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An Analytical Study of
the Work of Neville Brody
by John Talbot

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Introduction ;

In 1994, Neville Brody is still one of the most highly rated designers in Europe. He has had a career that has spanned nearly fourteen years. For someone to be able to make it to the top off the design profession, and to be able to hold on to that position is a remarkable achievement. However; despite the fact that Brody's work was hailed as breakthroughs in design in the early 'eighties, I believe that his work is flawed in many ways. It is through my research that I have formed my theories as to where it fails. I will look to see where the work has evolved from, and through critical analysis draw my own conclusions about the thinking behind his design.

In my first chapter I will give a brief account of Brody's early College life and look at how these years in the education system molded the character that would go on to become possibly one, of the most critically acclaimed graphic designers of the 1980s. I will form a discussion around what his major influences were that convinced him he wanted to follow a career in graphic design. This will continue with a brief account of his early working life as a designer in London.

In the second chapter I will start to try to assess, how and why, Brody treated design in the manner in which he adopted at the beginning of his career. This will look at, in depth, his approaches towards layout and general arrangement in design.

In the third chapter I will briefly look at his work as a typographer and study some of the type faces he designed. I will try to assess where the inspiration for his typefaces came from, and in doing so argue that they are not as new and revolutionary as we may think.

In my final chapter I will look at what future arrangements Brody has started to work on now. These will be examined and assessed. I will also study what Brody has said he feels the future holds in store, for the design community.

Chapter 1: An introduction to Neville Brody.

Neville Brody was born in London in 1957. He grew up in a suburb called Southgate, a place lying between two opposing environments, the chaos of London's West End and the relative peace and tranquillity of the Hertfordshire countryside. At school he studied A-level art and showed an aptitude for it. On leaving school in 1975 he went on to attend a Fine Art foundation course at Hornsey College of Art. However, Brody was already starting to have doubts about the validity of the course only a few months after starting. He felt that the course was aiming to produce Artists whose work was commercial rather than thought provoking.

"The College was by now well conditioned to the provision of good students"; in other words the capability to mass-produce students whose work would sell easily and be accepted by the general public. This, he felt, was a self defeating process which would ultimately lead to the suppression of the individual artistic talent present in each student and would also place a shadow of doubt over the whole reason for attending College in the first place. Brody believed that the reason to paint was to communicate feelings and thoughts; he saw the world of communication as being such a vast and complicated process to start with that the role of the individual human was being lost in this mayhem of visual information. Brody had decided by this stage that he wanted his work to be accessible and easily understood. He wanted to be able to communicate to as many people as possible and to do so in a manner that was more personal and less manipulative. He wished to open up rather than conceal information with a disguise of "Art".

It was at this point that he decided that Fine Art was not the correct faculty for implementing his theories and as a result, in 1976 he left Hornsey to start a three year degree course in Graphic Design at the London College of Printing. On starting the course here things still did not go the way Brody had hoped for. Brody had started with the belief that now he would have the opportunity to explore and develop the style of graphic communication that was denied to him at Hornsey, but this was not to be the case. Brody continued with his own approaches, not to the favour of the tutors. They

felt his work to be far too abstract and, as a result, to be totally uncommercial and so they failed him on many occasions. Brody felt that perhaps the tutors felt threatened by his new alternative approach to graphic design. He wished to take that which was traditional and turn it onto its head, thus producing work that was new and opposite to that which was normally branded as "acceptable". He wished to produce work that reflected the world around himself, a world that was changing rapidly. Finally (in 1977) he got the break he had been waiting for; this came in the form of the Punk movement.

By this stage it was late 1977 and London was starting to feel the effect of the full scale onslaught of the Punks. It was starting to affect life in many different ways both directly and indirectly; it was in effect the self-proclaimed revolution of youth against the state. The Punk movement stood up against everything that Brody felt had been suppressing him in College. It was a movement of collective hate towards organised society, a hate that had its own language, clothes, music and art. The music that fuelled its followers was supplied by bands such as The Dead Kennedys, The Clash, X, and probably their most famous ambassador, The Sex Pistols. What unites all these artists was their shared attitude; it was an attitude of defiance towards cultural and aesthetic norms, an attitude of distrust towards rationalist language and set ways of behaviour as stated by the law. It stood to redefine the ways people approach life, the way they live, and the roles of the individual in society. It centered around its belief that these things would ultimately have the effect of distorting the individual's sense of him or herself as an individual, and so therefore one must disrupt the usual modes of communication and develop a method of expression that is more authentic. Punk stood for everything Brody wanted to achieve through his work and so Punk provided the catalyst he needed, and it gave Brody the confidence he needed to go on and push his subversive style onto the tutors.

The art of the Punk movement can be seen to be reflected in much of Brody's early work; it was as bold and new as the attitude of its followers. It was, in effect, design which turned its back on the rules of design. Type would be laid out without any sense

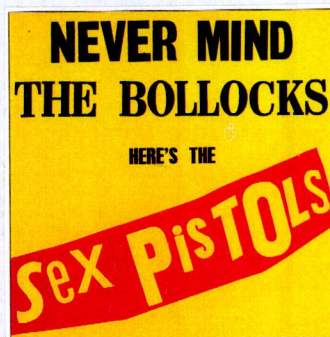


fig 1.1

of order or preconsideration of what the final product would look like. The way images were both sourced and positioned on the page seemed to be as random as the behaviour of its followers. On many occasions the torn-out style of type would be used; newspaper headlines and individual words and text would be recycled to state the required information, an example of this being the cover of the Sex Pistols album "Never mind the bollox" (fig 1.).

As with Punk, much of the background imagery in a large proportion of Brody's work bears little or no relevance to the type or to the information being conveyed. It acts only to create a mood or add tension to the piece. This can be seen in his design for the cover of the College magazine "Sputnik" (a College brief set in 1979), where the partially severed face of the man on the cover illustration has nothing to do with any of the contents in any way at all.

His torn-out approach to type and layout still was not readily accepted by his tutors, on one occasion he was nearly thrown out of the College for putting the head of the Queen sideways on a postal stamp design. But despite the tutor's lack of support for his style, it was accepted by many of his student colleagues whom he respected, and they provided him with encouragement to continue developing his contraband style.

At the end of his College days Brody wrote his final year thesis on magazine design, and as a result interviewed many people associated with magazine design at the time, amongst them Al Mc Dowell. Brody has said that at the time he had little or no interest in magazine design but wrote purely on this topic to achieve a good mark which would help him get a job after leaving. He was right; he would end up working for Al Mc Dowell at his studio, which allowed Brody the chance to continue working on his path of experimentation even in the workplace. The freedom that Brody was allowed here and at many other studios afterwards would allow him the chance to work on many personal projects and in particular his type faces for which he would be acclaimed. It also allowed him access to new computer technology just becoming available, that was at

the time a very elitist opportunity. It was this period of learning to use and manipulate computers in ways of type and image, never done before, that would eventually become his trademark. The advantages and disadvantages of using this "new" electronic medium for producing his work will be looked into in future chapters.

The story of his career is both ironic and almost fairytale-like, from being a student oppressed by his tutors to being in a position to change the way magazines look and, eventually, to his unofficial crowning as design Guru, leads me to believe that Neville Brody is the man who shaped the Eighties. Despite the fact that I feel that his work, to a great extent, is restricted by technology, he has through his exploration of this new medium, exerted an influence on the world of graphic design that will be felt for many years to come.

Chapter 2: The design behind Brody.

In this chapter I will look at the influences, theories, approaches and layout Brody employs in his work. It is in the field of layout that Brody succeeded in gaining critical acclaim for his new approach in the early eighties. He set out to relook at the way layout was being tackled by the whole of the design community at the time, especially in the area of how magazines were being visually formed both typographically and in the manner in which other non-type information was being approached.

“We need not be detained too long in figuring out why American television is loved”.

In watching American television, one is reminded of George Bernard Shaw’s remark on first seeing the glittering neon signs of Broadway and 42nd Street at night.

“It must be beautiful, if you cannot read.”

(Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, Methuen, 1985).

Because we live in a very fast moving world, both on a visual level and in the manner in which information can be passed from one person to another, Brody felt that the attention span of the average person was dropping to a very low level. The problem is that in this multi-media environment people live in a constant state of multiple choice as to which medium they go to for information (I use the word “information” to cover anything from business news to comics). Our society is becoming increasingly efficient at passing information in what is now the start of the format / media war for a place on the already, very busy, information highway. With new formats appearing, and becoming more accessible every year, such as CD ROM (read only memory), CD I(compact disk interactive), Teletext (Fast Text) the internet and also the availability of 24 hour television news, sports and music channels (CNN, NBC, MTV etc.), people have never before had such a wide and varied choice. These new formats provide the user with the possibility to provide whatever information they require in a fast, efficient manner . The most notable of these would have to be television, and in effect the more traditional forms of information carriers are now entering the severest point of “inter-media” competitiveness for their continued existence.

These new forms of media provide new, alternative, options to the public for accessing information, be it for purposes of education, reference or entertainment, and many do so at great speed. Other cases such as CD I; also have the advantage of allowing the user the option of interactivity with the material. In these times of satellite television and computer modem links to international databases, the magazine is now adopting a new role in society.

In the late seventies the onslaught of the Television boom was starting to have its effect on the levels of sales of magazines in Britain. Now more houses had access to at least one television set than ever before, what was happening was that people were turning away from magazines and turning on their television sets instead.

But what is the purpose of the magazine? Why print a magazine when with all the other possibilities for different media to choose from what is it that makes the medium of magazine special? It could be said that the majority of magazines sold worldwide every day are purchased purely for reasons of either reference or entertainment. It was in the field of entertainment based magazine design; that Brody has had the greatest influence in how they are constructed visually today. These magazines are published primarily for reasons of entertainment firstly with the information they provide taking a secondary role, examples of magazines which would fall into this category would be Cosmopolitan, U, Elle, Sky Magazine and ID. In effect what these magazines provide is a portable visual alternative to the goings on around you. They provide a form of expression which satisfies every human's inbuilt desire for a period of escapism from relative reality every now and then. They are, in effect, a mental lunch break. The market for this snack is enormous; every week new titles are becoming available with more titles being targeted at specific audiences than ever before.

However, at the end of the seventies, with the sales of magazines at an all time low, one editor of the time named Nick Logan, who had various associations with minor publications in London, on realising this decline and the financial problems associated with it,

set out to try to start a new publication even with the chance that everything could fail miserably. He teamed up with Neville Brody in 1980 to try to redefine what the purpose and possible potential of a new magazine could be. Brody believed it to be a feasible proposition but the entire structure of magazine design that existed at the time would have to be altered, Brody tried to develop an approach to the design of the magazine that would offer the consumer more than just the relevant information they required but something more precious. The magazine they founded was called The Face. It would take the form of an upmarket version of Smash Hits which was the best selling teenage pop magazine of the time, but while the latter was aimed at the age group of 11-15 year olds, The Face would be aimed at the 18-25 age bracket. Work on The Face started in 1980 on the limited budget of only £7000. The magazine took on the role of the medium for Brody to experiment with his new theories. He decided that if its success was a touch-and-go situation then the composition and layout should pull out all the stops on what had been done before. It would have to take on television full force if it was to succeed, by using unproven approaches never before used and so therefore unproven.

Magazines can be compared to television in many different ways, both are visual carriers of information, bringing their messages into all areas of life with equally relaxed ease. Both act as a social or political commentator and both rely on the continued and dedicated support of their own particular audience for the continuation of their existence.

The new style of layout that Brody employed to magazine design, drew its influences directly from the way television visually appears to the viewer. The design scrolled from one page to the next; the definition between pages was blurred and brought the reader from one article to the next in a seemingly joinless manner. As with television, the various articles were interrupted with advertisements, this being necessary to make the product economically feasible. The magazine medium does provide something more personal to the consumer; it lasts longer and will not be thrown away. Brody saw another great advantage with the format of the magazine which he believed was not being properly

utilised. This was the fact that they have a cover; which acts as a billboard to attract the buyer to investigate and possibly purchase the publication. What magazines can in effect do is advertise themselves.

When Brody combined his modern styles of typefaces with very striking visual imagery in a style that seemed new, fresh, and eyegrabbing, the resulting success of The Face was unparalleled by any other publication released at the time. Its success forced many other major magazines to stop and rethink their methods of presentation.

The concepts that Brody employed in the design of The Face magazine were new and untested, how the general public would accept the changes was also unknown to Brody. It was in a sense the first magazine to have a corporate identity of its own. This could be seen on every page of the publication, not just the cover and contents page, after which in most other contemporary magazines the layout would follow stricter more conservative rules. Although; conservative forms of layout are functional they would not necessarily convey the ambience of the subject being discussed in that particular article. Through design; Brody wished to create an approach that would present an article in a manner more personal to the reader than what was being used by other magazines. It would be through, this new thinking, that he would try to represent the mood of the topic being discussed. The page would work on two levels; firstly through layout, he would provide an open-plan look to the page, this being easy on the eye. Secondly; the page would act as a canvas, on which the various elements of the design would be used to visually convey the mood, or to create a mood to accompany an article which, he considered, needed a greater visual presence on the page.

From the presentation of the headline information to the footnotes to accompany photographs the powerful and stylish sense of identity would show through. Brody wanted the reader to become deeply involved with the actual physical action of reading the magazine and to achieve this he sometimes makes sections of text or headlines hard to read. This meant that the reader would have to make a more conscious effort to understand the

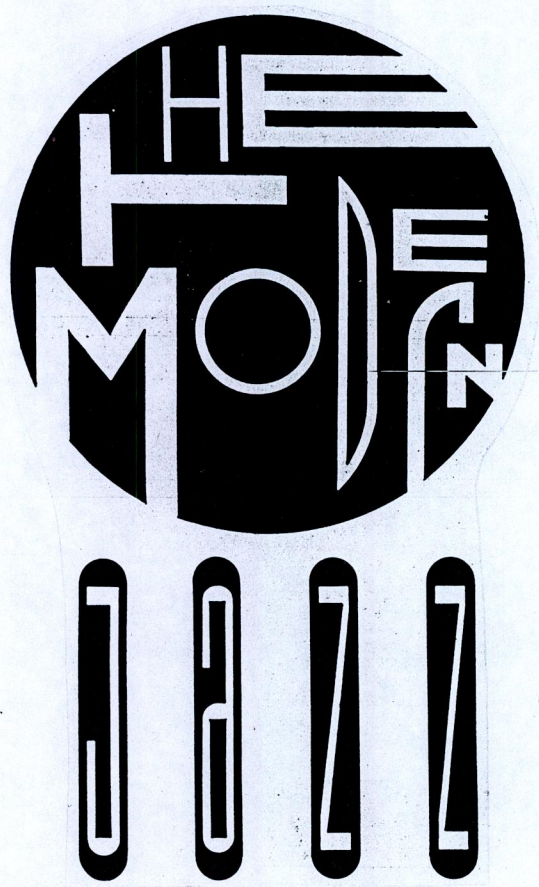


fig 2.1

message being conveyed. This can be seen in the design of the headline, for an article in The Face, entitled “The modern jazz” (fig 2.1 .). In this design; Brody has used various techniques to disorientate the reader. Firstly; the entirety of the type (with the exception of the word “jazz”) is set inside the confines of a circle. This, from the beginning, confuses the reader by not providing an obvious point from which reading should begin, this usually being the top left hand corner of a page. The type has been rearranged inside the circle, this acts to break down the natural progression of the letters which make up the words. The reader has to make a conscious effort to visually decipher both of the words. The type has been set in a variety of different weights, this provides many different different sizes of negative space within the letterforms. These changes in size of white space add variation to the design, as well as creating the optical illusion of movement inside the circle. This makes it harder for the eye to pan horizontally across the image; in effect causing the eye to jump up and down in order to assess, what is, a very visually confusing design in the first place. The letter “T” of the word “THE” has been turned 90 degrees and its descender has been pushed under the “H” and the “E”. This works to allow the complete word “THE” to be ranged further up in the circle than if it had been kept in its original form, it also still works to confuse the reading process. A similar technique has been used on the “R” and the “N” of the word “modern”. In this case the complete word would not have fitted horizontally across the width of the circle; in order to make it fit the “E” has been raised up in order to allow the “R” and “N” to be set underneath it. This acts to stop the reading of the word at the letter “E”, forcing the reader to look elsewhere for the remaining two letters. The letters “M,R,N, and E” bleed off the edge of the circle, this forms unusual counterforms along the edge of the circle which form a visual tension in the design. They also help to reduce the effect of visual isolation of the circle on the page; white- space outlets around the edge, join the insides of the circular design to the remaining area of whitespace on the page. Without which; a circular black design would seem alienated, or appear to float, on the white ground.

The entire circular design is set on top of the word “jazz”, which has each of its letterforms set into elongated black columns. This acts as a support to hold up the circular



fig 2.2

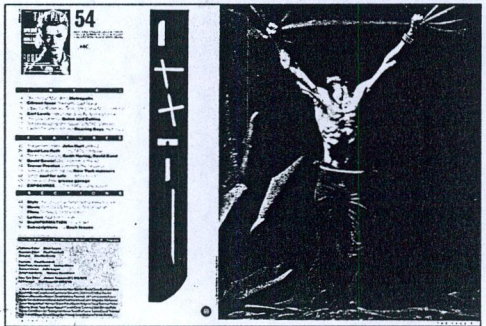
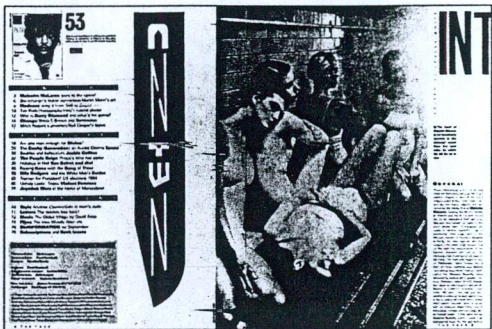
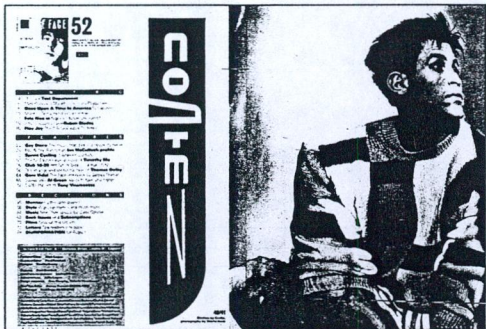


fig 2.3 - 2.8

element of the design, which would appear to roll on the page (due to its visual instability) if it were left unsupported. When this device is used in the context of the final page layout (fig 2.2.), it would appear to fill yet another role. It acts to give the impression that the headline design is on the same visual plane as the musician. Without the word “jazz” set into the columns, the circular element would take on a possible representation of a sun or moon object, and so the design would be psychologically pushed towards the background of the image. The word “jazz” acts to provide a connection between the background and the musician’s hand in the foreground, it is also using the hand as foundations for supporting the remainder of the design upon.

The techniques used in this design are very effective, but I believe that the design fails in one place. The way Brody has designed the letterform “R” could easily lead to it being read as an “I”. If this misunderstanding occurs, the headline would be read as “The Mode In Jazz” instead of “The Modern Jazz”. This is how I originally read the headline, however in an ironic way, my misunderstanding does support the fact that Brody wishes the reader to make a more conscious effort to understand the messages being conveyed in his work.

Other techniques Brody employed, to disrupt the smooth flow of reading, was the act of breaking a headline into pieces or having sections of it run off the page, or by obscuring the design with other compositional elements. This can be clearly seen in issues 50-55 where the “contents” headline gradually breaks down to unrecognisable forms over the course of six months, the result being illegible, but reflecting the visual essence and form of the original headline word (fig 2.3 - 2.8). Brody has looked to each letterform to try to assess what the visual image it conveys is. With this final image in mind; the design process can, over the set period of time, fill in the gaps between the starting type and the final representation of the original type. As can be seen in the illustration,

Brody has even dropped some of the elements during the course of the evolution of the design. The original headline is composed of 8 elements. The second is comprised of 8 again, through the next four issues it changes in the order of 6, 5, 6, and the final result

STYLE
STYL
+ U L
+ U L
+ U L
+ U L

fig 2.10

FRANKIE

fig 2.11

comprises of only three. It would appear that after the breakdown process has started, each consecutive image is a manifestation of the previous image and not necessarily a representation of the original headline. Brody has also changed the size of the ground on which the design sits in each consecutive image. This has been done to keep a balance between white and black space in the composition. The resulting composition after all the changes have taken place, is an representation, so abstract of the original, that the word “contents” has to be reinserted.

“With the steady breakdown of the contents logo, I was dealing with two ideas. First, the notion of modular design based on a set of units that fit together according to their use. Second, to achieve a more organic design that changed over a period of time.

(Brody, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, T and H, 1988.)

Brody appears to favour this technique in his design as he used it for the “Style” headline in The Face from Nos. 49, 51, 52, and 53. However in this occasion it is based on horizontal and vertical changes in the forms of the angular type (fig 2.10).

Other examples; that display this “break down” technique, would be the “Frankie goes to Hollywood” headline (fig 2.11.) ”The Face No.56, December 1984.”, where instead of degrading the text over a period of time he removes sections of the letterforms which he believes to be unnecessary to the legibility of the overall word. If each letterform is examined on it’s own it probably would to most people be unreadable or just appear as an abstract form of little or no meaning, yet when these abstract forms are combined they read as a recognisable letterforms. Out of all the letterforms, the most abstracted would be the letter “F”. If viewed on its own, it bears no resemblance to the normal way in which this letterform would be displayed. The only reason I can see, as to why it becomes recognisable, is because all the letterforms have one characteristic in common, which provides a visual and subconscious “clue” to the reader, which allows the deciphering of the word. The common item is that all the letterforms (with the exception of “K” and “I”) are formed around a 90 degrees arc of a circle. This shows to the reader that, although the letterforms appear to be created randomly, they in fact follow a pattern. Through this pattern; the obscure letterforms can be compared to our usual perception of letterforms, and as a result, a connection can be made, and the word can then be read. It would seem that Brody has managed to isolate the essential elements of letter-

(the real
mackenzie)

fig 2.12



fig 2.13



fig 2.14

forms, that our brains look for, in order to distinguish the particular letter, to allow for the reading process to occur.

This can be seen again in “the real mackenzie” headline (fig 2.12.) The Face, (No.60, April 1985), where the type has been trimmed of its “unnecessary” sections. Although this is not as inherently illegible as the “Frankie” headline it still relies on the eye to fill in the gaps in order to read it.

Brody’s belief was that he was creating a continuum between all the pages. The fact that some pages would read more easily than others was irrelevant, the continuum could only be seen in the design and visual appearance of the pages. He did not allow the size of page or even the format of the magazine inhibit the flow or style he was employing at that time. The Face stood for everything that was new and so the rules that governed its formulation should also be new and allow for greater freedom in design, not looking to the past for its inspiration or conforming to acceptable standard of formats and layout of the time.

The text for The Face was originally laid out to follow a four column grid system. This proved to be too restrictive for the aims of the magazine and so was dropped in favour of a three column system. This allowed the larger sized photographs to be included on the page (fig 2.13.). With The Face being a very visual publication the good display of photography was all important. However, the three column grid system did create some problems with text and headline balance and so was dropped. The final solution that was adopted was a two and three column combination (fig 2.14.). The only section of the magazine to retain the four column system was the “monitor” section, which needed the flexibility that the tall columns of text creates, to allow the use of small sized photographs to be dropped into their own section of relevant text with ease and not to appear cluttered on the page.

Brody allowed the photographers for The Face freedom in how they would approach the execution of the photography for whatever article they were working on at the time. Without the burden of an art director they felt free to experiment and so the majority of



fig 2.15

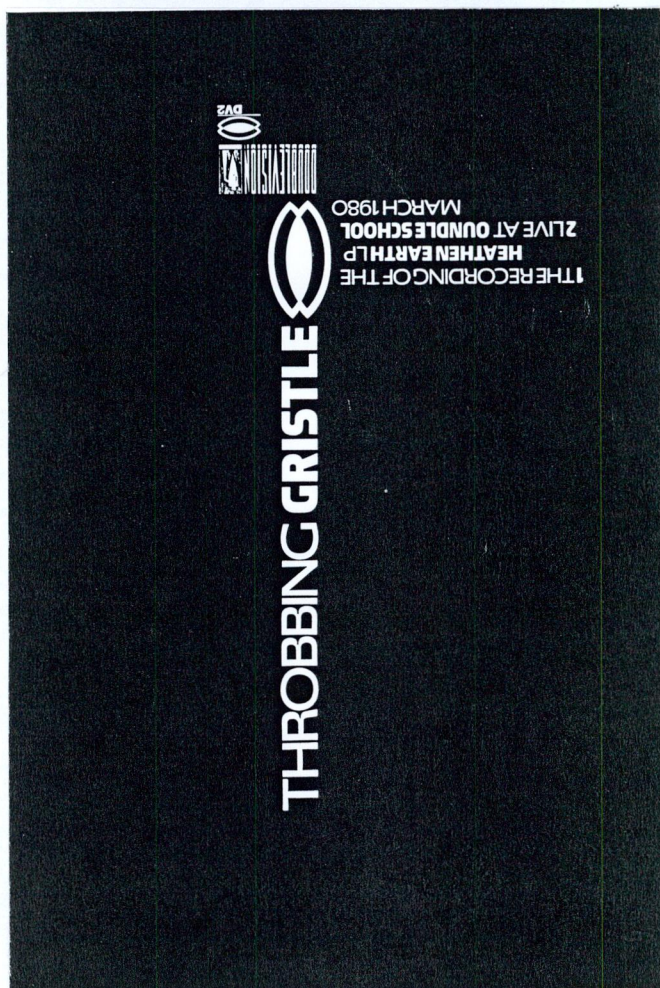


fig 2.16

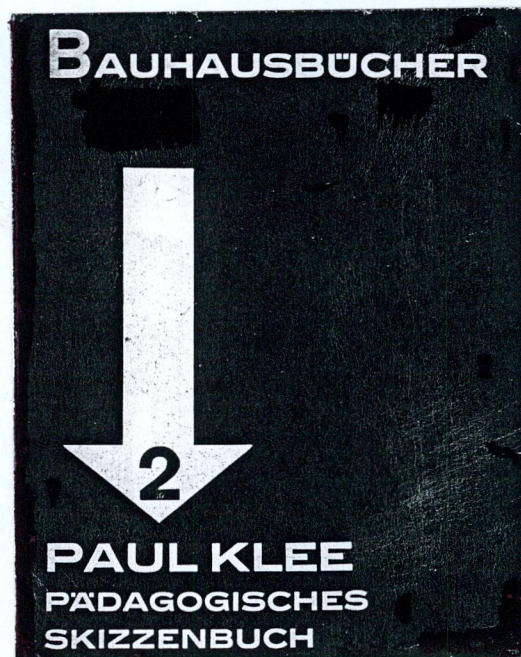


fig 2.17

the photography in The Face was new and unconventional. This again helped to reinforce the youthful, new and stylish image of the magazine. Incorporating the photography into the two and three column grid system allowed the images to be used large in two page spreads and where a more typographical solution was needed this open plan approach again lended itself to lots of white space in which headlines, text or logos could have plenty of room in which to be ranged. An example of the combination of large format photograph, white space, and large typographical headline would be Brody's double page spread for "The perfect beat" The Face (No 42. October 1983.), (fig 2.15). This also shows the use of headlines running of the confines of the page in order to provide the continuum effect from the previous article.

The style that Brody applied to The Face is present in the majority of the vast amount of other work he was producing at the time. It is a style and approach that is by no doubt individual and very successful (the fact of its extreme commerciality and financial success stand to support this) and has gained him great levels of respect and recognition in design circles. His techniques were hailed as breakthrough devices in design and he was said to be by far the most original designer of his time. However, despite his work being an alternative to what was being generally produced by his contemporaries, on the topic of originality I believe that his work can be directly related to work previously done by designers of the Bauhaus from the 1920s and 1930s. In some circumstances the similarities between individual pieces by Brody and Bauhaus can appear to be like mirror images of each other, in layout, typography and in the use of negative space. By looking at a selection of Brody's work and what I consider to be its Bauhaus counterpart, this can be clearly seen. For example, if we look at the poster that Brody designed for "Throbbing Gristle Video" in 1983 (fig 2.16) the influence of the Bauhaus on this design is quite obvious. To start with, the most similar point is the fact that all type is set in an uppercase sans serif typeface with a total lack of any punctuation of any description. When compared to the cover of the Bauhaus book No.2 (fig 2.17) again even more similarities can be drawn. The use of negative space on both pieces is almost identical with the only positive space being that which is occupied by type. Both pieces use a

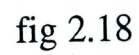


fig 2.18

visual “key” to guide the eye around the somewhat blank pieces. On the Bauhaus book this takes the form of the quite obvious white arrow which guides the reader to the name of the author (Paul Klee) and to the contents of the book. The visual key in the Brody design is not so obvious as on Moholy-Nagy’s design but is nevertheless just as effective; it is in the form of a double eye symbol placed at the base of the “Throbbing Gristle” headline. The double eye logo acts as a visual roundabout to bring your eye down to the “Double vision” logo and then back up and around to the relevant information about the poster.

Another clever design tool Brody uses is he has set the word “gristle” in a bolder typeface than the word “throbbing”. This acts as a visual support and foundation to stabilise what would be a quite unstable typographic design. This same technique is being used by Moholy-Nagy on the book cover as well, although in a slightly different manner. In this case the point of the arrow would be the unstable element in this design giving across the impression that the whole design is being supported on this single point. To give the design an enhanced sense of visual stability, Moholy-Nagy uses the method of setting the authors name (Paul Klee) in a larger and bolder typeface than type underwritten information. This has the effect of producing visual compression of the underlying text and so therefore, like a foot stomping on the ground, creates an effect of stability and a platform on which the remainder of the design can sit. Although the two designs convey totally different information, serve totally different purposes and use totally different typefaces, the similarities between both are remarkable.

The use of bolder letterforms to compensate for either lack of balance or the stabilization of a design, by Brody, can also be seen in the double page spread “The Lone Arranger” (fig 2.18.), for The Face (No. 38, June 1983.). In this case; Brody uses a bolder weight of typeface for the words “The” and “Arranger”. This is done because the headline has been placed vertically, and without the weight change, it would appear unstable. Brody has substituted the “O” in the word “Lone” for one of the many symbols included in a large proportion of his work (these will be discussed in the next chapter.). The symbolic “O” acts as the hub, from which the headline will hang on the page. It

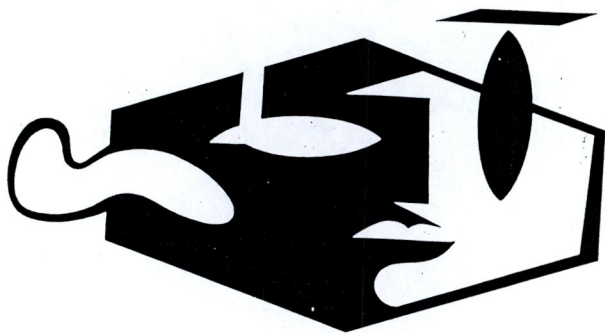
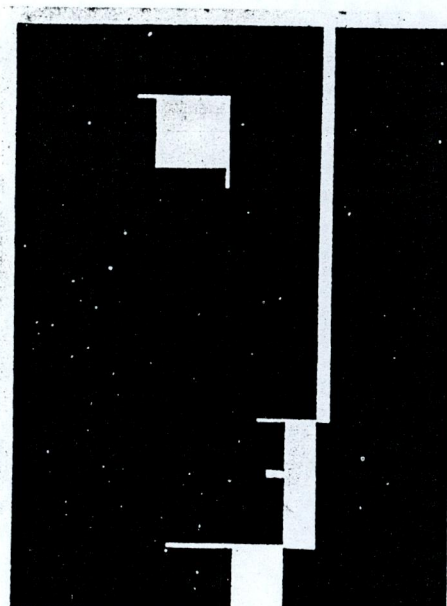


fig 2.19



BALIHALLIS-AUSSTELLUNG
WEIMAR, JULI - SEPT. 1923

fig 2.21

fig 2.20



could also be interpreted as a bolt or screw, which would act to fasten the design visually onto the page. To emphasise the vertical stability of the headline, the word “Arranger” needed the extra visual weight of the bolder type, this gives the visual impression weight hanging from a points.

Another example of Brody’s work being directly related to work of the Bauhaus would be his design for a logo (fig 2.19.) and a letterhead for “Second International Video Festival, 1982” (fig 2.20.). This particular design, I believe, has numerous similarities to a design by Herbert Bayer designed in 1923 for an exhibition of Bauhaus work at Weimar (fig 2.21.). There are many similarities between the designs, despite the fact that they both are different shapes. Both are based on an abstract presentation of a face, comprising of only two colours, white and black. In both designs, only the right eye in both images is presented in an obvious manner. The “eye” is where your eye is directed too, as a point to start viewing the design. In the Brody design he makes use of sharp angles to form a visual distraction to bring your eye down from the “eye” and to stop at the mouth. This same technique was used by Bayer to bring the eye down to the mouth and then on to the type which accompanied the design. Bayer’s design is of a very stable nature and the two, large black, sections that make up the face, sit firmly upon the bold type placed at the base of the design. The fact that there is no type in the Brody design means that the diamond shaped logo is unbalanced in its quantities of white and black space. To reaffirm stability, Brody has included a large counter balance of white counterform on the left side of the logo. This comes in the form of the elongated ear, which projects out to the left of the design. The design uses the point at its base as a fulcrum on which the design sits. This is in turn balanced by the black oval eye and eyebrow forms, on the right hand side of the page. The overall balance in the design could be compared to a see-saw, with the white counterform balancing up with the black oval, to create the effect of total, balanced visual stability. These comparisons could continue indefinitely, it is quite obvious that Brody bases his theory of layout on the previous teachings of the Bauhaus, this may not be evident in all of his work, but the examples I chose, I believe give a good representation of the thinking behind his design.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 & % ' () * + , - . : ;

fig 3.1

Chapter 3; The original Brody?

In this chapter I will look at various examples, of design work by Brody over the years. I will be looking to see where the weak links in his design are. As in the previous chapter I will try to show from where the design's origins can be traced, and show examples which can be compared. Another feature that makes the work of Brody recognisable is his use of symbols as a design aid. I will look at these and try to assess their role in the design process.

One area of design where Brody also gained great critical acclaim, was in the field of typography. He over the years has been responsible for the designing many different typefaces, most of which were "once-off" designs, used only for a single headline or logo typeface, never to be seen again. Many of his typefaces were quite unusual and seemed futuristic for their time. They also in many cases represented the ultimate in style and were often visually perceived as being symbols of youth culture.

Brody designed his first typeface in 1979, and he aptly named it Typeface One (fig 3.1). Even in this first design the elements which normally would be associated with design by Brody, are present within the letterforms. The typeface is based on a system of bars of three different weights. These are used in conjunction with each other to create the individual letterforms which make up the set. By using only three weights of bar, and using no curving versions, lends itself to the production of quite a limited range of solutions to the design of each letterform. As can be seen from the illustration the typeface has a very angular and sharp presence on the page. In comparison to some of his later type designs it appears very crude, but it still complies to the general rule which seems to cover most of Brody's type design; that is, simple geometric forms. He also uses vertical, horizontal, and circular elements to compose his letterforms.

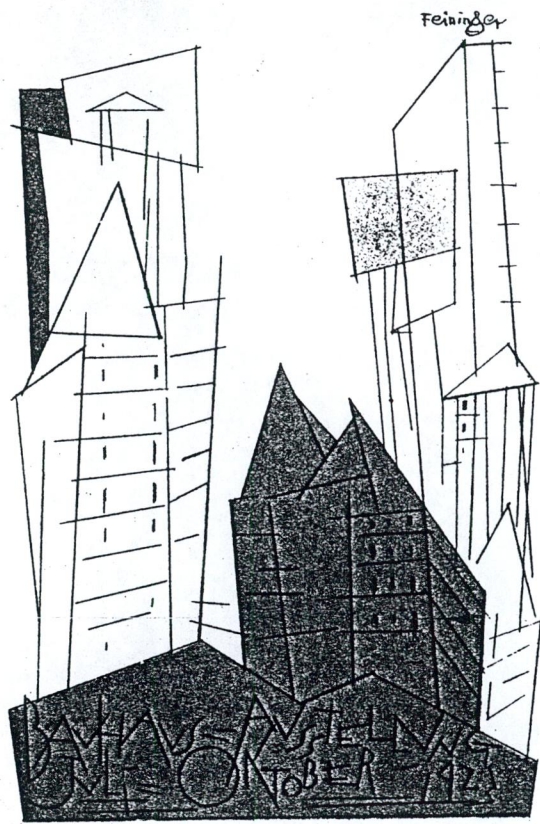


fig 3.2

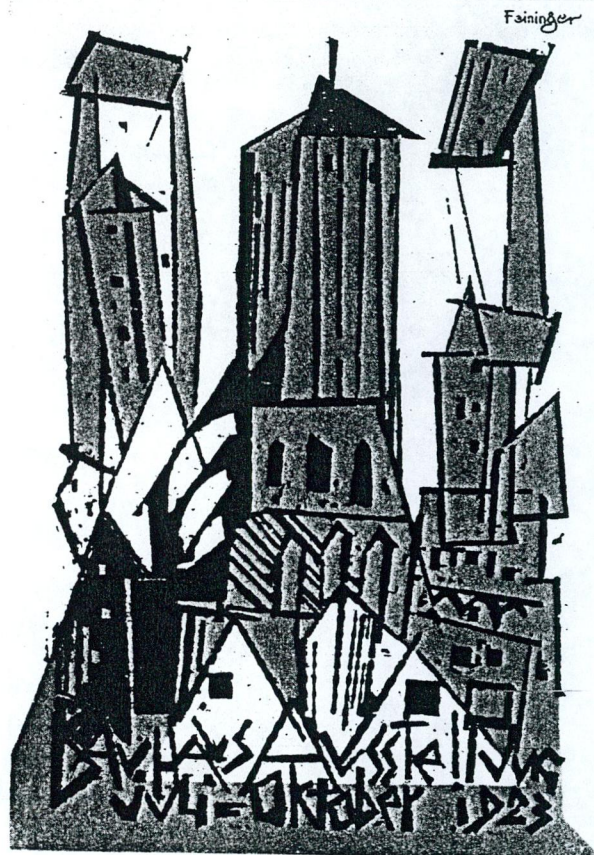


fig 3.3



fig 3.4

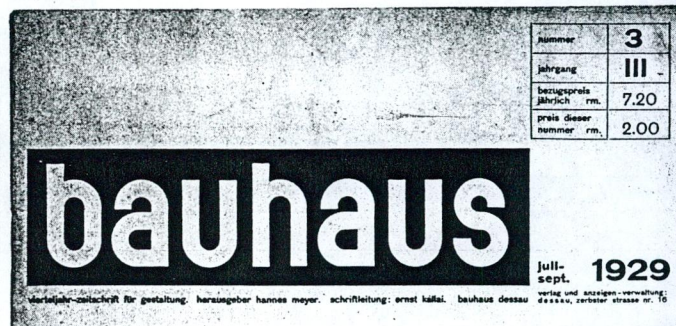


fig 3.5

abccdeefghijklmmnoo
pqrssttuuvvwxyz!?(+)

fig 3.6

abcdefghijkl
mnopqrstuvw
xyzag dd

fig 3.7

Typeface One is in my opinion not a very effective typeface to use for type setting. If the forms of each letter are studied it becomes obvious that Brody has shown little or no consideration, during the design process, to see how the letterforms work together when ranged to form words. With no logical progression in the design of each letterform, the result is a face that is impossible to kern to any degree of accuracy.

Even in this early design, it can be clearly seen that this face is just a reworking of another early Bauhaus design. If Typeface One is compared to the type on the Bauhaus poster of 1923 (fig 3.2.) many similarities can be drawn between the two. To start; the letters "S", "L", "V", "A", "B" and numbers "1", "9", "2" and "3", of the Bauhaus design, are almost identical to those designed by Brody. Even when compared to another Bauhaus poster (fig 3.3.) the similarities between typefaces continues. This direct association with Bauhaus can be seen in a large proportion of Brody's typeface designs. An example of this would be his famous type design Industria (fig 3.4.). When this face is set to spell the word "Bauhaus", and if it is compared to some of the later examples of Bauhaus typography, designed by Kandinsky in 1929 (fig 3.5.) the common aspects in each typeface are quite obvious. Both letterforms are constructed of similar weights of bars, and following similar construction shapes. The only major difference being, that Brody's face has a more square section to the shaping of the letterforms.

Another Brody typeface that shows great similarities to a Bauhaus typeface would be Brody's Typeface Three (fig 3.6.) which bears a remarkable resemblance to a typeface by Herbert Bayer. His condensed version of Universal (fig 3.7.) is basically just a rounded, smoother form of typeface than Brody's version. The Brody version incorporates a more elliptical form to the basic body shapes of each character, with some letterforms being almost untouched. These would include "a", "p", "q" and "w", all of which use the same x height as their original counterparts.

JULY TO OCTOBER 1987

TOUCH

JULY

T33.6

PROTECTION

JULY

TO:6

STRAFE FÜR REBELLION

SANTA MARIA

JULY

TO:7

SOLIMAN GAMIL

THE EGYPTIAN MUSIC

AUG

TO:9

THE HAFER TRIO

A THIRSTY FISH

OCT

T-6

TOUCH "LANGUAGE"

DISTRIBUTED BY THE CARTEL 01-033 2133

THE CARTEL

01-033 2133

THE CARTEL

01-033 2133

TOUCH 13 OSWALD ROAD LONDON SW17 7SS

fig 3.8

An interesting element that appears in a large proportion of Brody's work is his use of symbols. These seem to appear in almost every aspect of Brody's work, from business cards to album covers, and play a large role in the formation of Brody's personal identity which comes across in his work. An example of the use of these symbols would be Brody's poster for Touch (fig 3.8.), in which the symbols play an important role in the visual construction and composition of the design. This is a poster announcing the forthcoming releases by Touch. In this design the symbols serve to help visually organise a very confusing layout of type. They take on the form of what would appear to be industrial machine parts or the dial of a telephone. The word "Touch" is set in a very condensed typefaces, this is a very stable element on the page because the vertical height of the letterforms act to give the impression of an outward pressure against the boundaries of the page. The gentle curving of the letters "O", "U" and "C" support this impression of tension by adding a spring-like effect to the interior of the word. The remaining information text is set in a layered effect, this again is a very stable compositional technique. The entire structure of the design rests upon the black wave-like form at the base of the composition: overall a very rigid form of layout. However: the symbols play a very important role in this design. They serve to provide a sense of instability and movement to the composition. The line of five "dials" across the top, have all their negative counterforms (which take on the form of white squares along the edge) ranged in an manner which creates a sense of motion. The top left dial has it's counterforms lined towards twelve o clock, as does the top right dial, the three dials in between have theirs lined up randomly. This creates an impression of the dials rolling across the top of the word "Touch". The large dial at the base of the design is present to create a sense of instability rather than a sense of movement. It acts like a ball under a flat plank of wood, with the wave form taking on the role of the plank.

Brody uses these symbols for many other uses, such as for drawing the readers attention to important sections of a composition, or to simply add balance to a design. The



fig 3.9

style of rendering Brody employs in the symbols is identical to that which he uses for logos and corporate identities. In many cases his designs for either symbols or for logos would appear to be of an identical nature.

It is in the area of logo design that I believe Brody is at his weakest, as a result of his very strong style. If a cross section example of Brody's designs for corporate identities and logo designs are compared to each other, two distinct similar features, common to all, are noticeable. Firstly the use of colour is very close in all designs, and secondly a lot of the designs display a very similar ambience, or visual connection between pieces. This can be seen in (fig 3.9.). The fact that they all appear to be so similar is cause for concern. I believe design to be a continuous problem solving exercise. The solution that you arrive at, in a particular job, should be what you believe to be, the closest possible representation of the perfect solution. And since every job is different, the correct solution to each job should also be different. With Brody's designs the solutions he has arrived at are very close to each other in most of the designs. This is an example of where the style that a designer has become known for, has started to take from their creative talents. It would seem that clients would look to Brody for possibly for his talents as a designer and also the fact that the design will be roughly predetermined in style. For whatever reasons Brody has for using the same approach to solve every design problem is unknown, but I see the results of this approach as being inferior and predictable.

Chapter 4: Brody and beyond.

In this chapter I will look at Brody's ideas as to what the future holds for us, to see if what he thinks is valid and and a good representation of possible future happenings.

Design has certainly changed a great degree in the last ten years or so, and in these years we have witnessed some of the most influential developments in the whole history of design as we know it. But where is all this leading us? Brody believes that soon we will see the dawn of the era where every aspect of design is run and organised from the keyboard of the Macintosh.

“People seem to think we're well into the computer revolution, but this is only the beginning. We can only imagine the way it will become fully part of our lives in the future. For me its a very exciting period. The decisions taken over the next two years about how things will look are crucial, they'll be the ones that stay with us. At the moment every interactive programme looks the same; you click in a window and a menu comes up. Its like whatever happens first becomes the model for everything else. Now is the time to explore, to ensure that the best decisions are made with the best degree of insight and research.”

(Brody, XYZ magazine interview, August 1993,p14-15.)

The developments we see today are just the slow practice runs of what he believes to be primitive technology that will not show its true worth and affect on the design community for at least five to ten years. Brody has always been a great advocate for the use of the Macintosh since the early 'eighties and it would seem he can find no fault with it, defending it vigorously any time he is questioned on the subject. His belief is that the technology we are using these days gives no real idea of what awaits us; it can only hint as to the direction things will go.

Brody is now 38 and is viewing things very differently from the way he saw design at the height of his career in the 'eighties. He is now totally obsessed with the digital medium and has been trying to push new trains of thought connected with it onto the

design community.

“Behaviour with a computer screen is quite different; its pretty much much in a fixed position- at the moment anyway- concentration is different than with magazines, where you can glance through. So its a mistake to base electronic communication on the activity and habits we use for printing. I don't yet know how that will evolve, but it will be completely different.”

(Brody, XYZ Magazine interview, August 1993, p14-15.)

Through various ventures he is trying to expand the way designers visualise the role of the Macintosh in design. He believes that we have almost stereotyped the particular uses of the Macintosh, uses such as type setting, image orientation, document layout, and all the other commonly associated design uses for the computer. He sees the computer as filling an entirely separate role in design, a role even possibly opposite to the role it fills now. He believes that when magazines first appeared they were based on the looks and layout of newspapers, because this is what we were used to. However, the newspaper was based on the book which, in turn, was based on the manuscript. The same could be said of the television. When they first became available they looked nothing like they look today; in fact, they looked like radios, because again that was what we were used to. But when televisions first appeared nobody ever could have imagined the video recorder or even the video game. These were unseen alternative uses for a technology that has in effect changed little from its original concept. Indeed, now we have colour screens and remote control but in a way the concept of the television has not changed; the way we use it is what has changed. This is the direction computers will follow. We presently treat computers as units to produce printed pieces because this is the production method we are used to. We have not yet considered the computer as being a unit to produce computer outputted pieces, where the on- screen display is the final design which never leaves the confines of the microprocessor. Brody sees the use of on-screen displays as being one possibility for what lies ahead in design. After all, a design never looks the same on-screen as it does when you compare it to the final printed piece. This would be true, because what you see on-screen is

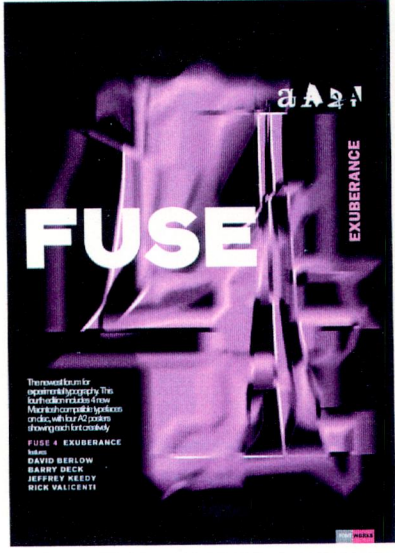


fig 4.1

only a representation of the design. The quality of the representation you view is only as good as the quality of the monitor's screen. And since the monitor's screen is only a pixelized representation of the design, it makes sense to treat the screen, as a separate medium.

The development of an "on-screen only" medium in the future, is a direction in design I can see as being possible. However; I believe that there are two reasons why this idea will not work to any great level of success at this point in time. These are; that until technology advances to fully utilise this concept, and to make the visual displays fully accessible to the general public, this idea will fail. Without an audience, who have access to monitor units or the possible future access to monitors, the purpose of the idea (being visual communication) is lost. And secondly; until feasible uses for the resulting product of this medium arise, then it is a development that will be wasted, by being confined to experimental uses in design only. As I have stated before; at the stage of development computers have reached now, I still believe them to be inferior tools of design for completing tasks other than ones which require the effect the computer produces. With the computer being used today as a "does it all" medium for design, it seems that to finally accept it for the separate medium that it is, is obviously a step in the right direction. To hear Brody state this, however, is rather surprising as it seems to show that he has finally realised the possible limitations of the Macintosh.

This view of the computer screen as being a hybrid state, neither truly digital or analogue (printed form) has been the centre of thinking for one of Brody's recent projects. The name of this venture is Fuse. This is an experimental look into the alternative uses for digital typography, and was set up in 1990. Fuse comprises of a complete software package, that contains discs with experimental font designs, posters showing the fonts in use, and booklets that provide information on what Fuse hopes to achieve (fig 4.1.). The typefaces that are on the discs (in previous issues) have been designed by well known designers such as Malcolm Garret, Phil Bains, Erik Spiekermann, Ian Swift and



fig 4.2



fig 4.3

of course Neville Brody. But what is the purpose of Fuse? Fuse has been set up as not a commercial venture but as what Brody believes to be a necessity. It is published through FontShop and is aimed to be sold to designers. It is an interactive typographical programme which allows designers to play with type and to see the results of experimentation with the letterforms of typefaces. It provides an outlet that allows designers the chance to use a programme which encourages the user to look at type, and its uses in modern design. Then to challenge their possibly preconceived views as to what types' role in design is. This is achieved through the use of various tools, that allow the designer to redefine the entire way that the type is presented on-screen. With digital type, the designer, is encouraged to challenge the visual presentation of type by distorting the forms and to draw up new fonts. This is even further encouraged by all the fonts being free of any copyright protection; Brody wishes the type to be "stolen" and then redesigned for the use of the individual. It is through using these new visual vehicles in design, that Brody hopes the alternative uses of redefined digital type will prove to be visually stimulating. It is not the literal meaning of the type that interests Brody, but the overall visual impact of a new expressive form of digital typographical design.

The experimental typefaces that are supplied on disc, are generally bordering on the verge of being illegible or have the appearance of having been put through a Photoshop filter (fig 4.2.). Although some of the faces do take on a more typical guise, such as FF gothic, designed for Fuse in 1993 by Brody (fig 4.3.). In each edition, designers are commissioned to design a typeface based around their own visual interpretation of a word, for example Fuse 6 was typefaces based on the word "codes". Other topics that have been used are "crash", "virtual", "religion" and "obedience". These typefaces can be installed on a Macintosh, and can be used in the same way as any standard font could be used, but only through experimentation will the purpose of Fuse be fulfilled.

The entire Fuse package comes contained in a single corrugated cardboard folder (fig4.4).

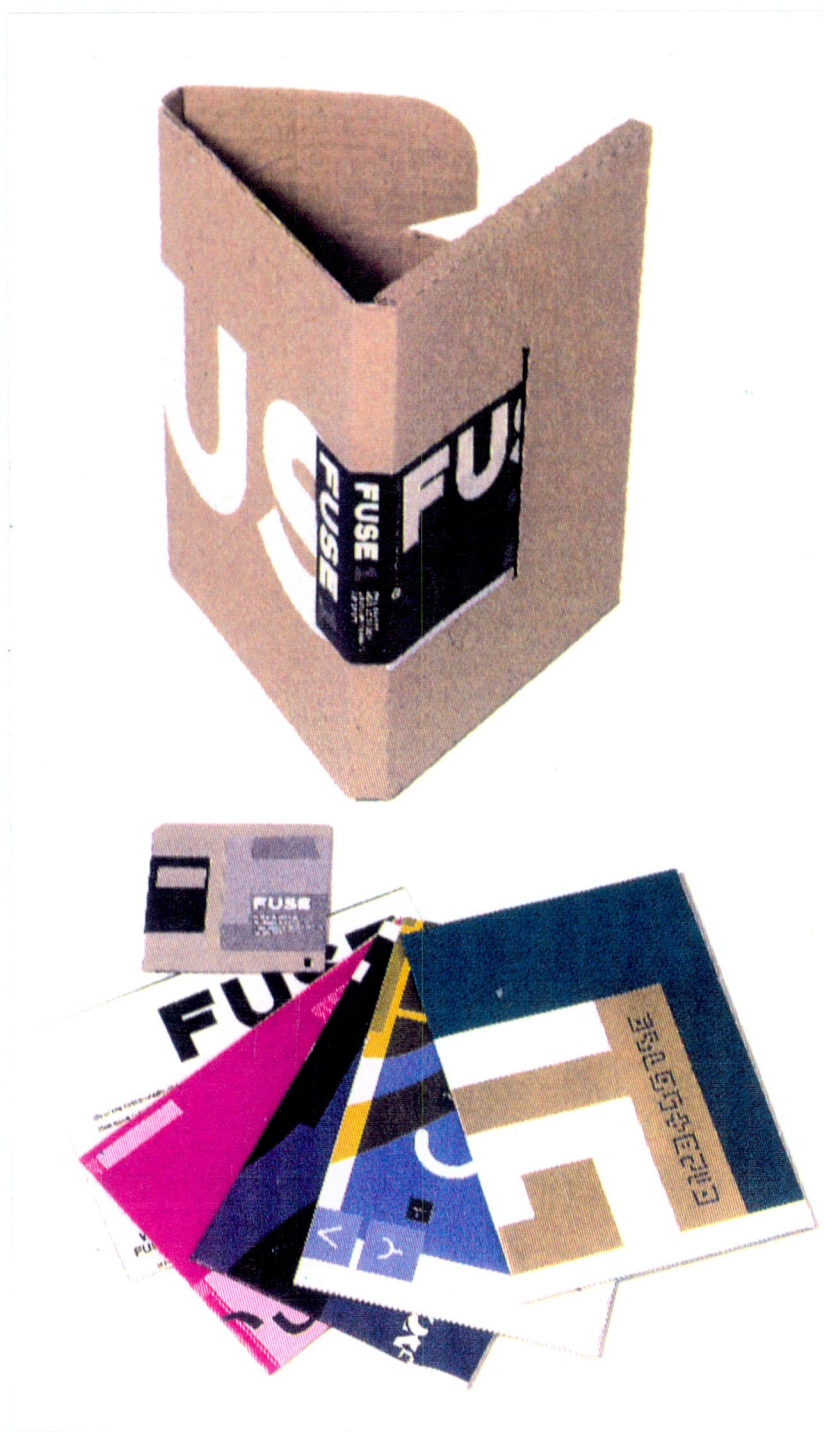


fig 4.4

This is to represent the hybrid state that is Fuse. It is not a typographical programme designed for producing printed images but is aimed at showing the image potential of on-screen display. Brody explains it as,

"I've had long conversations with American designers who say "why would you make a typeface that isn't readable?" I try to explain that Fuse is an experimental platform. It doesn't necessarily look at language and be restricted to the idea of words - it looks at visual language and the way we respond to written language."

(Brody, XYZ magazine interview, August 1993, p14-15.)

The ideas behind Fuse are well thought out. I believe that any form of experimentation in design is good. If the Fuse project manages to open an interest in the design community, for the idea of type as image for purely on-screen use, then this would be a great achievement for Brody. However; as is present in a lot of Brody's design, there would appear to be a level of pretentiousness and overdesigning involved in the Fuse project. It does not seem surprising that some designers doubt the project and will not accept it. Brody is asking a lot from the designer. What he is in effect doing is telling the individual to dismiss all that they have been taught over the years in relation to type, and embrace his Fuse ideology. Although the typefaces do present pleasing visual images to the designer, their use as a communication/design aid, I believe is very limited. These typefaces are in many cases illegible and so straight away are useful only as an image. Even the image they portray is so stylised and "Brodyesque" that they will surely become outdated and be useful only as cliché'd icons in remembrance of Brody's past achievements. Overall; I can see how Fuse will serve to fill a gap in the design market for new alternative programmes. But it seems that Brody has confused a few issues. If Brody believes that the technology we see today is but a vague reflection of what awaits us tomorrow, surely it seems pointless to develop new software for the future if

the very hardware that it is designed for will soon be gone or changed beyond recognition? Also with Fuse being primarily a type for screen use only programme, it seems ironic that any new images created with this programme, in order to be circulated, rely upon the medium of print to do so.

Conclusion.

To conclude this thesis, I will end by stating my own personal views on the work of Neville Brody. From the research that I have conducted into the work, theories, and the 4 sources from which I believe Brody has taken his inspiration. I have finally drawn a conclusion as to who Brody really is, what his work stands for and where I see his work developing in the future.

I will start by saying that I firmly believe Brody to be a great designer of our time. However his work lets down the thought process that he undertakes before working on a design. The work is restricted by the technology that he has adopted, and although he and the other members of his studio are probably at the forefront of computer assisted graphic design, I believe that in the majority of his work, the results would have been better if the design had been rendered with a more traditional medium. As a result of his blind devotion to technology his work suffers greatly.

The majority of the vast amount of work that is being produced by the Neville Brody studios, when viewed from a whole, presents to the viewer, a body of work that although colourful and amazing in its complexities, still presents itself with a curious flatness. All this can be contributed to the inferior qualities that a technology, still in its infancy, produces when used to cover the roles of all other media. The future could present the possibilities for technology to become available which will complement the work of Neville Brody. Until this time arrives, his ideas for the future developments in graphic design, will have to wait.

It is clear, from my research, that the work of Brody is to a great extent based totally on the previous work of the designers of the Bauhaus. As was shown, I believe that his “new” typefaces were not so new, and the styles of layout he used had all been done before.

What place lies in the design world for Brody in the future is unclear. Brody is a man who used the works of previous designers to his advantage, although he never states that past sources influenced him. I believe the future has no place for Brody. He has continuously reworked the past, and I believe the future is place for new ideas only. I hope this thesis has shown this to be the case.

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