

# **Entanglements of Place**

Exploring the Dutchness of  
Contemporary Typography in the  
Netherlands through a Practical  
Approach to Discourse

Welmoet Wartena



**Royal College of Art**

Postgraduate Art & Design

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This thesis represents partial submission  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Postgraduate Art & Design



This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Welmoet Wartena

Date: 19 September 2023

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Wartena', is written over a horizontal line.

## Abstract

Visual language plays a significant role in how one perceives the world. In the Netherlands, typography in print-based materials reflects the environment in which it was created. Specifically, typography in the printed book echoes different [Dutch] experiences of designers. The historical and contemporary context of typography in the Netherlands helps to shape what has become recognised as a distinct design culture; from type design to applied typography both digitally and in print-based materials. This practice-led PhD research is situated in the field of visual communication and draws on literature from cultural geography. My research asks how a geographical location can impact contemporary typography and its use in print-based work. It ultimately suggests an ‘ecology of semantics’, to understand the relationships – entanglements – between Dutch contemporary typographic production, discourse and place. Entanglements as non-linear connections between people, objects, subjects and their environment.

Building upon cultural geographer Doreen Massey’s philosophical and theoretical notions of ‘place as process’ – the [social] interactions within and beyond place – expose an understanding of the movement of typographic discourse and typography within the Netherlands and the printed page. Additionally, the research draws from theorists Tim Cresswell, Tim Ingold, Ewan Lentjes and Henk Hoeks. Looking specifically at the form of the book as print-based material, the social and cultural structures provide new perspectives to inform and understand entanglements between Dutch typography and place. This research takes into consideration a geographic location, the locale and a sense of place to connect discursive means of Dutch

contemporary typography and meaning through print. The concept of place is used both conceptually through a graphic design practice and as place-based conversations with participants.

This practice-led research uses a multi-method approach through dialogical modes, a dialogical methodology, to reveal the relationships between typography and place. The research brings together qualitative methods through a design-led conversation prompt for five semi-structured interviews with six participants. My experience in graphic design practice supports a dialogic process in print and in the visualisation and analysis of the research. The resulting conversations provide a rich resource for thematic analysis, criticality and tangible reflection on the printed page of a book. As a designer, I bring to this practice-led research, an understanding of the vocabulary of book design, and curiosity-driven experimental practice to make invisible ideas visible and tangible through structure, materiality, text, typography and the printed page. Book design processes allow me to think through the research relational, spatial and ecological. I approach place and the book as part of the spatial realm. The book as the object, process, instrument and outcome of the research. Materiality and [inter]textuality are phenomena of the methods that enable one to focus on how meanings of place are conveyed through typographic discourse. Seven themes emerged through the research practice: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education. The research outputs and outcomes consist of a thesis and concertina books.

This research makes an original contribution to the field of visual communication by expanding understanding of Dutch typographic discourse and how this is informed by experience of place. The research makes the entanglements of place visible, through a design practice, to provide an understanding of how a Dutch typographic discourse expresses cultural aspects on the printed page. The findings are an understanding of internationalisation through education and the impact of language as cultural identity. The research plays a vital role for design practitioners, theorists, and researchers for critical debate about the understanding of a sense of place.

Keywords: Typography, dialogue, place, materiality, representation, Dutch.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction



### 1.1 Context of the Research

This practice-led PhD research is concerned with the relationships between typography and place. Specifically, this research looks at the relationship between Dutch contemporary typographic discourse<sup>1</sup> that responds to, reflects and refracts place in the medium of print from the position of a graphic designer. The historical and contemporary context of typography in the Netherlands contains traditional and experimental typographic developments, and crosses disciplinary boundaries, such as between design, art and literature. These developments progressed with technology changing rapidly from the 1990s, both digitally and in print-based works. The medium of print today is still significant and important for the communication of information, knowledge exchange or artistic expression, alongside forms of digital media (e.g. websites, social media). This research focuses on printed materials and takes as its focus the book – a print format that provides a space for the exchange of and experimentation with ideas. The characteristics of a concertina book<sup>2</sup>, such as size and structure, allows for conceptual and visual design experimentation. Visual experimentation on the pages of a concertina book provides opportunities to explore characteristics of rhythm, space, pace, time, narrative and interaction between pages in relation to content and its reader. The structure of a concertina book consists of a piece of paper folded into an accordion-style fold. This is different from non-concertina books (e.g. codex book) where pages are bound together and protected by a cover. Furthermore, the concertina book contributes

1 Written and spoken forms of (visual) communication on the subject of typography.

2 This refers to the book production format (as part of my design practice) that unfolds in an accordion structure and, in this research, reveals aspects of place discussed in the semi-structured interviews.

to conceptual and relational aspects of content and is a tool and platform for communication (see Chapter Six, p. 113). The tangible object can be held in one's hand – touched, read or viewed.

My research is not about looking at typography *in* places nor about type design; rather, it asks how a place can impact contemporary typography in the printed book<sup>3</sup>. Typographic compositions on the printed page – whether a text, word, or letter – transmit culture<sup>4</sup> and communicate cultural aspects. These cultural aspects provide a form of communication in conjunction with language itself. The discourse of this research refers to the different forms of communication used to understand the relationship between contemporary Dutch typography and place. Looking specifically to the Netherlands (strong design culture and design education) as the geographical location and the case study of this research provides insights to the understanding of a cultural exchange<sup>5</sup> in typography through the medium of print. My research builds on the work of writer and design theorist Ewan Lentjes and editor and publisher Henk Hoeks, who discuss cultural values, social achievements and limitations of typographic communication in their publication *The Triumph of Typography: culture, communication, new media* (2015). This publication identifies two tracks, a 'historic track' (historical examples) and a 'systematic track' (technological approaches and examples). There are not many publications on the cultural significance of typography published in the Netherlands, and therefore Lentjes' and Hoeks' work provides a perspective, context and understanding of cultural values in typography. My research therefore takes this into consideration and brings an updated point of view.

3 The printed book refers to the book in general, which is different from the concertina book.

4 In the context of this research, culture refers to language, social structures, experiences and values; specifically, the material expression of culture, typography, as a form of meaning-making and representation.

5 The processes of dialogue and trading ideas in relation to place, which are embedded in Dutch typographic discourse.

My research approaches typographic communication and its relationship to place from a design practitioners' lens by inviting six participants to share their professional experiences. Therefore, this research provides insights into different perspectives and knowledges on cultural aspects of Dutch typography.<sup>6</sup> Within the Netherlands different geographical locations are discussed further in Chapter Six, p.156. The environment and visual language play a significant role in understanding the social and cultural structures of typographic developments. These structures relate to the [social] interactions of places and beyond, to what Massey has referred to as the 'processes of place'.<sup>7</sup> The final analysis of this research reveals how the social and cultural interactions and processes of place impact typographic communication.

My motivation for this practice-led doctoral research is a combination of personal interests and professional experiences about geography, concepts of place, the book and visual language. My educational background resides in the Netherlands and the UK, with an undergraduate degree in Visual Communication: Graphic design at Kunstacademie Minerva Groningen and a Master's degree in Visual Arts at Camberwell College of Art, London. These institutions gave me the foundation of histories, theories and practices of visual communication, visual arts and fostered my interests in the book. My professional design practice and research activities in book design, self-published artists' books, typography and design education, within the context of print-based visual communication, are fundamental in informing this research. Collaborations with publishers, editors and artists have informed my design process. My own professional experience and situated knowledge as a designer of books drew me specifically to study materiality, text and typography in relation to semantic content; for example, how materiality as a mode of communication contributes to the semantics of a text. Therefore, this research is well positioned in the School of Communication at the Royal College of Art. The diversity and interconnected aspects of communication approaches in the School have provided a conducive environment for this research.

<sup>6</sup> For Raymond Williams culture is a 'whole way of life ... and the forms of signification (novels, films ...) that circulate within society'. In this research, the form of signification (a representation), typography, provide the experience of a living culture. Robin Gable's, Raymond Williams culture is ordinary [1958], eds. Robin Gable, Raymond Williams, *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, (Verso Books, 1989), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> Doreen Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today*, 1991.

My professional experience in book design and teaching in Higher Education provide the knowledges and design processes for this practice-led research. The design practice including the design-led conversation prompt as part of the semi-structured interview process, text experiments and diagrams, concertina books as the research outputs, led to the research insights. Through the [design] practice new knowledge emerged. The benefit of the design practice was in how the practice surfaced an understanding of the way in which practice operates within the research and how it informs theoretical ideas from concerns raised by and within the design practice.

Experimental design practice enabled me to think through ideas and making these ideas tangible. Book design processes allow me to think through the research relational, spatial, and ecological. Place and the book are considered part of a spatial realm. The book form provides ways of spatially thinking about Dutch typographic discourse. Materiality, text, typography and the printed page make the invisible ideas visible and tangible. The structure, pagination and the act of reading the book are elements that contribute to an understanding of place. The book is simultaneously the object, process, instrument and outcome of the research. The operation and agency of the printed book provides an understanding of the entanglements and representation of Dutch typographic discourse. The design practice contributes knowledge in the field of visual communication through the processes of book design. The research benefits from the relational and dialogical forms found within [book] design as practice and processes. I argue that this is of contemporary relevance to shift our thinking from dichotomies to entanglements through the form of the book.

I am interested in *entanglements* between humans, nonhumans, language, place, space, ecologies and aspects of communication, and more specifically on how place has a profound impact on knowledge production. These entanglements between different entities characterise cultural exchange and communicate cultural values and beliefs (see Chapter Two, section 2.8). In the context of this research, *place* is an interdisciplinary concept and approach, which is investigated in terms of how it is understood in scholarly research such as geography, philosophy, art and design. Therefore, in this research I synthesise theoretical and philosophical concepts of place, through my graphic design practice, the concertina book and typographic experiments, to understand the impact of place on contemporary Dutch typographic discourse. Typographic discourse in this research is considered within an applied context of the concertina book.

Feminist theorist, philosopher and physicist Karen Barad proposes the

philosophical framework of ‘agential realism’<sup>8</sup>. This posthumanist framework provides an understanding of an epistemological-ontological-ethics approach of ‘how discursive practices are related to the material world’<sup>9</sup>. Human and nonhuman, nature and culture, discursive and matter are factors that play a role in knowledge production. It is the understanding of *how* these agencies are involved and/or related in entanglements of place. Barad’s notion of ‘intra-action’<sup>10</sup> signifies mutual agencies that exist in relation to each other through their intra-actions in an entangled world.

The English word ‘entanglement’ consists of ‘en-’ and ‘tangle’. ‘En-’ deriving from the Old French *en-* and from Latin *in-* meaning ‘in, into’.<sup>11</sup> Etymologically, the word *tangle* is of Scandinavian origin from mid-14 century, deriving from a Swedish dialect *taggla*, meaning to ‘disorder’, from the Old Norse *þongull* meaning ‘seaweed’: seaweed that entangles itself. I translate the word entanglements visually as non-linearity lines, lines as a loose knot. This loose knot relates to the relationships between Dutch typographic discourse and place. It is a visual metaphor for the coming together of people, objects, subjects and their environment. Doreen Massey discusses the event of place in *For Space*, specifically the idea of ‘throwntogetherness’, which refers to a place where the negotiation between human and non-human exists, and the ‘here and now’ in relation to its histories.<sup>12</sup> These relations between human and nonhuman, nature and culture provide an understanding of the ‘intra-action’<sup>13</sup> of entanglements. The relationality between different elements (discursive practices, typographic discourse, and materiality) provides epistemological knowledges of place. Curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud discusses ‘relational aesthetics’<sup>14</sup> – the theory of form – in his publication *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). It considers the [social] context and relations of an artwork. The artwork as part of relational elements (e.g. viewer/reader encounter) that form dialogues. A form (e.g. artwork) can create conditions for an exchange between object(s) and subject(s), artist/designer and materiality, or viewer/reader. These relational aspects are part of the entanglements of place.

8 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, (2007).

9 Barad, op. cit., p. 34.

10 Barad, op. cit., p. 33.

11 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/entangle>.

12 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 140.

13 Barad, op. cit., p. 33.

14 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presse Du Reel (2002).



Fig. 1 Kunstformen der Natur, plate 85: Ascidiacea, Ernst Haeckel, 1904.

The English word ‘place’ derives from Old French *place* (place, spot).<sup>15</sup> Developed from Latin *platea* (courtyard, open space), which evolved from the Ancient Greek *πλατεῖα ὁδός* *plateía (hodós, broad way)*, and from Proto-Indo-European languages ‘plat-’ meaning ‘to spread’.<sup>16</sup> A contemporary understanding of place, however, relates not only to a geographical location, but also to a ‘sense of place’ and a ‘locale’. The locale suggests the materiality of a place. As political geographer John Agnew remarks, the materiality of place represents both the real world and imaginary places.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, in applying this concept to this research it enables one to position typography – the materiality of language on the printed page – reflecting the ‘social relations’ of place.<sup>18</sup>

## 1.2 Definition of an Ecology of Semantics

This practice-led research proposes the concept of an ‘ecology of semantics’. The scholarly approaches of semantics and ecology, and the combination thereof, are extensively researched in fields such as linguistics, biology and media studies.<sup>19</sup> However, in this research I apply it as an approach to visualise and understand

15 <https://www.etymonline.com/word/place#:~:text=and%20directly%20from%20Medieval%20Latin,-From%20mid%2D13c>.

16 Ibid.

17 Tim Cresswell, *Place: An Introduction*, (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 14.

18 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 13.

19 Ryan Bishop, Kristoffer Gansing, Jussi Parikka and Elvia Wilk, *across & beyond: A transmediale Reader on Post-digital Practices, Concepts, and Institutions*, (London: Sternberg Press, 2017).

relationships between typography and place. The word ecology was first coined by German zoologist, naturalist and artist Ernst Haeckel, who used the term *ökologie*, which derives from the Greek word *oikos* meaning ‘household’, ‘home’ or ‘place to live’.<sup>20</sup> Ecology refers to the ‘relationship between organisms and their environments’<sup>21</sup> (see Fig. 1). Semantics refers to the making of meaning; specifically, in the context of this research, it refers to the outcomes of the research that represent the meaning-making process.

The concept of an ‘ecology of semantics’ represents the relationships between place and contemporary Dutch typography. The ecology of semantics consists of a two-fold approach: firstly, the relationships between the methods (diagrams, sketches, notes, conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews, design practice) applied in this research that form an Ecology. The methods are entities in themselves but operate in the system together towards a holistic outcome of the research (Chapter Three, p. 67). Secondly, through the analysis of my design practice, aspects of the current contemporary typographic discourse in the Netherlands reveal connections to place and articulate how the entanglements occur. My design practice is utilised to reveal these connections and consequently contribute to the existing typographic discourse. The key findings of my research identify themes that relate to place – time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education – of a contemporary typographic discourse. These themes underpin the semantics of the ecology and provide an understanding of the social and cultural interactions and processes of place.<sup>22</sup> Through the concertina book that visualises and represents the cultural interactions of aspects of place, the interconnected and relational aspects of the themes form an ecology of semantics.

This practice-led research uses a multi-method approach, employing a dialogical methodology,<sup>23</sup> to develop an understanding of how the entanglements between Dutch typography and place operate. The qualitative methods in this research are a design-led prompt, five semi-structured interviews with six participants, and graphic design practice. The six participants are designers, educators and/or academics located in the Netherlands. My graphic design practice consists of diagrams informing key aspects (for example, literature review, methodology) and decision-making in the research process, typographic experiments and the

20 <https://www.britannica.com/science/ecology>.

21 Ibid.

22 Massey, op. cit., (1991).

23 Gray, Malins, 2014, p. 24; Schön, 1983, p. 78.

design concertina books. The concertina book is established as place in itself in this research, and is used as an instrument to explore Dutch typographic discourse. Furthermore, the use of discourse in this research is through the semi-structured interviews, my typographic explorations and concertina books. My research works through theoretical and experimental design traditions of situatedness to embrace the acts of making as forms of knowledge production. It is the design practice and processes that generates new knowledge informing my research, rather than design outcomes as a means to executing knowledge as such. The concertina book tests and evaluates thoughts, ideas, and connections about the key themes. These processes and outcomes are discussed in detail in Chapter Six, pp. 146–183.

It is important to acknowledge that within the research process, I have tested different methods (for example, photo-elicitation<sup>24</sup>, visual analyses<sup>25</sup>) and/or approaches as part of an iterative process. In early experimental stages of the research, when scoping the field and understanding concepts of place, I undertook a field trip to Rotterdam in the Netherlands, a city I was not very familiar with. Located in the province of South Holland, Rotterdam is a city known for its rich history of art, design and architecture. In the context of this research, Rotterdam is related to many typographic developments (e.g. typography embedded in architecture, conferences, publications). The city is known for its connections with designers (Jannetje in ‘t Veld; Toon Koehorst), academics, and the influential Art Academy, Willem de Kooning Academie. This field trip provided me with an understanding of place, where I established a better understanding of my research. While walking, exploring and observing the city of Rotterdam, I took into consideration Massey’s theory of ‘place is a process’;<sup>26</sup> the social interactions and cultural connections within a place and the notion of the local and the global.

My *sense* of the city Rotterdam is that it exists of smaller pockets, specific networks of worlds. These networks of people and institutions are creating layers that are driving the city culturally, socially, and politically. Typography in situ in the city forms part of a place-making process. It was at this reflective moment I realised I was not looking at typography *in* a place rather as typography

24 Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 82; Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, (London: Sage Publications, 2016).

25 Rose, Ibid.

26 Massey, op. cit., (1991), p. 29.



through experiences and stories of designers and educators. I am interested in printed typography and how this is informed by social and cultural structures of a place. Additionally, the representation of a place in print provides me with an understanding of ‘seeing’ these invisible structures on the printed page. My documentation of the field trip consists of observational notes, and photography supported my reflective practice through writing and graphic design practice (see Fig. 83 in Appendix I p. 202). The field trip offered the initial evidence to formulate a set of overarching research questions for the project.

### 1.3 Research Questions

I aim to answer, through qualitative methods and adopting a multi-methods approach, the following main research questions:

- How can notions of geographical location (a ‘place’) inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?
- Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?
- What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

### 1.4 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the research is to make visible entanglements of place, through a series of semi-structured interviews and graphic design practice. Further, the research aims to propose an understanding of how a Dutch typographic discourse communicates cultural aspects on the printed page and is influenced by different aspects of place. The design heritage of the Netherlands contains a rich history of typography rooted in book typography, type design and early developments of printing and publishing houses. This research, however, investigates the cultural aspects of typography (see Chapter Two, p. 45) in the Netherlands. By gaining an understanding of these cultural aspects, contemporary typographic discourse in the Netherlands provides a framework of the cultural exchange of typographic communication.

The objectives of this research are to make visible the relationships between a Dutch typographic discourse and the structures of place in the Netherlands that suggests an ‘ecology of semantics’. The outcome of this research reveals and explores the processes of place, through the development of the methodology. The research contributes to the field of visual communication and to wider discussions about place, relationality, cultural heritage and written language.

### 1.5 Original Contribution to Knowledge

This practice-led research provides an original contribution to knowledge in the field of visual communication, through design practice, specifically the form of the book. The main research outcomes and outputs of this research are the thesis and the concertina books (see visual documentation of concertina books, pp. 170–183). Through a multi-method approach, a dialogical methodology, this research applied an iterative design process consisting of different elements; a design-led conversation prompt (part of the semi-structured interview process), typographic experiments and diagrams, that supported the final research outputs, the concertina books. The concertina book affords rhythm, space, place, folds, structure and understanding of the key themes (time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology, and education) that relate to place, through the ideation within the design process.

The concertina books, as a means through which knowledge is generated, provides insights into the social and cultural interactions and processes of place<sup>27</sup> that inform a typographic discourse in the Netherlands. The conceptualisation of an ecology of semantics, contribute to an understanding of meaning making processes through a design practice. Specifically, the concertina books reflect the global and local processes of place (seven themes) that form the concept of an ecology of semantics. Furthermore, the concertina books visualise, materialise and represent these processes and provide an understanding of entanglements of place. The critical engagement through the concept of the ecology of semantics further contributes to an understanding of the cultural exchange of typographic communication on the printed page.

<sup>27</sup> Massey, op. cit., (1991).

## 1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. In Chapter One, the introduction, the context for the research is outlined along with the research questions and my motivation for the research. The methodology and my design practice are set out, and an introduction to the concept of an ‘ecology of semantics’.

Chapter Two, *Place as Dialogue / Dialogue as Place*, sets out the theoretical context of the research, the literature that supports the concepts and discusses the gaps in knowledge that this research focuses on. I discuss the key notions of existing typographic discourses and concepts of place. I address the cultural heritage of typography in the Netherlands and provide a brief history of typography there, deriving from a rich history of book typography, and processes of place. The chapter examines the interdisciplinary approaches of the literature and practices from which my research questions arose. Furthermore, it presents initial key themes (technology and history) that are part of the ecology of semantics.

Chapter Three, *Places of Dialogical Modes*, discusses the methodological framework of this research. Through a multi-method approach, dialogical modes are proposed as the methodological framework. The dialogic methodology presented provides an openness where multi-methods meet and the cultural dimensions of Dutch contemporary typographic discourse and relationships to place are explored. The relationships between the methods contribute to the holistic approach. A detailed discussion of the methods of inquiry follows. The qualitative research methods utilised are a designed conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews, graphic design practice and thematic analysis.

Chapter Four, *Open Space: A Dialogue*, discusses the method of a ‘conversation prompt’, used in the process with five semi-structured interviews with six participants as a starting point of the conversation. The prompt consists of visual material and an information sheet that were sent to the participants prior to the interviews. I discuss the process and form of the conversation prompt in relation to the interviews. The outcomes are presented in this chapter. The conversation prompt was partially effective, and I learnt about personal experience, memories and historical examples. The semi-structured interviews developed into a conversation style throughout the process.

Chapter Five, *Living Words: A Dialogue*, focuses on the process of five semi-structured interviews with six participants. These interviews were conducted via online video recordings (due to Covid-19) with participants from the Netherlands to provide insights and understanding of the interconnections between typography and place. The participants were: Hansje van Halem, (graphic designer), Joost Grootens (graphic designer, educator, academic), Richard Niessen (graphic designer, educator), Remco van Bladel (graphic designer, educator), Jannetje in ‘t Veld (graphic designer, educator) and Toon Koehorst (graphic designer, educator). Collectively, their design practices span from print-based materials to exhibitions and digital design. The focus of their work is on the arts and cultural sector. The outcomes of the semi-structured interviews are presented, the intangible spoken word.

Chapter Six, *The Book as Place: A Tangible Dialogue*, analyses these semi-structured interviews and discusses reflections through my design practice. This chapter makes the living word (see Chapter Five, p. 101) tangible through typographic experimentation within the ‘place’ of a concertina book. The chapter discusses these processes and presents the findings of this analysis in relationship to the research questions. Through both traditional thematic analysis and my graphic design practice, I analyse how the themes emerged from the research with further analysis into each theme through seven concertina books to understand the social and cultural processes of typography in the Netherlands.

The concluding Chapter Seven of the thesis presents a summary of the findings of this research. It establishes the contribution to original knowledge in the field of visual communication, the limitations of the research and future directions for the research.

# Chapter Two

Place as Dialogue / Dialogue as Place:  
Literature and Practice Review

# Introduction

This chapter introduces key concepts and readings that support this research, drawn from the fields of visual communication and cultural geography. This interdisciplinary approach through the literature supports the discussion and provides a context and framework for this practice-led research. Key readings from visual communication are *The Triumph of Typography* by Ewan Lentjes and Henk Hoeks (2015) and *Typography as Vehicle of Science* by Gerard Unger (2007). Key readings from cultural geography are 'A global sense of place' and *For Space* by Doreen Massey (1991, 2007) and *Place: An Introduction* by Tim Cresswell (2015).

A better understanding of the connections unfolding through typographic discourse enhances our understanding of the impact of typographic communication and the way we read, perceive and understand the world. A spider's web is a complex natural construction that represents the complexity of social structures and cultural connections of place and beyond. The themes discussed here came out of a methodological process of reading and mapping the literature, utilising my graphic design practice as a method to visualise and represent information in the form of visual diagram (Fig. 2). My research diagrams make visible the cultural effects of communication on design decisions in the Netherlands to understand developments of cultural design exchange in typographic discourse. The diagram reflects the process undertaken in my practice producing visual design outputs of the literature.

The interdisciplinary perspective offered by the key readings in visual communication and cultural geography, enables me to position the readings

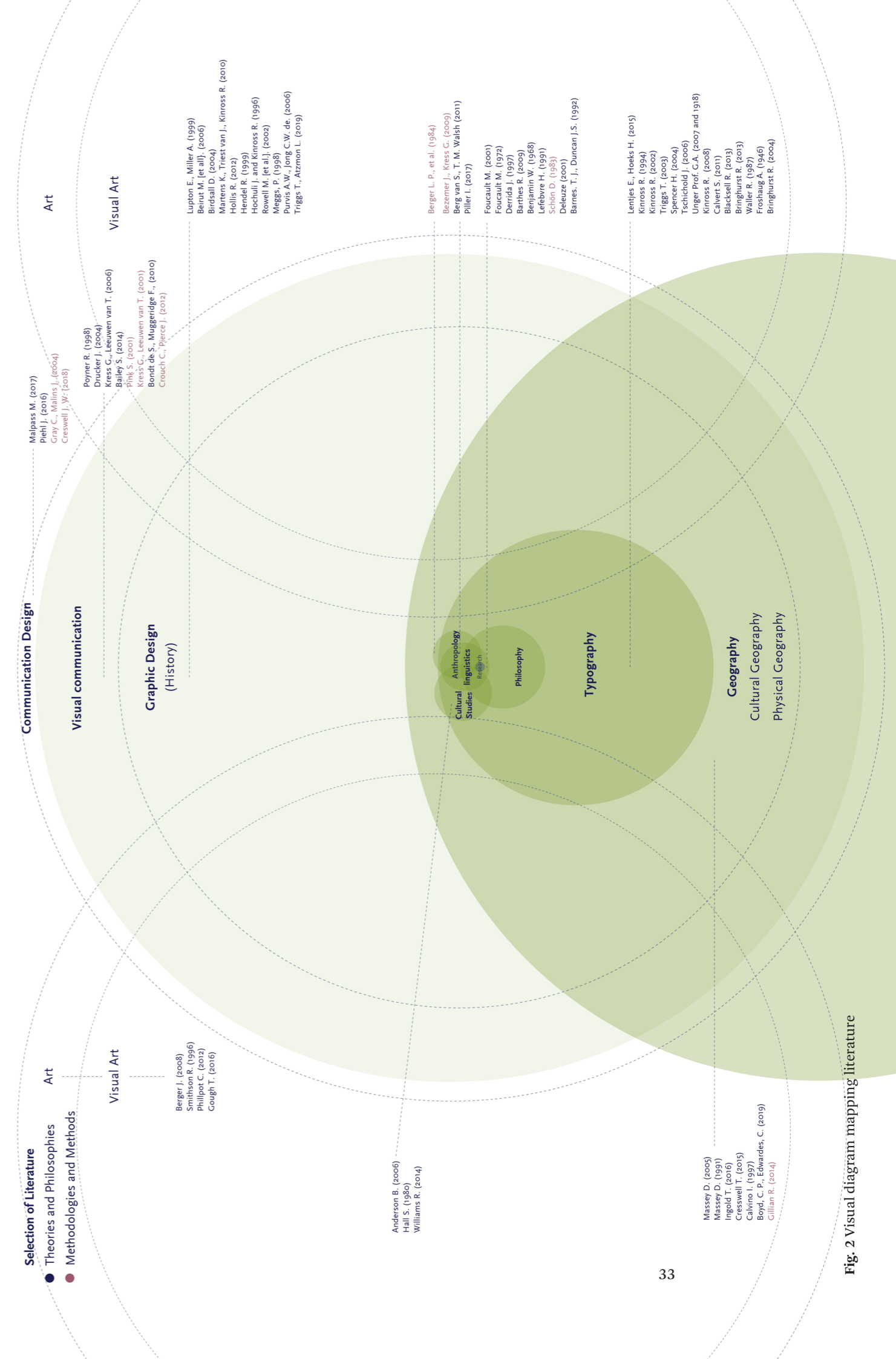


Fig. 2 Visual diagram mapping literature



in dialogue with each other and understand theoretical concepts. For example, these theoretical concepts, the book as instrument, the processes of a place and typographic approaches in the Netherlands, enabled me to identify my contribution to knowledge. The dialogues between key readings become a place for discussion and reflection on the themes. Through the key themes place, history, typography, the Netherlands, representation, printed book and culture within the sections of this chapter (sections 2.1–2.5, pp 35–51), and the literature and practice review, the gap in knowledge becomes visible and this is further discussed in the conclusion section of this chapter.

Our geographical position, environment and visual language play a significant role in how we perceive the world. The perception of Western culture is ‘increasingly dominated by movement of people, images and information’.<sup>28</sup> The Netherlands represents a distinct design culture,<sup>29</sup> with strong historical influences in graphic design, particularly typographic design, deriving from a rich and traditional book printing history. As such, this relationship generates space for an examination and understanding of the relationships between typography and place. Designer and writer Robin Kinross provides a history of Dutch typographic development in the Netherlands in his book *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*, 2010. Kinross suggests the influences of early printing press and book designers, such S.H. Roos and Jan van Krimpen, and type foundries had a profound impact on the development of the ‘tradition in Dutch typography’.<sup>30</sup> Van Krimpen worked within the traditions of European typography. Building on typographic traditions, the Netherlands also maintains strong international connections for the purpose of education and professional design practices (see Chapter Six, p. 165).

Culture is a complex concept involving aspects including language, social structures, experiences or values.<sup>31</sup> The concept of material culture covers the physical expressions of culture such as objects or written language. For example, the materiality of written language is typography, which therefore becomes a form of material culture. Through typographic communication, we understand

28 Massey, op. cit, (1991), p. 24.

29 Aaron Betsky and Adam Eeuwens, *False Flat: Why Dutch Design Is So Good*, (London: Phaidon Press, 2008).

30 Robin Kinross, *Modern Typography: An Essay in Critical History*, (London: Hyphen Press, 2010), pp. 100–101.

31 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 49.

cultural values as a way of meaning making and representation.<sup>32</sup> Representation, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall describes, ‘is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language’.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, the meaning-making in culture, ‘is the link between concepts and language which enables us to refer to either the “real” world of objects, people or events, or indeed to the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people or events’.<sup>34</sup> The relationship between concepts and signs creates the production of meaning. Representation through forms of language systems, whether images, words, sounds or objects are constructed through their creation as well as through interpretation.

Scholarly studies in linguistics have a long tradition and history in researching the relationships between language and place, particularly in the developments of a (spoken) language *in* geographical locations or regions.<sup>35</sup> There are few studies, however, discussing the impact of the environment on spoken language. Scientist Simon J. Greenhill discusses the effect of the environment on shaping a (spoken) language. Another study, ‘Language as shaped by the environment: linguistic construal in a collaborative spatial task’ by Jonas Nölle et al, discusses linguistic strategies to communicate positions in a maze.<sup>36</sup> These studies relate to spoken, not to written or visual language. I argue that place is impacting a visual language, in the context of this research the printed materiality of language – typography.

## 2.1 Place and Process

The word geography means ‘earth writing’, geo- meaning ‘earth’ and -graphy meaning ‘writing’ or ‘recording’.<sup>37</sup> Cultural geography, a subfield of human geography, was established by geographer Carl Sauer at University of California, Berkeley in the US. Cultural geography refers to a physical area (a location), [cultural] landscapes, social processes and ideologies of existing ‘lived relationships’.<sup>38</sup> Place as an interdisciplinary concept provides both a geographical and a philosophical perspective. In the context of this research,

32 Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

33 Ibid., p. 17.

34 Ibid., p. 17.

35 P. E. Reed, ‘Place and language: Links between speech, region, and connection to place’, *WIREs Cogn Sci*, 2020;11:e1524. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcs.1524>.

36 J. Nölle, R. Fusaroli, G. J. Mills, et al. ‘Language as shaped by the environment: linguistic construal in a collaborative spatial task’, *Palgrave Commun* 6, 27 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0404-9>

37 [https://www.etymonline.com/word/geography#etymonline\\_v\\_6020](https://www.etymonline.com/word/geography#etymonline_v_6020).

38 N. J. Clifford, S. L. Holloway, S. R. Rice, G. Valentine, *Key concepts in Geography*, (London: Sage Publications, 2011), p. 288.

the perspective of cultural geography relates to the understanding of a Dutch typographic discourse. A key scholar in discussion about place and space is geographer Doreen Massey<sup>39</sup> who argues that ‘place is a process’<sup>40</sup> and the social interactions and cultural connections within and between places are processes that continually move through boundaries and places, creating spaces that are always under construction. Massey therefore proposes that borders are porous, and places and spaces are always remade and never in stasis<sup>41</sup>. Places are relational, building upon histories and movement through these social interactions. The local and wider relations contribute to an understanding and making visible the character of a place – a sense of Dutch culture.

This chapter discusses an understudied aspect of contemporary typographic discourse and how it is informed by our relationship to place. Within the design practices of typography, collaborations become key to the movement of boundaries. Additionally, international interactions (international students, as well as international educators) in design education in the Netherlands make possible that there is an exchange of [typographic] knowledges and this moves beyond borders.

The concept of *place* in this research is significant to understand the relationship between contemporary typographic discourse and its milieu. Debates about ‘location’, ‘locale’ and ‘sense of place’ in relation to social structures, culture, landscape, space and how we see the world are discussed by geographers, philosophers and art critics.<sup>42</sup> The complex meaning of place is discussed by human geographer Tim Cresswell in *Place: An Introduction*.<sup>43</sup> Political geographer John Agnew’s three-part (location, locale, sense of place) approach to place provides a framework to understand place as a ‘meaningful location’.<sup>44</sup> Location refers, in this research, to the geographical position of the Netherlands in which the subject/object is placed. The locale, suggested by Agnew, is ‘the material setting for social relations’;<sup>45</sup> this materiality of a place represents both the real world and imaginary places. I argue that the printed page is the ‘locale’ of Dutch typographic discourse. A sense of place refers to the character of a place,

39 Doreen Massey, 1944–2016.

40 Massey, op. cit. (1991), p. 29.

41 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 13.

42 Agnew 1987; Tuan 1977; Lefebvre 1991; Lippard 1997.

43 Cresswell, op. cit.

44 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 12.

45 Agnew in Cresswell, op. cit., p. 13.

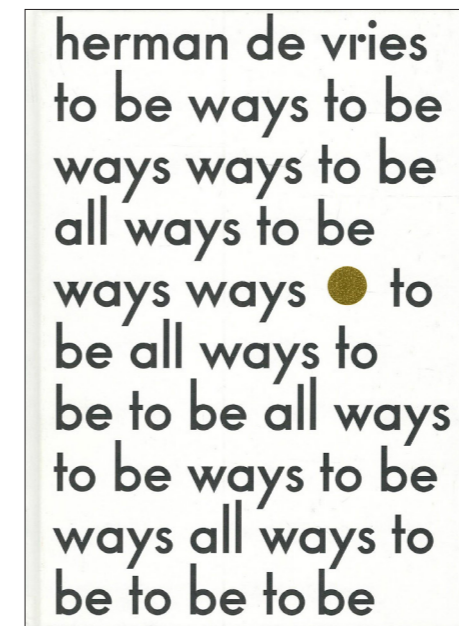


Fig. 3 Book cover *herman de vries, to be all ways to be* ed. by Cees de Boer and Colin Huizing, Valiz, 2015, Designers Remco van Bladel and Andrea Spikker.

experienced as an emotional attachment, a feeling of belonging or associations with a locale, the engagement with place through trajectories of both natural and cultural aspects.

Contemporary Dutch typography, specifically applied typography in printed materials, such as the monograph *herman de vries, to be all ways to be* (Fig. 3) are relational and are not fixed at a moment in time – their social interactions are entangled with histories. Social interactions with place are also, therefore, reinforced through the cultural production of typographic communication.

The concept of place as a ‘process’ will underpin the understanding of cultural exchange used in this thesis to mean the understanding of contemporary typographic discourse in print. Specifically, it will open the spaces, structures and connections of discourse in contemporary typography. Deconstructing and opening these networks in the Netherlands enable one to make the social and cultural landscape of typography visible and will evidence the geographical influence and impact on how meaning is perceived and understood. Meaning is constructed through (visual) language and the meaning people make is inevitably informed by their position in the world in relation to social, cultural, environmental and political factors. These invisible spaces further suggest that typography, the material form of written language, conceals social, environmental and cultural factors. Thus, a sense of place is conveyed.

The context in which typography is practiced is informed by these factors. The participants in this research provided valuable insights to understand different contexts of typography and the design processes to understand ‘the cultural significance of typography’.<sup>46</sup> Designer and educator Richard Niessen discussed street signage in the Philippines, a vernacular typographic approach, and the awareness of different [cultural] typographic approaches were discussed with some of his students (at Royal Academy of Art, The Hague). Therefore, interrogating typography in relation to a sense of place or ‘meaningful location’ enables a greater understanding of how ‘invisible’ typographic dialogue made visible leads to cultural exchange in this research context.<sup>47</sup>

Here, an understanding of a sense of place is applied to typography as a formal way of thinking expressed visually through written text, printed material, which acts as a mode of communication. Printed material such as the book can be described as a vehicle that transmits culture, text, visuals, materials and reflects and refracts networks of social and cultural activities.<sup>48</sup> An analysis of such printed material and the position of the designer<sup>49</sup> can therefore expose the cultural exchange of contemporary typographic discourse, which, like place, inevitably progresses and moves through time.<sup>50</sup>

Intercultural communication examines the communication between different cultures and the influences of cultural identity.<sup>51</sup> John Berger suggests: ‘We never just look at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves’.<sup>52</sup> From a cultural geographic perspective, the discussion of ‘places as process’<sup>53</sup> further emphasises social constructions within communities. Social interactions and cultural connections in the Netherlands are moving through the local, national and international boundaries of a place. Massey argues that when a place includes boundaries, this constitutes the ‘inside and an outside’<sup>54</sup> of a place. The local, national and international movement and interactions

46 Henk Hoeks, Ewan Lentjes, *The Triumph of Typography: Culture, Communication, New Media*, (Amsterdam: Lannoo Publishers/Terra, 2015), p. 15.

47 Agnew in Cresswell, op. cit., p. 12.

48 A. S. Arnar, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book and the Transformation of Print Culture*, (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

49 G.A. Unger, *Typografie als voertuig van de Wetenschap, [Typography as Vehicle of Science]*, (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Buitenkant, 2007).

50 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 98.

51 Ingrid Piller, *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

52 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1972, 2008), p. 1.

53 Massey, op. cit., (1991).

54 Massey, op. cit., (1991), p. 28.

of individuals and communities related to typographic discourse, such as education, design practices and publishers, and their geographical position in the Netherlands, create a new sense of place through the cultural production of the application of typography. A typographic discourse will therefore refract the social and cultural connections to a place. The understanding of intercultural communication between Dutch typographical communities and other international identities and places ‘must shift from reified and inescapable notions of cultural difference to a focus on discourses where “culture” is actually made relevant and used as a communicative resource’.<sup>55</sup>

This research proposes ways to understand these spaces of connection and analyses how the cultural relations between them are negotiated and transmitted through printed materials. The approach I have taken in this research leads to a process that aims to fill an identifiable gap of knowledge between place and typography, the cultural and social connections.

The literature provides understandings of concepts of place and how this relates to Dutch typography; further, it identifies a lack of understanding of the cultural approaches and values of typography. It addresses the facets of the research questions: how can notions of geographical location (a ‘place’) inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work and what are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment. The emphasis of typography in the literature is on history and technology or a linguistic approach.<sup>56</sup> However, I argue for an approach that informs an understanding of the cultural values and influences of a Dutch typographic discourse. The next section provides a brief discussion about the history of typography in the Netherlands.

55 Ingrid Piller, ‘Linguistics and Intercultural Communication’, *Language and Linguistic Compass* 1/3 (2007): 208–226, p. 221.

56 See for example, Adam Jaworski, 2015; Reneé Seward, 2022.



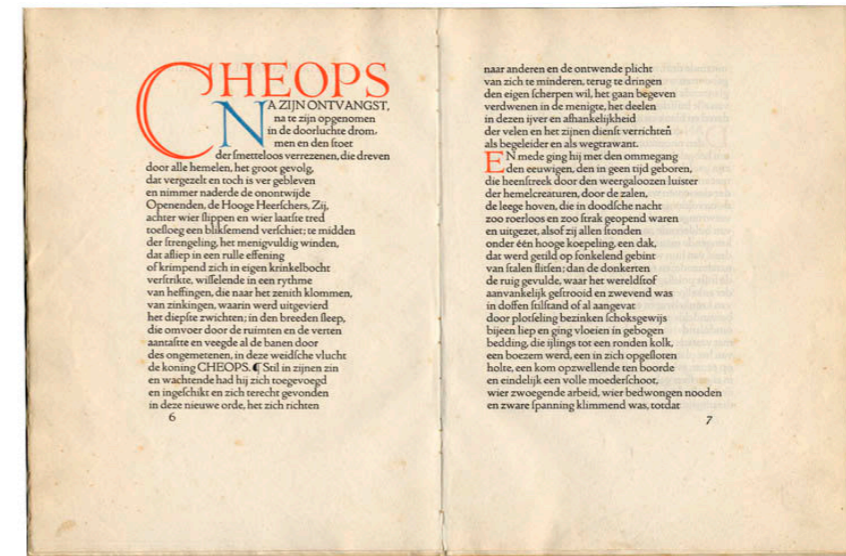
## 2.2 A Brief History of Typography in the Netherlands

This research is not about statements and ideas around ‘Dutch Design’ as such, a term that is globally known and considers influential product design, architecture or graphic design from the Netherlands. Design historians Joana Meroz and Javier Gimeno-Martínez discuss histories and ideas of Dutch design in their article, ‘Introduction: Beyond Dutch Design: Material Culture in the Netherlands in an Age of Globalization, Migration and Multiculturalism.’<sup>57</sup> They discuss national design in relation to globalization, migration and multiculturalism and the understanding of global networks. This research, however, is about typography in the Netherlands and understanding the role of place and its cultural connections in the development of a Dutch typographic discourse.

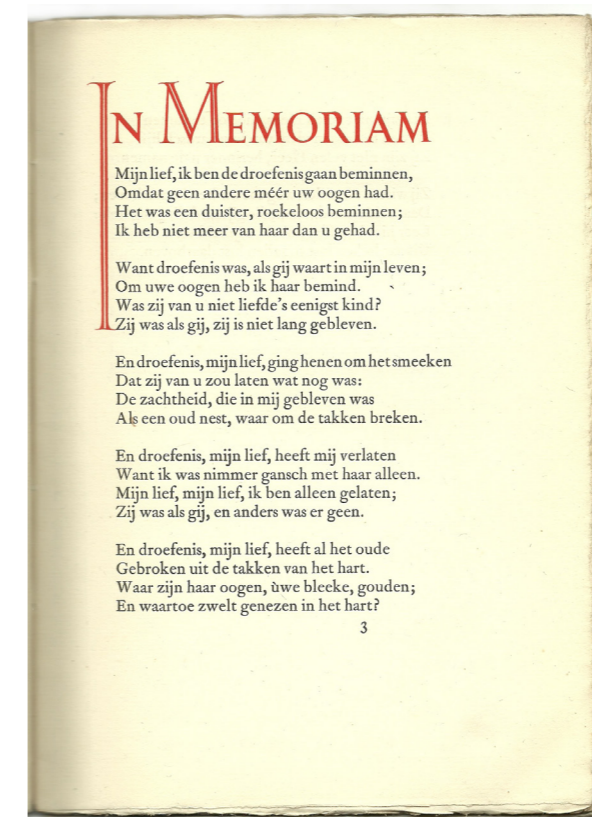
This section presents a brief historical intervention to provide a contextual and cultural understanding of typography in the Netherlands. The examples provided here had a profound influence on the development of book design and typography in the Netherlands. Letterforms and typographic communication communicate cultural value, inform and determine a visual language and perception of thinking over time. The Netherlands is building upon a rich history of book typography, with early 20th century influences by traditionalist typographers such as Sjoerd H. de Roos (Fig. 4) and Jan van Krimpen (Fig. 5). They both worked as type designers and book designers, de Roos at typefoundry Lettergieterij Amsterdam in Amsterdam and van Krimpen at printing house Johan Enschedé & Zonen in Haarlem.<sup>58</sup> Twentieth-century modernist approaches in Dutch typography include designer and typographer Tine Baanders (Fig. 6) and artist, architect, writer and typographer Theo van Doesburg (Fig. 7). Experimental typographic developments started also to develop in the 20th century and include artist and typographer H. N. Werkman (Fig. 8) who established a printing and publishing house in the city of Groningen in the Netherlands. In the early 20th Century from 1918 to 1932, the magazine *Wendingen* (Fig. 9) was established by architect Hendricus T. Wijdeveld. This magazine focused on architecture and art and maintained an experimental approach towards typography. These historical leading figures created foundations for the typographic landscape and a visual language in the Netherlands.

<sup>57</sup> Joana Meroz and Javier Gimeno-Martínez. ‘Introduction: Beyond Dutch Design: Material Culture in the Netherlands in an Age of Globalization, Migration and Multiculturalism.’ *Journal of Design History*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2016, pp. 213–27. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44652032>. Accessed 5 Sept. 2023.

<sup>58</sup> Kinross, op. cit., 2010.

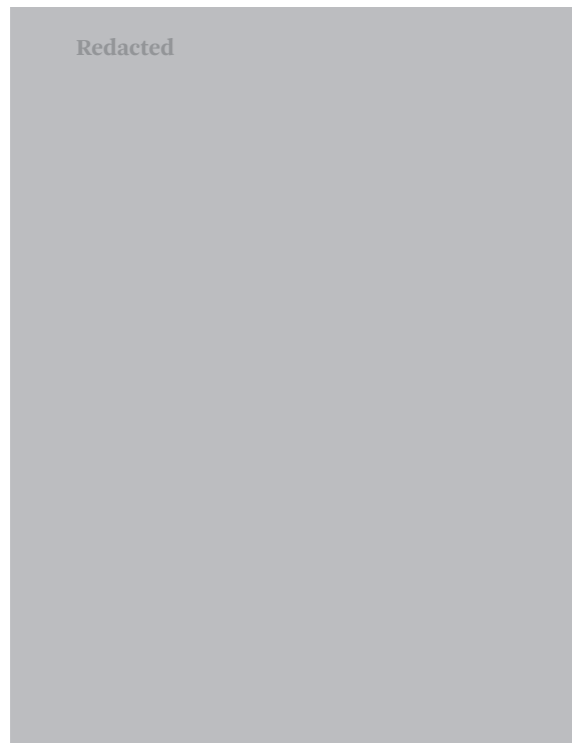


**Fig. 4** *Cheops* by J. H. Leopold. Private press: De Zilverdistel. Drukker: J. F. van Royen, 1916, Typodesigner S. H. de Roos, Letter: Zilvertype, Publication. Dutch poem.

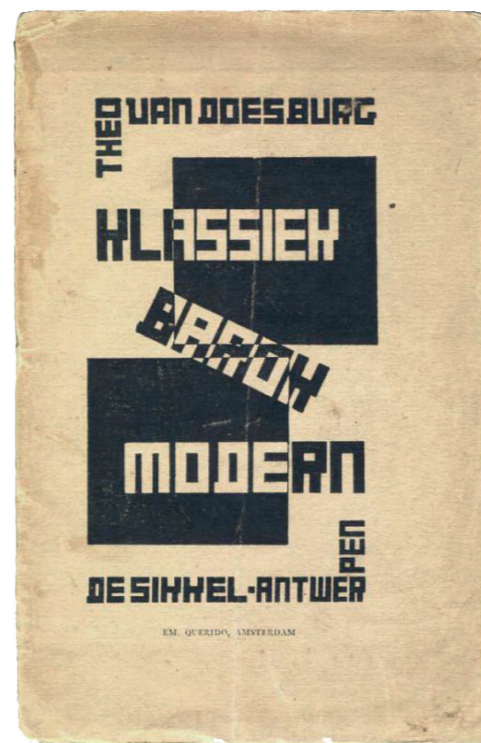


**Fig. 5** *In Memoriam* by J. W. F. Werumeus Buning, 1921, Published by Hijman, Stenfert Kroese en Van der Zande, Arnhem. Example use of initials designed by Jan van Krimpen in the Palladium series (1920–27). Publication. Dutch poem.





**Fig. 6** *Jubileumuitgave 1778–1928 Departement Amsterdam der Nederlandsche Maatschappij voor nijverheid en handel Amsterdam, 1928.* Designed by Tine Baanders. Bijzondere Collecties UvA.



**Fig. 7** *Klassiek-Barok-Modern* by Theo van Doesburg, 1920, Published by Antwerpen, De Sikkel; Amsterdam, Em. Querido. Designed by Theo van Doesburg. Publication.



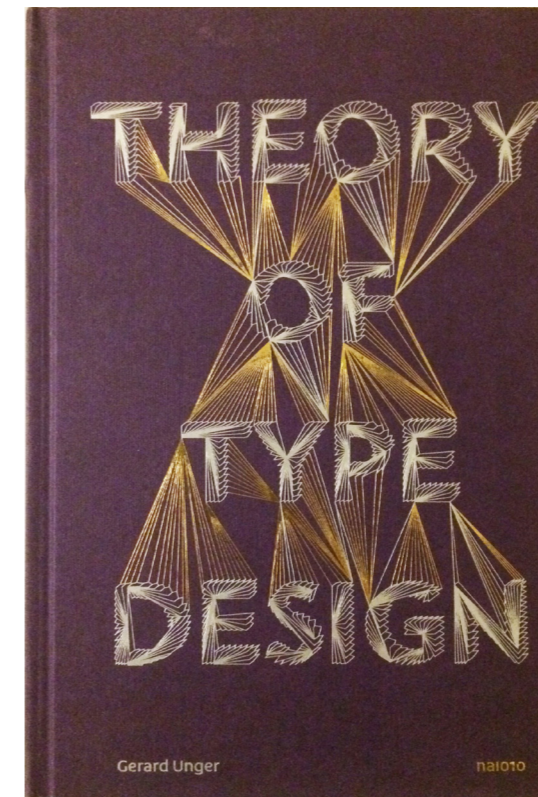
**Fig. 8** *Composition with letters X*, 1927, print, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Design by H. N. Werkman.



**Fig. 9** Cover of Dutch art magazine *Wendingen*, April 1918. Cover design by Cornelis Blaauw.

With the internet becoming a critical digital mode of communication and technology changing rapidly from the 1990s, typography developed further into digital areas. However, the importance of printed material remains relevant today, providing an ‘understanding of past, present and future’<sup>59</sup> in the field of visual communication.

Typographic cultural values and approaches are discussed *The Triumph of Typography* by Ewan Lentjes and Henk Hoeks (2015). This is an important publication, as one of the few publications about typography published in the Netherlands that discusses the cultural aspects and impact of typography. It establishes the importance of typography as a cultural object and as a vehicle of communication. Specifically, Lentjes and Hoeks discuss the developments in the history of typography by looking at cultural effects and social consequences of these developments. They address the changes in the field as a result from the impact of new media, with a focus on the meaning of typography as a system of communication.<sup>60</sup> This perspective is important as it aligns with this research. While there are typographic publications about type design, design processes, typographic observations in particular contexts and strong historical typographic publications, these publications<sup>61</sup> show a gap of knowledge exists in the cultural aspect of typography in relation to its context; specifically, in this research, the cultural relationship to the Netherlands.



**Fig. 10** Book cover *Theory of Type*  
Design by Gerard Unger,  
nai010, 2018, Designer  
Hansje van Halem.

### 2.3 Contemporary Typography in the Netherlands

The Netherlands has an established design culture in the production of (book) typography, through design education and in the writing of a history of design (visual communication). By understanding the impact of the environment, socially and culturally, on the use of typography, this research seeks to define how a sense of place has impacted the material form of language. For example, in the work of graphic designer Hansje van Halem (Fig. 10), whose use of typography shows experimentation, movement and a contemporary sense of culture.

Globalisation, the process of interaction among people worldwide, is increasing and its impact is affecting cultural ideas, meanings and values, resulting in ‘a global sense of place’.<sup>62</sup> Applied typography, created in the Netherlands, is shaped by its culture, history and the ‘in-migration of different nations’.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the place a person lives in shapes the way they think and how they experience the world. Place is a site of multiple identities and histories, and the uniqueness of place is defined by its interactions. Massey states in *For Space*:

<sup>62</sup> Massey, op. cit. (1991).

<sup>63</sup> Rob Kitchin, ‘Geographers matter! Doreen Massey (1944–2016)’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 17:6, 2016, 813–817, DOI: 10.1080/14649365.2016.1192673.

<sup>59</sup> Teal Triggs, Lesley Atzom, *The Graphic Design Reader*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Henk Hoeks, Ewan Lentjes, *The Triumph of Typography: Culture, Communication, New Media*, (Amsterdam: Lannoo Publishers/Terra, 2015), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> A selection of publications published in the Netherlands: *Typografie als voertuig van de Wetenschap [Typography as Vehicle of Science]* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Buitenkant, 2007) by Gerard Unger; *Dutch Type* (Berlin: Druk Editions, 2018) by Jan Middendorp. Selection of publications published at various publishers in Europe and US: *The Elements of Typographic Style: Version 3.1* (Hartley & Marks, 2004) by Robert Bringhurst; *Thinking With Type 2nd Ed: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press; 2nd edition, 2010) by Ellen Lupton; *Modern Typography: an essay in Critical History* (London: Hyphen Press, 2004) by Robin Kinross.



Their character will be a product of these interactions within a wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place.<sup>64</sup>

Language plays a significant role in the creation and circulation of concepts and is significant to this research. It connects place, culture, environment, typography and design. Linguist Ingrid Piller discusses patterns of communication through language, she refers to linguists Scollon and Scollon ‘inter-discourse approach’<sup>65</sup>, and asks how culture is made relevant by participants. Understanding contexts of participants in this research, and contexts in which printed materials are created can understand the social and cultural connections that inform the use of typography. In this research I make this visible through the concertina book (Chapter Six, p. 113).

Graphic design is the locale where the typographic discourse in relation to this research is situated. Typographic discourse communicates narratives. How do we use language to model the world and transform ways of thinking? The journey of typographic discourse is charted here through printed materials. Books, journals and conference publication make evident invisible spaces of connection between cultures. As the late Dutch graphic designer Professor Dr Gerard Unger states, ‘[W]riting is more permanent and functions across time and space’.<sup>66</sup> In his doctoral thesis ‘Alverata’<sup>67</sup> he discusses how to combine medieval concepts of typography and letterforms with contemporary concepts of typography, specifically looking at Roman letters in Europe. Through his research and typography, a cultural identity is revealed that resulted in a new typeface Alverata (fig. 11) reflecting time and place.


The logo for the Alverata type system is displayed on a light yellow rectangular background. It consists of three lines of text: the first line 'Αλβεράτα · Алверата' in a blue serif font, the second line 'Alverata Informal' in an orange sans-serif font, and the third line 'Alverata Irregular' in a darker orange sans-serif font.

Fig. 11 Alverata type system, three families available, 2014, 2015, Designed Gerard Unger.

64 Doreen Massey, *For Space*, (Sage Publications, 2007), p. 130.

65 Ingrid Piller, *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 8.

66 Gerard Unger, *Theory of Typography*, (Rotterdam: Nai010, 2018), p. 29.

67 Gerard Unger, *Alverata: hedendaagse Europese letters met wortels in de middeleeuwen [Alverata: contemporary European letters rooted in the Middle Ages]*, (Leiden University, 2013).

The main activities of cultural exchange take place through design collaboration, education, Netherlands-located practitioners’ international relationships, and international design and typographic conferences and their published proceedings.<sup>68</sup> Participants in this research all have international relationships, which enhances the exchange of ideas and cultural understandings. Cultural differences inevitably have an impact on the ways of thinking, as the living environment influences ‘ways of seeing’.<sup>69</sup> Yet, to return to Doreen Massey, it is clear that place and the environment we live in is formed by both global and local flows and it is the coming together of these that create its uniqueness. Massey suggests:

It is a sense of place, an understanding of ‘its character’, which can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond. A progressive sense of place would recognise that, without being threatened by it. What we need, it seems to me, is a global sense of the local, a global sense of place.<sup>70</sup>

This becomes particularly apparent in the semi-structured interviews where participants bring to the research a reflection of their own backgrounds, education and design experiences.

This ‘character’ (Dutchness) of the Netherlands, the site of this research, is what contributes to culture and the understanding of typographic discourse, creating a ‘progressive’ sense of place – one that looks outward. The conference ‘Windows on European Design’, 1992, held in London, with speakers from Denmark, France, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands, Germany resulted in a publication bringing together typographers and graphic designers across Europe. Their differences – language, landscape, materials, societal interest – influenced the cultural aspects of the design discourse at the time. Reviews stated that the exchange of ideas and awareness of cultural differences provided a view of graphic design across Europe.<sup>71</sup> Thus, these movements in and out of place create new relations between people and their environment and in the context

68 Publications examples include: Kinross, 2004; Noordzij, 2003; Unger, 2007.

69 Berger, op. cit.

70 Massey, op. cit., p. 29.

71 Michèle-Anne Dauppe, Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin, Teal Triggs, *Rear Window: a retrospective review of Windows on European Graphic Design*, Typographic Circle, Society of Typographic Designers, the Chartered Society of Designers, London, 1993. Post-conference publication. Conference 3 and 4 December 1992.

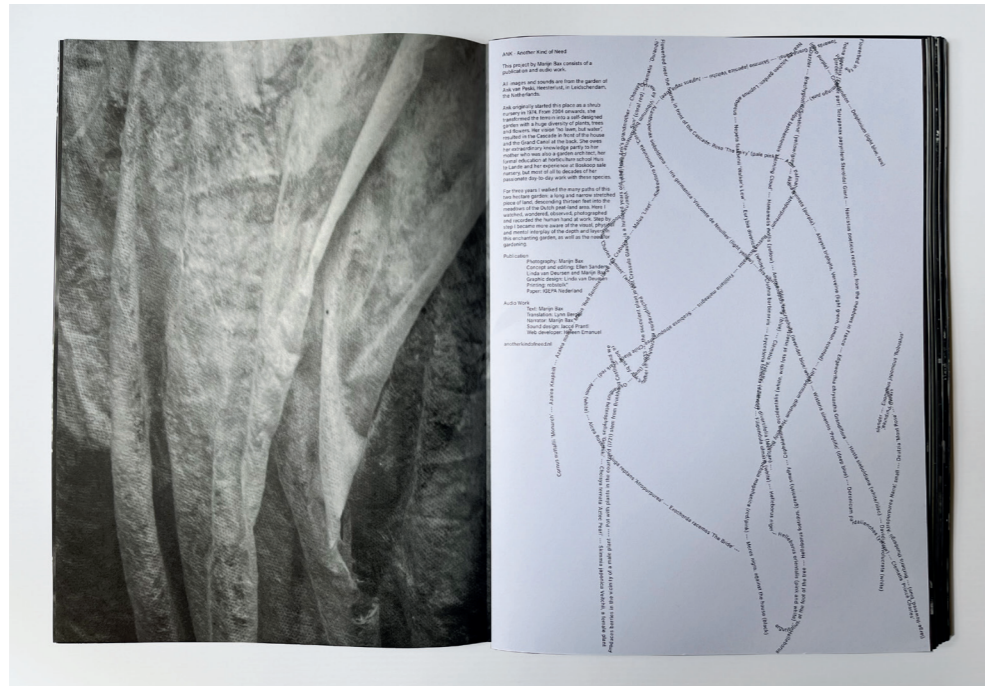


Fig. 12 ANK, *Another Kind of Need* by Marijn Bax, Fw:Books, 2022, Designer Linda van Deursen.

of this research, between typographers/designers and typographic practice (Fig. 12) to understand their thinking. Applying this to typographic discourse in the Netherlands, Agnew's<sup>72</sup> three definitions of place; the location, the locale and a sense of place makes visible the movement and connections between people and their environment. Cultural perceptions, cultural dynamics, critique and dialogues of cultural design exchange are increasing the awareness of cultural identity.<sup>73</sup>

Following Massey (1991) and applying an understanding of the processes of place, the ecologies and the connections between structured environments opens a space to interrogate and analyse the interconnected processes of typographic discourse. As van Leeuwen suggests: 'The universal aspect of meaning lies in semiotic principles and processes, the cultural specific aspect lies in their application over history, and in specific instances of use.'<sup>74</sup>

In this practice-led PhD research, the relationships between typography and place are made visible through visual representation and a process of translation

72 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 12.

73 R. Scollon, *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach, 3rd ed.*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

74 Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

through my graphic design practice. In the next section the theme of visual representation and translation is discussed. Visual representation is addressed through the research question: can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange.

#### 2.4 Typography: Communication across time and space

The theoretical and practice-based discourses that develop through typography discourses create traces of historical and contextual moments of culture. 'Time-space-compression refers to movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching-out of social relations, and to our experience of all this', as Massey says.<sup>75</sup> The international design connections of the Netherlands move through the boundaries of places and exchange a typographic discourse. In this era of cross-pollination where both print and digital publishing are developing rapidly, it is evident that the process of cultural exchange within typographic discourse are key to the understanding and development of visual communication. Printed materials, whether books or smaller publications, are essential objects/artifacts for understanding the development of typography, discourse and cultural values. Print remains key due to its permanence. Books travel through time, reflecting a particular period, and can communicate a message through time and across geographic boundaries. The book as a vehicle – a printed object that is able to communicate information and transfer cultural exchange – reveals cultural values and meaning through the content, design and materials.<sup>76</sup> For example, the artist book *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966) by artist Ed Ruscha portrays the Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles through photocollage and text in an accordion-format book. The book provides a sense of place and time through its structure and narrative of visuals and text.

The networks of social connections of typographers/designers unfold through the literature review and the research through the semi-structured interviews, making the social and cultural landscape of typography visible, and evidencing the relationship between place and culture. Place 'is thus an imagined and integrative space which comes to life through people's movements through it and their interaction with it'.<sup>77</sup> Through semi-structured interviews with graphic

75 Massey, op.cit., (1991), p. 24.

76 Sigridur, op.cit., 2011).

77 Johan Järlehed and Adam Jaworski, 'Typographic landscaping: creativity, ideology, movement', *Social Semiotics*, 2015, 25:2, 117–125, pp. 119–120. DOI: 10.1080/10350330.2015.1010318.



designers/educators in the Netherlands (for example, Hansje van Halem, Remco van Bladel), knowledge of their activities and connections creates an understanding of where and how typography is moving, and how information is traveling through places to understand cultural movements and cultural exchange. The consideration of political, social and technological circumstances creates opportunities to understand the connections between different cultures. Communication design transformed rapidly and developed new approaches to visible language: specifically, internet development, design software, printing techniques. These technological developments in print or digital design have huge implications in the way images and text are perceived today. *The Serving Library* is a print and online cultural journal founded in 2011 by graphic designer, writer and editor Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey; artist, educator and publisher Angie Keefer, and graphic designer and educator David Reinfurt. The journal provides reading experiences through printed texts and online texts. Online texts can be downloaded from the website as well. The interaction between print and online creates space for relational exploration of material and digital platforms. Printed material such as books, journals and conference publications, disseminates knowledge and develops a discourse. Translation (Chapter Five, p. 106) as an aspect of cultural exchange that provides an understanding of the nuances of a language and its cultural cues and interpretation in the same way that the [design] process of meaning-making through the concertina books (Chapter six, p. 144) provides an understanding of a Dutch contemporary typographic discourse.

Can we interpret the space of the unseen, the meaning of words? These meanings refer to the social structures, places and cultural influences. How does one's experience of, and relationship to, 'place' contribute to this? In his book *Lines, A brief History*, anthropologist Tim Ingold suggests, 'lines ... are phenomena in themselves'.<sup>78</sup> The study demonstrates the interconnected lines through linguistics, philosophy, geography, anthropology, biology and other disciplines. The interconnection between geographical locations reveals something about identity: the traces of a presupposed cultural meaning and 'how place is a way to understanding the world'.<sup>79</sup> These connections, threads and traces underpin the understanding the space of the unseen. 'Threads have a way of turning into traces, and vice versa. Moreover, whenever threads turn into traces, surfaces

78 Tim Ingold, *Lines*, (London: Routledge, 2016), p. xv.

79 Cresswell, op. cit., 2015, p. 113.

are formed, and whenever traces turn into threads, they are dissolved', as Ingold has it.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, it is the relationship between a geographical location, written language and typography which gives rise to specific cultural discourses and meaning.<sup>81</sup>

Typography can be described as a dynamic relationship within and between two components –Seeing and Perceiving.<sup>82</sup>

The vehicles of typography can be defined into different categories, such as education institutions or books, journals and conferences, but also as individual designers and educators. It is the entanglements, the lines and spaces between them, that create new discourses. These lines refer to the traces of knowledge, as journalist and writer Italo Calvino remarks:

Words connect the visible track to the invisible thing, the absent thing, the thing that is desired or feared, like a fragile makeshift bridge cast across the void. For this reason the proper use of language ... is one that helps us approach things (present and absent) with discretion, attention, and caution, and with respect for what these things (present or absent) can tell us without words.<sup>83</sup>

Engaging in the process of connections of typographic discourse to gain a better understanding of what is behind the visible form of the letter, a typeface, provides perspectives on relationships between typography, place and the printed text.

## 2.5 The Role of the Printed Book

Social experience, cultural perception of the book, the use and influences of typography in relation to the book's content<sup>84</sup> and its materiality and textuality are phenomena that open a 'dialogue' that enables the development of an ecology of semantics, introduced in this thesis introduction. The book is referred to, in this research, as an 'instrument' through which knowledge is exchanged and ideas are developed.<sup>85</sup> Discussion about the book as a medium or as an object is ongoing through various platforms.<sup>86</sup> As Johanna Drucker remarks: 'Every

80 Ingold, op. cit., 2016, p. 2.

81 Massey, 2015; Berg and Walsh, 2011.

82 Renée Seward and Emily Verba Fischer, 'Typography Education: Eco-System and Excellence', *Visible Language*, Vol. 50 No. 2, 2016, 199–217, p. 201.

83 Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the next Millennium*, (UK: Penguin Books, 2016), p. 94.

84 Sigridur Arnar, op. cit., 2011).

85 Ibid.

86 Arnar, 2011; Bondt de, et al. 2010; Gough, 2016; Phillipot, 2013.

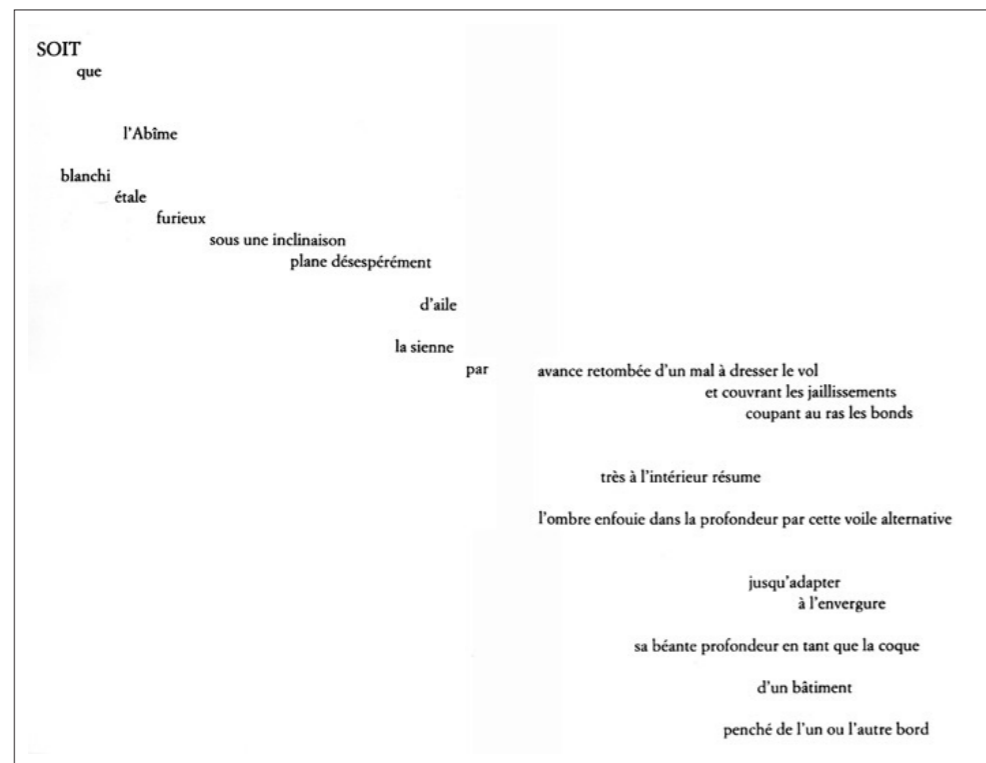


Fig. 13 Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard by Stéphane Mallarmé, 1897.

book is a metaphor, an object of associations and history, cultural meanings and production values, spiritual possibilities and poetic spaces, and all of these are part of the field from which the artists' book derives its identity, its shared connections and distinguishing features as a book whose realised forms and thematic intentions are only aspects of its totality as an idea'.<sup>87</sup> I argue a book is at once medium and object: the medium to transmit ideas and knowledge and the object as carrier of cultural meaning.

Books are complex and ever-changing, with a rich development in production and content. The French poet and theorist Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) began experimenting with poetry in the late 19th century to explore 'compréhension multiple',<sup>88</sup> the relationship between language and form in relation to the reader and used the format of the book to represent his ideas. Mallarmé redefined the experience of reading (Fig. 13) by engaging the reader in the process of his work. He identifies the book as a medium to redefine the relationship between his text (ideas) and its reader. Through his work our understanding of the book

87 Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, (New York: Granary Books, 2004), p. 42.

88 Sigridur, op. cit., 2011, p. 8.

contributed to the development of print culture, discussed by art historian Anna Sigridur Arnar in *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture*, 2011.

From 1910 to the mid 1970s an outburst of experimentation, innovation and development in the field of print saw artists, writers and political thinkers exploring new ways of thinking by publishing pamphlets, posters, manifestos and books. Typography became an important mode of communication. The development in the mid 1960s derived from avant-garde movements, such as Dada, Constructivism and Futurism, and Fluxus. The role of the codex book has 'proved one of the most useful, versatile and enduring technologies'.<sup>89</sup> For example, the artist book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) by artist Ed Ruscha. Conveying his ideas of petrol stations through photographs on the printed page with text captions. The artist book (codex format) is the object that exchanges cultural meaning to the reader.

Design educator Matthew Malpass argues in his recent publication *Critical Design in Context*, '... how objects encourage us to think in tangible ways when we consider how they feature in everyday life'.<sup>90</sup> The place of the written word in relation to objects and their tangibility provides a new cultural platform and understanding for discussing and transforming ways of thinking about typographic discourse and cultural exchange. When objects/elements/words are connected to content through a semiotic system,<sup>91</sup> the interpretation of the reader gives new perspectives to understand the subject. As Robin Kinross proposes in his pamphlet,<sup>92</sup> '... [R]eading in common, texts become meeting places, grounds for open discussion between people'.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the 'processes of places',<sup>94</sup> provides an understanding in the social and cultural environments. Therefore, the exchange of texts enhances the understanding of cultural influences on the object, in this case, specifically in the Netherlands.

To approach the book as medium and as an object enables the use of physical artifacts as a thinking tool and thus provides insight into the relationships

89 Martyn Lyons, *Books: A Living History*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), p. 7.

90 Matt Malpass, *Critical design in context: history, theory and practice*, (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 42.

91 Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, (Routledge, 1996), p. 41.

92 On the Hyphen Press website this publication is specifically titled as a 'pamphlet'. [https://hyphen-press.co.uk/journal/article/the\\_cover\\_of\\_fellow\\_readers](https://hyphen-press.co.uk/journal/article/the_cover_of_fellow_readers).

93 Robin Kinross, *Fellow Reader* (London: Hyphen Press, 1994), p. 23.

94 Massey, op. cit., 1991.

between subject, object and cultural influences. Visual culture theorist Nicolas Mirzoeff states, 'There is no outside to culture. Rather than dispose of the term, we need to ask what it means to explain certain kinds of historical change in a cultural framework.'<sup>95</sup> These historical changes underpin the understanding of the social and cultural connections of place. He asks, 'How does visual culture relate to other uses of culture?'.<sup>96</sup> The social interactions through place and the relationships between visual culture and other uses of culture are exposed in typographic discourse. As Ingrid Piller states, drawing from Scollon et al. (2012), '... culture is made relevant in a text or interaction and ... cultural identity is brought into existence through text and talk'.<sup>97</sup> Designer Gerard Unger addresses the reader in *Typography as a Vehicle of Science*: '... the reader's outlook changes permanently. It is influenced by the era and environment in which readers grow up and live, while major events and social developments – climate change, wars, epidemics, religions, globalisation, and growing conservatism – determine the mindset of the readers'.<sup>98</sup>

This practice-led research goes beyond the visible letterforms of the printed page and engages with the invisible spaces – the [social] relationships – that inform Dutch typographic discourse. An analysis of these spaces (see Chapter Six, p. 113) enables the interpretation and translation of these invisible forces, resulting in the representation of connections. This relates to the notion of the 'inside and the outside' as discussed by Massey (1991). It relates to a specific approach towards the environment, both urban and natural landscapes, and the spaces in between. We are in an environment, society is part of it and moves through it; however, when you are looking at the landscape, we are outside the environment.<sup>99</sup> For Cresswell, place is something you are inside of, and landscape is viewed from an exterior position. He specifically refers to the history of landscape painting. Place relates to the book: when immersed in a book, one is within a place and not outside it. The book and the content become metaphors for cultural values. The relationship between place, the social and cultural environment and the book impact reading experiences and transform ways of thinking. The book can be seen as a visual representation of place, and its textuality as a translation

95 Nicolas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, (Routledge, 1999), p. 23.

96 Ibid.

97 Ingrid Piller, *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 4.

98 G.A. Unger, *Typografie als voertuig van de Wetenschap*, [*Typography as Vehicle of Science*], (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Buitenkant, 2007), p. 16.

99 Cresswell, op. cit., 2015.

of landscape as Massey describes, '... the association between the spatial and the fixation of meaning'.<sup>100</sup> Place and book can both be conceived in the spatial realm. Text therefore can be considered as the fixations upon those correlating spaces. The unconventional book and publication structures considering place and temporality are for example, experimental literary works such as the early historical publication *Tristram Shandy* (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*) by Laurence Sterne. It was published in nine volumes over 8 years, the first volume was published in 1759. The books contain unconventional narratives throughout the nine volumes with visual interventions, such as lines or blank pages. Another example is *The Unfortunates* (1969) by B.S. Johnson. This publication is a book in a box containing 27 sections (the chapters) unbound. Furthermore, the book *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Danielewski experiments with typography throughout the narrative.

From a different perspective, Stuart Hall argues, representation is the reproduction of meaning through language.<sup>101</sup> This is further examined by design theorist Sheena Calvert, who discusses typography as the materiality of language in her work *Materia Prima, Text-as-image* (2011).

Place, visually represented through text and image in print, is where typography, culture and environment collide to create meaning. Through graphic design practice, the concertina book, the connection of typographic discourse is made visible and is moving beyond the visual representation of written language, typography. The concertina book as a platform for critical thought transforms ideas and the process of representation to encourage a state of awareness in the reader.<sup>102</sup> Representation, landscape and the form of the printed book present an understanding of visual meaning-making to address the research questions: How can notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?

Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?

What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment? In particular, by representing aspects of place through the concertina books (see Chapter Six, p. 142), this makes visible the cultural influences that connect a Dutch typographic discourse with its environment.

100 Massey, op. cit., 2007, p. 20.

101 Hall, 1997; Barthes, 2003.

102 Kinross, op. cit.

Through the medium of the book, cultural aspects develop and open new perspectives. As Roland Barthes suggests: ‘Language is restored to the nature of an instrument of communication, a vehicle of “thought”’.<sup>103</sup>

The social connections within printed materials; books, journals and conference publications are examined to identify the typographic discourse and cultural exchange. The following key designers, writers and academics are relevant to this research since their work and thinking relates to the processes and connections of place and typography in the Netherlands. Designer and writer Robin Kinross, designer and academic Gerald Unger and designer and educator Jan van Toorn. Through publications, education and conferences the Netherlands established connections. Their work influenced visual communication, education and the way we understand culture and how we read. These publications, such as Unger’s *Typography as Vehicle of Science*, explore the interaction between social interactions, typography and content. Foucault states in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

A task that consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practises that systematically form the object of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe.<sup>104</sup>

The typographic discourse of this research refers to the contents and representation that reveal the cultural influences and aspects of place through the concertina book (see Chapter Six).

When reviewing design practitioners such as Jan van Toorn, Piller remarks in these cases ‘... a text or book has been codified, analysed, described – the relationship between the object and culture becomes evident’.<sup>105</sup> Van Toorn’s strong belief in visual communication and the political impact of his publications creates an ‘open space’, a mode of communication for debate and discussion. Umberto Eco’s publication *The Open Work*<sup>106</sup> discusses the notion of ‘openness’:

103 Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 147.

104 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 54.

105 Piller, op. cit., p. 50.

106 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, (Harvard University Press, 1989).

the interpretation of an artwork that is always open and unfinished. I propose this applies to a typographic discourse as well as a publication. Additionally, this approach resonates with my own design practice as something that is always in process and open to discuss and expand on the subject matter that is represented.

Mapping the living conversations between people, places and things, such as publications, offers new insights into visual communication, typographic discourse and cultural exchange in the printed book. For example, in the semi-structured interviews with research participants, the different approaches of typography – as information, as text, as patterns, as systems – became apparent through their experiences and practices. Considering the historical developments and processes of applied typography, discourses that arise from the printed page create a new sense of place. The printed book travels through time and space and interrogates and reflects the social interconnections and processes of a place.<sup>107</sup> A text printed becomes an artifact that is constructed and created.<sup>108</sup> A text becomes a text through the layers of interaction with other people, discussions, dialogues, writing, thinking, editing, collaborating. This also includes interactions with locations and environments. This invisible interaction of a text starts to inform and influence a text and the object. There is a cultural transitioning taking place that is embedded in the text, and in the typography. This transformation, from nothing to the existing text informs ways of thinking. It becomes part of a discourse.

The printed page provides a place and space<sup>109</sup> to communicate typographic discourse. Stéphane Marllarmé argued that the book is an instrument. He wrote: ‘The book is thus not just a standard for the quality of the writer or a disciplined structure; it becomes an important tool– and instrument– for the potential to transform the public sphere’.<sup>110</sup> The book therefore becomes a space itself, a mode of communication to understand typographic discourse on the printed page. The ‘instrument’ creates a dialogue between content, form and reader. Furthermore, the movement of a book through time opens a cultural geographical dialogue. While ‘time’ is equated with movement and progress, ‘space’/‘place’ is equated

107 Massey, op. cit., 1991.

108 Ingold, op. cit., 2016, p. 13.

109 Massey, op. cit., 2007.

110 Sigridur, op. cit., 2011, p. 45.

with stasis and reaction.<sup>111</sup> This resonates with cultural aspects of typography in the Netherlands, its social structures and its movements, whereas the text on a page as static, locked into a location, referring to place.

In her essay, 'What is the cult future of the book?', Johanna Drucker states that 'the future of the book will be integral to the future of narratives and to the evolution of structured arguments into constellationary form'.<sup>112</sup> I argue the concertina books (see Chapter Six) in this research provide a visual representation of the spoken word and the interconnected aspects of place. By examining the role of the book, book as instrument, the cultural value of the book, the representation of language and ideas, and the reader, the research question about what the cultural influences are that identify connections between Dutch typography and its environment is addressed. Specifically, the cultural influences such as language and history inform typography and the book as a mode of (visual) communication, as the medium and as the object. However, it presents a gap on how aspects of place are involved as cultural influences and their impact on typographic discourse. The book as instrument and as place for typographic ideas further enables the understanding of the theme of time (which appears in the semi-structured interviews and is examined further in Chapter Six) through the notion of the movement of a book.

In terms of the book as a place for representation of the living word, it is the role of the book to examine the aspects of place and typography and thus address the research question: Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?

111 Massey, op. cit., 1991, p. 24.

112 Johanna Drucker, 'What is the cult future of the book', in *The Graphic Design Reader*, eds. T. Triggs, L. Atzmon, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 786.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Drawing together literature that discusses notions of place, intercultural communication, typography and the book identifies the gap in the understanding of social and cultural connections beyond the visible letterform. Therefore, it is possible to develop a deeper understanding of typographic discourse through a study of the relationships between typography and place. The book as place, to understand the social and cultural structures of typography in the Netherlands, provides a further understanding of aspects of place. Working with the literature and identifying key thinkers through the visual diagram, allows me to map the conceptual territory and create a distinct set of concepts that underpin this research, and to contribute to new knowledge in the field of visual communication. It paves a way for others to contribute.

From the findings and examples given in this literature and practice review, my research developed accordingly. The literature review enables me to position myself within the research and I developed methods to interrogate the role of place in Dutch typographic discourse. Following the literature review, the next chapter will discuss the methodological framework. Through dialogical modes – conversation prompt, open-structured interviews and graphic design practice – the current typographic discourse is opening up opportunities to understand perceptions of the world, place, geographical positions and movement.

# Chapter Three

## Places of Dialogical Modes: A Methodological Framework



## Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework for interrogating the cultural dimensions of Dutch contemporary typographic discourse and relationships to place. Dialogical modes are proposed in this interdisciplinary research as the methodological framework. The methodology, the study of methods<sup>113</sup> in this research enables the development of a multi-method<sup>114</sup> approach. The methodology is complex, qualitative and responsive<sup>115</sup> in nature. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the methods of inquiry informing the practice underpinning the research.

This practice-led<sup>116</sup> research is deeply informed by theories drawn from visual communication<sup>117</sup> and cultural geography.<sup>118</sup> In the Literature Review (Chapter Two) I discussed key notions and foundations of this research: typography in the Netherlands, place and process. The dialogic methodology is based on artist and independent researcher Carole Gray and Professor of Design Thinking and Innovation Julian Malins' responsive approach and provides an openness where the disciplines and multi-methods meet.<sup>119</sup> I argue that a dialogical approach is relational<sup>120</sup>, open and dynamic, and therefore relates to Massey's notion of

113 Christopher Crouch, Jane Pearce, *Doing Research in Design*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 63.

114 Crouch, Pearce, 2012; Creswell, Creswell, 2018; Gray, Malins, 2004.

115 Carole Gray, Julian Malins, *Visualizing Research, A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 21.

116 Gray, Malins, 2004; Smith, Dean, 2009.

117 Hoeks, Lentjes, 2015; Unger, 2007.

118 Massey, 1991, 2005; Creswell T., 2015.

119 Gray, Malins, op.cit.

120 The relational aspects of where borders meet create dialogic approaches and provides interconnections. Borders also refer to geographical borders.

'process', as 'never a closed system'.<sup>121</sup> These dialogic approaches are supported by an 'ecological epistemology',<sup>122</sup> as a way of thinking. This concept involves the production of situated knowledges as interrelated processes, connections between different entities and dynamic relationships between [living] things and their environment. I address the following research questions through this framework:

How can notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?

Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?

What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

The qualitative research method of the semi-structured interviews<sup>123</sup> are framed via the use of a designed conversation prompt that has its roots in the methods of cultural probes<sup>124</sup> and playful triggers<sup>125</sup>. Through thematic analyses<sup>126</sup> and graphic design practice, conceptual, social and cultural contexts are interwoven in Dutch contemporary typographic discourse and place.<sup>127</sup> Research through design connects the theoretical investigations and enables a focus on how meanings of place<sup>128</sup> are conveyed through contemporary typography in print-based material. The multi-methods applied in this research are connected to each other, as well as being independent entities that contain their own processes of practice. The relationship (Fig. 14, p. 64) between methods creates a productive and dialogic network that further provides a narrative. The research makes complex ideas and concepts tangible through graphic design methods. The graphic design processes (e.g. idea development and testing designs) provide ways of understanding relationships between Dutch contemporary typographic discourse and place.

121 Massey, op. cit., 2007, p. 11.

122 Christina Hughes and Celia Lury (2013) 'Re-turning feminist methodologies: from a social to an ecological epistemology', *Gender and Education*, 25:6, 786-799, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2013.829910

123 Traditional qualitative research practices within the social sciences.

124 Daria Loi, 'Reflective probes, primitive probes and playful triggers'. *American Anthropological Association*, EPIC, Iss. 1 (2007), pp. 232-245, 2007.

125 Loi, op. cit.; Akama, Yoko and Ivanka, Tania, 2010, What community? facilitating awareness of 'community' through playful triggers, In Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference (PDC '10). *Association for Computing Machinery*, New York, NY, USA, 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.1145/1900441.1900444>.

126 John W. Creswell, J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (London: Sage Publications, 2018).

127 Massey, op. cit., 1991, 2007.

128 Ibid.



Fig. 14 Visual diagram, Dialogic Methodology.

The practice outcome of this research, the series of typographic experiments and concertina books, represent the relationships between Dutch contemporary typography discourse and notions of place. The processes and outcomes of the methods, generated through a dialogical approach, create an ‘ecology of semantics’ (Chapter One, p. 23). This reveals interconnections between Dutch typography and social and cultural spaces. Making visible these spaces, enables the focus on how meanings are conveyed in typographic discourse through print. A dialogic engagement with six Dutch designers/educators that is generated through multi-methods, including the conversation prompt, enables the materialisation of a discourse of Dutch typography in relation to place. The conversation prompt provides social interactions and cultural connections with participants. This ‘space’ contributes to a notion of local and global understanding of Dutch typography.

### 3.1 A Dialogic Approach

I consider the semi-structured interviews with participants and the graphic design practice (making) as a form of *dialogue*. ‘Dialogic’ communication should not be confused with a ‘dialectic’ communication approach. ‘Dialectic’ communication is a discourse between two or more people [or objects] with different viewpoints that contradict each other, an opposition,<sup>129</sup> and often leads to debate. The word dialectic derives from the Greek *dialektikē*, meaning debate. A ‘dialogic’ communication approach relates to a form of communication that explores the meaning of a topic through, for example, a conversation or a process of making. The dialogic process is often an open-ended dialogue to understand a discourse. This openness provides space for the development of a typographic discourse between researcher and participants and between designer and materials.

The mode of ‘dialogic’ communication is relational. Relational in the context that these methods concern both the knowledge production of the semi-structured interviews as well as other iterative processes of methods used within this research. I believe the interactions between people, objects or subjects and their environment, the places they move through, can be described as dialogic. The openness of a dialogue provides space to develop ideas, whether these are through spoken word or visual language. Tim Ingold discusses the notion

129 S. Van den Berg, M. T. Walsh, D. T. Zlatić, in *Language, Culture and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, (Hampton Press, 2011), p.13.



of correspondences<sup>130</sup> as a process, open-ended and dialogical. He states, ‘[I]t is from these dialogical engagements that knowledge continually arises’<sup>131</sup>. A dialogue between different entities (e.g. the material and materiality of the form of the book) create relational connections. Relational aspects within dialogical modes could be understood as, what Nicolas Bourriaud refers to as ‘relational aesthetics’<sup>132</sup>. Relational aesthetics is a theory of form. The material form of an artwork ‘is a linking element’<sup>133</sup>. The form is relational through a trajectory of ‘signs, objects, forms, gestures’<sup>134</sup>. The concertina books exist in encounter with other formations.

Dialogical modes of communication allow the exploration of the entanglements between place and Dutch typography. Ingold refers to entanglements as a ‘meshwork’<sup>135</sup>, lines (relations) that move in a ‘textured world’<sup>136</sup> form entanglements. Karen Barad refers to ‘intra-action’<sup>137</sup> as a key element in her ‘agential realism’<sup>138</sup> framework. This specifies that agencies are relational, and their intra-actions are entangled. Therefore, the agencies (e.g. researcher, designer, participants, text, concertina books, seven themes; time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education) in this research are entangled. The understanding of entanglements becomes visible through the design experimentation and meaning<sup>139</sup> making processes. Language – spoken or visual – is always in process. I see the semi-structured interviews as the living word (see Chapter Five, p. 101). The knowledge and experience that is shared provides valuable insights. These living experiences and printed material, such as texts, provide a place of ideas and epistemologies.

130 Tim Ingold, *Correspondences*, Polity Press (2021).

131 Ingold, op. cit., p. 11.

132 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presse Du Reel (2002).

133 Bourriaud, op. cit., p. 20.

134 Bourriaud, op. cit., p. 20.

135 Tim Ingold, (2008). Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 40(8), 1796-1810. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a40156>, p. 1805.

136 Tim Ingold,(2008). Bindings against Boundaries: Entanglements of Life in an Open World. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 40(8), 1796-1810. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a40156>, p. 1808.

137 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, (2007), p. 33.

138 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Duke University Press, (2007).

139 Barad, op. cit., p. 148.

### 3.2 A Multi-method Approach

This research uses a multi-method<sup>140</sup> approach through dialogical modes to unpack the entanglements between typography and place. These entanglements are the key themes that are the findings from the research. Gray and Malins suggest that multi-methods ‘are related, often forming a developmental set, which is coherent’.<sup>141</sup> Multi-methods should not be confused with mixed-methods,<sup>142</sup> an approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data collection. This research brings together qualitative research methods in the form of a conversation prompt; six semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis; and graphic design practice. The methods used in this research build upon each other: each method is developed from a previous method and the methods refer to each other creating a discursive formation.<sup>143</sup> This discursive formation ‘is the way meanings are connected together in a particular discourse’.<sup>144</sup> It reveals a discourse of typography in relation to theories of place that answers the research questions.

Through my graphic design practice, which is deeply informed by the processes of my practice as a book designer, I analyse the collected information and data in a thematic analysis<sup>145</sup>, both through a traditional approach to thematic analysis<sup>146</sup> (see section 3.4.6 of this Chapter p. 73) and through graphic design practice. The research is an iterative process that is underpinned by a continual practice of reading, writing, note-taking, sketching, coding, mapping, reflection, reflexivity and critically evaluating methods through testing<sup>147</sup> and developing<sup>148</sup> them within the process of applying each method.

140 Crouch, Pearce, op. cit.; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Gray, Malins, 2004.

141 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 74.

142 John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (SAGE Publications, 2018) p. 328.

143 Gillian Rose discusses the Foucauldian term ‘discursive formation’ referring to relationships between ‘parts of a discourse’ in *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, (Sage Publications, 2016), p. 188.

144 Ibid.

145 Crouch, Pearce, op. cit.; Creswell and Creswell, op. cit.

146 Creswell and Creswell, op. cit., p. 291

147 The Conversation Prompt, Chapter Four.

148 Semi-structured interviews and graphic design practice, Chapters Five and Six.

### 3.3 Practice-led Research

In this practice-led research, the process of making, rather than a final outcome of the graphic design practice, will 'make tacit knowledge explicit through reflective practice'.<sup>149</sup> Representation and intertextuality are fundamental aspects of the design process. Visual representation of typographic discourse through print, makes visible linguistic relationships between text and meaning, and other modes of visual communication, such as the materiality of the book. Books are objects of cultural and social representation, as well as a place to research that generates information. The intertextuality between methods and within the concertina book itself creates the understanding of epistemological approaches of typography and place. In 2015, Christopher Frayling, former Rector of the Royal College of Art, proposed 'research through design'<sup>150</sup> as a form of learning and research through the medium of art or design. This was based on a reading from 1944 about research through art by Herbert Read. Frayling's approach reflects the notion of practice-led research, discussed in the publication *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean. They refer to writer and researcher Linda Candy's terminology of practice-led research as, 'practice-led research is about practice leading to research insights'.<sup>151</sup> This practice-led research applies the notion of the practice leading the research.

Following the outline of the research methodology, this chapter introduces the methods of inquiry. The deployment of the multi-methods is discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Five and Six and forms the core of this practice-led research.

149 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 32.

150 RTD 2015 Provocation by Sir Christopher Frayling *Part 1: Research Through Design Evolution*. <https://vimeo.com/129775325>.

151 Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 5.

### 3.4 Research Methods

#### 3.4.1 Conversation Prompt as a method of inquiry

In this research, I introduce the 'conversation prompt' as a method of inquiry. The conversation prompt operates as a creative and inspirational tool to elicit information and responses from participants through a dialogical approach. This tool, an anomalous object, aligns with a tool called 'playful triggers',<sup>152</sup> rooted in cultural probes<sup>153</sup> – an ethnographic method for gathering 'fragmentary clues'.<sup>154</sup> 'Playful triggers', as Daria Loi remarks, are for 'people to play, wonder and learn and to discover'<sup>155</sup> to establish a 'collaborative practice'.<sup>156</sup> However, the conversation prompt (see Chapter Four, p. 77) distinguishes itself from a playful trigger, as it is used as tool to start a conversation. The conversation prompt draws on an aspect of photo-elicitation<sup>157</sup> as a dialogic engagement to create a design-led method that is specific to a study of typographic discourse. The use of photo-elicitation is a way of understanding 'personal experience, knowledge and wider cultural discourses',<sup>158</sup> and 'social relations and identities'.<sup>159</sup> However, the term photo-elicitation is problematic in the context of this research, as it implies only photography can be used as a visual means to evoke a discussion/dialogue between researcher and participant. Adapting and re-contextualising this established photo-elicitation method, through the lens of a designer, creates space for intertextuality, exploring relationships between materiality, images and text. The conversation prompt provides resources that inform critical debates and start a dialogue about cultural perception.<sup>160</sup> The conversation prompt is embedded in the process of the semi-structured interviews referring to theoretical concepts of place – location, locale and sense of place<sup>161</sup> in relation to Dutch typography. Ultimately, the prompt creates meaning through modes of communication and enables a focus on how meanings are conveyed in Dutch typography and place.

152 Loi, op. cit., p. 237.

153 William Gaver, Andy Boucher, Sarah Pennington and Brendan Walker, 2004. 'Cultural probes and the value of uncertainty', *Interactions – Funology*, 11(5), pp. 53–56. Goldsmiths Research Online <https://doi.org/10.1145/1015530.1015555>, op. cit.

154 Loi, op. cit., p. 233.

155 Loi, op. cit., p. 237.

156 Ibid.

157 Drawing from the social sciences, photo-elicitation is a method whereby a visual image, the photograph, is used as a tool for interviews to generate data.

158 Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 82.

159 Rose, op. cit., 2016, p. 308.

160 R. Scollon and S. W. Scollon, *Discourses in Place Language in the material world*, (London: Routledge, 2003).

161 Cresswell, op. cit.

### 3.4.2 Understanding Place: Semi-structured interviews

Understanding place through the exploration of an established ethnographic method, semi-structured interviews,<sup>162</sup> connects the researcher and a (sense of) place. Semi-structured interviews are open-ended interviews and ‘allow the researcher to shape the discussion to some extent while also giving participants considerable freedom to direct its progress’.<sup>163</sup> They are part of an iterative process where each stage within methods informs the next stage in the process. Semi-structured interviews provide a general focus, without a ‘complete control of the process’.<sup>164</sup> This allowed me, as researcher, to partly shape the initial discussion, while also giving participants freedom in the discussion. The conversation then shaped itself through their response and our dialogue. Throughout the thesis I refer to semi-structured interviews. However, it is important to note that during the process of conducting them, the semi-structured interviews felt like conversations, with a more natural flow of dialogue than I expected. This was a positive, unanticipated development, as it made me more confident to conduct them.

Reading a place through visual and textual aspects (literature review) and dialogue<sup>165</sup> provides an understanding of cultural and social interactions and movements. The analysis of semi-structured interviews is approached through the lens of a designer. Through [visual] representation<sup>166</sup> of place, the designer analyses and reflects on semi-structured interviews through graphic design methods, which developed into a series of concertina books.

### 3.4.3 Modes of Communication: Graphic Design Practice

Positioning my practice-led research within visual communication, provides ways of researching through design;<sup>167</sup> specifically, understanding graphic design practice as a method. Within the design practice, my role as ‘practitioner-researcher, subjectivity, involvement, reflexivity is acknowledged’.<sup>168</sup> Subjectivity is engaged with aspects of knowledge, interpretation and representation.<sup>169</sup>

162 Crouch, Pearce, op. cit., p. 112.

163 Crouch, Pearce, op. cit., p. 112.

164 Ibid.

165 Berg, Walsh, op. cit.

166 Hall, op. cit.

167 Christopher Frayling, RTD 2015 Provocation by Sir Christopher Frayling *Part 1: Research Through Design Evolution*, <https://vimeo.com/129775325> (2015).

168 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 21.

169 Rose, 2016; Hall, 1997.

Subjectivity is based on contexts<sup>170</sup> and the personal construction<sup>171</sup> of this research. Through graphic design practice this research makes visible the epistemological relationships of typographic discourse and place. This is design as a critical approach of analysis and not as problem-solving, to provide in-depth understanding and new perspectives on the complex themes. Making key themes tangible provides an understanding of both the subject of the research and an understanding of what the design practice affords in this research. John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell note: ‘[B]eyond identifying the themes during the coding process, qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis’.<sup>172</sup> Through analysis, the graphic design process (concertina books) generates a description of themes and their representations.<sup>173</sup> Therefore, design methods are used as a tool to understand connections between theory and practice, as well as between the methods itself and design processes. This ‘intertextuality’ informs the understanding of Dutch typographic discourse – ‘the diversity of forms through which a discourse can be articulated means that intertextuality is important’.<sup>174</sup>

The visual documentation of the research represents my thinking process – a visual mapping<sup>175</sup> used as a method of thinking through reading, writing and ideas, and connects theories and practice. Investigating multiple perspectives in this practice-led research enables the creation of a ‘holistic picture’<sup>176</sup> of Dutch typographic discourse. Diagrams<sup>177</sup> are used to think through the literature and research thinking processes and identify key themes that emerged from the research. Reflection on these themes is developed through tangible practice, with the iterative process of practice informing the next stages of the thematic analysis and practice.<sup>178</sup> The graphic design tools are employed for thematic analysis. Each stage thus refines and clarifies the process and builds towards the outcome of the research.

170 Participants’ contexts and my own practitioner-researcher context.

171 Gray, Malins, op. cit.

172 Creswell and Creswell, op. cit., p. 269.

173 Ibid., p. 269.

174 Rose, op. cit., p. 187.

175 Rose, 2016; Ingold, 2013.

176 Creswell and Creswell, op. cit., p. 258.

177 Drucker, op. cit., 2013.

178 Rose, op. cit., p. 206.

### 3.4.4 The Book: Design as a method of inquiry

This practice-led research utilises graphic design as a method of inquiry, in that it establishes a way of doing research through design. Building upon previous methods and outcomes, in this section, the concertina book is developed to critically evaluate themes and understand connections between place and Dutch contemporary typography. Through the concertina book where I experiment on the pages with reflective text about the themes and forms that represent aspects of the semi-structured interviews, I critique and reflect on aspects of place in relation to typography in the Netherlands. This results in a seven concertina books with a typographic experimental approach on the pages. I discussed the book as an instrument in Chapter Two;<sup>179</sup> the instrument is the tool, the concertina book as used in this research becomes a place to research (see Chapter Six, p. 142).

Scholar Jan C. Swearingen refers to cultural theorist Walter Ong's discussion on dialogue, that 'enables new understandings of how texts function within different cultures at different times, whether those texts are oral or written, heard or read',<sup>180</sup> and this is reflected in printed material. The concertina book becomes a form of discourse. In my own design practice, the discourse generated from the conversations with participants 'allow[s] for a certain way of seeing, understanding and commenting'.<sup>181</sup> Both Dutch and English languages are used in order to understand nuances of Dutch typographic discourse. The relationship between the researcher, language and translation is discussed further in Chapter Five, in order to understand typography and cultural aspects in the Netherlands. Walsh clarifies by explaining:

As readers and as makers of meaning we go on to speak and write about literate and oral, and about the text, culture, and consciousness that surround the interpreter and the object of interpretation, whether that object is another person's spoken word, a text, or a physical phenomenon.<sup>182</sup>

179 Sigridur, op. cit.

180 C. Jan Swearingen, 'Vernacular Homiletics and Hermeneutics, Ong on Ramus, Milton and Wesley', in *Language, Culture and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, eds. Sara van den Berg, Thomas M. Walsh, (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), p. 32.

181 Matt Malpass, *Critical design in context: history, theory and practice*, (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 47.

182 Ibid., p. 32.

Additionally, the thesis is accompanied by a separate process book, one that makes more visible the design processes of the [design] practice in this research: the conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews and the concertina books. I approach the process book as a 'visual documentation'<sup>183</sup> that accompanies the research with further evidence of the developments of the practice components.

### 3.4.5 Reflective Practice

Reflection is used in a critical way in this practice-led research, as both 'reflection-on-action'<sup>184</sup> and 'reflection-in-action'.<sup>185</sup> Reflection-on-action is part of the general research process, referring to 'review, evaluation and analysis';<sup>186</sup> reflection-in-action is the activity of the design practice. This involves 'thinking about what we are doing and reshaping action while we are doing it'.<sup>187</sup> These concepts build on Schön's 'reflective practitioner' (1991) concept, where the practitioner-researcher is enabled to understand the design process as method through reflection.

### 3.4.6 Thematic Analysis

The research utilises thematic analysis – both traditional approaches and through the graphic design process – to analyse five semi-structured interviews with six participants to understand the locale, location and a sense of place. In [traditional] thematic and data analysis of qualitative research, scholars John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell remark, 'Researchers review all of the data, make sense of it, and organise it into codes and themes that cut across all of the data sources'.<sup>188</sup> Within the data collection process notes are 'written during the research process that reflect on the process or that help shape the development of codes and themes'.<sup>189</sup> Part of a traditional thematic analysis approach is getting familiar with the data and information of the semi-structured interviews and the transcriptions. Gillian Rose states that 'familiarity with sources allow you to identify ... keywords'.<sup>190</sup> I utilise my graphic design practice to further analyse and develop connections between keywords and explore meaning in relation to theories of place that, through visual diagrams, are developed into themes. Academics Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce stress that, 'framing

183 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 170.

184 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 22.

185 Ibid.

186 Ibid.

187 Ibid., p. 22

188 Creswell and Creswell op. cit., p. 257.

189 Ibid., p. 260.

190 Rose, op. cit., p. 206.





Fig. 15 Visual diagram, six stages of the research process.

and organising information in a thematic way through sensitising concepts allows us to find a way to interpret it'.<sup>191</sup> The research process was constructed in six stages which inform each other and build upon each other; see Fig 15, p. 74. Using my design practice to analyse the collected materials and through further reflection and analysis of broader themes through the development of the concertina books, I concluded there are seven key themes: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education.

### 3.5 Conclusion

The multi-methods approach provided the framework for this research. In developing this dialogical methodological framework, the relationship between theory and practice is connected through the methods that establish a narrative structure.<sup>192</sup>

In the introduction of this thesis, I discussed the definition of an ecology of semantics as a two-fold approach; to reiterate: firstly, the relationship between the methods in this research form an ecology to make meaning towards a holistic outcome of the research; secondly, the outcomes and themes of the research through my design practice as meaning-making aspects of place. The methods utilised in this research provide different modes of communication: literature, visual diagrams, conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis and graphic design practice. They are entities in themselves but connected to each other and inform each other to address the research questions. Therefore, this process presents a holistic approach to forming an ecology. As stated, an ecology is the relationship between entities and their environments. An 'ecological epistemology',<sup>193</sup> underpinning the ecology of semantics in this research, provides an understanding of situated knowledges in the meaning making processes.

The ecology of semantics makes visible, through graphic design practice, the key findings, the themes, that impact a Dutch typographic discourse to provide an understanding of the social and cultural interactions and processes of place.

In the next chapter the conversation prompt and visual material are discussed in detail as methods of inquiry.

<sup>191</sup> Crouch, Pearce, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>192</sup> Crouch, Pearce, op. cit.

<sup>193</sup> Christina Hughes and Celia Lury, 'Re-turning feminist methodologies: from a social to an ecological epistemology', *Gender and Education*, 25:6, 2013, 786–799, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2013.829910.

# Chapter Four

## Open Space: A Dialogue

## Introduction

Chapter Three set out the multi-methods approach focusing on the ways in which dialogical approaches through conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews and a concertina book, have begun to address the formation of an ecology in relation to the printed page and book.

The relationship between the methods applied in this research form an ecology of semantics (see Chapter One, p. 23).

In this chapter, I describe the development of the ‘conversation prompt’, which is a method that is part of the process of semi-structured interviews that were conducted with six participants. Specifically, I discuss what the conversation prompt is used for and the principle behind its form. This will be followed by an analysis, reflection and conclusion of the conversation prompt. The conversation prompt method is a tool that resulted from my research into strategies for collecting information<sup>194</sup> from participants. The chapter title builds on the term ‘open space’, based on the etymology of the word place. The word place stems from the Latin word *platea* meaning ‘courtyard, open space; broad way, avenue’, which derives from the Greek *plateia* (*hodos*) meaning ‘broad (way)’.<sup>195</sup> This tool, Open Space, is a print-based, A3 single sheet, folded booklet (Fig. 16). Open Space is created through graphic design as a ‘prompt’, to enrich a dialogue<sup>196</sup> with myself and selected participants (graphic designers, educators, and academics) about typography, culture and print in the Netherlands. The physical conversation prompt is utilised as a mode of communication to make abstract

194 Loi, op. cit.

195 These definitions are rooted in the word ‘plat’ meaning ‘to spread’ from the Proto-Indo-European languages. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/place>.

196 In Berg, Walsh, 2011, p.32.; Scollon, 2011.



Fig. 16 Open Space: A Conversation Prompt, folded booklet.



ideas and concepts tangible and concrete to participants. As design researcher Daria Loi suggests, a playful trigger focuses on ‘dialogue-creation, acting as communication’.<sup>197</sup> Through the questions I asked and the conversation prompt, the intention is for participants to think more deeply about how a geographical location, a place, impact Dutch contemporary typography through print.

The conversation prompt demonstrates a notion of ‘social’ space.<sup>198</sup> It becomes a ‘meeting’<sup>199</sup> place between interviewer and participants. The social space refers to the notion that this space is produced and ‘serves as a tool of thought and of action’.<sup>200</sup> It is a space for discussion to understand different cultural ways of knowing. Through the conversation prompt, the dialogic approaches contribute to the knowledge production of a typographic discourse in the Netherlands. For example, the conversation prompt opened the discussion with designer and educator Richard Niessen about his old teacher and his approaches to typography. The dialogic approaches are also informed by my own cultural and educational background in the Netherlands. The information collected from the conversations is analysed through my design practice. The meaning-making processes of the conversation prompt are discussed below.

#### 4.1 The Conversation Prompt as Cultural Object

During the design process of the conversation prompt for this research I took into consideration my own cultural contexts, perspectives and situated knowledges. Culture is a complex concept with material culture – the physical expressions of culture, such as objects or written language, and non-material culture, such as values, experiences, language and social structures. Through the object<sup>201</sup> we understand cultural values as a way of meaning making and representation.<sup>202</sup> As feminist scholar Donna Haraway states in her essay *Situated Knowledges*:

... poems, which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their *boundaries*

197 Loi, op. cit., p.237.

198 Lefebvre, op. cit.

199 Massey, op. cit., 2005, p. 68.

200 Lefebvre, op. cit., p. 26.

201 To understand a cultural object, I had the opportunity to test the idea in an international pedagogical context. An object acted as a starting point for a discussion about a topic and established a collaborative practice among students. This is showing different approaches of applying a cultural object and informed my thinking about cultural values. However, the opportunity was not directly connected to the core argument of this research, as it was applied in a teaching context.

202 Stuart Hall, op. cit., 1997.

materialise in social interaction. Boundaries are drawn by mapping practices; ‘objects’ do not pre-exist as such. Objects are boundary projects. But boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky. What boundaries provisionally contain remain generative, productive of meanings and bodies.<sup>203</sup>

The conversation prompt generates new knowledge when participants interact with it and engage in dialogue through the semi-structured interviews. Due to Covid-19, I adjusted the process and approach of the semi-structured interviews with participants from physical visits to online video conversations. This shifted my thinking about borders. With the online video conversations, geographical borders disappear and the interaction between me and the participants became a process between different geographical locations across space and time. The space of the digital realm and the social interactions provided a sense of place through the conversations. The conversation prompt contributed to a new typographic discourse through opening a discussion about different ways of seeing; the understanding (and representation) of place; and the influence and impact of place on Dutch typography.

##### 4.1.1 Typography as Cultural Object

As a graphic designer, I approach typography, both the visual letterform and the text on the printed page, as a deep understanding of culture and language. I am not a type designer but I am familiar with the visual letterform as a means of communication and how it may reflect the social and cultural<sup>204</sup> structures of a society as well as geographical locations and environments. In his book *Dutch Type* Jan Middendorp notes the geographical implications on identity: ‘The Netherlands is a small nation with big neighbours ... Throughout history, the sea has been an ally as well as a threat.’<sup>205</sup> Middendorp refers to Alston W. Purvis, an American design educator who notes that the Netherlands is ‘twenty-seven per cent below sea level, and from as early as the twelfth century this generated perpetual need to sustain an intricate network of dikes, bridges, aqueducts, dams, windmills, and canals’.<sup>206</sup> These aspects, as discussed by Middendorp, the

203 Donna Haraway. ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’, *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, 575–599. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066>. Accessed 25 July 2023 (p. 595).

204 Henk Hoeks, Ewan Lentjes, *The Triumph of Typography: Culture, Communication, New Media*, (Amsterdam: Lannoo Publishers/Terra, 2015).

205 Jan Middendorp, *Dutch Type*, (Berlin: Druk Editions, 2018), p. 9.

206 Ibid.



ability of the Dutch to work with the natural forces through ‘perfection, exactness, computation, order and planning’ contribute to a Dutch consciousness.<sup>207</sup> This consciousness is reflected in the Dutch cultural identity and visual language. These *local* events inform the visual letterform or applied typography (a text), and the typographer informs the character of the visual language from a *global* level through the exchange of global interaction. Places are where the local and the global coincide, and this process informs a better understanding of ‘its character’,<sup>208</sup> and its cultural identity. Therefore, typography on the page of the conversation prompt reflects both the local and the global activities of place. By purposely applying a Dutch typeface and through my own Dutch cultural consciousness and interactions on a global level with international students (as an educator), and design projects, the understanding of a cultural identity developed.

#### 4.2 A Visual Metaphor of the Prompt: A dot

The circle, a universal symbol, emerges as cultural phenomenon and a shape occurring in the natural world, for example in circular tree rings. It represents notions such as movement, infinity or process. In the context of this research, it is important to make a distinction between a circle and a dot. A circle indicates the outline of the shape, whereas a dot involves the circular shape filled as a whole. It is the circular shape that informs my thinking and my non-linear approach to this research, reflected in diagrams. I associate the circular shape with context, design, processes, connections, dialogues and relationships. A circular shape has no beginning and no end, and even though the circle is visually a closed shape (whether using a solid or a dotted line), I see a circle as a metaphor for open and ongoing processes. I associate it with movement. Movement reflects ongoing processes.

As a graphic designer, I translate the word ‘prompt’<sup>209</sup> visually and metaphorically as a dot. The semantics of a dot, a small round mark, cover a wide range of different meanings and metaphorical interpretations in areas such as linguistics, music, mathematics. The use of the dot as a typographic punctuation mark in the Latin alphabet refers to various definitions and approaches. Its main purpose is to mark the end of a sentence, known as the full stop. Furthermore,

207 Ibid.

208 Massey, op. cit., 1991.

209 Etymologically, the word prompt derives from the Latin ‘promptus’; from ‘promere’ meaning ‘to bring forth’, from ‘pro’ meaning ‘forward’ + ‘emere’ meaning ‘to take’. <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=prompt>.

a series of three dots, the ellipsis, indicates the omission of words or a text. Dots are also used as writing and communication systems, such as Braille and Morse code, representing letters from the Latin Alphabet. In these writing systems the dot becomes a visual mode of communication. The visual aspect of the dot is extremely important in maps. The dot represents locations of places and traces of histories.<sup>210</sup> The dot is a metaphor for connecting past, present and future. As a cultural object, the dot is a point of departure.<sup>211</sup> I used the dot as part of a way of thinking about the prompt, representing the typographic punctuation mark the full stop or period. This developed into a starting point for a ‘dialogue’<sup>212</sup> about the relationship between Dutch typography and place. It is the notion of connections and interrelations that ‘bring forth’ epistemologies of a typographic discourse.

#### 4.3 Dialogic Approaches through Print

A dialogue can exist between humans, between objects, between human and object, between human and environment, between object and environment. In *Language, Culture and Identity: The legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, Lance Strate discusses a media ecology<sup>213</sup> in relation to both dialogical and dialectical approaches in the work of cultural theorist Walter J. Ong. Strate notes: ‘Ong employs a dialogic or relational perspective, an understanding of dynamic interaction that opens the door to an even more complex ecologic’.<sup>214</sup> In Chapter Three (p. 65) I discussed the dialogic approaches used in the context of this research, both *as* method and embedded *within* methods.<sup>215</sup> In the following two sections, I discuss two approaches of dialogue that emerged through the process of making the conversation prompt and which resonate with Ong’s approach of a dialogue.

##### 4.3.1 Materials, Designer, Researcher: A dialogue

The material form of the conversation prompt reflects the physical form of the book. Through the design, testing ideas and experimenting with concepts, my thinking towards the approach of the conversation prompt shifted. The iterative

210 Ingold, 2016; Cresswell, 2015.

211 Pat Chun-Wu, ‘The Dot: Narrative, Metaphor and Transcendental Power’, in *Designwajskol*, eds. by Massimo Vignelli et al., (Oscar Riera Ojeda Publishers, 2015).

212 Berg, Walsh, op. cit.

213 Walter Ong’s perspectives on communication; culture; consciousness; print media.

214 Lance Strate, ‘Echolocations and Reverberations. Walter J. Ong’s lace in the media Ecology Intellectual Tradition, and his ongoing influence in our field’, in *Language, Culture and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, ed. by Sara van den Berg, Thomas M. Walsh, (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), pp. 159–172 (p. 161).

215 Berg, Walsh, 2011; Scollon, 2011.



Fig. 17 Material exploration of the Conversation Prompt.



Fig. 18 Imagery exploration of the Conversation Prompt.

graphic design process provides a space for thinking, making and reflecting. I developed a dialogue about the purpose of the conversation prompt and concepts of place on the page – the interaction between content and form. In this process it is imperative to address the challenge of what the *purpose* of the conversation prompt is, to use the printed ‘conversation prompt’ as a starting point for a conversation. This experimental approach towards the conversation prompt, and my reflective approach in the design process is utilised in a critical way, a ‘reflection-in-action’.<sup>216</sup> Reflection-in-action is the activity of thinking through my research and what the conversation prompt is doing, its context, and reshaping it while I am designing it in order to communicate the concept. I had reflective conversations through different materials, such as paper samples to experiment with how paper might shape or communicates ideas. The experimentation with different papers involved, for example whether I should use smooth paper or a paper with visible fibres, the colour white or more off-white and what would this add to the overall feeling or sense of the prompt; see Fig. 17. Further experimentation in the use of imagery involved testing on different kinds of paper to consider a sense of place and trialling different formats (Fig. 18).

For the purpose of the conversation prompt, my aim was to keep the design and information clear, because the conversation prompt had to be sent by post due to Covid-19 and I could not meet participants in person. Building on Schön’s

<sup>216</sup> Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 22.

‘reflective practitioner’<sup>217</sup> concept, as the practitioner-researcher, I am enabled to understand the design process as method through reflection. My own perspective as a Dutch practitioner-researcher based in the UK further shapes this design process.

My positions as both designer and researcher in this research are interconnected. The dialogic approaches between positions allow me to understand different practice processes and perspectives. As a designer, I respond to, analyse and reflect on the research questions through my design processes. As the researcher, I generate research materials, reflect on and analyse these materials. This includes, for example, the literature, conducting the semi-structured interviews and understanding different contexts. However, holding both positions allows me to undertake both ‘reflection-on-action’,<sup>218</sup> a critical skill to ‘review, evaluation and analysis’,<sup>219</sup> and ‘reflection-in-action’.<sup>220</sup>

The space of dialogue between design practice and theory produces knowledge as well as the outcome of the conversation prompt. Traces of my own histories, identities and language appear in the conversation prompt, through the making process. In reflection, my own histories, such as education, and living in both the Netherlands and the UK, made me think about identity. I look at the Netherlands from the outside, from a distance. This helps with understanding a culture better, including the nuances of languages. These traces, refer to my own [tacit] knowledges, my histories and background. My education in visual communication and visual arts in the Netherlands and the UK have impacted my design process, in terms of visual language. The conversation prompt connects print communication as a form of dialogue with the oral communication as a form of dialogue. The immersion of these forms of dialogue provides an understanding of [visual] communication. Scholars Ash Watson and Andy Bennett refer to sociologist Jeffrey Charles Alexander, in their article ‘The felt value of reading zines’, on the notion of immersion:

‘Immersion, Alexander details, is both an absorbing and projective experience where we draw an object into the self so it ‘seems to take on life’ while we ‘fall into the object’ ourselves ... In this dialectic between

<sup>217</sup> Schön, 1991; Rose, 2016.

<sup>218</sup> D. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, (Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>219</sup> Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>220</sup> Schön, op. cit.

subjectification and materialisation, ‘one no longer sees the object, but oneself, one’s projections, one’s own convictions *and* beliefs’ and ‘one lives and breathes the object, looking outside to the world from inside of it. Its texture is your texture’.<sup>221</sup>

The interactions and perspectives of others have informed my thinking. These spaces of interrelation are invisible, yet have imprinted regional identities in the conversation prompt. This is where a dialogue about the ‘processes of place’<sup>222</sup> opens and enables an understanding of typography in relation to a geographical location – the Netherlands.

#### 4.3.2 Conversation Prompt and Reader: A dialogue

The reader of the conversation prompt is the participant. The process of selecting six participants and their specific details are discussed in Chapter Five, p. 100. The participants are Hansje van Halem, Jannetje in ‘t Veld, Remco van Bladel, Joost Grootens, Toon Koehorst, Richard Niessen. They are graphic designers and educators located in the Netherlands. As graphic designers, the participants specialise in printed materials, such as book design and typographic design, but also have experience in digital design and exhibition design. As educators, they teach at different educational institutions in the Netherlands: Royal Academy of Art, The Hague, ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem, and abroad at the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen, Denmark. I selected the participants for the semi-structured interviews based on their printed work and their teaching experience (Chapter Five, p. 101). Participants received the conversation prompt prior to our conversation (see sections 4.5 and 4.5.1 of this chapter).

The printed page of the conversation prompt reinforces a cultural perception with the reader. As will be demonstrated, the clarity and simplicity of the design lead to a consciousness through the experience of using the conversation prompt by participants. The use of a serif typeface and of colours yellow and green contribute to this. One should be aware that contexts and events influence a reader. As typographer, designer and academic Gerard Unger suggests:

221 A. Watson and A. Bennett, ‘The felt value of reading zines’, *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 9, 115–149 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-020-00108-9>. p. 120.

222 Massey, op. cit. 1991.

... [T]he reader’s outlook has changed permanently. It is influenced by the era and environment in which readers grow up and live, while major events and social developments – climate change, war, epidemics, religions, globalisation, and growing conservatism – determine the mindset of the reader.<sup>223</sup>

In the introduction of this chapter, I discussed the definition of the title Open Space of the conversation prompt. The word ‘open’ refers to both the physical form of the prompt, as the dialogic form of communication between conversation prompt and participant / reader.

Holding the print-based conversation prompt in one’s hand triggers thoughts and reflections. Two participants reacted to and reflected on the conversation prompt by sharing experiences (see section 4.6.1 p. 96). This haptic dimension opens new dialogues and perceptions about materials and typography, instigating different ways of thinking. Considering the current prominent digital landscape, I believe the haptic dimension offers an important counterpoint to the digital landscape. The sense of material, the physicality of touch provokes thought, memory and experiences.

#### 4.4 The Printed Page: A dwelling place

The printed page can be described as a site where an activity or object is located. I suggest the printed page reflects a geographical location ‘which relates to other sites or locations because of interaction, movement and diffusion between them’.<sup>224</sup> Cresswell discusses the relationship between people and places as a relationship of dwelling.<sup>225</sup> I apply the concept of dwelling to the printed page – there is a relationship between the reader (participants) and the printed page (place). This ‘inhabitation’<sup>226</sup> suggests that the printed page is a dwelling place with different objects on the page. The objects – typography, image, colour – are designed at fixed locations on the page. There is no movement of these objects, however there is movement and space for concepts, ideas and dialogue.

The conversation prompt was printed on an A3 uncoated paper sheet folded into a A6 small print-based booklet<sup>227</sup>. It contains two questions and is accompanied by an information sheet (see section 4.5, p. 92). The contents of the information

223 Unger, op. cit., p. 16.

224 John Agnew, in *Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, ed. by J. Agnew and D. Livingstone, (London: Sage, 2011), p. 326.

225 Cresswell, op. cit.

226 Ibid.

227 As the instrument that elicits thoughts, feelings and memories.

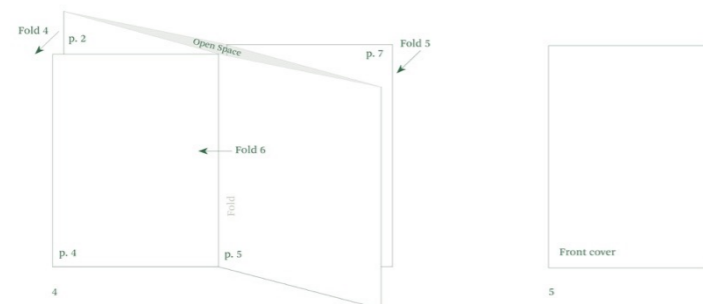
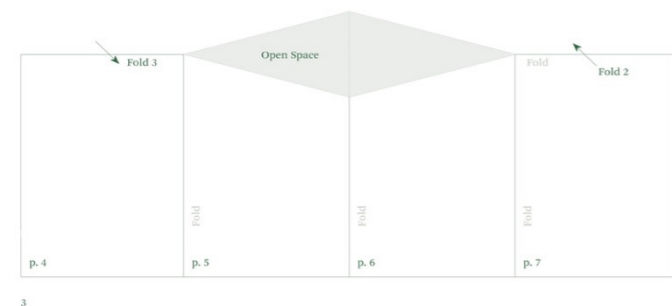
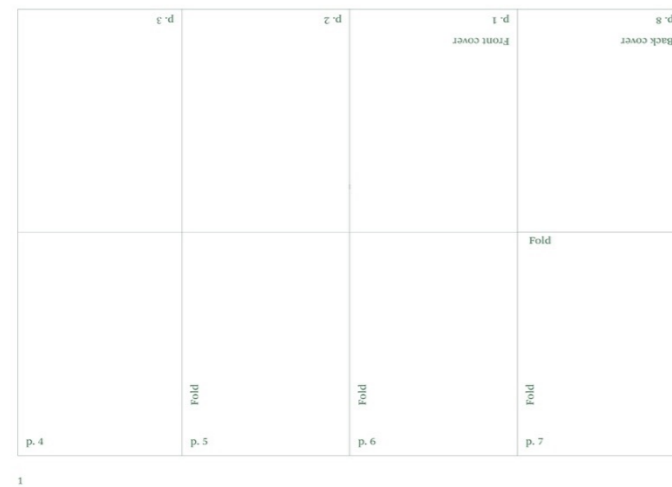


Fig. 19 Folding system of the conversation prompt.

sheet can be found in the Appendix II, p. 204. The prompt can be read visually as a booklet and unfolded into an A3 paper sheet to read the questions. I took into consideration that this print-based work would be posted to participants and therefore the size is practical. In the early stages of the preparation process of the conversation prompt, I considered various questions to use; for example, How does the location of your work influence your work?; How does a sense of place influence the process of working with typography?; What is your approach to the influences of typography in the printed book on the reader?; How is your approach of typographic design a material expression of culture? Through the process of the questions, my understanding of the concepts of place became clearer. My choice for the final two questions was based on my belief that the questions need to be clear, yet still provide room for a discussion. The two questions on the conversation prompt are distilled from the series of previous questions above.

How is Dutch typography communicating a sense of place?  
 How is your location influencing your thinking towards typography?

The folding system of the conversation prompt is a specific fold (Fig. 19, p. 88). After testing different folding systems, structural considerations and designs, the selected folding system allowed me to reflect on the form of the book and place.<sup>228</sup> Through the final folding system, I created pages that could be visually read as pages of a book, and when the sheet is unfolded the pages become one 'place' that holds the text (the questions). I started to reflect on a sense of place, both in the physical world, being in a place, as well as through images or text that represent a sense of place. This led me to focus on text on the page, its visual aspects, position, size, colour and the way it is communicating: text as contents and the visual and material aspects of language. Visual evidence of the design process of the conversation prompt is incorporated in this section (Fig. 20, p. 90).

The printed A3 uncoated paper sheet contains a physical open space – a cut – (Fig. 21) in the middle of the length of the sheet fold. This 'cut' reflects the idea of Open Space – a place for a dialogic interaction with participants – discussed in the introduction of this chapter. The physical folds in the paper material of the conversation prompt reflect on the idea of borders. Essentially, the border

<sup>228</sup> Agnew, 2005; Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 2005.



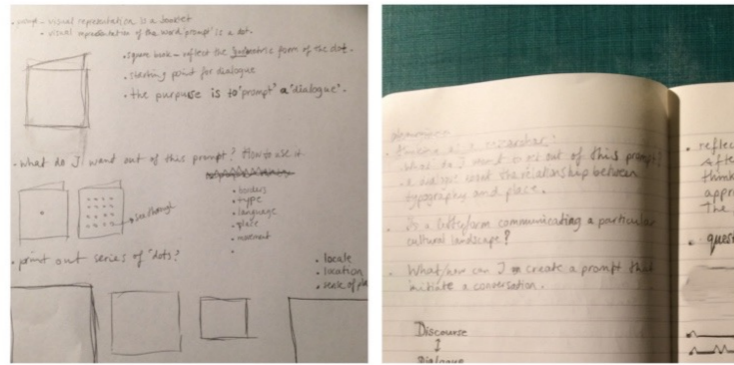


Fig. 20 Generating ideas.



Fig. 21 A cut

concept relates to the exchange and movement of Dutch typography through geographical borders.

The typography used in the prompt is the typeface FF Scala<sup>229</sup> by Dutch type and graphic designer Martin Majoor. I chose this serif typeface because it is a clear and open typeface and, because of its Dutch connection, it evidences the connection between place and typography. Only one participant (Joost Grootens) commented that it was a serif typeface. He paid close attention

229 The typeface was designed in 1991 and was designed for a specific place – the Muziek-centrum Vredenburg in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

to the conversation prompt and named aspects he noticed: typography, colour, image, folding system. This showed his awareness and knowledge and triggered his thoughts to identify typography in the Netherlands and notions of place, which is discussed in detail in section 4.5 of this chapter. He did not identify the typeface. I did not assume the typeface would be known by participants, however the designer of the typeface is a well-known type designer and known in the field of type design and it is also often used for book typography. The questions on the page are placed on either side of the A3 sheet. The cultural and natural landscapes connecting the letterform to its environment on the printed page are represented through the colours yellow and green: yellow reflects the cultural landscape and green reflects natural landscape. The visual is a landscape from Vledder, the place I am from in the Netherlands. My intention was to create a conversation prompt that provides the necessary information for the purpose of this research. The collected information from the conversations with the participants informed my understanding about the relationships between place and typography. As semiotician Gunther Kress and linguist Theo van Leeuwen suggests, ‘The universal aspect of meaning lies in semiotic principles and processes, the cultural specific aspect lies in their application over history, and in specific instances of use’.<sup>230</sup>

#### 4.4.1 Translation

Through the design process, I experimented with materials and form in the exploration of concepts. The visual experimentation translated my ideas into the conversation prompt and supported the exchange of ideas with participants. Only Joost Grootens expanded on the image of the conversation prompt in relation to place; he noted, ‘[Y]our place is depicted [as a] piece of nature with leaves’.<sup>231</sup> This was seen by Grootens as a traditional interpretation of place. There was no further discussion about the image, as the discussion moved on to his own views on place (see section 4.6.1). The conversations with Dutch participants were held in the Dutch language. However, this research was conducted at a British university – the Royal College of Art, London, (RCA) in the English language and therefore the conversations were translated into English. The English definition of the word ‘place’ is used in this research and the conversation prompt. Therefore, the conversation prompt contains a title and two questions in English. However, it is critical to understand the Dutch translation of the word ‘place’, which is ‘*plaats*’

230 Kress, op. cit., p. 4.

231 Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.

or *'plek'*. Both definitions have a subtle difference in meaning. *'Plaats'* refers to a location, whereas *'plek'* refers to both a location and a relatively small defined area. These Dutch translations, however, do not fully articulate the contemporary geographical concept of *'place'*<sup>232</sup> in the English language. At the beginning of each conversation, I explained the difference between the Dutch definition and the English definition of the word *'place'*, to explain that this research relates to the concepts of the English word. However, there was an interchangeable use of the words *'plaats'*, *'plek'* and *'place'* within the conversations.

#### 4.5 Ethics

Part of the process of conducting the conversations with participants is the ethics component of the consent form. I developed an information letter that accompanied the consent form, which was sent to participants inviting them to take part in this research. The final forms were approved by the Research Office at the RCA and are attached in Appendix III, p. 206. The participants agreed to take part in the research by confirming via email and signing the consent form. The preparation process of writing and editing the ethics form also informed my thinking and ideas about place. From the abstract theoretical concepts to a more concrete understanding of place, such as the locations where participants are based, for example, Amsterdam, Rotterdam. My own position as the designer and as researcher became clearer. Working from the inside about a topic through the design processes, and looking from the outside into the subject.

##### 4.5.1 Information Sheet

As part of the selection process, the conversation prompt was accompanied with an information sheet (Fig. 22). It provided the participant with a context of the research and three stages of how to use the conversation prompt prior the online video conversations. The information on the sheets gave participants background information and an understanding of why I had invited them for a semi-structured interview, how through conversations I gained a better understanding of the social and cultural processes that occur between designers and the place[s] in which they work, live and move through. The relationship between the conversation prompt and the information sheet inform each other's purpose. To illustrate the understanding of both the context and the use of the conversation prompt, see the image below; for the contents of the information sheet, see the Appendix II, p. 204.

232 Cresswell, 2015; Massey, 1991, 2005.

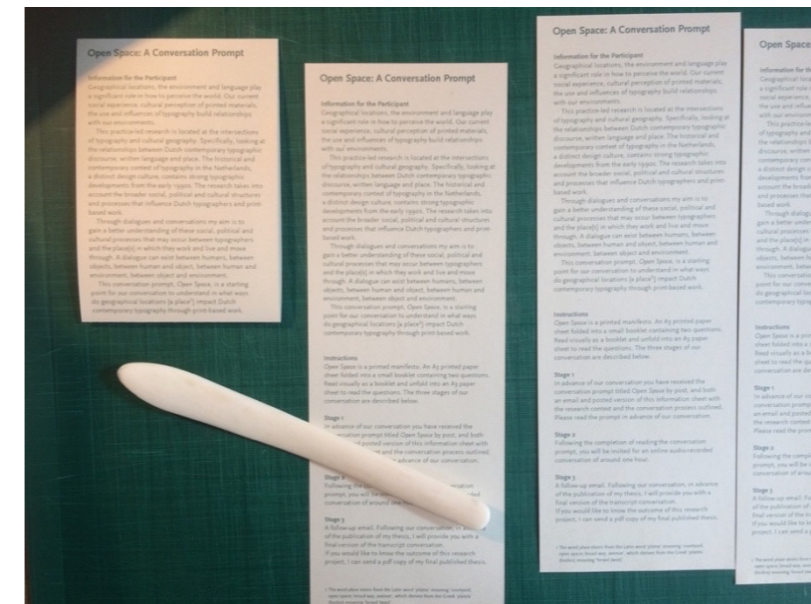


Fig. 22 Fig. 9 Information sheet.

#### 4.6 Analysis and Reflections

As discussed earlier, the conversation prompt made abstract ideas and concepts tangible and concrete to participants. After a stage of experimentation in the process of making, I developed a series of prototypes of the conversation prompt through material exploration and testing. I started testing these print-based prototypes (Figs. 23–26) with PhD colleagues at the RCA who were not involved in the conversations. I received valuable feedback from participants on the prototypes. A participant suggested being more *'bold'* in the design approach of the conversation prompt. Additionally, it was mentioned that the scale was *'timid'* and that I should reconsider the folding system as a clearer construction. Taking these comments into consideration, I reflected on how I could engage the participant more deeply with the subject matter through this conversation prompt. The spatiality of the object and the scale of the text on the page was too small. The position of the text on the page was too difficult to locate and read. The reflection on place from participants was limited at this stage but comments were made on the meaning of place itself.

I considered the folding system again, and made a clearer construction, which I discuss in detail in section 4.4 of this chapter. After receiving the feedback, I developed the conversation prompt further. The feedback was mainly related to form and structure. However, the question of why I was using printed material was raised a couple of times, as well as questions of why a book form. I believe





Fig. 23 Testing size prototype.



Fig. 24 Testing imagery prototype.

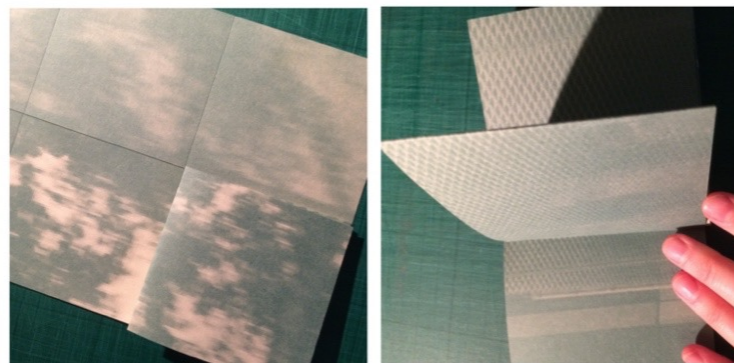


Fig. 25 Testing structure prototype.



Fig. 26 Participant testing structure prototype.

the form of the book and the tangibility of the printed material provoke ideas of related topics, such as maps or sense of place and, furthermore, interesting notions of structural ideas related to maps. 'Maps are constantly in a state of becoming', as Kitchin and Dodge put it,<sup>233</sup> remade and unfinished.<sup>234</sup> However, the scope of this research does not address the map as a specific subject.

Taking these observations and remarks into consideration, I explored and experimented further with the conversation prompt. I was thinking through the purpose of the conversation prompt. I changed the typography into bigger text on the page and used specific colours yellow and green (see section 4.4). In this iterative process of improving the conversation prompt, I developed the folding structure of the prompt. I changed the format from a small square size to an A6 folded piece. As mentioned, the reason is that this size is practical for sending by post. The conversation prompt and the information sheet were put into an A6 transparent folder. Ten copies of the conversation prompt were produced and six were posted to the participants in conjunction with the information letter, and consent forms were both posted and emailed.

As the researcher I asked myself whether I needed to have a conversation prompt to get the responses to questions. This reflection appeared after the first online semi-structured interview. Participant Hansje van Halem responded to the printed questions on the conversation prompt by reading them out loud first. I started to question whether the responses would be different with the absence of the prompt or whether I need it in the semi-structured interview process at all. This first semi-structured interview did not work the way I was aiming for. However, in the second semi-structured interview with participant Joost Grootens, a different approach happened. The participant analysed the conversation prompt in detail and stated: 'Maybe it's good that we just determine what typography and place is'.<sup>235</sup> His analysis of the conversation prompt led to the conversation about typography in the Netherlands. Therefore, in this instance the conversation was successful (discussed in the next section 4.6.1). At this point, the participant started to respond to both content and form of the conversation prompt, thus confirming how the conversation prompt could work as the starting point of a conversation to unpack the questions.

233 R. Kitchin, and M. Dodge, Rethinking maps. *Progress in Human Geography, Progress in Human Geography*, 31(3), (2007), 331-344, (p. 335).

234 Massey, op. cit., 2005, p. 107.

235 Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.

Five participants reacted to the conversation prompt with a memory, experience or relating responses to the understanding of places, such as places they work in or move through. The conversation prompt operated as an inspirational tool to elicit their responses. It enhances responses in a different way than, for example, 'playful triggers'<sup>236</sup> (see Chapter Three, p. 69), because of the interaction between content (questions) and form (design). The conversation prompt provokes experiences, histories and memories. Through the design and the material, these aspects are triggered. Participants referred to either their own experiences, or it reminded them of a particular design project or place, both physical and imaginary places.

#### 4.6.1 Findings: Conversation prompt

Prior to the online semi-structured interview, participants received visual printed material, the prompt, by post. Five of the six participants received this on time, before the interview; one participant did not due to postal delays. Five of the participants used it as a starting point for the conversation and one participant reflected on the visual printed material itself in relation to the questions and the conversation. Joost Grootens description of the prompt as a 'sterfolder',<sup>237</sup> a star-shaped folded A3 sheet, its visual aspects, both image and typography, were described. The image, a 'photograph from above'<sup>238</sup> of a physical location and the use of 'serif typography'<sup>239</sup> were described as 'quite traditional approaches'.<sup>240</sup> This was the moment he took the conversation further, as mentioned earlier, and discussed his 'broader'<sup>241</sup> view on place, aspects of place such as 'light'<sup>242</sup> and 'moments in time'.<sup>243</sup> He explained: 'Positioning I think is also an important one, so it also has to do with how you relate to a field and how you relate to society.'<sup>244</sup>

His comments suggested that, in addition to the questions, the visual aspects in the printed material 'prompted' a starting point to a conversation. The prompt purposefully uses a design-led approach that is different from simply providing

236 Loi, Daria, 'Reflective probes, primitive probes and playful triggers', *American Anthropological Association*, EPIC, Iss. 1 (2007).

237 Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.

238 Ibid.

239 Ibid.

240 Ibid.

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242 —

243 —

244 —

questions and information only in an email, for example. Demonstrating the diversity of responses, a different approach to the visual material was taken by graphic designer and educator Richard Niessen, who was reminded of an experience with his teacher, and he noted, 'I interviewed him about his typography'.<sup>245</sup> Graphic designer Hansje van Halem, and graphic designers and educators Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst used the conversation prompt pragmatically to answer and discuss the questions. These different responses to the visual prompt as a starting point of the semi-structured interviews provided me with insights as to how effective it was and provided useful material for reflection on its use. Thinking through whether a conversation or discussion needs a (visual) prompt, I concluded that *seeing* an image/text, a visual object, enables one to think differently about a topic, and that engaging with an object in your hand, interacting and having a conversation through this provides different knowledge.

The examples participants provided showed different kinds of knowledge: processes of design projects, teaching experiences, collaborations, typographic histories. Through the series of conversations with participants in the field, I gained a better understanding of the social and cultural processes that may occur between designers and the place[s] in which they work, live and move through, and how this impacted their practices and thinking. Graphic designer and educator Remco van Bladel, based in Amsterdam, mentioned the dynamic relationships between the 'environment'<sup>246</sup> (this can be a specific location) in which he works at a particular moment in time, as well as 'collaborations'<sup>247</sup> with people on a project, which influence his design process and the way he uses and applies typography.

In conclusion, the prompt was partially effective as a starting point for five of the six conversations, as one participant did not receive the prompt in time. A further limitation was that the impact may have been less than if I had visited the participants in person with the conversation prompt. Face-to-face interaction with participants and 'talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context could bring different experiences to the semi-structured interviews'.<sup>248</sup> From this process of using the conversation prompt, I learned

245 Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

246 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.

247 Ibid.

248 Creswell, Creswell, op. cit. p. 257.



that the responses vary from personal experience, memories or historical experiences. All participants referred to historical examples, for example the impact of education or teachers such as Bas Oudt<sup>249</sup> or referring to Modernism as an influence on the development of typography in the Netherlands, either to underpin their own design practice or as an understanding of the historical context of graphic design in the Netherlands. The theme of education had already started to appear.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

The outcomes of the conversation prompt Open Space are two-fold. It contributed to the content of the research, with the conversation prompt effective in generating information and understanding of typography in the Netherlands through the semi-structured interviews. This entails a knowledge exchange between the participants and me, the researcher, through the conversation prompt as a starting point for discussion. The six participants, who identify as professional graphic designers, educators, brought their own knowledge, expertise and experience to the discussion. The participants often occupy multiple roles, for example, also educators or authors. Therefore, the outcomes of the semi-structured interviews are naturally diverse. Furthermore, the shifting relationship between myself as a designer and as a researcher developed my understanding about how to approach the conversation prompt and its purpose. As the designer I developed the conversation prompt and as the researcher I used it in the semi-structured interviews. However, there is room for development for future use of the conversation prompt as a method. The design object itself could be developed further; for example, further experimentation around the idea of a sense of place could be explored in design approaches through typography and visuals. Print possibilities, such as blind embossing of text to represent a sense of place, could be explored.

The next chapter discusses the process of preparing and conducting semi-structured interviews with six participants from the Netherlands.

<sup>249</sup> Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

# Chapter Five

Living Words: A Dialogue

## Introduction

This chapter discusses semi-structured interviews as a method of inquiry – a series of six dialogues with participants from the Netherlands for understanding and collecting information. This method was designed to enable an understanding of the relationship between Dutch typography and place. In qualitative research with participants, the results of these semi-structured interviews reflect their experience and as such always result in a partial view. Through the conversations with the participants, I opened a dialogue to generate a discourse about typography in the Netherlands and how this is entangled with locations and a sense of place – an understanding of place.<sup>250</sup> Through the semi-structured interviews, I identified connections between Dutch typography and environments.

### 5.1 Situated Knowledges

Six Dutch participants, located in the Netherlands, were selected through a ‘stratified’ sampling method<sup>251</sup> for qualitative collection of information. The stratified sampling method applies a ‘clear sampling strategy’.<sup>252</sup> The strategy I applied involved four criteria as the starting point for the selection of participation: 1) active contemporary graphic designers and educators (often one and the same person) in the Netherlands; 2) typographic and book design knowledge of print-based materials; 3) practice: design/book projects in culture and/or art sector; 4) representation of gender – female and male. A sampling

250 Massey, op. cit., 2007, p. 131; Cresswell, op. cit., p.14.

251 Rose, op. cit. p. 90.

252 Ibid.

procedure provides the opportunity to make a ‘dataset manageable’.<sup>253</sup> I created a list of eight potential participants relevant to the research context, with the awareness that not everyone might be available. I was aiming to speak to six participants, since qualitative research that focuses on individuals’ experiences ‘involves a range of 3–10’<sup>254</sup> participants, to gain insight into their experiences and knowledge.

The invited participants were identified through mention of their work in recent typographic publications, such as *Gerard Unger: life in letters* (2021) by Christopher Burke, and graphic design practices. Additionally, through publisher Onomatopee Projects and educational websites<sup>255</sup>. I did not receive a reply from two potential participants, and therefore the selection process of the participants became iterative, to ensure different perspectives. Two of the chosen participants were unable to be involved, however one of these recommended another participant. I contacted this participant (graphic designer and educator) and selected one further participant through Onomatopee Projects’ website. Consideration was also given to ensure representation of both female and male participants. However, due to those participants who were unable to be involved, the representation of female and male is not equal, with the final list made up of two females and four males: Hansje van Halem, Jannetje in ‘t Veld, Remco van Bladel, Joost Grootens, Toon Koehorst, Richard Niessen. It is important to note that Jannetje in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst work together as a team.

The typographic applications in participants’ printed book projects provided examples of visual and conceptual approaches to contents and their cultural expression.

I was not personally acquainted with nor had I any interaction with the participants prior to this research. Invited participants are established design practitioners, educators and academics in the field of visual communication, graphic design and typography working in the Netherlands and abroad (both teaching and for design projects). Professor Joost Grootens teaches in Denmark and Italy; designer and educator Remco van Bladel referred to design projects in Germany and Brazil; and designer Hansje van Halem referred to a design project in China. The participants occupy different roles (see Fig. 27) at the same time and therefore their experience and knowledge comes from professional

253 Ibid.

254 Creswell and Creswell, op. cit., p. 262.

255 <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en>; <https://www.kabk.nl/>; <https://www.designacademy.nl/>.

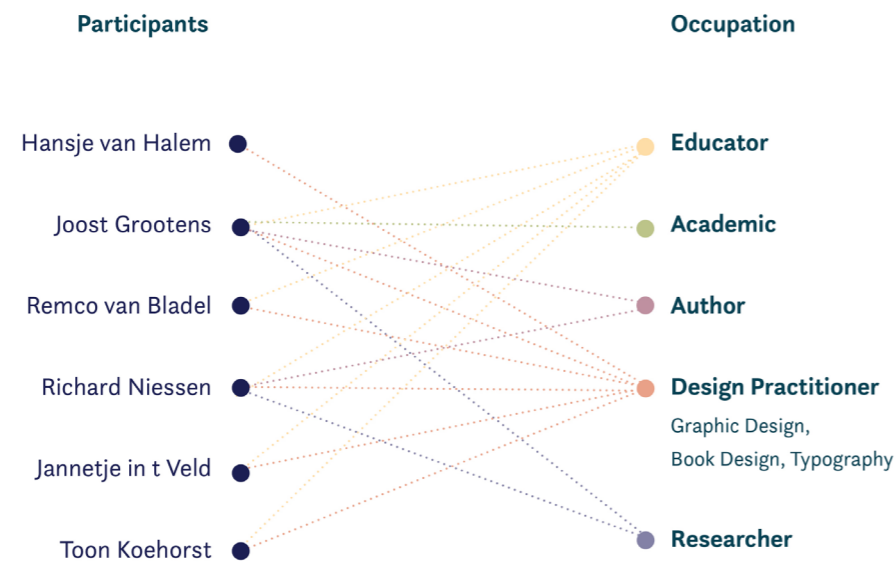


Fig. 27 Roles of the participants.

design practice and education. These movements and interactions between different geographical places and the movement between different occupations (e.g. designer, educator) show a breath of experience and an understanding of design processes in different cultural settings. The interaction between their occupations feeds into these design processes.

The online semi-structured interviews were held in the Dutch language, although two participants offered to speak in the English language. Since I have access to both English and Dutch (mother tongue) languages, the language choice was consciously made as a language ‘ideology’<sup>256</sup> in the context of this research. Professor of Applied Linguistics Ingrid Piller describes a language choice as ‘a practice and ideology’ in *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction*<sup>257</sup>. She refers to an ideology as the ‘appropriate/right’<sup>258</sup> approach to take. I believe that the use of the Dutch language for these semi-structured interviews was the appropriate choice due to respect for participants and their language and the importance of nuances in both spoken and written language. These nuances, such as cultural perception, are communicated *in* and *through* [spoken] language. It is sense perception in relationship to knowledge and

256 Piller, op. cit., p. 144.  
257 Ibid.  
258 Ibid.

understanding in language that shapes ‘human understanding’.<sup>259</sup> The Dutch language transmits a sense of place in these conversations. This was expressed through concrete examples of geographical locations in the Netherlands, such as cities like Amsterdam or Eindhoven, but also areas in the countryside, such as Oostvaardersplassen and the notion that Dutch landscapes are ‘man-made landscapes’.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, through the participants’ design experiences and processes, but also through language itself, a sense of place was conveyed.

The online recorded video semi-structured interviews with participants created spaces for the development of ideas. This space is both a ‘social space’<sup>261</sup> and a space ‘... as a product of interrelations’.<sup>262</sup> These interrelations took place between the participants, the researcher (me) and a digital Zoom environment. During the process of the semi-structured interviews, connections are made and ‘situated knowledges’ emerge in dialogue with the participants. Situated knowledge is a concept articulated by Donna Haraway in 1988 in her *Feminist Studies* article ‘Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective’.<sup>263</sup> Haraway’s view relates to, as Hughes and Lury remark:

... being situated in relations of multiplicity, or perhaps better, standpoint is the being in and of relations of situatedness. It is also about positioning – which is always a dynamic relation, and not a fixed place or identity that can all too easily solidify into an essence rather than persist as a process – and as such is able to provide the grounds of reflexive practice.<sup>264</sup>

The situated knowledges of participants, such as experiences or processes about examples of typographic projects, provide an understanding of the interrelations with their environments. Such environments include cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Leeuwarden, Arnhem), institutions (Werkplaats Typografie, Stedelijk Museum) and the environment of the printed page. As a design practitioner, I relate to these relations of multiplicity as a sense of place.

259 Berg, Walsh, op. cit., p. 5.  
260 Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.  
261 Lefebvre, op. cit.  
262 Massey, 2007, p. 10.  
263 Haraway, op. cit.  
264 Hughes and Lury, op. cit.



## 5.2 Living Words

A conversation or ‘living words’<sup>265</sup>– provides a space to develop complex ideas and understandings to further create heterogeneous perspectives. It produces ad hoc and essential information, which enables me to rethink and reflect on my research topic. Through my design practise I analyse this information and data. This is further supported by the work of C. Jan Swearingen, Professor of English, in ‘Vernacular Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Ong on Ramus, Milton and Wesley’<sup>266</sup> in *Language, Culture and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.* Swearingen writes: ‘Ong’s appraisals of the spoken and written word in different settings help us understand and appreciate verbal culture, whether oral or written, and the ways in which shared culture shapes consciousness.’<sup>267</sup>

The living words represent contemporary culture and fragments of contemporary situatedness in the Netherlands through the language in these conversations. In Western philosophy, speech has been privileged over text as a ‘vehicle for truth and understanding’.<sup>268</sup> This stems from the Classical period, with philosophies such as Plato’s focus on oral debates, writing was seen as secondary to speech. Print culture developed and changed the exchange of information, reaching audiences and communicating texts. However, I suggest that the materiality of language – typography – represents the printed text as lived; a text reflects histories and leaves traces. It reflects interrelationships between humans, places and spaces.

## 5.3 Semi-structured interviews

In preparation for the semi-structured interviews,<sup>269</sup> I contacted participants via email to establish interest and to set-up a meeting for an online audio-recorded conversation of around one hour at a time convenient to them. The semi-structured interviews use the prompt and its two questions as a starting point. This allows the semi-structured interviews to unfold naturally. During the conversations, I employed the two questions on the conversation prompt. Further unwritten questions developed from the conversation, related to what the participant discussed. The last two semi-structured interviews

265 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), p. 21.

266 Berg, Walsh, *Language, Culture and Identity: The Legacy of Walter J. Ong, S.J.*, (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), pp. 31–47.

267 Berg, Walsh, op. cit., p. 33.

268 Ibid.

269 Christopher Crouch and Jane Pearce, *Doing Research in Design*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 112.

developed into a conversational approach. As social scientist Emma Uprichard states: ‘both interviewer and interviewee are in action, co-constructing the emerging dialogue, which is being captured and composed dynamically through interaction’.<sup>270</sup>

Prior to the semi-structured interviews, I was not experienced in formal interview procedures and towards the end I developed my interview skills further. As a design practitioner, I shifted into different roles within the semi-structured interviews, as the organiser, the interviewer and the researcher. In the first two semi-structured interviews this was a challenging transition. However, participants shared experiences about their design practice with examples, design histories, teaching experiences and general views on topics such as the book, culture or Modernism. In the first interview I wasn’t sure I received the information I was looking for; over time I realised this was very valuable information and it provided insight about design processes and experiences. Once I collected the material from all participants, I was able to make connections between information from different participants and connect it to theories of place.

There was a shift from the third semi-structured interview to the fourth: it was in this shift that my confidence developed through practicing semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the last two semi-structured interviews were a little longer, over an hour, than the previous three. The conversations developed instinctively within the process. For example, in my conversation with Remco van Bladel, he discussed how different locations he works in (for example, the French countryside) influence his thinking and the impact of the people one works with. I commented on this with the notion that different contexts are created. This consequently opened a discussion about his design practice.

The conversations might have been longer if they had not been restricted by the online video conversation and the conversation prompt would be more prominent in the conversation when conducting semi-structured interviews in person. Another significant observation is that I, the interviewer and researcher, was looking into the Netherlands from an outside perspective,

270 Emma Uprichard, ‘Capturing and composing: Doing the epistemic and the ontic together’, in *Routledge Handbook of Interdisciplinary Research Methods*, C. Lury et al, (London: Routledge 2018), p. 87.

based in London. This approach informed my thinking to better understand the layers of a place, its design histories and the use of visual language within typographic applications or education.

The collected information is ‘untreated’ and is analysed through design practice (see Chapter Six) as [traditional] thematic analysis and reflection.<sup>271</sup> The heterogeneous perspectives of the semi-structured interviews ‘derive from a position in time and space ...’<sup>272</sup> providing a better understanding of situated epistemologies that informed my thinking to support the traditional thematic analysis, both through traditional approaches (reading transcriptions) and through design practice that further analyses the themes. I believe the conversations channel an essence and understanding of typography and concepts of place and the relations between these two. In my conversation with Remco van Bladel we discussed the influence of the Werkplaats Typografie<sup>273</sup> in the 1999s in the Netherlands. He explained, ‘[T]ypography suddenly becomes extremely important in graphic design and the Netherlands is completely central to this’.<sup>274</sup> He further explained the influence of people and mentioned Stuart Bailey who ‘actually export[ed] Dutch typography to other places’.<sup>275</sup> This example provides different concepts of place. The geographical places of the Netherlands and the city of Arnhem, but also the locale, the university as a place for interaction. It provides an understanding of the relationships between typography and place (see Chapter Six, p. 113).

#### 5.4 Transcriptions

I collected the information from the recorded online video semi-structured interviews and transcribed the Dutch conversations with software (Microsoft Word) into text. This text was then translated with software (Microsoft Word) into English. Most of the Dutch text was translated well into English and captured the nuances of the original conversations, but the limitations of automated translation using this software, is that it does not translate every word correctly. Consequently, I went through the software translation, with both the video recording (in Dutch) and the Dutch text next to it, to manually review and tweak some words to make sure the English text had the same intent as the

271 Crouch, Pearce, op. cit.; Schön, op. cit.

272 Reiter, Bernd, (ed.), *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 130.

273 A two-year Master’s programme, part of the ArtEZ University of the Arts, Arnhem.

274 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.

275 Ibid.

Dutch version. The transcription is used as the collected data and information to reflect on through my design practice, the tangible reflections visualised within the concertina books.

#### 5.5 Analysis and Reflection

This section discusses initial findings from the process of the semi-structured interviews.

The transition from design practitioner to interviewer provided understanding of different perspectives from participants on design processes, movement through places and experiences. An analogy can be made between an interviewer and a professional design practitioner, specifically regarding dialogical aspects. Prior to design processes and execution of a professional graphic design project (e.g. books), conversations take place with collaborators. These conversations are akin to the conversations of the semi-structured interviews, albeit with a different purpose. The aim of the discussion is to develop the understanding of a topic through the conversation. As a communication tool, the conversation prompt was used (see Chapter Four, p. 77) as the starting point for the conversations. Through the method of semi-structured interviews, I was able to explore initial ideas and understandings about place and typography in the Netherlands to respond to the research questions:

- How can notions of geographical location (a ‘place’) inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?
- What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

Specifically, through the storytelling about experiences and knowledges from participants, Jannetje in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst discussed the international context of design education. They noted that, ‘education has become so English language’-oriented.<sup>276</sup> This influences the cultural production of graphic design in the Netherlands, as cultural nuances within the Dutch language get lost in translation.

During the semi-structured interviews with the six participants, it became clear that participants operate outside the borders of the Netherlands and there are strong global interactions with people. Through their experiences and knowledges, I gained initial insights of cultural aspects (teaching, education,

276 Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.

cultural exchange) that impact their design practice. Since the process of formal interviews was new to me, I developed my skills in an iterative way. Through the practice of the semi-structured interviews my confidence grew, I listened active and was engaged and therefore my conversational skills developed.

### **5.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the semi-structured interviews and the process of preparing and conducting the interviews were successful, providing material for this research. I developed my skill set around conducting semi-structured interviews, in preparation, organising, communicating with participants, conversations, analysis. By practicing semi-structured interviews, the conversations between me and the participant became longer, and therefore I was able to anticipate questions within the conversation. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were limited to the online setting. The opportunity to conduct an in-person semi-structured interview would have added to the research as, I believe, having the conversation in the participant's environment would have provided further context and understanding for the discussions. Nevertheless, the online video interviews supported a rich conversation that provided information. Furthermore, the responses from the semi-structured interviews developed the understanding of typography in the Netherlands through participants' experiences, opinions and explanations of design processes in relation to the different places they interact with and move through. These experiences and interactions supported the development of the themes of this research.

In the next Chapter I discuss the thematic analysis of these semi-structured interviews through my design practice and my reflection, the process of these findings and key themes. I utilise my design practice as a method of analysis. Through thematic analysis, and the process of making, key themes are developed. I make visible and tangible the findings that emerge from the semi-structured interviews and my design practice.

# Chapter Six

## The Book as Place: A Tangible Dialogue



## Introduction

In Chapters Four and Five, I discussed the conversation prompt and processes of the six semi-structured interviews. My conclusions were that the conversation prompt as a method proved to be partially effective in its use of a printed object to initiate discussions about typography and place. The method of semi-structured interviews originally meant to be held in the participants' environment was affected by the online video settings due to Covid-19. Nonetheless, the resulting dialogue with participants provided information and knowledge about examples of their design practice, and an understanding of cultural landscapes, such as design histories and education in the Netherlands.

The traditional analysis of the semi-structured interviews and design practice provided the initial research themes: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education, (discussed below) and further insights into the practitioners' connections between applied typography, social structures and approaches of place. The themes were developed through keywords from the semi-structured interviews into a seven visual diagrams (pp. 134–140). The keywords relate to the approaches of place as the geographical place, the locale, and a sense of place in the visual diagram. The relationship between these three different approaches of place and their keywords form the theme.

In this chapter I will discuss and analyse these three approaches of place in detail within each of the main themes. Specifically, this chapter makes the intangible spoken word tangible through the place of a concertina book. However, this book is not one that simply places word-for-word transcriptions on its pages. The concertina book is a space for experimentation, a space for research and a place for ideation. The ideation is about how ideas form within the design process in

relation to answering the research questions through a deeper understanding of the semi-structured interviews and place. It makes visible the relationship between Dutch typography and place through the themes on the page. The way it becomes tangible in the space of the book is through a dynamic interaction between the living word and the page.

### 6.1 A Brief Outline of Process

This chapter builds upon the collected information and presents an analysis of findings of the semi-structured interviews with six participants using traditional thematic analysis and my graphic design practice as analysis – a process of 'analysis as a creative construction'.<sup>277</sup> This process makes sense and meaning of the information through the creative development of the concertina book.

Earlier in the thesis, I introduced and discussed the concept of an ecology of semantics. Ecology refers to the relationship between entities and their environment. Semantics refers, here, to the meaning-making processes. I arrived at this definition of an ecology of semantics by taking a two-fold approach to this research: one, the relationship between the methods in this research forming an ecology to make meaning towards a holistic outcome of the research; two, the outcomes, the themes forming an ecology of the research through my design practice revealing aspects of place that make visible the connections between typography and the Netherlands and articulate how these entanglements work.

The first step in a traditional thematic analysis identified broader themes in the literature review, like technology and history. This reflected in Chapter Two, section 2.2, with a selection of publications about typography,<sup>278</sup> published in the Netherlands, Europe and the US. The absence of critical approaches, thinking and writing about themes such as landscape and spatiality started to emerge. In Chapter Two, section 2.5 of the literature review approaches of the environment are discussed, both natural and cultural environments. In Chapter Two, sections 2.6 and 2.7, spatiality emerged as an approach of typography on the page.

I tested the themes by relistening and looking for patterns in the semi-structured interviews and transcriptions to validate them, which I discuss in this chapter in detail. Additional themes emerged from the semi-structured interview

<sup>277</sup> Gray, Malins, op. cit. p. 155.

<sup>278</sup> Publications take historical viewpoints or technical approaches, for example, Gerard Unger, 2007; Robin Kinross, 2004.

analysis that were not foregrounded in the literature review: education, borders, and locality. Time refers to the history in the literature review and the semi-structured interviews, and to the design processes of participants. I will discuss the next steps of the thematic analysis in detail in the following pages. To reiterate: the themes are: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education.

## 6.2 Documenting Contemporary Dutch Typography: Semi-structured interviews and transcriptions

The transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews (see Chapter Five) are created for two reasons: firstly, as documentation and evidence of the online video conversations since all individual recorded information was destroyed after the information was collected and transcribed and secondly, quotes from the English transcriptions are used throughout the thesis. The English transcriptions were used as material to which I applied the process of analysis through graphic design practice. However, there was a back-and-forward process between listening to the video recordings and reading the transcriptions in Dutch and English. This interaction allowed for more nuanced understandings of the semi-structured interviews, including the non-verbal communication cues such as connotation or pauses.

Fig. 28, p. 117, is an example of a transcription. The blue text is the Dutch language and the black text is the English language, to make the distinction between the two. It is crucial to clarify that the transcriptions of semi-structured interviews are a different form than a published text. Semi-structured interviews are spoken words, organic and fluid. Therefore, the transcriptions are a representation of these spoken words. Scholar Werner H. Kelber refers in his article ‘The Work of Walter Ong and Biblical scholarship’<sup>279</sup> to relationships between biblical text and spoken words. He explains: ‘[S]poken words function in live social contexts in a way written words do not’.<sup>280</sup> A published text, whether published in a book, online or elsewhere, goes through several stages before it was published. From writing, editing, rewriting, editing to proofreading and publication. Many eyes and hands go through a published text, and these stages often involve different people. The transcriptions in this research are not approached as a published text, but as the written form of the spoken word. It is the living word I analyse as such, not a published text, the transcriptions accompany this process.

279 Berg and Walsh, op. cit.  
280 Ibid., p. 60.

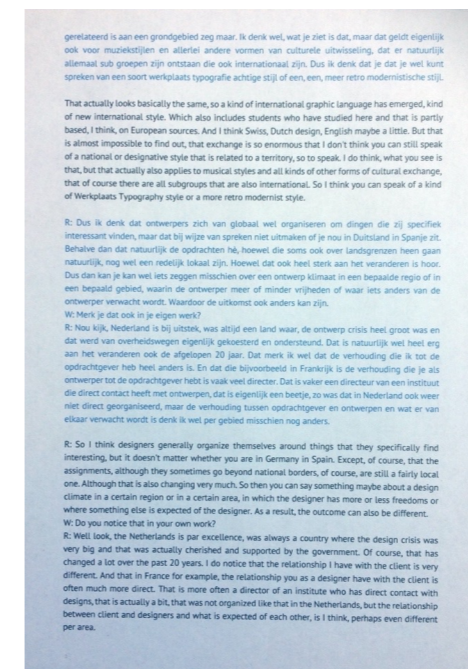


Fig. 28 Extract transcription Richard Niessen. In translation process. English and Dutch languages.

Listening is a form of reading that enables the understanding of non-verbal communication as well as the spoken content. This approach is discussed by Tim Ingold referring to Walter Ong in his aligning of both listening and reading. Ingold explains: ‘It is as though listening to speech were a species of vision – a kind of seeing with the ear, or ‘earsight’ – in which to hear spoken words is akin to looking at them’.<sup>281</sup> Reading the living word, both through video recordings and transcriptions, reflects a moment in time for the reader. Through the reading process over time, the content material can be (re)contextualised and translated into meanings. Designer, artist and educator Marian Macken discusses reading and time in *Binding Space: The book as Spatial Practice*; she states: ‘Reading may be private and suggests an intimacy of engagement: it is an active relationship between a representation or object and the individual’.<sup>282</sup> Reading, therefore, is an active event of ‘engaging’<sup>283</sup> with the living word.

281 Ingold, op. cit., p. 9.

282 Marian Macken, *Binding Space: the book as spatial practice*, (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 153.

283 Gibbons, A. (2012) ‘Multimodal Literature and Experimentation’, in Bray, J., Gibbons, A. and McHale, B. (eds) *Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, (London; New York: Routledge), pp.420–434, p. 421.

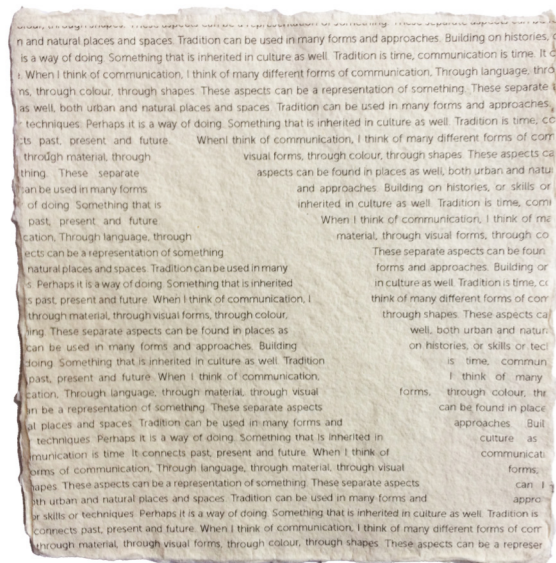


Fig. 29 Early reflections on the semi-structured interviews between readings of transcriptions, 2021.

### 6.2.1 Reading the Living Word: Reflections

Engaging in the listening and reading process provides a deeper understanding of the contents. The act of listening and reading is sensory, using sight, touch, sound and involves turning pages of transcriptions, going back and forward between the semi-structured interview recordings and pages of the transcriptions. The thinking and reflective process, in between listening and reading, provided a space for a small series of initial reflections through design practice to familiarise myself with the information. This experiment and approach to understand the content I collected and generated, was created early in the research. These experimental design reflections functioned as ‘punctuation marks’ in between listening and reading, as an interval for thinking through the information. These typographic explorations reflect on semi-structured interviews and ideas of place. The white space in the text on the page reflects a moment in time, and the invisibility of the spoken word.

The resultant short reflective text is a collection of loose thoughts, ideas, questions and wonderings. This text (see Appendix IV, p. 208) was used as the basis for the textual content of the design explorations (Fig. 29).

The size of the page, a square (150 mm x 150mm), refers to the size of the journal *Wendingen* discussed in the semi-structured interview with Richard Niessen<sup>284</sup>.

284 Page size inspired by the square journal *Wendingen* (see Chapter Two) published from 1918 to 1932, established by architect and typographer Hendrik Wijdeveld.



Figs. 30 and 31 Preliminary typographic explorations, 2021.

The process of these typographic explorations becomes a place of dialogue between the designer (me) and the materials. In Fig. 30 and 31, I tested layers of text on top of each other, so the texts are in conversation with each other. Gray and Malins refer to Donald Schön in their publication *Visualizing Research*,<sup>285</sup> who describes ‘design as a “conversation”, where design is considered as a dialogue between the designer and her work’.<sup>286</sup> The reflective text consists of five layers (referring to the five semi-structured interviews); the first layer is the complete reflective text and the next four layers are words (for example, materiality, stories, cities) from the text relating to the location of place, the locale and a sense of place. Experimenting with the reflective text informed my thinking through the material from the semi-structured interviews. The words that overlap, the darker areas of text (Figs. 32–35, p. 120–122), reflect on the research question about how cultural influences reveal connections between Dutch typography and its environment. The tones of grey in the layered text represent past and present, the light text refers to cultural influences from the past (e.g. modernism, referred to in the semi-structured interviews). The dark text refers to the present time (e.g. globalisation). The physical places in which design practices and education are carried out also show different cultural identities.

I synthesised the content of the semi-structured interviews in relation to my understanding of the three aspects of place; location, locale, sense of place.

285 Gray, Malins, op. cit.

286 Ibid., p. 153.









at that moment in time. The printed magazine was published in parallel with the early digital typographic and design developments on the computer. The digital technology provided opportunities to experiment on the page. Technology was an aspect I was not specifically looking for (I was not ignoring it either). I was looking for an approach or understanding about its visual communication and providing a cultural perspective on typography in the Netherlands.

The spoken words of the participants are a form of marking as well: they leave traces, ponderings, thoughts, histories, experiences, sounds, impressions, contexts. This textuality of spoken words involves relationships, the voice of the researcher (me) and the voices of the participants are interacting. This dialogical interaction resonates with the idea of a diagram. In her article 'Diagrammatic Writing',<sup>288</sup> Johanna Drucker discusses the concept of the diagram. She notes: '[T]he elements of a diagrammatic system create value in relation to each other, not as an image of or stand-in for something else'.<sup>289</sup> It is not the markings themselves, the notations on the page or sections in the transcriptions that create different approaches of thinking about place. It is this relationship between the living word and marking that creates different avenues of thinking. Typography as inscriptions on the printed page can be described as a form of marking (discussed in this section 6.4., p. 142).

To further understand quotes and their contexts from participants, I followed Agnew's tripartite definition of place that is made up of interlinked elements: sense of place, locale, location (see Chapter Two, p. 36). These criteria are established in the analysis with due consideration of the research questions:

How can notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?

What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

The three elements feed into the processes of a place;<sup>290</sup> for example, in Figs. 37 and 38, p. 125, the transcription of the semi-structure interview with Hansje van Halem, I referred to her experience of being part of an exhibition, *100 Years of Graphic Happiness*<sup>291</sup> in Nanjing, China, as the approach of movements and

288 Johanna Drucker, 'Diagrammatic Writing', *New Formations, Lawrence and Wishart*, Number 78, Summer 2013, pp. 83–101(19).

289 Drucker, op. cit., p. 84.

290 Massey, op. cit. 1991.

291 Semi-structured interview, Hansje van Halem, 2021.

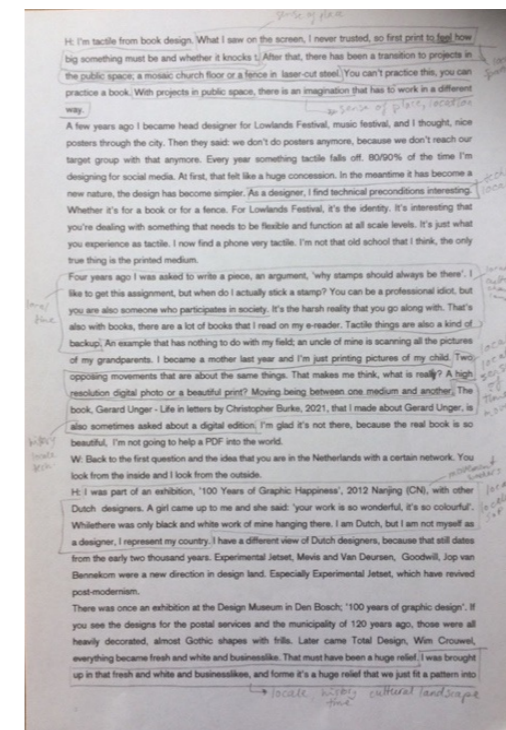


Fig. 37 Transcription extract with markings. Semi-structured interview with Hansje van Halem, 2021.

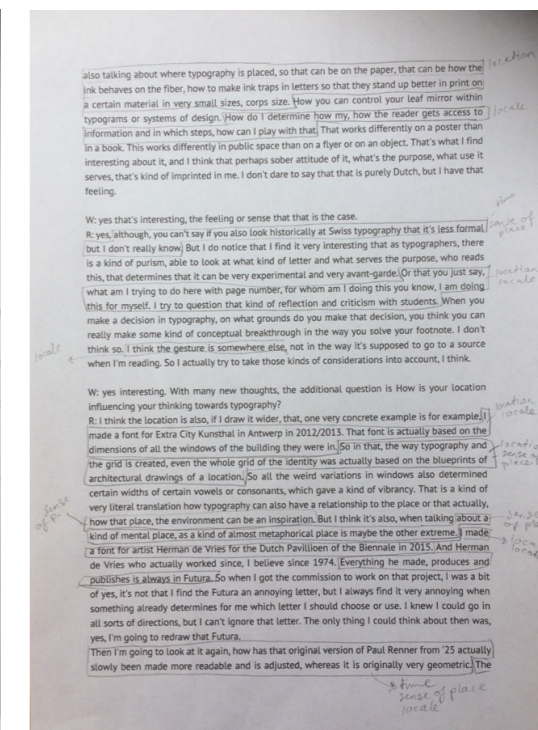


Fig. 38 Transcription extract with markings. Semi-structured interview with Richard Niessen, 2021.

crossing borders to different locations and cultures. The locale of the exhibition provided a cultural exchange of design approaches.

I asked myself questions, such as, how can I look differently at the content of the semi-structured interviews, not only for the obvious definitions of place, but also for the unexpected. Questions arose, about what time means; what the impact of education or the global movement of typography is? These internal dialogues provided a way of becoming familiar with the collected information from the semi-structured interviews.

In the process of analysing the semi-structured interviews in conjunction with the transcriptions (identifying, marking and looking for patterns), quotes and keywords that were relevant and related to the three approaches of place were marked on the physical page. The quotes further evidence the themes discussed later in this chapter. In Fig. 38 I provide a second example extract from one of the conversations with Richard Niessen.

As a designer I integrated colours (Fig. 39) in the transcriptions to make connections between ideas, quotes and identifying themes. For example, in the semi-structured interviews I noted participants discussed topics related



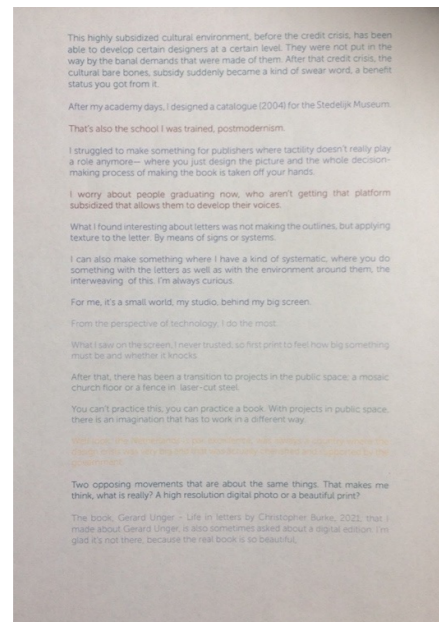


Fig. 39 Quotes extracted from transcriptions with colour coding.

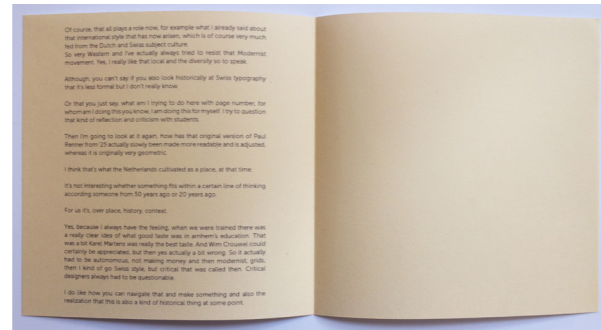


Fig. 40 Quotes collated from transcriptions with colour identification.

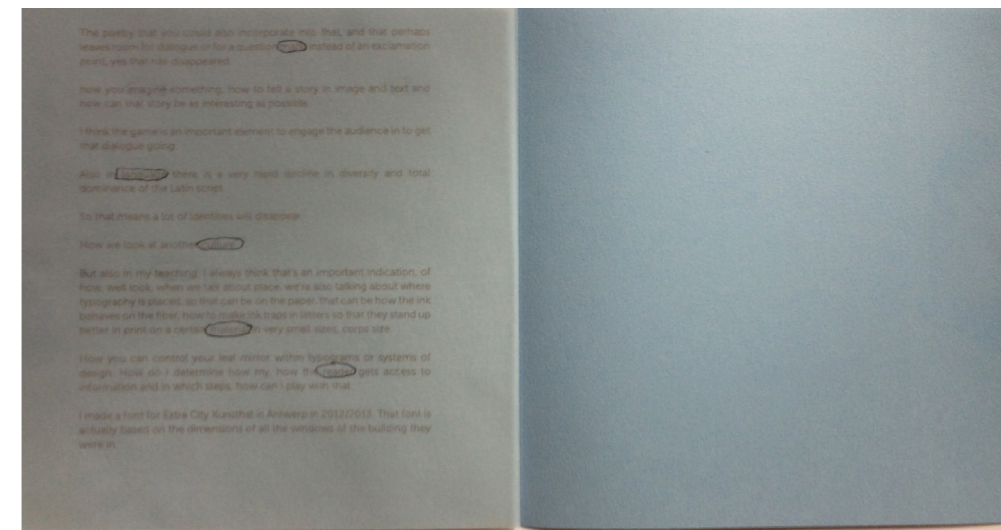


Fig. 41 Identifying keywords (e.g. language, material, reader) in text through translucent paper.

to history, such as examples of the influence of the Werkplaats Typografie or designer Karel Martens. Therefore, these sections in the transcription received the colour yellow, and further sections that referred to time, in relation to the three approaches to place, became yellow too.

This developed into a collating of coloured quotes to a double-spread page<sup>292</sup> (Fig. 40) to understand the relationships between different meanings. This refers to the idea of spoken word as a diagram, as mentioned earlier. However, Johanna Drucker refers to a form of diagram in ‘Diagrammatic Writing’<sup>293</sup> as:

... [T]hose graphical expressions that take advantage of spatial organisation to structure semantic relations. These graphical expressions are themselves meaningful as forms – they are a kind of poetics, or poeisis, a bringing into being of meaning through making.<sup>294</sup>

When the quotes are collated on to the page, it operates as a typographic diagram, making visible sections from the semi-structured interviews on the page to further define key themes.

292 The background colour refers to the colour coding of the quotes.

293 Drucker, op. cit.

294 Drucker, op. cit., p. 88.

To define the themes, I identified keywords by using translucent<sup>295</sup> paper on top of the transcription sections, and circling keywords (Fig. 41). In reflecting on the three theoretical approaches of place, I asked myself, how spoken language is materialised into visual language and how it provides a sense of place. Is this through images or through sound or written languages through typography or scripts? How can we see a sense of place? One can hear it perhaps in a spoken language and get a sense of place. The translucent paper is a material metaphor for a different location where another interaction takes place with the semi-structured interviews through the transcription sections. These interactions with the spoken words are another layer of meaning. The keywords are material representations of the conversations and small fragments that provide directions of thinking. For example, keywords such as language or teaching, direct me into how important the Dutch language is in a teaching context or how one’s cultural background influences a visual language.

The shapes on the translucent paper, which represent the [spoken] keywords on the page, informed an experimental approach of cut-outs and reflecting on the semi-structured interviews. In the process of keywords identification,

295 One can see through translucent paper and therefore see the sentence where the keywords came from.

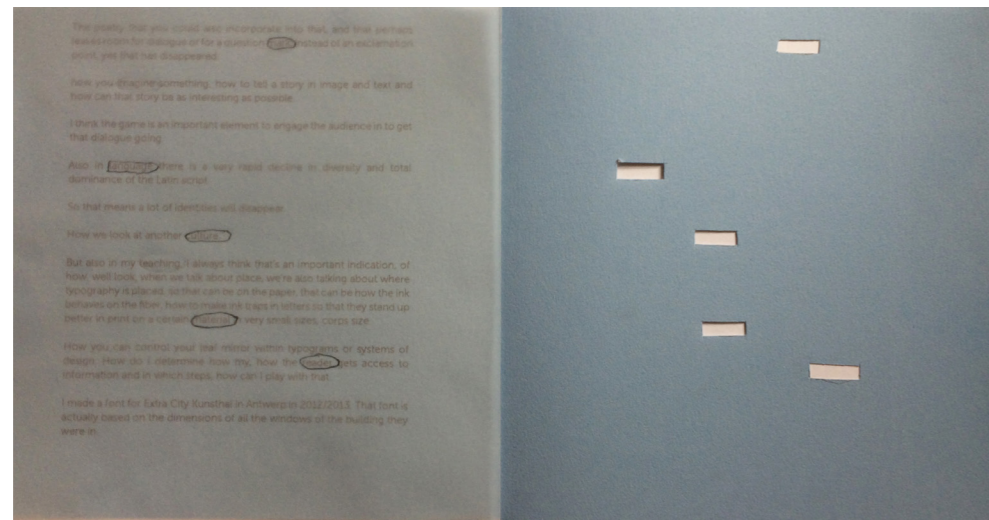


Fig. 42 Identifying keywords cut-outs, right page.

I cut out shapes (representing keywords such as social environment, culture, tradition) on the opposite page of the double spread (Fig. 42). Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, professor of Literature and Comparative Media discusses the literary work in Jonathan Safran Foer's book *Tree of Codes* (2010), in her article 'Old and New Medialities in Foer's *Tree of Codes*'<sup>296</sup>. The literary work is based on Bruno Schulz's 1934 'Street of Crocodiles' and creates a new story by die cuts in the text on every page. She states:

... words, their specific position on the page, the layout of that page, and its cut-out forms display, perform, in short, 'do' not just what they say but what they may have purported in their previous context, what they might have been, or, precisely, never could have been.<sup>297</sup>

The cut-outs are a form of marking through the paper material and make visible the keywords when folding the double-spread pages (Fig. 43, p.129). However, this is problematic since the context of the [spoken] word disappears when turning the double-spread pages. Therefore, going back to the translucent paper and cut-out shapes in this material (Fig. 44, p. 129) keeps the context visible to understand the meaning, yet separates out the keywords. This provides clarity in relation to the meaning of the keywords.

296 Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, 'Old and New Medialities in Foer's *Tree of Codes*', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.3 (2011).

297 Brillenburg Wurth, op. cit., p. 5.

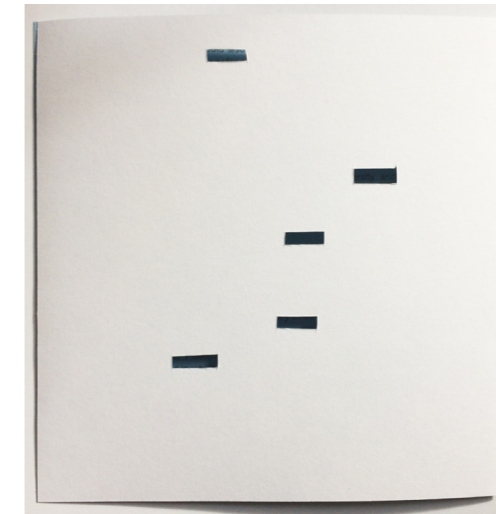


Fig. 43 Folded double-spread pages. Identifying keywords visible through cut-outs. Keywords are: mark, language, material, reader.

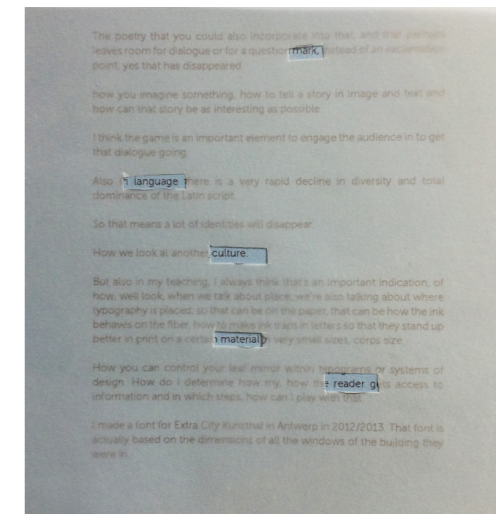


Fig. 44 Testing the cut-outs paper.

In *Tree of Codes*, Jonathan Safran Foer creates different reading experiences and therefore different contexts by the removal of words within text. The book was designed by graphic designer Sara de Bondt. The design of the words on the pages and the interaction between the pages provides a movement of words and contexts that is not linear. The structure of the book plays with the temporality of the story.

The experiment, by contrast, is making visible connections between words, keeping context, that created an understanding of social and cultural interactions in and through places that impact typography in the Netherlands – the things we can't see. The cutting out of shapes informed my thinking about space and place on the page, as well as in the real world. The cut-outs became a spatial shape at a location on the page. A moment of reflection. The cut-out shapes as the 'locale' of the page. The locale, as Agnew refers to it, are the 'material setting for social relations'.<sup>298</sup> These social relations represent interaction between the researcher and the semi-structured interviews or, for example, the discussion about how the Dutch cultural landscape changed through internationalisation of cultural exchanges in education or design projects. These social relations, the locale, create a new place for knowledge exchange. Remco van Bladel states: 'In the 2000s, suddenly the revaluation of typography became a kind of leading object within graphic design'.<sup>299</sup>

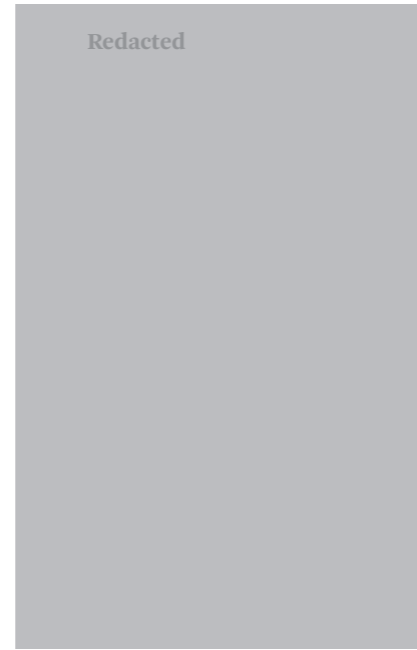
298 Agnew in Cresswell, 2015.

299 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.





**Fig. 45** Cover of Dutch art magazine *Wendingen*, November 1922. Cover design by Jan Duiker and Bernard Bijvoet.



**Fig. 46** Building plate / poster 'M for Living In', Design Richard Niessen, 2019 silkscreen print: Lezart.

The mark, as the material representation of the spoken word, indicates that something is happening at that location of the page. Following the marks on the page with the eye, the shapes become punctuation marks, a pause, a fragment. As Tim Ingold suggests, '... punctuation marks, which once signposted turning points on a walk or pauses along the way, have come instead to indicate joints of an assembly, marking of the segments of a vertically integrated, syntactic structure'.<sup>300</sup> If these marks are indeed joints of an assembly, I argue that these marks prompt discussions for further connections.

The square format<sup>301</sup> is inspired by the square journal *Wendingen* (see Chapter Two) published from 1918 to 1932, established by architect and typographer Hendrik Wijdeveld. In the semi-structured interviews with Niessen, we discussed Wijdeveld's work (Fig. 45, p. 130) in relation to Niessen's project 'The Palace of Typographic Masonry', an online and offline project that explores the variety of graphic languages and systems within societies (Fig. 46, p. 130). He referred to the work of Wijdeveld as 'he builds his designs',<sup>302</sup> specifically in relation to the title of his project. Niessen further explains that colleagues of Wijdeveld referred to his work as 'typographic masonry'.<sup>303</sup> As the pages become a place where typography is static and building ideas and connections, it provided a place where conversations become visible. However, as Massey argues, places are always in process;<sup>304</sup> there is a movement within places and beyond. Places, therefore, are not static. It is the typography on the page, in the book, that reflects the process of cultural exchange at that moment, a culmination in that present. Joost Grootens, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst discussed how they create work that reflects a particular moment in time: typographic discourse will therefore always be in process. It is impacted by the intersection of the local and global flows of people, education and knowledge. Niessen's typographic project reflects on typography both in the Netherlands and other cultures. Niessen's projects informed my thinking about my own design experiments, how I use typography on the page, for what purpose and the use of languages. The context in which typography is operating and the place where this is happening makes connections between history and present times.

<sup>300</sup> Ingold, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>301</sup> Size of the single pages is a 210 mm x 210 mm square, forming a 420 mm x 210 mm double page spread.

<sup>302</sup> Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Massey, op. cit., 1991.

Through the information collected from the semi-structured interviews, I reflected on how we communicate through the places one moves through. Whether communication is through the spoken word (Dutch or English) and/or through visual aspects of typography, and 'how to tell a story'.<sup>305</sup> I questioned whether typography is a story or is a place a story? The spaces that are created through the cut-outs respond to the stories, interactions and experiences of participants. How is a story providing a sense of place? Remco van Bladel mentioned the idea of a 'mental place'<sup>306</sup> as a way of working other than from a physical location, which means one is not bound to a specific physical location. He refers to a design project he completed for Dutch artist Herman de Vries who lives in Germany. A conceptual artist working with elements and products from the natural world. Van Bladel visited de Vries in Germany and designed a typeface called *Natura*, which was based on the typeface *Futura* by Paul Renner. *Futura* was used by de Vries for many years, but van Bladel recreated a typeface that reflected the conceptual thinking of the artist and his work. The conceptual thinking is referred to as a 'mental place'. This story provides an approach of conceptual thinking that reflect a sense of place, the natural world through typography.

After the identification of keywords, the understanding and making connections between [spoken] words and contexts, the seven themes emerged: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education. To evidence, make visible and readable the keywords that belong to each theme, the keywords are assembled in seven visual diagrams, one for each theme (Fig. 47–53, p. 134–140). The keywords that relate to the theme are highlighted. Notwithstanding, it is important that all keywords are visible to show the entanglement between themes in relation to different aspects of place, sense of place, locale or location. Throughout the semi-structured interviews, in conjunction with reading the transcriptions, it became apparent that keywords and their contexts sometimes overlap within themes. This is made more evident when printing the diagrams on translucent paper (Fig. 54, p. 141) and place them on top of each other. It makes visible the relationships between themes and keywords.

305 Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

306 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.

However, it only provides a two-dimensional visual and relational aspect of the themes. In order to further understand these themes as aspects of place, they are analysed and reflected upon, through the concertina book, in relation to the research questions and the processes of place, both locally and globally. This process is discussed in the next section 6.4 through the concertina book, as a three-dimensional relational practice.









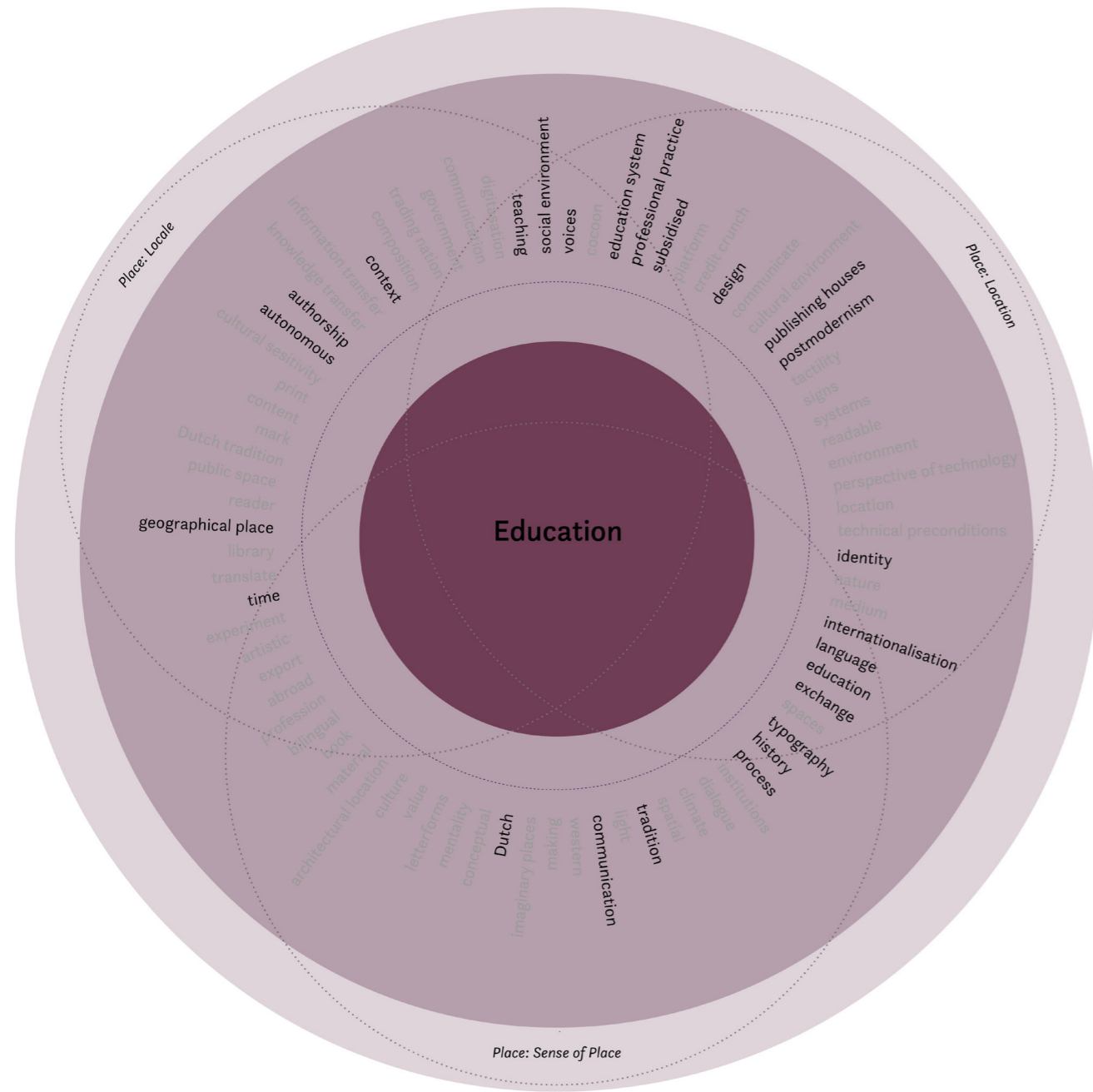


Fig. 53 Visual diagram theme Education with keywords.

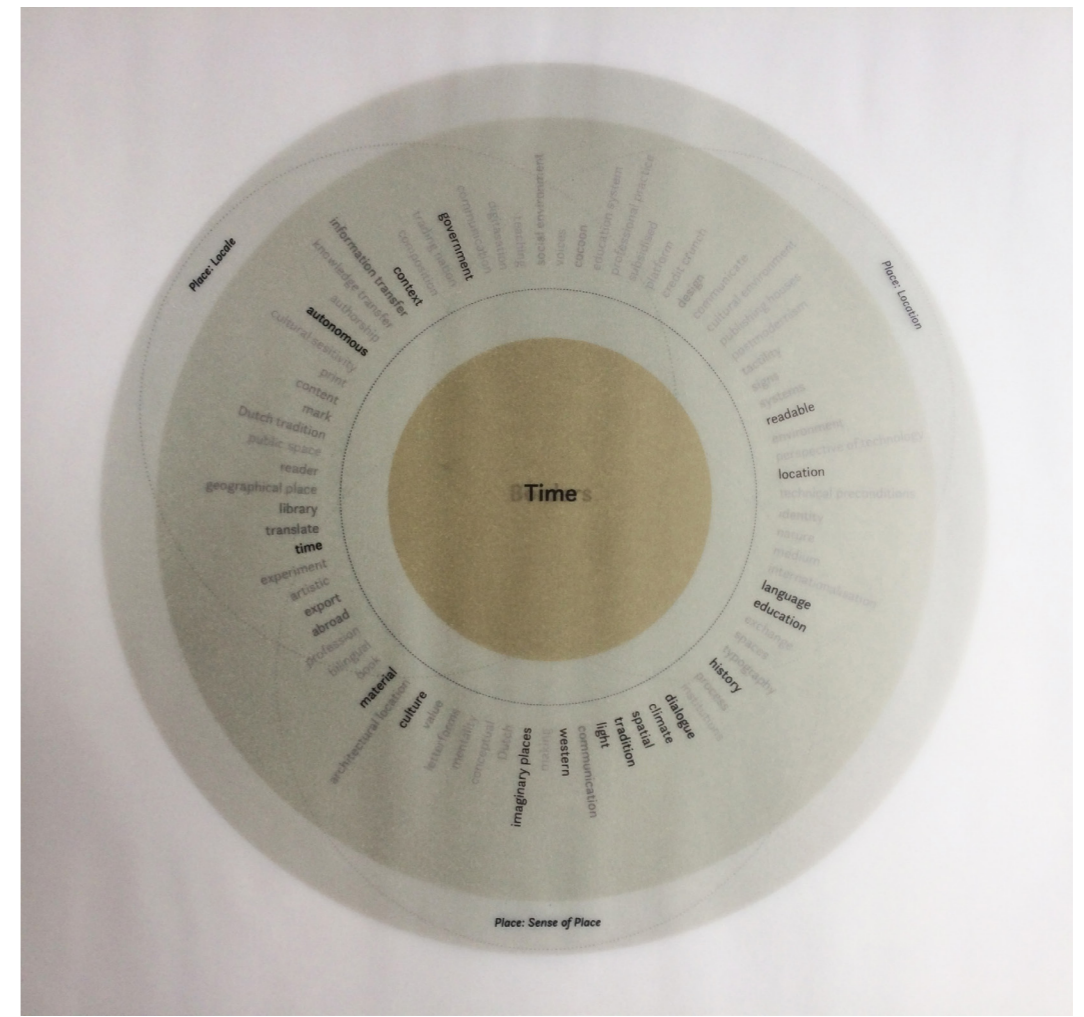


Fig. 54 Printed visual diagrams on translucent paper, keyword overlap within themes.

#### 6.4 Book as Place

The page of the book becomes a place for interaction and knowledge exchange, and a place for testing ideas. As both designer and researcher, I interact with the information as I analyse it. The pages of the concertina book reveal and make visible the social and cultural interactions of a place which impact a typographic discourse in the Netherlands. Typography as inscriptions on the page, the inscription as a trace on the material surface of the page. A trace of culture, a trace of place. This reflects upon what Tim Ingold discusses in *Lines*:

Though medieval thinkers did imagine that the work of memory inscribes the surface of the mind much as the writers inscribe the surface of the paper with his pen and the traveller inscribes the surface of the earth with his feet, they thought of these surfaces not as spaces to be surveyed but as regions to be inhabited, and which one can get to know not through one single, totalising gaze, but through the laborious process of moving around.<sup>307</sup>

Moving through the book and the process of the typographic explorations on the page reflect different aspects of place. The book as place is not a static place, but it moves through time and place. With perspectives of readers and makers changing due to technology, developments of knowledge over time or contexts in which a book is published. The print and digital cultural journal *The Serving Library*<sup>308</sup>, is produced in different contexts. Both online and print contexts providing a place for design exploration and reading experience.

The concept of a book as not a static place resonates with the idea of maps in relation to place. In the article 'Rethinking maps'<sup>309</sup>, geographers Rob Kitchin and Martin Dodge discuss the notion of 'ontogenetic'.<sup>310</sup> They refer to maps as always changing and 'remade every time they are engaged with',<sup>311</sup> therefore 'maps are transitory and fleeting, being contingent, relational and context-dependent'.<sup>312</sup> I utilise the concertina book to test and evaluate thoughts and ideas about, and connections to, the themes through the design process. It is a place to analyse the living word. We have an embodied relationship with the

307 Ingold, op. cit., p. 17.

308 Founded in 2011 by graphic designer, writer and editor Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey; artist, educator and publisher Angie Keefer, and graphic designer and educator David Reinfurt.

309 Kitchin, Dodge, op. cit.

310 Ibid, p. 335.

311 Ibid.

312 Ibid.

book as well as with the places we move through. As Joost Grootens stated in our conversation, 'Everything you make is always a kind of representation of your place and time where you are'.<sup>313</sup> For him, time is perhaps 'more important than place'.<sup>314</sup> As time reflects and represents the time one lives in, that impacts how we create and make. He provided an example about his graphic design practice, particularly the book, and ponders whether a book is still relevant. His books are 'statements about graphic design'<sup>315</sup> in a particular moment in time.

The analysis of social structures and cultural connections of typography in the Netherlands reveals the processes and patterns of cultural exchange. In relation to the processes of place and subsequent non-linear narratives, John Agnew's tripartite definition of place as location, locale and a sense of place contributes to the understanding of these connections.<sup>316</sup> A location, as Agnew suggests, is a place 'where an activity or object is located',<sup>317</sup> and relates to other locations. The locale of place, Agnew refers to, is where transformation of social life takes place. A sense of place, as he suggests, is a sense of 'belonging'.<sup>318</sup> These three approaches are reflected in my design practice through the design on the page: the text on the page at a particular location, the text as locale, the materiality of information that suggests a sense of place.

313 Semi-structured interview Joost Grootens, 2021.

314 Ibid.

315 Ibid.

316 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 14.

317 J. Cloke, R. Johnston, *Spaces of Geographical Thought*, (Sage Publications, 2005).

318 Ibid.



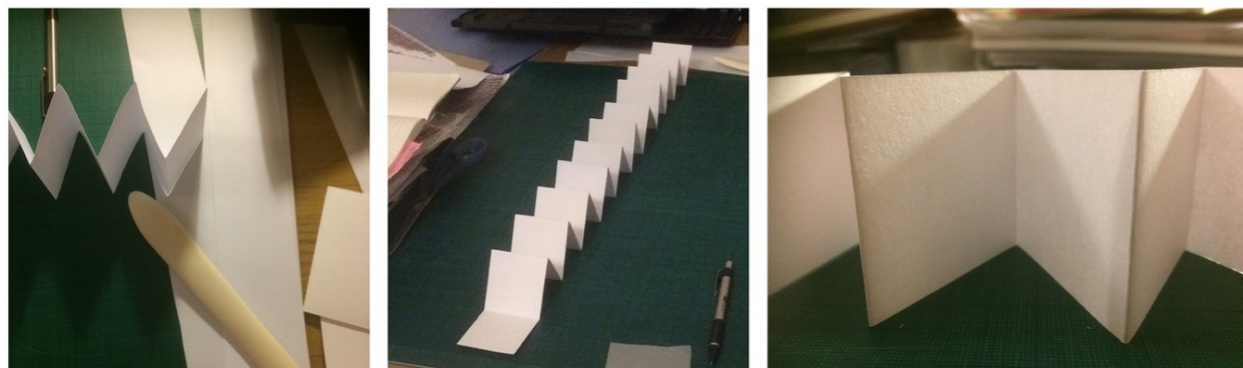


Fig. 55 Testing mock-up structure concertina book.

### 6.5 Concertina Book and Representation of the Living Word

The concertina book provides a form that is suitable for this research. The structure (Fig. 55) of the concertina book reflects metaphorically on a social and cultural structure – relationships. This specific structure relates to the concepts of the processes of a place.<sup>319</sup> I see the concertina book as an ongoing structure that reflects the themes. One could create a beginning and an end to make covers at the start of the concertina; however, I believe this structure resonates with places as ongoing processes – time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, education, technology. The pages of a codex book create a different interaction with and between pages. The concertina book structure allows for an ongoing flow of pages (back and front) and visual experimentation as narrative through pace, rhythm, space and time .

Through these aspects I respond to and reflect on place and evaluate the themes through design practice. I think through the book, using typography as a way of making and thinking about the themes of place. It is the integration between thinking and making that develops ideas. In her PhD thesis, designer and educator Jenny Griggs discusses ‘the significance of materiality in graphic design ideation’.<sup>320</sup> She refers to ideation as ‘how ideas form’.<sup>321</sup> Through the materials, both physical materials and the content of the semi-structured interviews, I further develop a dialogue through the design process. As Thomas D. Zlatich states about Walter Ong, ‘[I]deas exist in language, language is involved

<sup>319</sup> Massey, op. cit., 1991.

<sup>320</sup> J. Griggs, *Material literacy: the significance of materials in graphic design ideation, a practice-based enquiry*, unpublished PhD thesis, (RMIT University, 2018), p. 12.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

with matter, matter resides in time’.<sup>322</sup> It is this dialogue, the reflection about the spoken words and the connections with a place, that makes meaning through visual approaches. This book structure allows me to reflect and synthesise the information and create tangible forms of communication to answer the research questions:

Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?

What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

Through the concertina book, I aim to capture the essence of the conversations to accentuate and make visible the intrinsic relationships between Dutch typography and place. The concertina book is where these themes unfold. I created separate concertina books (150 mm x 150mm) for each theme.

As previously discussed, the analysis process starts with traditional thematic analysis, literature review and marking quotes in the transcriptions. The thematic analysis is further developed through my book design processes. I re-enter the dialogue between participants and myself (designer-researcher) and explore and analyse the semi-structured interviews to discover and reveal hidden and unnoticed connections between typography and place, and engage with knowledges that operate relationally in the concertina book form. In the following sections I discuss this design process in relation to the themes.

#### 6.5.1 Themes

In the previous sections of this chapter, I discussed how the themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews, through both a traditional thematic analysis and my design practice. The seven themes were crystalised from quotes and keywords: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, education, technology. These themes are analysed and reflected upon in detail in sections 6.6.2–6.6.8. These themes are the entanglements of place and reflect the local and global processes of typography in the Netherlands, for typography ‘mirrors the ongoing changes in society and how these influence the minds of designers and users alike’.<sup>323</sup> In the following sections, I discuss the interactions between people within one place and other places: interactions between institutions (for example, universities, museums) and people; place as a geographical location;

<sup>322</sup> Ong, 2011 p. 13.

<sup>323</sup> G.A. Unger, *Typografie als voertuig van de Wetenschap, [Typography as Vehicle of Science]*, (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Buitenkant, 2007), p. 12.



a sense of place; a mental place; a place on the page; and how text on a page operates and communicates.

### 6.5.2 Time

Typography is shaped by history, design and technology, and by its place in time. Typography on the page is not only a semiotic mode of communication, the materiality of language also reflects aspects of place and time. In conversation with Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst, we discussed identity and visual expression: when is a design appropriate in a particular time, and how as the designer do you belong in a cultural context? They note, it is 'how fashion works'<sup>324</sup> and to understand this, one needs to understand 'what functioned, at which place, at what moment in time, for whom'.<sup>325</sup> Typographic design reflects moments in time through design, technology and production. I referred to Joost Grootens in the chapter introduction. He discusses time as an important approach in his work. He reflects on the moment of time in his design process. It is the context in which one operates at a particular time that reflects place and social relationships and informs the approach of typography. In the concertina book, I refer to time in the colour yellow. Yellow makes time visible; you can't see time, but you can feel it.

I incorporated quotes from the semi-structured interviews and reflective writing in the concertina book. The keywords – education, language, history, dialogue, climate, spatial, tradition, light, western, imaginary places, culture, material, time, location, autonomous, government, context, readable – that led to the theme were an inspiration through which I started to explore the quotes and my reflective writing. Some of these keywords also overlap with themes; for example, climate, dialogue and light also refer to the spatial theme. The exploration on the page, the rhythm of the text and words on the page, these movements refer to time. Text leaves behind a mark in time: the gestures of language, and my own movements and thinking through this exploration on the page. The yellow text in the background is a combination of notes I took after the semi-structured interviews, as well as two quotes from my discussion with Remco van Bladel.

<sup>324</sup> Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.



Fig. 56 Layers of reflective text on translucent paper.

I started to think through layers of text as different voices of people. The fragments of text in the background are the voice of the participant, the text in the foreground is my own voice. They are in dialogue with each other on the page. The text in the background is visible as fragments, I see it as interpretations in time. Layers of text on top of each other refer to the layers of (design) histories. Designers and readers build on these histories. A concrete example is from my discussion with Remco van Bladel. As mentioned earlier, we discussed a design project where he designed a typeface, based on the Futura typeface, for artist Herman the Vries and explained 'how that original version of Paul Renner from 1927 actually slowly been made more readable ... it is originally very geometric'.

Both the text in this concertina book and places are palimpsestous. In textual studies palimpsest refers to the layers of text on the surface of manuscripts.<sup>326</sup> Old layers of text are removed, and new layers of text are placed on top of this. These layers represent places in time and the interaction of people.

The dialogue between me (the designer-researcher) and the materials is ongoing. Time is ongoing. In this concertina book I used translucent paper (Fig. 56). I reflect on the paper as time. Through the transparent paper you can see the text in layers (Fig. 57, p. 148) and the different voices are on top of each other as layers. The processes of a place are ongoing through time. The pace throughout the pages is a movement. I wrote a reflective text to explore this on the page (Fig. 58). As Massey states, '[T]ime-space-compression refers to movement and

<sup>326</sup> <https://reinventingthevictorian.wordpress.com/2013/06/04/palimpsestuous-vision/>.

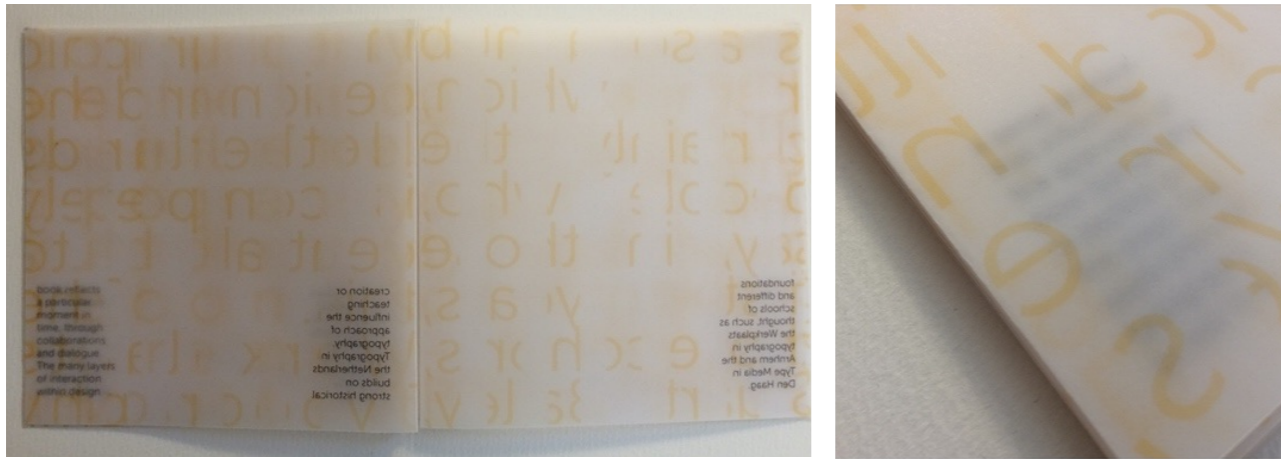


Fig. 57 Fragments of black text in interaction with yellow text on the page.

time is movement, time is change, time is culture, time is pause, time is experience, time is language, time is place, time is shared, time is history, time is non-linear, time is people, time is still, time is a location, time is light, time is pause, time is reflection time is invisible, time is duration time is sense, time is open, time is space, time is reading, time is writing, time is process, time is spatial, time is memory, time is imagination, time is environment. In my conversations with the participants, it became apparent that time is an important aspect of place, a sense of place, that influences the approach of how typography is applied on the page. The application of typography as text in a book reflects a particular moment in time, through collaborations and dialogue between people. The many layers of interaction within design creation or teaching influence the approach of typography. Typography in the Netherlands builds on strong historical foundations and different schools of thought, such as the Werkplaats typography in Arnhem and the Type Media in Den Haag.

“I think the Werkplaats Typography started in 1999, that all of a sudden it became very hip. Yes, I think that Karel Martens work suddenly started to get a kind of reevaluation again.”  
— Remco van Bladel.

“You suddenly see the kind of influence, typography suddenly becomes extremely important in graphic design and the Netherlands is completely central to this. The Werkplaats Typography is also a hub in which, certainly the people who, say, in those first years, those cohorts, Stuart Bailey, who then go abroad. They actually export Dutch typography to other places.” — Remco van Bladel

Fig. 58 Notes, reflective text and quotes on Time, used as content in different layers in design experiment.

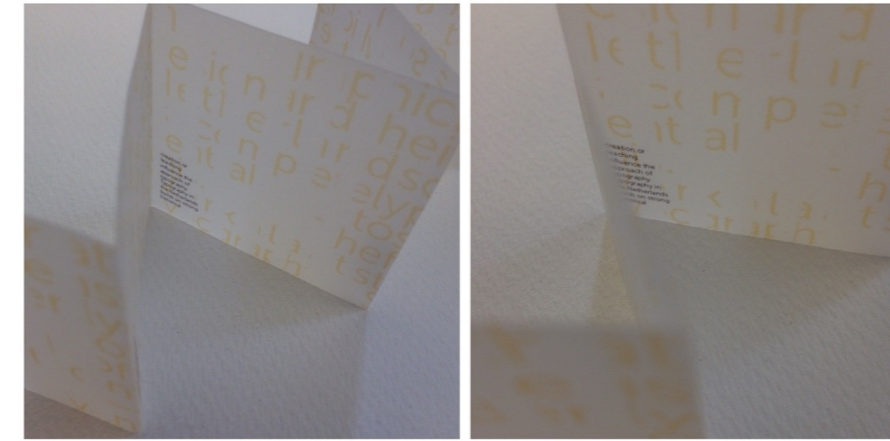


Fig. 59 Concertina fold, seeing time through the pages.

communication across space’.<sup>327</sup> Typography on the page becomes a reflection of time. Making text visible as mark-making presents a further understanding of time. Graphic designer Hansje van Halem discusses the impact of her education in the 1990s, a postmodernist approach, and remarks: ‘I do see that my work is a reaction to where I come from’.<sup>328</sup> Time is a duration (Fig. 59), it contains an openness. The processes of a place, the social and cultural interaction, have an openness. This openness refers to a free movement of people and cultural production.

Through my design practice on the printed page, I was able to understand the layers of different voices of people through time and printed materials from the past and present as a strong foundation for knowledges of design processes, production and contemporary typographic applications in print. Three participants explicitly stated the importance of time in their practice, Joost Grootens, Jannetje’ in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst. The layers of history are fundamental to the understanding of typography and the places that it interacts with.

327 Massey, op. cit., 1991, p. 24.

328 Semi-structured interview Hansje van Halem, 2021.



Fig. 60 Exploration typographic borders, printed and folded concertina book.

### 6.5.3 Borders

Borders, understood as a division between two or more elements, are often represented by a line.<sup>329</sup> A line implies differences and similarities of aspects on both sides of a line. I believe, however, that a border, a visible or invisible line, is a space where new perspectives take place and new ideas start to emerge. For example, interdisciplinary perspectives provide new insights in a field or approach. As I am drawing from cultural geography in this research, this supports my understanding of place. Through the next concertina book (Fig 60), I reflect on borders. The keywords that form the borders are: education, language, history, dialogue, tradition, communication, abroad, export, time, translate, library, autonomous, information transfer.

In conversation with graphic designer and educator Richard Niessen we discussed languages. He mentioned globalisation in the context of education. With a mix of students from all over the world, the language used to communicate is therefore English. The borders become fluent and open and a global sense of place<sup>330</sup> is starting to occur. Through this openness of the diversity of spoken languages in the Netherlands, borders are starting to become invisible and territories are mixing. This also relates to designers and as Niessen states: 'Designers organise themselves globally'.<sup>331</sup> Therefore, typography on the page is a 'knowledge transfer'<sup>332</sup> that transfers beyond borders. The pages of a book

329 Ingold, op. cit.

330 Massey, op. cit., 1991.

331 Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

332 Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.

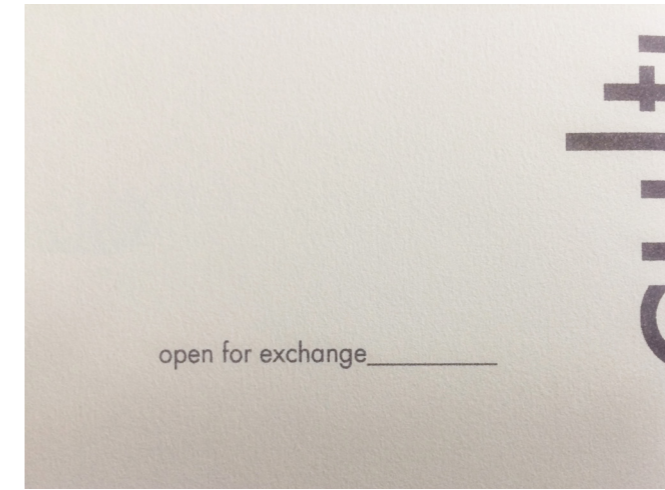


Fig. 61 Exploration lines, printed and folded concertina book.

move through borders and time. The explorations (Fig. 61) on the pages of the concertina book represent borders as lines. These lines create a space for new perspectives. By creating the lines on the page with words between or in relation to lines, a relationship starts to appear. This relationship is about both imaginary and concrete borders. For example, the word exchange is placed underneath a line, as this word is an abstract notion of working with and through borders. It is through this dialogue between me, practitioner-researcher, and the process that I realised borders are open.

With further exploration in my practice, borders became more obvious on different levels. Borders are crossed in various ways at any time globally.<sup>333</sup> The folding pages can be seen as borders or lines; the edges of the paper are borders; and the placement of the words on the edge of the page constructs borders. The typeface used is Futura (a German typeface), referring to my conversation with Remco van Bladel discussed previously. He refers to the typeface in relation to a project where he adapted it into a new typeface. I however, applied it to reference a different cultural typeface and cross the border from the Netherlands. I see these folds as metaphorical borders, and through the making of the concertina book I realised this application of typography relates to an awareness of cultural tradition. These traditions refer to historical foundations of typography and design, or as graphic designer and educator Toon Koehorst suggests, as 'cultural sensitivity'.

333 It must be noted that some people cannot cross borders due to political or social-economic issues.





Fig. 62 Preliminary exploration of typographic borders on the page.



Fig. 63 Exploration of typographic borders on the folds of the page.

The border line connects then both the local and global developments of Dutch typography. My research question asks: How can notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work? Therefore, the design process developed my thinking about a location.

The Netherlands is a country located in north-western Europe, with borders on the east (Germany), the south (Belgium) and the North Sea coastline to the north and west. People and objects move through borders. The impact of globalisation on social conditions (locally and globally) informs cultural production. For example, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst mention they work with Het Nieuwe Instituut, a cultural centre in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. They note that the organisation is 'very internationally orientated'<sup>334</sup> and communicates in English and Dutch. I believe, the English language brings an extra layer of understanding how to approach a design project.

I experimented visually with words and lines on the pages. The lines represent borders, both visible and invisible. Words such as cultural are positioned between lines as borders, with some space around the word that reflects the fluidity of cultures. As a result, through my design practice, the understanding of the movement of the book through time and place crossing borders is communicated. Borders are open, there is free movement of students, exchange of design knowledges and information. In the concertina book, borders are embedded into the structure of the book and also its design. Thinking through this process also provides an understanding that borders are areas of crossing: they involve a change from one side to another. In Dutch typographic discourse, borders represent the interaction between different cultures; for example, foreign students visiting the Netherlands or design collaborations across different cultures. By exploring the theme of the border in the concertina book, the understanding of different cultural influences such as language became clear in relation to Dutch typographic discourse. It is not a single geographical location that impacts typography, rather it is a global network of designers, educators and institutions that influences text on the printed page and how typography is applied. The experiment provided an understanding of the role of borders in typography in the Netherlands. By placing words on the fold (Figs. 62 and 63), this relates to the exchange of typography through geographical borders. Additionally, the typography on the page further enhances a cultural exchange between text and reader. The word tradition for example, refers to the relationships with historical typographic traditions. These historical typographic traditions crossing borders through time.

<sup>334</sup> Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.

#### 6.5.4 Landscape

Large areas of the natural landscape in the Netherlands are created by humans, the term *'maakbaar'* (makable) is often used in the Dutch language when referring to this landscape. For example, Joost Grootens referred to the *'Oostvaardersplassen'*, a nature reserve that is created. The notion of recreating a landscape also refers to 'not suffering from traditions'<sup>335</sup> and being open to innovation. Consequently, through my practice, I made a link that this echoes the cultural landscape of typographic design in the Netherlands, on the one hand building on histories and traditions, and on the other breaking traditions and seeking innovations in how typography is designed or applied. Grootens referred to the 'polder culture'<sup>336</sup>. A polder is a low-lying large area of land that forms an artificial hydrological entity. It is enclosed by embankments known as dykes. Referring to a polder culture, known as a 'polder-model'<sup>337</sup> is an approach to consensus-oriented decision-making despite differences between social entities. It was introduced by policymakers in the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s. The application of typographic design is shaped by the approach of the agency of graphic designers and their relation to commissioners. There is an equal relationship between them, and they are always in dialogue to create innovation and solutions. This is discussed by Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst. They state: 'We are going to have a conversation. And see how we can get there'.<sup>338</sup> They refer to Belgium, Germany and the UK having different expectations.

Building on a rich history of typography, the influence of Modernism is still visible in the cultural landscape of applied typography. The cultural environment in the Netherlands provides a space for the combination of artistic freedom, the autonomous voice and the analytical rigour in design processes. I see the page as an environment and as a landscape. The text (my reflection) on the printed page, as well as the page in relation to the other pages, provides a 'sense of place'.<sup>339</sup> As described by Cresswell about the work of John Agnew, a sense of place is, 'the subjective and emotional attachment people have of place'.<sup>340</sup>

335 Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.

336 Ibid.

337 Y. Schreuder, 'The Polder Model in Dutch Economic and Environmental Planning', *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 21(4), 2001, pp.237-245.

338 Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in 't Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.

339 Cresswell, op. cit., p. 14.

340 Ibid.

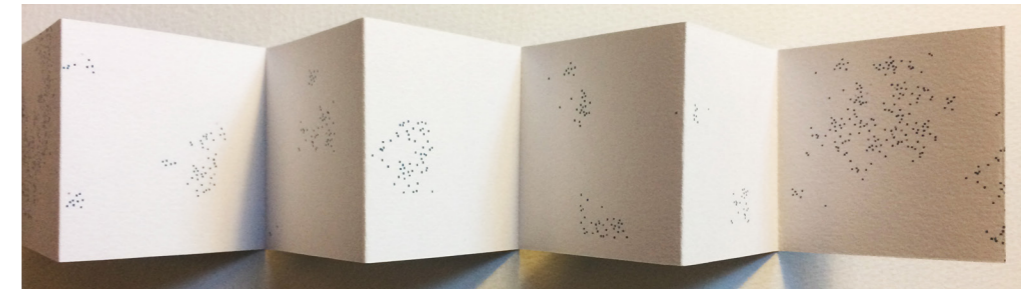


Fig. 64 Clusters of Full stops interacting with each other.

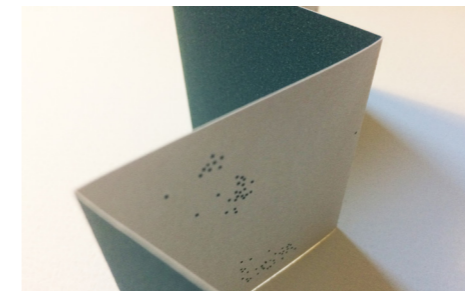


Fig. 65 Dark green representing the natural landscape.

Typography reflects the idea of belonging. The relational aspect of pages of the concertina book (Fig. 64) and typographic interaction on these pages contributes to a sense of place.

It is this notion I explored within the practice and analysis of the theme of landscape. The keywords that form the theme are: social environment, education, identity, internationalisation, language, history, process, climate, tradition, light, natural, communication, culture, material, translate, time, geographical place, reader, location, trading nation. The dark green in the design experiment concertina book (Fig. 65) refers to both the natural landscape and to the cultural landscape in the Netherlands. The dots are the full stop punctuation mark of the typeface Museo 300. I started this exploration with a small text (Fig. 66), notes and keywords. The text and the information I gained from the semi-structured interviews gave me an insight into the many global voices that are operating in the cultural landscape or that are influential in the application of typography on the page. These full stops on the page represent these different voices (Fig. 67). The voices of the participants in this research, institutions such as museums; Stedelijk museum, Museum Catharijneconvent, Museum Meermanno, Typographic Masonry; or educational institutions such as Design Academy Eindhoven, Royal Danish Art Academy, Werkplaats Typography

A flat land, the Netherlands, areas of landforms are created by humans, they are integrated in the natural landscape. How does this flat land influence one's thinking or a language. The landscape is viewed from the outside, as a visual experience. The cultural values of typography in the Netherlands are a combination of rigor and communicating information, as well as an artistic approach to depict one own voice. Words: social environment, education, identity, internationalisation, language, history, process, climate, tradition, light, natural, communication, culture, material, translate, time, geographical place, reader, location, trading nation.

Fig. 66 Reflective notes.

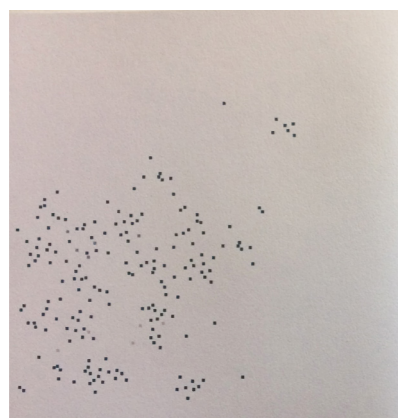


Fig. 67 Full stops representing different voices from a Dutch typographic landscape.

Arnhem, Rietveld, St Joost Academy; Media Type The Hague; historical and contemporary designers such as Jan van Krimpen, Theo van Doesburg, Gerard Unger, Experimental jetset, Wim Crowel, Christopher Burke and Karel Martens.

The pages with the full stops represent the locale, the social interaction and movements in the Netherlands – a cultural landscape. Changes in the cultural landscape in the Netherlands impact typography and the way it is applied. Specifically, the impact of government funding that created spaces for design experiments has been significantly cut since 2000. Internationalisation brings different cultures, different languages, experiences and knowledges within education or through design projects. The representation of these different voices, in the concertina book, brings forth an understanding of the design interactions that operate in the cultural landscape in the Netherlands. The reverse page, the dark green, represents the natural landscape. A natural landscape, created by humans, as I noted in the beginning of this section, reflects upon the creation of visual language on the printed page. In making visible the different voices through the full stops, I realised how these clusters representing the presence of designers, institutions and education are shaping Dutch typographic discourse. The clusters are shaping places too: they represent the locale of typography in the Netherlands.

### 6.5.5 Spatiality

The space on a page is as important as a place. Space creates rhythm. The typography on the page also provides a space for dialogue. In my conversation with Hansje van Halem, she discussed the shift between working on a book to working in a public space and states: 'There has been a transition to projects in the public space; a mosaic church floor or a fence in laser-cut steel. You can't practice this, you can practice a book. With projects in a public space, there is an imagination that has to work in a different way'.<sup>341</sup> A public space as a spatio-temporal event. Doreen Massey refers to spatio-temporal events:

Places not as points or areas on maps, but as integrations of space and time; as spatio-temporal events. This is an understanding of place – as open ('global sense of place'), as woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, and as in process, as unfinished business.<sup>342</sup>

In this exploration of space, I refer to the keywords that come together in this theme: internationalisation, spaces, typography, language, history, climate, spatial, natural landscape, environment, light, communication, imaginary places, materials, social environment, connections, composition, public space. Through the keywords on the page, I started to play with letters and size on the page to make visible the spaces surrounded a text or a letter. The text is a reflection on spatiality, how one makes connections between places through spaces. The background reflects a natural landscape and the paper material. Spaces become places for the imaginary. The cultural spaces that one moves through, such as public space, or the use of language are elements answering the research question: What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

I experimented with different ways of communication through the exploration of materiality. Spatiality is invisible, but becomes visible when one creates surroundings. By exploring different kinds of paper, I made connections between the material and a sense of place. The interplay between materiality makes new meanings and connections on the printed page. In the concertina

<sup>341</sup> Semi-structured interview, Hansje van Halem, 2021.

<sup>342</sup> Massey, 2007: p. 131.





Fig. 68 White spaces representing typographic histories in the Netherlands.

The spaces one moves through. The physical spaces and the imaginary spaces. The spaces of different languages, the space on the page. How text is applied on the page. White space on the page. Making connections between cities and other places, between countries through spaces and through communication.

Words: internationalization, spaces, typography, language, history, climate, spatial, natural landscape, environment, light, communication, imaginary places, materials, social environment, connections, composition, public space

Fig. 69 Notes and reflections.

experiment (Fig. 68), I explore the white spaces in the text. The text are notes and reflections (Fig. 69). The white spaces are marks on the material. These spaces are interrelations and interact with both the text and the material paper of the page. The white spaces refer to connections of histories, tradition or languages, understanding the locale of typography in the Netherlands. The white spaces also refer to the spatial conditions of place, such light and climate, which additionally have an impact on perceptions of place. Creating text on the page and making visible (white) spaces on the page through the concertina book provided an awareness and understanding of space on the page, as well as the spatial synergy between pages.

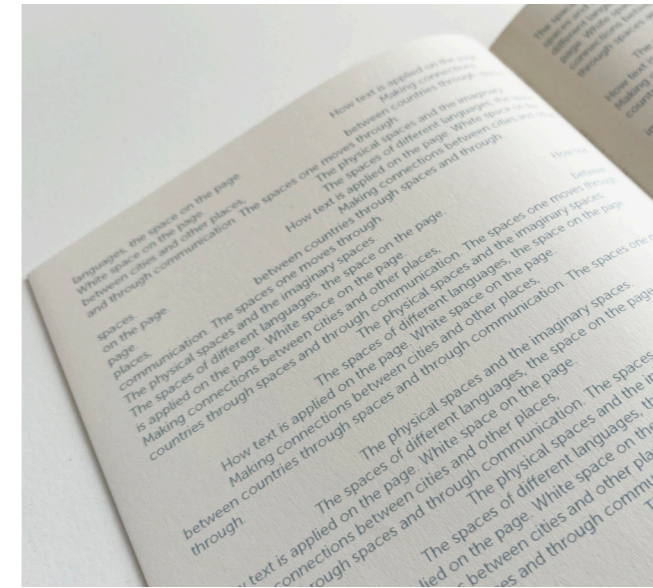


Fig. 70 Spatiality within text exploring the notion of light as a spatial aspect of place.

In his project *Palace of Typographic Masonry*, Richard Niessen describes the nine departments of the Palace. Spaces that provide ‘all aspects of graphic design ... within a larger narrative’.<sup>343</sup> The project exists online, in the digital realm, however the online space consists of a documentation of physical objects. The design practice resulted in an understanding of approaches of spatiality on the printed page as an important aspect of the application of typography and the understanding of visual communication. The public and digital spaces (for example, exhibitions) where typography operates are cultural environments that provide a place for communication and exchange. Building on historical typographic foundations provides spaces for understanding different approaches of typography and its visual communication. For example, Hansje van Halem refers to her peers (such as Bart Baets, Simon Wald Lasowski) from her education, saying, ‘We got the same information as students’.<sup>344</sup> However they all developed individual trajectories and visual languages. The spaces (Fig. 70) within the text of the concertina book are spaces to look through and text is visible on the reverse side of the page. These interactions between the pages become a narrative and the concertina book becomes a place to explore one’s own visual language imaginatively.

343 Semi-structured interview, Richard Niessen, 2021.

344 Semi-structured interview, Hansje van Halem, 2021.



Fig. 71 Dutch and English languages exploration of laction on the page.

### 6.5.6 Locality

The layout in the concertina book creates a dialogue between Dutch and English languages, with the locality of the text (Fig. 71) locked into place on its location of the page, developed into [visual] language. The text (Fig. 73, p. 162) I applied consists of notes, thoughts and reflections on the semi-structured interviews. Hansje van Halem referred to her local working space as a ‘cocoon’. She is not concerned with traditions, and it is her studio in Amsterdam where she works – her location. The theme of locality contains the following keywords: internationalisation, education, typography, institutions, design process, language, history, post-modernism, natural landscape, imaginary places, culture, Dutch tradition, government, public space.

The application of Dutch and English languages on the page in the concertina book communicates a sense of place through the language. This sense of place informed my thinking about languages and how they convey culture. I reflected on the identity of a culture. Identity is language, visual as well as spoken languages. Remco van Bladel referred to a project he was involved in about creating a library system for a library in São Paulo related to a collection of Yiddish books that arrived there from immigrants after the war. He noted: ‘Yiddish, ... a language with no fixed geographical location’.<sup>345</sup> I reflect on this as languages move to different places, sometimes disappearing, sometimes not, so how can we understand identity through a language.

345 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.

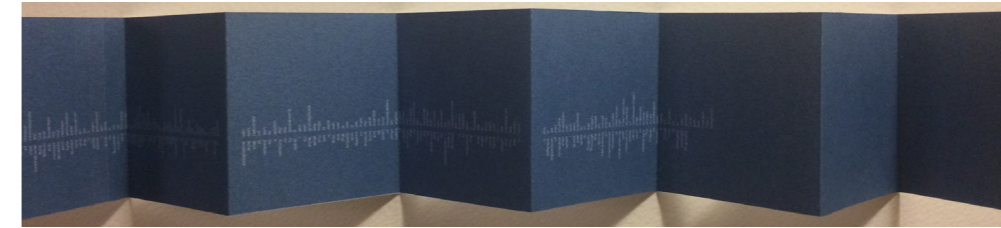


Fig. 72 Movement of language through the pages.

The words in the sentences, in Dutch and English, are placed each on a line to emphasise their locality. They are placed in close proximity to each other to refer to their relationship. The locality of the words (Fig. 72), operating in a specific location on the page, reflects on the notion of movements of people through places or being at one specific location. Richard Niessen discussed a project related to visual and vernacular languages used in Philippine street culture and its ‘local style’. Remco van Bladel explained a design project he created, locally, in Amsterdam. He created a typeface and identity for Public Art Amsterdam and created a language system for a map of Amsterdam.

It is the materiality of a local place that provides an understanding of a place. Materiality refers to actual places, such as institutions and environments, and to the printed page. The materiality of a (visual) language on the printed page provides an understanding of the impact of how language is embedded in different ways in Dutch typographic discourse: through the materiality of the language, typography, but also through conversations in design collaborations, processes and education. Jannetje in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst discuss the places they enjoy for collaborations. They state: ‘We find a museum a totally fascinating place’,<sup>346</sup> and discuss the museum as a place that allows them freedom in their design projects, for example, Het Nieuwe Instituut and Museum Catharijneconvent. Imaginary places are the local spaces of the mind, making connections between ideas and the environment.

346 Semi-structured interview, Jannetje in ‘t Veld and Toon Koehorst, 2021.



Dutch: “Er is een soort internationale grafische taal ontstaan, soort nieuwe internationale stijl. Die ook studenten die hier hebben gestudeerd weer meenemen en die is deels gebaseerd wel denk ik op, op Europese bronnen. En ik denk Switsers, Nederlands ontwerp, Engels misschien een beetje. Maar dat is bijna niet meer te achterhalen die uitwisseling is zo enorm dat ik denk niet dat je nu nog kunt spreken van een nationale of aan te wijzen stijl die gerelateerd is aan een grondgebied zeg maar. Ik denk wel, wat je ziet is dat, maar dat geldt eigenlijk ook voor muziekstijlen en allerlei andere vormen van culturele uitwisseling, dat er natuurlijk allemaal sub groepen zijn ontstaan die ook internationaal zijn.” — Richard Niessen

Het is belangrijk dat ik mijn stem ook in het Nederlands laat horen. Voor mij is dit een andere expressie van taal dan wanneer ik in het Engels spreek en schrijf. Door de sociale interacties van internationale studenten of samenwerkingen met instituties binnen steden zoals Amsterdam, Den Haag, of Arnhem is er een global local aan het ontstaan. Talen integreren.

English: “A kind of international graphic language has emerged, kind of new international style. Which also includes students who have studied here and that is partly based, I think, on European sources. And I think Swiss, Dutch design, English maybe a little. But that is almost impossible to find out, that exchange is so enormous that I don’t think you can still speak of a national or designative style that is related to a territory, so to speak. I do think, what you see is that, but that actually also applies to musical styles and all kinds of other forms of cultural exchange, that of course there are all subgroups that are also international.” — Richard Niessen

It is important that I also make my voice heard in Dutch. For me, this is a different expression of language than when I speak and write in English. Through the social interactions of international students or collaborations with institutions within cities such as Amsterdam, The Hague, or Arnhem, a global local is emerging. Integrate languages.

Fig. 73 Notes and reflective text used as content in design experiment.

The concertina book provided the local environment for thinking through typography in the Netherlands. Internationalisation in cities, institutions or educational institutions are connected, therefore typography in the Netherlands develops into a ‘global sense of place’.<sup>347</sup>

By placing the two languages on the page, greater understanding of the importance of dialogue developed. A local dialogue is happening on the page between the two languages, but dialogue is an important aspect of local typography in the Netherlands in creating interaction between different cultures for further cultural exchange.

<sup>347</sup> Massey, op. cit. 1991.

### 6.5.7 Technology

Through my own design practice, I make use of technologies such as computer software and printers. Technology is an aspect that has influenced the cultural production of typography, especially with digital means developing rapidly. In his article ‘Embodying the past, designing the future: technological determinism reconsidered in technology education’,<sup>348</sup> Jonas Hallström discusses the concept of technological determinism. This concept refers to the role of technology in design, education and social activities. Hallström argues:

Technology itself plays a major role in design processes, not only because technology development is what designing is all about, but also since the existing technology at any given point in time – be it in society at large, the design workshop or the classroom – frames what is possible to achieve in terms of new outcomes.<sup>349</sup>

Through technology, design processes are also developing. Hansje van Halem creates her designs through design software, such as Adobe Illustrator. She notes: ‘I always discover something new’.<sup>350</sup> She creates ‘from the perspective of technology’.<sup>351</sup>

This theme consists of the following keywords: exchange, education, history, typography, language, history, material, time, experiment, Dutch tradition, knowledge transfer, perspective of technology, publishing houses. The starting point of the design experiment was the typewriter. Joost Grootens refers to the typewriter in our conversation. He notes that typography is ‘linked to a device to make typography’, for example, the ‘typewriter, or to a set of lead letters that you had to work with or to a computer program’.<sup>352</sup>

I explore the typeface typewriter and use the words ‘experiment’, ‘material’, ‘education’ and ‘history’ to think through printing techniques, such as digital printing or offset printing, as different printing techniques result in different quality mark makings. The letters are placed on top of each other to resemble the typewriter’s movement when the device get stuck, it overlays letters (Fig. 74).

<sup>348</sup> J. Hallström, ‘Embodying the past, designing the future: technological determinism reconsidered in technology education’, *Int J Technol Des Educ* 32, 2022, 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-020-09600-2>

<sup>349</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>350</sup> Semi-structured interview, Hansje van Halem, 2021.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Semi-structured interview, Joost Grootens, 2021.



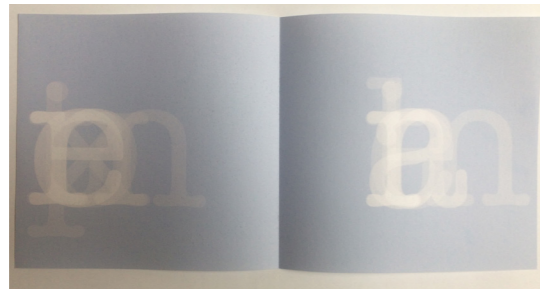


Fig. 74 Exploring typewriter techniques through digital means.



Fig. 75 Exploration through the folded pages.

I reflected through this marking process on the development of print technology, the use of materials, such as paper. Through the experiment, I realised, from the conversations with the participants, that fast-changing digital environment is demanding and print, still relevant today, developed into a different approach as a medium for information. Digital media distributes information quick, whereas print maintains a different approach in distributing information. The concertina book (Fig. 75) provided me with the understanding of the materiality of language and why the tactile object is still important today. It is the representation of the spoken word that stays alive through the technology of the printed page. And how the representation on the page is perceived by its reader.

In my conversation with Hansje van Halem, we discussed what tactility is: '[W]hat you experience as tactile',<sup>353</sup> and this can be a physical object. Testing different papers developed my thinking about the quality of paper as well as the environment. The conscious decisions one makes using paper is to create an awareness of the impact on the environment. Additionally, visual language in print conveys a different form of communication than digital forms. As Richard Niessen states, a 'poster can provoke',<sup>354</sup> but this has disappeared to some extent in the Dutch landscape and graphic design is used as an instrument, and this has had the effects to 'actually communicate one-way traffic',<sup>355</sup> only to the client and not to a wider audience. There should be more room for dialogue between design and audience or for questions, he adds.

Technology addresses the research question: What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?, through

353 Semi-structured interview, Hansje van Halem, 2021.

354 Semi-structured interview Richard Niessen, 2021.

355 Ibid.

both print and digital variations. Technology influences how information is created and how information is perceived. The six participants create design projects using different media, both digital and print. Digital technology has an impact on how information is accessible and how it is communicated. Remco van Bladel mentioned in our conversation how 'the arrival of font software has actually been democratised over the past 20 years'.<sup>356</sup> These [cultural] developments impact how typography is applied in print or digitally.

#### 6.5.8 Education

The importance of design education as a place for learning that contextualises a design practice in a moment in time and place. This provides a context for the socio-economic influences of contemporary design practice and the importance of design history. Through globalisation, educational systems become increasingly culturally diverse. In the initial semi-structured interviews, I started to see, intuitively, and through the analysis of my practice, that education plays a vital role in the development of typography and is a (social) place for (global) interaction and connections. As designer and educator Grootens notes: 'Thirty-five per cent of the Master's students are not Dutch' at the Design Academy Eindhoven.<sup>357</sup> Thus, I further developed the understanding of education through my practice. The theme of education contains the keywords: internationalisation, education, exchange, typography, institutions, language, history, imaginary places, value, culture, Dutch tradition, audience, government, credit crunch. Since the educational system in the Netherlands became very international and diverse, Richard Niessen mentioned a booklet made by a friend, about painted billboards in Surinam, reflecting on, 'how we look at another culture'.<sup>358</sup> Through the global interactions within education, the exchange of knowledge is diverse.

The Netherlands maintains strong international connections for the purpose of education and professional design practices. Additionally, long-term established international connections include, for example, book designer Irma Boom teaching at Yale University in the US. Consequently, these movements provide an understanding of the social and cultural interactions between places. Typography therefore moves both inside and outside of geographical territorial borders. In conversation with Hansje van Halem about education, she discussed the impact of her own education on her work.

356 Semi-structured interview, Remco van Bladel, 2021.

357 Semi-structured interview Joost Grootens, 2021.

358 Semi-structured interview Richard Niessen, 2021.

The understanding of culture and values, traditions. The exchange of knowledges through internationalisation. Through education we learn skills, histories, we meet people, we teach each other, we gain a sense of place. What is information. How developing a visual language? The exchange of knowledges through internationalisation. How can we understand the imaginary. Institutions. Developing imagenaries.



Fig. 76 Reflective notes.

Fig. 77 Coloured text to create visual dialogue between texts.

Through my practice I referred to the education theme with the colour bordeaux red. I associate this colour with the different cultural interactions in education. I see the printed page as a place for cultural imaginations, ones that are making new connections through dialogue. This page as a place is always connected to its histories and its culture. As Tim Ingold discusses: 'To be a place, every somewhere must lie on one or several paths of movement to and from places elsewhere.'<sup>359</sup> Education is an important place for exchange through knowledge, learning or making. Through the concertina book, I explored the notion of dialogue. The reflective texts (Fig. 76) were placed at different positions on the page to create an interaction between them. I explored different tones of colours (Fig. 77) to create a visual dialogue. This resulted in the understanding of two forms of dialogue discussed in the semi-structured interviews: the educational background of participants and the impact of this on their own work, and the role of teaching in design education. In addition to the Dutch language spoken at these education systems, English is now spoken in most Higher Education institutions. Therefore, the education system develops from a local to a global institution.

359 Ingold, op. cit., p. 7.



Fig. 78 Punctuation marks representing different cultural identities.

In conversation with Richard Niessen, we discussed the globalisation (Fig. 78) of the education system in the Netherlands, histories of graphic design and the relationship of design within society. The keywords from the quotes in the transcriptions are: identity, internationalisation, language, education, exchange, typography, history, process, tradition, communication, Dutch, time, geographical place, autonomous, authorship, context, teaching, social environment, voices, education system, professional practice, subsidised, design, publishing houses, postmodernism. Addressing the research question of how notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work, the locality of design education in the Netherlands becomes a global environment with many different languages. Consequently, 'the language itself is of course already a change',<sup>360</sup> which refers to the increase of English spoken language, as well as to the variety of visual languages. Building on a rich history of typography and [book] design – a graphic heritage<sup>361</sup> – and government funding (particularly in the 1990s and 2000s), typographic communications 'are reflective of an era's cultural climate and of how people live and think', as Gerard Unger states in his publication *Typography as a Vehicle of Science*.<sup>362</sup>

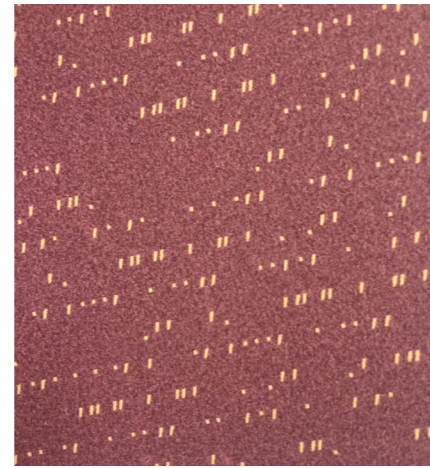
360 Semi-structured interview Richard Niessen, 2021.

361 The term graphic heritage is discussed in the 'Repositioning Graphic Heritage' research project by Robert G. Harland and Johnny Xu. They approach graphic heritage as processes 'through which people experience and are informed about urban heritage through graphic images'. However, in the context of this research I refer to the term as the cultural heritage of graphic design in the Netherlands and the objects created. The development of Dutch typographic discourse is informed by the heritage of typography in the Netherlands, its traditions, histories and cultures. Robert G. Harland and Johnny Xu, <https://www.urban-graphic-object.org/project/repositioning-graphic-heritage-2/>, 2021.

362 Unger, op. cit., p. 12.



**Fig. 79** Punctuation marks creating a global sense of place.



**Fig. 80** Detail punctuation marks.

An understanding and finding within education is the internationalisation of education in the Netherlands. The punctuation marks (Figs. 79 and 80) represents different cultural identities that create different sense of places. This resonates with the internationalisation within education. By locating text on different positions on the page, this interaction provided an understanding of different cultures and the knowledge exchange within education. It is where the local becomes global. The range of languages contribute to cultural exchange and provide different perspectives and understanding of different cultural identities. Additionally, Dutch educators also teaching abroad in for example Italy or Denmark. There are two schools of thought that influence typography through education: firstly, Werkplaats Typography in Arnhem provides an artistic and conceptual approach; and secondly, Type Media in Den Haag provides a rigorous and analytical approach. However, both approaches emphasise the path of the autonomous<sup>363</sup> designer.

<sup>363</sup> Independent decision-making within the processes of graphic design projects.

## 6.6 Concertina Books: A visual documentation

This section (see pp. 170–183) contains a visual documentation of the seven final concertina book research outputs through which knowledge was generated. As part of the dialogic methodology, the design-led conversation prompt (part of the semi-structured interview process), typographic experiments and diagrams supported these concertina books research outputs.



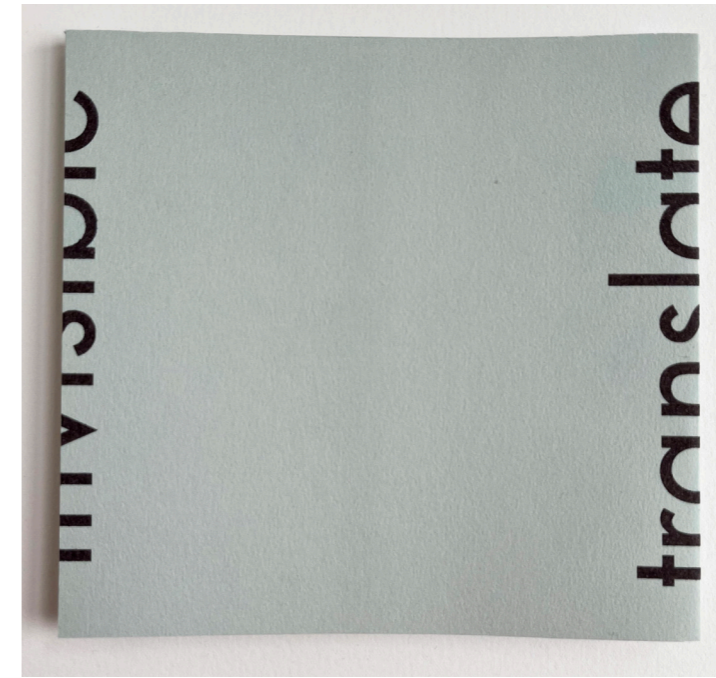


◀ Fig. 81 Detail Concertina book: Time

▲ Fig. 82 Concertina book: Time

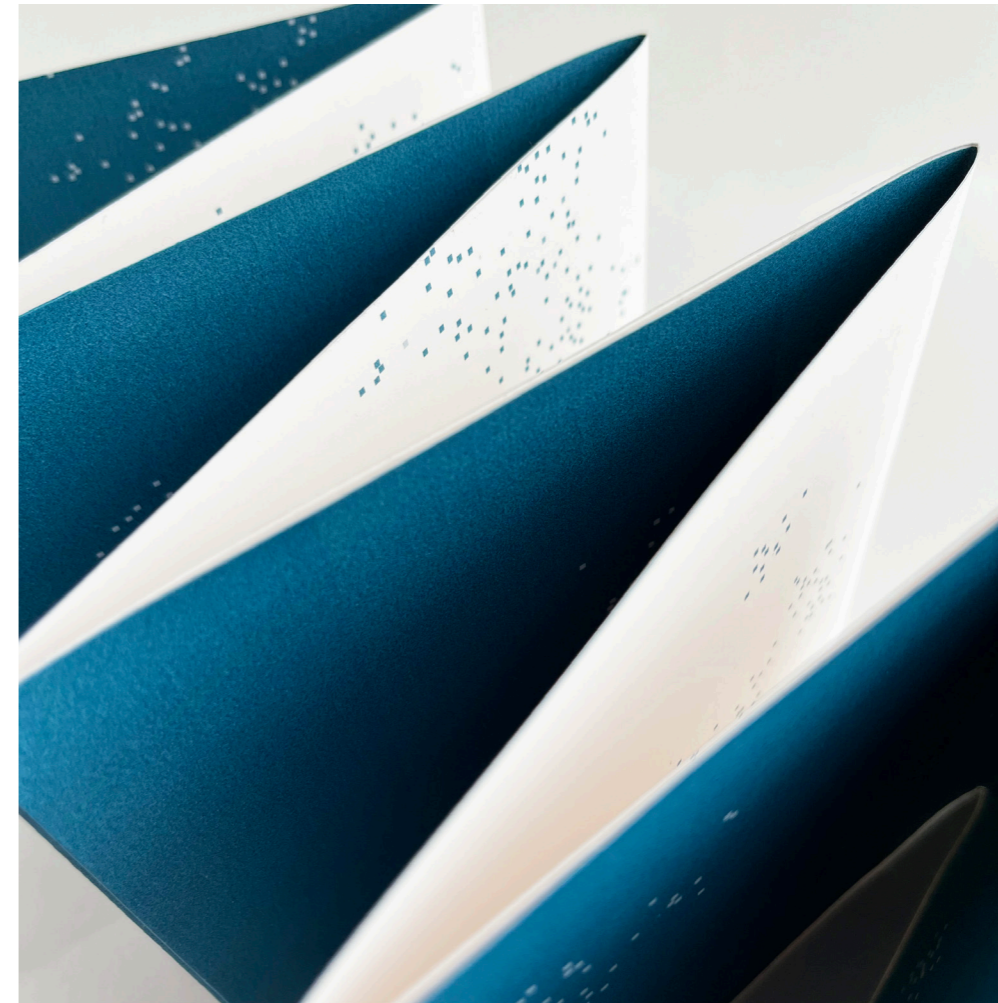
▼ Fig. 83 Pages concertina book: Time





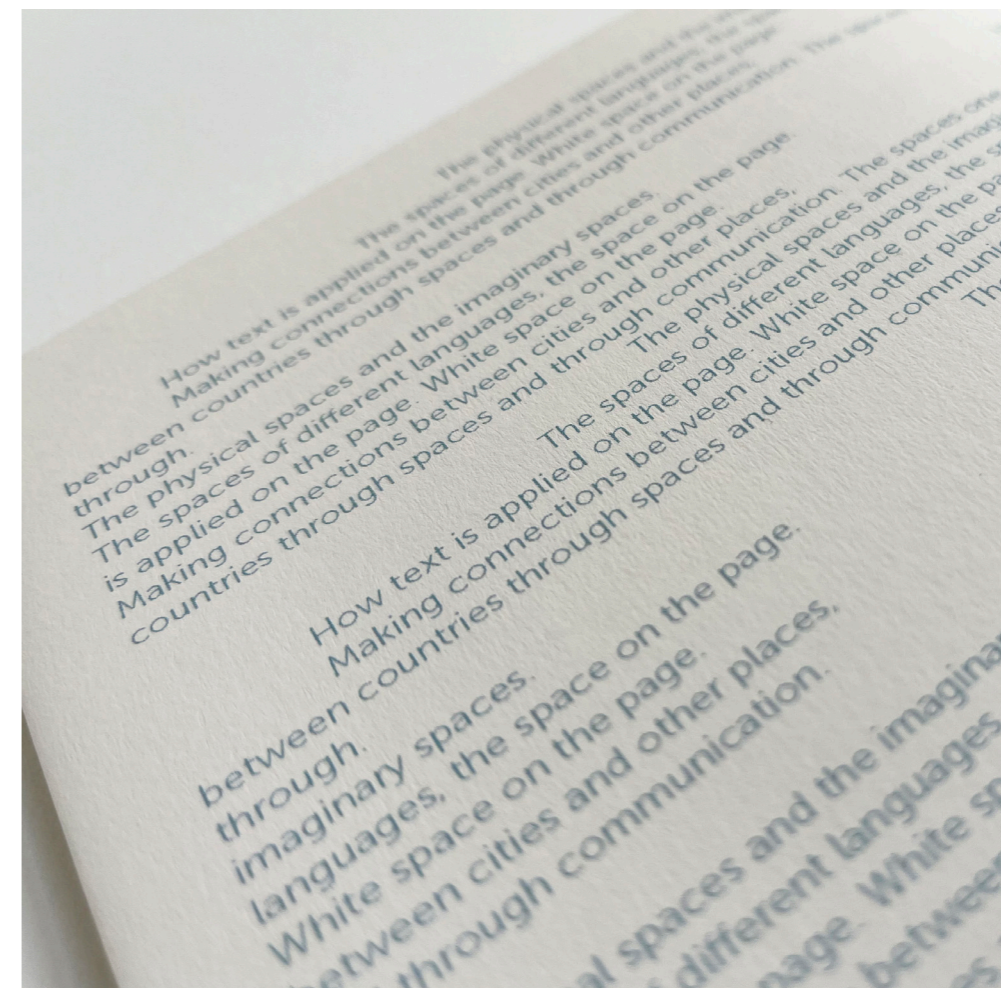
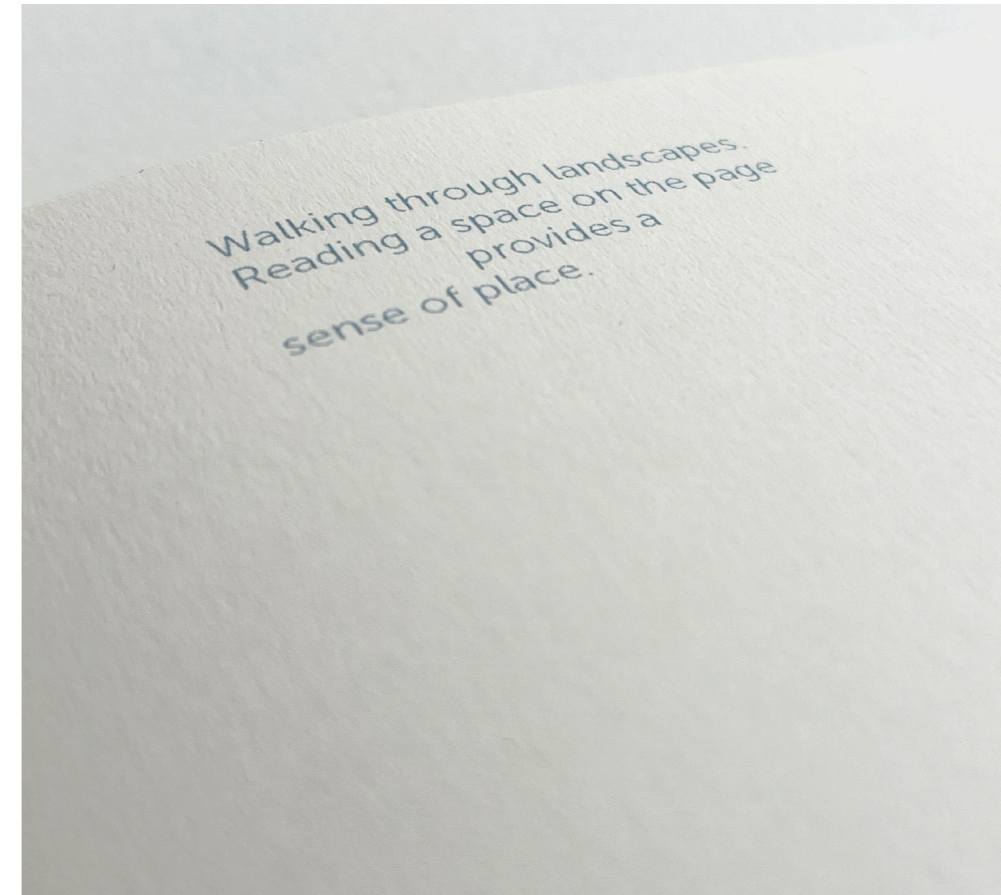
- ◀ Fig. 84 Concertina book: Borders
- ▲ Fig. 85 Front cover concertina book: Borders
- ▼ Fig. 86 Pages concertina book: Borders





◀ Fig. 87 Concertina  
book: Landscape  
▲ Fig. 88 Pages concertina  
book: Landscape  
▼ Fig. 89 Detail concertina  
book: Landscape





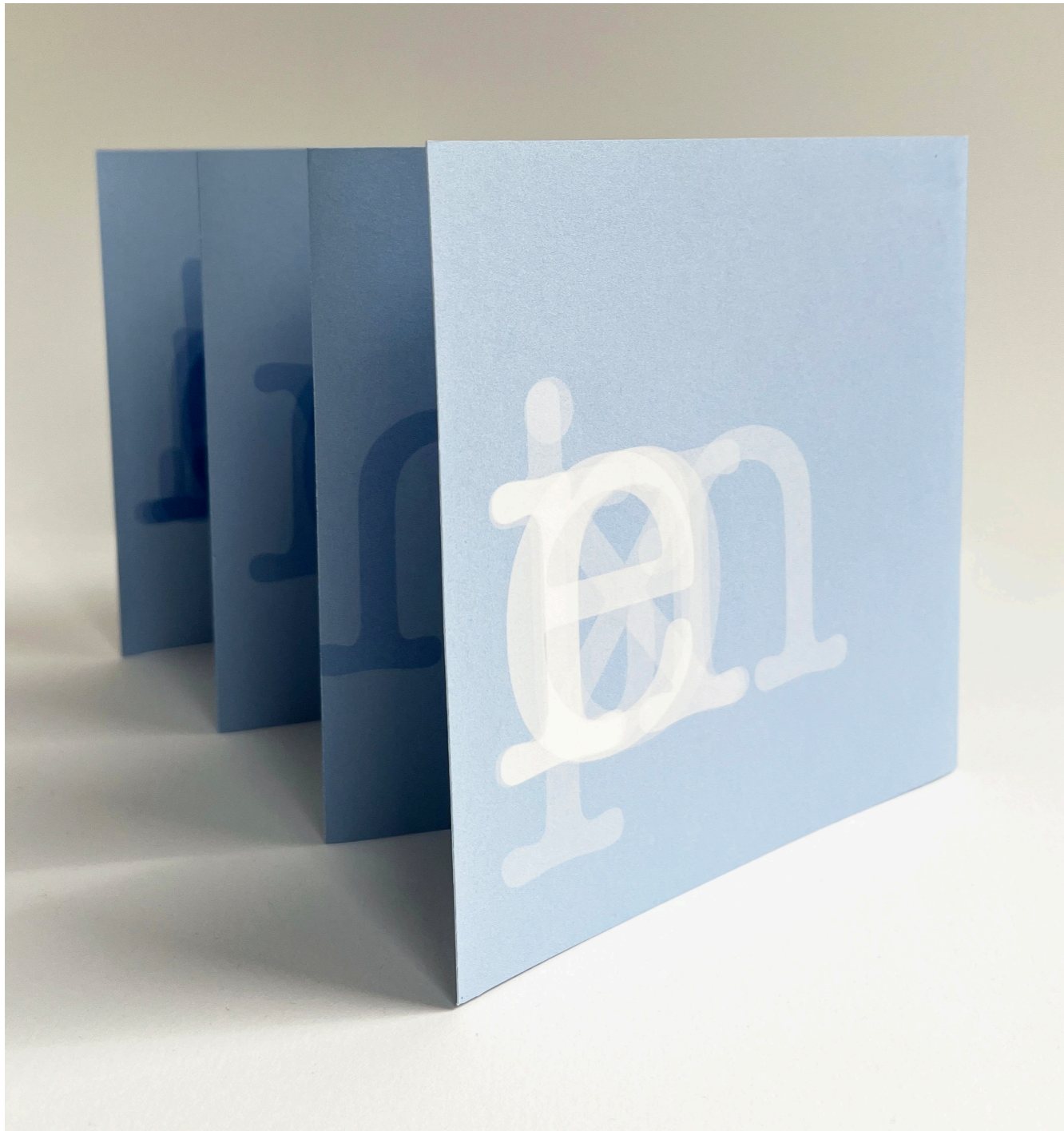
◀ Fig. 90 Concertina book: Spatiality  
 ▲ Fig. 91 Detail concertina book: Spatiality  
 ▼ Fig. 92 Page concertina book: Spatiality





◀ Fig. 93 Concertina  
 book: Locality  
 ▶ Fig. 94 Detail concertina  
 book: Locality





◀ Fig. 95 Concertina  
book: Technology  
▲ Fig. 96 Pages concertina  
book: Technology  
▼ Fig. 97 Detail concertina  
book: Technology





◀ Fig. 98 Detail outside pages concertina book: Education  
 Fig. 99 Concertina book: Education  
 ▲ Fig. 100 Detail inside pages concertina book: Education



## 6.7 Conclusion

Through my design practice, I revealed the key themes (see pp. 170–183) that emerged from the semi-structured interviews and that make visible the relationships between a Dutch contemporary typographic discourse and place. These relationships – time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology, education – are the ‘processes of a place’<sup>364</sup> in the Netherlands. These processes reflect a cultural exchange through typography in the world and in the concertina book. As a result, the key themes provide a ‘global sense of place’<sup>365</sup> in Dutch contemporary typographic discourse. These representations of knowledge – the ecological epistemology,<sup>366</sup> are therefore relational processes and an entanglement of place. This addresses the research question: How can notions of geographical location (a ‘place’) inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work? Furthermore, there is an overlap of themes, specifically, time, borders, education and landscape, where internationalisation and flow of movement play a fundamental role in the impact of the application of typography in the Netherlands, through spoken, written and visual languages. Different cultures bring different perspectives to the Netherlands and exchange knowledges, whether in education or in design project collaborations<sup>367</sup>.

Moreover, the key themes provide further understanding of the research question, What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment? The social interactions between institutions, cities, and education systems are entangled with global interactions. However, the Dutch language as cultural identity provides an understanding of a local sense of place. A sense of place also refers to historical movements, for example Modernism. This still impacts one’s thinking and approaches towards graphic design, typographic applications and design education in the Netherlands. In the semi-structured interviews, there is little mention or references by participants to female graphic designer/typographers, either historical or contemporary. This is concerning, as this should be visible and it indicates that more awareness should be created through education. Western ideals, including Dutch design, have dominated other culturally inclusive visual languages. At the time of the semi-structured interviews, participants reflected a Western cultural [historical] ideal towards graphic design.

<sup>364</sup> Massey, op. cit., 1991.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Hughes and Lury, op. cit.

<sup>367</sup> Participants of this research collaborated on design projects in e.g. China and Germany.

The research question: Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?

My design practice is a visual expression of meaning-making, evidencing analysis and the representation of knowledge. I was able to develop, make visible and represent ideas that came out of the semi-structured interviews. Through the process of materialising and visualising, the practice outcomes, the concertina books are an ecology of semantics. The final findings of the research are also an ecology of semantics. These findings are the processes of a place that impact Dutch typography. The definition of the ecology of semantics is discussed in the introduction of this thesis (see Chapter One, p.22) as a two-fold approach. The ecology of semantics came out of the components of the research and refers to the methods of the research as semantic approaches of meaning making. It also refers to the themes as the semantics that form an ecology that relate to the processes of place, the social and cultural interactions that connect typography in the Netherlands. The themes are entities in themselves and have their own habitats, yet they related to each other and, in the context of this research, cannot exist without each other. The themes are interrelated and influence a typographic discourse in the Netherlands.

The next chapter delivers the conclusion of this practice-led research. I discuss the findings and outcomes, the contribution to new knowledge, process and limitations and the future of the research.

# Chapter Seven

## Conclusion



## Introduction

In this research I discussed and explored the relationships between typographic discourse and place, specifically applied typography in the Netherlands through a conversation prompt and semi-structured interviews explored through graphic design practice. I positioned the research within visual communication. The exploration of an 'ecology of semantics' has resulted in new insights on multiple levels. This final chapter concludes with my research findings and addresses the research questions, the original contribution to knowledge, the limitations and future directions for the research.

### 7.1 Summary and Key Findings

In my research, I set out to address the research questions:

- How can notions of geographical location (a 'place') inform typographic articulation in contemporary print-based work?
- Can graphic design practice make implicit meaning visible in written language to help communicate notions of national identity and cultural exchange?
- What are the cultural influences that point to connections between Dutch typography and its environment?

As a design practitioner, I approach this practice-led research as research *through* design.<sup>368</sup> The conversation prompt and the semi-structured interviews are used to collect data and information. I used thematic analysis and graphic design practice in the interrogation of the book form as a visual and textual representation in print of the participant's and my own spoken words. The

368 RTD 2015 Provocation by Sir Christopher Frayling *Part 1: Research Through Design Evolution*. <https://vimeo.com/129775325>.

conversation prompt and concertina books contribute to an understanding of the how relational processes of a place, the themes of time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology, education, impact a typographic discourse in the Netherlands.

The chapters built upon one another from the literature review as a process which helped to identify the research questions, to establishing a methodological role for the practice in finding novel methods to address the research questions. In Chapter Two the interdisciplinary literature review establishes selected theoretical concepts of place in relation to contemporary typography and the book in the Netherlands. The literature is mainly located in history and technological approaches of typography. There is limited representation of cultural values<sup>369</sup> of Dutch contemporary typographic discourse in the field visual communication. Emerging from the literature review was an identifiable absence of critical approaches on the themes of cultural landscape and spatiality.

In Chapter Three I critically engage in the methodology of this research. This multi-method approach allowed for different modes of communication to collect and analyse the data and information. The dialogical approach in this research, through the conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews and graphic design practice, brought together the spoken word and its representation through the production of the concertina books. The interactions between methods as a holistic approach, developed into an ecology of semantics as a foundation for this set of interviews in Dutch typography. The semantics refer to the meaning-making processes of each method. The ecology of semantics emerged from the multi-method approach and from the contents of the semi-structured interviews referring to the themes of the research.

In Chapter Four I explore the conversation prompt as a tool to instigate the semi-structured interview. The conversation prompt was deemed to be partially effective as a research tool, since one participant did not receive the conversation prompt. Five of the six participants received it and three of the five actively engaged in the conversation through responses to the questions, sharing an experience and engaging with the design of the prompt itself. Covid-19 made the process of the conversation prompt complicated, as I had to send it by

369 Henk Hoeks, Ewan Lentjes, *The Triumph of Typography Culture, Communication, New Media*, (Amsterdam: Lannoo Publishers/Terra, 2015).

post, rather than use it in an in-person discussion. The conversation prompt, developed from an iterative design process, as a tool for communication guided specific directions in the conversations with those who interacted and reacted to the prompt. A different set of conversations would have resulted without the prompt. Considering asking questions only verbally would have prompted different reactions or experiences.

Chapter Five describes the process of semi-structured interviews with six participants who live and work in the Netherlands. Through each iteration of the semi-structured interviews, I became more confident in the best ways to conduct the semi-structured interviews. As a result, the last two semi-structured interviews are longer than the previous three, and I engaged in the conversation that elicited more insights by asking more questions. Importantly for the research, this approach resulted in a more discursive and conversational style.

A research limitation caused by Covid-19 was that the semi-structured interviews were documented as online video recordings. By not conducting the interviews<sup>370</sup> in the physical environment of the participant, the restrictions of the technology did not enable nuanced conversations about the topic and materiality of its environments. From the online semi-structured interviews, I gained engagement in the research topic, communication through email and easy access with the internet as the location. Lost in the process are non-verbal cues, context of one's environment and conversation prompt given to participants in person. Furthermore, the process and practice of semi-structured interviews provided a space to develop ideas about applied typography in the Netherlands. The participants provided information about their experiences, design practices, design processes, design history, historical and contemporary key figures (including Herman de Vries, Gerard Unger, Roger Willems, Karel Martens, Jaap van Triest, Jan van Krimpen) in art and design, design education, experiences of teaching in relation to the places they live in and move through. Further themes emerged from the semi-structured interview: education, borders and locality. Time was a reoccurring theme in relation to history and design processes of participants.

370 B. Lobe, D. L. Morgan and K. Hoffman (2022), 'A Systematic Comparison of In-Person and Video-Based Online Interviewing', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221127068>.

Chapter Six resulted in seven themes (time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education) through a thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews, specifically, through graphic design practice. The design practice provided ways of thinking to make visible the key themes and relationships between typography and place and resulted in seven concertina books. The concertina book represents the entanglements of place and the semi-structured interviews. Furthermore, the research noted the impacts of internationalisation on typography in the Netherlands, through education and design projects. Different cultural voices provide different perspectives through language.

The findings (Fig. 81) of this research reveal the entanglements of place that impact a typographic discourse in the Netherlands. Specifically, through a conversation prompt and the material representation of the living word and the semi-structured interviews. The dialogical process with participants provided an understanding of their design processes and experiences that is impacted by global relationships through design collaborations and education. Their interactions with different cultural identities provide a global sense of place through a typographic discourse. By making relationships between a geographical place, the Netherlands, and its typography, the Dutchness of the typographic discourse is shaped by global interactions. These global interactions are cultural influences that impact typography in the Netherlands, such as the use of the English language in education and within design projects. The seven themes (to reiterate: time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education) show the processes of place and their impact on typography in the Netherlands. Further examination of the themes through the design practice, the typographic explorations and the concertina books, provided a sense of place on the page. The most valuable affordance of a designer is the ability to take the invisible idea into the world to make it visible to their audience/s.

As the practitioner-researcher of this practice-led research, I critically reflect on the process and outcomes of research from the perspective as a book designer. My 'reflection-on-action'<sup>371</sup> and 'reflection-in-action'<sup>372</sup> (see Chapter Three p. 73) provides an understanding of the original knowledge that was generated

371 Gray, Malins, op. cit., p. 22.

372 Ibid.



through the design practice. The final outcomes and outputs of the research are the thesis and concertina books. Through the research process I developed my design practice into a research method. This development required conceptual thinking and applying my book design knowledge throughout the research process. The research enabled me to develop relational thinking and make this visible through the concertina books. I think spatially through complex ideas and theories, therefore the book is the instrument to analyse place and typographic discourse.

The [experimental] design practice made invisible ideas material and tangible and led to insights. The design practice creates a relational way of thinking through a dialogical methodology and bridges the connections between practice and theory. Specifically, the book form<sup>373</sup> allows for relational<sup>374</sup> thinking through materiality, structure, text, typography and the printed page. Through the process of writing, thinking and making my perspectives changed and the knowledge about typography in the Netherlands developed into the seven themes. The dialogical interaction through semi-structure interviews, materials, the analysis through the book form, provided a relational understanding of the entanglements<sup>375</sup> of place. The design practice forms the ecology of semantics (see Introduction p. 23) and provides the representation of the entanglements of place. The book as a [spatial] object, process, instrument and outcome of the research, creates meaning making processes that understand relationships between typographic discourse and place and is an original contribution to knowledge to the field of visual communication.

The decisions and considerations within the [design] process of my research informed and changed my thinking profoundly. It prompts more questions, e.g. how to understand a sense of place through text or spoken word? Making entanglements of place tangible and visible, I gained a better understanding *why* the themes impact a typographic discourse on the printed page. It is this tension between reality and imagination that meet through the design practice. As a result of this research, I approach my design practice differently, as a form of knowledge production. The book particularly, as a form of knowledge production, conceptual thinking and a method of enquiry. I approach a research

373 Lucinda Hitchcock, 'Word Space / Book Space / Poetic Space, Experiments in Transformation', *Visible Language*, Vol. 34 No. 2 (2000).

374 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presse Du Reel (2002).

375 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, (Duke University Press, 2007).

subject/object from different directions to understand influences and contexts. The research taught me that my assumptions, biases, and belief systems are fragments that are informed by my own sense of place.

As the practitioner-researcher, I am crossing disciplinary boundaries (art, design, cultural geography, and ecological thinking) throughout the research and design practice. The multidisciplinary approach is important and shifted my perception and understanding of a typographic discourse in the Netherlands. This created an extra dimension in critical thinking that developed my research. The posthumanist<sup>376</sup> approach provide an understanding as to how I look different at subjects/objects and understanding entanglements of place.

376 Ibid.

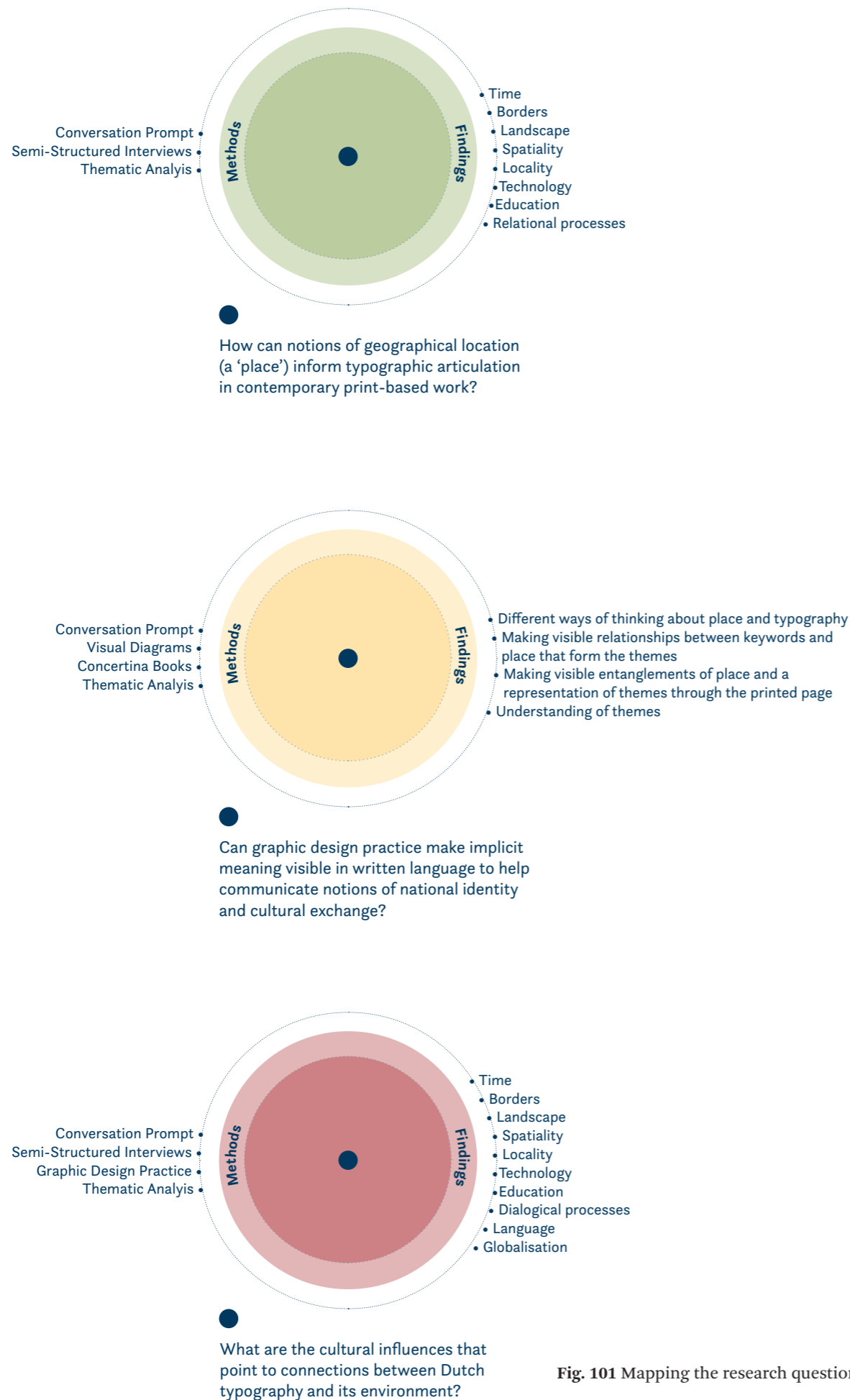


Fig. 101 Mapping the research questions

## 7.2 Original Contribution to Knowledge

In this thesis I have argued that different aspects of place, the local, a location and a sense of place, are part of the processes in the Netherlands which impact a Dutch typographic discourse in the book. This research provides an original contribution to knowledge in the field of visual communication from the position of a graphic designer specialised in book design. It offers an understanding of contemporary typography and their social and cultural background in the Netherlands, specifically, a different way of looking at written language and [geographical] and sense of places through the spoken word. The research moved beyond typography in the urban landscape<sup>377</sup> or signage, type design and technological tendencies for the production of typefaces, to how a place can impact contemporary typography in the printed book and understanding cultural significance of typography.

The identification of the gap in the literature review reveals the strong tendency on history and technology of typography<sup>378</sup> (Latin alphabet) in the Netherlands and globally. However, approaches towards cultural aspects or values<sup>379</sup> of typography are limited and understanding their [social] interactions with place. This study is an attempt to fill this gap in knowledge by investigating the relationship between Dutch typographic discourse and place. I made visible the entanglements of place, understanding how a Dutch typographic discourse communicates cultural aspects on the printed page and is influenced by different aspects of place, and how my graphic design practice makes the invisible space of meaning visible in the written language. This resulted in a set of findings, discussed in section 7.1 of this chapter. These findings provide an understanding of contemporary typographic discourse in the Netherlands and the cultural exchange of typographic communication.

The thesis further contributes to an understanding of how a typographic discourse emerges from a shared place-based heritage between graphic designers, educators and academics. Massey's notion of the processes of a place, discuss the social interactions between places and people. My research reveals that not

377 Robert Harland, *Graphic Design in Urban Environments*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016); J. Singer, *Typographic Landscape Ecologies*, online publication: August 2017–ongoing; Bharain Mac an Bhreithiún and Anne Burke, 'Language, Typography, and Place-Making: Walking the Irish and Ulster-Scots Linguistic Landscape', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 38, no. ½, 2014, pp. 84–125. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43410725>.

378 Unger, 2007; Middendorp, 2004; Bringhurst, 2004; Lupton, 2010; Kinross, 2004.

379 Henk Hoeks, Ewan Lentjes, *The Triumph of Typography Culture, Communication, New Media*, (Amsterdam: Lannoo Publishers/Terra, 2015).



only social interactions have influence on typography in print-based work, but also cultural elements, such as values or beliefs underpinning the typographic discourse. The relational processes – the key themes of time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology and education – are connected to each other and present ways in which a typographic discourse is continually in ‘process’. The conceptualisation of an ecology of semantics, as a form of critical engagement with cultural aspects of typography through aspects of place, provides results in different design variations as a novel contribution to the field of visual communication. These results are generated through a multi-method approach of a design-led conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews, a graphic design practice emphasising book design and a thematic analysis.

The results are a design-led conversation prompt that instigated conversations and a series of concertina books representing the living word and the themes about the cultural aspects of place that influence applied typography in the Netherlands. The meaning-making processes through the design practice are the semantics of the ecology. From my position as a designer of books, I have utilised design to investigate the complexity of place and understanding a typographic discourse. The concertina book affords rhythm, space, place, folds, structure and understandings of the key themes through the ideation within the graphic design process. I approach the design process as a holistic approach to make visible and tangible the entanglements of place. The key themes mentioned above that emerged in the research are part of the ecology of semantics, providing an understanding of the interconnectedness of a geographical place through my design practice of the concertina books and how cultural aspects are communicated through a contemporary Dutch typographic discourse. Specifically, the themes represent the semantics of the ecology and provide an understanding of the social and cultural interactions and processes<sup>380</sup> of place. The relational aspects of the themes form the ecology of semantics. Additionally, the relationship between the methods (diagrams, sketches, notes, conversation prompt, semi-structured interviews, graphic design practice) applied in this research form an ecology. The methods are entities in themselves but operate in the system together and iterate towards a holistic outcome of the research.

380 Massey, op. cit., 1991.

Through visualisation of abstract and complex ideas, this research makes theoretical concepts visible for study. The research opens perspectives of the changing field of visual communication and contributes to existing discussions about typography, place, environment and the role of the book. The research develops an understanding of Dutch contemporary typographic discourse in relation to concepts of place. By developing an understanding of these relationships, the research provides insights into the way we [re]approach the world and how typographic discourse is manifested through a material expression of Dutch culture. The ‘ecology of semantics’ reflects both the global and the local processes of social and cultural typographic interactions in the Netherlands – the entanglements of place. Therefore, a text on the printed page is never static.

### 7.3 Limitations and Future Directions

One limitation of the research was that the semi-structured interviews were conducted via online video conversations on Zoom due to Covid-19. The semi-structured interviews provided invaluable information, however the extra dimension when meeting and talking to someone in person provides a layer of non-verbal communication and knowledges in one’s own environment. The research contains a partial view, due to the number of participants (six). To gain experiences and knowledges from participants, John W. Creswell, J. David Creswell suggest ‘a range of 3–10’<sup>381</sup> participants for their experiences. Participants were selected on experiences of their design practice and teaching experiences, with consideration for including female and male participants. Future directions could be developed which bring into focus a wider range of voices.

The conversation prompt could benefit from further development as an object. It was limited in its size due to the postal distribution system in the Netherlands. It also could benefit from an interaction between the researcher, conversation prompt and participants in person. For the purpose of this research, I limited the book design practice to the concertina book form. However, exploration into other book forms could be addressed in future projects.

381 Creswell, Creswell, op. cit., p. 262.

Upon completion of the PhD, my ambition is to continue researching the relational aspects of place and how this impacts visual communication. Building upon the findings of this research, as a platform for further study, one or more themes (time, borders, landscape, spatiality, locality, technology, education) could be a starting point (a conversation prompt) for a conversation with participants. Specifically, the representation of different cultural voices (including participants outside the Netherlands) would enhance a sense of place and an understanding of cultural identity in visual communication. The concept of an ecology of semantics provides a relational way of thinking and meaning-making through the design practice as a form of analysis, especially through representation and visualisation and explore different book forms. I aim to build upon my proposal of an ecology of semantics to expand an ecological thinking approach within visual communication design research and further explore interdisciplinary research. Future projects include:

- A symposium and series of seminars, the living words, to further develop and continue the conversations with invited participants, and opening discussions to other disciplines, conducted globally.
- A publication for output and dissemination of the research. I aim for a publication about an ecology of semantics. This publication would include findings of this research.
- I will further disseminate my research through research papers, conferences, research journals (for example, *Communication Design*, *Design Issues*, *Art of Research*, *Cultural Geographies*).
- Through design research, I will explore alternative book forms in relation to concepts of place.

I conclude with my vision on how the complex notions of place within the ecology of semantics can further benefit from a graphic design practice. By creating the material representation of aspect of place, I sought to develop a book form that enhances an understanding of relational aspects of place and contemporary Dutch typographic discourse. Through the multi-methods approach of this research, through different modes of communication, I made visible the relationships between Dutch typographic discourse and the social and cultural processes of place in the Netherlands to communicate cultural aspects on the printed page. I identified seven key themes that determine processes of place in the Netherlands and play a key role in how typography in the Netherlands is informed and impacted by these social and cultural structures. The methodology,

my graphic design processes, and the key themes of the research contribute to the understanding of typographic communication design within the field of visual communication.



# Appendices

## Appendix I

### Pilot study fieldtrip Rotterdam, The Netherlands, August 2019

This pilot study explores and investigates the understanding 'place' (Agnew, 2005, Cresswell, 2015, Massey, 2005). How can we better understand the relationships between the local and the global. By linking places to places beyond, we can gain a better understanding of 'its character' (Massey 1991). This reflects on cultural geographer Doreen Massey's theory 'global sense of place'. Rotterdam is a city linked to cultural and historical developments, trading and owns a rich history of art of design in the Netherlands. Located in the province of South Holland, at the mouth of the New Maas (river) leading to the North Sea. In the context of this research, Rotterdam is related to many typographic developments (e.g. conferences, publications), designers and academics, and has an influential Art Academy, Willem de Kooning Academie (strong typography department). Typographer, historian, type designer and educator Gerrit Noordzij originally from Rotterdam (currently Den Haag), provides the foundation and direction of the pilot study in Rotterdam.

### Reflections of fieldtrip Rotterdam through writing and graphic design (Fig. 102).

Inside and outside a place/city. How typography is moving and used. How design agencies are designing. What do I see in the city. It is raining. Reflections. I listen to the stories told about Rotterdam. We cycle and walk around the city to see different areas of Rotterdam where cultural events are happening. A cluster of museums in one particular area, close to the city centre. A cluster of almost invisible studios for designers and artists. Thought: if I was walking around this city by myself, I would have had a



Fig. 102 Reflections of fieldtrip Rotterdam through graphic design practice

different experience. I would not know about these invisible spaces. My guide gave me inside knowledge of historical and contemporary aspects of the city. How people move around the city. How connections are made between designers/artists. How museums are working within the city. Diverse architectural approaches. I listen to the story about the Boymans van Beuningen Museum, that is now closed for seven years to reconstruct the building. Build next to the museum is a contemporary silver shining boll building, which should hold a selecting from the museum on display and containing a digital archive of the museum's pieces. A rather strange object in the landscape of neatly arranged architecture. I listen. Whilst I listen I observe the city, the atmosphere, the construction. Typography. A sense of the place. We walk. Then there is the river. Rotterdam is divided by the river Nieuwe Maas into the north and the south. I look at the other side of the river, it feels there is a different place in the distance. How is language used in the city. Noticeable in the conversation is the use of English words in the Dutch language, which sometimes is inappropriate due to the meaning and context. Where is this coming from? Is the language influenced by the environment? And how? Is this exchange, is this the local and global?



### Information sheet for conversation prompt 'Open Space'

See Chapter Four, section 4.5.1, p. 92 for detailed information.

#### Information for the Participant

Geographical locations, the environment and language play a significant role in how to perceive the world. Our current social experience, cultural perception of printed materials, the use and influences of typography build relationships with our environments.

This practice-led research is located at the intersections of typography and cultural geography. Specifically, looking at the relationships between Dutch contemporary typographic discourse, written language and place. The historical and contemporary context of typography in the Netherlands, a distinct design culture, contains strong typographic developments from the early 1990s. The research takes into account the broader social, political and cultural structures and processes that influence Dutch typographers and print-based work.

Through dialogues and conversations my aim is to gain a better understanding of these social, political and cultural processes that may occur between typographers and the place[s] in which they work and live and move through. A dialogue can exist between humans, between objects, between human and object, between human and environment, between object and environment.

This conversation prompt, Open Space, is a starting point for our conversation to understand in what ways do geographical locations [a place1] impact Dutch contemporary typography through print-based work.

#### Instructions

Open Space is a print-based, folded booklet. An A3 printed paper sheet folded into a small booklet containing two questions. Read visually as a booklet and unfold into an A3 paper sheet to read the questions. The three stages of our conversation are described below.

#### Stage 1

In advance of our conversation you have received the conversation prompt titled Open Space by post, and both an email and posted version of this information sheet with the research context and the conversation process outlined. Please read the prompt in advance of our conversation.

#### Stage 2

Following the completion of reading the conversation prompt, you will be invited for an online audio-recorded conversation of around one hour.

#### Stage 3

A follow-up email. Following our conversation, in advance of the publication of my thesis, I will provide you with a final version of the transcript conversation.

If you would like to know the outcome of this research project, I can send a pdf copy of my final published thesis.

**This section has been redacted, it contained sensitive materials.**

- Information letter send to participants
- Semi-structured interviews transcriptions, Dutch and English languages
- Consent forms



## Appendix IV

### Reflective text of Reading the Living Word

See Chapter Six, section 6.2.1, p. 118 for detailed information.

When I think of communication, I think of many different forms of communication, through language, through material, through visual forms, through colour, through shapes, through sound. These aspects can be a representation of something. These separate aspects can be found in places as well, both urban and natural places and spaces. Tradition can be used in many forms and approaches. Building on histories, or skills or techniques. Perhaps it is a way of doing. Something that is inherited in culture as well. Tradition is time, communication is time. It connects past, present and future. I am interested in the different aspects of place. The different levels of place. The real geographical location in the world as well as the imaginary places that exists. This can exist through literature, through the human minds, through visual artworks, poetry or music. The interaction within a place are small ecologies. The connections the make with humans and non-humans. How is language used, through images, text, typography as materiality. How can we understand a sense of place through text for example. How is typography applied on a printed page. This influences readers. How do we tell stories. The importance of understanding histories. Understanding different cultures to learn from each other. Different perspectives provide new understanding of

how we look at the world. I believe everything is connected and don't look at places as isolated entities. I think, one can only understand its isolation when you understand the connections. In the conversations with participants, I felt they put value and importance on creating work that reflects its time at that moment in time. Public spaces that interact with artworks and its surroundings. In one of the interviews artist Herman de Vries was discussed. I resonate with the work of this artist as his work involves the natural world. Cross-cultural aspects of knowledge exchange, such as language through exhibitions. How different cultures look at languages. Collaborations between cultures on a local scale as well as on a global scale. As I noticed in the semi-structured interviews, to think about the location one interacts in or through are sometimes unconscious [inter]actions. Different ways of how typography is used on the page. Punctuation. Patterns in typography. The book still important medium and exists aside digital platforms. The openness of cities. Reflecting upon my own practice, the book, typography, stories. Making visual hidden and unnoticed aspects of places. Experiences of making books, exhibitions, installations, collaborating and teaching.

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