Faith in Type is a series of Christian students’ narratives of faith represented through illustrative typography. Through handling type as image as well as language, I am pushing the purpose of typographic communication beyond merely conveying information, the type will stylistically, formally, and conceptually portray faith and the difficulties of describing it in words.
I grew up in a very small town in Southeast Michigan, and was raised in a Lutheran home. Almost everyone I knew identified themselves as being Christian, whether it was Lutheran, like me, Baptist, Methodist, nondenominational, or the like. Even the people who didn’t follow or believe in Christianity acknowledged it, usually without complaint or protest, probably due to the fact that it was so present around them. I could not be more thankful that I grew up as a Christian, knowing the stories of the Bible, especially those of Jesus’ life; nor could I be more thankful for having grown up around people who shared my same beliefs.

I always felt that my friends and family and I bonded on a level so deep and so intimate that no other form of unity could compare. By the time I reached high school, the loveliness of my faith became clearer to me, and I became totally enamored of it. I read the poetic narratives in the Bible, and I prayed, thus affirming with myself the wonder of this worldly book that I saw on such an unworldly level. Having faith in Christ became a huge part of my identity, and it carried me through to college.

Upon coming to the University of Michigan in 2006, I quickly noticed how different from my hometown it was. I realized how uncomfortable the campus atmosphere could be when it came to Christianity, sometimes due to people discrediting it, or sometimes Christians themselves not portraying it in the most positive way. It was not like it was at home, where the Christian faith was not only praised a great deal, but it was also a norm.

New Life Church is a very contemporary, nondenominational “church for the next generation.” It felt as though it was made for college students like me, who were fearful or anxious in light of the spiritual tests that college can bring, as well as the rigorous changes college students undergo. I experienced that connection to people that I felt back home, that strong common ground in having faith in Jesus. What I loved the most were the Slices of Life, where students got up and humbly shared their stories of faith in Christ. These meaningful personal narratives were what I found as compelling about faith, that people can put words something often perceived as inexplicable. This intrigue eventually led me to create Faith in Type.
It would do my project's justice for me to describe it as being "about religion". My project is about something that transcends religion, while simultaneously giving it meaning. "Faith is a way of seeing," Fowler, in his renowned work, elegantly and accurately explains how religion is both a very different thing, qualitatively and scientifically proven or disproven. It is one enormous question regarding the source of pure truth, begging one to ponder over the aspects that are entirely unknown. It is this fascinating idiosyncrasy that makes faith so complex, and with which college students wrestle.

### NARRATIVE
In addition to my interest in the Christian faith, personal narratives fascinate me. I am attracted to interest in the stories of Christian college students like me for example, New Bill's "Slices of Life". It amazes me that people use this remarkable device known as language, and that they use it to connect themselves with their thoughts, opinions, memories, and of course, their faith. Writing is a deep passion of mine, so translating students' spoken narratives into a written form seemed to me an ideal project concept. Written words also press the notion of faith, something as large and amorphous, into something concrete and real. Though faith is in this process of pressing an idea into language, the process is necessary to understand faith and its specific, unique impact on the lives of individual people.

Aside from his clearly defined considerations of faith and religion, Fowler also writes about "the Six Stages of Faith Development" (P-Pre-Stage One through Stage Five), positing that college students are typically at the Third or Fourth stage. Stage Three Synthesizes-Conservative Faith is the stage in which "the meaning-maker begins to construct a personal myth," where he or she combines his or her memories, present life, and envisioned future to form one whole story around which he or she builds his or her beliefs and ideals (Corcoran 343). At this stage, young adults are typically "formalized," and their narratival are heavily influenced by authoritative people around them (parents, teachers, peer groups, etc.). It isn't until Stage Four that individuals develop an appreciation in which an individual's view starts to become more individualized, that he or she can fully come into his or her own personal faith. It is in this stage that the self is more confirmed, and one can make meaning independent of outside influence. But this is also a disadvantage, because one becomes too self-indulgent (Corcoran 343). College students at secular schools typically wrestle with their faith at this point, finding connections and trying to stifle them. One who is transitioning from Stage Three to Stage Four "may often come across a moment of confusion as he or she begins to reflect on the relative strength of the viewpoint of one's group," which leads to one developing a new story. (This is not to say that one rejects one notion of faith in order to adhere to another, but rather it is a process of differentiating and integration (Clare and Fitzgerald 105)). This was the case with me upon coming to the University of Michigan freshman year, and more often than not, this was the case with my interviewees.

Henry A. Corcoran is a Lutheran pastor who has done significant research on faith development in college students. For the Christian college students with whom I spoke, their stories fell within the meaning-making concept of Fowler's three stages of faith development. This happened through "faith"—give purpose to having faith in Christianity, but the stories of Christian's experiences with 'Christian's school' finding connection and trying to stifle them. Here, Jesus works in our lives in that we are able to find individualistic proof that faith, though mystical and amorphous is real. Narratives then, in themselves become religious experiences, serving a metaphysical or spiritual function where we neither have concrete identities within our abstract universes.

Simone Weil is a religious philosopher who takes narratives to a new level. Her writings take the concept of religion—something that is already abstract and in many ways inexplicable—and abstract it further, beyond conventional human boundaries. She sees for herself the answers to the toughest of questions regarding God, the divinity of Jesus, and religion as a whole broader, and her words evoke powerful imagery.

"Christian healing the sick, raising the dead, etc.—that is not human, almost I feel it to be an imitation. The supernatural part is the sweat of blood, the unsatisfied longing for human consolation, the sup-

faith
Typography brings to written language an entirely new dimension, giving words personalities through different stylistic letterforms and glyphs. It can illustrate an enormous spectrum of voices, such as those I encountered during interviews with students. For many interviewees, I kept the typography quite simple, but for some, I wanted to reflect their distinctivity depending of course on the content of the quote, the context in which it was stated, and the emotions or state of being of my interviewee.

"A language, as a collective phenomenon, takes the form of a totality of imprints in everyone’s brain, rather like a dictionary of which each individual has an individual copy. Thus it is something which is in each individual, but is none the less common to all. […] There is nothing collective about speech. Its manifestations are individual and ephemeral. […] Language in its totality is unknowable, for it lacks homogeneity. But the selection drawn above and the priority it implies make it possible to clarify everything" (de Saussure, 19-20).

According to de Saussure’s cyclical yet accurate description of language, language is something which grows and changes, in ways that are especially important in the written form. He writes that, though words soubliably and ideas assign specific meanings to them, everyone will interpret those meanings in different ways. Its lack of homogeneity, though, does not hinder it from being able to clarify, this paradox being that which keeps my project interesting. I was using words to clarify something amorphous and cloudy, and though every student with whom I interviewed used different words and linguistic devices to describe their faith, those words and devices were still able to assign particular meanings to the idea of faith as a whole. I was careful to keep this philosophy in mind while creating my project, as so as not to become too wrapped up in only creating solid designs.

Looking at written language, then, as an illustrative typography required me to understand that the meanings of the words were in many ways being signified by the images that were the letterforms. Choosing the appropriate font when working with computer-based type was designed differently. The result was a competing blend of different emotions and typographic expressions, all simplifying several complex stories. I had envisioned doing something similar with my project, transforming personal narratives into typographic designs, each with its own distinct aesthetic, yet all coming together to form a whole.

"Type swelling to show pain and injury". But the distinction drawn above and the priority it imposed on my interviewee’s story. I kept the typography quite simple, but for some, I wanted to reflect their distinctivity depending of course on the content of the quote, the context in which it was stated, and the emotions or state of being of my interviewee. Despite his nearly flawless typographic prowess, Carson created work that was very complex, and I didn’t want to draw as much upon his style asley for the sake of the drawing upon it. Nor did I want every type design to essentially have the same voice, for Carson’s work all has one distinct voice to it. I moved beyond Carson’s style and into the work of Lance Wyman, Paula Scher, other poster designers, and typographic design books to get a sense of the varying graphic styles I could employ. I also considered basic formalistic issues such as hierarchy and layout to prevent myself from losing sight of the fundamental elements of design.
I gleaned from all of these pieces was that there were ways in which I could activate type—make it move, make it illustrative, make it create tension, make it illustrative. I considered choice of typeface, noticing, for instance, how different the expressiveness of sans serif was compared to serif; I considered making type itself an image all its own, whether it was a chaotic tornado (Figure 15) or a human figure (Figure 13). These pieces helped me to solidify and expand my notion of what illustrative type, expressive type, and/or type as image really meant, and how using it in dozens of different ways can express dozens of different faith-based narratives.

I noticed that my own typographic style was very similar to that of the designers by which I was so inspired, and it was highly decorative. Design critic T. M. Cleland is a huge advocate for decoration in design, especially when it comes to typography. He criticized modernists (designers in particular) of “simplifying traditional forms of type as you might simplify a man by cutting his hands and feet off. You can no more dispense with the essential features of the written or printed Roman alphabet than you can dispense with the accents and intonations of human speech. This is simplification for simpletons, and these are block letters for blockheads.” In many ways, I agree with this postmodern philosophy, for it is very relevant to Faith in Type. I am drawing upon quite a large variety of design sources as inspiration, most of which fall under the design genre of postmodernism, which really pushes the use of illustrative typography. This is a design trend that saw its heyday in the 1980s and 90s, yet it is still a very prominent style seen in the industry today, albeit with a Modernist twist.

Today, postmodern design is now in many ways a variation of David Carson’s and Paula Scher’s earlier work. The typographic treatments still evoke stylized voices (rather than merely displaying emotionless information on a page), yet they draw upon the aesthetical qualities of Modernist design (simply without Modernist ideologies). The style of Faith in Type is best described as postmodern, with a sprinkles of Modern style. Whether I use Modern typefaces and manipulate the language, or juxtapose several different typefaces and use a rigid grid structure, the overall feeling is decorative and illustrative—nay, postmodern.
After inundating myself with Holzer’s type projections, I was able to glean from it what was relevant and tailor it to my project. I would be projecting onto a flat wall within a very particular space, whereas my projections were essentially filling a void and responding to an illuminated cross hanging on the opposite wall. In this regard, my projects were very different from Holzer’s, yet, seeing how she made the text behave so people were still helpful, for I was able to figure out how to make my projections as bright and high-quality as possible.

TERMS of REFERENCE

My interviews with students were brief but deep, in-voking all the same questions, but extraordinarily different answers. Almost everyone with whom I spoke shared a testimony of coming into his or her faith, a low point for several, a realization of life when faith had a profound impact, and of stories of how life since college had influenced, strengthened, or challenged his or her views on Christianity. Their movements natural, they would look downward when trying to navigate their words through a thicket of troublesome memo- ries or hard-to-swallow topics into which their voice and thoughts had carried them; then, they would look up at me when talking about the confidence and joy-ousness with which their faith had provided them.

Following the recordings were strict- ing for the setting their facial expressions, hand gestures, eye movements, and all other visual sen- sory experiences were stripped away from the audio, and existed only in my memory. Only hearing lan- guage caused me to really understand what was be- ing articulated, listening to people stumbling over their words with sighs and lies, and splices words together accidentally in figuring out which words to select was very indicative of the穷乏 of the topic for, they were not necessarily looking to locate the words they would do their narratives justice. Sometimes, they could not locate the words, and would ask me to say “It’s like… I don’t know.” or, “You know what I mean.” This was obviously an aspect of faith that comes as no surprise to anyone, but it was remark- able to witness people be as in awe of it, that they struggled so hard to find the words to describe it ac- curately. For instance:

He says you can “see God” in other people. Is this something he keeps yours giving when you are speak- ing about your faith?

Katie “Yeah, I dunno…that’s like another thing that I’ve always like…that’s been sort of a problem, be- cause I always feel like everyone else sees it way more in touch with God than me and I’m like… weirdly disconnected, and like…just kind of like floating off. And like… it’s just like… it’s just like… in my darkest times or whatever, I’ve felt like maybe I’m just not like capable of like… being that person, ‘cause I, I just feel like everyone else is more… connected than I am or something or like… I dunno which like… I dunno that’s one of those things that everyone thinks everyone else is doing better than them, and it’s not really true, but like it’s hard to not think about it. But um… I guess…” It’s more like ev- ery time I like… come close to giving up, it been like a lie, a really like emotional experience where like…” I feel like… I like, it usually has come kind of like a sob fest where I’m like, “Do I really like have I really like hit this point?” and just… there’s some- thing…” I can’t even begin to describe it I just have some- thing I feel like… like it can’t be right and I’m not…”

I really don’t know how to describe it, but after I heard other people’s stories, it was different. I wasn’t really like, “I accept this,” but it clicked and things like… changed.”

Mike

Not only were these elegant statements on their own, but also it was a pleasant happenstance that they fit as well together, for it provided me with ample op- portunity to create a body of projections. I then start- ed to reflect on the interviews further; finalizing my quotations and looking at them linguistically and as typographic.

DESIGN IN COLOR

Each design’s color palette and use of type comple- ments the personally and tone of the person and his or her story, as well as the other designs. All designs are the same size, the outlier being the final one. This was not only the most passionate statement I heard out of everyone’s narratives—this, why it is larger— but it was the most readable, and warranted a differ- ent typographic statement.

“would that I had incorporated myself as much that I just believed. But then I’d looked back at how my life had played out, there was just no doubt it was real.” – Amy

“Clearly, there’s something more to us than… than chemical reactions.”

– Evan

“When we did actually break up, right after the con- version happened, I felt this…peace that I had nev- er really felt before.”

Evan

“I really don’t know how to describe it, but after I heard other people’s stories, it was different. I wasn’t really like, “I accept this,” but it clicked and things like…”

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DESIGN AS PROJECTION

After creating these ten type designs, I felt the need to push further. Printing them in color gave them vibrancy, but I wondered if there was a way to give them life. So, to collaborate with the church that inspired me both artistically and spiritually, I helped organize an event with New Life. The event, held on Saturday, March 13, 2010 at 7 p.m., was named after my project. It gave college students the chance to come worship God through song, and to see my type designs projected in the sanctuary.

The building is very architecturally contemporary, which complements the contemporary nature of the church itself—deemed “church for the next generation” because of its mostly college aged members and edgy, pop-punk worship style. New Life’s graphic presence—from their logo to their slide show slides—utilizes illustrative typography, and they have an almost entirely type based mural on one of the walls in the lobby. My project, then, in terms of content and style, was integrated into the space and the overall environment seamlessly.

Only five of my designs were used, since some exist better than others as projections. The type was converted to pure white to maximize brightness, and any graphic elements were eliminated. This prevented the designs from competing with the surrounding architecture. The projections were displayed before and during, and after the event, and behaved much like a glowing, spiritual presence as they transitioned from one to the next. They glowed not in a cinematic or worldly way, but in an ethereal one, as though they were shadows of angels. The images added a bold decoration to the lyrics—another element of projected type designs.

The songs were all very powerful, and the worship team performed them with an assurance that US an emotive force in everyone present. Aside from Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone), the songs were very contemporary, which complemented the environment and the casually dressed audience.

The event was as much about planning ahead as it was about people coming together to praise God through song. So, during sounding, my projections were not displayed, as we wanted to keep the lyric slides projected behind the worship team. However, both the church and I wanted our work to be integrated into every part of the evening. So, larger scale designs of my type designs were used as background images for the lyrics. The images added a bold decoration to the lyrics—another element of projected type designs.

The video ended with my Slice of Life, and as the lights came back on, the audience applauded. I was pleased and humbled to see that they admired my work, and it was especially gratifying, making my Slice of Life much easier for me to articulate the next day. In addition, I was reminded of the people who had told me they had thought about a slice of life and had immediately thought of me. I am always almost attracted to verticality in design, which is why all of my designs and projections were vertically dominant. This personal bias worked appropriately for my project, for the image of verticality so often represents the religion, as instilled in us perhaps by the authority, scribes, and translators of the Bible—has established a powerful latitudinal, vertically oriented symbol that help one perceive the religion. Heaven is perceived as up above us, while hell is perceived as below us. We look up to try to understand eternal life, the Holy Trinity, to remind ourselves of the concepts of hope and faith, and we look down to remind ourselves of the things from which we desire to turn away. Though focusing more on religion than on faith was beyond the scope of my project, it was relevant to the religious setting of New Life Church in which I projected my designs. The vertical movement in the space was highly apparent, mostly through the cross on the west wall, the projector screens dangling from the ceiling; and, of course, the balcony. As mentioned earlier, this up-down dynamic was also very present during my interviews with students, and further solidified my confidence in creating vertically dominant type designs.

The first seven songs, the worship team took their seats, and all the lights faded to black. I stood the stage, preparing to give my Slice of Life about my project. After a few minutes, singing my type projections through the doors and windows that separated the lobby from the sanctuary. As they entered the sanctuary to find seats, there were not enough, and they passing out small sheets describing my project. The enthusiasm that everyone brought to the space was uplifting, and the Worship team performed them with an exuberance that lit an emotional fire in everyone present. Aside from Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone), the songs were very contemporary, which complemented the environment and the casually dressed audience.

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CONCLUSION
If you have a story to tell, you put it to words. You speak it, you write it; you convey your personal narrative so that others may understand it, but also so that it is preserved in your memory as a symbolic life experience. Narratives are our way of relaying and making meanings of the world around us, and they facilitate our development as human beings. They are in themselves religious experiences, serving a metaphysical purpose to help us form concrete beliefs and identities from that which is intangible. Just such an intangible thing is faith, and having faith begs a story all its own.

Through telling ten different stories of faith using illustrative typography, I was able to see how a complex artistic practice such as typographic design could relate to something as complex as having faith. Not only was I able to hone and rigorously develop my skills as a designer, but I was able to tell a series of stories as one, non-linear narrative about knowing in one’s heart the power and truth of his or her faith.

FINISHED WORK
The following images are of a few spreads of my book, as well as images from my book's presence in the gallery.
Kimberly James
Faith in Type
Typography

“Faith in Type” is a series of University of Michigan students’ narratives of faith represented through experimental typography. It seeks to utilize the expressiveness of experimental typography to convey the inclusive and inclusive nature of faith, as well as the complex language used to describe it.