In **Helvetica,** a 2007 documentary about the ubiquitous typeface, filmmaker Gary Hustwit visits graphic designer Massimo Vignelli in his New York studio. Vignelli speaks to camera about his long-held philosophical belief in using only five typefaces in his work. He says, with a wry expression that softens the statement:

"I don't think that type should be expressive at all. 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.***"

Later in the film, in Amsterdam, Hustwit hears another dogmatic quick brown fox, graphic designer Wim Crouwel, make a related point with an example from his own work:

"If I see today, designers they use all typefaces … one day one typeface, the other day the other typeface. All in favour of a certain atmosphere.

I don't like that.

... I made these post stamps on De Stijl movement. In the beginning, if you see the sketches, I tried to use typefaces from Van Doesburg, one of the artists of De Stijl movement. Then, I decided for the final designs not to use these typefaces, because the illustration is already from the period ... I used the most neutral typeface, **Helvetica.** *... The meaning is in the content of the text, and not in the typeface."*

The terms *"expressive"* and *"atmosphere"* are used by these two elder statesmen to sneer at a loosely-defined vernacular typography. This is the lowest common denominator of unsophisticated visual communication, in which typefaces are unthinkingly *looked at* by witless innocents who also enjoy spotting faces in clouds.

With regret, sixteen years after the **Helvetica** film's release, we designers, drowning at the firehose of the internet's constant regurgitation and corruption of historical graphic form, can no longer afford to preserve both

of these esteemed forefathers. We are running low on memory. For reasons of brevity and clarity then, it has been decided that Massimo and Wim will henceforth be represented in graphic design history as a compound character:

Wimo.

Unfortunately for **Wimo**, and perhaps only partly apparent in the mid-2000s, when Hustwit was interviewing them, desktop publishing and the internet have unleashed their worst fears about visual literacy. From their vantage point in the graphic afterlife, **Wimo** is being continually poked in the eye by audacious feats of typographic punning and they can't sleep at night for barking dogs. The pretence of typography's rational authority simply cannot be maintained in this era of LTYPI (*lack of typographic imagination*: the prac-

tice of choosing typefaces by their names), online meme-generators that default to Impact, and wildly popular social media polls that ask earnestly if the word water "**sounds different in your head**" when it appears with a stock photograph of blue, rippling water as a background, as if this were some deep, unconscious Gestalt arriving to the typographic party in a *#WhiteAndGold* dress.

This is not simply an amateur/professional distinction, however. Consider a label listing ingredients on a piece of food packaging that follows one of the many national guidelines for identifying allergens. A ubiquitous typographic device distinguishes food allergens by presenting them in bold type. Slight variations on the phrase "**for allergens, see ingredients in bold**" appear on countless packaging designs across the English-speaking world. Anecdotal research suggests that most of these designs present the words "in bold" in **bold**. Not in *italic*, you unders-

tand, but we'll get to that. This has the undeniably useful function, for the eye that quickly scans the label, of immediately relating whichever ingredients are emboldened to the explanation of why, normally placed somewhere on the periphery of the label. **Wimo** might begrudgingly acknowledge this functionality, but, presumably, they would have to maintain that it is ultimately redundant, and that the phrase "**for allergens, see ingredients in bold**" has an identical meaning whether it is in bold or not.

Perhaps what offends dear **Wimo's** typographic sensibilities most profoundly is a more mischievous kind of punning. **The "mindsmile" is a term apparently introduced into graphic design discourse by Beryl McAlhone's 1996 book A Smile in the Mind: Witty Thinking in Graphic Design.** A single graphic object dominates mindsmile mind-share: the logo for international courier FedEx, designed by Landor Associates in 1994, in

which an arrow — practically the universal symbol in courier branding — is created in the negative space between the capital E and lowercase x of the company's name, as it appears set in its chosen corporate typeface, Futura Bold. It is at once devilishly clever and apparently effortless. Stephen Kelleher Studio's 2021 monogram for fast food franchise Burger King has recently reheated the genre. If the mindsmile is all about ingenious economy of text-image coincidence, then this logo appeals with its simultaneous exploitation of both the formal relation between the capital B and K, *and* their conjoined form being a believable icon of two pieces of bread and a meat patty.

That any of this can be parsed as an intellectualised distinction — the subject of graphic snobbishness on **Wimo's** part — is made complex by such typographic puns seeming to have much in common with the altogether more cultured expressions of concrete poetry, a genre of artful

typography which remains endlessly fascinating for curators of Kunstvereins across Europe. Artist Ian Hamilton Finlay's The blue and the brown poems, for example, operate by having words *perform* themselves and their semantic relations through spatial arrangement, colour designation, and overprinting effects. How are these poetics distinguished from the corporate mindsmile? **Wimo** mocks the barking dog, but is thrilled by the spectacle as — wraovceks — waves crash into rocks?

At this point we ought to attend to the innocent keyboard at which the graphic designer sits. That thing deserves a second glance, a wary side-eye. Its limitations and affordances condition what can be typed, after all. Notice, for instance, **THAT WE HAVE A HARDWARE CAPS LOCK**, and those who use it in extended prose are considered **OBNOXIOUS**. And yet we make no positively-reinforcing affordance for polite italics on the keyboard. You'll need to enquire of

the imperial Character palette for that, anon. The handling of italics in computer software, then, does mark a boundary between the amateur and professional production of documents. In the history of word processing software, an italic effect has typically been achieved by clicking a single button in the interface that triggers an indifferent, algorithmic operation to remap the coordinates of the letterforms into a slanted formation. In professional page layout software, the italic — at least in best practice — is an entirely distinct font file, whose letterforms are drawn separately to their Roman counterparts, observing a distinct tradition. Yes, those extra mouse clicks: opening the font menu, scrolling, selecting, are a matter of professional pride. They are what separate the knowledgeable graphic designer from the ignorant amateur.

Sneering aside, editorial customs associated with typographic styling

can also be legitimately contentious. Khairani Barokka finds colonial undertones in the use of italics for words outside the primary language of a text (typically English):
"I've come to understand the practice of **italicizing** *such words as a form of linguistic gatekeeping: a demarcation between which words are 'exotic' or 'not found in the English language,' and those that have a rightful place in the text:* **the non-italicized.**"

And while **Wimo** has held firm on their top five, mainstream typographic production has only continued its explosive, unchecked proliferation. Even Times New Roman, the workhorse serif that got the nod from **Wimo**, has since spawned every conceivable unauthorised stylistic variant, from the sans-serif to the pixel font. The punningly named Times Newer Roman might especially have annoyed **Wimo**, being a subtly widened version of the typeface marketed as a life-hack for students asked to submit their essays in 12 point Times

New Roman. Using the newer variant, indistinguishable from the original by eye, the student need produce 13% less words! What's more, and perhaps the ultimate poke in **Wimo's** eye, the graphic designer David Rudnick, who draws their own custom type for every project, has a social media bio that reads simply: Time's New Roman.

***So**, let's raise a crystal goblet to*
Wimo.

Poor, restless **Wimo**.

Wimo, who thought the mid-2000s were bad.

Wimo, who dreamt of a serene retirement, strolling the neatly sign-posted streets of the graphic afterlife.

Wimo, who showed a lifetime of restraint, even when temp-

ted by highfalutin metaphor, big brand synergy, and charming graphic coincidence. *As they look down, surveying the global communication space*

...

Wait, if they see that one,
oh no,
no,
no.

Wimo!

Don't look,
don't look!

Too
late.