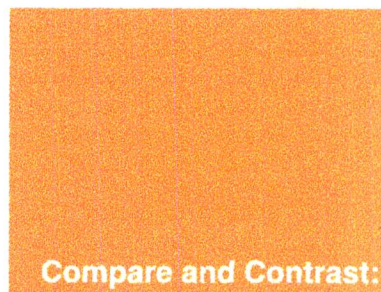
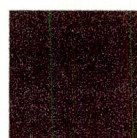


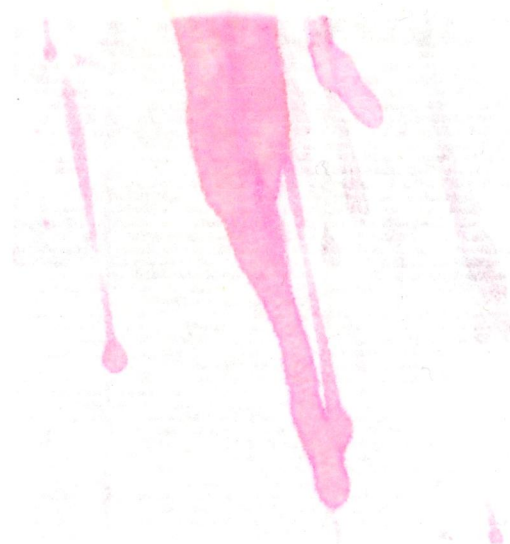


# THE <sup>RED</sup> FACE



Compare and Contrast:

Neville Brody and the  
Constructivists





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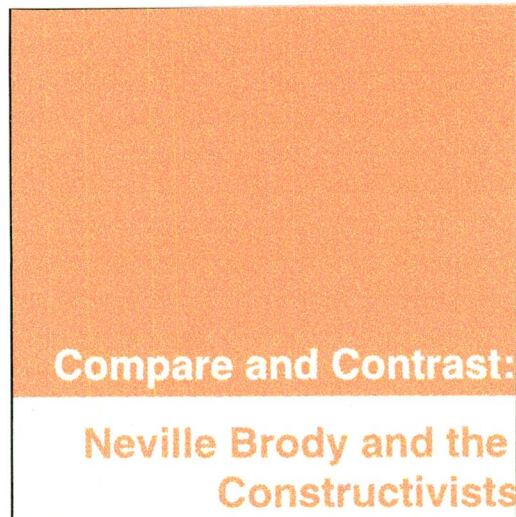
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National College of Art & Design  
**Visual Communications**



by

**Conor Micheal Swanton**

Submitted to the Faculty of History of Art & Design and Complementary  
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## 1. Introduction:

For my Thesis I intend to compare and contrast the work of Neville Brody and the Constructivists. I have a number of reasons for wanting to deal with this subject. In studying Graphic Design I have come to realise the importance of research into art and design history and have also become very aware of the influence of the Constructivists on Graphic Design. I find the designs created by the Constructivists in the 1920 's very interesting. In fact, when my fellow students and I discuss good design we find that there are always references to the work of the Constructivists. Their work seems to me and to many of my fellow students to be very strong and confident. Their approach to design seems to be inspired by much more than mere whim or stylistic fad. There seems to have been a strong connection between the strength of ideas flowing from that revolutionary period and the strength of the graphics. We are fascinated by how fresh and modern their work remains after such a long period. We feel that it towers above much of the design being created today. Design that seems as fresh as some of the Constructivists work does, seventy years, on deserves some study to see whether lessons can be learned from it.

In contrast there seems to be a lack of strength and inner conviction behind much of the design work produced today. This certainly seems evident to many of my fellow students and me. Is there a connection between the level of social conviction and the decisiveness or lack of decisiveness of the graphics produced in a period? Do the infinite possibilities presented by computerisation of graphics make it more difficult to produce clear, simple work now, than was the case in the 20's with very limited equipment?

My interest in Brody comes from my admiration for his graphics. He has been an important influence on graphic designers for more than





a decade. He has the reputation of being a designer who is as equally talented designing typefaces or illustrations as he is at designing magazine layouts. Much of his work on the Face as art director has helped to change the way in which magazine design is perceived. "In tandem with Neville Brody's design, The Face's reinvention of magazine language was to have an international influence that dictated a thousand stylistic variations" (Wozencroft, 1988, p95)

He, in turn, has been influenced by the Constructivists in developing much of his design work. This gives me two reasons for having an interest in Brody. I also find it interesting that a form of graphics generated in the Socialist 1920's should find a later echo in the 'Capitalist' 1980's. In making use of the graphical approach developed by the Constructivists, however, it seems possible that Brody might have taken a form graphics generated by social conviction and adopted it for mere stylistic purposes.

I wondered whether this is a general problem in the way that some graphic designers make use of the work from the past. Is there a danger in simply resorting to glib copies of past work rather than attempting to deeply understand and learn from it. Have we become a generation concerned only with superficial style rather than with inner conviction? Is this resulting in uncertain graphics?

To try and get some answers to these questions I set out to examine and compare the work of the Constructivists, and of Brody. I have spent time studying some of the graphics produced in the two periods in question. I also spent time reading about the social conditions existing in these two periods of the Twentieth Century to see how they might have influenced the graphics produced.



## 2. Methodology

My first objective was to carry out some basic investigation about material relevant to the Constructivists and to Brody. In examining the material available in the NCAD library I quickly realised that while there was extensive material about the Constructivists in general, much of it would not be of direct relevance to my own area of interest. Having done some preliminary reading I have shortlisted the material which I consider to be most relevant to my subject. These are listed in the Bibliography and have been referred to in several places in my text.

Having shortlisted the essential texts I next set about reading each to get a general idea about the subject matter and to begin to make notes of points which I felt would be relevant to developing my Thesis. I noted that no matter how selective you are about obtaining appropriate texts there is still always a gap between what you want to discover and the information that is actually available in a given publication. Each book or article is assembled for a particular purpose and it marshals its information for that purpose.

My problem has been to digest and reassemble all the information in such a form as to have a coherent statement developed from the general theme which I set out to study. While much of my time has been spent in interesting reading, not all of it has lent itself to giving an insight into exactly what I am concerned about, ie. the factors that lead to the development of the Constructivists and the influences of that movement on Brody. What I have discovered from trying to obtain material on Brody was that the majority of articles in which he was featured refer to Jon Wozencroft's book *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody 1*, leaving me with much recycled information.

What follows therefore is only as good as the time and effort available to me in putting together this work. I do not claim that all of it will stand

up to rigorous academic scrutiny but I hope that it throws some light, however hazy, on what I think is an aspect of graphics well worth more serious study. I might add that I would find it very much easier to develop work and ideas in a visual way rather than in a written form. It has been interesting to have to put into words, and to structure, ideas that are essentially visual.

The structure of the thesis has evolved after several attempts at defining what I was trying to say about the subject. I have finally decided that I needed the following structure:

1. A general introduction to define the scope of the Thesis
2. A chapter describing the influences on the development of the Constructivists,
3. A chapter on the general development of Brody's graphics,
4. A chapter discussing the influences of the Constructivists on Brody,
5. A general summary of my findings.

### 3. Influences on the development of the Constructivists

It is impossible to discuss Constructivism without first looking at the political, social, industrial, context within the New Soviet Russia from 1917 to the 30's. "The development of design into an autonomous art form is closely linked to the October Revolution of 1917 and its influence on all aspects of social and cultural life" (Laurentiev, 1995, p3.)

The Revolution of 1917 brought with it severe changes in social as well as in political ideals. There was general excitement in the country resulting from the liberating effects of the revolution and from promises made by Lenin to the people. These included promises of a new society with increased production, new technology, new rights for minorities and equal rights for women. Some people benefited from a society freed from religious taboos. Tsarist Russia had been severely anti Semitic in its politics, which had seriously hindered the cultural and political potential of the Jews. El Lissitsky is an example of an artist who benefited from that aspect of the freedom that the Revolution brought.

" Between 1916 and 1919 El Lissitsky devoted himself almost totally to the cause of Jewish National Art. He took part in the organisation of exhibitions by Jewish artists. He studied Jewish Culture.....Lissitsky did not actively participate in the upheavals of 1917. Shortly after the revolution, he appears to have done work for the cultural department of the new government and to have designed a Soviet flag, which was carried across Red Square by members of the Government on May 1, 1918." (Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990 ,p15)

11 Lissitsky like so many of the avant-garde guard artist & writers owed much of his freedom of expression to the revolution. In 1919 Marc



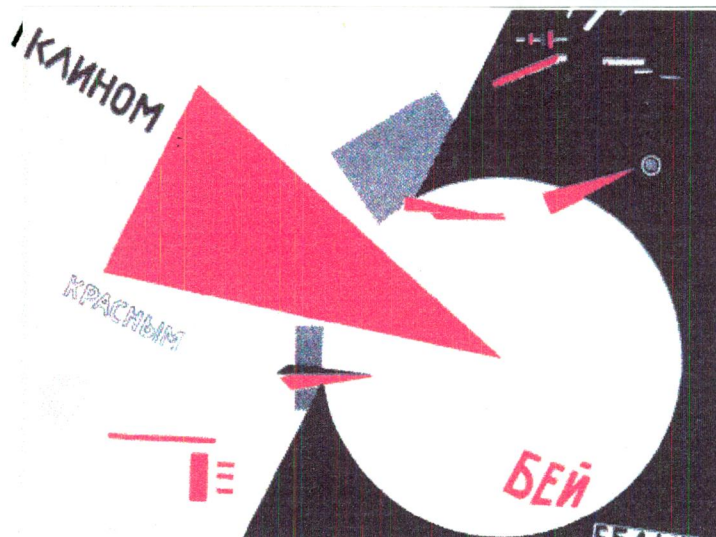
Chagall, appointed commissioner for artistic affairs in Vitebsk, his hometown, gave Lissitsky a position as instructor in the department of architecture and head of the graphics workshop. Shortly afterwards Kasimir Malevich also joined the faculty.

Many artists, including Lissitsky, were given social responsibilities by the new Soviet Government. Lenin's government wanted rapid change in a country where the majority of the population could neither read nor write. The writers, artists, and architects, as a result became responsible for introducing such objectives as universal literacy.

Russian artists and designers were invited by government to produce posters and book covers to promote Soviet thinking, but with the aim also of encouraging the education of the masses. "Part of the reason for the remarkable looking books of the 1920's was the designer's enthusiasm for encouraging reading by making printed matter look inviting to a wide range of tastes." (Compton, 1992, p10)

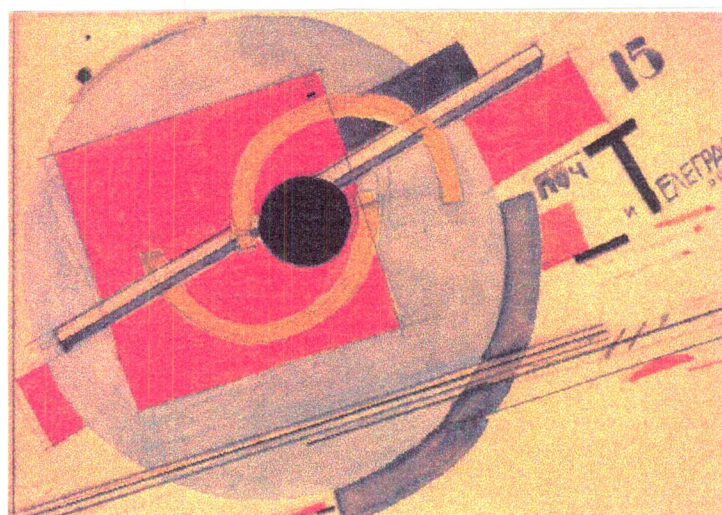
Avant-garde artists were also given the chance to participate in the creation of a new identity for the Nation. The world of art and the new state were so closely linked that art followed the political journey every step of the way in the first five years. During a period when the Soviet Government was defending itself from counter-revolutionaries (whites) art entered a similar agitation period. Agitation posters appeared everywhere, on trams, on boats, and in the streets supporting the revolution.

A good example is the Lissitsky poster 'beat the Whites with the Red Wedge' 1919/1920. This was an assignment to make propaganda for the Red army in their battle against the Whites. This poster refers to the military maps and symbolised to identify armies. Lissitsky has manipulated these shapes and created posters abstract in colour and shape, which successfully represented the Red Army pushing, even chasing, the Whites away. See fig 1.



1.

FIG. 1



2.

FIG. 2



of propaganda "During the 1930's politics began to leave a heavier mark on Lissitsky's work; exhibitions and books increasingly took on the look of propaganda for Stalin; the pavilions that he designed for locations abroad were to show off the achievements of the Soviet Union" (Municipal Van Abbemuseum, 1990, p25)

Avant-garde artists now played a key role in developing Russia. They had the full support of a new government. Art and Communism were now side by side, two movements with similar aims and similar beliefs. Using Futurism to describe the Avant Garde at the time, one of the Government members put it like this: " Creative activity is the most important and substantial foundation which binds together Futurism and Communism at this moment. There are at present no other movements,save Socialist & Futurist, which have the capacity to hold the future in their sights." (Anikst, 1987, p)

With the support of the Government the avant-garde set about redesigning everything for the Government. Because of the increase in National production it became essential that a Government Department would be set up to design packaging for the products being produced. One example of creative people working together on such projects was the teamwork of artist & designer Alexander Rodchenko and the poet Vladamir Mayakovsky.

They were given the task of producing the bulk of the Government's advertising in the 1920's when they were appointed to the Advertiser Constructor.

" The Advertiser Constructor produced about fifty posters and one hundred sign boards,packaging design,wrappers,advertisements in columns,illustrations in magazines and newspapers" (Anikst, 1987, p23)

An example of their work is a newspaper advertisement for the State Department store GUM. Mayakovsky invented the slogan which reads "Everything for everybody, high quality and cheap". Rodchenko then interpreted his words and generated the graphical design from the





FIG. 3



"Everything for everybody, high quality and cheap". Rodchenko then interpreted his words and generated the graphical design from the words. These were by no means the only artists producing design work for the Government. There was a growing sense among artists of the need to work for the masses rather than for the elite few who would have commissioned art in the past.

The abstraction that began to appear in the work of Lissitsky and the abstraction that became the centre of Russian avant-garde design owed much to the teaching of Kazimir Malevich. I think that Malevich's influence came to some extent from the position he held in Russian politics. "Members of the avant-garde including Tatlin & Malevich- had taken up more overtly political activities in 1917 and joined the Soviets of Soldiers & Workers Deputies which effectively ruled Moscow between February and October 1917" Compton,1992, p45)

Malevich had eliminated most of the realistic elements in his painting as early as 1913. He broke his paintings down into a complete abstraction. Objects became simple shapes, forms, and areas. His new form of art using bright geometric shapes gave a feeling of modernism. This seemed to echo the feelings of Soviet Russia at the time. It reflected the politics and introduced a complete break from the past. This work looked to the future rather than the past.

" It was painters,stage designers,and artistically trained designers.....who welcomed the burgeoning political and social changes as an echo and confirmation of their own revolutionary spirit,and saw in them all but unlimited possibility for future work"

(Laurentiev, 1995 )

The culmination of shared ideals between the Russian government and the avant-garde ultimately resulted in a willingness among artists to produce work for the good of the new Russia.

"The reorientation of art so that it would use industrial production as its medium,not paint or canvas,was recognised by a considerable section of leftist artists to be the proper aim of their own creative work". ( Anikst, 1987, p15)

Production art was born. The avant-garde would bring art back to the people. Art would combine with the effort of a new Country. Art now



held the unusual position of having a direct role to play in the shape and look of the new society. "The notion that artists had a role in shaping industrially produced goods for the masses....was the most powerful of such movements" (Anikst, 1987, p)

Production Art was taking the first steps towards a Soviet concept of design. This concept involved looking to the future; their designs were to be modern. Their attitude to technology was that it should be the inspiration for design technology, symbolised by factories, rebuilding, and looking towards a new future. Although Production Art followed Malevich's abstract approach in many ways, there was quite a varied approach generally.

"Alexander Rodchenko subverted the notion of the artist as a specialist by experimenting with a wide variety of artistic areas to question the boundaries between them; he applied himself directly to the language of everyday life in Russia of the twenties ...for Rodchenko, design was a means of the artist coming between his work and the needs of his public: a design to interact....his 'Abstract' language can legitimately be interpreted as the expression of an unusual determination to establish a dialogue with the public, to make each operation undertaken on language itself potentially explicit, by renouncing the mediated representation of reality and by transforming the materials, immediately, into form, into a medium of communication.." (Wozencroft, 1988, p )

Gradually there came to be a movement towards sharing ideas and theories among the many artists working within the new system. Tatlin, Malevich, Mayakovsky, El Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Vesin and Medunetsky were involved in several meetings spanning four months in an artistic research centre called Inkhuk. This resulted in their ideas becoming unified into the theories and guidelines for Constructivism. "The artists and architects who dedicated themselves to establishing production art also worked as theoreticians, practitioners, and teachers. Those drawn into the movement were enormously varied in their approaches and specialises." (Anikst, 1987, p.17)

construction and the composition of factors differentiating them. The ideas which were most clearly identified at these meetings became the foundation stone for a new method of design called Constructivism. This required design to have a function which would be expressed through structure and use of materials.

“ Nothing superfluous, nothing without purpose, excluding any form of decorative embellishment or stylisation, materials to be used in the best possible manner in relation to their intrinsic properties. Then the result will be constructive”  
(Anikst, 1987, p17)

The ideals had been laid down for Constructivism but it essentially followed the rules of Production Art. Constructivist designers maintained their stance of following design into production, and their view that technology should be reflected in design.” The decided inclination towards Constructivism and the use of anything that technology made possible (including concrete, glass and metal) largely derives from the confrontation with the functional aesthetic of architects and engineers”.  
(Laurentiev, 1995, p )

Time governed the approach of much of the design work. There was a requirement in the case of some poster design where the designs were to be created in a period sometimes as short as 10 hours. The Advertiser Constructor was an example of an Organisation where its main designer, Alexandro Rodchenko worked under extreme time limitations.

“ The intense pace at which the Advertiser Constructor worked was astonishing. A few advertisements were completed every day. Mayakovsky would receive a commission in the morning; in the evening Rodchenko would collect the finalised text and go home to sketch. By eleven the next morning I had taken the posters round to Volodia...In the evening the routine repeated itself...It was high pressure work, in order to get the posters out everywhere.”

(Anikst, 1987, p )



Constructivist designs are visually strong and dynamic. Because of the time constraints, and because of the designer's acceptance of technology typesetter's equipment became one of the main tools of design. They began to explore the possibilities of typography, use of elements such as exclamation marks and oversized letters. " Their design solutions are dominated by sharp contrasts of letter size and the use of various thickness of rule." (Anikst, 1987, p126) .Alexei Gan's cover for the Architectural Journal *Sovremennaya Arkhitektura* is an example of this type of exploration. The design contains 3 oversized letter forms filling the top 1/3 of the cover. The remainder of the cover is a good example of how designers began using space, block text, and a bold rule to achieve an overall balance with dynamism.

El Lissitzky's front cover of *Veshch* in 1922 is another example of this approach. Looking at the cover the eye is drawn into the cover because of his use of a strong diagonal rule. This appears as if it would fall off the page were it not counterbalanced by weighty type. It can also be seen that there is a strong grid structure supporting the design. The diagonal rule gives the cover an element of freedom. This use by designers of type as a design device allowed them to manipulate words so as to emphasise their meaning. "Phrases would be split up according to their meaning, their intonation, their oral rhythm, and each part then given the characteristics of typeface, size, and colour appropriate to its role in the message" (Anikst, 1987, p126)

To summarise then, Constructivism evolved as a result of many and varied influences. The primary force seems to have been the Revolution itself and the opening up of new possibilities for society and for artists that resulted from it. Part of the programme of the new Government was a drive for Industrialisation to bring work to the people and a drive for education for the masses. Artists were favoured by the new regime who valued them as useful agents for bringing about some of the changes required. They themselves seem to have been eager to get involved in art for the masses rather than for the elite, and they embraced the new technologies as a means of expression as well as a means of reproduction of work.



**CA 2**



ГЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ НАУКИ И УЧЕБНИКОВ В ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОМ ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВЕ

**4.**

FIG. 4



**5.**

FIG. 5

It is clear to me that these varied influences produced a fresh, new form of graphics quite different from anything that had gone before it. The liberating effects of the revolution seems to have energised some of the artists caught up in the new era. Creative work is difficult to pin down. When it works well we can try to figure out why but at best we are only guessing at what exactly produces work that is exciting and stimulating. The dynamics leading to the finest work of the Constructivists are only just touched on here but I am satisfied that to a considerable extent the form of the Constructivist's work has evolved from circumstances surrounding the artists concerned. These circumstances included the added effect that resulted from various artists working or collaborating together, rather than working in isolation. This work would not have evolved before in time, indeed it never previously evolved, simply because the appropriate circumstances did not exist before the Russian revolution.

#### 4. General development of Neville Brody's graphics

Neville Brody was one of the best known and most influential graphic designers of the 1980's. He grew up in Southgate, a suburb of North London. At school he studied A-level Art, very much from a fine art point of view. "ever since I had any self awareness, I've wanted to do art or painting." (Wozencroft, 1988, p5)

In autumn 1976, Brody started a three-year B.A. course in graphics at the *London College of Printing*. Although the LCP did have a strong crafts background, Brody felt its atmosphere to be repressive and stultifying.

Speaking of his time at college he says...

"I wanted to communicate to as many people as possible, but also to make a popular form of art that was more personal and less manipulative.....colleges aren't geared towards producing pioneers but gauge their success on professional imitation ....I was at the LCP during a period of transition, away from the basic belief in the Bauhouse attitude that you produced Fine Arts like drawing and printmaking, firsts, to find out about the techniques involved, and secondly, to bring a different understanding of communication to your design work. .... Then, all of a sudden, we were being taught that the only reason for doing a life-drawing or any experiment in printing was to come up with a motif that could be



translated and extended into an advertising project or record design cover. The college was no longer interested in ideas for their own sake." ( Wozencroft, 1988, p )

Despite these difficulties and conflicts it is interesting to note what he has to say about some of the facilities available at the college, which to my mind clearly helped significantly in his development as a designer.

"They had some great facilities at the college- the old Daily Mirror printing press(1906 vintage I think),screen printing,Monotype and computer typesetting machines,and a colour Xerox machine that cost only 20p a copy."(Wozencroft, 1988, p5)

Another factor that seemed to have helped in his development as a designer was the fact that Punk rock was beginning to have a major effect on London life.

"Punk hit me fast, and it gave me the confidence I needed. What really did it for me was Wire's Pink Flag, and especially what they said about it at the time-that you should pursue an idea, do it, stop,then go on to the next one"(Wozencroft, 1988, p5)

Jon Wozencroft,writer of the graphic language of Neville Brody gives some insight into the frustrations Brody must have felt in making his way through college.

"His tutors condemned his work as 'uncommercial',once again preferring 'safe' economic strategies to experimentation....Brody's designs did not go down well; at one stage he was nearly thrown out for putting the Queen's head sideways on a postage stamp design. He did,however,get the chance to design posters for student concerts at LCP." (Wozencroft, 1988, p 6 )

Brody also mentions that Ian Wright, who was in the year above him,was also at odds with his tutors; "his work was fantastic and very influential on mine. He had a very illustrative approach to type,yet he was totally misunderstood and accused of lack of commercialism to a

far greater extent than I was." ( Wozencroft, 1988, p.5,p10)

It is clear from these accounts by Jon Wozencroft, and from Brody's own comments that his period in college was characterised by frustration and rebellion against the status quo. This rebellion was fuelled to an extent by the Punk rebellion in London. There may be some dynamic force at work here that in a small way parallels the larger types of rebellion that occurred in society in Russia. Is it possible that rebellion ,of itself, generates an energy that gets transmitted to the work of creative people?.

Brody's thesis was on magazines and one that caught his imagination was *Garbage*, produced by Al McDowell, so Brody went to interview him. McDowell was involved in *Rocking Records* at that time also and with his thesis complete Brody went to work with McDowell.

"I was there for nine months, a time of absolute poverty while living in a squat in Covent Garden. *Rocking Russian* (record company) was very expressive on a creative level, but businesswise, it was possibly the worst-run institution I've ever been involved with." ( Wozencroft, 1988, p9 )

He began to design record covers and Concert posters mostly for Human League. Even at this early stage in his career he had an illustrative approach to typography. "Record covers really were the boom industry in design at that time. There was a supportive network to enable an interesting sleeve to reach anything from 10,000 to 50,000 people. I thought the record shop was just as valid a showcase as the framed environment of art galleries, or, better still that your living room was a place to look at and think about visual expression, without any dogma of a gallery"..... He gained attention mainly through his work designing record covers for the Fetish label " This eventually gave me the chance to get out of the mainstream and work on the things I wanted to.... " As the Art Director of Fetish he began experimenting with the beginnings of a new language that consisted of a mixture of visual and architectural elements." (Internet -Fontfinder )

The Face:

He joined the Face magazine in 1981 as Art Director. He made a



name for himself by producing memorable spreads in the magazine. He received much acclaim for his innovative work in which he combined typeface and pictures. He ultimately revolutionised magazine design in England.

“I wanted to use the three-dimensional space of a magazine. Magazines are 3D items in space and time- there’s a connection between page 5 and pages 56 and 57, a continuum... Why be inhibited by the edges of the page?.. The Face deliberately had a very short production time. It needed to be as immediate as a weekly with all the disadvantages of being a monthly. It was a well worked out system but it needed to be: I had only 11 1/2 hours to design a four page feature... I was turning around 40 pages in as many working hours. It was necessary to have a full design team, but this was not financially possible... it was part of the transition from low-budget culture to the multinational version of ‘Youth Culture’...” (Wozencroft, 1988, p96)

From Brody’s statement above it is possible to draw comparisons with the Advertisement- Constructor. From time to time you forget that the majority of Constructivist/ Brody work was on a tight deadline. I find it amazing therefore that it contains a precision and balance that looks laboured on. Other comparisons show the ease at which lesser artist’s copied both the Constructivist’s and Brody’s design. “Rodchenko increasingly initialled his cover designs, possibly because other designers were copying his style” (Compton, 1992, p97). In the majority of interviews which I have read featuring Brody he has displayed anger at those who copied and commercialised his work.

“the problem with the Face was that people didn’t challenge it in design terms. People were willing not only to accept it, but to codify it, then rip it off. If I was one of those people ripping off the Face, I wouldn’t be able to sleep at night.” (William’s, 1990 p82 )

“For some old issues of the Face, the structure we wanted led to a specific need for typefaces that weren’t available. So I hand drew those types. ... Anyway the design also required that there was something unique and individual ... The Face looks as it did because we had a



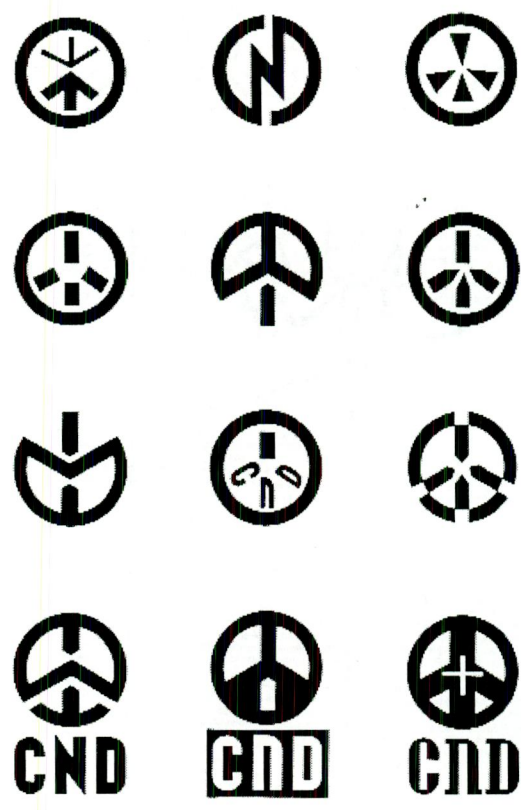
certain range of typefaces available.I'd be the first to admit that they weren't all ideal.They were compromises.My problem is that I'm not a trained typographer.I'm learning all along..."(William's,1988, p35)

He was the first graphic designer to become a household name, so much so that at one stage he was as likely to be appearing on a magazine cover as designing it. His style of design became synonymous with design in the 1980's. As regards his success and its impact on others Brody claims to be shocked by this. He accepted the wave of publicity,he says, in the hope that it would get across his ideas about design.He expected to stimulate thought-not irritation- among his peers.

It is interesting that in the midst of the cynicism and decadence of the 1980's Brody could have been so influenced by the Constructivists. " For me what happened between the years 1914 and 1935 has dictated everything that has happened since in all areas of design." (William's, 1990, p82 ) From this interview he seems to have had some socialist views. " ..The parallels between the 30's and the 80's are so strong in England-the unemployment, the divided nation,an authoritarian government. " ( William's, 1990, p82). In looking at say Rodchenko he has stated that he has been influenced by his design but not by the Communist ideals which inspired Rodchenko's design. " If you look at some of Rodchenko's paintings,you'll see he anticipated abstract expressionism by a good 50 or 60 years. Its so abstract, some of his colour field work..Rodchenko was more about humanitarianism than about communism...."(William's, 1990, p82)

Brody has however been involved in various political activities of the left. These range from producing logos for artists against apartheid in 1986, *CND* in 1985, the *RED WEDGE* in 1985 and various cover designs for the *NEW SOCIALIST MAGAZINE* in 1986. His attempts at design for Socialist Institutions have had very mixed results.

He was asked to 'update' the *CND* symbol. He produced various options none of which were selected for use. " They came to me with a brief that said the *CND* was loosing popularity..because young people saw *CND* as something to do with their parents. My brief was to try to work the logo into something more relevant to a younger



6.

FIG. 6

generation...I think that their original logo is brilliant and unbeatable, but the brief wasn't to produce a better logo, it was to produce a different logo."(William's, 1988, p 35). Brody tried several variations on the logo. He kept the basic stark, black on white shape, but sharpened up the edges. The symbol looked threatening, even missile-like, according to one critic.

To sum up then, it is interesting to note his rebellion against the status quo via his difficulties at college and his interest in the Punk revolution. It is also of interest to note that Brody became caught up inevitably with the requirements of working to the demands of Industry with all its mass production and time dictated demands. The industrial 'machine' that Brody worked within however was driven by the demands of commercialism not socialism.

The demands of rapid production of design work appear to have resulted in the need for Brody to resort to simple forms in much the same way as the Constructivists resorted to them. Elements of the type of idealism that affected the Constructivists are also evident in Brody and his determination to have a radical impact on design.

It has to be admitted that Constructivism is but one of the influences on Brody. In his search for originality he was open to very many other influences. What interests me however is that a design movement from so far in the past should have any influence at all in the present day. The fact that it has been shown to have had an influence is a tribute to the quality of ideas and approaches developed in that era.



## 5. The influence of the Constructivists on Brody

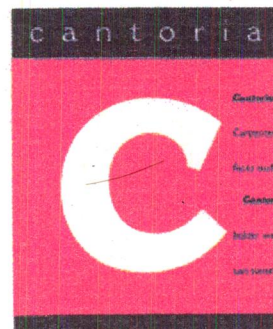
The piece of design in which the influence of the Constructivists on Brody's work first became apparent to me was created by Brody in 1986. This is the cover for the type prospectus of Cantoria. What I have found fascinating is Brody's use of strong coloured shapes. The cover contains a large red block with weighty black rules on the top and bottom. To balance the use of space he has used a block of heavy type in the bottom right hand corner. I quickly came to realise the similarities with Lissitsky's typographic designs for *Olia Golosa (for the Voice)* 1922.

I could clearly see the connections between the two ie. similar usage of space, a use of strong rudimentary shapes, and yet throughout each piece a beautiful balance and simplicity. These strong qualities are I feel, lacking in much Graphic Design work today. Brody has brought something new to design. The symmetry was sought through a block of text, not another typographic element as would have been common for Lissitsky.

Brody makes direct reference himself to the influence of the Constructivists. "The Constructivism of El Lissitsky and Kasimir Malevich made an impression on me that was at one time equally vital." (Wozencroft, 1988, p7)

Where this influence can be most clearly seen is in his design work for the double page spread produced to feature the band Kraftwerk. His references to Constructivism here are I feel close to pastiche. He has linked Kraftwerk's industrial music to the references to Russia's Industrial development following the Revolution. The spread contains several recognisable Constructivist elements. The strong, red,

monotype  
TYPOGRAPHY

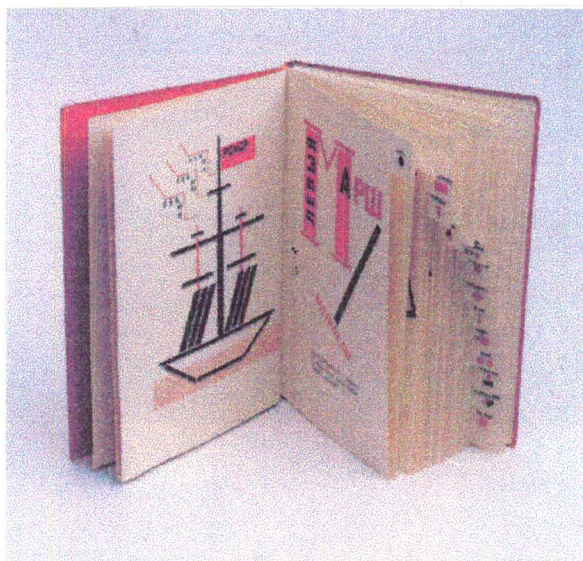


*Cantoria* is an exciting new face from Monotype's Run  
Carpeton which follows in the tradition of earlier Monotype  
faces such as *Dalle Robbia* (1931) and *Canterbury* (1935).  
*Cantoria*, however, has a clear identity of its own, with the  
holder weights retaining the individuality of character which  
can sometimes be lost as weights increase.

*Cantoria* has been created as a  
large family of romans and italics  
and this broad choice of styles, its  
holder makes it an ideal face for  
advertising or magazine work.

7.

FIG. 7



8.

FIG. 8



oversized W which balances the off angled title has great similarities with Lissitsky's 1922 cover *Object, No. 3*. The strong angles are apparent in both. Brody uses a circle to end the title in much the same way as Lissitsky had used circles to balance abstract shapes. "The 'O' which is given prominent position on the cover of *Epople*, recurs on the cover for the *Voice* where it serves no purpose as a letter, but simply balance three abstract forms" (Compton, 1992, p96 )

Constructivist ideals seem to figure strongly with Brody's work in the *Face*. Much like the design of the Constructivists Brody has stated that every piece of design featured in the magazine had a purpose.

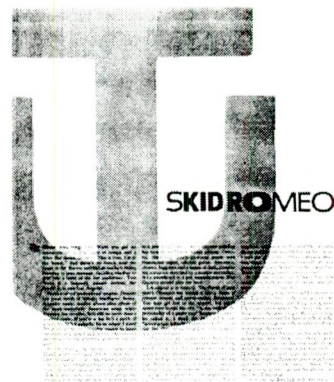
"Everything in the *Face* was reasoned; every single mark on the page was either an emotive response or a logical extension of the idea's" (Wozencroft, 1988, p96 )

He has also made clever use of the editorial logo for style. From issues 49 through to 53 he took the word style and, issue by issue, converted into an abstract pattern of rectangles, circles, and semi-circles. This use of abstract typographic elements is similar to Lissitsky's use of the abstract to suggest words. In 1922 Lissitsky's cover for *Epople* uses the device of constructing an E with a semi-circle and a rectangular block. For his cover for *Rabbi* the word *Rabbi* is not printed in type but is made up from strong abstract shapes. I feel that Brody's best magazine work has benefited from his influence from the Constructivists. For example the double page spread featuring Tom Waits shows a great use of space, and abstract shapes. Brody has constructed a motif from the T and the W which has similarities when enlarged with the visual impact of Russian Typeface. Brody made extensive use of such symbols in his work.

"More particular to Brody's work is the use of primitive symbols" (William's, 1988, p36)

To my mind Brody's work in such spreads emulates the Constructivist's use of space and weight in balance but substituted abstract shapes for body text and photographs. Sometimes body text is weighted so that it makes up a solid looking block to balance against the large abstract letters and symbols e.g. the spread featuring Paul Weller. Here Brody has 3 main symbols on the page. A





Robert (see reported in 1988)  
LA in search of the latest  
republican Jim Moran, owner of  
the first and a broken down  
house.

Robert (see reported in 1988)  
LA in search of the latest  
republican Jim Moran, owner of  
the first and a broken down  
house.

12.

FIG. 12



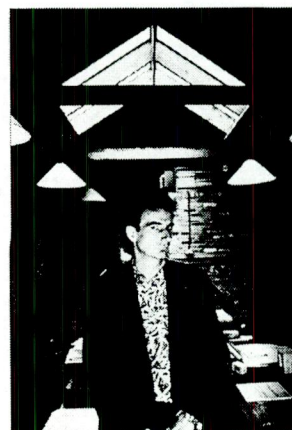
Can Paul Walker learn to stop  
screaming and face the world  
without a gun? (see 1988)  
and political implications?

13.

FIG. 13



HOW TO STAY  
IN BUSINESS  
AND NEVER  
GO OUT OF  
STYLE.  
In 1988, the world  
was a different place.



14.

33 FIG. 14



9.

FIG. 9

STYLE =  
 S + U L E  
 = + U L E  
 = : - = . - III

10.

FIG. 10



11.





circle with the word age inverted out of it, beside that condensed type with the word concern and body text underneath. The illusion is that there is a circle, a grey block and a black rectangle on the page. He again uses the technique in a spread featuring Paul Smith. In this case he has turned the word 'the' vertically and used a heavy typeface so that it reads as a block. this in turn is balanced by the use of type which he invented using circles and squares.

This is a standard device of the Constructivists. Titles become base geometric objects which are then juxtaposed with each other for dynamic effect. Surkov's cover for the Mayakovsky play the Bath House is a case in point. The title is set in bold type so that it becomes a solid rectangle, the authors name is set in a smaller, lighter typeface so that it visually becomes a lighter block of grey. These are set in balance to grid structure which makes up the cover.

The influence of the Constructivists can be clearly seen in Brody's designs for the Face magazine. For example, the early logo of the magazine consisted of a square divided into one black and one red triangle classical Constructivist treatment. The use of type, borders, typographic shapes on many of the double page spreads illustrate the connection. In a page featuring Mel Gibson in May 1983 Brody's use of type is, I feel, very reminiscent of the way El Lissitzky would organise a body of type. For example Lissitzky's front cover for ASNOVA has the body text organised so that it doesn't read as one boring column. He achieved this by breaking up the type with the use of large point sized letters, black borders, hanging indents, large bold dropped capitals.

Another cover in question is from May 1984. This has a pure yellow background with large blue and red type which creates a band under the background. This is very reminiscent of many of the Soviet posters. The type used is squat and blocky. The colours are more garish but it has the undoubted feel of a Constructivist work. Brody has also used the device of changing letters into symbols and then mixing the two. This also applied to his later work where he used more



90 Н.

В. МАЯКОВСКИЙ

Баня

1930

ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЕ ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО

15.

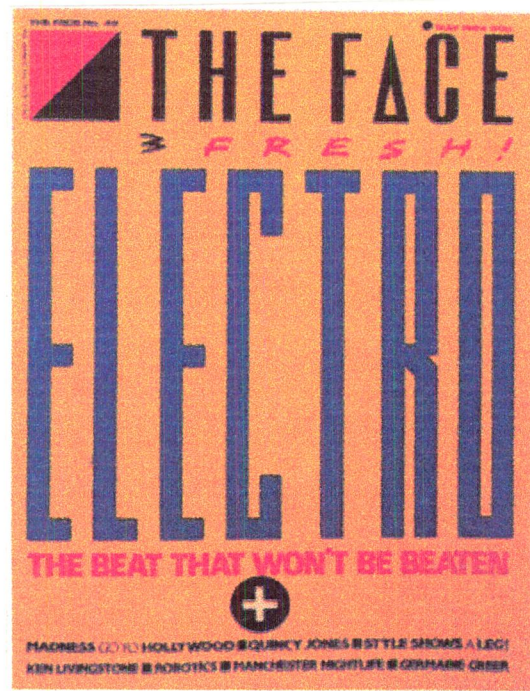
FIG. 15





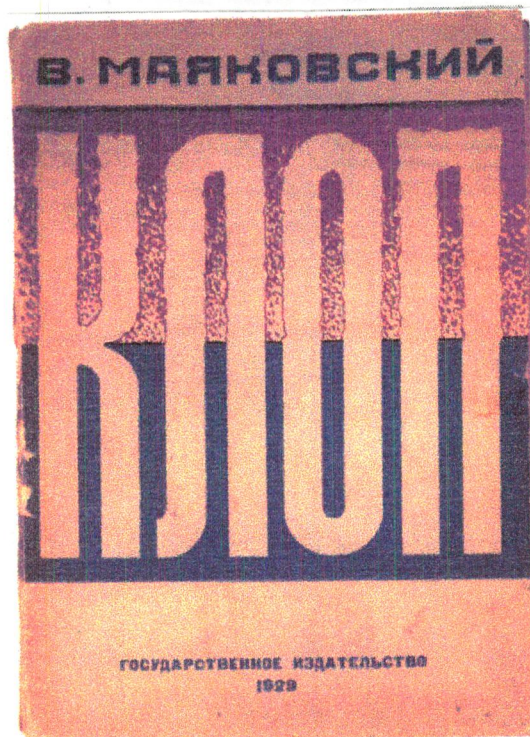
17.





18.

FIG. 18



19.

37 FIG. 19





ethnic symbols and where the large type mixed with shape is still used.

Brody has taken elements from the Constructivists techniques and used them not only in the Face, but in the New Socialist, Feminism & Class Politics, and City Limits. Large letters are underlined with thin black borders. Items can be read as points and the eye is free to follow the text down the page lead by heavy black type and black lines. Brody's infamous use of abstract shapes on many of the editorial pages in the Face e.g. Contents ( which was gradually reduced into symbols) can clearly be seen to have been inspired by El Lissitsky's covers from Mayaksvskys book 'Khorosho' 1928, and Rodchenko's 1923 cover for LEF. This latter work contains a solid looking square symbol used in a Face spread of September 1983. The general blockiness of Brody's designs clearly owes much to Russian design. I feel that the Constructivist influence on Brody's design reached its climax between 1983 and 1984. It is possible to see in some of the style spreads from that period a more inventive use of space and typography from Brody. In a spread dating April 1984 the use of type and typographic arrows shows the closest resemblance to the design of El Lissitsky's *For the Voice* 1923. The first thing your eye catches in Brody's spread is the bold oversized O and the grey 2 above it. This type configuration itself is very similar to Lissitsky's arrangement in the 'Be kind to Horses' pages of *For the Voice*..

Some comparisons are so marked that if the colours were changed slightly and the typeface was in English they would look perfectly in place in editions of the Face from '82 to '86. This raises the question of whether Constructivists design was so advanced that it remains ageless, or whether this familiarity results rather from the fact that designers in the '80's such as Brody, in deriving work from the Constructivists , reintroduced the graphic language first developed in the '20's. Is there a problem in the fact that the style has been borrowed but separated from the political beliefs that gave rise to it?. Brody himself discussed this in an interview. " If you look at some of Rodchenko's paintings you'll see that he anticipated abstract expressionism by a good 50 or 60 years. Its so abstract,some of his colour field work. Its completely apolitical. Rodchenko was more about Humanism than about Communism"





**20.**

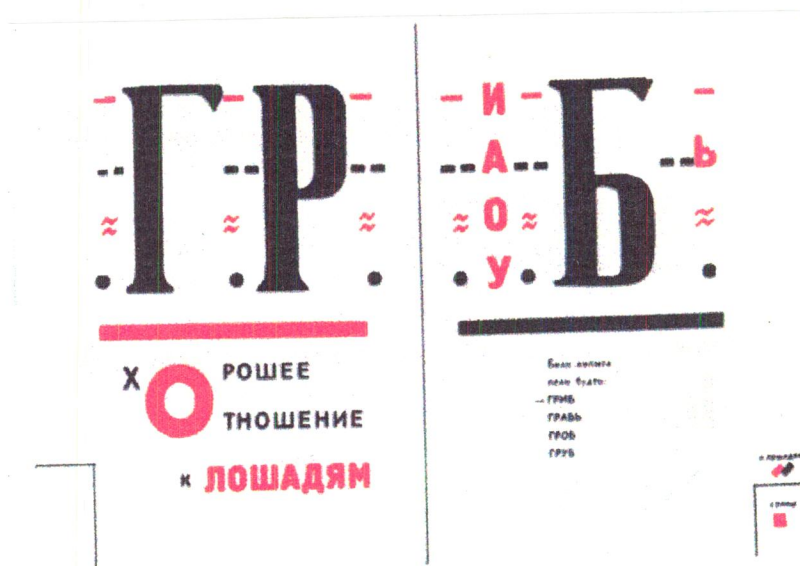
FIG. 20





21.

FIG. 21



22.

FIG. 22





Communism in the '20's was about Humanism. They were supporting a Government which they felt was supporting the people of Russia. Their graphics were political for the very reason that their politics were Humanist. Brody suggested that he was merely taking style from the Constructivists designs. Did he miss out on much of the content in these Constructivist designs?.

I am impressed especially with the thought processes he brings to design in issues of February and March 1985. In February a spread featuring Madonna contains a large M in white on a black block on the left hand page. For the next issue the M was turned upside-down for a spread on Andy Warhole but the upturned M retains a photo of Madonna which is bleeding off the page. This was to highlight Warhol's use of reusables. I think that this is real innovation in graphic design.

When I began this thesis I was slightly critical of some of Brody's work in the Face. I understood his design analysis stating that every piece of design in the Face had been rationalised. I drew similarities between this design thinking and that of the Constructivists. I was disappointed therefore to find examples in the Face where design serves no other purpose but to "give emphasis to an otherwise flat page"(Wozencroft, 1988, p109)

I felt that by doing this Brody was losing much of the thought and dynamism featured in work such as the Madonna/ Warhole spread. I have since learned that El Lissitzky often used abstract forms for no other reason but to create a balance between abstract forms. An example being his cover for Object which contains a circle with no other objective but to balance a strong diagonal grid.

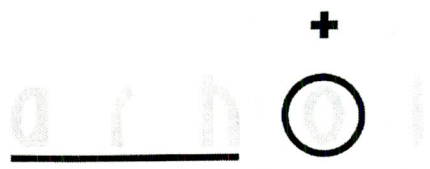
I am however still critical of some of his client based work. I feel that his disastrous CND project raises questions about Brody's ability to work within the boundaries of a clients brief. The majority of commercial design work which he produced leads you to believe that the Brody style was more important to him than the wishes of the client. An example being a logo created for Bloomingdale's year of the Dragon promotion in 1988. It is immediately recognisable as a Brody design. The futuristic type coupled with the flat geometric dragon logo makes the design instantly recognisable. This very point was picked up upon in I.D. interview.

"his work may also be seen as just another

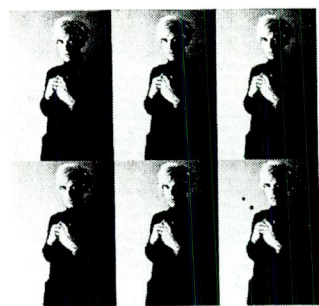




There's nothing more... reading my books... I don't think I...  
 I don't think I... reading my books... I don't think I...  
 I don't think I... reading my books... I don't think I...

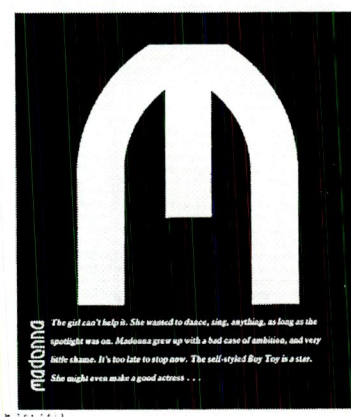


THE TRUE  
INTERVIEW



23.

FIG. 23



The girl can't help it. She wanted to dance, sing, anything, as long as the  
 spotlight was on. Madonna grew up with a bad case of ambition, and very  
 little shame. It's too late to stop now. The self-styled *Boy Toy* is a star.  
 She might even make a good actress...



# THE glamorous life

Madonna's first...  
 Madonna's first...  
 Madonna's first...

24.

FIG. 24



**25.**

**FIG. 25**



**26.**

**FIG. 26**



Handwritten symbols arranged in two vertical columns. The right column contains symbols resembling 'D', 'C', '4', 'D', 'O', and 'C'. The left column contains symbols resembling 'J', 'W', 'C', 'O', '4', 'J', and 'C'.



**27.**

**FIG. 27**



victim of the design- as- fashion process, like most everything else. And, considering his distinctive personal style, it's sometimes hard to believe that his 'solution' to a design problem is anything but Brody imposing his look"

(William's, 1988, p34)

## 6. Conclusions:

What then are my conclusions having gone to the trouble to investigate this subject? First of all I am satisfied that the Constructivists have been a major influence of Brody and through him many other graphic designers in the 80's. Time will tell whether Brody's influence will have an impact as far into the future as the Constructivists have had. Personally I doubt whether it will. For one thing Brody, though a gifted and committed designer, is after all a single individual.

The Constructivist movement by comparison was widespread in its era and it embraced many of the Arts as well as many artists. The patronage given by government at the time undoubtedly assisted in spreading the influence of the Constructivists in Russia and beyond. Their approach was as truly revolutionary in artistic terms as the revolution itself was in social and political terms.

Their approach was rooted in solid theory of design, not based on eclectic use of borrowed forms as Brody has done, and accused others of doing to him. In my opinion the Constructivists, by virtue of having such a solid body of work, may well continue to directly influence graphics when Brody has been forgotten. One of the difficulties faced by designers today is that the technology now available makes it possible to scan, reproduce, distort, rearrange, mirror, or overlay virtually any image. This is in danger of resulting in facile, undisciplined, and overwrought graphics.

The clean, vigorous, disciplined, approach of the Constructivists could, if studied, help to act as a counterbalance to this danger. Their graphics may seem primitive in some ways today but they have the raw energy necessary to make a strong visual impact.

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