National College of Art and Design

Faculty of design
Dept. of Visual Communications

An analysis of Postmodern typography
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Submitted to the Faculty of
History of Art and Design
and Complementary Studies
in candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Design
in Visual Communications

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# Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

I find that I am very interested in typographical forms, and the role of typography in communication particularly expressive typography. But when I started my research I found that expressive typography was too broad a topic for my thesis so I narrowed it down and I found myself with postmodern typography.

Postmodernism is a movement which evolved in the 1960s as a critical response to the dominance, and perceived sterility of modernism. It re-established an interested in ornament, symbolism and visual wit. Postmodernism sometimes sacrifices legibility to expressiveness. The movement to me is like, let's just say, being on a strict diet and not being allowed anything that is not on your diet plan, and then just breaking out and bining! Of course it is not like that at all, it is related to art and culture and not food, but I just want to convey the freedom the postmodern designers must have felt.

Most people when they hear the word postmodernism they visualise playful and fun architecture and product designs before typography. Maybe I could go so far as to say that they do not visualise postmodern typography. In this thesis I would like to make an attempt to aid those people in visualising postmodern typography. I shall do this by examining some typographical design work in relation to some product designs. As I am by no means an industrial designer, this analysis will be based on their surface appearance.

Before I discuss postmodernism, I believe it is essential to have an understanding of modernism, as it was the constraints of this movement that brought about postmodernism. So in the first chapter of this thesis I shall examine modernist typographers, namely L.Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer, and attempt to point out some of the reasons postmodernist typographers reacted so strongly against it.

Another aspect of postmodern typography is sometimes the disregard of legibility in

favour of expressiveness and visual excitement. I would like to take a look at the effects of illegibility on typographical design, and whether the message is communicated more or less as a result of this. Also, through typography the postmodern designer can fuse type and the message so that type becomes the pictorial message. This experimentation may also result in reduced readability but the question is, does the visual excitement created by the creative approach of type as image more than compensate in the illegibility it causes?

Contemporary practitioners of postmodern design are Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko, who designed and published the much talked about and innovative typographical design magazine, Emigre. Even though this is a widely acclaimed and award winning magazine, not everyone praises it. People either 'love it' or they 'hate it'. It offends modernist designers because of its constant assault on conventions. I would like to discuss some of the critical comments made about the magazine.

The procedures I used to accomplish my aims included a collection process whereby I gathered examples of modernist and postmodernist typography and product designs from books, magazines, posters and advertisements, etc. Then I analysed each design in relation to one other, incorporating them into separate chapters. Research in libraries provided a historical background, while the study of numerous contemporary magazine articles gave a current account of typographic progress.

# C h a p t e r   1 :   M o d e r n i s m

I cannot begin to discuss Postmodernism without understanding the movement of

Modernism.  Modernism is a term used to describe a movement in the visual arts and

design in the first half of the 20th century, which reacted strongly against the declining

standards in craftsmanship and the decorative excess of Art Nouveau.

> With the defeat of the German Empire in the First World War, the
> legitimacy of 19th century culture appeared bankrupt.  Many Germans
> had to start fresh again.  Modernists recognised the need for a new
> approach, a new way of thinking which would enable the production of
> well made artifacts for mass consumption, The new style was intended to
> signify the rise of the worker and the end to class division within industrial
> society. (Gottschall, 1993, p40)

 Modernist designers also encouraged the move towards bold geometric forms, the

elimination of decoration and the use of asymmetric layouts.The Bauhaus was the focal

point of the Modernist way of thinking and "many of today's approaches to typographic

design are offshoots of the work done under the Bauhaus masters".(Gottschall, 1989, p38)

 When the Bauhaus was founded , the European art world was in turmoil, with new move

ments springing up everywhere.  Of the new movements, Cubism, Suprematism,

Constructivism, deStijl and Dadaism had most effect on the Bauhaus.

> Cubists broke down the visual appearance of everyday objects into
> paintings that went quite beyond conventional observation in that they
> showed more than one view of an object at the same time.  The dynamic
> typography of the Russian Constructivist designer El Lissitzky, the static
> asymmetric design of the Constructivist Dutch painter Piet Modrian and
> the impudent freedom of Dada are other main influences on modern graphic
> design.  Dada was something quite different; it rejected the conventional
> methods and limits of painting and made use of typographic symbols.
> They used the symbols in the most eccentric way, producing dynamic
> layouts.(Gottschall, 1989, p39)

 With Dada influence the Bauhaus typographers such as L.Moholy-Nagy, Herbert

Bayer and Joost Schmidt were in the mood to reject anything.  They rejected axial

symmetry and traditional margins in their typography.  They also rejected serifs and

decoration, though at first the influence of Dada led them to use heavy rules and type founders' borders and squares. They sought to produce the ideal typeface by using straight lines and circles, seeking a geometrically contrived alphabet. By today's standards, their work may look heavy handed, obvious or perhaps even clumsy. However it did not appear so then, particularly in Germany where the Gothic typeface was still in everyday use.

Herbert Bayer, El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy and Jan Tschichold were at the centre of the Modern movement bringing a vital new emphasis to words through design, layout and the organisation of space, by emphasis and their choice of typeface. Principles for this new typography were slowly being established; they called it functional typography. As the architect Louis Sullivan declared, "form follows function". According to Quay, "their rejection of all forms of historicism and embellishment led them (Modernists) to embrace an aesthetic of clean, simple and functional forms"( Quay, 1993, p64.). This became one of the central beliefs of Modernist thinking.

The basic constituents for the new typography were geometrical simplicity, contrast of typographical material, the exclusion of any ornament not functionally necessary, a preference for keeping within the range of type sizes that could be machine set, the use of photographs for illustrations, the use of primary colours and the acceptance of the machine age and the utilitarian purpose of typography.

## M o h o l y - N a g y

Moholy-Nagy was born in Hungary and studied law in Budapest. During his studies he was interrupted by the war and in 1915 he enlisted in the Hungarian army, but was wound ed in action during 1917. During his recuperation period he decided to pursue his interest in art. His awareness of the avant-garde movements, including Constructivism, deStijl and Dada took him to Vienna in 1919 and then on to Berlin in 1921. In Berlin, Moholy Nagy had a lot of contact with El Lissitzky, before coming to the Weimar Bauhaus. His studio in

Berlin had become a meeting place for the avant-garde and El Lissitzky, Van Doesburg and and Schwitters were frequent visitors.

In 1923 Walter Gropius invited Moholy-Nagy to teach at the Bauhaus in Weimar. When he arrived there he was put in charge of the metal workshop. I would like to take a look at some of the metalwork produced by his students in relation to some typographic design work produced by Moholy-Nagy, in particular the design of the 1923 Bauhaus prospectus, Fig 1.1, and a coffee and tea service, Fig 1.2. Both designs are very structured. In the prospectus the verticals and horizontals are dominant and the vertical line rules up, with the text at the bottom right of the design. Also the '1919' and '1923' are in line with the left hand side of the square underneath. This design is orderly and functional, that is to say your eye is guided around the design in a geometrical way. In the coffee and tea service designed by Wilhelm Wagenfeld, a student of Molhoy-Nagy's, the forms are reduced to their most simple geometric elements-cylinders. There is no ornament or decoration on the tea and coffee service; they are entirely metallic with black handles and knobs. The tea and coffee service is functional in the sense that the pots have large, strong handles which enable the user to lift it carefully and safely since they would contain hot liquids. The jug, however, has a different handle to those of the pots. I assume this is because it would contain milk which would be a cold liquid. But this still does not account for the awkward appearance of the handle and if the design is meant to follow the function, why then have such a handle? Is it a form of decoration? And yet Wilhelm Wagenfeld when asked about the designs of the metal workshop said "form and function must always attain a clear unambiguous design which the function has produced the form"(Whitford,1992, p176): The spouts of the coffee and tea pots are positioned in such a way that one can get every last drop of tea/coffee. The pots are designed in such a manner that their form is followed by their function but I find the handle of the jug a little off track.

STAATLICHES
BAUHAUS

WEIMAR 1919 1923

BAUHAUSVERLAG G.M.B.H.
MÜNCHEN
MAXIMILIANSTR. 18

Das Buch, welches anläßlich der ersten Aus-
stellung vom 15. August bis 30. September 1923
des Staatlichen Bauhauses zu Weimar nach
dessen 3½ jährigem Bestehen erscheint, ist in
erster Linie Dokument dieser Anstalt; es reicht
aber, dem Charakter der Anstalt entsprechend,
weit über eine örtliche oder spezifische Ange-
legenheit hinaus ins allgemeine, gegenwärtige
und zukünftige Gebiet künstlerischen Schaffens
und künstlerischer Erziehung.
So wie das Staatliche Bauhaus das erste wirk-
liche Zusammenfassen der im letzten Jahrzehnt
gewonnenen Einsichten in künstlerischen Ent-
wicklungsfragen bedeutet, so nimmt das Buch
spiegelnd Teil an diesen Fragen und bedeutet
jedem, der sich über den Stand dieser Dinge
unterrichten will, hierzu ein willkommenes Mittel.
Darüber hinaus bleibt es ein geschichtliches
Dokument. Denn das Bauhaus ist, obwohl zu-
nächst einzigartig, keine insulare Erscheinung,
sondern ein kräftiger Trieb, der sich voll ent-
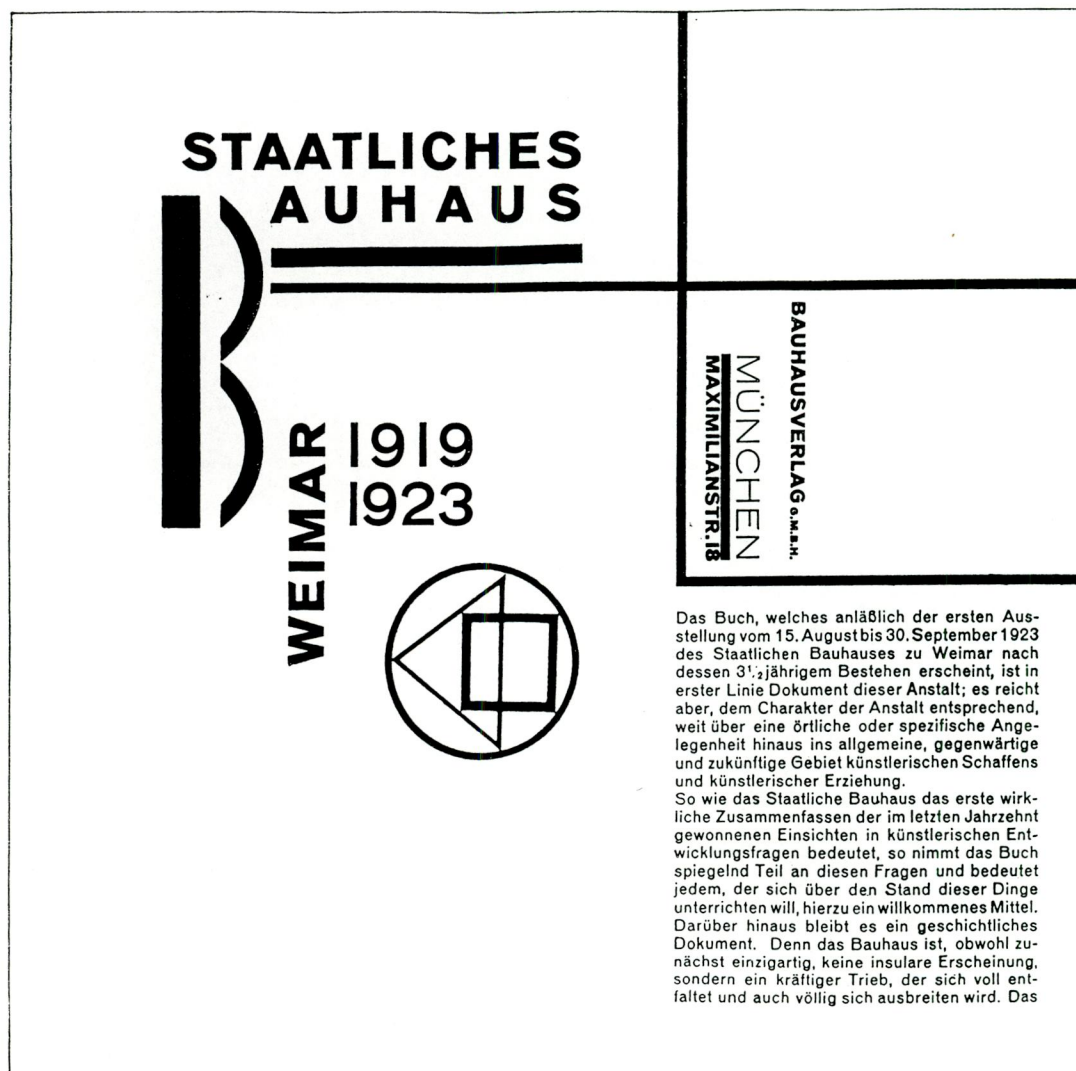faltet und auch völlig sich ausbreiten wird. Das

Fig. 1.1   1923 Bauhaus Prospectus designed by Moholy-Nagy

Fig. 1.2   Coffee and tea service designed by Wilhelm Wagenfeld

Similarly, in the design for the Bauhaus prospectus by Moholy-Nagy, the typography is free from any ornament and decoration and the typography alone is important. As Tschichold wrote, "we aim at simplicity, we therefore require simple clear typefaces." "(Gottschall, 1989,.p-) Moholy-Nagy uses sans serif type in his design which creates simple and clear typography. The purpose or function of typography is to make reading easy as well as making it appear easy to read, therefore we can assume that form follows function. According to Moholy-Nagy, " typography is an instrument of communication. It must communicate clearly in the most urgent form. Clarity must be emphasised because in comparison with prehistoric pictograms it is the essence of script." (Whitford, 1992, p188)

Moholy-Nagy sometimes used modular, simple letters designed at the Bauhaus rather than pre-existing styles. We can see this in the letter 'B' of Bauhaus, where the letter was created by using a thick vertical line and two arcs. The rule under the word Bauhaus guides the eye into the vertical rule which in turn guides your eye down to the text in the bottom right hand corner. The rules also help to structure the layout of the design and helps to anchor the design on the page.

## Herbert Bayer

Herbert Bayer was a student at the Bauhaus from 1921 to 1923; in 1925 Walter Gropius invited him to head the typography and printing workshop. Bayer played a major role in developing a 'new typography', which used sans serif type, heavy rules, and systematising girds to create clean and logical compositions. While instructing in the typography work shop, he uttered his famous dictum: "why should we print with two alphabets? both a large and a small sign are not necessary to indicate a single sound. Capital *A* equals a small *a*, two alphabets for one word? Why twice the number of symbols if half the number accomplishes the same thing?"(Whitford, 1992, p240 )

This was, for a while, printed at the foot of the Bauhaus notepaper. As a result of this precept, the Bauhaus began in 1925 to abandon capital letters. Bayer also produced his first design for a minimal sans serif typeface in which he used strict geometric shapes ( ie: circles, vertical and horizontal lines), Fig 1.3. Since most type was produced by machines, Bayer argued that it was unnecessary to imitate the incised line of the chisel or thin up stroke and thick down stroke of the pen. The letterforms were created from a few selected arcs and straight lines and Bayer only used the parts which were structurally essential. To better understand the letterform construction, I have devised a grid to portray the development of the design (Fig 1.4). Universal's letterforms are composed of geometrically defined lines of uniform width, the 'o' is a perfect circle. The 'k' was created from two circles with a vertical line, of equal width. Intersecting slightly left of the centre. Hence, by selecting the upward and downward arc to the right of the intersection plus the vertical line, the letter 'k' is made visible. Similarly, the 'x' is created by connecting two half circles. We can see from the rounded alphabet that there are only two diagonals, the letters 'v' and 'z'. A lot of the characters are repeated and in reality Bayer only designed 20 letters for his universal alphabet as opposed to a full 26 characters. The 'b', 'd', 'p', and 'q' are the same design consisting of a circle and a vertical staff. The 'h' and 'y' are the same, and the characters 'u' and 'n' are identical. Finally, the 'm' and 'w' are of the same design.

Bayer's design of universal is typical of form following function; "lowercase only plus strict geometry equals time saved, better comprehension and greater happiness." The alphabet is a tool of communication and communication, in turn, is the basic function of the alphabet. Therefore the design of the letterforms of universal, and the common use of the sans serif typeface in modernist designs, were constructed simply in an effort to create better comprehension and more effective communication. Whether or not a sans serif typeface is functional in the sense that it is more legible is a matter of debate. But as

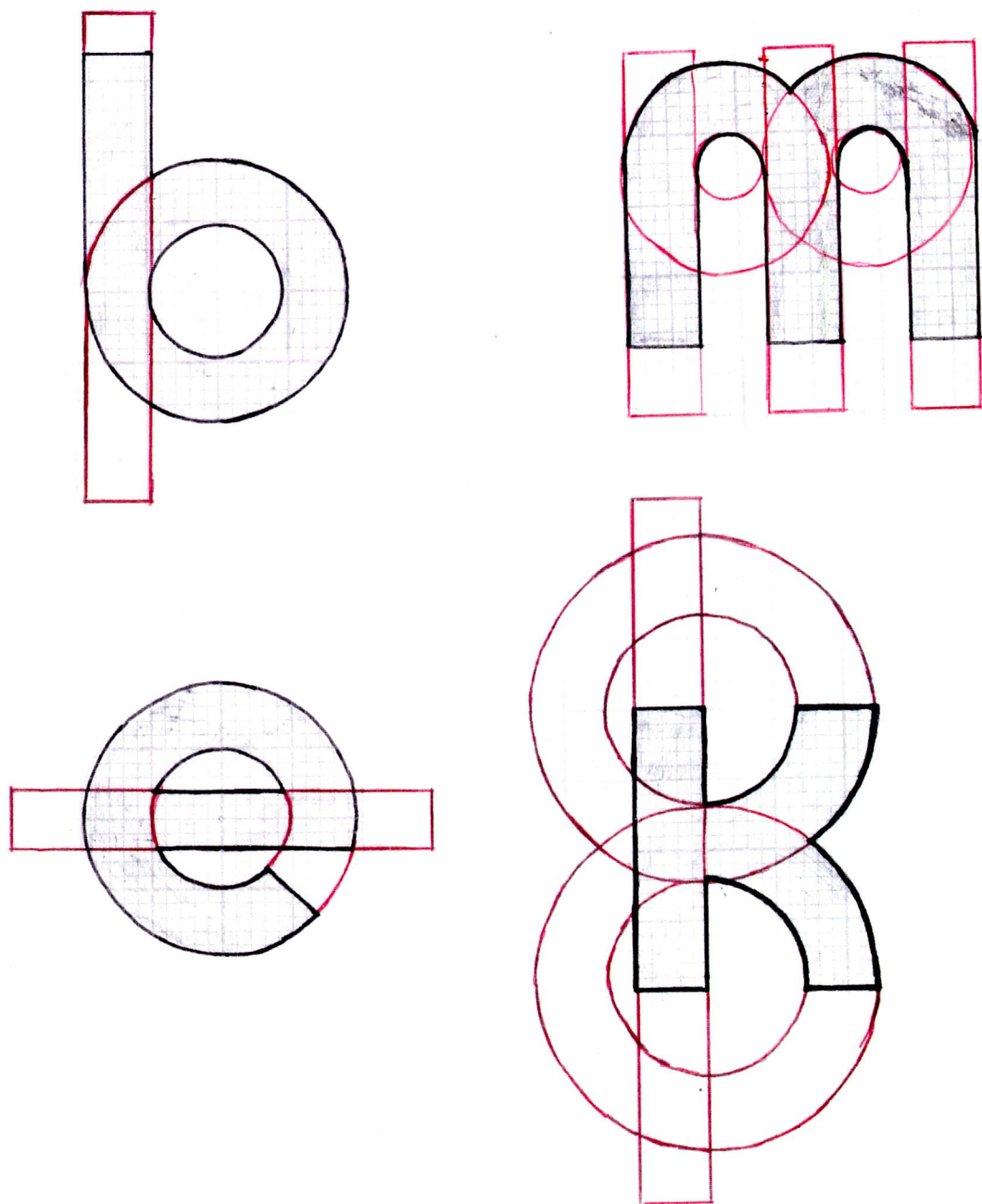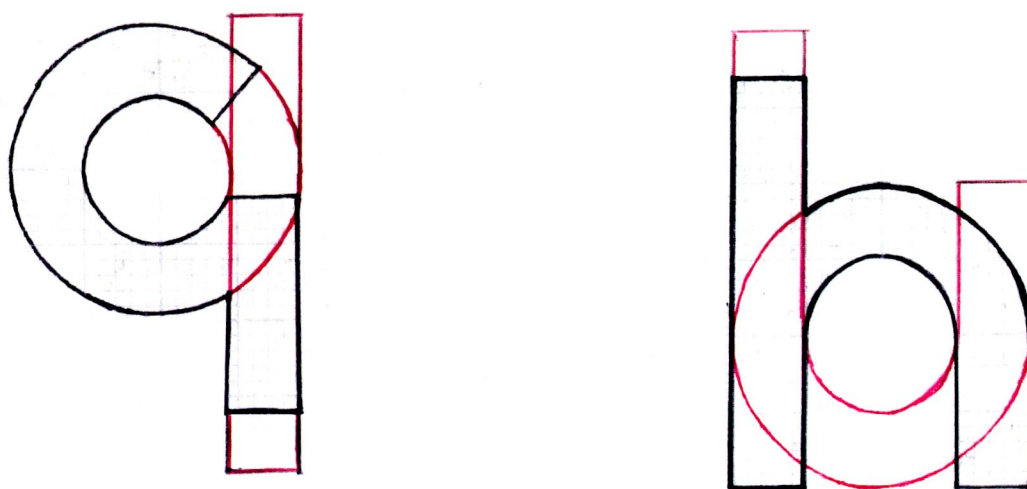Fig. 1.3  Herbert Bayer's Universal typeface

Fig. 1.4   Grid showing Universal's letterform construction

John Lewis suggests, "reading habits die hard and, with nearly five hundred years of unbroken use of the roman typeface, it is clear that the roman serif letter may still have plenty of life left in it. Letters are after all recognition symbols and in a well designed letter if a serif adds to the recognition value, it earns its keep." (Lewis, 1978, p79) Bayer did accomplish one thing: the lack of uppercase letters would reduce the printer's storage space, set-up time and overall costs.

Bayer's typography, like other modernist designs, was orderly and functional and we can see this in some of Bayer's many promotional designs, such as the cover design of the Bauhaus catalogue of products in 1925, Fig.1.5 and the poster design for Kandinsky which was designed in 1926, Fig.1.6. In these designs Bayer's universal typeface was not used, although the Bauhaus abandoned capital letters in 1925. One can only assume that they quickly realised that his typeface was not effective and therefore reverted to using their old typefaces. Bayer's use of the grid meant that he carefully organised elements into a controlled eye-flow. He uses all sans serif type and the large 'Kandinsky' type lines up with the rules on the left and right of the design. Bayer uses rules in the Kandinsky poster to unify the design elements and to give the design structure, but is this not a form of decoration? In this poster design, like that of other modernist designs, there is very little colour used. Bayer uses red and black printed on yellow. The modernists use primary colours and generally only print type in black and red. Bayer's typography in the Kandisky poster varies in point size from considerably large to quite small which achieves various degrees of emphasis.

In the cover design of the Bauhaus catalogue horizontals and verticals are dominant and the typography is flushed left, ragged right. One is introduced to the design from the left, as people read from left to right, to the right angled rule then to the arrow which gives the eye a direction leading into the words 'Das Bauhaus in Dessau' and gently down

Fig. 1.5   Cover design for Bauhaus product catalogue designed by Bayer

Fig. 1.6 Herbert Bayer design for an exhibition in Dessau celebrating Kandinsky's sixtieth birthday

through the other text of the design. Again, Bayer has used rules, an arrow, a circle and a rectangle. The rectangle containing the type serves to highlight the headline and the rules subdivide the area 'Katalog der munster.'

The grid was very important design factor to the modernist as it allowed for an orderly and harmonious distribution of typography and other graphic elements. It is a discipline imposed by the designer. The grid is a system of proportions based on a module, the standard of which is derived from the graphic elements themselves. When creating the grid the designer must take into account all the graphic material: picture, text, space between text and pictures, columns of text, page numbers, picture captions, headings, etc. A grid must be specially created for each problem, but when it is established the designer can play with the graphic elements within this structure all he likes.

Herbert Bayer said in 1965, "typography is not self expression with predetermined aesthetics, but it is conditioned by the message it visualises."( Lewis, 1978,p73). This statement of Bayer's is true in the sense that a designer has to communicate the message in the correct manner. The aim of all typographic designers is to transmit the author's message to the reader. But in Bayer's statement he suggests that form should follow function and that the information should be presented clearly without allowing the form to upstage the content. But should design be so impersonal? Surely if everyone designed in the manner Bayer suggested the design results would be similar, dull, maybe even predictable. Apart from the overriding rule of making clear the author's message, are there any absolute typographic laws? The possibilities for experimental typography are enormous. This belief that Bayer and other modernists had led to a counter-reaction in the form of the development of the postmodern typographic movement. Tschichold realised that there were problems with such a tight design regime and in an article for Schweizer Graphische Mitteilungen, he wrote,

The new functional typography is well suited for publicising industrial products (it has the same origin), yet its means of expression are limited because it strives solely for puritanical 'clarity' and 'purity',............there are many typographic problems which cannot be solved on such regimented lines without doing violence to the text, ............many jobs, especially books are far too complicated for the simplifying procedures of the New Typography. ( McLean,p-, 1975, )

The New Typography brought radical new concepts to the whole idea of printing design.

The typographers of this new way of thinking gave us a new design language for tackling

many design problems, but as Tschichold expressed, the New Typography was not an

answer to every problem and its self-imposed rules produced greater limitations than

anything it was trying to replace.

# Chapter 2 : Postmodernism

"Most people have heard of postmodernism and don't have a clear idea of what it means. They can be forgiven this confusion because postmodernists don't always know and even when they think they do, often find themselves disagreeing"(Jencks,p15,1986,.)Postmodern typography has many names: new wave, swiss punk, pluralist, west coast, avant garde, and deco. What is it? why is it? where is it going? These are some of the questions I would like to examine and hopefully answer by analysing the work of Postmodern designers. Postmodernism is a design movement that evolved in the 1960s as a critical response to the dominance and perceived sterility of modernism.Embracing art, architecture and applied arts, it re-established an interest in ornament, symbolism and visual wit. Modernist typography focused on clarity, order and discipline. Elements not essential to clear communication were out. There was an international modem movements credo of "less is more" and it was Robert Venturi, the Postmodern designer credited with bringing vitality to buildings and interiors, who hit them on the head by countering it with "less is a bore".(Collins, 1990, p103)

Some critics regard 'pastiche' as the single most important element of Postmodernism.Jeffery Keedy seems to think that "there is no escaping being postmodern, since the typefaces available are (or based on) old typefaces. When you try to do something contemporary, you rely on these old typefaces and conventions." (Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p64) In a sense it is an old wave with a difference. It is an attempt to achieve the vigour and explosiveness and the element of surprise that the Futurists and Dadaists gave to typographic design. I think that one could play the game of searching for the precedent, but it is a largely a trivial pursuit to do this. Postmodern designers, in my opinion, want to re-invent these styles. Just as Zuzana Licko designed the 'Variex' type

# variex LigHt:
## AabcdefgHijkLMNopqrsstuvwxyz
## (1234567890)
# variex regular:
## AabcdefgHijkLMNopqrsstuvwxyz
## (1234567890)
# variex bold:
## AabcdefgHijkLMNopqrsstuvwxyz
## (1234567890)

Fig. 2.1 Zuzanna Licko's Variex typeface

typeface out of simple geometric shapes, single-case construction is an idea that was originally presented at the Bauhaus by Herbert Bayer. Licko describes the typeface as follows,

> Variex is a stroke postscript typeface constructed from lines of uniform weight, these letterforms have been reduced to the basic powerful gestures of primitive writing hands. The alphabet is single-case with alternative characters for optimal letter combinations. The bold is three times the weight of the light which is half the weight of the regular.(Elam, 1990, p153)

I think that this typeface, although similar to Bayer's, has Postmodern characteristics in that it is somewhat playful and fun whereas Bayer's design is quite sterile. There is more expressiveness and a sense of movement due to the extra length in the staffs. And also the F and S flow, giving it a sense of vitality. The K, M, N, V, W, and Z have very sharp angles which contrasts with the roundness of the other letters.

At the forefront of the early Postmodern typographic movement were Odermatt and Tissi in Zurich, and Wolfgang Weingart in Basle. I would like to take a closer look at the work of these designers in relation to Postmodern product design, hence defining the characteristics of postmodern typography.

## Odermatt and Tissi

Odermatt is a self taught graphic designer. He did not study under the typographic designers at Switzerland design schools and because of this he probably developed an individual way of thinking which was reflected in his design work. Therefore, it is not surprising that he was one of the first to depart from the modernist style.He worked in Zurich with the industrial designer Georg Vetter (1944-45) and with the designer/painter Hans Falk (1945-48) before spending three years with the Paul Zurrer advertising agency. He opened his own studio in Zurich in 1950 at the age of 24. Tissi was trained at the Kunstgewerbeschule, Zurich (1954-58). After her education there she worked as an

apprentice designer specialising in corporate identity, advertising, posters and book design. In the early 1960s Rosemaire Tissi joined Odermatt's studio and in 1968 became partner.

Wolfgang Weingart cites two main streams in today's Swiss graphic design, the 'orthodox' and the 'innovators', "Odermatt and Tissi have always been counted among the innovators. Their handwriting influenced the Swiss in the late fifties, the sixties, and well into the seventies.always a little more inventive, more imaginative, and above all more subtle."(Gottschall, 1989, p134)  Their work has evolved from the rigorous formality of the International Typographic Style to embrace a more playful and intuitive approach inspired by postmodernism.  They blended the clear and effective presentation style of their contemporaries with dramatic use of colour and a fresh way of positioning the graphic elements, and the division of space on the designed page.

Odermatt and Tissi's unexpected typographic arrangement of letters in their 'Offset' poster (1981), Fig 2.2, has abstract qualities which introduce a decorative element in the poster design.  They have turned the letterforms on a 90 degree angle and the letters are cropped by overlapping them.  " Odermatt and Tissi couple a playful approach to typographic design with respect for the message."(Gottschall, 1989,p134)  So, too,in. Robert Venturi's collection of chairs for Knoll International, Fig2.3, the backs of the chairs are cut out in unusual shapes giving them a sense of playfulness and fun.  They remind me somewhat of the dwarf's chairs in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, as they have a sense of fairytale fantasy about them.  The poster design along with the chairs, are very interesting to look at and would hold a person's attention for quite a while.  In the poster design as the compositional space is the controlling force, with the 'o' composed of a geometric circle.  The 'o' as a circular form is the most compelling element and a natural starting point.  The 'f' letterforms draw the eye back in space and then the eye is led out to the foreground with the 's'.  Then the eye is guided back in space with the overlapping 'e'
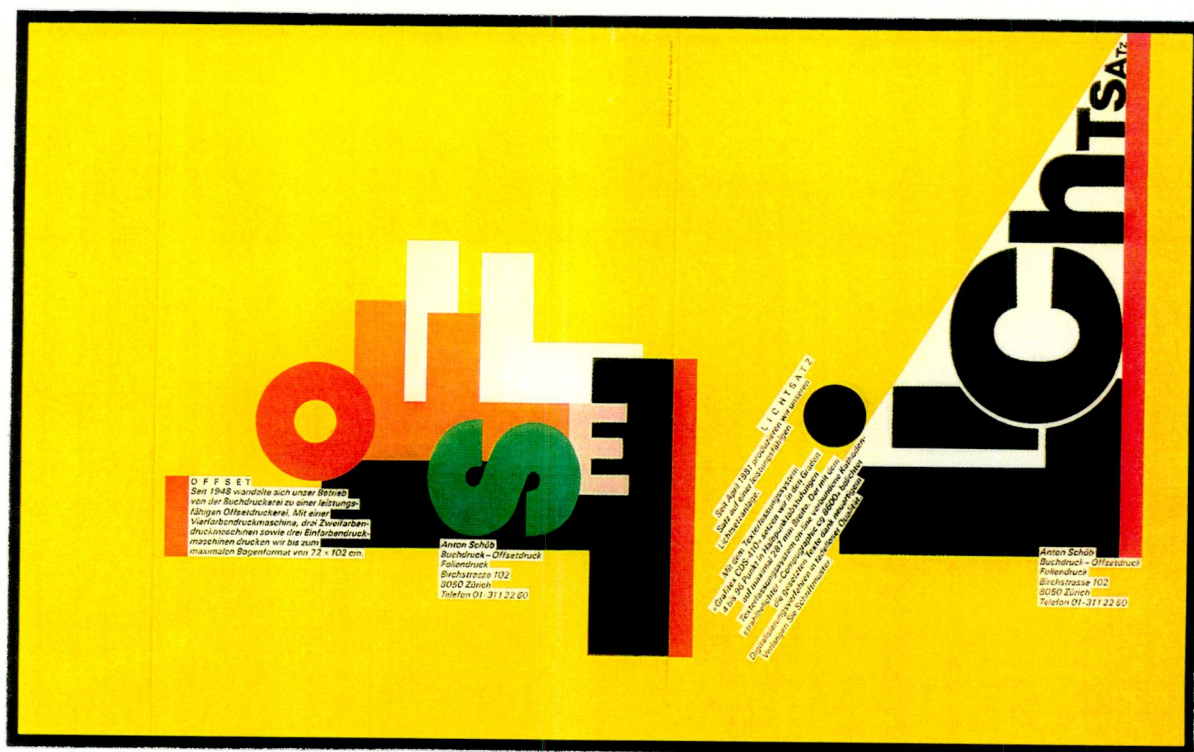
Fig. 2.2   'Offset' poster designed by Odermatt and Tissi

Fig. 2.3   Collection of chairs for Knoll International designed by Robert Venturi

and 't'. The designers also use variations in type weights within the word 'Offset'. Similarly, the chairs also are visually stimulating. In both the poster and chair designs, (bright and cheerful) colour is employed. It is not just for emphasis but it is also a form of embellishment.

In another one of Odermatt and Tissi's poster designs for the 'Sommer Theater' (1981), fig2.4, they use symbolism and a strong contrast of form. Rather than forcing the copy text into a rectangular shape, they used the type in irregular shapes and arranged these around the smooth geometric construction of the sun, symbolising the rays of sun-light.They have successfully thrust off the horizontal discipline which the invention of printing from moveable type had imposed. Michael Graves uses symbolism in his design for a kettle, Fig2.5. On the end of the spout he has a little bird which would, I assume, whistle when the kettle boils. Also, Michael Graves has taken an unusual approach to the design of the kettle, sugar and creamer. They are cylindrical in shape narrowing towards the top. Also, the handles have a bright blue cover. In both Michael Graves' design and Odermatt and Tissi's poster design there is a lot of personality, in that in looking at them one is immediately reminded that an individual designed them as opposed to their being cold and mechanical.

Another postmodern trait which is obvious from Odermatt and Tissi's poster design for 'Fotosatz', Fig2.6, and their typeface's Sonora, and Sinaloa, Fig 2.7, is the use of parallel lines. Similarly, in Stanley Tigerman's designs for his tea service, salt and pepper shakers and picture frame, Fig 2.8, the use of parallel lines is again apparent. However, these lines are used as a form of decoration to visually enhance Stanley Tigerman's designs, where as in the Odermatt and Tissi poster design, 'Fotosatz', they function as more than a form of decoration. The letterform textures and visual power of negative space are at work in this design. The letterforms shift from plane to plane in compositional space, from positive to negative representation, and from solid to textured form. The
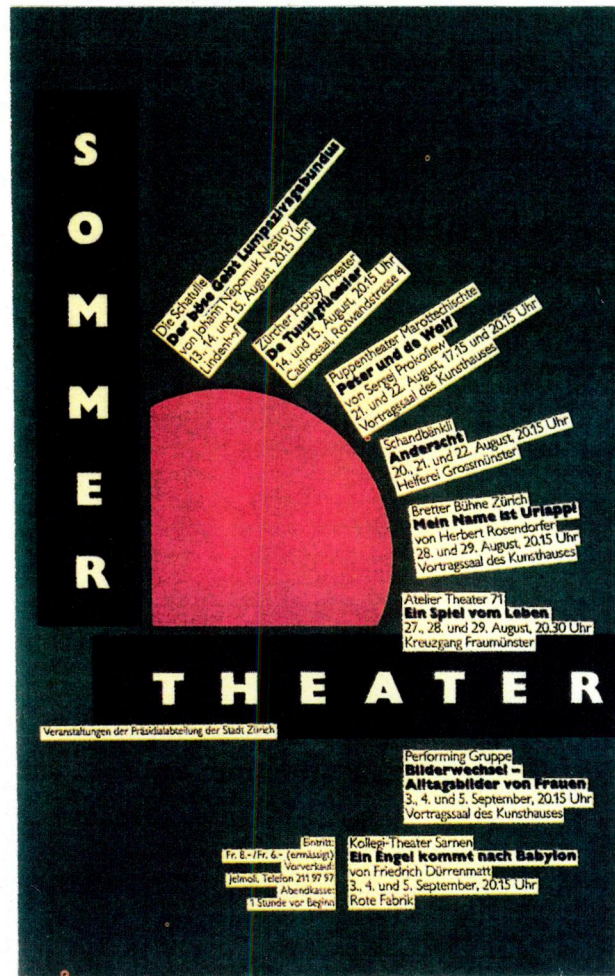
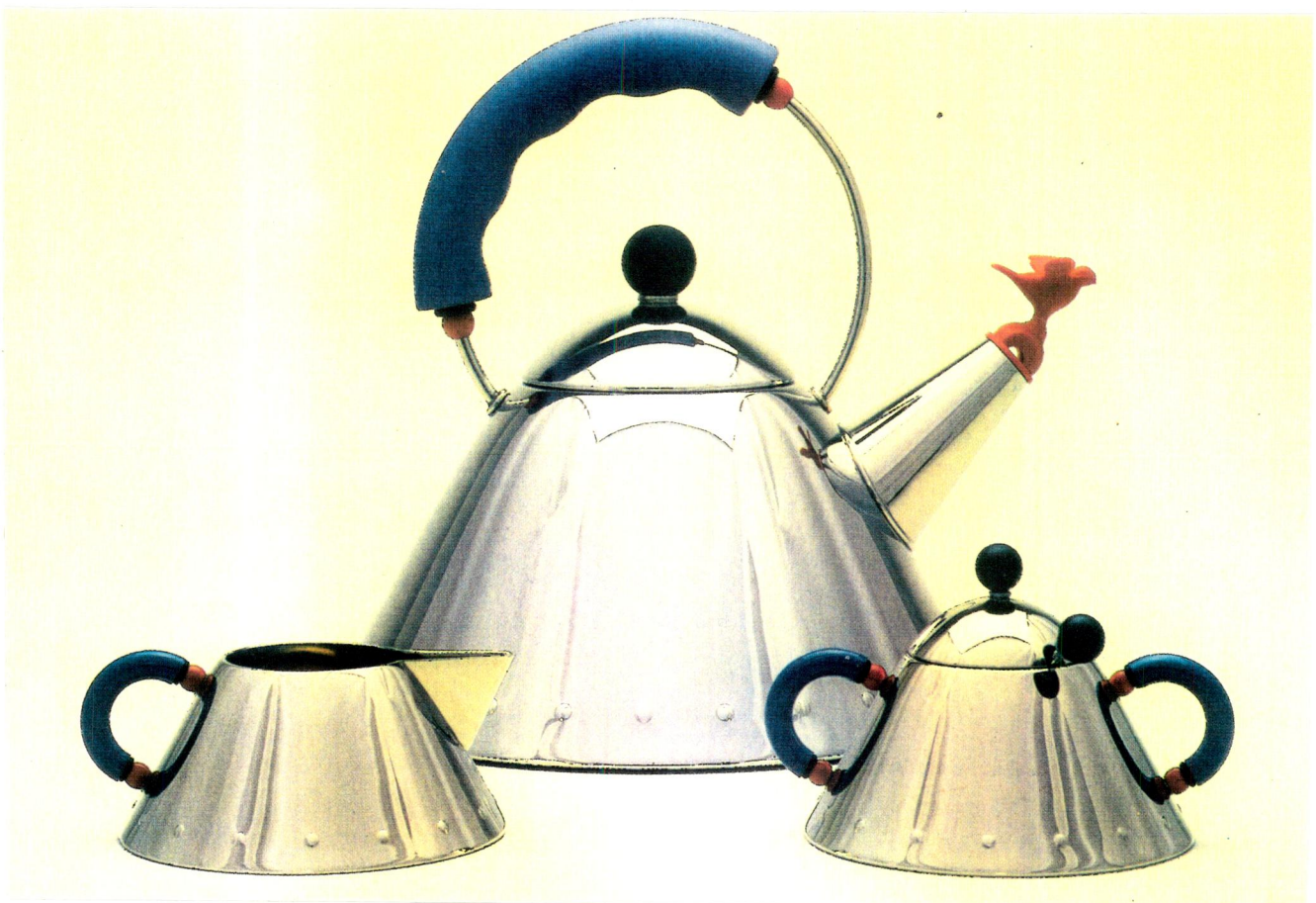Fig. 2.4 'Sommer Theater' poster designed by Odermatt and Tissi



Fig. 2.5 Kettle, sugarbowl and creamer designed by Michael Graves

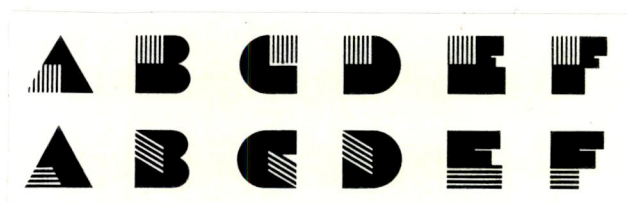Fig. 2.6 'Fotosatz' poster designed by Odermatt and Tissi



Fig. 2.7 Odermatt and Tissi typeface designs, Sonora and Sinaloa
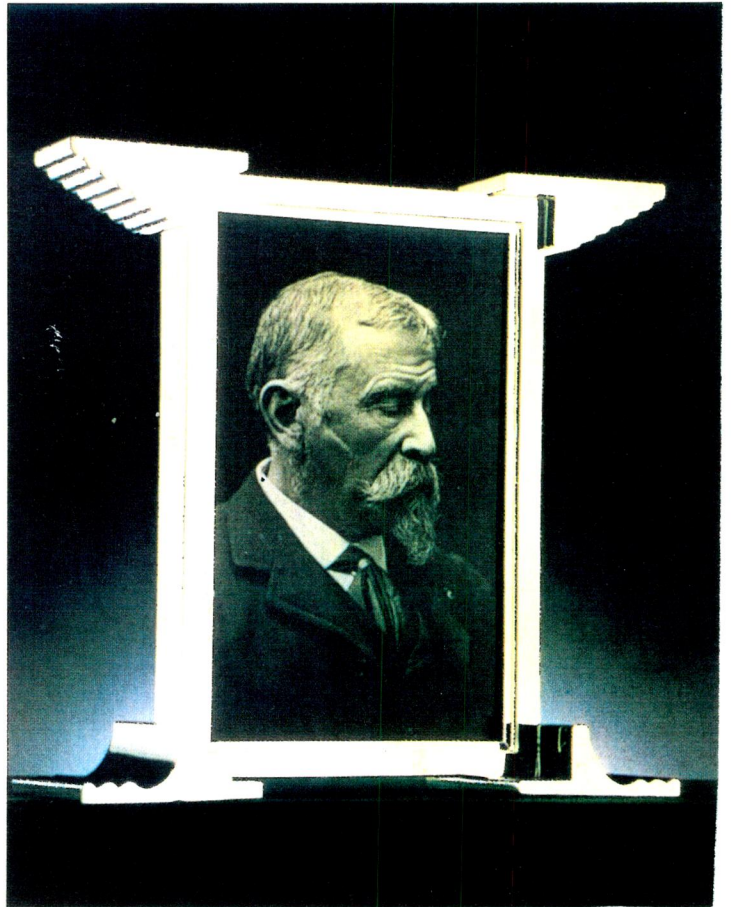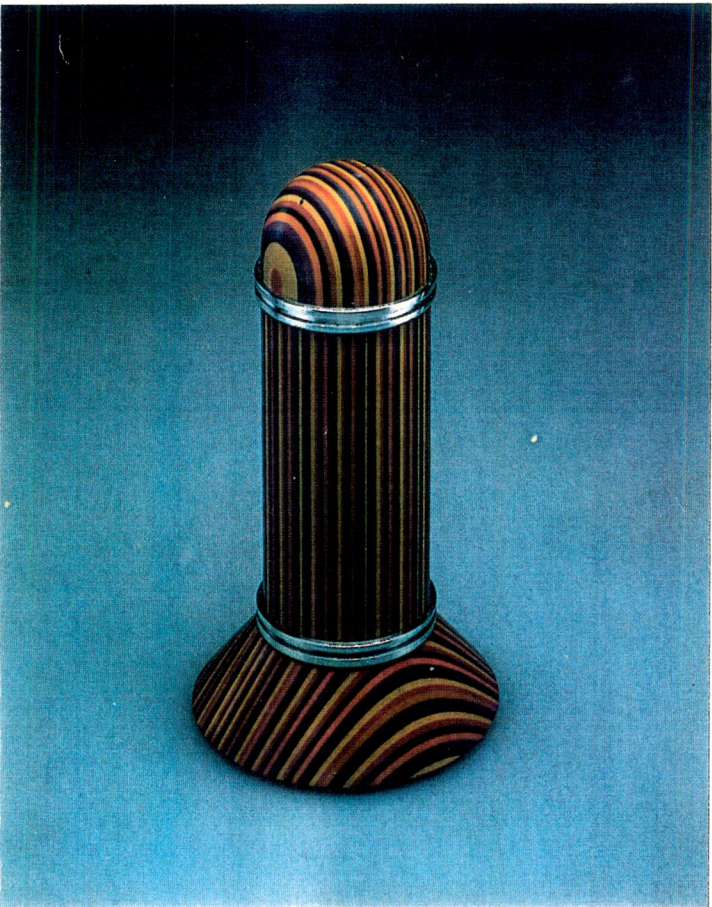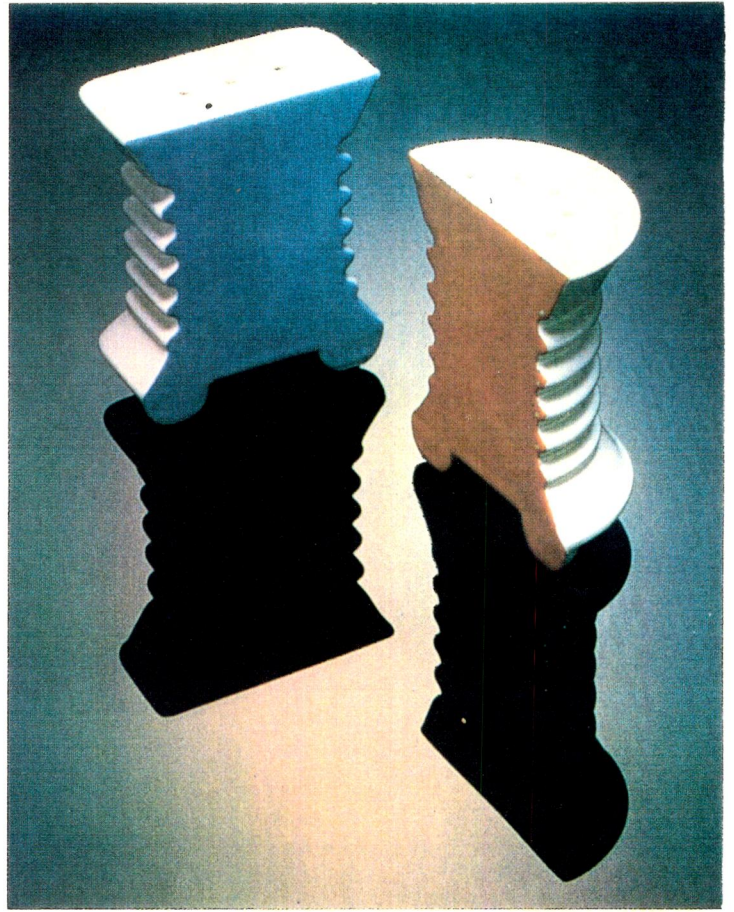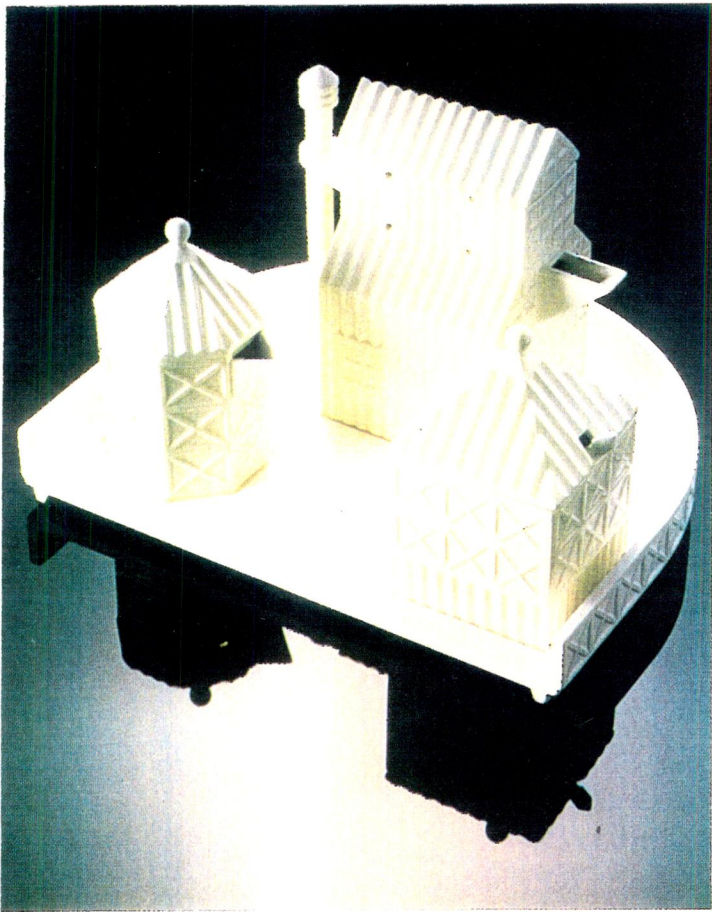
Fig. 2.8   Tea service, salt and pepper shakers and picture frame
designed by Stanley Tigerman

diagonal red bar 'Fur die Zunkunft' anchors the composition and gives the viewers eye a resting place within all of the visual activity. The whole composition works well together and is further unified by the fact that the strips which create the 'f', the dots which create the 'z', the red bar 'Fur die Zkunft' and the type beside it ('Fotosatz') are all at a common angle.

From analysing these designs I can say that postmodern typography consists of, in my opinion, typographical freedom and flexibility, using letterforms to create abstract shapes. Contrast is achieved through the combination of a wide, and sometimes wild, variety of fonts that are quite different in weight size as well as design. The departure from symmetry and horizontally fill their compositions with a sense of movement and vitality. Also, the imaginative use of contrast in the utilisation of space, the dramatic distribution of black and white, and their skillful use of colour adds to this.

## Wolfgang Weingart

Although the result of the postmodern designers were vitally dynamic, should modernist designers be disregarded totally, in search of lively innovative designs? I think it would be foolish to do this. Wolfgang Weingart, typographic designer and teacher credited with bringing vitality to the graphic design world, takes modernist Swiss typography as a departure point and then looks at it critically to develop new design directions. In his own words, at a lecture on Swiss typography, he said, "it was never the idea to throw either Basle or Swiss typography over board." (Weingart, 1986, p46)

Weingart had been a student at Basel school of design, but he dropped out after only three weeks because he found the strict modernist teaching too dogmatic. Hoffmann and Ruder recognised his potential and offered him a teaching position at Basle, in the advanced program for foreigners. While teaching on this, Weingart has influenced a generation of typographers who exported his ideas to America and the world. When he

joined the Basle faculty he felt a need to revitalise typographic design.  Weingart violated

the respected rules of typography when it was necessary for effectiveness.  He

experimented with design elements to create uniquely dynamic solutions,  He replaced the

grid with intuitive thinking to achieve vitality.  Paul Rand agrees that,

> The intelligent designer will recognise that the grid can help him

> achieve harmony and order, but also that it may be abandoned
> when and if necessary.  To function successfully, the grid system,
> like all workable systems, must be interpreted as freely as necessary.
> It is this very freedom that adds richness and a note of surprise to
> what might otherwise be potentially lifeless. ( MacLean, 1995, p125,)

He replaced disciplined rationality with the expressiveness reminiscent of El Lissitzky and

Piet Zwart.  Weingart achieved this by intuitive, expressive typographic experiments.  He

utilised wide word spacing and letter spacing, step rules, reversed type blocks,

unpredictable contrast of type weight, and diagonal or random placement of letterforms.

An example of the work Weingart teaches at Basle is an air flight schedule, Fig2.9,

which was designed by one of his students.  The words 'Schweiz Montreal Chicago' are

set with a progression from top to bottom.  In this particular case the client is Swissair,

who are an airline company, and the effective use of word and variable letter spacing along

with the curve the type is placed on, has part of Swissair's most typical activity visualised,

that of flying.  The letters are in the air and then gradually they curve for touchdown.  This

innovative use of typography conveys a sense of movement and excitement.  Weingart has

succeeded in conveying to the student that the letters or a typographical line are not, as in

modernist typography, stiff and only applicable in a very limited way.  As Weingart himself

says, "typography is not only for reading and must not be a pain.  Typography can be a

game and a lot of fun." (Weingart, Design Quartly, p3)  Yet in this design the layout still

has harmony and order.  The other typographical elements are horizontal with regular letter

Schweiz Montreal Chicago

Montreal an 15.15

Chicago an 17.05

Zürich ab 12.05

Basel ab 10.40

Bern ab 10.20

Fig. 2.9 Swissair flight schedule
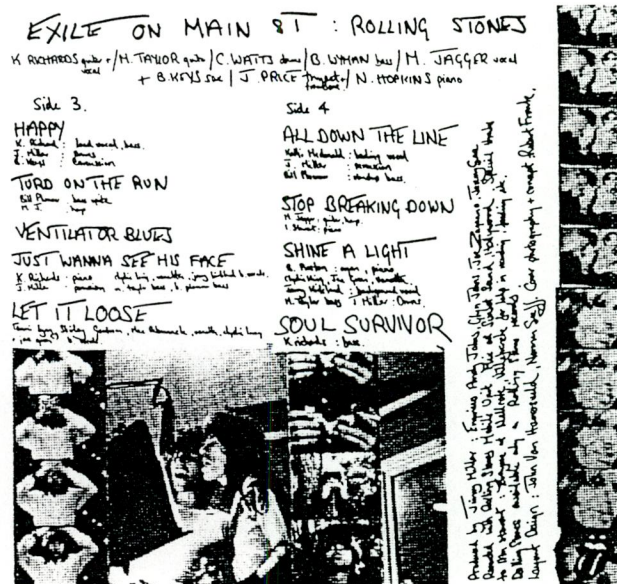
Fig. 2.10 The Rolling Stones 'Exile on Main St.' album cover
designed by Wolfgang Weingart

and word spacing, but this complements the creativity of the 'Schwiz Montreal Chicago' line, adding elegance to the design. He also uses a lot of white space and realises that the empty space is not merely a background but adds to the message he wants to convey, in this case flight, as the letters are floating in the space.

Having said all this, not all of Weingart's postmodern teaching is like this, that design approach was appropriate to the particular brief. Weingart's inside cover of the The Rolling Stones record Exile On Main Street, Fig2.10 it is not elegant in its approach. The subject matter, The Rolling Stones, possess qualities of hard rock and non-conformist attitudes. A German music critic and non-designer said of this 'anti-design' idea, "this cover, with all its vulgarity and tastelessness, works like an ironic comment on the polished image which 'The Rolling Stones' acquire, in the eyes of many critics, after their English tour." (Octavo, 1987, p4) Because typography at that time was usually typeset and printed, the use of quick and heavy handwriting on the cover was questioning the conventional concept of typography.

I think that Weingart and some other postmodern designers incorporate traditional aesthetic values with freedom, vitality and change. They reject the modernist design methods of being stiff, sterile and only applicable in a very limited way. They, in my opinion re-introduced a progressive approach to design.

# C h a p t e r  3 :  L e g i b i l i t y

In Postmodern design, legibility is often sacrificed to expression. "The postmodern condition, challenging functionalism in typography has led to experimentation with the message rather than words, with type as image, with recognition rather than reading."(Dauppe,1991,p4.) Postmodern designers, such as Weingart, Baines, and Brody challenged the accepted dogmas which stem from modernism. These dogmas were the use clear, simple type, the exclusion of anything superfluous, and the use of colour not for decoration purposes but as a form of emphasis. The aim was to improve readability. Modernism in itself was a profound movement, but it may have become impoverished and sterile. Through typography the postmodern designer can present the message and the pictorial idea in one design. Sometimes this experimentation with type may cause the loss of a certain amount of legibility. However, is the message communicated any clearer as a result of this, or does the excitement created by the novel typography compensate for the slight difficulty in reading?

The concept of legibility itself raises the question, legible for whom? Legibility is an ongoing debate. Postmodernist designers often sacrifice legibility to freedom and vitality and the modernist designers insist on legibility. According to Wolfgang Weingart, " type must not always be legible." He goes on to say, " the important questions are, who is the audience and what is the message?" (Weingart, Design Quartly, p.15 ) Certainly in advertising there is much to be said for unorthodox typography. If a message has to be noticed, anything that helps may be justified, even if it means using mixed-up fonts, mutilating letters, using punctuation marks from larger or smaller fonts, turning words upside down or reversing type in blocks of colour. Joan Dobkin's poster for Amnesty International, Fig 3.1, uses illegibility in her design. Her use of illegibility is very

Fig. 3.1   Amnesty International poster designed by Joan Dobkins

appropriate, as it is an expression of feelings. Dobkin's use of distorted type and her agitated style of drawing and confused lines express the anxiety and terror experienced by the victims of the political and military system in El Salvador. Her use of illegibility conveys this confusion in a very powerful way. It also indicates the lack of communication in El Salvador. In the case of Joan Dobkin's poster, illegibility is an appropriate way of solving the problem. But, as Rita Sue Siegal suggests, "for many designers, an over-whelming concern with style is endangering the connection between graphic designers, the term 'problem solvers' and the concept of appropriateness."(Siegel,1994, p 157 ) Is personal style taking over? "The new type can sometimes suffer from weirdness for its own sake, a mere distancing of the artist from the work, a time-wasting peek-a-boo of meanings." (Fenton, 1995, p4)

Neville Brody experimented with the Style and Contents logos for <u>The Face</u>. Brody steadily broke down the Contents logo, Fig. 3.2, it was stripped down until it had become simply two abstract marks. He then did the same to the Style logo. Is Brody's experimentation justified? What was his intention? Was it merely self-indulgence, was Brody's personal style was taking over? Kevin Fenton suggests, "without legibility, I do not see how typography can exist as typography. It dissolves into illustration." (Fenton, 1995, p5)..Therefore where does this leave Brody, as an illustrator or a typographer? Maybe it is not as clear cut as that, perhaps, as Gill wrote "legibility in practice amounts simply to what one is accustomed to." (McLean, 1980, p45) People who bought, those particular issues of, <u>The Face</u> were aware of the changes and were familiar with them. Therefore illegibility may not have been a factor, although this would not have been the case if they had not been accustomed with the breakdown. Maybe Brody was trying to design a new way of reading. After all what is legible now may have been completely unreadable in the past:

> Baskerville is perhaps the epitome of a legible typeface,embodying
> the traditional virtues of a classic. But when first introduced in 1757,
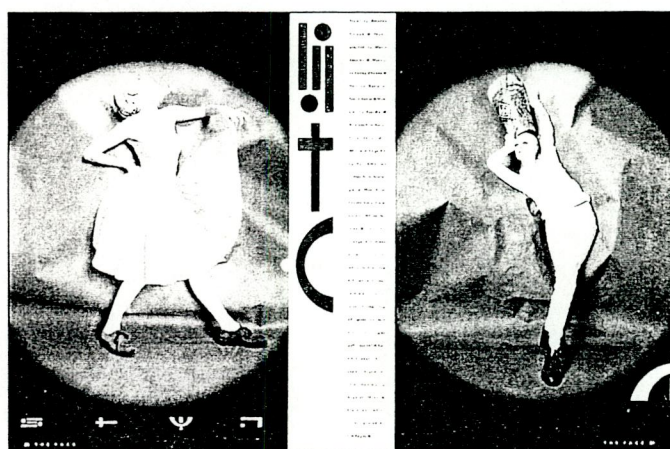
Fig. 3.2   Neville Brody's Style and Contents logo designed for The Face

> Baskerville was heavily criticised for its illegibility-for being 'fatiguing to the eye' and indeed for 'blinding the nation' with 'Baskerville pains'. (Dauppe,1991,p6)

Is it, perhaps as Michele-Ann Dauppe wrote, "the cry of legibility masks a reactionary attitude against progress, change, critical intervention." (Stiff, 1993, p4) Times are changing: technology is improving. We are living in an age of hundreds of television channels, thousands of magazines, books, newspapers and an inconceivable amount of information via telecommunications, with a visually literate audience. People are used to a sophisticated level of visual coding and pace. This use of typographic vitality and freedom pulls the reader in as an active participant, and makes reading a creative act rather than a passive absorption of information. But is reading such a passive process? In today's society everything is fast and convenient and people read less because of this; they have been distracted by more dynamic models of presentation such as MTV, which demands more of us, it is visually challenging and this visual complexity can add to greater visual excitement. MTV presents the viewer with a rush of images and then the viewer is left to decode the logic behind it. People are being conditioned in a new way. "MTV is softening up the terrain for innovative work, and designers who fail to grasp the sensibilities of the emerging audience of young adults will be left in the dust." (Meggs, 1992, p111) Is this really the way of the future? Kevin Fenton believes that "the new typography has the power to introduce us to new feelings, new interpretations, new shades and shadows of thought. That is no small accomplishment. But at the very least, type shouldn't make us more stupid than we already are." (Fenton, 1995,p5)

Robert Bridges says "true legibility consists of certainty of deciphering; and that depends not on what any reader may be accustomed to, but rather on the consistent and accurate formation of letters" (McLean, 1980, p42) This means that letters should be clearly distinguishable from each other so that the message will be legible. Legibility

would be decreased by letters that look too much like one another. But legibility is not always a simple question of deciphering verbal information. Images too can be read, and images built up from letters may be read on several different levels. The composition of letters by Ott and Stein, Fig3.3, does not reveal its verbal message until the small block of numbers at the bottom right of the page, are noticed. These then are instantly recognisable as the dates on a calender. The composition of the letters spells the word 'Oktober'.

Typography is simply the art of discovering what pleases the eye and making information so appealing that the eye can not resist it. "The eye is lazy and it refuses to read anything that is not pleasant to read." (Aicher,1983,p129) Although the double spread from one of the Octavo magazines, Fig3.4, it is intriguing and exciting to look at, it is nearly impossible to read. The type varies, from extremely small point size to quite large. In some areas the type is also layered and the only way to read the text, as it is not in sequence, is to follow the numbers which accompany each statement. I think that this particular spread is just too hard to read. Its merit is only on being interesting to look at. "The words have to be compelling enough for the reader to try and overcome the difficulty in reading them, if not they will just abandon the task." (Meggs, 1992, p110) I think that this spread would not sustain the reader's interest long enough to work it out, partly because they would become annoyed and infuriated if they could not find the next number in the text sequence. I know I did, and as a graphic designer I am supposed to have the advantage of being visually literate!

Another typographic and design magazine which is much talked about and influential is Emigre, designed and published by Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzanna Licko. Emigre also experiments with legibility and Philip Meggs feels that,

> Some designers fail to recognise that many of the typographic
> experiments in 'Emigre' and limited-edition 'artist's books', are created
> by designers for designers and are meant to test the limits of
> typographic expression, don't readily translate for mass-media audience.
> (Meggs, 1992, p112)
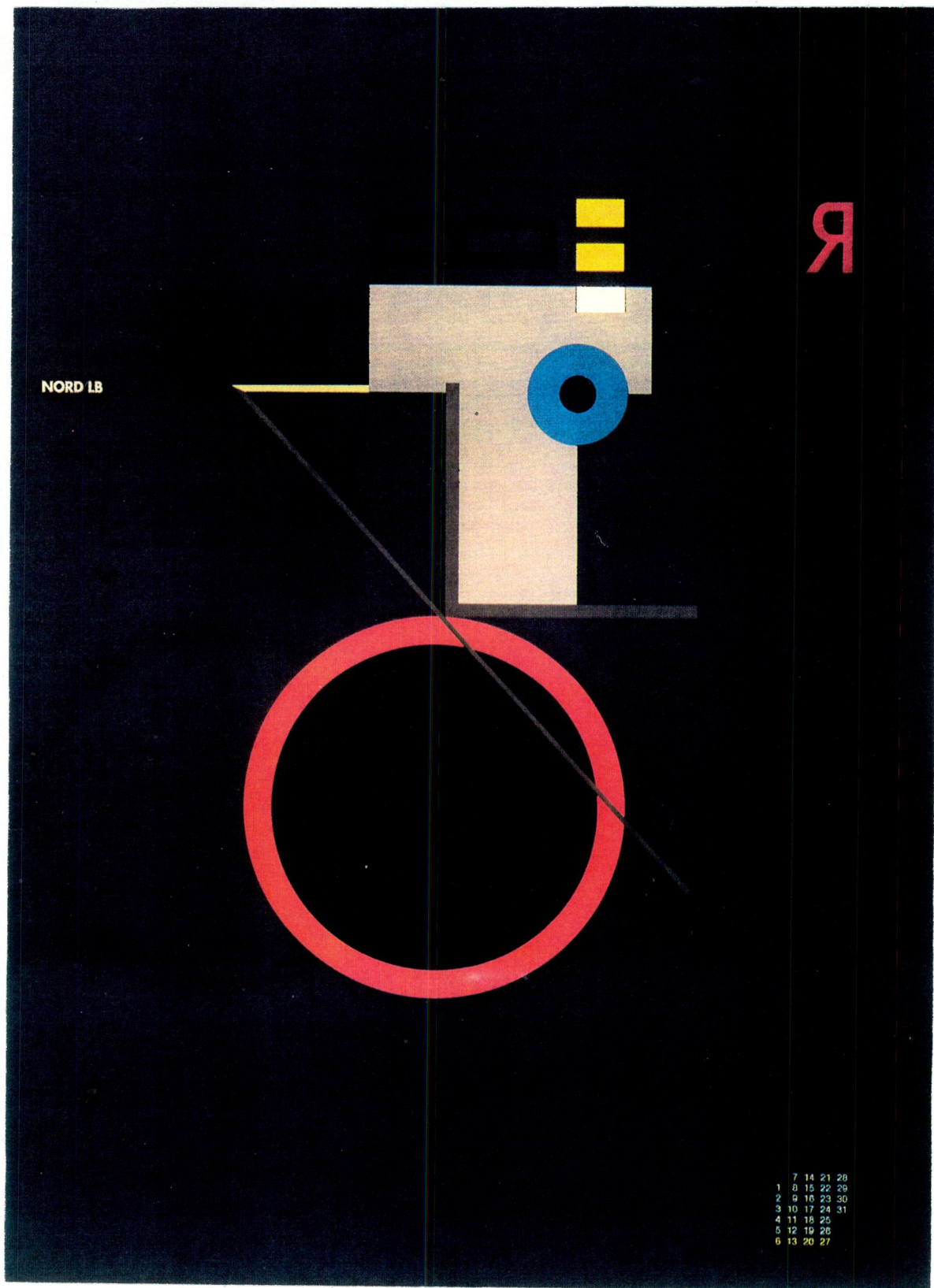
Fig. 3.3 'Oktober' designed by Ott and Stein
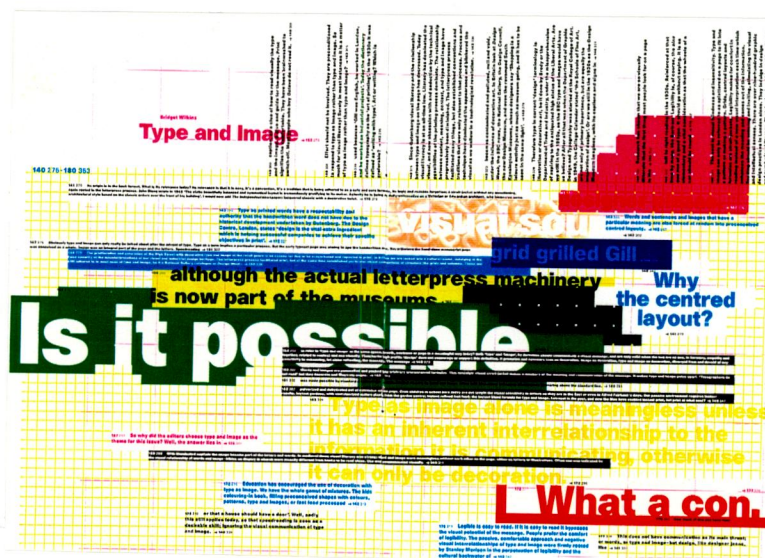
Fig. 3.4   Double page spread from Octavo

But Rudy Vanderlans counteracts this statement made by Meggs by saying,

> The only people who have tremendous problems reading 'Emigre'
> are graphic designers, who have been trained to make type clear.
> The rest of the world doesn't live in that purist atmosphere. It doesn't
> know it's not supposed to read 'Emigre'. Younger people look at it in
> the same way they look at other magazines, because magazines are
> changing. (Dooley, 1992,p50)

Legibility may not always be a prime requirement of printed matter that is not continuous reading matter. Legibility may be less important than both noticeability and recognition. The most important requirement of display typography is to be noticed, if it is not noticed; then it will not be read. The eye of the reader has to be caught, intrigued and cajoled into reading the copy. To catch the reader's attention certain methods may be used, which in turn may make the design less legible. In the 'Mates' condom advertisements, Fig 3.5, the type is treated in a playful manner; it is stretched and pulled into the shapes of two people. Although the type is not instantly legible, it can be read in both cases. In these examples of type as image, the visualisation of the text does have an inherent relationship to the information it is communicating, therefore it exists not merely as a decoration. Also, these designs work well because they not only catch your attention, but, they will also be remembered, therefore fullfilling their job as advertisements. "Instant legibility, the first time it is seen, is far less important than that it should remain, for its intended life distinctive, attractive and recognisable." (McLean, 1980, p45) Instant legibility is not of prime importance to some design work but there are areas within design where there should not be any kind of mistake about legibility at all, for example road signs. These signs should be clear and all the rules of clarity and legibility should be applied to them because people only have a split-second to read a road sign.

I can only conclude from this that the key factor concerning legibility and postmodern design is appropriateness. "Designers must evaluate what constitutes appropriate levels of legibility on each project, and design accordingly." (Meggs, 1992, p112) The job of the
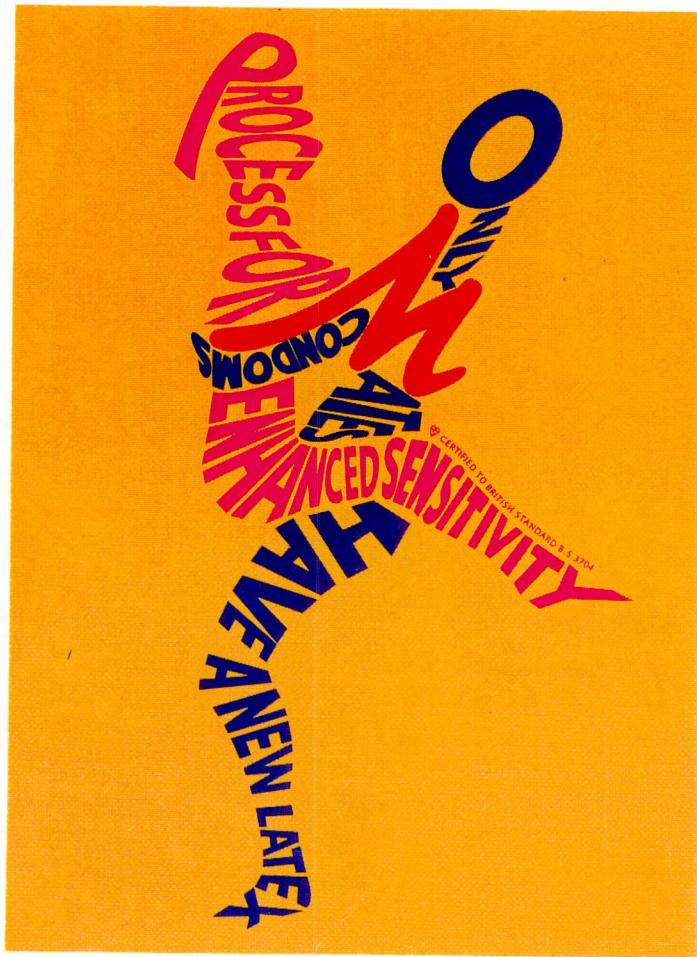
Fig. 3.5  Mates condom advertisements
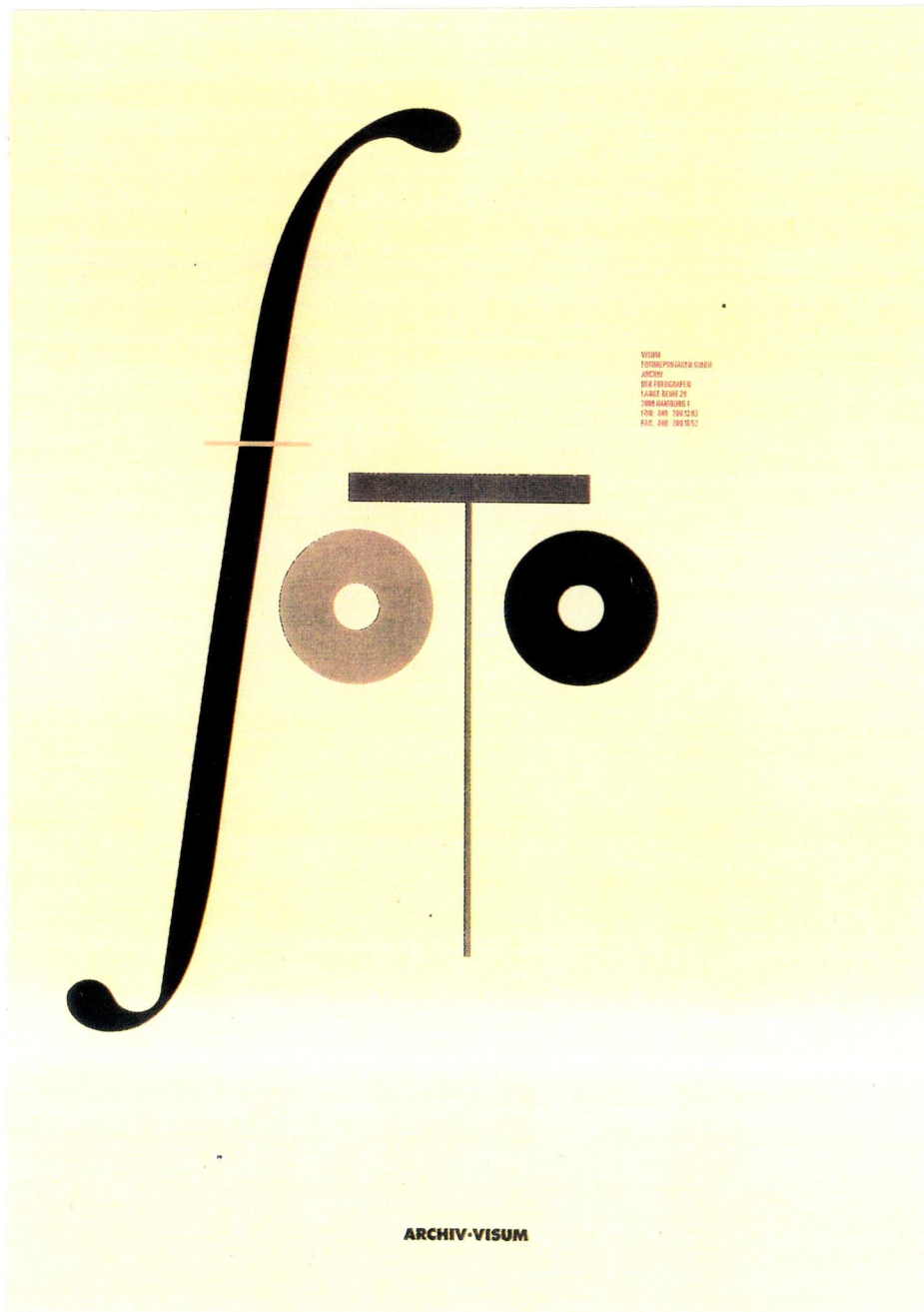
Fig. 3.6   Advertisement for photo archive designed by Ott and Stein

designer is to evaluate the project by answering the questions; for who, what, when and where? The designer must establish from the beginning of the project the precise feelings and associations that they wish their design to communicate. They must balance between legibility and creative typography. The principles of legibility should be considered in some detail in order to show how lettering can be manipulated without losing its ability to express the verbal information. An example of type as image in which there is typographic creativity without loss of legibility, is the advertisement for a photo archive designed by Ott and Stein, Fig3.6. Letterforms were used to build up this striking composition. Frutiger's Univers, 'O', is used to produce the concept of the camera lenses or maybe even the two eyes of a face. The 'T' symbolises a nose and the 'F' is the hair. The use of an italic 'F' enhances the flow of the hair. The words 'Archiv-Visum' at the bottom of the page creates a mouth. The word 'Foto' is perfectly legible but because of the different type weight and size, as well as the appropriate use of type styles, a face is created. Ott and Stein have used space to its best advantage with the large italic 'F' giving it a sense of movement and the text type at the top right of the design gives an indication as to where the forehead would end. The words 'Archiv-Visum' complement the length of the 'F' and the composition as a whole. The reduction of the palette to a few rich grey tones indicates the tradition of the black and white photographs. So the bottom line is ' typographic creativity can be expanded, as long as it is controlled by people with knowledge and taste.'(Stiff,.1993, p5)

# Chapter 4 : Emigre

Emigre is a much talked about typographical magazine which is either loved or hated. The traditionalists and modernists alike find it offensive and Massimo Vignelli has made no secret of his feelings about Emigre's design work. He has said, "it is a national calamity. It's not freedom of culture, it's an aberration of culture." (Meggs, 1991, p91) This guy really hates it! But on the other hand it has been regarded (by some design critics) as, "innovative, inspirational, and embodying our cultural zeitgeist."(Meggs, 1991, p91) Then why if Emigre is a "factory of typographic garbage"(Meggs,1991, p91), has it won some important awards and why are so many graphic designers looking towards it for inspiration? I am discussing Emigre because I think it is a contemporary postmodern design magazine constantly challenging typographical and legibility conventions, "the magazine that ignores boundaries"(Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p7). The magazine is published and designed in California by Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko. Emigre is printed using its own fonts which Licko designed on the Macintosh computer. Their typefaces range from extremely low resolution 'bit-mapped' fonts to highly legible text faces for print.

Rudy Vanderlans was born in the Hague, Holland in 1955. From 1974 to1979 he attended the Royal Academy of Fine Art in the Hague, where he received a Diploma in graphic design. The curriculum was moulded after the functionalist ideologies of the International Swiss Style. There was great emphasis put on the grid and clarity. Although Vanderlans was intrigued by modernist design work, he found himself interested in the work of more expressive designers and Milton Glaser, an American designer, made a deep impression on him. As Glaser put it, "there is no single voice capable of expressing every idea, romance is still necessary, ornament is necessary, and simplification is no better than

complexity."(Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p9) After training and practising graphic design in the Netherlands Vanderlans emigrated to American 1982 to study photography at the University of California, Berkeley. It was there he met Zuzana Licko, whom he married in 1983.

Vanderlans had been educated with modernist principles, but it wasn't until he got a job in an American newspaper, <u>San Francisco Chronicle</u>, that he realised that you could get away with breaking the rules. All the things he had been taught in college, such as legibility and good and bad type, were brushed away, and the paper was doing well regardless of this. "This was when I realised that all the rules, formulae and form-follows-function ideas were not applicable to each and every item."(Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p12) This led Rudy Vanderlans to challenge the preconceived ideas that he had about typography. He pushed the limits of legibility, and wanted his design work to be exciting and innovative. He expressed this through <u>Emigre</u>, which quickly became a testing ground for Vanderlans and Licko's experiments. "I had been so brainwashed about designing to the grid that I wanted Emigre to look a lot more spontaneous." He goes on to explain, "my only grid was going to be the four crop marks."(Dooley, 1992, p51)

The first issue of <u>Emigre</u> featured the work of artists, architects, poets and photographers. There was no budget to produce <u>Emigre</u> and the Macintosh was not yet available. Vanderlans himself was financing the publishing of issue No1. In the spread from the first issue, Fig4.1,typewriter type was used. In order to make it look less like ordinary typewriter type he either enlarged it or reduced it in size. Typewriter type, especially if there are little errors such as a dropped letter or manual corrections, give it the sense of human presence and a personal touch. Also when the type is enlarged, its rough edges are revealed, adding texture to the design. Photographs and paper were randomly torn and stuck down in a collage. This approach reminds me somewhat of punk design
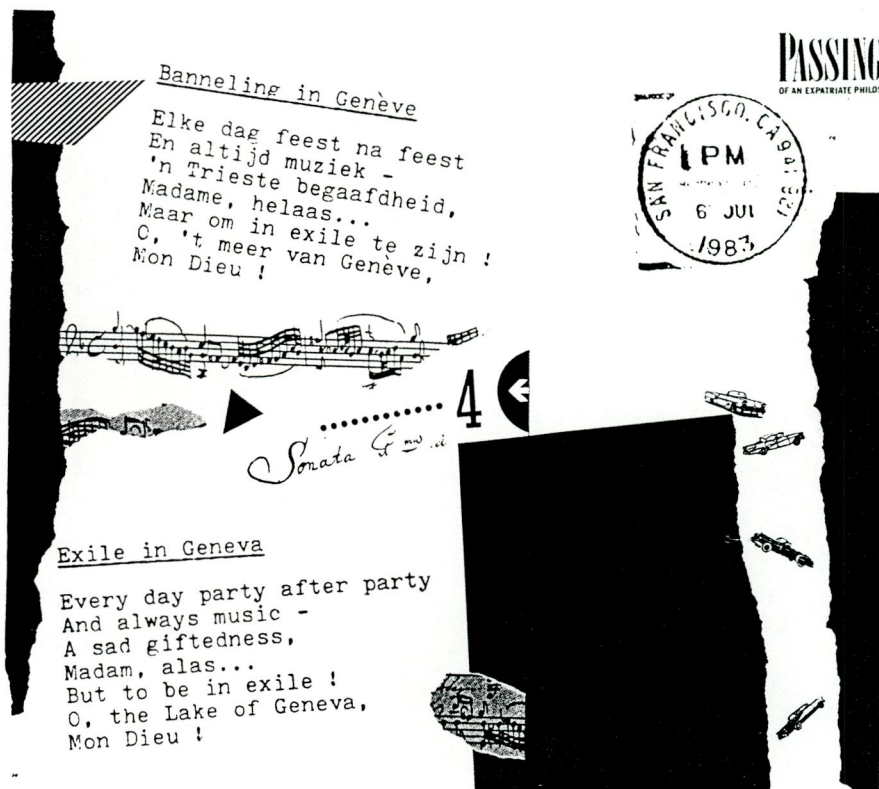
Fig. 4.1 Page layout from the first issue of Emigre
designed by Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzanna Licko

adding a sense of rebellious to the design. The type layouts were also randomly placed and were quite expressive, lacking a traditional grid. The design of the spread also incorporated little decorative symbols such as music notes and the tiny cars. The overall layout is exciting, spontaneous and quite postmodern. But one has to ask the question, if Vanderlans had the finance for modern printing methods, would he have been so creative?

In 1984 the Macintosh became available to Rudy Vanderlans and Zuzana Licko. This somewhat changed certain aspects of their design on Emigre. It meant that they no longer had to use Typewriter type because Zuzana Licko quickly learned how to use the Macintosh to create new fonts. The torn photographs and paper were also gone. The computer also meant that Vanderlans had control over all aspects of the typography. He could vary, at will, the major design elements of columns, positions, widths, and shapes. The leading, wordspacing, and letterspacing became flexible and could be changed in response to only a few simple key-strokes.

This advanced technology enabled Vanderlans to experiment endlessly without having to go through a hired typesetter. This was a large advantage Vanderlans and Licko had, compared to earlier postmodernist designers such as Odermatt and Tissi, and Weingart. We could say that earlier postmodernist designers were restricted by time in their experimentation. I wonder how different their designs would be if they had a personal computer at their fingertips? Would their experiments and designs be like those of Vanderlans and Licko? Who knows? But Vanderlans designed some layouts for Emigre which were very similar to some of Weingart's work, Fig. 4.2. In these layouts Vanderlans widened some columns and narrowed others so that the text type would fit. Then he overlapped the columns and fitted them together which created visually exciting results. Vanderlans admits that they are not 'original' designs.

**CONTENTS #3**

Certain people have the capacity to change the way things are. By their own special energy or artistry or a combination of both, they create situations that affect the lives of many people in a community. Tom Marioni is one such person. I am grateful for his continuing generosity in participating in this issue.

Also included in this issue is our first conversation with a curator, and not just any curator, a museum director turned curator. It will not be our last as we try to include all types of people working in the art field in the magazine's dialogue. The operative word is communication. I'm banking on the notion that the more information we all have the easier it will be to try and sort it all out and find some answers for our future.

And also, before we forget, the initial issues of *Shift* have shown you what Artspace is possible of in the area of magazine production. Now that you understand our commitment to contemporary art criticism, it's time for you to show your support of *Shift*. Subscribe!

**Anne Marie MacDonald**

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**PART 2. CONVERSATIONS**

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**5**

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Bill Berkson** is a poet and art critic who contributes regularly to Artforum and Art in America. He teaches art history, theory and criticism at the San Francisco Art Institute. **Kathy Brew** is the Managing Director of Libros the Walter, a performance space in San Francisco. Her activity has appeared in High Performance, Artweek, Afterimage, and The Independent. She is still an amateur at everything still at work on a documentary and video involving becoming a performance or video artist. **Mark Durant** is an artist and writer living in San Francisco. **Suzy Farbman** is an art collector with a particular weakness for Detroit's Cass Corridor art. She is a board member of the Friends of Modern Art, Detroit Institute of Arts. A free-lance writer, she is a contributing editor of Detroit Monthly magazine. **Bruce Ferguson** writes for many art publications and has most recently curated exhibitions for the dormant Olympics in Canada and the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. **Mark Levy** is currently researching and writing a book entitled The Modern Artist as Shaman. **Tom Marioni** is a San Francisco artist/performance artist. **John McCarron** is the Senior Director of Artspace and is the former curator of the San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery. **M.F. Porges** is a writer and artist who lives in East Oakland. Her artist's book, Dimunched Halves was published last year by Words & Pictures. **Rudy VanderLans** publishes and designs Emigre magazine. **Anne Marie Walker** has decided to use her family name and now will be known as **Anne Marie MacDonald.**

Contents page, *Shift* 3. **1988.**
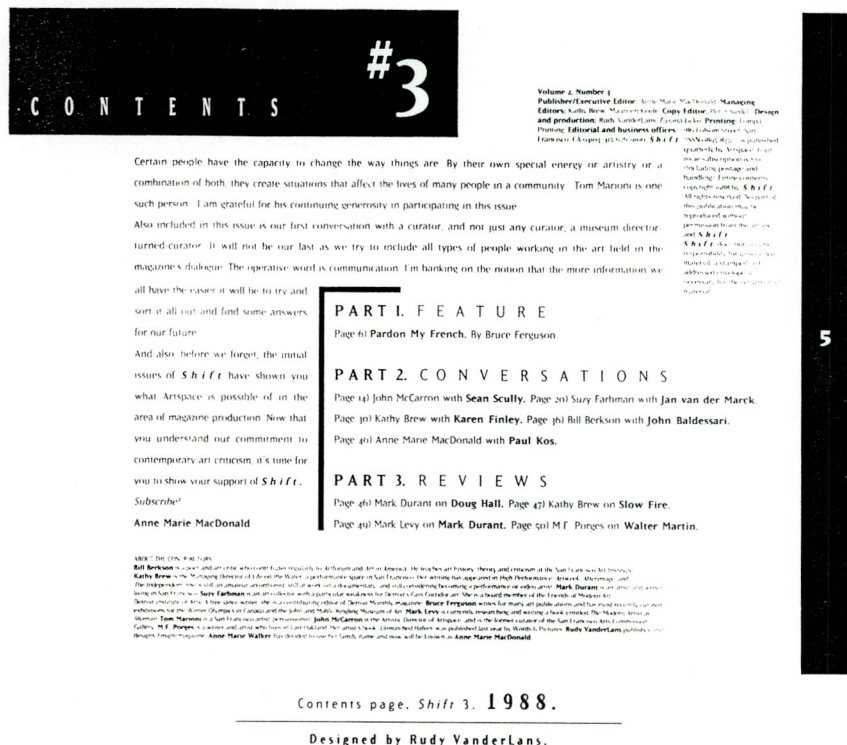
**Designed by Rudy VanderLans.**

Fig. 4.2   Contents layout from a later edition of Emigre
designed by Rudy Vanderlans

Although the result was not exactly new, Weingart in his many typographical experiments in the sixties and seventies had created many such layouts, some extremely elaborate. But his were created traditionally and I imagine, were too time consuming and costly to implement commercially. (Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p51)

Sometimes Vanderlans uses intricate weaving of text and graphics that challenge the conventions of legibility and, as a result of this, Emigre has received a lot of criticism. Zuzana Licko's fonts have also been under attack from critics who say, "the hyperdigital ized type that you see in Emigre is an insult to the written language."(Licko and Vanderlans, 1993, p52 ) Vanderlans and Licko were experimenting and they did not want to conform to what was perceived as the 'right' typography. Emigre's assaults on Modernism did not go down too well with Massimo Vignelli, who accused Emigre of being an "irresponsible aberration of culture."(Dooley, 1992, p53) The typographical designs produced in Emigre are not the type of design work Massimo Vignelli is used to. As he is a modernist designer he does not believe in the approaches taken by Vanderlans and Licko. Vanderlans' comment on Massimo Vignelli's statement was,

"for all I care, Massimo Vignelli can hate Emigre, esthetically. But then to go and say it's bad for culture as a whole, that really hurts. Because how, then, do we go about making culture? By just copying Massimo Vignelli? Or is it maybe possible to create our own ways of expression? (Dooley, 1992, p54)

The answer isn't in copying the work of Massimo Vignelli. The Modernist movement was based on a simple set of values as opposed to postmodernism. The typographic tradition is one of constant change due to technological and cultural advancements. Technology has a crucial role in contemporary typography and the Apple Macintosh has facilitated the development of radical approaches to legibility in typography. The amount of visual and creative freedom that is available because of the computer is unequalled. None of this was available to modernist designers and technology has passed them by."Massimo and all those modernists were revolutionary, but now when it comes time to change what they changed, they are the biggest crybabies ever. They're worse than the people they tried to

change before."(Dooley, 1992, p54) But then we also have to take into account that if it were not for the modernist designers we would not be where we are today in design, and Vanderlans, Weingart, etc., would have nothing to react against!

The digital revolution has also made possible new ways of designing and making type. Licko quickly discovered the computer's type design possibilities. She used a programme called FontEditor, which allowed her to design low resolution fonts. Typefaces were freshly changed for every issue of Emigre. She designed numerous of fonts. Although they provided Vanderlans with a welcomed alternative to typewriter type, which was used in the first issue, is there really a need for so many fonts? Massimo Vignelli seems to think that,

> In the new computer age the proliferation of typefaces and type
> manipulations represents a new level of visual pollution threatening
> our culture. Out of thousands of typefaces, all we need are a few
> basic ones, and trash the rest.(Keedy, 1993, p54)

But then surely we are back to modernist dogmas, or are we? If we were limited to the fonts that we were allowed to use would all the designs end up looking similar? Given the value placed on individuality and personal expression, I think that there would only have to be a handful of people in the world for this to work. How does the saying go, 'variety is the spice of life.' After saying that, isn't 'quality better than quantity?' As Jeffery Keedy has said, "there is no reason why all typeface's should be designed to last forever, and in any case how would we know if they did?"(Keedy, 1993, p50)

Licko's low resolution typeface designs by their very nature do not have structural differences that sharply distinguish them from one another, as do high resolution letter-forms. The absence of these structural differences within an alphabet makes the quality of reading more difficult.Fig4.3 shows the letters 'O', 'D', and 'Q' of the digital typeface 'Oakland'.

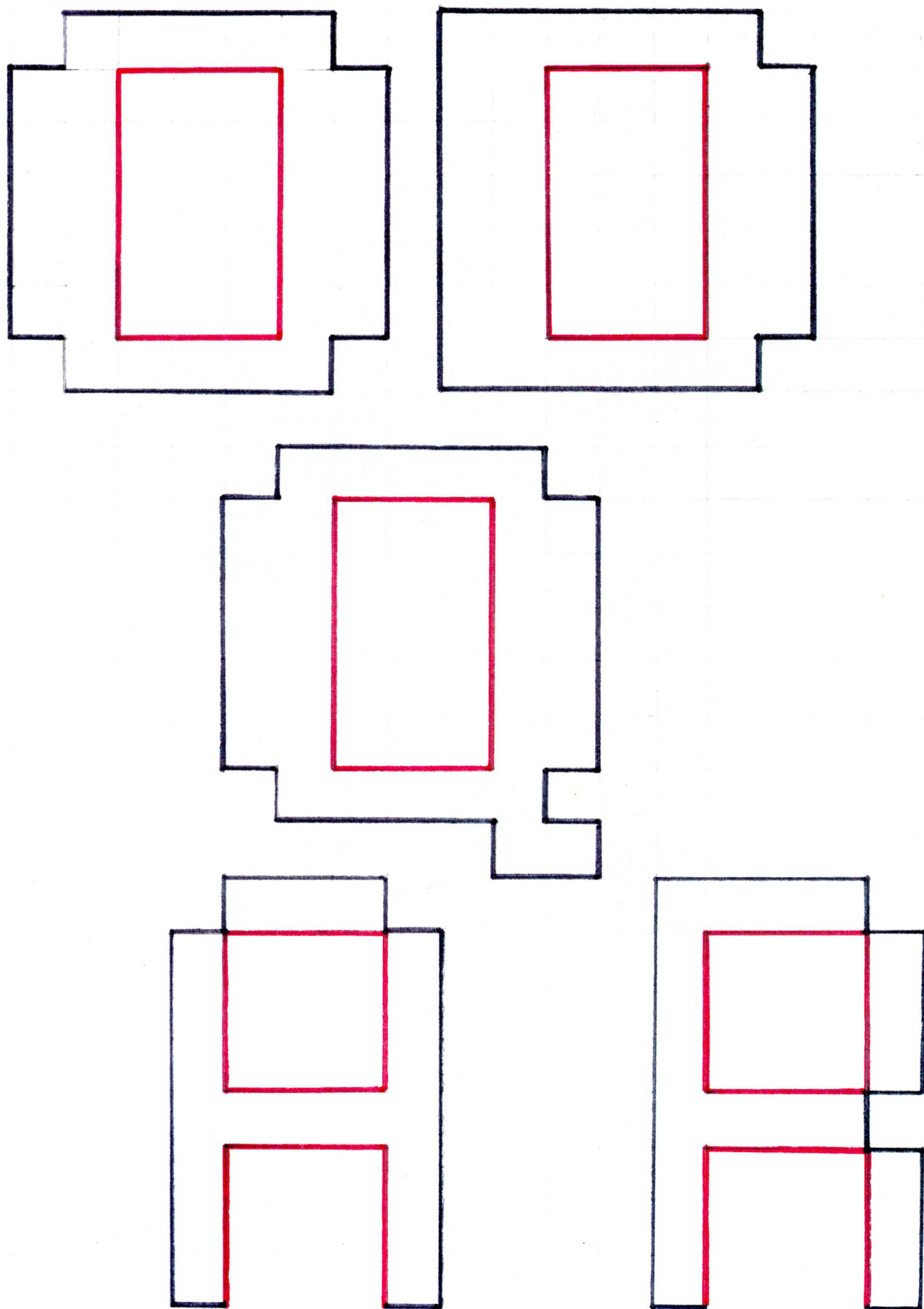Fig. 4.3. Letters from the fonts Oakland six and Universal,
designed by Zuzanna Licko.

Also 'A' and 'R' are taken from the typeface 'Universal'. In both of these cases Zuzana Licko uses the minimum number of pixels needed to define an alphabet. Because of this the inside structure of the typefaces end up being similar, which may result in reduced readability. Is this reduced readability due to the fact people are not used to seeing them? Zuzana Licko sums it up by saying, "we read best what we read most" (Schwemmer-Scheddin, 1991,p13)

Whether or not something is esthetically beautiful is all a matter of opinion and personal taste, but some critics have labelled Emigre as "just plain ugly". (Dooley, 1992, p46) What constitutes something being ugly? Is it because it is different and it is something people don't know how to react to. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. As Ralph Waldo Emerson in the 'Conduct of Life' wrote, "the secret of ugliness consists not in irregularity, but in being uninteresting". (Heller, 1993, p57) This is an interesting point and one to consider in relation to the typographical design of the modernists, their aims always being simplicity, clarity and strict use of the grid. Also, their type was always sans-serif. These limited guidelines may have caused similarity, therefore causing the result to be uninteresting.

# Conclusion

With regard to the the modernist movement "the more basic a problem is stated, the more difficult it becomes to solve. Complex problems allow mistakes and superficialities to be more easily hidden." (p14, Octavo, Wolgang Weingart) I think that this is true. It is very hard to make something look simple and if you do not succeed the mistakes can be quite apparent and easily picked out. It is all very well in theory but in practice it is a different matter. Although if it were not for the modernist movement where would we be in typographic design today? Modernism brought radical new concepts to the whole idea of printing design. The typographers of this movement gave us a new design language for tackling many new design problems, but as it proved, modernism was not an answer to every design problem and its self-imposed rules and constraints produced greater limitations than anything it was trying to replace.

Postmodernist's quickly followed by reacting against the constraints of modernism by re-establishing an interest in ornament, visual wit and symbolism. Type as image was used to create visual excitement. Other postmodern traits were mixed type weights and styles within the same word. Grids were created and then violated. Weingart, because he took modernism as a starting point, learned to deal confidently with format, space, proportion and composition. Many designers who studied under Weingart returned to America to practice postmodernism. Their design work, although reflecting some of his work, also vigorously challenged the fundamental principles of legibility. Postmodernist typographers often regarded visual excitement and expressiveness more important than legibility. Legibility may be sacrificed in some typographical design work if it has an inherent relationship with the information it is communicating. After all, typography is primarily concerned with aiding the communication of ideas and information. There is no one set of

rules for creating effective typography, except appropriateness.

The limitless opportunities offered by the availability of the computer and its software have given a new dimension to the word experimentation. Some of the experiments might be justified because the design results in the reader engaging with otherwise boring material, but this seems neither the effect nor the intent of some of the new design work. Some designs are merely self-indulgent. Many of the new wave typographers have used these new opportunities to achieve great effects but others have used it more as self-expression. Earlier on, in Chapter 3, I spoke of Brody's typographical design work for The Face (Style and Contents logos which he stripped to a few abstract marks ). In my opinion, this is an example of postmodern design which is playful and novel, but that is its downfall. Brody is pushing this playfulness too far and his personal style is taking over.

Now for the first time, because of the availability of the personal computer and its software, it is possible for anyone to design and draw a typeface and then actually use it without any restrictions. The computer gives the user endless possibilities when designing. There are people playing around with the software, discovering these possibilities, and just going crazy distorting and experimenting without any real thought or concept behind the designs they produce. There is a new level of visual pollution. This is when "the word experiment has come to justify a multitude of sins." (Heller, 1992, p52) The question is where do we draw the line? Rejecting the rich and varied history and traditions of typography is inexcusable but clinging to traditional views without looking forward is just being lazy.

Although, modernism's harmony of proportions and its clean, perfect finish appeal to many typographic designers, many still share a preference for colour, ornament and rich design that postmodernism provides. In today's society, creative, innovative and even widely diverse approaches to typographic design are accepted. But the question is not

which one is best (it is not a competition) but merely, which is a more appropriate solution to a specific design problem. "It has never been possible for one style of graphics to be appropriate for all graphic design occasions or all forms of message delivery."(Siegal, 1994, p157).

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