer exercises a choice as to what *to see* and what *not to see*, what *to record* and what



TOP  
Letterpress insert,  
*Qwerty 4* (1994)

LEFT  
The decommissioned Jessie  
McPherson Hospital,  
now the site of the QV  
Shopping Centre (c. 1994)

RIGHT  
Glue Outlines, Melbourne  
(c. 1994)

OPPOSITE TOP  
*Template Gothic*  
Barry Deck (1989)

OPPOSITE BOTTOM  
*Bankrupt Regular* (1993)



*not to record*. Such determinations introduce the possibility of a ‘critical vernacular’, a perspective that I was to redefine throughout the coming years of practice.

#### HUMANISING THE VERNACULAR

Several years later, my critical approach to vernacular visual language was to manifest through *Assembly* (2000) which sought to humanise vernacular graphic design through the display of hundreds of logos hand-drawn by school-aged children. This project had been inspired by a hand-drawn Commonwealth Bank loan application form that I had found on a branch counter in 1995.<sup>13</sup> Despite my absolute joy at its discovery, the embarrassed bank teller had been profusely apologetic, explaining that she had drawn it because the bank had run out of the ‘proper printed ones’. Most likely considered ‘un-corporate’ by its creators, this document was deeply persuasive in its humanity – the very virtue that the bank had been desperately trying to express to a sceptical public through countless expensive advertising campaigns. This was a refreshingly honest artefact, having been made not as a parody but from within the bank itself, and was a contrast to the then-fashionable satirical logo emulation made popular in the 1990s by firms such as The Designers Republic (TDR)<sup>14</sup>. Instead this hand-drawn sheet stripped bare the cold mercantile face of the bank, exposing a more direct and human form of typographic communication. Like the typeface *Bankrupt Bold* designed some six years prior, this represented a humanised, and politicised, ‘vernacular’.

Commonwealth Bank  
Commonwealth Bank of Australia  
AGD 123 456 789  
Visit our Internet site at www.commbank.com.au

**Are you considering?**

- Purchasing a home
- Purchasing an Investment property
- Borrowing for any worthwhile purpose

Given Name \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Post Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

When would you like to be contacted?

Within 48 hrs  Within 1 week

Other please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred time \_\_\_\_\_

Bank Only Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Officer's name: Andrea

ABOVE  
Hand-drawn loan application  
form from the Commonwealth  
Bank (c. 1995)

#### DESIGNER AS AUTHOR

Just as the vernacular movement’s embrace of ‘the everyday’ may have represented a territory grab by the design profession, so too the authorial role of the designer in writing and publishing was viewed as territory up for negotiation. By the early 1990s the software tools for small-scale desktop publishing had arrived, offering a simultaneous erosion of its trade typesetting base and rich possibilities for designers to climb higher up the ‘cultural food-chain’ – to author content as well as craft its visual representation.

In his seminal 1996 essay ‘The Designer as Author’, design critic Michael Rock framed the inherent responsibilities and complexities of generating content:

Authorship may suggest new approaches to the issue of the graphic process in a profession traditionally associated more with the communication than the origination of messages. But theories of authorship also serve as legitimizing strategies, and authorial aspirations may end up reinforcing certain conservative notions of design production and subjectivity – ideas that run counter to recent critical attempts to overthrow the perception of design as based on individual brilliance.<sup>15</sup>

Ironically Rock’s ‘Designer as Author’ essay popularised the notion of designers cultivating content complementary to its visual form. Rock backpedalled in a following essay ‘Fuck Content’ (2009) where he clarified the original intention of his earlier text as framing the act of design as essentially linguistic, conjuring up the designer *as* author rather than what he saw as its misinterpretation as designer *and* author.<sup>16</sup> Released more than a decade

after the first essay, Rock’s clarification of the design-authorship position failed to stem the enthusiasm of designers to be involved in the generation of content. Critic Anne Burdick summed up the potential of this transition in design:

With complete control over all aspects of the communication, the graphic designer as author, in the tradition of Marinetti *et al*, has the freedom to explore more deeply the relationship between content and form, including issues which may be inappropriate to client communications but relevant to design. Autonomous works of total authorship must be considered a valuable contribution to graphic design.<sup>17</sup>

Rationalising the demolition of divisions within graphic design, Burdick continued:

‘Designers should not write more to become better writers but to become better designers’.<sup>18</sup> Another design critic, Rick Poynor, recognised that not only did authorship call for content, but that content demands meaning, especially when used as critique. Poynor describes the act of design as a form of editing, noting that the most significant choice of all, because it precedes everything else, is choosing what the design will be about.<sup>19</sup>

Burdick eloquently framed the proposition of ‘designer as author’ as an expanded argument around the capacity of designers to write in the first place, arguing that writing feeds the profession in two ways: through the challenge of critical analysis and through the exploratory freedom of self-initiated work.<sup>20</sup>

Burdick’s statement, which I read a year or two into the *Qwerty* series (1991–1995), clarified

the intentions and opportunities behind my own need to write in a critical voice. Her insights also influenced me to re-orientate my publications into forms of inquiry rather than description. From 1995 onwards, *Qwerty* shifted its focus from the *appearance* of typographic phenomena to the societal and cultural *meanings* of those forms. English designer Jonathan Barnbrook describes this as being a transition from being a problem *solver* to a problem *revealer*,<sup>21</sup> highlighting the capacity graphic designers have in analysis, audience awareness and the giving of visual form to communicate questions instead of answers. A 1994 review of the *Qwerty* series in *Eye* notes:

In the hope of fostering a spirit of debate and interaction, contributions are solicited from readers during the magazine’s four-month production cycle. These offerings have inadvertently altered *Qwerty*’s aesthetic: from the somewhat predictable potted interviews with local design companies in Issue 1, it has become progressively more abstract and idiosyncratic.<sup>22</sup>

Amidst the frenzy of spirited critique in the pages of *Emigré* (1984–2005) and *Eye* (1991–), the uptake of design authorship highlighted the complete lack of any Australian contribution to this international typographic discourse.

When describing the state of Australian design publishing in a 1998 article for the English typography magazine *Baseline* my frustration was unapologetic, pointing out that when *Qwerty* had begun (seven years prior) the counters of design bookshops in Australia had been simply an empty space used for wrapping.





OPPOSITE  
Albums of type in the built  
environment was indicative of  
an observational orientation.  
(c.1994)

OVERLEAF

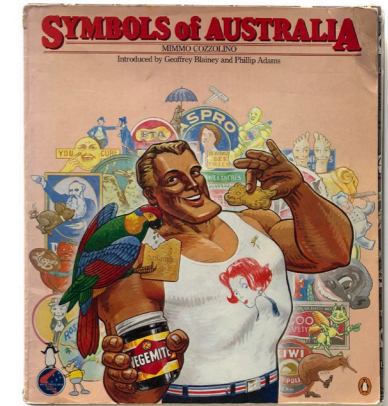
FAR LEFT  
*Jake Tilson:*  
*Museo Internacional de*  
*Electrografia* (1997)

SECOND FROM LEFT  
*Atlas Magazine N° 4*  
*Jake Tilson*  
(c.1993)

SECOND FROM RIGHT  
*Funnel Magazine N° 1*  
(1997)

SECOND LEFT  
*Symbols of Australia*  
*Mimmo Cozzolino*  
(1980)





By 1998 these same spaces were piled high with self-published Australian design literature. Although a casual glance at this print material may have indicated a healthy cultivation of discussion and debate, most of these publications were based on a portfolio model – a record of current corporate identities, reports and packaging.<sup>23</sup>

By the mid to late 1990s the editorial positions of many international periodicals such as *Eye*, *Baseline* and *Emigré* were beginning to bounce off each other, creating a cross-Atlantic self-referential loop. This led me to look for alternative forms of publishing outside of conventional graphic design. My investigations uncovered the artist books of Jake Tilson, particularly the *Breakfast Special* series (1986–89), which presented a powerful duality: offering typographic abstraction threaded through a narrative involving a fictitious character known as Mr. Emerson who eats five breakfasts in five cities over five days. Each of the five stories provides

an opportunity ‘to explore local atmosphere and detail in which typography is as vital to the descriptive effect as the imagery used. The choice of a specific typeface to reflect each city was important – and to write in the local language, which in *Alphabet City* meant using Polish’.<sup>24</sup> Tilson uses found typographic references, such as newspapers, magazines, wine labels and shopfronts, to suggest the typographic character of each of the five cities.

A winter afternoon spent in Tilson’s London studio in 1995 bolstered my commitment to a form of design authorship that addressed issues outside of design. I saw first-hand the financial subsidisation that design work offered in enabling him to publish books. *Breakfast Special* presents an archaeological journey using typographic artefacts as a ‘binding’ narrative, representing a sense of discovery and the observation of small things. Tilson’s use of tipped-in pages had influenced my own use of similarly distinctive, laborious elements in *Qwerty* as a way of reinforcing the human

intimacy of its diminutive A7 format.<sup>25</sup> This form of independent design publishing offered me a space between the trade-based ‘Design Industry Periodical’ (such as *Communication Graphics*) and its opposite extreme, the ‘Art Book’, a form criticised by Rock as offering ‘a form of design authorship from which function has been fully exorcised’.<sup>26</sup>

This renewed authorial position re-cast the intent of *Qwerty* – to produce a series of works that were abstract in perspective, accessible to a local design profession<sup>27</sup> whilst presenting a unique Australian contribution internationally. Through *Qwerty* I navigated the preconceptions of the self-published form, challenging a prevailing attitude that ‘the singularity of the artist’s book, the low technical quality and the absence of a practical application may alienate the professional graphic designer’.<sup>28</sup>

#### LOCAL AND/OR GENERAL

For my practice the rise of graphic design authorship offered the possibility of expressing my own cultural perspective through typography. Geographical isolation from a northern hemisphere-centric discourse persuaded me that any distinctive contribution I could offer would be a local one, based on identifying, articulating (or even at times contriving) an Australian typographic voice.

For *Qwerty* this meant a *local perspective* requiring *local observation*, referencing one’s own visual environment, particularly in the more photographically illustrative early issues. These included close-ups and montages of typography found in the Australian environment – milk bar open signs, old typewriters, spent date stamps, suburban house numbering and even the ubiquitous Civic Guide logo<sup>29</sup> – marks and artefacts that were familiar and recognisable to Australians.

This approach was not without precedent. Mimmo Cozzolino’s *Symbols of Australia* (1980) had presented an encyclopaedia-like reference of local trademarks as a ‘mirror of people’s dreams, ambitions and daily life’<sup>30</sup> and was considered wide enough in its appeal to be accepted by a major international publisher, Penguin.

*Qwerty* and *Ampersand* avoided any parochial or nationalist agenda by seeking to present a unique perspective through the selection of local typographic references aimed at an international audience.

Many publications authored and produced by designers followed in the wake of *Qwerty*. Some were typographically orientated, such as *Don’t Believe the (T)Hype*, a humble sampler booklet of typefaces informed by Australian references such as Holden EK car badging. Produced by the short-lived Prototype foundry and funded through the commercial studio Casa Forte Design, this continued

the observational awakening of what may be considered an Australian typographic identity in the early to mid-1990s. However most other publications produced during this time took on wider design issues – these included *Name Magazine*, *Funnel* (one issue, c.1997) and the Tasmanian *Typo Tastic* (two issues, c.2005–6). The most sustained was *Open Manifesto* (2003–2017). Collectively these works, emanating out of the designer-author era, contributed to an exploration of discourse around how the Australian design experience relates to a larger international context. This flurry of local design publishing began to wane as the internationalising effect of the internet began to make such discussions less urgent, or in many people’s minds, not relevant at all.

# Sans Forgetica

^ B C D E F G H I J K  
L M N O P Q R S T U  
V W X Y Z 1 2 3 4 5  
a b c d e f g h i j k l  
m n o p q r s t u v  
w x y z 6 7 8 9 0 !

## THE FONT TO REMEMBER

### THE PUBLIC FIGURE

Public engagement has increasingly played a role in my practice – whether in print publishing, exhibitions, place-making or forum events. Deliberately seeking a broader public audience inevitably involved becoming identified as a public figure in the field of typography.<sup>31</sup>

In the first decade of practice – from *Qwerty* (1991), the *Ampersand* series (1996–2001) through to *Fancy* (2003) – the level of public engagement was used conventionally as a measure of how ‘successful’ the project had been – such as attendee numbers at launches, extent of media coverage. This insecurity had come out of knowing many contemporary self-publishers slept each night with thousands of unread copies of their work under their beds, a situation I was determined to avoid.<sup>32</sup>

Having worked for both *The Age* and *The Herald and Weekly Times*, I was aware of the importance of distilling a project idea into a form that journalists could understand, be excited by and easily transform into a viable media story. Over time this gave greater impetus to the projects being presented as stories rather than independent investigations. Eventually this orientation towards storytelling permeated the nature of my writings, which were framed as narratives that would resonate with the public through issues that mattered to them. This usually involved centring on things outside of design.<sup>33</sup>

Historical precedents of Melbourne graphic designers engaging the public exist in widely varied forms – from the early childhood education orientated *Jigsaw Factory* by Bruce Weatherhead and Alex Stitt (*Weatherhead & Stitt*), through the various publishing efforts of All Australian Graffiti culminating in Mimmo Cozzolino’s *Symbols of Australia* (1980).

The Melbourne public may also have been educationally engaged by the embrace in the 1960s of the Swiss Internationalist School design which ‘(...) informed education reform and the development of tertiary graphic design courses... which drew on Swiss teaching models (...)’.<sup>34</sup> Despite these efforts, discussions of typography were generally focussed towards industry, often centred around technological developments.<sup>35</sup>

The timing of my own public engagement of the public in the early 1990s fortunately coincided with the widespread use of desktop publishing, bringing with it the capacity for anyone to choose typefaces. With the public now making these everyday decisions, this opened up a broad curiosity around fonts and their meanings.

My outwardly-focussed communication of design has been assisted by another element within my practice – teaching. The ability to discuss design with those unfamiliar or beginning in the field (verbally or in writing) has assisted in my developing a public presence. Unsurprising this is a common occupation amongst members of my community of practice such as Peter Bi’lak, Tobias-Frere-Jones, Rick Poynor and others. The reflective elements of my research open up pedagogical channels for integrating scholarship into teaching as well as offering a

way of communicating my practice concerns into a broadly distributed form.

A recent case-study in public engagement is the development of *Sans Forgetica* (2018), a typeface I collaboratively designed with psychologists Dr. Janneke Blijlevens and Dr. Joanne Laban from the RMIT Business Behavioural Lab (BBL). Based on the psychological theory of ‘desirable difficulty’ the typeface was designed to slow down the reading process and engage memory through the use of a back-slant and a gapped letter structure. In designing a typeface to assist students remember selected small texts, the project resonated with a worldwide audience by connecting to a contemporary anxiety around human memory, drawing global media coverage.<sup>36</sup> The millions of people made aware of *Sans Forgetica* show the importance of a narrative or ‘back-story’ behind the outcome. Had this project been framed with typography at its centre instead of memory, it is doubtful that such public resonance would have resulted. Nor would the public have made the important connection between the intent and function of the typeface, and by inference the suggestion that typefaces are part of our everyday lives.

Having a public persona (albeit only related to typography) has been beneficial to my practice. Through my ‘typographic evangelism’<sup>37</sup> many public issues have been discussed through the prism of letterforms, including the need for diversity (articulated through *Death to Helvetica*) and the importance of humanising design (expressed through *Assembly*). These will be explored in more depth through subsequent chapters.

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented a contextual framework from which the beginnings of my practice emerged. I have introduced the formative discourses in my development of typographic observation as well as the need to express and distribute those perspectives – design vernacular and design authorship respectively – and how these were adopted then adapted for my purposes, intents and cultural context. In particular, this chapter has explored how my first publishing effort, the *Qwerty* series (1991–1995), manifested this specific combination of interests through a localised typographic language.

This initial chapter has set the broader cultural, political and economic context from which subsequent typographic investigations were undertaken in my practice. These ultimately contribute to a cumulative ‘typographic way of knowing’ that would go on to inform further decades of projects that gradually explore practice concerns in a more nuanced form. This chapter has offered brief vignettes into matters to be explored in greater depth in subsequent chapters, specifically the role of place, the power of critique and the ways in which letterforms are able to articulate these concerns.<sup>38</sup>

OPPOSITE  
*Sans Forgetica*  
(2018)



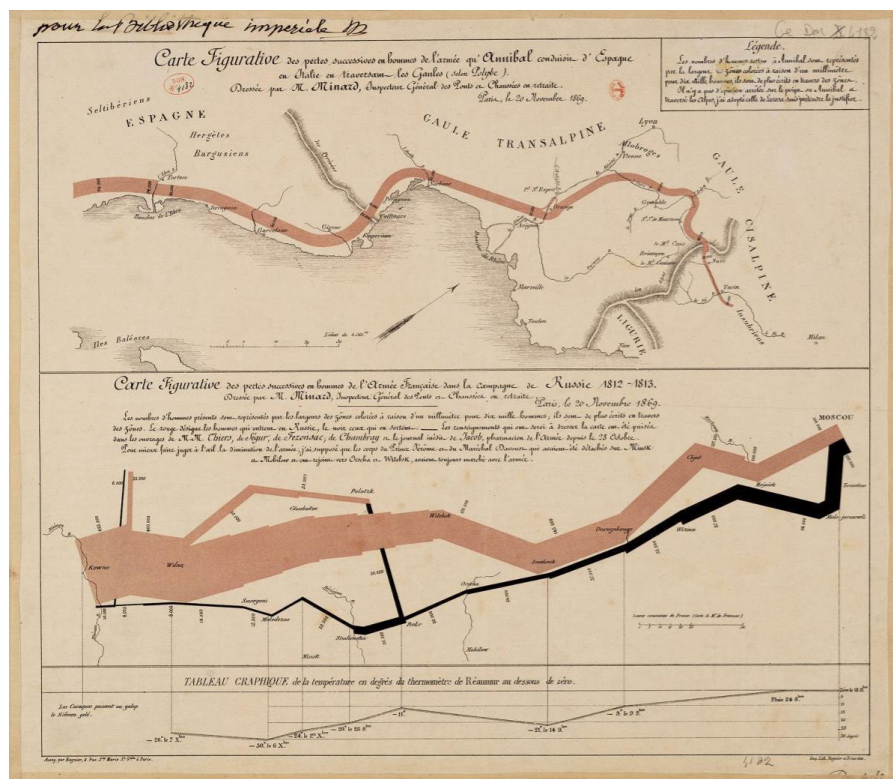
PLACE



## PLACE

It is mid-1985 and as a year 12 student I anxiously pore over the VTAC guide, a booklet outlining the current tertiary course offerings across Victoria. Within the description of the RMIT Visual Communication course, a particular word excites me and so I decide to put that course at the top of my preferred list. Having always been fascinated by maps, it was not for another six months that I realised the word I thought so thrilling – *topography* – was in fact *typography*. Misreading a single letter was to have the unexpected result of forever associating these two disciplines.

This chapter interrogates the role of place within my practice. More specifically it will explore the *mapping* of place (spatial connection) and the *reading* of place (social connection) through design project case studies. It will then explore how a typographic way of knowing can be used as a lens for telling the stories of place.



PREVIOUS PAGES  
Unknown Pleasures  
Album Cover for Joy Division  
Peter Saville  
(1979)

ABOVE  
Carte figurative des pertes  
successives en hommes de  
l'Armée Française dans la  
campagne de Russie 1812-1813  
Charles Minard (1869)

## MAPPING OF PLACE TYPOGRAPHY & TOPOGRAPHY

Although my adolescent confusion between *topography* and *typography* was serendipitous, it has informed my awareness of what is shared between the two. Interpreting topography (in its conventional cartographic sense) as mapped space seen from above, it exhibits more parallels to typography than similar spelling: maps and type are both presented as neutral, utilitarian carriers of information yet are inherently subjective; both negotiate the distribution of internal and external space; both include and exclude, emphasise and de-emphasise; both can present the seemingly familiar in new ways; and both are systems that distil complex sets of information into concise graphic form.

Expanding upon the dictionary definition of a map as a 'diagrammatic representation of an area of land',<sup>1</sup> design theorist Joost Grootens defines a map as 'a product at the intersection of cartography and graphic design. It is both the outcome of a process that builds on the premise that reality can be modelled, as well as a graphically reproduced object that conveys a message to a user'.<sup>2</sup>

Both type and maps offer a seductive sleight of hand, presenting a seemingly objective system of order whilst persuading through the subjective selection of content. The originator of a field known as 'critical cartography', British geographer John B. Harley questioned the 'scientific' or 'objective' aspects of maps. He stated that cartographers manufacture power rather than objectivity.<sup>3</sup>

Just as is the case with any product of graphic design, maps are objects of power since they code their subjects and provide identity. When maps are made, data is filtered and a system of symbols is

conceived: maps are designed, and design contributes to the manufacturing of power through maps.<sup>4</sup>

Within recent practice I have increasingly become more aware of the parallel capacities of typography and cartography to offer *subjective* (even critical) expression and connectivity from within a seemingly *objective* (neutral) container. Behind the history of the map is what Jeremy Crampton calls a:

whole series of engagements in politics, propaganda, crime and public health, imperialist boundary-making, community activism, the nation-state, cyberspace and the internet. That is, mapping has a politics.<sup>5</sup>

The subjectivity of both maps and typefaces is highlighted when they are untethered from their original informational purpose. In the case of mapping, a liberation from conventional geographic representation offers opportunities to link seemingly unrelated phenomena in order to pursue a specific argument. Evidence of this is Charles Minard's *Carte figurative des pertes successives en hommes de l'Armée Française dans la campagne de Russie 1812-1813* (1869) which pioneered the presentation of multiple datasets as one spatial information product. In the one diagram Minard was able to show Napoleon's march into, and his retreat from, Russia. Minard brought together elements such as temperature, number of troops, altitude, location and battles to collectively explain the failure of Napoleon's campaign.<sup>6</sup> In doing so he reconfigured conventions of spatial representation, transforming maps into forms we would now describe as information graphics.

Similarly, the untethering of typography from its conventional intentions, such as instruction or seduction, opens up the possibilities for engagement with cultural concerns. For example, a rediscovered 'ghost sign' no longer advertising a long-gone product transcends its original purpose to become a signifier of social history, economics and politics.

Although intentions may differ, the management of space is central to both type and maps. Privileging space as a point of concern suggests a specific awareness and sensitivity to its distribution, particularly in regards to place. According to Cross, 'spatial intelligence' is one of Howard Gardner's six forms of intelligence, and a designerly way of knowing may indeed be informed by all six.<sup>7</sup> It is this particular spatial awareness, or intelligence, as a component of a designerly way of knowing that I wish to focus on in this chapter.

A spatial intelligence necessitates the recognition of spatial absence as well as presence. Noting the political dimension of absence within cartography, Harley points out that the key to decoding a map is to look for its silences – maps 'exert a social influence through their omissions as much as by the features they depict and emphasise'.<sup>8</sup>

The power of void spaces, albeit in a more formal sense, is also familiar to the typographer, whose careful composition of internal and external spaces is used for the pragmatic matters of legibility and readability. The Canadian writer Robert Bringhurst states 'typographic letters are made legible not only by their forms and by the colour of the ink that prints them but also by the sculpted empty space between and around them'.<sup>9</sup>

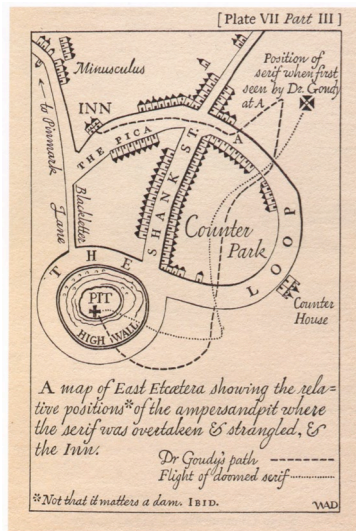
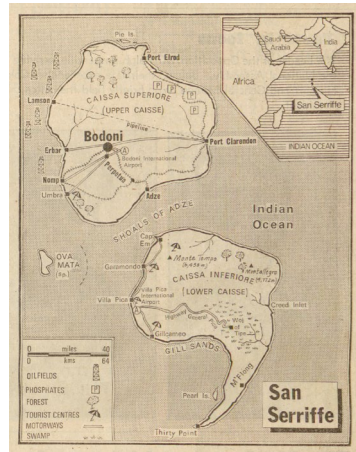
Matthew Carter notes 'the central paradox of type design is that in an immediate sense we design letterforms, but letterforms are not our product. We are really word-shape designers; it is only in combination that letters become type'.<sup>10</sup>

British typographer Alan Kitching brings a more philosophical dimension to the relationship between space, form and type by asking a seemingly simple question – What is a vase? He argues that a vase is not a place where you put a flower, as you cannot put it in the clay. The flower is being put into a space that already exists, with or without the vase. The vase, like architecture or typography, is simply a way of managing space.<sup>11</sup>

With their seemingly objective public personae, type and maps share another similarity: their authorship is unseen. In *Maphead* Ken Jennings notes that 'in one sense, geography's ubiquity is an argument for its importance'.<sup>12</sup> This echoes an argument used when assessing the cultural significance of typography – that it is 'hidden in plain sight'. The absence of attribution is central to this perceived invisibility – both are seen as being simply present with no sense of authorship. As Jennings puts it, 'Modern maps have, essentially, no origin at all: they simply emerge—fully formed, as if from the mind of Zeus... they are maps of something—but not by anyone'.<sup>13</sup>

Mindful of the shared interests between these two 'ographies', type designers have made direct reference to their counterpart, most notably *Surveyor* (2001) by *Hoefler-Frere Jones*. In his description of this extensive type family Frere Jones takes the reader on a metaphoric journey of place:





TOP  
Detail of an insert to  
*The Guardian* Newspaper,  
1 April (1977)

ABOVE  
Map of East Etcetera,  
W.A. Dwiggins  
(1936)

OPPOSITE  
'Readymix Logo' satellite  
image from the National  
Mapping Agency (1995)

*Surveyor* is a... letter with compact proportions, delicate serifs, and a sinewy italic designed to follow rivers and coastlines, map lettering invited endless variation to help distinguish different kinds of data. A map that used italics for rivers and canals might use its roman for churches and villages, small capitals for bays and harbours, and a grand, sweeping arc of italic swash capitals for the names of the oceans.<sup>14</sup>

Given the narrative power of cartography it is unsurprising that even typographic humour has been wittily translated using the language of maps. The fictional Island of 'Sans Serriffe', printed as a spoof in the *The Guardian* on April Fools Day 1977 (with its capital city Bodoni and its golden beaches known as Gill Sands)<sup>15</sup> is such an example, as is W.A Dwiggins' 1936 whimsical map of the imagined town of East Etcetera featuring the mysterious 'flight of the doomed serif'.<sup>16</sup> Both show the parallels between maps and type, used in these instances in the service of humour.

Within my own practice I have sought to explore the relationship between maps and type. For *Qwerty 5: 'Big Is Beautiful'* (1995) I set myself the task of finding the largest of each letter of the alphabet within Australia. After receiving a tip-off of a 'two-mile logo' in an area north of Esperence (on Western Australia's southern coast) I contacted the Australian Mapping Satellite Service who were finally able to topographically photograph the overgrown remnants of a massive Readymix logo that had been graded out of the desert floor in 1964.<sup>17</sup> This research uncovered its contested intention – had the two-mile logo been built as an advertising opportunity to passing air

traffic or, as the Perth office of Readymix explained, a remote four-way desert airstrip?. Although I was not the first to know of its existence, by re-contextualising it as a typographic cultural phenomenon through *Qwerty 5* (1995), *Ampersand* (1996) and *Fancy* (2003), I connected this supersized oddity to many seemingly external elements: economic agendas (publicity); political power (those who lobbied to have it removed); geography, weather (the supposed challenges of); its method of visual record (cartography) etc. The research around the Readymix site highlighted to me that combining the typographic and the cartographic can result in a rich expression of place.

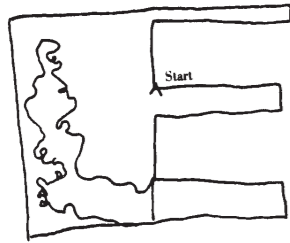
The experience of documenting 26 very large letterforms for *Qwerty 5* also showed me the powerful clarity of the topographic view. The French scholar Michel de Certeau comments upon the transformative capacity of viewing from above, albeit in an urban environment, specifically from the New York World Trade Centre:<sup>18</sup>

His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar eye, looking down like a god.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of 'reading from above' is present in literary depictions of urban place, particularly in my own focus – cities. In Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987), the detective character Quinn is tracking a mysterious walker named Stillman, who appears to be wandering the streets of New York in a random fashion. After days of observation, it was only







ABOVE  
Stillman's sketch of Quinn's movements in Manhattan, from *The New York Trilogy* Paul Auster (1987)



ABOVE  
Opinionated Map *US Geography and Climate* Paul Scher (2002)

OPPOSITE  
Visual investigations into 'Step Typography', Wolfgang Weingart (2014)

when Quinn mapped his movements from above that he realised Stillman was in fact spelling out 'Tower of Babel' using the grid-structure of Manhattan as a base.

(...) Stillman had not left a message anywhere. True, he had created the letters by the movement of his steps, but they had not been written down. It was like drawing a picture in the air. The image vanishes as you are making it. There is no result, no trace to mark what you have done.<sup>20</sup>

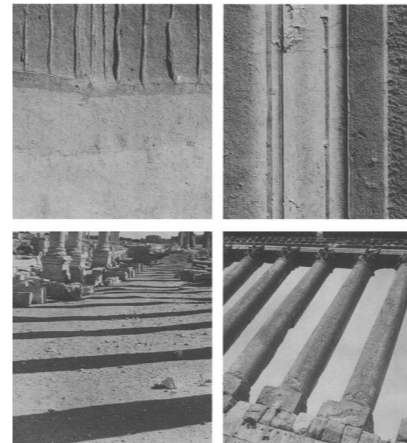
However, the topographic mapping of movement only hints at the humanity it records. Used in isolation it fails to recognise the importance of a direct human experience. De Certeau highlights this deficiency when he argues that:

It is true that the operations of walking can be traced on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths (here well-trodden, there very faint) and their trajectories (going this way and not that). But these

thick and thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by. Surveys of routes miss what was the act itself of passing by.<sup>21</sup>

The experience of a city is individualised in a way that is not acknowledged by conventional cartography, argues Harmon: 'the coded visual language of maps is one we all know, but in making maps of our worlds we each have our own dialect'.<sup>22</sup>

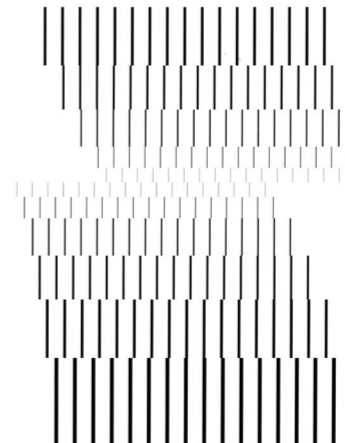
Kevin Lynch recognises that the visualizing of urban space as a montage of typologies may in fact be closer to the fragmented way in which we create our own mental maps.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps we can begin to use database-driven maps to understand place within a system of relations determined by their relevance to our queries, rather than their geographic location.<sup>24</sup> Aligning our own experience and recollection of place enables necessary connections, or as Harmon points out, 'like memory, geography is associative'.<sup>25</sup>



The 'opinionated maps' of American designer Paula Scher offer us a direct intermeshing of human experience within map-making. Scher's painting for the cover of the AIGA Annual *Graphic Design USA II* (1989) listed every state of the United States showing the percentage of people in each who used *Helvetica*.<sup>26</sup>

I made up the statistics, but I decided to base them loosely on the 1986 Reagan-Mondale presidential election. I reasoned that if Reagan carried a state the local designers were probably inclined to use a lot of Helvetica.<sup>27</sup>

Further hand-painted 'opinionated maps' by Scher emerged over the following decade, all drawing upon her own experiences of place.<sup>28</sup> From my own perspective Scher's work importantly unites a powerful trio – typography, cartography and story into a unified form. Each of these shifts as the viewer 'reads' the work – the 'opinionated maps' are



immediately and recognisably cartographic then realised as typographic composition, through which a personal narrative is finally delivered. Yet the effect is instantaneous as the map is, quite literally, the stories.

Other projects seek to present story and place simultaneously through direct physical experience. It was during a chance encounter with Jeffrey Shaw's installation *Legible City, Responsive Environment* (1988–91) at the 1992 Sydney Biennale that I first witnessed this combination rendered as a city in typographic form. This work comprised a stationary bicycle that the user could ride through a simulated representation of a city made of computer-generated, three-dimensional letters forming words and sentences along the sides of the streets. Using the ground plans of actual cities—Manhattan, Amsterdam and Karlsruhe—*The Legible City* replaces the existing architecture of these cities with text formations. As Shaw notes, 'Travelling through these cities of words is consequently

a journey of reading; choosing the path one takes creates a recombination of these texts, and spontaneous conjunctions of meaning'. The architectural mapping of textual stories represented in *The Legible City* suggested to me the possibilities of typographically rendering the specific narratives of cities.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE TERRAIN OF THE PAGE

On the more intimate and constrained terrain of the typeset page, typographers are aware that visual representation of text features its own unique topography – with contoured textual hierarchies creating a foregrounding or backgrounding of specific informational content. Texts are metaphorically mapped, from the highest peaks of hierarchical importance (key messages) through flatter plateaus (continuous, longer length text) to its deepest troughs (less consequential content such as footnoting).

Such metaphoric association between terrain and typography is apparent in the works of

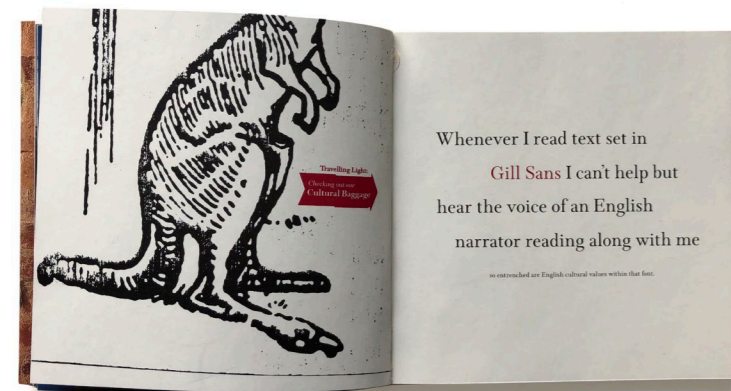




TOP  
*Capitalis Senatus*  
typeface designed by  
Garry Emery (1988)

ABOVE  
*Ampersand N°1*  
Stephen Banham  
(1997)

OPPOSITE  
*Licence Photo Studio*  
Walker Evans, New York  
(1934)



Swiss typographer Wolfgang Weingart, who noted:

Whether it was the digging sites of Baalbek, the buildings in the ancient caravan city of Palmayra in the Syrian desert, or the clay settlements on the southern outskirts of Damascus, I began to see everything documented on my trips, every topographical image as typographic abstraction. At last I perceived the aesthetic connection between the contour of the landscape and my typographic pictures.<sup>30</sup>

Weingart reveals his reference, naming this particular period of typographic exploration ‘Step Typography’. He reflected upon the stone staircases in the ruins of Baalbak (Lebanon), noticing similar stepped patterns on the surfaces of stone walls, stating that ‘observations of two and three dimensional structures were the source of many (typo) graphic variations...’<sup>31</sup>

Although not typographic, recent manifestations of cartographically referential work include Peter Saville’s seminal cover artwork for Joy Division’s 1979 album *Unknown Pleasures*, with its stark lineal curves hugging a dynamic sonic terrain<sup>32</sup> and Brian Eno’s four-part *Ambient* series (1978–1982). Both these works have been instructive for my own work, not only in terms of poetic understatement (Saville) but the power of graphic seriality (Eno). Both hint at a metaphoric place through the use of found cartographic abstraction. Their distinct lack of specific information breaks cartographic convention, preserving a mysterious opacity to these ‘locations’, rendering them both nowhere and everywhere.

## READING OF PLACE NATIONAL

A stroll along any British high street will reveal something rather curious about the lettering on view: almost all of it stems directly from, or shares some common ancestry with, the typefaces created by Edward Johnson (1872–1944) and Eric Gill (1882–1940). Indeed, their influence can be discerned throughout British life. Switch on the television or computer, open a newspaper, watch a film, read a map, fill in a form, go to a shop, take a train, drive along any road – almost everywhere you look, the lettering style they introduced will be there in front of you.<sup>33</sup>

However you travel to France, by plane or boat, the chances are that you will see some of Roger Excoffon’s typography within minutes of arriving in the country. If it is not the tail of the plane bearing the Air France logo, it will be a delivery lorry leaving the port with its business name set in *Banco*, *Choc* or *Mistral*, three of his most distinctive typefaces.<sup>34</sup>

Two different cities. Two different countries. Yet they share a relationship between typography and place. This nexus between physical location and its typographic expression has been a focus of investigation within my practice, in particular the national specificity of being a typographer based in Melbourne, Australia.

In *Ampersand* (1996) I explored the role geographic location plays upon cultural identity. To illustrate this I drew upon typefaces that had come to represent a national character, in particular the capacity for *Gill Sans* to conjure the voice of an English narrator.<sup>35</sup> I questioned whether Australia would ever have its own equivalent. I now

realise that this naïve proposition fails to acknowledge a key factor in the cultural absorption of typographic identity – usage over time. Nationally emblematic typefaces such as *Gill Sans* and *Helvetica* have achieved their status as visual shorthand for England and Switzerland respectively through an enduring presence in civic and commercial communications over many decades. The relationship between a national typographic identity and the investment of time could also be viewed spatially in that it links geographic space (place) with temporal space (time).

A typographic articulation of Australian culture had been undertaken nearly a decade prior to my own questioning in *Ampersand*. In 1988 Gary Emery (of Emery Vincent Associates) had been commissioned to design a bespoke titling typeface for Australia’s New Parliament House. Playfully known by the local design press as *Capitalis Senatus*<sup>36</sup>, the typeface answered the pragmatic demands of the project, whilst subtly referencing the early signage of the colonial era. The result is an amalgam of *Trajan*, *Avant Garde*, *Futura* and *Copperplate Gothic*. Having been installed nearly three decades ago, the success of Emery’s typeface lies not only in its skilful execution and its avoidance of a laboured ‘Australian-ness’ but its enduring presence within this Australian institution. Emery observed ‘I don’t think we should necessarily go looking for the regional. But if we look inwards, then we can discover what is true to the place and create a sense of place and a sense of meaning that is Australian. The visual manifestation of that will be unique’.<sup>37</sup>

The intent to visually represent any culture can lead to brutal abbreviations, compressing the complexity of lived experience of a place



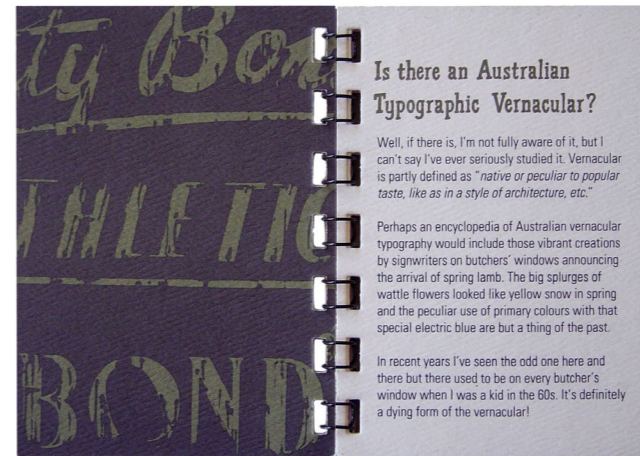
into a pattern of crudely-related symbols. Likewise, the representation of a city presents challenges that, as Lynch suggests, can only be made clearer by recognising and organising its constituent parts into a legible network:

Just as this printed page, if it is legible, can be visually grasped as a related set of recognizable symbols, so a legible city would be one whose districts or landmarks or pathways are easily identifiable and are easily grouped into an over-all pattern.<sup>38</sup>

Within my earlier practice, the exploration of place was an ingredient in a wider investigation of typography’s capacity to reflect lived human experience – in particular, my own. This may explain why my need to write from the perspective of being an Australian typographer faded over the decades, from being a prime concern in early issues of *Qwerty* through to a mere byline in later publishing.

The earlier incarnations of this enquiry are worth closer examination as they not only





OPPOSITE AND LEFT  
Spreads from *Qwerty 2*  
Stephen Banham  
(1992)

show the beginnings of my interrogations of place but also their early confusion with nationality (specifically Australian). The second issue of the *Qwerty* series, *Qwerty 2: The Vernacular Issue* (1992) explored the existence of a truly Australian typographic expression. Despite its well-intended premise, its reliance on aesthetic triggers ultimately led to a rather contrived and reductive effort to find a ‘national’ typographic persona.

The use of local references in the *Qwerty* series led to accusations of parochialism. In defending this position several years later, I pointed out that such content simply reflected the everyday type on the streets rather than a strategy for expressing a distinctly Australian persona. Some things were (quintessentially Australian), such as the racetrack betting slips in *Qwerty 1*, and others were not.<sup>39</sup>

Despite its flawed intent, *Qwerty 2* opened up a brief opportunity to reflect upon what it was to be an Australian designer (in a pre-internet era) and what unique perspectives this could possibly offer. More than 25 years later, the real worth of this search for national identity in *Qwerty 2* may lie in the journey of personal identity for its young author/designer.<sup>40</sup>

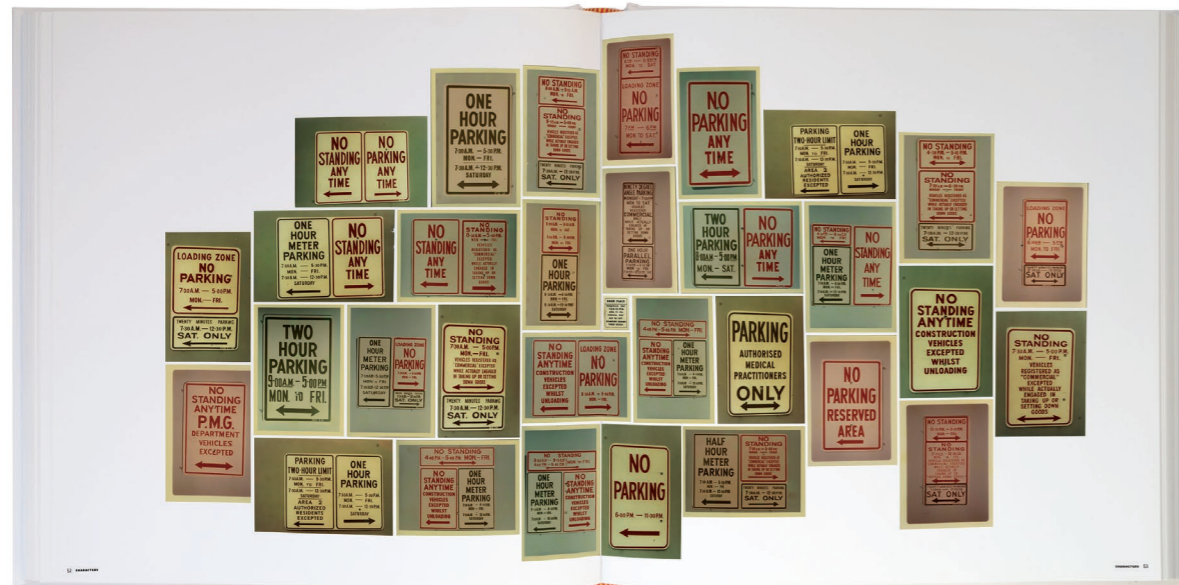
This earlier approach to identity also brought up its own inherent contradictions – I resented being labelled an ‘Australian designer’ in the international design press whilst simultaneously publishing stories that drew upon distinctly Australian observations and perspectives. This conflicted position gradually dissipated as the work began to look at place not through a national prism but through a more nuanced sense of place. Selected case studies are presented further in this chapter to bring a greater understanding as to the developments in how ‘a sense of place’ has been articulated through projects within my practice.

#### READING OF PLACE MELBOURNE

Although my relationship with a national identity has been fraught at times, my sense of place regarding my own city, Melbourne, has been a more comfortable one. Tightening the focus, I will now investigate the role that Melbourne has played in my practice and my typographic expression of place.

The concept of ‘Melbourne-ness’ is as much an abstracted collection of experiences and memories as it is a geography. Melbourne has been a regular ‘character’ in its literature – the misty darkness of Fergus Hume’s *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, Neville Shute’s doomed Melbourne in *On The Beach*, the inner-city debauchery of Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip*, the rich multicultural Melbourne of Arnold Zable’s *Café Sheherazade* through to the class tribalism of Christos Tsiolkas’ *The Slap*. They not only highlight Melbourne’s cultural depth and multiplicity but also how challenging, even futile, any attempt at distilling its character is.





My own contribution, *Characters: Cultural Stories Revealed Through Typography* (Thames and Hudson, 2011) centred on a human experience of a city told through the stories of its typographic markers of place – signage. What at first may appear to be a narrow focus instead magnifies and reflects the unique and often unconventional narratives of place and its people. Melbourne was the case study city for *Characters* yet its aims were universal. The book proposed that any city could have its stories told through typography, and that this form of storytelling could be undertaken in any city of the world, given local knowledge and observation.

When viewed in the context of my practice, *Characters* marks a shift in how place is typographically articulated – through a specific city (Melbourne) rather than through an entire nationality as it had been in earlier publishing such as *Qwerty 2*.

Even in projects prior to *Characters*, Melbourne was regularly present in my writings. In *Ampersand* (1996) the typographic expression of the ‘self’ took on an unashamedly local reference, slicing the ubiquitous *Melways* street directory logo down to its first two letters – ‘Me’. This representation, understandable only by Melburnians, suggested that local perspectives were as valid as international references, offering an intimate voice amidst the globalised chorus of 1990s typography. *Ampersand* was the first issue in a follow-up series to *Qwerty*, offering a larger page format with more extensive texts.

My design focus on a city is not without precedent. Design studio Inkahoots is based in Brisbane and explicitly sites its practice within that city’s political fabric, particularly in its opposition to the right-wing Joh Bjelke-Petersen era (1968–1987). Both studios appear to be exceptions, as Poynor pointed out in his research for *Eye 46*,

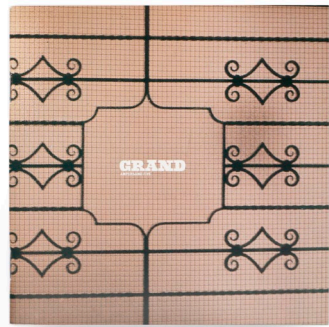
(...) It’s odd, looking at contemporary Australian graphic design, how little it seems to be informed by a strong sense of place.<sup>41</sup>

Later attempts at expressing ‘Melbourne-ness’ avoid an overarching sense of the city, instead expressing it through specific detail. Whether through the provenance of street naming (*Cluster*) or design surveys of economic over-stimulation (*Cashcow Oblique*) these projects represent the uncovering of the city’s unseen typographic rhythms and patterns, reinterpreting this seemingly familiar place in new ways.

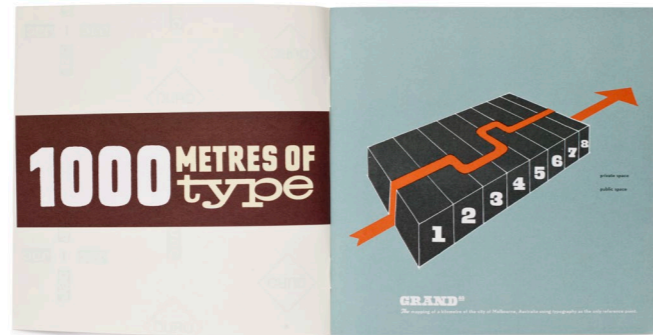
OPPOSITE  
*Characters: Cultural Stories revealed through typography*  
Stephen Banham  
(2011)

TOP  
*Ampersand N°1*  
Stephen Banham  
(1997)

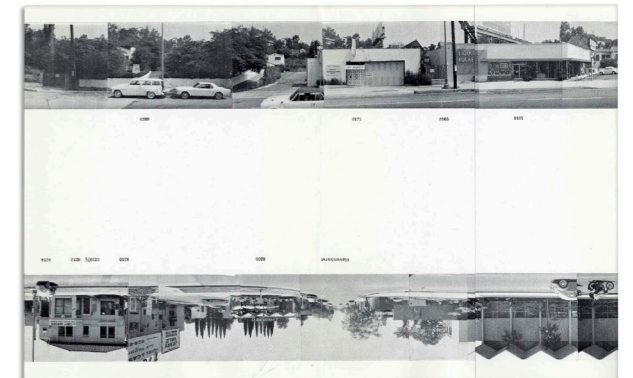
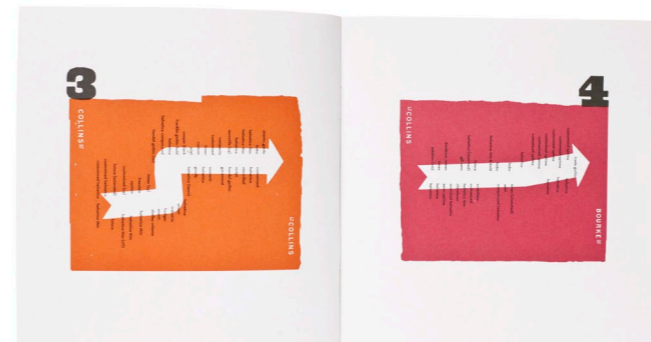




TOP, RIGHT AND  
OPPOSITE LEFT  
*Grand*  
Stephen Banham  
(2001)



OPPOSITE RIGHT  
*Every Building on  
the Sunset Strip*  
Ed Ruscha  
(1966)



## STORIES OF PLACE

Having investigated place through the parallels of typography and topography within both national and city contexts, I will now interrogate how a typographic knowing of place can lead to its ultimate form of dissemination – the story.

Stories of place widen the focus from the previous section's investigation of the *mapping* of place (showing patterns of spatial connection) into this section based on the *reading* of place (showing patterns of social connection). Framing these social connections through a typographic lens, they become a form of 'typographic storytelling' – using letterforms as the conduit through which stories of social change, politics and economics<sup>42</sup> are linked, interwoven and expressed. At its heart, typographic storytelling draws upon the power of letterforms as cultural signifiers in order to make tacit relationships more explicit.

### STORIES OF PLACE *Grand*

In the winter of 2001 I analysed place through an extensive typographic audit, using field research to note every instance of typography across 1000 metres (or eight city blocks) of central Melbourne. The route itself was familiar to me on a daily basis, beginning at Flinders Lane (the location of my studio at that time) and running through to Latrobe Street (the location of the university at which I teach). Upon reflection, this choice of route revealed an autobiographical element, that the audit was documenting not only the city but my own experience of it.

The resultant publication, *Grand* (2001) featured a city block map per page with every typeface meticulously specified and listed. The variety and frequency of typefaces appearing across the kilometre were expressed through a series of diagrams investigating the role of place, specifically socio-economic

environments, in the choice and distribution of typefaces.<sup>43</sup>

Although the typographic audit echoes many of Spencer's photographic explorations in *Typographica*, its graphic representation draws more closely upon one of Spencer's contemporaries, FHK Henrion, in particular his design of *Royal Hall: The Official Record*.<sup>44</sup> Henrion's use of hand-drawn aural and architectural contours throughout the book provided a cue for *Grand's* diagrammatic approach to both the mapping and its analysis.

At some point in *Grand* however two of the primary concerns of my practice at that time – critical discourse and typographic observation – become entangled and trip each other up. Indicative of an earlier period in my practice when dogma was privileged over analysis, the texts in *Grand* present a bluntly political commentary on the over-representation of *Helvetica* across the chosen kilometre.<sup>45</sup>

Midway through, the intent of *Grand* appears to shift from the reading of place through an analysis of the '1000 metres of type'<sup>46</sup> to an impassioned, yet predictable, busting of the *Helvetica* neutrality myth.

This typographic audit could only ever hope to offer a frozen moment, place and perspective. Fifteen years later *Grand's* enduring contribution may be as a 'snapshot' of Melbourne's conservative typographic complexion in the early 2000s.

In using a methodical and exhaustive audit to map and read place (and time), *Grand* sought parallels with previous durational works such as Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). Ruscha had described his 1966 work as 'architectural in nature... they all possess a ground line, a landscape line that is actually horizontal, all the way through the book'.<sup>47</sup> Ruscha's inclination for frontal observation follows a photographic trajectory from Walker Evans' *Highway*

*Corner, Reedsville, West Virginia* (1935), through John Baldessari's *Looking East on 4<sup>th</sup> and C, Chula Vista, Calif.* (1967) and Dennis Hopper's *Double Standard* (1961). Rather than a horizontal viewpoint, the orientation of *Grand* is topographic, less pictorial and more diagrammatic.

In 'mapping' the kilometre length of Melbourne, *Grand* was recognising and revealing an underlying pattern language and its relationship to the activities that contribute to defining the character of that area.

The graphically reductive pages of *Grand* tell a tale of protest against a perceived cultural flattening during the insecure first few years of the new millennium. In acknowledging and questioning the over-representation of an imported Swiss neutrality into Melbourne, it brought up issues of the role of type in relation to place and national identity, reminding us that typefaces do in fact come from somewhere.



STORIES OF PLACE

*Cluster*

Whereas *Grand* eventually imposed a pre-existing argument upon a place, a far more considered approach in simultaneously mapping and reading place emerged through a later project, *Cluster* (2013). *Cluster* proposed that the origins of what would be considered urban branding today can be found in thematic street naming systems.<sup>48</sup> The research preceding *Cluster* uncovered not only individual housing estates but entire suburbs within Greater Melbourne that had been given unique personalities through the collective naming of their streets.<sup>49</sup> With the help of several research assistants I combed maps of Melbourne, discovering areas named after all manner of themes including football players, golf, authors, rivers, stadiums, numbers, Camelot, the 100 Years War and even the Beatles.

*Cluster* was based on the premise that naming engenders identity. As Deyan Sudjic notes:

it is still true that the identity of a city, as a whole, starts with its name.<sup>50</sup> ...street names can usefully describe topographies and indicate functional differentiation or orientation...they also show the resonances and the depths of the historical layers in a city. Street names are a declaration of political intent as well as a navigational tool.<sup>51</sup>

This project sought to connect social history through typographic representation. Displayed as an extensive system of related marks, the cluster maps adopt glyph-like characteristics. Whereas *Grand* measured the tangible<sup>52</sup> (typefaces), *Cluster* mapped the intangible (patterns of naming) that only adopted type-like qualities through interpretation. This proposition hints at expanding the ‘typographic’ into forms exhibiting distinctly type-like traits. In doing so, *Cluster* marks an important maturation in my practice in its embrace of ambiguity and reader-led conclusions.

In some specific cases, such as the transformation of Elwood’s swampland into a ‘perfumed’ network of streets named after English poets, *Cluster* makes explicit underlying economic intentions. The ethics of embellishing status for commercial gain through aspirational (and unrelated) naming is implied, to be drawn out by the reader through a gentler, less dogmatic tone.

*Cluster’s* openness to multiple interpretation may have lent it the requisite artistic credibility to be selected as a Melbourne Festival Art Tram in 2015. For me this highlighted the potential of an idea that, like *Characters* (2011), is about a localised place yet also universal in its scope.

*Cluster* was conceived and designed *about* the public *for* the public, so it was fitting that it should be transformed from an exhibition to 52 metres of tram, one of the most readily identifiable aspects of Melbourne. When applied to the sides of the tram, the scale of

the ‘glyph-maps’ allowed the street names to be displayed within the line-work, making it possible for commuters to locate their own streets yet understand it as an overall system of naming.

Despite their many differences, *Cluster* and *Grand* do share a way of mapping place through the ‘present yet unseen’ systems concealed below the visible surface. Both reframe the seemingly familiar city and suburban streets by acknowledging tacit lines of connection. In drawing these phenomena together, often as a taxonomy, the projects echo de Certeau’s metaphoric description of navigating a city as one searches a library:

randomly stacked shelves mean that their contents are lost to us, or reveal themselves only through random encounters, but some form of categorization gives us a chance to explore in a purposeful way.<sup>53</sup>

In seeking to make underlying systems such as politics and economics evident, projects such

as *Cluster* represent place through both the seen (built form) and unseen (lived form). The medium through which this is communicated is storytelling. In showing an extensive network of streets named after 1980s Essendon Football players for instance, *Cluster* uncovers an underlying cultural aspiration through sport; loose municipal naming laws; and an indication of subdivision dates and geographies of ‘growth corridors’. Although the street signs within this estate are clearly visible, their collective meaning is only made clear through this kind of specific focus.

Through storytelling, projects such as *Cluster* seek to make our understanding of ‘place’ clearer by creating a map of human experience. Gouveia, Farais and Gatto argue that our ‘image of (an) environment is based on the interactions people have with their surroundings that help them to make sense, code and evaluate their environment’.<sup>54</sup>

Yet different projects from my practice do this using different strategies. For example, stories of a ‘branded place’ are common across both *Grand* and *Cluster*, yet *Grand* represents this as a mapped observation of typographic form while *Cluster* is toponymical observation resulting in a typographic-like form. A maturation in the way that place is represented becomes evident – the *Grand* project is more literal and prescriptive whilst the *Cluster* project presents a more lateral and speculative proposition of place.

*Cluster* was in part catalysed by my interest in *Morgans* Street Directories, editions of which I had collected from 2011 onwards. When comparing these editions as sets, the growth of outer suburban Melbourne becomes very evident, and with it the naming of new estates.

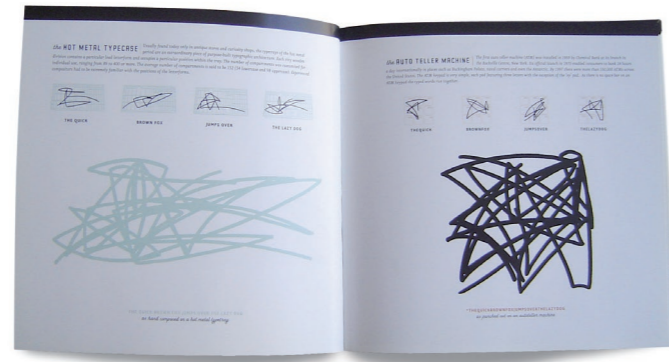
This manifested an intrinsic fascination with ‘variations across time’ (in this case, maps over chronological editions). This is discussed in greater depth in the next chapter on ‘sets’.



PREVIOUS PAGES  
*Cluster*  
Diagrams and Tram  
(2015)

ABOVE  
*Fancy*  
Stephen Banham  
(2003)

OPPOSITE  
*Characters: Cultural stories revealed through typography*  
Stephen Banham  
(1989)



STORIES OF PLACE  
*Fancy*

The use of narrative in expressing place becomes a prominent concern in my practice with the publishing of *Fancy* in 2003. Throughout the previous year I had amassed an extensive collection of found printed ephemera. These included a series of postcards featuring what appeared to be direct, hand-written messages but had been in fact mechanically printed en masse as advertisements. This patently ‘untrustworthy’ material led me to investigate the blurring of fact and fiction within graphic design.

*Fancy* began by questioning why the graphic design sections in libraries are categorised as non-fiction whilst the currency of graphic design is considered to be creative, speculative and at times fanciful. This question forced me to acknowledge the conventions of how design is documented – that graphic design writing usually takes the form of retrospective

summaries of designers (*real* people) and the artefacts they have produced (*real* things).

Instead *Fancy* presented a series of typographic stories – some factual, some false. These range from the tale of the ‘Glue Forecaster’ (a mysterious signage installer who tried to predict the longevity of business by writing forecasts in the glue that held up their signage), the story of Arthur Stace (who evangelically chalked the word ‘Eternity’ an estimated 500,000 times across the streets of Sydney) through to the ambitious Roman Kingsley (a South Australian bird-trainer who developed a new system of skywriting using highly-trained geese). The truth (or not) of these stories is never revealed to the reader, inviting open speculation.

*Fancy* represented some shifts in perspective – it was my first publication that was completely story-based; it did not explicitly position itself as Australian (*Qwerty 1*, *Qwerty 2*), address issues of the Australian design industry

(*Convoy*) or audit an Australian cultural landscape (*Grand, Assembly*). Instead it laid the foundations for a broader expression of place through narrative, to be investigated more rigorously in *Characters* eight years later.

This use of storytelling allowed me to shift my understanding of place beyond referring to a specific geographic place or national identity and instead look into increasingly metaphoric places – such as, in the case of *Fancy*, the place that truth and fiction occupied within graphic design.

STORIES OF PLACE  
*Characters*

The focus on narrative developed over many years made the selection of content for the *Characters* book very specific. In contrast with earlier publications such as *Qwerty 2* which presented a more aesthetically-based sense of place, the criteria for *Characters* had now been reversed, privileging narrative depth. *Characters* proposed that a city could be read through the stories of its typography, particularly its signage. Through sites and stories within its case study city (Melbourne) the book investigated how localised typographic narratives could be applied universally to any city in the world, a point acknowledged by *New York Times* design critic Alice Rawsthorn:

It would have been possible for him to have described almost any other city, town or village through its signage, but Mr. Banham chose Melbourne because

he lives and works there, and knows its signs so well. The result is a spirited and perceptive cultural history of the city and its signage...<sup>55</sup>

*Characters* drew upon over 20 years of observations, photographs and writings, in particular the groundwork for a previous booklet project *Characters and Spaces* produced for the 2009 Melbourne State of Design Festival.<sup>56</sup> Whilst *Characters and Spaces* took a single city block of Melbourne as a specific focus, *Characters* embraced an entire city.

The stories within *Characters* were researched and contextualized through a cultural and historical framework. The ‘Aqua Profonda’ lettering at the Fitzroy Pool was one such example. From this site came the story of a concerned pool manager in 1953 who, after rescuing many children of newly arrived Italian migrants from the deep end of the pool, decided to paint a very large ‘Deep

Water’ warning. He however misspelt the sign, spelling the Italian ‘Acqua Profonda’ as the Latin ‘Aqua Profonda’.

60 years on, the sign is not only a functional warning<sup>57</sup> but an enduring legacy of post-war migration. It has since been used as a metaphoric backdrop in the 1982 film of Helen Garner’s *Monkey Grip*, a title for public protest, a musical and even the Australian exhibition in the Venice Biennale of Contemporary Art. The narrative approach taken with this site, and all others in *Characters*, exploited its connective value (in this case literary, political, economic, multicultural and artistic) rather than merely visual appeal.



LEFT TOP AND BOTTOM  
The Acqua Profonda sign  
in *Monkey Grip*  
(1982)

MIDDLE  
*Multistory*  
Stephen Banham  
(2016)

RIGHT  
*Pause Here Then Go*  
Stephen Banham  
(1993)

## STORIES OF PLACE *Multistory*

In 2016 a project emerged that allowed me to develop the narrative structures developed in *Characters* to transcend the printed page into a public place. Funded through the City of Melbourne ‘Test Sites’ public art program, *Multistory* tells a series of linked stories around objects and architecture that can be seen from a single large window overlooking a slice of Swanston Street. In many ways this project offers both a mapping and reading of place – a *macro* view of a section of the city from above street level given graphic form – which is then imbued with the intimate telling of connected stories (*micro*) within that area.

Unlike the sites in *Characters*, those in *Multistory* are not typographic but are sites of broader interest expressed through typography. Installed within the aspirational Emporium shopping centre, this project explicitly highlighted the role of place through

narrative and by being in that place. Positioned directly outside the entrance to the toilets, *Multistory* offered a captive (waiting) audience an opportunity to pause and engage with the series of linked stories, the last sentence of one story neatly folding into the next: an explanation of the QV acronym leads to the Queen Victoria Hospital’s significance in vaccinating children, which then leads to the council’s efforts to inject hormones into the plane trees to minimise pollen release.

Bringing these collective stories into the lived experience of shoppers through typography suggests their unexpected connection to the history and events of the city. It gently proposes that the human experiences of the city are not only shared but are intrinsically connected with each other. This draws upon the ideas underpinning Ryan Gander’s *Loose Associations* which Francesca Grassi describes as a process that ‘shows a recognisable digressional approach that creates a series of happy encounters rather than a simple

discovery’.<sup>58</sup> Benefiting from reflective observations and analysis of the candidature, *Multistory* opens up multiple ways of reading, able to be read either from its beginning or its end. By liberating itself from a fixed medium such as print and unexpectedly bringing itself to the viewer, it cites a very specific spatial relationship with the city and its inhabitants.

The highly considered, site-specific narrative in *Multistory* offers a developmental counterpoint to a much earlier project. During the early 1990s recession when Collins Street shopfronts lay empty, artist Maggie McCormick curated the *No Vacancy Project* (1990–1994) through the Melbourne City Council enabling artists to exhibit their work in a central location. As McCormick recalls ‘In the context of that time, there were derelict shop fronts right opposite the Town Hall – the idea that people were offering to actually do something to them was very attractive’. Even the foyer of the then-derelict Regent Theatre was used for temporary installations

and performances.<sup>59</sup> It was into this context that my typographic installation *Pause Here Then Go* (1993) was installed in a derelict shopfront, now a Ralph Lauren boutique. The work itself, a tiled colour-photocopied image of signage sourced from a Japanese language book, was conceived as a blunt comment on the passive consumption of art. Mindful of the need to be bold to capture the wandering gaze of the casual passer-by, it clearly did its job, turning up in the pages of *The End of Print*, Lewis Blackwell’s seminal monograph of David Carson. Carson had photographed it during a Melbourne lecture tour, mistakenly crediting it as an ‘empty storefront, New Zealand’.<sup>60</sup>

A lot more than just 23 years separate *Multistory* and *Pause Here Then Go*. The different approaches taken between these two public projects highlight how my doctoral research had shifted my practice concerns from presenting a definitive statement (a non-site specific monologue) into to a more discursive narrative of place (a conversational

storytelling). Whereas *Pause Here Then Go* presented a re-contextualisation of an existing typographic image, *Multistory* was intrinsically site-specific, underpinned by considerable research into stories centred on the various features seen from that one single viewpoint. It invited the viewer to participate by creating their own narrative journey. Its tone is gentler, humorous and more confident. *Pause Here Then Go* is intentionally provocative, indicative of an agitated, less settled young designer. Although both projects involve the use of windows,<sup>61</sup> *Pause Here Then Go* delivers an opaque abruptness whilst *Multistory* presents a clearer, more engaging narrative. The former is designed to be *looked at*, the latter to be *looked through*.

The transformation of a ‘typographic way of knowing’ into ‘typographic storytelling’ as a way of expressing place was developed through a long process of maturation across many projects of my practice. It took the pre-existing dispositions of the typographer, such



LEFT  
Children's drawings  
from *Circular*  
(2010)

OVERLEAF LEFT  
The 'NewMinster,  
Champion of the West'  
manhole cover plate  
from *Circular*  
Stephen Banham  
(2010)

FOLLOWING PAGES  
*To The Beach*  
Stephen Banham  
(2012)

OPPOSITE  
The 'Race to the Park'  
manhole cover plate  
from *Circular*  
Stephen Banham  
(2010)

OVERLEAF RIGHT  
Digital Sketches for  
*To The Beach*  
Stephen Banham  
(2012)

as observation and pattern recognition, and brought these together into the continuity of narrative. Metaphorically framing this as a 'typographic lens' reinforces its dual ability – to tighten its typographic focus whilst simultaneously opening up broader cultural connections. The development from *showing* typography (as done in the *Qwerty* series) to telling stories *through* typography gestures to a more enduring and engaging relationship with the reader's sense of place. In articulating place through a narrative-based strategy, I have sought to broaden a public understanding of typography through introducing parallel elements of interest. This disseminates a 'typographic way of knowing' by acknowledging the ultimate power and purpose of stories to resonate and linger.

## PLACEMAKING

The past decade of my practice has seen a further shift in how place is articulated. It has moved from representing place through photographic record (*Qwerty*), documentation (*Grand*) and story-telling (*Fancy, Characters*) into a more direct and site-specific act – place-making projects. These interventions into the built environment explore narrative in a physically embedded form, literally *contributing* to a place rather than *referring* to it.

The installation of (usually three-dimensional) typographic works into the built environment highlights the spatial tension between letterforms and their most closely related built form – architecture. Like type, 'architecture is not simply the construction of buildings; it is the construction of space, both inner and outer. It is also the enshrining of stories'.<sup>62</sup>

The jostling between architecture and typography for expressive supremacy was noted as early as Victor Hugo's 1831 novel *Notre Dame de Paris*:



Architecture is dethroned. Gutenberg's letters of lead are about to supersede Orpheus's letters of stone. The invention of printing is the greatest event in human history. It is the mother of revolution. It is the mode of expression of humanity which is totally renewed...<sup>63</sup>

In Herbert Spencer's 1961 issue of *Typographica*, American graphic designer Robert Brownjohn frames the tensions between the architectural and the typographic through the figurative 'man in the street':

A visitor to New York taking his first morning's walk down Fifth Avenue stopped to inspect a bit of architectural detail that appealed to him, stepped back, looked up, and was pole-axed with the full force of one hundred and two floors of Empire State Building. The bit of detail that got his eyes above his head was a big, fat, curly letter F. The fact is that we begin to see our cityscape not so much as architecture as

three-dimensional typography... Until he is knocked down and stares up at a from the stretcher, his streetscape is road, pavement and the first two floors. He remembers buildings by name, number, and any other graphic statement within his vision.<sup>64</sup>

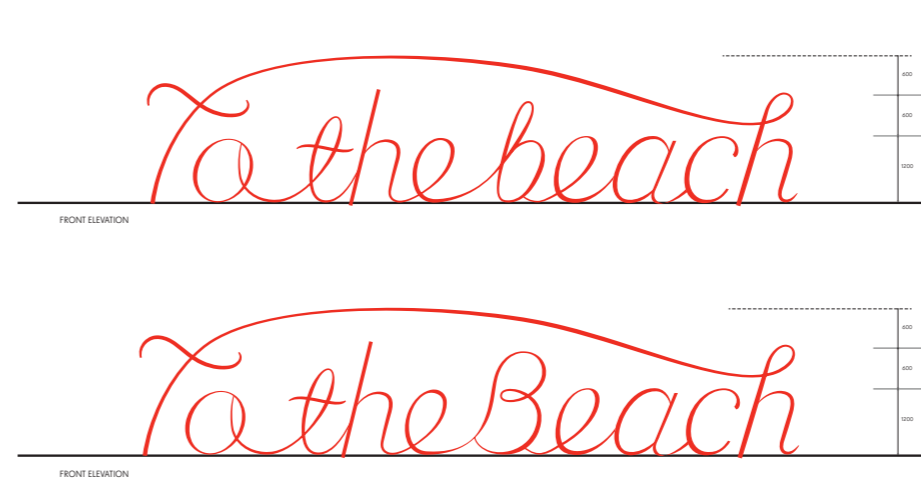
The interplay of typography upon and within the built environment necessitated a term to express this tension – the 'typographic landscape':

(...) what we call typographic landscape is the landscape formed by a subset of graphic elements in the urban environment: characters that form words, dates and other messages composed of letters and numbers. Typography is here understood in a broad sense, including reference to alphabetic and para-alphabetic characters obtained from processes that would otherwise be better described as lettering (painting, engraving, casting etc.) and not only from automatic or mechanical processes that characterize typography in a more restricted sense.<sup>65</sup>

In *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Venturi, Brown, Scott and Izenour reframed architectural form as graphic form and described Las Vegas as a communication system in which repetitive urban identification elements are represented by neon signs, street signs, lettering and other forms of graphic design.<sup>66</sup> This theory seemed to anticipate the notion of the typographic landscape.

Within the field of visual communication we find precedents in investigating typographic landscapes through the research carried out by figures such as Nicolette Grey, Alan Bertram, Jock Kinneir, Phil Baines and Catherine Dixon, all of whom have articulated that the 'visual, aesthetic and cultural identity of the city is made up of, amongst other things, its graphic elements'.<sup>67</sup> In some recent projects I have had the opportunity to contribute to a typographic landscape. These will now be presented as case studies.





PLACEMAKING  
*Circular*

My first three-dimensional design commission was the large-scale concrete works for *Arthouse* (2000) in North Melbourne. Despite its widespread public adoption as a local typographic landmark, it was designed and built as signage and remains so.<sup>68</sup> Ten years later however the opportunity of using built form in a more investigative manner arose with the commissioning of *Circular* (2010).

Funded by a consortium of stakeholders including the City of Wyndham, VicUrban and the Walker Corporation, *Circular* sought to engage the citizenry of Point Cook, a new suburb south west of Melbourne. In response to local stories gleaned through extensive local community consultation, I designed a set of eight predominantly typographic man-hole covers.

*Circular* expanded my observational methods to include both primary and field research – a mode used extensively in subsequent place-making projects.<sup>69</sup> This opened up the capacity to express contemporary stories of place as well as social history, politics and economics. For example, discussions with locals revealed a community-wide concern about the lack of parks and common gardens in the Point Cook area. I reflected upon this observation by designing a man-hole cover as a typographically-based children’s game where the ultimate destination of a journey across suburban subdivisions and cul-de-sacs was a parkland and playground.

The storytelling dimension within the *Circular* project was enabled through directly engaging the community – by watching, listening and asking. This not only avoided the imposition of an ‘imported grand artistic gesture’ but also allowed for the translation of community awareness and lived local experience into typographic form.

PLACEMAKING  
*To the Beach*

By 2012 my typographic place-making projects began incorporating elements of civic utility into their design. The council of the seaside suburb of Frankston commissioned a three-dimensional work that addressed poor town planning that from the 1970s had orientated its main shopping strip away from the beautiful foreshore. Although one of the primary functions of this work was directional, simply saying *To the Beach*, the work also sought to engender a feeling of destination – a sense of having arrived somewhere. The final outcome was a bright red sculptural script built as ten layers of powder-coated steel. The distinctively undulating tops of the letterforms laterally answered the mandatory ‘marine motif’ required in the brief, avoiding depictions of the seaside such as sand buckets.

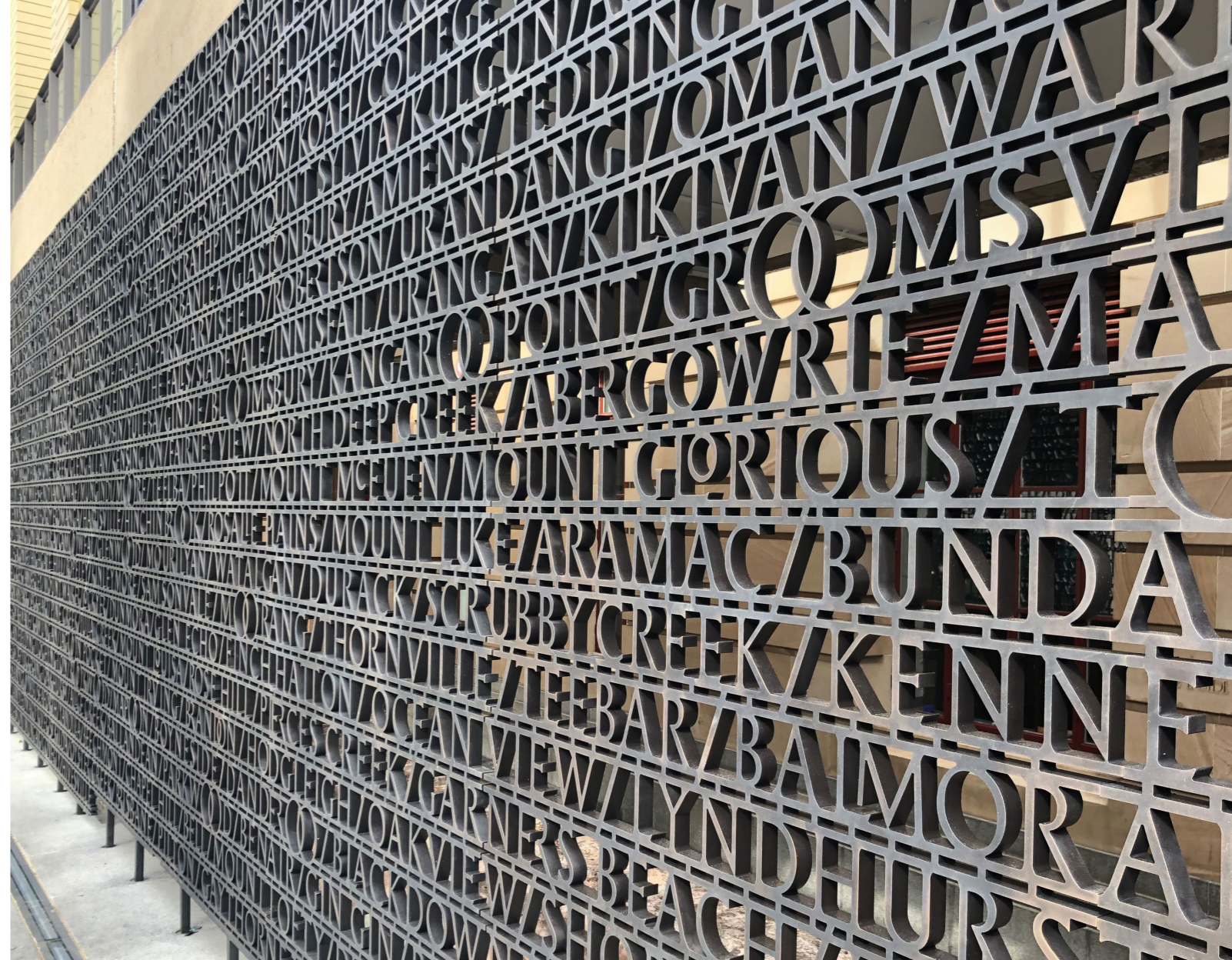
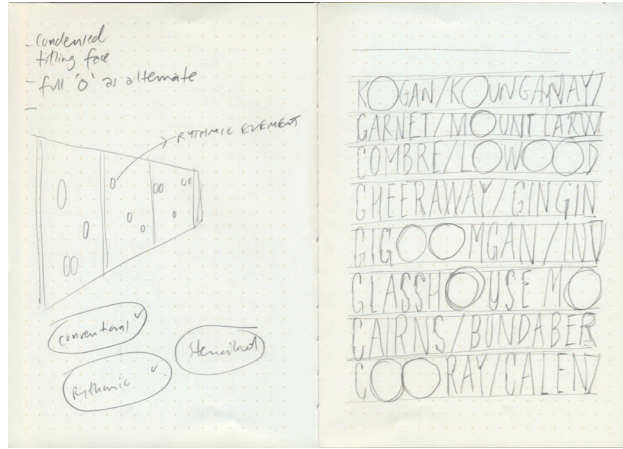
Installed outside the busy pedestrian exit of Frankston railway station, the bright red *To The Beach* was designed with an additional civic purpose in mind – the typography functions as bus-stop seating. The sturdy (and surprisingly comfortable) script letterforms lent themselves well to their publicly ergonomic function. The work also signifies the beginning point for a ‘bird-seed trail’<sup>70</sup> of metal discs set into the pavement leading to the Frankston beach located a block away.

*To The Beach* hints at a deeper understanding of typographically telling the story of place within my practice. This project not only reflects the community but directly contributes to it. Combining public utility with an expression of local identity led to a public acceptance of this bright red monumental script as visual shorthand for the Frankston









area, evidenced by its regular appearance in tourist brochures and Instagram posts by visitors, as well as possibly inspiring a local youth music festival named *To The Beach*.

Both *Circular* and *To the Beach* are significant within my practice in that they are typographic articulations of a suburban experience – the approach common to both projects is an embrace of the unique aspects of place.

In *Circular* the cultural stories sought to both inform and articulate the lives of new residents in this outer suburban ‘growth corridor’ through generating a system of gentle, quiet discoveries whilst *To The Beach* was seeking to rectify and clarify an existing geographic circumstance through a playful drama, scale and colour.

#### PLACEMAKING *Anzac Square*

Where *Circular* drew upon local stories, and *To The Beach* combined utility with expression, the most recent place-making project, *Anzac Square* (2018), proposed a more ambitious idea – telling the story of place through recognising a localised language.

Commissioned through Sydney architectural firm TKD for the Queensland Government and the Federal Veteran Affairs Office, the project called for the design of four bronze commemorative screens spanning over 200 square metres framing Brisbane’s Anzac Square, situated between Elizabeth and Ann Streets in Central Brisbane.

Wishing to avoid pictorial depictions of war, soldiers or specific battle scenes, the architects decided to instead approach the design of the screens from a typographic perspective.

The eventual content for the typographic interpretation provided to me was a listing of the 2072 Queensland towns from which servicemen and women originated. This list had been carefully researched and exhaustively compiled through the State Library of Queensland.

Upon reading the list of Queensland town names, I immediately recognised a typographic patterning. There was a unique predominance of double ‘O’s in the town names – Toobanna, Toobeah, Toogoolawah, Toowoomba, Toolburra etc. This feature reflected the Queensland Government’s preservation of original Indigenous location names, the phonetic translation of which makes the ‘OO’ sound common.<sup>71</sup>

The acknowledgement of the underlying indigenous provenance of the words emerged out of my typographic observations of place, language and sound. My research during this candidature has framed such awareness





and recognition as a ‘typographic way of knowing’ – a knowledge that is not only manifest through the design but can also lay the foundations of expressing place through verbal and visual storytelling. In the specific case of the Anzac Square commemorative screens, it is a story encompassing the historical legacies of colonised languages.<sup>72</sup>

Building upon the melding of expression and utility developed through *To the Beach*, the development of the ‘OO’ forms offer both typographic clarity and structural support. Not only are they bringing a local complexion to the memorial and breaking up the potential monotony of an all-capitals (titling) listing, the uniquely ligatured ‘OO’s connect the vertical lines, give greater structural strength to the bronze work and can also be used as receptacles for poppies and other flowers.

The typographic design was also informed by the lighting system designed for the site. The screens needed to appear as a lightweight texture of letters, to be read as a mass rather than a formal listing. The town names were placed randomly, deliberately discouraging people to seek out specific towns, instead making the screen legible as a collective, shared experience. The slim laneways on the other side of the screens became a surface onto which reverse typographic textures could be projected upon.

The clarity with which I recognised this typographic pattern was due to my being an outsider looking inward.<sup>73</sup> When the design concept of referring to local language was presented to the many tiers of Queensland Governmental boards involved, the positive response was almost always the same – a sudden realisation of the familiar. Many

expressed that it was like seeing something they had always known and lived amongst. Yet it was the perspective of an informed outsider that detected these patterns that had previously been ‘hidden in plain sight’. In recognising and employing these patterns and repetitions throughout the design, this ‘typographic lens’ transformed these into an political expression of locality, language and place on a grand scale.

From *Circular* to *Anzac Square* the storytelling of place through a typographic landscape has only been possible through a commitment by clients in both time and funds. Such resourcing has only been made available to my practice in recent years, perhaps suggestive of a more established position within the field and confidence by clients.

The ultimate contribution of these long-term projects is the permanence of what is left within that place, to remain present in the lives of those whose stories it reflects. Through the familiarity that comes with the passing of time, these typographic expressions gradually assume the most enduring form of all – they become part of that place.

CONCLUSION

To situate oneself through a ‘sense of place’ is a universal human need. This chapter has interrogated how this primary human concern has been explored within my practice from a number of perspectives – from the typographic parallels of mapping place, through to the specifically typographic implications and expressions of national place and urban space. It has analysed the ways in which these perspectives can be used to generate stories of place using a typographic framework. The emerging role and potential of

typographic place-making within my practice has also been a focus of interest, opening up future possibilities for public engagement in the expression of specific sites. Central to the argument within this chapter is that any typographic articulation of place is best approached through another intrinsically human need – the need for story and connection.

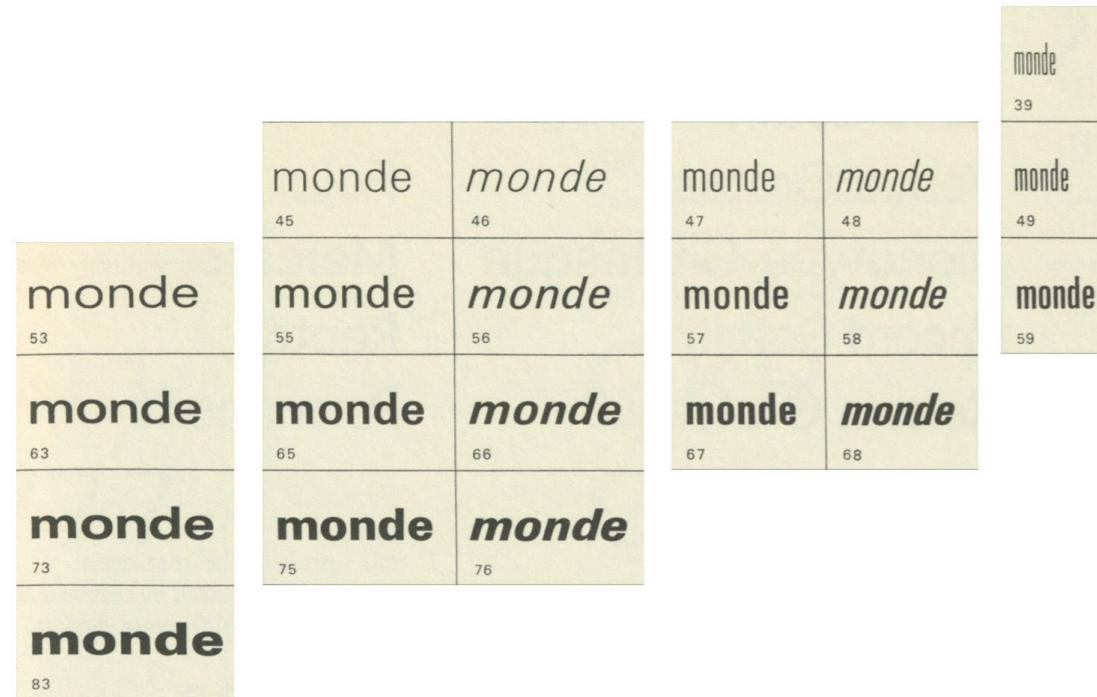
PREVIOUS LEFT  
Sketches for the  
*Anzac Square Project*  
Stephen Banham  
(2018)

PREVIOUS MIDDLE  
Digital Rendering of  
the *Anzac Square Project*  
Stephen Banham  
(2018)

PREVIOUS RIGHT  
AND OPPOSITE  
*Anzac Square Project*  
Stephen Banham  
(2018)

**SETS**





## SETS

1988. St Kilda, Melbourne. Sunday afternoon. Inside the dishevelled offices of community radio station 3PBS, a fresh-faced graphic artist is assembling the next issue of the station magazine, *Waves*. Galleys of typeset text are collated, lined up and stuck to a board printed with a light blue grid. This weekly task is then interspersed by hand-drawing the headlines, traced from old Letraset catalogues. Throbbing throughout the various dimly lit rooms of the radio station was the twisting bass of Jamaican dub music – a live broadcast of the Reggae Show. The ‘versioning’ of Jamaican dubs would become a metaphoric mode for my own understanding of a central typographic paradigm – repetition and reinterpretation.

## MUSICAL VERSIONING AND TYPOGRAPHIC VARIATION

This chapter explores how a ‘typographic way of knowing’ has enabled the detection and use of familial systematic sets inherent to typography through projects within my practice. In particular, I will investigate the transformative capacity of these typographic sets in generating narrative through the use of pattern and repetition.

When thinkers seek to describe typographic phenomena, the most common analogies are musical ones. ‘Typography is to literature as musical performance is to composition; an essential act of interpretation, full of endless opportunities for insight and obtuseness’<sup>1</sup> according to Bringhurst, whilst the description of sizing and spacing of type ‘like composing and performing music or applying paint to a canvas, is largely concerned with intervals and differences’.<sup>2</sup> Further parallels are observed across history with the system of naming specific type sizes during the sixteenth century such as 6pt = nonpareil, 7pt = minion, 8pt = brevier, considered by Bringhurst to be ‘the typographic equivalent of the diatonic scale’.<sup>3</sup> Indeed the typographic lexicon is imbued with musical parallels, with type regularly described in terms of its tone, rhythm, harmony and scale.

Beyond these spatially descriptive concerns, type and music also share a common evolutionary process: constant incremental reinterpretation and revival. Hoefler notes that within typography ‘revivals can take many paths, none of them well marked, but all of them sharing the goal of adding something new and unique to the corpus’ whilst Shaw maps the increasing volume of typographic revivals along a spectrum from direct translations (facsimiles) to acting as a conceptual springboard in experimental designs.<sup>4</sup>

In my formative musical experience, these seemingly endless tiers of reinterpretation became familiar through my interest in Jamaican music, specifically dub music. Within this musical genre the generation of different iterations of the same tune is so prevalent that a specific term – ‘versioning’

– was created to describe this process. ‘Versioning’ would involve the production of a dub plate, usually the flip side of the original, to be used to back live ‘toasting’.<sup>5</sup> Dub music is therefore an interpretative variation (a mix) of a pre-existing piece of music. The power of the ‘version’ mixer lies in the ability to use the mixing board as though it were a musical instrument – removing and rearranging sound rather than adding to it. In the dub, the engineer strips the original down to the essential rhythm foundation, bringing this out as the focus of attention. The rest is then reshuffled, rearranged and remixed to emphasize certain components at certain times. A good dub takes out what is unnecessary so that the emphasis remains on the rhythm. Empty space is as important as substance; balancing the two in a creative and interesting way is the key to a good mix.<sup>6</sup>

Both musical versioning and typographic revivalism frame their contribution within prescribed parameters maintained by a recognition of the original source. Such restricted development rarely produces fundamentally new forms, instead presenting a multitude of infinitesimal adaptations of preceding works. As Lindauer and Müller point out, variation within music is an established paradigm:

The principle of variation in musical composition, which is characterised by constant and variable parameters, has existed in written form since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In music, by variation means ‘melodic, harmonic and rhythmical change and transformation of a theme, and is by no means random, but directly proportional to its initial form, the musical theme.

Our concept of variation intends to bring about a deliberately targeted change of a selected object, or parts of an object, and then to modify, transform or reinvent them. What we mean is the functional, content-related variation.<sup>7</sup>

In a typographic context, a recently developed typographic technology seeking to package this sequence of progressions into a unified form is the ‘variable’ font – a single font file offering a theoretically infinite range of weights and widths.<sup>8</sup> When viewed within a wider typographic history, variable font technology seems to satisfy a pre-existing desire to ‘universalise’ families of type. The value of such an intent is however open to conjecture, as Drucker observes: ‘Any universal “language” will always stop just short of where real communication begins—in difference, deviation and distinction’.<sup>9</sup>

The now established convention of extensive systemic families was forged in the mid 1950s with the release of ‘the universal, sans serif, sans ideology typeface,’ Adrian Frutiger’s *Univers*.<sup>10</sup> This development presented *Univers* as a total set of forms, with variants in weight, expansion and contraction, from the outset. The claim was made implicitly (in its naming) and to some extent explicitly (its publicity) that it was the typeface to meet all needs in any typesetting system in any language using Latin characters’.<sup>11</sup> As Kinross notes, ‘Since the appearance of *Univers*, and with the further development of photocomposition and then of digital processing of letters, the idea of the typeface as a large family of variants has become the normal’.<sup>12</sup>

Echoing the claims of *Univers*, the weight ranges available within the variable font system suggest its variations could potentially answer all the typographic needs of the user, from super expanded to super condensed, from ultra-thin to ultra-black. Whether such claims of universality can be proven true or not (or even desired), such technical developments reinforce the notion of a ‘familial set’ as central within typography, building as they do upon the super-families that emerged from the early 1990s such as Lucas DeGroot’s *Thesis* (1994–1999), Erik Spiekermann’s *Meta* (1991–1999) and Martin Majoor’s *Scala* (1990–1993).

The fundamental role of sets in the typographic world offers much more than a system of distillation, variation and revival. Sets can also be used as a form of expressing narrative. This will be explored more rigorously in the next chapter.



**A FAMILY OF THINGS. THINGS AS A FAMILY**



TOP  
Letraset Manual  
(1986)

BOTTOM  
Visual Communication  
Department Graduation  
Night Invitation  
(1988)

The recognition of ‘familial sets’ is a primary focus of the typographic way of knowing, a perspective that filters and detects systems, patterns, nuanced differentiations, connections and relationships between parts of a whole. Like the mirrored mechanism of a physical lens, it sees both a *family of things* as well as *things as a family*.

Cross argues that the detection of such ‘codes’ embodies a designerly way of knowing<sup>13</sup>, and that their recognition and transformation into ‘concrete form’ contribute to a body of such knowledge. Typographers develop this way of knowing, having been trained to look for the ‘codes’ of familial connections, commonalities and differences. Traditionally their first reference for such comparisons was the font specimen book – a document that represents not only an everyday working resource but also a glimpse into a typographic utopia. My introduction to this was via my 1986 Letraset Manual, a weighty wire-bound catalogue of not only dry-transfer display typefaces but the entire equipment range for the graphic arts industry. Engineered for comparison, these manuals feature idealised design scenarios with beautiful word combinations falling effortlessly into place. These expensive imported Letraset manuals, approaching their technological twilight even 30 years ago, were nevertheless vigorously traced and photocopied until their binding eventually gave way.<sup>14</sup>

Although Letraset sheets limped into the digital age, to be recently revived as a nostalgic novelty for new generations with no memory of its practical roots, for me it is the suffix within Letraset that is of particular interest. As the British typographer Ruari McLean notes, the term ‘set’ is a central descriptor in traditional typography and printing, ‘(...) used

as a noun to define the width of a type, and for a series of books which when complete are a ‘set’. It is also used as a verb for composing type, and for the drying of ink.’<sup>15</sup> McLean’s definition highlights the embedding of sets within the very lexicon of the trade: it begins with each font representing a unified set of individual glyphic elements; each typeface a set of its constituent font weights; each setting sample presents a set of related displays and so on. The result is a kind of Droste effect with type specimens showing sets within sets within sets.<sup>16</sup> My constant reference to multi-faceted sets over three decades working as a typographer has developed a fluency in seeing and comparing sets, not only within the field of typography but beyond it – the application of a ‘typographic knowing’.

Projecting the orderly and engineered world of type specimens outwardly into the messy street-level observation of the everyday eventually generates a tension. The application of this typographic knowing during the formative decade of my practice (1989–1999) centred on observing and photographically documenting the ever-changing typographic complexions of Melbourne. Although none of this considerable mass of ‘street photographs’ professed to be anything other than a visual record, the observational habit did foster a means of understanding how places can be typographically related or contrasted, and how such patterns may yield a kind of narrative.

The drawing of relationships from sets of photography has been explored by many practitioners, most notably the Melbourne-based artist Patrick Pound and the British artist Daniel Eatock. Both have developed practices based on detecting narratives across sets of images, stories that may have remained

undiscoverable if viewed individually. An avid collector, Pound is interested in systems and the ordering of objects: an attempt, perhaps, to make things coherent. As Pound says, ‘to collect is to gather your thoughts through things’.<sup>17</sup> Eatock’s early career however is a more familiar trajectory to me (both of us having emerged bruised from a brief experience in the advertising industry) and one that Eatock is eager to differentiate himself from. When distinguishing out this experience from ‘pure’ graphic design he noted ‘When I was making design, I strived for a kind of concept or frame that guides what the results could be. And I tried to reduce it, as much as I could, into this singular thing’.<sup>18</sup> Eatock’s reductive mindset seeks to simplify, clarify and order things, explaining that he uses ‘self-referentiality as an objective guide to reduce the extraneous and subjective, and strive for a conceptual logic’. Although unaware of Eatock at the time, many pages of *Ampersand* (1996) such as the railway platform video boxes, the burnt Coca-Cola sign or remnant signage glue blobs parallel what Eatock’s presenting of ‘incidents, alignments, coincidences, viewpoints, temporary situation, and other small small things that often go unnoticed’.<sup>19</sup> Like Eatock, the nature of these observations is conceptual rather than photographic.

Eatock’s observations build upon a historical lineage including Walker Evans, who through his pioneering documentation of early twentieth-century America, drew upon familial relationships between things found in the urban everyday. ‘Letters, grids, scaffolding, fire escapes, windows and window shutters, chains, lunch counters with their repeated shapes of cups, plates, and saucers, rows of people,

SKIN TYPE #1

SKIN TYPE #2

SKIN TYPE #3

SKIN TYPE #4

SKIN TYPE #5

SKIN TYPE #6

smokestacks, the Brooklyn Bridge, girders, clotheslines: all became alphabets, a writing “found” by the camera.’ Evans’ ‘wider lens’ in maintaining the context of the typographic forms informed my later privileging of the importance of cultural context (such as the case studies presented throughout *Characters*). Evans’ ability to playfully imbue sets of inanimate objects with typographic character figured in later projects such as the Queen Victoria Market Boxes.

If Evans signified the ‘macro’ urban perspective which emphasizing the singular artefact, Edward Fella represented its very opposite, the exploration and expression of typographic detail. Fella’s substantial collection of hand-drawn American store lettering also presents a street-level text. As Lewis Blackwell notes, ‘Fella’s work, ...reinforces our understanding of the meanings in specific letterforms or words or sentences by helping us understand the variations’. For my purposes, Fella represented the roving eye of the flaneur. His work was at its greatest influence during the publishing of the *Qwerty* booklet series (1991–95) when a strong emphasis was placed upon the local peculiarities of visual communications. This can be seen in the exploration of the provincial Civic Guide signage in *Qwerty 1* (1991) or the domestically-designed garage sale posters in *Qwerty 2* (1996).

A more sentimental document of street-level typographic artefacts presented as sets appears in *StoreFront: The Disappearing Face of New York*. It displays a photographic preservation, recording a frozen moment during an uncomfortable urban transformation. ‘These storefronts have the city’s history etched in their façades. They set the pulse, life and texture of their communities’.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps with

a nod to Ruscha, each storefront is shot from a similar flat ‘pedestrian’ angle, inviting direct comparison whilst reinforcing their cumulative power.

Connecting a series of seemingly unrelated narrative threads opens up rich possibilities for storytelling, as English artist Ryan Gander has proved with his *Loose Associations* project – a playfully tenuous narrative threaded across various, often disparate, observations. Rather than the visual comparisons present in the work of Pound or Eatock, *Loose Associations* privileges the narrative structure. For Gander, an initial observation of ‘desire lines’ in the street veers into a discussion of ‘trauma lines’ used in British hospitals, only to continue as a critique of the lines used for navigating the Barbican Centre. This leads to a discussion of the ‘passivity lines’ used in police interview rooms, followed by a dialogue on a chair common in such environments – the Robin Day Polypropylene Chair of 1962.<sup>21</sup> Springing from one thread to the next, *Loose Associations* takes the reader on a gentle yet compelling journey.

Published across various issues of *Dot Dot Dot* magazine, Gander’s writings have been instructive in suggesting to me that storytelling can overcome both the restrictions of *design* (as it required no visualisation) and the restrictions of *truth* (as it required no inherent authenticity). This realisation was most directly influential upon my projects such as *Multistory* (2015) which presents linked stories of features seen from a single window.<sup>22</sup>

As my practice evolved in the new millennium, the criticality of studio-led projects began to bleed seamlessly into client-led projects, and this systematic ‘familial thinking’ was

likewise transferred. A project that highlights the transition is the design commission to produce the visual identity and all printed collateral for the 2003 Venice Biennale of Art. Patricia Piccinini’s exhibition for the biennale, entitled *We Are Family*, ‘brings a fresh, personal perspective to some of the most difficult ethical issues of our time. What is normal? What is the nature of our relationship with animals? Are some lives worth more than others? What constitutes a family?’<sup>23</sup> It is this last question that became the conceptual basis of the identity – the familial relationships that underpin our connection with others.

The identity design drew upon many of the inquiries of repetitive pattern and primary research developed from *Assembly* (2000) and *Grand* (2001). A key design element of the identity was the spectrum of flesh tones, echoing the variety of ambiguous lifeforms presented by Piccinini. People with differing skin tones had these matched to pantone colours, which became a chromatic navigational system for the exhibition catalogue and other print material.

The display typeface used was the then-newly-released *Expletive Script* by Jonathan Barnbrook – a typeface whose very unconventional alternative weights represented an organic abstraction appropriate to Piccinini’s work.

The design of the Australian Pavilion bag also drew upon the deep spatial observation developed through previous projects such as *Qwerty* (1991–5) and *Grand* (2001). It focussed on the bag not as an empty vessel but on its ultimate purpose, a receptacle of various heavy catalogues. The bag was designed to appear to sag under the weight of Piccinini’s

works, and went on to win the Biennale-wide ‘Battle of the Bag’.<sup>24</sup>

The range of flesh-tones applied previous understandings of repetitive variations within a typeface family, whilst the bag design reflected the observational eye of the typographer in how form and proportion can be distorted by weight. The appropriately named *We Are Family* project allowed my metaphoric exploration of familial relationships, though in a typographic sense rather than the biological one proposed by Piccinini.

This case study highlights that, even in 2003, I was approaching projects in a systematic way without the awareness that this form of knowing was a strategy of my practice. It was an unrecognised typographic lens through which the world can be viewed, detecting familial relationships between things rather than individual entities. It defines, groups and connects, enabling conceptual connections between projects irrespective of whether they are client or studio led.<sup>25</sup> The typographic eye, culturally informed to see comparisons and contrasts, can likewise apply this perspective outward ‘into the street’ in order to highlight associations with other social and cultural influences and entanglements. The next chapter explores the finer aspects of how such sets are defined – the power of repetition and pattern.



ABOVE  
Biennale Bag from  
Patricia Piccinini’s  
*We are Family* exhibition  
(2003)

OPPOSITE  
Colour Spectrum used  
in Patricia Piccinini’s  
*We are Family* exhibition  
(2003)





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE  
*Assembly*  
 (2000)

## REPETITION AND PATTERN

Expanding further upon the type specimen book mentioned previously, we can observe that such comparative cultures are predicated on establishing the appearance of repetition. From these repetitive variations in space and interval, patterns inevitably emerge. The ‘typographic knowing’ takes an already well-trained pattern recognition of letterforms and expands these powers of observation across other forms. In *Traces of Man* (1961) it is possible that Herbert Spencer employed his own habitual ‘typographic ways of knowing’ to establish relationships within and between the images he photographed. Spencer reflected that his photography, taken across many countries over many years, exhibited a single common characteristic – pattern. Spencer differentiated this as a ‘pattern of a special kind for in taking them my aim has been to capture not formal pattern but *expressive* pattern’.<sup>26</sup>

Systems of repetitive variation are prominent not only within graphic design but also the finer-grain field of typography. Karl Gerstner recognised an inherent multiplicity within such systems, observing ‘all the elements occur in series, or better, in groups’.<sup>27</sup> Kinross applies this multiplicity to the very functioning of a typeface: ‘not only may a typeface consist of a family of variants (italic, bold, and so on) but, if it is to work properly at every size, it should consist of sets of variants of these variants’.<sup>28</sup>

The renowned American type designer W.A. Dwiggins also recognised pattern as central to the very core of making letterforms, remarking that each form is ‘a pattern made within a space... It begins and ends. The things are true about the shapes of letters and are true about all designs that have pattern and motion’.<sup>29</sup> El Lissitzky observed pattern as a link between typography and language when he noted,

‘From the passive, non-articulated lettering pattern one goes over to the active, articulated pattern. The gesture of a living language is taken into account’.<sup>30</sup>

The use of repetition and variation feature through many of my projects, emerging most explicitly with the publishing of *Assembly* (2000). For this project I visited a series of schools, both private and public, and interviewed 600 children (aged between 7–15 years). The students were asked to draw a logo of their choice. With all visual reference removed, the children to rely on their visual memory. The intent of *Assembly* was to gauge not *which* logo they drew but *how* accurately they could render it from memory. The outcome of the research was a survey of 458 logo drawings by children, reproduced en masse in a large poster format.<sup>31</sup>

The hand-drawn logos reproduced in *Assembly* show both the *singular* (the uniqueness of each child’s response) as well as the *multiple* variations (their repetitive and cumulative impact). Viewed in isolation each of the drawings may simply appear as a novel rendition of a familiar logo. When presented as an extensive suite of variations, the volume of marks addresses the political intent of the publication, namely the visual resonance of branding to young children, and the implicit collusion of the design industry within this.

Repetition in *Assembly* seems particularly appropriate given that it reflects the constant (and repetitive) exposure of children to brand campaigns, making such mental recollections of the brand possible in the first place.

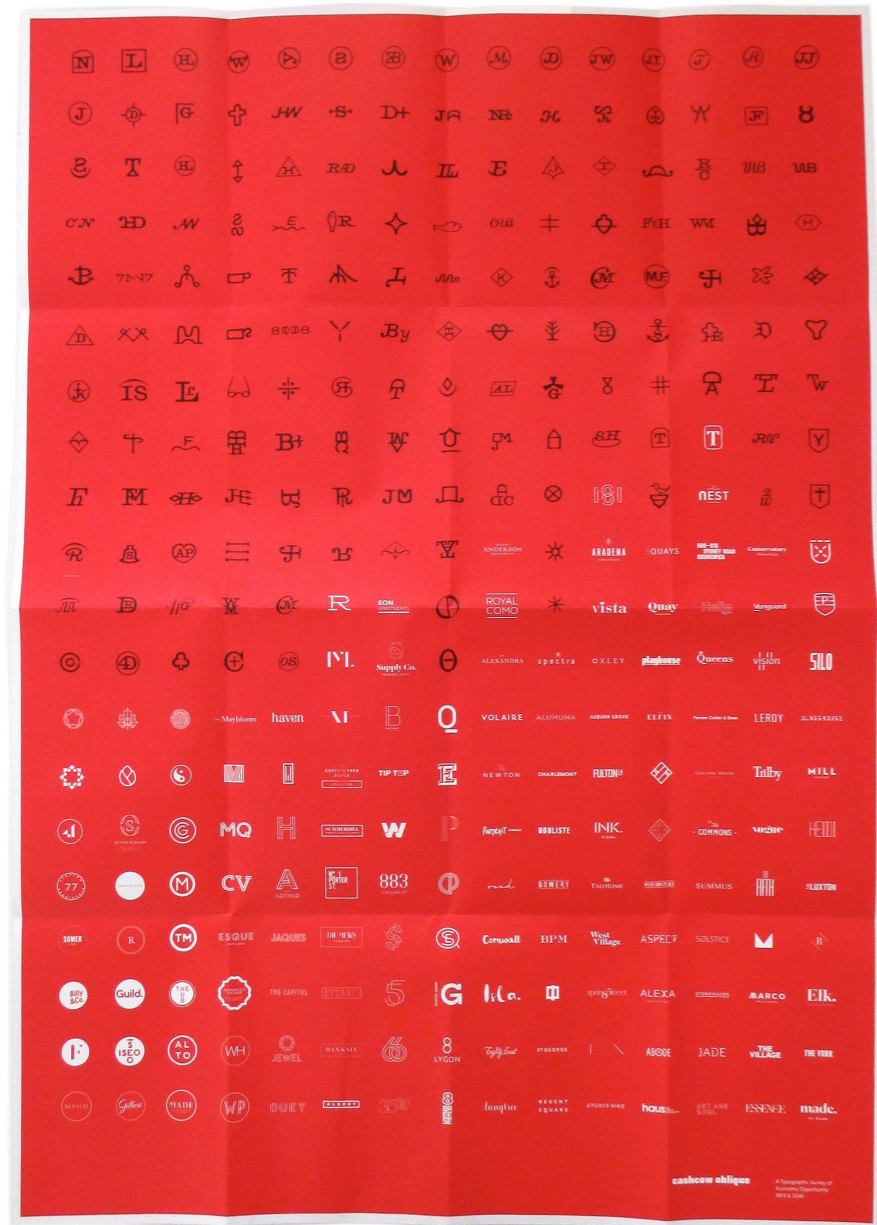
Produced during my candidature some 16 years later, *Cashcow Oblique* (2017) also revealed the enduring commercial imperatives



of design. The project was my response to the superlative, yet homogenous and ubiquitous, marketing of real estate. Seeing these in both mass and within a historical context would highlight the ‘super-charging’ of graphic design during periods of economic overstimulation (booms). Two distinct eras of market oversupply were selected: the cattle boom of 1873 and the real estate boom of 2016. The hundreds of graphic marks from both eras presented side-by-side highlight not only their design similarities but also the embellishment contrived for product differentiation. Immediate comparison is invited through their neat and orderly listing, presented on a single sheet poster rather than a sequence of pages. Above all, it is the power of repetition that amplifies these relationships.

In presenting a mass assemblage of logos from 1873 and 2016, *Cashcow Oblique* reveals their lack of individual identity and instead shows a taxonomy of brand marks – similar





OPPOSITE  
*Casbcow Oblique*  
 Stephen Banham  
 (2018)

ABOVE  
*Typographica*  
 New Series №10  
 Herbert Spencer  
 (1989)





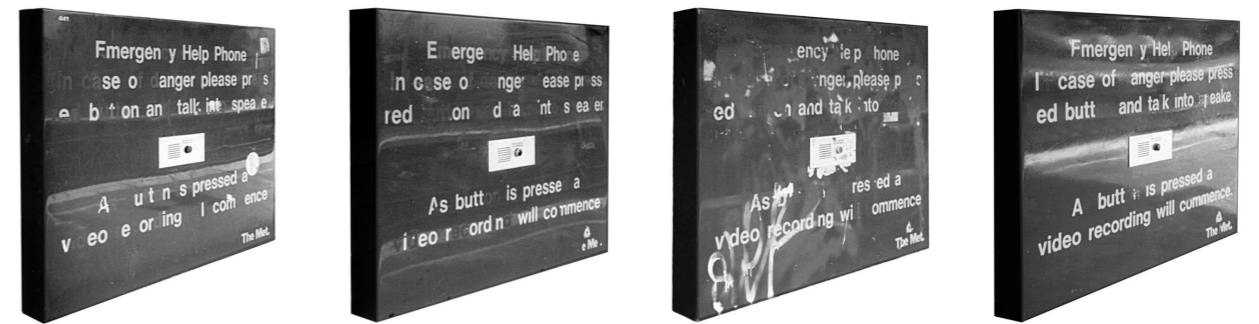
TOP  
*Water Towers*  
 Hilla and Bernd Becher  
 (1988)

OPPOSITE  
 Railway Station Boxes  
 from *Ampersand N°1*  
 Stephen Banham  
 (1997)

*within* their own time and similar *across* time. Contemporary real estate brands appear completely familiar to us, sporting all the fashionable styling of our time – in-lining, embellishing, faux provenance – and are clearly situated in the ‘now’.<sup>32</sup> These variations provide the viewer not only with a sense of *physical* place (Melbourne) but also *temporal* place (1873 and 2016), articulated in tandem not in the form of pictorial documentation (photography, for instance) but through typography.

Through the presentation of an extensive set of real estate and cattle brands, *Cashcow Oblique* explores the cumulative interplay between the singular and the multiple through the use of repetition. As Lindauer and Müller note, ‘Exploring known objects by means of variation stimulates the reinvention and reinterpretation of forms and functions’<sup>33</sup>.

The motivation for using pattern, variation, similarity and contrast within existing



designed forms is to create a method of storytelling. This is a more mediated narrative, expressed through variation within forms already designed. In many of my projects, such as *Assembly* and *Cashcow Oblique*, this strategy uses a particularly distilled and abbreviated designed form – the logo.

The manner in which such designed artefacts are used has evolved throughout my practice. From the observation of design in built environments such as the train station video boxes in *Ampersand* (1996) through to the more rigorously taxonomic showings of designed marks in *Cashcow Oblique* (2017), repetition has been used in gradually sharper and clearer ways.

Early influence in this inclination for repetition can be found in Spencer’s *Typographica*, more specifically Allen Hutt’s article ‘Newspaper Seals’,<sup>34</sup> Anthony Robinson’s ‘Design Underfoot’<sup>35</sup> and Charles Hasler’s ‘A Show of Hands’,<sup>36</sup> which feature surveys of

newspaper seals, manhole covers and printers fists respectively. Normally viewed as singular forms, the mass representation of these designed marks provides not only a sense of their formal design but also the place and time in which they existed.

By using designed forms in this repetitively taxonomic manner, I have highlighted their individual nuances. Collectively their adaptation and customization to specific contexts and uses (place and time) become more apparent. For example, Hutt’s collection of newspaper seals indicates a particular moment in newspaper print technology, a slower media cycle as well as imagery peculiar to England (such as lion and griffin heraldry). The set of newspaper seals makes no attempt to represent everybody from everyplace, instead a set of readily identifiable marks for Londoners from the mid-twentieth century. Such specificity challenges the spatial and temporal placelessness of ‘universalised’ graphic design.

A pioneering work in the understanding of the power of repetition is the *Water Towers* series (1988) by Hilla and Bernd Becher. This book features 224 images of water towers photographed over a period of 25 years, all presented in similar proportion and position in frame. Although described as a contribution to ‘objective photography’, it is the repetitive sequential rhythm that amplifies the underlying individuality of each tower (through composition, lighting and selection) as well as the cumulative mass of this durational project. The Bechers referred to these photographic documentations as *typologies* or *typologies of topographies*, offering sets of individual forms that eventually become a ‘collective whole’, gaining what Lindauer and Müller describe as an ‘inner coherence’<sup>37</sup> as ‘the attentive beholder notices minimal differences and is tempted to attach importance to them’.<sup>38</sup>





A similar experience of viewing coherence through numerous yet minimal differences is felt within Ed Ruscha's *Every building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). The viewer is firstly made aware of the variations in architectural façades; secondly one notices patterns of less explicit details such as signage, vehicles and street furniture repeated again and again through its considerable concertinaed length. Such calm, repetitive uniformity illuminates such features through their similarities and differences.

Anticipating Ruscha's fascination with horizontal spatial rhythms by several years (and my own contribution *Grand* by four decades) is an early project by Herbert Spencer known as 'Mile-a-minute typography'.<sup>39</sup> In July 1961, Spencer, driven by his assistant Brian Little, undertook the 20-mile journey from Marble Arch in central London to London Airport, stopping as they went to photograph the road signs seen *en route*. Spencer laid out most of his 51 photographs as a continuous, eight-page sequence of black and white pictures of varying shapes and sizes, with no text other than the briefest of descriptive captions.<sup>40</sup>

His descriptions of what he saw formed a rhetorical critique on the current state of British signage:

(...) A jumbled jungle of words in a vast range of styles, on panels of many different shapes, sizes and colours, mounted on walls, on lamp standards, and on wood, metal, and concrete supports of many kinds, and varying in height from twenty feet, or more, down to within a few inches off the ground – and, indeed, sometimes actually resting on the ground propped up with old cans or rubble.<sup>17</sup>

Spencer's audit is a repetitive exercise in observing patterns of directional clarity. His motivations for undertaking this spatial survey were pragmatic – by showing the messy variety of signage forms, Spencer was advocating for a clearer and more unified British signage system, something that was finally addressed several years later, in 1964, by Jock Kinneir and Margaret Calvert.

Whereas Spencer's 'Mile-a-minute typography' audit in *Typographica* called for a consolidated unity of national signage standards, my own typographic audit of a Melbourne kilometre undertaken for *Grand* argued for the opposite – greater variety in the face of a perceived threat to 'typo-diversity'. Whereas Spencer's arguments are specific and workable, the position of *Grand* is reliant on the consensus that an over-prevalence of *Helvetica* poses a 'culturally flattening' threat. Despite their differing intents and outcomes, both projects use the typographic traits of repetition and pattern to express their arguments.

In my exhibition *Cluster* (2013) I refined the use of repetition and pattern by bringing a glyph-like quality to linear geographic representations. As mentioned previously, this repetition suggested the *cartographic* within the *typographic* – transforming maps of thematically named streets into a system of glyph-like forms. Rather than being the outcome of a conscious design decision, these shapes are more the result of random elements such as the informal naming by the original land developers or the physical topography of the area (or 'lay of the land'). The reading of these codified marks as a typographic-like system is enabled through their strongly familial relationships, each being a variation





## TRANSFORMATION

PREVIOUS  
*Cluster*  
City Gallery  
Stephen Banham  
(2013)

TOP  
Queen Victoria  
Market Boxes  
Stephen Banham  
(2013)

OVERLEAF  
Detail of  
*Assembly*  
(2000)

of the other. The viewer unifies this mass of variable forms into a pattern to be decoded. My transfiguration of disparate marks into a form that is understood by the viewer is indicative of a designerly way of knowing, aided by the inclination of the viewer to bring their own cultural readings and meanings to these repetitive marks, as Crotty states:

We inherit a “system of significant symbols”. For each of us, when we first see the world in a meaningful fashion, we are inevitably viewing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. Our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning and, by the same token, leads us to other things.<sup>42</sup>

The ‘other things’ one is led to through the reading of systems are increasingly forces considered external to conventional graphic design. Design writer Emily King notes that ‘new systems in graphic design are derived from a huge variety of disciplines –

mathematics, technology, science, geography, the everyday, politics, linguistics, literature, art – and their outcomes are multiple and eclectic.’<sup>43</sup> Applying this framework to projects such as *Cluster*, it acknowledges that ‘external’ systems such as economics and geography have been interwoven throughout – from the analysis, the mapping, the ultimate forms of the marks – by the cultural storytelling around those marks.

As a typographer I employ repetition and pattern as a mode of creating comparative systems of nuance and variation. Over the decades this has developed within me an almost instinctual propensity to transform observations into sets of variations. When connected through story to other ‘external’ cultural phenomena, these systems may carry possibilities in expanding the edges of where typography starts and finishes

To frame individual forms as repetitive variations is not merely a re-ordering of

elements but a *transformation* of elements. The *Cluster* project transformed geography into typography whilst *Assembly* transformed children’s drawings into a form of critique. This fundamental shift can also happen with pre-existing built form, metamorphosing utilitarian objects to playful parts of a typographic puzzle.

As part of a larger re-invigoration program to re-invigorate the Queen Victoria Market (QVM), I was approached by the City of Melbourne to come up with a way of ‘activating’ their 850 market trader boxes. These stark, shiny metal boxes on wheels accommodate produce overnight in nearby warehouses. Instead of merely beautifying, my response was to acknowledge their unifying features such as shape and material, and in so doing view each of the boxes as components of a larger whole.

Mindful that the boxes were commonly used in groups, I designed each box side to feature

a simple linear element – straight, circular or diagonal. When viewed in large groups the boxes suggested a seemingly infinite set of geometric letter combinations. Seeing the boxes through this typographic lens, with its emphasis on ‘systems thinking’, the design celebrated the randomised nature of box distribution, allowing the ‘incident of accident’ to occur. This resulted in the boxes appearing as a mass of abstract shapes on some days, while on others recognisable word-like assemblages could be discerned. The scope of this fragmented language is tempered by its finite nature, constrained into a limited set of permutations.

Each QVM box was designed as a single part of a greater whole, a set of constituent anatomical parts of letterforms to be randomly sprinkled throughout the market. This makes clear another metaphoric relationship – that a primary purpose of the market is the purchase of culinary ‘ingredients’, which are parts within a larger schema.

The freedoms that emerge from the systemised play of the QVM project are built upon my previous investigations, most specifically the exhibition and forum *Accidents Not So Grotesk* (2006) investigating unpredictable forces in the design process. This event, featuring the author of *All Messed Up*, RCA design academic Anna Gerber, highlighted the rich creative possibilities of embracing ‘external forces of uncertainty’ such as luck, accident, serendipity and even failure. Kinross notes that ‘An interest in failure is no more than a necessary part of an interest in how the world is’.<sup>44</sup>

The compelling contradiction of the QVM project is that the creation of an orderly set of parts also results in a dynamic system from which unpredictable combinations and interactions may occur. Ultimately it is the sheer multitude and variety of trader boxes, and the resultant permutations, that enables such playful freedoms.



#### CONCLUSION

This chapter establishes the significance of familial sets and patterns as a contribution to a typographic way of knowing within my practice. Through specific projects it has examined how such patterns have not only been recognised but used as a form of articulating argument, reflecting Cross' proposition that 'designing is a process of pattern synthesis, rather than pattern recognition'.<sup>45</sup> It is through the configuration of these often unseen rhythms, sets and patterns that necessary narratives are formed, or as Cross attests: 'The solution is not simply lying there among the data... it has to be actively constructed by the designer's own efforts'.<sup>46</sup> Specifically this chapter investigated the manner in which such recognition and translation has been used as a way of expressing cultural phenomena considered *outside* typography *through* typography. The *Assembly* (1999) and *Cashcow Oblique* (2017) projects offered informative case studies in

supporting the use of taxonomic sets to highlight moral responsibility and economic prerogative respectively.

Expanding upon the musical parallels within typography, I referenced the use of repetition and spatial rhythms through contemporary art (Ruscha's *Every building on the Sunset Strip*) and publishing (Spencer's *Typographica* and *The Water Towers* by Hilla and Bernd Becher) to give a contextual understanding of how this can likewise be employed within typographic practice. The capacity of familial sets to generate narrative was also explored, shown in case studies to adopt graphic form (*Cluster* project) and physical form (*Queen Victoria Market* Project).

Viewed through this prism, patterns and sets are recognised and used as a powerful device for connecting typography to cultural meaning and story. Their capacity for critique will be the focus of the next chapter.



CRITIQUE



#### CRITIQUE

‘Stephen Banham was in a city café the other day when a man in a suit sidled up, looking at him strangely. “Hey”, the man exclaimed, “You’re that guy who hates Helvetica!”. “I’d never seen him in my life,” Banham says, understandably bemused. The Melbourne-based graphic designer might well be the first person in history to have been recognised in the street as a campaigner against a typeface’.

MCCAMISH, THORNTON. ‘A BOLD TYPE OF GUY’, *The Age*, 19 MAY 2004



Building upon preceding investigations into the storytelling of place and the role of familial sets, patterns and repetitions, this chapter explores how a typographic way of knowing can be deployed as a practice of critique. Through the reflective study of a series of project cases from my own practice, I will interrogate the ways in which my practice has uncovered systems of power through typography, including the use of a ‘playful agitation’ and direct intervention.



ABOVE  
*Utopia Oblique*  
Stephen Banham  
(2009)

## THE POWER OF THE OMNIPRESENT

An obvious, yet important, initial acknowledgement is that there are few things more omnipresent in our urban experience than letterforms. The ubiquity of type as an accepted part of the everyday renders it virtually unseen in the public consciousness. Yet this constant presence shows our collective reliance on typographic communications, highlighting their capacity to express our humanity, language, diversity and culture.

Although the contribution of type is often concealed beneath an assumed utilitarian function, letterforms represent a significant expression of our cultural time and place. As Michael Rock puts it ‘(...) typefaces document and codify the ‘current’, generating the artefacts that will serve to frame our own generation’.<sup>1</sup>

Being ‘hidden in plain sight’ offers rich possibilities for typography to be used as a tool in revealing the dynamics of power. Max Bruinsma articulates this when he notes: ‘since design has become not just a problem-solving tool but a visual language, designers are in a perfect position to channel critical notions and alternative views (...)’.<sup>2</sup>

In her investigation of criticality, Ramia Mazé suggests a relational system comprising three parts: that criticality within practice can be seen in how we reflect upon our methods in order to locate our voice and articulate our position; criticality within a community of practice or discipline can be about trying to challenge or change traditions or paradigms; and criticality can also be targeted towards other issues and ideas outside design altogether.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging the powerful capacity of design to articulate critique, Mazé’s three forms of critique represent a

multi-layered structure, shifting outward from internal to external concerns. Within the context of my own practice, her theories reinforce the visualisation of this research as a metaphoric prism-like structure – a typographic lens.

### CRITIQUE OF THE SELF

Delving deeper into how Mazé’s framework is manifest within my practice projects, the first (self-critique) can be observed in the early, naïve grappling with self-identity through stylistic explorations. This is most pronounced in *The Book of A–Z*, a large format hard cover book into which an array of my experiments and scribbles from 1989–90 are adhered.<sup>4</sup> The raw material for these ‘experiments’ was rough photocopies of pre-existing galleys of type or statements from type catalogues used as positional elements in design compositions.<sup>5</sup> Although this work represents my first steps in giving typographic voice to ideas, they were internalised, self-referential exercises showing little concern for the world beyond myself.

### CRITIQUE OF THE DESIGN COMMUNITY

By 1998 I had spent a decade within what I considered a deeply flawed design industry, compelling me to write and publish my frustrations of this experience in *Convoy*. An earlier manifestation of this frustration emerged in *Ampersand* (1996) in a story entitled *This is a story about a door* whereby I describe a door (situated off Smith Street Collingwood) whose charming lettering had been painted over by a new unknown tenant. It eventually transpires that this new tenant is in fact a graphic design studio, reinforcing my view of an industry blind to the impact of such ‘cleansing’ on the physical environment of a city. This set up an opposition to this

(ill-defined) ‘industry’ that was to continue through subsequent writings.

Although this form of critique centred around a localised (Australian) design community, *Convoy* was written in a way that sought resonance with an international design audience. Fuelled by debate in *Émigré*, *Eye* and *Adbusters*, these writings argued for a more morally-focussed dimension to graphic design by revealing the economically self-serving complicity of the designer. These arguments were taken to a more public and direct form in the second of the *Character* forums (2006) which featured a live debate on the political neutrality of the graphic design profession, provoking lively discussion between speakers from diametrically opposing standpoints. By the end of the 1990s my focus of public commentary had moved from the self to one centred around the Australian design community. Reflected across publishing and forums, my intention echoed Mazé’s description of a secondary stage of critique – that of ‘challenging or changing tradition’.

### CRITIQUE BEYOND DESIGN

The extension of my critique beyond myself and my community of practice into a wider territory emerges through publication projects such as *Utopia Oblique* (2009). In focussing on the many utopians throughout history who have chosen to represent their visions through language and typography, this publication not only highlights the culturally expressive power of the letterform, but also a more critical dimension – the lack of contemporary political vision.<sup>6</sup> *Utopia Oblique* investigated the common usage of Esperanto as the preferred lingua franca amongst many self-proclaimed micro-nations, drawing a relationship between

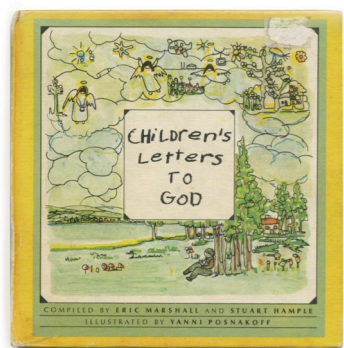
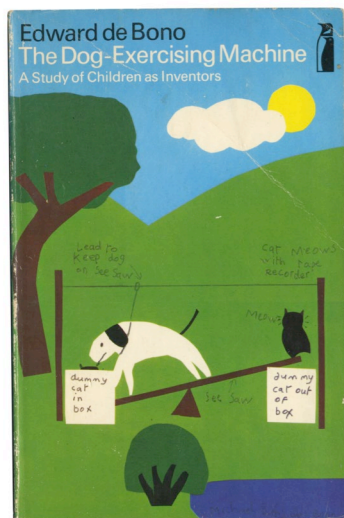
a universal language and universal freedoms.<sup>7</sup> One of these Esperanto-speaking micro-nations was Rose Island, a small community situated atop a sea platform built nine miles off the coast of Rimini (Italy) in 1968. My reference to Esperanto in *Utopia Oblique* was then threaded through a narrative including pop-culture (via William Shatner<sup>8</sup> and Charlie Chaplin<sup>9</sup>) and literature (E.W.Cole’s *Book Arcade*<sup>10</sup>) to make further cultural connections. The design element linking content to form was the featuring of a typeface I had just designed, *League* (2008), which contained Esperanto glyphs.

*Utopia Oblique* sought to culturally connect typography to the human need to express ideas through language. Although the authorial intent of the publication was centred on utopias, it was expressed through stories of literature, pop culture, dead languages and micro-nations, with typography the common thread through them all. From a wider critical perspective, *Utopia Oblique* used typographic form as a lens through which to highlight the conspicuous absence of utopian thinking in current political discourse.

### THE CRITICAL AND THE POLITICAL

Viewed alongside explicitly politically-focussed studios such as InkaHoots, Barnbrook or Grapus, my studio projects make no claim to engage in conventional political protest, nor any formal alignment with specific political parties or ideologies.<sup>11</sup> Instead the projects explore a critical position through a typographic parallel, ‘rendering visible ‘social realities and bodies of knowledge that might otherwise remain imperceptible’ through typographic form.<sup>12</sup>

## PLAYFUL AGITATION



TOP  
*The Dog Exercising Machine*  
Edward De Bono  
(1970)

ABOVE  
*Children's Letters to God*  
Eric Marshall &  
Stuart Hample  
(2013)

OPPOSITE  
*The Book of Numbers*  
Herbert Spencer  
(1974)

OPPOSITE RIGHT  
*Characters & Spaces*  
Stephen Banham  
(2009)

Projects are able to express or suggest a critical position through two primary enablers – by playfully agitating through wit, humour or satire, and through a direct typographic intervention within an environment. Each of these ‘enabling devices’ will be investigated in following sections.

How best to engage an audience whilst offering critique? Over several decades my practice has investigated this question, and developed a metaphoric combination of two seemingly oppositional elements – the sweet and the bitter, the smooth and the sharp – in a process I would describe as ‘playful agitation’.<sup>13</sup>

If ‘wit is the sugar that precedes the medicine’<sup>14</sup> humour has been used throughout my projects as an introductory ‘sweetener’ in commentary. To understand how this operates within my practice I will investigate how each of these necessary halves contribute within design projects.

The role of ‘play’ within graphic design ideation and communication has been explored considerably, most notably by Stephen Heller and Bob Gill, so no claim of originality in this respect is made. For Heller: ‘Play is necessary to the design process because unless a designer is working within a rigid system that prohibits all variants, exploration is an integral part of all initial problem solving’,<sup>15</sup> but the focus of this investigation is not the nature of play per se but rather its combination with critical intent. This shifts the emphasis from play being a tool in problem-solving ‘affirmative’ design to its use in a problem-revealing critical position.<sup>16</sup>

In the earlier years of my practice the usual target of satire was the re-emergence and idealisation of the chilled Swiss internationalist

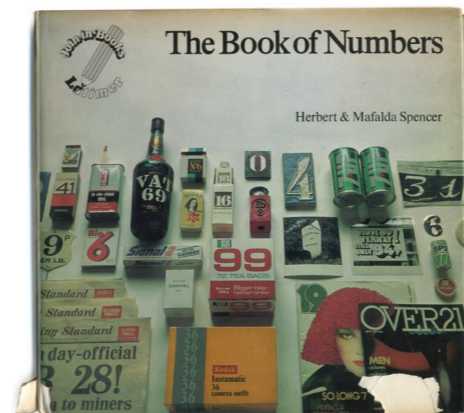
Style (read as *Helvetica*). Given its cultural association with efficient, joyless intent, humour in this context would appear to offer the perfect counterpoint. Humour is also naturally helpful in engagement, as Heller points out: ‘humour is a mnemonic tool – something that helps (or forces us) to recollect’.<sup>17</sup>

The humorous tone within my practice was formed by exposure to many predecessors, each of whom has woven wit and humour throughout their works in unique ways.

The many books produced by Italian designer and educator Bruno Munari showed me the possibilities of a child-like playfulness in visual communication. Of particular note is his 1974 book *roses in the salad*<sup>18</sup> which presented a seemingly simple idea – using common vegetables as a printing device – yet was able to produce a rich variation and abstraction. It showed how sets of similar images playfully create a collective meaning, a seriality that I was to use within the poster format of *Assembly* (1999) displaying an extensive multitude of playful imagery. Like *roses in the salad*, *Assembly* revealed the outcome of direct engagement with children.

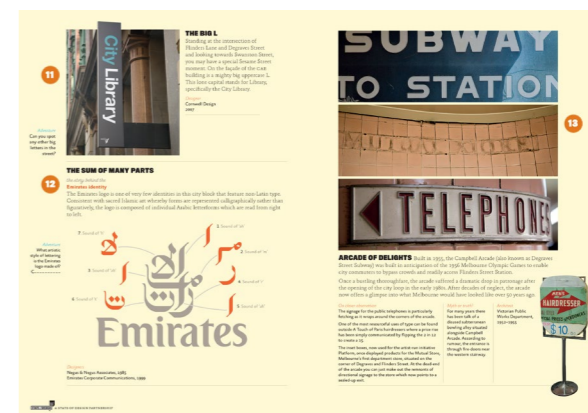
The central tenet of the *Assembly* project – the direct participation of children – was conjured after reading Edward de Bono’s *The Dog Exercising Machine: A Study of Children as Inventors* (1970).<sup>19</sup> Combined with *Children's Letters to God* (1966), a book literally showing pages of correspondence between children and their imagined god, these two texts introduced to me the richly expressive qualities of children’s hand-drawn reflections.

Similarly playful, but with a sharper surveying eye, is Herbert Spencer’s *The Book of Numbers*



(1974). Although ‘street typography’ was being wittily explored in advertising design by many of Spencer’s contemporaries (such as Robert Brownjohn, Ivan Chermayeff and Alan Fletcher) his 1974 book dared to extend this curiosity to the world of children. The spirit of observation developed through his *Typographica* series naturally flows through the text written by Spencer and his then sixteen-year old daughter Mafalda to encourage children to become ‘number-spotters’. They give some hints as to where this awareness may lead – ‘...you will discover, as we did, much of interest besides numbers that might otherwise have passed unobserved’.

Echoes of *The Book of Numbers* can be seen in *Characters and Spaces* (2009), a small booklet I was commissioned to produce for the State of Design Festival to inform and inspire the general public of the presence of design within their city. This self-guided tour booklet, featuring a series of typographic sites within a single city block, was accompanied



by an observational quiz for children. A public art project I designed the following year, *Circular* (2010–11) recalls the participatory tone of Herbert’s 1974 book, encouraging children to rub, trace and play with the set of eight typographic man-hole covers set into the footpath of Point Cook.

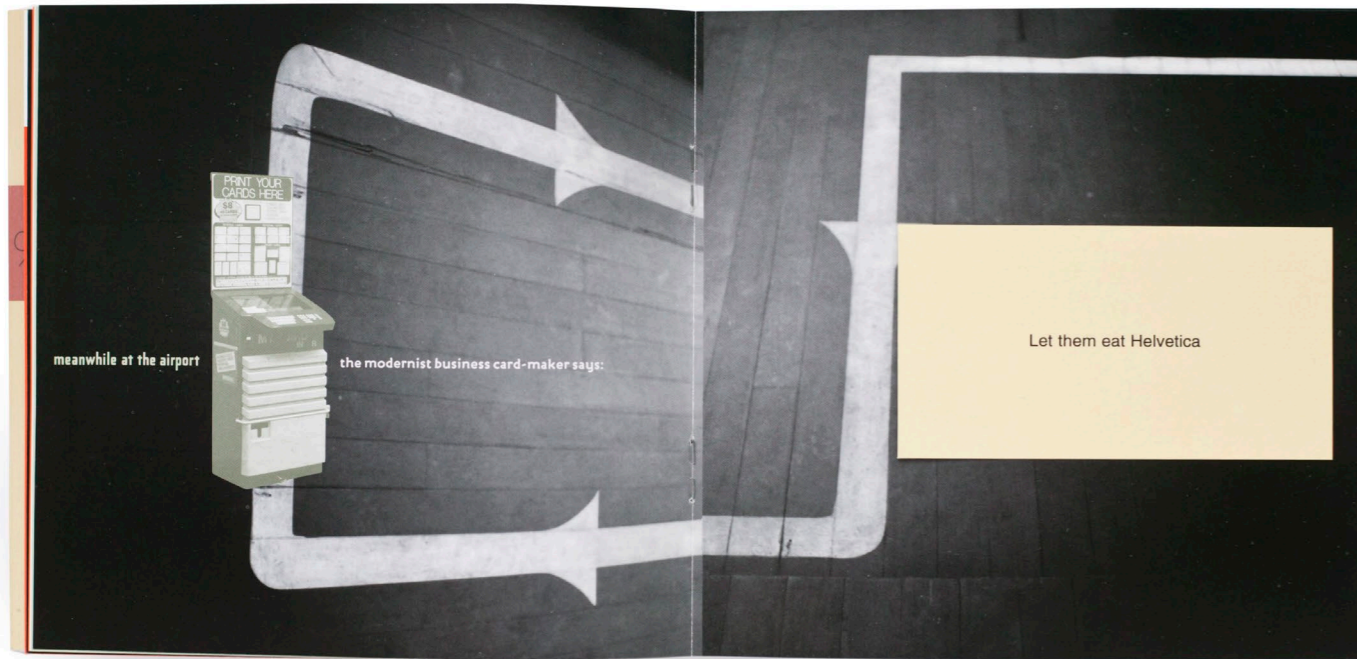
In many of my projects humour has been used to humanise. An influence upon this approach is the book *Logo R.I.P* (2003) which presents over 60 ‘dead’ logos and the stories behind their ‘lives’.<sup>20</sup> The authors deliberately use a humorous lexicon of anthropomorphic terms such as ‘lifespan’, ‘death’ and ‘rebirth’ to give these seemingly ubiquitous logo forms a human persona.

This humanising quality is echoed in my own projects dealing with logos such as *Assembly* and *Cashcow Oblique*. Both these projects reconnect designed marks with the culture that produced them, asserting that such ‘utilitarian’ marks can express human traits

such as fragility, glory, failure and inevitably mortality. By recognising this subjectivity, the use of such marks for critical intent becomes possible.

These later, more nuanced approaches represent the refined outcome of a blunter form used earlier. The pitch of my critical voice shifts considerably across the breadth of my practice. Earlier books such as *Qwerty I* (1991) carry an almost prophetic tone, with page spreads exclaiming ‘Forget not the scalpel!’. This gradually moves to a more quizzical tone in *Convoy* (1999): ‘Could you imagine a public meeting where the speakers only discuss the colour of the megaphone?’ to the far more tempered, suggestive voice of *Cashcow Oblique* (2016) ‘(...) notions of the new may not be quite so new after all’. The evolution of how these critical arguments are voiced reflects a necessary maturation, from the raw and didactic towards the confident and nuanced.





PLAYFUL AGITATION  
*Convoy*

As I more closely investigate the process of playful agitation, a firm starting point is *Convoy* (1999) a project that personifies this strategy. The critical proposition of this square-format 24-page book was that, in the absence of wider political or cultural engagement, graphic design was only ever capable of producing commercially affirmative outcomes.

Humorous metaphor is used throughout its argument for expanding graphic design beyond solely commercial imperatives. Through a series of provocative statements ('never trust fonts named after cities'), I satirically voice this frustration.

Written in Paris during my research into French political graphic design, my frustrations are expressed through a series of pages featuring what had been a common sight that 1998 winter – the ridiculously embellished faux-rococo plastic carousel ticket booths. As a critical expression of graphic design these ludicrously shiny plastic forms presented the perfect metaphoric object – offering instant gratification through a commercial transaction, all grotesquely packaged as an ignorant distortion of history.

These images were coupled with equally satirical typographic statements: 'To install *Brushscript* simply place in trash', 'Refuse to go to weddings if the invites are set in *University Roman*'. These divider pages sought to highlight the pointlessly self-referential and superficial concerns of the design industry as I saw it then.

THIS PAGE  
*Convoy*  
Stephen Banham  
(1998)

OVERLEAF  
Drawings for *Rentfont*  
Stephen Banham  
(1997)



One spread from *Convoy* features a winding painted arrow<sup>21</sup> running across the pages stating 'Meanwhile at the airport the modernist business-card maker says: Let them eat Helvetica'. This page is a comic amalgam of many observations – I had noticed that the low-budget automatic business card printing console at Melbourne airport had a similar 'anti-mastery' to the self-consciously 'undesigned' work by many local designers, re-packaged as boutique 'Helvetica Chic'.<sup>22</sup> These pages highlighted this transference of low to high culture, echoing the ethical debates around the use of the vernacular a decade before.<sup>23</sup> The playful co-opting of Marie-Antoinette's famous phrase to its typographic incarnation 'Let them eat Helvetica' led to me printing similar statements as stickers, distributed widely across Melbourne and mailed out to interested parties internationally for free.<sup>24-25</sup>

By the time I wrote *Convoy*, social commentary had become a personal focus of design enquiry. Initial research into politicised graphic design cultures led me to the work of the French design collective Grapus (1970–1991) and to question whether their political legacy has continued to inform contemporary French graphic design. To answer this, I spent more than two months in Paris interviewing scores of prominent members of the graphic design community on the enduring influence and legacy of this period in French design. I published this research in the English typographic periodical *Baseline* and the Australian design magazine *Monument*. Had this politically-charged generation of French graphic designers set a mould for others to continue a questioning and critique of authority? Almost without exception my

interviews and discussions uncovered the complete opposite – that political engagement of this earlier era was seen as an aged irrelevance that had been replaced by more immediate economic imperatives. I concluded, 'In Paris anyway, current graphic design appears to be shedding the tattooed skin of the older militant generation and looking elsewhere'<sup>26</sup>. In an interview for *Eye* in 1991, Grapus founder Pierre Bernard conceded that he no longer believed in producing revolutionary design but rather that revolutionary designs exist. He pointed out that 'It's always easier to perpetuate the same forms and contents rather than search out for new ones. Of course, design can't change everything, but nevertheless it is the search that leads to change'.<sup>27</sup>

Uncovering such political disillusionment in Paris was disappointing and only echoed my own frustrations with a nihilistic Australian design community over the previous decade. With the writing and design of *Convoy* taking place during the 1998 Paris research trip, its pages are permeated with this frustration. To counter this, I looked for other spirited cultural critiques within graphic design, unearthing the Dutch designer Piet Schrueders who stated in 1977,

the profession of graphic design is criminal and really ought not to exist at all.... A designer is criminal because his profession is one of those specializations that the world can easily do without: he is criminal because he sells contrived ideas about order and objectivity while in reality he is obliterating content by pouring a tasteless sauce over the assignments that are entrusted to him...<sup>28</sup>

Schrueders went on to historically contextualise his design contemporaries, reflecting that, ‘probably in another thirty years we will reminisce about Jan Van Toorn, Wim Crowwel and Pieter Brattinga, just as we do now about Billy the Kid, Al Capone and the Godfather...’.<sup>29</sup>

So what exactly was the ‘end-game’ of *Convoy*’s critical argument? What was it trying to change? With a readership predominantly situated within design, *Convoy* sought to persuade the profession that it was not isolated from politics and economics but rather was subject to, or even obedient to, such forces. *Convoy* set up humorously absurd juxtapositions, such as comparing two objects bearing a very strong visual resemblance to each other, yet imbued with completely different economic values such as the ‘No Overtaking’ truck mud flap and the Commonwealth Bank logo.<sup>30</sup> By exposing such economic relationships and distributions of value, *Convoy* revealed the explicit monetization of design through a playful outer skin of humour and absurdity.

#### PLAYFUL AGITATION *Rentfont & Cashcow Oblique*

Having established how playful agitation works within a single project (*Convoy*), I will now explore the development of this strategy within the practice by comparing its use in two projects set apart by two decades.

The *Rentfont* project (1998) presents a satirical reinterpretation of Paul Renner’s typeface *Futura* (1927) and introduces a new typeface called *Futures*. Each glyph of this fictitious typeface is commercially sponsored to feature a corporate logo over a 99-year lease. As the publication proposes

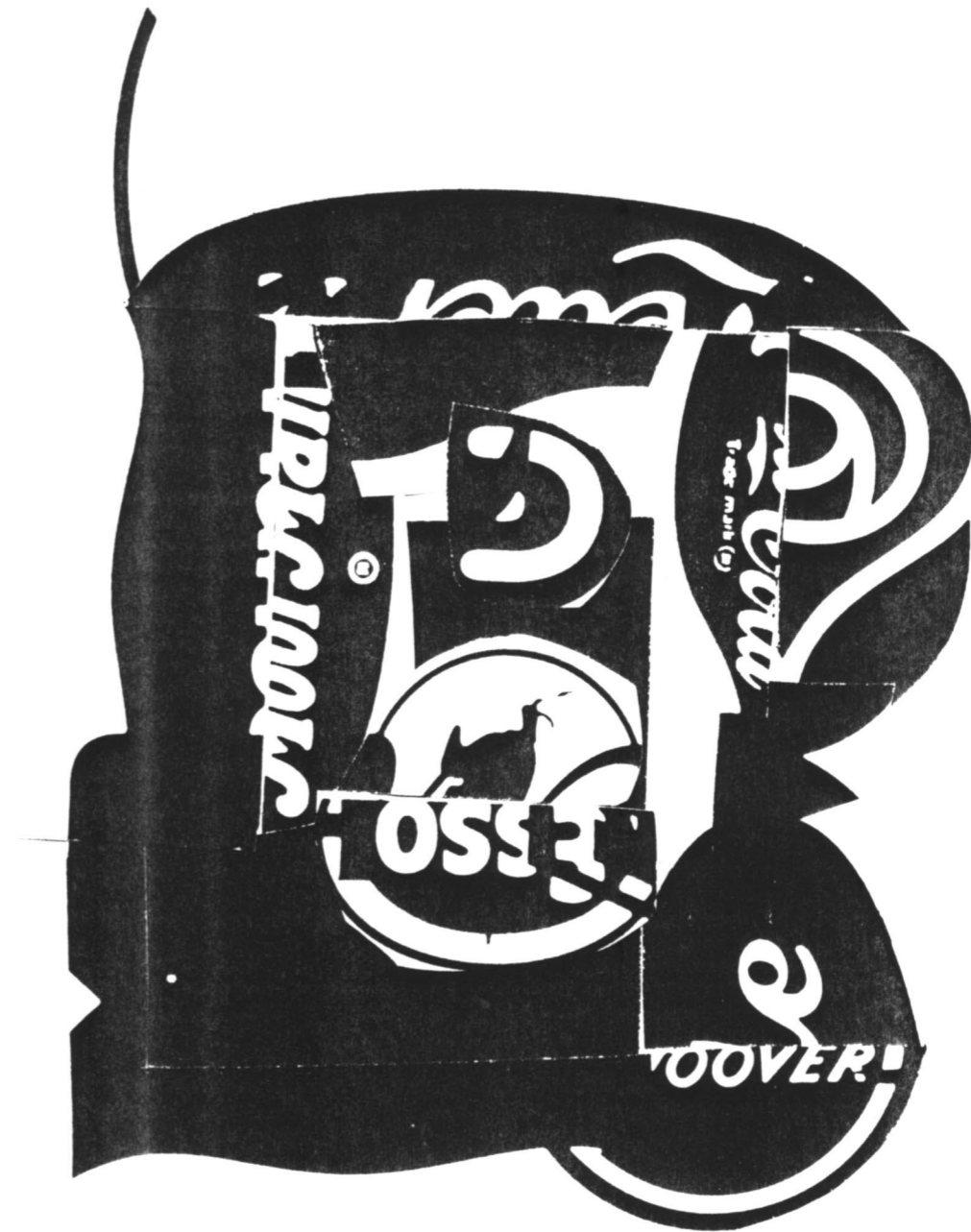
on its opening page, ‘If you can design a corporate identity from fonts, why not a font out of corporate identities?’<sup>31</sup> This paradigm flip continues with the by-line for *Futures* stating: ‘the font that makes the language of business the business of language’.<sup>32</sup> Although intended as a preposterous idea, it did not seem any more ludicrous than the emerging corporate ownership of language through the trademarking of words, phrases and even entire statements throughout the last decade of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

The choice of *Futura* as a satirical target was not accidental. With its monoline geometric structure, it is considered to be a key typographic symbol of early twentieth century European modernity, boldly marketed to printers as the ‘Die Schrift Unserer Zeit’ (The type of our times)<sup>34</sup>. This lofty modernist statement made it a perfect counterpoint to the absurdly mercantile *Futures* typeface proposed. *Rentfont* sought to highlight the political contradictions of a European graphic design modernism whose original intentions were eventually co-opted into corporate America by its post-war diaspora. Kinross contextualises this further:

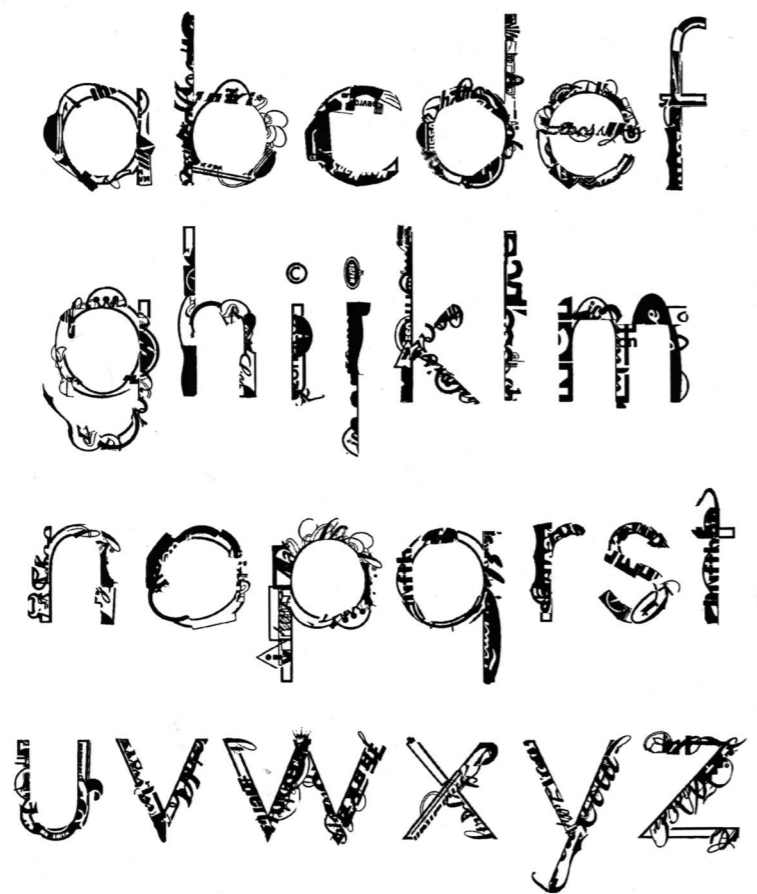
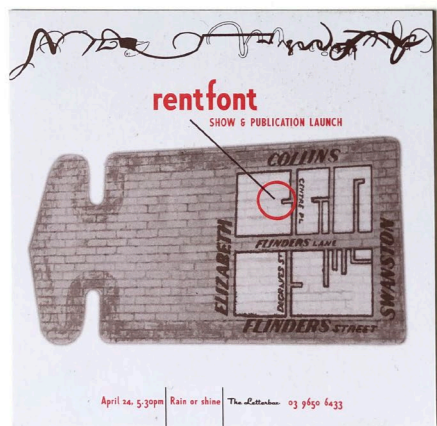
the fate of modernism in the twentieth century: the attempted social and aesthetic revolution that took off, shakily, from the continent of Europe in the 1920s and began to suffer drastic, almost fatal reversals in the 1930s (in Germany above all) but which struggled on, dispersed and diluted and which re-emerged in the post war world of the West and somehow, rather mysteriously, became a common visual currency during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

The absurdity of *Futures* being proposed as ‘the standard font’ is a specific reference to the early modernist notions of universality, in particular Herbert Bayer’s Bauhaus typeface *Universal* (1925). *Rentfont* argued that the structural simplicity of these ‘universal’ typefaces, created out of a minimal set of consistent angles and curvatures, was the perfectly apt expression of a convenient political simplicity. My critical voice deliberately appropriated the arrogant tone used in the original marketing of *Futura* as the ‘type for today and tomorrow’ whilst adding a humorous absurdist twist.<sup>36</sup>

Counterpointing *Rentfont* with a project produced 18 years later, *Cashcow Oblique*, highlights how I had developed ‘playful agitation’ as a critical strategy for storytelling. *Cashcow Oblique* sets up a direct comparison between the cattle boom of 1873 and the real estate boom of 2016 by way of an extensive inventory, an insect-collection-like taxonomy of marks leaving the viewer to see the humorous patterns of market oversupply and embellished brand differentiation. By 2017 the sheer absurdity of *Rentfont* has diminished, replaced by a more considered and analytical voice. Less dictatorial in tone, the exact ‘subject of attack’ of *Cashcow Oblique* is left ambiguous – is it the graphic design industry, the real estate industry or the underlying economic system of investment speculation? It is all of the above. The direct references to typographic history in *Rentfont* explicitly pinpoint a readership of fellow graphic designers whilst *Cashcow Oblique* casts a wider net, seeking a broader readership and a more open-ended critique. Both its humour and its critique reside in the one place – its absurd taxonomic presentation.







TOP LEFT  
Promotional Card for  
the *Rentfont* exhibition  
at *Citylights*  
Stephen Banham  
(1997)

TOP RIGHT  
Drawings for *Rentfont*  
(1997)

Although both projects embody a playful spirit, a substantial shift can be observed in how I articulate an underlying agitation. The understanding of a ‘typographic way of knowing’ within my practice had been realised through my research candidature. By *Cashcow Oblique* my critical argument is based on the reading of existing graphic design rather than the need to generate new forms. My authorial expression is through the collecting, collating and assembling of comparative content. The reader is left to draw their own conclusions, creating a distance from graphic treatment and accommodating the reader within the project. In contrast *Rentfont* relies on the design of new forms to illustrate its proposition.

Both projects reference history but for different reasons. *Rentfont* satirically transplants 1920s German modernism into contemporary capitalism. *Cashcow Oblique* also refers to the past (the cattle boom of 1873) but only as a comparative point to current branding culture. Both projects highlight the endurance of economic systems by showing how little has changed between the eras. *Rentfont* does this through design history whilst *Cashcow Oblique* uses social and economic history.

Across the two projects, the nature of the humour has also evolved. *Rentfont* presents a conclusive satire delivered in the form of a graphic punchline whilst *Cashcow Oblique* presents a more looped argument, taking ubiquitous forms from the street, re-contextualising them within history then re-introducing them back into the streets in poster form from whence they came. The hand of the designer is still evident but the sharpness of the idea lies in the observation of typographic patterns through frequency and

## FROM OBSERVATION TO INTERVENTION

across time.<sup>37</sup> *Cashcow Oblique* highlights the development of a gentler form of typographic persuasion. It is being playful whilst quietly delivering agitation through sleight of hand.

### INTERVENTION

Just as persuasive elements such as humour have been developed as argumentative tools, so too has the depth of engagement. Earlier projects such as the *Querty* and *Ampersand* series relied on observation and documentation as their main method of engagement, presenting typographic artefacts and drawing out their possible cultural meanings. Whilst this was fitting during a period when the means of production was exclusively print, the shift in the nature of projects towards physical presence called for a more direct approach – public intervention.

An early manifestation of this more direct engagement was a series of public forums I initiated and convened from 2005–2010. Presented at Federation Square’s Deakin Edge and attracting up to 500 attendees at a time, the *Character* event series addressed the increasing placelessness of design debate by enabling ‘live’ and ‘physically present’ rigorous discussion of issues intended to resonate with a wider public. This orientated the event themes towards ethical and cultural dimensions of graphic design practice, addressing such diverse questions as: Is it ethical to style-guide a city?; Why is graphic design politically neutral?; How can we embrace the accidental?; Why is there a re-emergence of craft? Later *Character* events took the form of city tours of typography and a forum on typographic films (which included the Australian premiere of the documentary *Helvetica*).<sup>38</sup>

The *Character* events marked an evolution from commentary to a more discursive model, representing a discussion of public matters through the lens of graphic design, specifically typography. These forums, screenings and tours collectively explored the role of typography in the experience of a city. By bringing typography into public discourse these events addressed one of the key inhibitors to the acceptance of letterforms having a critical capacity – their complete ubiquity. Unlike other creative forms such as theatre or art, typography is not ‘presented’ in a formal sense but is instead embedded into the very fibre of our streets, its only cultural expectation is just simply ‘being there’. The silent expectation of typography to solely fulfil its utilitarian role – instructing, informing, persuading – undermines its acceptance as a potentially critical voice. Discussing the city through a typographic lens offers a way to address this, making letterforms a means through which critical and subversive acts can be expressed.

One of the most profound instances of such subversion can be found not in the work of a graphic designer but that of an architect. During the renovation of the northern half of Centreway Arcade by Cocks, Carmichael and Whitford in the 1980s, the architects installed a wall featuring a pattern of evenly-spaced metal uppercase *Helvetica* letters.<sup>39</sup> Positioned high above the eye-level of passers-by, this feature generally goes unnoticed unless one takes the time to stop, look up and carefully read the letters, mentally inserting word spacing where necessary. It eventually reveals its message: *We live in a society that sets an inordinate value on consumer goods and services.*<sup>40</sup>





OPPOSITE LEFT  
Centreway Arcade by Cocks,  
Carmichael and Whitford  
(c. 1980s)

OPPOSITE RIGHT  
Character 6 at ACMI  
(2009)

LEFT  
*The Age*  
13 September 2003

RIGHT  
*Eye International Journal*  
of Graphic Design  
Issue 30 (2009)

Installed upon the walls of a city shopping arcade, this typographic intervention is not only powerfully ironic but wickedly seditious of the arcade’s primary function – retail. The subversion is made possible by cleverly exploiting the ubiquity of type in our built environment, giving the impression to the passing public that the words are doing their usual job (advertising, instructing etc) whilst they are in fact expressing an unapologetic critical statement.

INTERVENTION  
*Assembly*

*Assembly* (2000) begins with the provocative statement that if current graphic design discourse was to be visualised as a digital typeface, ‘(...) every keystroke would be an exclamation mark or a full stop, with a total absence of question marks’.<sup>41</sup> I wrote this introduction as a protest against the uncritical mercantile underpinnings of the design industry. By highlighting the effect of branding

upon the minds of young children, *Assembly* proposed a more open-ended approach with questions of design through engaging the public directly.<sup>42</sup> Emerging at the end of the first decade of my practice, *Assembly* represented an intervention through, and determined by, direct public involvement. It sat both outside and inside design – directly involving an unconventional community (schoolchildren) in a process centred on their visual memory of design.

The visual clarity of the logo recollections drawn from a child’s memory reinforces one of the key critical intents of *Assembly*, to highlight the complicity of graphic design within the brand indoctrination of young minds. Framed as a critical and self-evident project, *Assembly* avoided any definitive anthropological findings but instead, like later projects such as *Cashcow Oblique*, led the reader to draw their own conclusions.<sup>43</sup>

INTERVENTION  
*Death to Helvetica*

On the reverse of the *Assembly* poster is printed a yellow typographic pattern proclaiming ‘Death to Helvetica’.<sup>44</sup> This was the first manifestation of a statement that would become the most ‘publicly adhesive’ typographic intervention in my practice to date.

*Death to Helvetica* argued that the omnipresence of *Helvetica* represented a larger desire for political neutrality, and by suggestion, cultural passivity. The specific reference to the Swiss typeface formed an analogous argument against the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy of the typeface’s neutrality’.<sup>45</sup> Gui Bonsiepe likewise dismisses claims of neutrality, noting that:

pure information exists for the designer only in arid abstraction. As soon as he begins to give it concrete shape, to bring it within a range of experience, the process of rhetorical infiltration begins.<sup>46</sup>

Central to the agitations behind *Death to Helvetica* (DTH) was an acknowledgement that *Helvetica*, like all typefaces, carries within it an inherent rhetoric, described by Kinross as ‘the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others’.<sup>47</sup>

*Death to Helvetica* was not a single project, nor did not take a single printed form. Instead it was a provocative argument that ran through a series of my books from *Convoy* (1999) through *Assembly* (2000) and finally to *Grand* (2001). It is more accurately described as a ‘period’ of the practice than as a distinct project within it. *Death to Helvetica* took many forms between 1999–2001 including self-published texts, interviews, t-shirts, stickers and public forums.

The focus on *Helvetica* was influenced by an encounter in 1989 with Erik Spiekermann who had described the typeface within the German context as ‘more common than clean air’.<sup>48</sup> For Spiekermann this typeface had become a self-

limiting cultural default. The broad familiarity of Helvetica made it the perfect springboard for a public intervention, leveraging its ubiquity as an entry point to more politicised arguments. What the DTH project uncovers is that the omnipresence of typography, particularly *Helvetica*, can be both an inhibitor (through a public failure to notice) as well as an enabler (through a public familiarity) in taking a critical position.

The arguments underpinning DTH become clearer when viewed in historical context. In contrast to the typographic experimentation prevalent throughout the early 1990s, the uncertain last years of the twentieth century brought with them a yearning appetite for the safe, certain and familiar. This was reflected in the widespread resurgence of *Helvetica*, the Swiss sans originally made popular by representing stability during a post-World War anxiety. Forty years later it had this same appeal, this time blanketed in a foggy wistful comfort. This nostalgic popularity is tinged with irony

given that *Helvetica* had been originally marketed as a ‘nostalgia-killer’, erasing the ‘old, dusty and home-made’ era of the 1950s and ‘restoring them to shiny beauty’.<sup>49</sup>

The criticality underpinning *Death to Helvetica* was reliant on public engagement, with its power being leveraged through mainstream media. Playfully written as an adversarial courtroom debate, journalist James Button explored the *Death to Helvetica* proposition across two pages of *The Age* newspaper in September 2003. Initially Button had considered the idea of protesting against a typeface as obscure, but he was eventually convinced of its cultural connections:

Until I got onto Banham’s trail I didn’t know a lot of things – about typefaces, type history, type love. Now I’ve finally grasped his point: type is character as well as meaning, not just the messenger but the message. With the eagerness of a convert, I wanted to decode every sign I see.<sup>50</sup>





By purposefully seeking broad publicity, the arguments behind *Death to Helvetica* began to intervene into a more public dialogue. This was a deliberate strategy to present what appeared to be a design-centred concern (typefaces) only to then transform it into a wider discussion around diversity in cultural expression.

After a time, this washed back into the design press. Writer Alice Tremlow noted the public resonance of *Death to Helvetica in Eye*: ‘an article on typography in the mainstream press is news in itself’.<sup>51</sup> Tremlow referred to the *Age* reader responses: ‘One commented: ‘Really interesting article in the paper on Saturday. Now I can’t look in shop windows. I just look at them.’... ‘Just read your article in *The Age* ... I kept grinning thinking, thank God finally someone has decided that three or four full pages on typography isn’t such a boring thing to print in the paper.’<sup>52</sup>

So explicitly public was the *Death to Helvetica* intervention that it may be appropriately described as a ‘campaign’, a term also highlighting its critical intentions. Like any conventional political campaign, the project was supported by considerable merchandise including sloganized t-shirts and stickers featuring statements such as ‘Death to Helvetica’, ‘Helvetica Thin. Just Say No’<sup>53</sup>, ‘Never trust fonts named after cities’,<sup>54</sup> ‘Turd Polisher’<sup>55</sup> and ‘Less is M.O.R’ (meaning ‘middle of the road’).<sup>56</sup> Throughout 1999 and 2000 these stickers were plastered by a small army of helpers all across Melbourne streets, laneways, toilets and trams<sup>57</sup> – a suitably grass roots approach for a pre-social media campaign.

Two years later, in 2002, an international movement to ‘Ban Comic Sans’ also made the leap from design circles into public debate. Initiated by American designers Holly and Dave Combs, *Comic Sans* was described as ‘like someone threw up on the keyboard and that’s what came out’.<sup>58</sup> Many casual observers mistook these two campaigns to be similar, ignoring the fundamentally different intent behind the projects. The argument behind Ban Comic Sans was an aesthetic one – *Comic Sans* was railed against as a blight upon the landscape of typography because of its ‘daggy’ informality – whereas the argument behind *Death to Helvetica* carried a critical intent, the typeface targeted not for its form but for its culturally-associative claim to neutrality.

As a direct intervention, the *Death to Helvetica* project transformed a common detail of the everyday (‘just a typeface’) into a larger public discourse. By humorously framing the public argument as a matter of ‘typo-diversity’, it sought to align the importance of typographic variety with other social arenas where diversity is considered essential such as cultural diversity and botanic diversity. This suggested the ultimate aim of the project: that, despite being ‘hidden in plain view’, typefaces do in fact speak of our human lives and identities.

#### CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that a typographic way of knowing can be used for critical purposes. This ‘typographic lens’, with its connective ability to see patterns and relationships, is able to structure an investigative narrative.

Through a series of case studies from my practice, it has been proposed that a critical perspective on larger social and cultural issues can be articulated through the prism of typographic storytelling.

Using Mazé’s schemata of criticality as a framework, I explored the definitions and development of criticality throughout my practice, citing specific projects as gradual steps in this evolution from the blunt dichotomies of earlier projects through to the more nuanced arguments proposed in later works. Mapped in parallel was the progression from a self-directed criticality to a more externalised public discourse.

This investigation studied the key ways in which this criticality has been enabled through playfully delivered agitation and direct intervention into a community or place. Relating to the first of these, the role of humour as an engaging ‘sweetener’ was contextualised both through the acknowledgement of precedents and their contribution to this strategy of engagement. An investigation of intervention recognised the significant shift in my practice from print to built-form, expanding the *design of things* to the *design of experiences* from which a more critical voice has emerged.

The knitting together of these various strands of my practice strengthens the central argument of this chapter – that a typographic lens can be used to transform cultural issues into stories that are both publicly engaging and critical.

OPPOSITE  
Stickers from  
*Death to Helvetica*  
(2000)

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CONCLUSION





1

### THE QUEEN OF ACRONYMS

KFC, BWS, RMIT – we are surrounded by acronyms. So it is surprising that many people don't realise that QV refers to the *Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital*, the site of which the centre now stands on (a clue is the laneways within are all named after nurses). Established *by women for women*, the (QV) Hospital made a substantial injection into preventative healthcare, particularly for mothers and children.

2

### ONLY CHOKING

But unknown to most there's a whole other kind of injection that has been taking place since 2014 – namely the injection of hormones into the humble plane trees of Central Melbourne (renown for their choking pollen) to reduce their harm to allergy sufferers.

3

### WAITING ON TABLES

More greenery, this time on the top. With their name proudly set into the façade, *Denyers* continue the medical theme of the area as manufacturers of operating tables (handy being close to a hospital). These days the building is better known for another type of table – bar tables – on its rooftop.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of undertaking this research has been transformative. This research journey led to a greater understanding of how a cumulative '*typographic way of knowing*' has developed within my practice.

My investigations have specifically clarified for me the ways in which this '*knowing*' has been engaged through design projects as a means of cultural expression and critique.

## EMERGING TRAJECTORIES

The ‘typographic lens’ for which I argue and which has framed this dissertation has enabled me to explicate the various connective modes of my practice: its expression of place; the inherently familial relationships within typography; and its capacity to uncover systems of power. This reflective research project has investigated the origins and development of such modes over time, from the pre-practice period to projects undertaken during the candidature. My understanding of my practice has been further contextualised as part of a broader theoretical framework within the discipline of typography and graphic design. I have acknowledged historical and contemporary communities of practice, in relation to which I have positioned my own contributions.

The clarity this research has brought to my practice is most evident in recent works, such as *Cashcow Oblique* and *Brisbane Anzac Square*, both of which were designed mindful of research reflections such as familial sets and identifying place respectively, transforming a tacit ‘typographic way of knowing’ into a deeper ‘awareness of typographic knowing’.

Such shifts can become evident even in the most seemingly incidental of ways. An example is a simple pencil sketch drawn during the course of this research to map the critical capacities within my practice. It features two arcs stretching across a timeline of nearly thirty years. The top arc, representing *studio publishing*, shows criticality consistently rising throughout the decades, whilst the bottom arc, indicating *client projects*, shows no capacity for criticality, crawling along the bottom for the first ten years – then rises dramatically. Other than just showing me what I had *done*, this sketch showed me what I did not *know* – that I was transferring a deeply known typographic perspective from my publishing across my entire practice. It displays to me how additional projects were now being viewed through a ‘typographic way of knowing’, synthesising my practice and enabling it to articulate matters beyond design *through* typography.

The two arcs in the diagram also highlight a deficiency of my earlier practice – that my critical publishing voice only existed through subsidies from ‘affirmative’ and uncritical design projects. This schism emerged through research from my Masters project *Mixed Business* (2003) which investigated precedents and methods for aligning personal value systems within graphic design practice. The outcome of this earlier research was a

complete re-framing of unhelpful binaries such as ‘commercial’ and ‘non-commercial’, replacing them with *client-led* projects and *studio-led* projects. This opened up the possibility of studio values to flow within *all* projects, whether income-generating or not. At that point however I had not yet identified the ‘value’ itself and the ways in which it could inform the practice. This has now been clarified in this research as a ‘typographic way of knowing’.

When reflected upon in a more granular level, the trajectory to my current practice becomes clearer. During the first five years of my practice (1991–1996) client projects had been pragmatically undertaken for economic survival during an economic recession whilst the need to write, design and publish typographic critique was satisfied (albeit in a humble form) through the *Qwerty* series (1991–96).<sup>1</sup> The viability of this two-stream practice was threatened in 1995 when my main client, The Gas and Fuel Corporation, was privatised by the Kennett State Government. By this time the profile *Qwerty* had begun to attract alternative clients, primarily in the cultural sector, who sought out a similar curiosity and criticality in their commissions.

Further profile following the *Ampersand* series (1996–2001) and *Fancy* (2003) helped to knit together studio-led and client-led projects by continuing to attract clients receptive to conceptual and critical responses. Evidence of this was the commissioning of the studio to design the identity for the Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC) in 2005. The resultant identity system was based on a symbol common to both musical notation and typographic language – the parentheses. The development of an entire typographic system, including a bespoke uni-

case typeface *Recital Sans*, offered an extensive vocabulary of marks to reflect the wide range of operations of the MRC. By viewing music through a typographic lens, I recognised languages common to both typography and music – space, interval, tone, volume and rhythm – making clear connections between the visual and the aural, communicating to the public that music offers a wide, rich and inclusive language open to all.<sup>2</sup>

The two trajectories shown on the sketch finally met in 2013 when the *Cluster* project synthesised research into a studio commission.<sup>3</sup> This project ultimately manifested as print, an exhibition and three-dimensional form – and marked a shift towards projects that could offer multiple outcomes (literary, spatial and artistic outcomes respectively). Such projects were able to engage a variety of audiences including social historians, cartographers, designers, artists and, importantly, the general public.<sup>4</sup>

Although the meeting of these arcs indicated a harmony between client-led and studio-led projects, my doctoral research has brought a much deeper and more unified awareness to my practice, bringing together many of the methods and values identified in the study. A recent design project underscoring this is *Elm Type* (2018), which called for a typographic interpretation of a series of conversations between old elm trees and passing pedestrians in Carlton’s University Square. Anticipating the removal of these prized but dying trees, the Melbourne City Council allocated each tree with an email address through which park users could express their messages of gratitude. The resultant email correspondence (with council staff responding as the trees) became the

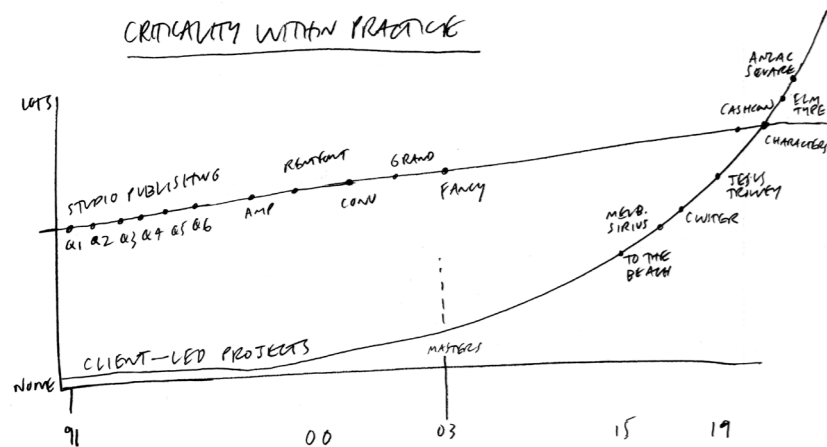
textual content, to be etched into the park solid seating, hewn from the felled elm trees. The messages are gently back-lit, each statement individually fading in and out throughout the night. The *Elm Type* project evidences many ways of typographic knowing investigated in this research: involving primary research and intervention (*Assembly*), a playful agitation (*Convoy*), a story of a specific place (*Circular*), localised place-making (*To The Beach*) and transformation of built-form into a ‘concrete language’ (*QV Market*).

Recognising an underlying ‘typographic way of knowing’ within my practice has required considerable reflection and investigation, moving me *outside* of my practice to acknowledge larger theoretical frameworks to then enable a deeper look *inside* my practice. Acknowledging my larger communities of practice through this research has brought with it a conscious awareness of my own position amongst my predecessors within the canon of typography.

The explorations within my research have both compressed time (in mapping developments across decades of projects) and expanded projects (looking closer into motivations, processes and contributions). The approaches now taken in my practice are mindful of my influences, circumstances, personal dispositions, values and above all the Socratic paradox of now knowing how little I actually know.

## ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND HISTORY

Many projects within my research investigate the capacity of typography to reflect and express social phenomena. These have necessarily compounded into the themes of economics, politics and social history.







When economics – broadly defined as the organised management of human material, resources, goods and services – is applied to a more sociological activity such as auditing the distribution of typefaces across a selected area (as undertaken in *Grand*) its concerns investigate the determinacy of the economy – how the mapping of typeface-use reflects the macroeconomics of a specific area (ie. highly aspirational markets being codified by typefaces conventionally associated with high-status branding etc). Projects such as *Cluster* have a less direct approach to economics, instead suggesting that economics may operate as an underlying incentive in street-naming decisions (ie. Elwood streets being renamed in order to achieve a similar aspirational end – this time through language. It is only when these thematic clusters are topographically mapped that they assume typographic form.

The concerns of politics have been defined as a three tier structure: civil government, the state, and public affairs; human conflict and its resolution; the sources and exercise of power.<sup>5</sup> Within the *Grand* project, it is the third of these elements that is employed as a critical factor in questioning the role of typography as a tool of control and economic reinforcement and authority (articulated specifically through the attested over-use of Helvetica). It is through this process that a particular cultural activism emerges – using an unconventional focus (typefaces) to comment upon matters of social concern. Though less explicit through *Cluster*, a similar political dimension is implied in the argument that the process of naming itself is a political gesture, one that embeds power structures into the toponymic fabric of our built environment.

Social history is evoked through both projects – gently through *Grand* which draws upon pre-existing patterns of socio-economic activity through the typo-audited kilometre of Melbourne – then more vigorously in *Cluster* which links the thematic naming systems to the cultural evolution of a city (ie. the national fervour of the 1970s that named the streets of the Endeavour Hills estate after those aboard the Endeavour etc). Deploying social history enables the longitudinal comparison and contrasting of matters of social concern over time and in the process disengaged with the tendency for industrially produced design outcomes to be centred on the ‘now’ (present). Within both *Grand* and *Cluster* the interweaving of social history represents a contextualising force, acknowledging an enduring typographic presence embedded within built environments.

These three key streams – economics, politics and social history – have been explored in a way that acknowledges and builds upon their necessarily intertwined nature. Within *Grand* and *Cluster*, the first (economics) offers an insight into the activity, the second (politics) uncovers the reasonings behind that activity and the third (social history) recognises patterns of such activity over time. Reinforcing such necessarily intermeshed relationships, Jones attests ‘The border between politics and economics is particularly open, for the obvious reason that states dispose of substantial material resources while production and exchange can hardly take place without some framework of security.’<sup>6</sup> It is in this spirit of connection that the *Grand* and *Cluster* projects can, despite the twelve years between them, offer insights into the ways in which my practice has pursued the threads of economics,

politics and social history as both parallel and concurrent investigations.

#### DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The dense, multi-layered ‘ways of knowing’ seen through three decades of projects gives an insight into my view of the world – a kind of typographic lens. And this is how the research has been visualised – as a prism framing not only approaches to projects but the manner in which they relate to the practice, and the world beyond.

In order to articulate the contribution made by this research and to propose its future directions, this lens now needs to be articulated in relation to the broader discipline. I will now examine the contributions offered by each of the key modes discussed in the dissertation.

As argued in previous chapters, the capacity to think in related or familial sets (a kind of ‘systems thinking’) is so intrinsic to the discipline of graphic design as to virtually be part of its essence. Mindful of this I have sought to avoid any claim that such thinking is exclusively held within my own practice. Instead the research makes its contribution to the discipline by naming the awareness and deployment of such relational thinking as part of a larger ‘typographic way of knowing’. Strengthened by the fact that ‘systems thinking’ occupies such a fundamental place within the graphic design discipline, this proposition only requires an awareness to re-orientate this disposition in order to generate connective narratives leading to alternative outcomes to conventional ‘affirmative’ design. The case studies within this dissertation serve as evidence of these possibilities and connectivity.



PAGE 112  
Sketch of the  
critical capacities  
within my practice  
(2017)

PAGE 114  
Detail of  
*Multistory*  
(2016)

PAGE 118  
Bronze casting of  
the *Anzac Square*  
*Project*  
(2019)

Within the graphic design discipline, the investigation and expression of ‘place’ has increasingly become a focus of inquiry as a counterbalance to a prevailing sense of ‘placelessness’ in design (from its conceptualisation and production through to its dissemination). My research proposes that the stories generated through a ‘typographic way of knowing’ can be used as a tool to understand and articulate one’s own unique environment. Case studies such as *Characters* (2011) and *Anzac Square* (2019), which both feature a re-framing of specific sites through typography, offer direct examples of this at work.

Although critical voices are not new within the graphic design canon, my research proposes new ways of being able to enunciate such criticality. By acknowledging and deploying the ‘ways of knowing’ held within the eye and mind of the typographer, a critical/political narrative can be formulated which necessarily incorporates social and cultural elements and connections. *Cashcow Oblique* (2017), for example, demonstrates a ‘typographic knowing’ (through observation, collation and synthesis) which is then used as a juxtaposition in order to tell a story of economic histories, resulting in a statement critical of contemporary marketing of real estate. The critical intent is not new, but the use of typographic knowledge to do it is.

#### DUAL DIRECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Midway through my candidature an interesting observation was made during a research work-in-progress presentation. When presented with the structural lens diagram of the research some attendees viewed it as being concave (shaped inwards) whilst others saw it as convex (shaped outwards).

Such observations point to the multi-directional contribution this research may offer the design discipline, the broader public or indeed, both. The contribution of this research runs in two-ways: from discipline-to-public and public-to-discipline – offering the public a way of looking inwards to design whilst also enabling designers to look outwards.

Written reflectively by a design practitioner, this dissertation has privileged strategies that take an ‘outward’ perspective (from my practice to the discipline and the public). Central to this argument has been the concern of public engagement through expressing social and cultural concerns through a ‘typographic way of knowing’. Yet this research may equally be used by a public wishing to gain a greater understanding of how a typographic way of seeing (the lens) leads to a typographic way of thinking – and how this can be used to tell the stories of how things relate to each other, how power is distributed and how we make place.

## ENDNOTES

### RESEARCH APPROACH

- 1 Sue Atkins & Kathy Murphy, ‘Reflection: a review of the literature’, *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 18 (Oxford, 1993), 11.
- 2 Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, (London, Birkhauser, 2007), 25.
- 3 These works include *Cashcow Oblique* (2017) and *Multistory* (2016)
- 4 Christopher Frayling, *Research in Art & Design*, (London, Royal College of Art, 1993), 2.
- 5 Peter Downton, *Design Research* (Melbourne, RMIT University Press, 2003), 17.
- 6 Downton, *Design Research*, 35.
- 7 Linda Candy, Ernest Edmonds, ‘Practice-based research in the Creative Arts: Foundations and Futures from the Front Line’, *Leonardo*, Vol 51, N<sup>o</sup>1, (Massachusetts, ISAST, 2008), 63.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Boyd E M & Fales A W, ‘Reflective learning key to learning from experience’, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 23(2) (Toronto, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1983), 99–117.
- 11 Downton, *Design Research*, 49.
- 12 Nigel Cross, ‘Design Research: A disciplined conversation’ *Design Studies* 15, (Amsterdam, Elsevier), 5.
- 13 Downton, *Design Research*, 95.
- 14 Downton, *Design Research*, 56.
- 15 Maggie Breslin, Richard Buchanan, ‘On the Case Study Method of Research and Teaching in Design’, *Design Issues Volume 24*, N<sup>o</sup>1, (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2008), 39.
- 16 Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, (London, Birkhauser, 2007), 22.
- 17 Luke Feast and Gavin Melles, ‘Epistemological Positions in Design Research: A Brief Review of the Literature’, 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Design Education, University of New South Wales, 2010), 3.
- 18 Norman Blaikie, ‘Major Choices in Social Enquiry’, *Approaches to Social Enquiry* (Oxford, Polity, 2007), 22.
- 19 Maggie Breslin, Richard Buchanan, ‘On the Case Study Method of Research and Teaching in Design’, *Design Issues Volume 24*, N<sup>o</sup>1, (Massachusetts, MIT Press 2008), 36.

- 20 Robert Stake, ‘Qualitative Case Studies’ *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (New York, Sage Publishing), 444.
- 21 Like letterforms, the case studies are defined by the spaces around and between them.
- 22 Robert Stake, ‘Qualitative Case Studies’ *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (New York, Sage Publishing), 443.

### CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

- 1 Rick Poynor, *Typographica* (London, Lawrence King Publishers, 2000), 21.
- 2 Erik Spiekermann, *Rhyme & Reason: A Typographic Novel* (Berlin, H. Berthold, 1987), 10.
- 3 Tobias Frere-Jones, *Alphabet City* (Melbourne, The Narrows, 2009).

### PRE-PRACTICE

- 1 The very first *FontShop* catalogue was given to me by Erik Spiekermann on a 1989 visit to Meta Design.
- 2 This was hastily pasted upon the wall under the cover of darkness using a hideous home-made glue. Like any artwork adhered to the rapidly demolishing wall, it was soon souvenired by passers-by.
- 3 Originally published as *Ursache & Wirkung: ein Typographischer Roman* in 1982.
- 4 Erik Spiekermann, *Rhyme & Reason: A Typographic Novel* (Berlin, H. Berthold AG, 1987), 24.
- 5 Spiekermann then went on to expand upon these themes in his subsequent best-seller *Stop Stealing Sheep and Find out How Type Works* (Adobe Press) in 1993.
- 6 Ellen Lupton, ‘High and Low’ (A Strange Case of Us and Them?), *Eye, The International Review of Graphic Design*, Issue 7, Vol 2 (London, Eye Publishing, 1992), 72–77.
- 7 Jeffrey Keedy, ‘I like the vernacular – NOT!’ *Lift and Separate. Graphic Design and the Vernacular*, (New York, The Herb Lubalin Study Centre of Design and Typography, 1993), 7.
- 8 Ibid., 7.
- 9 Katie Salen, Surrogate Multiplicities: Typography in the Age of Invisibility, *Visual Language* 35.2 (Cincinnati, 2001), 142.
- 10 Ellen Lupton, ‘High and Low. A Strange Case of Us and Them?’ *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*. Issue 7 (London, Eye Publishing, 1992), 77.
- 11 Rick Poynor, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*. Issue 6 (London, Eye Publishing, 1992), 92.
- 12 This site is now the QV (Queen Victoria) Shopping Centre.
- 13 This artefact is reproduced in *Assembly* (2000).
- 14 The Designers Republic (TDR) were known for their postmodern and often subversive repurposing of Japanese anime and corporate identity, most famously for the music industry such as Pop Will Eat Itself (PWEI), The Orb and Aphex Twin amongst many others.
- 15 Michael Rock, ‘The Designer as Author’, *Looking Closer Four*, (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 237.
- 16 Michael Rock, ‘Fuck Content’, *Multiple Signatures: On Designers, Authors, Readers and Users*, (New York, Rizzoli International, 2013)
- 17 Anne Burdick, ‘What Has Writing Got to Do with Design?’, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*, Issue 9 (London, Eye Publishing, 1993), 4.
- 18 Anne Burdick, ‘What has writing got to do with Design?’ *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*, Issue 9 (London, Eye Publishing, 1993), 5.
- 19 Rick Poynor, ‘The Designer as Reporter’, *Obey The Giant: Life in an Image World* (Berlin, Birkhauser, 2001), 188.
- 20 Burdick, ‘What has writing got to do with Design?’, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*, Issue 9 (London, Eye Publishing, 1993), 5.
- 21 Adrian Shaughnessy, *How to be a graphic designer without losing your soul*, (London, Lawrence King, 2010), 127. Barnbrook may be paraphrasing an earlier term ‘problem-finding’ first coined by 1960s radical architectural practice Superstudio (1966–1978).
- 22 Jim Davies, ‘Qwerty Review’, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*. Issue 15 (London, Eye Publishing, 1994), 84.
- 23 Stephen Banham, ‘The Problem with Koala Sans’, *Baseline Magazine* Issue N<sup>o</sup> 25. (Kent, Bradbourne Publishing, 1998), 5.
- 24 Jose Alcala, *Jake Tilson – Investigations in Cities 1977–1997*, (Bilbao, Museo Internacional de Electrografia, 1998), unnumbered.
- 25 The metric dimensions of A7 are 74mm wide by 105mm deep.



- 26 Michael Rock, ‘The Designer as Author’, *Looking Closer Four* (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 241.
- 27 The local design community was then somewhat parochial in nature.
- 28 Michael Rock, ‘The Designer as Author’, *Looking Closer Four* (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 242.
- 29 The hot metal type used in the first issue of *Qwerty* (1991) had been scavenged from an old abandoned bush printery just outside of the small Gippsland town of Walhalla.
- 30 Geoffrey Blainey, ‘Behind the Label’, Introduction to Mimmo Cozzolino, *Symbols of Australia*, (Melbourne, Penguin Books Australia, 1980), 11.
- 31 This led to serving as a typographic expert witness in the Federal Court of Australia in 2009, including the experience of being cross-examined by Julian Burnside QC on typographic matters.
- 32 Prior to social media, editorial coverage of projects in mainstream print media was essential.
- 33 This meant avoiding descriptions of design-centred processes and theories.
- 34 Denise Whitehouse, ‘A Matter of Influence: The Swiss School and the growth of the Graphic Design profession in Australia’, *dharn.org.au* (Design History Australia Research Network), 2017.
- 35 Many discussions during this time centred around IcoGrada, AGDA, Adobe Seminars or PacPrint.
- 36 As of 30 January 2019, the *Sans Forgetica* project attracted: 700+ million earned media impressions, \$7+ million (AUD) media value, 27+ million social media impressions, 246,000+ font downloads, 36,000+ chrome extension users and 150,000 video views.
- 37 An early description coined by Rick Poynor in *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design* in 1995.

## PLACE

- 1 <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/map> accessed 5 December 2018.
- 2 Joost Grootens, ‘Complexity and Contradiction in Map Design’, *Back Office: Graphic Design and Digital Practices 2* (Éditions B42, 2018), 21.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 65.
- 6 Laura Jelfs, William Cartwright, Gita Pupedis,

- ‘Considering innovations in cartography and changes in geographic representation methods’, *Geospatial Science Research 3*, (Melbourne, RMIT University, 2014)
- 7 Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, (Berlin, Birkhauser, 2007), 41.
  - 8 Peter Hall, ‘Bubbles, Lines and String’, *Back Office: Graphic Design and Digital Practices 2* (Éditions B42, 2018), 65.
  - 9 Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style*, (Dublin, H&M Publishers, 1992), 35.
  - 10 Matthew Carter, ‘Now We Have Mutable Type’ in R.McLean (ed) *Typographers on Type*, (New York, WW Norton & Company), 182–186.
  - 11 Alan Kitching, *S Book 3. Interviews with typographers*. (Southampton Solent University, School of Design and Technology, 2006), 83.
  - 12 Ken Jennings, *Maphead*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2011), 47.
  - 13 Jennings, *Maphead*, 85.
  - 14 <https://www.typography.com/fonts/surveyor/overview/> accessed 22 July 2018
  - 15 Philip Davies, Seven Page Supplement, *The Guardian*, 1 April 1977, 17–23.
  - 16 Bruce Kennett, *W.A. Dwiggins: A Life In Design* (San Francisco, Letterform Archive, 2017), 273.
  - 17 Stephen Banham, *Fancy*, (Letterbox, 2004), 8.
  - 18 The view from the summit of the now-absent World Trade Centre in New York.
  - 19 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 92.
  - 20 Paul Auster, *The New York Trilogy*, (New York, Faber and Faber, 1987), 71.
  - 21 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 97.
  - 22 Katharine Harmon, *Yo u Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 4.
  - 23 Kevin Lynch. *The Image of the City*, (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1960), 6.
  - 24 *Ibid.*, 6.
  - 25 Stephen Hall. Introduction to *You are Here. Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*, (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 15
  - 26 Jake Chessum, Reputations: Paula Scher, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design* Issue 77, (London, Eye Publishing, 2010), 48.

- 27 Paula Scher, *Make It Bigger*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), 148.
- 28 Scher’s disposition for the cartographic may have come early in her life. Her father, who worked for the United States Geological Survey as a photogrammetric engineer, invented a device that corrects the distortion caused by aerial photography. It is a beautiful irony that she spent much of the 1990s creating her own ‘distortions’ – twisting subjectivity and human experience through her hand-painted maps. Paula Scher, *Make It Bigger* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002), 148.
- 29 The Manhattan (1989) version of this work comprises eight separate fictional storylines in the form of monologues by ex-Mayor Koch, Frank Lloyd Wright, Donald Trump, a tour guide, a confidence trickster, an ambassador and a taxi driver. Each storyline has a specific letter colour, so that if the bicyclist wishes, he or she can follow the paths of each narration. In the Amsterdam (1990) and Karlsruhe (1991) versions of *The Legible City* all the letters are scaled so that they have the same proportion and location as the actual buildings that they replace, resulting in a transformed but fairly exact reproduction of the actual architectural appearance of these cities. The texts for the Amsterdam and Karlsruhe versions are largely derived from archive documents, such as newspapers, which describe prosaic historical events that took place in these cities, and are often positioned in the events’ respective locations. (<https://www.jeffreyshawcompendium.com/portfolio/legible-city/>). The name of Shaw’s work also inspired the name of my thesis.
- 30 Wolfgang Weingart, *Wolfgang Weingart: Typography: My Way to Typography*, (Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 212.
- 31 Wolfgang Weingart, *Wolfgang Weingart: Typography: My Way to Typography*, (Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 118.
- 32 The terrain is a soundwave visualisation of the space pulsar CP1919.
- 33 Mark Ovenden, *Johnston & Gill: Very British Types*, (London, Lund Humphries, 2016), 9.
- 34 Julia Thrift, ‘Roger Excoffon’, *Baseline Magazine*, sans serif issue. (London, Esselte Letraset, 1991) 35.
- 35 Stephen Banham, *Ampersand* (Letterbox, 1996), 9, 11.

- 36 Harry Pears, ‘Capitalis Senatus’, *Design World* Issue 22 (Melbourne, Design Editorial Publishing, 1991), 8.
- 37 Rick Poynor, ‘Look Inward’, *Eye, The International Journal of Graphic Design*. Issue 46, Volume 12. (London, Quantum Business Media, 2002), 23.
- 38 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1960), 2.
- 39 Rick Poynor, ‘Reputatons’, *Eye, Journal of International Graphic Design*, Issue 46. Vol 12 (London, Eye Publishing, 2002), 60.
- 40 The search for cultural identity is an important experience for each new generation of Australian graphic designers.
- 41 Rick Poynor. *Eye, International Journal of Graphic Design*, Issue 46, (London, Eye Publishing, 2002), 22.
- 42 Factors conventionally considered outside the realm of graphic design.
- 43 Despite its creatively noble intentions, *Grand* slips into conventional modes in two main ways: the mapping presented adheres to a literal measure of a phenomenon across a geographic space; whilst the typefaces it measures are typically commercial applications of letterforms.
- 44 Frederick Henri Kay Henrion (FHK). *Royal Hall: An Official Record* (London, Max Parish Publishing, 1951)
- 45 This reinforced previously anti-Helvetian statements from the preceding publication, *Assembly* (2000).
- 46 Stephen Banham, *Grand* (Melbourne, Letterbox, 2001), 2.
- 47 Richard D. Marshall, *Ed Ruscha*, (New York, Phaidon, 2003), 59.
- 48 The use of the term ‘urban branding’ deliberately refers to contemporary descriptions of identity.
- 49 In contemporary discourse, these market-made personas would be considered ‘branding’.
- 50 Deyan Sudjic, *The Language of Cities*, (London, Penguin Books, 2016), 75.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 76.
- 52 Tangible, though obscure to many.
- 53 Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984), 92.
- 54 A. Farias, P. Gatto, P. Gouveia, Letters and Cities: Reading the Urban Environment with the Help of Perception Theories. *Visual Communication Vol 8* (3). (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2009), 336.

- 55 Alice Rawsthorn, ‘Old Signs of the Times’, *New York Times*, 7 May 2012.
- 56 *Characters and Spaces* (2009) focused on the typographic stories that came out of just one block of the central business district. Two years later, this idea was expanded across all of Greater Melbourne in *Characters*.
- 57 Although the Italian migrant communities have long moved on from the very gentrified Fitzroy.
- 58 Ryan Gander, *Loose Associations and Other Lectures* (Onestar Press 2007).
- 59 <http://emptyspaces.culturemap.org.au/emptyspace/melbournes-no-vacancy-project> accessed 19 July 2017.
- 60 Lewis Blackwell, *The End of Print: The Graphic Design of David Carson* (London, Lawrence King, 1995), 57.
- 61 Added to this, the covers of two other books feature photographs of windows. The cover of *Grand* (2001) features a laneway window grille on the side of Bible House in Flinders Lane, while *Fancy* (2003) features a large industrial window of the now-demolished Australian Paper Mill factory in Fairfield, taken at night by David Sterry. The use of windows may have been an unconscious metaphor for looking inwards, something I considered lacking in the design industry at the time.
- 62 Darran Anderson, *Imaginary Cities* (Influx Press, 2015), 274.
- 63 Victor Hugo, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame: Or, Our Lady of Paris* (Paris, Gosselin, 1831), 351.
- 64 Robert Brownjohn, *Typographica* New Series, Issue 4, (London, Lund Humphries, 1961), 31.
- 65 A. Farias, P. Gatto, P. Gouveia, ‘Letters and Cities: Reading the Urban Environment with the Help of Perception Theories’, *Visual Communication Vol 8* (3), (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2009), 338.
- 66 A. Farias, P. Gatto, P. Gouveia, ‘Letters and Cities’, 336.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 Evidenced by its continuing presence in council brochures and real estate advertisements.
- 69 *Circular* involved a collaboration with Christine Eid. She has continued to be involved in subsequent design projects, primarily as a researcher.
- 70 This bird-seed trail is yet to be completed.
- 71 This observation was reinforced by the various

- suburban train station names on my way to meetings in Brisbane.
- 72 My acknowledgement of an indigenous presence may have also been informed by the strong indigenous focus within the programs and charter of RMIT University.
  - 73 Although I had in fact spent many of my childhood summers with relatives in Brisbane.

## SETS

- 1 Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style* (Dublin, H&M Publishers, 2002), 19.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 145.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 45.
- 4 Paul Shaw, *Revival Type: Digital Typefaces Inspired by the Past*, (New York, Yale University Press, 2017), 3.
- 5 Vocalising over the instrumental version, a process that eventually led to rapping in the hip-hop genre.
- 6 <https://debate.uvm.edu/dreadlibrary/bush.html> accessed 14 June 2018.
- 7 Armin Lindauer and Betina Müller, *Experimental Design* (Salenstein, niggli publishing, 2015), 163.
- 8 <https://www.monotype.com/resources/articles/variable-fonts-making-the-promise-a-reality/> (accessed 13 July 2019)
- 9 Johanna Drucker, The Critical ‘Languages’ of Graphic Design. *Looking Closer Four: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 177.
- 10 Robin Kinross, The Rhetoric of Neutrality. *Design Issues*: Vol 11, N°2, (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2005) 27.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 12 Robin Kinross. What is a Typeface? *Unjustified Texts* (London, Hyphen Press 2001), 120.
- 13 Nigel Cross, *Designerly Ways of Knowing*, (Berlin, Birkhauser 2007), 25.
- 14 Given the restricted terms of reference in the pre-internet era, these manuals became such an influential typographic resource that when the RMIT Visual Communication Course held a student competition to design its 1988 graduation show invitation, my (entirely typographic) design was a parody of the typical Letraset catalogue page. This design won the competition and was printed and

distributed throughout the Melbourne graphic design industry.

15 Ruari McLean, *The Thames and Hudson Manual of Typography*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1980), 75.

16 The Droste effect, known in art as ‘mise en abyme’ is the effect of a picture recursively appearing within itself.

17 Eatock, Daniel. *Daniel Eatock Imprint* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 5.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

212223242829303637383941 Herbert Spencer, *Typographica* New Series N<sup>o</sup>4 (London, Lund Humphries, 1961), 3.

## CRITIQUE

1 Michael Rock, ‘Typefaces are rich with the gesture and spirit of their era’ *LD*, May/June (New York, ID Publishing, 1992).

2 Max Bruinsma, ‘Culture Agents’ *Looking Closer 4*, (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 59.

3 Ramia Mazé, *Lapsis Forum on Design and Critical Practice – The Reader* (Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2009), 397.

4 This book was a blank dummy from my sister who then worked at book distributor *Gordon and Gotch*.

5 I use the term ‘experiment’ loosely as I had little understanding of historical precedents at this time.

6 The second in the *Oblique* series, this publication looked to *Emigré’s* precedent of folding narrative content into a type sampler.

7 The emphasis on Esperanto came from a long-standing family interest in the language, my grandfather being a fluent speaker and assessor of the language.

8 William Shatner featured in one of the very few Esperanto films, *Incubus* (1965).

9 Chaplin used Esperanto in *The Great Dictator* (1940).

10 The utopian bookseller Edward W. Cole supported a universal language in the hope of bringing world peace.

11 Between 1998 and 1999 I spent several months living in Paris, writing and researching on the political inclinations of the ‘post-Grapus’ generation of

French graphic designers.

12 Brad Haylock, ‘Picture Education Today: Data Visualisation as a Practice of Critique and Care’ *Designing Cultures of Care*, (London, Bloomsbury 2019), 37.

13 This term also refers to an earlier book, *Graphic Agitation* by Liz McQuiston, London, Phaidon 1993.

14 Steven Heller. *Design Humor: The Art of Graphic Wit* (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), 31.

15 Ibid., 34.

16 L. Jacobson, ‘Critical Design as approach to next thinking’ *The Design Journal*, 20:sup1, (London, 2017).

17 Steven Heller, *Design Humor: The Art of Graphic Wit* (New York, Allworth Press, 2002), xxix

18 Bruno Munari. *roses in the salad* (Mantua, Edizioni Corraini, 1974).

19 Edward de Bono, *The Dog-Exercising Machine: A Study of Children as Inventors* (New York, Penguin, 1970).

20 The Stone Twins, *Logo R.I.P.: A Commemoration of Dead Logotypes* (Amsterdam, BIS Publishers, 2003).

21 The arrows featured are the police line-up walking instructions painted on the floor of the old Melbourne City Watch-house (formerly the City Morgue).

22 The specific reference was to Melbourne-based design studio *3deep* whose business card at that time was set in an unknerved *Helvetica Medium* as if to suggest a disengagement with the formal crafting of design.

23 The design of this page owes much to the diagrammatic language of Ladislav Sutnar’s *Design In Action* (1961)

24 Whilst the phrase ‘Let them eat cake’ (*Qu’ils mangent de la brioche*) is commonly attributed to Queen Marie Antoinette, there is no record of this phrase ever having been said by her.

25 Other statements included ‘Less is More. Just look at the invoice, and ‘Less is M.O.R.’ (middle of the road).

26 Stephen Banham, ‘After the Shouting: French Graphic Design’, *Baseline Magazine* Issue 29 (Kent, Bradbourne Publishing, 1999),P5.

27 Rick Poynor, ‘Reputations: Pierre Bernard’, *Eye, International Review of Graphic Design*. Issue 3, Vol 1, (London, Eye Publishing) 9.

28 Although the original source of Piet Schrueders texts are available only in Dutch (*Lay-in Lay-out*. 1977), they were made accessible to an English-speaking audience in the Wise Guys Issue of *Émigré* (1990).

29 Piet Schrueders, *Lay-in Lay-out, enander oud zeer* (Amsterdam, De Buitenkant, 1977)

30 The Commonwealth Bank corporate identity was designed by Ken Cato in 1989.

31 Stephen Banham, *Rentfont*, (Melbourne, Letterbox, 1998), 1.

32 Ibid., 3.

33 This exposure of the purchase of language was graphically depicted in an earlier public art project *Contentment* (1995) which I designed as a billboard and installed in Adelaide only for it to be destroyed by a rainstorm two hours later.

34 Klein, Schwemer-Scheddin and Spiekermann, *Type and Typographers* (London, Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1991), 91.

35 Robin Kinross, ‘The Rhetoric of Neutrality’, *Design Issues*: Vol 11, N<sup>o</sup>2, (Massachusetts, MIT Press), 24.

36 Douglas Thomas, *Never Use Futura*, (Princeton, Princeton Architectural Press, 2017), 26.

37 All the typefaces used in both *Cashcow Oblique* and *Rentfont* were produced in-house.

38 *Character* Events 2005–2007, BMW Edge, Federation Square

39 Centre Place runs north between Collins Street and Flinders Lane in Melbourne, Australia,

40 This is featured in *Characters* (Thames and Hudson, 2011) as well as many of my typographic tours of Melbourne

41 Stephen Banham, *Assembly* (Melbourne, Letterbox, 1999). The statement appears without a full stop.

42 In the *Assembly* project bag stuffed full of faded faxes and scribbblings, an early note includes a specific intention: ‘Not so preachy as Convoy’. The lack of extended texts and analysis was even planned: ‘The intentional absence of any analysis or conclusions will go some way to minimise its uses in the formation of marketing strategies and the like’.

43 Each child contributor to *Assembly* was included in the credits as well as receiving a free copy.

44 Set in the then-newly released French script typeface *Champion* (1989) designed by Francois Boltana from *Lettres Francaises*, a 1998 ATypI compendium of French typefaces. This book was given to me by Jean-Francois Porchez when I interviewed him in his house that winter. The type sample was photocopied up and altered for the *Death to Helvetica* artwork.

45 Rudy Vanderlans, Interview with Experimental Jetset, *Émigré* Issue 65 *If we’re standing on the shoulders of giants, what are we reaching for?* (Oakland, Emigre, 2003), 19.

46 Gui Bonsiepe, *Visual/Verbal Rhetoric*, (Ulm, 1965), 30.

47 Robin Kinross, The Rhetoric of Neutrality. *Design Issues*: Vol 11, N<sup>o</sup>2, (Massachusetts, MIT Press) 21.

48 Klein, Schwemer-Scheddin and Spiekermann, *Type and Typographers* (London, Architecture Design and Technology Press, 1991), 116.

49 Gary Hustwit, Interview with Michael Beirut. *Helvetica*, (Feature Film, 2007), located at 25m:35s

50 James Button, ‘Not My Type’, *The Age*, 13 September 2003, 2.

51 Alice Tremlow, ‘The loneliest insight’, *Eye International Journal of Graphic Design*, Issue 50 (London, Eye Publishing, 2003), 39.

52 Ibid., 39.

53 A subversion of the ‘Just Say No’ (anti-drug)

educational campaign promoted by Nancy Reagan from 1987 onwards.

54 A reference to the naming of early Apple system fonts after cities (London, Chicago, New York) as well as *Zurich*, Bitstream’s renaming of Adrian Frutiger’s *Univers* (1954).

55 A reference to the perceived servile nature of the graphic design industry as one operating at the eleventh hour to simply make content appear more visually pleasing.

56 A subversion of the modernist mantra ‘Less is More’, M.O.R is an acronym for ‘Middle of the Road’.

57 The stickers were ‘ganged-up’ on stocktake sale print runs for Melbourne fashion label Vixen, whose brand colours were burgundy and yellow. They were distributed by students and other type enthusiasts.

58 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/vincent-connare\\_n\\_3837441](http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/vincent-connare_n_3837441) accessed 19 July 2017.

## CONCLUSION

1 The early 1990s recession saw a period of economic downturn affect much of the world. The economy of Australia suffered its worst recession since the Great Depression. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early\\_1990s\\_recession\\_in\\_Australia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_1990s_recession_in_Australia) (accessed 24 March 2018)

2 The Melbourne Recital Centre (MRC) operates under a charter that stipulates public accessibility. A restructure of the MRC board and staff saw the original identity system revised and ultimately abolished in 2008.

3 The City of Melbourne, through the City Gallery, commissioned the curation, design and production of the *Cluster* project in April 2013.

4 This was enabled through the *Cluster* tram travelling through Melbourne streets in 2015.

5 Jones, Charles. *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations* (4 ed). Online version accessed 18 December 2019. Oxford University Press, 2018.

6 Ibid.



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## CATALOGUE OF AUTHORIAL PROJECTS

### PUBLICATIONS

*Cashcow Oblique: A Typographic Survey of Economic Opportunity 1873 & 2016* (2016)

Poster Format, 594 x 420mms folded down to 210 x 148mm, Offset printed.

Assistants: Nina Mujdzic, Heather Walker, Mike Mathra, Miranda Prestage.

*Cluster: Exploring the stories and patterns behind Melbourne Street Names* (2013)

Book, 36 pages plus 8pp jacket, 150 x 150mms, Offset printed.

Collorating historian: Emeritus Prof. Graeme Davison. Commissioned by the City of Melbourne.

*Characters: Cultural stories revealed through typography* (2011)

Book, 272 pages, 235 x 235mms, Offset printed in full colour, with poster jacket.

Researcher: Christine Eid. Edited by Margaret Trudgeon. Commissioned by Thames & Hudson Australia.

*Characters & Spaces: 17 stories in 1 city* (2009)

Book, 12 pages, 210 x 148mms, Offset printed in full colour.

Researcher: Christine Eid. Photography by Nick Kriesler.

*Utopia Oblique: Creating a perfect world of type through a perfect type of world* (2009)

Book, 24 pages, 160 x 160mms plus fold-out poster 320 x 320mms. Offset printed in full colour.

Assistants: Niels Oeltjen, Estelle Ihasz. Edited by Nickolai Gadovich (Nick Gadd).

*Orbit Oblique: A typographic homage to animals lost in space research* (2008)

Book, 24 pages, 160 x 160mms, Offset printed in full colour. Hand stitched binding. Letterpress printed cover.

Assistant: Niels Oeltjen. Photography by Rhiannon Slatter.

*Fancy – Typographic Embellishment* (2004)

Book, 60 pages, 165 x 165 mms, Offset printed in two colour in four combinations. Cover printed full colour.

Edited by Nickolai Gadovich (Nick Gadd). Photography by David Sterry.

*Mixed Business – Integrating Value Systems into Graphic Design Practice* (Masters Research) (2003)

Book, 128 pages, digitally printed, wiro bound. Edition of three.

*Ampersand 5 – Grand* (2001)

Book, 24 pages, 145 x 145 mms, Offset printed in two colour in four combinations on adhesive stock.

*Ampersand 4 – Assembly* (2000)

145 x 145mm poster offset printed in three colour, presented in full colour cardboard casing 150 x 150mms.

*Ampersand 3 – Convoy* (1999)

Book, 24 pages, 140 x 140mms, Offset printed, published as a plastic edition of 500, and a later paper edition of 500.

Assistants: Stephen Horsley, Sonia Kretschmar. Photography: David Sterry.

*Ampersand 2 – Rentfont* (1998)

Book, 24 pages, 145 x 145 mms, Offset printed. Full colour cover, two colour internals, tracing paper inserts.

Assistant: Andrew Budge (intern)

*Ampersand 1 – Ampersand* (1996)

Book, 64 pages, 145 x 145 mms, Offset printed, perfect bound, presented in a custom polypropylene box. Gingham font on floppy disc in rear plastic pouch.

Published in an edition of 1500. Illustrations of gingham cloth inserts by Sonia Kretschmar. Assistants: Grigory Volchok, Andrew Budge, Richelle McDermott, Mark Molloy.

*Qwerty Issue 6 – At home with the alphabet* (1995)

Book, 40 pages, 105 x 74mms, Offset printed in two colours as a set of two 20 page books bound together with concertina cover. Twin wiro-bound. Cover made of hand-cut non-slip mat plastic.

Assistants: Belinda Marshall, Sonia Kretschmar, Grigory Volchok.

*Qwerty Issue 5 – Big is Beautiful* (1995)

Book, 64 pages, 105 x 74mms, Offset printed in two colours as a set of two 32 page books bound together with concertina cover. Tracing paper banding. Hand-stamp numbered. Edition of 250.

Assistants: Sonia Kretschmar, Grigory Volchok. Contributors: Chris Schilling, Miriam Kolker, Mike Muscans, Rei Zunde, Simon Leah, Jane Watson, Graham Gould, Randall Smith, Sonia Kretschmar, Nick Fletcher, Courtney Pedersen, Shane Carroll, David Harris, Keith Lewis, Robert Vale.

*Qwerty Issue 4 – Recession* (1994)

Book, 20 pages 105 x 74mms, offset printed in two colours plus 4 page letterpress insert and a 20 page tracing paper insert concertina-folded down to 40 x 55mms. Wiro-bound. Packaged with stickers. Hand-stamp numbered. Edition of 250.

Contributors: Grigory Volchok, Ken Stanley, Damian Kelly.

*Qwerty Issue 3 – A Shadow of its former self* (1993)

Book, 20 pages, 105 x 74mms, Offset printed in two colours, wiro-bound. Boxboard insert hand-stamped with stencil. All type is stencilled and then scaled down to page format. Hand-stamp numbered. Edition of 250.

Assistants: Grigory Volchok, Sonia Kretschmar. Contributors: Mimmo Cozzolino, Rachel Prescott.

*Qwerty Issue 2 – The Australian vernacular* (1992)

Book, 20pages, 105 x 74mms, Offset printed in two colours, wiro binding. Inserts of contributor artwork and divider page. Edition of 200.

Contributors: Mimmo Cozzolino, Fabio Ongarato, Darren Ledwich, Scott Austin, Tanja Brgoc.

*Qwerty Issue 1 – For those who get their hands dirty* (1991)

Book, 16 pages, 105 x 74mms, Offset printed in two colours, wiro binding. Tracing paper inserts of interviews. Edition of 200. Contributors: Noel Pennington and Liz Nicholson (Design Bite) and Peter Long.

### EXHIBITIONS

*Cluster* (2013)

City Gallery, Melbourne. Curator: Stephen Banham, Historian: Prof Graeme Davison. Photography: Louie Porter.

Assistant: Nina Mujdzic.

*10 years of Creative Fellows* (2013)

State Library of Victoria (Melbourne)

*Public Offer* (2013)

RMIT Design Hub, Melbourne. A survey of Melbourne Design Publishing 1980–2000. Curator: Kate Rhodes

*Paper City* (2010)

City Gallery. Co-curated by Dr. Andrew May & Christine Eid (Melbourne) A survey of letterheads and their cultural role in the formation of Melbourne life.

*Stereotyped* (2010)

Object Gallery, Sydney. Collaborator: David Chesworth.

Assistant: Claire Ghyzel.

*Mirror Of Your World; Books and Ideas* (2008)

Permanent Collection, State Library of Victoria (Melbourne). Group Exhibition, Curated by Des Cowley and Clare Williamson.

*Orbit Oblique* (2008)

Craft Victoria, Melbourne. A series of medical x-ray light boxes coinciding with the font sampler Orbit Oblique.

Assistants: Niels Oeltjen, Tim Mang.

*Accidents Not So Grotesk* (2006)

BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne. A series of large boxes on wheels exploring the role of accident in design.

Assistant: Niels Oeltjen.

*Signs of the Times* (2006)

City Museum, Treasury Building, Melbourne. Curator: Simon Gregg

*Mirror Of Your World; Books and Ideas*  
(2005)  
Permanent Collection, State Library of Victoria (Melbourne). Group Exhibition, Curated by Des Cowley and Clare Williamson.

*Typo-Beirut*  
(2005)  
Group Exhibition, American University, Beirut, Lebanon.

*Defining Beauty*  
(2003)  
Group Exhibition, Bus Gallery (Melbourne)

*19th Biennale of Graphic Design*  
(2000)  
Group Exhibition, Brno, Slovakia.

*Zac 99: Alternatives in Graphic Design Practice*  
(1999)  
Group Exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, Paris.

*IDEP Spring Design Show* (1999)  
Barcelona, Spain

*Rentfont*  
(1998)  
Citylights Artist-run Program, Centre Place, Melbourne. Curator: Andrew Macdonald

*New York Type Directors Club Show*  
(1997)  
Global Tour of Typographic Excellence.

*On Type* (1997)  
Exhibition and Forum, RMIT University, Melbourne. Curator: Barbara Mau.

*New York Type Directors Club Show*  
(1996)  
Global Tour of Typographic Excellence.

*17th Biennale of Graphic Design*  
(1996)  
Group Exhibition, Brno, Slovakia.

*New York Type Directors Club Show*  
(1995)  
Global Tour of Typographic Excellence.

*Kre-8 Type*  
(1993)  
Acland Street Art Gallery, St Kilda, Melbourne. Curator: Andrew Hoyne.

*\$19.95*  
(1993)  
Metropolitan, Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne. Co-exhibit with Sonia Kretschmar.

*3rd International Visual Poetry Show*  
(1993)  
The Lounge Nightclub, Melbourne.

*Qwerty*  
(1991)  
The Lounge Nightclub, Melbourne.

## FILMS

Sans Forgetica (2018)  
10x10: RMIT Design Futures Lab (2012)

InFrameTV (2012) II part interview

On the Shoulders of Giants; A Tribute to 13 Graphic Designers (2012) DVD

Behind the scenes of the Characters book (2010), online

Art Nation (2010) ABC Television

The story of the RMIT logo (2010) DVD and online. Produced by RMIT University Marketing.

Fancy – Typographic Embellishment (2004)

DVD made for launch event.  
Production by Sarah Dreschsler

Art Show (2002)

Channel 31 Television.  
Interviewer: Esther Anatolitis

Ampersand 5 – Grand (2001)

VHS Video made for launch event.  
Production by Andrew Trewern

Ampersand 4 – Assembly (2000)

VHS Video made for launch event.  
Production by Andrew Trewern

Ampersand 3 – Convoy (1999)

VHS Video made for launch event.  
Production by Andrew Trewern

## PUBLIC FORUMS

*City as Fiction* (2012)  
City of Melbourne, Chapter House, Melbourne.  
Convened by Lou Weis.

*Neon* (2016)  
Film Premiere, Q&A with director Lawrence Johnston. Nova Cinemas, Melbourne

*A BriefExchange* (2016)  
Work-shop, Fitzroy, Melbourne

*Fun with Logos* (2015)  
An activity for children to explore the world of logos. M Pavilion, Melbourne

*Utypia* (2014)  
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne.  
Coinciding with the Emily Floyd exhibition ‘Far Rainbow’.

*Book Design Forum* (2012)  
2012 Sydney Writers Festival,  
Walsh Wharf Theatre, Sydney

*Signs of Life Forum* (2011)  
2011 Melbourne Writers Festival,  
NGV Theatre, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
A discussion of Characters Book.

*Character 6* (2010)  
ACMI Cinemas, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
Speakers: Stephen Banham, David Lancashire,  
Carolyn Fraser.

*Character 4* (2007)  
BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
Speakers: Garth Davis, Gary Hustwit.

*Character 3* (2006)  
BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
Speakers: Anna Gerber, Kevin Finn, Simon Pampena.

*Character 2* (2006)  
BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
Speakers: Stephen Banham, Steven Cornwell,  
Jason Grant.

*Character 1* (2005)  
BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne.  
Speakers: Stephen Banham, Ian Dryden,  
Andrew Haig, Vincent Lazzara, Jeremy Wortsman.

## PUBLIC ART COMMISSIONS

*It was around here*  
(2020)

LED structure, stencilled painted type.  
Installed upon Building 55 of RMIT (corner of Queensberry and Cardigan Streets, Carlton).  
Commissioned by City of Melbourne Test Sites Program. Installation by Boom.

*Multistory Window*  
(2016)

Decals on glass window, Emporium Shopping Centre, Level 3 (overlooking Caledonian Lane).  
Commissioned by City of Melbourne Test Sites Program. Installation by Heaths Signs.  
Assistant: Nina Mujdzic.

*Cluster – Melbourne Art Tram*  
(2015)

Decals across fifty metres of tram-side.  
Commissioned by Melbourne Festival and Yarra Trams. Assistant: Elisabet Garriga

*Circular*  
(2010)

Set of eight sand-cast iron man-hole covers.  
Installed across the pedestrian crossings in Main Street of Point Cook. Collaboration with Christine Eid (TOW). Studio Assistant: Claire Gyzhel. Commissioned by VicUrban and Walker Corporation (Point Cook, Melbourne)

*Pause Here Then Go*  
(1993)

Colour photocopies adhered to board, hung in empty shopfront in Collins Street. Supported by the City of Melbourne ‘Word Window’ Program, curated by Maggie McCormack.