a favourable influence on exports within Europe. Typefoundry Amsterdam could now sell types cast by Berthold, so these were not cast in-house in Amsterdam. Nero (Berthold’s Lo Schrift), Metro (Berthold’s City), Sirene (Berthold’s Signal), and probably Post-Antiqua as well, were brought on the market in this way. De Roos adapted Berthold Grotesk as Nobel (1929), which would grow to be one of Typefoundry Amsterdam’s best-selling series. That it was an adaptation of an existing design was not mentioned at the time of its introduction. Nobel had to answer the demand for more severe sans-serif types that arose with the New Typography. Among the Typefoundry Amsterdam designs issued by Berthold were Oranien-Medieval (Erasmus Medieval) and Holländische Medieval. In 1941, during the German occupation of the Netherlands, the cooperation between the two firms came to an end.

From 1926, Dick Dooijes (1909–98) worked as De Roos’s assistant. His principal task was to make the working drawings. In 1941, after De Roos left the foundry, he became designer and draftsman, as well as taking charge of the typographic library. The foundry had earlier approached Sem Hartz, then working at Enschedé, about taking De Roos’s position, but nothing came of it. Besides Dooijes, L.H.D. Smit (1917–86) was employed as a type designer beginning in 1949. In 1945, G.W. Ovink (1912–84) had joined the firm as aesthetic adviser. He had received a doctorate in 1938, writing his thesis on Legibility, atmosphere-value and forms of printing types, and thereafter set up as an adviser for typography and advertising printing. His principal task at the foundry was to develop and supervise new type designs. In addition, he had joint responsibility for the typographic library, and he contributed to the company’s public relations with publications and lectures. This work occasionally interfered with his more scholarly studies.

In addition to type designs by their own employees and those acquired from other foundries, Typefoundry Amsterdam commissioned type from freelance designers. The policy was very much one of following existing trends. The foundry’s own types were above all to answer the needs demonstrated by the best-selling foreign designs. Their 1951 commemorative book reports proudly about the foundry: ‘As far as current production capacity, it can surely be bettered only by the American mammoth concern, American Type Founders, Incorporated.’9 In 1962, Dooijes began the development of his Lectura, intended as one of the foundry’s general-purpose types – alongside Garamont and Columbia. He and Ovink regularly consulted about the design. Market research had indicated that the type had to be something in the Garamond genre, but more economical with space and more regular. The first (advance) specimen appeared in December 1968, and an extensive one entitled Lectura salutem in May 1969. The press release reports: ‘the fact that the typefoundry dared to take on the investment required by such an extensive series of types as the Lectura, is proof of their confidence in the vitality of metal type for a long time to come.’ This quickly proved a poor assessment, however, for the metal-type era was on its last legs. In 1981, Tetterode-Nederland (as it was now called) left its building complex in the Bilderdijkstraat and the Da Costakade. Parts of the library’s interior were transferred to the Old Lutheran Church on the Singel in Amsterdam, used by the University of Amsterdam.

After being occupied by squatters for a long time, the buildings were converted into studio, office and living quarters. The firm, of which the typefoundry was now only a small and insignificant part, occupied a new building in Amsterdam (Bos en Lommer). Casting continued on a limited scale for a few years to serve small printing offices and amateur presses. On 23 December 1988, however, the foundry was officially closed.

On the way out to Tetterode’s current premises, located since 2011, in the Parkwijk area of Almere, I made conscious use of 10 electric signs and 4 non-electric signs to get from A –> B. These electric signs often make me think about the letter-objects journey to dematerialisation. Which, I also think, essentially began with the invention of electricity. Or, was it when Napoleon requested Captain Charles Barbier to come up with a code his army could communicate with silently and at night?
In any case, it seems obvious to write, but it when a letter is dematerialised it is much more difficult to see what it really is. And now I was travelling to a place that has been instrumental in their becoming so. The Lettergieterij Amsterdam v/h N. Tetterode, [L.A.] built up by the merchant/entrepreneur Nicolaas Tetterode, started as a typefoundry and, shortly after, also began to handle and supply printing presses. These printing presses would basically include set-line of lead letters. These little objects, letters or groups of words, could then be printed as an impression or perversion on paper. These lead-letter-objects would be visible in the machine they were inserted. The letters were a part of the mechanical engine. Activated, or set in motion, at the stage of the mechanical cycle they were required. The letters didn’t really affect the other parts of the machine at all and at the end of their job they were removed, recycled or melted. Like people working in a factories production line they could do their job essentially without interacting with the other parts of the machine, yet they were essential to a result. This was the material of S. H. de Roos’ Hollandse Mediæval typeface, for example. Hollandse Mediæval was a popular product in the L.A. catalogue; from its release in 1912, up until post-WWII – when the company decided to no longer market it. A reason for its removal describes a time when a place [Europe] had to ‘reset’ and begin to rebuild. This particular type of rebuilding would eschew the ‘arts and crafts’ associations that de Roos’ letter evoked – assigning it a new situation, where cultural connotation becomes essentially linked to calculation. The demand in this period of time – at least as indicated by L.A.’s promotional magazine Typografische mededeelingen – seemed to be for ‘brisk’ typefaces. Already this adjective seems to be too fast for heavy lead: “Get the lead out!” the phraseology predicts. And this would eventually happen – in a different guise than Moholy-Nagy’s utopian imagination of a unification between ‘graphics and photography, so lettering and pictures would become one whole’. Letter production indeed made the move to optics. Developed as industry modernised, in the search for more efficient processes. Processes that would perpetuate themselves to be in service of speed and quantity (which they were) … & mass production … but on reflection also reveal themselves to a consolidation and hiding – into structures that would make it more difficult to directly experience these printing letters.

Phototypesetting machines were introduced to work with new offset printing machines. Letters now were images on a photomatrix, a outline of a letter commanded in a computer-assisted process, exposed with light to produce strips of composed type. These strips output for paste-up... were still handle-able, visible and at a 1:1 scale; but lighter, more malleable and rendered onto a transparent film surface. Getting them ready for film with wax and glue, you would still have to get your hands dirty...

There were still type-designers employed at the L.A. at the time, but commissioned freelance designers (who usually worked on a royalties system) or mergers with other type-image production companies were being forged... The designers and their letter-designs were being out-sourced, as the graphic machinery became a core part of the business. With these new machines there seemed to be a choice, or a predilection, presented within type-design: Towards designing types for the new machines (that weren’t about the machines), exploiting their capabilities and features as a starting point, or adapting the traditional letters, their carried-over histories and connotations, to new imaging processes. These imaging processes that were simultaneously finding their way into civilian objects – like surveillance and entertainment equipment. Both approaches had advantages and drawbacks and both complicated a position, both requiring adaptation and compromise to work with the new machines. Paradox rules in the discipline of design, I usually think its saving grace. These optics, capable of prismatic and wild behaviours.
From the production – by no means the least amount – of 400,000 kg of lead letters in 1952 to less than 1,000 in 1988, the ‘lettergieter’ (the caster of lead letters) kept his job at Tetterode. Even during the integration of the photosetting machines. But neither process would endure the next stage of the letters development: Digitisation. In the mid-80s, when letters went truly digital, disappearing from our hands and concentrating them to our fingertips, graphics companies dealt with them with varying degrees of responsiveness. Tetterode’s then marketing manager, an advocate of this transition to digital, was connected for so long, he even had a digital typeface named after him. The new and latent programming language called PostScript, which no longer used the computer to command a photomatrix, but made the letters ‘describable’ by the computer steered us into our desktop design era. Letters that were once lead, then a negative – still realised as a physical object – would now never again become worn (only corrupted). The typeface, here, is transformed into a system that could now fit into many devices and facilitate (human) communication between them. They can even start to communicate within themselves. This allowing us to have a more circular, or reciprocal, relationship to the things we read and see and see and read and can use.

This transition to digital information (a file), connected to a concatenate computer language, implemented in complex integration and workflow systems perhaps turns the letter from a ‘tool’ into a ‘device’, a contrivance and a convergence of typical functions. Again, things disappeared, not to make things faster, but more integral, knotted. Potentially infinitely reproducible, at least once they are ‘activated’.