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Faculty of Design
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The Graphic Art of Alvin Lustig.

by

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INTRODUCTION

As the topic of my thesis I have chosen to discuss the designs and theories of the late American designer Alvin George Lustig (1915-1955). I have found Lustig's enlightened approach and definition of the role and responsibilities of the modern designer to be an invaluable source of inspirational guidance to me as a design student. The aim of this thesis is to present Lustig as an invaluable source to contemporary designers, as I feel his views and achievements are still of great relevance today.

A brief mention of his book cover designs, in a college lecture concerning the modernist designers of the 1940's first introduced Lustig's designs to me.

Prompted by the examples I saw at the lecture I began to seek out more information on him. The extensive design section of the college library, supplied me with a reasonable amount of visual examples of his work, but there was limited written material available.

By tracing references from the bibliographies of the books I had found, I discovered an design archive devoted to Lustig at the Wallace Library, Rochester Institute of Technology, New York, U.S.A, and I was able to obtain a detailed list of the contents of this archive via the internet.

After several unsuccessful attempts I eventually established contact with a member of the Wallace Library staff again via the internet. Initially there was difficulty with supplying with the information I had requested from the archive as I was not affiliat-

ed with their college. But after considerable correspondence on my part they kindly furnished me with all I had requested.

As a result their now exists a permanent link between N.C.A.D and the Wallace Library's extensive design archives.

The material I obtained relating to Lustig consisted of several magazine articles dating from the 1940s and 1950s and number of unpublished manuscripts, (see bibliography) all of which in addition to being extremely valuable to my research, are fascinating in their own right as historical documents.

My methodology in approaching and fulfilling my aim is as follows:

In order to put his achievements into context, chapter one supplies a brief biography of Lustig's education and design history. The second chapter is concerned with introducing an outline of Lustig's attitude and approach to design in general.

I will demonstrate in chapter three, through my own analysis of particular pieces of his work, how Lustig put these theories into practice.

Having successfully presenting my view of Lustig's inspirational wealth, my conclusion will be a recap of the main points mentioned as well as an assessment of the results.



CHAPTER ONE

Born Modern



CHAPTER ONE

This chapter consists of a brief biography of Lustig's design history and education. Providing an introduction to Lustig himself and a background to place the rest of the thesis in context.

BORN MODERN

Lustig was a prolific designer, whose life was unfortunately cut short at the age of forty due to a progressive illness. Yet during the relatively few years he worked he accomplished much. He conceived and gave the first expressions to many of the ideas and strategies in relation to design which are taken for granted today.

He was among the first practicing designers who saw the role of the designer as a synthesiser. As he put it: "synthesising the needs of man with the nature of materials, fusing the beauty of the fine arts with the utility of the practical arts" (Lustig, 1946, p. 2) With such views it isn't surprising that he was described as "possibly the most avant-garde" of the designers working in America at that time. (Fenton, 1951, p. 900)

He experienced a limited formal education, attending for only a short time the Los Angeles City College and the Los Angeles Art Centre to which, incidentally, he returned to teach.

He then studied for only three months under the renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright and then under the instruction of the Mexican fresco artist Jean Charlot.

Despite his limited, and self styled education, he had a desire to embrace design in all its forms as he believed that as a problem solver, the designer ought to be capable of working with as

many forms of design as possible.

His versatile career included; the design of the first two covers of I.D (INDUSTRIAL DESIGN) and he later became art editor and art director. Following this, he was art director for LOOK, and as well as various other magazines he also designed regularly for FORTUNE magazine. [Fig.1]

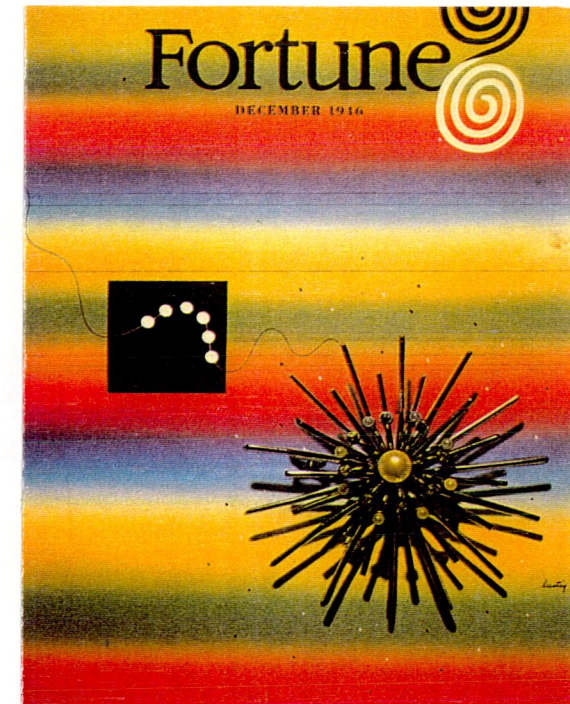
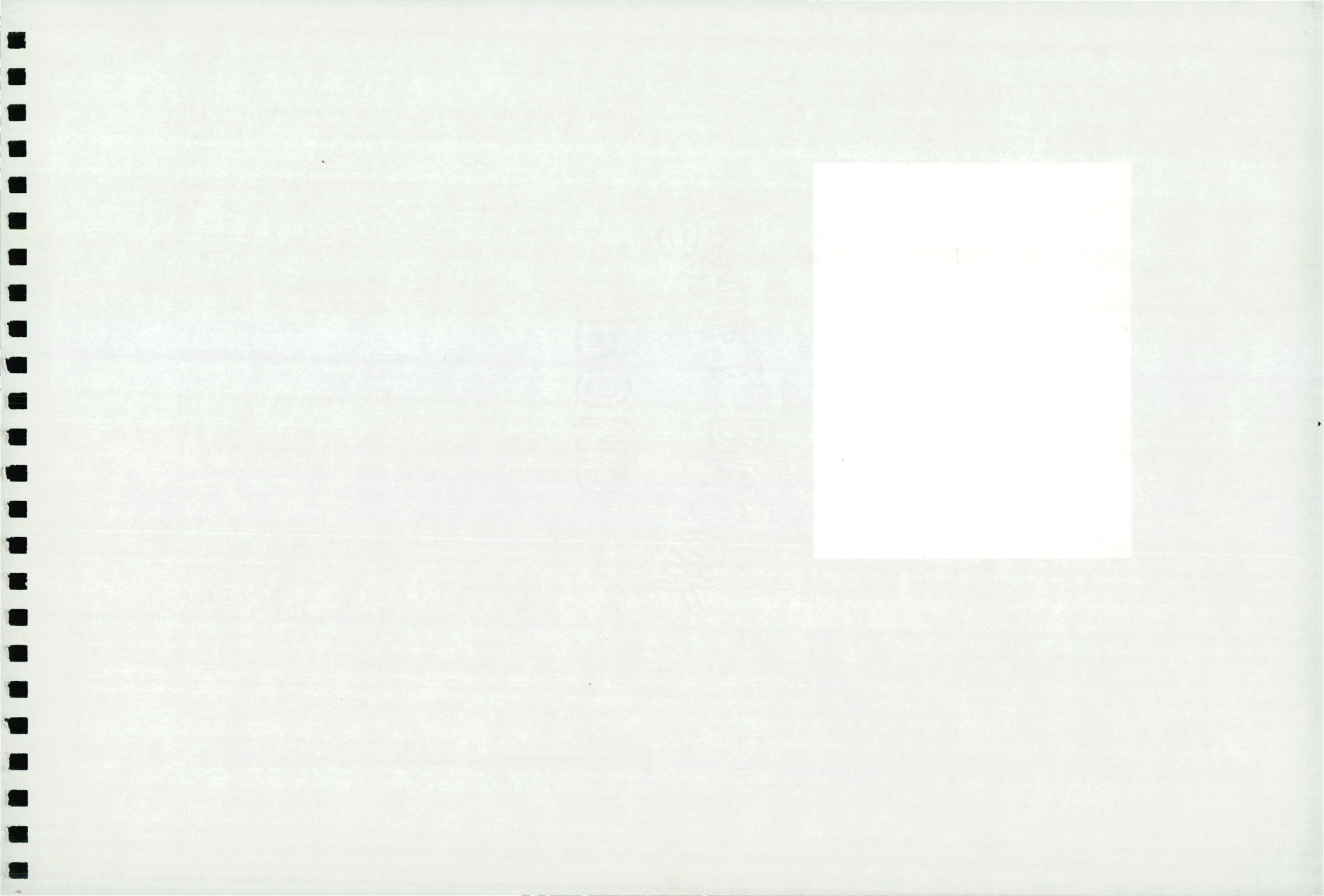


Fig.1 Cover of Fortune Magazine. Designed by Alvin Lustig, December 1946



CHAPTER ONE



Fig.2 Alvin Lustig (1915-1955)

While running two design offices in New York and Los Angeles he worked on letterheads, catalogues, advertising, record albums, signage, furniture, fabrics, interior design, letterform design, symbols, trademarks, identity programs, sculpture, architecture and a one man helicopter. He even designed the opening sequence for the popular animated cartoon *Mr MaGoo*. As a result Lustig is known for his expertise in virtually all the design disciplines, although it is for his transformation of American book jacket design that he is renowned. Most notable of these is the collection of designs he did for the New Directions* publishing firm. *(see chapter three)

Lustig refused to specialise as he believed that all design was a matter of form and colour and the only differences between projects were largely technical.

The synthesis of the fine and applied arts was a central concept of his. As a leading innovator in the education of design students in his day, Lustig as a design curriculum consultant, together with Josef Albers (of the Bauhaus) developed the design programs in the early Fifties at Black Mountain College (North Carolina), the University of Georgia and Yale. Today they still remain among the finest design programs in the world. Tragically due to a complication of diabetes, after spending a year virtually blind, he died in 1955 aged forty.

600
120 x 120 high
165

600
120 x 120 high
165

CHAPTER TWO

A visual Poet

Bridging the Gulf

Mice do exist

Printed Persuasion



CHAPTER TWO

In order to better appreciate and understand Lustig's work and achievements this chapter provides an outline of his theories. It is an introduction of particular attitudes and views Lustig held, towards design. By an examination in the third chapter of particular examples of his work these points will be expanded upon.

A VISUAL POET

Lustig's social consciousness and aesthetic values were formed as a result of the changes taking place during Depression-era America. The war and fascism in Europe in the 1930's caused designers, painters and architects to flee their homelands seeking refuge in America. Such figures including Walter Gropius, Herbert Bayer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Alexey Brodovitch brought a refreshingly new array of formed ideas from Europe which excited and inspired young American designers and artists who had begun to work again through Roosevelt's New Deal WPA programme.

Their influence of ordering space and design elements and their use of photomontage, large letterforms and symbolism, asymmetrical balance and contrasting type and pictorial matter were of particular inspiration to American designers and artists.

"To the Bauhaus we are indebted for a new philosophy of design." (Abbott, 1993, p. 3)

Looking at Lustig's work, his book jackets in particular one can

see the influence of this influx of new ideas on him.

"He reinterpreted and polished the visual languages of the Bauhaus, Dada and Surrealism and extricably wedded them to contemporary avant-garde literature." (Heller, 1993, p. 33)

He wasn't alone. Paul Rand, Lester Beall, Bradbury Thompson, among other modernists produced art-based book jackets and together defined the American approach to 1940s graphic design. But Lustig's distinction was in, as the publisher James Laughlin wrote in PRINT "the intensity and purity with which he dedicated his genius to his idea vision," Laughlin continued saying that "while the others were graphic problem solvers, Lustig was visual poet whose work was rooted as much in emotion as in form."

(Heller, 1993, p. 33)

For me, this is what distinguishes Lustig from the other designers. Lustig solved what ever design problem was in hand successfully while at the same time producing work that an embodiment of own his design integrity.

In defining his responsibilities as a designer Lustig emphasised the significance of the use of his gifts in the service of society. He did not demand that art serve a political purpose, but he did ask continually how art could enrich life, and not just the lives of wealthy collectors.

"Our whole civilisation is shot through with design. Some of it is accidental, some intentional, some good, some bad." Lustig was concerned with the intentional and the good...



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Design, he said is a form of justice between men and material. If this moral tone is offensive to some, remember that design is concerned with relationships, and relationships are always good or bad, never neutral. Some of these relationships are technical or aesthetic, others are involved with human needs and desires.

In the midst of these relationships is the designer, synthesising the needs of man with the nature of materials, fusing the beauty of the fine arts with the utility of the practical arts. Herein lies the responsibility of a designer to his society.

If I seem to place a heavy mantle of responsibility on the shoulders of those who are really only expected to make nice shapes and colours, it is because history demands it. Every act that allows productive facilities to serve only itself, contributes inevitably to the threat of destruction that already looms on the horizon.

(Anonymous, 1946, p. 2)

BRIDGING THE GULF

Lustig was first introduced to modern art, sculpture and design in his final year of high school, by his enlightened art teacher, who, as a result of her enthusiasm for the contemporary, was “scoffed at by all of the other members of the faculty.” (Heller, 1993, p. 34)

She showed him the posters of, among others, Adolphe M. Cassandre and Edmund McKnight Kauffer, and made him aware of modern painting and architecture. “She was able to show me what they were, and from that moment my way of seeing was transformed.” He remembers, as he wrote in the AIGA Journal in

1953, that “Something happened,” when he was first exposed to contemporary art. “This art hit a fresh eye, unencumbered by any ideas of what art was or should be, and found an immediate sympathetic response... I belonged to that younger group that was *born modern*.” He later wrote “that this ability to ‘see’ freshly, unencumbered by preconceived verbal, literary or moral ideas, is the first step in responding to most modern art.” (Heller, 1993, p. 34) Up until the 1940’s, anyone who was so conceited to call themselves a designer was scornfully referred to as “a slow layout man with an ego”. (Meggs, 1989, p. 68)

A layout man being a pair of hands doing what they were told. He was valued as an artist with drawing abilities and a sense of placement, but no-one would consider asking him to solve a problem, let alone think about one, such matters were the realm of the Artist, not the lowly designer.

But this attitude towards design was changing in America. This layout man who arranged writers’ words and illustrators’ pictures on a page was slowly replaced by, “the modern graphic designer, a conceptual problem solver who engaged in the total design of the space, orchestrating words, signs, symbols and images into a communicative unity.” (Meggs, 1989, p. 68)

This new design found an initial foothold in a handful of upscale and forward looking magazines, including BAZAAR, VOGUE and FORTUNE. Such magazines created a new platform where the results of the meeting of American culture and European art sensibilities could be easily accessible to the general public on a



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wide scale. Lustig was one of the leaders of “the group of young American graphic artists who have made it their aim to set up a new and more confident relationship between art and the general public.” (Clarke, 1948, p. 244) Clarke also suggested, that the key to Lustig’s success was in ‘bridging the gulf’, as he put it, between fine art and applied art.

For years the artist and the commercial designer operated in distinct and often contrasting fields. Only a relatively small intellectual group followed the artist into the realms of subjective experience which he was conquering. But now the climate is changing and changing rapidly. The artist need no longer live in virtual isolation. Without in any way sacrificing his integrity, he can put his hand to work with a definite practical purpose. What were originally (Lustig’s) private symbols, fruits of his own esoteric vision, have already begun to arouse a wide echo among a public which has learnt to demand new answers to new questions. (Clarke, 1948, p. 242)

MICE DO EXIST

When Lustig was once asked: ‘what do you do?’, he replied: “I make solutions that nobody wants to problems that don’t exist.”

(Anonymous, 1946, p. 1)

Design is in some way related to the society which creates it. Each area of design, during any period, be it architecture, fashion, furniture, interior or graphic design, is an expression of the society. The designs to which people respond to most directly

and positively are those which express their feelings and tastes. This does not, however, say that the main priority of a design is to be accepted immediately.

Lustig believed that the great designers anticipated the requirements of their society and successfully expressed them through ‘good’ design before the society was completely prepared or willing to accept what proved to be something they really wanted. It takes time for people to adjust to design. An example Lustig used himself to illustrate this point was in reference to the gradual acceptance of (at the time) *modern* homes; “as recently as ten years ago, ‘modern furniture’ and ‘modern homes’ were thought to be rather cold and weird. Today they are commonplace and are accepted without any feelings of shock and surprise.” (Lustig, 1954, p. 3)

A designer can’t depend on market research. All market research can show is what pleases the public at that moment... He must blaze his own trails. He must be constantly on guard, cleansing his mind of the tendency to relax into a routine format, ready to experiment, play, change and alter forms. If he lacks the inherent ability, the insight, the intuitive selection of what is right for his time, he will not go far and will eventually be forced to enter another field. If he is equipped with these essential characteristics, he will lead the way to new and more effective approaches to design in all its forms...His greatness is dependent on his being able to recognise ahead of time, almost unconsciously, the trends that will contribute most to the proper expression of the society he lives in. He both follows and leads. He follows his instinct and leads the public. (Lustig, 1954, p. 4)



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Lustig was an innovator, he succeed in properly expressing future trends. To quote an article regarding this fact: "He is making the most beautiful mousetraps in the country. And people are beating a path to his door because they know that mice do exist."

(anonymous, 1946, p. 1.)

PRINTED PERSUASION

For a client, to hire Lustig was to get more than a mere cosmetic make-over. Lustig wanted to be involved in every possible aspect of the design programme in hand, from the letterhead to the office interior. This apparent need for total control did scare many potential clients from hiring him.

Authur A. Cohen, the president of The Noonday Press in the early fifties, for whom Lustig designed many book jackets, remembers that when Lustig was hired to provide advice on Noonday's paperback covers he attempted to redesign the whole publishing firm. (Hodik, 1989, p. 128)

Lustig's feelings were that he worked most effectively with clients who were able to clear their minds of any preconceptions about the way the product should look. If the client is willing to experiment, then it's time to call somebody whose particular talents, abilities and experience have been directed towards the creation of something new and different. Ideally, he felt, the client should

even take the initiative in embarking on a process of understanding the meaning of design and its skills.

Where designers have been employed to the best advantage, a great deal of their success has been as much the result of the contribution of their clients knowing how to use a designer and work with him is as much a part of the job as what the designer does on his own hook!

Using a designer improperly, is as fraught with the possibilities of failure as using any skilled consultant improperly. (Lustig, 1954, p. 5)

In an article he wrote in 1943, concerning the relationships between the client and the designer, Lustig advises that the basic thing to remember is that the designer's relationship to a problem "should be a comprehensive one and not fragmentary. The designer is an expert in the control of the physical elements, and if (he is) allowed to work out the problem in his own terms, the result will be an effective piece of printed persuasion."

(Anonymous, 1943, p. 47)

Lustig saw the redesign of the client as another major responsibility of the designer, as he was convinced that the public for his design were, by and large "form blind." (Hodik, 1989, p.130)

He devoted a great deal of his time to talking with his clients as he was concerned with the benefits which could be attained from a mutual understanding, confidence, and respect between the client and the designer.

The closer the relationship and interchange, the more cohesive and perfect the result.



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This chapter has introduced, in my opinion Lustig's basic theories towards design. He believed the designer should be an innovator and a conceptual problem solver. He stressed the importance of combining the fine arts with the practical arts so to benefit society.

He strove to better the relationship between the client and the designer. As the basis of discussion I will continue in the next chapter to demonstrate how he successfully put these attitudes into practice.



CHAPTER THREE

The Early Years

Design Approach

The Designs for the New Classic Series

The Modern Reader Series

The Noonday Press Designs



CHAPTER THREE

The aim of this chapter is to present the relevance and value to designers today of Lustig's design approach, through my own analysis of his work. In particular to his execution of his book jacket designs of the late 1940s and early 1950s, I will be demonstrating how Lustig put his theories, introduced in the second chapter, of design into practice.

THE EARLY YEARS

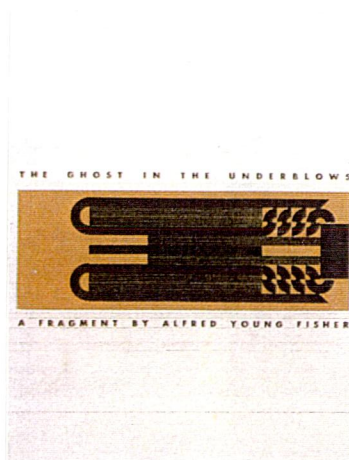


Fig. 3

The entire book is designed and illustrated with these symbolic abstract structures. [Fig. 3]

His self promotional material [Fig.4] [Fig. 5] produced at the time also utilised these futuristic structures.

He saw this kind of design as “attractive to those who, with limited budgets, seek fine design and typography.” (Hodik, 1989, p. 123)

Lustig's early designs were influenced by his time with the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. They were abstract compositions printed entirely from arrangements of standard typesetting rules. These type ornaments were usually just used by printers to hold and space the type characters. The most notable example of this work is the long poem *The Ghost in the Underblows* by Alfred Young Fisher.

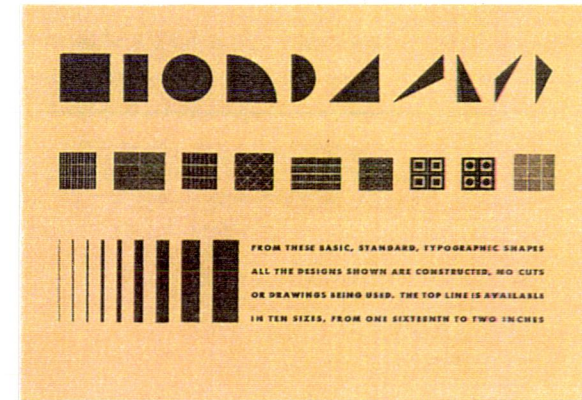


Fig.4 Self promotional 1935

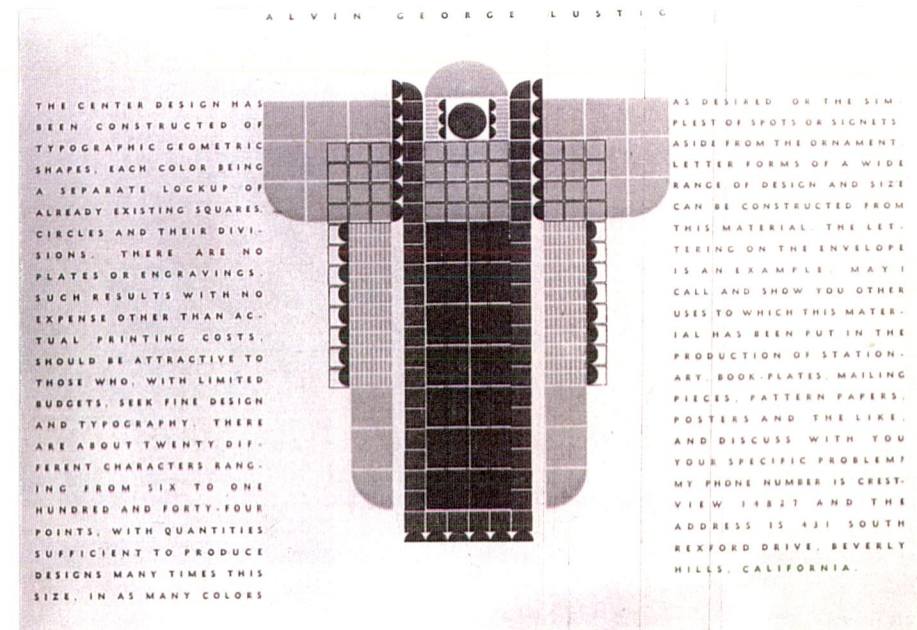


Fig.5 Self promotional 1935

Handwritten notes on a small white card, including a date and some illegible text.

Handwritten notes on a larger white card, including a date and some illegible text.

Handwritten notes on a small white card, including a date and some illegible text.

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During this period of experimentation with these early designs, he was sought out by publisher James Laughlin, who had heard that this young designer was doing “queer things” with type. Laughlin remembers that on meeting Lustig in his workshop, in 1940, he was “disturbed by these ‘mechanistic and yet suggestive’ designs,” and that he felt he had met an “artist who might possess a touch of real genius.” This was the beginning of an association, as Laughlin described, “of continuing satisfaction.”

(Laughlin, 1949, p. 2005)

Laughlin’s New York based publishing firm New Directions, held an exalted position in American literary circles for bringing challenging and often controversial literature to American readers. He commissioned Lustig to design the jackets for a twenty five volume series of reprints, entitled The New Classics. This non-mainstream list included such varied authors as Henry Miller, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Gertrude Stein and D.H. Lawrence.

Mainstream publishers at the time were usually very reluctant to embrace abstract art based approaches to book jacket design. Laughlin, with his higher literary ambitions must be credited with great courage in allowing Lustig the latitude to experiment in this field.

As the fundamental marketing precept was that a book jacket must attract and hold the buyer’s eye from a distance of up to ten feet, there was a tendency to prefer vulgar visual narratives,

type treatments and techniques.

These American book jackets of the time tended to be painterly, cartoony or typographical, as they were considered to be more effective in capturing the public’s attention. [Fig.6]

Commenting on his view that most of this contemporary book design was pretty lifeless, Lustig wrote:

“The inability to respond directly to the vitality of forms is a curious phenomenon and one that people of our country suffer from to a surprising degree.”

(Heller, 1993, p. 34)

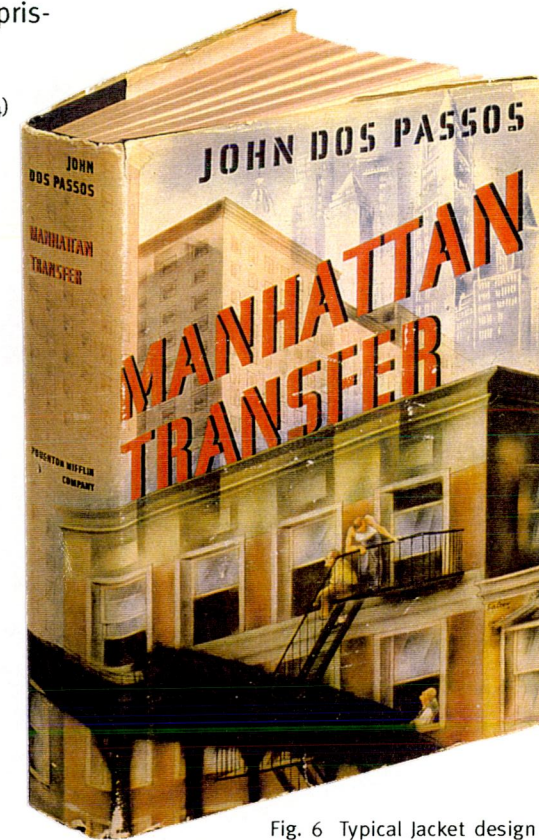


Fig. 6 Typical Jacket design of the time



SCANNED BY
BOOKMIND

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DESIGN APPROACH

Lustig firmly believed that the solution to a design problem was dictated by the problem in hand.

As he felt that design should apply to every dimension of life, he recognised that every design problem was unique and should be approached on its own merits with as unbiased, fresh and flexible an attitude as possible.

As the client ideally should not be concerned with preconceptions of how the design should finally appear, neither should the designer.

Perhaps the single most distinguishing factor in the approach of the contemporary designer is his willingness to let the problem act upon him freely and without preconceived notions of the forms it should take. (Heller, 1993, p. 37)

I believe the reason Lustig's jackets were so successful was due to the fact that he followed this ideal and never attempted to convey an personal signature style. It is an important factor in understanding Lustig's approach to his book jackets and indeed to all of his design work. He did not see that his book designs should be a means of personal expression for himself as a designer. He frowned upon "the absurdities and excesses which in some circles pass for 'modern' book design." Believing rather that a designer must primarily "express the book, not himself,

and above all he must achieve an overall harmony and unity in its parts." (Laughlin, 1949, p. 2007)

Ashley Havinden, in his book, *Advertising and the Artist*, characterised this modern aesthetic:

The aim of the good designer is never to show off his erudition or his modernity. He must never intrude a personal or private preoccupation with any design form. His sole intention is to put whatever talents he has for inventive construction, simplicity and understanding of the medium to...the service of expressing the idea..with the upmost clarity, force and conviction. (Chawst, 1998, p. 32)

Lustig was a form giver not a novelty-maker. The style he chose for The New Classic books was not a conceit but logical solution to the design problem in hand.

This did not become a signature style any more than his earlier typeset compositions, or his purely typographical designs which he did later in his career for The Noonday Press. The style created was for the series in hand, and not for himself, he possessed an impressive versatility which allowed him to tackle every project from a fresh perspective.

I have heard people speak of the Lustig Style, wrote Laughlin in *Print* but no one of them has been able to tell me, in fifty words or five hundred what it was. Because each time, with each new book, there was a new creation. The only repetitions were those imposed by the physical media. (Heller, 1993, p. 33)

Using the market-place as his laboratory, he varied approaches



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within the framework of modernism.

Through strict formal consistency Lustig created and maintained an unique and instantly recognisable personality for The New Classic series, but at no time did the overall style of the series overpower the identity of each individual book.

THE DESIGNS FOR THE NEW CLASSIC SERIES

With each of the jackets he designed for The New Classic series, Lustig tested the limits of book jacket imagery.

Each design is a mix of expressionistic and analytical forms which interpret rather than narrate, conveying the emotive power rather than the specific narrative content of the novels, plays or poetry contained within.

He rejected the typical literary solutions of summarising a book through a single, usually, simplistic, image. "His method was to read a text and get the feel of the author's creative drive, then to restate it in his own graphic terms" (Heller, 1993, p. 28)

Lustig saw line and shape not as pure form but as a powerful symbolic language. He did not recognise form and content as two entities to be somehow joined together, rather, he conceived of them as inseparable.

He searched for signs and symbols that could convey the very soul of the literary subjects. Lustig believed, like the abstract painter Wassily Kandinsky, that visual forms and colours pos-

sessed an inner life.

The distinctive symbolic marks which Lustig utilised for these jackets owed more to the renderings of his favourite artists, such as Paul Klee, Joan Miro and his friend Mark Rothko, than any accepted commercial style of the time. (See examples next page) [Fig.7] [Fig.8] and [Fig.9]

He freely borrowed from these painters he admired, not to use their influences as an end in themselves, but rather as a way to "bring to the book some of the new conceptions of the use of space that had given vitality to the allied fields of modern art."

(Hodik 1989, p. 124)

Philip Johnson commented that "there was focused into his person a channelling from the great modern painting of Picasso, Matisse and Mondrian. He focused their teaching into the creation of public symbols which make our surroundings." (Hodik, 1989, p.125)

Lustig believed that after abstract expressionism, painting was dead and design would emerge as a primary art form- hence his jackets were not only paradigmatic examples of how Modern art could successfully be incorporated into commercial art, but showed other designers how the (dying) plastic arts could be harnessed for mass communications.

(Heller 1993, p. 28)



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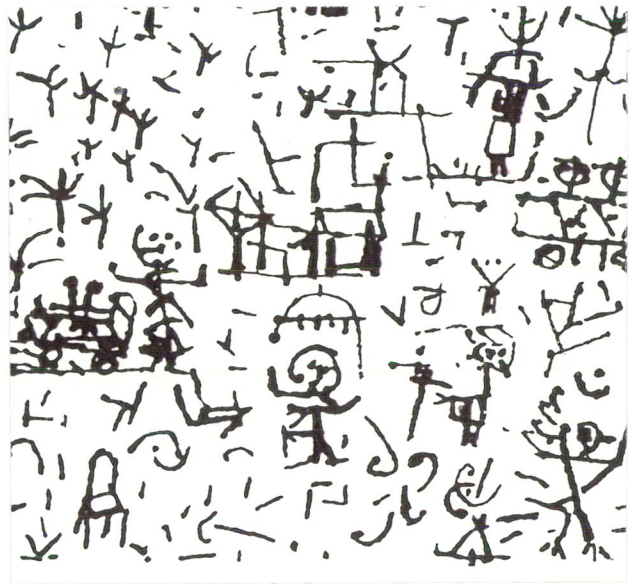


Fig.7 Children's playground' by Paul Klee, 1937

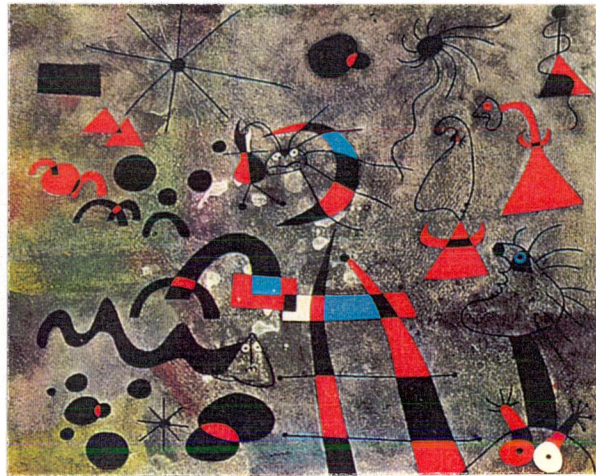


Fig. 8 The Ladder of Escape by Joan Miro, 1940

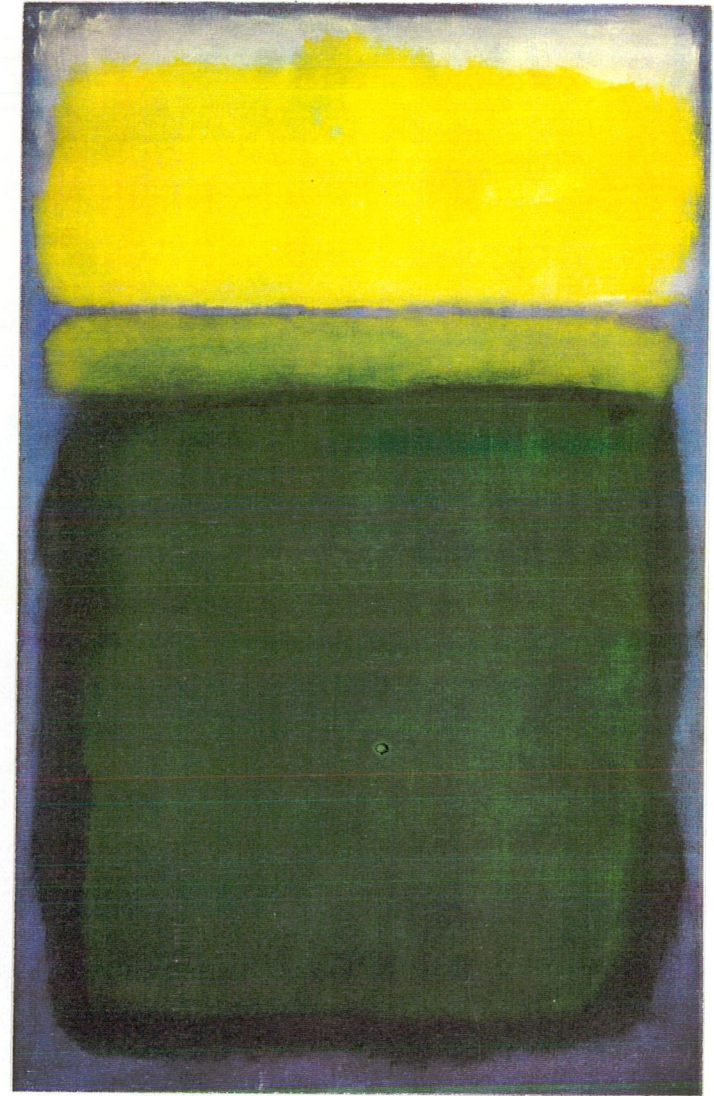


Fig.9 'Untitled' by Mark Rothko, 1951



Handwritten text in cursive script, appearing to be a name and a date. The text is faint and difficult to read but seems to consist of two lines: "John J. [unclear]" and "1875".



CHAPTER THREE

Lustig's unorthodox use of small, discreet titles on his clearly art based jackets entered him into taboo territory. He defended his approach by arguing that as he was designing for a literary audience "a thing of beauty will always attract attention among readers of taste and be desired by them". (Laughlin, 1949, p. 2006) His argument was more than proved when sales increased 300 per cent on the introduction of his jackets to the series.

An example of this use of subtle type can be seen on the jacket he designed as part of this series for James Joyce's play, *Exiles*, [Fig.10] The title which appears in lowercase, san serif, plain white type, is placed in the upper left of the cover. The author's name, appears above and to the right of the title. It is neatly rendered in black and is smaller in size than the title but the use of bold capitals emphasises it clearly. The type is delicately combined with the rest of the composition by the use of colour connecting the author's name with the black of the rudimentary figures and the white of the title with the entangled bundle of lines on which the figures lie. The information supplied by the type is an important consideration and is clearly displayed, and easily legible despite its small size. The type, as with all of the elements, is handled skillfully with acute sensitivity for the entire design. The play itself is concerned with the interaction of the three main characters with each other and their common struggles. This jacket, as with all of Lustig's jackets conveys the emotive content of the play rather than specific details, with the use of, in this instance abstract and symbolic elements.

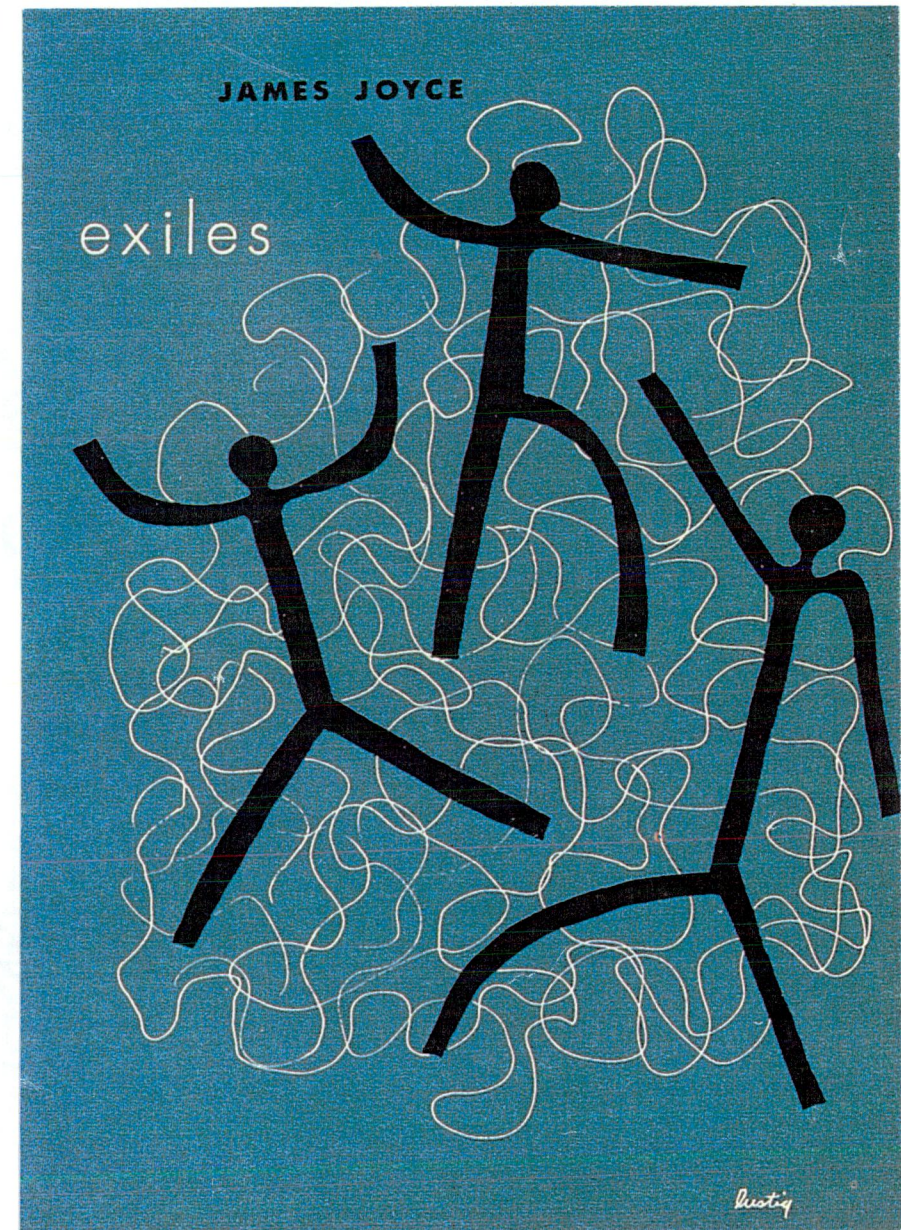


Fig.10 Exiles By James Joyce. Jacket Design by Alvin Lustig, 1947



FOUND

CHAPTER THREE

Are the figures attempting to break free from the mass of confusion which surrounds them or are they reaching out to one another? This jacket prompts the viewer to ask such questions. It creates a desire to open and read the book and to, most importantly from the publisher's and writer's point of view, buy it.

Compare this design with the jacket of more a recent reprint of the same play for a series of Joyce's writings [Fig.11] by an unknown designer.

The author's identity is made painfully clear by the size and treatment of the vulgar nineteenth century display type in an attempt to suggest the period in which it was written, and obviously to be easily seen ten feet away.

The use of a drop-shadow on the title would normally be used where the background interferes with the legibility of the type. In this instance this is not the case so it presumably is being used in an attempt to give the design visual depth and dynamics. It does not achieve this result as it misuses technical devices in place of informed, intelligent design.

There has been little consideration given to the composition. Besides the fact that the title is almost in fear of being crushed by the weight of the author's name, the positioning of the actual title of this particular play below the author's monolithic identity, suggests irrelevancy.

What this cover tells the would-be buyer is that the title is incidental and the most important thing is to know is that James Joyce wrote it. It promotes the misguided idea that the reputation of the author is more important than the work itself.

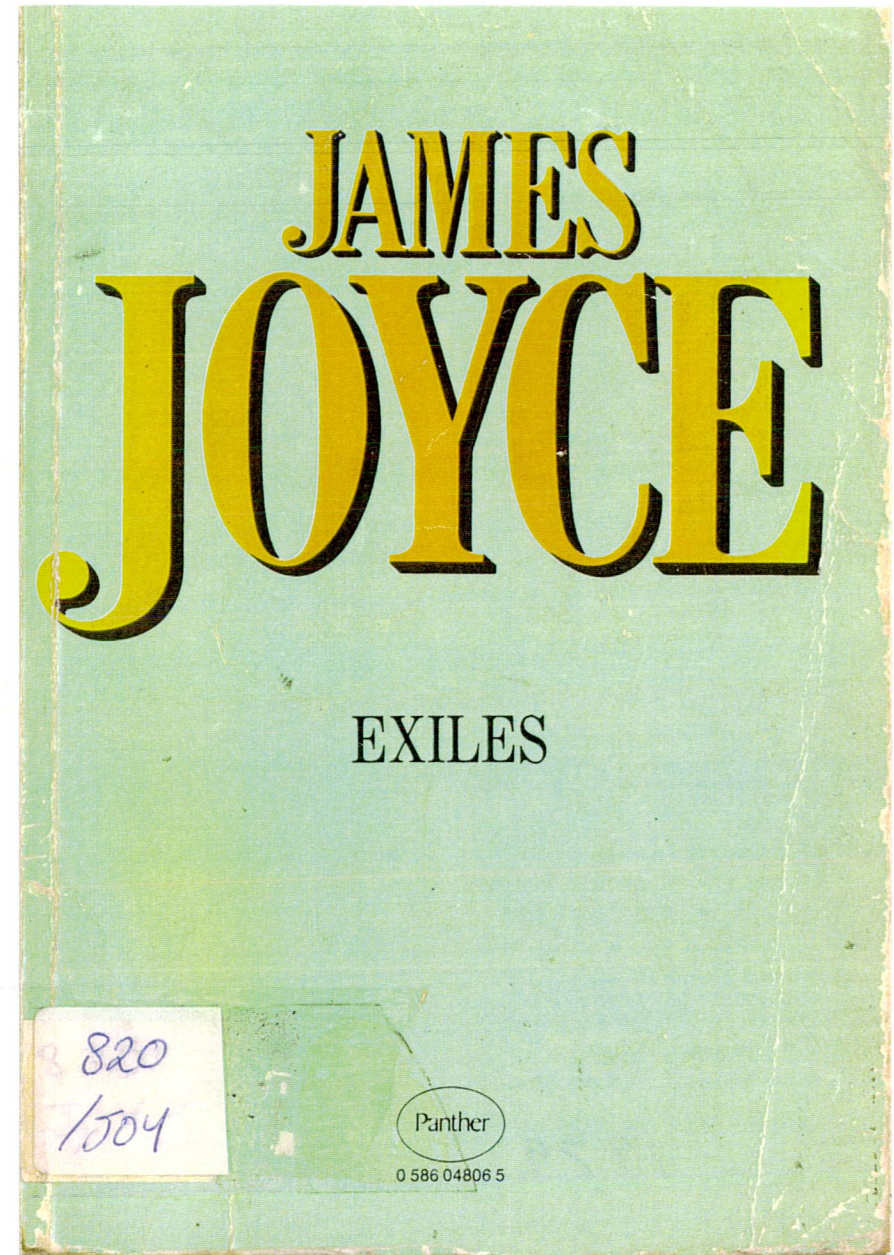


Fig.11 Reprint of Exiles, 1979. The designer is not credited.



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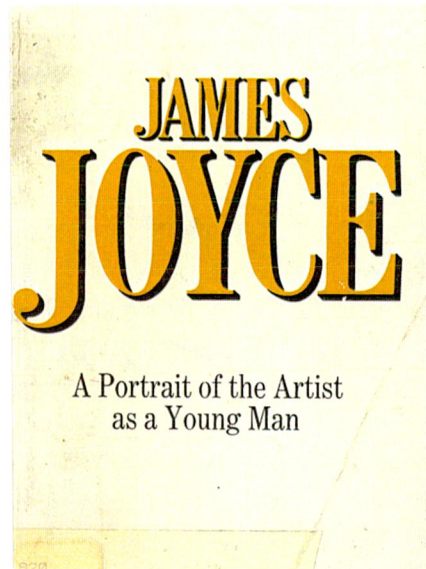


Fig. 12 Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man

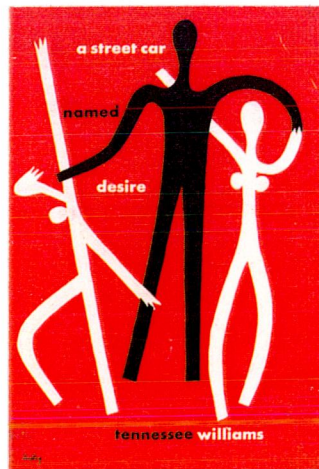


Fig. 13 A Streetcar Named Desire

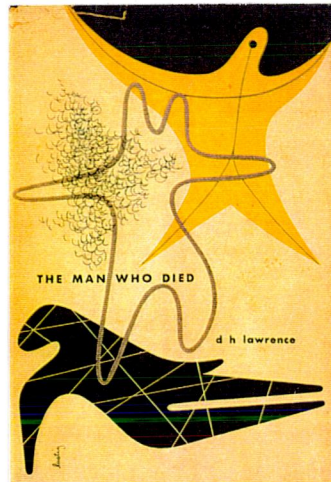


Fig.14 The Man Who Died

The identity of each book in the the series is completely overshadowed by the treatment of the author's name.

The jackets of all the books in this series are virtually identical, as the only visual distinguishing detail between them is the title.

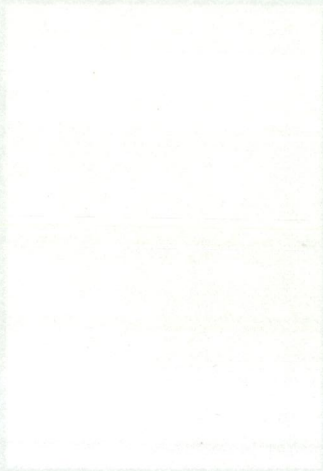
(See other example from this series) [Fig.12]

The delicate balance necessary to achieve a well designed series, of maintaining an overall unity while giving each individual book its' own identity, has not been successfully handled here.

However, under the competent hand of Lustig, this balance is present in the The New Classic series. Although none of Lustig's jackets could be mistaken for each other there is a subtle sense of unity between them all, which adds another dimension to owning a selection of the titles in the series. (See other examples from the New Classic series) [Fig.13] and [Fig.14]

The rather rote design of the Joyce series tells nothing of what can be expected of the writer's creativity from within the cover either subtly or obviously. We are assured on the back cover of *Exiles* that this play is an *enthralling experience*, but no indication is made to convey this on the front cover which is the initial point of attention to the prospective buyer.

Lustig's skilled approach towards his design, however, demonstrates so much more thought and integrity, resulting in a powerful design, which would unarguably be desired by a reader of taste. Lustig's design is an embodiment of his skill as a designer while the other jacket naively, misuses attention grabbing tricks.



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CHAPTER THREE

In order to appreciate the superior results which were realised by Lustig, as a designer who has been allowed to have at least reasonable control over a design, it is worthwhile to compare the jacket he designed for Franz Kafka's *Amerika*, with a later re-print of the same book by an anonymous designer.

The flat, disjointed, five pointed star which dominates the black cover of Lustig's jacket [fig.15 next page] resembles a vaguely humanoid shape. It is off-white in colour and is unbalanced by the several red stripes which divide it in half. Emerging from the top of the star are childlike squiggles of smoke, the rendering of which suggests the influence of Miro's mark making. These details together with the handwritten letterforms of the title roughly scratched into the surface of the star and the author's name hand signed at the lower right of the cover, all combine to represent accurately the rather harsh critique of a *mythical America* which is expressed in the text.

A heavily industrialised urban setting is depicted on this other cover, [Fig.16 next page] a cramped environment where high rise buildings share the same area as the heavy machinery. The entire cover is taken up with this image of an overcrowded, work orientated society, this scene is quite suitable to the content of the book, as it does attempt to illustrate the attitude of the book accurately.

The title indicates the idea that this is a particular to America. But without the title it could be a scene representing any indus-

trialised city or country.

This is the fault I see with this cover. It seems that although the image was chosen for being apt, the *design* was applied later. With little or no consideration for the image, the title and author's name seem to have been added separately, the type interferes with the background and vice versa.

The designer's interaction with the cover was obviously a fragmentary one, and he was unable to successfully make the elements fit together. The entire cover was weakened as a result of the designer being compromised.

Lustig's advantage was he had a comprehensive input in the design and the resulting benefits are quite apparent.

Having been given the freedom to consider the all of the elements as a whole, and arranging them together in harmony, what is produced is a strong, well designed jacket, with a *unity in it's parts*. His cover is striking, and memorable.

One glance at Lustig's jacket conveys the theme, title and author, while at the same time presenting a image which demands interest and inspection, as the form and content are one,

The elements of later jacket do not achieve this composition: unity as there is an inappropriate conflict within the design and the jackets' effectiveness is therefore lessened.

Steven Heller compared Lustig's jacket with an earlier German version by the montagist John Heartfield*, which depicted a far more literal panorama of New York skyscrapers. He found that "Lustig's approach (was) subtle but not obtuse." (Heller, 1993, p. 33)



CHAPTER THREE



Fig. 15 Amerika by Franz Kafka. Designed by Alvin Lustig. 1948



Fig. 16 Amerika by Franz Kafka. Designer not credited. 1975



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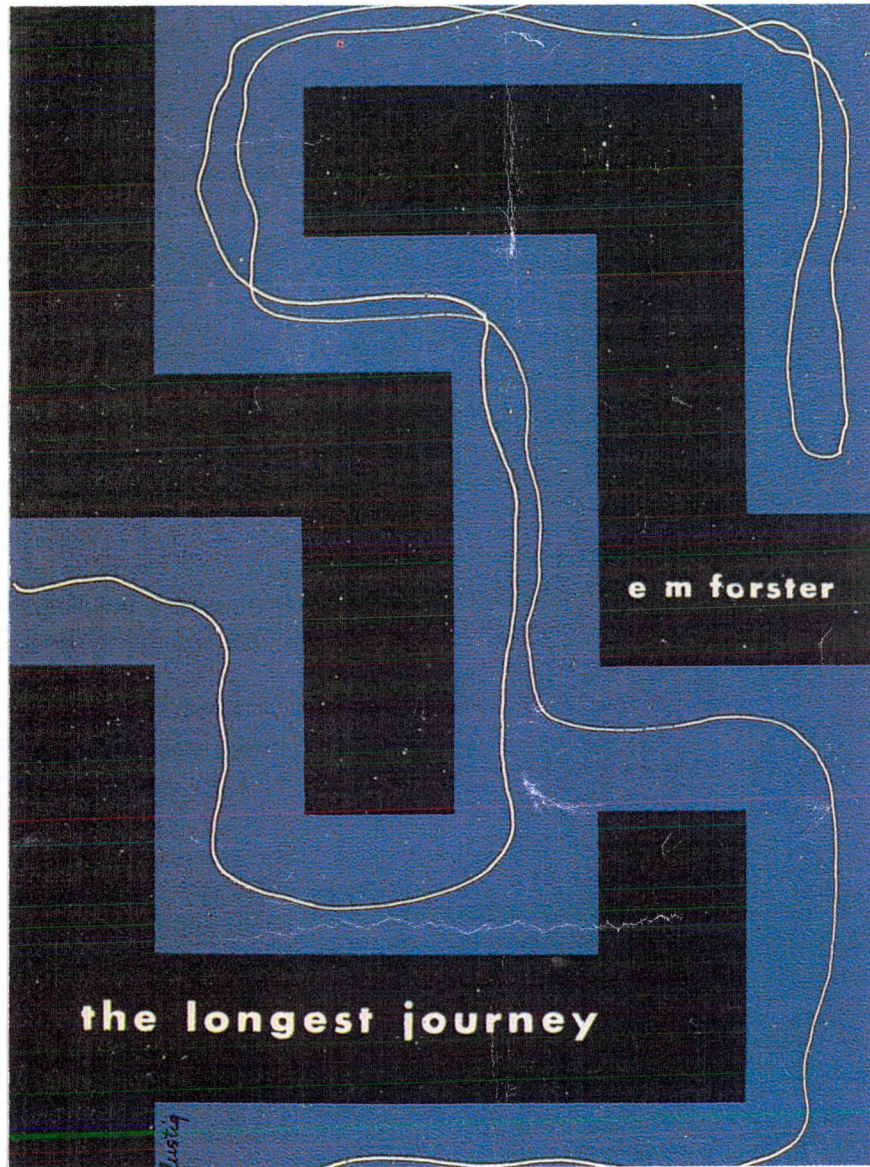


Fig.17 The Longest Journey, Jacket designed by Alvin Lustig, 1947

For E.M. Fisher's *The Longest Journey*, [Fig.17] Lustig creates a labyrinthian maze using simple flat, blue and black bars of equal thickness, which interlock at right angles to each other. A loose, hand rendered, seemingly lost white line wanders through a solid claustrophobic passageway.

The small size and use of lowercase type for the title and author's name are informative, necessary details, by being placed with sensitive consideration of the rest of the composition they complement rather than compete with the design. The type is rendered in white on the dark background subtly enforcing its presence.

The jacket certainly doesn't illustrate the romantic setting which the author creates in the text, but again more importantly alludes to the tension that underscores the plot.

Lustig's displayed an inherent talent as a designer, his designs supply something more, in addition to fulfilling their requirements as book jackets.

The Longest Journey in particular, is an excellent example of one of Lustig's jackets which can be considered as a complete and self contained work of art.

Its theme comes from the content of the book but it has a beauty that is abstract unto itself. As an object it is in itself attractive and captivating and one can easily imagine it gracing the walls of an art gallery.

In these, as in all Lustig's jackets, the approach is indirect, but through its sincerity and compression and thus has more imaginative power than direct illustration could ever achieve.



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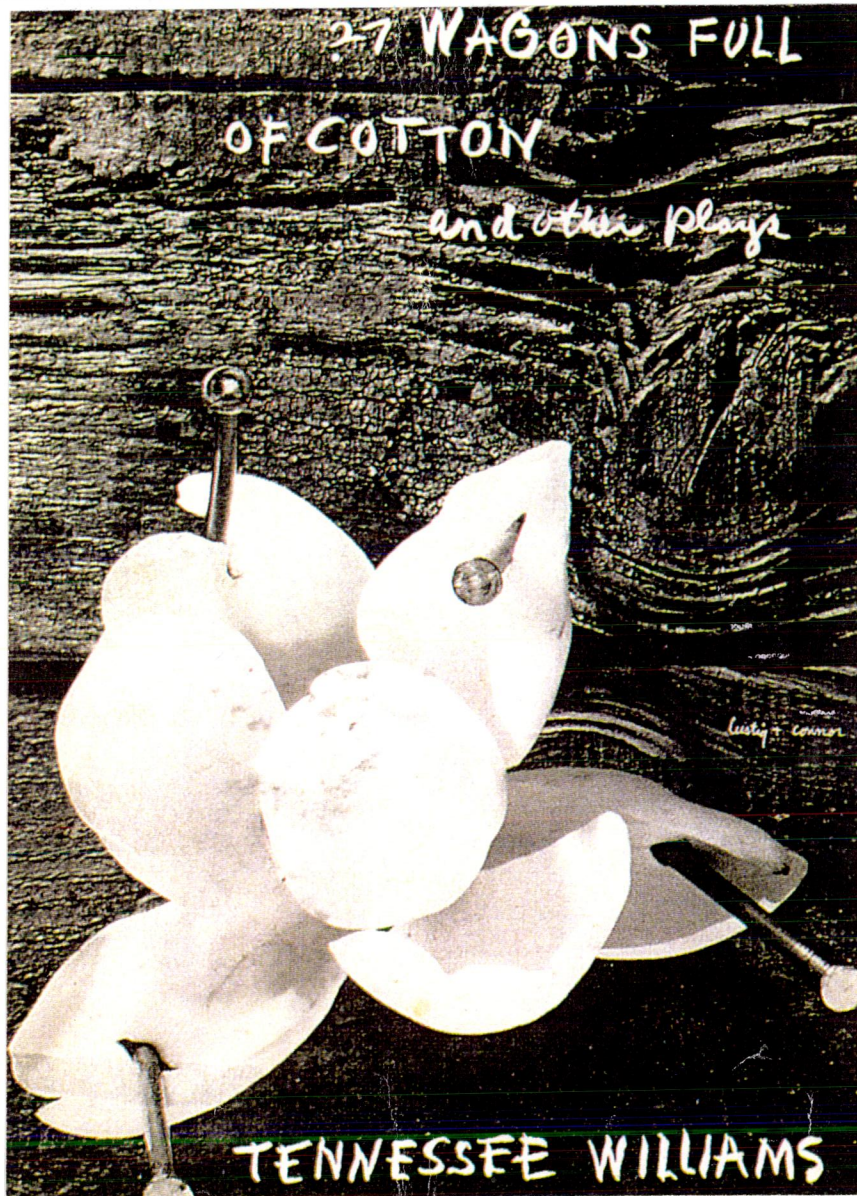


Fig.18 27 Wagons Full of Cotton, 1949

THE MODERN READER SERIES

A delicate magnolia flower is brutally pinned to a rough wooden siding by four nails on *Tennessee Williams's 27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. [Fig.18] The title and author's name is roughly applied in white as if directly onto the wooden background.

The contradictory photographic symbols used here to represent the "underlying violence and hatred behind the civilised facade in human affairs", creates an extraordinarily poignant jacket.

(Meggs 1992, p. 353)

The Bauhaus school advocated rational, objective design compatible with the scientific age. The machine for Lustig was not evil, it was an inevitable a fact of life. He believed that it was the designer's role to integrate what the machine had brought us with the spiritual and cultural value of our human heritage.

Lustig further applied the new concepts of design from Europe in pioneering the processes of photomontage and photo assemblage in American book design, as a means of giving the two dimensional surface a three dimensional illusion and depth. Through his designs for the Modern reader series Lustig transformed the otherwise realistic medium of the photograph, into a tool for abstraction and symbolism through the employment of reticulated negatives, photograms and set-ups.



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CHAPTER THREE

These jackets are a testament to Lustig's versatility as a designer. The stark black and white cover of *Lorca's 3 Tragedies* by Federico Garcia Lorca was [Fig.19] one of many covers he did which he tested the effectiveness of inexpensive black and white photography in a genre routinely known for garish colour photography. "His designs come from a highly developed sense of what can only be called playfulness. He uses type, abstract design photo-montage or whatever comes to hand, as a result his jackets are sparkling, brilliant..." (Fenton, 1951, p. 900)

Lorca 3 Tragedies, (which is still in print today) is an assemblage of five symbolic photographs within a solid grid structure. The composition is tied together through poetic disharmony. In this stunning montage, rather than applying the necessary information of the author's name and title as separate elements they become integral parts of the entire construction by being represented as photographed objects.

Steven Heller describes this jacket as a "masterpiece of symbolic acuity, compositional strength and typographic ingenuity", which he believes forms the basis of many contemporary book jacket designs, using fragmented images, minimal typography and rebus like composition. (Heller 1993, p. 26)



Fig.19 Lorca 3 Tragedies. Designed by Alvin Lustig, 1949

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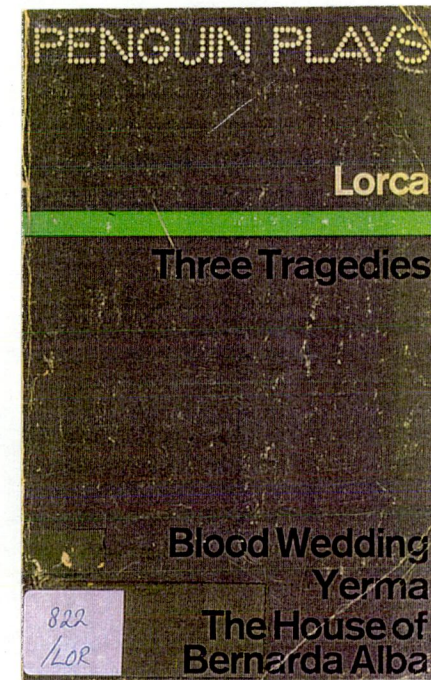
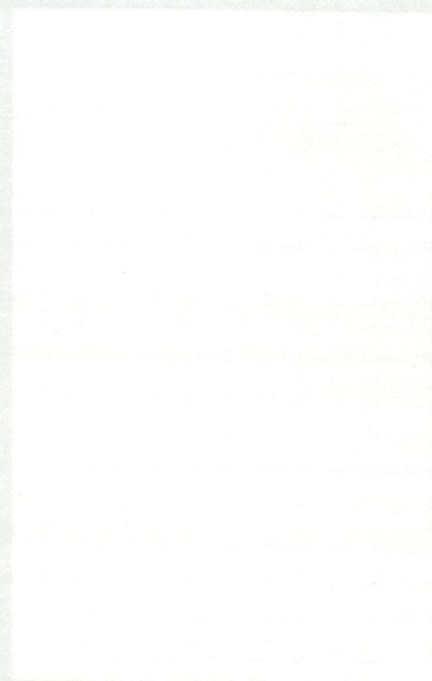


Fig.20 Lorca 3 Tragedies, 1969 re-print

It is difficult to find equal satisfaction with the design solution of the later Penguin re-print of the same title. [Fig. 20]

The alignment all the elements to the right creates an unbalanced structure. The use of novel typography and simplistic composition results in a design which does not stand the test of time.

Failing to communicate to a contemporary audience.



CHAPTER THREE

The jacket for *The Confessions of Zeno* by [Fig.21] is another example of Lustig's excellent photographic solutions for this series. Dominating the entire right side of the jacket, is a reticulated self portrait which resembles a flaming face.

The left side of the jacket is divided in two upper and lower panels of flat colour.

The image of a voodoo doll full of round-headed pins and an open coffin, its lid resting at an angle, is positioned within the lower left white panel. Depth is provided to the composition due to these elements being presented smaller in scale than the face and in addition to the shadows they cast.

The title which is reversed in white on the upper black panel is rendered in an elegant wedding-script, as is the author's name. These letterforms are reminiscent of the surrealist graphics of the 1930's which Lustig admired. (Heller, 1993 p.33)

Connecting the type with the rest of the image is the detail of the letter Z on the lid of the coffin, which echoes the letterforms of the type. Due to the functional rather than novel composition, in addition to possessing an inherent aesthetic value, and is unlike any American book jacket of the time, it still appears contemporary.

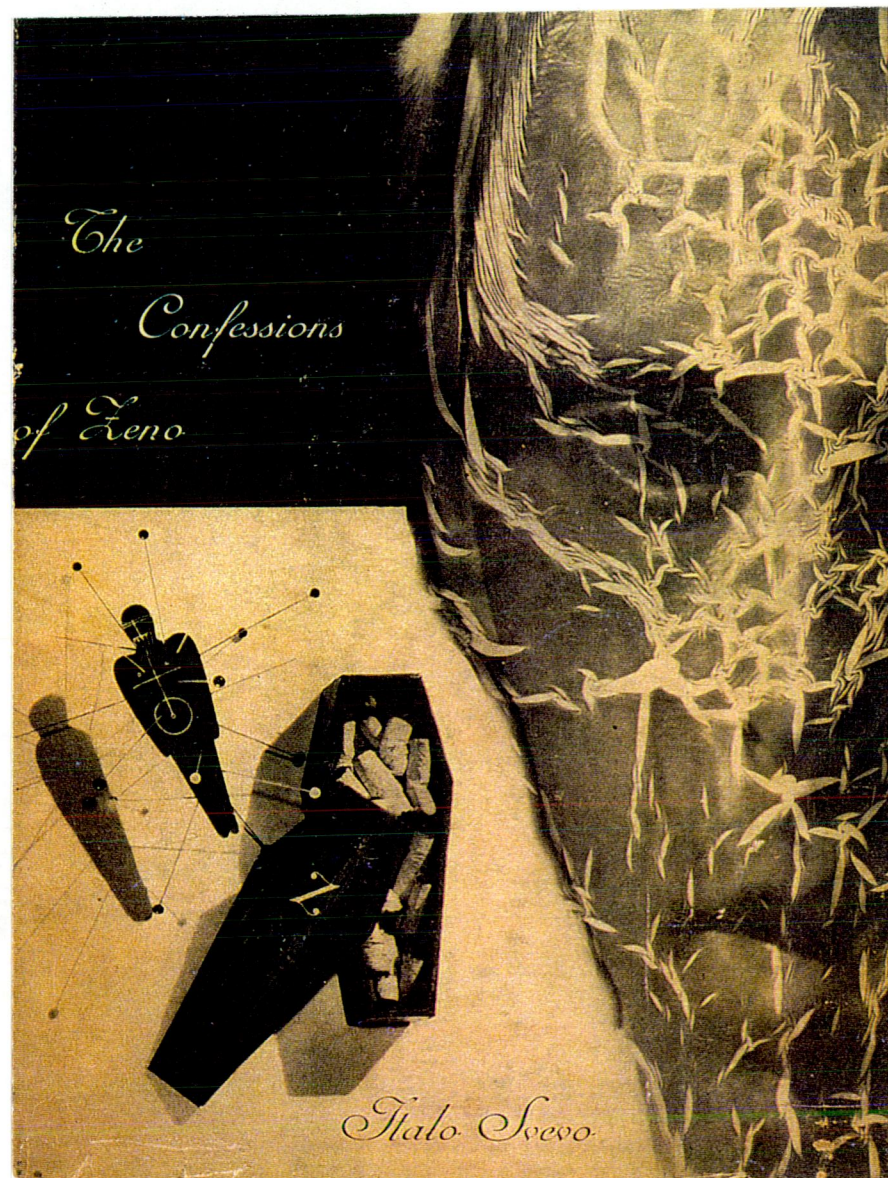


Fig. 21 The Confessions of Zeno. Designed by Alvin Lustig, 1947

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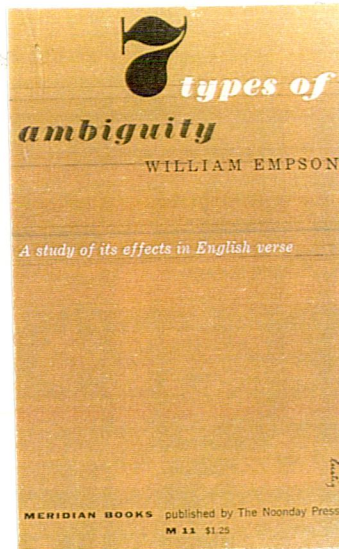


Fig. 23 7 Types of Ambiguity, Noonday Press

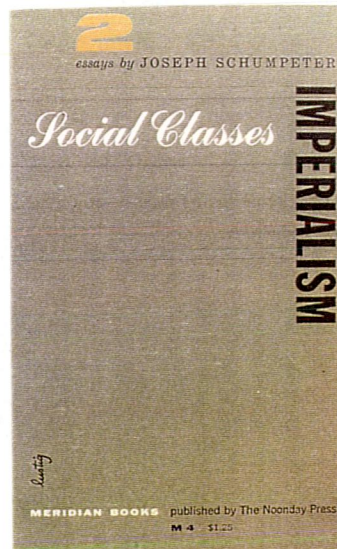


Fig. 24 Social Classes, Imperialism, Noonday Press.

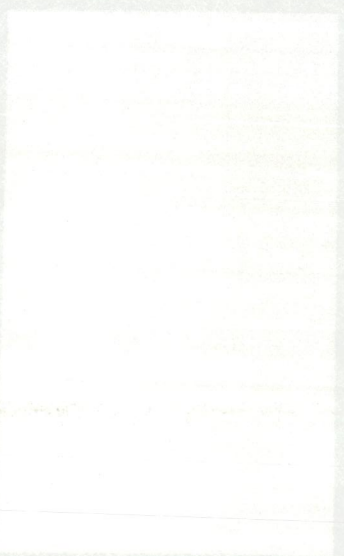
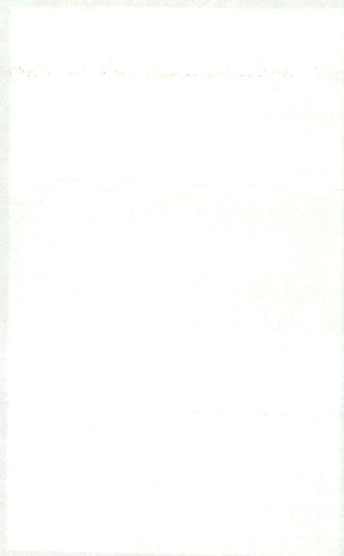
THE NOONDAY PRESS DESIGNS.

While Lustig's later book jacket designs for The Noonday Press, designed between 1950 and 1954 were much calmer in appearance and less visually stimulating than his New Direction designs they were nevertheless unique in their context.

At the time, the typical paperback cover was characterised by overly rendered illustrations or thoughtlessly composed type. To distinguish the Noonday covers, which focused on literary and social criticism, philosophy and history, from his earlier fiction jackets for New Directions which used abstract pictorial imagery, Lustig chose to utilise pure typography set against flat colour backgrounds. (See examples of this series this page [Fig.22] , and [Fig.23] [Fig.23] next page)

This format used the flat background as an anchor against which various eclectic type treatments were offset. As the series of covers were intended to be viewed as a patchwork, Lustig's subtle restraint with his typography was a counterpoint to the subjects usual tendency for cluttered and confused covers.

As his typography here was again, functional rather than novel, it is not rooted in any particular time period or style, giving these designs a timeless quality which can successfully communicate to any generation, producing alluring designs for a series of literature which was known for its blandness.



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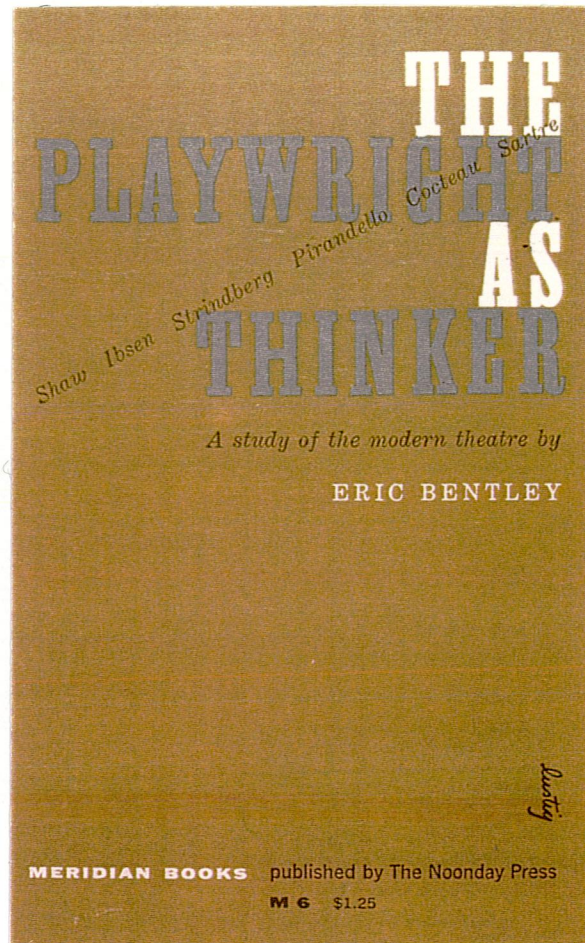


Fig. 22 The Playwright as Thinker, Noonday Press.

This examination of his book jacket designs between 1940 and 1954 reveals an evolution from the total abstraction of his early compositions, through his abstract and symbolic pictorial imagery for New Directions to the symbolic typography of his Noonday Press jackets. Due to his overwhelming versatility it is difficult to speculate how he might have continued if he had lived past his fortieth year.

From this chapter one can see that despite the saying, in fact a book is often judged by its cover. Whereas originally the dust jacket on a book was a plain paper wrapping which was discarded after purchase, today, as a direct result of the innovations designers such as Lustig introduced, everyone is familiar with the added dimension of pleasure and enjoyment a well considered, attractive book jacket can give to the reader. If not, obviously the jackets in hand, so to speak, are not successful designs. They are not communicating the content of the book. Lustig was a visual communicator. Book jacket design was only one facet of his genius. But by examining his jacket designs the inherent ability Lustig possessed as a conceptual problem solver is apparent.



CONCLUSION

I think it is crucially important for today's design students to look back at designers such as Lustig, so to understand the necessity of a well defined, well informed approach to design.

The situation which exists today, where it seems the only requirements necessary in order to work professionally a designer is to have competent technical ability on a computer, and perhaps a years experience of a *graphic design* course. There is, as a result a lack of indepth consideration for what is being communicated. Looking at Lustig's design achievements it is apparent the benefits can be gained from a approach such as his.

He stressed the importance of the combination of the fine arts with the practical.

Although he had essentially designed his own educational experience himself, Lustig totally believed in the possibility of a truly effective design school. He believed that the best design programs of art departments would always be found closely related to the best painting programs.

By combining the ideal of the art school with the reality of the working designer it is possible to

produce people who are capable of finding some reasonable specialised activity that will give them a 'hook' onto the existing economic situation and at the same time produce people who have the vision and moral integrity to continue to be creative people even though they are involved in a technical society. (Hodik, 1989 p.134)

In his design achievements which can only be described as inspirational, Lustig maintained an impressive integrity to his work. presenting him as an impressive paragon to contemporary design.

All of Lustig's work presented in this thesis admirably stands up to the harsh scrutiny of time. A body of work which serves as a valuable model for how modern form can be effectively applied in the midst of today's aesthetic chaos.

I have found refreshing encouragement from the work and principles of Alvin Lustig, who for me, is the definitive definition of what in fact a designer is.



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