



I Beam - The Dancers Edition

I Beam is an annual project that exploits contemporary typography software to construct typefaces developed by different creative groups. Initiated in June 2003 as part of the Arts Councils Architecture Week programme, I Beam The Architects Edition focussed upon the architecture profession. The project proved to be very successful as we were able to get some of the UK's best architects to contribute and develop a unique Font. Once published as a CD-Rom and distributed for free across the country it became clear that the I Beam fonts were not just novelty typefaces, but actually revealed a great deal about each Architects thinking and designing process.

Future Systems and Stephen Perrella were interested in distortions of actual typefaces, whilst Will Alsop and Wayne Hemingway developed creative tools for the public to use for themselves. Form Design a Plymouth based practice and Neal Huston from the USA have used a symbolic approach, dRMM have used their studio's texture library and Feilden Clegg Bradley employees cut up and rearranged Helvetica to develop their own characters.

In many ways the different characteristics of each font indicated how the Architects design and develop their large scale work for buildings and environments, and provided the public with an insight into their thinking process. Something that is rare in contemporary art and design since the manufacture of artworks, buildings and performances are so well crafted, and so much of what we see is mediated by modern technologies that hide the development process.

Soon after last years show and publication, the team that developed the fonts made the decision that I Beam should become an annual project that focussed upon different creative groups in order to further reveal the unusual thinking and making processes that are associated with different forms of art and design. So through a brief discussion we decided to look to the fields of dance and performance to develop the 2004 edition; I Beam The Dancers Edition.

Possible reasons for choosing this broad and very diverse area of creative practice maybe the regions strong relationship with dance, theatre and performance and the recent success of TR2. The Performance Research journal published by Routledge is part developed by researchers at Dartington College for the Arts, and much of the work that they do identifies the very best of contemporary work in the field. What ever the reason it was clear that who ever we were able to work with, they would provide us with a very different series of ideas to that of the Architects.

Through April and May of this year dancers, performance artists and live theatre groups were approached and asked to develop an idea for a typeface. Through telephone conversations, email instructions and interviews, broad ideas were distilled down to specific concepts for the designers to take into font form.

This years works are a terrific range of ideas that represent the spectrum of creative practice that occurs within the dance and performance community.

Blast Theory's microdot inspired letters reveal hidden messages that hint toward a political rhetoric, whilst Rosemary Lee's Figures allow us to compose tableau's and dance routines with her hand drawn performers. Siobhan Davies was interested in capturing the time that somebody spent on particular keys as they wrote about her recent work Birdsong, we were able to capture this time and develop an alphabet of letters that are barely recognisable if not used very much, and swollen if used a great deal. Students from Lipson Community College developed a dance piece from the longest word that they could think of; supercalifragilistic expialidocious, whilst Attik dance divided their keyboard into an upper case font that followed the finger movements of their admin officer Sarah Coby, and a lower case alphabet developed through the expressive movement of the dancer Louis Taylor. Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) has constructed a three layer font that applies predetermined meaning to letters from T for teeth and M for mutilate forcing you to reflect upon your body as it punches away at the keys. Sue Smith of CandoCo dance company demands that we perform actions and take part in a performance routine ourselves, as each key we press instructs us to 'hold it there' or 'kiss your elbow'. And finally, Lone Twin held a host of people to Ransom until they provided letters from the pivotal sentences within a book that meant a great deal to them.

All of the fonts are very different indeed and express many different relations of body, space and the very usual act of typing into a keyboard.

The IBeam team of designers are:

Matt Bilson, Richard Boyd, George Grinsted, Ian Hutchinson, Gavin Mackintosh, Chris O'Shea and Chris Speed.

Special thanks to Sam Spake for movement interpretation in charcoal for Attik Dance.

The project was developed by Plymouth Arts Centre and the Institute of Digital Art and Technology.

Copyright remains with the dancers and performance artists.

Installation

Mac OS X (To install for a single user):

1. Open your Home folder
2. Copy the Mac font file to: Library: Fonts

Mac OS X (To install for all users):

1. Double-click your hard disk icon in the top-left of the Desktop
2. Copy the Mac font file to: Library: Fonts

Mac OS 9 and below:

1. Double-click your hard disk icon in the top-left of the Desktop
2. Copy the Mac font file to: System Folder: Fonts

Windows:

1. Click the Start menu and select: Control Panel
2. If necessary, select: Switch to Classic View
3. Double-click: Fonts
4. Copy the PC font file to this folder