

PB remembered by colleague Catherine Dixon

On the day Phil died I stepped from a London Underground station and saw a great example of a Johnston roundel design. It is hard, to lose someone who helped shape the way I look at the world, and who is there in the day-to-day rhythms I find for typesetting words.

My working relationship with Phil began in 1991 when I was sent to see him. I was starting my final undergraduate year at Central Saint Martins, and though my sketchbooks were full of letters, the idea that this was typography seemed preposterous. Typography was something ‘serious’, something done by other people.

After some nodding – he was never an effusive tutor – Phil sent me off to read Ruari McLean’s *Manual of Typography*. And so began my journey, realising that words were key to my work. One of the ideas in my sketchbook had been to plot one text within another. I used the McLean introduction and the opening lines of John’s Gospel from the Christian Bible, bringing them together in a two-part letterpress composition. Back then, I was completely ignorant of Phil’s own experiments with language, letterpress and faith, and he could have so easily have said, ‘Oh that, yeah, I’ve done that.’ But he never did. It was characteristic of the teaching practice he built. He stayed open to the vision of his students, giving them space to find the way forward on their terms.

I started freelance work as the first of several design assistants in Phil’s studio, helping out on early projects for Phaidon, including John Maizel’s *Raw Creation* (1996). The rule-driven design system that Phil had set up for the layouts was so complex that he took care of text while I oversaw the integration of images in highly expressive spreads.

We designed well together, diving in and out of each other’s project files. We would write into each other’s sentences, with the outcomes representing a true synthesis.

Alongside the studio work, I worked part-time on a research project at CSM’s Central Lettering Record (CLR), see *Eye* 15 and 25. Phil had inherited responsibility for the CLR when he started teaching, but (by his own admission) had no real knowledge of it. As I navigated the historical collections and designed systems for updating them, he recognised the potential for what both the CLR and I might bring to teaching. Across the decades we developed our own lettering collections, with my research into how we build narratives around letterforms complemented by Phil’s interest in industrial lettering and transport sign systems. Opportunities to travel, research and document what we found opened out with many of these journeys incorporated into our book *Signs* (2003) and other articles along the way, such as ‘Letter rich Lisbon’ in *Eye* 54.

He was the best of people to share things with. He listened, and had so much to offer in return, no matter who you were. He was a one-person portal to worlds that are usually distinct, but through him came together; the poetry and professional pragmatism of design colliding with the theory and rigour of academic research, underpinned by his sure grasp of history, made accessible through a gift for teaching. It was an exuberance for learning that elevated every day in the studio and made 30 years of working together feel like an adventure.