



Why Fonts Matter

By Sarah Hyndman





Font Fortunes

Roll up, roll up, what does your choice of font reveal about your personality?

Instructions: choose the typeface you feel most drawn to from this selection, then turn to pages 142-143 to read your own Font Fortunes personality analysis.



Pick Me

Miracle Font

Choice #1



Pick Me

Miracle Font

Choice #2



Pick Me

Miracle Font

Choice #3



Pick Me

Miracle Font

Choice #4



Pick Me

Miracle Font

Choice #5

Font Fortunes personality analysis

Read the personality analysis that matches the Font Fortunes typeface you chose at the start of the book.



You have traditional values and can be a bit of a perfectionist at times.

You prefer an intellectual or academic conversation over a display of emotions. Your style is of quiet refinement and you are the opposite of ostentatious. You are seen as wise and a little conventional, but you are forward-thinking and not old-fashioned.

You read a great deal and enjoy a well-made cup of tea.

Your friends trust you to give well-informed and considered opinions, and that if you don't know the answer you'll just say so (rather than making something up).

Secret guilty pleasure: enjoying the smell of quality when you unwrap something new like a wallet, handbag or a freshly printed book.

Baskerville is a Transitional Serif typeface which was designed by John Baskerville in Birmingham, England in the 1750s.



You are practical and versatile, and able to turn your hand to many things. You have a pragmatic and calm approach, which may give the impression that you are conventional and not a risk-taker.

You like to take a neutral viewpoint and weigh up a situation before voicing a well-considered opinion. You will often find yourself as the mediator in a heated situation.

You are a minimalist at heart and feel happiest living in an uncluttered environment, ideally with views that stretch all the way to the horizon.

Secret guilty pleasure: dressing up for a stylish event, or an outlandish fancy dress party. You will give the impression that you need to be coerced into this, but secretly you really enjoy it.

Helvetica is a neo-Grotesque Sans Serif. It was created by Max Miedinger and colleagues in 1957.



You come across as poised and thoughtful and this sometimes gives you an air of importance. However, this outward appearance of confidence hides your more reserved personality. You are a people watcher but, rather than doing this from the shadows, you are happy to stand in the middle of the room and to be seen.

You always know exactly how to dress for a situation, whether it is the glamour of a party or a casual weekend away.

You think it is the small, finishing touches that reveal the most about a person.

Secret guilty pleasure: doing something indulgent and messy like eating chocolate in the bath or wearing flip flops in the mud.

Didot is a Modern (or Didone) typeface. It is based on typefaces created by Firmin and Pierre Didot in Paris in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.



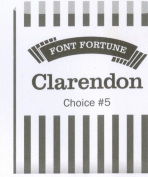
You are a traditionalist who likes to think of yourself as being modern.

You are articulate and you use the correct spelling and grammar in emails, texts and tweets – no abbreviations or acronyms from you. But this does not mean you are overly formal, far from it in fact. Your friends see you as an everyman (or woman), a regular Joe, one of the gang.

You have a cheerful, outgoing demeanour with a slightly idiosyncratic manner (which can occasionally frustrate those closest to you).

You are practical and you always know what to do in a situation, so you will often be the person people turn to when they have a problem or need advice.

Secret guilty pleasure: swearing. Gill Sans is a Humanist Sans Serif typeface designed by Eric Gill in England in the 1920s.



You have that quiet, assured confidence that means you do not have to shout to get attention. You are a natural leader although you do not always choose (or want) to be.

You have both feet firmly on the ground and have a love of the outdoors. You enjoy wide, open spaces and the freedom that comes from walking in the countryside.

You are a practical person and if there's a problem you would prefer to work out how to solve it yourself rather than delegating the task to others.

You are more of a doer than a thinker and all your views are your own.

Secret guilty pleasure: enjoying a nostalgic moment like crying at a sentimental film in the dark.

Clarendon is a Slab Serif typeface that was created by Robert Besley in England in the 1850s.

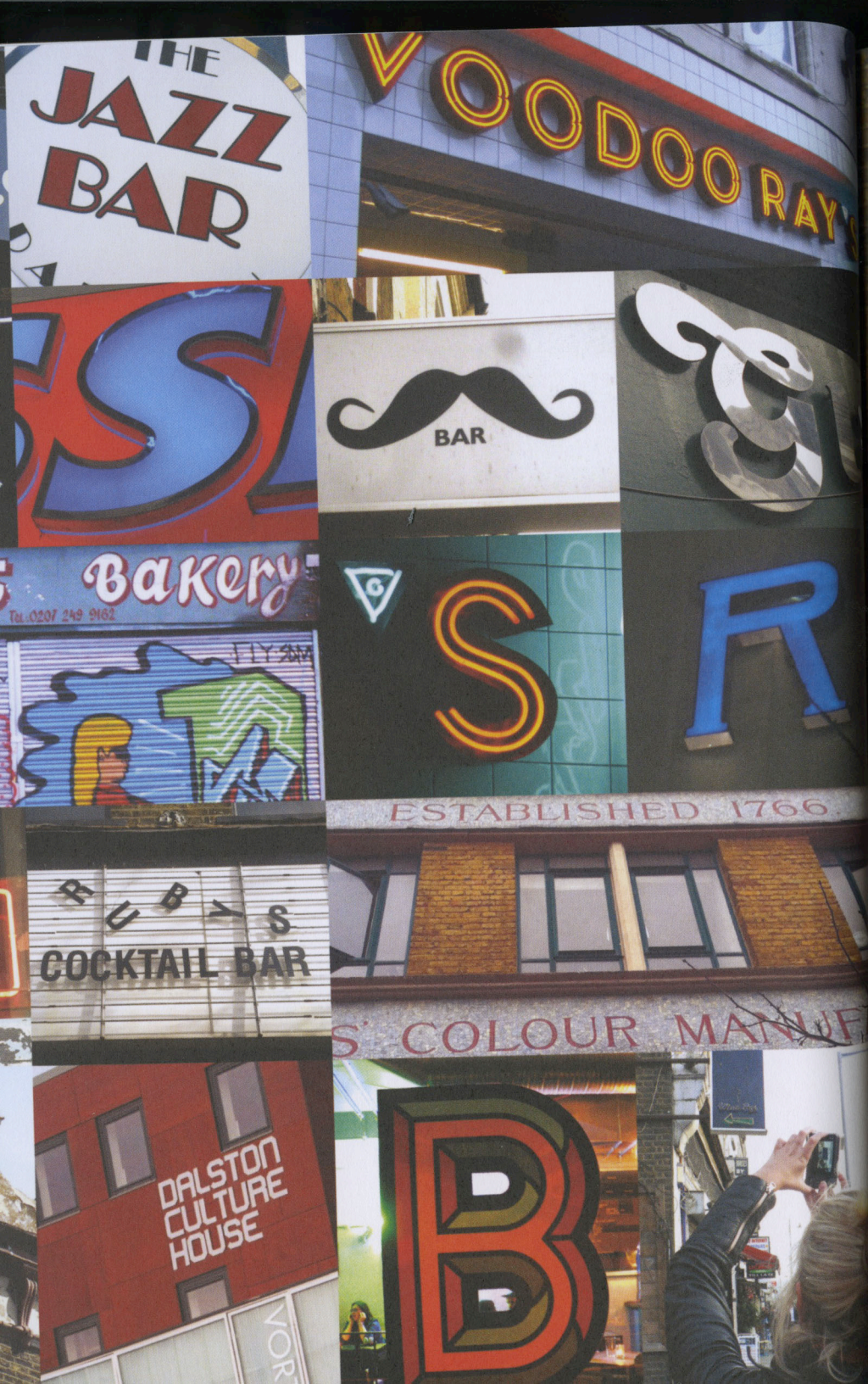
Who is this book for?

Fonts are no longer just for geeks or graphic designers. Thanks to technology and the gadgets we use, more people than ever before are aware of them — from gateway fonts* like *Comic Sans* to the superstar typefaces like *Helvetica* and *Gotham*.

We are all type consumers. Typefaces/fonts play a vital role in our everyday lives. They help us to navigate, to make choices, to shop, they keep us safe and sometimes they play a game of sleight of hand.

In this book you are invited to consider your emotional response to type. Each font or typeface has a personality that influences your interpretation of the words you are reading, by evoking your emotions and setting the scene. You instinctively understand this, but it happens on a subconscious level. Becoming consciously aware of the emotional life of fonts can be entertaining and ultimately give you more control over decisions you make.

*Applying gateway drug theory to typography is to suggest that using a seemingly naive font could open the door to the use of more serious and 'hard core' typefaces.



1

Typefaces, they don't really matter

Justin Webb, BBC Radio 4 Today

Dalston Type Safari

'Mockingbird Tapas' sign painted by Peter Hardwicke / Art Deco 'Jazz Bar' / New York-style 'Voodoo Ray' / Fried chicken shop Flare Serif 'S' / 'Moustache Bar' icon / '70s-style *Candice* 'G' / Vernacular 'Tom's Bakery' / 'Voodoo Ray's' 'S' / Art Deco 'Rio Cinema' 'R' / 'Dalston Superstore' in neon / 'Ruby's' in condensed *Helvetica* / 'Crown and Castle' Grotesque Sans Serif / Geometric 'Dalston Culture House' / Woodblock-inspired 'Birds'

TYPEFACES, THEY DON'T REALLY MATTER?

I was sitting nervously in the BBC Radio 4 *Today* studio very early one Saturday morning trying hard not to think about the 7 million listeners who were apparently tuned in as I gave my first ever live radio interview. Time seemed to slow and my heartbeat got louder as I waited the eternity it seemed to take for the interview to begin. As the moment got closer I started to worry that not only was I losing the ability to speak, but also I could no longer remember anything — not even my name. How was I going to have a conversation about typefaces?

Finally the light saying 'live' went on and the interviewer turned to me and said, 'Typefaces, they don't really matter?'¹ This is a question that I have been asked so many times that I forgot my nerves and found myself taking on the familiar role of 'type advocate' as we chatted about the importance of type in our everyday lives.

Type consumers

We are all type consumers: we all interact with, and consume, a vast array of typefaces every day of our lives and most of the time we do this without being consciously aware of it. Type influences what we read and affects our choices because we all instinctively understand what it is communicating to us, and we have been learning to interpret the references all our lives.

As a graphic designer I actively think about type when I am working, but once I am 'off duty' I become a type consumer. At this point I generally stop paying attention to fonts. Occasionally I will notice one if it stands out for a reason; I might find it particularly pleasing, unexpected, or an inappropriate choice.

I was interested to see how many fonts I consume as I go about my everyday life, so I set myself the challenge of counting how many I encountered over the course of an hour on a Saturday morning.

Phone: check time, emails (2) / Bathroom: toothpaste, shower products, toiletries (7) / Open curtains: road markings, signs, vehicles (3) / Kitchen: coffee, fridge, clock (5) / Breakfast ingredients (7) / Toaster, microwave (3) / Living

room: TV, news, advertisements (14) / Sort through books and magazines, pick a bag up off the floor (7) / Computer (5) / Items on the desk (4) / Open post (9) **Total: 67**

This takes a bit of focus as you quickly forget to notice the fonts and get distracted by the activities. Try this challenge for yourself. How many fonts do you consume in an hour?

Curating fonts

Famous brand logos can often be recognised from the type alone. What you see can be reduced down to just a fragment of the logo and you will still know instantly what the brand is. This is because your brain is a 'pattern-matching machine'. You compare what you look at to things you have seen before and catalogued in your mind. Once a logo has become familiar you no longer even need to read the words to know what they say, because you recognise it by its shape: think about the Coca-Cola™ or Google logos. You do this from an early age, as demonstrated by Anna, aged 4, whose mother Sandra tweeted 'Our daughter Anna says our car is from Boots (the chemist). What is our car?' The answer is on page 21.

We curate the logos we surround ourselves with from the range of brands we use in our everyday rituals. These include toothpaste and shampoo, the objects we select to reflect our personality, like the brands of clothes we wear and expensive lifestyle items like cars. We are 'creatures of habit' says design writer Steven Heller², who observes that it takes a 'diabolically brilliant' marketing plan to entice us to change our brand loyalty. But if a brand alters its typography to a style that no longer feels in keeping with our values we can be acutely aware of the change. In 2010 high street fashion shop Gap scrapped its redesign after just a few days following customer protests that the new logo looked 'cheapy, tacky, ordinary' and returned to the original logo created from the *Spire* typeface.³

The image shows the original Gap logo, which is the word 'GAP' in a tall, condensed, all-caps sans-serif typeface called Spire.

Original design: *Spire*

The image shows a redesigned Gap logo, which is the word 'Gap' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif typeface called Helvetica.

Redesign: *Helvetica bold*



Game: Supermarket Sweep

Congratulations – you’ve won the lottery! To celebrate you’re going to buy all the luxury items in the shop. How long will it take you to find all the luxury products?

Supermarket A

Number of luxury items:

Time taken to find them:

Now turn the page to go to Supermarket B.

Font users

After centuries of having typefaces chosen for us by designers and printers, we now live in a time where design tools are being increasingly democratised and more people than ever before are finding themselves looking down a font menu and deciding which ones to choose.

At a recent event I asked a 12-year-old for her thoughts on the typefaces I had printed out on a table for a game. I was taken aback by how articulately she explained which she would choose for different genres of books. She told me that she would change the font on her Kindle until it ‘felt right’ for each book she read. She preferred *Palatino* for fiction set in the past and a Sans Serif like *Futura* for her factual schoolbooks. The other youngsters in the room said they went through a similar process. When I was a child the typeface was an immutable part of a book because the

designer or printer had already selected it. Since I had no choice I took typefaces for granted. Having a choice has given a generation of readers a new appreciation of type, and selecting a font has become as normal as choosing which t-shirt to wear or which cereal to have for breakfast.

Fonts save you time

Imagine a world with just one typeface. This might be an aesthetically appealing idea if you picture a 1950s shop full of packaging, with type all neatly lined up in a clean, Sans Serif style like *Helvetica*. This is the design of supermarket A (above). However, the reality is that, although this shop might look stylish and relaxing, your shopping trip would take much longer without the complex visual clues typefaces give you. You would have to stop and read the words on every pack to find out



Supermarket B

Number of luxury items:

Time taken to find them:

See page 21 for the answers. It should have taken you considerably less time to find the luxury items in supermarket B where the typefaces give you visual clues.

whether it is a luxury or cheap product, the full fat or healthy option, your favourite brand, the one you would never buy, or your guilty pleasure.

Fonts help you to choose

Typefaces help you to decide who you would trust to do a professional job for you. For example, which of these three lawyers would you hire? (See page 57).

LAWYER **LAWYER** *Lawyer*

(a)

(b)

(c)



**The
Ampersand
Arms**

(d)



*The
Ampersand
Arms*

(e)



**The
Ampersand
Arms**

(f)

When you are in a new town the signs over the doors help you to choose where to eat and drink. Which of the three 'The Ampersand Arms' on the left do you think would suit you and why? (See page 133).

However, signs can occasionally be misleading. For example, I regularly walk past a pub with a sign in an Ornate Script similar to example (e). This is a style you are used to seeing on wine labels and wedding invitations, so you could assume that it is a wine bar or somewhere to go for a quiet, romantic drink. The reality is quite the opposite in fact, as you find yourself in a noisy, beer drinkers' pub with football on the large television screens.

Fonts keep you safe

When driving, you need to know at a glance whether a sign is official and you must react quickly, or



whether it is simply an advert that you can read at your leisure (or choose to ignore). Official road signs fit an established set of visual conventions. They use clear and neutral type which is highly readable, and generally in a Sans Serif style because these have proved in tests to be the most readable from a distance.

The road sign system in Britain was created in the 1960s by Jock Kinnear and Margaret Calvert⁴, who designed the two new typefaces *Transport* and *Motorway* as part of the project. Life-sized signs were made and tested for legibility in an underground car park and in London's Hyde Park. Kinnear and Calvert established that words set in upper and lower case are more legible than those in just upper case, as they have silhouettes that can be distinguished from a distance. This was considered controversial at the time.

LEGIBILITY Legibility

By contrast, the advertising signs that sit alongside the road signs shouting out their messages (above) can easily be distinguished by their decorative and colourful letters, each with their own brand type style, colour and images.



Clearview

Frutiger

Helvetica



Destination: Paris

Art Nouveau, e.g. Arnold Böcklin

Destination: London

Johnston is the official London Transport typeface

DESTINATION: NEW YORK

Geometric Sans Serif e.g. Twentieth Century

Serif to Sans Serif

AB

Serif

AB



AB

Sans serif

Fonts show you the way...

Official directional signs in a visually cluttered and busy airport are generally easy to recognise, even when you are in unfamiliar surroundings or the signs are in a different language. According to design writer Alissa Walker⁵ there are just three typefaces used by around three quarters of the airports in the world: *Clearview*, *Frutiger* and *Helvetica* (shown above). These are chosen for their clarity and legibility and are similar in style to the type found on road signs.

... and tell you where you are

Once you have arrived at your destination, you know immediately if you are in another country from the less familiar style of lettering on the signs and businesses. In Paris, the influences of Art Nouveau can still be widely seen, for example on the Métro signs. The unofficial typeface of London is *Johnston*, which is used across the London transport system. Geometric Sans Serif styles like *Twentieth Century* were popular on signage in New York in the mid 20th century and these inspired Tobias Frere-Jones's *Gotham* typeface, made famous when it was used for Obama's 2008 presidential campaign.



If you were to be parachuted into an unknown location it would be the content and style of the signage that would give you some of the biggest clues to your whereabouts. You can test this out by playing the online game [GeoGuessr.com](https://www.geoguessr.com/),⁶ which transports you to a random location somewhere in the world using Google Street View. The challenge is to see how quickly you can work out where you are.

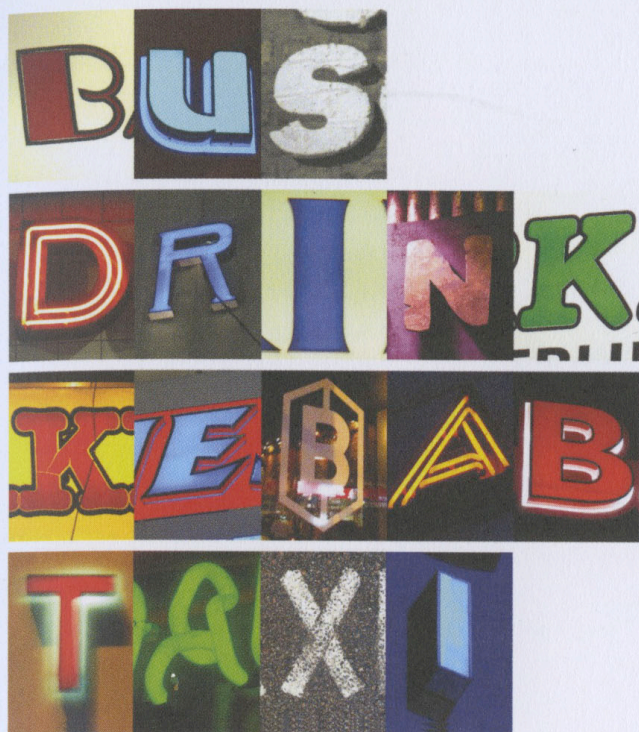
Typographic DNA

The combinations of type found on signage reveal a great deal about a city, town or specific area. They reflect the social, economic and historical development of the area and create their own, unique typographic DNA.

I take people on Type Safaris through Dalston in East London. These are guided walks exploring the signage with a photography challenge to take part in along the way. We sometimes end the tour by going for drinks in a quintessentially 'Dalston-style' bar, which has a chequered lino floor (from its previous life as a furniture shop), a glitter ball and lampshades made from plastic colanders.

Dalston is a vibrant area that has undergone dramatic change since the East London rail line

was extended to the area. The signs along the main thoroughfare, Kingsland Road, reveal layers of history dating back to when it was a London outpost in the 1800s. Signs from the Art Deco cinemas have been preserved alongside the vernacular D.I.Y. signage of the market stalls and the lettering over the shops and restaurants that reflect the different communities that have made the area home over the years. More recent additions are trendy bars and shops, as the area has become popular with artists and students and it is now an established social destination. Venues continue to pop up and vanish, often retaining the signage and the name of their previous incarnations during their fleeting lifespans.



Opposite: Ilfracombe Type Safari by Karina Monger
Left: Dalston Type Safari by Sarah Hyndman

Type Safari challenge

Take up the challenge and create a typographic composition to reflect the area where you live.

- 1 Think of a phrase, quote, memory or lyric that you associate with the area, ideally between 10 and 25 characters long (including spaces).
- 2 Write this down on a piece of paper. Take a pen or pencil with you so you can cross out the letters as you find them.
- 3 Find the individual letters on the signs that make up your phrase, ideally using a camera with a zoom lens so you can isolate each letter.
- 4 Have fun and get creative; try daytime and night-time versions for comparison.
- 5 Combine your photos to spell out your phrase.

What's the difference between legibility and readability?

This is legible but not very readable.

This is legible and much more readable.

Legibility: Can you read the words?

Readability: The choice of typeface, the design and layout can create a more (or less) readable experience.

Answers

Page 16

Anna's family car is a Ford.

Page 18

Supermarket sweep: *There are six luxury products to be found in each supermarket.* Typefaces: *Cooper Black, Edwardian Script, Impact, Helvetica, Franklin Gothic Condensed, Candice.*

Lawyers' typefaces: *Trajan, Stencil, Cinema italic.*

Ampersand pub typefaces: *Engravers' Old English, Flemish Script, Cooper Black.* The Ampersand Arms pub name was suggested by Daniel Smithies via Twitter.

References

1 Sarah Hyndman interviewed by John Humphrys and Justin Webb, 2013, *Radio 4 Today*, typetastingnews.com/2013/09/17/radio-4/.

2 'Food Fight' by Steven Heller, 1999, *AIGA* vol. 17.

3 'Lessons to be learnt from the Gap logo debacle' by Tom Geoghegan, 2010, *BBC News Magazine*.

4 'The road sign as design classic' by Caroline McClatchey, 2011, *BBC News Magazine*.

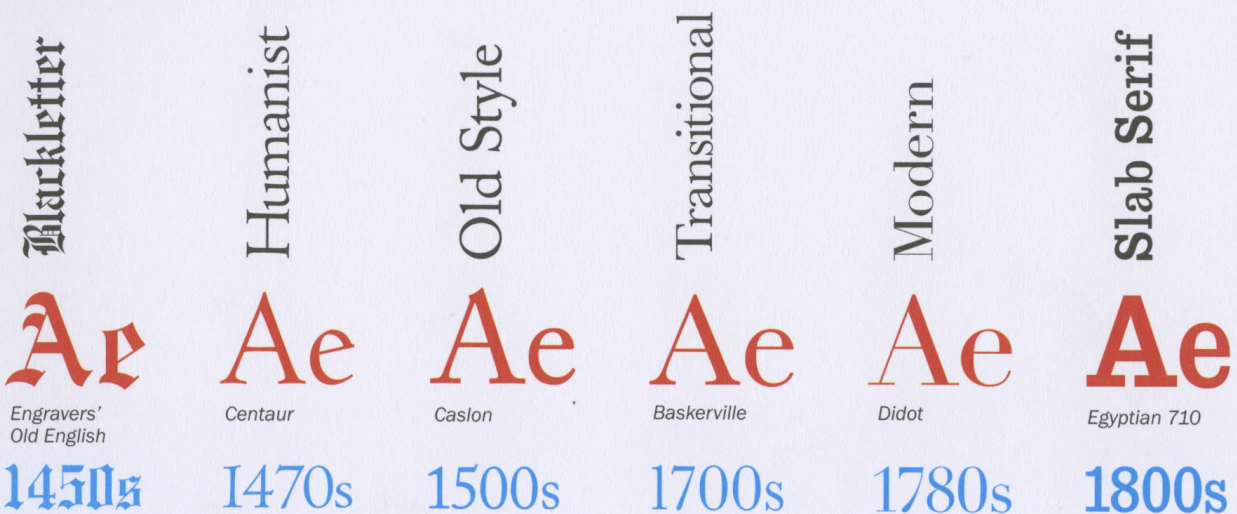
5 'Why the Same Three Typefaces Are Used In Almost Every Airport' by Alissa Walker, 2014, gizmodo.com.

6 'Where in the world am I? The addictive mapping game that is GeoGuessr' by Will Coldwell, 2013, *Independent*.

2

Functional vs evocative

His Consolation of Philosophy printed by William Caxton
in 1478, courtesy of St Bride Library and Archives



FUNCTIONAL VS EVOCATIVE

Humans are social creatures and the act of communicating with each other, of exchanging experiences and passing on history, has played an important role in our evolutionary survival. The information we share has taught us what is safe and what might be dangerous, helped us to find food and stay healthy, and bonds us together in communities. For millennia this was done through the rich oral tradition of storytelling.

Early books were only available to be read by a privileged few because they were time consuming to create. In the Middle Ages they were meticulously hand-copied by monks, with beautifully ornate detail. These large, heavy tomes were precious and housed in monasteries and universities. The average person had no access to books so reading was not a skill many needed to learn. Instead, the high street signs of the day featured iconic symbols, some of which we still see in use today, like the striped red and white barber's pole, the pawn broker's three hanging spheres, and the visual interpretations of pub names.

Then everything changed...

The introduction of moveable type to Europe meant that multiple copies of books could be printed. This was to be a game changer as books became accessible to the whole population and not just a

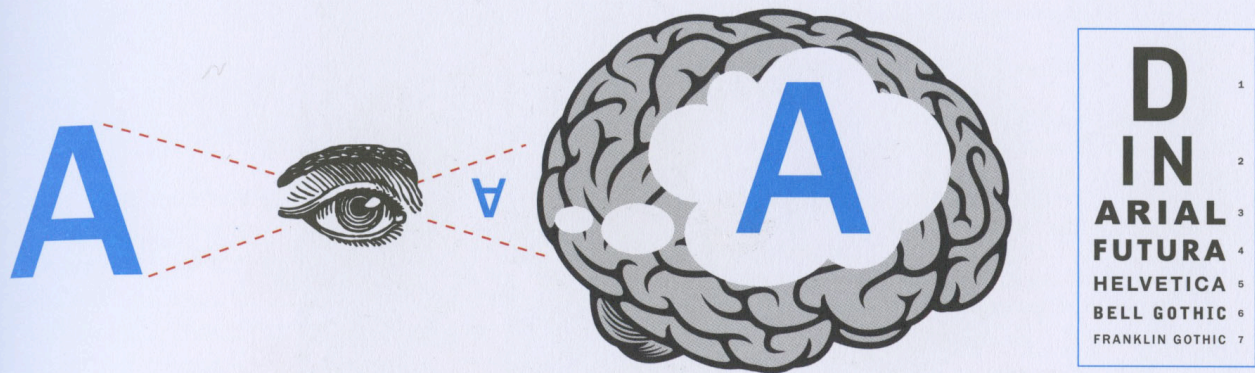
minority. The first major book to be printed was the *Gutenberg Bible* (see page 126), produced by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany in the 1450s. By the 1470s William Caxton had introduced the printing press to England and he also became the first English book retailer.¹

Books were still large and heavy, but within a few decades Aldus Manutius² invented italic type, which was narrower enabling more words to be printed on a page, and he scaled the size of a book down to make it portable and cheaper to produce. Following these developments a much wider audience gained access to knowledge. Literacy rates increased and education was no longer a luxury available only to the wealthy. Ideas could be shared on an unprecedented scale and a knowledge revolution had begun.

Evolution of type

The first printed typefaces were Blackletter type styles that reflected the meticulous handwriting of the scribes. However, these letterforms were intricate for metal type and the coarse, absorbent paper of the era was not suited to printing such fine details. Typeface design has always gone hand in hand with developments in printing technology and paper quality. In the 1470s printers turned to simpler type styles that were better suited to the process and materials available to them. They took

Type is functional



inspiration from the calligraphy of the Italian Humanist writers, who created letterforms closer to the Roman inscriptions found on Trajan's column than the heavy, gothic Blackletter scripts. This classification is known as Humanist³ and the calligraphic influence can be seen in the shape of the letter 'e' (see opposite).

The transformation from Blackletter script to Roman Serifs was a dramatic change of style. But in the five and a half centuries since there has been relatively little change by comparison, even with the arrival of Sans Serifs. By contrast, fashion and transport have changed beyond recognition from the medieval outfits and horse-drawn carriages of the 1400s to what we wear and the transport options of today.

There is an interesting juxtaposition that takes place when type styles from the 15th and 16th centuries are used on the screens of today's devices. One of the options on a Kindle is *Palatino*⁴ which, although designed in the 1940s, is based on the Humanist types of the Italian Renaissance and named after 16th century Italian calligrapher Giambattista Palatino. Yet it does not seem out of place used for 21st century technology. Early printed book specialist Tom Nealon talks of the endurance of Nicolas Jenson's Roman type of the 1470s and says this design had 'nailed it'⁵. He suggests that if you set a book today in Jenson 'no one would bat an eye', yet setting it in Blackletter would be like using 'runes or Klingon'. In the future,

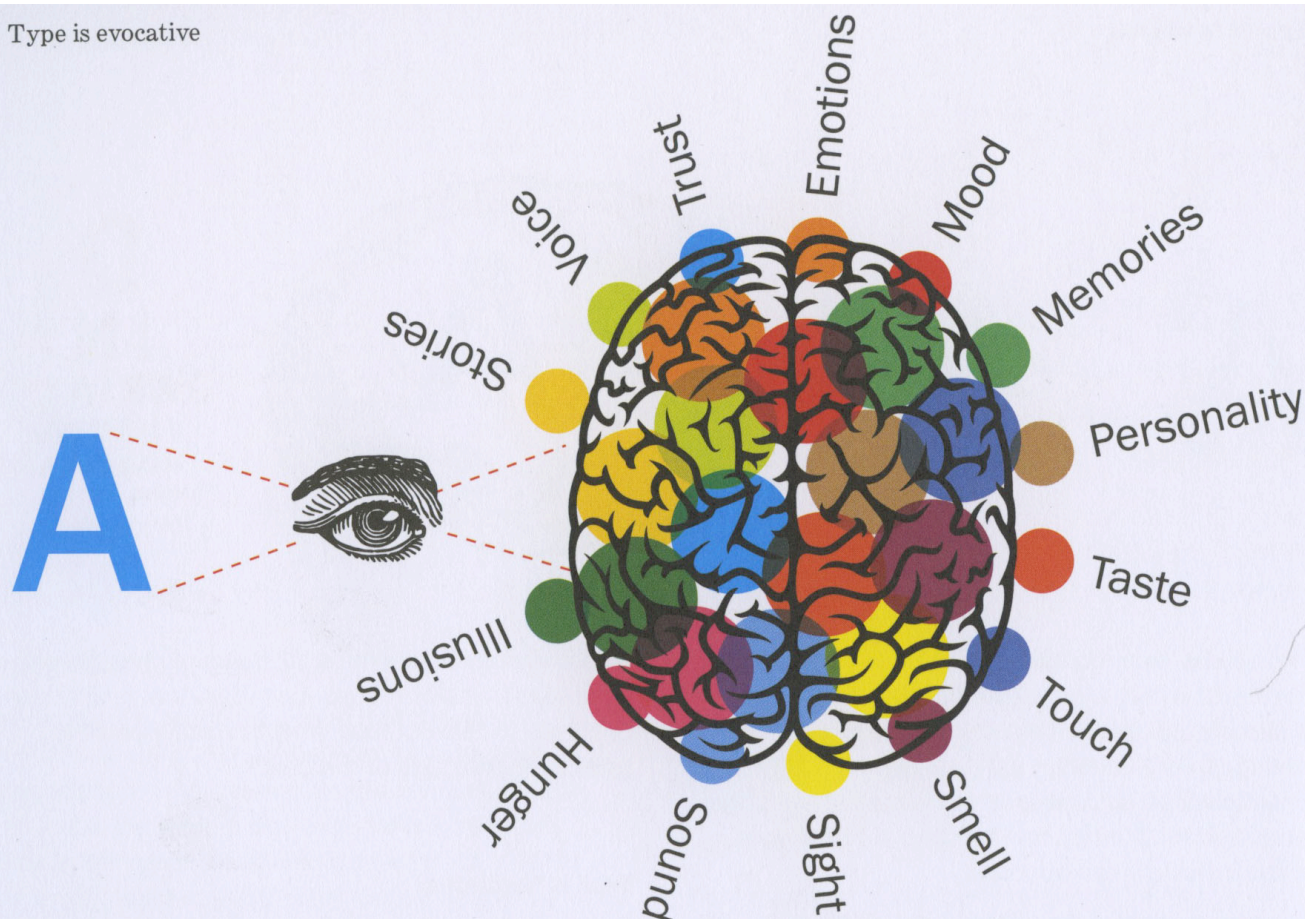
as technology accelerates the pace of change, will typefaces transform beyond recognition or will they continue to reflect these links to history and the printing techniques of the past?

Type is functional

Type functions as a carrier of words. It displays these efficiently so that the reader's eyes can glide seemingly effortlessly across the page as they read. It is sometimes considered that type should be 'invisible' and not intrude on the reading experience. The title of American typographic expert Beatrice Warde's 1930 essay, 'The Crystal Goblet'⁶ refers to her opinion that type should function like a clear wine glass and purely 'carry but not obstruct' the content.

Much research into typefaces explores their legibility, focusing on the mechanics of letter shapes and how they function. Testing includes eye-tracking and monitoring response times. An example is the research Monotype type foundry has done with MIT into legibility of typefaces on car dashboards (see page 125).⁷

There are rules for typography, which can be found in many books and blogs on the subject. Over the page are some of the most important ones. (See page 134 for examples and explanations of the terminology).



- 1 The ideal point size for body copy is between 8.5–12 points (print) or 15–25 pixels (web).
- 2 Line length should be a maximum of around 80 characters (including spaces); if your lines are longer then consider more columns.
- 3 Buy good typefaces for professional work. Don't use free ones as you get what you pay for.
- 4 Body copy can be difficult to read when centred or justified.
- 5 Use all caps sparingly: it is less readable and looks like you're SHOUTING.
- 6 Combining multiple display typefaces can look like you're throwing a fancy dress party.
- 7 Pale text reversed out of a dark background may fill in when printed and can be hard to read.
- 8 Never artificially stretch or compress type; choose an extended or condensed font.
- 9 Beware of bad kerning (the spacing between letters). This can look unprofessional and has been known to create unexpected swear words.

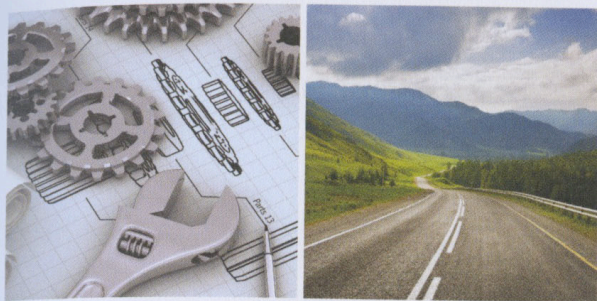
However this book is not about the function of fonts or the rules of typography...

Type is evocative

There is more to type than just being an invisible transmitter of words. The different shapes and styles of the typefaces themselves stimulate responses independently of the words they spell out, and before we even read them.

Type triggers our imaginations, evokes our emotions, prompts memories and links to all of our senses. We automatically recognise attributes from the physical world, like how loud it looks, whether it is heavy or light, fast or slow, or what it would feel like to touch. We have also learned a great deal from our shopping experiences, which include knowing whether something is expensive, aimed at children, or how it might taste.

It is easy to measure how readable a font is, but it is less straightforward to measure how it makes people feel. As a result, there is less public domain research in this area and much of what we know as designers comes from personal observation and experience.



How a typeface functions is practical. It could be compared to building and fine-tuning a car engine for optimum performance. What a typeface evokes is about the experience of being a type consumer and using it. This is like taking the car out for a drive on the open road, turning up the music and enjoying how it makes you feel.

References

- 1 'William Caxton', en.wikipedia.org.
- 2 'Aldus Manutius', typographia.org.
- 3 'History of typography: Humanist' by John Boardley, 2007, ilovetypography.com.
- 4 'Kindle Paperwhite' by Stephen Coles, 2012, fontsinuse.com.
- 5 'Kern Your Enthusiasm 12' by Tom Nealon, 2014, hilibrow.com.
- 6 'The Crystal Goblet' by Beatrice Warde, 1930, World Publishers. 'The Crystal Goblet' is an essay on typography by Beatrice Warde. The essay was first delivered as a speech, called 'Printing Should Be Invisible', given to the British Typographers' Guild at the St Bride Institute in London on October 7 1930.
- 7 'Monotype Introduces the Burlingame Typeface Family', press release by Monotype 2014, monotype.com.

Online Type Tasting surveys can be found at typetasting.com.

'Typeface' or 'font'?

The TYPEFACE is the design, an example is *Helvetica*, this includes the entire family of sizes, styles and weights.

A FONT is the format you experience the typeface in. Traditionally this would have been a set of metal type in a specific size, style and weight: for example 12-point *Helvetica* bold. Today we access typefaces through many more formats and the meaning of the word 'font' has evolved to encompass them. The term now includes the files we access via the font menus on our computers, mobile devices and websites.

I recently explained this to a client who concluded that 'a typeface is like my collective family, the Greenes, and the fonts would be the individual Greene family members.'

Another comparison could be that a typeface is the story, for example *Star Wars*, and the fonts are the different formats you could choose to watch it in.

The two terms are becoming increasingly interchangeable and I think conversations about type should not be overshadowed by terminology anxiety.

Typeface

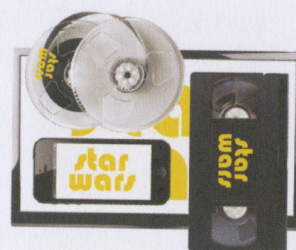
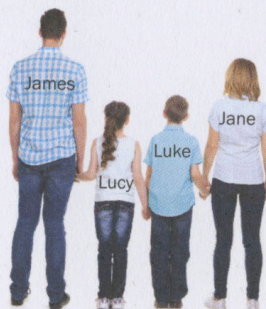
Helvetica

Greene family

Star Wars

Fonts

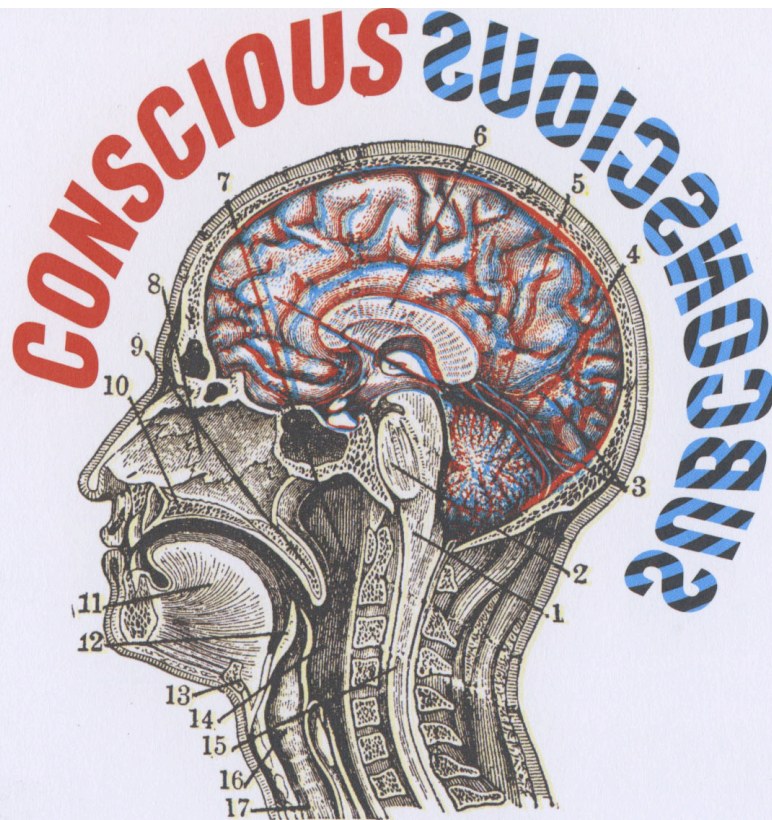
Helvetica thin, 8 pt
Helvetica thin italic, 8 pt
 Helvetica light cond., 8 pt
Helvetica light cond. italic, 8 pt
 Helvetica, 8 pt
Helvetica italic, 8 pt
Helvetica heavy, 8 pt
Helvetica heavy italic, 8 pt
Helvetica heavy ext.,
Helvetica heavy ext.



3

How do fonts influence you?

The audience wearing Font Goggles that revealed the 'secret' messages communicated by fonts, at Sarah Hyndman's talk for the London Design Festival at the V&A, 2014. Photo by Martin Naidu



HOW DO FONTS INFLUENCE YOU?

Spoiler alert!

Before reading this chapter take the challenge in this short film: typetasting.com/movie.html¹

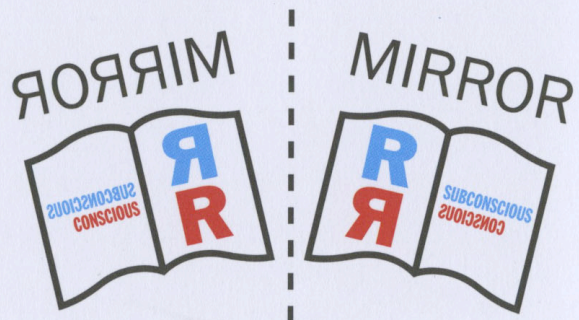
Is type a conspiracy? Does it coerce you with secret messages hidden from view? No, far from it. Type appears right in front of your eyes and is clear for you to see. It is your choice not to pay attention to it consciously and to focus on reading what the words actually say. The type itself is still transmitting plenty of information, but it is communicating it directly to your subconscious.

Through the looking-glass

Typefaces/fonts prime you with a great deal of information and set the scene for the words you are about to read. They give words a backstory, a personality, clue you in to whether or not you can trust them, whether they will be serious or light-hearted, academic or childish. Generally, well-set type is designed so that you 'look past' the

typeface and focus on the words themselves — unless of course the font does not match, like somebody with a bad haircut or a miscast actor in a film (see page 56).

At any time you can choose to become consciously aware of the messages the fonts themselves are communicating. On the facing page the red words simply give the name of each typeface, whilst the blue words in 'mirror writing'² suggest what they could be saying directly to your subconscious brain. Hold the book up to a mirror to reveal what the blue words are spelling out.





THE FONT
WHAT IS IT TELLING YOU?

Gill Sans

BBC accent

Edwardian Script

Victorian

Helvetica

Boring*

FRIZ QUADRATA

FRIED CHICKEN SHOP

Comic Sans

!@#*~

Sleight of hand

Neuroscientist Dr David Lewis describes type as being 'hidden in plain sight'³ and explains that it transmits information 'supraliminally', which means it is within the threshold of awareness. This is the opposite of subliminal, which takes place outside your awareness; for example, it might happen too quickly for you to register it. You can choose whether to notice supraliminal messages, but you are not aware of subliminal ones.

al	Supraliminal	Supraliminal	Supraliminal	Su
E	BUY ME	BUY ME	BUY ME	B
	⌚ 0:020	⌚ 0:030	⌚ 0:040	⌚ c
I	Subliminal	Subliminal	Subliminal	S
	⌚ 0:020	⌚ 0:030	⌚ 0:040	⌚ c

Examples of subliminal messages are the 'blipverts' that featured in the *Max Headroom* sci-fi film in the 1980s. These were television adverts

shown so quickly that they influenced viewers subliminally without them realising. At the time these prompted concern that advertisers were really using them to brainwash customers.

Examples of supraliminal communicators are the score or soundtrack to a film, the smell of food, and typefaces, all of which we will look at in more detail in this chapter.

In his article 'The Art of Honest Deception',⁴ author Vincent H. Gaddis explains that a magician's skill is not that he can perform tricks too quickly for the eye to see, his skill is in cleverly misdirecting the attention of the audience during the performance. He says that magic tricks are successful because they are 'nine-tenths simple distraction'. Printed words are like magicians, they distract you from paying attention to the fonts and instead you concentrate on reading what they say.

Typefaces and magic tricks both take place right in front of our eyes, but somehow they can seem invisible. Lewis describes this as 'perceptual blindness', explaining that we 'don't perceive what we don't attend to'.⁵ Professor Daniel J. Simons



calls it 'inattentional blindness' for the same reason. Simons demonstrates this well in 'The Monkey Business Illusion'. This is the challenge from the short film at the beginning of this chapter.⁶

Wood for the trees

One of the things I have learnt from my experiences as a graphic designer is to proofread large type in titles and headlines carefully, because this is where spelling mistakes can go unnoticed. It is easy to get so focused on the small details of a design project that we can forget to take a step back and only spot the spelling mistake (with that heart-sinking feeling) once the project is finished and printed. This is a classic example of 'not seeing the wood for the trees'.

I once arranged to meet a friend in Liverpool Street station under the 'really big departures board'. After a while she rang me to say she could not find it because there were too many signs. When I found her I said 'look up' because she was standing right underneath it, but she had

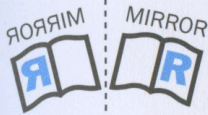
been so busy looking at all the small signs she had not noticed the huge one that ran the full width of the station.

Under the influence

Type sets the tone and gives you clues about what you are about to read. Headlines and titles often feature display typefaces that have larger-than-life characteristics. This works much like the music in a film, which sets the scene for what you are about to watch. The soundtrack tells you whether you can relax, whether to feel sad, or if you should start to feel anxious and get ready to close your eyes before the action actually happens.

It is the iconic music in *Jaws* that creates the tension and primes you to be teetering right on the edge of your seat and ready to jump at the moment the shark actually appears.

In *Alien* the noise gets increasingly frenetic, building up to the shock of the creature suddenly bursting out of John Hurt's chest.



Helvetica

Cheap

Flemish Script

Cheap

Cooper Black

Cooper Black

VAG Rounded

VAG Rounded

In the film *The Ring* it is the unanswered phone that makes the scene so creepy when the figure climbs out of the well and then out of the television screen itself. I recently watched this with the sound turned off and not only was it no longer scary, but it became almost comical.

Shops and supermarkets are aware that many factors like type, design, music and aroma can influence how we shop, but without us being aware of this consciously.^{7,8} In an article on subliminal selling, Dr David Lewis refers to a study that found that if classic rock was playing in a shop, 'baby boomers' were more likely to make purchases. Yet, when they were asked about it afterwards, two-thirds did not even remember what music had been playing.

In another study C. S. Gulas and C. D. Schewe⁹ show that wine buyers will purchase more expensive wine when classical music is playing in a shop. Napa-based graphic designer David Schuermann specialises in designing wine labels and says 'we always make a wine look about \$10 more expensive than it is'.¹⁰

The smell of freshly baked bread or roast chicken wafting through a food shop can have you heading for the bakery aisle or picking up the ingredients for a roast dinner, even if you had no desire to eat either before walking into the shop. I find myself detouring to buy a coffee when I smell fresh coffee or see the font used by my favourite coffee shop.

Wine

Arial black

Wine

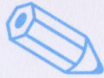
Didot

Wine

Flemish Script

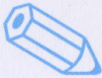
What am I telling you?

Agincourt



What am I telling you?

Didot



What am I telling you?

Helvetica



What are these fonts telling you? Write your answers under each typeface.

Next time you are out shopping and you find yourself with items in your basket that you had not planned to purchase, stop and become aware of all the stimuli around you. Are there external factors influencing your purchasing choices?

Sponsored fonts

When I scroll down my font menu I see some typefaces that I associate with brands. Opinion is divided on whether a company's typeface being in the public domain for everybody to use dilutes its brand image, or whether its increased presence is a clever form of advertising for a strong and recognisable brand.

When I see *Cooper Black*¹¹ (shown on the previous page) I think of the easyJet logo. The typeface looks to me like comfortable pillow-like clouds and I find I can easily start daydreaming about holidays.

Also in the list is *VAG Rounded*,¹² which was designed for Volkswagen AG in 1979. Making it available to the company worldwide was a problem at the time. To get around this the font was put into

the public domain and was soon included in most free font packages. Although it is no longer their corporate typeface, the link will always be preserved in the name.

I think there is an opening for a big brand to commission a handwritten-style typeface family as an alternative to *Comic Sans* that could be bundled for free with standard operating system software. Since a large proportion of the audience would be schools and children, I would hope it is a brand promoting positive and healthy values, or that encourages curiosity, and not one advertising fast food.

WHAT AM I TELLING YOU?

Sinaloa



WHAT AM I TELLING YOU?

Wainwright



WHAT AM I TELLING YOU?

Madame



References

- 1 'Monkeying around with the gorillas in our midst: Familiarity with an inattentional-blindness task does not improve the detection of unexpected events' by Professor Daniel J. Simons, 2010, i-Perception.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGQmdoK_ZfY.
- 2 'Through the Looking-Glass' by Lewis Carroll, 1871. In the reflected version of her own house Alice finds a book with the poem 'Jabberwocky' written in 'mirror writing', which she could only read by holding it up to a mirror.
- 3 *The Brain Sell: When Science Meets Shopping* by Dr David Lewis, 2013, Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- 4 'The Art of Honest Deception', by Vincent H. Gaddis, 2005, strangemag.com.
- 5 'Subliminal Selling' by Dr David Lewis, 2013, themindlab.co.uk.
- 6 Ibid. Professor Daniel J. Simons.
- 7 Ibid. Dr David Lewis.
- 8 'Using background music to affect the behaviour of supermarket shoppers' by Milliman, R. E. 1982, *Journal of Marketing*, 46 (3), 86-91.).
- 9 'Atmospheric Segmentation: Managing Store Image With Background Music' by Gulas, C. S. & Schewe, C.D. (1994).
- 10 'Drinking With Your Eyes: How Wine Labels Trick Us Into Buying' by Michaela Doucleff, 2013, kqed.org.
- 11 'Cooper Black' by Oswald Bruce Cooper in 1921.
- 12 'VAG Rounded' by Gerry Barney et al., wikipedia.org.

Online Type Tasting surveys can be found at typetasting.com.