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Coming back to the use of typefaces in electronic publishing: many of the new typographers receive their knowledge and information about the rules of typography from books, from computer magazines or the instruction manuals which they get with the purchase of a PC or software. There is not so much basic instruction, as of now, as there was in the old days, showing the differences between good and bad typographic design. Many people are just fascinated by their PC's tricks, and think that a widely-praised program, called up on the screen, will make everything automatic from now on.

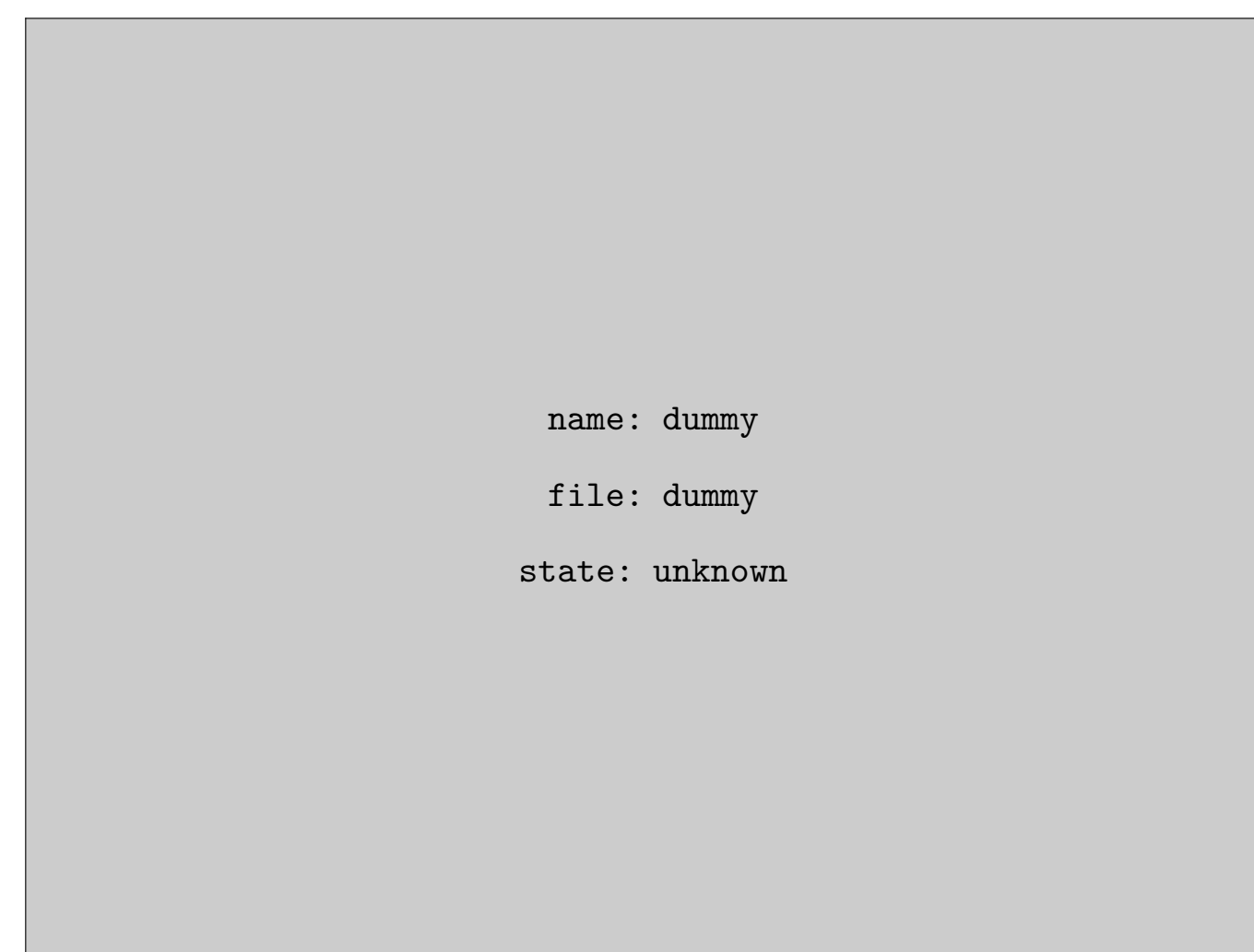


Figure 1 Coming back to the use of typefaces in electronic publishing: many of the new typographers receive their knowledge and information about the rules of typography from books, from computer magazines or the instruction manuals which they get with the purchase of a PC or software. There is not so much basic instruction, as of now, as there was in the old days, showing the differences between good and bad typographic design. Many people are just fascinated by their PC's tricks, and think that a widely-praised program, called up on the screen, will make everything automatic from now on.

If [in 2600] you stacked all the new books being published next to each other, you would have to move at ninety miles an hour just to keep up with the end of the line. Of course, by 2600 new artistic and scientific work will come in electronic forms, rather than as physical books and paper. Nevertheless, if the exponential growth continued, there would be ten papers a second in my kind of theoretical physics, and no time to read them.

Donald Knuth has spent the past several years working on a system allowing him to control many aspects of the design of his forthcoming books—from the typesetting and layout down to the very shapes of the letters! Seldom has an author had anything remotely like this power to control the final appearance of his or her work. Knuth's T_EX typesetting system has become well-known and is available in many countries around the world. By contrast, his METAFONT system for designing families of typefaces has not become as well known or as available.

In his article "The Concept of a Meta-Font", Knuth sets forth for the first time the underlying philosophy of METAFONT, as well as some of its products. Not only is the concept exciting and clearly well executed, but in my opinion the article is charmingly written as well. However, despite my overall enthusiasm for Knuth's idea and article, there are some points in it that I feel might be taken wrongly by many readers, and since they are points that touch close to my deepest interests in artificial intelligence and esthetic theory, I felt compelled to make some comments to clarify certain important issues raised by "The Concept of a Meta-Font".

Imagine trying to live in a world dominated by dihydrogen oxide, a compound that has no taste or smell and is so viable in its properties that it is generally benign but at other times swiftly lethal. Depending on its state, it can scald you or freeze you. In the presence of certain organic molecules it can form carbonic acids so nasty that they can strip the leaves from trees and eat the faces off statuary. In bulk, when agitated, it can strike with a fury that no human edifice could withstand. Even for those who have learned to live with it, it is often murderous substance. We call it water.

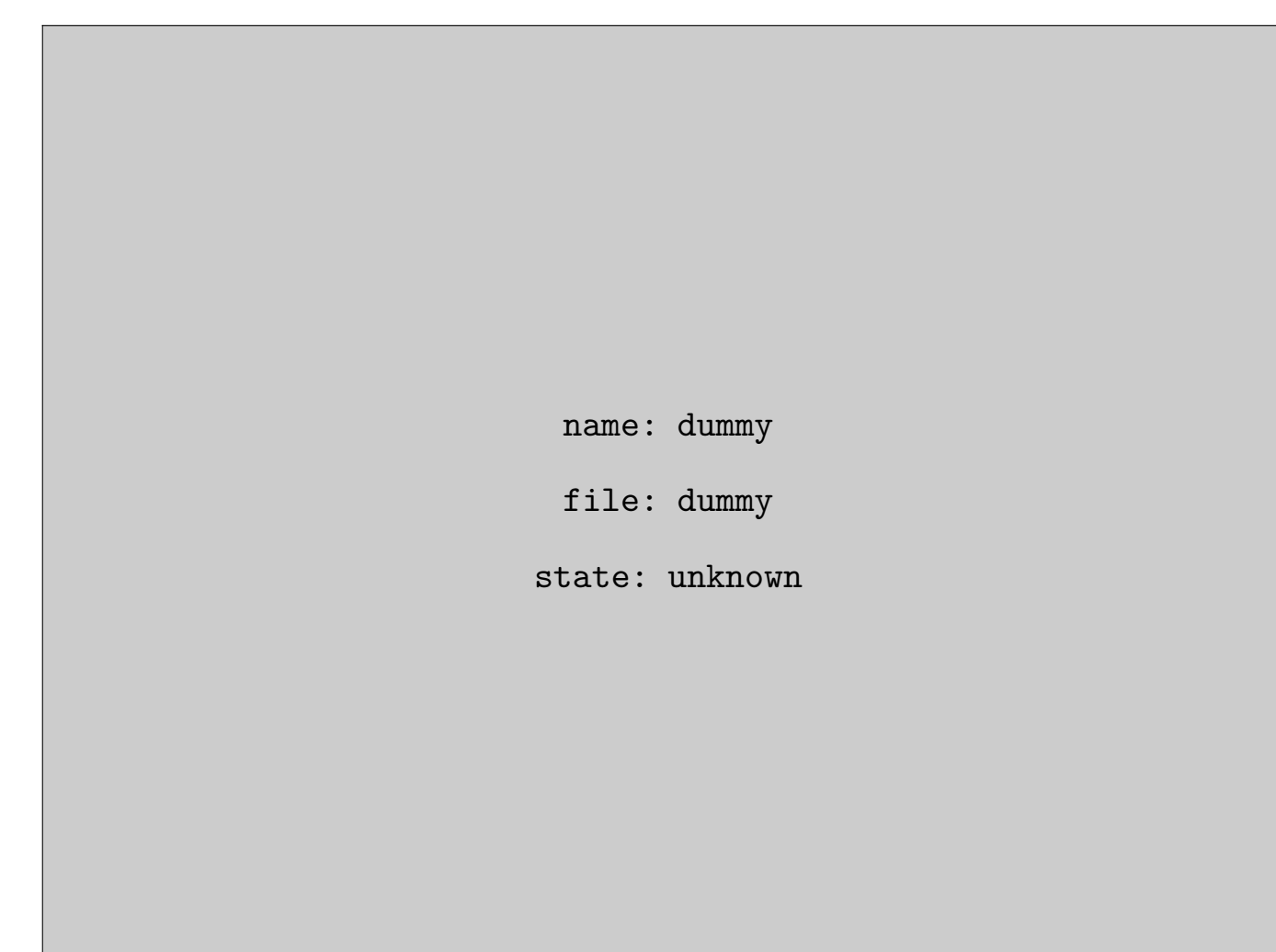


Figure 2 Imagine trying to live in a world dominated by dihydrogen oxide, a compound that has no taste or smell and is so viable in its properties that it is generally benign but at other times swiftly lethal. Depending on its state, it can scald you or freeze you. In the presence of certain organic molecules it can form carbonic acids so nasty that they can strip the leaves from trees and eat the faces off statuary. In bulk, when agitated, it can strike with a fury that no human edifice could withstand. Even for those who have learned to live with it, it is often murderous substance. We call it water.

