

Anti-Matter (Non-Type) – An Artistic Research Project
A Publication Report
Maziar Raein, Associate Professor, Department of Design
March 2020

Contributions from:
Dr. Ane Thon Knutsen | Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo
Ellmer Stefan | Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo
Edwin Pickstone | Glasgow School of Art
Helen Ingham | Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design

BACKGROUND



THE PUBLICATION CONTAINS

– Article; Particle or Wave? Both.

Edwin Pickstone

– Article: The Mark on The Wall

Ane Thon Knutsen

– Article: Anti-Matter (Non-Type)

Three Workshops and One Font

Maziar Raein

Ane Thon Knutsen

Ellmer Stefan

– Article: Across The Line Project

Maziar Raein

– Article: Much ado about nothing... The KHiO Letter Archive

Maziar Raein

– Visual Essay of Process

Maziar Raein

Ane Thon Knutsen

Ellmer Stefan

[Examples below]



Across The Line Project

A number of years ago I came out of a building where an arts conference was being held, and the delegates which included artists, designers and art historians poured onto the street in order to make their way to the next session. In the open air, we were bathed in a blue light that emanated from the sunlight reflecting on to a modern building opposite us, which was clad in blue glass. The reflected blue light poured not only onto us, but also the white Portland stone building we had just come out of and made the whole building glow eerily in the midday sun. All the the artists and designers stopped and stared at this spectacle, while the art historians kept walking. Suddenly a number of them stopped, turned around and asked us what on earth are you looking at? And at that moment I realised, that despite their training, they literally were blind to what was being seen by us.

...

This anecdote illustrates a deep principal difference between looking and seeing, and seeing is a specialist skill. For many of us in the visual arts this differentiation is a distinctive expression of the quality of expertise, understanding or even know-how of our practice.

The act of looking is the observing the world through our eyes on an everyday basis, making sure we know where we are going, not bumping into things and so on. While seeing, is the act of looking with an intent that demands focused attention and a projection of our visual faculty through deep observation. For many, this skill is learned at art school

through life drawing classes for instance — though this is less the case now in contemporary art education — and terms such as ‘edge of form’ to describe the drawn line, or ‘weight’ to describe mass and structure are part of our common professional parlance.

This project is concerned with the term ‘negative space’, which is the space between things. A space which describes the absence of form and structure by distinguishing between what is there and what is not. For example the triangle that is formed if you were to stand with your hands on your hips, is just air and nothing exists there. However, it describes through ‘absence’ the position of your arm in three dimensional space.

Having spent many hours organising the material in the KHiO Letter Archive, I had leafed through much of the material often noticing the spacing of letter forms. Graphic designers and typographers are specialists in seeing lettering and word spacing and spend their time manipulating and adjusting these spaces. The material was either beautifully laid out or somewhat crudely spaced depending on the machinery or technical production of the different publications. The result is not only aesthetic, but also effects its legibility. But as a typographer once said to me “typography is juggling with balls in space – that no one else can see” and most people, other than those interested in letter forms rarely notice the significance of spacing.

...

I initiated this project because I became convinced that there was a need to reinvestigate how we draw letter forms especially with contemporary digital tools – which is nearly always through the manipulation of line – and ask how can we re-evaluate seeing and giving form to letters through an understanding of negative space. Working with form, from outside in, or as attributed to Michelangelo “just chipping away everything that doesn’t look like David”!

Well I say this now! But at the time my instincts were just to play with negative space, and after a few months of tracing, inking and filling in inter-letter spaces I found I was not really cracking the conceptual framework or more precisely I was not able to articulate which exact approach to take to this puzzle. Therefore, I was very lucky that my colleagues the typographer Stefan Ellmer and the PhD. Graphic Design Candidate Ane Thon Knutsen agreed to join me in this research project.

We worked together collectively, each bringing different skills and knowledges to the process – and ‘the process’ itself was fundamental to our collective understanding.

This project started with a drawing question in mind, and employed artistic research approaches that generated and expanded beyond the remit of the initial question raised. This is a characteristic of robust research, since research must by definition be richer than the question, in order to contextualise it and shape it. However, in artistic research this presents the methodological need for not only referential and theoretic frameworks, but also material/technical and conceptual ones that are the frames of reference for our practice and its various complex facets.

So we initiated a series of three workshops; firstly tracing letter forms from material in the KHiO Letter Archive and closely investigating the inter-letter spaces between letter forms. Tracing with pencil on paper, and making cut outs that when unintentionally recombined on an overhead projector, generated an understanding of negative (white) space in the conception and perception of typographic designs. The second workshop employed hand-routing of shapes directly into MDF-plates and the printing from those shapes. While the third, that took place in the Publications Workshop, took

the cutting and printing approach to a more familiar and controllable medium. Cutting letterforms into linoleum which revealed the necessity of drawing in the removal of material when forming letter shapes.

In this publication we have tried to give a glimpse into the complex process we undertook, and share with you extracts of our research. This is not a documentation of the project, or a research report since as previously stated this project generated much research and many questions for future research. Rather here we try to share with you glimpses of the reflections and insights we had as a group along the way.

In a sense, this project was also an attempt to establish a research community of interested parties, through intense and deep (and very often hilarious) dialogues that helped us formulate a number of understandings. The workshops, individual work, and through reflection-in and on-action, and by interacting with materials and technical knowledges we developed an understanding about drawing which is at the core of this project.

We were further aided in this process by rich collaborations within the college with Vibeke Luther O'Rourke and with our international colleagues; Edwin Pickstone at the Glasgow School of Art and Helen Ingham at Central Saint Martins College of Art to whom we are deeply grateful.

During this project we aimed to operate within the context of Artistic Research, as envisaged by KHiO and the Norwegian Artistic Research programme. We have faced a number of challenges, since there are emerging ontological frameworks, each addressing specialisms not to mention trans-disciplinary practices.

One challenge, that as yet remains not fully investigated is how do we display research: in order to encompass the material research, process rich research, discourses and questions raised by outcomes. The other challenge we faced is the failure of the academic essay, since it fails to accommodate the flow of discussion and debate amongst the three main researchers. Therefore, we opted for a semi-structured discussion during which we reflected on what we had learned and achieved.

Maziar Raein

...







