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THE RHETORIC OF TYPE

*An exploration of the experiential
and iconic nature of letterforms*

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I declare that *The rhetoric of type: an exploration of the experiential and iconic nature of letterforms* is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

K. A. Rath

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SUMMARY

& Key Terms

The ability to select and apply type sensitively is an art form that requires an astute knowledge of the communicative complexity of letterforms. However, as a designer and design educator, I have observed that many designers frequently select and apply typefaces inappropriately or arbitrarily because they are simply unaware of the complex meanings underlying letterforms, as well as the power of the communicative choices they make. Many designers with even a basic understanding of type still tend to prefer to use illustration, illustrative graphics, icons or photography as their primary media of communication. In the event that type is indeed used, designers tend to choose ‘clean’ typefaces because they *appear* to detract less from the communicative aspects of other rhetorical texts already at play in their design. In other instances, letterforms may be chosen to achieve an array of elaborately intricate design layouts that are often superficially strewn across decorative, trite and eye-candied designs.

Key terms

From these observations, I have therefore dedicated my study to delineating and discussing two default modes or methods used for selecting and applying type – type as *experiential form* and type as *iconic form* – in order to illustrate the powerful, yet intricate communicative facets of the letterform. The first mode relates to how designers select type based on a typeface’s experiential form. By this, I refer to the connotations that we derive from our physical and sensual perceptions of letterform shapes. I refer to George Lakoff’s experiential metaphor theory, as well as sound-image symbolism theory (synaesthesia) in order to identify reminiscent and intuitive letterform perception. The second describes several ways in which designers invoke symbolic connotation by selecting iconic typefaces. Here, I investigate historical and cultural narratives woven into iconic typefaces and how these narratives may be signified, resignified and repurposed.

As a means of understanding the interconnected nature of meaning embodied by the letterform, my final objective is to highlight letterform communication from a visual rhetorical perspective. By conducting an in-depth case study of the *Fraktur* typeface (as communicating at once experientially and symbolically), I stress several tensions that exist as a result of overlapping meaning and the interconnected nature of the two default modes of type selection. I thereby argue that designers need be aware of the communicative implications of their default modes or strategies to typeface selection. My point of departure is that a more holistic approach to selecting and applying typefaces could be followed and that rhetorical theory may provide an analytical framework for such an inclusive perspective. I maintain that if the communicative complexity of letterforms is viewed from a visual rhetorical perspective, where rhetorical intricacies of meaning embodied in the letterform are thoughtfully and holistically considered (where designers may question their default modes of type selection), designers can be more strategic in directing meaning through type.

Rhetoric of type, type as experiential form, type as iconic form, letterform communication, function of the letterform, history of type, *Fraktur*, non-linguistic type, type as image, synaesthesia, conceptual metaphor theory, popular culture, type as myth, symbolic type, Theo van Leeuwen, Steven Heller, George Lakoff, Richard Buchanan.

DEDICATION

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1.1 | Rationale

The ability to select and apply type¹ sensitively is an art form that requires an astute knowledge of the communicative complexity of letterforms¹ (Atzmon 2008:13). However, in my experience as a designer and design educator, I have observed that designers and design students alike are often unaware of complex meaning underlying letterforms and the power of the communicative choices they make. I have found that designers therefore frequently select and apply typefaces² inappropriately or arbitrarily,³ possibly as a result of an incomplete view of, or approach to communicating with type.

One reason may be that because typography⁴ is so inextricably linked to language – that is, its letterforms are viewed as abstract⁵ or linguistic signs – its non-linguistic communicative complexity is, in most instances, overlooked or even ignored. I have also found that in design practice, design educators and creative directors are particularly critical of the way type is selected and applied in various design contexts; they expeditiously point out their design students' and employees' incongruous use of type, yet are often unable to substantiate a reasonable substitute. This sort of type criticism has brought about an air of hesitation in design practice regarding the appropriate implementation of type. In the event that type is indeed implemented in a design context, I have observed that designers frequently select type based on two main factors.

On the one hand, they tend to select typefaces based purely on the formal features of the letterform. Here a typeface's formal features may appeal to a designer for a variety of reasons. On a visceral level, a typeface's unique structural qualities may 'feel' appropriate in the particular design context (Bachfischer 2007:4). Another reason may be that a typeface's formal features seem conceptually appropriate to a particular design context. Alternatively, a typeface may be

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Chapter One

Introduction

chosen because its decorative, structural quality lends itself to a designer's particular style preference or taste (Bonneville 2011:[sp]). In other instances, where type selection is less intentional, ornamental or visually interesting typefaces are selected to achieve an array of elaborate and trendy design layouts that are superficially strewn with decorative, arbitrary and eye-candied designs that lack conceptual context (Trummel 1988:127).

On the other hand, designers may gravitate towards typefaces because they are recognisable or 'iconic'. In some instances, designers may opt for recognisable typefaces such as *Arial*, *Comic Sans*, *Papyrus* or *Times New Roman* simply because they are easily accessed through free type, editing and design software. Alternatively, designers may opt for iconic⁶ typefaces that are deemed a credible or 'safe' choice. This approach is often perpetuated by design educators and experienced designers who advocate only a handful of safe (or apparently neutral) type choices such as *Garamond*, *Gill Sans*, *Helvetica*, *Futura*, and so on. Unfortunately, owing to frequent use, these classic or iconic typefaces are generally viewed as banal in design spheres. Iconic typefaces are also frequently selected owing to their mythic status, where their letterforms embody rich historical and cultural connotation.⁷ While I believe that this is occasionally a strategically sound motive, designers risk defaulting to overused type icons that are often applied in a literal way and appear trite (Bonneville 2011:[sp]). Another danger is that a letterform's cultural connotations may fall outside a viewer's frame of reference or aesthetic sensibilities.

Nonetheless, despite this criticism, I maintain that both the formal and symbolic⁸ aspects of the letterforms are important considerations when selecting a typeface and if considered in isolation, designers risk miscommunication. That is, in cases where *either* a typeface's formal composition *or* its iconic status is the only motive for selection, designers do not necessarily

1. 'Letterform' describes the visual articulation or the formal structure of a typeface. I make use of this term in particular to distinguish between linguistic and non-linguistic communicative properties of Latin alphabets. While 'letter' refers to the linguistic property of type, 'letterform' emphasises its non-linguistic communicative property. Essentially, connotation is derived from the 'image' quality of type. I refer to the letterform as embodying meaning from our physical or sensory experience as well as our symbolical interpretation of it.
2. 'Typeface' refers to a family of letterforms that together showcase a unique formal composition (see Letterform). Moreover, the term refers to a specific style or physical appearance of a set of letterforms. For instance, *Times New Roman* or *Comic Sans* are frequently referred to as fonts (light, regular, bold and so on), however since they comprise a distinctive structure, I use 'typeface' to refer to the design of the face's style. In this study, names of typefaces are italicised.
3. It should be noted that I do not presume all designers to manage type inappropriately. I maintain that educational institutions globally provide excellent typographic training of various typographic strategies, at varying levels of competencies.
4. 'Typography' is an umbrella term for the study of letterforms, typefaces and the practical selection and application of type in layout (which includes *parerga*). In this study my premise concerns typography of the Latin alphabet as it is a contribution to Anglomorphic discourse.
5. According to Marc Trieb (1989:81), Barbara Emanuel (2010:16), Denise Crisp (2012:206-207) and Susan Hagan (2012:107-108) the abstract nature of letterforms renders type less obviously communicative in comparison to pictorial media such as photography or illustration, for example.
6. 'Icon' refers to a sign or symbol that, over time, comes to embody several layers of cultural signification. The iconic typeface exhibits a particularly recognisable form owing to its popular status and resonates as a mythic cultural structure.
7. 'Connotation' or 'Signification' refers to meaning or a signified that is evoked from the letterform. As it pertains to the letterform, connotation therefore does not refer to semantic connotation or connotation that may be evoked by manipulation of *parerga*. In addition, I use connotation in the Peircian sense, where the 'representamen' (image) evokes connotation and results in an 'interpretant'. In this sense, connotation implies that a sign *is to be or has been* interpreted (Peirce in Scott & Tomaselli 2009:10; Reyburn 2013:64).
8. 'Symbol' or 'symbolic' refers to iconic letterforms that embody cultural and contextual values, beliefs or ideas. While it is arguable that all typefaces are, to a degree, culturally symbolic, I use the term specifically in relation to symbolism that is evoked by the *iconic* typeface.

1.2 | Background

take into account alternative communicative aspects that may be embodied simultaneously.⁹ For example, where the letterform's formal composition is the only motive for implementation, designers do not necessarily consider cultural legacies that may be also at work. An exclusive or partial approach to selecting type is problematic since both factors work together and have profound implications on a typeface's communicative potency. I argue therefore that insensitive and inappropriate type choices are made as a result of an incomplete understanding of the communicative complexity of type communication.

Some of the motives I have mentioned are arguably more appropriate or deliberate than others. However, since selecting and applying type is an art form, not an exact science, one cannot be too prescriptive since there is certainly room for personal expression and intuitive reasoning in design. I maintain, however, that the designer needs to anticipate the communicative experience and deliberately consider all communicative aspects of the letterform. Therefore, when selecting and applying type sensitively, designers require an astute knowledge of the communicative complexity of letterforms and a well-tuned sense of divergent connotation that may be embodied by its form (Atzmon 2008:13). The aim of this study is thus to address this issue, and argue for a more holistic understanding of letterform communication so that designers may be more strategic and deliberate when selecting and applying type.

A crucial reason for these limited approaches to typeface selection may be owing to changing and dialectical conceptions regarding the perceived function of type that may be observed throughout various debates in the historical typographic landscape. That is, influential historical typographic movements taught at design institutions perpetuate a recurring theme in typographic design where a 'new style' tends to reject the style immediately preceding it. This perceived changing function of type design leaves a legacy of shifting type ideologies that today lead to polarised attitudes surrounding the communicative function of letterforms.

These polarised attitudes culminate in foggy guidelines in both design education and design practice regarding the correct or appropriate use of typefaces. On the one hand, if designers are taught that the formal features of a typeface interfere with its linguistic function (concerns of legibility), then letterforms are often deemed overly elaborate, fussy and too illustrative. Here the letterform is perceived as a neutral vehicle, where the emphasis is clearly placed on the linguistic function of type. For educated designers and especially older generations of designers trained in the Modernist tradition, ornamentation is forbidden in typographic practice (Bruinsma 2006:[sp]). They have been taught to choose 'clean' typefaces such as *Helvetica*, *Univers* or *Futura* since they appear neutral and therefore seem to interfere less with other communicative elements in the same design (Brumberger 2003b:208). Although this attitude toward the function of type is useful in advocating a necessary appreciation for typographic legibility, here the non-linguistic aspect of the letterform is generally considered secondary to and separate from the communication of a design text¹⁰ (Serafini & Clausen 2012:[sp]).

9. While it is indeed possible that the letterform's cultural associations align with its formal connotation, I have found that this is most often not the case.

10. 'Text' refers to a physical design, or communicative artefact. A typeface may be referred to as a design text, a visual text or communicative text, emphasising a different aspect of a typeface as an 'object'.

When creating a communicative text, designers typically prefer more immediately communicative media such as illustration, illustrative graphics, icons or photography as their primary medium of communication (Atzmon 2008:13; Trieb 1889:81). Alternatively they engage more with typographic *parerga*¹¹ since these elements are deemed more communicative.

On the other hand, typography is seen as an experimental medium, where more ‘adventurous’ designers, and curious design students test the limits and dimensions of the letterform. They perceive the letterform as context free and handle it autonomously (Bruinsma 2006:[sp]). For younger designers especially, an experimental zeal in typography is important in developing a sense of the textural quality of the letterform and cultivating an ‘expressive’ aesthetic. However, with easy access to open source type software,¹² free type catalogues,¹³ online design and typographic portfolios and websites,¹⁴ letterform experimentation becomes ever more appealing and often results in type experimentation for experimentation’s sake (Heller 2006:12; Serafini & Clausen 2012:[sp]).

Although both attitudes surrounding the perceived function of type are commonly taught in design education and favoured in design practice, it is possible to suggest that neither fully engages with the intricate, non-linguistic communicative aspects of the letterform. I argue that when any of the above attitudes aim to supplant the other, designers dogmatically insist on particular typefaces that may be either inappropriate for or insensitive to a particular design solution.

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11. In Jacques Derrida’s sense of the term, *parerga* (meaning ‘about the work’) refers to the figurative ‘frame’ of any communicative text. In the context of this study, *parerga* refers to any class of element that falls outside or around the letterform. For example, letterform *parerga* may refer to any particular design element (such as colour, line, light or shape) or principal (such as space, width, size, texture or pattern), layout decisions (such as hierarchy, or position), as well as any conceptual manipulation that is not inherently part of the typographic letterform (Lupton 1994:[sp]).
 12. Examples include *Fontlab*, *Typetool*, *Adobe Illustrator* and *TypeDrawing*.
 13. Examples include *1001 free fonts*, *Adobe Typekit*, *Da Font*, *Font Book*, *Font Squirrel*, *Microsoft Office*, *My Fonts* and *Suitcase*.
 14. Examples include *Behance*, *Bored Panda*, *Graphic Exchange*, *Graphic porn*, *FFFFound*, *Frere-Jones*, *Logopond*, *Toilet paper* and *Vimeo*. Examples of design publications include *AIGA*, *Design issues*, *Eye magazine*, *ICOGRAIDA*, *Issuu magazine*, *iJusi*, *One Small Seed*, *Ted-Talks* and *Visual language*.

1.3 | Aim and objectives

In this study, I aim to highlight default modes or methods used for selecting and applying type and argue for more integrated discernment and greater awareness of communicative factors of letterforms. My point of departure is that a more holistic approach to the selection and application of typefaces could be followed and that rhetorical theory may provide an analytical framework for such an inclusive perspective. I maintain that if the communicative complexity of letterforms is viewed from a visual rhetorical perspective, where rhetorical intricacies of meaning embodied in the letterform are thoughtfully and holistically considered (where designers may question their default modes of type selection), designers can be more strategic in directing meaning through type and avoid the previously mentioned pitfalls.

In order to develop such a holistic perspective, I firstly present a brief historical overview of selected typographic movements in order to illustrate a broader ethos of particular typographic movements and dialectical positions concerning the perceived functions of type. Thereby I investigate whether these dialectical ideologies may have translated into dogmatic and limited conceptions surrounding type communication in current design practice.

The second objective is to explore theory regarding the letterform as a non-linguistic communicative medium by referring to semiotic theory.¹⁵ By its very nature, the letterform is primarily a linguistic, alphanumeric sign.¹⁶ This is essentially what distinguishes the letterform from a pictogram. However, the act of *selecting* from an *array* of different typefaces indicates the significance of other communicate aspects embodied in the form of type: the letterform. I therefore investigate two communicative aspects of the (non-linguistic) letterform (how they contribute to letterform connotation) and situate them as two default modes of selection. I investigate possible reasons *why* designers select certain typefaces over others,

and thereby highlight considerations that might underpin the designer's choice. I acknowledge that while there are several ways of investigating typographic semiotics, by analysing 'modes of selection' I highlight the designer's decision-making process and present a new way of framing letterform communication. I therefore analyse and discuss type as *experiential form* and type as *iconic form*, as default modes or methods in the selection and application of type. The first relates to how designers select type depending on the structural differences within letterforms that evoke connotations based on reminiscent or instinctual experience. The second describes several ways in which designers invoke symbolic connotation by selecting iconic typefaces. I investigate and consolidate pertinent theory that underpins each mode and illustrate both by means of visual analyses of selected examples.

15. 'Semiotics' refers to the study of the signification process by which signs take on meaning; where the sign *stands for* something else (Tomaselli & Scott 2009:8). It should be noted that owing to the expanse and complexity of the field of semiotics, I only refer to relevant concepts of theorists such as Roland Barthes, Ferdinand de Saussure, Julia Kristeva, Charles Sanders Peirce and Theo van Leeuwen.

16. 'Sign' refers to a text that *stands for* something else (Tomaselli & Scott 2009:8). The sign forms in the process of signification whereby a signified (or concept) is evoked from the signifier (or object). I refer to two types of signification embodied in all typefaces. In relation to typography, linguistic communication refers to type's alphanumeric role; that is, as the visual articulation of language (Walker 2001:8). The non-linguistic communicative aspect of type refers to the image-quality of the letterform as it relates to visual communication. Non-linguistic signification refers to an additional connotative aspect of the letterform (over and above its alphanumeric aspect). For instance, *Times New Roman* communicates something different to *Comic Sans* in a non-linguistic sense (see 'letterform').

1.4 | Theoretical framework and research methodology

The final objective is to analyse and disentangle the interconnected nature of letterform communication from a visual rhetorical perspective. In order to do so, I undertake a more extensive case study analysis of *Fraktur*. By conducting a case study analysis, I stress several tensions that exist as a result of overlapping meaning and the interconnected nature of the two default modes of type selection. I therefore provide a qualitative theoretical and visual exploration of the relationship between experiential and iconic communication of the letterform. I argue that designers need be aware of the communicative implications of their default modes or strategies to typeface selection. I consequently argue for an integrated approach in the selection and application of type and thereby, I hope to provide a rhetorical perspective on type in order to encourage type sensitivity by promoting deliberate and strategic decision-making on the part of the designer in the selection and application of typefaces.

My investigation into the communicative complexity of the letterform is presented as a qualitative conceptual study. This study sets off from personal observations regarding the most common or default modes of type selection; their respective communicative issues form the basis of an exploration of two facets of letterform meaning. The observations are derived from my own experience in design practice, theory and education, in my capacity as a practicing designer and design lecturer. I maintain that a useful way to address type *design* tendencies (mentioned in the rationale above) is from the point of view of a *designer*. My study is not, however, intended as a complete or exhaustive system of classification, but rather a pragmatic and progressive perspective that addresses the most common reasons for selecting type. Owing to the scope of my research premise, I am therefore aware that I may omit certain aspects of typographic communication, additional theoretical or practical insights, and address this is my conclusion. Moreover, while I acknowledge that other frameworks exist, I argue that my study is more accessible to designers insofar as it departs from the designer's decision-making process. In other words, my study looks at the strategic selection of type as a rhetorical act.

I also conduct an extensive review of literature in order to theoretically ground three particular aspects of my research (Hofstee 2006:91). Firstly, I consult literature that illustrates the historical landscape of typography in order to establish popular conceptions or attitudes toward the perceived function of typography. In outlining these conceptions, Chapter Two is furnished with accompanying visual examples with the aim of identifying ideological, emotive or experiential contents, cues, themes, patterns and biases (Ormond & Leedy 2004:144).

In addition, I analyse and critically contrast salient theories and key insights from seminal and otherwise prominent sources in order to underpin my observation regarding two communicative aspects of the letterform (or default modes of type selection). For the first, I follow Theo van Leeuwen's (2006:146) suggestion that connotation may be derived from our physical experience of letterforms. Here I investigate conceptual metaphor theory, theory surrounding the experiential metaphor, phonology, synaesthesia and phenomenology. The second follows Steven Heller's (2006:20) suggestion that type may be considered a medium of popular culture, and investigates the influential position held by popular typefaces as icons. I make use of popular culture theory as a framework to investigate cultural contexts that shape iconic typefaces and lead to their statuses as heavily symbolic and commonly referenced visual canons (Heller 2001:vi).

As part of an interpretative approach I also conduct several brief visual analyses of practical examples with the intention of illustrating the two proposed communicative facets of the letterform and the theoretical tenets of each. I approach the analyses from a ready-to-hand¹⁷ perspective where case-specific examples are identified and analysed on a case-to-case basis in order to compare and contextualise letterform perception or meaning, as opposed to *classifying* letterform characteristics (a present-at-hand¹⁸ method). In this way, communicative aspects of the letterform are investigated or interpreted in context. In the penultimate chapter, I examine how each different communicative aspects of the letterform overlap organically.

I also consult seminal literature on (visual) rhetoric theory in order to argue for and provide a visual rhetorical perspective on type communication that considers the rhetorical complexity of letterform communication. In doing so, I consolidate insights into rhetorical theory that

focuses on the strategic aspect of visual rhetoric in directing meaning (Buchanan 2007:5-6). Visual rhetoric serves as a particularly useful perspective since it highlights multiple, interconnected communicative dimensions of letterforms (Foss 2005:145). Although I intend to highlight visual rhetoric as a strategic perspective, I do not presume to be prescriptive or provide exhaustive and all-encompassing strategic type anecdotes. It is precisely because of a rhetorical perspective on type that my study avoids prescriptive type anecdotes. In addition, as Buchanan (2001:187; 2007:6) and Jun (2009:[sp]) point out, if used as a strategic and analytical tool, visual rhetoric also highlights 'operational' or strategic thinking on the part of the designer. Since this study is intended as strategic discourse for communication designers, a focus on the strategic role of the designer in relation to letterform communication is appropriate and is a unique approach in this study.

17. In *Tool-Being* (2013), Graham Harman refers to the Heideggerian concept of 'ready-to-hand' as a practical, organic way of experiencing matter. This may be seen as a type of *qualitative* interpretation.

18. Harman (2013) speaks of the 'present-at-hand' as a theoretical, categorical way of observing and analysing 'objects' as dead matter. This may be seen as a *quantitative* interpretation.

1.5 | Literature review

In illustrating a visual rhetorical perspective on type, I undertake an extensive analysis of *Fraktur* as my primary case study. I have chosen *Fraktur* as a case study because it is at once both immensely iconic¹⁹ and communicates through expression of form. It is also a suitable case study insofar as a great amount of discourse surrounds its historical context and usage, which offers polarised views as to its ‘proper’ usage, especially with regard to its Nazi associations. Moreover, *Fraktur* is a particularly suitable example since the typeface has endured several decades of resignification²⁰ in design that is continuously resignified today.

In this study, I investigate a broad range of literature from a variety of fields, including typographic history, semiotics, conceptual metaphor theory, synaesthesia, phonology, popular culture, and visual rhetoric. I also investigate additional literature that provides conceptual links between these fields. In the literature review that follows, I highlight key insights and pertinent theorists (listed alphabetically) in each respective field. In the respective chapters that follow, I grapple with and consolidate each theoretical field in greater depth.

I firstly undertake a brief historical investigation of selected typographic movements. I look primarily at seminal historical typographic accounts provided by Max Bruinsma (2006), Louise Fili (1999), Heller (1999; 2001; 2006), Roxanne Jubert (2006), Ellen Lupton (1988; 1996; 1997; 1998; 2000; 2004; 2009) and Philip B Meggs (1989; 1998; 2001). Other, less frequently cited, historical accounts are referenced from articles by Otl Aicher (1988), Helen Armstrong (2009), Chris Burke (1992), Roger Fawcett-Tang (2007), Richard Hollis (2006), Douglas C McMurtrie (1929), Rick Poynor (1991), Talbot Reed (1920), Jess Righthand (2010), Kevin Robertson (1994a; 1994b), Michael Rock (1996), Herbert Spencer (1982), Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzanna Licko (1993). The extensively detailed accounts provided by these authors are useful in orientating and contextualising different typographic movements within a historical typographic landscape. While they do provide valuable insight into cultural, mechanical, technological and stylistic developments and corresponding ideological tenets that underlie the perceived function of the letterform, I also investigate typographic manifestos and articles written by practitioners of these movements in order to directly reference their ideological tenets. These are sourced from typographers and theorists including Herbert Bayer (1967), Jeffrey Keedy (1998), El Lissitzky (1926), Katherine McCoy (1994; 2000; 2009), Laszlo Moholy-Nagy (1925), Mark C Taylor (1992), Jan Tschichold (1928), Massimo Vignelli (1994; 2007), Beatrice Warde (1930) and Wolfgang Weingart (2000).

19. That Judith Schallansky dedicates an entire book – *Fraktur: mon amour* (2008) – to the typeface, certainly suggests its iconic status.

20. According to Butler (1993:21), resignification refers to a process whereby naturalised connotation is mobilised, softened and over time, readapted to signify meaning in a new way. Resignification is derived from an associational chain of signification that is already established. Therefore, new or second order meaning diverges from the dominant meaning (Barthes 1972:114).

I have found that the majority of the existing historical documentation provides linear and therefore chronological accounts of type styles. Although sources such as Heller's *Stylepaedia* (2006) provide non-linear accounts of such styles, a large majority of the above sources are intended as objective historical documentation and do not provide links to current design practice. Therefore, throughout my own historical overview, I specifically highlight how these styles are appropriated today, as a matter of personal taste or educational background.

From my research into typographic communication, I have come across several authors such as Jennifer Clausen (2012), Nina Nørgaard (2009), Frank Serafini (2012), Hartmut Stöckl (2004), Marc Trieb (1989), Theo van Leeuwen (2005; 2006) and Robert Waller (1987) who have suggested that type is not readily viewed as a non-linguistic communicative or 'semiotic' medium. Van Leeuwen (2006:141) suggests that this may be because most academic research available on type is mostly concerned with aspects surrounding typographic legibility. In his thesis entitled *The typographic contribution to language: towards a model of typographic genres and their underlying structures* (1987), Waller focuses primarily on 'typography for language' (typography in a linguistic sense) and intentionally highlights that he is 'not interested' in letterforms (in a non-linguistic sense) since they have little to do with 'language'. Waller's text is but one example of many sources that view typography in a similar way. Although today type is not only considered a linguistic sign, these articles highlight an attitude to type communication that has influenced debates surrounding its perceived communicative function.

I have also come across numerous discussions and debates regarding the connotative value of form or 'style' in general. Authors such as Leslie Atzmon (2008), Barthes (1972), Michael Bierut (2007), Noël Carroll (1985), Heller (1999; 2001; 2006), Marshal McLuhan (1964) and Duncan Reyburn (2013) argue that style or form is frequently conflated with superficial and decorative add-ons. Atzmon (2008:13, 26) suggests that this may be because meaning is less overt in 'form', while Bierut (2007:165) adds that design purists hold that concepts, or 'internal' conceptions, are of primary importance in the process of design thinking. It is possible to suggest that this particularly popular (although rather limited) view in design discourse only exacerbates the restrictive conception of letterform communication.

In criticising the narrow conception of type as solely a linguistic sign, the above authors recognise the letterform as a source of non-linguistic semiotic exchange. This way of thinking tends to align with McLuhan's view that the structural articulation of the medium is in and of itself, communicative. In his chapter entitled *The medium is the message*, from *Understanding media: the extensions of man*, McLuhan (1964:9) argues that typically, the content of any medium blinds its creator to the character and form of it. However, he holds that it is specifically the form of the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association. The medium therefore, is the message. The above authors' views are helpful in systematically establishing that letterforms are powerfully connotative in a non-linguistic sense (albeit subtly) and thereby validate inquiry into factors that contribute to its connotation.

Several theorists and various strands of philosophy and research have confirmed my suggestion that letterforms can communicate in two dominant ways. As I have previously noted, I situate these as the most common or default modes of type selection and therefore investigate and consolidate pertinent theory that underpins each. Both are discussed separately here.

The first relates to an experiential interpretation of the letterform. Here I consider literature that specifically engages with the communicative aspect of a letterform's stylistic qualities. Bruinsma (2000), Clausen and Serafini (2012), Stöckl (2004) and van Leeuwen (2005; 2006) stress the existence of communicative nuances 'hardwired' into the structure of the letterform that are derived from our physical experience of them. Van Leeuwen in particular, refers to a kind of learned or reminiscent experience of letterforms when he speaks of the 'experiential letterform'. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's explanation of metaphorical experience in *Metaphors we live by* (1980), is particularly useful in systematically clarifying and unfolding van Leeuwen's concept. They refer to a similar kind of metaphorical mapping, whereby connotation is derived by metaphoric comparison between an 'abstract' object and its referent. Conceptual metaphor theory is thus useful since it investigates interpretation of abstract forms (such as letterforms) of communication.

Van Leeuwen (2006:151-152) also outlines 'categories of classification' as a tentative multimodal methodology for broadly grouping letterform experiences. Similarly, in *A framework of influential factors on the typographic quality of text perceived by its audience* (2007), Gerhard Bachfischer attempts to organise influences on letterform perception into what he refers to as an integrated framework. In *The semiotics of typography in literary texts: a multimodal approach* (2009), Nina Nørgaard discusses and clarifies van Leeuwen's notion framework for classification, but also points

out the constraints of his classification framework and suggests that perhaps further research is necessary in order provide a more accommodating framework. The problem with categorising letterforms as van Leeuwen does, is that it assumes that a present-at-hand method of letterform analysis is the fundamental way of relating to the communicative value of letterforms. In actuality, his categories cover only part of a huge typographic territory; the complexities and intricacies of letterform communication extend far beyond his rather limited categories.²¹ For example, how do we categorise letterforms that exhibit disconnected, seemingly 'sloppy' contours, yet seem to communicate 'precision' more effectively?

While van Leeuwen's approach is indeed restrictive since he refers specifically to the viewer's interpretation of physical attributes *reminiscent* of physical experience, he does imply that a more instinctual approach to letterform perception may exist. Several other authors have deliberately pointed out that connotation may be experienced on an intuitive level, irrespective of its referential sign. Remaining under the umbrella of 'experiential form', Peter Cho (2005), Johanna Drucker (1994; 2002), Diane J Gromala (2007) and Madgy Ma (2008; 2011) are of the opinion that form can potentially evoke a highly subjective, phenomenological or visceral response that derives from first hand, immediate and subjective experience of it. Cho, along with sound symbolism scientists EM Hubbard (2001), Wolfgang Köhler (1947),

²¹ It should be noted, however, that van Leeuwen (2006:152) explicitly mentions that the framework is a "*first attempt* at identifying the distinctive features of typography" [emphasis added] and that the list does not provide an exhaustive description of letterform characteristics.

Peiffer-Smadja (2010) and VS Ramachandran (2001) offer an alternative, yet relative theoretical basis, known as synaesthesia (or sound-image symbolism theory) by investigating acoustic value that is attached to shapes. Although synaesthesia is specifically intended for sound-shape relationships, it is perhaps possible to suggest that if a link between sound and image is established, then it is also feasible that letterforms (as ‘images’) also connote intuitively. Denise Crisp (2007), Nørgaard (2009), Serafini and Clausen (2012) echo this view and suggest that there may be merit in exploring similar visual-shape relationships that relate specifically to letterforms.

In investigating the second default mode of selection, I refer primarily to popular culture theory and conceptions regarding the symbolic nature of the icon. That is, a typeface’s iconic status greatly impacts on decisions regarding type selection. From my research, I have noted that several theorists and dominant strands of typographic discourse suggest that all typefaces embody cultural symbolism. While I do not dispute this, I focus on literature that discusses popular, iconic typefaces as opposed to mere culturally constituted ones. Although all typefaces embody cultural symbolism, I have noticed that iconic typefaces seem particularly vulnerable to inappropriate selection and application since they achieve greater social usage and resonance and therefore appear immediately recognisable and seemingly more accessible. In order to provide a theoretical overview of popular culture theory and what is meant by ‘icon’, I refer particularly to the work of Barthes (1972), Bruinsma (2004), Heller (2006; 2010), Martin Kemp (2012), Jack Nachbar and Kevin Lause (1992) and Keyan G Tomaselli and David Scott (2009). Other useful insights from Raymond Betts (2013), Barbra Brownie (2009), Amanda du Preez (2013), Douglas B Holt (2004), Jennifer Lemon (1996) and Deanna D Sellnow (2010) are also referred to in further explaining particular concepts related to popular culture and iconicity.

While the above authors’ insights are useful in investigating overarching popular culture theory, Heller (1994; 2001; 2006; 2010) is particularly helpful in situating popular culture theory as it relates to type icons. Heller, along with Brian Altenhofen (2010), Leslie Atzmon (2008), Simon Garfield (2010), Rock (1992) and Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin (1998) investigate cultural contexts that shape iconic typefaces and lead to their statuses as heavily symbolic and commonly referenced visual canons.

As part of the investigation into iconic symbolism within the context of popular culture, I also focus on several ways in which letterforms are currently repurposed in design practice. In discussing the mythic nature of iconic typefaces, I refer largely to discussions surrounding Barthes’ notion of myth as well as Judith Butler’s (1993) concept of resignification. Bruinsma (2004), Brownie (2009), Buchanan (1985), Heller (2006), Michael Herbst (2005), Ma (2008), Tomaselli and Scott (2009) also offer useful insights that clarify the process of mythic resignification. The authors discuss myth not only as ‘naturalised connotation’, but also as an intertextual,²² malleable design structure that, if successfully repurposed, gives rise to divergent meaning. Julia Kristeva’s concept of intertextuality – as interpreted by Voica Simandan (2010) – is also relevant here since it deals with meaning as a complex cultural amalgam.

22. ‘Intertextual’ (intertextuality) refers to the dialectic and overlapping of connotation or meaning in letterform perception. In her explanation of intertextuality, Julia Kristeva (in Simandan 2010:[sp]) attacks the notion that signification is objective, predictable and stable. She explains that images are always in a state of ‘production’. She continues that they are fluid in nature; they convey dialectic meaning since their connotation is often pluralistic.

I also consult literature that offers alternative views into how icons become ‘symbolic’. For example, in *Simulation and simulacra* (1994), Jean Baudrillard insists that icons do not embody complex mythic narratives. He argues that the icon is a kind of simulation (simulacra), where connotation is totally severed from naturally developing cultural meaning. Baudrillard’s rather unyielding assertion is perhaps problematic since it is possible to demonstrate countless current, practical design examples where the myth is indeed at play. His views are nevertheless valuable since they do account for a process whereby *certain* typefaces achieve iconic status.

Earlier in this chapter, I noted that designers usually default to two modes or methods of type selection. From my research I am aware that theory concerning letterform communication exists, but these discussions usually consider one or the other method separately. Moreover, studies of this kind usually attempt to classify features of typefaces along strict frameworks or the user perception of the letterform. After extensive research into typographic discourse however, to my knowledge, no theory or investigation exists that considers the interconnected communication of letterforms from a strategic perspective. Therefore, in this study I attempt to investigate type communication from a rhetorical perspective, where I argue for a more holistic consideration of the communicative *complexity* of type as a strategy in achieving appropriate selection and application of type.

In attempting to position type from a rhetorical point of view, I consider a range of insights from several theorists in rhetorical discourse including Amare and Manning (2007), Atzmon (2008;[sa]), Guy Bonsiepe (1965; 1994), Anneli Botha (2011), Buchanan (1985; 1995; 2001), Cristina de Almeida (2009), Hanno Ehses (1984; 1988), Craig R Hullett (2005), Sonja K Foss (2005), Elizabieta Kazmierczak (2001), Soojin Jun (2007; 2009; 2011), Robin Kinross (1985),

Lupton (1988), McCoy (2000), Valerie Peterson (2009), Reyburn (2013), HP Rickman (1981), Linda Scott (1994) and Paul Trummel (1988). In most of these visual rhetoric studies, Aristotle is frequently credited as the key rhetorical philosopher where his rhetorical appeals are often applied to design texts. Buchanan (2001), for example, applies Aristotle’s rhetoric to instances of design objects to explicate how form indeed influences audience perception of its function. In another example, Botha (2011) dedicates her dissertation to investigating the rhetoric of information design texts from an Aristotelian perspective. Reyburn (2013) on the other hand, offers an alternative framework – ‘the five canons of visual rhetoric’ – as an eloquent insight into what constitutes a ‘rhetorical situation’ (factors that occasion a rhetorical text).

While classical and seminal rhetoric theorist such as Aristotle (2010) and Kenneth Burke (1941; 1969) do offer useful introductions to rhetorical discourse as well as key rhetorical concepts, I refer primarily to the works that focus specifically on *visual* rhetoric and outline popular perceptions as they relate to communication design discourse. Moreover, authors such as Eva Brumberger (2003a; 2003b; 2004), Barbara Emanuel (2010), Elizabeth Kostelnick (1990), Parker (1997), Rock (1992) and Wright (1994) focus specifically on promoting type as a *visual* rhetorical medium, explaining that type conveys a visual texture, tone, and mood that suggests a rhetorical stance.

I have also found that the above authors' insights appear to pinpoint a focus in visual rhetorical studies where great emphasis is placed on persuasion and the degree of eloquence of the 'rhetorical object'.²³ In *Visual rhetoric and the special eloquence of design artifacts* (2008), for example, Atzmon refers in particular to the persuasive value of rhetorical form. She argues that 'material aesthetic form' – the materialisation of visual objects – is a site of rich rhetorical material, vital in orchestrating a persuasive text. Hélène Joffe dedicates her article, *The power of visual material: persuasion, emotion and identification* (2008), to investigating the rhetorical potency of 'emotive' advertising campaigns. A focus on the persuasive 'object' is also typical of studies that focus on type rhetoric. In *Rhetorical handbook: an illustrated manual for graphic designers* (1988), for example, Ehses and Lupton illustrate tropes and schemes as effective tools in manipulating the letterform to appeal to logos, pathos or ethos. Another example is Brumberger's *The rhetoric of typography: the awareness and impact of typeface appropriateness* (2003a), in which she examines whether and how a typeface may be deemed persuasive.

Although these studies typically highlight *whether* a design text is rhetorical, they also (often indirectly) imply the strategic nature of rhetorical design practice. This is helpful since they view visual rhetoric, to a degree, as a strategic framework. Foss (2005) and Jun (2009; 2011) point out, for example, that although visual rhetoric usually concerns the visual object as the

'communicative artefact' (rhetoric as object), it is also considered a strategic perspective (rhetoric as communicative act) that involves an analysis of the communicative aspects of visual rhetorical objects. In *Declaration by design: Rhetoric, argumentation, and demonstration in practice* (1985), Buchanan frames visual rhetoric as a communication strategy in his investigation of rhetorical design objects as visual arguments. Ehses and Lupton's workbook (1988), also illustrates strategic application of rhetorical theory in graphic design.

While these studies argue for the importance of a rhetorical approach to design, few (if any) provide a constructive framework that outlines strategic approaches to understanding conceptually loaded letterforms. Moreover, little exists in the way of providing a practical theoretical framework from which to understand the communicative complexity of the letterform in terms of default modes of type selection. The closest suggestion of a similar study is Trummel's article entitled *Rhetoric and typography creative interaction in modern communication* (1988), where he investigates rhetorical structures of the letterform and argues for 'perceptual analysis' of letterforms. However, his short six-page article deals primarily with discounting Modern type ideology, and highlights that more in-depth investigations into rhetorical strategies for type application are needed. Therefore, in the context of this study, I implement visual rhetoric as a 'strategic tool'; I depart from the position *that* typefaces are communicative in the non-linguistic sense and situate my investigation as a holistic perspective onto the communicative aspects of the letterform. My intention is to create awareness of common methods of selecting and applying type in order to encourage more thoughtful and strategic type practices.

²³ I maintain that these contributions are tremendously important in spotlighting the rhetorical capacity of design texts. Without such fundamental and foundational contributions, a study such as my own would not merit discussion since it is possible to speculate that visual design media in general (let alone typefaces), may still escape rhetorical consideration.

1.6 | Outline of chapters

As already pointed out, I therefore undertake a thorough case study analysis of the communicative complexity of *Fraktur*. In outlining the typeface’s ‘mythic’ composition, I refer primarily to historical accounts of the typeface by Altenhofen (2009), Peter Bain (1998), Philipp Bertheau (1998), Chris Burke (1992), Heller (2008), Philipp Luidl (1998), Nicolas O’Shaughnessy (2009), Schwemer-Scheddin (1998), Paul Shaw (1998; 2009) and Hans P Willberg (1998). I also reference several contemporary adaptations of *Fraktur* as illustrated by Maurício Lanês (2015) and Judith Schalansky (2008) and consult several theorists including Dick Hebdige (1999), who explain key concepts that relate to *Fraktur*’s resignification in contemporary design practice. It is worthwhile to point out that in offering semiotic interpretations on *Fraktur*, Heller in particular has been criticised for indulging in some myth resignification of his own. By citing Erhard Schütz in *Normalschrift. Zur Geschichte des Streits um Fraktur und Antiqua* (2010) Bose (2010:98) points out that:

There had ever since occurred something like a retrospective perfectioning of the National Socialists’ propaganda as if it were “Corporate Design”. ... Examples of careless history writing of this nature are ... Steven Heller’s Iron Fists. Branding the 20th century totalitarian state ...

It is clear that Schütz is critical of the manner and rhetoric with which Heller interprets propaganda in the context of corporate identity design. It is worthwhile to note however, that as a respected design historian, Heller offers a factually credible *interpretation* of *Fraktur* (as Nazi propaganda) that is intended as a critical investigation of its symbolic rhetoric. Therefore, as design study, where the focus shifts from a purely objective, historical recount of the typeface (there are other scholarly articles such as Bose’s, that provide more in-depth insights into the history of *Fraktur*) to a brief historical overview and critical interpretation of its possible communicative aspects, Heller’s views may be taken into consideration.

The second chapter of this study provides a brief historical overview on the shifting attitudes towards the ‘proper’ function of type. The overview provides brief synopses of pertinent typographic movements and outlines polarising philosophies regarding how the appearance of letterforms ‘should’ be crafted in order to achieve a particular aim. This chapter highlights a recurring theme in typographic design where a new style tends to reject the style immediately preceding it. It is argued that this perceived changing function of typographic design leaves a legacy of shifting type ideologies that today lead to polarised understandings surrounding the communicative potential of letterforms.

Chapter Three investigates the first default mode of selection as related to the communicative capacity of letterforms. The chapter is prefaced by a brief investigation into the communicative function of the letterform as a non-linguistic sign, since in both strategies it is argued that the letterform’s ‘distinctive features’ embody connotation. Thereafter, I identify the communicative potential of letterforms as it pertains to our physical experience of their distinctive forms. The overarching theory of experiential form is divided into two further sections that relate to reminiscent and intuitive interpretation of letterforms.

Sequentially, Chapter Four investigates the second selection mode, where highly iconic typefaces are frequently selected as connotative short-hand. By consulting popular culture theory, it is suggested that particular, well-known letterforms not only evoke the ethos of the era or context in which they were conceptualised, but that through social usage, become mythic structures that embody powerfully connotative symbolism. In illustrating several examples, I suggest that symbolism evoked by the letterform may be repurposed and reimagined in new design contexts and that the perpetual reframing of these letterforms increases their popularity and therefore renders them susceptible to even further resignification.

Chapter Five serves as a critical synthesis of theory surrounding the communicative capacity of letterforms. I firstly investigate existing conceptions surrounding visual rhetorical theory and thereafter synthesise overlapping communicative tensions in the letterform that arise as a result of referencing one mode of selection over another. In conducting an in-depth case study analysis of *Fraktur*, I position the interconnected and multi-layered communicative aspects of the letterform from a rhetorical perspective. In doing so, I argue for a more strategic approach to achieving meaningful type selection and application.

The conclusion comprises a summary of the chapters and delineates the contributions of the study. In addition, I put forth limitations of the study and subsequently suggest possible areas of research that may advance discourse in the field of typography. Finally, I offer concluding remarks on several observations made in the study.

02

Chapter Two

*A historical overview of the
perceived function of the letterform*

Typographic language, not only what we write, but *how* we write it, is a visual signature of cultural and contextual influences. According to Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:67), typography is a fundamental way to discover, adapt and realise cultural history and identity. As the graphic signature of language, typefaces embody rich historical landscapes as well as social, cultural and technological practices of an era. According to Heller (2001:vi), insight into typographic history is one way of investigating how cultural philosophies adapt and materialise in new ways. He suggests that without a proper grounding in historical conceptions regarding the function of typography, designers lack the grammar of typographic communication.

Therefore, the following brief historical overview of selected Western European typographic movements²⁴ is presented in order to illustrate changing and often opposing, perceived functions of typography and the letterform in particular. For the purposes of this chapter, only selected and prominent historical events that occur after the introduction of the printing press are discussed in order to illustrate the broader ethos of selected typographic movements. In this chapter, I attempt to shed light on possible reasons for dogmatic ‘either-or’ approaches to type selection and application. The last section provides a synopsis and comparison of the investigated typographic styles and considers the significance of historical shifts in terms of divergent type styles in current examples of type use. It should be noted that while I criticise current typographic selection and application tendencies, my intention is not to critique philosophies of previous type movements per se; rather I attempt to highlight how these philosophies are often out-dated in current communication design practice.

2.1 | A note on technology and type ideology

It should also be noted that although this study investigates selected historical typefaces and cultural contexts, it is not intended to be a concise historical study of typography. Also, owing to extensive theory covered in this study, less common typographic terms are footnoted, however I assume that readers have some basic knowledge of European type history and terminology as well as the most prominent type, design and art movements.

Since the development of Johannes Gutenberg's²⁵ revolutionary printing press (c.1450), the letterform has endured numerous graphic iterations, not only stylistically, but also in terms of the perceived function of type. Throughout decades of type design, the favoured task of the letterform has alternated between that of purely functional carrier of content to decoration or elaboration.

Although several printing techniques (such as woodblock printing) existed well before his invention, Gutenberg's printing contribution situated him as the inventor of movable-type printing and crafted, mechanical typography (Jubert 2006:38). Gutenberg's press also sees the start of rapid and extreme advancements in mechanical and technological printing, type creation and manipulation processes throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that serve as key influential factors in the changing cultural perception of the function of the letterform (Lupton 1996:30; Crisp 2012:210). From the development of the Pantograph in 1839 and Linotype in 1886 until the release of digital type design software such as *Fontographer* (1986), *Quark XPress* (1986) and *Adobe Illustrator* (1987), technology has influenced type production, both affording and restricting freedoms to type designers (Righthand, 2010:[sp]). Therefore, new possibilities created through technological advancement have greatly influenced the perceived function of the letterform.

24. Although I am mindful of meso-American, Aborigine, Asian and African type histories, Ethiopian, Arabic, Indian, Chinese and other indigenous scripts are not discussed within the scope of this chapter. I do however briefly investigate the ideographic and 'image-based' trajectory of type in Chapter three. Furthermore, although Blackletter type history features prominently within the proposed historical landscape (especially in German speaking territories) its historical significance is discussed later, in Chapter five, since it is more immediately relevant to the *Fraktur* case study. Finally, the extensive cultural and political rivalry between Roman and Blackletter types (from the fifteenth century) is not discussed here, since it falls outside the objectives of this chapter. Again, this is briefly mentioned in Chapter five.

25. Full name; Johannes Gensfleisch zur Laden zum Gutenberg.

2.2 | A search for geometric perfection: the Roman letterform

Perhaps the most prominent and contrasting views on the function of the letterform stem from one of the first instances of mechanised typography, the Roman typeface²⁶ (1470). Until the appearance of flamboyantly designed and crafted ornamental typefaces during the Victorian Era (1837-1901), classic Roman faces served as the type of choice throughout most of Europe (excluding German-speaking territories where popular literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were printed in Blackletter) since the mid-thirteenth century (Shaw & Bain 1998:12). The Roman, developed during a period of great advancements in mechanical reproduced and letterform refinement, marks a pertinent era in typographic design. Major advancements in letterpress as well as novel reproduction processes reached unprecedented heights in Italy, and inspired typographic craftsmen to experiment with the limits of their newly developed media in order to achieve geometrically perfect letterforms (Jubert 2006:49).

Since Nicolas Jenson's introduction of the first distinctive Roman typeface in 1470, the Roman letterform acquired a greater smoothness in comparison to its Gothic and Humanistic²⁷ predecessors. *Jenson* typeface (Figure 1) became a benchmark for Roman typography until, in 1529, Geofroy Tory geometricised and refined uppercase Romans. In his famous work *Champ Fleury* (Figure 2), Tory brought width and thickness variations to the letterform (although many imperfections are present in its kerning and curve detail). Tory gave roundness to the Roman letterform and specifically uppercase letters, while lowercase letters remained ragged, irregular and lacked proportion (Reed 1920:9). Only one year later, Claude Garamond extended



FIGURE 01 Detail of layout from *Eusebius' De Evangelica Praeparatione*, designed by Nicolas Jenson, type set in *Jenson*, 1470. (Codex [sa]).

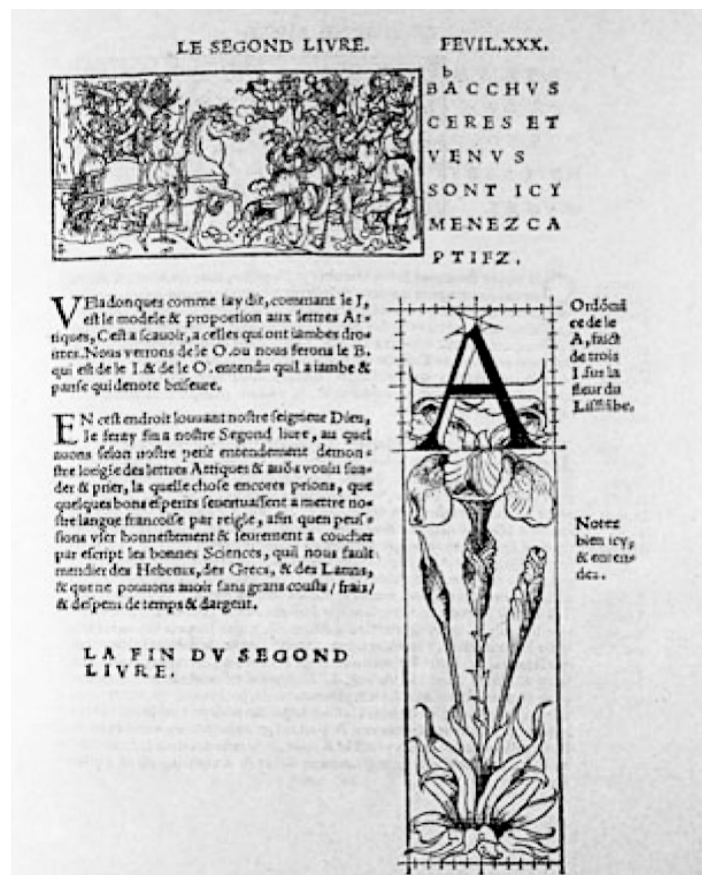


FIGURE 02 Layout from *Champ Fleury*, designed by Geofroy Tory, 1529. (Ketterer Kunst 2006).

Tory's efforts by then fine-tuning the Roman family to a consummate degree (Jubert 2006:57). *Garamond's* fine strokes exhibit a definite thickness while its serifs are triangulated in order to optimise clarity (Reed 1920:10). The smooth *Garamond* (1530) face (Figure 3) became the standard European typeface for two centuries until 1692, when French type founder Philippe Granjean designed *Romain du Roi*; a typeface that exemplified the precision of letterform construction occurring at that time (Heller 1999:19). Echoing concerns for reason, critique and science — characteristic of the seventeenth century — *Romain du Roi* was, more than any of its predecessors, strictly designed on a mathematically constructed grid and by means of calculated parameters²⁸ for each individual character (Jubert 2006:68). Granjean was not, however, ignorant of the power of visual correctness and altered his mathematical creations accordingly (Reed 1920:13). His most prominent alterations are the broader than 'mathematically sound' stems of characters such as 'I', 'M', 'N', 'T', 'W' and 'Y'.

In 1784, *Didot* (Figure 4), the first modern Roman, was cut at the foundry of Firmin in France. Modern Romans such as *Didot* differ from earlier examples in their rigidity and mechanisation.

26. The Roman typeface is one of two major classifications of typography (Roman and Blackletter). The Roman is typically characterised by definite variations of thickness in vertical and horizontal axes and is usually composed of serif structures. Blackletter, on the other hand, is characterised by thick, heavy shapes with severe angles and pointed vertices that appear to overpower the whiteness of the page (Shaw & Bain 1998:15).
27. 'Humanistic' pertains to sans serif typefaces characterised by their hand-drawn quality. Although similar to script typefaces, humanistic letterforms are not necessarily joined.
28. The typeface structure was constructed under the guidance of a design committee according to a square grid divided into 64 square boxes (division on one side into eight, followed by subdivision into six, giving a total of over two thousand micro-squares). For the italic version, the same process is followed, except, here, each square is transformed into a slanted parallelogram (Jubert 2006:68).

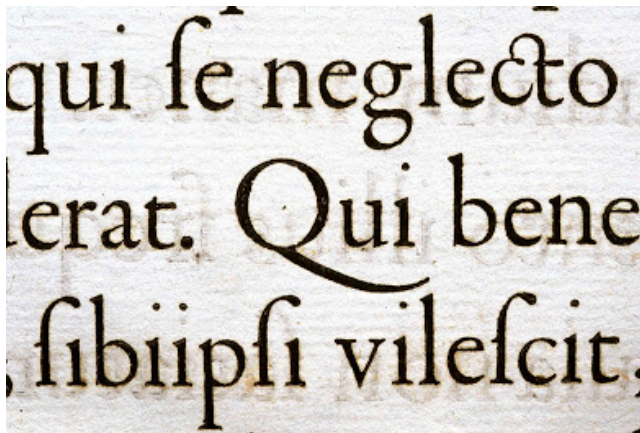


FIGURE | **03** *Garamond*, designed by Claude Garamond, 1530.
(Garamond or Garamont? 2011).



FIGURE | **04** *Didot*, designed by Firmin Didot, 1784.
(Blevins 2012:[sp]).

The advent of copper engraving methods for type design in 1780 (utilised in the construction of *Didot*) facilitated a drive for letterforms that appear more elegant when contrasted with the uneven cuts, weights and shadings of previous Romans (Heller 1999:19). In addition, letterforms are formed around a vertical axis while hairlines are thin and stems markedly thicker than previous Romans. This new, ground breaking mechanical technique also allowed for straighter and bracketed serifs (Jubert 2006:77). The Didot family's funding contribution to the development of presses powered by steam (as opposed to manual operation), spurred enthusiasm for even greater precision²⁹ in print quality during the 1810s. The introduction of *Didot* therefore reenergises the drive toward perfected geometry by overcoming previous mechanical restrictions.

By 1787, Giambattista Bodoni of Parma, Italy, interpreted his own version of *Didot*, *Bodoni* (Figure 5). Since *Didot* was exposed to a fair amount of criticism regarding legibility when set in eight-point size or less, Bodoni accentuated differentiating features of his typeface in order to create distinctive feature associations. Bodoni sharpened fine lines and thickened heavier ones, producing a Roman with a markedly strong visual contrast (Reed 1920:13). Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries, Bodoni's typeface accessed the mechanical breakthroughs pioneered by the Didot family. For Bodoni, simplicity and sharpness are qualities that best serve typographic design:

Little by little literature, philosophy and industrialism direct the taste of those who study them toward simplicity and sobriety, to the point that the beauty they like best will be one unembellished by hackneyed ornaments (Bodoni in Jubert 2006:80).

Another notable typeface, *Baskerville*,³⁰ (Figure 6) surfaced around 1800 in British publication houses. The typeface was met with extreme criticism,³¹ since, as a modern English Roman, it falls into a ‘less agreeable’ epoch of degeneration where ideals of typographic beauty gives way to sordid economy and glitzy marketability (Heller 1999:19; Reed 1920:11). Essentially, the typeface was hailed as too ‘sparkling’ and ‘showy’ in that it was said to *blind* readers who attempted to read large amounts of copy. Nevertheless, *Baskerville* later began to garner enthusiasm through promotion by Benjamin Franklin who hailed it a ‘sparkling’ example of the process of refinement and technical precision.

Modern Roman typefaces are characterised by the level of rational and calculated construction that inevitably minimises the role of the hand (in the design of letterforms), eliminating gesture and personal style (Jubert 2006:76). Owing to, in large part, massive technological strides achieved in letterpress printing, the Roman character underwent a process of significant refinement and abstraction, perhaps predicting later trends in Modern letterform design. Typographers and type craftsmen of this era developed delicate techniques that yielded the sharpest and finest visual effects (Reed 1920:14). It is clear that, through abstraction and refinement, typographers strove to achieve a previously unattainable degree of legibility, clarity, balance and geometrical perfection in their respective Roman interpretations (Jubert 2006:61).

29. The *Didot point* (equivalent of the American Pica measurement, that is, 0,3759mm), for example, remains an international standard of measurement in typographic precision (Jubert 2006:77).

30. *Baskerville* was designed by John Baskerville.

31. According to Reed (1920:11), various esteemed art critics vehemently protested against the use of *Baskerville*.

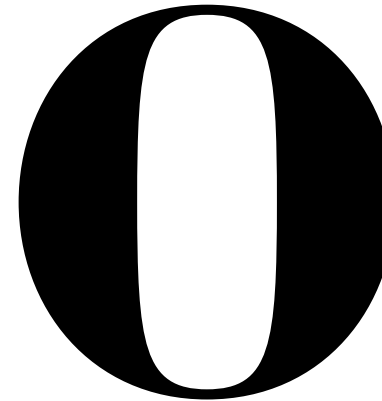


FIGURE 05 *Bodoni*, designed by Giambattista Bodini, 1787.

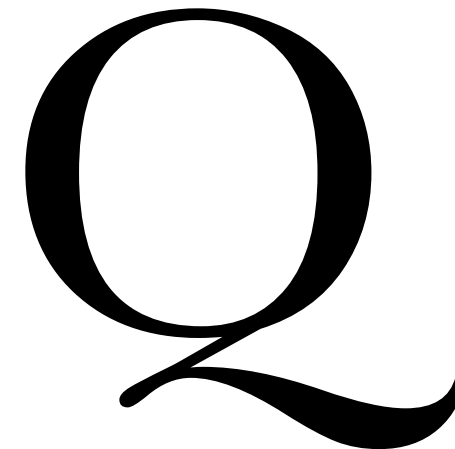


FIGURE 06 *Baskerville*, designed by John Baskerville, 1757.

2.3 | Ornamentation and excess: Victorian letterforms

The late eighteenth century saw the onset of the Industrial Revolution, and with it, decisive changes in typographic design. As much as the Industrial Revolution powered massive design changes, so too did a string of tumultuous socio-political events. Europe witnessed, among other things, extreme wars and riots, class conflicts and the emergence of a definitive bourgeoisie super structure (Jubert 2006:90).

The Victorian Era marks a critical juncture in technological, commercial and social history (Heller 2006:321). With a rapid and previously unmatched pace of technological advancements, Victorian engineering in type design rose to the status of high art. That is, Victorian type design evolved largely in response to breakthroughs in technology where mechanical manufacture of cheaply produced paper, automated printing afforded by steam power, lithography³² and chromolithography³³ (1797) rendered the typographic landscape almost unrecognisable (Jubert 2006:94). According to Heller (2006:322), the development of lithography in particular, along with the electrotype and the substitution of wood with metal in printing presses, quickened the pace of large runs of typographic print reproduction, in the space of a century. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed even further mechanical developments in the form of the pantograph and router³⁴ (1834), the rotary press³⁵ (1850s), and the introduction of automated type compositions. The introduction of linotype machines³⁶ facilitated the first instance of automated type setting and composition (Jubert 2006:102). In addition, typographic trades transformed from artisanal practices into typographic industries. For example, printing that utilised Gutenberg's press rose from 500 sheets per day to more than 3000 (Jubert 2006:93).

These processes eliminated the laborious affair of individual character typesetting and significantly quickened printing speed (that is, printed pages per hour).

Owing, in large part, to the above-mentioned technological advancements, Victorian type design seems to mirror an era defined by extravagance, opulence³⁷ and almost obscene wealth for more people than ever before. These and other mechanical developments seemed too great an enticement for Victorian type designers who began to construct extremely ornamental and elaborately styled letterforms. That is, the letterform revelled in ornamentation and flourish (Figure 7a-j).

³². Lithography is a printing process invented between 1796 and 1798. Whereas previously ink was transferred directly onto paper, the lithographic process makes use of a water-repelling process. Greasy substances repel water and ink takes to the fatty areas. The prepared media is then run through an automatic steam press (Jubert 2006:93).

³³. Chromolithography follows a similar process to lithography; however, this colour process requires a separate stone or 'plate' for each applied colour. This method required skilled registration accuracy (Jubert 2006:93).

³⁴. The pantograph is a mechanical linkage mechanism formed from parallelogram shapes. When one pen (router) moves, the second pen, situated at the cross-section of the second linkage, mimics its action.

³⁵. The rotary printing press comprises a cylindrical drum around which transfer images are curved. The drum's cylindrical form allows the press to rotate continuously, allowing for extended printing 'runs'.

³⁶. The first linotype models were designed by Ottmar Mergenthaler in 1886.

³⁷. The term 'architectonic' for example, was coined during this period and used to describe a specific type style that adapted decorative, ornamental aspects of Victorian architecture (Heller & Fili 1999:25).

Loud, decorative characters filled the typographic vocabulary and were subject to extreme distortion, exaggeration, stretching and dismemberment, and were reconstituted to the point of being unrecognisable in comparison to original Roman letterforms (Jubert 2006:102). Moreover, customised typefaces and ‘extravagant bastardisations’ of modern Romans were flamboyantly designed specifically for commercial use. The refinement of these specimens kept type foundries on the precipice of mechanical advancements in an attempt to remain ahead of competition and capitalise on an environment of visual saturation (Jubert 2006:201).

Questions of design and style were as much an area of concern as the production rate and reach of mass printed media (Jubert 2006:97). Owing to the uptake in information transmission (communication cables were being laid between every major global city), Victorian design spread globally and, in America particularly, resulted in the explosion of printed advertising industries (this echoes the widespread availability of products on sale at the time). The letterform was thus dressed heavily in ornamental flourishes in order to capture the attention of mass markets (Heller 2006:323; Heller & Fili 1999:22).

The proliferation of commercialism through type design also saw an unprecedented number of new decorative typefaces, from Tuscan³⁸ to ‘garish, fat Egyptian’³⁹ faces (Figure 7d) and sans serifs that rejected classical norms in favour of type novelty (Heller & Fili 1999:19-20). Type attained enormous diversity and richness, spawning eclectic innovations and dubious hybrids (Figures 7e-i) composed of expanded, outlined, inlined, extruded, faceted, floriated, perspectival and bowed forms as well as overemphasised accentuations of a typeface’s formal features⁴⁰ (Jubert 2006:98; Miller & Lupton 1992:22).

The typographic page was ornamented with sometimes four or five markedly different, decorative typefaces amongst detailed filigrees (Heller & Fili 1999:25). Typographers achieved decorative lettering with heavy drop-shadows cast against vibrant arabesque patterns and over embellished pages and posters (Figures 7a-i). In contrast with mathematically precise Roman letterform construction, Victorian techniques encourage the alteration of letterforms at random (Otl Aicher 1988:156). It is clear that Victorian type craftsmen sought to challenge their media, since the quality and extremely fine detail of letterforms demonstrates the artisan’s desire to “... twist and contort the brass metal rules used in page composition to do feats of typographic acrobatics they were never manufactured to do” (Heller & Fili 1999:25). This may be because traditional Roman typefaces, conceived for purposes of clarity and legibility did not satisfy the Victorian⁴¹ typographer’s appetite for visual impact, abundance and novelty (Jubert 2006:98). In almost direct contrast to the process of abstraction identified across several centuries during the development of Roman serif types, Victorian typographers obliterated aesthetic boundaries in favour of opulent and indulgent type compositions.

³⁸. The Tuscan typeface is characterised by ornate, curled, pointed or bifurcated serifs (Tuscan 2014

³⁹. Upon Napoleon’s return from a three year Egyptian expedition, and publication of *Description de l’Égypte*, (1809), the term ‘Egyptian’ became fashionable throughout Europe. Therefore, type foundries appear to have branded typefaces that exhibit slab or heavy serifs as ‘Egyptian’ even though they have little to do with Egyptian hieroglyphics. Egyptian typefaces were often used for decorative headlines only, because the heavy serifs impeded legibility at smaller point sizes (Lupton [sa]:[sp]).

⁴⁰. Features include weights, stresses, cross-bars, serifs, angles, curves, ascenders and descenders.

⁴¹. It should also be noted that during the Victorian era, Art Nouveau style letterforms – styled from natural motifs – were also prevalent from 1890-1914. Although arguably not *as* elaborately dressed or cluttered as the Victorian specimens, Art Nouveau letterforms nevertheless also contribute to the overarching spirit and drive for ornamentation and decoration.

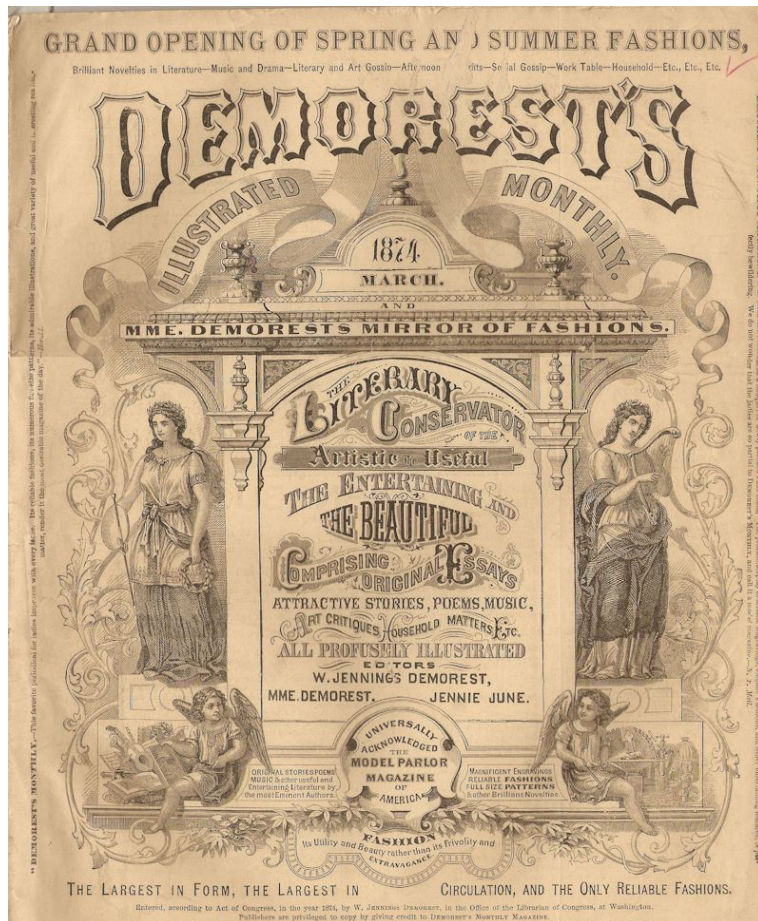


FIGURE 07a *Bemorest's* magazine cover, designer unknown, 1874. (Heller & Fili 1999:24).



FIGURE 07b *Mrs. S.A. Allen's* advertisement, designer unknown, 1880. (Heller & Fili 1999:24).



FIGURE | **07c** *Palm's* transfer letters catalogue cover, designer unknown, 1885. (Heller & Fili 1999:24).

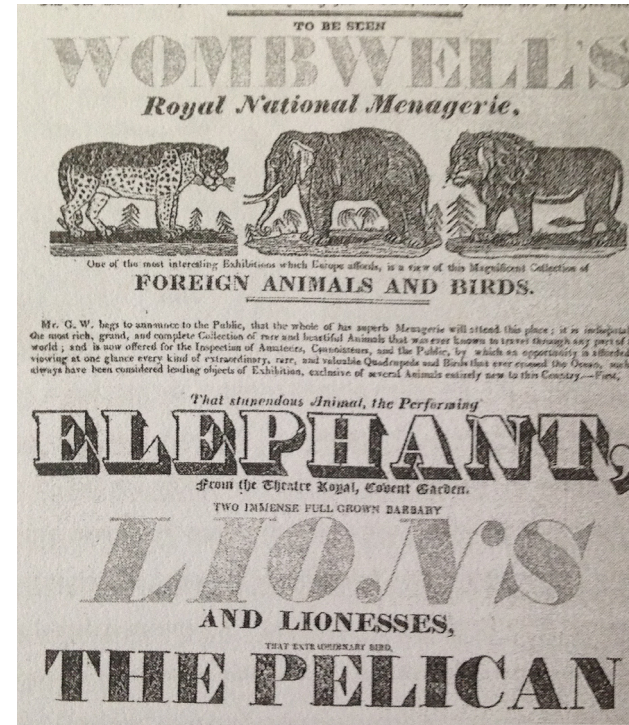


FIGURE | **07d** *Wombwell's* broadsheet, designer unknown, 1865. (Heller & Fili 1999:20).

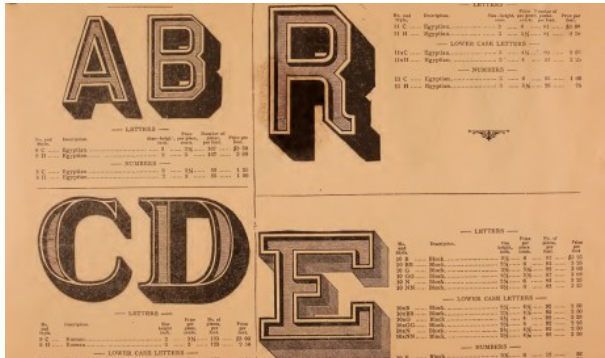


FIGURE | **07e** *Palm's patent transfer letters*, designer unknown, 1885. (Heller & Fili 1999:20).



FIGURE | **07f** *Modelle de Letters specimen*, designer unknown, 1884. (Heller & Fili 1999:27).

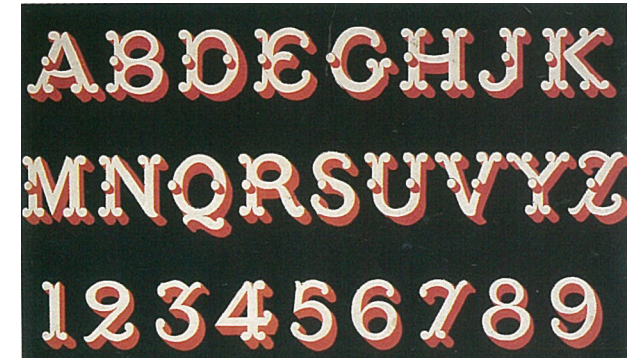


FIGURE | **07g** *Modelle de Letters specimen*, designer unknown, 1884. (Heller & Fili 1999:27).

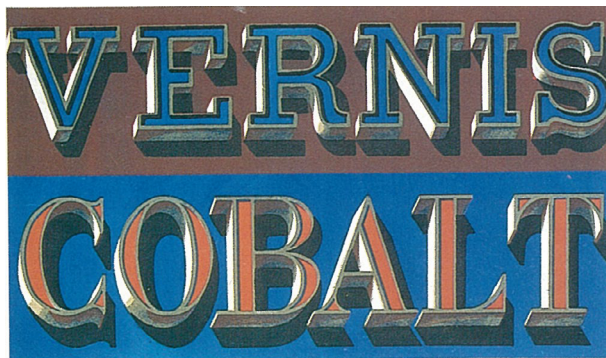


FIGURE | **07h** *Modelle de Letters, Vernis Cobalt*, designer unknown, 1884. (Heller & Fili 1999:27).

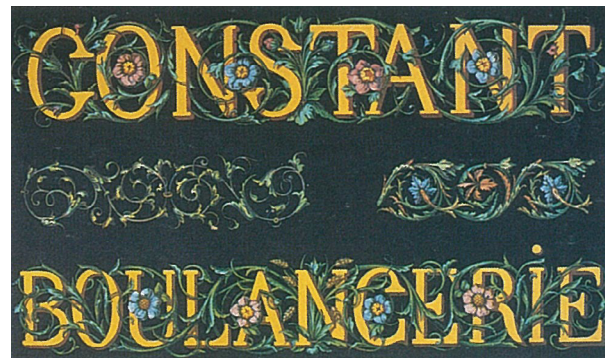


FIGURE | **07i** *Modelle de Letters, Constant Boulangerie*, designer unknown, 1884. (Heller & Fili 1999:27).



FIGURE | **07j** *Modelle de Letters, Manuel de Peintures*, designer unknown, 1884. (Heller & Fili 1999:27).

Today, Victorian typography is repurposed in the form of embellished letterforms and visually saturated layouts. It is possible to argue that owing to a similar progressive inclination in design technology, the ethos of Victorian inquisition is perhaps matched in current visualisations that strive for a similar spirit of novelty and variation. Here, Victorian style is often employed purely for the purpose of visual embellishment or to recall previous typographic mannerisms, where it is a hodgepodge of several expressive typefaces that captures a Victorian attitude to type. That is, designers typically implement Victorian letterforms as a way of situating a design as ‘vintage’ or ‘eclectic’. The vast array of Victorian inspired designs, posters and other media make use of five or more typefaces, often consisting of hand-drawn scripts, faux three-dimensional lettering and textured slab serifs. Supporting elements are randomly selected merely to fill space, while type is composed within banners or holding shapes set at various, incongruent angles (Figures 7k-l).

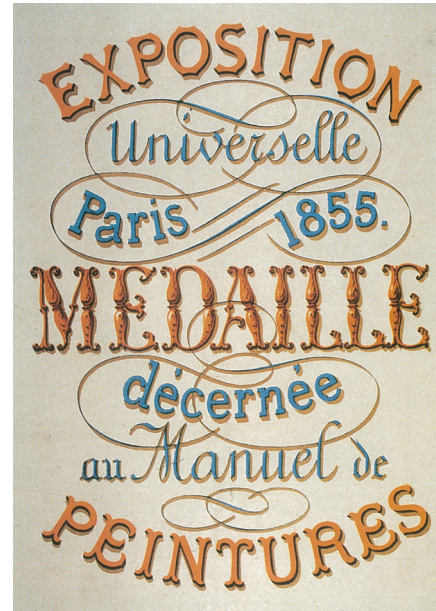


FIGURE | 07k

Exposition Universelle, designer unknown, 1855.
(Heller & Fili 1999:25).



FIGURE | 07l

Action speaks louder than words poster, designed by
Ginger Monkey studio, 2014.
(Actions speak louder than words 2014).

2.4 | Reactive type: Avant-garde letterforms

In the wake of an oversaturated visual landscape and excess born of industrialised, commercial cities, artists and craftsmen begin a process of simplification. This meant that, in type design spheres, the embellished Victorian letterform no longer held traction. For example, the embellished letterform is noticeably absent in *Sachplakat* (poster object) designs that appear around 1910 in Berlin, toward the end of the Edwardian⁴² era. The minimalist poster genre, pioneered by Lucian Bernhard, produced a method of minimalising visual clutter (as found in Victorian advertisements) by removing a number of visual elements in poster design. The *Sachplakat* (Figure 8) therefore usually consisted of only a marketed product, a logo or trademark and at times, a single line of bold type (Heller & Fili 1999:62). The new, simplified poster style comes at a time where increased traffic propagated by Victorian design resulted in escalated volumes of messages and greater competition for public attention that was essentially viewed as ineffective noise (Heller & Fili 1999:59).

It is clear that the start of the twentieth century evidences changing attitudes that seem to challenge traditional pictorial codes and proved to be radical in terms of changes to a techno-industrial, urbanised culture, where designers and artists began to question what was deemed acceptable and socially ethical (Jubert 2006:92,108). The harnessing of electricity and major developments in speed of transportation transformed humankind's interaction with the environment, while improved schooling and increased literacy sparked a culture of social betterment and moral elevation (Jubert 2006:148). In addition, breakthroughs in the fields of science, along with the introduction of psychoanalysis and Marxism, formed building blocks from which social upheavals could take place. Typographers sought social freedom through radicalism and protest, and sought activism through type craft (Jubert 2006:155). The function of type design was therefore assessed by its impact as a vehicle for protest (Jubert 2006:155).

Consequently, abstracted letterforms arose as a means of signifying the deconstruction of bourgeois letterforms by stripping its visual form (Jubert 2006:154).

The onset of German Expressionism, Fauvism, Suprematism, Futurism and Dadaism in the first decades of the twentieth century saw the first visually definitive uprising against a global society capable of 'abhorrent social and political values', although only the former and latter provide significant contributions to the historical *typographic* landscape (Heller & Fili 1999:65). These movements used the letterform in an attempt at demolishing pretence, excess and acute commercialism. The type space becomes liberated; freed from the traditional page and resulted in experimental letterforms and layouts (Heller & Fili 1999:156).

Two groups emerged with the onset of German Expressionism in 1905, namely, *Die Brücke* (1905) and *Der Blaue Reiter* (1911), which were championed by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Wassily Kandinsky respectively. Of the two groups, the former was especially interested in experimentation with regard to figurative distortion and fashioned a visual language based on so-called primitive imagery, including African totems and masks. By 1918, the movement became particularly active in creating protest posters (Figure 9), carved from woodblock lettering derived from African iconography. In spite of massive advancements aimed at achieving detailed type precision, German Expressionists championed freeform, primitive letterforms that explicitly negate mechanical precision (Jubert 2006:155).

⁴². The Victorian era ended around 1901 and was followed by the Edwardian from 1901 – 1910. To a certain extent, Edwardian design already began to rebel against many Victorian ideas and aesthetics.



FIGURE | 08 *Rarität* poster, designed by O.W. Hadank, 1920. (Heller & Fili 1999:62).



FIGURE | 09 *KG Brücke* exhibition poster, designed by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1910. (Jubert 2006:157).

Another movement in the vanguard of typographic disruption, Dada,⁴³ marks an era of mass socio-political conflict that resulted in gross human fatality and class segmentation. As opposed to segmenting sub-categories of design, Dadaists sought to hybridise forms of graphic design in protest against the war of 1914-1918, which they believed was funded by extreme bourgeoisie capitalism (Heller & Fili 1999:65). For the Dadaists, random amalgamations of type, image and other graphic instances broke traditional forms of design and hijacked meaning through completely original forms of layout and montage (Jubert 2006:168). Dadaist typographers did not conform to a specific letterform per se. Instead, they stretched, distorted and cut up a combination of mismatched letterforms to form fragmented type amalgamations (Figure 10a). As if in utter defiance of former attempts at refined letterforms, characters were fragmented and randomly or autonomously set in processed collage formats. These shrapnel-like layouts were set in justified columns of ragged text, often skewed beyond conventional grids and margins. Multiple weights and faces were simultaneously used in a single, nonsensical composition. Text buckles or advances in tightly packed series while overlapping and smashed lead characters hindered hierarchal systems of legibility (Heller & Fili 1999:66).

In manipulating classical typographic standards, the haphazard, ‘expressive’ Dadaist letterform (and shaped through distorted *parerga*), serves as a beacon of social and political rebellion that defies all concerns for legibility. It is clear that the Dadaist ethos was underpinned by a drive for social expression that is commonly returned to in current typographic practice. Unfortunately, however, designers currently gravitate toward distorted letterforms often purely for the purpose of inspiring visual interest or texture to break the white page (Figure 10b). This typographic code also seems to fuel an exploratory spirit seen in later Postmodern typographic movements.



FIGURE 10a *Gutenberggedenblatt*, designed by Johannes Baader, 1920. (left) (Jubert 2006:170).

FIGURE 10b *The creative manual cover*, designed by Matt Theodosopoulos, 2013. (above) (Theodosopoulos 2013:[sp]).

43. The term ‘Dada’ was coined in 1917 at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Switzerland and literally denotes ‘nothing’; a random term that defines a movement grounded in contradiction, humour, self-mockery, the ridiculous, the strange and the absurd (Jubert 2006:168). Some of the key figures include Marcel Duchamp, Jean Arp and Kurt Schwitters.

2.5 | Abstraction and utilitarian functionalism: Avant-garde letterforms

Decisive shifts in design practice occurred from the early 1920s onwards and specifically with regard to the utilitarian function of the letterform. From the early 1920s, notions such as functionalism or *la forme utile* (useful form), rationalism and constructivism come to the fore to supersede the idea of reactive (type) forms (Jubert 2006:170, 180). The collapse of Dadaist typography and type-as-revolt sees the birth of utopian idealism sought through abstracted, ‘pure’ letterforms. At stake were not only issues of form, but also how the abstraction of form might address social and political issues of the time (Jubert 2006:155). After World War I (1914-1918), Europe experienced a widespread cultural depression owing to an obliterated economy and a rise of social and class protests. At this time, avant-garde activity aspired to reconstruct a social, political, economic and cultural society (Jubert 2006:180). At its core, Modernist philosophy internalised a belief that society was on the verge of a primal step of evolution, born of the machine age. According to Vignelli (1991:51), Modern letterforms therefore symbolise a commitment to improving life through better design.

Functional and clear type became the aim for proponents of this early avant-garde drive. Type design was driven by Modern philosophy, which held that letterforms should act as neutral agents of transmission; that is, as utilitarian vehicles for conveying the message of any given copy (McClellan [sa]:1). Letterforms were therefore sifted to remove trivial ornamentation and kitsch decoration. Type design was seen as a utopian craft, where the utilitarian type product could be used to facilitate mobility and education for the masses (Heller & Fili 1999:69). By abstracting the letterform of excessive decoration, Modern typographers made a stand against greed, excessive commercialism, exploitation and vulgar, cheap reproduction and pollution (Vignelli 1999:52).

In contrast to Dadaist typographers, the utopian Modernists sought to solve problems of chaotic visual designs spurred by industrialism (Meggs 1998:330). By embracing industrialised ingenuity, designers begin to solve questions of utility, function, clarity and visual or hierarchal efficacy (Jubert 2006:180). To a degree, commercialism is even embraced in this new avant-garde. Branding and brand conceptualisation developed into a viable design vocation, with the typographic logomark as its most recognisable output. Early examples of type design in brand development include Lucian Bernard’s logo plaque for Manoli Cigarettes (Figure 11) in 1919 and the design of a typographic logo mark for Odol mouthwash in 1920.

The spirit of embracing technological advances continued throughout designs and artwork in Russia from 1920 onwards. Vladimir Tatlin’s experimental collages constructed from industrial products became known as ‘machine’ and ‘product art’ and later informed the Russian Constructivist aesthetic. Constructivist design elements, as featured on El Lissitzky’s 1923 cover design for *Design twists* (Figure 12), were formed around melanges of geometric shapes; an aesthetic that is mirrored in letterforms of a similar, geometrical nature (Heller & Fili 1999:74).



FIGURE II | *Manoli Cigarettes* logo, designed by Lucien Bernhard, c. 1910. (Jubert 2006:171).

As is the case with most early Modern design styles, Constructivism was framed by a drive toward social reform⁴⁴ (Jubert 2006:181). It was not, however, only philosophical concerns that drove the impetus of Constructivist type design, but also concerns of a practical nature. Three-dimensional, Victorian letterforms were no longer financially viable owing to the excessive amounts of inks and cost of printing production (Jubert 2006:182). Plagued by a shortage of resources (such as paper and ink) after the First World War, Constructivist typographers therefore developed a reduced type style based on letterforms (limited to red and black ink) set at right angles and framed by bold rules and borders (Figure 13) in order to prevent expensive misalignment errors in the design and printing processes (Heller & Fili 1999:76).

From the 1920s, typographic design flourished in and around western regions of Europe during a period of socio-political upheaval. An emerging typographic current comes to the fore in the form of The Bauhaus Style,⁴⁵ emanating primarily from a typographic epicentre known as The Bauhaus School (Jubert 2006:199). Bauhaus letterforms comprise simplified geometric shape combinations and are set according to diagonal layout rules, usually in primary colours (Figure 14). The function of type was, in accordance with all other forms design practiced at the school, that form follows function⁴⁶ (Keedy 1998:[sp]).

⁴⁴. In typographic design, any form of ornamentation was considered symbolic of Czarist and oligarchic indulgence and thus stripped (Heller & Fili 1999:76).

⁴⁵. The Bauhaus or Build-house style is a cross-fertilisation or hybridisation that fused influences from Constructivism, Arts and Crafts, the Werkbund, Expressionism, Dada and De Stijl.

⁴⁶. The phrase was first coined by Louis Sullivan in 1896 and is often referred to as the quintessential statement of decoratively 'clean' modernist architecture.

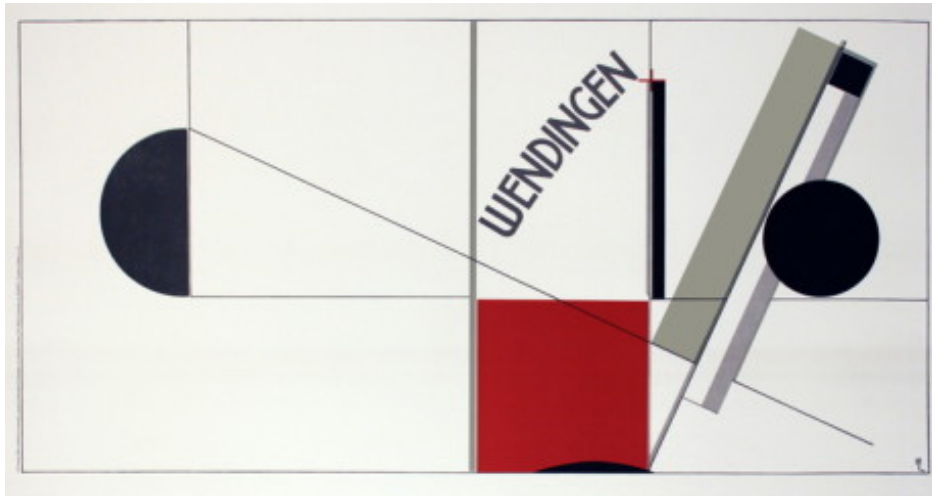


FIGURE | 12 *Design Twists* magazine, front and back cover, designed by El Lissitzky, c. 1920. Silkscreen and press, 1600 x 60 mm. (Jubert 2006:186).

The Bauhaus attracted Modern designers Walter Gropius,⁴⁷ El Lissitzky, Theo van Doesburg and László Moholy-Nagy, who all contributed to the school’s type design curriculum. These designers held that the letterform should function as a vehicle of pure transmission, void of connotation (Righthand 2010:[sp]). Moholy-Nagy stressed that the letterform should “present precise information . . . For legibility, the message must never suffer from a *priori* [sic] aesthetics”. Moreover, Modernist designers argued that type clarity and precision could only be realised by the simplified lines of sans serif typefaces since serif type specimens were deemed unnecessarily complex and signified links to traditionalism. Moholy-Nagy (in Jubert 2006:200) explains that the advent of the serif extremity “conceals through hedonistic ornamentation, rather than rationalising enlightenment and necessity”. The sans serif was therefore seen as a perfect specimen of formal abstraction since it met the requirement for clarity and purity (McClellan [sa]:1). In designing the iconic sans serif *Universal* typeface (Figure 15) for example, Herbert Bayer (a graduate of the school) sought to design clever, simplified and mathematically concise letterforms that championed the notion of universality and sought to promote a common international spirit (Vignelli 1991:21). Moreover, for Bauhaus designers, the search for a singular, abstracted and culturally objective set of letterforms seemed to instil a sense of unity and purism. According to Lupton (1996:47), striving toward a universal letterform presented the opportunity for completely abstracted forms that would communicate content directly to the eye, bypassing or transcending any form of potential interpretation in the process.

⁴⁷. Walter Gropius was appointed as the first official director of the school in 1918.



FIGURE 13 Page spread design for *A book of poems* by Mayakovsky, designed by El Lissitzky, c. 1924. (The history of visual communication: Avant-garde [sa]).



FIGURE 14 Bauhaus exhibition poster, designed by Joost Schmidt, 1923. (Jubert 2006:184).



FIGURE | 15 *Universal*, designed by Herbert Bayer, 1925-1926.
(Jubert 2006:202).

2.6 | Absolute clarity, legibility and abstraction: late Modernist letterforms

During the 1920s, emphasis on liberal social activism gradually waned, and the emphasis on the letterform as vehicle of political commentary lessened. Type design in the Netherlands (from 1918) in particular, known as De Stijl (the style), seemed to escape the ethos of socio-political upheaval experienced by other European countries. This is probably because the Netherlands took no active part in World War I and enjoyed good economic and industrial growth. In the Netherlands, the letterform was for the first time viewed as a *completely* neutral vehicle of communication.

Despite the clear split from socio-political commentary, an undeterred drive for objectivity, neutrality and a pristine clarity, unencumbered by ornamentation, remained unassailable and unflinching; an ethos that is particularly typical of De Stijl type design. De Stijl typographers clearly exhibited a similar zeal for geometric precision sought by their contemporaries in Russia and Germany; however, they substituted Bauhaus' religious proclamation of utopianism avant-gardism for more pragmatic laws of geometry (Heller & Fili 1999:89). As if to directly mirror a Mondrian painting, De Stijl letterforms (Figure 16) are designed on flat, rectangular grids (Jubert 2006:190). Moreover, De Stijl's plastic (neoplasticism)⁴⁸ or superficial appearance⁴⁹ echoes an ethos of political neutrality and the designer's calculated approach to letterform construction.

De Stijl's pertinent contribution to the typographic landscape lies not in its catalogue of letterform design, but as a philosophical precursor to a new, standardised style that sought a reconstituted approach to letterform construction. In 1928, the onset of a pinnacle in Modernist typography was sparked by the philosophical writing of Jan Tschichold⁵⁰ in his

seminal work *Die Neue Typographie*⁵¹ (The New Typography). Echoing sentiments from De Stijl, *Die Neue Typographie* promoted an abandonment of classical or traditional type forms and the search for a quintessential typeface for the future. The resulting style, The New Typography, is perhaps as much a natural development from earlier De Stijl design, as it is a dedication to a complete focus on letterform design (as opposed to architecture, for example). Winkler (1990:38) maintains that the new typographic style was hailed as a philosophy without a socially or ethically entrenched dogma, and that its type design thrived in accommodating real-world, corporate demands. The advent of the style sees a culture of designers who viewed technology as a means of simply transcending bourgeoisie classism and global capitalism through abstraction, towards a universal, objective future (Heller 2006:8; Wild 1992:56).

48. Neoplasticism is a doctrine defined by simplicity and vigour achieved through stark horizontal and vertical black lines and thicknesses combined with solid areas of flat colours (blue, red, black and white).

49. It should be noted that certain De Stijl typographers (including Mondrian and van Doesburg) later rejected De Stijl since its fundamental purpose is that of functional utilitarianism, which they believed to be superficial (Heller & Fili 1999:90).

50. After attending several Bauhaus exhibitions typographic expositions from 1923, the then twenty-one-year-old German typographer began to pursue a growing affection for structured, overly simplified design (Jubert 2006:197). Tschichold was heavily influenced by typographic contemporaries (at that time) such as Gropius and Maholy-Nagy, with whom he often collaborated on corporate and institutional typographic projects.

51. *Die Neue Typographie* is an eloquently compiled manual that highlights key tenets underpinning the aesthetic of The New Typography.



FIGURE 16 *Klei* magazine cover, designed by Theo van Doesburg, 1920. Pencil, gouache, ink and collage on transparent paper, 800 x 570 mm. (Jubert 2006:191).

These practitioners searched for ‘an absolute aesthetic’ that would transcend the particulars of context and social politics, and most importantly, break away from any attachment to past reference. Tschichold (1928:[sp]) explains that typographic objects, “designed without reference to the past, have been created for a new kind of man: *the Engineer!*”

For Tschichold and his contemporaries, the essence of The New Typography is type clarity. He maintained that clarity served as a practical means of wading through a cluttered visual landscape propagated by industrial production techniques in the early part of the twentieth century. Pure form, as he describes it, was informed by logical pragmatics of the written and read word. For Tschichold and fellow type critic, Beatrice Warde, the letterform should function as a transparent vehicle that transports the intention of the copy or text, without an “excess of ‘colour’, [that] gets in the way of the mental picture to be conveyed” (Warde 1930:40). In *Typographie/Typography*,⁵² Emil Ruder (1967:23) showcases some exemplary guidelines of the typographic doctrine:

Typography has one plain duty before it, and that is to convey information in writing. No argument or consideration can absolve typography from [t]his duty. A printed work which cannot be read becomes a product without a purpose ...

52. Ruder was a graduate of the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (School of Arts and Crafts) in Kassel. Later, while teaching at the *Kunstgewerbeschule*, Ruder dedicated an extensive course on one typeface, *Univers*, comprising twenty-one variations, designed by Adrian Frutiger in 1954.

Ruder (1967:27) also provides definitions, clarification and recommendations that characterised The New Typography's style philosophy:

First principal: The text must be clearly legible. The 'mass of text' on the page must be measured to make it possible for the reader to take it in without undue effort ... the spaces between words, between letters, and between lines must be carefully proportioned. A line of more than sixty characters is hard to read; too little space between lines destroys the pattern they make, too much exaggerates it ... Typography is basically a question of ordering and precision.

Warde (1930:40) extends that 'expression of thought', man's most profound gift, is best captured in written text and not expressive letterforms. For her and Tschichold, type should thus act as neutral and object thought transference and avoid, at all costs, conjuring any form of 'conflicting' expressive authorship:

The aim of typography must not be expression, least of all, self-expression ... In a masterpiece of typography, the artist's signature has been eliminated. What some may praise as personal styles are in reality small and empty peculiarities, frequently damaging, that masquerade as innovations (Tschichold in Heller 2006:218).

53. With the outbreak of World War II (1939), depleted resources meant little time and effort was afforded to developing a new typographic style. Since Switzerland remained free from wartime demands, the Swiss design industry continued to pursue the typographic avenues launched by pioneers of the The New Typography (Jubert 2006:321).

It is therefore clear that the letterform was viewed exclusively as a linguistic device, where any non-linguistic symbolism is not only ignored, but also actively eradicated. Moreover, the emphasis on the letterform is not only legibility, but also the degree to which it facilitates readability.

In Switzerland, The New Typography evolved into an even more reductive, purely functional form, now referred to as The International Style⁵³ (Heller & Fili 1999:129). If any residue of political or social dogmas surrounded Modern design up until the 1940s, The International Style certainly presumed to eliminate these associations (Heller & Fili 1999:129). Never, in typographic history, had the search for universalism and economy in typographic design been so unshakably entrenched as it was in Switzerland at this time (Meggs 1998:379). This also meant that the role of the type designer underwent massive cultural shifts.

The new collective, The (Swiss) International Style, was propelled into consciousness by progenitors Theo Ballmer, Max Bill, Karl Gerstner and Markus Kutter, who retained The New Typography's aim to achieve objective clarity above individualistic style. Functioning in much the same way as earlier Modern type specimens, Swiss letterforms were constructed of mathematically organised, geometric elements. Swiss type philosophy placed even greater emphasis on technical detail; geometric spatial divisions were scrutinised to within micrometres to ensure pristine kerning and undeniable legibility (Jubert 2006:321). A grid method also introduced stricter hierarchies that prohibited the use of more than one font (in one or two weights) in the same layout, whilst hierarchal importance was addressed by means of point size and position. A skewed grid (Figure 17) continues the tradition of asymmetrical layout and maintained optical order by means of modular and geometric progressions and codified letterform sequences (Heller & Fili 1999:130). The grid's significance rose substantially and resulted in a repertoire of finely tuned layout and typeface templates that encouraged



FIGURE 17 *International Zeitung* poster, designed by Karl Gerstner and Markus Kutter, 1960. (Heller & Fili 1999:130).

standardised and refined compositions and letterforms (Jubert 2006:323). In typeface templates, for example, x-heights, proportions of ascenders and descenders and thicknesses of main strokes were heavily scrutinised in order to achieve a tighter degree of standardisation. The style evidences a drive toward micro-typographic perfection, valorising typography and legibility, and yields a delicate dynamism and controlled elegance in layout and letterform design.

The concept of ‘space as image’ is another element that is endemic to Swiss-style type design and is clearly most often expressed in poster design of the time (Figure 18). Here liberation of white space became as much a part of the textual composition as did the black ink that comprised each mathematically placed letterform (Jubert 2006:323). By affording the letterform the ‘luxury’ of space, it is seen as elevated to the status of graphic image enriched by abstract elements such as glyphs, signs, initials, words, unusual lettering and ligatures:

Typography is the design of textural compositions not unlike the way in which modern, concrete painting is the design of surface rhythms. The compositions are constituted of letter images arranged as words (Max Bill in Jubert 2006:324).

In keeping with earlier Modern concerns of objective clarity and legibility, The International Style also elevates the letterform to iconic status. The letterform as ‘graphic image’ is exalted as a fine art piece. That is, the letterform is no longer viewed as invisible, rather it is seen as an especially finely crafted iconic symbol of Modern philosophy. It therefore follows that in the post-World War II period, several iconic typefaces begin to emerge as the embodiment of the

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<p>Ausgabe September 1958</p> <p>Inhalt Einführung Der Einfluß der modernen Kunst auf die zeitgenössische Grafik Industrie-Grafik Foto-Experimente für die Grafik Design Die besten neuzerlich gestalteten Schweizer Plakate 1931-1957 Experiment Um und die Ausbildung des Grafikers »Die unbekante Gegenwart« Eine thematische Schau des Warenhauses Globus, Zürich Chronik Buchbesprechungen Hinweise Pro domo Einzelnummer Fr. 15.-</p>	<p>Issue for September 1958</p> <p>Contents Introduction The Influence of Modern Art on Contemporary Graphic Design Industrial Design Experimental Photography in Graphic Design The best recently designed Swiss Posters 1931-1957 The Um Experiment and the Training of the Graphic Designer "The Unknown Present": An Exhibition with a special theme for the Globus store, Zürich Miscellaneous Book Reviews Memoranda Pro domo Single number Fr. 15.-</p>	<p>Fascicule septembre 1958</p> <p>Table des matières Introduction L'influence de l'art moderne sur la graphique contemporaine Graphique industrielle Photoexpérimentale pour la graphique Design Les meilleures affiches suisses actuelles 1931-1957 L'expérience d'Um et la formation du graphiste «L'actuel inconnue» Exposition thématique des Grands Magasins Globus, Zürich Chronique Bibliographie Indications Pro domo Le numéro Fr. 15.-</p>
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FIGURE 18 | *New Grafik* periodical cover, designed by Carl Vivarelli, 1960. (Heller & Fili 1999:130).

Modern ethos. *Helvetica*⁵⁴ (Figure 19), designed in 1957 by Max Miedinger and Edouard Hoffman, is perhaps the *most* iconic contribution to the International Style's typographic landscape. Although its letterforms are abstracted to achieve a kind of Platonic idealism, the typeface's distinctly 'generic' features are in fact celebrated as pinnacle achievements in Swiss style letterform development. In current design practice especially, *Helvetica* is of the *most* iconic typefaces; exalted as an icon of simplicity, rationality and neutrality. Its letterforms embody a drive to democratise typographic communication because of its standardised and unembellished construction, based on a culmination of decades of favourable typographic formula prescription (Heller 2006:157).

The legacy of Modern typography reverberates well into many design spheres in the twenty-first century. Since the 1950s, multinational corporations have adopted the guidelines set by the International Style (and its Bauhaus precursors) as a graphic standard in branding since it affords them way forward in the design of 'clean', 'neutral' graphic communication (Heller & Fili 1999:133). *Helvetica* (and its derivatives) in particular, emerged as the typeface of choice for international business because of its generic construction (Figures 19b-i). Its apparently neutral aesthetic also floods branding, wayfinding, infographic, motion graphic, broadcast and editorial design spheres since typefaces such as *Helvetica* tend to *detract less* from *already* communicative design texts. Modern type design is favoured since the uncluttered type forms encourage associations or connotations such as professionalism, slickness and refinement.

54. *Helvetica* was formally known as *Neue Haas-Grotesk* after the Haas type foundry in Switzerland.



FIGURE 19a *Helvetica*, designed by Edouard Hofmann and Max Miedinger, 1956-1957. (Heller 2006:157).

Underpinning Modern philosophies of utilitarianism, functionalism and an impetus for social betterment are often ignored in favour of slickness and a ‘clean’ overall style. Several leading and authoritative voices in design practice appear to favour the ‘neutral’ Modernist aesthetic philosophy. Vignelli (in *Helvetica* 2007), for example, explains:

I don't think type should be expressive at all. I mean, I can write the word 'dog' with any typeface and it doesn't have to look like a dog. But there are people that when they write 'dog', it should bark!

Since Modern type is seen as objective representation, it is often turned to as the default type category in a culture that favours quick design solutions since the designer may avoid ‘expensive’ time dedicated to investigating a typeface’s communicative capacity (Jun 2009:[sp]). Since its letterforms are mostly viewed as inexpressive, designers often opt for Modern types because they are an apparently ‘safe’ choice in that they avoid interfering with other communicative texts in the same design. According to Kinross (1985:29), neo-Modern type designers therefore deny the existence of any symbolic residue in ‘clean’ letterforms. This is problematic since Modernist ‘neutrality’ is essentially an ideology and therefore rhetorical in and of itself (Kinross 1985:19). In other words, that very fact that designers rely so heavily on typefaces such as *Helvetica* and exploit their ‘neutral symbolism’, shows that the typeface is anything but neutral (since it is symbolic). Designers who make use of Modern type specimens invoke an ethos that is essentially ‘constructed’ and is therefore imbued with ideological qualities (Winkler 1990:39).



FIGURE | **19b** *Lufthansa* logo, designed by Otto Firlre, 1959. *Helvetica Bold* typeface. (Lufthansa logo 2012).



FIGURE | **19c** *Translation recordings* logo (re-design), designed by 1910 design group, 2012. *Helvetica* typeface. (Translation Recordings [sa]).



FIGURE | **19d** *Epson* logo, designer unknown, 1975. *Helvetica* typeface. (Epson Timeline [sa]).



FIGURE | **19e** *Deloitte* logo (re-design), designed by InterbrandSampson, 2010. *Gotham Bold* typeface. (Designed by author).



FIGURE | **19f** *Sappi* logo, designed by Ernst de Jong, 1979. *Arial Bold* typeface. (Sappi: company history [sa]).



FIGURE | **19g** *The Gap* logo (re-design), designed by Trey Laird, 2009. *Arial Bold* typeface. (Walker 2010:[sp]).



FIGURE | **19h** *American Airlines* logo, designed by Massimo Vignelli, 1967. *Helvetica* typeface. (Martin 2014:[sp]).



FIGURE | **19i** *American Apparel* logo, designer unknown, c. 2000. *Helvetica Bold* typeface. (American Apparel: About [sa]).

2.7 | Experimentation for experimentation's sake: Postmodern letterforms

Changes in industrial conditions and a post-war economic boom during the early 1970s lead to an environment that was highly favourable to graphic design industries (Jubert 2006:370). That is, production techniques (not only in typographic design) extended well beyond the financial limits of earlier decades. Coupled with an apparent sense of disillusionment toward Modern 'rationality', a newfound economic freedom encouraged an unbridled quest for graphic freedom. Therefore, by the mid-1970s, typographic design witnessed yet another massive philosophical shift, in the form of Postmodern type design where letterforms are rooted in an age that favours iterative mass-culture and welcomes digitisation.

Postmodern type design is an umbrella term used to group type styles and practices during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, such as New Wave, Deconstruction and Grunge (Heller & Fili 1999:167). Developments in design research, production and philosophy linked closely with Postmodern ideological underpinnings. For Postmodern type designers, an absolute, universal and pure letterform (sought by Modern typographers) is unachievable, since the typographic medium, as a formal concept, is a product of imperfect human intellect grounded by context, historical and referential influence (Lupton 1996:30). The notion of transcendental universality in typeface design was considered impractical and unachievable since the designer has subjective, complex and eclectic visual investment in material forms (that is, letterforms are conceived by the *human* mind).

⁵⁵. Companies such as Push Pin Studios exemplify the 1960s design counter culture, especially in their use of psychedelic imagery.

The ease and freedom afforded by the digital era drives Postmodern typographers' intent to provoke and unhinge the tightly defined rules of their Modernist predecessors (Heller & Fili 1999:167). Whereas adherence to distinct stylistic trends had previously been clear, the realm of technical possibilities proved too exciting for Postmodern type designers to ignore. The concept of complexity replaced simplicity, subjectivity replaced objectivity and ornamentation returned to the letterform (Heller & Fili 1999:167). Protest and counter cultural designs⁵⁵ of the 1960s also spur a tendency toward hybridisation and intertextuality in typographic design. As also seen in the art of the time, themes centred on whimsy, humour, retrospection, ambiguity, kitsch and extravagance.

The introduction of New Wave typography during the 1970s, pioneered by Wolfgang Weingart, features as the first of a variety of type idealisms that provided impetus for the upswing of Postmodern letterform design. Weingart began to question ideals of absolute order and wondered whether rules proposed by The International Style had become refined and overused to the point of anaemia (Jubert 2006:375). In reaction to logical and rigorous Modernist rules, Weingart began experimenting with unorthodox ways of manipulating the letterform and its spatial composition, introducing a spirit of intuitive, 'new' type design known as New Wave (Jubert 2006:379; Meggs 1998:435). Weingart's stylistic contribution to the style includes the implementation of extreme variations in leading and drastically wide and irregular letter spacing or kerning (Heller 2006:220). Weingart is also credited with the elimination of indents at the beginning of paragraphs, positive and negative interplay, free compositions (eschewing horizontal and orthogonal layouts), non-purpose

underlined text, the elimination of gridded layouts, and the mid-word juxtaposing or superimposing of type weights (Figure 20) (Meggs 1998:436). Later, with the arrival of the first personalised Macintosh in 1984 as well as font and layout design platforms, Weingart and his American contemporaries, April Greiman and Dan Friedman further experimented with and distorted letterforms through extreme leading, dishevelled grids, wide letter spacing, cropped letterforms and unusual typeface pairing (Lupton 1996:49).

A mass influx in communication technologies (traditional media, film, television and later the Internet and World Wide Web) also promoted the formation of international design communities in the 1980s. This led to unprecedented quantities of visual clutter and spurred the onset of a techno-type era that resulted in overwhelming doses of intertextuality, pluralism and commercial populism, materialising in conceptually superficial, pastiche-like letterforms (Heller 2006:12). The emergence of *Émigré*⁵⁶ magazine in 1983, a publication solely dedicated as a catalogue or exhibition of independent type design, serves as a clear indicator of such a type wellspring. *Émigré* came to epitomise the digital era of typography, showcasing a plethora of digitally generated fonts (Figure 21). Among them were innovative dot-matrix fonts, Bitmaps Obliques and early high-resolution digital typefaces (Heller & Fili 1999:118).



FIGURE 20 *Kunstgewerbeschule* exhibition poster, designed by Wolfgang Weingart, 1974. (Fielder 2015:[sp]).

⁵⁶ *Émigré* was started by Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko.

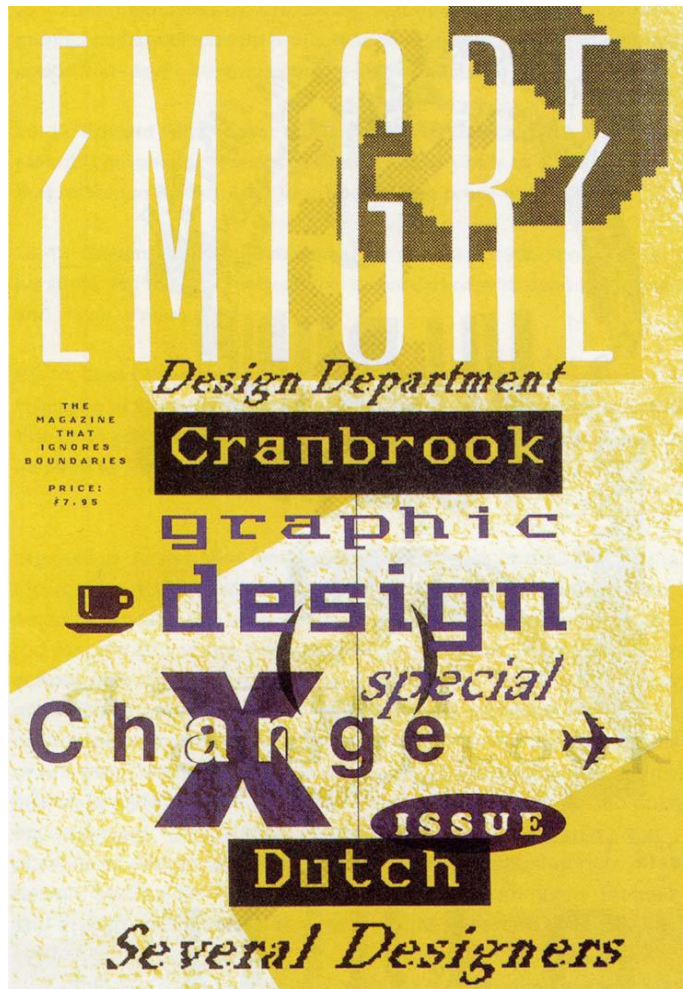


FIGURE 21 *Émigré* magazine cover, designed by Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko, 1989. (Vanderlans & Licko 1993).

With drastic graphic changes emerged philosophical discourse that sought to underpin New Wave's stylistic tendencies (Lupton 1996:51). McCoy's *Typography as discourse* (1988), for example, outlines fundamental tenets to a new type discourse underpinned by Derrida's ideological map, Deconstructionism. In principal and with regard to type design, Deconstruction asks of the viewer to identify how formal representation reflects the type form's internal essence (Lupton & Miller 1994:345). In other words, Deconstruction, based on Post-structuralist thought, is an attack on the supposed neutrality of the letterform. Moreover, Deconstructionists held that interpretation of type form is a flexible and spontaneous experience between the designer and the audience and therefore escapes fixed-meaning (Lupton & Miller 1994:347, 349). All communication is considered a weave of many layered interpretations of meaning⁵⁷ (Jubert 2006:384). For Deconstructionist typographers the layering of *content* takes precedence over simply layering *formal* collage elements (McCoy 1988:82). Poynor (1991:83) adds that whereas New Wave type designs tend to resemble collage-like formal exercises, the dishevelled and distorted nature of overlapping letterforms in Deconstructionist layouts engage directly with the multiple meanings of text. Deconstructionist letterforms manifest stylistically through the forced connection between content and form because Deconstructionists understood that meaning and interpretation are rooted in the complexity of history and that the letterform should therefore reveal multiple reference points (Heller 2006:109).

57. Although McCoy's theoretical underpinning considers Deconstructionism as a theoretical pretext, it is possible to argue that Deconstructionist letterforms and typographic layouts are, in reality, decorative (Lupton & Miller 1994:351). McCoy (in Heller & Fili 1999:181) acknowledges that Deconstructionist ideals become perfunctory in type design and that the full gravitas of Derrida's tenets are better realised in fine art applications.

Eschewed layouts favoured chaotic type hierarchy and highlighted dishevelled letterforms that were layered in paragraphs placed in smaller, disjointed and ambiguous sections across the page, forcing the reader to engage with bites of referential text⁵⁸ (Figure 22). The typographic page consisted of hybridised letterforms and mysterious letterform cross-sections, of interferences and strangely interlinked levels of type, unexpected juxtapositioning and placement alongside polysemic innuendos (Jubert 2006:384).

Shortly after the emergence of Deconstructionism, the rapid expansion of the World Wide Web (during the 1990s) exposed type design to an even greater referential strain (Meggs 1998:455). More so than before, computer graphics enabled retro revivals, eccentric vernacular works and hybridisations with relentless abandon. Chaotic visual layouts composed of irregular and crude letterforms consumed the pages of type publications world-wide and encroached heavily upon commercial design (Keedy 1998:[sp]).

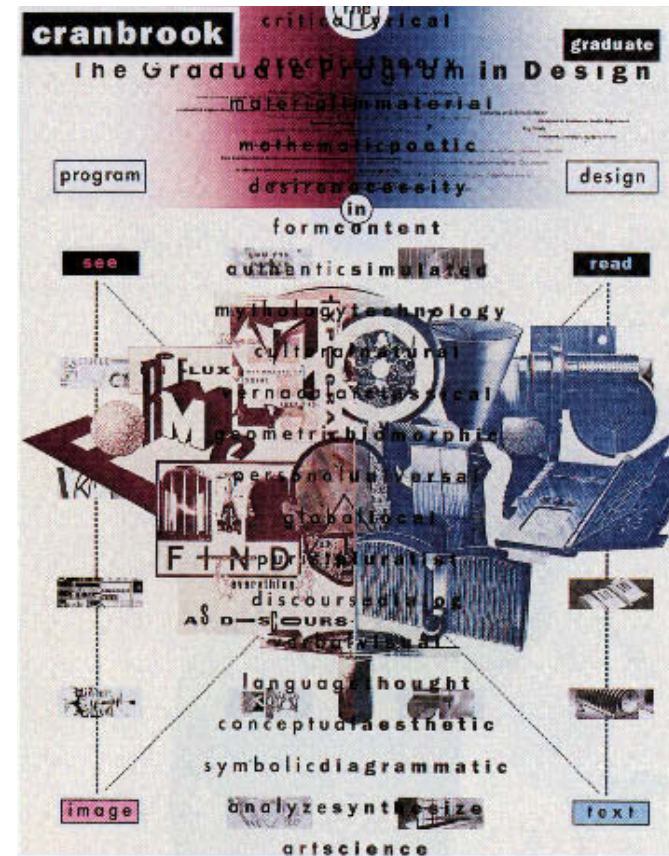


FIGURE 22 See Red poster for Cranbrook graduate design, designed by Katherine McCoy, 1989. (Armstrong 2009:[sp]).

58. The reader begins to engage in a gestalt-like process, whereby smaller bites of information are understood only within the context of the overall visual form. Deconstructionists believe that a linear narrative averts the viewers' critical engagement with letterforms and instead, focuses their full attention to the content of the copy.

These stylistic tendencies are, to a large degree, hardwired in Grunge letterforms. Often viewed as the pinnacle of Postmodern typography, Grunge signifies a burgeoning youth movement dedicated to the inversion of Modernist tidiness and is synonymous with genres such as hard rock and punk (music). The construction of Grunge letterforms references cut-up, hodgepodge punk-style assemblages of designers such as Jaime Reid and Neville Brody (Figure 23a-b). Lacerated collages, raw graphics and anarchic compositions become design standards that stage the distressed and decaying Grunge letterform (Jubert 2006:375). In addition, extreme distortion and surface abrasion (Figure 24a) often cause the Grunge letterforms to appear to shake or shiver (Heller & Fili 1999:186). At a glance, it appears that almost any visual text or texture offers fertile inspiration for the Grunge typographer (Heller 2006:150).

Arguably, the most recognisable Grunge aesthetic emerged in the late 1980s, from the work of David Carson. Carson's abandon of Modern type virtues in his designs for *Ray Gun* magazine,⁵⁹ (Figure 25a-b) where he challenged popular conceptions regarding legibility and readability in publication design, promoted previously held type taboos. For example, the radical aesthetic reduced words to visual textures interwoven with scratched, mutilated textiles (Figure 24b), while page numbers were blown proportionally out of scale (often larger than the headline). Words tend to bleed off the page mid-paragraph, and were even printed backward. Carson's (and other) Grunge types appeared as extremely mangled forms where it is "difficult to discern the message of their form, if indeed one exists" (Rock 1996:113).

59. *Ray Gun* is a rock-and-roll magazine, founded by Carson in 1992.



FIGURE 23a *God save the Queen*, artwork for Sex Pistols, designed by Jaime Reid, 1977. (Jubert 2006:225).



FIGURE 23b Collage of album covers, designed by Neville Brody, c. 1980. (Compiled by the author).



FIGURE 24a *Grunge alphabet*, designed by Scott Yoshinga, 1995.
(Heller & Fili 1999:188).



FIGURE 24b *Sidewalker*, designed by Schiavi Fabrizio, 1995.
(Heller & Fili 1999:189).

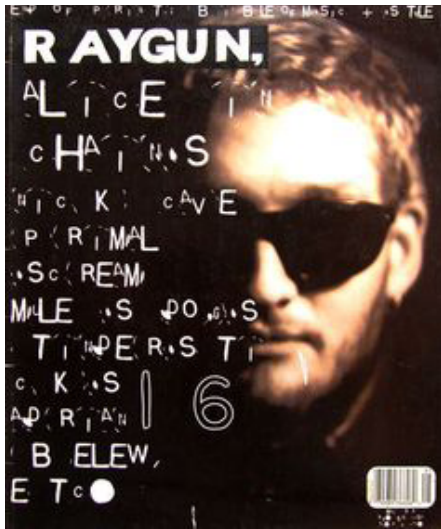


FIGURE | 25a

Ray Gun magazine cover, designed by David Carson, issue 16, 1995. (Ray Gun / magazine [sa]).



FIGURE | 25b

Ray Gun magazine cover, designed by David Carson, issue 50, 1997. (Ray Gun, anniversary cover 2011).

Today, Postmodern styles in general have become effective shorthand for designers who wish to evoke a sense of rebellion or ‘counter-culture’ in their design (Figure 26). Buchanan (1985:5) argues that these designers tend to favour “unruly, antagonistic, bizarre, or often inexplicable concepts that challenge and confuse the general public”. Grunge style is, however, frequently criticised as a novelty aesthetic that is heavily dependent on typographic puns and supplants a barely identifiable ideological underpinning (Bierut 2007:40). Moreover, at a foundational level, many design schools promote Grunge-like type experimentation without an accompanying understanding of the letterform as a communicative medium (Meggs 2001:x). Therefore, radical conceptions that shatter conventional conceptions surrounding letterform as a symbol of pushing the boundaries of acceptability – epitomised by the Postmodern ethos – lose purpose because designers implement letterform experimentation merely for the sake of textual expression (Nørgaard 2009:141). In other words, designs that invoke Grunge type design in current design contexts may seem somewhat dated since intended novelty and shock hold little traction. Moreover, some designers simply mimic a Postmodern experimental style owing to personal taste, or to achieve ‘interesting’, ‘lively’ or ‘visually dynamic’ layouts (Figures 27a-c). Butler (1989:94) argues that, unable to generate a ‘new’ style, graphic designers regurgitate Grunge letterforms in an attempt at visual variety. Heller (2008:5) and McCoy (2009:82) add that this kind of iterative and stagnant experimentation for experimentation’s sake, results in hollow letterform shells fashioned by flimsy semantic⁶⁰ forms.

⁶⁰. ‘Semantic’ refers to the most logically and widely accepted or understood function of a particular medium. The semantic value of typography for example, refers to its linguistic function. A semantic concept refers to clever interplay between linguistic and visual puns. For example, writing the word ‘down’, vertically.

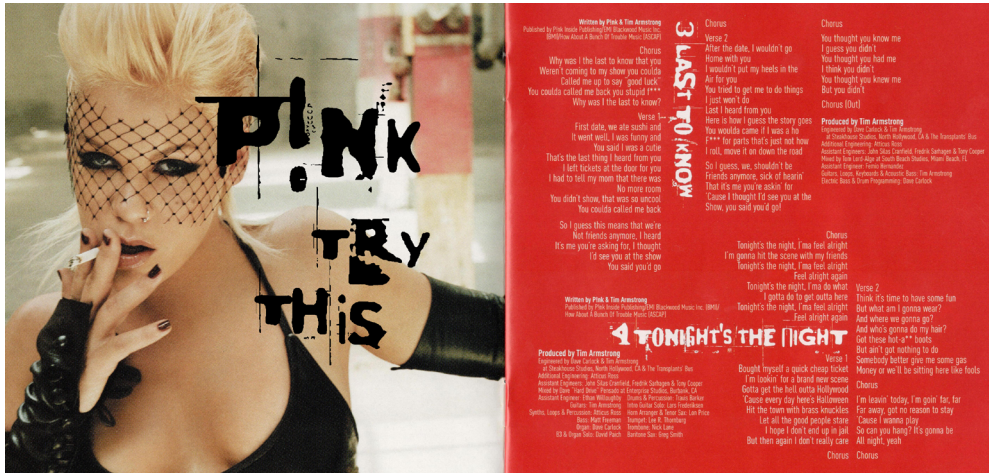


FIGURE 26 *P!nk Try this* album cover, designed by Jeri Heiden, 2003.



FIGURE 27a *She* business card, designed by Bruno Cesar Abreu, 2013. (Abreu 2013:[sp]).



FIGURE 27b *Lamborghini Gallardo* advert, designed by Fernando Bacaro, 2013.
(above) (Grunge Article - Lamborghini 2013).



FIGURE 27c *Children in Prayer* pamphlet, designed by Little notebook studio, 2011.
(right) (CIP 2011 2011).

2.8 | A legacy of the changing function of the letterform

From the brief historical synopsis of type developments presented here, it is clear that type design reflects its period of production (Hollis 1997:216). I have outlined how the formal conception of type is influenced by its perceived function at any given time. Moreover, apart from the changing perceived function of the letterform, I have shown that type history reveals (often) radically different attitudes toward the perceived function type. A number of philosophical positions with resulting tendencies in typographic history can be identified.

For example, Modern type designers actively seek to eradicate stylistic or communicative nuances by means of abstraction and the removal of ornamentation in letterforms. They promote clean, ‘neutral’ typography that “does not interfere with the overall communicative design artefact” (Warde 1930:43). Numerous contemporary neo-Modern designers and typographic designers tend to propagate the idea of neutrality⁶¹ and often utilise apparently non-expressive letterforms in their communicative designs (Kinross 1985:26, 27).

Typography from the 1970s onwards demonstrates a strong shift away from clean, refined and abstracted letterforms. The rejection of a purified, objective and universal mode of communication articulated from the 1920s is replaced by a drive for personal expression inundated by intertextuality and type distortion, and is facilitated by great advancements in

digitalisation and type manipulation software (Lupton 1996:46). Although stylistically antithetical to Modern type philosophy, it is possible to suggest that Postmodern type specimens *also* suggest an incomplete view of the inherent communicative complexity of letterforms. Theorists such as Meggs (1998:432), for example, argue that Postmodern designers experiment with form as an act of inquisition, rather than to realise a communicative need, while Heller (2001:v) adds that mere letterform mutation does not guarantee intelligent type design. It is possible to argue that typographic experimentation of this kind only inflames popular (Modern) views that more expressive letterforms are deemed superficial and that any form of ornamentation or structural augmentation is reduced to surface styling, appended as an afterthought for visual impact (Buchanan 2001:194; Heller 2006:8; Atzmon 2008:13, 26).

Each typographic movement presented here was, at its inception, hailed as the solution to repudiated type design practices and ideologies that preceded it. Practitioners in each movement sought to disrupt or debunk prior ideological underpinnings that inform the perceived function of the letterform. This pattern may be observed throughout design history and indicates an oscillation from one movement to the next between contradictory philosophies (Tomes & Armstrong 2010:29). It is possible to argue that these dogmatic attitudes toward the function of type lead to polarisation in current type practice regarding the function of the letterform. In other words, the legacy of shifting type ideologies has led to polarised understandings and limited perspectives regarding the full communicative potential of letterforms.

⁶¹ Bruinsma (2004:[sp]) and Kinross (1985:24, 29) suggest that while the idea of neutrality is philosophically coupled with the Modern letterform, it functions none the less as a communicative sign and can thus never be neutral.

Unfortunately, deeply ideological Modern and Postmodern letterforms are today often simply implemented as visual trends and are selected and appropriated at whim. Without historical grounding, designers do not understand the many, often-contradictory communicative ‘functions’ of the letterform; a skill that Heller (2001:v) maintains is essential in visual communicative literacy. As a result, type designers often opt for one typographic impetus, method or style over another as a matter of personal preference or educational background (as opposed to selecting a typeface based on a variety of formal and cultural factors that are most suited to a design concept). Therefore, in whichever style is ‘picked’, the full communicative potential of letterforms is never realised.

Now that a historical background has been provided, in which I have outlined opposing attitudes that may have led to limited perspectives on the communicative potential of type, the following two chapters investigate two default modes of type selection and application. The first mode considers experiential form of the letterform as the main consideration in typeface selection. Following this, a second mode is presented that investigates an approach to selecting type based on its popular or iconic status.

03

Chapter Three

*Type as
experiential form*

In this chapter I discuss the designer's experiential perception of letterforms (how type communicates experientially) as a main consideration in selecting and applying a typeface. In order to realise this objective, I delineate two ways in which letterforms connote experientially. I investigate two subcategories that have continuously emerged during my research in this field; type as reminiscent form and type as intuitive form.

In the section that immediately follows I attempt to first establish theoretical groundwork for understanding type as not only communicative in the linguistic (alphanumeric) sense, but also non-linguistically. A preface such as this serves to position the letterform within a semiotic context since, in this study, the form of typography – its letterform – is considered the stimulus for selection.

3.1 | Perspectives on type form

As I have suggested in the previous chapter, polarised ideologies on the perceived function of the letterform contribute to a lack of awareness of the full communicative potential of letterforms in current design practice. As if spurred by Modern type ideology, semioticians have also until recently, overlooked the communicative ‘visual grammar’ of the letterform (van Leeuwen 2005:138). Semioticians appear to have aligned with Modern philosophy that views type as a linguistic vehicle for language and not as a communicative ‘image’ in its own right. Images, unlike type, are believed to provide a richer source of ‘visual grammar’ for semiotic interpretation. Viewed as an abstract formal structure, the letterform is less readily seen as communicative in comparison to a photograph or illustration, which usually bears sufficient and immediately recognisable resemblance to its referent and therefore, there is little trouble in linking the idea with the representation (Trieb 1989:81). It is clear that these views tend to view the non-linguistic connotation as separate from the letterform.

Despite this rather limited view, the image quality of type has long since served a pivotal role in even the most basic forms of communication. From its earliest inception, the linguistic function of the letterform is understood only by means of graphic marks on a surface. From the first appearance of writing, the link between image and type is clear; it evidences an art of visualising ideas pictorially (Barthes 1977:155). Hieroglyphics, ideographics, rock art and instances of *Schriftbild* (writing pictures), for example, serve as structures not only of cultural linguistics, but also of visual language, where form depicts an action or emotive quality.

Initially, these type systems were pictorial in nature; that is, they were created using pictures and illustrations as a way to refer to identifiable concepts, actions or emotions more directly. Although not the first documented examples, Peter Flotner’s *Anthropomorphic alphabet* (1540)

as well as Giovanni Batiŝta Bracelli’s *Alfabeto figurato* (1632) typify the pictorial nature of early type (Figures 28a-b). In these pictorial examples, graphic features are often borrowed from imagery and are imported into the domain of letterforms since they are already laden with connotation (Brownie 2009:12). For Stöckl ([sa]:78), the very compounding of the term ‘typographic’ (type and graphic), suggests some kind of connection to the meaning potential embedded within type imagery. The idea is that typography takes on communicative traits whenever it employs structural resources typical of an image.

Over centuries of type refinement, letterforms have gradually become streamlined to lessen their dependence on elaborately pictorial forms. Today, the majority of letterforms appear less obviously pictorial owing to their ‘abstract’ construction (Crisp 2007:206). While this is indeed evident, it is important to point out that the ‘image’ quality of type is not entirely absent. That is, while letterforms are clearly less pictorial, their ‘image’ quality may still be interpretable. Stöckl ([sa]:78) uses the term ‘typopictoriality’ to explain that type may be seen as a form of abstracted imagery that conveys recognisable figures, but is not inherently pictorial. Van Leeuwen (2006:143) extends Stöckl’s definition and states that type is still used ideationally to represent specific emotive qualities. For instance, letterforms are often divided polemically and demarcated texturally by their degree of similarity or difference (van Leeuwen 2006:143). Typefaces may be described as masculine or feminine, soft or hard, quiet or loud, energetic or intimate, dangerous or fragile, sensual or emotionless, extravagant or reserved, brutal or delicate, and so on.

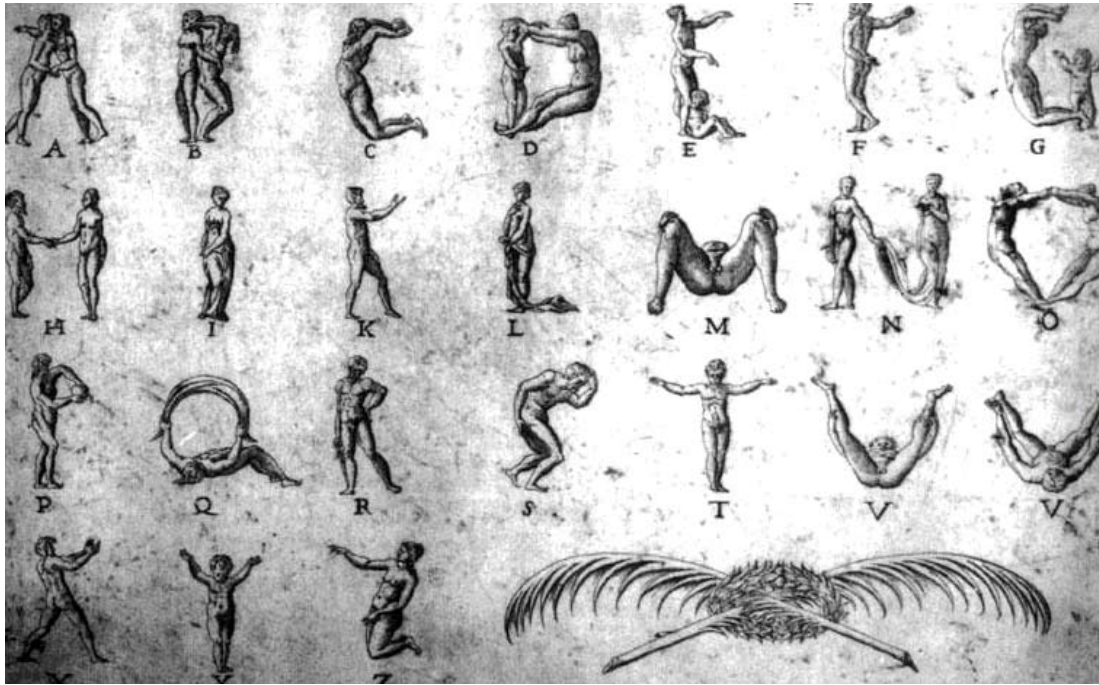


FIGURE 28a *Anthropomorphic alphabet*, designed by Peter Flotner, 1540. (Bruinsma 2000:2).



FIGURE 28b *Alfabeto figurato*, designed by Giovanni Batista Bracelli, 1632. (Bruinsma 2000:3).

It is therefore possible to argue that the boundaries between imagery and letterforms have become increasingly blurred (van Leeuwen 2006:143; Brownie 2009:12). As graphic imprints of language, letterforms are arguably the most important and fundamental means of visual communication. Although type is clearly (and readily acknowledged as) a linguistic medium, as a kind of image structure, it also communicates non-linguistically. Bruinsma (2004:[sp]) echoes this view and explains that every visual medium – including type – is read as an image and therefore always communicates. Following Lupton’s (2004:8) assertions that typography is a *graphic* imprint of what language looks like, it is possible to argue that she refers specifically to the image quality of type – the letterform. Rock (1992:123) follows McLuhan’s (1964:9) assertion that ‘the medium is the message’ and argues that in the same way, the typographic medium – the letterform – frames connotation. Other theorists including Brownie (2009:4), Heller (1999; 2001; 2006), Nørgaard (2009), Serafini and Clausen (2012), Stöckl ([sa]) and van Leeuwen (2005; 2006) also recognise the non-linguistic aspects of the letterform and agree that its formal expression or ‘style’ is part of the communicative content – that is, the mechanism by which concepts are communicated. Barthes (1977:162) suggests that it is the ‘syntagm’ of denotation (the style of the form) that exhibits its communicative complexity. His view seems plausible, in typographic terms at least since, like images, letterforms are indeed constructed of elements of a ‘visual grammar’.

It is therefore the unique visual shapes evident within the structural make up of letters’ forms that elicit connotation (Stöckl [sa]:78; Heller 2006:8; Ma 2008:32). Here, visual structures such as line, shape, contrast, size, weight and texture inherent to letterforms, although ‘abstract’, function as communicative structures (Serafini & Clausen 2012:[sp]). In Figure 29a, for example, it is possible to argue that geometrical precision, curves and

extreme contrast variations unique to the *Argo*’s formal structures communicate a sense of fluidity and elegance, whereas *Besom*’s (Figure 29b) rather more gestural visual structures may suggest informal and colloquial or even juvenile and primitive connotations. In another example, certain organic shapes unique to the *Survival* (Figure 29c) typeface may register as playful, organic and exuberant, while the precision of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines of the characters in Figure 29d (*Reckoner*) may read as industrial, calculated and mathematical. We read these typefaces as collective type-images or ‘macrotypographic signs’ whereby we identify and decode each shape as an instance of graphic communication (Stöckl [sa]:81; Trummel 1988:121). Following Gestalt theory, we essentially perceive the collective type-image as connotative because we are able to identify clearly distinguishable features in the ‘macrotype’ (Finke, Manger & Fichtel 2012:105). Scientists, Gary McGraw and Douglas Hofstadter (1996:621) explain that we read the basic, primitive shapes in letterforms; the ‘physical instances’ of the letterform – parts of the letterform that correspond to conceptual roles on a mental level for their test subjects.

In *Towards a semiotics of typography* (2006), van Leeuwen refers to similar ‘physical instances’ when he speaks of the visual quality of letterforms. He and Barnbrook (1993:127) describe ‘visual quality’ as the ‘visual’ patterns of recognisability or shapes that make up the identity of the letterform. Van Leeuwen (2006:148-151) orientates his article around identifying the associative, defining or differentiating visual shapes that describe the appearance of a letterform. He describes the ‘distinctive features’ of the letterform and outlines several preliminary categories by which he believes a majority of distinctive typographic features may be grouped.



FIGURE | **29a** *Argo*, designed by Anthony James, 2014. (James 2014:[sp]).



FIGURE | **29b** *Besom*, designed by Krisjanis Mezulis and Gatis Vilaks 2015. (Mezulis & Vilaks 2015:[sp]).

The first, *weight*, refers to the thickness of the forms used to design a letterform. Increased weight is used to increase salience, however, it may be used metaphorically to appear ‘assertive’, ‘daring’, ‘domineering’, ‘indulgent’ or ‘solid’, while its opposite can convey a letterform that is ‘timid’ or ‘flimsy’. *Expansion* refers to the condensed or narrow nature of a given set of characters. Wider typefaces tend to be seen in a positive light, providing room to breathe or move, while condensed forms appear cramped, overcrowded and restrictive of movement. *Slope* refers to the degree at which a character may lean (dependent on or independent of italic application). Sloping letterforms seem to connote ‘organic’, ‘personal’, ‘informal’ and ‘hand-crafted’ in contrast to their formal, mass-produced counterparts. *Curvature* within letterforms might impart notions such as ‘soothing’, ‘soft’ ‘maternal’ and ‘organic’, while *angularity* refers to typefaces of an ‘abrasive’, ‘harsh’, technical’ or ‘masculine’ nature. *Orientation* refers to the typeface’s inclination toward horizontal or vertical dimension. Van Leeuwen (2006:150) argues that the meaning potential of horizontally and vertically orientated type is based on our experience of gravity. Type that is horizontally orientated may, for example, suggest ‘heaviness’, solidity or ‘inertia’, while vertically orientated letterforms could suggest ‘lightness’ ‘aspiration’ or ‘majesty’. *Connectivity* communicates in much the same way that a slope connotes ‘nurture’, ‘wholeness’ and ‘integration’, however, disconnected typefaces might suggest ‘atomisation’ or ‘fragmentation’. Letterforms that are internally disconnected might appear ‘unfinished’, ‘sloppy’ or ‘organic’. Finally, *regularity* refers to the contrast and consistency between regular and irregular (or off-pattern) forms. Typefaces that follow strict patterns of regularity might appear more formal and traditional while irregularities present across a set of letterforms might connote quirk and novelty or even ‘anarchy’ and ‘rebellion’.

Although van Leeuwen’s categories provide a basic overview of letterform connotation, they cover only part of a massive typographic territory. Moreover, many of van Leeuwen’s categories refer to general layout or hierarchal *parerga* and not the letter *form* in particular. Therefore it is possible to argue that the complexities and intricacies of typeface and letterform design extend far beyond these categories. How, for example, might we categorise a form that we cannot connect to any prior visual reference, yet that still manages to elicit connotation? Moreover, how do we account for instances that appear to follow the prescription for say, disconnected, ‘sloppy’ letterforms, yet seem to communicate ‘precision’ more effectively? Therefore, van Leeuwen’s brief exploration does not explain *why* we experience the formal qualities of *letterforms* in a particular way.

For this reason, I propose to use ‘experiential form’ as an umbrella term when analysing and discussing how the meaning potential of letterforms is derived from our interpretation or experience of *form*; how we internalise connotation and thereafter, how we articulate it. In the sections that follow, I continue from the position that letterforms are indeed communicative as non-linguistic signs and explore and suggest how, based on perceptual experience of a letterform, we may experience a letterform’s ‘distinctive features’. I examine how letterforms draw associations based on both the viewer’s reminiscent experience of material metaphors (as sharp, soft, wild, bold, whimsical, friendly, stable, masculine, threatening, bloody or elegant), as well as our instinctual or visceral perception of the letterforms. I therefore delineate two *ways* in which distinctive features of letterforms are commonly interpreted and present them as motives for the selection and application of type.



FIGURE 29c *Survival*, designed by Fabian de Lange, 2015.
(De Lange 2015:[sp]).

FIGURE 29d *Reckoner* typeface, designed by Alex Dale, 2014.
(Dale 2014:[sp]).

3.2 | Type as reminiscent form

As I have pointed out, designers often struggle to identify connotation evoked by the letterform since the image-quality of the letterform is considerably more abstract when compared to other forms of visual communication that appear to provide concrete physical representations of ideas (Emanuel 2010:16). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:124), this may be because in engaging with and interpreting abstract media, we subconsciously activate our conceptual system; an autonomous system that we are normally or readily aware of. For example, we understand the concept of an ‘argument’, however, we may not as easily illustrate a visual representation of it. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:124) continue that as soon as we move away from concrete physical representations and begin to work with abstract concepts we begin to engage with *metaphorical* reasoning. According to the authors, metaphors enable a *systematic* progression of understanding that structures our understanding of abstract concepts.

The term ‘metaphor’, is commonly used as a poetic linguistic expression where one or more words are used outside of their normal conventional meaning to convey or map a similar concept onto an otherwise unrelated domain. In this way, through substitution, something is understood in terms of something else. Although this classical concept is intended for linguistic prose, metaphors are also helpful in other areas of study since they govern our everyday functioning and experience of phenomena (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:124). Lakoff and Johnson explain that the way we think, negotiate and experience our surroundings is a matter of metaphorical experience and that our everyday behaviour reflects our metaphorical understanding of experience. They continue that because conceptual metaphors are present in everyday metaphorical expressions, some of the most basic concepts are comprehended via metaphor.

I refer again to the example of an argument here. We might say that the ‘argument’ be understood metaphorically, as a kind of war. We exercise metaphorical expressions such as ‘your claims are *indefensible*’, ‘the *strategy* behind his argument’ or ‘I *won* the argument’ in order to position our understanding of an argument. We understand the inference of an argument since we understand what is inferred by war. Metaphors work in what Lakoff (1993:213) refers to as ‘containers’. If a concept (x) proves true for one of two domains (a), and that domain is compared, by means of the metaphor, to a second domain (b), the concept should prove true for the second domain as well. In other words, if we say the argument ‘hit a dead end’, and a dead end refers to a halt, then the argument is halted. Using another example – love is a journey – we might say that the metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience (love) in terms of a very different domain of experience (journey). Fundamentally, the first domain (love) inherits secondary mappings that are associated with the second domain (journey) to form ‘inheritance hierarchies’.

Since we use this kind of metaphorical reasoning when trying to understand or convey emotive and abstract concepts, it is perhaps possible that the communicative challenges presented by abstract letterforms may be addressed in a similar way. Van Leeuwen (2006:146), for example, speaks of the ‘experiential metaphor’ – a concept similar to Lakoff’s metaphorical containers – in addressing letterform perception. He explains that the distinctive features of a typeface can evoke meaning that is derived from or reminiscent of our physical experience of materially similar phenomena. Trummel (1988:123) refers to a similar kind of metaphorical perception, and explains that in perceptual experience, the abstract visual stimulus of the letterform creates a structural skeleton that helps determine the referential connotative role.

Following the authors' assertions it is therefore possible to argue abstract letterforms are fertile objects for metaphorical interpretation. Phil Jones (2007:[sp]) agrees and explains that it is precisely because of their abstract quality, that letterforms serve as perfect examples by which to realise the efficacy of metaphors. He explains that the process of metaphorical mapping is evident when examining the formal structure of letterforms since these forms are reminiscent of phenomena we have *already* experienced. Crisp (2007:206) refers to the mimetic nature of letterforms and explains that typographic embodiment is imitative of things we encounter in the physical world. In other words, visual qualities or distinctive features of letterforms may be key in identifying metaphorical links to physical experience.

Thornface (Figure 30), designed by Jan Erasmus in 1997, is a typical example of what is meant by form that is reminiscent of experienced phenomena. In examining the typeface from a metaphorical perspective, a process of conceptual mapping, similar to that described above, may be observed. Erasmus explains that the distinctive features of his typeface may be compared to natural defensive mechanisms such as horns, claws, stings, beaks and razor wire. He states that the typeface's 'T', for example, reminds him of rhino horns while the sans serifs remind him of the splintered end of a thorn pulled off of a branch (Erasmus 2007:71). Here, the surface representation of the letterform has a quasi-pictorial form, which results in the experience of 'mimicking an image' (Kazmierczak 2001:184). We might therefore draw a mimetic comparison between the typeface and a collection of thorns. Metaphorically speaking, we might suggest that '*Thornface* looks like a collection of thorns'. Here, the 'inheritance hierarchies' are highlighted within Lakoff's container. Conventionally, thorns connote themes such as danger, defence, difficulty, constriction, discomfort (a 'thorny issue'), pain, sharpness, desolation, evil, treachery or even heartbreak. Since the typeface



FIGURE 30 *Thornface*, designed by Jan Erasmus, 1997. (Erasmus 2007:71).

shares a container with ‘thorns’, it inherits these concepts. We might therefore suggest that *Thornface* implies danger (or defence against danger). The metaphor is invoked and, since *Thornface* evokes these (and similar) concepts, it may be appropriate to use in design contexts with similar themes.

Another example of metaphorical mapping is evident when examining connotation of the *Nylon* typeface (Figure 31). Barnbrook (1993:128) explains that in designing the typeface, he aimed to design a set of characters that would override the cold, scientific image of man-made, glamorous structures. In order to achieve this, he created haphazard combinations of irregular, triangular shapes that intersect at uncomfortable angles. In letters such as the ‘S’ and ‘O’, contours and width consistency seem imperfect while serifs are inconsistently placed throughout. By means of this, Barnbrook references organic, distorted structures metaphorically. Therefore, we might say that characters in *Nylon* look like a mélange of misplaced junk since junk is disordered and organically strewn.

In both the above examples, metaphorical mapping is achieved based on experience of material phenomena. I have, however, come across other examples where typefaces may be reminiscent of less material experience. In *Echo* (Figure 32), for example, designer Tobias Frere-Jones (1999:232) attempts to visually trace the movement of an echo in the design of its letterforms. Since the forms refer, visually, to how the sound of an echo may be transcribed, associations such as vibration, movement and dynamism that are relevant to the concept of an echo are also hardwired into *Echo*’s letterform. While *Echo* clearly refers to a more abstract ‘experience’ (since it is possible to argue that we understand visual vibration through scientific traces of sound), it nevertheless references a reminiscent concept.



FIGURE 31 *Nylon*, designed by Jonathan Barnbrook, 1995. (Barnbrook 1993:127).

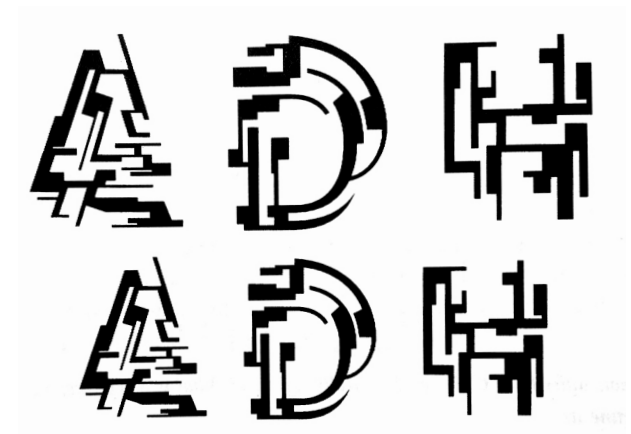


FIGURE 32 *Echo*, designed by Tobias Frere-Jones, 1991. (Frere-Jones 1999:232).

3.3 | Type as intuitive form

From the examples above, it is evident that the metaphor is grounded in perceptual experience. I have argued that letterforms can communicate metaphorically by autonomously mapping phenomena that we experience daily. Pictorial features may be borrowed from any visual paradigm and imported into the domain of letterforms, bringing with them a range of connotations. It is important to note, however, that the viewer cannot map themes between two domains if they have no prior (first-hand) understanding of either domain or their inherited concepts (Lakoff 1993:240). Lakoff explains that metaphorical mapping occurs because most of what we know is realised through vision; if we see something, we know it to be ‘true’. If we can see something and know it to be true, we might say that we have therefore experienced it. Thus, the resulting metaphor seems completely natural. If the viewer is not immediately aware of a material reference, connotation is often derived in another way.

The examples presented in the previous section explicitly highlight the reminiscent property of referential letterforms. It is perhaps a valid assertion that indeed most letterforms must, to a degree, reference some kind of material experience. While it appears that there is indeed validity to this assertion, I have found that not all typefaces may be easily or readily interpreted by means of experiential metaphor, since it is not always possible to ‘place’ the distinctive features of a typeface (van Leeuwen 2005:140; Drucker 2002:153). That is, although a typeface is composed of unique structural nuances, we may be unable to draw structural comparisons to any material experience. Its features are perhaps not recognisable in that they invoke concrete visual references, yet their features convey – rather intuitively – a distinctive essence (van Leeuwen 2005:14).

In Figure 33a-c, for example, it is possible to state that while each of the lowercase ‘g’ characters are composed of ‘distinctive’ or unique features, they are less immediately reminiscent of material reference. We may argue that in comparison to other letterforms, the ‘g’ of Figure 33a evokes a quirky or peculiar personality, even though we may not be able to immediately refer to a visual example of ‘quirk’. We may ask what it is about the geometry and symmetry of Figure 33b that exudes slickness and a degree of retro, while the similar geometric precision in Figure 33c conveys rather more technical or scientific qualities. A designer may opt for the sleek movement of Figure 33b when branding an innovative or cool sport brand, while Figure 33c may be more suited to sci-fi or techno thriller film poster. It is, indeed possible that in these examples, certain viewers may be able to ‘place’ the letterform’s distinctive features, however, it is likely that characters are selected based on the designer’s intuitive perception or experience of them.

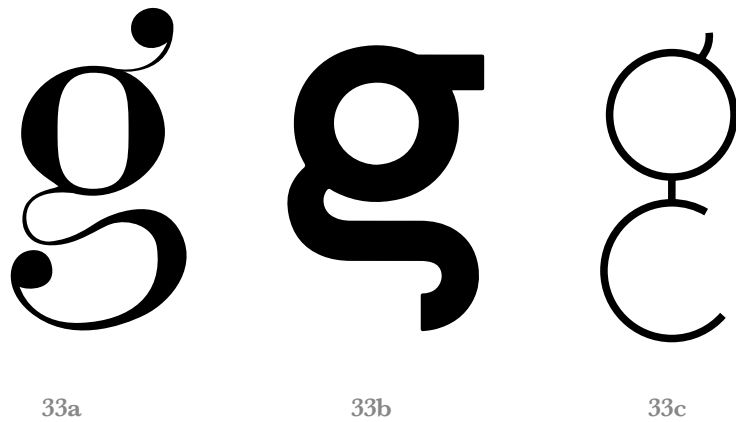


FIGURE 33 Diagram illustrating 'g' type letterforms.
(Compiled by the author).

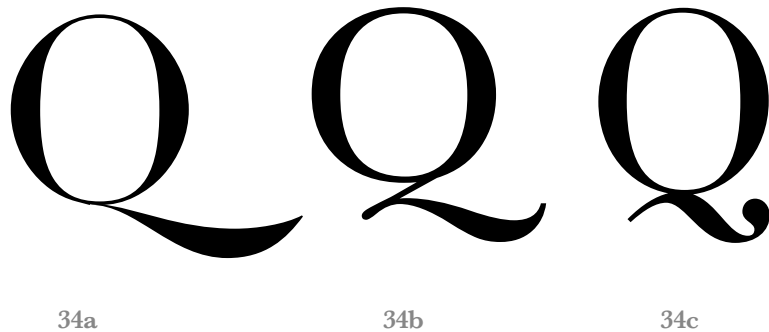


FIGURE 34 Diagram illustrating 'Q' type letterforms.
(Compiled by the author).

That letterform perception may indeed invoke an intuitive response is further evident when comparing letterforms of a similar structure. For example, it is possible to argue that the dramatic contrast, geometrical precision and curved gesture of the Roman 'q' letterforms in Figures 34a-c suggest 'elegance' or 'class'. If we examine the distinctive qualities of each letterform alongside each other in greater detail, however, we begin to assign slightly different, yet convergent characteristics. For example, it is possible to suggest that Figures 34a and 34b are to a greater extent opulent and regal, while Figure 34c conveys a sense of charm, frivolity and delight. A designer may elect to incorporate Figures 34a or 34b when envisioning more of a mature elegance, whereas Figure 34c may be more appropriate for branding a princess tea set, for example.

From these examples, it is possible to argue that the meaning potential of letterforms is not exhausted by metaphorical connotation (Ma 2008:91). In cases such as these, a stimulus of another kind is at play. Here, we perceive meaning through synesthetic or kinesthetic pathways (Cho 2005:11). Gromala (2007:3, 27) explains that when referential negotiation of the structural body fails, we invoke a visceral response to structural stimuli. In other words, in order to make sense of less obviously referential phenomena, we engage with our affective or visceral experience of them. Therefore, in the following section I draw on discourse from phonology and existential phenomenology since both fields concern sensory interpretation of 'less material' phenomena. In this way, I hope to delineate intuitive responses in the process of sound-to-image mapping, in order to thereafter investigate whether a link exists between intuitive shape-association and letterforms.

3.4 | Insights into intuitive perception

The study of phonology, or sound symbolism theory, is by now well documented throughout centuries of experimental research. Research in this field postulates that sounds are meaningful beyond their semantic value and that there is a distinct relationship between sound and connotation (Cho 2005:8). Essentially, discourse in phonology assists in illustrating how linguistic sounds may be visualised.

From its conception (c.1700), phonologists looked to linguistics as a means of describing sound-meaning relationships and began to examine the phonological features and structures of language (Drucker 1994:15). At the same time, linguists, poets⁶² and writers alike began to engage with phonological expression in their respective arts. They discovered that sounds of words can feel a certain way (sharp or muffled, for example); that they can provide a visceral or kinaesthetic response. The letter ‘p’ in words such as *pip*, *pop* or *pout* for example, serves as an instance of an ‘explosive’ sounding letter (van Leeuwen 2005:140). Consonant sounds ‘b’, ‘g’ or ‘d’ in words such as ‘brood’ or ‘grand’ connote slowness, while fricative, higher frequency sounds ‘f’, ‘v’, ‘s’ and ‘z’ in words such as *zip* and *fizz* communicate speed. The mental image of sound affects a listener on an emotional level, without recourse to concretised meaning. Therefore a link between the acoustic image of sounds and the mental concept or emotion they construe became well established from the eighteenth century (Drucker 1994:23).

In documenting their phonetic discoveries from the latter part of the eighteenth century, phonetic scientists required an effective method of transcribing their discoveries (Drucker 1994:13). For this reason, they turned to visual form (as opposed to linguistic description) as the most reliable vehicle for their recordings.⁶³ This may be because, according to Drucker (1994:18), the graphic

image tends to strike the eye as a more permanent and lasting impression than mere linguistic sound transcription. Scientific research therefore saw intensified focus on interpreting the acoustic value attached to shapes. Experiments were conducted using ‘inscriptional’ apparatuses that could produce shapes when affected by sound. Ernst Chladni, for example, found that two distinct shape-patterns were created when he ran a violin bow against the edge of various glass plates (Cho 2005:18). Edourd-Leon Scott de Martinville’s invention of the photautograph (1857) evidences similar transcriptions, only this time by way of vocal recording. When a subject speaks into the photautograph’s funnel-shaped collecting chamber, an elastic membrane and stylus at the opposite end of the chamber leave a graphic trace on a steadily moving strip of paper. These and several other experiments⁶⁴ occurring from the 1900s illustrate a divergent strand of language studies, where investigation is primarily concerned with mapping the phonological features of shapes (Drucker 1994:15).

62. Arguably the most significant breakthrough in this line of thought occurred much later, between 1916 and 1921. At this time, the *Zaum* poets of Moscow, under the charge of Ossip Brik, studied patterns of sound in subconscious thought.

63. Sound-image mapping is not unique to studies of the 1700s. The study of sound-image representation dates to the time of Pythagoras (c. 571-495 BC) who is credited with discovering the numerical relationships that determine tones of the musical scale (Cho 2005:18). A few centuries later (mid-1400s), sound is once again reimagined in visual terms in the example of Hangul, the Korean alphabet (Cho 2005:6). Again, in 1799, the discovery and interpretation of the Rosetta stone serves as yet another reference point. Here, language was deciphered by the link between spoken sounds and (hieroglyphic) visual signs (Drucker 1994:14).

64. In 1909 for example, Theodore Rosset developed a mechanical device consisting of a tube, a mouthpiece, a drum and vibrating needle that tracked the disturbance of air, onto paper, during sound pronunciation (Drucker 1994:16).

A more recent study, conducted by Cho in 2005, consisted of an alphabet, named *Takeluma*, which explores similar sound-image relationships, only here it takes the form of an interactive or reactive installation. According to Cho (2005:23), when a participant or speaker vocalises a phoneme sound (into a microphone), sound reactive filaments within the installation appear to bend and distort the shape of digital pixels according to patterns that are produced by the sound waves. Cho transcribed the resulting forms into a ready-for-print alphabetical system (Figure 35) where similar types of sound (for instance, p and t or b and d) are materialised in visually similar shapes. In addition, high or low-pitched vowels resulted in forms that were, respectively, either tall and thin or wide and rounded.

The examples I have presented until now affirm that form may be conceived through visceral engagement. Although these theoretical associations trace the relationship between sound and image, several other sites of investigation have, however, also suggested a potential link between *emotive* sounds that manifest in *connotative* forms. In 1911, for example, Ferdinand de Saussure developed a theoretical analysis that would transfer scientific outcomes into a critical case study of visual forms that he termed ‘the image of language’ (Drucker 1994:17). For de Saussure, the sound-visual relationship resulted in the formulation of a sign that may be understood beyond mere transcription. De Saussure’s studies later became the cornerstone of methodology for the Formalists⁶⁵ at the Prague School. In order to privilege ‘pure form’,

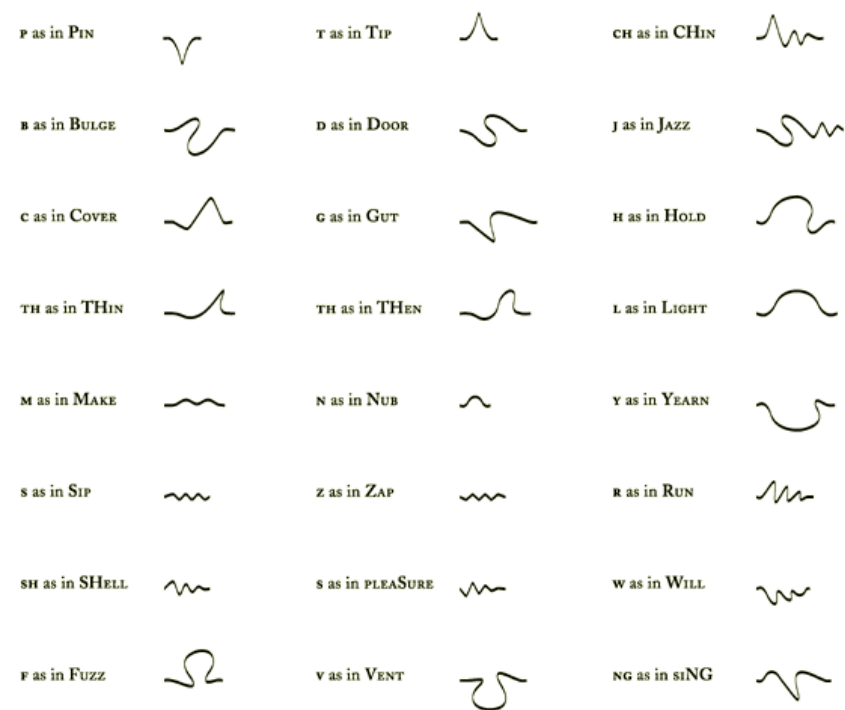


FIGURE 35 Specimens from the *Takeluma* project, Peter Cho, 2005. (Cho 2005:23).

65. As an ideological framework, Formalists views the visual image as divorced from history, cultural context or any form of social conditioning (Drucker 1994:36).

formalists looked to de Saussure’s linguistic case studies of the phonological sign and attempted to adapt them in terms of form analyses. Yuri Veltrusky (in Drucker 1994:32) writes of extensive visual experiments that were conducted between 1934 and 1940 at the Prague School, where emotive sound was recorded by means of emotive forms. Drucker (1994:15) describes their examinations as the investigation into the *visible trace of expressive sound*.

Several other cognitive psychological studies have yielded practical examples of this rather intuitive sound-image mapping. In 1947, Wolfgang Köhler released *Gestalt psychology, an introduction to new concepts in modern psychology*, in which he suggested that there may be natural or intuitive constraints in the way that sounds are mapped onto visual forms. Köhler presented two, otherwise non-figurative shapes (Figure 36) – one rounded and one spikey – to an undisclosed number of English-speaking subjects. Along with the shapes, he verbalised two non-sense words; ‘Maluma’ and ‘Takete’. Köhler asked the participants to pair the respective shapes with the word they found instinctually more appropriate. In his reports, he indicates that a vast majority of the subjects assigned ‘Maluma’ to the rounded shape and ‘Takete’ to the spikey shape on the right.

More recently (2001), a similar (and arguably more prominent) experiment, known as the Kiki and Bouba effect was conducted by researchers VS Ramachandran and EM Hubbard, which resulted in similar findings (Ramachandran & Hubbard 2001). The scientists presented two shapes (Figure 37) similar to ‘Maluma’ and ‘Takete’ to independent participating viewers and asked them to pair the shapes with the words/sounds ‘Kiki’ and ‘Bouba’. The researchers found that 95 per cent of English-speaking participants instinctively associated the round shape with Bouba and the spikey shape with Kiki. Peiffer-Smadja (2010:6) explains that the

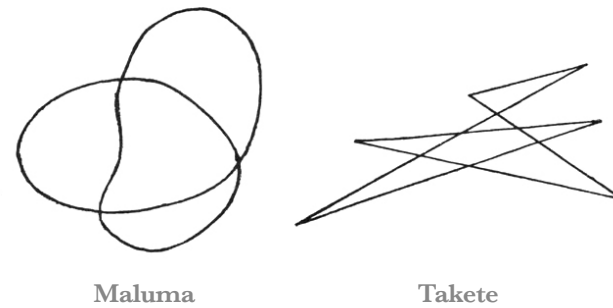


FIGURE 36 Illustration of maluma and takete, 1947. (Cho 2005:8).

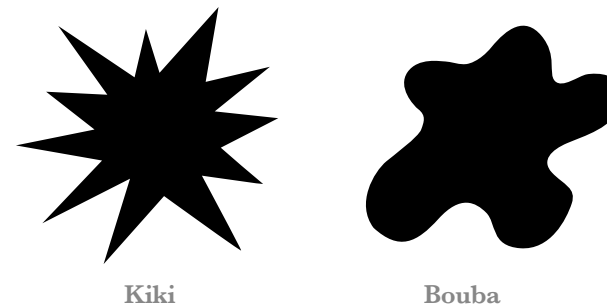


FIGURE 37 Illustration of Kiki and Bouba, 2001. (Kiki & Bouba 2012).

short, fast and sharp ‘ki’ sound in Kiki mimics the sharp physical appearance of the angular shape. In the case of the deeper sounding ‘Bouba’, the slow transition from ‘boo’ to ‘ba’ results in a forward to backward motion of the mouth that appears to imitate an organic, continuous ‘gloop’ or ‘round’ motion of a blob or blob-like shape. Cho (2005:9) adds that the deeper ‘boo-ba’ intonation is ‘more to swallow’ and therefore connotes a ‘slower’ shape in comparison to the faster ‘ki-ki’ sound. It is also possible to argue that the structural quality of these shapes (sharp or rounded) appears to echo the vibration of the sound. Peiffer-Smadja (2010:6) agrees and explains that there is a geometrical resemblance between the textual sounds of the words and the shape of these objects. Therefore, it is possible to argue that certain vowel, consonant and intonation combinations represent visual or tactile properties of objects.

There is also evidence in developmental discourse that further highlights this relationship. In discussing reading difficulties that are associated with Autism, Cerebral Palsy and Down’s Syndrome, Janice Light and David McNaughton (2012:[sp]) explain that in early developmental stages, children begin to recognise letterforms as a means of associating sounds with sensory experience. In doing so, they build awareness of sound-image signification and thereby strengthen their instinctive or motor reactions to the visual appearance of words during the reading process.

It is possible to contend that the above examples are instances of synaesthesia where perception is interpreted viscerally. Peiffer-Smadja (2010:6) explains that examples of synaesthesia are not reliant on metaphorical memory association; rather, their associations are of a sense-related nature. Synaesthesia is a result of cross wiring in the brain, where any given sensory sensation is experienced in response to stimulation of another sense (Peiffer-Smadja 2010:6). David Robson (2011:[sp]) adds that people seem to blend sensory experiences, including sound-image

relationship, sound-smell relationships⁶⁶ and image-smell relationship. Although the hypothesis for this is still unknown, a majority of sound symbolist scientists base the results of this effect on a type of instinct (Peiffer-Smadja 2010:7). According to Cho (2005:11), this kind of visceral perception is particularly prevalent in instances where a more abstract experience is to be interpreted. In other words, in order to make sense of less obviously referential phenomena, we engage with our affective experience of them.

Cho (2005:2), Drucker (2002:153) and Gromala (2007:3, 45) maintain that synaesthesia may be framed as particular kind of existential phenomenological response (not reminiscent) to stimuli. The authors explain that existential phenomenology is essentially a philosophy devoted to understanding the *essence* of an object by means of visceral experience⁶⁷ (Ma 2008:36). One might say that synaesthesia is a kind of existential phenomenological response to phenomena because, in the process of synesthetic mapping, the viewer gains a first hand, subjective or visceral experience of the visual at hand. Ma (2008:38) refers here to the ‘intentionality’ in phenomenological theory.

66. Several tests were conducted at the University of Edinburgh in 2010 in order to explore the links between sounds and tastes using different vowel sounds to identify bitter, sweet, salty or sour taste sensations. The researchers, Christine Cuskley, Simon Kirby and Julie Simner found that certain words elicit cross-sensory connections in the brain. After dropping bitter, sweet, salty and sour solutions into their subject’s mouths, they were asked to produce different kinds of vowel sounds that seemed to best match the taste they experienced. The findings show that sweet tastes are associated with high vowel sounds, in which the tongue is placed near the roof of the mouth. Lower vowel sounds are associated with sour tastes while flat vowel sounds are equated with bitter tastes (Robson 2011:[sp]).

67. According to Husserl (in Ma 2008:38), visceral experiences refer to the *lived experience* of an object; that is, the way we make sense of the everyday world as it is lived and felt.

She explains that intentionality refers to the internal experience of being conscious of the essence of something. Gromala (2007:45-47) refers to similar ‘essence’ in defining introspective perception. She explains that through visceral engagement with the ‘body’ (or external structure) of an object, we achieve a subjective, internal reading of it that is exclusive of any referential description. We therefore seek to interpret the essence of the visual and in doing so, it evokes a phenomenological or visceral response (Husserl in Ma 2008:38).

Megan Fowkes’ phenomenological typeface experiment⁶⁸ (Figures 38a-b) serves as particularly relevant and practical example in systematically outlining the process of intuitive letterform perception. In her experiment, Fowkes essentially pairs two phonological words, ‘gwah’ and ‘wizi’ – set in *Velvet* and *Organics Elements* respectively – with two respective illustrated characters⁶⁹ based on her phonological and visceral response to the distinctive features of both the characters, as well as the typefaces. By means of this, she highlights intuitive perception as a possible motive for selecting typefaces.

In analysing the project further, it is possible to argue that from a phonological point of view, Fowkes’ phonological word compositions⁷⁰ highlight specific sounds or intonations that describes a particular mood, energy or unique physical aspect of each character.⁷¹ In analysing the choice of typeface in relation to its respective phonological sound, it is possible to argue that the high-pitched, ascending quality of ‘wi’ to ‘zi’ appears to mimic the meticulous or sharp, albeit mischievous, nature of the first character. Fowkes therefore sets ‘wizi’ in *Organic Elements* owing to its sharp features and curved embellishments. The sharpness and whip-like curvature, created by dramatic contrasts in shape thickness, seems to portray a sharpness of mind, mischievous enthusiasm and perkiness. On the other hand, the heavier, thud of

the ‘gwah’ sound represents the unmoving and perplexed or dumbfounded demeanour of the second character and is emphasised by the bulkier, elongated structures unique to the *Velvet* typeface. Essentially, the characters’ visual forms are abstracted to achieve its essential quality or characteristic. This process results in an image-sound relationship.

As part of the experiment, Fowkes also created abstract ‘symbols’ (Figures 38c-d) – derived from dissections or the distinctive features of their respective typefaces – that capture an essential or common ‘essence’ shared by the character, its assigned sound and letterform. For instance, the symbols created for the first character seem to share an energetic, sharp, meticulous and upward striving slant to their form. In contrast, the simplified, angular and thick forms in instances of the second set of logo marks tend to communicate heaviness, dejection and disbelief.

68. Fowkes’ designs form part of a 2014 typographic project conducted under my supervision for the Information Design degree at the University of Pretoria and is presented here as an experimental process of sound to image mapping.

69. Illustrated by Shaun Otackl, 2005.

70. The phonological words are intuitively intoned.

71. It should be noted that the ‘appropriateness’ of her word choices is greatly impacted by their compositional juxtaposition since, as I previously mentioned, visual texts are often understood polemically and demarcated by their degree of similarity or difference.

gwah



FIGURE | **38a**

gwah logo, designed by Megan Fowkes, 2014.
Type set in *Velvet* bold.
(Scanned by the author 2014).

wizi



FIGURE | **38b**

wizi logo, designed by Megan Fowkes, 2014.
Type set in *Organic Elements* regular.
(Scanned by the author 2014).



← Chosen symbols →



Alternative solutions

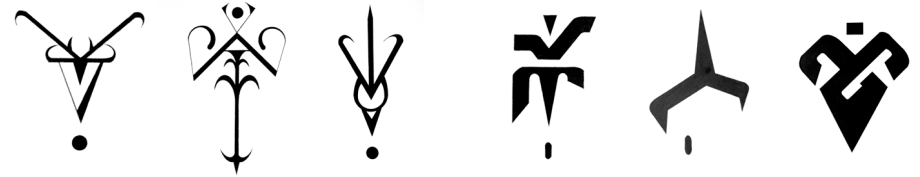


FIGURE | **38c**

Abstracted *wizi* symbols, designed by Megan Fowkes, 2014.
(Scanned by the author 2014).

FIGURE | **38d**

Abstracted *gwah* symbols, designed by Megan Fowkes, 2014.
(Scanned by the author 2014).

The first-hand encounter of stimuli presented here demonstrates a step-by-step re-mapping of emotive essence from one medium (illustration) to a second (sound), and finally to letterforms. I argue that Fowkes intuitively experiences or *feels* the essential quality of the typeface. Following my earlier assertion that a letterform's distinctive features are not always immediately reminiscent of material experience, it is possible to argue that letterform perception may be intuitive and of a visceral nature. In selecting a particular typeface a designer may respond to the 'inherent essence' of the letterform, irrespective of its referential sign – should it exist (Drucker 1994:36). In this way, intuitive experience can become the motive for selection of a particular typeface. In sum then, an intuitive interpretation refers to a designer's subjective interpretation of letterforms based on the visceral, intuitive or first-hand experience of its distinctive features.

It should be noted that some of the examples presented may appear more 'successful' than others since each interpretation is subjective. Drucker (1994:44) and Ma (2008:37, 40) agree that a phenomenological response or *feeling* is highly subjective and therefore the process of signification between the viewer and subject is significantly complex. It follows that when more than one viewer is exposed to the same letterform, one subjective response does not necessarily correspond with another. Nevertheless, these examples point out that visceral responses do exist and a designer's intuitive experience of a letterform can be the motive or strategy in the selection and application of type. As evidenced in the Kiki and Bouba effect, it is imperative for the designer to identify and consider which of these subjective interpretations are widely accepted or recognised as natural. In defining 'essence' (in Ma 2008:37), Husserl explains that although the interior quality or condition of a thing is subjective, it is also simultaneously universal. That is, he maintains that although interpretation begins as subjective, we find that they are universally shared. Therefore, common subjective interpretations of a letterform's visceral evocation may be harnessed and appropriately applied to a design.

In this chapter, I have suggested that a designer's experiential perception of letterforms may be one reason that they select particular typefaces. Furthermore, I have suggested the experiential perception may be further subdivided into reminiscent and intuitive experience. On the one hand, connotation may be evoked from the metaphorical interpretation of letterforms. Alternatively, a typeface's essential form can also evoke a visceral or intuitive response. A designer's experiential perception of letterforms is thus derived from the ability to extend physical experience metaphorically (for example, the spine of a character may be *as sharp or dangerous as a thorn*) as well as intuitively (for example, a particular curve may connote sensuality versus another that might connote flamboyancy). As a communicative strategy, it is important for the designer to consider the physical or material aspects of signification as well as more abstract or visceral connotation in achieving appropriate selection and application of type. That is, while letterforms may communicate at a metaphorical or reminiscent level, they may communicate on an intuitive level as well. Designers therefore need to consider both metaphorical and intuitive letterform perception as communicative strategies. According to Drucker (1994:43), neither should be considered in isolation since each continues to interrupt the domain of the other in a 'happy play of signifiers'.

As part of investigating the communicative complexity of letterforms, I have identified an additional default mode of type selection. Now that the communicative propensity for letterforms to evoke connotation experientially has been explored, the following chapter explores meaning that is derived from a cultural perspective, as an iconic symbol; type as iconic form. Here I investigate symbolic connotation embodied in the letterform.

04

Chapter Four

Type as iconic form

In the previous chapter, I suggested that type is both linguistically and non-linguistically communicative since it evokes connotation through our experience or interpretation, metaphorically or intuitively, of the distinctive features unique to its letterform. While this remains true, several theorists including Atzmon (2008:15), Heller (2001; 2006; 2010), Rock (1992), Stöckl (sa) and van Leeuwen (2005; 2006) maintain that *certain* typefaces communicate in an additional capacity. Collectively, these authors assert that specific letterforms achieve widespread recognisability because they act as graphic imprints of a specific ethos of a specific culture, and at a specific time (Heller 2006:8). These authors refer to this as the iconicity of a typeface.

In this chapter, I attempt to establish the communicative propensity of iconic typefaces. In order to do so, I firstly provide a thorough grounding of what is meant by popular culture, and how it serves as fertile ground for the process of iconisation. Thereafter, by referring to several examples briefly, I trace different processes of 'resignification' of iconic type.

4.1 | Popular culture and the icon

Currently, the term ‘popular culture’ is often linked to concepts such as pop (popular music), celebrity, frivolity, Americanisation and capitalism. Authors such as Betts (2013:2) exacerbate these sentiments by defining popular culture as “... the mass-produced means of *pleasure* and *entertainment* that are currently *enjoyed* by billions of people ...” [emphasis added]. However, popular culture theory applies to a much broader set of tangible and intangible concepts that are integral to shaping a broader understanding of how we navigate and construct complex communication structures in our respective cultures (Heller 2010:12).

Although the above definition does little in the way of acknowledging theoretical tenets of popular culture discourse, it does, however, highlight that popular culture, as its name suggests, is inextricably linked to popular aspects of culture. Therefore, before delineating what is meant by ‘popular culture’, it is perhaps worthwhile to mention that ‘culture’, according to Lemon (1996:208), refers to:

... the patterns of meaning embodied in symbolic forms by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs.

Until the turn of the nineteenth century, ‘culture’ seemed a sufficient term, in cultural studies, in describing the *shared* patterns of meaning – that is, all the ethnological customs, beliefs, values, norms and practices – of a particular community (Lemon 1996:208; Scott & Tomaselli 2009:8). However, with accelerated growth of mass societies, and the speed of technological and mechanical advancement during the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840), a need arose for a new site of cultural study that described the increasingly shared nature of the collective experiences, conceptions, beliefs and insights of intercultural societies.

Indeed, before the Industrial Revolution, the procession of technological and mechanical advancements was never quite so tightly clustered (Betts 2013:9). The development of several new forms of communication, including the telegram (1831), telephone (1876), radio frequency (1920), television frequency (1925), satellite frequency (1963) and of course the Internet (1990s) meant that intercultural exchanges of fashions, trends, beliefs, conceptions and discoveries were swiftly shared amongst otherwise divided cultures. Intercultural exchanges of this kind predict not only a tendency towards homogenisation, but also toward further exploration and sharing of cultural beliefs and values (Kemp 2012:3). These collective insights are the ‘approved’, regularly accepted or frequently referenced cultural beliefs and values of a culture (Nachbar & Lause 1992:10). In other words, they refer to the *popular* insights of culture. Popular culture then, refers to the customs, beliefs, values, norms and practices that are (or have been) accepted or endorsed by large number of people (Nachbar & Lause 1992:14).

Popular culture theorists also often refer to the term *Zeitgeist*,⁷² a construct that describes the an ethos, cultural outlook or perception that is unequally imposed or embraced by particular members of a culture at a specific time (Nachbar & Lause 1992:4). Whereas a *Zeitgeist* refers to a metaphysical presence or spirit of cultural ideology, popular culture, on the other hand, encapsulates *all* popular components of culture. Moreover, what differentiates popular culture is that, by implying a kind of ‘shared’ culture, it highlights a communicative function. In other words, in communicating shared, culturally constructed popular beliefs and values, societies or cultures access a range of constructed cultural references (Nachbar & Lause 1992:4).

^{72.} *Zeitgeist* may be directly translated from German as *Zeit* (time) and *Geist* (spirit).

These references are what popular culture theorists such as Bruinsma (2004), Heller (2010), Lemon (1996) and Scott and Tomaselli (2008) refer to as ‘symbolic forms’.

Symbolic forms span extensive historical territories and account for huge amounts of recognisable imagery today. Many archaic symbols record passages of humanity throughout several thousand local cultures at different instances in time (Jubert 2006:18). From pictorial manifestations seen in Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Middle-Eastern Hieroglyphics (3300-3200 BCE), to Chinese ‘ideographics’ (3000 BCE), Sumerian rock art (2300 BCE), schematic pictograms throughout upper and middle Africa, Greco-Roman pictorial alphabets (900 BCE), imagery carved into walls in Christian catacombs up to the sixth century AD, and several other examples of religious imagery replete with iconography, these symbols served as heterogenic means of communication (The icon ... 2003; Jubert 2006:18-25).

Today, although not necessarily confined to religious spheres, popular symbolic forms function in a similar way. They serve as inter- and intra-cultural signals of communication because they are localised or intimately familiar, yet also universally interpretable. Therefore, in the context of communication design discourse, a popular symbolic form is frequently referred to as an icon⁷³ (Heller 2010:10). Icons, as hypermediated ‘familiar texts’, achieve massive, often global, comprehension and resonance. Kemp (2012:3) explains that the icon is separated from mere ‘trendy’ or ‘culturally resonant’ texts after it achieves exceptional levels of widespread recognisability and cognitive potency. Today, icons are situated in a universal catalogue of popular instances of culture(s). Du Preez (2013:144) explains that the rise of the icon is one of the by-products of the increasingly mediated and globalised culture. Therefore, what is popular in one culture may be adopted or recognised by another.

The icon is essentially the materialisation of a *Zeitgeist* or symbolic ethos since it showcases a recognisable graphic structure and serves as a sign of social and technological developments that reflect the consciousness of an era (Ma 2008:22; Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:67). One might therefore contend that a popular culture artefact may be referred to as iconic since it *symbolises* a particular culture or stylistic epoch (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:17). Du Preez (2013:144) explains that, just like a *Zeitgeist*, an icon represents meaningful clues to a specific world-view since it embodies ideas honoured by a particular culture. The icon exists as a *tangible* cultural beacon that communicates an intangible idea or ethos. Unlike *Zeitgeists*, which are confined to boundaries of specified time and culture (Nachbar & Lanse 1992:4), icons transcend these boundaries (Kemp 2012:3). That is, icons carry with them the ethos from the culture and time in which they were conceived, across other cultures at different times. Kemp (2012:3) contends that icons are therefore globally recognisable: “The moment at which the viewer begins to interpret globally recognisable connotation, they begin to engage with the icon”.

A workable definition may be that an icon is a recognisable, graphic imprint of an ethos or the embodiment of cultural narratives that define a particular ethos of a specific culture, at a specific time (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:19). Graphic styles in particular serve as rich iconic markers of cultural accomplishments and underpinning ideological tenets of any one time in a historical design landscape (Heller 2006:8).

⁷³. ‘Icon’, from the Greek term *Eikon*, refers to an image or portrait that occupies a symbolic function.

From this definition, it is possible to suggest that recognisable letterforms may also be considered iconic since they may potentially identify and depict what a culture or era looked or looks like. Burke (1992:20) argues that letterforms serve as one of the most eloquent means of expressing the style of any epoch while Kurt Campbell (2009:39) agrees and adds that owing to their cultural constitution and historical resonances, certain typefaces must be considered iconic. Therefore, as Heller (2006:8) explains, the letterform can function as a graphic imprint of an era and becomes a collective, visual archive that displays *Zeitgeists* (that is, popular beliefs and values) from various recorded popular occurrence in cultural history (Nachbar & Lause 1992:4-5).

In Chapter Two, I pointed to a number of ‘symbolic’ typefaces, not only to illustrate distinctive typographic practices of each respective time, but also to highlight each as recognisable icons of their respective typographic eras. *Bodoni* (Figure 5) and *Baskerville* (Figure 6), for example, exemplify the pursuit of technical precision facilitated by technological advancement at the turn of eighteenth century. *Helvetica* (Figure 19a) is iconic of a Modern drive toward type neutrality and clarity, while grunge types such, *Grunge Alphabet* (Figure 24a), *Sidewalker* (Figure 24b) and *Nylon* (Figure 31) signify cultural and ideological rebellion (Garfield 2010:264-266).

It is worthwhile at this point to reiterate that by describing these typefaces as iconic, I am actually referring to the degree of recognisability⁷⁴ of their letterforms (Heller 2012:10). Rock (1992:122) holds the same opinion and explains that it is specifically the visual imprint of the letter; the letter’s distinctive *form* that evokes the *Zeitgeist* of an age. He continues that it is their structural markers (distinctive features) that are suffused with historical and nostalgic evocation. For this reason, when describing the iconic status of typefaces, I refer to the historical and cultural provenance that is signified by the *letterforms* of an iconic typeface.

4.2 | Type as myth: signification and resignification

As icons, letterforms take on mythic qualities whereby their iconic form embodies symbolic narrative structures. Atzmon (2008:14) and Altenhofen (2010:160) argue that letterforms are imbued with and encoded by rich historical contexts, and consequently they conjure up powerful associative narratives in the minds of viewers. Moreover, as mythic structures, letterforms’ narratives are continuously used as signification in current design contexts. Atzmon (2008:17) explains that these narratives function as “a constellation of meanings embodied in a material artefact that are assembled and reassembled ... over time”. In the following section, I briefly investigate what is meant by Barthes’ concept of the ‘myth’ and analyse how mythic structures such as type icons are ‘assembled and reassembled’ in current design contexts. I therefore discuss two ways in which iconic typefaces come to adopt and adapt meaning fluidly in naturalised as well as new ways, as icons for signification and resignification.

⁷⁴. A letterform’s degree of recognisability is of course contingent on subjective experience; that is, a particular typeface may be recognisable by some and not by others.

According to Joseph Campbell (1960:3), all cultures engage with mythological narratives as a means of galvanising and mobilising cultural revelations. According to Campbell (1960:4), man cannot maintain himself in a culture without belief in some kind of mythological construction. Entertaining and light-hearted fables of otherworldly beings that face perilous or moral tribulation are often seen as cultural truisms to be adapted and applied in real world instances. Here, myths surround many aspects of culture and serve as a social bonding agent since, as the icon’s communicative underpinning, they serve as shared or familiar narratives.

In his book *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes refers to myths of a similar nature. While his examples substitute Greek and Roman examples for localised and cultural myths (far subtler instances of cultural connotation), his explanation of imagery or ‘icons’ as carriers of myths, nevertheless highlights the myth as a narrative device. For Barthes (1972:107), the myth is a narrative or a message that is evoked by symbolic (and therefore iconic) form. Above, I mentioned that icons evoke a cultural outlook or ethos as connotative symbols. It is therefore clear that there is certainly a strong connection between ‘myth’ and connotation. Barthes (1972:109) himself defines the myth as a connotative sign since he classifies it as a common mode of signification. As Scott and Tomaselli (2009:19) point out, however, there is a key difference. According to them, myth differs from the connotation in so far as it actively naturalises meaning; since it is established over time, it suggests that the narrative evoked by a sign has ‘always been so’. Barthes (1972:107) explains that the myth is derived from a type of social usage; from the evolution of human history that converts cultural meaning into naturalised ‘fact’. Essentially, the myth is a narrative that has *already* been worked on; it is *already established* signification (Barthes 1972:110).

From this interpretation, it is possible to argue that iconic letterforms are essentially ideal examples of mythological structures because their structural form signifies or embodies naturalised historical connotation that is read as naturalised cultural narratives – as non-linguistic signs that *already* exist (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:19). Barthes (1972:117) qualifies this assertion⁷⁵ when he explains that a structure that evokes a myth “postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions.” As mythic structures, letterforms serve as particularly potent embodied structures of signification.

Because of this, type icons become a universal language system; an expansive visual vocabulary for communication design because they immediately reference what we already know of their context (Bruisnma 2004:[sp]). It is indeed the case that in current design practice, designers frequently implement type icons in their designs since these letterforms embody immediately connotative structures.

I refer back to *Bodoni* and *Helvetica* as examples here. Although *Bodoni’s* myth is quilted from an extensive historical landscape, it is arguably most associated with the ethos of modern Roman type design, where elegance of form is inspired by a drive for precision. Today, numerous designers therefore implement the typeface in order to signify a sense of prestige in their designs. Garfield (2010:206) for example, argues that, “[c]ertainly there is no quicker way of saying class” when illustrating *Bodoni’s* particular appropriateness on the cover of

⁷⁵. Using the example of the iconic Inca *quipu*, Barthes (1972:110) explains that the myth indeed operates within iconic objects.

Vogue, *Elle*, *De Kat* and other high-end fashion magazines (Figures 39a-c). *Bodoni* and other modern Romans such as *Baskerville* and *Didot* appear in several other examples (Figures 39d-e) where ‘high-end’, glamour, elitism, prestige and class are key concepts.

Although not as long established as *Bodoni*, *Helvetica* also signifies a particular set of ideological connotations. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, as an icon of simplicity, clarity and apparent neutrality, the typeface is routinely applied in corporate logotypes that seek to exude similar tones (Figures 19a-h). In recent design memory, it is probably most notably used as the default typeface in the redesign of the *iOS* interface in 2013; *Apple Macintosh’s* mobile and tablet operating system (Figures 40). From their crisp, white product packaging to the minimalist and ease-of-use approach to product design, it is clear that Apple’s drive for simplicity is mirrored by *Helvetica’s* clean, Modern aesthetic (Kuang 2011:[sp]).

It is particularly relevant to note that designers tend to recycle type icons and therefore, through continuous reuse their myths become ever more ingrained. Herbst (2005:30) and Brownie (2009:8) explain that the naturalised myth, its signification, therefore becomes an icon’s dominant, first order or ‘origin’ myth. While it is possible to argue that a ‘dominant myth’ is perhaps more naturalised, Herbst and Brownie point out the presence of additional meanings that may also be embodied in iconic type. Bruinsma (2006:[sp]) picks up on Herbst’s and Brownie’s observation and explains that in a Postmodern design context, meaning is indeed derived from the overlapping of often-conflicting signification. This is only compounded by our increasing dependency on telecommunication, broadcast and social media channels, where visual literacy is increasingly shared (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:22). A plethora of intertextual visual imagery therefore induces a saturated visual environment where

designers are not only exposed to a wider vocabulary of type icons, they also begin to ‘mix’ iconic symbolism in ways that form ‘new’ visual expressions (Bruinsma 2004:[sp]). Barthes (1977:156) refers to a similar state of intertextuality in his discussion of the polysemy of images. He explains that the symbolic image (or the icon) is never without intertextual signs.

Intertextual visual communication is an especially relevant concept in the context of mythic connotation (Barthes 1972:114). Barthes explains that mythic connotation is derived from an associational chain of signification. Therefore, what is initially seen as logical connotation attached to the naturalised icon, becomes a signifier for a *second* order of connotation. In typographic terms, this means that an iconic typeface’s initial, naturalised connotation may be reinterpreted and assigned a new function (Bruinsma 2006:[sp]). Once the type icon has established its dominant narrative, it is then subject to a process of mythic interpretation that Butler (1993:21) refers to as ‘resignification’. She explains that once icons are naturalised, they are mobilised and over time, are reorientated or readapted to signify new meaning. This means that when designers work with type icons in their designs, they may ‘rework’ underpinning myths by exploiting richly woven connotations already established in the typographic icon. In this way, the (typographic) myth is a malleable narrative apparatus that is open to appropriation by the designer at the time it is conceptualised and then again when it is revisited (Barthes 1972:109). By using an iconic typeface in a new context, designers essentially resignify it by exploiting existing connotations and thereby generate an altered version of the initial symbolism.

Once again, I refer to *Helvetica* as an appropriate example. As I have pointed out, the typeface is frequently referred to as a typographic standard in corporate identity design, where it is



FIGURE | 39a

Vogue Paris magazine cover, November 2008.
Logo set in *Bodini*. (Rock the trend 2008).



FIGURE | 39b

Elle Romania magazine cover, November 2011.
Logo set in *Bodini*. (Elle covers [sa]).



FIGURE | 39c

Dekat magazine cover, April 2014.
Logo set in *Bodini*. (De Kat 2014).



FIGURE | **39d** *Cartier* logo, designer unknown, [sa].
Logo set in *Bodini italic*.



FIGURE | **39e** *Gucci* logo, designer unknown, [sa].
Logo set in *Bodini regular*.

praised as of the most neutral and readable typefaces in the design field. As such, *Helvetica* is generally regarded an icon that, when implemented, signifies simplicity, neutrality and objectivity – terms generally associated with ‘professional’ design. Owing to the typeface’s particularly prevalent use in graphic and communication design, it has therefore also garnered ‘celebrity status’ as a designer’s font. The documentary *Helvetica* (2007), for example, explores the exceptional proliferation of the typeface in design spheres. The documentary highlights several examples from subway information graphics, branding and brand paraphernalia, to textile design, motion graphics and poster design that each prominently showcase several examples of the typeface on display. It is therefore possible to argue that the typeface has garnered somewhat of a cult following amongst designers as a sign of a designer who is educated or ‘in-the-know’.

On the other hand, specifically because of its (over) use in communication design, *Helvetica* has also garnered a reputation as an extremely safe and boring typeface:

If I see a brochure, with lots of white space and six lines of Helvetica ... the overall communication that that says to me is ‘do not read me, because I will bore the shit out of you’ (Stefan Sagmeister in Helvetica 2007).

In Figure 41, for example, designer Guilia De Amicis mocks *Helvetica* as a designer’s habitual typeface by literally ‘dressing’ the typeface in fashionable apparel. She explains that the intention of the project is to “make fun of this specific design habit about Helvetica-fashion” (Helvetica 2013:[sp]). In another example (Figure 42), Paul Kawai highlights *Helvetica*’s apparently boring structure in his poster entitled *Helvetica Boring* for the *Creative type No.3* (2011) exhibition.



FIGURE 40 Screen shots of the interface design for *Apple iOS 7*, 2013. Interface set in *Helvetica light*. (Ritchie 2013:[sp]).

As a result of these contested conceptions regarding *Helvetica* as symbolic of humdrum design, designers often implement the typeface in a playful and ironic manner by pointing to its clean aesthetic. In Figure 43, for example, Ilana Bean applies the word ‘clean’ using *Helvetica* letterforms that are set in some kind of cleaning agent or detergent, to a cloakroom mirror. It is possible to argue that by installing the design piece in a bathroom, Bean’s light-hearted attempt at highlighting the typeface’s ‘cleaning’ function, also appears to poke fun at the typeface as a symbol of strict and prestigious design rules and typeface exclusivity, where it is used only in the upper echelons by designers in the know.

From the examples above, it is certainly possible to state that the varying methods of reimplementing of *Helvetica*’s myth further signal its iconic status. *Helvetica*’s signification diverges; its meaning is repurposed and resignified to introduce new meaning. Iconic letterforms such as *Helvetica* become signs to which a complex layering of connotation has occurred, usually after a certain period of time. Essentially, new layers of meaning are added and naturalised associations allow the myth to communicate in a new way (Bain & Shaw 1998:14; Bruinsma 2006:[sp]). Moreover, it is possible to argue that the myth evolves and develops according to a design agenda and in this way, connotations roll into one another and reshape interpretation (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:19).

It is important to emphasise, however, that when new meaning is introduced in the mythic or iconic form, it is always aligned (to varying degrees) with already established, naturalised connotation. The designer cannot discard the dominant narrative since it is the framework



FIGURE 41 *Helvetica* poster, designed by Giulia De Amicis, 2013.
(De Amicis 2013:[sp]).



FIGURE 42 *Helvetica Boring* exhibition poster, designed by Paul Kawai, 2011.
(Kawai [sa]:[sp]).



FIGURE | **43** *Clean typography*, designed by Ilana Bean, 2014.
(Bean 2014:[sp]).

of reference that governs the icon's initial connotation and gives rise to the secondary resignification in the first place. That is, it is the dominant mythic narrative that leverages the symbol's iconic status. The dominant interpretation therefore transcends subordinate parameters of its initial making (Herbst 2005:20). Brownie (2009:4) explains that the initial connotation therefore *contributes* to the connotation of the repurposed typographic icon. Scott and Tomaselli (2009:21) explain that new meaning may even be contradictory; however, if the icon is to endure, the contradictions must be subsumed into a dialectical dynamic that is capable of accommodating shifts and reversals of meaning. In other words, if new conceptions are to communicate effectively, the relationship between connotation of the original and new signifier must remain compatible, even if the icon is deliberately used in an ironic way, in which case, resignification points to the 'original' or initial, dominant myth.

In all of the examples illustrated above, it is clear that the ideological underpinning of *Helvetica* is emphasised in order to achieve divergent communication in the (re)use of the typeface. In this way, the icon is both fixed (recognisable and representing continuity of meaning through signification) and malleable (open to resignification of new layers of meaning). By reworking or resignifying the already present signifier, the new sign imparts connotations from *both* the first sign as well as the second.

4.3 | Type as simulacra and accessible type

As I have pointed out, Barthes (1972:117) argues that in order for the myth to function, it must work on already naturalised signification. He explains that the myth postulates a kind of knowledge – that is, it points to a past or historical memory. Barthes (1972:110) holds that the myth is “chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the nature of things”. Scott and Tomaselli (2009:19) agree and argue that icons are assigned complex overlaying of connotation over a period of time. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that the greater the letterform’s historical constitution, the richer the layering of symbolic significances organically attached to it. Until now, I have argued that iconic type achieves new meaning by closely aligning with already established connotation. In this sense, meaning is divergent, yet still related.

In observing certain icons, however, it is possible to suggest that they do not necessarily require ‘historical memory’ in order to reach iconic status. Madonna, for example, is generally considered an iconic pop figure, although her ‘identity’ is hypermediated since it occludes connotation to the historical or religious symbol. In this way, icons such as Madonna may be seen as hypermediated representations that elevate an otherwise banal object to ‘celebrity’ status; one that escapes the history of the object it represents (Scott & Tomaselli 2009:18).

In researching and consolidating iconic typefaces, I have come across several examples where connotation is derived from social usage as opposed to mythic or historical constitution. In some instances, a typeface’s historical narrative is completely reimagined as a kind of as simulacra while in other instances, typefaces become iconic simply because they are accessible.

Therefore, in the following sections I briefly discuss two additional processes – iconic typefaces as simulacra and the accessible type icon – where iconic typefaces come to embody meaning.

4.3.1 | *Iconic typefaces as simulacra*

Jean Baudrillard’s conception of simulacra is by now well recognised, analysed and discussed in depth in communication discourse. In his discussion of simulacra in *Simulacra and simulation* (1994) as the ‘implosion of meaning’, Baudrillard presents his theory as antithetical to the tenets of Barthes’ myth,⁷⁶ in that he negates the idea of resignification when explaining that in a Postmodern context, meaning is never ‘reinjecte’d; instead, it is imploded and devoured. Baudrillard (1994:79) argues that meaning has little to do with resignification and maintains that connotation is never naturalised. Instead, as objects of simulacra, icons are directly destructive of meaning. He describes this as a process of dissimulation, where an iconic image is no longer referential; it is the generation of a new ‘real’ or ‘hyperreal’ without origin (Baudrillard 1994:3). In his analysis of Disneyworld as a microcosm, Baudrillard (1994:12) explains that its new meaning is severed from its source; ‘information devours its own content’. The image of Disneyworld as a phantasmagoria or ‘pleasurable America’ is seen as an artificial map of the ‘real’ America, that constitutes (in part) poverty stricken ghetto cultures, rapists, trailer parks, murders, corrupt politicians and so on (Baudrillard 1994:13). In contrast to the mythic sign, the Disneyworld simulacrum evidences a short-circuiting of meaning

since it exists in isolation as the hyperreal and liquidates referential ties to the ‘original’. The simulacrum therefore becomes the original and evokes wholly new connotations.

While it is possible to argue that Baudrillard’s view of simulacra as an all-encompassing Postmodern depository of meaning is perhaps over-exaggerated – especially since I have outlined the potency of myth – it remains a relevant hypothesis with regard to iconic type. It is of interest firstly because, as I have pointed out, iconic connotation is not solely evoked through reworked association. As I have also mentioned, I have observed instances where iconic typefaces appear to ‘stage’ meaning instead of resignifying it.

The *Playbill* typeface (Figure 44a) is a particularly interesting example of simulacra in this sense. Conventionally, the typeface (along with several hundred derivatives) is perhaps most immediately iconic of old western genre films, owing to its prominence on typical ‘wanted’ posters (Figure 44b) that feature in films such as *Once upon a time in the west* (1968), *Pat Garrett & Billy the kid* (1973) and *The outlaw Josey Wales* (1976). The typeface was, however, never intended as an icon of the Wild West. It is possible to argue that expensive type presses that

would have been needed to achieve the elaborate ornamentation of the ‘old western’ typeface were of short supply in the romantic setting of sweeping desert landscapes and the rugged rural terrain during the American frontier (1865-1900). Instead, as Garfield (2010:223) points out, type would most likely have been hand-written, or in the most formal of instances, typed using a typewriter.

Designed in 1938 by Robert Harling, *Playbill* is actually a typical example of the Victorian Egyptian slab serif. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, Victorian typographers strove to advance the capabilities of typographic machinery, in order to create elaborate, fat (or bold) slab serif typefaces (known as Egyptian slabs). The Egyptian slab serif in particular, was intended as a means of capturing attention in the particularly saturated Victorian visual environment. Therefore, beyond the idea that it was intended as a typeface for poster design, there is little to no systematic or historical narrative to suggest an inherent connection between *Playbill* and the western film genre. As is typically the case with Americana, fierce capitalistic endeavours rip the typeface from its original timeline and, as Baudrillard suggests, supplants it as a hyperreal icon. Therefore today, *Playbill* has become endemic to ‘indigenous’ American pop culture.

76. It is worthwhile to mention that Baudrillard (1994:81) acknowledges the presence of myth, however he maintains that we are usually not aware of its historical provenance.

4.3.2 | *Accessible type icons*

In other instances, typefaces may become iconic simply because they are accessible. Default web and *Microsoft Office* fonts such as *Arial*, *Courier*, *Times New Roman* and *Trebuchet* are often viewed as go-to fonts simply because people are confronted by them on a regular basis. Arguably, the most typical example here is the proliferation of *Comic Sans MS* (Figure 45a). *Comic Sans MS* is largely an iconic typeface; however its relatively unknown historical association renders it particularly germane here.

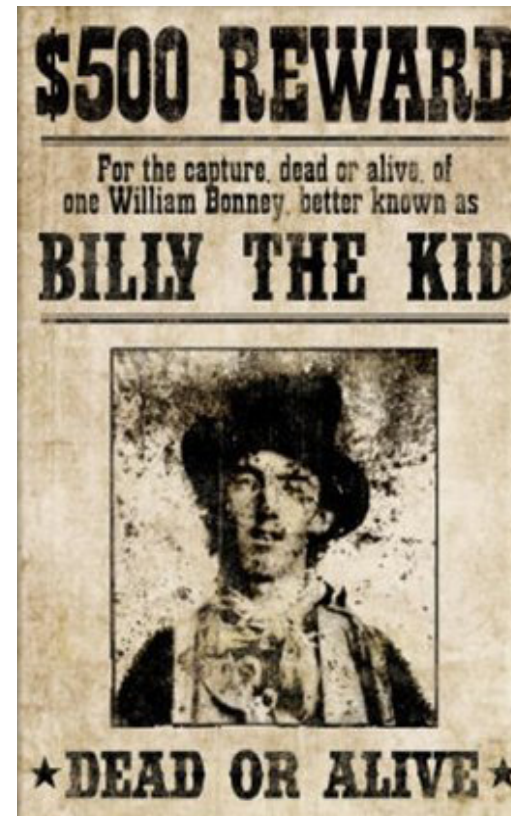


FIGURE | 44 Example of a wanted poster, set in *Playbill*, designer unknown, [sa]. (Posters and Prints [sa]).

The typeface was designed in 1994 and originally intended for *Microsoft Bob* – a software package that was designed to guide users through the workings of the *Microsoft Office* programme (Garfield 2010:19). Initially, *Microsoft* implemented the more formal *Times New Roman* typeface as the default type for the programme, alongside ‘child-friendly’ illustrations (such as the user’s guide, Bob himself – a sweet, effervescent dog). After receiving largely negative feedback from several focus groups regarding the visual appeal of the platform, *Microsoft* tasked designer Vincent Connare, to design a ‘creative’, ‘friendly’ and hand drawn typeface. Connare therefore looked to various comic style typefaces from *DC* and *Marvel* comics such as *Batman* and *Watchmen* of the 1980s. He believed that since their letterforms appear to be hand-drawn, using a felt tip pen, they might connote a friendly tone. Connare thus set about creating *Comic Sans MS* – a hand drawn, casual typeface comparable to the soft, round and blunted end of a child’s scissors (Garfield 2010:22).

Soon after its inclusion as a free, supplementary typeface in *Windows 95*, the typeface reached exceptional global exposure since almost anyone who had access to a desktop computer could access it. One possible reason that *Comic Sans MS* was the favoured option from 1995 (compared to other free typefaces, for example) might be because of its ‘friendly’ or informal structural appeal. Another reason follows research that suggests that the typeface’s structural simplicity makes it an exceptionally legible and readable typeface (Johnson 2014:[sp]). Studies surrounding dyslexia in particular suggest that sans serif typefaces such as *Comic Sans MS*, constructed primarily of curved or rounded shapes, offer greater visual contrasts between upper and



FIGURE | 45a

Comic Sans MS, designed by Vincent Connare, 1994.

lowercase letters ('Q' and 'q' for example) and are better suited⁷⁷ to reading for low vision comprehension disabilities such as dyslexia (Typefaces for dyslexia 2015).

Owing to its 'friendly' appearance, the typeface is indeed often used in appropriate contexts such as in the logos for kindergartens or comic strip captions, where a 'friendly' ethos is intended. It is possible to argue that in more 'appropriate' instances of its use, *Comic Sans MS* is indeed a mythic structure. Unfortunately, however, *Comic Sans MS* is most often sprawled across an infinite number of other, less appropriate media that have nothing to do with the icon's initial signification as a symbol of informality or colloquialism. Just a few examples include restaurant menus, ambulance and transport decals, clothing, porn sites, church brochures, health and safety signage, instructional manuals, and so on (Figures 45b-d). Owing to *Comic Sans MS*' numerous disparate uses, it has received widespread global criticism (extending well beyond the wrath of design critics) as a 'poorly designed' typeface. In *Six fonts that piss people off*, for example, Cliff Kuang (2009:[sp]) highlights designers' particular disdain for *Comic Sans MS*:

The jolly typeface has spawned the Ban Comic Sans movement, nearly a decade old but stronger now than ever, thanks to the Web. The mission: 'to eradicate this font' and the 'evil of typographical ignorance.'

77. Luz Rello and Ricardo Baeza-Yates (2013:[sp]) argue that this may be because *Comic Sans MS* facilitates the uptake of information in terms of quicker response times; it reduces fixation time and allows for better content comprehension, which quickens reading time.

78. Authors include Matthew Carpenter (2011:[sp]), Natalie Kitroeff (2015:[sp]), Janie Kliever (2015:[sp]) and Valdimir Gendelman (2013:[sp]). Sites include Absolute Graphix (Top five worst typefaces [sa]), Bored Panda (11 Fonts that designers love to hate 2015) and Fastcompany (The 8 worst fonts in the world 2011).

Garfield (2010:297) and numerous other critics⁷⁸ also criticise the typeface and list it as one of the worst typefaces available. It is indeed generally regarded as taboo in design practice to make use of this typeface other than ironically. In Figure 46 for example, Caleb Holloway overtly criticises the typeface by conceding that it is beyond aesthetic reproach. On the poster, *yeah okay*, the type, set in *Comic Sans MS*, is overlaid three times in translucent primary colours and is captioned:

... a desperate attempt at featuring Comic Sans in a project and having it look something other than horrendously unacceptable (Holloway 2014:[sp]).

More ironic use of the typeface may be seen in the design of a business card for graphic designer Bridget Jöhve (Figure 47). As I have previously pointed out, in corporate identity design, designers may typically prefer 'safer' typefaces such as *Helvetica* (or other sans serifs) where legibility is of primary concern. It is probable in this case, that by subverting a typical design standard, Jöhve's ironic use of *Comic Sans MS* points at that typeface as an icon of bad design. In another example, Toxel.com (2012) features several logotypes of well-established brands where *Comic Sans MS* replaces the otherwise present typeface (Figure 48a-f). It is possible to argue that the humour of these designs (where arguably 'well designed', 'serious' or 'elegant' logotypes are redesigned to incorporate a 'poorly designed' typeface) would be overlooked had the typeface not become synonymous with 'poor design'. In 2014, the typeface even underwent a process of technical rejuvenation. Designer Hrant Papazian (owner of *MicroFoundry*) addressed the 'technical aspects' of the typeface in his design of *Comic Neue* (Figure 49), a typeface that showcases considerably neater, mathematically constructed versions of original *Comic Sans MS* letterforms. It is worthwhile to point out the very occasion of such a reinvention signals *Comic Sans MS*' iconic stature.



FIGURE | 45b

The Stove Doctor vehicle branding, designer unknown, [sa]. Type set in *Comic Sans MS*.
(Photographed by the author 2015).



FIGURE | 45c

Danger signage for *SSE* power distribution plant in Illinois, designer unknown, [sa].
Type set in *Comic Sans MS*.
(Photograph by the author 2013).

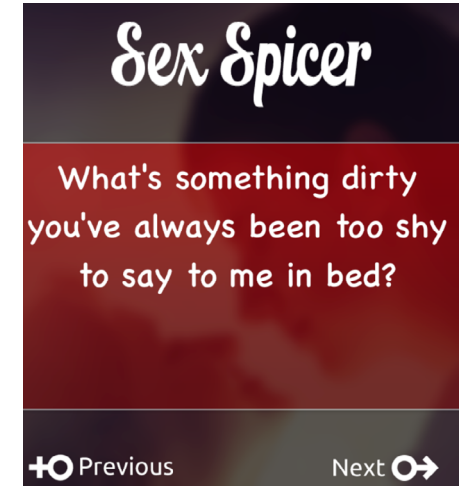


FIGURE | 45d

Sex Spicer mobile application interface, designer unknown, [sa]. Type set in *Comic Sans MS*,
(Sex Spicer [sa]).

In these examples, *Comic Sans MS*' initial myth is completely emptied and assigned wholly new connotation, as an icon of 'poor design'. In this example, it is possible to argue that connotation is void of historical narrative. Instead, the typeface becomes iconic through virtue of being accessible. In almost a viral effect of popular culture, the more the typeface is used, the more it is used.

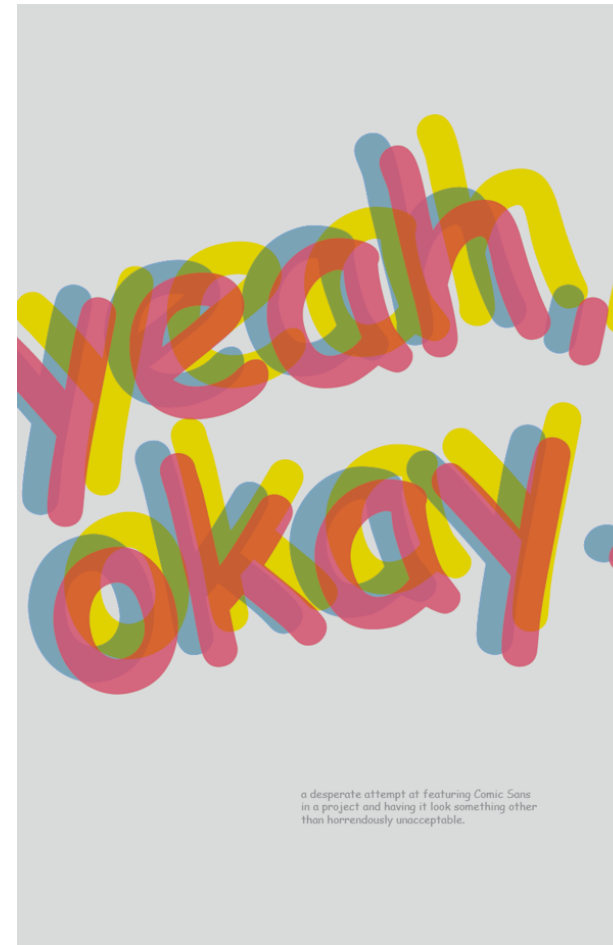


FIGURE | 46 *Yeah, Okay.* poster design, designed by Caleb Holloway, 2014. Type set in *Comic Sans MS*. (Holloway 2014:[sp]).



FIGURE 47 Business card, designed by Bridget Johve, 2014.
Type set in *Comic Sans MS*.
(Johve 2014:[sp]).

In this chapter I have outlined the second default mode of typeface selection. From the examples above, it is clear that certain typefaces achieve an additional layer of meaning as iconic and therefore symbolic communicative structures. Through visual examples, I have outlined a few processes by which iconic typefaces come to embody connotation. In the first instance, I argue that iconic typefaces are naturalised mythic structures. Here the iconic typeface endures a rich legacy of historical and cultural encoding that culminates in letterforms that signify connotative imagery. I also argue that these mythic structures are subject to reinterpretation and resignification whereby connotation diverges and the typeface achieves a complex layering of new meaning in several design contexts. Following this, I argue that iconic typefaces are not always historically entrenched, and that certain iconic examples achieve symbolic connotation through social usage. Therefore, in the scope of this chapter I have shown that apart from the experiential property of letterforms, designers may choose to select iconic typefaces based on their symbolic property as agents of popular culture. Now that both default modes of selection have been discussed, the following chapter investigates the communicative complexity of letterforms from a visual rhetorical perspective by exploring the connotative intricateness that result when connotation is evoked through several communicative aspects of the letterform.



FIGURE | **48a-c** Logo subversions, designer unknown, 2012. Logos set in *Comic Sans MS*. (Comic Sans logos 2012).



FIGURE | **48d-f** Logo subversions, designer unknown, 2012. Logos set in *Comic Sans MS*. (Comic Sans logos 2012).



FIGURE | **49** Typeface showcase for *Comic Neue*, designed by Hrant Papazion, 2014. (Rozynski [sa]:[sp]).

05

Chapter Five

*A rhetorical perspective
on type*

In the previous chapters, I outlined two ways that typefaces are commonly chosen and thereby presented an essentially semiotic perspective on two communicative aspects of letterforms. A purely semiotic perspective such as this is limited, however, since it ignores the designer's active role in directing communication appropriately. Since this study is intended for communication design discourse and practice, I now turn to rhetorical theory as a critical lens for analysing and considering the interconnected communicative dimensions of letterforms that designers should consider when selecting a typeface. I therefore proceed from the position that letterforms are indeed communicative and investigate the intricate nature of rhetorical decisions with regard to the appropriate selection and application of type.

I begin by investigating traditional conceptions regarding rhetoric and visual rhetoric in order to situate visual rhetorical theory as a strategic perspective on letterform communication. In illustrating a rhetorical perspective of letterform selection, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of the *Fraktur*⁷⁹ typeface (Figure 50) as a non-linguistic communicative sign, and I also speculate on common strategies and possible motives behind its use. That is, I investigate not only 'what the typeface says', but also what designers are possibly attempting to communicate by using *Fraktur* in their designs. *Fraktur* is a particularly relevant example, since it is an exceptionally iconic typeface that communicates both experientially and symbolically. Moreover, *Fraktur* is surrounded by much debate concerning its appropriate use since it is a highly controversial typeface (as I will illustrate in due course). Through my rhetorical analysis of *Fraktur*, I uncover and outline several rhetorical implications or issues that arise in order to argue for a more strategic and intentional approach to selecting and applying type appropriately. Essentially, I argue for a more holistic understanding of the rhetorical complexity of type.

5.1 | Visual rhetorical perspectives in design

It is important to note that while the observations I make throughout this chapter are supported by corresponding philosophies and opinions of relevant authors, they are speculative in nature and therefore, it is impossible to pinpoint precise motives that underpin the choice of *Fraktur*.

The field of rhetorical discourse spans many centuries and comprises numerous rhetorical strategies, frameworks and paradigms offered by an extensive pool of seminal theorists. Owing to the scope of this study, I attempt to highlight only the most relevant ideas that may contribute to the development of a rhetorical perspective on letterforms. For this reason, I refer primarily to rhetorical sources by and cited by design theorists.

First introduced in ancient Greece, rhetoric is considered the oldest known theory of western language (Ehse & Lupton 1988:7). It is by now well documented that early allusions to rhetorical practices originate from the time of Empedocles (c. 444 BC), Protagoras (c. 481-420 BC), Gorgias (c.483-376 BC) and Isocrates (436-338 BC). In their teachings, the Greek Sophists promoted knowledge and wisdom as powerful faculties to be used for the purposes of verbal persuasion (Reyburn 2013:76). For them, rhetoric was seen as a mannered vocabulary that describes the effective and persuasive use of speech. Persuasive language was seen as a process of directing patterns of communication where the rhetorician seeks a style or mode of appeal that, if appropriate to the situation at hand, is highly persuasive.

Although the Sophists first began to institute rhetoric in their teaching, perhaps the most recognised and widely regarded rhetorical documentation comes from the theoretical insights of Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotle (2010:8) defines rhetoric⁸⁰ as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion”. It is clear that Aristotle’s definition highlights a traditional understanding of rhetoric as a practiced art of verbal persuasion. It follows therefore that Aristotle’s definition was essentially intended for application in the faculties of law and verbal argumentation. Buchanan (1985:4, 6) argues, however, that at a fundamental level we all attempt to persuade others of our ideas, to a greater or lesser degree,

79. Contrary to general typographic classification currently used, *Fraktur* is used in this study, to refer to the complete group of broken scripts, and not exclusively the particular historical form designed by Johann Neudorffer, which can be distinguished from *Textura*, *Rotunda* and *Schwabacher Fraktur* (Bose 2010:89). The equivalent, in an English-speaking context, is ‘Blackletter’.

80. In his teachings, Aristotle identifies three proofs or appeals of rhetorical argumentation; *logos* (the appeal to logical, rational and systematic structuring of an argument), *pathos* (the appeal to social and cultural sensitivities of the audience) and *ethos* (the regard for or esteem of the character of the speaker).

in our daily activities. It is therefore possible to suggest that persuasive argumentation extends beyond the borders of law and verbal language. Burke (in Foss 2005:141), for example, explains that in the past century, the landscape of rhetorical theory is extended to include other ‘human symbol systems’ such as architecture, dance, mathematics, music, sculpture, and so on.

Classical themes of rhetoric have also emerged in design theory and focus on the rhetorical or persuasive features of the visual (Buchanan 2001:195). Foss (2005:142) explains that the emergence of rhetoric dedicated to the visual was necessitated by the pervasiveness of visual clutter from the middle of the twentieth century. Several design theorists have indeed attempted to reimagine rhetorical theory specifically in the context of visual communication (Buchanan 1985:6; de Almeida 2009:2; Foss 2005:141). In 1965, for example, Bonsiepe demonstrated the validity of visual rhetoric in the decoding of advertisements (Ehse & Lupon 1988:3). He suggested that if visual texts are able to communicate without the aid of lengthy verbal keys, they should certainly be considered rhetorical. In *The rhetoric of neutrality* (1985), Kinross examines train timetables of different time periods within the twentieth century in an attempt to illustrate the persuasive properties of even the most apparently ‘objective’ design artefact. It is clear that rhetorical principals became geared toward visual design and provide a theoretical soundboard for designers who attempt to affect a user in an effective, clever way.

In building a definition for visual rhetoric, several authors quite simply refer to it as the study of visual imagery within the discipline of rhetoric (Foss 2005:141). LaGrandeur (2003:119) maintains that visual rhetoric may be defined as the fluency of images while Foss (2005:141) and Reyburn (2013:74) explain that it is the study of the relationship of images

to persuasion. It is possible to argue that these views tend to situate visual rhetoric as the communicative object (Foss 2005:145). In visual communication studies, for example, visual rhetoric is routinely implemented as a framework to investigate the degree to which a particular ‘design object’ may be deemed eloquent. Essentially, the design object is positioned as a ‘persuasive’ visual argument. As LaGrandeur (2003:119) points out, the emphasis of a visual rhetorical study is typically placed on whether an *object* is rhetorical or ‘fluent’.

If framed within the context of communication design, however, where communication is the goal, visual rhetoric offers a particularly useful perspective onto the strategic *act* of design. For example, Kinross (1985:20), Bonsiepe (1999:167) and Resnick (2003:15) hint at strategic implication when they refer to visual rhetoric as the *art* of communication. Ma (2008:28) refers to this more directly in her definition of visual rhetoric as the *strategic use* of visual signs in the creation and management of directed meaning.

In the context of type design, a rhetorical perspective is helpful not only in considering the divergent and interconnected communicative facets of the letterform, but also as a way of speculating as to the nature of the communicative decision that underlies the selection of a particular letterform. That is, a visual rhetorical perspective accounts for many interconnected ways in which design texts communicate or are made accessible, attractive, understandable, credible or appropriate for a context (Buchanan 2000:[sp]). In this way, visual rhetoric focuses less on the ‘persuasive object’ and more toward understanding factors that influence the motives underpinning the communicative act (Burke 1969:22-23). In the context of this study then, visual rhetoric is seen as a strategic focus on letterform communication.

5.2 | A rhetorical analysis of *Fraktur*

Situating visual rhetoric in this way (as a strategic act) also implies the presence of a strategist. Jun (2009:[sp]) highlights the strategic implementation of visual rhetorical as a more *active* form of communication, where the designer is integral to analysing, making sense of and then initialising rhetorical aspects of design media. In the context of this chapter, I refer to the strategist or rhetor as the designer, since I position two communicative aspects of type as rhetorical strategies for designers. Buchanan's (2001:187) view appears to support my objective, since he describes designers as 'the agents of rhetorical thinking'. As a strategic outlook, visual rhetoric encourages consideration for intentional communication on the part of the designer. This is of particular interest here, since this study is intended as strategic discourse for communication designers. Now that I have discussed various positions on rhetorical theory and explained how I view visual rhetoric in the context of this study, the following sections illustrate a rhetorical analysis of *Fraktur* and investigate several factors that influence its communicative capacity.

As pointed out in Chapter Three, *all* typefaces communicate, in varying ways, experientially. That is, communication is initially derived from our reminiscent or sensory experience of a letterform (Ma 2008:39). That is, from the moment the typeface is conceptualised and constructed, it evokes connotation through our experience or interpretation, metaphorically or intuitively, of the distinctive features unique to its letterform.

Typefaces such as *Fraktur* are particularly interesting, since their letterforms are more rhetorically complex (in comparison to many less established typefaces) in that they can potentially convey a multitude of connotative facets, experientially and symbolically. Therefore, the following case study serves to illustrate the communicative complexity of *Fraktur's* letterforms; that is, as embodying both experiential and iconic connotation.

Situated in a current climate of Postmodern visual culture, the connotative aspects of *Fraktur* are considerably intricate. That is, rhetorical communication or 'meaning' in a Postmodern context, is derived from the overlapping of often-conflicting communications (Bruinsma (2006:[sp])). Bruinsma and Zappen (2009:281) contend that a singular, transcendent or monolithic interpretation of communicative structures is unachievable since they are no longer read as 'pure matter'. Buchanan (2000:[sp]) echoes these views and argues that in an ecology of culture, diverse perspectives inform all aspects of communicative artefacts. Therefore, 'meaning' is composed of a complex cacophony of intertextual voices, where communicative structures communicate differently, and in different contexts (Zappen 2009:281). Type, as a communicative structure, is dialectic in this sense since 'meaning' or connotation is not univocal.

5.2.1 *Fraktur as experiential form*

In this section, I therefore undertake a case study analysis, wherein I analyse the rhetorical complexity of a number of *Fraktur* examples in order to highlight several tensions that exist as a result of overlapping meaning and the interconnected nature of the two default modes of selection. I have purposefully separated *Fraktur*'s communicative aspects into 'motives' for application in order to illustrate instances where designers emphasise a particular connotative aspect of the typeface as communicative mode.

From a purely formal point of view, designers may opt to invoke the experiential properties of *Fraktur*'s letterforms as a communicative strategy. That is, by selecting *Fraktur*, a designer may seek to invoke a particular set of metaphorical or intuitive associations that are particularly unique to the structure of its letterforms. This refers to the sharp, splintered, hooked and whip-like angular features that constitute *Fraktur*'s structural anatomy. Garfield (2010:188, 190) for example, describes *Fraktur*'s letterforms as 'barbaric' and composed of "... elaborate, swirling waves of ink, better suited to iron gates than paper ... and the unforgiving jagged lower-case, akin to sticking needles in one's eyes". In referring to the particular form of the serif as resembling a spike on a medieval flail, Heller (2001:43) describes *Fraktur*'s letters in a similar way (Figure 51). Following Heller's interpretation, it is also possible to suggest the splintering of the ascender is evocative of a breast ripper⁸¹ while the curve of the amplified descender appears to mimic the swift action of the blade of a battle-axe (Figure 52). A dominant perceptual interpretation may therefore be that *Fraktur*'s distinctive features appear 'dangerous' or 'severe'.

⁸¹. The breast ripper, or iron spider, is a torture instrument developed around c. 1600 in Bavaria, Germany. The instrument, designed to rip the breasts from women, was used specifically on women accused of adultery or abortion.

Fraktur

FIGURE | **50** *Fraktur*, designed by Johan Neudorffer, c. 1522.

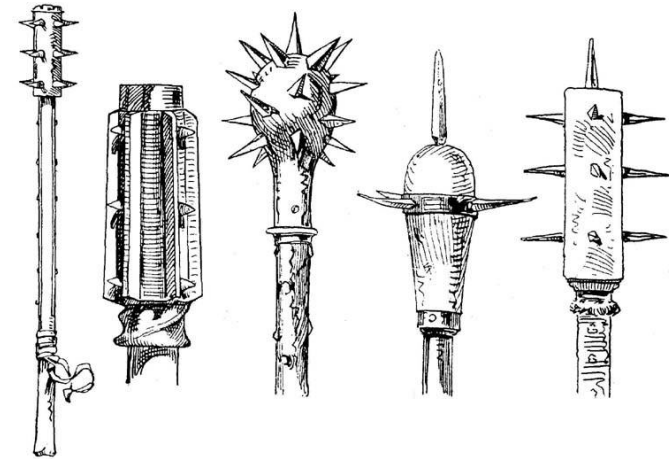


FIGURE | **51** Medieval weaponry, illustrator unknown, [sa].
(Textual images [sa]).

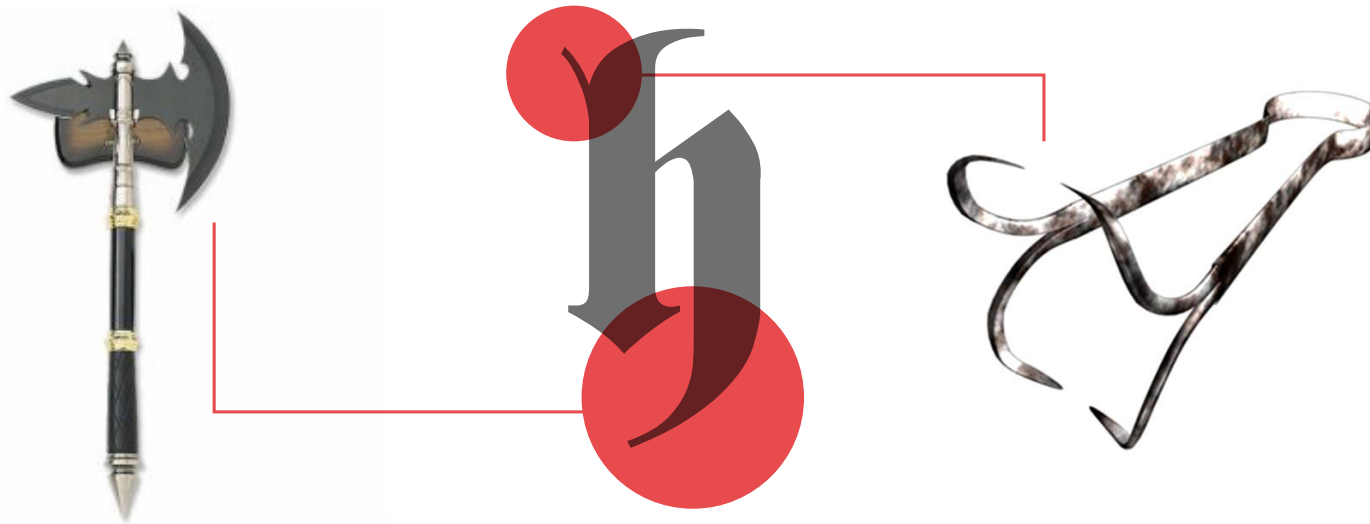


FIGURE 52 Example of metaphoric mapping of shapes in the 'h' of *Fraktur* and medieval weaponry. (Illustration compiled by the author).



FIGURE 53 *Disney Villains* illustration, Lukas Zimmer, [sa].
Logo design by the author, 2015.

My own logo crest design for *Disney Villains*⁸² (Figure 53) serves as another example here. In my example, the villain's facial features, adornments and other *mise-en-scène* such as the logo crest or holding shape are composed of severely sharp, angular and hooked visual shapes. As I have pointed out, *Fraktur* is composed of similar distinctive features. Therefore, in selecting the typeface, I suggest a visual link between the typeface and several other visual cues in the composition. Through metaphorical comparison, I position the typeface's distinctive features as reminiscent of physical experiences that evoke 'dangerous' material cues. Therefore, in a particularly 'wicked'⁸³ context, the choice of typeface seems appropriate.

It is worthwhile to point out that apart from *Fraktur's* severe structure, its letterforms are also composed of curved and organic features, emphasised by a particularly exaggerated contrast between thick and thin calligraphic sections of the characters. In the logo for *The Black Anchovy* design agency (Figure 54), for example, it is possible to argue that the distinctive curvature of *Fraktur's* letterforms is intended as the communicative quality. Here, the uppercase characters 'B', 'A' and lowercase 'h', 'k', 'v' and 'y' appear to visually trace the movement and form of the anchovy. Moreover, the thick and thin juxtaposition of weight, and the calligraphic nature of the letterforms appears to affirm an elegance of movement.

⁸². The commercial illustrations are by Lukas Zimmer [sa].

⁸³. The concept of 'wicked' is also culturally constituted since what might be seen as 'wicked' in one culture may be seen as something else in another.



FIGURE | 54

The Black Anchovy logo design, designer unknown, [sa].

It is also possible to argue that a designer may not consciously *intend* to draw links to any specific visual references. In yet another interpretation, it is feasible that *Fraktur* may be selected based on a designer's intuitive perception of its letterforms. Referring once again to the *The Black Anchovy* example, one might argue that *Fraktur's* letterforms encourage a more affective interpretation. That is, the designer may have sought to mimic the particularly 'sharp' taste of an anchovy; a synaesthetic interpretation. In this case, *Fraktur's* form is perceived viscerally since a visual correlation is made between its letterforms and a less material or more abstract experience of taste.

Whether in reference to weaponry, wicked shapes or sharp tastes (or similar allusions), it is clear that designers may opt to implement *Fraktur* as part of a design owing to their experiential perception of its letterforms, independent of the typeface's historical context. It is worthwhile to note that this is an especially common strategy when a designer is not familiar with a typeface's symbolic connotations. This does not mean that a designer intentionally negates the symbolic properties of the typeface. Rather, it is possible that the experiential properties are merely highlighted as the preferred reading. Moreover, as I illustrate in the sections that follow, it is possible that a designer may wish to invoke *Fraktur's* formal qualities in conjunction with its symbolic aspects.

5.2.2 | *Fraktur as signification*

As previously mentioned, apart from its experiential references, *Fraktur* also communicates at a symbolic and therefore iconic level. The typeface has endured a rich legacy of historical and cultural encoding that culminates in iconic letterforms that illicit powerfully connotative imagery. In this section, I attempt to highlight two⁸⁴ dominant or first order mythic narratives that are embodied by *Fraktur's* letterforms: as an icon of Nazi ideology and as an icon of German heritage.

At this point it is necessary to consider a brief historical overview of *Fraktur* since I aim to map its historical and socio-cultural embodiment as an iconic typeface. In order to grasp a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic function of iconic typefaces, Heller (2001:vi) argues that a thorough understanding of its history is paramount. He adds that an initial historical grounding is necessary to identify specific events that shape the underlying stylistic and ideological tenets of a typeface. In conducting an overview such as the one presented below, I track the process of iconisation in order to outline multiple cultural narratives that inform *Fraktur's* symbolic interpretation.

Fraktur's myth is inextricably rooted in a long-running landscape of Germanic history that dates from 768 when, under Charlemagne's rule (768-814), the German language became cemented as the preferred and ruling language of most of its European territory. It was Charlemagne's intention to unify European territories under Germanic rule and patronage. In an effort to materialise his endeavour, Charlemagne requested the design of a script that would unify a vast collection of existing script of the time. Therefore, at Charlemagne's request, *Carolingian Miniscule*⁸⁵ script (Figure 55) was conceived. The typeface appeared to provide particularly adequate expression of linguistic nuances, syntax, punctuation and phonetic devices unique to the German language and therefore remained in use for some time (Bertheau 1998:23).

Seven hundred years after the Carolingian revolution, however, classic forms of *Carolingian Miniscule* were reworked into *Textura*⁸⁶ (Figure 56), the first variant of the Blackletter family.⁸⁷ This shift occurred at the height of European Renaissance (c.1450) when illuminations and manuscripts became particularly popular as a result of increased focus placed on aristocratic enlightenment. Manuscripts of this time were information rich and, as a fully developed typeface replete with variations in weight, *Textura* appeared to offer better hierarchy in layout (Jubert 2006:32). Soon after its introduction, the *Rotunda*⁸⁸ typeface (Figure 56) appeared as an interpretation of *Textura* in Switzerland and Italy.

^{84.} I am fully aware that other dominant myths are associated with *Fraktur*. For example, since *Fraktur* is a member of the Blackletter family; a style of typeface design that is evident from the first inception of typographic craft is also takes on symbolic connotation as a traditional or vintage 'literary' script of the medieval era. In this way it is often used as a signifier of 'olden days' in fables and other classical inscriptions. For example, Blackletter types were used by William Morris in the design and layout (in 1896) of Geoffrey Chaucer's literary collection, *The Canterbury tales* (1387-1400). Owing to the scope of this study, however, I have elected to focus on two dominant myths as they pertain to *Fraktur* in particular, and not the entire Blackletter family.

^{85.} *Carolingian Miniscule* was created by Alcuin of York (an English craftsman). Its form is derived from half-uncial and earlier forms of hand written scripts.

^{86.} *Textura* was designed by Johann Sensenschmidt (c. 1450), a German printer from Nuremberg.

^{87.} Blackletter refers to a family of four Gothic typefaces including *Textura* or *Gotisch*, *Rotunda* or *Rundgotisch*, *Schwabacher* and *Fraktur* (Shaw 1998:77).

^{88.} *Rotunda* was designed by Erhard Ratdolt (c. 1462), a German printer from Augsburg.

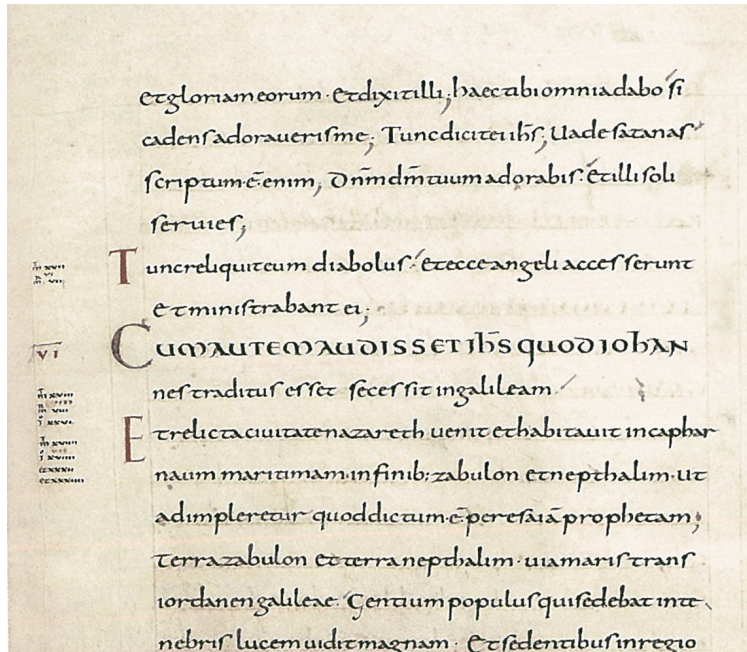


FIGURE 55 Sample of *Carolingian Minuscule*, designed by Alcuin of York, c. 800. (Jubert 2006:30).

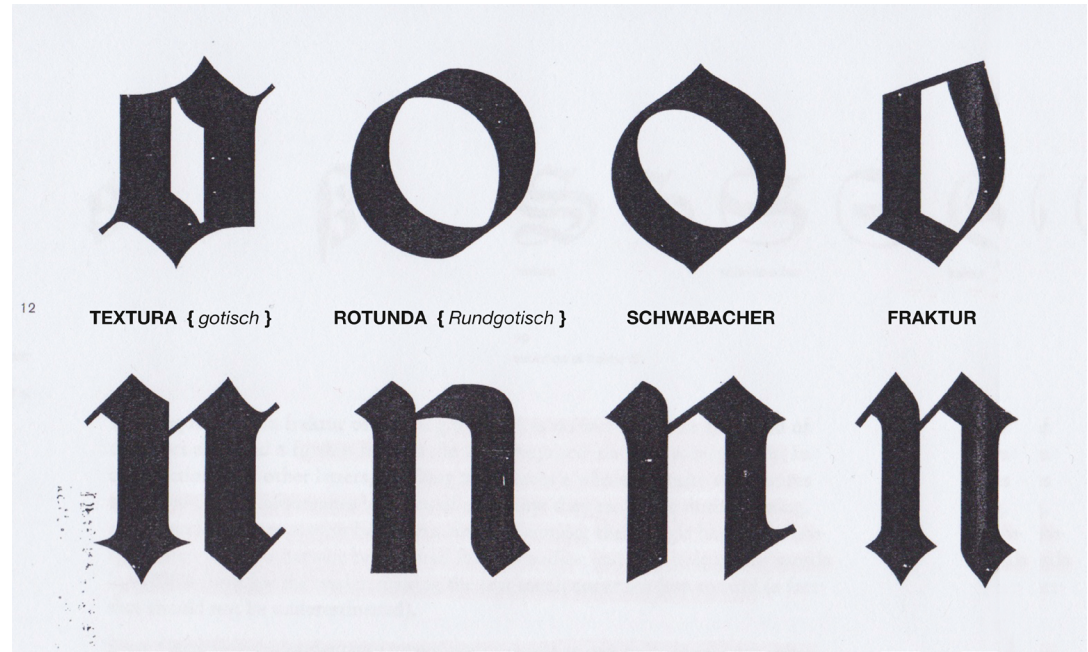


FIGURE 56 *Textura*, *Rotunda*, *Schwabacher* & *Fraktur* type specimens, c. 1400-1500. (Bain & Shaw 1998:16).

Around 1468, Germany began to separate from Catholic doctrines when German revolutionary, Martin Luther lent his voice in protest to a deplorable state of affairs brought on by the Roman Catholic Church (Willberg 1998:40). In an attempt at strengthening national and international presence of Germany, the German language endured fundamental transformation in terms of its linguistic and syllabic forms (Bertheau 1998:24). Luther's objective was to refute the long held dogma that through God's will, Rome (and therefore, its roman languages) would come to dominate the world. Therefore, owing to their presence in the Latin Bible, Luther banned further use of *Textura* and *Rotunda* that he believed were strongly linked to Catholic Europe. In its stead, Luther advocated the use of the *Schwabacher*⁸⁹ typeface (Figure 56) that was later used in Luther's German Bible (Willberg 1998:40).

At the same time, rivalry and tensions between French (and Roman) states and Germany inflamed. As if to rebut Luther's preference for Blackletter types, Roman letterforms were instated soon from 1465, as the official Franco-Roman typeface for European states such as France, Switzerland and Italy (Jubert 2006:49). As might be expected, the Roman letterform appeared purposely distinct from Blackletter types in terms of ornamental reduction and the overall appearance of its more rounded forms, and became synonymous with concepts such as modernity, French enlightenment, personal liberty and cosmopolitanism. Blackletter types (and especially *Schwabacher*) on the other hand, were linked to notions of medievalism, conservatism, authority of state and nationalism (Bain & Shaw 1998:11-12).

During the reign of Maximilian I (1486–1517), arguably the most distinctive of the Blackletter types was created. *Fraktur* – its name derived from the angular and broken curves in its letters – developed from Maximilian's Imperial Chancery in 1489 (Bain & Shaw 1998:13).

The typeface appears frequently and almost exclusively in German literature of the time and consequently was often referred to as a purely nationalistic, German type (Willberg 1998:40). Owing to increasing popularity of the Roman letterform in a majority of the European areas, as well as growing political tensions with France during the sixteenth-century, Germany clung tightly to *Fraktur* as its national script (Bain & Shaw 1998:12). German authorities looked to *Fraktur* repeatedly as an intrinsically German symbol of nationalism during the Napoleonic wars of 1803-1815, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, and well into the outbreak of World War I.⁹⁰

In many respects, *Fraktur* was even considered particularly adapted, in its construction, to the phonetics, linguistic and syllabic composition of the new High German language. In terms of economy (especially relevant to the availability of print resources during wartime), the letters of *Fraktur* are particularly well suited to long German words since they are closely spaced. This meant that, per line, *Fraktur* accommodated more letters than Roman types (Figure 57). In addition, *Fraktur's* counters and gaps between letters are narrower than those of Roman types, once again affording *Fraktur* more letters per line. *Fraktur's* ascenders and descenders (Figure 57) are also shorter than Roman types, therefore reducing the leading

⁸⁹. The third Blackletter variant, first introduced into to Europe in Bohemia and Germany in 1480.

⁹⁰. Germany's defeat during the war ushered in a fragile economy and, more pertinently, a wounded cultural identity (Heller 2008:18). As a result, and in order to instil a renewed faith in German policy, German Nationalists looked to *Fraktur* as a symbol of purity in German identity (Willberg 1998:41).

Steuereinschätzungskommission
Didot

Steuereinschätzungskommission
Fraktur

FIGURE 57 Comparison of *Fraktur* (Blackletter) and *Didot* (Roman) typefaces. (Layout by the author 2014).

requirement between lines of text, which again increased the number of text lines per page (Luidl 1998:17-18). Finally, although *Fraktur* may seem more difficult to read in contrast to Roman forms; for German phonetics, this is perhaps not the case.⁹¹ Excessively long German words are broken down into linguistically convenient parts through the use of the elongated ‘s’ and the variety of ligatures afforded by *Fraktur* (Luidl 1998:18-19).

Despite its diverse history (of which, I have only presented a brief account), *Fraktur* is perhaps most associated with the Nazi regime. From 1934, after the instatement of the Nazi party, the typeface was used in an official capacity to transcribe documentation that described Nazi intentions for Germany. It is well documented that the Nazi regime ferociously campaigned their political ideologies by means of various forms of propaganda. The aim of propaganda media was to develop a powerful German workforce, promote national identity, solidify German authoritarianism and promote social unification of the Aryan race.

It is often argued that Hitler’s artistic aspiration inspired his keen understanding of the acute persuasive power of *visual* unity and iconographic symbolism which lay at the core of Nazi propaganda rhetoric (Heller 2008:14; O’Shaughnessy 2009:58). Hitler invoked *Gleichschaltung* (forcing into line; elimination of all opposition), the deliberate and systematic infiltration of Nazism into every aspect of German society. He and head of the Propaganda

⁹¹. It is also possible that through continuous exposure to *Fraktur*’s characteristic shape formations, German speakers read the typeface with greater ease in comparison to cultural language derived from Latin, for example. In this way, legibility is contingent on exposure.

and Public Enlightenment faction of the Nazi party, Joseph Goebbels, strove to unfold Nazism throughout every aspect of its visual propaganda (O'Shaughnessy 2009:56) and as a result, all visual iconography was rigorously scrutinised to ensure strict conformity to a focused Nazi visual identity (Heller 2009:33). Therefore, the swastika, Hitler's own iconographic image and eagle iconography were the primary icons used throughout visual propaganda. Apart from these more illustrative icons, however, Hitler also understood that the typeface in which official texts were set was just as rich a source of cultural identity and Nazi rhetoric (Aicher in Shaw 1998:77; Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:54). Therefore, along with the above-mentioned ancillary iconography, *Fraktur* became equally integral in effectively encoding and disseminating the Nazi visual identity (Heller 2009:38, 49).

Known then as *Schrift* or *schöne Deutsche Schrift* (beautiful German Script), *Fraktur* became the official and national type of the Third Reich (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:56). The typeface's long-established ties with German history meant that the typeface was deemed historically 'pure' and was therefore (once again) instrumental in forging national identity. Heller (2009:52) explains that since *Fraktur* had been created in Germany during the nineteenth century, it was allegedly imbued with *Volksität*⁹² symbolism. Not only did the Nazis officially instate *Fraktur*, they also marketed its instatement by emphasising its national purity metaphorically:

Germany marches! Everyday thousands of soldiers in rows and units ... leave the machines at our type foundry. Many hundreds of thousands have already entered print shops all over Germany. They function as soldiers of German marketing (unknown author in Shaw 1998:80).

Feel German, think German, speak German, be German, even in your own script ... German script, it is an indispensable protective weapon for Germans abroad against menacing de-Germanisation (unknown author in Garfield 2010:191).

Hitler believed that control of the press and all forms of communication media was crucial to the success of Nazi propaganda. All new and existing printed media, including instructional manuscripts, historical manuscripts, banners, political propaganda, military insignia, vehicle, aeroplane, train, boat and submarine inscriptions, school textbooks, postcards, wayfinding, newspapers and official documentation (Figure 58a-n) were therefore to be printed, retyped or 're-branded' in *Fraktur* (or one of the condoned variations)⁹³ according to strict regulations and guidelines (Figure 58c) ordered by the German Labour Front⁹⁴ (Heller 2009:49). As Bose (2012:98) points out however, although popular readings, main headings or subscripts and 'branded' sections of propaganda media were set in *Fraktur*,

^{92.} *Volksism* or *Völkisch* is a Nazi term, which explains that all German speaking people share a common culture.

^{93.} These bastardisations include grotesques such as *Tennenberg*, *National*, *Element*, *Gotenburg* and *Deutschland* (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:56).

^{94.} The German Labour Front controlled trade chambers in charge of printing and typography (Heller 2008:48).

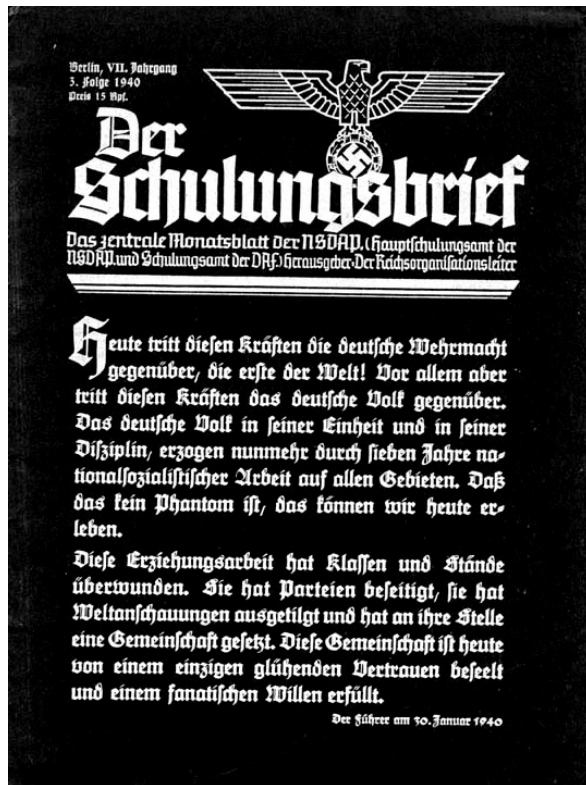


FIGURE | 58a

Training brief set in *Deutschland* (bastardisation of *Fraktur*), 1927.
(Notes on Fette Fraktur [sa]).



FIGURE | 58b

Nazi recruitment poster, [sa].
(Oswald 2010:[sp]).



FIGURE | 58c

Official declaration of *Fraktur* as the official Nazi typeface, [sa].
(Shaw 2011:[sp]).



FIGURE 58d Nazi inspection of storm troopers in Danzig, Poland, [sa]. Banner translation: "Danzig is a German city and wants to return to Germany". (Innes 1972:30).

FIGURE 58e Pro-Nazi rally in Danzig, Poland, [sa]. Banner translation: "Danzig is a German city and [looks] to Germany. Adolf Hitler!" (Innes 1972:38).



FIGURE 58f (left)

Documentation of Hitler's speeches in *Völkischer Beobachter* newspaper, c. 1939. (Hamilton 2012:[sp]).

FIGURE 58g (right)

Nazi mockery of the treaty of Versailles, 1935. (Innes 1972:6).

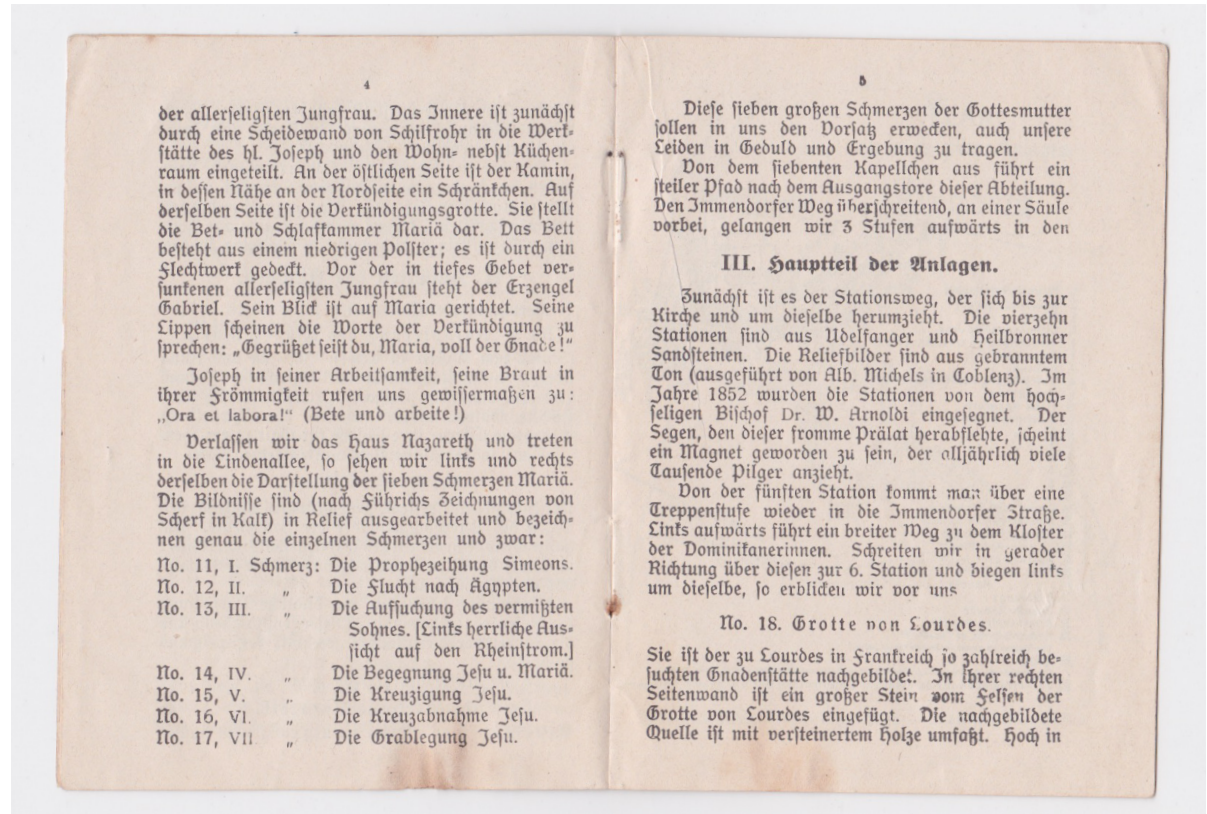


FIGURE | **58h-i** Official architectural plan of religious institutions in Arenberg, cover and inner, 1938.



FIGURE | **58j** Memorial postcard featuring the infamous propaganda Horst Wessel song, 1939. Song title translation: The flag held high.



FIGURE | **58k** Postcard promoting German Saar territory, 1935. Song title translation: German is the Saar.



FIGURE | **58l** German 12 Pf. Luftschutz stamp, set in *Deutschland* (bastardisation of *Fraktur*), 1937. (Innes 1972:7).



Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik

Viertes Heft 71. Jahrgang 1934 Verlag des Deutschen Buchgewerbevereins zu Leipzig

Mit kritischen Augen durch die Bugra-Maschinen-Messe 1934

Bei dem seit langen vorherrschendem Tempo der technischen Entwicklung ist es unmöglich, technische Museen so auszugestalten, daß sie dem Besucher jederzeit ein getreues Bild von Stande der Technik eines bestimmten Gewerbes geben. Alljährlich kommen neue Maschinen, Werkzeuge und Materialien heraus, mit denen man den dauernd sich steigenden Anforderungen gerecht zu werden trachtet. Von dieser Entwicklung ist auch das Druckgewerbe nicht ausgenommen. Die Leiter oder Mitarbeiter von graphischen Betrieben, die mit der Technik Schritt halten wollen, sind daher gezwungen, alle Gelegenheiten wahrzunehmen, um sich über das zur Zeit Bestehende und die voraussichtliche Weiterentwicklung innerhalb ihres Berufes zu unterrichten. Aber weder Museen noch Ausstellungen können als solche Gelegenheiten gewertet werden. Der im allgemeinen zu verzeichnende starke Anstieg zu allen Ausstellungen, die mit dem Druckgewerbe in irgendeinem Zusammenhang stehen, erklärt sich doch nur aus der Tatsache, daß diese Ausstellungen besonders für das große Publikum zugeschnitten sind, der Fachmann also daraus keine allzu wertvollen Anregungen schöpfen kann.

Ganz anders ist es, wenn eine Gewerbeausstellung wie die seit Jahren immer wiederkehrende Bugra-Maschinen-Messe alles

zusammenfaßt, was für den neuzeitlichen Druckereibetrieb nur irgendwie in Betracht kommt. Die Tatsache, daß auf der in jedem Frühjahr stattfindenden Bugra-Maschinen-Messe auch die Umrüste in Druck- und anderen Maschinen sich in aufsteigender Linie bewegen, darf als Beweis dafür angesehen werden, daß die Entscheidung zum Ankauf einer neuen Maschine in wachsendem Maße von der Betriebsvorführung und der Vergleichsmöglichkeit mit andern Fabrikaten abhängig gemacht wird. Und wo ist der Vergleich vergleichbarer Druckmaschinen besser möglich als im Deutschen Buchgewerbehaus in der Dolzstraße in Leipzig.

Hier im Buchgewerbehaus wurde so viel Platz geschaffen, daß allen führenden Firmen der Lieferindustrie des Druckgewerbes Gelegenheit gegeben ist, ihre wichtigsten Erzeugnisse und Neuerscheinungen im Betrieb vorzuführen. Die bei einzelnen Lieferfirmen vor Jahren noch bestehende Scheu vor der Vorführung ihrer Maschinen in nächster Nachbarschaft der Konkurrenz, darf erfreulicherweise als überwunden angesehen werden, und in gesunderm, freiem Wettbewerb treten sich die maßgeblichen Fabrikate gegenüber.

Vergleichende Betrachtungen der verschiedenen für den gleichen Zweck geeignet erscheinenden Fabrikate und Rück-

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FIGURE | 58m (left)

Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik cover, designed by Karl Wehmeier, 1934. A showcase of Examples of *Fraktur* used during the rule of the Third Reich. Set in *Völkisch Fraktur*. (Shaw 2011:[sp]).

FIGURE | 58n (right)

Deutsches Volk, Deutsches arbei article in *Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgraphik*, 1934. Documentation heralding the Nazis' new Germany, and new German Industry. Heading set in *Rembrandt-Fraktur* with title in *Tiemann-Fraktur*. (Shaw 2011:[sp]).

for pragmatic reasons, Hitler and German society were accustomed to scientific and technical literature that constituted bulk sections of text (as seen in figures 58f, g and n) would be set in Roman type. However, all modern sans serif typefaces were banned from public communication channels since they were the favoured typeface of Nazi opposition⁹⁵ (Heller 2008:49).

Furthermore, German typographers were compelled to join Nazi typographic trade chambers as a means of maintaining strict watch on typographic outputs in Germany. The chambers' strict directives dictated not only precise guidelines for using *Fraktur*, but also how lettering even for unofficial documentation should conform⁹⁶ (Heller 2008:49). Rudolf Koch (in Willberg 1998:43) eloquently summates the adoption of *Fraktur* in national identity branding of the Nazi party:

German script – that is, the Fraktur family, is like a symbol of the inherent mission of the German people, who, among all civilized races, must not merely defend but also act as a living model and example of its unique, distinctive, and nationalistic character in all manifestations of life.

95. Hitler even forced closure of the Bauhaus (in 1933) because of its vehement insistency on promoting sans serif letterforms, which he renounced as *Judenlettern* or Jewish letters (Jubert 2006:247). In its wake, the *Offenbacher Schule* (school) was opened in order to provide specialised typographic courses that cultivated *Fraktur* type craft. The school also developed graphic teaching materials and produced annual type specimens featuring a limited number of sanctioned derivatives of *Fraktur* (Bain 1998:69, 70).

96. Tschichold, the advocate of *Die Neue Typographie*, was ordered to compose layouts for German published books, set entirely in *Fraktur*, for example (Willberg 1998:42).

In 1941 however, *Fraktur's* domination over written forms of German communication came to an abrupt halt. To the surprise of the German population, an edict was issued forbidding the use of the typeface. All printed media had to be readjusted to accommodate Roman typefaces instead of *Fraktur*. The official explanation for this was that Hitler had obtained information suggesting that Jews had taken control of early printing presses and spread their '*Schwabacher-Judenlettern*' (*Schwabacher* Jewish letters) in an attempt at Jewish or capitalistic domination (Willber 1998:47). Other explanations suggest that Hitler believed Johann Neudörffer – *Fraktur's* designer – was of Jewish origin (Schwemer-Shedden 1998:51). Garfield (2010:192) offers a further alternative and maintains that in the occupied territories, where German was not readily spoken, *Fraktur* was difficult to read. He adds that limited print resources outside of Germany meant that *Fraktur* was not reproduced in, for example, Dutch or French foundries.

In post-World War II and current perceptions of the typeface, polarised views of *Fraktur's* legacy indicates a tension within current German culture regarding the appropriate circumstances of its use, since many Germans and Jews are particularly sensitive to any form of Nazi symbolism. As I have pointed out from the numerous examples of Nazi dogmatism regarding the strict implementation of *Fraktur* from 1934, it is clear that the typeface is most noticeably and strongly associated with the Nazi regime and therefore epitomises Nazi ideology. In *The design of hate*, Heller (1994:44) argues that connotations of hatred and cruelty are 'painfully obvious' and embedded in *Fraktur* letterforms to the point where they are seldom misinterpreted.

It is both startling and perhaps a poignant matter-of-course that in post-World War II German design particularly, *Fraktur's* myth becomes a strategic tool in the visual resurrection of racism, anti-Semitism and other far-right-wing tenets of Nazism. From the 1970s – several decades after the reunification and democratisation of Germany – German youth cults attempted to revive notions of Nazism entrenched in international conceptions of German identity (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:61, 63). Bands and artists who fall within the *Oi!* music⁹⁷ genres, for example, orientate their neo-Nazi brands by quoting Nazi iconography and *Fraktur* in particular. *Oi!* music began to surface from the 1970s and has garnered a reputation as a racist genre with a far-right political agenda.⁹⁸ Designs for *Oi!* imagery tend to suggest social resentment, rebellion and anti-establishment political agendas. Their visual identity is linked with issues surrounding class struggles and are visualised as reactionaries who revolt because of a paranoid sense of being surrounded by enemies (Schwemer-Sheddin 1998:65).

97. *Oi!* music is an umbrella term that encompasses rock and roll sub-genres such as punks, skinheads and particular folk and heavy metal variants. *Oi!* is defined as a form of working class protest genre that formed in reaction to the governance of Margaret Thatcher during the late 1970s.

98. It should be noted that according to Matthew Worley (2013:[sp]), many involved in the *Oi!* scene actively fought against right-wing connections to their music. Their lyrical and graphic preoccupations reflect tensions inherent within socio-economic and political realities under Thatcher's governance of the late 1970s.

99. *Skrewdriver* was formed in 1976.

100. *Störkraft* was formed in 1987.

101. Although the term neo-Nazi is frequently adopted to refer to a host of varied conceptions, in the context of this study, the term refers to social commentators who seek to revive far-right political and social tenets of Nazism.

*Skrewdriver*⁹⁹ and *Störkraft*¹⁰⁰ (disturbance force), for example, were of the first political neo-Nazi¹⁰¹ bands. Their visual identities comprise symbolic references that generously borrow from Nazi iconography, and in the spirit of neo-Nazism appear to imply a strong sense of Nazism. The wording of *Skrewdriver's* albums *White Power* (1983) and *Hail the new dawn* (1984) (Figure 59) for example, evokes strong undertones utilised throughout Nazi propaganda. The cover of *Hail the new dawn* features a bastardisation of *Fraktur* alongside appropriated Nazi 'battle' imagery that features prominently on several Nazi propaganda posters (Figure 60a-b). In addition, a perpendicular cross is situated on a battle flag, replacing the otherwise present swastika. One interpretation may be that this suggests a renewed health of Nazi ideology. In the second example, *Störkraft's* logo mark (Figure 61) is set in *Fraktur* and features on the cover art for singles such as *You do not belong to us!* (1990) and *Murder without remorse* (1993). Text that appears on their album cover for *Gib niemals auf* (Never give up, 1996) is composed again, almost entirely in *Fraktur* (Figure 62). Further examples of *Oi!* style bands who utilise *Fraktur* as part of their visual identity include (but not limited to) *Werewolven* (Figure 63a), *Saccara* (Figure 63b), *Christian Death* (Figure 63c), *Children of the Reich* (Figure 63d), *Schlachthaus* (Figure 63e), *Macht & Ehre* (Figure 63f), *Swedish skins* (Figure 63g) and *White Devils* (Figure 63h). The prominent use of *Fraktur* in *Oi!* imagery clearly indicates that the typeface is considered a deeply evocative Nazi symbol.

Owing to examples such as these that further entrench notions of Nazism into *Fraktur's* letterforms, theorists such as Heller (1994:44), Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:57) and Shaw (1998:80) hold that the typeface is seldom used in current design since the abuses of National Socialism are too recent in memory. These authors maintain that the marketing and use of *Fraktur* has ineradicably branded it as a symbol of *Nazi* ideology, regardless of the design intention.



FIGURE | 59

Front cover of *Hail the new dawn* vinyl album cover for *Skrewdriver*, designer unknown, 1984. (Die Fahne hoch 1939).



FIGURE | 60a

Es lebe Deutschland! (Long live Germany) propaganda poster, designer unknown, c. 1940. (Die Fahne hoch 1939).



FIGURE | 60b

Harte zeiten, harte pflichten, harte herzen (Hard times, hard duties, hard hearts) propaganda poster, designer unknown, c. 1940. (Die Fahne hoch 1939).

Störkraft



FIGURE 61 (top)

Official *Störkraft* logo, designer unknown, [sa].
(Combat Hellas 2011).

FIGURE 62 (left)

Front and back of *Gib niemals auf* album cover for *Störkraft*, designer unknown, 1996.
(Combat Hellas 2011).

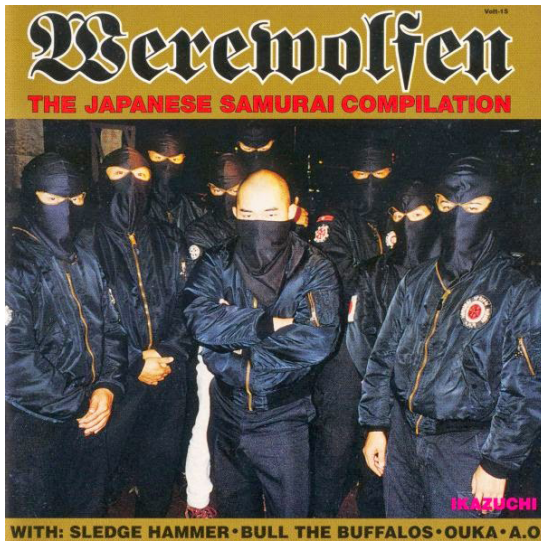


FIGURE | **63a** (top left)

The Japanese samurai compilation album cover for *Werewolven*, designer unknown, 1995. (Combat Hellas 2011).



FIGURE | **63b** (top right)

Der letzte Mann (The last man) album cover for *Saccara*, designer unknown, 1994. (Combat Hellas 2011).



FIGURE | **63c** (bottom left)

Skeleton kiss album cover for *Christian Death*, designer unknown, 1992. (Combat Hellas 2011).

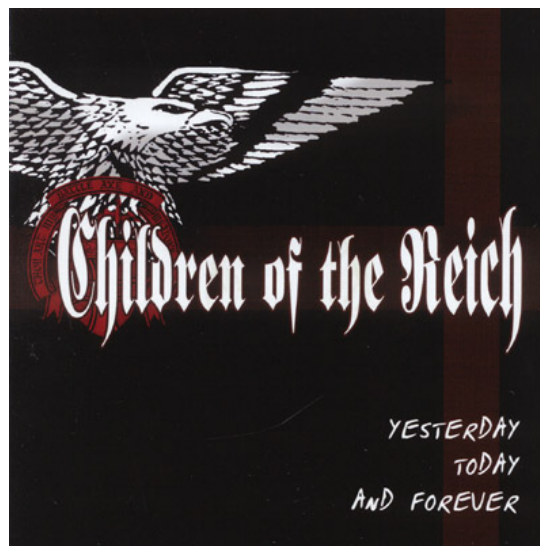


FIGURE | **63d** (bottom right)

Yesterday, today and forever album cover for *Children of the Reich*, designer unknown, 2000. (Combat Hellas 2011).



FIGURE | **63e** (top left)

Unsere Pflicht (Our duty) album cover for *Schlachthaus*, designer unknown, 2000. (Combat Hellas 2011).

FIGURE | **63f** (top right)

Geden den Untermensch (Against the sub-human) album cover for *Macht & Ehre*, designer unknown, [sa]. Unofficial release. (Combat Hellas 2011).



FIGURE | **63g** (bottom left)

Swedish skins album cover. Various artists, designer unknown, 1995. (Combat Hellas 2011).

FIGURE | **63h** (bottom right)

The Voice of Hate album cover for *White Devils/Nightslayer*, designer unknown, 2003. (Combat Hellas 2011).

Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:58) argues that any attempts to revive the typeface and fulfil any new communication will prove difficult since it is so heavily interwoven with connotations of devastation. Heller (1994:44) maintains that despite attempts at resurrecting the typeface in a new light, historical connotations endemic to *Fraktur* will prevail for as long as the typeface remains in circulation.

While it is indeed true that the impact of Nazi devastation reverberates well into the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century, the authors' steadfast assertions appear to overlook a fundamental principal of iconicity. It is specifically because *Fraktur* is iconic (a mythic canon in popular culture) that it is subject to a multitude of associations (Barthes 1972:117; Scott & Tomaselli 2009:13). Therefore, apart from the rather controversial examples above, where designers make use of *Fraktur* in an effort to directly quote Nazism, the typeface is also commonly used to signify a second dominant narrative. As presented above, *Fraktur* is not solely implemented during the rise of Nazism in Germany. Rather, the typeface is endemic to an *extensive* historical German landscape (of which Nazi Germany is certainly a part) and is present during critical junctures in German wartime history where it used to galvanise German identity. Throughout its historical implementation, *Fraktur* was intended as a reassuring symbol of nationalism and German heritage. In Schwemer-Scheddin's (1998:54) opinion, *Fraktur's* letters depicted the German notion of nationalism better than any other iconic imagery. Therefore, although it is clear that connotations of Nazism are simultaneously entrenched in *Fraktur's* letterforms, it is possible to argue that, as an icon of German history, the typeface also embodies German heritage.

In Germany's historical makeup, concepts such as nationalism, patriotism and national identity were mobilised through *Fraktur*. As a symbol of nationalism, *Fraktur* is the embodiment of a German political construct. According to Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:50), political constructs are concretised and mobilised through national language while language is visualised through its National type. Political agendas become aestheticised in the form of a visual German language and materialised by nation's adopted typeface. In this way, while the Roman letterform stood for European Enlightenment, *Fraktur* favoured adherence to traditional politics and ideologies that suited German the lifestyle (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:53). In addition, and specifically in the case of German language, *Fraktur's* particular aptness for German linguistics and phonetic pronunciation showcased idiosyncrasies of the national German language. By means of this, *Fraktur* foregrounds the national language's particular suitability to its country and in turn, the suitability of the typeface is highlighted (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:51).

In current design spheres, designers frequently return to *Fraktur* as a typical sign of German heritage. For example, the typeface is notably prevalent in visual marketing campaigns and visual identities of German alcohol brands, as a symbol of national heritage (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998:59). *Windhoek Beer*, a Namibian¹⁰² beer and beer brewery, is a particularly pertinent example here. The *Windhoek* logo mark (Figure 64) is set in *Fraktur* and forms part of a brand emblem consisting of a *faux* crest and text inscribing the date at which the brewery was established. Crest iconography is often used in branding as a kind of nostalgic insignia as symbols of heritage pride, especially if the particular heritage can be geographically defined (Oettle 1999:265). Inscriptions such as 'established in' or 'since' that form part of a brand logo are a common branding tactic that highlights brand heritage.

On the brand's website, the narrative of *Windhoek's* origin and beer cultivation is notably highlighted. The tale of 'a few brave men', emphasises Ohlthaver and Lißt's patriotic endeavour to brave arid lands¹⁰³ to cultivate a unique, German innovation. The site states:

Hermann Ohlthaver and Carl Lißt set out to brew 100% pure beer in the arid, untamed wilderness of Namibia ... They wondered what madness had brought them here and how soon they could return to the familiar surroundings of their native Germany ... They were passionate about beer; beer made the right way, the German way.



FIGURE | 64

Windhoek logo, designer unknown, [sa].
(Windhoek [sa]).

Other alcoholic beverages of German origin use similar visual cues in order to strengthen national heritage. These include *Bärenjäger*, *Denkendorf Echte Kroatzbeere*, *Jägermeister*, *Olaf Bergh*, *Rotweisser* and *Schöffelhofer* (Figure 65). These examples clearly demonstrate another rhetorical facet of *Fraktur*; as a symbol of German heritage and national identity.

¹⁰². Although the brand and brewery developed in Namibia (in the erstwhile German colony) by Hermann Ohlthaver and Carl Lißt, it is positioned as essentially German alcohol brand.

¹⁰³. The domination of a foreign land is a narrative not unfamiliar in Nazi visuals. The Nazi's often employed this narrative in order to galvanise support from German youth. Hitler called on young men or *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler youth) to brave new lands in order to colonise and expand German territory. Various posters and insignia feature images of *Hitlerjugend* marching to war, crossing borders, battling natives and planting the German flag in occupied territories, while girls were illustrated conducting household chores, waiting for their beaus' return.



FIGURE 65 Montage of logos for German-brewed alcohol adapting variations of *Fraktur*, designers unknown, [sa]. (Compiled by the author).

From the historical account presented above, it is clear that as an icon, *Fraktur's* letterforms embody a set of historical and cultural narratives (Heller 2006:8, 20). As I have illustrated, over time, these connotations have become naturalised myths and form part of a global vocabulary of signification. Its letterforms serve as a rich site of already naturalised connotation for graphic designers, where its myth is readily referenced as symbolic of Nazism, as well as German history and nationalism (O'Shaughnessy 2009:75).

5.2.3 *Fraktur as resignification*

In the examples above, by appropriating *Fraktur*, designers refer to either one of two dominant 'origin' or first order myths as a communicative strategy. In doing so, however, the designer is reliant on the audience's knowledge of the typeface's historical context. One might say that the audience's particular insight into *Fraktur's* symbolism is a primary indicator of whether it makes some kind of logical or emotional appeal (Tyler 1992:21 & Foss 2005:144). For example, *Fraktur's* cultural relevance may connote differently to people from different cultural backgrounds, or different ages and political or religious affiliations since human interpretation is culturally and contextually constituted (Bruinsma 2004:[sp]; Jones 2011:361; Reyburn 2013:79). It follows therefore that the more universalised the icon becomes, the more amenable it is to historical reconstitution (Barthes 1972:112). To a sixteen-year-old South African, for example, a gap may form between the *Fraktur* and its first order or origin myth. It may be that *Fraktur's* sharp, formal structure is the only 'appeal'. This is not necessarily a problem, however, since a sixteen-year-old South African may not be the intended audience. It is nevertheless important to point out that if *Fraktur's* symbolism is not relevant to the audience's frame-of-reference and context within which it is disseminated, it may be misread or simply glossed over (Atzmon 2008:13).

It is possible to argue therefore, that in a contemporary global culture, *Fraktur's* 'German' undertones are less explicit, particularly in countries outside of Germany (and certain areas of Europe). For international audiences, *Fraktur's* underpinning myths begin to diverge, although traces of the dominant interpretation are always present. *Fraktur* is dialectic in this sense, since although it initially symbolised one 'thing', over time, the connection is often softened; meaning becomes fluid, is resignified and begins to diverge. Over time, and owing to a process of contextual layering, *Fraktur's* myth has become more immediately suggestive of two particularly prevalent concepts that have deviated from the typeface's two first order myths.

In the first instance, *Fraktur* is not only used to symbolise German identity, but also as a canon for 'Germanic heritage' in general. As I pointed out, *Fraktur* is a member of Blackletter types that are endemic to a much wider Germanic historical landscape. Consequently, it is possible to suggest that the typeface epitomises tradition and enduring heritage. In other words, over time the typeface is interpreted as somewhat removed from distinctly German roots and becomes a symbol for a blend of heritage.



FIGURE 66 *The Baron*, store signage, Pretoria, 2014.
 (Photographed by the author).



FIGURE | 67

The Oak Bar, store signage, New York, 2009.
(The Oak Bar logo 2009).

The Baron (a tobacconist situated in Menlyn Shopping Center, Pretoria) and *The Oak Bar* (a stately, vintage bar situated in *The Oak Room* hotel in Central Park, New York) serve as suitable examples here. Although both logo marks are set in *Fraktur* (Figure 66-67), neither brand is positioned as essentially German (either geographically or in terms of brand ethos). Instead, if interpreted alongside their ‘crest’ iconography, it is possible to argue that *Fraktur* is used to brand the venues as examples of ‘vintage’ spaces.

It is also particularly interesting to note that in both of the above examples, *Fraktur* is implemented as part of visual identities for venues that are essentially branded as ‘masculine’ spaces. Therefore, while *Fraktur* is clearly used to connote ‘heritage’, it also borrows from naturalised connotations associated with the notion of beer or harder alcohols as a traditionally masculine beverage. Thus, both spaces are branded as sites of traditional, gentleman’s pastimes.

In the second instance, *Fraktur*’s Nazi connotations are softened to the point where it becomes less an icon of intolerable cruelty, barbarisms or morbid termination of life and instead functions as an icon of ‘general taboo’. Here, *Fraktur* is not necessarily intended to refer to Nazism in a direct sense. Rather, the typeface is mobilised in various ways, as an icon of social taboo and rebellion. In observing a massive visual catalogue of iconography typical of ‘alternative’ music genres, for example, it is evident that the typeface is routinely used as shorthand in visual media designed for subcultures such as ‘hip-hop’, ‘rock-n-roll’, ‘metal heads’ and ‘goths’. Interestingly, as Hebdige (1979:3, 91) points out, subcultures highlight taboo content (consciousness of class and consciousness of difference) through iconic imagery,

as signs of ‘forbidden identity’; a sinister presence of rebellion to the ‘straight’ world. As a symbol of taboo, *Fraktur* also comes to embody associated conceptions such as social nihilism, provocation, transgression, perversity and so-called sexual deviancy born of social or cultural ‘exclusion’ and ‘separation’ (Lanês 2015:[sp]). That is, these genres are collectively viewed as ‘forbidden’ and of ‘other’ social agendas. Here, the concept of the ‘forbidden’ is galvanised by the ‘other’ and transgresses our categories of social acceptability (Stone 2004:8).

At this point it is also worthwhile to reiterate Barthes’ (1972:114-117) assertion that any new meaning introduced to the icon aligns with already established, naturalised connotation. For example, it is possible to argue that without reference to the first order Nazi myth, it is debatable whether *Fraktur* would have come to embody concepts such as taboo, the forbidden other, provocation or sexual perversity. Therefore, *Fraktur*’s prevalent use as Nazi iconography serves as a gateway that contributes to the typeface’s ‘new’, resignified myth.

In hip-hop culture, *Fraktur* is often implemented as a symbol of rebellion against classism and racial inequality. While the historical circumstances of its rise as a sub-culture and commodification in American music industry are considerably extensive and complex, hip-hop culture generally refers to a music and visual style that symbolises the crusade of lower working-class, black American citizens during the 1960s in achieving political, economic and racial equality (Blanchard 1999:[sp]). Today however, hip-hop music usually refers to culture of racial rebellion and frequently refers to similar ‘taboo’ iconography. Although arguably less ideologically motivated than in the 1960s, imagery used in promotional campaigns for hip-hop artists seems to infer a ‘thug’ lifestyle, where stories of drug taking,



FIGURE | **68a** (top left)

The Trinity, album cover for *Sean Paul*, designer unknown, 2005.

FIGURE | **68b** (above)

Bone, Thugs n Harmony: The world's enemy, album cover design, designer unknown, 2010.

prostitution, poverty and thievery are painted as a result of racial oppression. Hip-hip album covers (Figures 68a-b) and various other forms of promotional imagery frequently feature *Fraktur* (or its derivatives), alongside gang iconography such as tattoos, graffiti, bandanas and weaponry, as symbols of a stylistic rebellion.

As previously mentioned, *Fraktur* is also regularly implemented in heavy metal imagery with a similar intention. The use of *Fraktur* in the *Affliction* logo (Figure 69a), for example, yet again illustrates that the typeface is symbolic of taboo subculture. As a ‘metal’ clothing brand, *Affliction* is positioned on its website (Affliction Clothing [sa]) as a brand for:

... those who live fast and are willing to endure pain and suffering to push the limits of what is possible.

The brand ethos is also suggested through the use of other iconographic cues such as skulls intertwined with eagle or phoenix feathers and thorny vines (Figure 69b) that are often implemented alongside the *Fraktur* logo mark. In addition, the fact that *Affliction* merchandise is almost always ripped, scorched, scratched and made using leather, adorned with spikes and chains, only reinforces the link to a particularly ‘afflicted’ lifestyle.

Fraktur is used to similar effect in the visual identity for *Black xs* (Figure 70a-c), a range of *eau de toilettes* manufactured for *Paco Rabanne*. In each case, the titles *L’Exces* (the excess) and *L’Aphrodisiaque* (the aphrodisiac) suggest that the perfumes elicit forbidden pleasures; that they offer the wearer access to a rock-n-roll lifestyle of sexual excess. In both examples, the logo is once again set in *Fraktur* amongst skull, rose¹⁰⁴ and other imagery¹⁰⁵ (Figure 70c)

that from part of the campaign identity. The *L’Aphrodisiaque* bottle is decorated with a spiked dog collar that is pulled around the bottle’s ‘neck’, while the texture of the hard outer casing is suggestive of sexual kink and bondage practices. Iconography of this kind infers connotations that align with notions regarding ‘social taboo’ that at the very least, intensifies similar conceptions embedded in the typeface.

What is of particular interest in the last few *Fraktur* appropriations (*Affliction* and *Black xs*), is that where *Fraktur*’s first order Nazi connotation takes a ‘back-seat’, the typeface’s purely formal or experiential qualities appear to come to the fore. That is, although *Fraktur*’s cultural symbolism is arguably one consideration for application, it is probable that, from my earlier experiential analyses, the typeface’s experiential references are also a primary reason for implementing the typeface. In the *Affliction* example, it is possible to argue that in conjunction

104. While the image of the rose may elicit several connotations, it is possible to argue that in this context, combined with its thorny stem, it is intended as a symbol of forbidden eroticism or sexual pleasure involving some degree of pain.

105. The advertising campaign surrounding the launch of the fragrance, comprising video clips, billboards, magazine adverts and website imagery feature topless, tattooed and androgynous men wearing studded and embellished leather trousers, fur jackets, chain necklaces and chokers compound fetishist symbolism that is intended as the campaign ethos. They also feature alongside topless female models in spiked heels and black feather boas. Other imagery features a sexualised skeletal clown and harlequin-like figures adorning black feather boas, and tight leather skinny trousers.



FIGURE 69a *Affliction* logo, designer unknown, 2012.
(left) (Photographed by the author).

FIGURE 69b *Affliction* apparel, designer unknown, 2012.
(above) (Affliction clothing [sa]).



FIGURE | **70a** (far left)

Black xs L'Excès perfume packaging, designer unknown, 2014.

(Paco Rabanne: Fragrances: Black xs 2014).

FIGURE | **70b** (left)

Black xs L'Aphrodisiaque perfume packaging, designer unknown, 2014.

(Paco Rabanne: Fragrances: Black xs 2014).

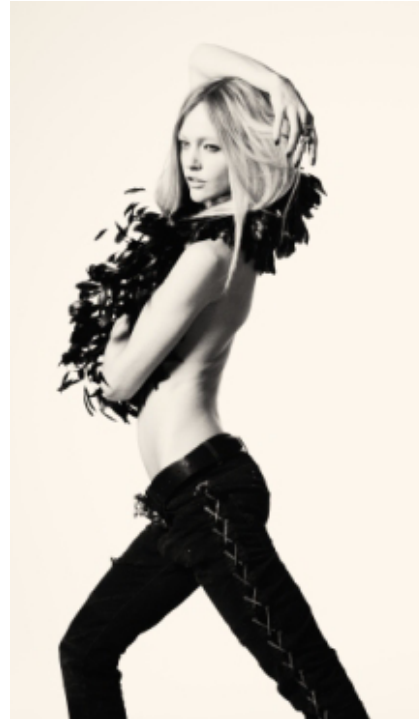


FIGURE | 70c

Montage of imagery used for the *Black xs* advertising campaign, designer unknown, 2014.
(Paco Rabanne: Fragrances: Black xs 2014).

with sharp and ripped visual textures juxtaposed with the logo mark, *Fraktur's* particularly harsh, spiked and hooked features connotation pain, suffering and perhaps (social) entrapment, and compound the overall ethos of a dangerous lifestyle. In the *Black xs* example, it is most likely that in conjunction with iconography such as the rose and spiked collar, *Fraktur's* form connotes a kind of sexual or forbidden 'pain'.

The album art (Figure 71) for '*Numb*' (2003) by American rock-n-roll band *Linkin Park*, is another particularly useful example here. On the one hand, it is clear that the metaphorical properties of the pointed vertices of *Fraktur's* letterforms are invoked. It is possible to suggest that the designer selected *Fraktur* since its letterforms appear to mimic the shape of the thorny logo mark. We might therefore say that since the typeface 'looks thorny', it takes on the conceptual properties of a thorn. On the other hand, a symbolic aspect is simultaneously at play. Typically, rock bands such as *Linkin Park* are positioned, in visual terms, in much the same way as hip-hop artists. As societal underdogs who have been rejected by society in some way, they are branded as hardened, non-conformists who use their lyrics as a cultural voice against social and political injustice. It follows that their visual identities might evoke a similar ethos. Therefore, the designer may have intended to invoke symbolism that is endemic of concepts such as pain, aggression or suffocation. In these examples, typeface is exceptionally powerful, both symbolically *and* experientially since both invite similar interpretation.

In the above examples, the ideology of the 'disruptive subculture' is commoditised (as opposed to Nazism) and infused into a mainstream culture in iconic forms such as *Fraktur*, where its initially shocking stylistic innovations are softened and made palatable for a consumer market (Hebdige 1973:93-94; Herbst 2005:15). Although *Fraktur* is understood as



FIGURE | 71 Promotional artwork for *Linkin Park*, designer unknown, [sa].

controversial, the reasons *why* it is are less important for a capitalist market. Hebdige (1973:93) explains that in this way, icons enter a process of recuperation where the ‘fractured order’, occasioned by the revolting icon, is ‘returned’ (as a spectacle), as *part of* capitalistic culture. Recuperation, as a form of graphic resignification, is useful in communication design since designers begin to cultivate additional layers of meaning or new myths in visual icons.

In the process of resignifying *Fraktur’s* myth, the typeface’s cultural meaning is inevitably ‘emptied’, where it becomes a viable symbol in mainstream design. That is, through continuous appropriation and resignification, *Fraktur’s* meaning becomes somewhat ambiguous to allow for ‘palatable’ interpretation. For example, *Fraktur* is implemented as the primary visual identity of the visual rollout for a 2005 advertising campaign for *Reebok*. The campaign name ‘*I am what I am*’ is set in *Fraktur* (Figure 72) and the campaign manifesto (Reebok – I AM campaign 2005) suggests that by showcasing several celebrities and their idiosyncrasies, the campaign seeks to ‘empower youth to accept their individuality’. Therefore, in this example, the concept of ‘rebellion’ is even *further* softened; a sort of disarming of more extreme conceptions surrounding the taboo. In a capitalist environment, where standardisation is prevalent, *Fraktur* becomes a symbol for something much less transgressive. It is possible



FIGURE | 72

Selected imagery from the *I AM* Reebok campaign, DBL Films, 2005. (Reebok - I AM 2005).

to suggest that in this example, the typeface is a symbol for ‘assertiveness’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘individuality’ (as opposed to ‘rebellion’, ‘taboo’ and ‘exclusion’) and thereby positions the brand (to a degree) as a ‘cultural activist’ (as opposed to revolutionist). It is probable that in softening *Fraktur’s* myth even further, massive corporate advertising campaigns such as *Reeboks’* also borrow from connotation that has been naturalised through the typeface’s appropriation in hip-hop culture.

5.2.4 | *Fraktur as a resource for disruptive reflexivity*

As pointed out earlier, Heller (1994:44), Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:57) and Shaw (1998:80) argue that *Fraktur* is seldom used in current German design since the abuses of National Socialism are too recent in German memory. These authors suggest that the historical connotations endemic to *Fraktur* are fixed imprints of popular culture. Schwemer-Scheddin (1998:57) argues that in an attempt at excluding fascist symbols, many Germans regard the use of *Fraktur* as inappropriate. I have, however, also pointed out that despite the authors’ steadfast assertions, *Fraktur* is indeed implemented in a number of German contexts.

It is precisely because the use of *Fraktur* is considered controversial that, for niche markets, it is appropriated in yet another way. Here I refer to the implementation of *Fraktur* as a rich source for ironic and disruptive resignification. That is, for German and other cultures that are largely aware of *Fraktur’s* complex ideological narrative, the typeface is used in ironic and disruptive ways. It is perhaps inevitable that in post-World War II German design, *Fraktur* is frequently situated in a process of redesign, where designers attempt to destabilise

its Nazi myth by appropriating and satirising the icon in order to subvert entrenched notions of brutality and death associated with German visual culture of the 1930s.

As previously mentioned, *Fraktur* was implemented as a symbol of rebellion against classism and racial inequality in the 1960s as part of underground hip-hop culture (Blanchard 1999:[sp]). It is possible to argue that in this particular context, *Fraktur’s* myth is resignified to such an extent that it is, in actuality, subverted to mean quite the opposite of its Nazi symbolism. In this context, the use of *Fraktur* is also ironic considering the typeface’s ‘Aryan’ roots.

Irony is indeed a frequent source of reflexivity in design practice owing to its particularly potent communicative effect in destabilising or altering a reference. (Anolli, Infantino & Rita Ciceri 2001:141). *Fraktur: Mon Amour* (2008), compiled by Schalansky, cites 137 excellent design examples of irony as a reflexive tool. The book is essentially a catalogue of *Fraktur* or closely derivative types. With the exception of the foreword, conclusion and references, each page is dedicated to a different designer and showcases a well-crafted derivative of *Fraktur*, designed using only pink and black inks (Figures 73a-d).

When I first examined the book, it seemed that the use of pink, along with a ‘romantic’ suggestion of the French title (*Fraktur*, my love), serves as a deliberate attempt at severing ties with Nazi symbolism; emptying *Fraktur* of its historical myth. One interpretation may be that the *Fraktur* catalogue is intended as a *Fraktur* simulacrum. Following this reading it would appear that the *Fraktur* derivatives are artificial maps or copies of the original typeface where referential ties to the historical origin are liquidated. While it is indeed possible that the designs are intended as simulacra, further examination of the book reveals that

Schalansky's (2008:11, 19) foreword actually highlights *Fraktur's* controversial history: "... *Fraktur* appear[s] to have long been buried under historical rumor" and "*Fraktur* drifts mysteriously, with one foot in the grave through our typographic everyday life ...".

Since references to Nazism are intentionally highlighted here, it is therefore more likely that the rhetoric of irony is at play. By appearing to disguise *Fraktur's* Nazi myth, the designers intentionally stress it and then present an alternative. The reference to the myth is logical since *Fraktur* (and other Nazi imagery) is recognisable to a particular audience. Therefore the design appears credible or logical. However, since the logic is subverted, it appears humorous and therefore clever. It is clear that these German designers (and their intended audiences) are acutely aware of *Fraktur's* historical connotations, and deliberately attempt to reshape meaning through reflexive processes.

As an icon, *Fraktur* comes to bear a rich series of varied associations for a large audience, over a period of time (Kemp 2012:3). In almost a snowball effect, layers of divergent connotation become embodied by *Fraktur's* letterforms. This means that *Fraktur* is subject to a multitude of adapted associations since its mythic connotation is, and will continue to be, resignified in contemporary design contexts (Barthes 1972:117; Scott & Tomaselli 2009:13).

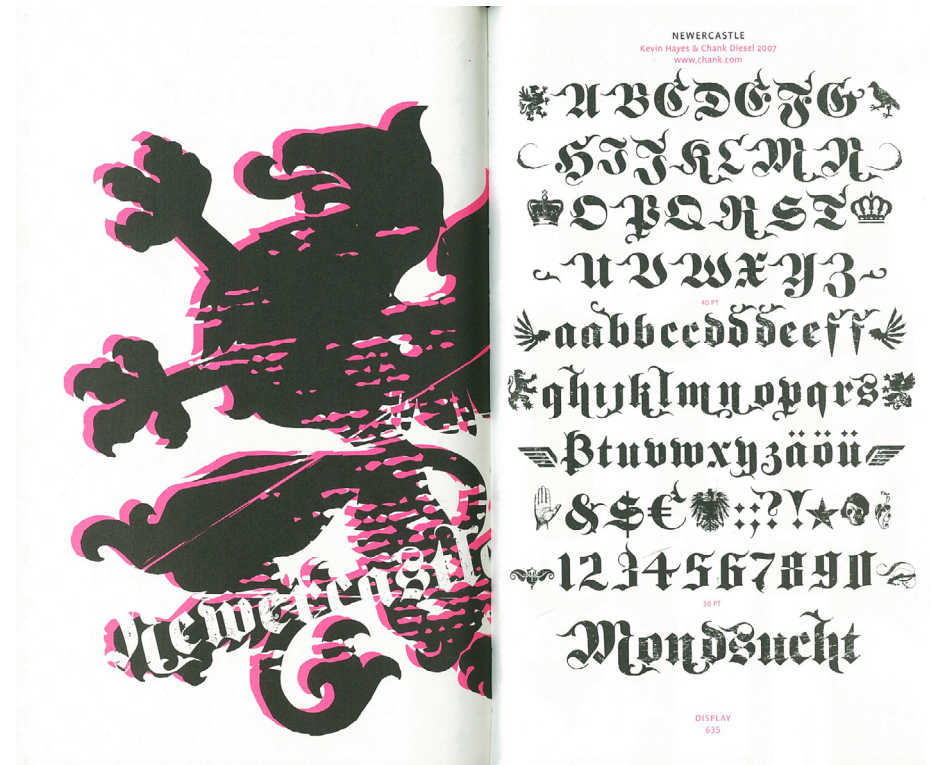


FIGURE 73a *Newer Castle* type showcase, for *Fraktur: Mon Amour*, designed by Kevin Hayes and Chank Diesel, 2007. (Schalansky 2008:635).

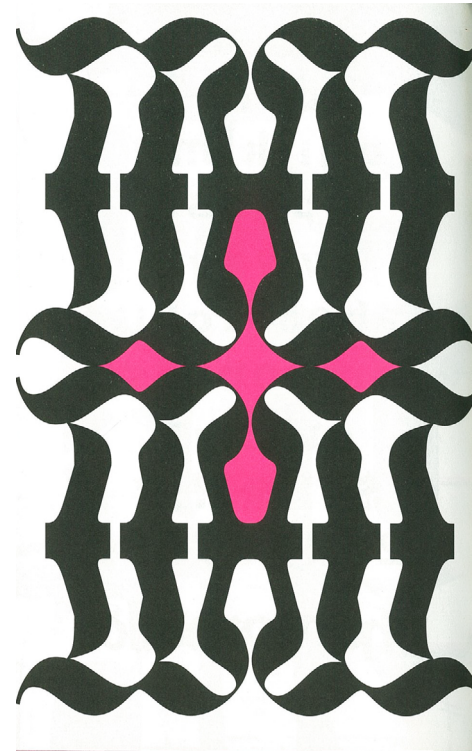
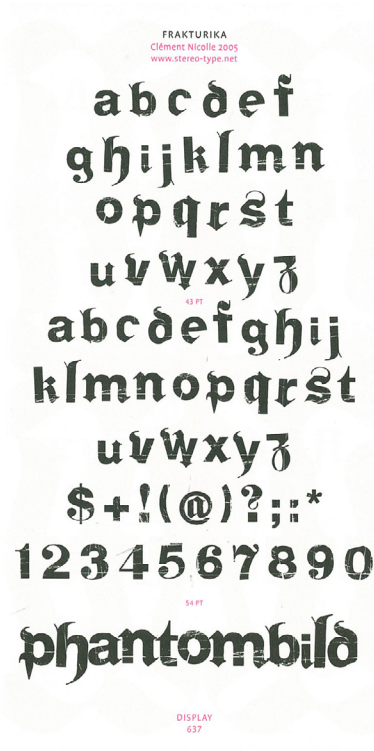


FIGURE 73b *Frakturika* type showcase, for *Fraktur: Mon Amour*, designed by Clément Nicolle, 2005. (left) (Schalansky 2008:637).

FIGURE 73c *Fraktendon* type and pattern showcase, for *Fraktur: Mon Amour*, designed by Lars Harmsen and Boris Kahl, 2002. (above) (Schalansky 2008:639).

5.2.5 | *Speculations as to inappropriate uses of Fraktur*

In the examples above, I analysed and discussed several effective or arguably ‘appropriate’ instances where a particular connotation, encoded in *Fraktur*’s letterforms, is emphasised. The difficulty in negotiating the communicative complexity of type is that in certain instances, the ‘emphasis’ of a particular meaning over others that are also present (although perhaps less explicit) may be ‘inappropriate’ for a specific context. For example, the symbolic significance of a type icon may be at odds with its experiential expression. Here I mean that a symbiotic accord between the typeface’s iconic value and its experiential quality is not always present.

The logotype for *Läckerli Huus* (Figure 74) is a notable example. *Läckerli Huus* is a confectionery and biscuit boutique that was founded in 1903 in Basel, Germany. Owing to a significant gain in popularity, the confectionary range is now exported to England, the United States, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. It is possible to suggest that in the logo, *Fraktur* is intended to highlight the company’s long established heritage, especially since *Läckerli Huus* is positioned in an international marketplace. But it is also possible to suggest that for a confectionary product, at face value, the sharp vertices of *Fraktur* are problematic, since they appear to contradict the softer and saccharine nature of a ‘sweet’ product. It is therefore possible that the metaphorical or intuitive associations drawn from *Fraktur*’s form may be misaligned with the intended rhetoric.

It is also worth noting that, following Barthes’ (1972:112) suggestion that icons are globally accessible, the probability of misinterpretation is compounded by the brand’s international reach. It is possible that initially, the company served only local markets, however, since

the intended audience has grown, the logo design is now subject to multiple interpretations, where a cultural concept such as ‘heritage’ may be overlooked *in lieu* of a more experiential interpretation. It should be stressed, however, that although the use of *Fraktur* is, in my opinion, ‘formally’ inappropriate, its symbolic connotation is arguably appropriate. Therefore, although *Fraktur*’s form is an unusual choice from a formal perspective, its implementation in this example is not necessarily problematic on the whole.

On the other hand, in contexts where a designer intends experiential communication as a communicative strategy, discordant symbolic associations may be simultaneously evident. In the logotype for the *Butcherknife Brewing Company* (Figure 75) for example, it is possible to argue that the metaphorical properties of the ‘f’ of *Fraktur* are invoked where the ‘f’ mimics the form of a butcher’s meat cleaver. It is possible that an older German or Jewish audience may view the logotype as insensitive, owing to a visual link between the Nazi typeface and butchery. It is nonetheless probable that since the brewery is located in Colorado, United States, *Fraktur*’s cultural relevance is outside the average American’s frame-of-reference and therefore its experiential quality may be the expected reading. Following this interpretation, it is possible to argue then that the relative ‘weight’ of different associations influences its propriety. If the intended audience is unlikely to read the typeface’s symbolic baggage, it is probable that it is perceived mainly experientially. Actually, the issue is more pragmatic than ethical, since in instances such as this, where a German audience is not necessarily the intended audience; the designer needs to consider who they can afford to ‘offend’. I maintain however, that if designers employ an experiential strategy, they should be aware of the presence of an icon’s symbolic capacity and whether it will have an impact of the intended audience’s perception.



FIGURE | 74 (above left)

Lächerli Huus store signage, designer unknown, [sa].
(Courtesy of Keystone 2012).

Butcherknife
BREWING COMPANY

FIGURE | 75 (left)

Proposed logo refinement for *Butcherknife Brewing Company*, designed
by Andrea Butler, 2013.
(Butler 2013:[sp], retraced by the author 2015).

As pointed out in Chapter One, I have also found that the choice of typeface is often subject to whim, where it appears any form of communicative strategy is absent. Owing to its ornamental ‘novelty’, *Fraktur* is particularly susceptible to ‘novel’ applications in this regard. The use of *Fraktur* in the logo for the *Family Dentist*¹⁰⁶ (Figure 76) is a suitable example here. The website for the *Family Dentist* (Our Story [sa]) establishes the practice’s distinctly personal and friendly tone, which suggests that the company ‘cares’ about the welfare of their patients:

Taking the time to care is something that we take very seriously at our practice ... Overcoming your fears and anxieties can be done in a calm and pleasant manner ... We, at The Family Dentist, look forward to welcoming you to be part of our growing family.

Following their brand positioning, it is possible to argue that the rhetoric of *Fraktur* is unconsidered since it clearly misaligns with the ethos of a ‘family’ dentist. Moreover, the sharpness of *Fraktur*’s letterforms is more evocative of the ‘pain’ of going to the dentist, rather than the ‘calm’ experience that is purportedly offered. In addition, since the practice is clearly newly established, it is doubtful whether the designer sought to highlight brand heritage (especially considering the absence of any other heritage iconography). From these readings, it is possible that an (unfortunate) association may be drawn between an icon of death or ‘pain’ and the practice of dentistry. Although it is unlikely that this effect was intentional (since it is likely that the typeface was selected because of its decorative and ‘eye-catching’ form), by



FIGURE 76 *Family Dentist* logo, designer unknown, [sa].
(Photographed and retraced by the author 2014).

¹⁰⁶ In 2015, I redesigned the brand identity for the *Family Dentist* in order to demonstrate the efficacy of an appropriate typeface. The newly designed identity is available at <http://www.thefamilydentist.co.za/>

5.3 | Toward a rhetorical perspective on type

ignoring the interplay of symbolic and experiential associations embodied in the typeface the designer risks miscommunication and renders the design possibly inappropriate. In cases such as this, where type is applied unintentionally, the design becomes a pastiche reputed as pejorative and shallow (Heller 2006:12). In searching for an interesting, ‘visually appealing’ style, the designer misappropriates the communicative agenda of the letterform by introducing an element of arbitrariness to the work (Trummel 1988:127; Bruinsma (2004:[sp])).

The intention of the above analyses is not to criticise the use of *Fraktur*. Rather, I have attempted to highlight my previous assertion that the rhetorical complexity of the letterform is often overlooked or even ignored in design practice. I argued that when a typeface is selected, designers often tend toward one of the outlined modes of type selection over the other. As pointed out in Chapter Two, this seems to have been compounded by traditional perceptions regarding the function of letterforms. On the one hand, if letterforms are deemed too elaborate, decorative or fussy, designers tend to choose familiar and safe typefaces because they appear to be ‘neutral’ and inherently good. On the other hand, typefaces are often subject to extreme experimentation where obliterating the structural limitations of the typeface for the sake of novelty or experimentation is the designer’s only concern.

I maintain that letterforms are complex rhetorical structures since they can convey different meanings, to different audiences at different times. I have shown that in the process of articulating letterform communication, designers either consciously or unintentionally evoke symbolic and experiential meaning (Serafini & Clausen 2012:[sp]). Designers need to be aware that multiple, concurrent interpretations of a letterform can exist (Barnbrook 1993:128; Bierut 2007:165-166). Bruinsma (2004:[sp]) agrees and extends that the power of typographic rhetoric lies in the understanding of *all* its communicative facets. For designers, Bruinsma’s assertion necessitates not only a thorough understanding of both experiential *and* iconic connotation, but also how they are connected. In gaining a more holistic understanding, designers can limit the field of association so that their choice of typeface is directed toward a *specific* audience

(Tyler 1992:29; Bruinsma 2000:8; Lupton 2012:12). The strategic structuring of a rhetorical narrative of type directs the audience through a systematic sequence of corroborating signs, which cultivates a preferred reading (Atzmon 2008:14). Designers essentially translate structures of meaning in a way that makes it accessible to others (Bruinsma 2004:[sp]). Barthes (1977:156) refers to this as the practice of ‘anchorage’. He explains that the rhetorician (or in this case, designer) makes *fixed* a ‘floating chain’ of polysemous signs, in order to avoid the ‘terror of uncertain sign’. He extends that the rhetorician “helps me to choose *the correct level of perception*, permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding” (Barthes 1977:156).

If the rhetorical intricacies of type are approached with sensitivity and greater awareness, designers may access an expansive vocabulary of visual connotation that is ripe for referencing (Bruinsma 2006:[sp]). In understanding and synthesising inter-communicative components, designers can be more deliberate in selecting and applying letterforms that speak in a particular voice and therefore advance and *direct* association (Buchanan 1989:101; 2001:191; Ma 2008:37). That is, by acknowledging and understanding the rhetorical complexity of letterforms – that particular letterforms embody interconnected and multi-layered connotation – a designer can be more considered in reshaping meaning through rhetorical processes. In this way, the letterform becomes a powerful narrative tool at the disposal of the designer (Atzmon [sa]:2).

In the examples above, I have discussed several possible motives for the selection and application of *Fraktur* and I highlighted the typeface as a rich and complex site of dialectic rhetorical meaning. I have shown that letterforms are organised in narrative structures, constructed of layered and interconnected meanings (Atzmon 2008:13). Whether these meanings are strategically or less intentionally invoked – where the choice of typeface either

seems a matter of superficial styling or if the choice of type is seemingly more intuitive – the moment a typeface is chosen and applied, the process of rhetorical infiltration begins (Bonsiepe in Kinross 1985:18; Buchanan 2001:194). Whether through the stylistic accentuation of a single serif or considering its role as a marker of popular culture, the letterform communicates to the reader before even one word is read (Fawcett-Tang 2007:14).

6.1 | Summary of chapters

In Chapter One, I suggested several reasons that occasion the need for this study. I demonstrated that designers tend to prefer a particular method of type selection (if indeed any) over another and that an incomplete understanding of the interconnected communicative aspects of type may lead to inappropriate or insensitive type applications. In addition, I provided a background and possible causes for inappropriate type selection and application, and thereby illuminated a research gap as the focus and research aim of this study – that is, an exploration of the complex interrelationship between connotation of experiential and iconic letterforms in the selection and application of type. In addition, this chapter also established explicit research objectives and outlined research methods, theoretical frameworks and relevant literature that, after thorough investigation, would help ground pertinent arguments of the study.

Chapter Two provided a historical overview of selected typographic movements from Victorian typography onward. The aim was to highlight key changing and usually opposing, perceived ideological functions of the letterform and illustrate how the broader ethos of each movement manifests visually. By means of this, I attempted to illustrate dogmatic attitudes concerning the ‘correct’ use of type in current design practice. Moreover, I illustrated that most design movements downplay or ignore the complex communicative nature of type as both a linguistic and non-linguistic sign.

In Chapter Three, I investigated the first of the two default modes of type selection – type as experiential form. I first established that despite the perceived function of type in traditional typographic practice, letterforms are indeed communicative as non-linguistic signs. I argued that the distinctive features of letterforms are visual cues that evoke specific meaning, either



Chapter Six

Conclusion

metaphorically or intuitively. I also explored key tenets of conceptual metaphor theory as well as synaesthesia, phonology and phenomenology as they relate to perceptual or visceral letterform connotation. I disentangled each as a sub-category of experiential type and delineated their theoretical focus on metaphorical and visceral type connotation respectively. The principal aim of Chapter Three was to make a theoretically sound argument for selecting and applying type based on its experiential properties.

In Chapter Four, I outlined the second of the two default modes of type selection – type as iconic form. Here, I cited authors who argue that type icons are symbolic, mythic narrative structures. I situated the iconic typeface as a symbolic structure of popular culture where, over time, symbolic connotation or myth is naturalised and falls subject to appropriation. I argued that typefaces can exist as historical imprints that depict the way political and sociological aspects of culture are navigated at a particular time. I analysed several contemporary designs that appropriate iconic typefaces with the aim of illustrating how they encapsulate a wellspring of cultural narratives that are resignified or repurposed in current design contexts. Moreover, I explored alternative theories that postulate how iconic structures, as simulacra and accessible type icons – come to embody meaning in alternative ways.

I presented the penultimate chapter as a rhetorical perspective on type communication. In illustrating several perspectives on visual rhetoric in design practice, I positioned visual rhetoric as an analytical framework for considering the communicative complexity of letterform communication. I conducted a thorough case study analysis of *Fraktur* and illustrated how a typeface can communicate at once experientially and symbolically. Moreover, I investigated many examples that reveal how the typeface's meaning develops

and is repurposed in an array of communicative design contexts (both appropriate and less so). I suggested that, through a rhetorical perspective, designers could become aware of the communicative intricacies and tensions that can exist in the letterform and therefore be more strategic and intentional in the selection and application of type.

6.2 | Contributions of the study

In this study I have argued that generally, within or outside the auspices of design, the communicative complexity of letterforms is under considered (van Leeuwen 2005:145). In Chapter One, I argued that typefaces are frequently selected for either formal or symbolic reasons. I maintain that when these approaches are taken in isolation, type is often used in inappropriate communicative contexts. For example, an overemphasis on a letterform's symbolic context can lead to a miscommunication if its formal connotation is read instead.

Heller (2001:x) argues that inappropriate examples of type may be as a result of design education that tends to neglect typographic history. He explains that without a solid historical grounding, designers struggle to navigate type trends and styles and their underpinning ideologies. Therefore, by means of an historical typographic analysis, I pinpointed a legacy of dialectic approaches to type application and how these approaches greatly influence the selection and application of type in current design practice. I essentially argued that the above-mentioned limited approaches to selecting and applying type stem from the historical legacy regarding several antithetical perceptions as to the *proper function* of the letterform.

From this observation, I have proposed a more unified approach to selecting and applying type. In an attempt to synthesise various positions and theories on the communicative nature of letterforms, I highlighted several interconnected communicative intricacies of letterform communication. I have thus argued for a more holistic perspective on type communication and that visual rhetorical theory can provide such a perspective. Essentially, the aim of this study is to contribute to strategic discussion regarding the selection and application of appropriate type. I hope that by illuminating the rhetorical nature of the 'communicative decision', this study might encourage more intentional implementation of the letterform in communication design.

It is also worthwhile to highlight a smaller, yet notable contribution to discourse on letterform communication, outlined in the second half of Chapter Three since it may lead to more in-depth future research. Although several theorists speak of metaphorical letterform perception, I have not come across any research that applies sound-image symbolism to the type image (type as a non-linguistic sign) as an instinctual approach to letterform perception. Van Leeuwen (2005:145) confirms this and explains that while typefaces are often selected based on their formal appearance, little theoretically sound research exists that attempts to formalise an apparently 'instinctual' method of selection and application. In this study, I addressed the instinctual perception of letterforms as a sub-category of experiential form. I briefly investigated how synaesthesia may be seen as a form of visceral or intuitive perception of the letterform.

6.3 | Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

Although, throughout the study, I make use of selected visual examples to illustrate key theoretical conceptions regarding iconic type, owing to the scope and length of the study, I am unable to conduct additional visual analyses of alternative iconic typefaces. Therefore, additional studies that further investigate the communicative complexity of other iconic typefaces (such as *Helvetica*, *Comic Sans*, *Futura*, *Papyrus*, *Monotype Corsiva* and so on) might further validate theoretical inquiry into and strategic practical engagement with letterform communication.

In addition, since this study is an enquiry into the communicative complexity of letterforms specifically, I have not engaged with any other kinds of design media. Moreover, while I briefly touch on ‘external’ elements – such as the typographic grid and type layout in Chapter Two – in-depth discussion surrounding typographic *parerga* (such as colour and layout) falls outside the aim and length constraints of this study. Therefore in future studies, it might prove worthwhile to investigate possible implications that *parerga* may have on the communicative complexity of typography, and indeed the letterform in particular.

In addition, although I have presented two default modes of type selection as derived from my own observations as a designer and design lecturer, other analytical frameworks may be equally useful in addressing or describing type selection strategies. Moreover, other insights might yield alternative ways in which letterforms communicate. For example, although I engage primarily with the iconic typeface (in Chapter Four), all typefaces are indeed culturally embodied and therefore communicate symbolically. Therefore, another area of research might unfold intercultural communication that can arise when an internationally recognised typeface is interpreted in local contexts.

Also, my personal observations throughout this study suggest a ready-to-hand approach for investigating letterform communication. While I maintain that a ready-to-hand approach is more appropriate to a qualitative study such as mine, since it considers case and context specific examples, present-at-hand or ‘objective classification’ systems are indeed helpful as practical and more immediate type classifications. These systems are useful in instigating debate and engagement with more qualitative types of research. It is only after engaging with van Leeuwen’s distinctive features analysis, for instance, that I realised the potential for a more qualitative framework.

Owing to the focus of my study, I have emphasised letterform interpretation primarily from a designer’s perspective. While I have suggested that designers should be mindful of audience perception as it pertains to letterform communication (I briefly mentioned possible external, cultural influences on the preferred reading of letterform communication), future studies might expand on and consider audience perception in greater detail. Jones (2011:374) suggests that as agents of culture, designers should acknowledge the active role that the audience plays, not only in decoding, but also in encoding visual rhetoric. A study that indeed focuses on how audience interpretation imparts additional layers of communication on the letterform might also address areas of design ethics that criticise the deceptive potential of rhetoric with regard to type.

6.4 | Concluding remarks

Finally, as previously stated, my study only briefly investigates the relationship between synaesthesia and the letterform. A future study might conduct in-depth ‘quantitative’ experiments and collate findings – similar to the Kiki and Bouba effect – that further validate, in scientific detail, the relationship between letterforms and sound in particular, as a form of visceral response to letterforms. Moreover, since I have articulated that a phenomenological investigation considers sensual or visceral perception, further studies might consider the relationship between type and senses other than sight and sound.

Whether implemented as visual candy, or in an effort to evade harsh criticism, it is clear that many designers often overlook the communicative potential of the letterform. Essentially, the letterform is perceived as at once an eye-sore and invisible. These type ‘controversies’ or communicative dilemmas that I frequently encounter, both as an Information Design lecturer at the University of Pretoria and graphic designer, indicate a great need for furthering discourse in this field. This is the reason that I have carefully investigated the communicative aspects of the letterform in this study.

In a current climate of Postmodern appropriation that affords easy access to an array of typefaces and typeface design programmes, I have found that the selection and application of type has, to a large degree, fallen slave to caprice and whim. Type is decoratively applied to almost any artefact, from clothing, to décor and furnishings, upholstery, baggage, packaging, posters, pamphlets, directional signage and so on. Even in design contexts, designers select and apply type for its decorative quality and are often heavily criticised for this. I have found that harsh criticisms deter designers from using more expressive typefaces and encourage a stronghold of safer typographic standards (Kuang 2009:[sp]). Interface and print design alike are saturated with exceptionally clean, inexpressive typefaces that exhibit hardly noticeable stylistic differences. With a renewed interest in ‘clean’, functional design, I am often disheartened by a kind of ‘poverty’ or monotonous standardisation with regard to the type’s use in the design landscape.

Engaging experiences with forms of communication cannot occur when the ultimate goal of communication is to make the medium invisible in order to obstruct distraction and embellishment (Botha 2011:96). In contrast to popular design perceptions of type neutrality,

it is perhaps possible to suggest that owing to their abstract nature, letterforms are of the most eloquent objects of communication because they speak in quieter, more subtle tones (Stöckl [sa]:77). As Richard Hendel (in Emanuel 2010:100) explains:

When I read a manuscript I start to look in the back of my mind for typographic allusions or relations. I ask myself automatically, what are the types that might do justice to this book? Is there a type that comes from the same time ... or a type from the same place ... or one that embodies a similar intellectual attitude ... Most typographic illusions are, of course, all but invisible to the average reader. But I choose to believe that these allusions matter, even to readers who don't see them.

Hendel's insight reveals that even when rendering type invisible it is not always as deliberate an act as it was for the modernists; it is possible to argue that even the layman (to whom type is most often viewed in the linguistic sense; as a tool for language), in the very act of 'choosing' a typeface, is to some degree aware of its communicative potential.

To this end, I maintain that letterforms are powerfully communicative non-linguistic structures in their own right. With such powerfully communicative media, designers are tasked with the role of director where, in a climate of visual saturation that forces visual communication into a constant state of competition, it becomes ever more important for the designer to intentionally discern and internalise the communicative complexity of their design media. My own observations, for example, have changed considerably throughout the process of completing this study and as I have engaged with alternative readings and perceptions with regard to letterform communication. For example, I initially viewed and positioned *Fraktur*, quite insistently, as a heavily symbolic Nazi icon. After considering its

use in various other design contexts, however, I began to acknowledge the complex nature of its symbolism. Therefore, I believe that a rhetorical perspective on letterform communication is useful since it is wide enough to include various communicative aspects that designers need to consider when they communicate with type. Type speaks in a variety of voices and I contend that acknowledging, understanding and internalising the interplay of these voices fosters strategic, sensitive and intelligent design.

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