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Faculty: Design

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**Expressive Typography**  
**The Art of Non-communication**

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1918

Thermodynamics

1918

# con tents

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# Introduction

The role of typography in modern visual communication is changing both in the way it is perceived by the audience and in the way designers use it to convey the message.

The Modernist schools of teaching, which were the standard for the best part of this century, composed orderly, well tempered messages, supposedly objective generally using sans serif letterforms. But in the last 20 years a new generation of Typographers have been reacting against this cold neutrality, experimenting with the idea that type can also carry an emotional impact which effects how the verbal message is read and so personalising it. This to the Modernists defeats the whole purpose of typography, which to them is to permit only a single authorised reading. However, the new generation aim to promote multiple rather tan fixed readings, to provoke the reader into becoming an active participant in the construction of the message.

This thesis looks at the debate on the role of typography in communication. Also, it will concentrate on how the new generation of designers answer their modernist critics. This will be done by concentration on the work of two of the most influential exponents of this new approach, Neville Brody and David Carson. It will be looking at the backgrounds influences and their most important work. The reason for choosing them is because their work answers the critics better than anyone else.

Neville Brody is widely regarded as the designer of the 'eighties mainly for his ground breaking work on The Face magazine, which almost single handedly changed typographic form, a basic means of communication to a means of self expression. Later his pioneering work on the macintosh computer, with such projects as Fuse, has made him one of the worlds most influential expressive typographers.

If Brody was the designer of the 'eighties, then David Carson has to be the designer of the 'nineties, having designed and art directed Beach culture and RayGun, two of the decades most influential periodicals. Both of which have won numerous awards for their challenging typography and layout. He has provided a huge number of young designers with a whole new way of looking at type.

Some of the questions that arise when dealing with expressive typography in relation to the role of new technology in its origins and also, should legibility be mandatory in typography or can type be used to evoke emotion. Is the way the messages are conveyed changing? Is the role of typography changing from a means of communicating verbal information to a means of self expression?

Most of the material available on this subject has come from articles in design periodicals. This is well documented subject as there was a huge amount of information there. In the case of Brody and Carson again a lot of information came from periodicals but also from biographies.

# tradition Vs expression

Modern expressive typography has come in for a lot of criticism from modernist designers, this has given rise to much debate especially in relation to legibility, also raised questions about the part the desk top computer plays in the development of modern design.

It is true that a lot of the new expressive typography has been made possible because of the developments of the desktop computer, font design software and page make up programmes. These have afforded type a fluidity of physical form, ease of manipulation and an apparent lack of boundaries which seemed unimaginable fifteen years ago. That is not to say that it is purely a result of this technology. I feel that the desktop computer has offered the world of design and typography many possibilities and has introduced new perspectives on typography, but because they are so readily available and so easy to use, they have removed typography from the exclusive domain of the specialist and placed it in the hands of ordinary designers, which has led to a lot of low standard work being produced. However, it would be wrong to blame the technology for reducing standards across the board, as some commentators for traditional aesthetics have done. History has shown, that over the past two hundred years, each time there has been new technology introduced there has been a similar drop in the quality of the typography produced. Though in each case, when designers begin to take more interest in the new methods they start to demand more from them and so in the long run standards improve. Though, there is a lot of work being produced with its origins in the new technology. There is also a large group of designers who had consolidated their ideas before digital technology became available and when it did, it was seen as a new medium through which they could express their ideas and not a source for them. The works of both Neville Brody and David Carson are good examples of this but there are many good examples of designers who's work has developed



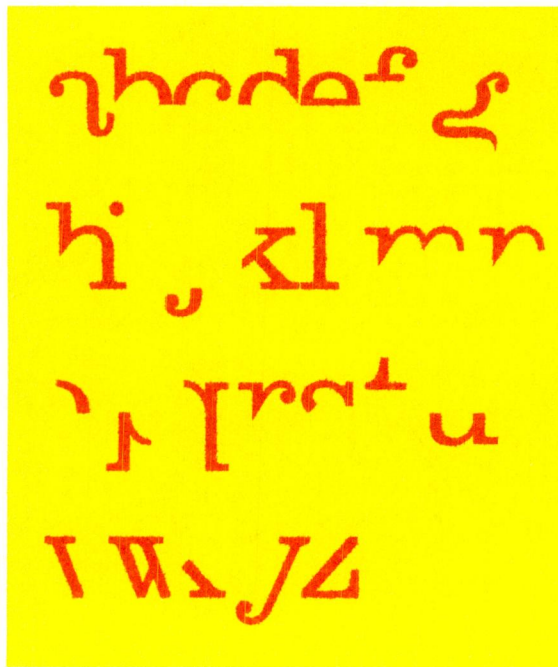


Fig 1

in this way, among them is Phil Baines, who was at college experimenting with letterpress and the boundaries of legibility when the desktop computer became available. When a couple of years later he started to work on a computer he continued where he left off with the letterpress the only difference being computers gave him more freedom. One of the best examples of this digital experimentation is his typeface for the **Fuse** project **Can You...?** (fig 1) which was an attempt to reduce each letter of the alphabet to the bare minimum needed to recognise it.

Typography in the digital era is quirky, personal and expressive. The modernists who permit only a single authorised reading are rejected as being too corporate, limiting and rigid, as though typographic diversity might have a detrimental effect on the message and that the possibility of multiple readings might confuse the reader. This might be so. But the aim of many designers is to promote multiple rather than fixed readings to provoke the reader into becoming an active participant in the construction of the message, and so get something out of it, other than the verbal meaning. Jeffery Keedy is of the opinion that

*"If someone interprets my work in a way that is totally new to me, I say fine,"*

(Poynor, Rick, *Typography Now the Next Wave*, London, Booth-Cliddorn, 1991)

During the 40's modernist designers started to develop a global design system. They put forward a set of guidelines which greatly limited the number of options available to a designer, in order to ensure a design communicated its message quickly and clearly without ambiguity. One of the guidelines which related to typography recommended the use of a very limited number of sans serif typefaces. For example Massimo Vignelli claims to have only ever used six typefaces in his career. New typographers on the other hand seem to

relish ambiguity, preferring to delay the punchlines. David Carson is of the point of view that if it takes a reader a little while to understand a message they won't forget it quite so quickly. Many of the new typographers create this ambiguity in their work by creating their own typefaces for specific jobs. Designers such as Rudy Vanderlans of **Emigre** in America and Brody in Europe use such typefaces to ensure that their work carries their own specific identity and tone. Barry Deck who has worked with **Emigre** gives this as his reason for designing his own typefaces:

*"Whenever I start a new job and try to pick a typeface none of the typefaces give me the voice I need. They just don't relate to my experiences in my life. They're about somebody else's experiences, which don't belong to me,"*

He goes on to say,

*"I am really interested in type that isn't perfect.....Type that reflects more truly the imperfect language of an imperfect world inhabited by imperfect beings,"*

(Poynor, Rick, *Typography Now the Next Wave*, London, Booth-Cliddorn, 1991)

Deck's typeface **Template Gothic** is based on an old sign he found in a laundret and is his attempt to recreate the spirit of crude lettering templates.



Fig 2

As well as those who investigated the possibilities of the computer comes another group who use hand made and ready made type. Designers such as Barry Deck and Edward Fella find great value in hand drawn and mechanical type for their impurities and flaws.

Edward Fella is the best example of this crude typographic style, after years of working as an illustrator and commercial



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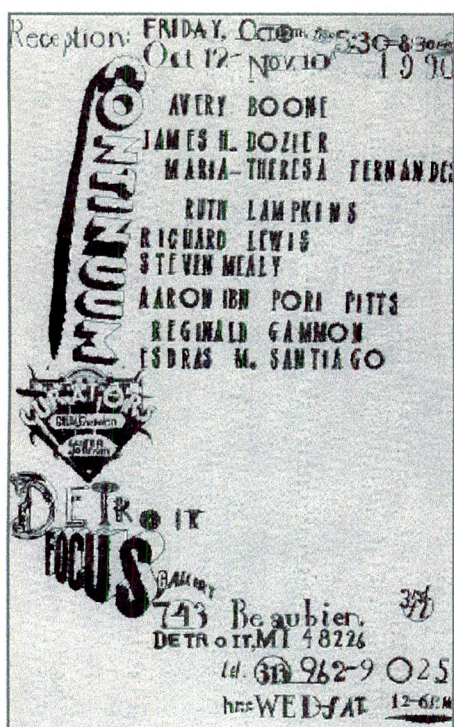


Fig 3

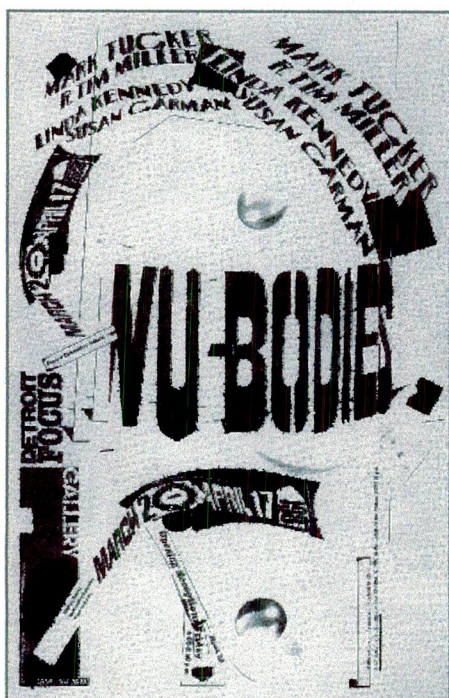


Fig 4

artist, he went to study graphic design at Cranbrook Academy of Art where he got very interested in typography and type design. He decided that type was the way he wanted his work to go. At first a lot of his typography was hand drawn and had a very illustrative style as can be seen in a poster for an exhibition at the Focus Gallery in Detroit (fig 3). Its crudely rendered type seems to meander across the page among doodles and scribbled marks, It seems to break every rule of typography and aesthetics. Even when using computer generated type his distinctive 'dirty' style shows through very strongly as in figure 4, another poster for the Focus Gallery. All his work, be it hand drawn or computer generated is extremely expressive and has a very distinctive style.

Cranbrook Academy of Art, in Detroit at the moment, is the source of many of the most innovative and interesting developments in typography. The head of the design department Katherine McCoy has been there for the last 25 years and in that time she has employed a very innovative and expressive form of teaching. Cranbrook is at the forefront of exploring the deconstruction of type and the layering of its elements to manipulate visual language to elicit different meanings. The result is a direct challenge to the audience, which must learn to read these layered image/type constructions.

The questions of legibility and personal expression that preoccupy the new typographers become for more acute when the aim is to hold the readers attention over a long piece of text. Questions arise: are the new fonts suitable for anything other than display? Or, is it time to re-examine the accepted differences between typefaces for text and headline?

To the modernists the first function of type is the conveying of verbal information and they feel that nothing should get in



the way of this. If there is one characteristic that links many of the new expressive typographers it is their combined assault on this the most important aspect of typography.

Modernists argue that type must remain neutral and orderly to convey the verbal information of the text. This is in their eyes the sole purpose of typography and they achieve this using inexpressive sanserif letterforms. Typographers who prefer a personalised expressive approach react against this cold neutrality. Phil Baines is of the opinion that;

*"Legibility, presents information as fact rather than experience"*

(Poynor, Rick, *Typography Now the Next Wave*, London, Booth-Cliddorn, 1991)

There is nothing wrong with logic and linearity, he argues, but these qualities satisfy only the rational side of the brain. And for him and his colleagues it is equally important that typography should stimulate the senses as well as engaging the intellect.

The question of legibility and personal expression that preoccupies the new typographers becomes far more acute when the aim is to hold the viewers attention over a long piece of text. Legibility is the clear conveying of the content through clarity of text. A lot of new typographers feel that if the type is conveying a message on another level which reduces legibility but conveys an appropriate non-literal message as well, the loss of legibility is being compensated for and if it takes the reader longer to read it, he or she has a better chance of remembering it.

All typefaces must obey these two rules firstly, each letterform must show enough formal contrast to allow efficient recognition of the individual characters. Secondly, they must show sufficient formal harmony to allow easy eye travel. If a typeface obeys these rules with practice any

typeface can be legible. In the words of Zuzanna Licko of  
**Emigre**

*"It is the readers familiarity with a typeface that  
accounts for its legibility".*

(Poynor, Rick, *Typography Now the Next Wave*, London, Booth-Cliddorn, 1991)

For example, we might find it impossible to read Black letter  
(fig 5) with ease today but in pre-war Germany it was the  
dominant letterform. And Baskerville (fig 6), rejected in 1757  
as ugly and unreadable, is now regarded as one of the most  
serviceable typefaces available for long body copy.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Fig 5

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Fig 6

# Punk Paint Surfer

Neville Brody and David Carson have had a huge influence on graphic design in the 'eighties and 'nineties mainly through their art direction of **The Face** and **RayGun** respectively. Between them they've had a great deal to do with the growth in popularity of modern expressive typography as a means of communication, but what is it about them that makes their contribution so important? To answer this it is important to go back before **The Face** and **RayGun** to look at how their ideas were formed, through their backgrounds, education, influences and early work. Brody came to graphic design having always wanted to be a fine artist.

*"I don't remember a time in my life when I was going to do something else. Ever since I had any self awareness I've wanted to do art or painting."*

(Wozencroft, Jon, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988)

When he started to pursue that direction at the Hornsey College of Art where he was doing a one year foundation, he found the fine art mentality to be to elitist, only catering for a small gallery market. He wanted to create a popular art form that would communicate with as many people as possible which, in his opinion, fine art wasn't doing. So he decided graphic design would offer him much better possibilities. He thought, why not take a "painterly approach" to a print medium?

At the age of twenty Carson was a professional surfer, with a top rank of eight in the world. By the age of twenty-six he was working as a sociology teacher, while at the same time running his own surf shop, and this was when he caught the graphic design bug. He chanced upon a flier for a two week summer workshop at the University of Arizona and from that point on he devoted all his time to graphic design. In his own words,

*"I just became so fascinated with the look and feel*



*of the subject. I became somewhat obsessed, with a bit of tunnel vision that cost me a relationship and even my health from time to time."*

(Blackwell, Lewis, *The End of Print*, London, Laurence King, 1995)

Later he enrolled in a three year degree at San Diego State University in the Design School, transferring after one month to Oregon College of Commercial Art. Carson was never interested in the rules and the technical end of graphic design; he was more interested in taking a more intuitive abstract approach. So when a job as a junior at Surfer Publications came along he took it not even having completed his first year of college.

*"I'm drawn to abstract art. Sometimes I think I'm just painting with type and image."*

(Blackwell, Lewis, *The End of Print*, London, Laurence King, 1995)

When it came to choosing a college after his Hornsey foundation year, Brody went for what at the time was considered to be the most traditional and purist graphic design school in Europe, the London College of Printing (LCP). In 1976 he started a 3 year BA. Brody's work was very different to the other students' work and the lecturers preferring the safe economic solution, condemned it calling it too uncommercial. But he wasn't put off. At that time the biggest influence on London life and Brody was Punk Rock. It gave him the confidence and enthusiasm to take his design as far as he could, far beyond what he was being taught.

*"The LCP gave me nothing but grief. Punk hit me fast, and gave me the confidence I needed."*

(Wozencroft, Jon, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988)

What punk was about was youth rebellion. It was a reaction against the system, and due to the LCP's traditional reputation Brody felt he was in the perfect position to do this. He felt that to react against something you had first to learn about it totally.

While at college Brody got to design posters for student concerts and on leaving college, he felt that music was just as valid a showcase for his work as the framed environment of art galleries. It would offer him the chance to continue the experimentation he has started while in college. He spent the best part of two years working first for Rocking Russia design company run by Al McDonnell and subsequently for Stiff Records, which introduced how the commercial aspirations of a company could overshadow his creativity. He wasn't entirely happy with his situation at Stiff. Then when through a band called 23 Skidoo he met Rod Pearce who had just signed the band to his new independent record label called Fetish Records, Brody jumped at the chance to become the labels art director.



fig 7

When working with Fetish, Brody was given total creative freedom with the only limitation being budget. It gave him the chance to continue what he had started in college and to consolidate his ideas. The work he was doing with Fetish had a very primitive feel and an earthy quality which was in stark contrast to the very stylistic corporate graphics at the record companies. The work he was doing with Fetish had a very primitive feel and an earthy quality which was in stark contrast to the every stylistic corporate graphics of major record companies. The work was a gut reaction to the music and it also represents his reaction to the commercial market place which presented music in a very sterile way (most record covers at the time consisted of a photograph of the band and a title). Brody wanted to develop his own idea of tribalism which was apparent in music at the time, he was

reintroducing human markings into the visual environment. As he felt that would get more of a reaction from the audience figure 7 show three examples of covers done at this time.



The work had a very illustrative, fine art approach with the type being very much secondary to the image. This can be said of all Brody's work at the time and was due to his hatred of type. He was frustrated by typography because he was falling into the trap of treating type in the same way as everyone else, which went against everything he felt and stood for as a designer. He felt type was too structured and traditional, not susceptible to change and experimentation.



fig 8



fig 9

When you look at Brody's work in the couple of years before he started to work on **The Face** you may think it was done by a different designer. This was mainly due to his use of type on these early record covers. If you look at the work he did for Fetish Records, which are probably some of the best examples of his work at that time, the image is the dominant element and the type is very much a secondary element. This was due, as was mentioned earlier, to this hatred of type. But saying that there are also some good examples of creative use of hand-done type on some of these records figures 8 and 9 shows the 23 Skidoo records "The Gospel comes to New Guinea" and "Lost Words" where the bands name is constructed like an abstract series of symbols. The name isn't instantly recognisable but the more you look at it the more simply recognised it is. It makes very little sense as words but it did create quite an effective logo. Where I think he failed with the type on these covers is that they look like the image and the logo are treated as separate elements and the integration of the two was not considered in the early stages, almost as if type was very much a secondary element and an after thought.

When Carson started work for Surfer Publication as a junior in '82 he didn't have much design experience nor did he have any idea of how to put a magazine together. However, he



learned on the job and by '89 he had gotten the job as art director of **Beach Culture**, a sister magazine to Surfer. This is when Carson really started to make his presence felt in the design world. What he did with **Beach Culture** was to wreak havoc with typography. Using no apparent grid system and taking outrageous liberties with headlines, the reader had to decipher the message. A lot of people complained that they just could not read it, which didn't bother Carson. He justified what he was doing by saying the people that couldn't read it were not "his audience". The magazine was aimed at a specific age group who had grown up with MTV and were more visually aware and would appreciate the experimentation. The magazine was widely discussed and a lot of people didn't know what to make of it. But in a two year period **Beach Culture** won over one hundred and fifty design awards. But despite of all its successes, **Beach Culture** was business failure and folded in 1991.



fig 10

From day one Carson had very little regard for the established rules of typography. In **Beach Culture** he took huge liberties with headlines in many cases making them practically indecipherable. There was no apparent structure to the magazine, with each spread being

treated as a separate piece. Figure 10 shows a double page spread from an article entitled "The Last Hold Out", which was property feature. The t and h of the word "the" are drawn on their side in bold black form to create the impression of a house with a door and windows. The letter e looks like it is standing in the doorway with the rest of headline very small, reversed out of the bottom of the letter h.



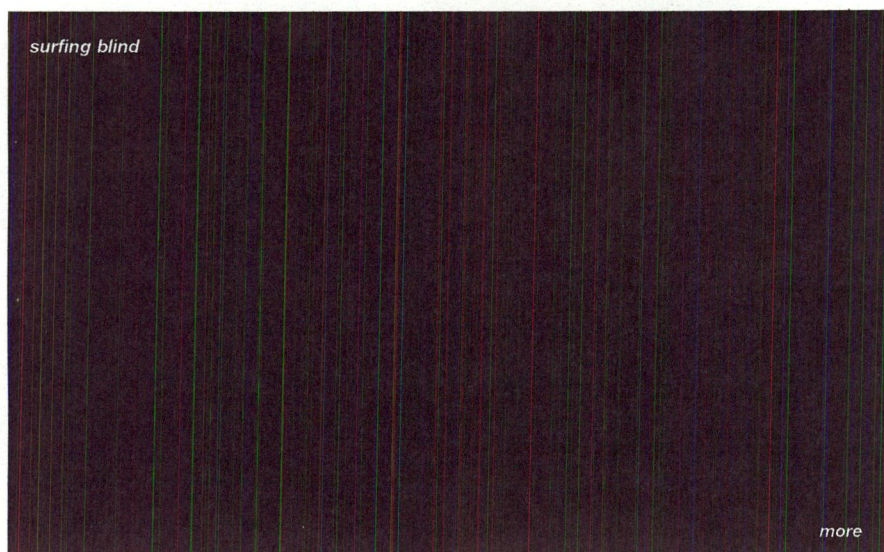


fig 11

The second example shown (fig 11) is one of Carson's most widely acclaimed spreads. It is titled "surfing blind" and is a feature on a person who teaches blind people to surf. The spread is very bold and was intended to shock and confuse the reader. The spread when first opened appears completely

black, with only a very small headline appearing in the top lefthand corner of the page, which is very uncharacteristic of Carson's work. Directly opposite the headline in the bottom right is the word "more" which indicates that it is the start of an article. But when the page is turned the article isn't there. Instead the it appears much later in the magazine. The spread works extremely well in that it confuses and disorientsates the



fig 12

reader and, along with the total darkness of the spread, it evokes images of surfing blind much better than any photograph or illustration. Figure 12 "Hanging at Carmine St" along with the two previous examples show **Beach Culture** spreads all of which are very different from each other, which was

the intention of Beach culture, the design of each spread related directly to the piece and not in any way to the overall look of the magazine. Its is because Carson never used a grid system when working on **Beach Culture** he had complete freedom when working on a piece. Each spread was well thoughtout and related extremely well to the content of the text.



Although Brody and Carson have very different education backgrounds and there work is very different style wise.

There are similarities that can be drawn between them, mainly in there approach to a piece. Because Carson is lacking a formal education he has never really been influenced by the conventions of graphic design and their restrictions, he never considered what he was doing in terms of the accepted standards, instead what he was doing was his personal response to a piece. In stark contrast, Brody received a very traditional design education at the LCP but even so his major influence wasn't his education but the Punk movement which helped him challenge and reject what he was being thought. He wanted to create a new way of approaching his work which was personal to him.

Both Brody and Carson were striving to put forward a new means of communication through very personal expressive work. They were doing this in very different ways, Brody mainly through illustration and photography, Carson through typography. Another differance is that all Brody's work was done a few years before Carson's desktop computer weren't avabile, while a great deal of Carson's work was produced using computers. It is because of this that is very difficult to compare their early work as the differences are so great, it is not until Brody started to work on magazines that comparisons can be drawn.

# the bibles of style

The medium of the magazine has over the past forty years become a showcase for new and innovative ideas on typography from **Esquire** in the 'fifties, art directed by Henry Wolf to **ID** in the late 'seventies art directed by Terry Jones. Modern expressive typography is no exception, with **The Face** and **RayGun** being two of the most important publications from the point of view of putting forward new ideas on the use of typography, not only in the context of a magazine but in graphic design in general, the following is an account of how each of these magazines was put together in relation to layout, structure, use of imagery and, most importantly, use of typography.

## The Face

When Brody started work at **The Face** he had never worked on a magazine before, but he had a very definite idea of how he wanted it to look. He was looking to create a magazine that was visually interesting, but also had a fluidity through type and image, page to page and from one article to the next. He wanted **The Face** to question the traditional structure of magazine design. Magazines at that time were generally laid out a lot like newspapers and Brody felt there was no need for this. He felt he could apply the same level of creativity to a magazine as he did to his record covers. He wanted his magazine to be visually interesting, to invite that viewer to read it. When designing **The Face** Brody wanted to suggest three things:

*"Firstly, how much of a headline do you need to be able to recognise it? Secondly, I wanted to give the idea that with each spread of The Face there was an infinite choice, and what we had done was to select out one small part of that, and lastly, I wanted to use the three dimensional space of the magazine."*

(Wozencroft, Jon, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988)

What Brody ment by the three dimensional space of the

magazine has to do with the idea of a magazine as an interactive object where the reader is in control and, has the power to go straight from page five to page fifty if they want, there has to be some visual connection between all the pages, an identity. A lot of factors went into the creation of identity for **The Face**. All aspects of the magazine were considered; type, image, white space, and they were all given equal importance in the creation of a flowing, easy to read and visually beautiful magazine.

When it came to choosing a format for **The Face**, Brody choose three column and two column grids as a sound structure to enable him to experiment on subsequent layers and still keep some continuity throughout the layouts. The exception to this was the introduction to an article/feature which needed to be more flexible. But even these pages were based on the grid to a certain extent.

When designing an article Brody looked on the opening spread as an entrance and he wanted that entrance to be as inviting and visually interesting as possible and this was achieved through a number of means. Firstly, he kept the amount of body copy on the opening spread down to a minimum. In some cases there would be none at all and only the headline and/or an image would appear on the first double page spread. There would generally also be large amounts of white space to invite the reader gently into the body copy.

**The Face** has a very distinctive and quite unusual policy when it came to commissioning photographers for an article. They were never art directed; instead they were given a free hand, apart from a briefing before hand. Brody felt this would achieve much more adventurous results. He felt if he interfered with the photography, the design would be



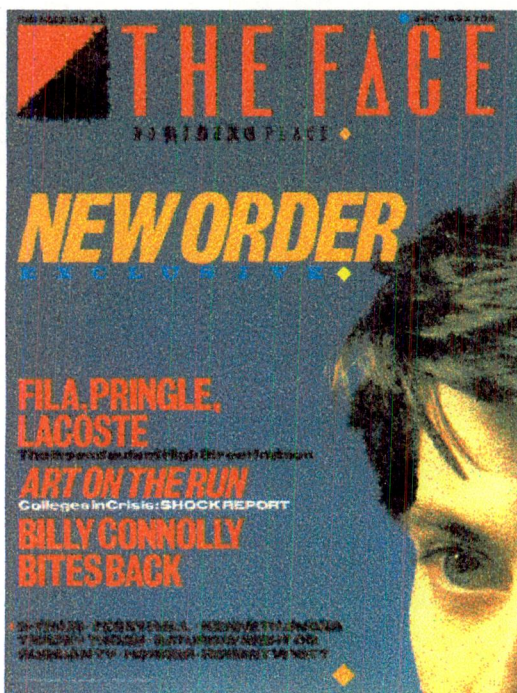


fig 13

overstepping its mark. The photography sometimes inspired the design and the spread was laid out around it. In other cases radicle cropping of photographs was used to create a certain feel, as in the cover of **The Face** No 36, July 1983 (fig 13). It was thought by the editor that the band New Order were not recognisable enough to be cover stars. Brody felt a new approach was needed so he gave the photo of the band's singer a radicle crop which was helped by the use of very large italic type to give the cover maximum impact. The cover was subsequently chosen as cover of the year in the magazine publishing awards.

Another good example of Brody's use of photography is the opening spread for an article entitled "**The Face** review of 1985" (fig 14). The editor came up with idea of using a picture of Madonna to sum up that year. So Brody cropped the picture to isolate just enough of her features so as she would remain recognisable. The photo was blown up to the

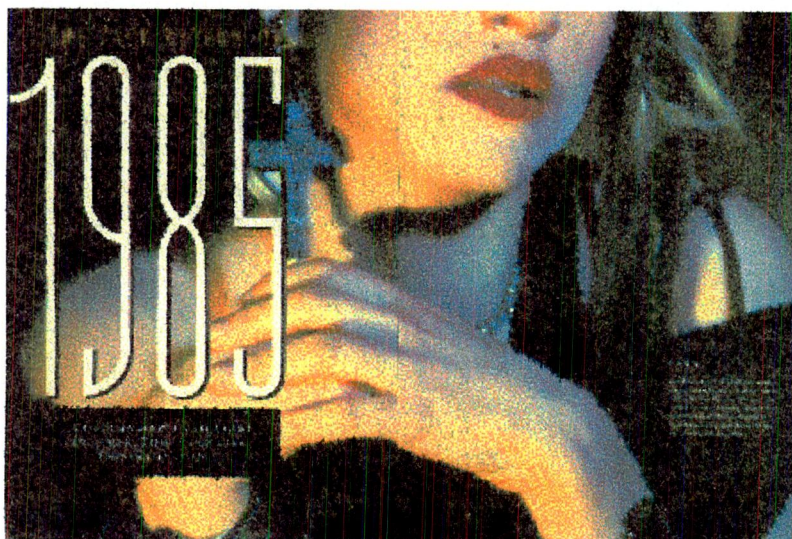


fig 14

full size of the double page spread to give it maximum impact. This is a good example of the photograph influencing the design of the spread.

Brody also had very definite ideas about the type in **The Face**. He felt established headline typefaces didn't say what he wanted them too; he felt they were too limiting.

*"If you want to design something, no matter how good or how different your ideas are, the typeface has been designed by someone else. People think there is a lot of choice, but in a way there isn't. It leads to what I call the typesetting supermarket. You get a job, and the first thing you do is you go around with your trolley and choose a couple of typefaces*



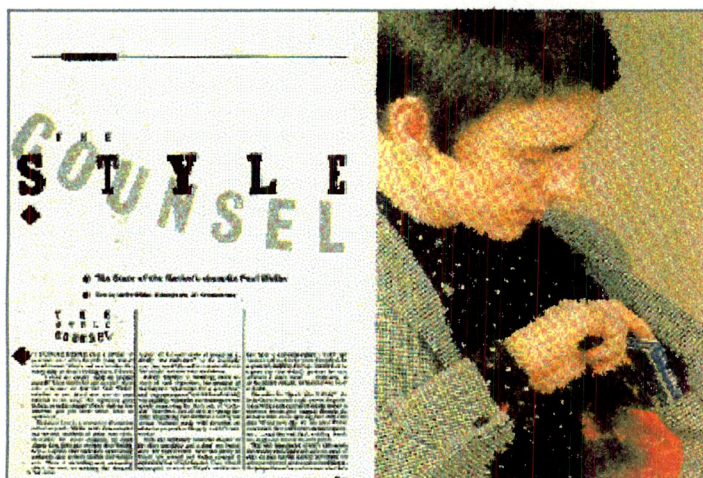


fig 15

designers used. Two 1993 examples of Brody's mixing of typefaces are "The Style Council" (fig 15), and "Europe" (fig



fig 16

Weller; it is not about the band but instead is a fashion piece. In the second example the most notable element is the small Europe heading at the top of the page. The letter "E" isn't a letterform; it is more like the primitive symbols of Brody's early work, and it marks the beginning of Brody's experimentation with creating his own letterforms. Pretty soon after this almost all headlines in **The Face** were Brody's own typefaces/letterforms.

When Brody approached designing his own type for **The Face** he took his inspiration from the '20s and '30s especially the Constructivists and he did this for a couple of reasons. Firstly, Brody felt that this earlier period had a lot in common

and build your structure around that. I prefer to build the structure, and then that defines the typefaces. In some cases it defines a typeface which doesn't exist"

(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, *Creative Review*, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)

So in early issues what he did was combine exiting typefaces to make his headlines which is a technique a lot of the punk





fig 17

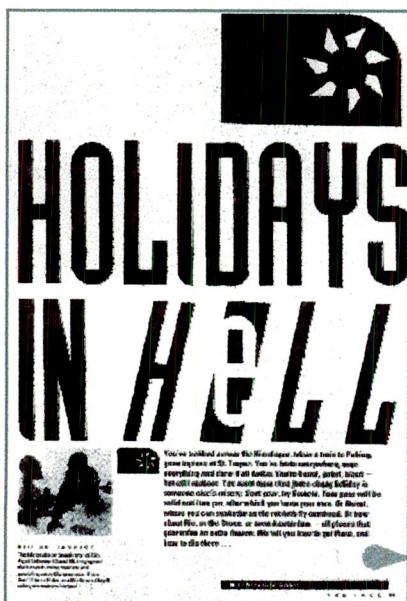


fig 18



fig 19



fig 20

with the 'eighties (eg economic recession and a totalitarian government) and he wanted to say that through **The Face**. He also felt the spirit of the Constructivist graphic designers was the same as his. They were looking for a new means of communication and that is exactly what Brody was trying to do with **The Face**. He was trying to draw a parallel between the 1930s and the 1980s. Figure 17 shows "Typeface 2" which was designed for **The Face** and used from issue 50 onwards. Brody felt that the geometric quality of the typeface was authoritarian but also this geometry allowed for flexible and playful application. Figure 18 is Typeface 2 as a headline in **The Face**. Notice how the Roman letter E is reversed out the block to make it look italic, which is also used to emphasise a hidden world which the article deals with. This typeface was very versatile and was used quite widely through the magazine in a lot of different ways (figure 19). This typeface was later digitally redrawn and called Industria. It has become one of Brody's best known typefaces to date. Figure x shows Typeface 6 which was first used in **The Face** issue 73. It is based on squares and circles, further developing the idea of using a geometric base. The new logo for **The Face** (fig 20) was designed using Typeface 6 reversed out of a block which was used as a band across the top of the cover so as not to interfere with the image and also to give good shelf impact.

## RayGun

David Carson had been working in magazines for quite a while and when he started work on **RayGun** he knew exactly what he wanted to do with it.

**RayGun** was to be the music and fashion magazine of the 'nineties, and so was to be very style orientated, which suited Carson. He saw it as a vehicle to take the experimental styles of **Beach Culture** to next level.



**RayGun** was launched in November 1982 by Santa Monica publisher Marvin Jarret and almost immediately it became a huge talking point, not for its content but for its radical design. Carson was described by some as a master of typography and by others at the king of non-communication (for his challenging attitude and approach to his work). He was also criticised for the lack of legibility in his text and the apparent lack of any continuity or structure to his magazine.

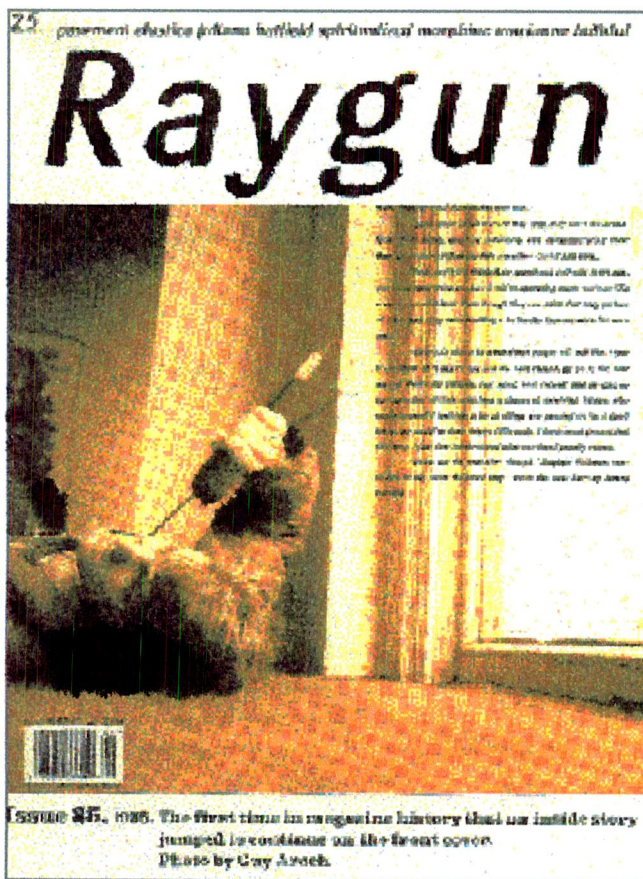


fig 21

When designing **RayGun**, Carson decided he didn't want any set structure or grid system. He wanted each spread to be a clean canvas onto which he could apply type and image with the only restriction being the edge of the pages. Also, he didn't have the pages numbered because he felt nobody picks up a magazine and reads it from start to finish; instead they flick through and jump from article to article as they wish. Figure 21 shows an issue of **RayGun** where an article jumps from the middle of the magazine to the front cover and then back inside again with no indication given to help the reader. Carson got a lot of criticism for his work at the time for **RayGun**, but he didn't mind it. He just dismissed it, saying, that those people are not his audience.

*"MTV has been going for 12 years. There are people out there who have been watching MTV from 10 to 22 years old. Their visual orientation has changed and it's crazy not to address that."*

He goes on to say,

*"You can't get an 18 year old to jump into a grey page of type anymore no matter how well its written."*

*(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, Creative Review, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)*

He justified what he was doing by pointing out that, because

young people are so visually aware they need to be challenged when reading a magazine and when they have to decipher a message it makes it more memorable for them.

**RayGun** opened the way for some extremely free work by major and also upcoming illustrators through the sound in print section. This was where six to eight pages of each issue were given over to illustrations of song lyrics, some of which were commissioned and others which were sent in by readers. This to a certain extent made **RayGun** a popular fine art magazine, of sorts.

The typography in **RayGun** is what Carson is best known for and it is also the most controversial area of the magazine. In **Beach Culture** Carson did a lot of experimentation with headline and image, but in **RayGun** he started to experiment with the before untouched area of bodycopy. It was layered doodled over allowed to flow of the page and set at bazaar angles sometimes upside down, which in many cases made it quite a challenge to read it.

Headlines were in many cases distorted so much that in many cases they were completely illegible but Carson didn't mind he justified what he was doing saying

*"I never say to myself lets break the rules, that just happens along the way, but I'm working to my own informal rules of interpreting a piece".*

(Blackwell, Lewis, The End of Print, London, Laurence King, 1995)

The experimentation Carson was doing with body copy in my opinion didn't work in a lot of cases in the context of a magazine and the main reason for this is the lack of legibility. When you to read a piece a lack of legibility in the headline doesn't create too many problems, if it takes a second or third look that's okay because when you do decipher it there is a sense of achievement and when you have deciphered it



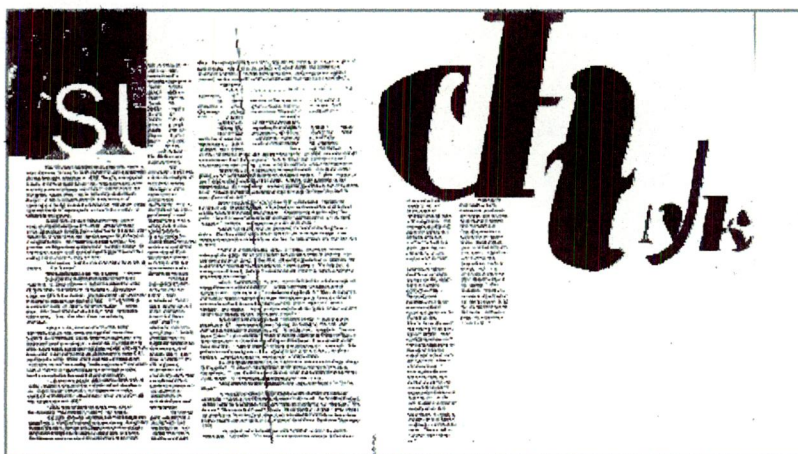


fig 22

reversed out of the body copy so sections of the text disappear, if you notice at the top of the "er" they are

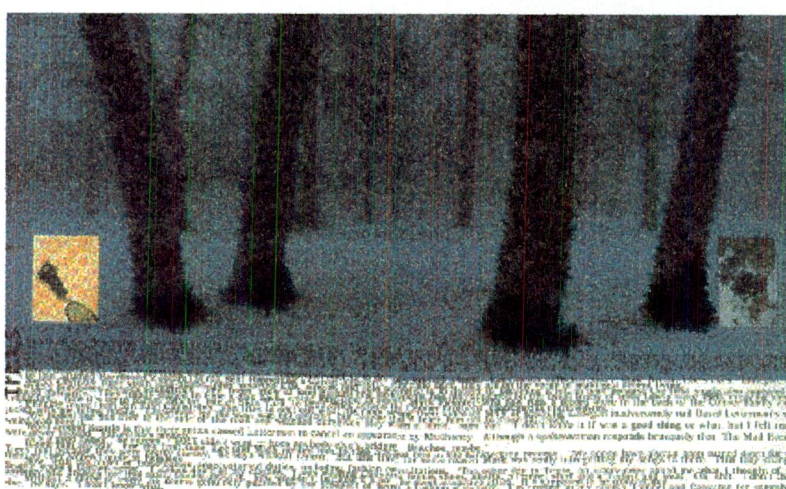


fig 23

you are already drawn into the article. But in relation to body copy a lack of legibility to a degree where the viewer has to take a second look to read it can become very frustrating over a long piece of copy, and that's what happened with a lot of articles in **RayGun**. Figure 22 Superchunks where the title is

blocking almost a full line of text, also figure 23 Screaming Trees where the line length is the actual width of the double page spread with the text leading of the page on the right which makes the text extremely difficult to read, also the reading is very tight which just makes it even more difficult.

When it came to designing headlines the typefaces Carson choose for the early issues were generally **Emigre** fonts. When **RayGun** started to grow in popularity more fonts started to get associated with Carson, which he didn't like.

*"People used to say to me that somebody was ripping me off just because they were using the same Emigre fonts as me, which made me think that I had to get away from using those fonts it that's how people saw it"*

*(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, Creative Review, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)*

So, he started creating his own type mainly by manipulating existing typefaces. In a lot of cases the type would be created for a specific article depending on the feel of the piece. His starting point when designing a spread it read the copy and listen to the music. It could be a line from a song or a chord

sequence of a quote that sets him off. He would interperate the article and design it instinctively. Sometimes the headline may be two or more existing typefaces layered and chopped together. In other cases it might be very crude hand written scrawl. All were very crude and gave the impression that the layouts were very spontaneous, which was what Carson was trying to achieve. He wanted **RayGun** to be as vibrant as the music that was being covered.

One of the main reasons why The Face and RayGun were so successful has to do with the creative freedom Brody and Carson had when designing them. They both took very different approaches, where Brody went out to make a social comment on what he felt was wrong in Britain at that time and also to redefine the modern magazine, Carson went out to destroy the magazine in the name of youth culture.

When you look at The Face you feel every mark is there for a reason. The spreads relate very well to the content, with The Face you read the graphics and imagery as well as the text. Raygun is the opposite you get the impression that you are not supposed to read the content otherwise why make it so different and in a lot of cases impossible. As a magazine Raygun is beautiful to look at, hell to read. One thing these magazines have in common is that they were very style orientated in content and in appearance and ultimately that was their down fall.



# the price of success

With all the success Brody and Carson enjoyed with **The Face** and **RayGun** and the huge influence they had on modern expressive typography there was also a major downside to the success. Both designers were trying to question the conventions of type design by taking a much more personal approach. But people didn't see it like that. Instead of being influenced by the thought process of Brody and Carson and challenging it, to create something that was personal to them. Other designers just started to copy **The Face** and **RayGun** to a point where when you look through the magazine you can't tell the advertisements from the articles. This especially upset Brody;

*"With The Face I was trying to challenge very basic comforts and structures conventions ..... The Face grew out of a feeling that things didn't have to be as they appear. The irony is that I started to question and challenge and ended up creating the next set of routines. In a way I totally failed. The work was supposed to encourage a dialogue, not encourage more of the same."*

(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, Creative Review, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)

What he was trying to do was to suggest a new way of approaching type. However, what people saw was a new astatic style and that is what they copied. Every new statement he made was not seen as something to challenge but something to copy. With **The Face** Brody was trying to make a social comment through type on the

*"parallel between what happened in the thirties and the situation in the eighties. The divided nation, the class division, the economic recession, and a highly authoritarian government."*

(Wozencroft, Jon, The Graphic Language of Neville Brody, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988)

**The Face** was supposed to be a catalyst for any argument on how to bring greater dynamism to the content of a magazine through the design. In some ways **The Face** was probably too commercially successful. Because of this success **The Face** became associated with the youth culture which inspired it and this is why it was copied so much by advertisers trying to sell to that part of the market. The more successful **The Face** became the more it was being looked on as a monthly graphic phrase book which enabled imitators to make the right visual noises. His work was a personal experience to what Brody felt was wrong with design at that time, but people only picked up on the visual impact of the work, not the creative process behind it.

Pretty much the same thing happened to Carson. He saw **RayGun** as

*"A starting point for how things might go..."*

(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, *Creative Review*, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)

But as with **The Face**, as soon as its popularity grew it was exactly how things went. As with Brody, Carson was suggesting a new way of thinking and approaching design as spontaneous and intuitive.

Once the popularity of **RayGun** grew every

advertising agency wanted the **RayGun** style. But most of them didn't care if they were getting the real thing or just a watered down imitation. Figure 24 shows an ad for Casio Watches that



fig 24



appeared in **The Face** last summer along side a spread from **RayGun** in early 1993. The two are so similar that it goes beyond being influenced and closer to plagiarism. Behind the ad is London design agency Peter Kane and its creative



director Peter Bristow who when asked about the inspiration for the ad, had this to say

*"I have a strong feeling for the work of David Carson and Neville Brody... It's certainly in the spirit of Carson but there was on intention to plagiarise."*

(Creative Review, Oct 1997, p19)

After **The Face** the next major project Brody took on was as art director of **Arena** which was by the same publishers of **The Face**. It was a magazine for readers who had grown out of **The Face** and was also geared more towards men. When Brody approached the design of **Arena** he didn't want it to become the next big thing.

*"I thought it was time to stop, to take stock, and to see how the land lay. I want to suggest that some of*

*the hysteria should be taken out of contemporary design by adopting a very straightforward, informal approach."*

(Wozencroft, Jon, *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988)

To achieve this he used a very limited number of existing typefaces for his headlines, mainly Helvetica and Garamond. The magazine never really had a strong identity which was probably intentional. The type was kept simple but the layouts were still quite dynamic with bold headlines and photography and liberal use of white space. **Arena** (fig 25) was very structured and it was that structure that created the identity for the magazine rather than typography or any other individual feature. The design itself was never intended to have a strong identity, instead the words and images dictate the design.

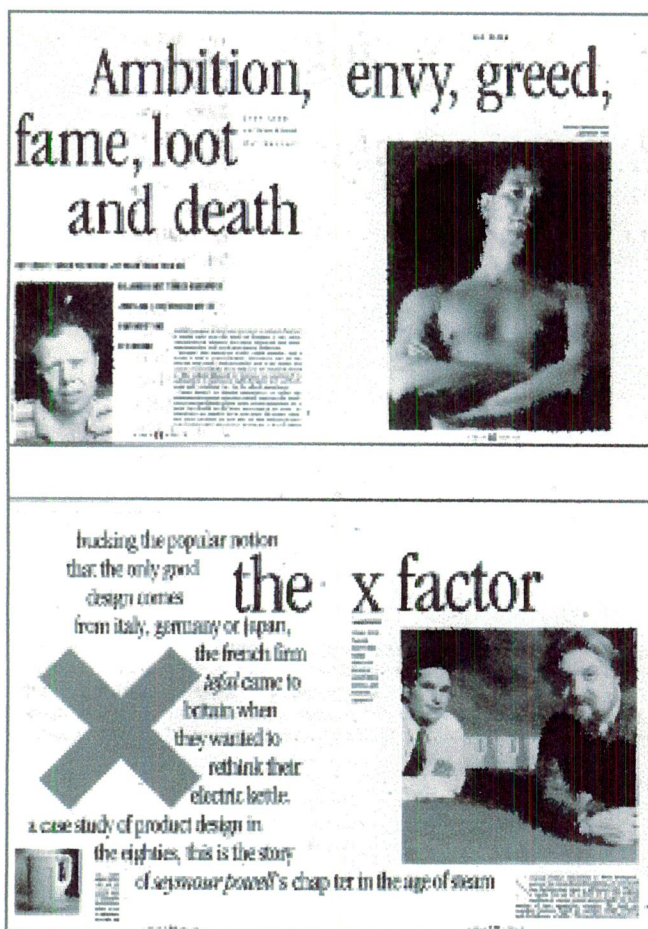


fig 25

Around this time the Macintosh computer and font design software were just becoming available and Brody played a

large part in the rise in popularity of this new technology. When it first became available it was getting limited attention from designers and the media. So in October 1990 the **Fuse** project was set up by the Brody Studio, Brody saw it as not so much a commercial venture but a necessity. It was published through the fontshop network as a new medium to highlight the creative possibilities of digital typography. **Fuse** created an outlet that allowed type designers to challenge conventional thinking about the form and function of typography. **Fuse** was marketed as a series of packages with five experimental digital typefaces all by different designers and five posters showing creative application of each face.

The digital typefaces Brody designed for **Fuse** and other projects were some of the most ground breaking of the new digital era. For example when **F State** (fig 26) was being designed, the negative space was considered as much a design element as the letterform itself. Then the characters were



fig 26

cropped into abstract forms which made some of the characters virtually illegible. When applied there are no spaces between words and no leading, so when you see it at first it looks like an abstract pattern. So, if you were unfamiliar with the font you would find it illegible. This was the point of **F State**, to get the viewer to unlearn everything they had learned about the form and recognition of conventional type and then completely relearn it in relation to **F state**. This try to show that a typeface is legible only due to the familiarity of the viewer with it. I think **F State** is quite an extreme example of this idea but it does make a good point about legibility, which was the point behind a great deal of the **Fuse** fonts. If people hadn't challenged the boundaries of legibility of typefaces down through the



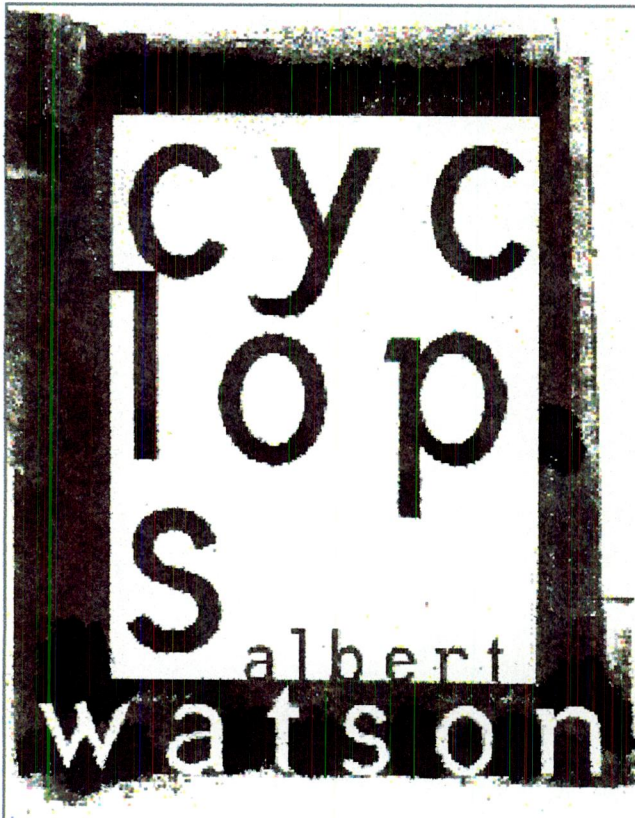
centuries we could still be reading hyrographics or ancient scripts. When print technology began to develop the look of type changed greatly, so it is only natural that digital technology should do the same.

Since leaving **RayGun**, Carson has become very much sought after by major advertisers. In the last couple of years he has designed major ads for Nike, Pepsi, Sony and Kentucky Fried Chicken. He has also kept up his music related work, having created album covers for Prince and David Byrne, and it was through his connection with David Byrne that he got into another major design medium, T.V. and film.

When he was offered the chance to design the credits and promotional graphics for a film by Byrne he jumped at the chance, always having felt that

*"As a graphic designer you are almost doing yourself a disservice if you are only working in print."*

(Neville Brody Meets David Carson, Creative Review, Vol 14, May 1994 p27-30)



After that he designed some sequences for MTV and some T.V. adverts for the likes of Sega and Budweiser. The work was very similar in style and approach to **RayGun**, the only real difference being it was moving. The only downside to getting all this work in television is that, because he was getting to a much larger audience, his desire not to become a designer of one particular style was becoming a problem, especially since all the clients wanted was the **RayGun** style. This is why, recently, he has turned his back on advertising for the larger corporations, and concentrated more on less high profile jobs that would give him more creative freedom. A good example of this is the work he did with Albert Watson on his photographic biography *Cyclops* (fig 27). Carson

somehow managed to convince Watson to have an all type cover. The black and white cover actually works very well because it doesn't have a photograph on it like every other book of photography, and so it really stands out on the shelf. The cover is more reminiscent of Carson's work on **Beach Culture** than **RayGun**, as you get the feeling things may have been done for a reason, for example the title being framed like a photograph. The cover seems to have an idea behind it as opposed to a lot of the work in **RayGun** which seems to be completely style driven.

Despite all the varied clients Carson has had since **RayGun**, his work hasn't developed very much in that time. This could be down to a couple of factors, one being that he has become a victim of his own success. The style he developed on **RayGun** has gotten so popular that clients may think that's all he does or can do, and so he only gets clients who want that style. Another explanation could be that he is just so style orientated that he is not concerned with making a statement, just being hip.



# conclusion

Expressive typography has come in for a lot of criticism for its lack of legibility and also, for the role new technology has played in its development, in relation to origins of work and inspiration behind it. Yet it has still grown greatly in popularity among designers and the audience.

Modernists condemn expressive typography as if they feel their own work is in danger, which is not the case. Expressive typography is not a direct challenge to the modernists. It is just offering another option. The first role of graphic design and typography is to get the attention of the audience and then to deliver its message. To modernists the delivery of the message as quickly and clearly as possible is seen as the only function of typography, but in the 90's the audience is much more visually aware and demands more than just clarity of information and mere legibility. They also want to be entertained and that is what expressive typography is trying to do. So therefore expressive typography is a necessary progression. Graphic design as with all art forms need to keep progressing and diversifying so as not to become sterile.

Graphic design has had to evolve to keep the interest of the audience. People want posters, record covers, book covers etc to be visually entertaining, absolute clarity of information is no longer necessary or appropriate. It is Carson's recognition of this that has helped him to become so successful. Carson recognised when he started working on RayGun that the target audience of the magazine had grown up with MTV and videogames and so are extremely visually

aware and would need more than nice photography and well written articles to keep them interested.

When you look at the question of the role digital technology, it would be very unfair to put the credit or blame, as modernists insist, for the development of expressive typography on computers. I have shown with the work of Brody, Carson and Phil Baines that a lot of designers have developed their ideas and consolidated them before going to computer, which are only a tool. What computers have done is to offer endless possibilities of manipulation so as to be the perfect tool for the expressive typographer. Aesthetically, computers have had a huge influence on typography, and an excellent example of this is the typeface's of Neville Brody. When you look at the development from his early fonts from **The Face** to the **Fuse** fonts (eg **F State**) there is a huge jump in relation to the visual dynamics. **The Face** fonts are still quite conventional in composition, whereas **The Fuse** fonts are highly creative and visually challenging far beyond anything that was possible before computers became available. Computers have given type a fluidity of physical form an ease of manipulation and lack of boundaries which would have been unimaginable twenty years ago, this can only be a good thing creatively and for production as they give the designer full control over every aspect of design.

When you look at the work of Carson you have to say he is an excellent art director; he has a great eye for what is hip for example his use of early emigre fonts on the early issues of **RayGun**. Where his weakness lies is that he has a very limited vocabulary and his work has not developed nearly enough over the last ten years for him to be considered a great designer. There is a development from **Beach Culture** to **RayGun** but after he left **RayGun** he got stuck in a rut where everything he did was in the **RayGun** style and when



he did change he went back to the style of **Beach Culture** which I feel is better than that of **RayGun** but still he is going around in circles with very little progression. Or perhaps the **RayGun** is still communicating to the right people. Even so, you can't take away from the way Carson took on the design world and destroyed it from the inside. Brody on the other hand has during his career been able to constantly develop and evolve, from his early hatred of type to the era defining typefaces of **The Face**, to his ground breaking work on the desktop computer. He has done more than any one designer to help the cause of expressive typography. But even Brody has to step a side for the deconstructed work of the likes of Carson.

There is no doubt that there is a shift taking place. It has been under way for the last twenty years but only in the last few years with the attacks on the work of Carson, **Emigre** etc. that the bitterness of modernists has become apparent. After years without their work being challenged they find themselves on the defensive. The new breed of expressive typographers have jumped up from nowhere and pointed out that modernist typography isn't right for this time.

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