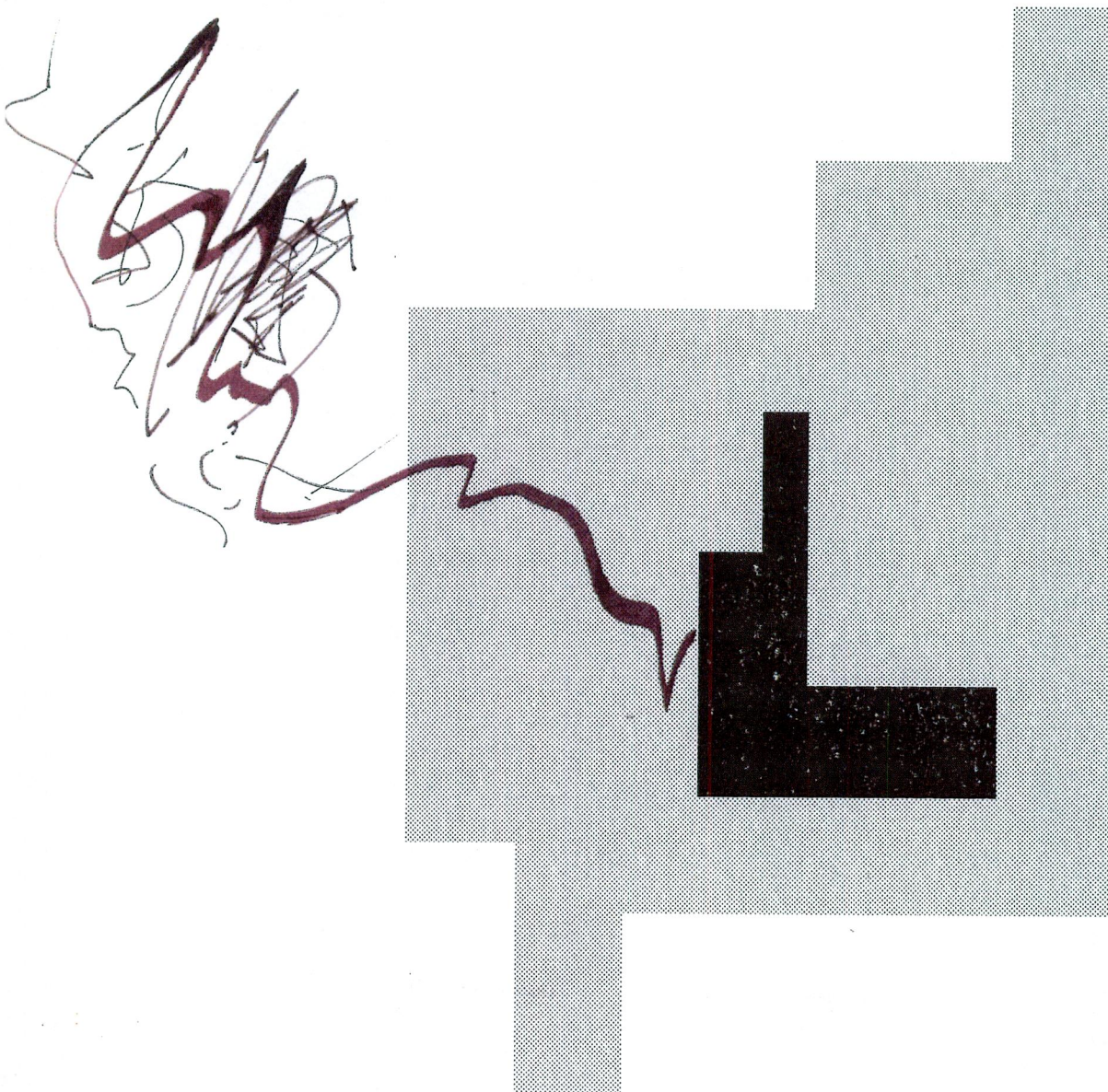National College of Art and Design

Faculty of Design
Visual Communications

'New Wave' London Design
A comparative analysis of Why Not Associates and 8vo

By Lorcan Donnellan

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Submitted to the Faculty of Art and Design
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Contents

List of figures

List of figures

Introduction

A new wave of energy in British Design has emerged in London in the late eighties. The work of these designers challenged the complacency of older established firms, emphasising a return to typography as a dynamic and all important element in their designs. Unlike the first wave of rebels - Neville Brody, Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville, who steered clear of the mainstream while working for style magazines and independent record labels, many of the new generation cut their teeth at the serious end of the business, working for a host of corporate clients. Two such newly established consultancies are Why Not Associates and 8vo, who between them have worked for prestigious clients in recent years.

Although both groups have been at the forefront injecting vitality back into British design, but they essentially represent two different approaches. Why Not incorporates an anarchic element which have drawn freely from pioneering typography of the twentieth century. These elements combine with other unusual influences into an aesthetic which is contemporary but retains its Englishness. 8vo on the other hand, have taken their cue from the 'International Style'. Their aim has been to introduce modernist typography and abstraction into Britain from the inside. I shall first look at their starting points for these two design consultancies and their early work. The main discussion will centre on their work from 1989 onwards, at which time they both began to make an impression. I shall look at each consultancy individually and then compare their work, examining how they have contributed to current typographical and design issues.

Both design groups have been well represented in design magazines, however due to a lack of indepth information I found it vital that I visit and interview Why Not and 8vo myself. These interviews resulted in a lot of original material and the opportunity of seeing them both as living breathing design studios, allowed me to get beneath the superficial labelling and misinformation of design magazine journalism. Also since there has been no major coverage of Why Not and 8vo's work since 1992, visiting their studios allowed me to see work which has not yet been published.

Why Not Associates: starting up

A look at how 8vo was formed; their education, their influences and their objectives.

Why Not Associates was formed in 1987 by Andrew Altmann, David Ellis and Howard Greenhalgh. They were all graduates from the Royal College of Art and Design. Altmann had studied at St. Martin's in London where at that point, recalls Altmann, the type was the line you put under the idea.(Donnellan, 1994) By this he means that type, at that time, was not being considered as a dynamic element in design. Coming from there, he had a portfolio of work that was solid graphic ideas. Altmann, like Ellis, went to the R.C.A. to test his craft and to direct his work toward typographic experiment.

They were with the notorious 1987 class at the R.C.A.from which a lot of talented designers emerged. The year was exceptionally large because the course was being shortened, which meant the merging of the two and three year courses. This gave the students much more to discover amongst themselves. It also meant the students greatly out-numbered the tutors, who were famed to teach by destruction. This was also at the time of Gert Dumbar's brief installment, but Why Not Associates do not credit him as a major influence. Altmann recalls:"He wasn't an influence because he was never there. I did see a lecture he gave, but I was influenced more by his attitude than his work. I wouldn't say he would call himself a typographer, a lot of his work uses the same typeface and ranged left in the corner."(Donnellan, 1994) What struck Altmann was that Dumbar seemed to be having a great time, and Altmann saw him as a kindred spirit (Altmann and Dumbar occasionally drank together) Why Not did pick up on Dumbar's stage photography, something which other students started to experiment with also. Dumbar's absence rather than presence, governed the atmosphere of the year. Altmann remembers that a lot of the more interesting people of the course would sit in one corner; such as Sean Perkins (of Cartlidge Levene), Phil Baines, Ellis, Greenhalgh and himself. They discussed their work and exchanged ideas incessantly. Altmann and Ellis looked to Herbert Spencer's *Pioneers of Modern Typography* for inspiration, it offered them a wealth of typographic expression which was almost non-existent at that time in Britain. They were seriously influenced by Piet Zwart, Ian Hamilton Finlay and Kurt Schwitters. Altmann experimented with the structure of language. He would make posters out of Dylan Thomas short stories and try to capture the pace and mood of the story; the type
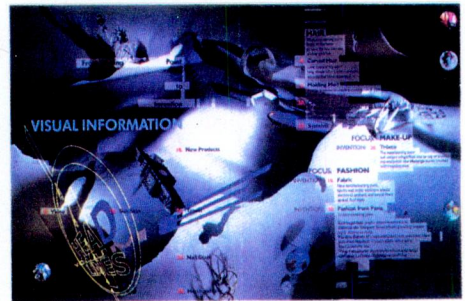
Figure 1: *Headlines* spread (1987)

Figure 2: *Headlines* cover (1987)

becoming an illustration like concrete poetry. Altmann claims never have to read design magazines and instead looked to painters who used type in their work, such as Ed Rushe. Why Not criticise designers who are so involved with their subject that they only read design magazines, talk only to other designers and see life as purely in terms of design only. "It is very limiting. They don't pay attention to painters, for example, or junk sales, or other kinds of things," says Altmann. "I like to spend time in my garden, looking at flowers and not really concentrating on 'design' per se." (Donnellan, 1994) Altmann's attitude to design is typified by the fact that he never discussed design with Dumbar, but instead talked about "women and football". (Donnellan, (1994) This gives an insight into Why Not's fun loving approach to design, which draws from their own personal experiences and from the visual world around them. From their college days, they believed they could do work which was satisfying and fun, and get paid for it. The rector of the College Jocelyn Stevens did not have the same faith in these anarchic students; condemning them as unemployable. This, Altmann and Ellis had convinced themselves of already. "We certainly didn't want to work for anyone else" says Ellis, and I couldn't think of any London studio that would let us do the kind of work we wanted to do".
(Donnellan, 1994)

Luck intervened when Howard Greenhalgh, a fellow student, came to them with a hairstyle magazine called *Headlines* to be redesigned for a U.S. cosmetics company called *Sebastien*. "The original magazine was like a remedial Smash Hits," recalls Altmann. "We spent most of our time trying to hide the pictures they sent us" (Donnellan, 1994). Meanwhile, Greenhalgh, who mainly did video work, learned about graphics and Altmann and Ellis incorporated photographic techniques into the magazine, stretching the blandest material into inventive spreads; for example their layout spread for the introduction pages (fig.1). They went back to college and played around with images on basic image computers. Other photographs were made into 3d sets and photographed with other elements or they projected images onto textured backgrounds like stone; a technique they employed for the magazine cover (fig.2). This was the first time they used photographic techniques, something they would incorporate into their work in future projects. An interesting note about the use of type on these spreads is that it is often mistaken for Macintosh generated type. The truth is that Why Not had been

Figure 3: *Latter Day Modernism* (1987)

doing this kind of work long before they ever worked on a computer. They would get text set in different sizes and then spend days cutting it up and handsetting it. A good example of their typographic approach is the brochure they did shortly after leaving college for the Camden Arts Centre exhibition (fig.3). The title *Latter Day Modernism* is repeated many times in varying syntactic arrangements - revealing their relish for word play. The type and its relationship to geometric shapes, forms the main structure of the design. Letters and words merge with their environment and at times seem to be extensions of the surrounding structure. This quirky fun approach to typography is what Altmann calls "Type as Entertainment". Why Not's work often uses more intuitive marks, as with the blotch of ink in the right hand corner, which contrasts with the more hard-edged forms.

Why Not Associates happened by chance. After *Headlines* they were suddenly bombarded with work, so they decided they needed a studio. The name "Why Not Associates" stuck from a college jibe which was started by a friend who referred to them as having a "Why Not" attitude. "Associates sounds really quite formal but Why Not doesn't," says Altmann. "We rather liked the contrast, and besides, it soon became too late to change it" (Donnellan, 1994). From the start they were not interested in empire building. They did not want to end up as businessmen who no longer take an active part in the design process. "We feel that the fact we do our own work and do not employ minions is a signal to clients that we emphasise quality", says Altmann. They have preferred a more relaxed approach, taking jobs which were more satisfying: Ellis believes the really interesting design work always comes from outside the big groups and that the people who run the big groups have always seemed more interested in the idea of being successful, rather than in the work they produce. (Donnellan, 1994) Teamwork has been a vital element in the way Why Not has worked from the beginning. Even back in college Ellis and Altmann worked closely together, designing a magazine called *Yak* with Phil Baines. One of the outstanding characteristics of their work is the ability to turn ideas on their head, a result of constant exchange of ideas. Whereas Altmann sees Ellis as the better visual designer, his own strengths lie in the generation of ideas, a grounding which he received at St. Martin's.
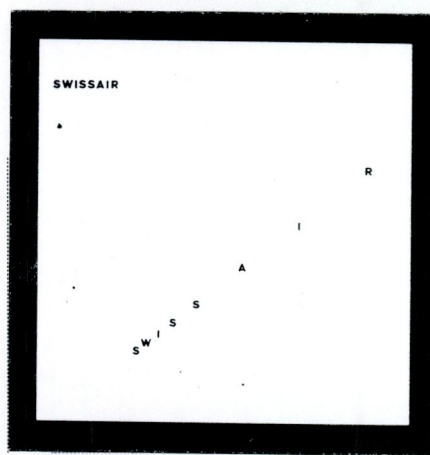
Figure 4: *Swiss Air*

8vo: starting up
A look at how 8vo was formed; their education, their influences and their objectives.

8vo was started in 1985 by Hamish Muir, Mark Holt and Simon Johnson. They set up in London in opposition to the typographic mediocrity which prevailed in Britain. Hamish Muir, who had been the initial motivator in the design group had studied at the Bath Academy of Art. About the time he spent there says: "I can say with my hand on my heart that I learned little about graphic design at Bath. What I did learn was to trust one's own intuitive processes and apply them in reality," (Emigre,vol. 14, 1992, p. 28)

At the time he expressed a loathing of everything that was current in British design. At that time remembers Muir, typography was the grey stuff at the bottom of the poster: It was the afterthought.(Donnellan, 1994) He was never comfortable with coming up with witty ideas with a line of centred type underneath it. He decided to do a postgraduate course at Basle. Simon Johnson would study there a year after him. At Basle, Wolfgang Weingart had developed design models which expanded on the stale approach of Emil Ruder's 'Swiss Design'. The Swiss style at that stage had reached a dead-end because the rules that had been set out by theoreticians such as Ruder had become fixed values, which lead to stagnation. While this new approach still held dear the basic values of Swiss design, such as the importance of production in design and the value of the unprinted area of the page, its main break was the exploration of the syntactic relationships to increase meaning. An example of the simple exercises given there is the Swiss Air design (fig. 4) where the letters rising communicate the idea of a plane taking off.

"Only through intelligent open-minded investigation based on formal typographic understanding can a designer develop, become independent and learn to challenge excepted design standard"-(Weingart Octavo 4, page 2)

   Under Weingart and Armin Hoffman simple exercises were emphasised so that the students would learn something of value in the duration of the course. However, a lot of students, Muir remembers, took these exercises at face value and incorporated them into their real work (Donnellan, 1994). They failed to grasp that at Basle they were learning a process which they could take away and from which develop their own design language. Muir sums up the course's value by saying:

"'Basle provided a thorough understanding of the European tradition in graphic design and we became immersed in the fundamentals of visual language. Unlike design courses in Britain, all students at the Kunstegewerbescule were offered a very broad education while leaving as highly competent practitioners .In Armin Hoffman's words, the course aims to be both wide and deep'." (Aldersey Williams, *Designweek*, vol. 4, no.44, Nov. 1989, p. 27)

8vo did not form directly after Basle. Muir met up with Simon Johnson two years afterwards and they both came into contact with Mark Holt. Mark Holt had been in San Francisco, where his work had been a reaction to that around him. After numerous meetings, they formed 8vo. All of them had similar ideas about what they didn't want to do at that stage. Muir says the intention was never to product Swiss design (Donnellan, 1994). Muir admits there were similarities in the way they manipulated type, but he prefers to refer to it as the "International Style". He rejects the Swiss label placed on their work, because of the confusion about what Swiss design is:

To me, Swiss design or typography refers to a lot of important developmental work that pioneers such as Tschichold etc. were involved in, some of which were absolutely amazing and advanced. But often in England, when people talk about Swiss design, they refer to the three-column grid and the seven point Univers light type of design, which is often boring and pointless. (Maughan, *Blueprint*, Sep., 1986, p.79).

Basle was only half of the equation - now they looked to the pioneers of Modernism, their objective was to bring their principles into a present day graphic language. Their name ''8vo' was chosen to give a degree of anonymity, as an antidote to the pretentious concoctions at present abounding, and as a signal to clients, printers and fellow designers who take a serious interest in design for production." (Maughan, *Blueprint*, Sep. 1986, p. 78). 8vo is the conventional abbreviation for *Octavo*, which is the page size you get from folding a standard sheet of paper three times, to form eight leaves or sixteen pages.

8vo's objectives were remarkably similar to those which Tschichold announced in 1925. In a similar way to Tschichold they set guidelines for themselves to counter-

act the reigning typographic mish-mash and the arbitrariness of style which was prevalent in England at that time. 8vo was not influenced by any particular modernist designer. Tschichold's work was subsequently absorbed by others, forming the basis for the Swiss style in the forties and also by people like Anthony Froshaug and Geoff White. Froshaug and White had particular relevance to 8vo as both of them took up the lonely task of pursuing modernist experimentation in Britain. (The former in the 1940's and the later from the 1960's onwards.)

8vo sought relationships of considerable mutual trust and responsibility between 8vo and its clients. Equally they insisted on total commitment to achieving a good product on the part of their typesetters and printers. Like Tschichold they claimed not to be pursuing a style, but rather their work dealt with the formal relationships between visual components rather than being a servicing mechanism for 'clever ideas.' Muir explains that; "Idea based design relegates visual/aesthetic considerations to a secondary role." (Donnellan, 1994). Their work from the start was instantly recognisable. "Everything they produce indicates a relish for the use of words and type, a commitment to photography and an appreciation of abstract and dynamic texture, colour and form." (Maughan, *Blueprint*, September, 1986, p. 49).

They put firm emphasis on photography like the photo modernists of the 20's and 30's. Lazlo Moholy-Nagy contends in his essay "Isms or Art":

> Today it has become almost natural to favour a representa-
> tion done by mechanical means, with all its consequences over a
> painstaking manually executed visual representation. In this
> competition the photographic process will win out, because of
> the immense possibilities for representation: Only a kind of fetish
> for handwork can be the reason for opposition against this con-
> tention.(Wingler, 1978, p.224)

Also in the spirit of modernism they rejected ornate idiosyncratic typefaces - prefer-ring the sans serif. Muir defends this by saying;

> To me, when you look at any page or poster, you can imag-
> ine all the millions of millimetres, like an imaginary grid.
> Somehow for me sans serif type works perfectly on the grid. It
> doesn't get in the way. We always say that it is not the typeface,

Figure 5: *Hacienda 4* (1986)

its what you do with it that's important. (*Emigre,*vol. 14, 1992, p.20).

8vo rejected centred work as one of the unthinking designers shortcuts and part of the British obsession with symmetry. They also show contempt for the British inclination for nostalgia, concentrating on developing a design language of today that looks to the future. 8vo were uneasy about the term 'design' which has been abused in what they see as a greedy consumerist society, where design is used to sell a look which is unrelated to the product. Muir feels that kind of design is going to change every four years.because the work produced under a 'design' label has not got any theoretical basis to it. It is very superficial. (*Emigre*, vol. 14, 1992, p. 21)

They instead looked back to the forties and fifties when designers and teachers shared a determination with businessmen and governments to see greater social cohesion and to make everything work efficiently. There was a degree of objectivity and idealism, expressed in publications like the *Contact* books and *Picture Post* and in the design work of DRU which resulted in far higher standards of public design than we see today. *Octavo* in the same vein, confronted social issues relating to design in articles such as Peter Rea's 'Where is the school of thought', in issue three. Muir says;"We intend to remain at our present size. Larger design groups seem to find it inevitable that servicing their clients becomes more important than the end product. We believe that by remaining small, our partnership will remain design led." (Maughan,*Blueprint, September, 1986, p. 49*). Such attitudes are rarely found among today's designers, and except when they work on their own or are cushioned by full-time teaching posts.

Their seriousness about design, their attention to both typographic and technological details has led them to term their work 'Visual Engineering.' Teamwork is all important, all partners discuss ideas thoroughly and when they have agreed, they apply themselves simultaneously to the job. 8vo has prided themselves from the beginning in having a non-precious approach. They feel that one of their strengths is an ability to listen to one another. In what they describe as a building process, every element has to be totally acceptable to each of its partners. This assumes that fluidity and the accommodation of radical change are essential to the design process. In the three examples of 8vo's work illustrated here, their fluidity and the

Figure 6: *Circuses and Bread* (1986)

Figure 7: *ICA posters* (1986)

building parts of the process are exemplified in their *Hacienda fourth birthday poster* (fig.5). At one stage the design was quite three dimensional as it became more complex. In its final form, while still very rich, the poster returned to a flat image with heavy layers of blue/black and bright red inks particularly appropriate for the silk screening process. *Circuses and Bread* (fig. 6) shows their carefully structured building processes. 8vo's programme for live events at the ICA (fig. 7) demonstrates 8vo's skills in handling photographs and type dynamically.

8vo's work with its modernist dress of sans serif type, horizontal and vertical type placement integrated with solid geometric shapes (as in *Hacienda 4* [fig. 5]), is totally European in look. Later on they said that their temporary escape from England gave them their ability to stand back from Englishness and avoid much of the mutual admiration which stultifies creativity in England. Mark Holt comments on this;

> As a nation - we are so insular - when I went to the U.S.A. in 1981, I thought my status as a designer trained and working in the U.K. would open doors for me automatically. But on the contrary, the degree of design expertise and energy that I found was extremely intimidating and nobody wanted to know about British design. (Maughan, *Blueprint*, September, 1986, p.49)

8vo started *Octavo* in 1986, mainly because nobody was bothering to develop a design language in Britain. The journal would focus primarily on typography within graphic design, but also look at the way letterforms are used in the visual arts, poetry, architecture and the environment. Typography was been seriously neglected as a dynamic factor in design. The journal would expire after eight issues, with sixteen pages in each. They did not have much idea of how they would approach the project but they decided that each issue would have the same format given a different typographical treatment depending on content. The journal would also serve as a self promotional move and would give them the opportunity to make friends with similar interests.
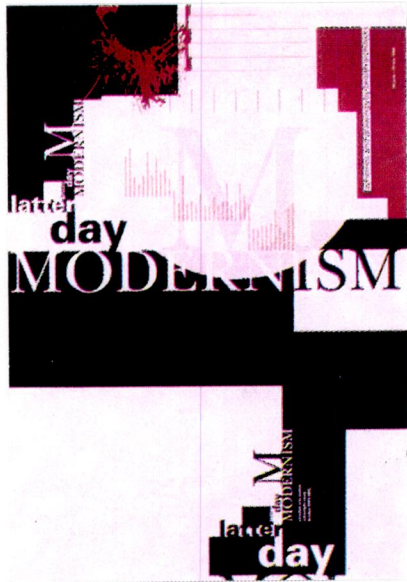
Figure 3: *Latter Day Modernism* (1987)

Figure 5: *Hacienda 4* (1986)

Brief Comparison

Their very names; Why Not Associates and 8vo, imply a difference in attitude. The contrast of R.C.A. and Basle ultimately reflects their differing perspectives; although from the beginning they have worked with similar elements. Comparing for example Why Not's *Latter Day Modernism* (fig.3) and 8vo's *Hacienda's fourth birthday poster* (fig.5), one can see a similarity in their concerns. Both use type as a dominant structural element - the large serif capital 'M' becomes an extension of the surrounding structure in a similar way to the blocky sans serif 4 in the Hacienda poster. In both posters type collides and merges with the surrounding geometric forms. The overall look is similar with blocky shapes in flat colour jutting out of the main structure and enclosing areas of negative space. Both posters use a similarly muted palette. There is also a relish for wordplay evident, 8vo and Why Not have rejected the crisp one-liner for a more ambiguous disjointed message, in which, design plays an equal part in the message. Syntactic experiment are a common concern and this is evident in the way the letters of Hacienda recede into the background and Why Not have repeated the title *Latter Day Modernism* in varying syntactic relationships. In both posters the type is set at either horizontal or vertical axis which are common modernist phrases. They both looked back to early modernist typography, but for 8vo it formed a basis for their self-imposed restrictions and priorities.

Why Not were certainly aware of this pioneering work, however, the influence was absorbed with many others into their more playful approach. In *Latter Day Modernism* a modernist look is emphasised for obvious reasons, however Why Not extend the modernist repertoire with the use of serif faces. Also their love of expressive marks manifests itself in the splatter of ink in the top left-hand corner which contrasts the surrounding forms: Altmann explains; "our work has always had marks which we could not justify other than they seem to hold the composition together" (Donnellan, 1994). Modernist process has always had a playful element to it, even some of the Bauhaus work was highly experimental. Examples of this are the invitation for their renowned parties and festivals: "Preparations for these festivals inspired the student's creativity, free from and unburdened by actual design problems".(Wingler, 1978, p.483) The invitation to the 'Beard, Nose, and Heart' festival (fig 8) was designed by Herbert Bayer, and shows an expressive use of type and photographic image. Even work by Moholy Nagy at times distorted type in inventive ways (such as his advertising poster for automobile tyres [fig.9]). In a similar way Why Not use any means at
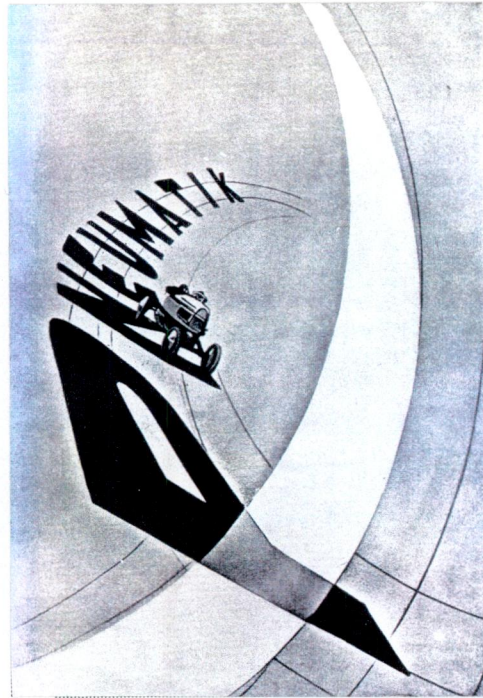
Figure 9: Tyre Company Advertisement (1926)
Lazlo Moholy Nagy-

Figure 9: Party Invitation (1926) Herbert Bayer

their disposal to distort type. The ideas behind New Wave and Modernism have never been that far apart. It is interesting to note that Gert Dunbar (the Dutch designer renowned for his unorthodox approach to design and who greatly influenced the young London 'New Wavers' during his professorship at the R.C.A.) studied under Anthony Froshaug (the first British exponent of modernist principle) and was a friend of Piet Zwarts before he died. Also Weingart's experimental work in Basle in the 1970s, led to the birth of New Wave design with designers like April Greiman leading the way: "At that time, almost twenty years ago, no one thought that this new visual attitude and method of experimentation could be the beginning of today's so-called 'New Wave' style." (Weingart, *Octavo*, vol. 4,1987, p.1). Common also to both these camps is the emphasis on photography as an alternative to the decorative illustration that proliferated design at that time. However 8vo restricted its use to that of the exact picture (as can be seen in their *I.C.A.* posters [fig.7]), whereas Why Not experimented with the possibilities of Dutch inspired stage photography (as in their *Headlines* project [fig.1])

Both 8vo and Why Not made a decision to stay small; neither were interested in empire building, putting good design before commercial gain. Why Not believed that the work they turned down would be just as important as that which they took on. 8vo, to a greater extent had definite ideas about who they would and wouldn't work for. These kind of decisions were unheard of up until then. In contrast to Why Not, 8vo had an agenda, to which they would rigorously adhere, for the next four years. Their magazine *Octavo* would become an integral part of their development process and serve as a self-promotion exercise through which they could attract clients of a similar perspective. Why Not confess to not having adhered to any serious theoretical programme. They have been more concerned with meeting the demands of everyday deadlines, leaving the reasons for why they do things to design magazine journalists.
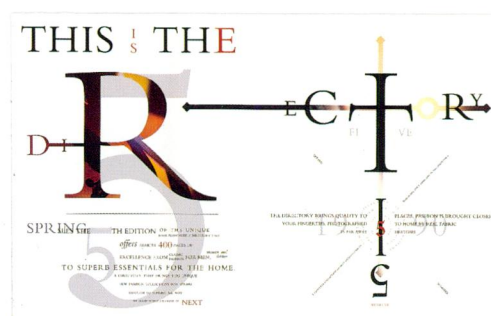
Figure 10: *Next* cover (1988)

Figure 11: *Next* introduction spread (1988)

Why Not Associates their work

Why Not Associates quickly gained a reputation as "cheeky chappies," says Altmann, something which they have built their career on (Donnellan, 1994). Their popularity with design magazines has elevated them to design popstarism. Their work is a mixture of daring and know-how, producing some of the most exciting images of the decade. One such project was the visually superb Next catalogue which extended their interest in staged photography. Next stipulated only one thing in their brief: They wanted the result to look state of the art. Companies such as Next have been willing to support subversiveness in return for looking 'on the edge.'

For the cover (fig.10) they decided they would do something colourful with a five in it, as it was *Next's fifth catalogue*. They used anything they could find to create an interesting image. The five itself was cut out of polyboard, and they used its negative shape in the board to project coloured lights through it. The background was a sheet of luminous white card which reflected the light and the name Next was projected onto the card itself. The *Next catalogue* described itself as the 'Bible of Clotheswear.' Since Jon Barnbrook's typographic work was very biblical, they asked him to do the typography. Barnbrook integrates serif typefaces into weird constructions and strained syntax in a way which is alien to the typeface, but retains its look of Englishness. The biblical look was emphasised on the introduction pages (fig.11) using overlapping serif forms to create a cross image.

Altmann feels Barnbrook went too far with the designs which shows total disregard for legibility but accepted it because he recognised that the copy was meaningless as Next used the same copy each year (Why Not did not employ Barnbrook for the following two catalogues they did for Next). Barnbrook's defence of this treatment is that maybe we should consider whether such messages are worth reading at all. Why Not also believe that the visually sophisticated audience needs and expects rather more than passive copy. As Altmann told an audience of typographers at the Chartered Society of Designers recent debate on legibility:"'If the type is laid out in an intriguing, playful and entertaining way, the reader may be immediately stimulated and then begin to break down the type until the message is received.'" (Poyner, *Blueprint,* vol. 77, May 1991, p. 32) The painterly quality of Why Not's work is their way of drawing viewers into the message and holding attention: a reti-
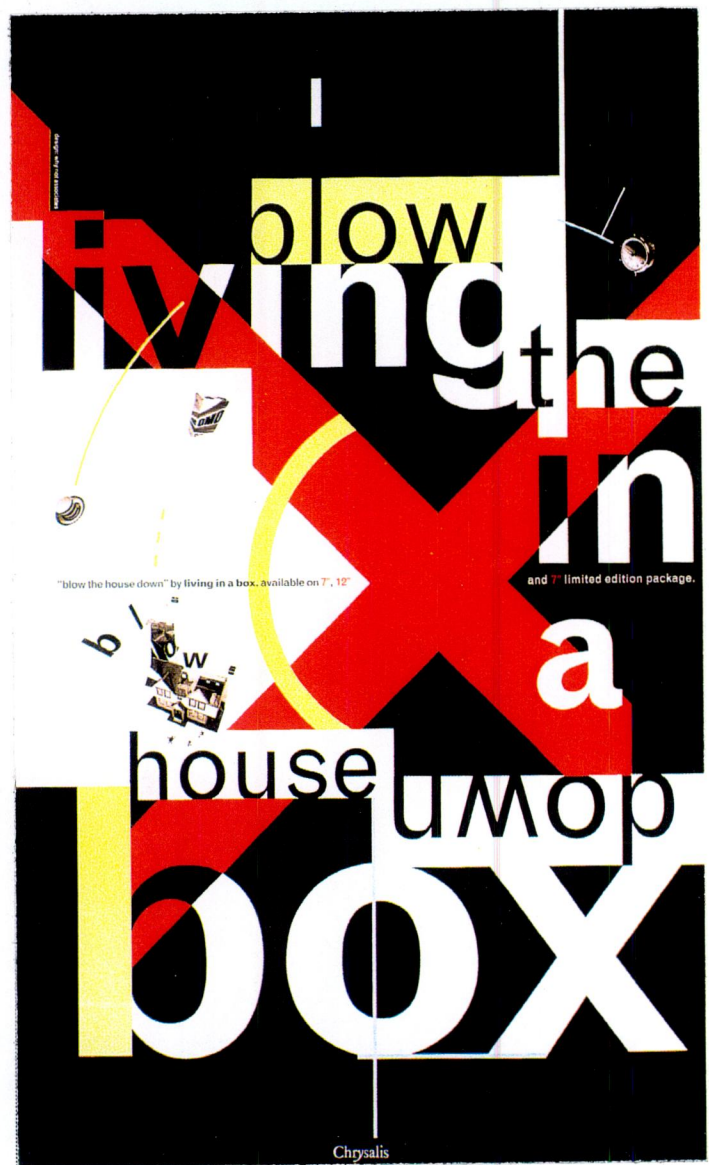
Figure 12: *Living in a Box* poster (1989)

Figure 13: *Smirnoff* advertisements (1990)

nal reward. In the case of the Next mail order directories, the "message " was more a matter of lyrical image than literal communication. Why Not had been originally offered the job to do the whole catalogue, but they turned it down, because they would have to adhere to Next's restrictions about how the clothes should be represented. "We are not into hard sell" says David Ellis. "Our work is about finding a look to package our product."(Donnellan, 1994)

For the band "Living in a Box", they did the packaging, advertising and the pop video. The use of typography as an integral part of the structure can be seen in the record sleeve and poster (fig.12). The design was a play on the song's title *Blow the House Down*. They created a typographic tornado: A huge letter X forms the central structure around which type and image (in this case, fragments of a model house) are placed. Legibility is strained, but is held together by the use of different weights to distinguish between the band's name and the song title. A pleasure in word play is apparent in the loose scattering of text and how the word 'down' is upside down. The overall effect is one of turmoil, but with a solid underlying structure. In keeping with this theme, the origami-like sleeves of the single was designed to burst open revealing the disc .

Why Not has injected humour and imagination into projects which in the past have been treated quite blandly. Why Not's Smirnoff posters (fig.13) for the underground are an example of this. The concept was based on Russian Constructivists with the letters of Smirnoff 'constructed' in steel and placed against a red background. Each letter was contained in a poster and the full word could be read by passers-by. The letters and background are enlivened by projected images of type and other geometric shapes. Detailing and lettering were also created in the Freehand programme on the Macintosh which would go unnoticed by most people. Altmann explains that it was pure self-indulgence on their part (Donnellan, 1994). The overall effect is stunning, and is one of their most attractive solutions. Self-indulgence has been their trademark - Why Not believe they can have their creative cake and eat it. However, this implies the client is being short-changed, which is certainly not the case. As Altmann points out; "'we want to produce work that is self-expressive, but also solves the client's problem. You might as well be a painter if you are not solving the client's problem.'" (Poyner, *Eye*, vol. 7, 1992, p. 57)

Figure 14: *Ted Baker* (1990)

Figure 15: *Ing* packaging

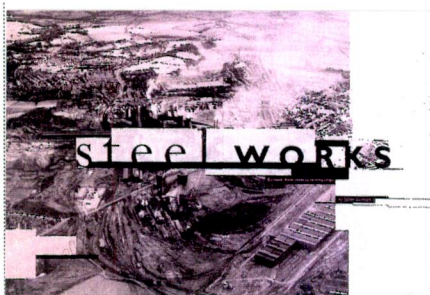Figure 16: *Ing shop* idendity

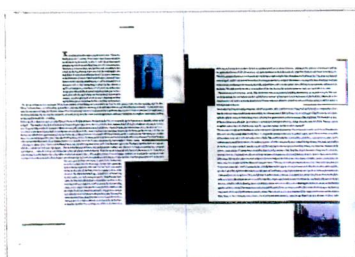
Figure 17: *Steelworks* title page (1990)

Figure 19: *Steelworks* page layouts (1990)

Figure 18: *Steelworks* cover (1990)

Why Not's solutions vary with each client. The next important assignment came about because one of their client's played football with a streetwise retailer called Ray Kelvin, who happened to be on the lookout for some designers to flesh out his concept for a chain of shirts specialists, based on a fictitious character called *Ted Baker* (fig. 14). After the success of *Ted Baker*, Kelvin asked why Not to help out on his latest concept, which he described as "bringing Brompton Cross to Oxford Street". The result was Ing; The naming of the store gives a clue to the way Why Not approaches some of the fundamental issues of design. Greenhalgh came up with the suggestion during a casual conversation about the name for the 'designer pop group' that he hoped to launch. Altmann immediately appropriated the name for the new shop. "We wanted a word we could play around with, but that didn't tie us down to a concept or a character in a way that perhaps Ted Baker did," says Altmann. "At the same time, we had to resist the temptation to go over the top. It was a real struggle to keep the thing cool."(Donnellan, 1994). The identity was used for all its packaging (fig.15) in a playful way; walkING (for footwear) clothING etc. Why Not also designed a huge copper ING which was set in wooden panelling (fig.16).

Around the same time, Why Not did a more personal project called *Steelworks*. The books idea was conceived by a fellow student at the R.C.A. Julian Germain who wrote the text and took the photographs. The idea was a social commentary on a forlorn mining town which had been thriving in the 60's. Germain was looking for a treatment which would be retrospective in feel but also of contemporary design. Why Not's work was very suited to this brief, as it progressively shows itself to be steeped in English tradition, while also being a language of today. The title-piece (fig.17) mixing Bembo and Gill sans, is an elegiac type-image for a lost industrial past.This is used effectively on the cover design(fig.18); Why Not using an image of corroded steel to communicate the industrial dereliction of the town.The text columns of the page layouts (fig.19) are unusually shaped and the blocky geometric forms are integrated with the composition giving it an industrial feel. The expanse of white space on the pages also communicates the vacuous existence of the town. Also the option for one colour on the inside pages, as well as being economical recreates the feel of the sixties.
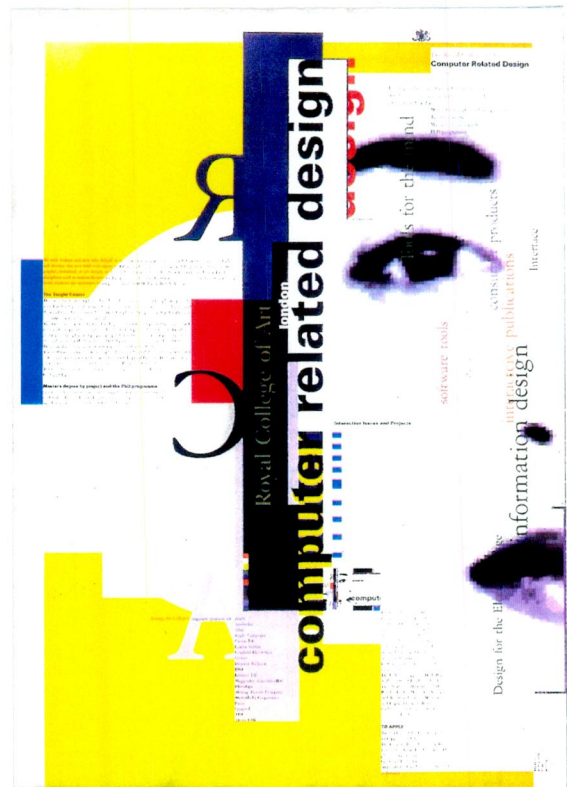
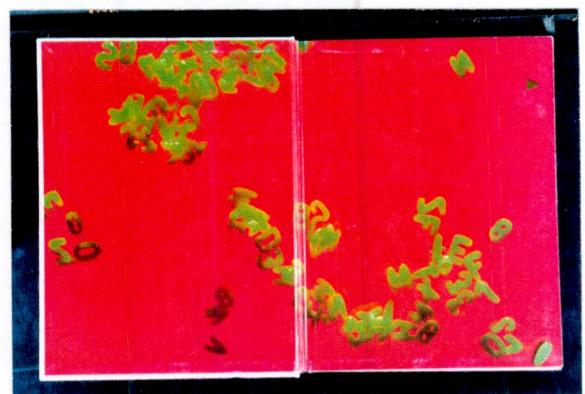Figure 20: *Computer Related Design* poster

Figure 21:*Typograpty Now* lay-out and inside of cover

The poster *Computer Related Design* (fig.20) required a different approach and Why Not produced a design which looked very much in the spirit of a technological age. The image is complex and layered in its structure and use of type, and thus celebrates the capabilities of the computer. The pixelated image of the woman's face is elegant and its simplicity contrasts with the hybrid of abstract shape and text. The immense copy which would doubtfully be read, acts as image and is in keeping with the theme of 'access to information'. The letters R.C.A. are cleverly integrated into the structure, with a large image of the colleges coat of arms printed in a light tint behind layers of imagery. A tiny version of the symbol also sits on the top right corner and with its dimunitive size looks more like an insect (Why Not poking fun at their former college).

This computer look was called on again when Why Not were asked to design *Typography Now the next wave,* a book which catalogues the recent work of new wave designers in Britain and around the world. They were given a great deal of freedom in their approach and it resulted in a much more intuitive expression of the macintosh aesthetic which reflected the content of Rick Poyner's essay *Type and Deconstruction.* At Why Not's suggestion, Poyner worked closely with them on the essay, writing it in four levels which could be given give a more coherent treatment by the designers. Poyner was initially uneasy about this unusual approach but was pleased with the results. The design is highly idiosyncratic and experimental but wholly suitable to a book which is about new designers who are 'reluctant to accept that the conventions of typography as inscribed inviolably on tablets of stone'. (Poyner, 1991, p. 8). The page designs (fig.21) hold to no particular format but are consistent in their use of colour, abstract constructions and treatment of type. Text blocks weave in and out, interacting with other typographic material such as rules and bars as well as solid blocks of colour. Key words and phrases are emphasised by large type and different colours, idiosyncratic typefaces or perhaps poking out of a column of text. Altmann justifies this approach by the nature of the book's audience, who would take the time to break down the text and probably enjoy doing it. The book's cover is a play on the word wave which is given three different representations. Why Not had intended the image on the inside of the cover (fig. 21) of alphabet soup to be the cover but the company went with the cover of the dummy they produced. Whereas the design shows Why Not at its

Figure 23: *Queens Stamps* (1992)(1991)

Figure 24: *Queens Stamps envelope design*

most expressive as regards its design, this is more to do with the nature of the message rather than an extension of their design language.

> "As Why Not develops, the essential Englishness of their design - a quality shared by some of their closest associates, is becoming clearer. As with Phil Baines and Jonathan Barnbrook there is a love of ornamental complexity that throws out echoes of gothic architecture illuminated manuscripts and even the Arts and Crafts tradition".(Poyner, *Eye,* no.7, vol.2, 1992, p.59)

Why Not's two most significant projects to date celebrate the Englishness inherent in their design marrying the opposites of what Peter York once summarised as 'Punk and Pageantry'. In their postage stamps commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Queen's accession (fig, 23), and their identity for the Hull 1992 Festival, their existing graphic repertoire found a perfect though improbable match in the deep traditionalism in the subject matter.

Why Not confess to having been 'flabbergasted' when they received a call from the Royal Mail asking them to go ahead with their invited proposals for five first class stamps."The over-riding impression of regal dignity and human warmth was a keenly judged answer to the brief" (Poyner, Eye, no.7, vol. 2, 1992). The result was one of Why Not's most elegant and controlled pieces yet. The expected 'Why Not-isms' take the form of broken silver borders with steps and curves and a network of filigree rules that links typographic elements within the stamps and connects them when seen as a sheet. These elements combine with heraldic devices carefully muted on the Quantel paint box to create a jewellry box - like setting that vividly conveys the Queen's status as a national treasure. Altmann accounts for their of Englishness as partly to do with the fact that they use serif typefaces but at the same time in an alien context. For the type on the stamps they used a traditional typeface Perpetua, but in an expressive way and in conjunction with a plethora of rules and constructed shapes which stops at the threshold of chaos. This can be seen on their envelope design (fig, 24) where the surrounding unprinted area gives the overall look of sophistication.

With the *Hull Festival,* Why Not had another unexpected chance to apply the graphic language they had developed in earlier projects to a more precisely defined
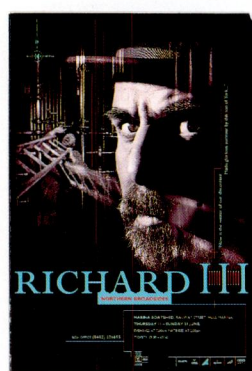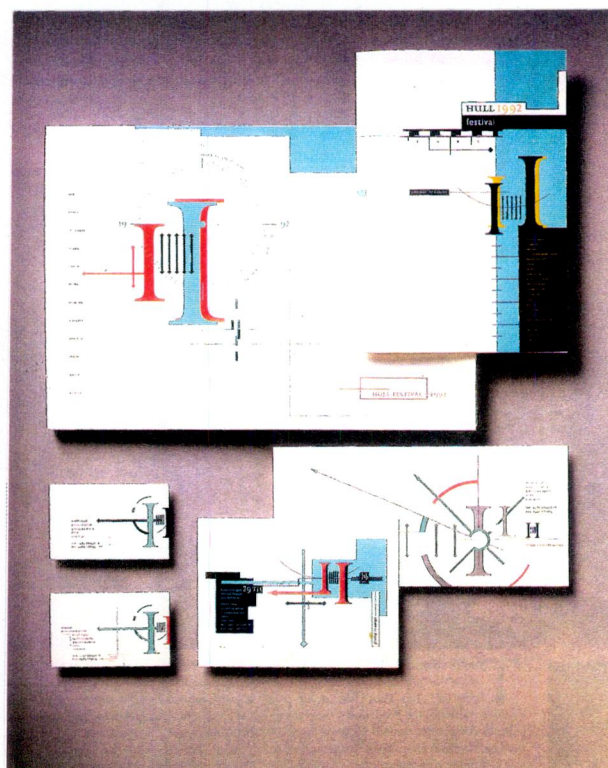
Figure 25: *Hull Festival* logo (1992) (1991)

Figure 26: *Hull Festival* stationary and brochures
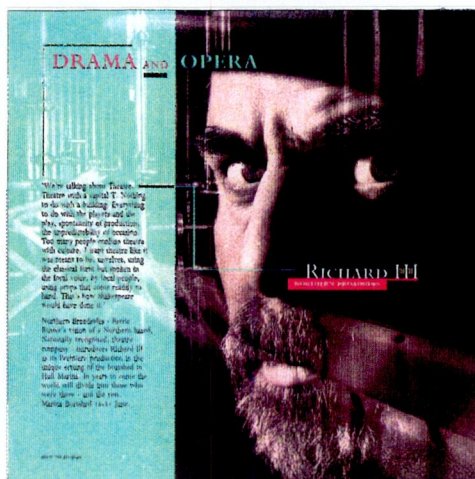

Figure 27: *Hull Festival* posters (1992)

set of problems. Their clients were fifteen bluff Yorkshire Councillors with a reputation amongst local designers for conservative taste. At the core of the Festival's programme, the Council hoped to find an identity that the city could use after the festival was over. "The last thing they wanted was a single logo to be slapped on everything", says Ellis. "It needed to be adaptable and malleable".(Donnellan,1994)

The starting point for the programme is an "H" (fig.25) with the bar replaced by five arrow-tipped vertical strokes. "A stylised portcullis that evokes the city's past and symbolises the Council's conception of both city and festival as a gateway to Europe". Rick Poyner. These few elements provide the graphic vocabulary and typographic framework for the festival's stationary, posters (fig.26) , brochures (fig.27), maps, shopping bags, street signs, invitations and stationary. Even when they are used in their most exploded and dissected forms, it is easy to recognise the festival's identity, reinforced by the bold use of verdigris on the copper roofs on the city's buildings. The typography itself - Eric Gills Perpetua with Gill Sans, like the project as a whole, is both traditionally English in mood and austerely modern in asymmetry.

Why Not's work since then has become simpler and more classical. "There is less work" explains Altmann; this is a lot to do with clients like the Royal Mail who insist on them removing irrelevant marks. "We have changed since we started, back then we did what our instincts told us and a lot of time it didn't work", says Altmann (Donnellan, 1994), referring specifically to the magazine *Headlines* which was their first job. In a way Why Not have become a little complacent about their work but possibly it also has to do with their desire to stay in business. The summer hadn't been that busy and they had to lay off Chris Priest who had been working with them for two years. They are now down to two associates as Howard Greenhalgh has moved downstairs to form "Why Not Films". The move towards simpler work has also as much to do with 'a change is as good as a rest'. Their work has still its definitive stamp such as the promotional work for *Oilily* (fig. 28) with its oddly cropped photographs and use of disjointed syntax. The overall look is elegant, but the idea seems weak; a watered down version of earlier work. The *Philip Glass poster* (fig. 29) which was done last summer is surprisingly symmetrical in its composition. The image is quite rich and the reflections of the typography are a clever play on
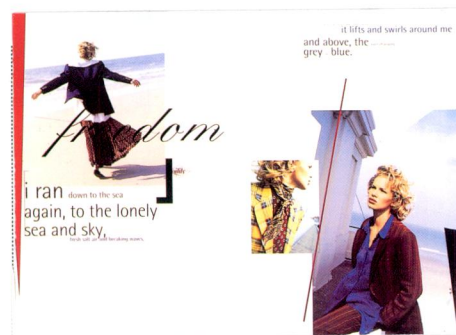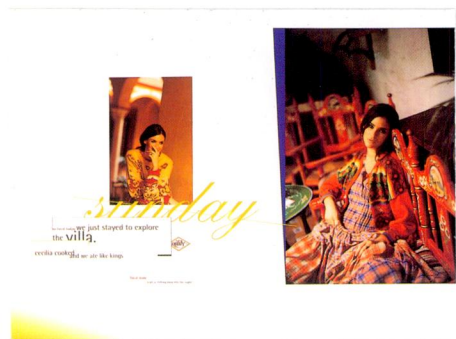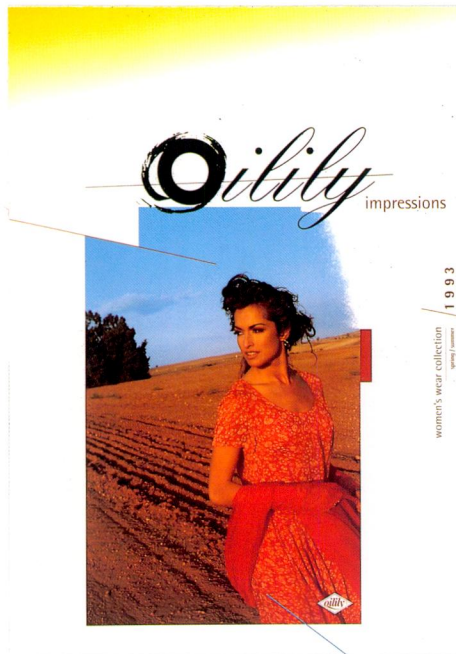
Figure 28: *Oilily* brochures (1993)
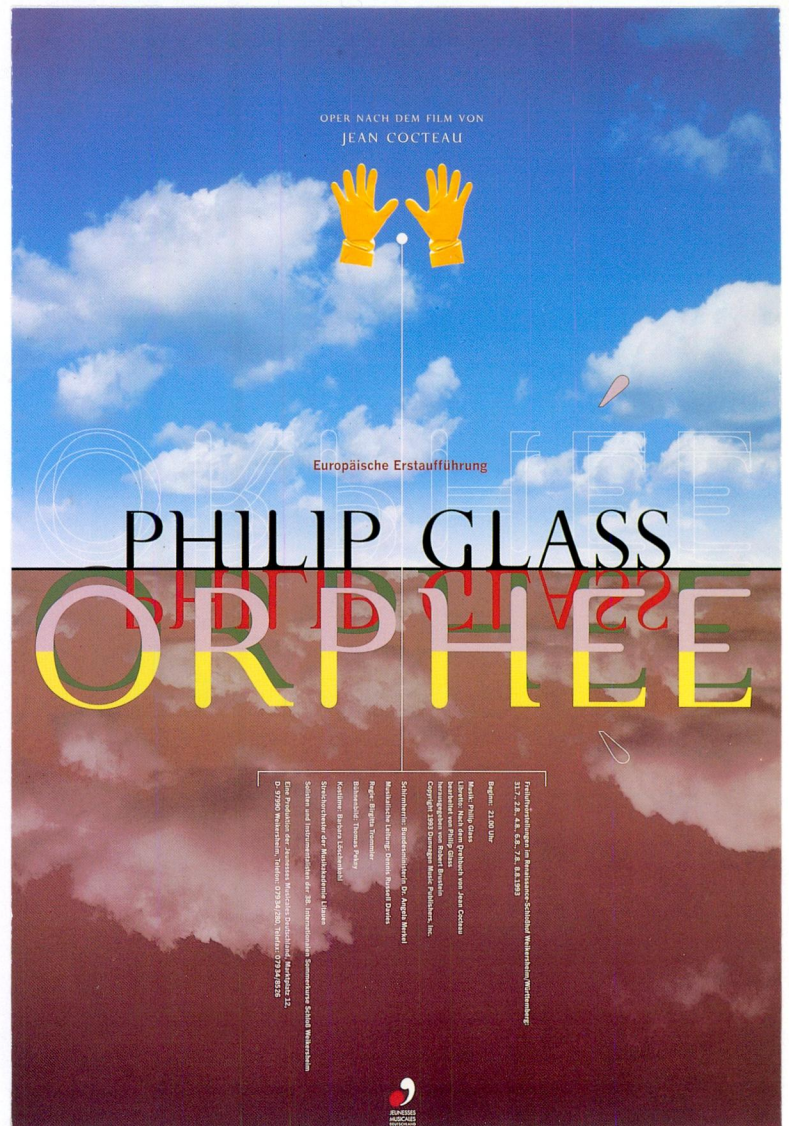
Figure 29: *Philip Glass* poster (1993)
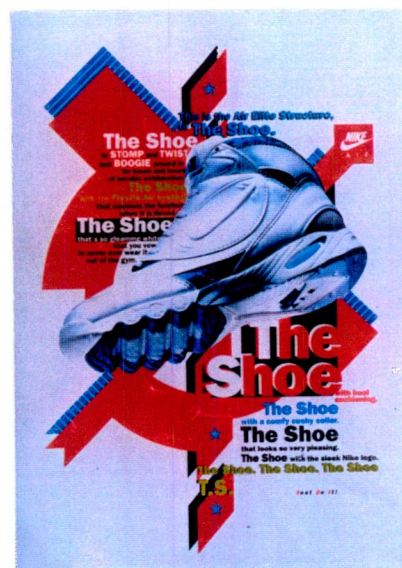
Figure 30: *Nike* advertisment (1993)

the composer's name, but the poster doesn't express the vigour of earlier work.

Their albums and singles for *Dodgy, A and M Records* are fun and amusing, the most inventive of which is their single cover for 'Water Under The Bridge', which uses calligraphic forms and collage to spell out the title. Why Not still get top clients - they have recently done an advertisement for *Nike* (fig.30) A lot of Why Not's clients are short-lived, such as Next, who they did three catalogues for. They also have loyal clients in companies like Royal Mail for whom they have designed another set of stamps for next year. They are still enjoying success, however, they are a little cynical about the 'design stardom' which design magazines have elevated them to. "In away we have been put up there to be shot at" jokes Altmann (Donnellan, 1994). So far, this has not happened. However, Why Not must seriously evaluate their direction before they begin to stagnate. Perhaps their present complacency is a reflection on clients who won't take risks.

Figure 32: *Invitation Card*
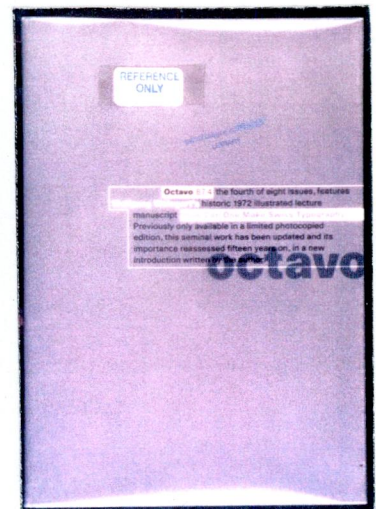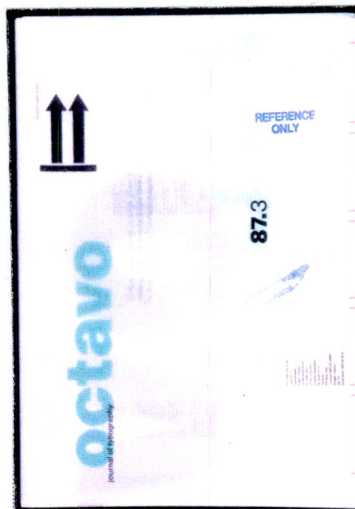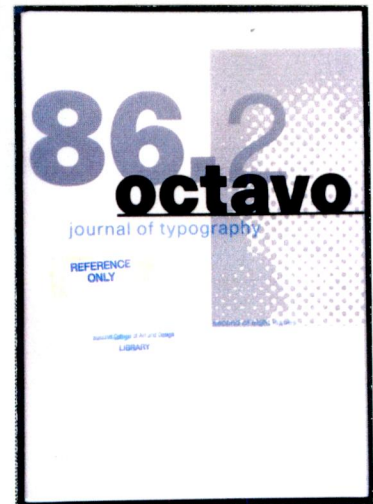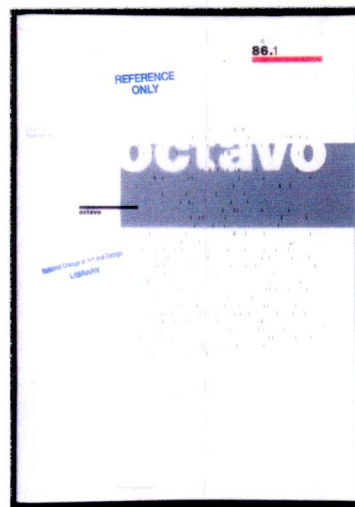
Figure 31: *Octavo issues* (1-4)

Figure 33: *Octavo 88.5* cover

8vo;their work

Octavo is one of 8vo's most visible products: "It is a proclamation of design intent and a record of experimentation"(Labuz, 1993, pg 132). The first of eight issues came out in 1986 and it was planned that the following issues would be published at six month intervals. The first four issues took a retrospective approach looking at the work of such designers as Anthony Froshaug and Geoff White, while also dealing with some contemporary work such as April Greiman's short article 'Information Texture', which was about her use of the Macintosh. *Octavo* was planned to use the the same format, but with differing typographic treatments in relation to content. Issues one to four (figs 31) were designed as a group and the overall look is subdued, the limited use of colour emphasising structure. For the main part the inside layouts adhere to two or three column grids, but the cover designs were more experimental: 8vo's first exercises in layering type as image. 8vo used the transparent flyleaf to layer type over text which was printed on the cover itself. The introduction pages have more experimental use of syntax, text running from one size to another and breaking out of the standard text column. Issue 3 uses the horizontal composition of the page with the text flowing from one page to another. The design of the first four issues was purposefully subdued in order not to overwhelm the work of the artists which it covered. The magazine also incorporated elements of the work by invited designers it represented into its own design. In this way *Octavo* can be seen as a process of assimilation, each issue adding to 8vo's design vocabulary. For instance, issue three's cover has type over-laying large sans serif letters of the journal's name, in a similar way to Froshaug's invitation card (fig. 32) on page six of issue one. Issues one to four are the least exciting of the series but they were the groundwork, setting an agenda from which 8vo's ideas could expand.

"Issues five and six are representative of an interest in extending Muir's modernist tradition" (Labuz, 1993, pg 132). The cover of *Octavo 88.5* (fig. 33) offers new possibilities - the flyleaf is used to greater effect. The type printed on the flyleaf interacts with that which is printed on the cover underneath. Typography may be easily read (by taking off the flyleaf and reading each message separately) or it can be appreciated as visual layering. The reader is being forced to interact with the information and thus the reader is asked to think. At the bottom of the truncated phrase 'fifth of eight iss', a row of dots and the increasingly vibrant hue of the

Figure 34: *Octavo 88.6* inside cover
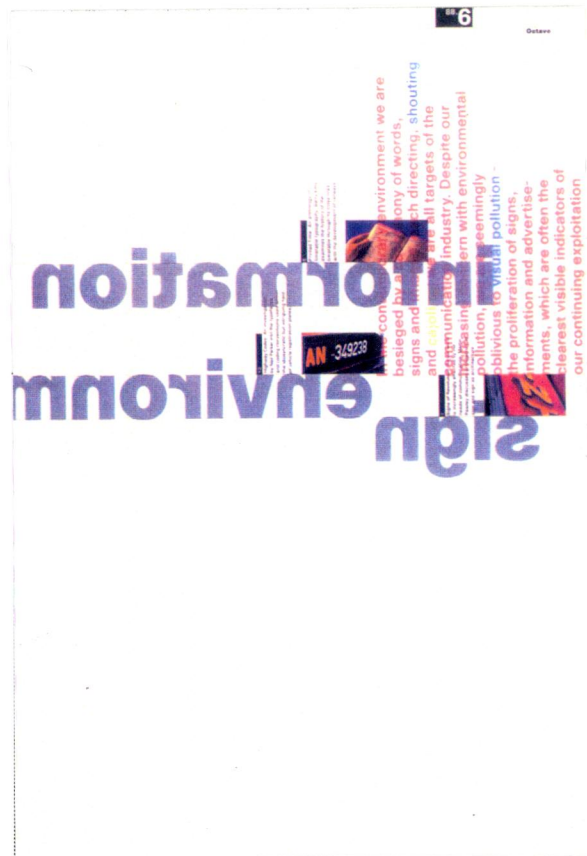
Figure 35: *Octavo 88.6* cover
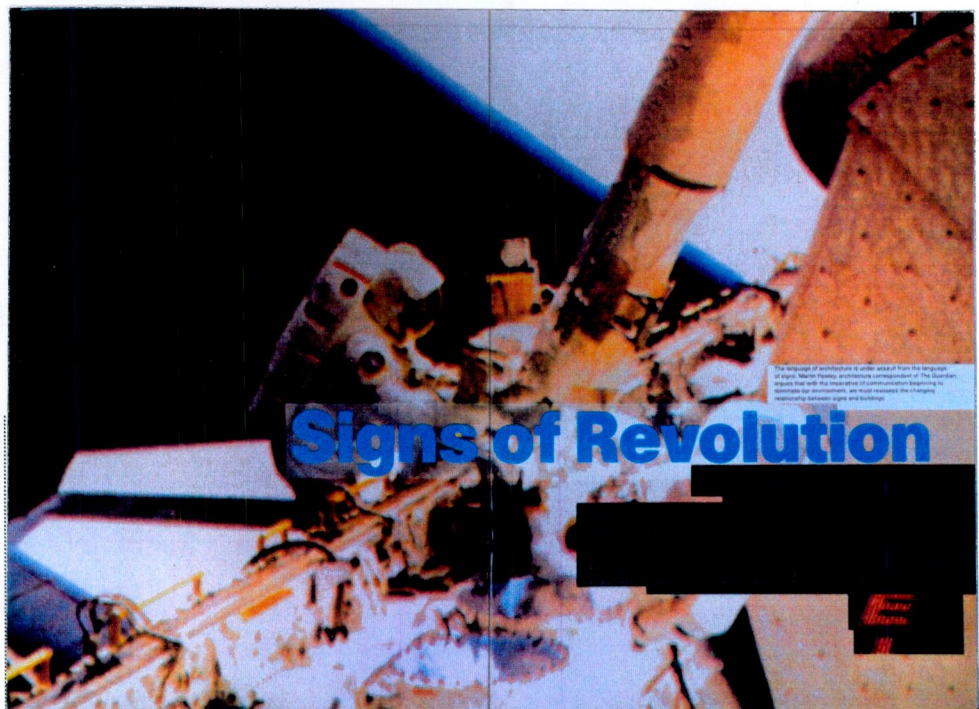
Figure 36: *Octavo 88.6* inside cover

information bar leads the viewer in the same direction as the phrase - inward towards the contents of the journal. The inside page (fig. 34) is a burst of dayglo yellow and gradations are used for a startling effect. This signifies an emphasis being placed on colour: "Colour is seminal to their latest work. Vibrant colour. No longer is it the morgue like toned grey and black of the early 8vo years". (Wilkins, *Graphics World*, no. 81, Nov/Dec, 1989, p. 52). In *Octavo 88.6* patterns become increasingly difficult to read. Type is printed on the front and the reverse of the fly-leaf (fig 35). To add to the visual chaos, the introduction (which in previous issues is printed on the inside page) is printed on the cover and sits behind the text on the flyleaf. The text concerns the graphic designer's responsibility to the environment and society: "In the contemporary environment we are besieged by a cacophony of words, signs and images, each directing, shouting and cajoling; we are targets of the communications industry"(8vo, *Octavo*, vol. 6, 1988, cover page)

The dilemma 8vo presents to us is 'visual pollution' and in the same way as our world has become a confused proliferation of competing messages, so too the cover of *Octavo* is deliberately chaotic and layered. In order to break down the message, the reader must interact with it. Not only is the title 'Information Environment Sign' printed backwards but it also, along with other text and images, obscures the introduction which is printed on the cover underneath at a ninety degree angle. Unlike previous issues, the magazine's title is not a dominant element in the composition, but is instead quite small and placed in the top-right hand corner. However, the format is instantly identifiable, with its adherence to the sans serif, its flyleaf and its respect for the unprinted area as a design element.

The contrast between the cover and the inside page (fig 36) is startling, with an explosion of image and colour. The title 'Signs of Revolution' glares in bright blue Helvetica bold against the colourful space age image. Unlike previous issues, the treatment of text is highly experimental. The article is a commentary on our cities in which information in the form of signs pervades, overwhelming the visual environment. Likewise the text does not adhere to any structure: The text columns are irregularly shaped, sometimes starting on the other page and working its way across. This irregularity communicates the idea of sprawling information and while legibility is not totally diminished, the difficulty in reading the article is a signal to

Figure 37: *Friedland* packaging and brochures
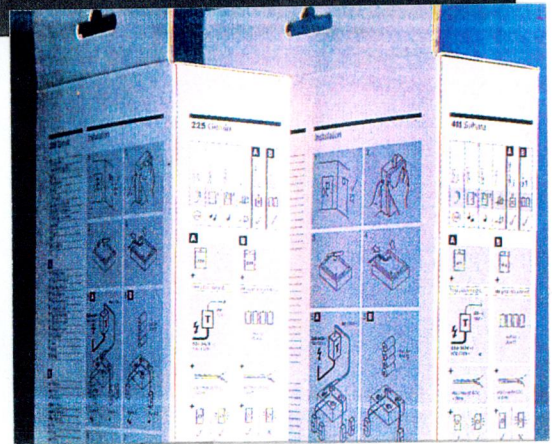
Figure 38: *Friedland* technical diagrams

Figure 39: *Hardware* poster
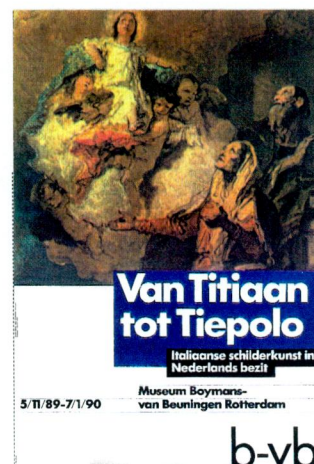
Figure 40: *Titian and Tiepolo* poster

designers to be more responsible in their action. Throughout 8vo's development there is a direct parallel between their typographic explorations in *Octavo* and its work for clients. The Friedland project, which lasted the best part of 1988 has a similar treatment to the *Octavo* issue of that year. Freidland are a bell-chime manufacturer from Stockport. It's identity (which can be seen on 8vo's packaging (fig. 37) with its graduated information bar is similar to the cover of issue 5 (fig.33) Its brochures are not far from *Octavo*; using photography in a similar way to the cover of issue *88.6*. The article 'Printed Time' in the same issue reflects their interest in information graphics which was also a primary concern in the Friedland project. "8vo's abilities as system builders have been tested to the limit by the sheer scale of reorganising and redesigning Friedland's technical data".(*Blueprint,*May, 1989, p. 14). Taking a chance that paid off, they decided to use an unfamiliar Berthold typesetting system, the first of its kind in the country, to generate and store diagrams used in technical information (fig 38) provided in thirteen languages. The potential cost savings for Friedland, which previously produced such material from scratch, are large indeed. In Friedland 8vo found a client more than equal in its commitment to modernist purity. Friedland's packaging has long since been distinguished by a reliance on grids and visual systems to impose the appearance of unity on its assembly line, even when there was a large divergence between the appearance of the bell chimes themselves. 8vo were very successful in updating their identity which was twenty years out of date.

Octavo has been partly a means of making contact with designers with similar concerns to themselves. Wim Crouel had contributed an article to issue 5, and 8vo subsequently met with him and showed him their work. Later, Crouel asked them to tackle the identity and promotional work for The Boymans van Buenigen Museum in Amsterdam'. According to Muir; "'I think what he felt he could get from us was a varied approach. He could see in *Octavo* that we changed the way we designed each issue based on content. I think he understood that we could probably come to grips with the different sorts of content matter of the various exhibition catalogues and express ourselves without overpowering the art'".(*Emigre*, vol. 14, 1992, p.53) Wim Crouel is a very opinionated designer and 8vo found every presentation like a tutorial. Whereas 8vo claim to have found this process of benefit, it seems like Crouel had been a limiting influence and that the project would have been pushed
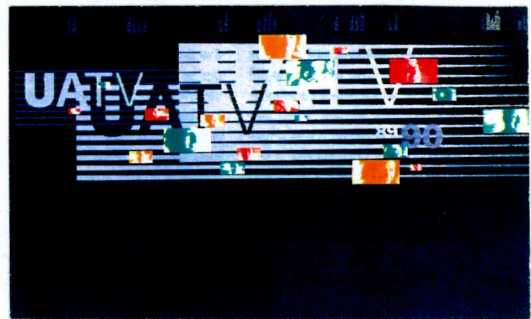
Figure 42: *Uden Associates* poster
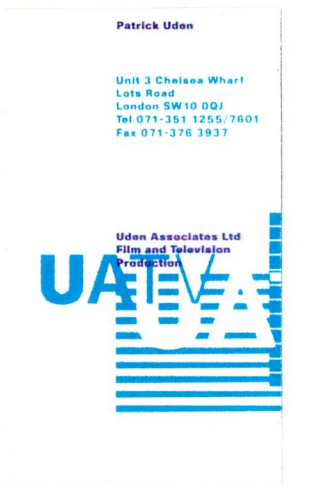
Figure 43: *Uden Associates* stationary

Figure 41: *Uden Associates* cassette and labels
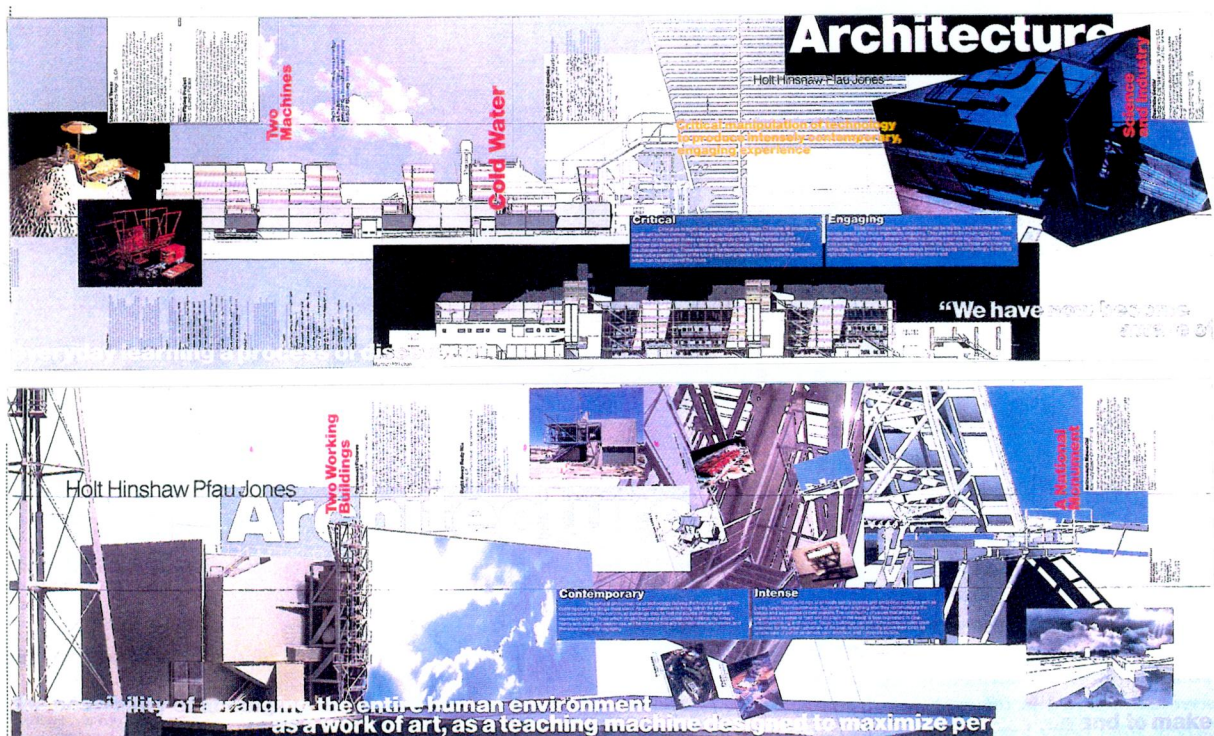
Figure 44: *Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones* poster/ brochure

further in terms of the relationship of typography to photographic image. A more successful example of this is their *Hardware* poster (fig. 39); the outline sans serif of the title interacts with the image behind it. 8vo's visual vocabulary sympathises with the tone of the poster, as it is promoting a exhibition of modern art, however I feel other posters such as the one for the *Titian and Tiepolo* exhibition (fig.40) are more problematic. Here the sans serif and geometric structures jar against the expressively rendered painting. The project overall fails to take any risks, the identity (lowercase Univers initials) looks like it was done in five minutes and the look of the type with its bulky text blocks calls to mind early 8vo work.

Much more challenging and inventive is 8vo's identity for Uden Associates; a London film and television production company. The client wanted an identity that would reflect the energy and flexibility of the new digital technology. 8vo's solution subjects the company's *UATV* logo to a series of graphic transformations that broadly correspond to the production process. The cassette and cannister labels (fig 41) and the folder cover and poster (fig. 42) are the most abstract, while the stationery (fig 43) is appropriately restrained. 8vo have produced an identity which is instantly recognisable while also providing an adaptable structure which can be used for various forms of promotional material. 8vo have thrown away the rule book at this stage, but not without fully absorbing it first. Whereas the use of sans serif in the Boyman's van Buenigen project is stark and unimaginative, here it is cleverly integrated into a modern language; its solid graphic forms able to withstand the transformation it is subjected to. The effective use of colour and the layering of photographic images in the poster give it an energy which has surfaced in 8vo's work as they have progressed.

Their double-sided poster (fig 44) for the San Francisco architectural firm, Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones explodes with colour. The connection between modern architecture and typography dates back to Le Corbusier's extensive use of grids but also can be seen in the typographic material that modernist typographers use, such as stepping effects, rules and the solid non decorative shapes of the sans serif which have an architectonic feel to them. 8vo's treatment of this double sided poster uses these devices extensively in a building process using text and photographic image. These multi-layered constructions effectively reflect the ideas of a forward looking

Figure 45: *Factory Music* cd cover

Figure 46: *Hacienda 7* poster
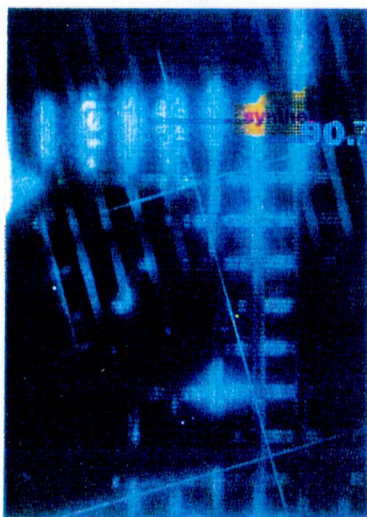
Figure 47: *Octavo 90.7* cover

A new language of synthesis is needed;
it must express the spirit of the age and
not be afraid of tomorrow.

It must reject
letterpress-derived-dead-typography

Figure 48: *Octavo 90.7* introduction spread

architectural company who have not forgotten the principles of twentieth century modernism.

The piece first functions as a brochure and folds out into breathtaking panoramic poster on both sides. The text (while initially serving as information) now becomes image; part of a complex assemblage of type and photography. The sheer scale of the poster is breathtaking, communicating the vastness of the company's enterprise. The two sides are linked by the company's announcement which flows along the bottom of the poster and continues on the other side as a continuous dialogue.

However, 8vo's clients are not always predictable, since 1986, they have worked for *Factory Music*, for which they have done promotional work for their club Hacienda and numerous CD covers (fig. 45) which Factory also produce. With the Hacienda posters 8vo have pursued explorations in European abstraction. In a comparison of Hacienda 4 (fig. 5) of 1986 and Hacienda 7 (fig. 46) of 1989 one can see how much their vocabulary has changed, with the introduction of curved elements in the shapes they construct. In sympathy with these curved forms 8vo have started to use rounded versions of Akzidenz Grotesk typeface which in contrast to the block-like forms, are more curved in their shapes. The application of bright colour is typical of their work at this stage (the white areas are luminous and continue broadcasting after dark).

In 1989, 8vo installed their first Macintosh and by 1990 their connection to computer design is clearly visible. Issue 7 of *Octavo* begins with a call to fellow designers to embrace this new technology, in the same way as the early modernists embraced the technological means of their time. 8vo believes that the computer forces the designer into the new: When the determinants are new, radical change must occur from within. It is a declaration not dissimilar from Weingart's rejection of Swiss formalism. The flyleaf (fig 47), the introduction page (fig. 48) and nine of the interior spreads use a grid as a visual device. This acknowledges a heritage but it signifies that we must look for new structures that have relevance to this technology. The image of a man's eye is printed on the cover and can be seen vaguely through the dense imagery on the flyleaf. The eye represents vision; a serious look to the future.

Figure 49: *Type and Image* (legibility spread)

communicates on a number of levels, the eye is led continuously in circles through this complex construction. Captions like 'Why the centred layout', 'Grid Grilled Gill', 'What a Con'; transmit the message in a powerful way; the typographic treatment reinforcing the overall message.

This page is also a celebration of the Macintosh, which 8vo see as liberating technology. This spread with its multicolored layers would have been impossible to handset. The overall tone is an announcement to fellow designers to embrace this technology and to realise a modern form of communication. This however, was misunderstood by some designers. Ken Garland went to town in criticising this spread in his article *'Stop Footling Around'*:

> All the incipient mannerisms that had been present from the very first issue have now burgeoned into monstrosities. Whatever respect there had been for text had now all but disappeared. Innovation had become gimmick."(Garland, *Design*, December 1992., p. 11)

Garland totally missed the point - the essay was repeated on the back page in standard linear format. The spread was not meant to be read coherently, but was intended to provoke other designers out of their complacency about communication. 8vo's work has revelled in the potential of the Macintosh since *Octavo 7*. However, it has not changed their work dramatically, which had in a way anticipated the new technology. Even in 1986, 8vo were aware of the computer's impact in the future:

> As information technology promises to make everyone capable of designing and producing printed documents, the study of the arrangement of visual information on a given surface assumes a fresh significance, if we are not to be blessed with yet more typographic mediocrity.(8vo,*Octavo*, vol. 1, 1986, p.1)

8vo's work had become progressively layered and complex, the Macintosh brought a stage further. The embracing of this new means of production corresponded with 8vo's opening up to other ideas: Issue 7 has an article on Philippe Apeloig's work, who although having a training in *Swiss* design, demonstrating a much freer use of typography using serif typefaces with sans serif, distorting them when required to

Figure 50: *It really is Magic* poster

Figure 51: *Jet Offset* poster

increase meaning.

Muir says they have survived by working against the rules they started off with (Donnellan, 1994). Although in the beginning 8vo rejected any distortion of type-faces placing emphasis on purity of form, this had changed by 1990. In the poster 'It Really Is Magic' (Fig 50) which was for a printers called Magic, the immense copy forms the image and 8vo's typographic treatment exemplifies printing capabilities of the client's new Berthold system. The overall look is not far from the infamous legibility spread (fig. 49) and in a similar way, the text communicates through its visual impact, rather than the copy itself, which is quite bland.

The *Jet Offset* poster/brochure (Fig. 51) is also a visual expression of a printer's capabilities. Here 8vo have successfully created a junction between the literal and the visual message. The words are disjointed and in order to connect them, the viewer must search through its layered structure, at the same time, being visually stimulated by its frenetic imagery. The *Magic* and *Jet Offset* posters show 8vo at their most playful yet; it is obvious that they are enjoying the process more in they are becoming more inventive in their inventive use of type and layout. Muir looks back at the earlier work as "the chore", something which had to be worked through before they could move onto more "expressive" work. (Donnellan ,1994)

By 1991, they re-evaluated their direction and concerns and these materialised in their calender for Zanders (a manufacturer of fine papers near Cologne). Zanders have employed the best in the artistic field since 1961 to design their calendar, every Christmas has stood out as a beacon of quality .

> "The commission to design the calendar is a godsend for the designer or design company that wins the job. The Zander's package includes complete artistic freedom, unrivalled produc-tion facilities and technical help, and distribution world-wide to the people who matter".(Evamy, *Design*, December '91, p. 34)

Contributions to the calendar have been Roy Lichenstein, (1987), Antonio Tapies (1988) and David Hockney(1989). According to Simon Kennedy who joined 8vo in 1990); "The calendar project happened at an important time for us in terms of the
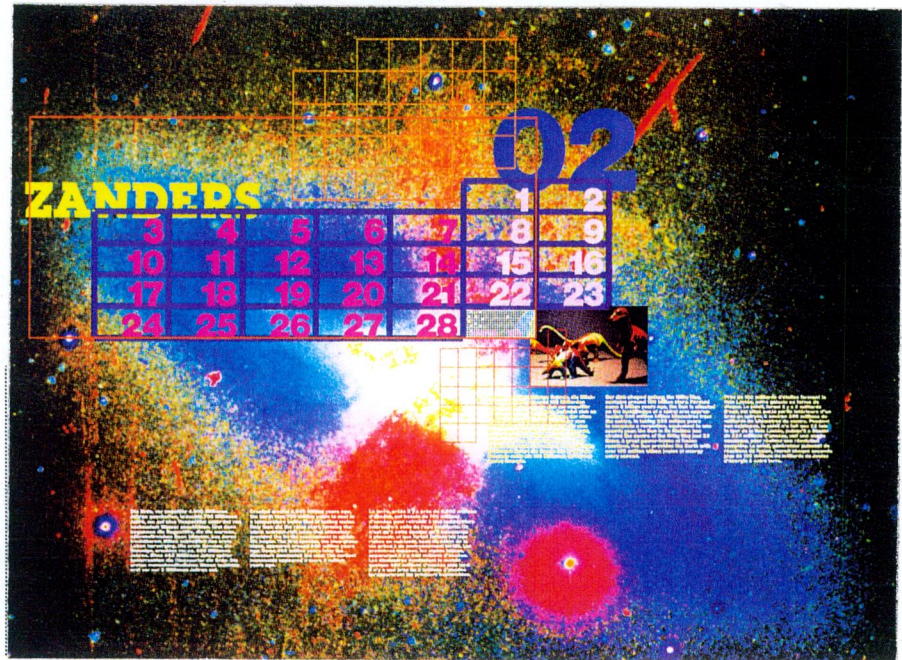
Figure 52: *Zanders calender* February page

Figure 53: *Zanders calender* February 29th

direction and development in our work' (Evamy, *Design*,December, 1991, p. 35) .
Not uncommon with 8vo the dialogue between them and the client was empha-
sised. Between them, 8vo and Zanders have created a breathtaking trip to the junc-
tion of modern print technology and design. The title of the calendar is Time,
Future, Machine Its central theme, developed by 8vo is the measurement of time,
and the development of the human understanding of time scales. 'Underlying the
ferment of image, grid and text is a simple existentialist wish: that we learn the true
value of the time we have!"(Evamy, *Design*,December, 1991, p. 35).

The year starts with the Big Bang Theory. In February (fig. 52), dinosaurs appear -
February 29th has a page to itself (fig. 53), where the origin of the leap year is dealt
with. The reader is taken on a journey through history shown how the concept of
time was developed. In between, there are megaliths, pyramids, sundials, sunflow-
ers, Albert Einstein (fig. 54) medieval Book of Hours and a Buddha(fig. 55). In con-
trast to previous approaches to the calendar, 8vo wanted to emphasize the concept
and spent days researching in the astronomy department at Foyles. The calendar
marks a new phase in their development. Muir explains;"there is a typographic atti-
tude through-out the calendar, in that the grids and modules, which were precon-
ceived, become the fabric for the whole thing. The text becomes secondary, and
the storyline comes to the fore". (Donnellan, 1994) 8vo had been trying to break
away from producing the kind of typographically based work the office had
become well known since 1986

The designers had been disappointed by past neglect of the numerical progression
of the calendar, all too often run as a strip along the top or bottom of the page.
After the final day of each month, a die-cut exposes the remaining days of that
week in the grid of the following month. A 'ghost' grid of the previous month also
appears on each page. Both devices, besides adding depth to the overall
imagescape, save flicking back and forth to check dates, as the calendar is far too
big for such inconveniences. 8vo made a point of integrating the clients logo into
the design. Kennedy explains that they used it used it the same size on every page,
but just hidden it within the layers (Evamy, *Design*,December, 1991). Different
papers are used for the pages and these are indicated by a single rectangle of virgin
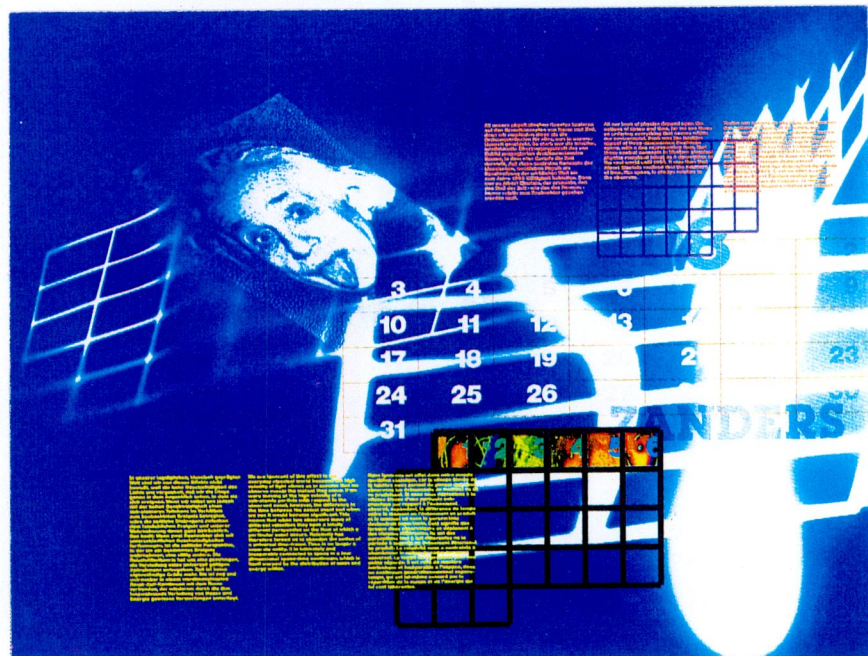paper placed in each grid. The whole calendar was designed on the Macintosh,

Figure 54: *Zanders calender* August page
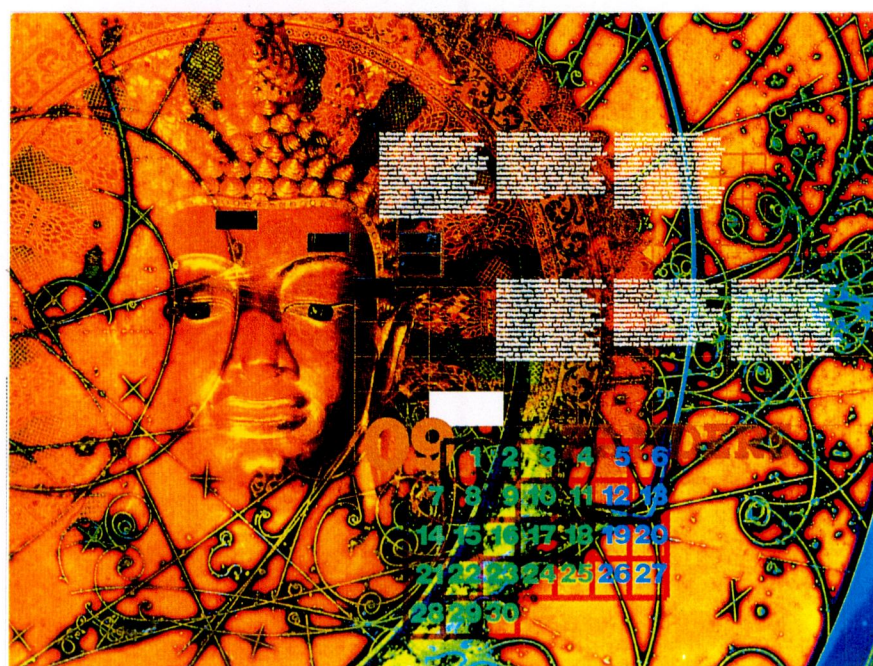
Figure 55: *Zanders calender* September

from initial story- boards and layout developments through to finished visuals for each page. "We were interested in using the Macintosh for design and not for production". (8vo, *Page*, vol. 4, 1992, p. 5) The Macintosh gave them a better idea of the finished result and allowed them to explore avenues which otherwise would be too time consuming or simply impossible without this technology. "We made a conscious choice for flexibility so that we could try different ideas quickly and be able to make meaningful assessments of many multi-dimensional parameters as the project developed through the concepts and design phases"(8vo, *Page*, pg 5). The page structures (accurate to one hundredth of a millimetre) were all determined on the Macintosh. These structures provided a constant source of reference in bringing together elements created on the various systems.

Dialogue between 8vo and Zanders was mainly about production techniques - their production staff were continually on hand to give advice. The finished product is an exhilarating spectrum of production techniques - metallic mezzotints and over-prints and varnishes. Holt and Muir have created what they believe to be the definitive statement about where 8vo stands. Typecast in the late eighties by the subdued manner of early issues of *Octavo*, and tired of being lumped together with dozens of designers who have imitated their muted layouts, 8vo has exploited the opportunity of the Zander's calendar to put distance between itself and its imitators. According to Mark Holt; "'We are not making design out of type anymore. We have put the emphasis on content. We have put the images first. We have been going for six years as 8vo, but we are only just cutting the surface, we are only just starting to produce 8vo work'". (Evamy, *Design*,December, 1991).

Octavo 8 which came out in 1992 is only available on CD-Rom disc, a daring move on the 8vo's part to "challenge the standards of communication and interface design in the emerging new media"(Wilkins,*Octavo,vol. 8, 1992*). The essay is on Multi-media - the use of computer technology to combine images and sound in new and more interactive ways. The material is structured into an editorial and nine 'subject areas' - 'Communication', 'Information', 'Media', 'Interactivity', 'Metaphors', 'Issues', 'Roles', 'Future' and 'Challenge'.

The act of 'reading' on this CD is by using the mouse. You click the mouse on the

Figure 56: *Octavo 92.8* sequence

subject area and the text is narrated as you watch phrases materialises on screen to reinforce the ideas (fig. 56). This demands greater interaction of the reader - the text must be prompted at continual intervals with the mouse. Phil Baines in his reveiw of the issue has the following criticism: "Even a straightforward 'animated' sequence only happens via user-prompting. You want more detail? Just click. You want to continue? Just click. You want to go back and read that last sentence? Hard luck. Sounds cumbersome? It is ".(Baines, Design, vol. 5, no. 2, 1992)

Baines found the essay itself both interesting and thought provoking. Great claims have been made for this new media: is as important as the introduction of the first printing press, the first telephone and the first tv. "Multimedia is accessible, electronic media signals the death of print" (Wilkins, *Octavo*, vol. 8,1992). Overall Baines criticises the format as not doing anything to excite or encourage people about the new media. Baines does not reject CD-Rom's potential for easing the pre-sentation of complex material, but in this case he sees it as no more then a gim-mick. This I would not agree with fully; the CD-Rom issue is not technology for its own sake; it has been used to develop further the interactive nature of the previous seven issues of *Octavo;* the flyleaf was used not only to layer type over that which is printed on the cover itself. The slight opacity of the flyleaf creates a depth of vision and this is pushed further in *Octavo 8:* The text shifts between layers, emphasising the main points of the narrated text and then blurring into the background. A con-stant element amongst these layers is a grid image which had been introduced to 8vo's vocabulary in issue seven of *Octavo.*

8vo have not produced much work 1992 which they wish to be represented by. Zanders is a tough project to follow; clients who appropriate such freedom to designers to designers are very rare indeed. However in a number of projects 8vo have pushed their ideas further, building on their new direction which was established in the Zanders project: According to Simon Kennedy;

> "The calender as an object is the perfect vehicle for a dense visual narrative, one that can be 'read' over a period of a year. The calender told a complex story with 366 days in which to do so. Other work with dense visual statements include 'Nation Fender Association', Mohndruck pre-press brochure and Boymans/8vo collaboration."(Donnellan, 1994)
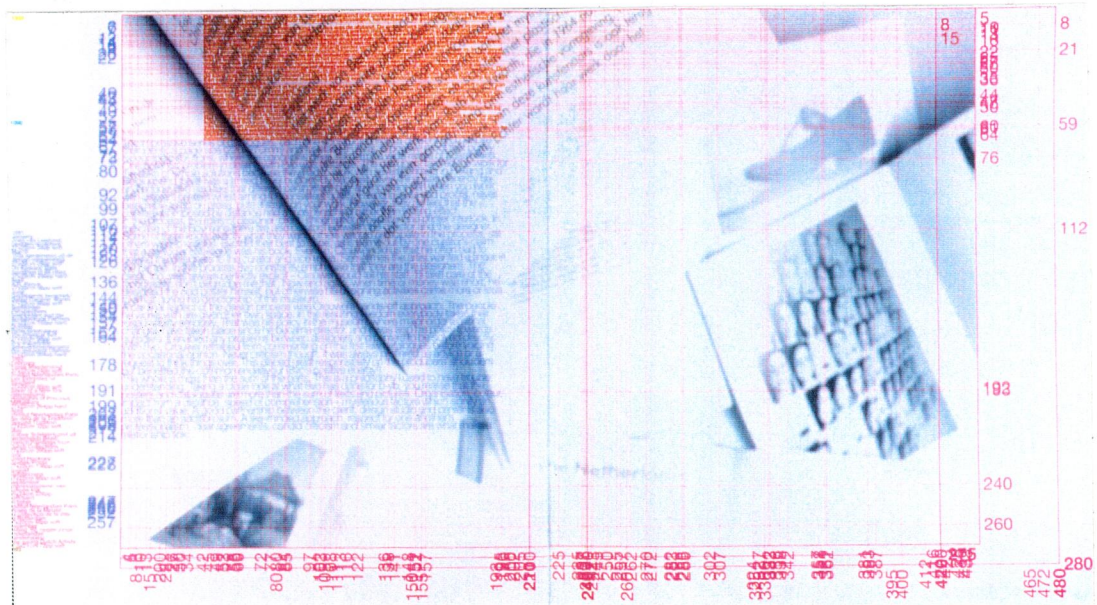
Figure 57: *NFA* brochure

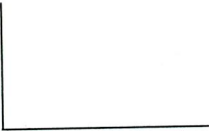Figure 58: *Design: 8vo, London* spread

The *Nation Fender Brochure* (fig. 57) bears a close similarity to their work for Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones (fig. 44), and this is a reflection of the fact that NFA have a lot in common with HHPJ; they are both innovative architectural firms who have a thorough understanding of modernist principle and have an international outlook (it is worth noting that NFA are based in Thailand but the buildings represented show only slight nuances of the native culture). In a similar way to the HHPJ brochure poster, the design integrates photographic images of buildings, structures and architectural models, with artists impressions of building developments as backgrounds. Thus not only are the buildings well represented but one gets an idea of the various stages of the development process. The text's legibility is often strained against these complicated, colourful backgrounds. As in the case of their Zanders calender, 8vo are letting the images tell the story.

8vo cross the boundaries of legibility in their brochure *Design: 8vo, London*. Produced last year it is probably their most innovative designs to date. It continues their new direction which was established with the Zanders project: Like the calendar it opts for a visual rather than a literal message. The booklet marks Wim Crouel's retirement as the director of the Museum Boyman's-Van Bueningen. The text concerns 8vo's approach to their work for Boyman's and Wim's Crouel's influence. The text focuses on the theoretical ideas behind their approach rather than the work itself: Thus 8vo have not used standard representations of the various promotional material they design; but instead the images are close-ups of sections of the brochures overlaid. The images are blurred, becoming abstract tonal areas with some contrasting areas of sharpness. This technique is at its most colourful on the brochure's cover, the image overlaid with a plethora of multi-coloured grid lines. Whereas the grid lines refer to 8vo's attention to technical detail, the areas of merging colours refers to the imagination. 8vo are quoted in the text as saying: "'We don't need influence from outside, just involvement with the problem, prag-matism, conviction and formula,inventing positive energy, mystery, intuition, strat-egy, process.'" (Paul Groenendal, 1993, p. 6).

The inside pages follow the same format only with black and white photographic images and the addition of text. The text is difficult to read because of the tonal backgrounds and the absence of leading. Legibility is most strained on page seven

(fig. 58) where the text is layered over a blurred image of text from a Boyman's brochure. Since *Design: 8vo, London* was of limited edition and only sent to interested parties, 8vo knew its audience would take the time to read it. Once read the text could be appreciated as texture; as part of a sophisticated visual assemblage which communicates on a visual level.
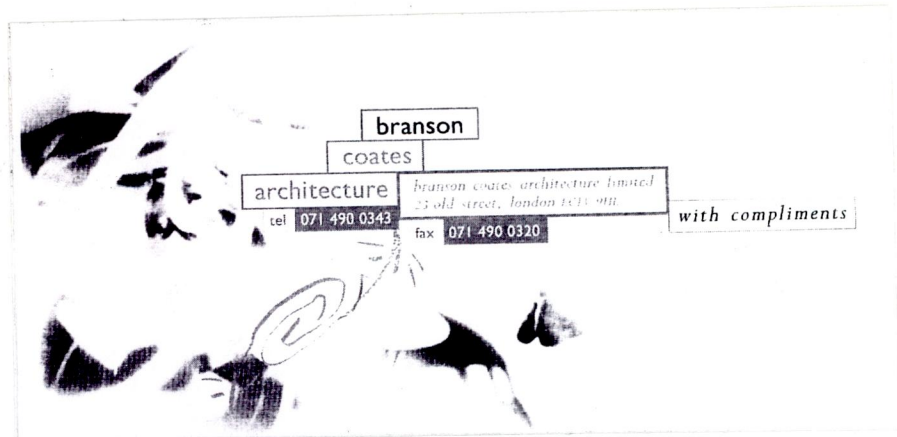
Figure 59: *Branson Coates* compliment slip

Figure 44: *Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones* poster/ brochure

Why Not Associates and 8vo ; a comparison

A comparison of their work in the context of contemporary design and its issues.

Why Not Associates and 8vo have gained significant recognition from the design world. They have earned success on their own terms and in doing so have challenged standards which other designers mindlessly accept. Why Not have become the idols of student designers; they rapidly shot to design stardom mainly because of their popularity with design magazines. But as with other designers and design groups who have gained success too quickly, the fall from their pedestal could be just as sudden. It seems Why Not, in trying to hold on to their initial success, have fallen into the creative dead-end of self-imitation. However regardless of whether or not they continue to progress, they have to date made a vital contribution to British design.

Self-imitation is something which 8vo have avoided. From their modest beginnings in 1985 they have planned their development to be consistent and gradual, never losing sight of basic principles: "'Do each job better than the job before, never duplicate, not anyone else, not yourself'". (Groenendal,1993, p.5). Their own magazine *Octavo* was a valuable self premonition exercise: *Octavo* as a vehicle, explains Simon Kennedy, introduced 8vo to clients, who, on commissioning design were prepared to extend a far freer rein because they both understood and more importantly trusted the output of people who were capable of publishing, designing an editing such a magazine (Donnellan, 1994). 8vo had the foresight to realise the value of long-term business relationships and thus have not been affected as much as Why Not by the end of the consumerist boom. Whereas Why Not seem now to have to compromise with clients, 8vo are still enjoying considerable creative freedom: "I imagine we are given a freer rein than most - because we expect it to be so. This is an understanding that is rarely expressed but often implicit in the relationship".(Donnellan, 1994)

Why Not and 8vo have attracted different types of clients and this is highlighted, for instance, by the contrast of their work for architectural firms; Why Not's identity for Branson Coates (fig. 59) reflects a much more outlandish approach to architectural design than that of the modernist mode of Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones, reflected in 8vo's double-sided poster (fig.44). Branson Coates are more intuitive in their design approach and this is reflected in the abstract forms (inspired by the photography of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy) behind the type-logo itself, which which its box

32

Figure 61: Brochure spread Kia Boon Phoa

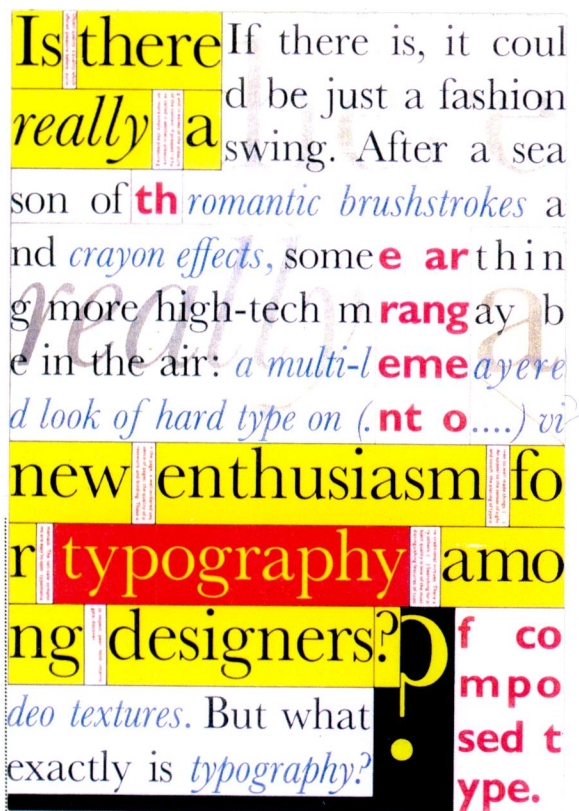Figure 60: *Issue* cover Cartlidge Levene

Figure 63: *Graghic World* cover Phil Baines

Figure 62: *The Written Image* poster Jon Barnbrook

shapes gives a feeling of structure. Similarly 8vo's modernist vocabulary of the sans serif, rules,grids and stepping effects have an architectonic feel to them which is in sympathy with HHPJ's design process. Despite the contrasts between these two architectural firms they both have a European outlook which Why Not and 8vo share. Both have worked extensively in Europe. As with other London 'New Wavers', their work communicates on a fundamental visual level rather than a literal one. Today's designers have opted against the very English idea-based approach to which design is secondary in importance. Why Not's Next Five catalogue design and 8vo's Zanders calendar are good examples, of this where the message is a visual one and thus can easily cross national barriers. Designers are adopting an international approach because they are now experiencing the entire world rather than just their own country. Also students are studying abroad more (in such course as the post-graduate course in Basle) and also designers are lecturing in other countries (such as Gert Dumbar's time at the R.C.A. which greatly influenced the new generation of London designers).

8vo were one of the first British design groups to adopt a European perspective and have since influenced such design groups as Cartlidge Levene: Ian Cartlidge has said; "'We would like to be thought of as European Designers. That's very important, to me, British Design still has that nostalgic ring about it.'"(Poyner, *Blueprint*, May, 1991, p. 33) Simon Kennedy says the work of both Cartlidge Levene (fig. 60) and Kia Phoa Boon (fig. 61) have been influenced by 8vo. (Donnellan, 1994)

Why Not, on the other hand, in common with the work of Phil Baines (fig. 62) and Jon Barnbrook (fig. 63), have retained traditional undertones in their work which are more apparent in projects such as the Queen's commemorative stamps and the Hull City Festival project. These designers believe that one can be modern without forgetting one's heritage. In his article 'Modernity and Tradition', Phil Baines makes the assertion that there is little disparity between these two concepts. To support this he quotes two of the greatest exponents of modernist theory - Tschichold and Le Corbusier: "'Tradition means handing over, delivering up, legacy, education, guidance'".Tschichold says (in 'The Form of the Book' p. 84); "'Tradition means handing over, delivering up, legacy, education, guidance'" (Baines,*Eye*, vol. 2, no. 7, 1992, p. 35)

"'To be modern is not a fashion but a state. It is necessary to understand history, and he who understands history knows how to find continuity between that which was, that which is, and that which will be'".(Baines, *Eye*, vol. 2, no. 7, 1992, p. 35). Baines concludes that this seems to fuse traditionalism and modernism and points to a way of working in the future which is positive in its philosophical concern and tolerant in its means of expression.

Although 8vo have stringently adhered to a modernist approach, they realise it was only one route to take. "'We formulated a very strong feeling that there was a lot of crap around. Stuff without foundation. We found that the only way to actually produce good work was by having a tunnel vision and by committing ourselves to rejecting a lot of bad influences'"(*Emigre*,vol 14,1992,p.22) Simon Kennedy says that the sans serif was one of many options; they simply chose to avoid the rest (Donnellan, 1994). 8vo set themselves parameters and restrictions from which they could develop - and their commitment to developing a present day design language has meant their work has never become anachronistic.

Why Not use serif faces but with an asymmetry which is completely modern in con-struction. Why Not have drawn freely from Modernist design. In the tradition of Herbert Bayers' Bauhaus typography and also Dutch design, Why Not often use lower-case type (at the R.C.A Altmann did his thesis on legibility in children's books). They have use it for both their own identity and their one for Branson Coates, however the reasons are purely aesthetic. In contrast to 8vo, Why Not do not analyse or theoreticise about what the do. 8vo devoted issue six of *Octavo* to the issue of lower-case vs. upper type.

> Lower-case letter forms, when used exclusively, have in the past had undertones of a rationalist, pioneering and even revolu-tionary nature; there is a sense of existing standards being ques-tioned, of arguably anachronistic modes of communication being challenged. The lower-case theme may initially seem eso-teric, but in many ways it is a microcosm of longer debate, one which rouses pertinent questions about the potential of design to be part of a force for positive social change, rather than mere-ly a grinning, compliant service industry. (8vo, *Octavo* 88.6, pg 1)

8vo feel strongly about the social role of design, an agenda which is very rare in today's design profession. Articles such as Peter Rea's Where is the *School of Thought* (issue 3) and *Signs of Revolution* by Martin Pawley (issue 6) raise questions about the designer's responsibility to society. Whereas Why not have no social agenda, they do believe that a more socially activated designer will emerge once British education changes its emphasis from that of how to make money. Peter Saville was quoted in the ID Birthday issue as saying that the 'nineties will witness the arrival of more caring intelligent design. "Now that the consumerist boom is over other things will come to the fore".(Saville, *ID magazine*, vol. 5, no.3, May 1991)

Certainly design groups like Why Not and 8vo have made positive steps towards more intelligent design. Their questioning of accepted standards have resulted in fresh imaginative solutions for projects which have in the past been dealt with in a very bland way. In the area of corporate identity, both Why Not and 8vo have produced identities which are malleable and applicable in many different while retaining their familiarity (for example Why Not's Hull City logo and 8vo's identity for Uden Associates). Both their unwillingness to accept tablets of stone dogma, has also contributed to current typographical debates. The editorial role of the designer has been addressed by them both, something which Weingart recognised as missing from graphic design courses."In my opinion, one cannot make really good typography without exact knowledge and precise understanding of text"(Weingart,1987,p. 16) "'It is essential when you start a project that you first analyse the text and image material; read it, try to understand it, because the design comes out of the content."(Donnellan, 1994). After Why Not's close involvement with Rick Poyner in deciding a structure for his essay 'type and deconstruction', (the introduction for *Typography Now: the next wave*), Poyner added to the end of the essay *Type as deconstruction in the digital age*:

> If this kind of typography is not to become an exercise in
> style, or fashionable deconstruction, then designers must be able
> to function as visual editors who can bring acute perception to
> their readings of text. In some cases (*Emigre* and 8vo's maga-
> zine, *Octavo*, are examples) the designer might combine the role
> of editor and typographer. If this is not possible, then author
> and typographer must work together more closely than is usually

the case to establish and amplify textual meaning. Only then
there will be a satisfying relationship between typographic
expression and text; (Poyner,1991, p.18.)

The designers role in communication has become increasingly important since the new technology gives the designer unlimited control. The designer can control not just the way in which information is presented (typeface, typesetting and lay-out), but with hands-on directness designers have become visual editors who control the meaning of information itself. Why Not's idiosyncratic and totally unconventional design for the book, *Typography Now-the next wave*, reflects the aesthetic and freedom of this liberating technology. However, unlike the work shown in the book, Why Not's approach to typography anticipated the Macintosh; they were hand setting similarly layered typography in college. The book is a 'work in progress' review of the results of the changes of technology in the last ten years. "The work, illustrated in *Typography Now* demonstrates some of the visual excitement, confusion and often down-right ugliness that easy access to the new technology has created." (Webb, *Eye*, vol. 2, no. 7, 1991)

Probably nothing causes more argument amongst graphic designers than where the boundaries of legibility lie.Unfortunately, as Michele- Anne Dauppe points out in her article *Get the Message*, the debate on legibility has been diverted to one on craft: This, Dauppe explains, is because the technology smashes vested interests: The whole guild-like conspiracy of typographer/typesetter/printers being usurped by the Macintosh - when under threat raise high the 'craft' banner(Dauppe, The work work shown in this book looks to the outer edges of legibility and frequently beyond. Now the construction of metal type, which carried over into typesetting, has been removed, all the rules of conventional typography are open to challenge. Designers are their own compositors and systems are so flexible that experimentation is easy. Layers of type can be built up, one on another on any desired axis. Images can be merged with information. The typeface itself can be altered, hybridised or invented. In a lot of this work legibility varies from strained to nonexistent. Philip Meggs in his article; *The New Illegibility* accounts for the increased illegibility as fuelled by the collapse of they typesetting industry and the placement of powerful graphics software into the hands of people who either don't know or don't care about legibility (Meggs, *Print*,vol. 46, no. 5, September, 1992, p.11).
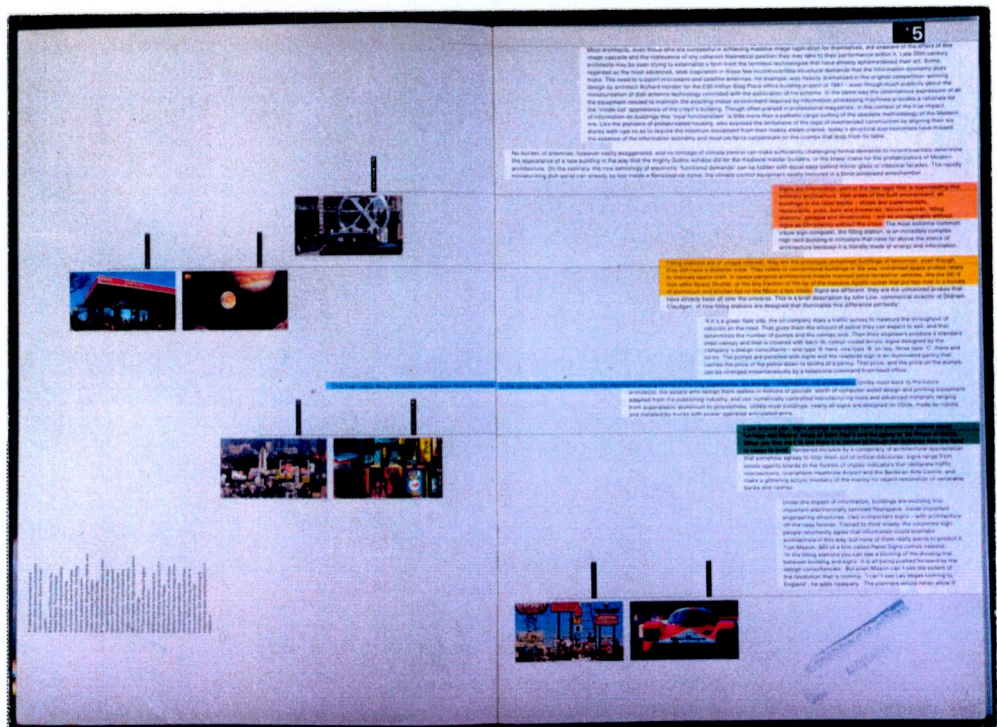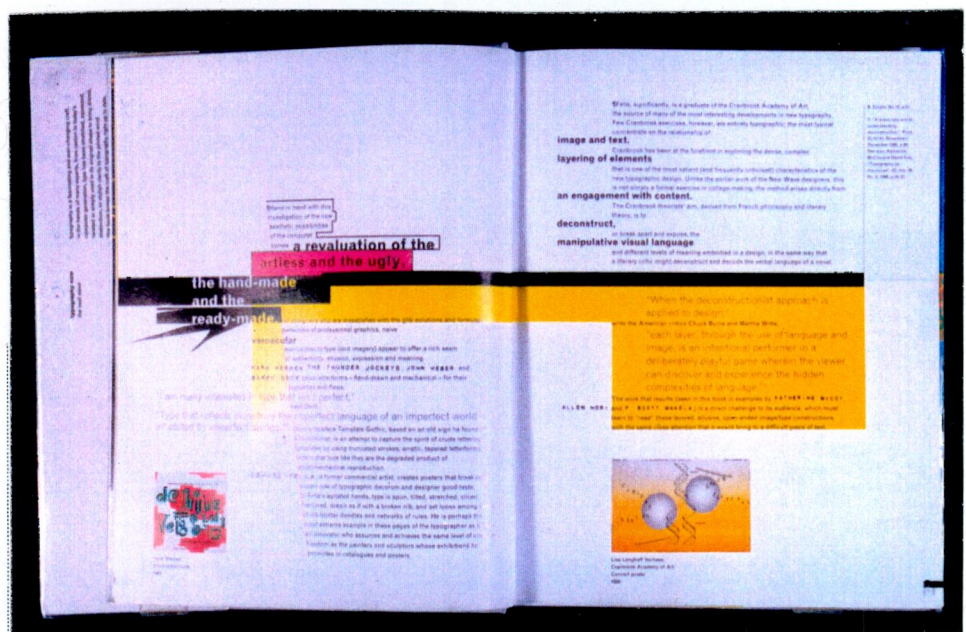
Figure 64: *Octavo* layout (8vo)

Figure 65: *Typography Now* layout (Why Not)

It must be noted that the majority of the designs in *Typography Now* have not reached a mainstream audience - they are either self-motivated projects or produced for specialist audiences like college or art institutions, the music industry and niche magazines. Of them the work of Why Not, Studio Dumbar, 8vo, Philippe Apeloig and April Greiman have reached wider audiences. Why Not's lay-out design for Poyners text, stretches syntactical relationships as Why Not knew its audience would take the,time to break the message down. Why Not's lay-out design for Poyner's text stretches syntactical relationships as they knew its audience would take the time to break the message. "We like to make people struggle", says Altmann. 'The Swiss School thing is all about making communication easier. We have a great appreciation of that kind of work but it has been done. For us, design is about making something so interesting or intriguing to look at, hat people make the effort to read it'.(Donnellan, 1994) In other projects they have in contrast shown incredible control and sensitivity: Altmann explains;"when you are doing stamps which commemorate the Queen's anniversary, you have to make them work for the public". At the same time Why Not maintain that the visually sophisticated audience of today demands more that a bland treatment of typography.

8vo have similar ideas on typography, having built upon the experiments of Weingart in Basle during the 1970s. He and his students consciously emphasised the syntactical possibilities in typography; maintaining that the relatively high stimulus of such a text compensates for its low readability. In his essay 'How to make Swiss Design' he asks what good is readability when nothing in the text attracts one to even read it (Weingart, *Octavo*, vol. 4, 1987, p.15) Like Why Not, 8vo realise that legibility, for certain jobs, serves a vital function. According to Simon Kennedy;"some designers approach a business card in the same way as a book cover, or a poster. This is wrong because, for instance,, a poster must communicate its message from a distance." This was a valuable lesson that 8vo learned from Wim Crouel. Both Why Not and 8vo have challenged the conventional page structure in order to increase meaing (sometimes at the expense of legibility): Their is a similarity between 8vo's spreads of *Octavo 88.6* (fig. 64)and Why Not's layouts for *Typography Now (fig. 65)*. Simon Kennedy explains 8vo's stance on legibility;

'*Octavo* and specifically the legibility spread were experiments
in legibility. We understood that many readers (those who both-

ered to read at all) would accept the challenge of reading such material. Many designers fail to understand the suitability of reducing legibility when producing work which must, as its primary function, communicate its message via the words and not the design' (Donnellan, 1994)

It was message directed at fellow designers rather than the public. Ken Garland's criticism of the layout for its blatant disregard for linearity, was completely missing the point. 8vo deliberately obstructed the textual flow in order to force designers to realise that the message is not served best by a linear treatment. The fact that many designers missed the point, is a reflection of the lack of understanding contemporary designers. The debate in contemporary design between traditionalists and the technologists diverts attention from the lack of communication between 'New Wavers' themselves. Why Not's understanding of 8vo's work is limited to the superficial labelling of design magazines. Similarly 8vo have made inaccurate assumptions about Why Not's work and show little tolerance for designers of a contrary perspective to their own. " I wholeheartedly wish that Phil Baines became a catholic priest. Catholics ask to be fucked over by maniacs, design students do not" (Donnellan, 1994). Kennedy is not only criticising Baines' ideas on design, but also is saying that he expects other designers and students to religiously follow them.

8vo have maintained a isolationist position in London.and their 'them and us' attitude contradicts any gestures (such as *Octavo* magazine) to create forums of discussion in Britain. 'New Wave' in London could not be compared to collective movements, such as the Bauhaus, where designers worked together and shared ideas in striving for a common goal. It is possibly a reflection on a ego-centric society where each designer wants to stake his claim on his own ideas to the extent. It is a positive signal for the future that designers like Why Not and 8vo are being more intelligient in the way they approach projects. However in order for these ideas to be understood and developed by designers on the whole, there is a need for a healthy exchange of ideas, which is missing at present.

Conclusion

Why Not and 8vo represent the emergence of design groups have challenged accepted standards, amidst a prevailing climate of mediocrity. At the height of the consumerist period in Britain they both put an emphasis on producing quality work, rather than making money. Both consultancies looked back to the work of the early twentieth century pioneers of typography such as, Piet Zwart and Jan Tschichold. Both revived typographic experimentation as an integral part of their design process. However they represent two different attitudes, which is highlighted by their different educational roots; Basle and the R.C.A.. Whereas 8vo adopted stringently the principles of modernist typography to form a base from which they could develop, Why Not drew from these ideas in a freer manner, mixing them with more unorthodox influences. Both rejected the use of illustration in their work, opting for photography.

Both consultancies have rejected the typical English approach to design which communicates in a literal manner, opting for a more European approach which communicates on a visual level (as it needs to cross national barriers). 8vo's international outlook and style has influenced other London based designers. Why Not, on the other hand, represent an alternative approach, which retains its sense of "Englishness", thus fusing traditionalism with a modernist aesthetic. 8vo realise their modernist approach is one of many alternatives, but they used it as a way of channelling their direction, without being distracted by the mediocrity of their contemporaries. However they also took up the concept behind modernism such as the social role of the designer. Such an approach reflects the emergence of the a more socially responsible designer, something which which was unheard of in 80's consumerism. Whereas Why Not have no social agenda, they see this as a result of a change in the educational system's priorities.

In the early nineties there is a tendency towards more intelligent design and both Why Not and 8vo have been innovative in their approach to projects, which, in the past have been blandly treated. In the case of the designers editorial role, Why Not have involved themselves with information on a closer level by working with Rick Poyner on his essay *Type and deconstruction in the digital age* . Also 8vo have dealt with this issue by editing and publishing typography journal *Octavo.* Both consultancies have based their approach to design on content and have produced varied approaches, depending on the audience of the message. Why Not and 8vo realise the importance of legibility, but in certain instances have deliberately obstructed it in order to increase meaning. The

Conclusion

issue of legibility has increased significance with the arrival of the Macintosh. this liberating technology has been embraced by these 'New Wavers', their work exemplifying its capabilities. Both Why Not and 8vo's work anticipated the Macintosh in the way they layered type. Whereas Why Not claim it has only made their work easier to do and the finished product more sophisticated, 8vo (in the same way as the Bauhaus embraced the technological means of their time) have used the technology to push their ideas further. 8vo beleive the computer makes the conventional rules to design (which were derived from the letterpress) obsolete and the designer must search for new approaches, which are relevant to today technology. Why Not have made an important contribution to date, but appear to be stagnating at present. 8vo have made sure their work has developed consistently. They have lifted a lot of their self-imposed restrictions now, putting more emphasis on images rather than type.

Designers like Why Not and 8vo signal a more intelligient to design. However at present the lack of communication and understanding between designers, which is evident in the microcosm of London, is an unhealthy reflection on the contemporary design. What is needed is a confluence of ideas where contributions can be understood, absorbed and applied to the benefit of design and society as a whole.

Appendices

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