

Written response: draft 1

You Have The Answer by Anthony Burrill combines type to ‘remind us of how we are linked with other people. How those alliances are interdependent and shape the fabric of our lives’. His process of letterpress, screen print and mural shout louder with every iteration. The increasing scale and crop make the viewer focus on *how* his ampersands meet. They almost touch, personifying the type and we read our human relationships *into* the letter forms. In this way he is creating typographic pieces in the form of ‘Adhocism’, as coined by Jencks and Silver, who claimed that “all creations are initially ad hoc combinations of past subsystems” (Jencks and Silver, 1972).

Copying Anthony Burrills *typesetting* process showed me that it is about planning and executing an outcome using a controlled method to create reproductions. Though imperfections happen, the result is deliberate, strong, purposeful. Hand stamping the ampersands showed me something different, but still using the same tool. Minimal planning with instinctive execution brought myriad imperfections and a free-flow state, making me feel closer to the unexpected results.

The experience has prompted me to ask:

What happens if we focus on imperfection in letterpress?

Can these imperfections mirror those found in human relationships and even celebrate them?

Does type design outside of a digital space offer a richer creative experience for the designer?

Based on these critical reflections of the tool, I propose 10-100 hand stamped iterations using combinations of 10 different ampersands. I will enlarge a selection of these combinations in order to explore and highlight their imperfections. In the spirit of adhocism, I will then collect imperfect combinations together in a group to evaluate their anthropomorphism. Can we see ourselves in them and how will they act as a group?

References

Burrill, A. (2024) anthonyburrill.com. Available at: <https://anthonyburrill.com/showcase/you-have-the-answer/> (Accessed: 20th January 2025).

Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (1972) *Adhocism; the Case for Improvisation*. First Edition. London: Secker and Warburg

Written response: draft 2

‘The negative space is a value to consider’ José García Oliva

Letterpress is a technique of relief printing where a hard raised letter form in wood or metal is inked and applied to a surface leaving an impression. At a basic level, letterpress imparts knowledge from a document.

To hack or subvert this linear process from movable character to paper, we need to consider its most basic meaning. In her analysis of documents, Lisa Gitelman suggests that the document exists in order to document and its occurrence on paper ‘bearing semiotic traces is not merely the most typical case, it is also the most salient, since the affordances of paper and the function that defines documents have become inextricable from one another’ and ‘documents are important not because they are ubiquitous . . . but rather because they are so evidently integral to the ways people think and live. The epistemic power of the know-show function is indisputable, and the properties of documents matter in all kinds of far-reaching ways.’ (Gitelman, 2014, p.4)

In my iterative experiment, I attempted to reverse the act of letterpress and therefore documenting, to take ink back from the page to see what was left behind.

By using a piece of moveable type and experimenting with various adhesives, I developed a homemade method for reversing letterpress. Instead of ink, double-sided sticky tape was applied to a type block. When pressed to printed matter with force and then removed, a hole was left behind. These were initially destructive and unrecognisable, then more reminiscent of letter forms when more care was taken in removal. Various publications including a book, a map, wallpaper became an experiment. After they were complete, I realised that by reversing the print that was made, be that a hand stamped woodblock character or a page from a magazine, leaves a space that has *value*. Removing the printing became printmaking and the negative space became ink.

This anti-letterpress is indelible. If we either letterpress, or remove it, we are communicating, documenting, simply due to the fact a surface exists and that we manipulate it. In its earliest of definitions, ‘The Greek word *typos* generally

means “trace” and ‘The Greek word *graphein* generally means “to dig.”’ (Flusser, 2011), bringing an archaeological element to its latin offspring, *typography*. The human invention of writing means there is an inescapable need for us to communicate.

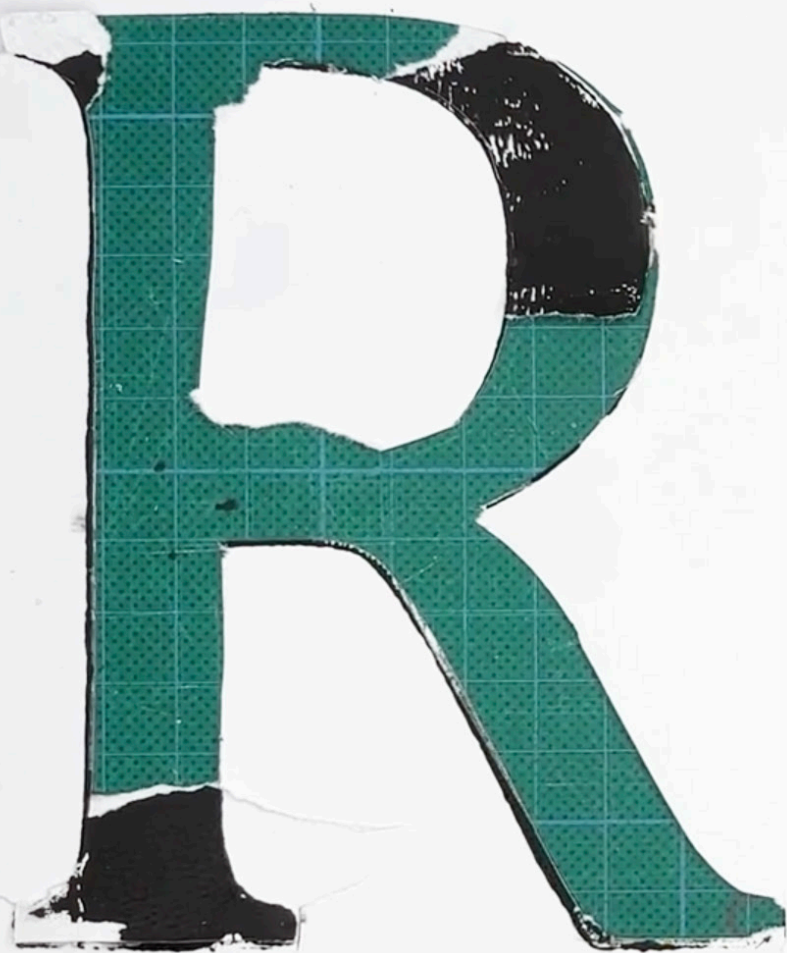
‘The goose quill put an end to talk. It abolished mystery; it gave architecture and towns; it brought roads and armies, bureaucracy. It was the basic metaphor with which the cycle of civilization began, the step from the dark into the light of the mind. The hand that filled the parchment page built a city.’
(McLuhan and Fiore, [1967] 2001, p. 48).

Rather than stripping back this medium to an abstract, pre-alphabet, olfactory environment mentioned by McLuhan and Fiore, is there a way of using this anti-letterpress to *see* differently? Can it be used as a lens to see through?

References


Burrill, A. (2024) anthonyburrill.com. Available at: <https://anthonyburrill.com/showcase/you-have-the-answer/> (Accessed: 20th January 2025).

Jencks, C. and Silver, N. (1972) *Adhocism; the Case for Improvisation*. First Edition. London: Secker and Warburg

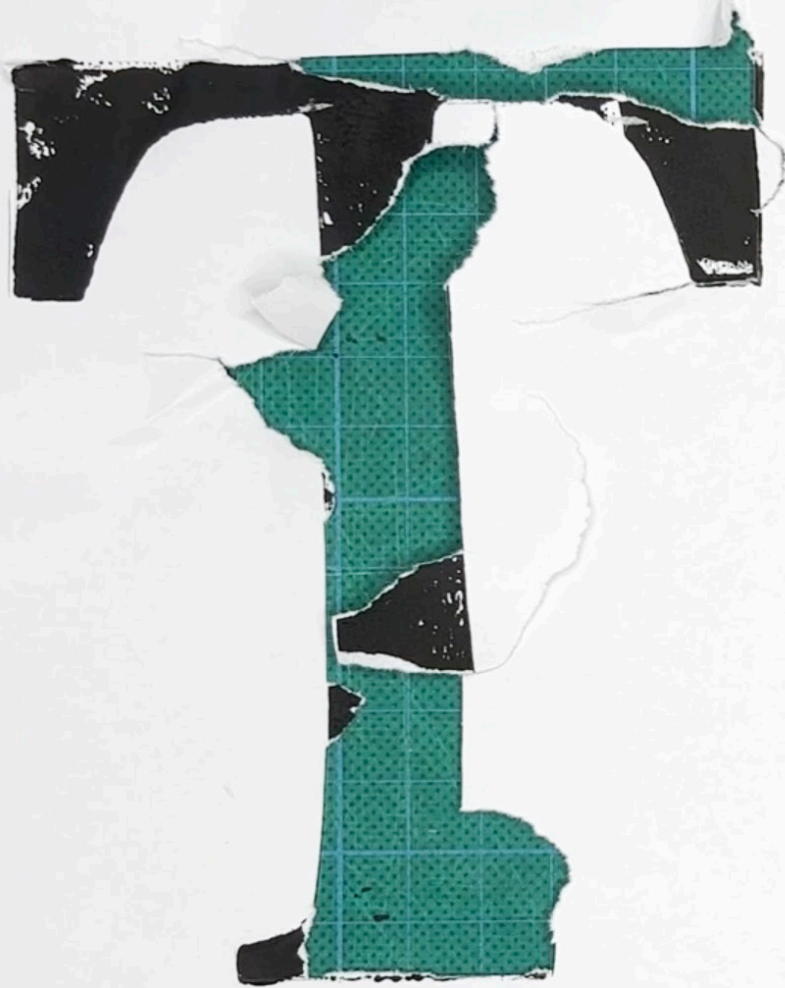


on yellow stock offered deeper insight. Its imperfection and contrasting palette evoked protest. If I combined this method with engaging text, could it offer deeper meaning?

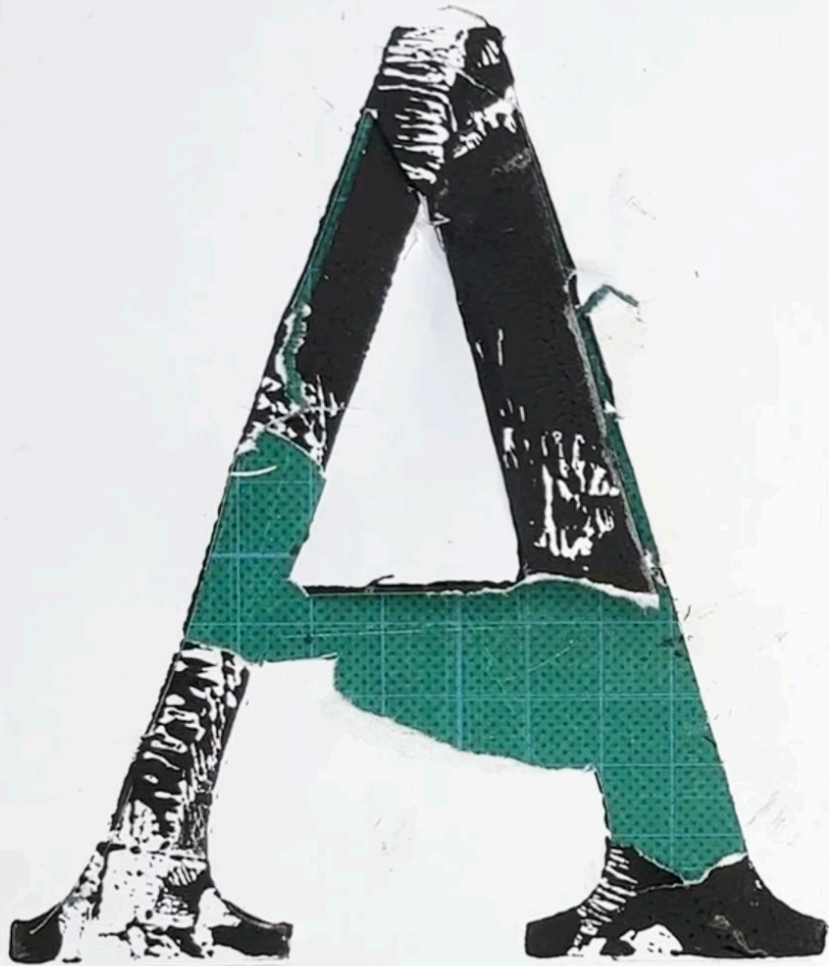
eflecting on “Anti Letterpress” led me to ask if my method could be explored more deeply. The iterations where printed matter such as a book or a map were reprinted upon and the ink subsequently removed served to emphasise the value of negative space. The temptation was to collage, iterating for aesthetics, but the single ‘T’ letterform printed

A large, stylized letter 'N' in a dark green, textured font, set against a light green grid background. The letter has a slightly distressed, hand-drawn appearance.

ew iterations were filmed, edited and offered as moving image. A set of hands stamp the inked serif letter forms on paper before returning to abruptly rip the ink away with the same wooden type. The words 'PRINT MAKE' form before the word 'TAKE' is overlaid. The two films are tonally different. The first uses black ink, newsprint and cutting matt, familiar tools of a graphic designer and remove the word 'TAKE' from the underlying paper. It is gentle and slow accompanied by the subtle breathing of the printer. The second is quicker and printed upon emergency yellow paper. The hands print all at once and immediately a single 'T' removes part of the 'M' to render 'TAKE'.



he yellow iteration is more successful, its simplicity and use of colour making it more resolved. The first, which took the most time, was preparation. Despite limitations of home-based printmaking, filming and editing, the experience was visceral. I worked physically and connected intimately with the method, recording the experience and any questions that arose. Could further iteration perfect the process? By finessing typesetting, style, narrative and word choice, could this appeal to a wider audience?



narchic removal of ink from this piece subverts the clean and conventional drop cap and text. It shocks us with unexpected movement and challenges our assumptions about paper, ink and print. It also serves to make the reader alert to this content and the simple power of the method it describes. The underlying historic epistemic power of documents (Gitelman, 2014, p.4) can be questioned by hacking how they are made. Does ink on paper offer us validation, inclusion and identity? And conversely does its removal offer us freedom from judgement and human tribalism?

References

Gitelman, L. (2014). *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*, Durham: Duke University Press