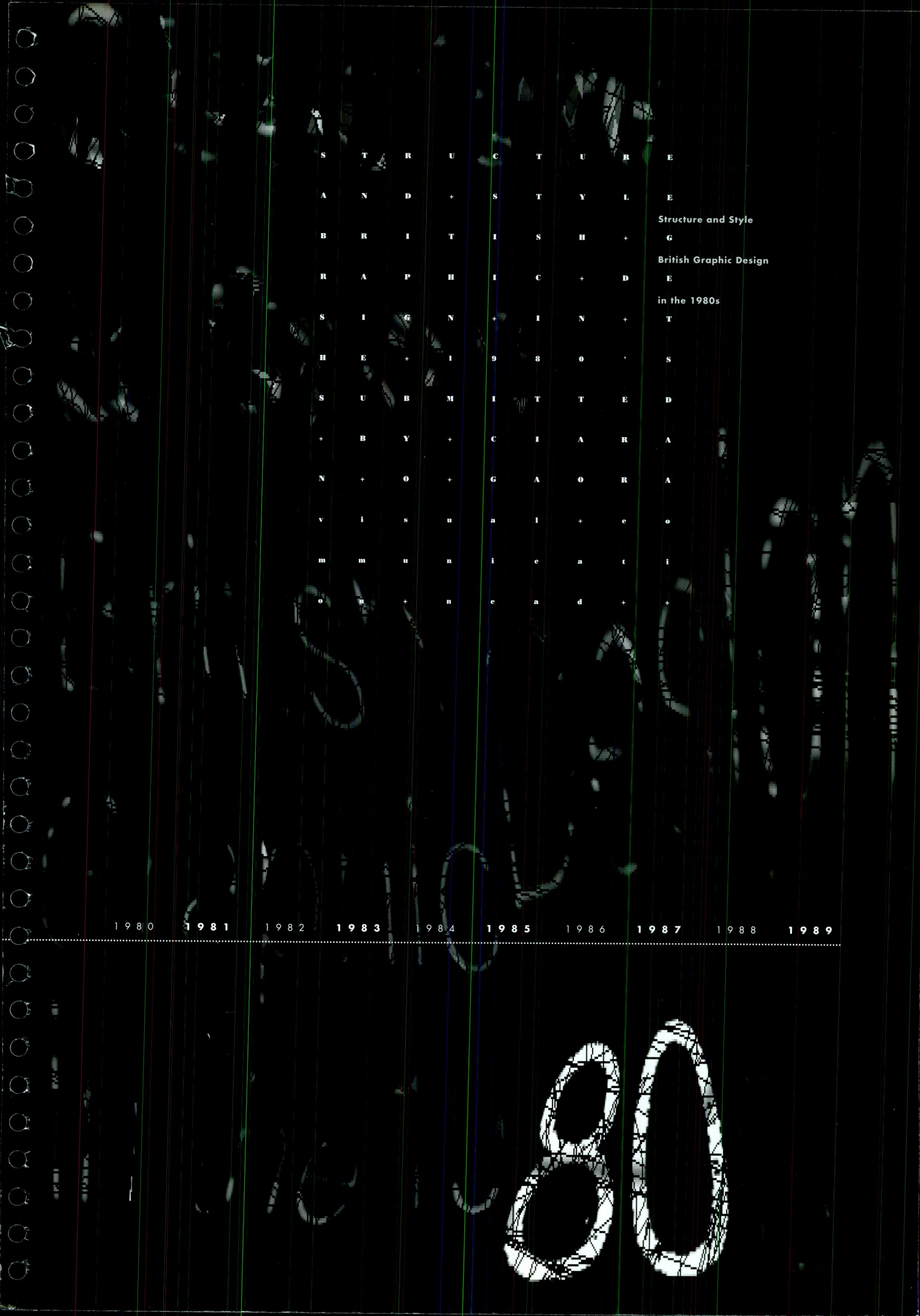

STRUCTURE AND STYLE
BRITISH GRAPHIC DESIGN
IN THE 1980s
SUBMITTED BY CIARA NOGAO
visual communication and
1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989
80

Structure & Style

British Graphic Design in the 1980s

Ciarán ÓGaora

March 1991

Submitted for Batchelor of Design in Visual Communications

National College of Art and Design

"... art chat, *if taken seriously*,

makes you an ill person."

Peter York

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Mealla, Marion and Des and Angus at DBA for their help in getting this thesis together.

Contents

Preface

This dissertation has been written by a person who started their secondary education in 1980, the start of a decade that has been noted for its emphasis on style. It could be argued that, to those whose thoughts were shaped in the 'Eighties, style is more important than content. I would ask you to bare this in mind while reading this.

I have consciously set out to structure and phrase this dissertation in such a way as to engage the reader and make the subject somewhat enjoyable. This approach in itself could be considered of the 'Eighties. It is for this reason that I would warn you not to accept this *'Thesis'* on face value, or to be distracted by its style of writing or presentation.

Introduction

'Punk? it's about being fucked off with a non-stop lecture from the last generation.'[1]

1
Mark P.,
Quoted in Mc Dermott,
London 1987.
p.67

With the punk explosion in the late seventies the lecture was stopped, the rules were thrown out and British graphic design moved away from slick smooth professionalism.

'Anarchy is the Key, Do-it-yourself is the melody.'[2]

2
Jamie Reid,
Quoted in Mc Dermott,
London 1987.
p.62

The process of design was democratised. All you needed now was a newspaper and a pair of scissors. You didn't even need to have anything to say. Punk returned 'Pop Culture' to the kids and made the street into the studio. Design was now dictated to by the young. It was produced by the young, for the young. It rejected the past and proclaimed that there was 'no future'.[3]

3
Jonney Rotten
"Anarchy for the UK"
Sex Pistols, 1977.

It was out of this environment that the designers of the 'Eighties emerged. In **Chapter One** I will look at the birth of Punk and the influence it, and, in particular, its graphic exponents had upon design.

As punk burned out and design kept going, many young designers fed off the expressive freedom that punk had instilled in them. Anything was possible, they had the power to influence the future. In **Chapter Two** I will look at the emergence of the new blood in design. I will explore the way that these designers looked to the past to present their own futures.

As the importance of design grew in parallel with Thatcher's consumerism, the whole world of *'designerism'* emerged. Designer dinners filled the shelves and designer jeans hung in the shops.

With built-in-obsilesence, and style being the order of the day, **Chapter Three** will concern itself with the whole notion of style and the importance it had in the 'Eighties.

The use of structural elements in many of the designs expressed renewed leanings to functionalism. In **Chapter Four** I will be questioning the rhetorical value of using structural elements as well as the whole idea of functionalism as a reaction to styling. To what extent was this neo-modernism expressed through the renewed importance placed on function, or was it just another stylistic stance?

In my conclusion I hope come to an overview of design in the 'Eighties and what its legacy is for the 'Nineties.

Chapter One

Prelude: The birth of Punk

'Tradition is the pivot around which British culture revolves, including the reactions against it in the form of shocking or humourous eccentricity.'[4]

4
Huygen, London 1989, p.32

In Britain since the 'Fifties there has always been a strong connection between the art schools and the development of pop music. The emergence of Punk was no different. It could be said to have been started as an art movement, drawing parallels with *DaDa* of the 'Twenties.

Punk set out to democratise popular culture. The music was based on the idea of get up and do it. In the mid-seventies, artists such as *Genesis P. Orridge* (a.k.a. Andrew Megson) took art out of the institutions and galleries and into the *'living cauldron of street culture'*.[5] He received popular attention through his controversial exhibition at the ICA in London called *'PROSTITUTION'*. The exhibition caused an outrage. In it, Genesis presented pornographic shots in frames as well as used tampons in glass exhibition cases. This exhibition confronted the media as well as the establishment. It was fully in tune with the Punk ethic of pushing both music and visuals beyond the limits of what was normally acceptable. One no longer needed to be slick and professional.

5
Genesis P. Orridge Quoted in Mc Dermott, London 1987. p.67

Malcolm McLaren

If Punk was the DaDa of the 'Seventies, who was Punk's Marcel Duchamp? The popular answer to that would be *Malcolm McClaren*. Malcolm McClaren is the man credited with bringing Punk to a popular audience. He studied art in the late 'Sixties ad had become interested in the ideas of the situationists. Situationism was a European movement which set out to cut across different doctrines and develop social participation and social action. Having had experience with the emerging punk scene in New York, McClaren returned to open up a shop on the Kings Road with *Vivienne*

Fig. 1
A situationist poster from Paris, 1968

Fig. 2
Jamie Reid

Sex Pistol flyer to coincide with the Queens silver jubilee in 1977

Fig. 3
Malcolm McLaren

Fig. 4
Vivienne Westwood

Westwood. The shop was called *'Sex'* and it was from here that he started to orchestrate Punk as a popular movement in Britain.

Malcolm McClaren wanted to turn British Rock 'n' Roll culture on its head. The vehicle for this was the formation of the Sex Pistols. The Sex Pistols personified the movement. McClaren managed them, Westwood dressed them, and Jamie Reid, an art college friend of McClaren's, produced their graphics.

Jamie Reid

Jamie Reid had attended art college with McClaren at Croyden. He too was influenced by the Situationists and had, since the late 'Sixties been involved with the use of graphics as a form of subversion. Examples of this were his stickers proclaiming *'SPECIAL OFFER, THIS WEEK ONLY - THIS STORE WELCOMES SHOPLIFTERS'*. These stickers were fly-posted on the fronts of large department stores on Oxford Street. When it came to designing the graphics for the Sex Pistols, Reid used many of the same techniques.

Reid's artwork for the Sex Pistols reflected a democratisation of design and a rejection of slick professionalism. He set out to offend. Provoke a response, not to convey a coherent political message, though this in itself was political. His visual vocabulary drew upon the vernacular: torn paper, typefaces cut out of newspapers in a blackmail note style, bright colours symbolic of the bright hard sell colours used in detergent packaging. He created visual slogans using apparently sacrosanct icons such as the image of the Queen with a safety-pin through her nose juxtaposed with an anarchy flag. He created a style that was visually effective, but one that could be recreated quickly without the use of the new technology. Old newspapers were the new catalogues, the typewriter or marker became the typesetter. The photocopier was the popular printing press. The other advantage of Reid's style was that it required no understanding of design to reproduce. Design was taken off the draughting

fig . 5
Jamie Reid

Album cover for
'Never Mind The Bollocks'
1977

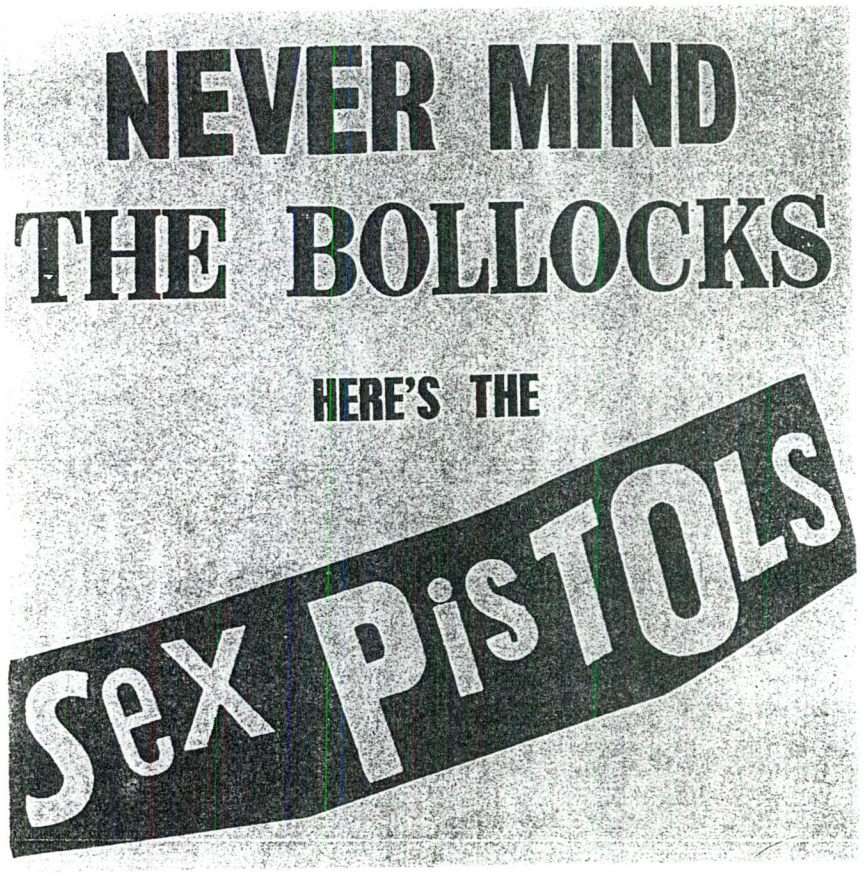


fig. 6
Jamie Reid

Stickers for *Suburban Press*,
1973

fig. 7
Jamie Reid

'Pretty Vacant',
origional artwork for the single
and poster, Virgin records,
1977

board and put onto the butchers table.

Fanzines

Jamie Reid gave Joe Public a visual vocabulary he felt at home with. The Fanzines that emerged in the late 'Seventies to feed the growing interest in Punk were a perfect testament to this.

'If you thought the last issue was crap,
wait till you read this one!' [6]

6
Cover Slogan from the fanzine *Situation 3.*

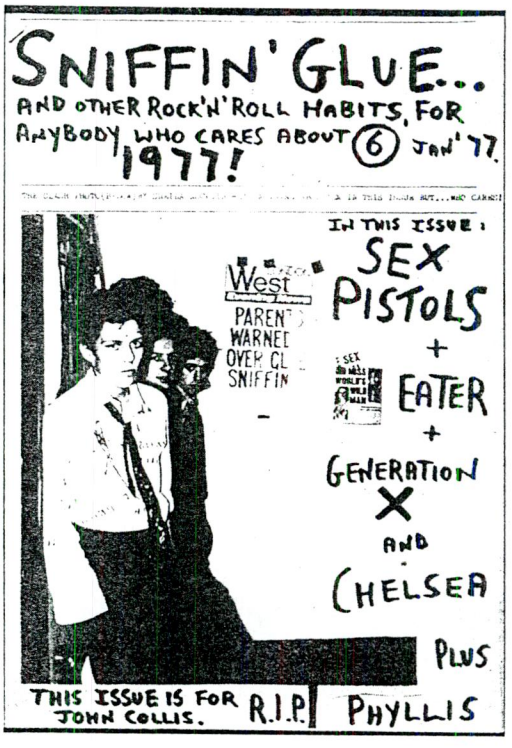
Peter York discusses the re-emergence of fanzines in a *Harpers & Queen* article in 1977. This article is reproduced in his own book *Style Wars.*

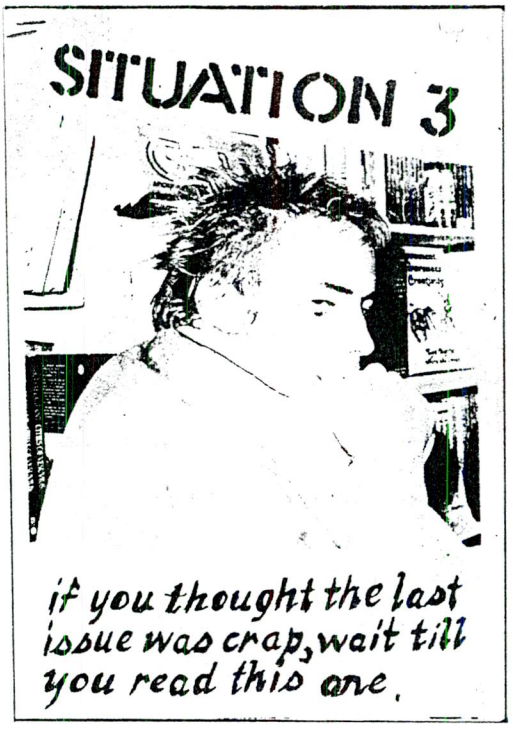
These magazines (if they can be called that!) did not claim to represent great ideas or a master plan to save the earth. Nor did they set out to present the viewer with beautiful type and glossy photos. What they presented to the reader was an example of someone doing something for themselves. The fanzine represented an outlet other than just music with which people could be involved. They also made it possible for Punk to operate as a working-class subculture. Education and wealth weren't necessary and in fact inexperience and skill-lessness could be seen as an advantage.

Other than presenting a new visual style and a belief in the public participation, what did Punk give to up-and-coming designers?

The Sex Pistols broke up in 1979. Punk was being absorbed into the commercial world as retailers used the new icons of rebellion to sell to the youth market. It seemed to have become just another British eccentricity. Punk however, with its get up and go philosophy had spawned a plethora of independent record companies such as *Factory, Rough Trade* and *Stiff.* It was out of these that many of the new designers were to emerge.

fig. 8
A selection of fanzine covers
from 1977-1980





Barney Bubbles

Barney Bubbles (born Colin Fucher) was one such designer. The majority of his work was related to the music industry. He had worked with local bands after studying graphic design at Twickenham. He worked for the Conran Group for a short while in the 'Sixties, and was also involved with light shows for bands such as *Hawkwind*. In the 'Seventies, Bubbles retreated from the scene and lived in Ireland until the emergence of the Punk movement. He was a strong believer in the need for an alternative culture and after a chance meeting with *Dave Robinson* of *Stiff Records*, he became a new element of Punk culture.

> **'I spent years wondering "should I paint?" instead of painting, and suddenly realised that what I am doing is painting! It's only bits of Letraset, but it's still shapes and things so, I'm a painter! Great!'** [7]

7
Barney Bubbles,
Quoted in *Baseline*,
Bradbury Thompson Issue.
1989.

Bubbles brought a wider range of visual symbols and styles to punk. He introduced modernist images from the 1920s. Just as Reid's work could be seen to be, to a certain extent, in the style of DaDa, Barney Bubbles introduced the work of *Futurists, the Bauhaus* and *DeStijl*. Though using these references he kept in tune with the idea of conveying a sense of immediacy and feeling. Unlike Reid, Bubbles did not stick with a set style. He was not someone who wanted attention. He rarely credited himself on his work and so it is often hard to know his full contribution to British graphics. The introduction of these other images to punk helped its graphics break away from what had become the rather abrasive style of Reid's work. To a certain extent, this introduction of retro' influences and the renewed interest in Modernism spelt the end of Reid's work in the music industry. It was now just a style and void of a lot of its original impact.

Many of Bubbles' sleeves had distinctive illustrations on them. The influences for these illustrations came from diverse artists like Matisse, Kandinsky and Pollock. In his album cover for *The Damned* we can

Fig. 9
Barney Bubbles

Cover for *Elvis Costello and the Attractions' 'Armed Forces"*
1979

This album cocer folds out revealing various panels including references to artists such as Jackson Pollock and Mondriaan, as well as 'Pop' art

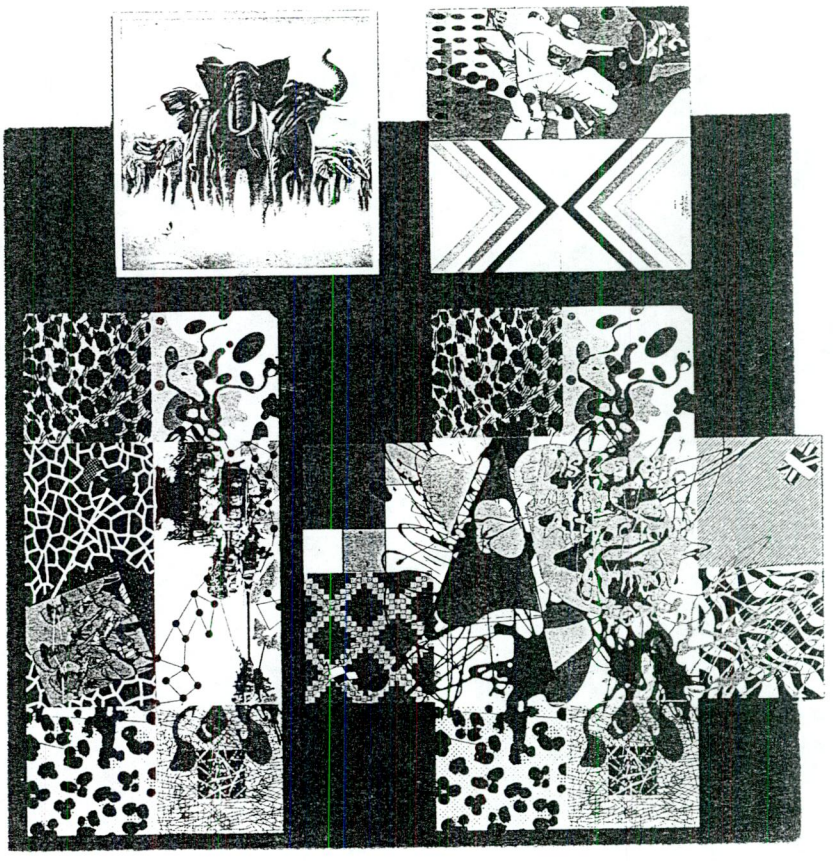


Fig. 10
Barney Bubbles

Album cover for *The Damned*

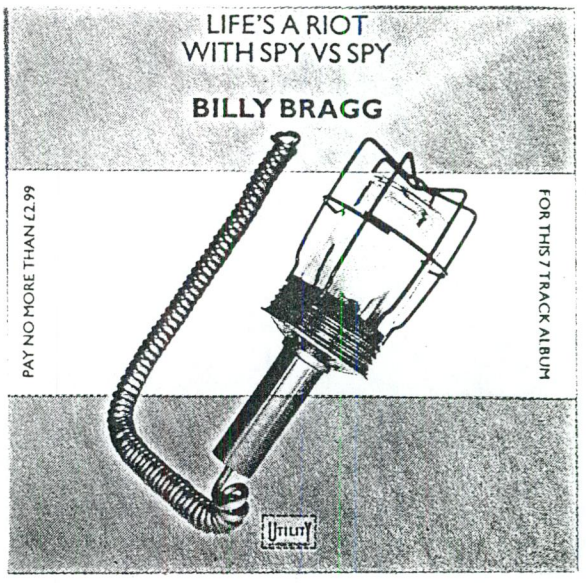


Fig. 11
Barney Bubbles

Billy Bragg's
'Life's a Riot with Spy versus Spy'

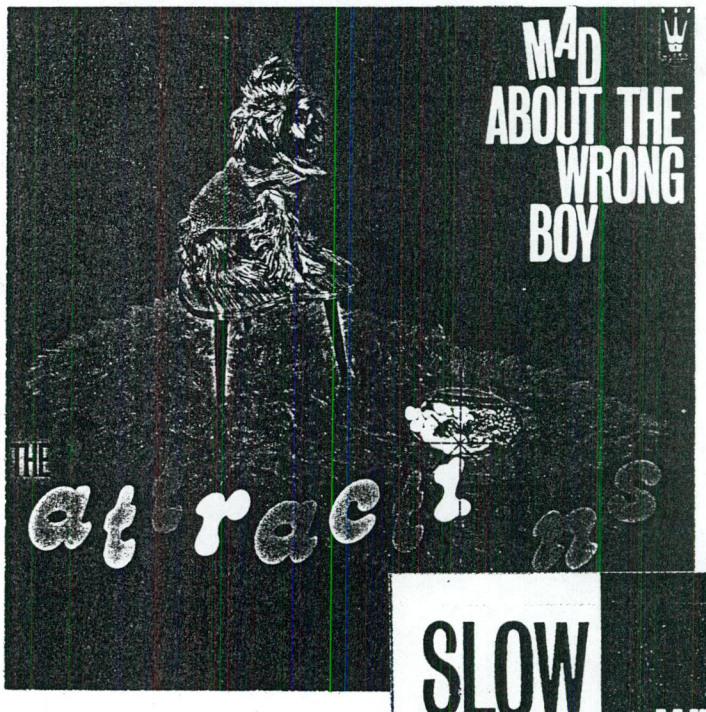


Fig. 13
Barney Bubbles

The Attractions
'Mad about the wrong boy'

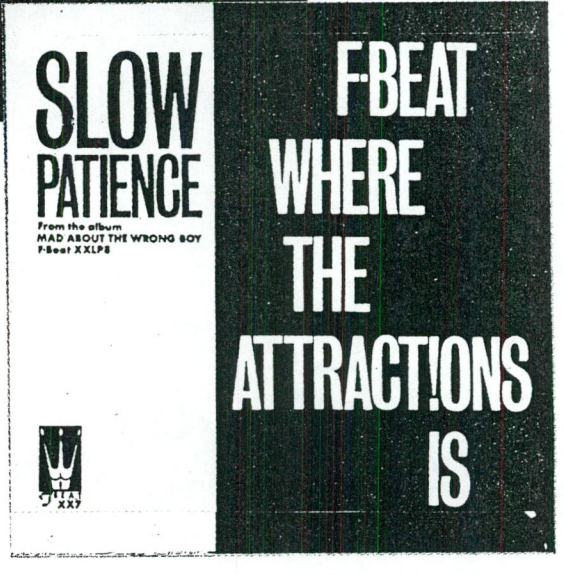


Fig. 14
Barney Bubbles

F-Beat
Where the attraction is'

see this influence in a sort of Kandinsky pastiche for both the illustration and the type. In his cover for *Billy Bragg*, *'LIFE'S A RIOT WITH SPY VERSUS SPY'* we see him paying homage to *Jan Tschichold's* design for *Penguin* Books. In this instance he has replaced the Penguin motif with a mechanics torch. This industrial image helps us redefine the way in which we perceive Tschichold's work as well as having the primary effect of informing as to the working class socialist nature of Billy Bragg's songs. Many of the references went over the heads of those who bought the records but this did not stop the design's visual qualities from conveying the feeling. Bubbles seemed not to appropriate styles for historical reasons or designer self-referencing but for their visual impact.

Bubbles didn't just 'put down' type. He used it in a very illustrative manner. He used type to reflect the entire cover. It was integrated. Bubbles drew up his own typefaces (as in *the Damned*), used unfashionable typefaces as in *The Attractions - 'MAD ABOUT THE WRONG BOY'*, but he was also able to place type perfectly to make it sing (*F-Beat*, *'WHERE THE ATTRACTION IS'*). Bubbles opened up the whole idea of an intelligent Punk attitude. In Bubbles work we see what could be called the emergence of post-Punk and the idea of personal expression and communication but through the questioning use of a variety of graphic sources.

Terry Jones

'Instant design is a lie. It's never really instant. I like design that has the feeling of being grasped. Often to achieve something that looks like it was thrown together takes a lot longer than something that looks like it's been designed. Things that look like design are a piece of piss.' [8]

Jamie Reid's street based style was not however given up. It had its supporters in the design world as well as on the street. Terry Jones was a former art director with *Vogue*. At Vogue, Jones kept in touch with emerging fashions. Punk emerged and Jones saw it as something fresh, as an excuse to break the rules. His colleagues at Vogue did not look on Punk

8
Terry Jones quoted in *Direction* Magazine, Lamacraft,J., 'Terry Jones on the Spot.'

Fig. 15
Terry Jones

Cover and page-spreads
for *i-D magazine*

with the same enthusiasm, and so with a group of friends he set up i-D magazine in 1980. At the beginning i-D was little more than a fanzine. It was similar in style to the work we associate with Reid. The magazine dealt primarily with fashion, and in particular, street style. Its subtitle was *'Manual of Style'*. It wanted to represent what was happening among the student stalls and second-hand clothes shops and document it immediately. The whole concept was instant design, to which Reid's graphic style was perfectly suited. It was not based on perfect proportions, nice faces and slick presentations, but rather on immediate up-front presentation. Terry Jones exploited what immediate reproduction and creative processes he could find. He used the photocopier as a creative tool, with similarities to the way that Warhol exploited the inadequacies of the silkscreen process. He used typewriters and random *Letraset* just as the early 'naive' Punk fanzine creators had done. Polaroid photographs, colour photocopies, low resolution computer typefaces and video images, all became part of Jones's instant visual vocabulary. i-D was in keeping with early Punk's visual style. Its look and non-conformist approach as well as its state of constant rapid change helped it to keep that approach alive. Indeed, often times it was hard to read the editorial content: the entire look of the magazine being more important than what was being said.

Summary

Punk, it could be argued, was made popular by a few individuals desire to sell the clothes from their shop on the King's Road. It represented no particular political stance, but echoed a growing cynicism by the young. Its D.I.Y. philosophy had an effect on the fashion and music industries in the way that it lead to the setting up of many independent companies. Jamie Reid's strong graphics have been absorbed into the common vocabulary to represent rebellion and opened up an avenue of acceptability for those that came after him.

The work of Barney Bubbles represented a move away from nihilism in a more informed eclectic approach to graphics. Terry Jones showed how the early visual style of Punk could be reinterpreted and used in a popular high street circulation magazine.

Chapter Two

The post-punk designers

At the end of the 'Seventies the Labour Party in Britain was in crisis. After the winter of discontent they lost power and Margaret Thatcher was swept into government as the public hoped for a better future. Punk in ways, with its anti-liberal stance and do it for yourself ethic, seemed to have prepared the way for working class conservatism. The Left was split between moderates and the 'loony left'. There followed a polarisation of political thought in Britain. Many things were on the minds of people at the beginning of the decade; inner city riots; the deployment of cruise missiles in Britain; the Falklands War; the invasion of Afghanistan; poor East-West relations and rising unemployment. There was an underlying sense of pessimism covered over with a thin veneer of consumerism. The inner city slums and cardboard cities were contrasted by sparkling new suburban shopping malls with instant credit and free parking.

It was out of this environment that the young designers emerged. Most had been students during Punk and had taken its spirit on board. They each had their own particular interests to bring to their work. After the democratisation of design by punk, it seemed as if designers set out to reassert their ability to present things that they layman couldn't. They heralded in a new era of professionalism, but with an individual streak.

Malcolm Garrett

'In the 1960s there was a real revolt against being taken over by Big Brother, the faceless corporation. Now people like the idea of being a corporation themselves rather than being taken over by one.' [9]

Malcolm Garrett started his training at the Department of Typography in Reading and then switched to Manchester Polytechnic where he joined his friend *Peter Saville*. He had been a student when Punk started

9
Malcolm Garrett,
Quoted by Poynor in
Blueprint, 1988.
pp. 42-48

Fig. 16
Malcolm Garrett

Graphics for
Tthe Buzzcocks
c. 1979

Fig. 17
Malcolm Garrett

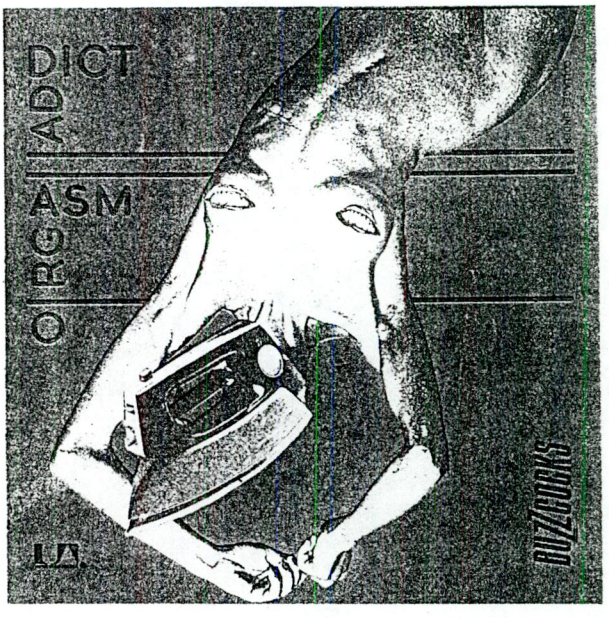
The Buzzcocks album
c. 1980

For this album Garrett used a disposable bag marked with the company's re-order number in a position that was hard to miss.

Fig. 18
Malcolm Garrett

The Buzzcocks' single cover
'Orgasm Addict'

Garrett's first important cover combining ideas from the 20s with a radically new approach to the placing of type.



but had absorbed its attitude and energy, and like *Barney Bubbles*, brought a more informed approach to graphics. One of the most influential books at the time was *'The Pioneers of Modern Typography'*. This book, which was first printed in 1969, was a collection of design work from designers such as *El Lissitsky, Piet Zwart, Alexander Rodchenko* and *Jan Tschichold*[10]. This book was to become a bible for the likes of Garrett and many of his contemporaries. Attitudes to type and design as a whole were to become more considered. After punk there were no rules to be broken and designers started to explore the possibilities of the medium without restrictions. The work that was to bring Malcolm Garrett to notice was his early work for the band *The Buzzcocks*.

10
This book, written by *Herbert Spencer* was re-published in 1982 such was the demand.

These covers date from around 1978-80 and illustrate Garrett's inquisitive approach to designing a record sleeve. He used devices such as disposable plastic bags, equal status for band name and song title, as well as using the informational copy (eg. the record serial number) as the focal point within the design . In his cover for the single *'ORGASM ADDICT'* we see the influence of *John Heartfield* and *Max Ernst*. These Buzzcocks covers were part of his attempt to redefine the whole idea of record packaging. Continuity was kept throughout the range through the use of hard edged design and standard type. These sleeves seemed to be less like packaging and more like a corporate identity programme.

The success of the alternative bands and reciprocally, the work of their associated designers, gave them a previously unheard of degree of power over the record companies. As record sales plunged in 1980, the record industry had to face up to the fact that it was the anti-establishment stance of some bands that made them successful. The industry had no choice but to accept the new independence. As Malcolm Garrett pointed out *'The success made them worried about their own position and they had to allow the new bands more freedom'*[11]. The result of this was that many of the record companies closed down their art departments and welcomed the young designers to take to their ranks. Garrett set up the company *Assorted*

11
Malcolm Garrett,
Quoted by Huygen,
London 1989.
p. 150

Fig. 19
Malcolm Garrett

Durran Durran
'THE REFLEX'
1984

Here Garrett uses type and shapes to recreate the Constructivist style

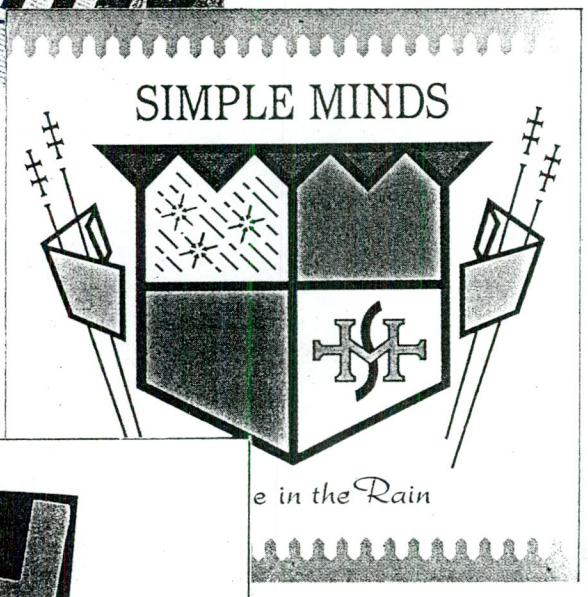


Fig. 20
Malcolm Garrett

Simple Minds
'SPARKLE IN THE RAIN'
1983

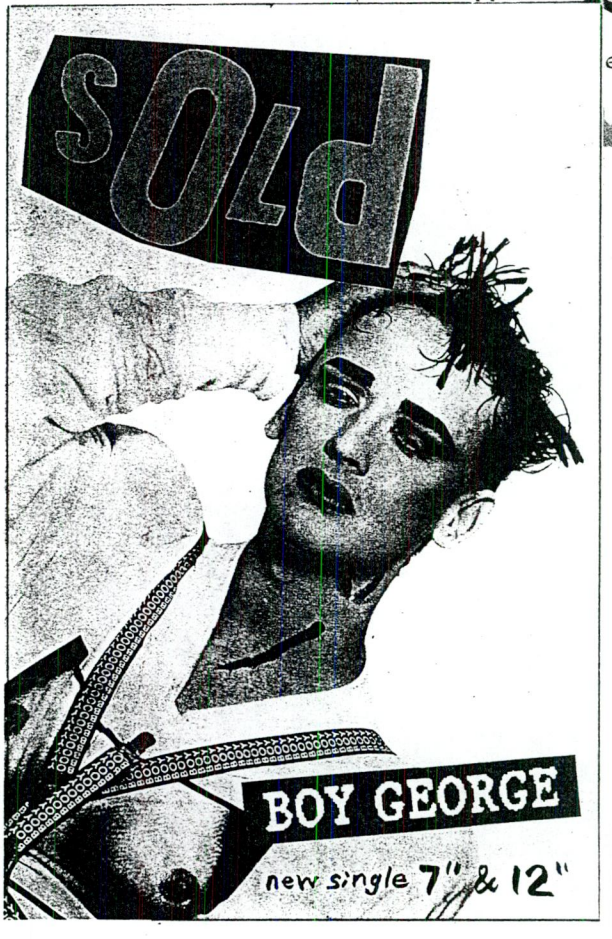


Fig. 21
Malcolm Garrett

Boy George poster
1987

iMaGes in 1979 and set about exploiting the new design freedom. He claimed that Assorted iMaGes *'will use any style; avoids fashion; ignores trends; dismisses fads; deplores dogma; remains oblivious to politics; adores American cars; eats at MacDonalds and sleeps irregularly'*[12]. It appeared that design was now starting to become a buzz word for the growing consumerism as bands like *Spandau Ballet, Simple Minds* and others of the *'New Romantic'* scene emerged the look was everything and the likes of Garrett moved into gear. The bands that Garrett catered for were very conscious of style and image. This importance of style was brought through to the design of the record covers.

12
Malcolm Garrett

Quoted in McDermott, London 1989
p. 71

13
Malcolm Garrett

Quoted by Poynor in *Blueprint*, 1988.
pp. 42-48

'I've always treated the band Duran Duran as a corporation and I've always tackled their presentations in a corporate manner - I did their first sleeve as if they were an airline company.' [13]

The corporate approach to design was to become a hallmark of his work. Borrowing styles to suit the bands we saw *constructivism* on *Duran Duran*, heraldic references on *Simple Minds* and even *Jamie Reid's* punk style revamped, glossed and beautified to sell *Boy George*. This was ten years after the infamous *'Never Mind the Bollox'* cover. Here we see in this Boy George poster the 'Eighties being true to its consumerist stereotype. 'SOLD' up big and direct in a punk pastiche. Punk has been adapted to consumerism. No hiding the fact that this is not a subversive political message. It is saying straight up: buy this record, buy these clothes, be 'sold' on this image. There was no hiding consumerism, no false embarrassment about hard sell. Assorted iMaGes worked closely with the marketing departments of the various record companies and used its eclectic approach to different graphic styles to sell the bands to their specific target market. All these styles led to both the education of the public to different styles, and to the saturation of styles and an increase in the rate of change.

Peter Saville

Though Peter Saville studied with Malcolm Garrett at Manchester and worked with him informally on projects, his work did not project the same 'style doing speed' approach.

'Everything on Factory is designed, as opposed to decorated.' [14]

14
Peter Saville
September 1979
quoted by Johnson,
London 1984.
p. 33

It would be true to say that Malcolm Garrett dealt more with 'pop'. Peter Saville worked closely with *Factory Records* in Manchester - a record company associated with more serious post-punk bands. He is particularly associated with the band *Joy Division* and subsequently *New Order*. Saville's designs for these bands illustrate his approach to design. As he says in the above quote he is not interested in decoration. His work shows the careful attention to typeform and type placement. With the cover of the album *'Closer'* by *Joy Division*, we see a return to classicism. He used Roman lapidary letters, which were specially drawn for the project, centred above a photograph of a graveyard by *Bernard Pierre Wolfe*. The whole look of the album reflected, in a very understated way, the music contained within. Through the use of carefully considered type and image, Saville created something more than a disposable piece of music packaging. The sleeve was now an item of possession. It took on its own life and iconography. Indeed the cover of 'Closer' found itself incorporated into a *Julian Schnabel* painting *'Ornamental Despair'*. Saville displayed an ability to design with great economy. In subsequent album and single covers for Joy Division and New Order, he continued this simple straightforward approach. He refused to compromise simple classical design for garish commercialism and the big sell.

His designs could be accused of being elitist. In some instances, such as on the covers for New Orders single *'Blue Monday'* or the album *'Power, Corruption and Lies'*, the name of the bad or record didn't even appear on the sleeve. In these two instances he created a colour code

Fig. 23
Peter Saville

Joy Division
'Closer'

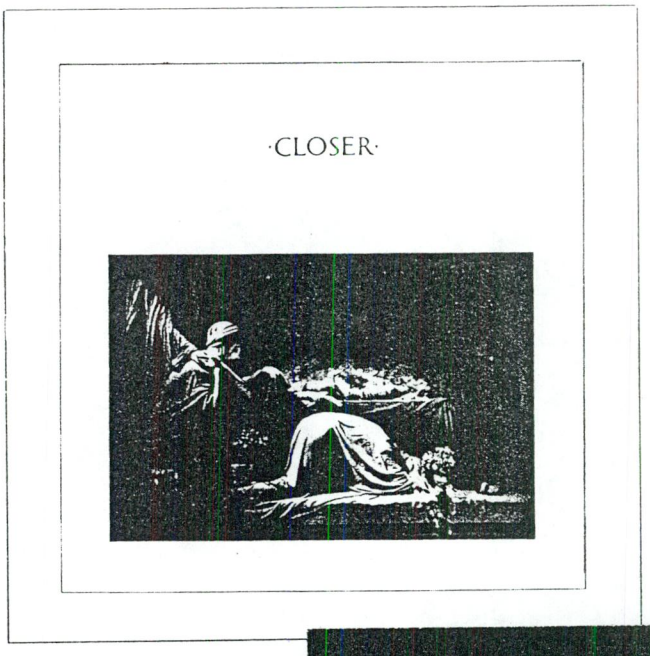
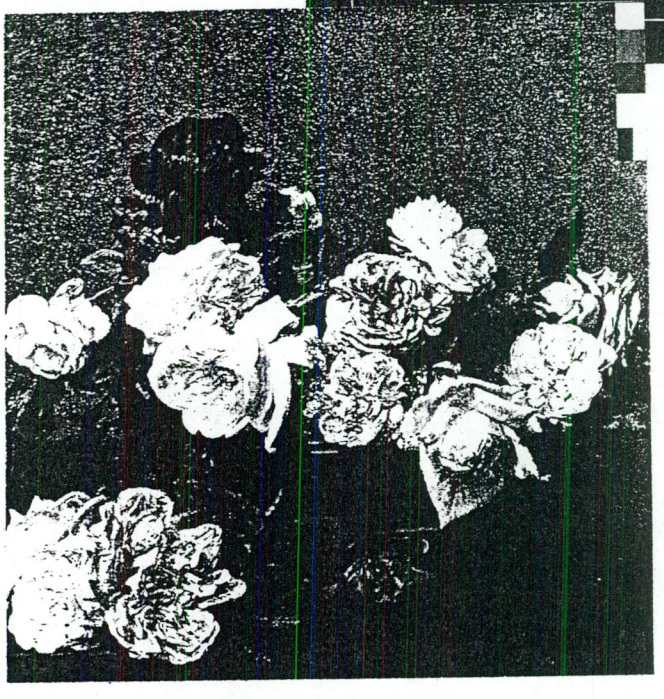


Fig. 23
Peter Saville

Joy Division
'Love will tear us apart'

Fig. 24
Peter Saville

Joy Division
'Power Corruption & Lies'



which appeared on the back of the album. This code would then be deciphered which would enable you to read the colours on the sleeves. This approach echoed the feelings of the bands he was dealing with.

'Well we're into music really, not self-publicity.' 15

15
Bernard Sumner, lead singer with New Order, in a radio interview with Dave Fanning, RTE Radio 2, March 1982. Quoted by Johnson, London 1984. p. 98

As Saville's work progressed through the 'Eighties, he drew on more typographic and graphic references but still with the same attention to detail. *Albertus* typeface for *'CEREMONY'* by *New Order*, *Italian Futurism* for *'PROCESSION'* and *Wim Crowel's* 1967 *New Alphabet* for re-releases of *Joy Division's* records in 1988.

His cover for New Orders album *'LOW LIFE'* in 1985 is seen by many as a classic. On this album Saville moves away from the expected oblique imagery that people came to expect. Instead, he went for four portraits of the band members. A face appeared on each cover of the album (front, back, inner sleeve front and back) but not in the slick glamour photo style. These faces were used to create a feeling that still helped preserve the band's distance. The type, as always, was ahead of the trend. He used a 1920s Sans Serif Nuezeit in a way that was reminiscent of *Ovtavo* or *Arena* magazine, but, as always, before them. The word 'NEW' appeared on a tracing paper overlay which overlapped the 'ORDER' which was printed on the sleeve itself. The effect was very simple but very effective. It is this deceptive simplicity that made Saville's work stand out.

His style, if it could be called that, was based on his desire to do things with every single element considered. He explored different mediums and, like Malcolm Garrett, he set out to redefine the role of record sleeves. As Garrett went for the hard sell, we saw Saville taking a more oblique approach. In his covers for New Order in the late 'Eighties we saw covers that had no information, just full bleed photographs of textures, colours or else a single icon such as a leaf. Is this really packaging, does this sell? I would say that it does. Aloofness and detachment will always sell to a certain

Fig. 25
Peter Saville

New Order
'Ceremony'
1980

The Dog with the tourch motif comes from the origional 'Thirties type sheet for the Albertus typeface.

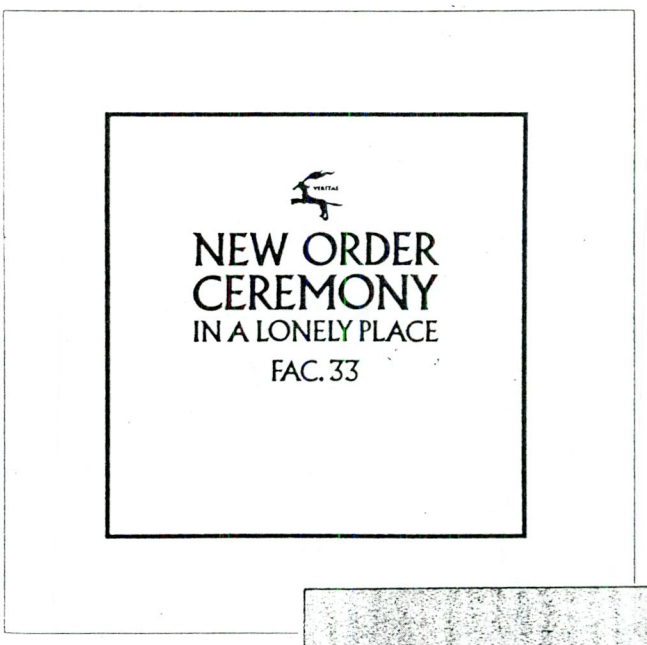


Fig. 26
Peter Saville

New Order
'Procession' 7" single

This motif is based upon Italian Futurist graphics

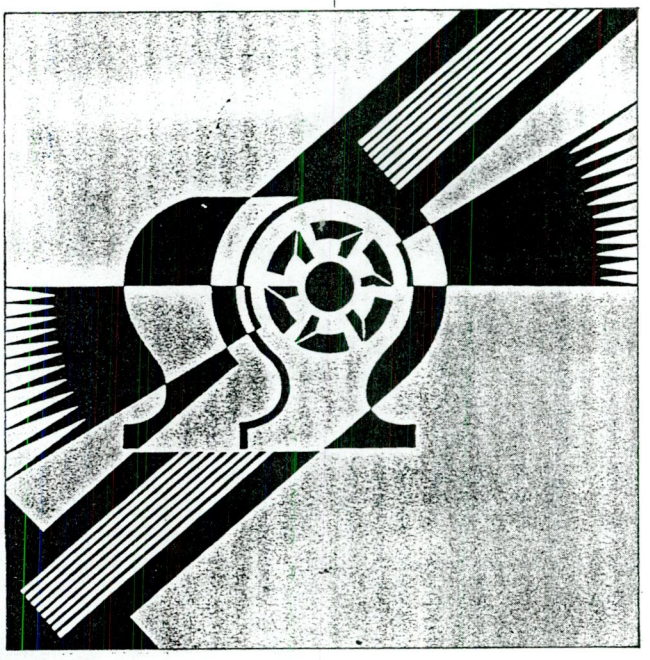


Fig. 27
Peter Saville

Joy Division
'Atmosphere'
1988

This poster for a 1988 Joy Division reissue uses a Jan van Munster sculpture.

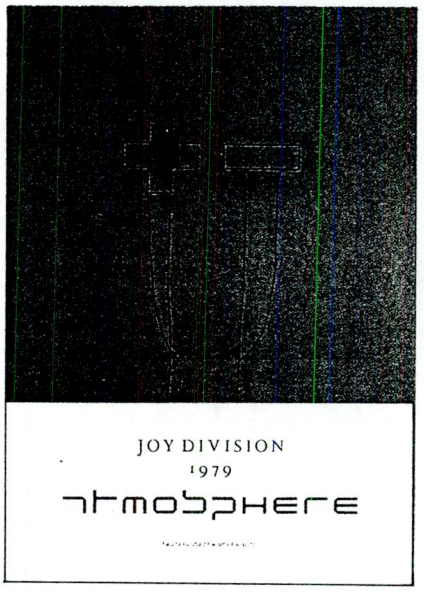


Fig. 28
Peter Saville

New Order
'Low Life'
1985

This record sleeve demonstrates Saville's approach to the placing of type. The results appear effortlessly understated, and the achievement is to bring off powerfull visual effects with apparently minimal means

audience. People like to think as themselves as more in the know as they develop socially. Just as you might appreciate a good wine, if you have an educated palette, you too can recognise an 'in' band by their self-referencing graphic imagery. Saville made an art of the sleeve as *item of possession.* The fact that his designs were both beautifully considered, and to the uninitiated elusive, they became to a certain extent a status symbol. If not a status symbol of wealth, then a status symbol of social credibility. It was up there with the *Golf GTI, Rolex, Gucci bag, Armani suit* and *Filofax.*

Neville Brody

'I've tried to break down the language of communication into it's various codified forms.'[16]

16
Neville Brody.
Quoted by Poynor,
Blueprint, April 1988,
p. 51

By the age of thirty-one, Neville Brody had become the most imitated designer of the decade and had a retrospective of his design work at the V & A Museum in London. Brody was born in London in 1957 and took a degree in graphic design at the London College of Printing.

'Ten years ago a group of people said: "You don't have to accept things the way they are. Rules are changeable". From that realisation everything became questionable, nothing was true.'[17]

17
Neville Brody.
Quoted by Poynor,
Blueprint, April 1988
p. 50

It was this post-punk questioning that Brody brought to his design. Like Garrett and Saville, he looked to sources of inspiration such as *'The Pioneers of Typography'.* In his earlier work for *Fetish Records* he took a very painterly approach to his designs. Nonetheless, type was still an integral part of the whole design process. Brody experimented with a whole variety of techniques: carved wood, clay, plaster and re-photographed photographs. He used the *PMT* machine to create layered half-tones. All these effects, and the way in which they were used in conjunction with hand-drawn type, created a very distinctive record sleeve. They had an almost tribal quality. The illustrations and distinctive typography took on an iconographic status.

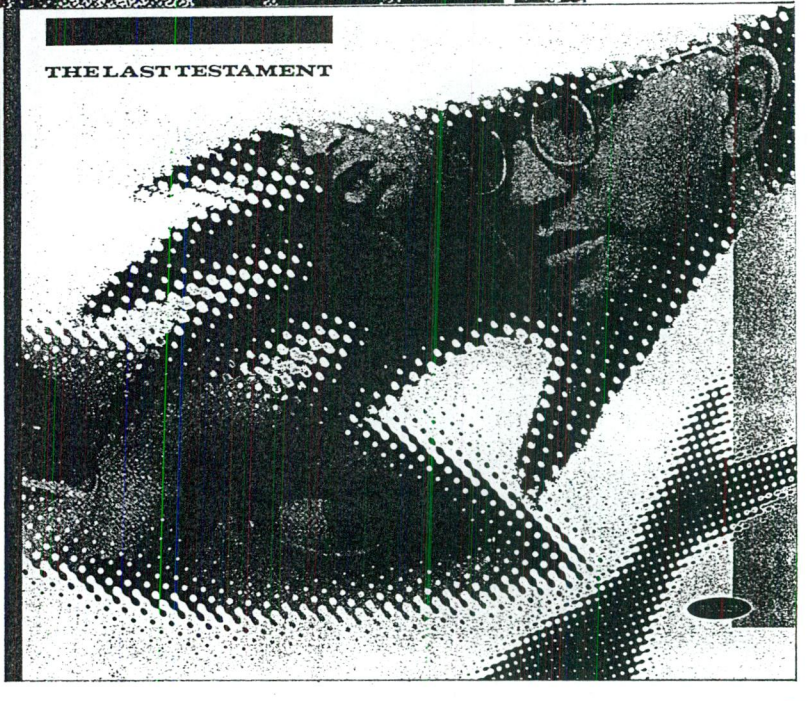
Fig. 29
Neville Brody

23 Skidoo
'The Gospel comes to New Guinnea',
Fetish Records,
1981

Fig. 30
Neville Brody

Poter for *Cabaret Voltaire*
1980

Fig. 31
Various artists,
'The Last testament"
Fetish Records,
1983



It was in *The Face* magazine that Brody was to receive most attention. *Nick Logan* started The Face in 1980. It was one of a host of magazines such as *i-D, Blitz* and *ZG* that appeared at the start of the decade. In 1981, Brody joined the shoestring staff on The Face. He set out to make every double page spread into a poster and brought his experimental questioning approach to the field of magazine design. Brody claimed that his designs and style *'... evolved from a breakdown of the traditional structure.'*

18
Neville Brody.
Quoted by Poynor,
Blueprint, April 1988
p. 50

This de-constructionist approach can be seen in the graphic treatment he gave the heading for the contents page. As the weeks went by he gradually broke down the letterforms of the word *'contents'* until they became little more than graphic shapes. They meant nothing to those other than the people who had been initiated in the previous weeks. This could be seen to be to a certain extent elitist. This unashamedly elitist approach finds parallels with Saville's New Order covers. Through the abstraction of the letterforms, Brody was also creating markings that identified the Face. It created the basis of the magazine's visual language, a language accessible only to its self-defined audience.

As mainstream graphics assimilated his design style, Brody kept changing to such an extent that with the arrival of *Arena* magazine he rejected it. He retreated into typographic orthodoxy and to an extent, presented an anti-design[19] aesthetic. In this magazine he used *Helvetica*[20] as opposed to his own typefaces. He claims to choose this face because it's so horrible, so void of expression. Still, even with this one typeface he pushes its use through experimentation and exciting placement with full-colour photographs. His work in the late 'Eighties bares some semblance to the work produced by *Wolfgang Weingart*, the prophet and guru of post-modern typography.

19
The term anti-design started to be used by designers such as Brody in the late 'eighties. What they meant by this was not that they were against the notion of design, but that they were rejecting the view of design as surface decoration or a styling process. Their way of rejecting this view was to revert to a design orthodoxy whereby the designers role appeared to be that of a technician.

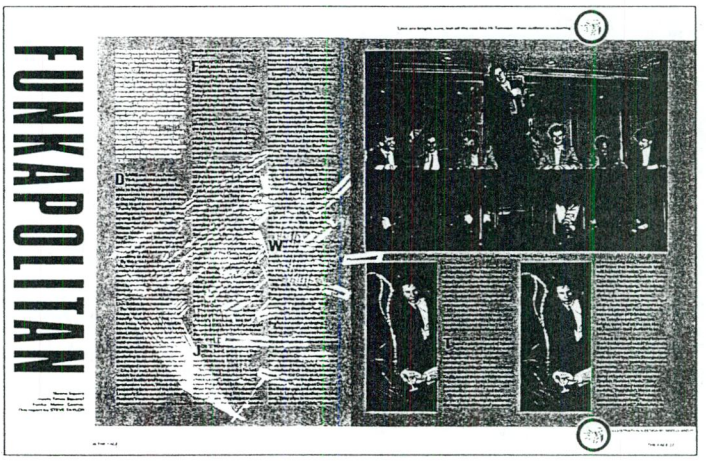
Brody also rejected the popular view of designers by referring to himself as a 'commercial artist'.

20
Helvetica was a popularly used sans serif typeface which was designed in the 'fifties. It is associated with faces such as *Univers* and modernist informational typography.

Unlike Terry Jones' work with i-D, Brody's work for the Face and Arena placed an importance on the written text. The Face presented a far wider range of subjects than the fashion led i-D magazine. It

Fig. 32
Neville Brody

Various spreads
from The Face,
August '81 - march '82



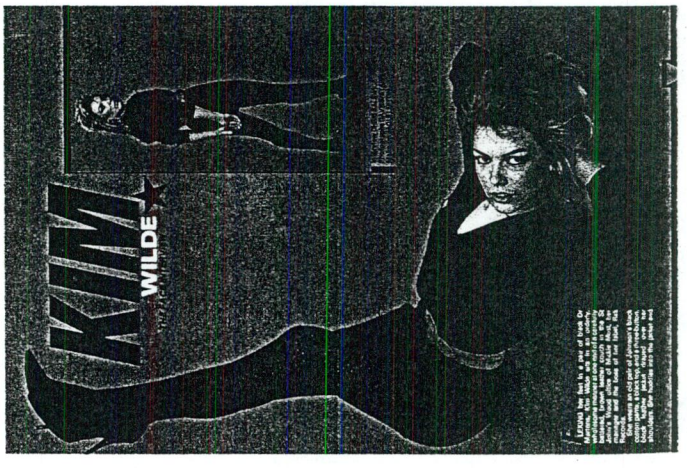


Fig. 33
Neville Brody

Contents page frome The Face,
Numbers 50 - 55,
1984

'With the breakdown of the contents logo, I was dealing with two ideas. First, the notion of modular design based on a set of units that fit together according to their use. Second, to achieve a more organic design that changed over a period of time. Over eight or nine issues, the word 'Contents' was stripped down untill it became two marks– a way of pinpointing and highlighting the recognition of words as opposed to their readability. Iwas also questioning the role of the contents page in the magazine, and more widely, visual coding as it applied to written language.'
(Wozencroft, London 1988, p. 33)

Fig. 34
Neville Brody

Style logo as it degenerated over four issues of The Face, Numbers 49, 51, 52, 53.
May, July to Sptember 1984

' The same with the Style logos, initially these too were drawn-up to look like corporate symbols, but as they developed into abstract marks, people could still read them as "style" and might not have even noticed that the word was no longer made up of real letters.'

(Wozencroft, London 1988, p. 33)

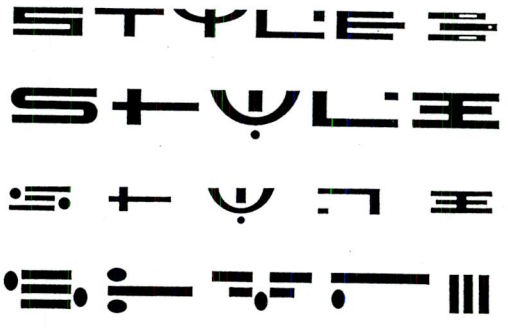


Fig. 35
Neville Brody

Cover,
Arena Number 3,
Winter 1987

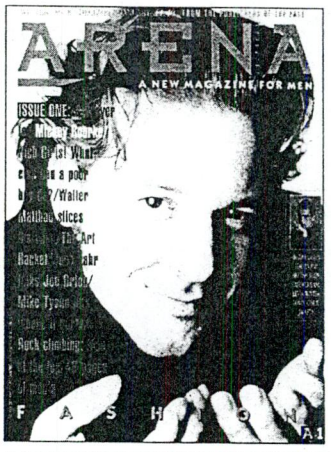


Fig. 36
Neville Brody

Double page spread,
Arena Number 1,
Winter 1986

Here we see Brody using Garamond for headlines

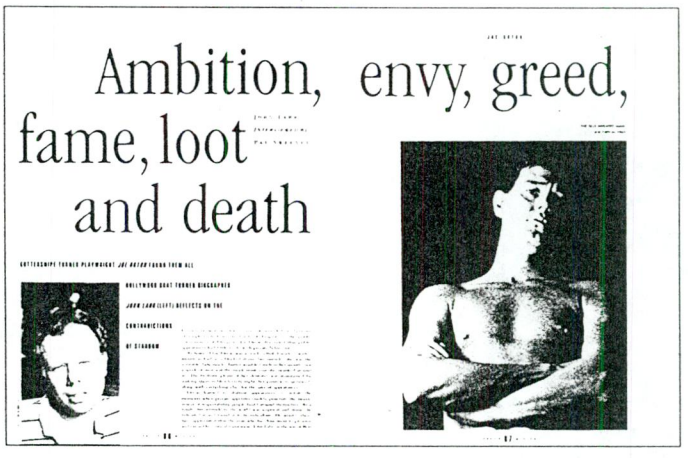
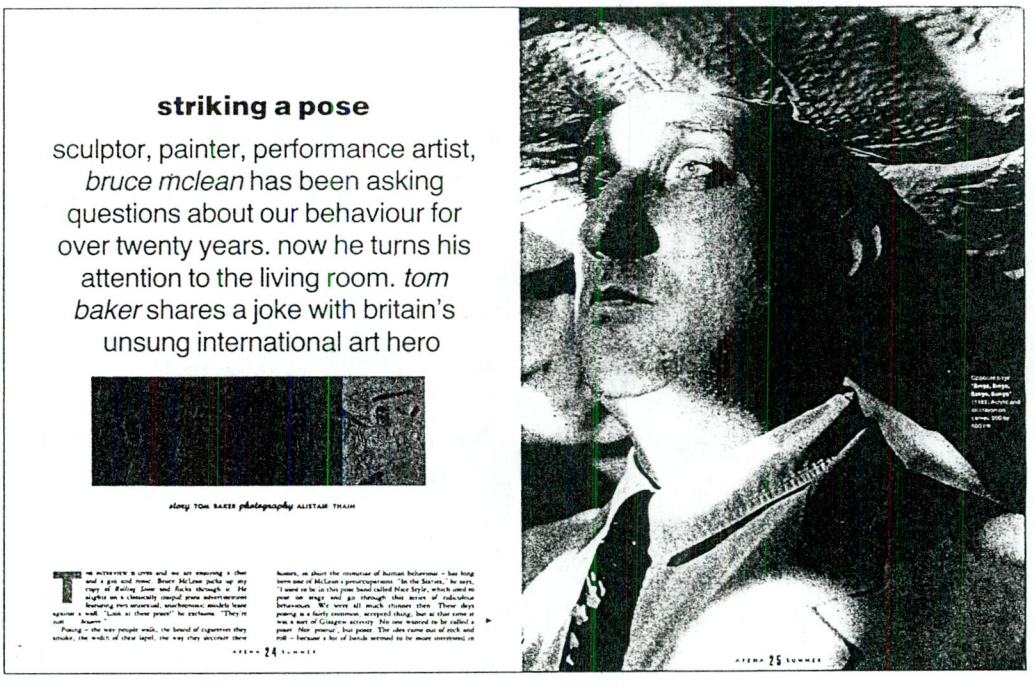


Fig. 37
Neville Brody

Double page spread,
Arena Number 3,
Winter 1987

This spread illustrates the way in which Helvetica was used in Arena. Here the type and image have been separated. This puts more emphasis upon the content rather than the design itself



was for this reason that the Face was to exert a far greater influence. It was the ultimate 'lifestyle' magazine presenting the reader with not only an underlying look in the form of the layout in photographic content, but also in its editorial content - what should you wear, support, eat, listen to, look at or be interested in? The Face, and other publications in its genre gave you all the answers.

21
Vaughan Oliver
From photocopy manuscript for article entitled 'Working Relationships', unpublished.

Vaughan Oliver (23 envelope)

'In packaging a record I aim essentially to capture moods, and to satisfy the musicians with a visual interpretation of their aural creation.

Fortunately, I am not asked to present these musicians as public personalities, as grinning facepacks or as sex for sale ... nothing so temporary.'[21]

The design duo, *23 Envelope*, have made their name as the house designers for the record company *4AD*. Their work could be described as being fine-art based. Their work is loose, intuitive and evocative. Vaughan Oliver started working at 4AD records at the beginning of the 'Eighties. Oliver works in-house and so has a very close working relationship with *Ivo Watts-Russell*, the company's manager, and the bands on the label. He studied graphic design at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Polytechnic under *Terry Dowling* between 1975-79. He subsequently worked for *Michael Peters and Partners* doing packaging design. He produced his first sleeve for 4AD in 1981. This was a collaborative effort between himself and his schoolfriend from Newcastle Polytechnic, *Nigel Grierson*. Grierson had studied photography at the RCA after completing his course at Newcastle.

It is Vaughan Oliver's input that interests me more in so much as dealt with all the design aspects of the various projects, art directing, Griersons evocative and textural photography. Vaughan Oliver sights his influences as being his tutor *Terry Dowling, Russell Mills, Samuel Beckett, eastern european shopfronts* and the work of Russian film-maker *Andrei*

Fig. 38
23 Envelope

Vaughan Oliver (left) and
Nigel Grierson (right)

Fig. 39
Vaughan Oliver

Modern English
A3 poster
4AD
1982

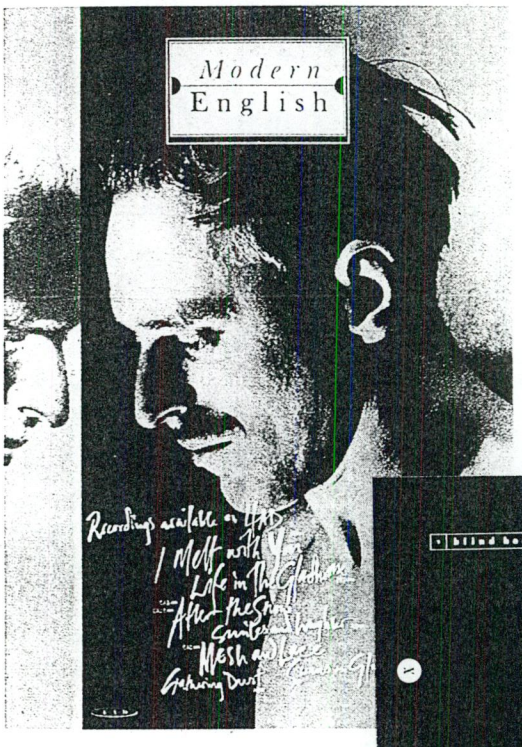


Fig. 40
Vaughan Oliver

Xymox
Blind Hearts,
A3 poster
4AD
1987

Fig. 41
Vaughan Oliver

This Mortal Coil
It will end in tears,
A3 poster
4AD
1984

Tarkovsky.

The work produced by 23 Envelope can find parallels with the work of designer *Reid Mlles* and photographer *Francis Wolff's* collaborations for *Blue Note Records* in the 'fifties and 'sixties. We see the same interaction between intuitive use of type and evocative photography.[22]

22
More information and examples of the work of Miles and Wolff can be found in EYE, issue 1.
'Cool, clear, collected.' by Robin Kinross. p.p. 72-82

Vaughan Oliver majored in illustration while at college but developed an interest in the illustrative qualities of type: *'I see typography as much an illustration to project mood and feeling via mark making as it is a piece of information'.*[23] Here we see the whole idea of type being used as a form of mark making just as in the work of Neville Brody. Oliver used old type catalogues with apparently 'out-of-date' typefaces and through its textural treatments, as well as colouring, made it an integral part of the whole design. He wanted the whole design to be working with the image to create *'a harmonious whole'.*[24] He was lucky to be dealing with a company and bands that gave him this freedom. The bands such as *Modern English, Cocteau Twins* or *X-Mel Deutchland* did not get prime time airplay and were not into shots of themselves on the sleeves. The brief, therefore, was to evoke a feeling for the music on the cover. It was this need for an evocative visual vocabulary that led him to seek inspiration from his own experiences as well as those of fine artists working in disciplines outside of design.

23
Vaughan Oliver
From photocopy manuscript for article entitled 'Working Relationships', unpublished.

24
Vaughan Oliver
From photocopy manuscript for article entitled 'Working Relationships', unpublished.

Russell Mills was breaking down the barriers between fine art and illustration while at the RCA in the late seventies. His book covers for Picador as well as his collaborations with the artists/musician *Brian Eno* provided a blueprint for the introduction of abstract texture and alternative working methods to popular design. Vaughan Oliver collaborated with Mills on the cover of *Ian McEwan's* books for *Picador.* Here we see the rich textured and eclectic approach of Mills's illustrations complimented by Oliver's sympathetic intuitive typography.

As technology has developed through the 'Eighties, Oliver

Fig. 42
Design/typography
Vaughan Oliver
Art Direction/illustration
Russell Mills

Five book covers for Picador by Ian McEwan,
First Love, Last rites
In Between the Sheets
The Imitation Game
The Cement Garden
The Comfort of Strangers

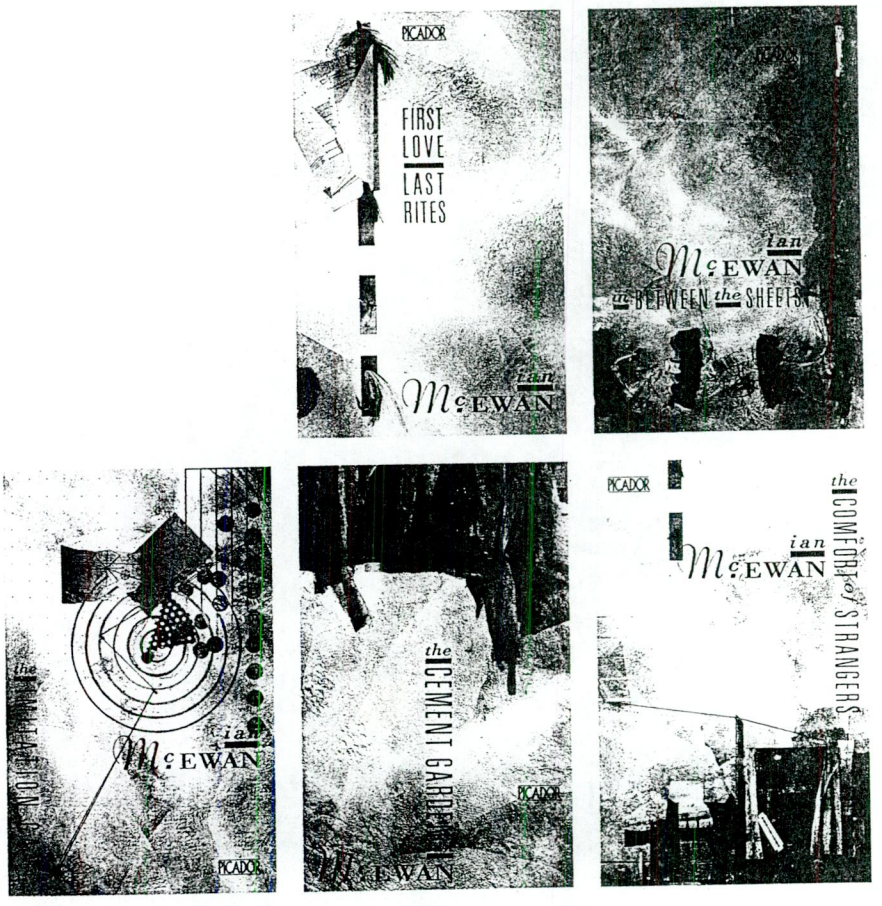


Fig. 43
Vaughan Oliver

Album Cover
Ultra Vivid Scene,
ULTRA VIVID SCENE,
4AD
1988

Fig. 44
Vaughan Oliver

Album Cover
Cocteau Twins,
TREASURE,
4AD
1984

Fig. 45
Vaughan Oliver

Album Cover
Clan of Xymox
CLAN OF XYMOX,
4AD
1985

has broadened his range of solutions. His use of the graphics paint box has received a lot of publicity. Using this tool he has been able to create layered illustrations for both his record sleeve projects as well as for printed material such as the Crysalis annual report.[25]

25
Various magazines such as *xyz* and *Graphics World* have covered Olivers used of paintbox technology.

The work of 23 Envelope and Russell Mills illustrate the way in which fine art methods were incorporated into commercial graphics. It represents an alternative to retrospectively based styling. It reflected the sensitivity to the mood and imagery of the music as well as providing an outlet for the more art-based approach to design.

8vo

If the work of *23 Envelope* was evocative and soft focus, then the work of design group *8vo* could be seen as industrial and hard-edged.

> **'Octavo has evolved from a desire to see an independent publication which acts as a serious forum for the discussion of matters, both contemporary and historical, relating to graphic design.**
>
> **As editors, we take an international, modernist stance.'[26]**

26
Introduction to first issue of *Octavo*, Issue 86.1

In the introduction to the first issue of *Octavo,* the four editors, *Simon Johnston, Mark Holt, Michael Burke* and *Hamish Muir*, pinned their modernist colours firmly to the mast. *Octavo, 'a journal of typography'*, first appeared in 1986 and can be viewed as a journal that puts forward the views, influences, and aesthetic values of the company 8vo. Octavo was envisaged as a series of eight journals, six of which were produced in the 'Eighties. To follow its progression in both layout and editorial content is to follow the reaction against designerism as the 'Eighties progressed.

As a design company, 8vo have been involved with design projects ranging from record covers for *Factory Records* to promotional

Fig. 46
8vo

Detail from back
of Album cover
Dirruti Column
'Without Mercy'
Factory Records
1984

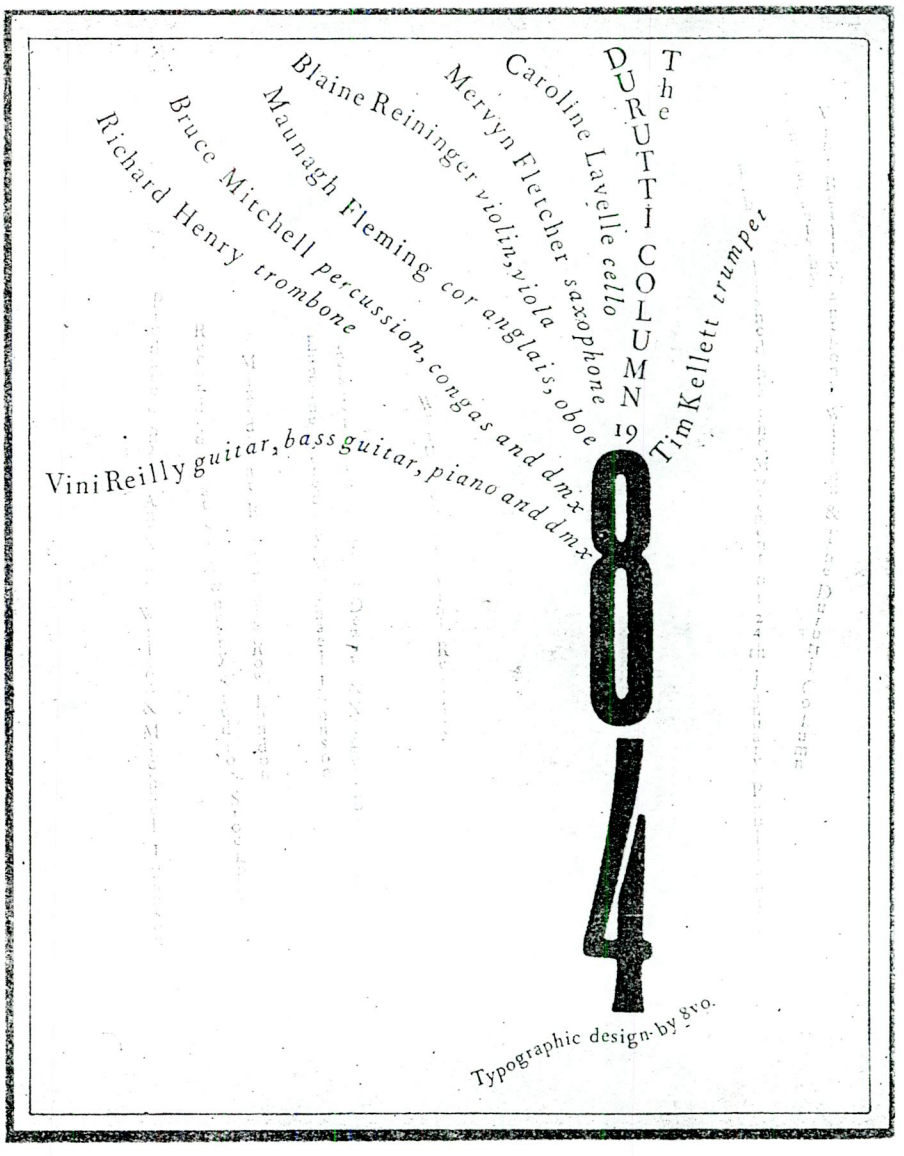
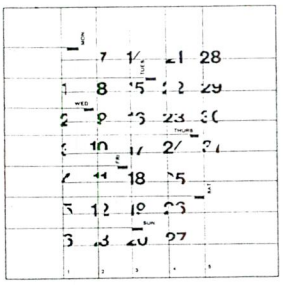


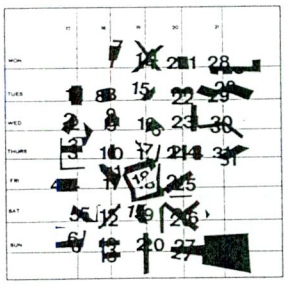
Fig. 47
8vo

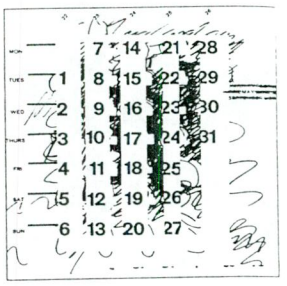
Sample of personal work by Hamish Muir while studying under Wolfgang Weingart at Basel, c.1983

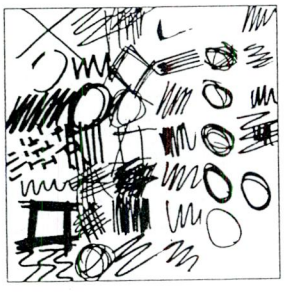
Weingart explains this work: 'For years the design of calendars has been a recurring theme in our typeshop. Type must not always be legible. The important questions are "Who is the audience and wahet is the message? Calendars for a printer, a travel agency or an artist?" In this case the student has expressed his own private design world by making a calendar for himself. Some might find these illegible, but public legibility was not his concern.'

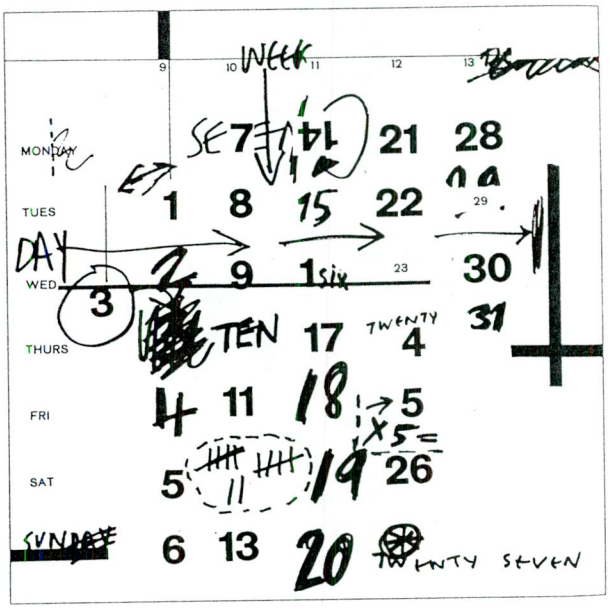
Design Quarterly, 130
p. 16
1985











material for *Pfau Jones Architects*. From their earlier work, such as the cover for *Durrutti Column's 'WITHOUT MERCY'* album, they have displayed an interest in semantical typography.[27] In this case they draw upon the French concrete poet *Appolinaire* for inspiration. One of the design groups partners, *Hamish Muir*, studied under *Wolfgang Weingart* at Basle in the early 'Eighties. 8vo paid tribute to the teachings of the influential Weingart in issue 87.4 of Octavo. Weingart believed that *'only through intelligent open minded investigation based upon formal typographic understanding, can a designer develop, become independent, and learn to challenge the accepted design standards.'*[28]

27
Semantical typography is explained and discussed in an article entitled 'Semantical Composition' *Octavo*, issue 86.2 pp. 2 –6

28
Wolfgang Weingart quoted in the introduction to Octavo 87.4

Muir and his colleagues in 8vo followed through Weingart's approach as well as his visual style: sans serif type; steps; rules; weight changes and sudden changes in scale. As 8vo came to prominence in the mid-'Eighties, they provided a forum for re-evaluating and challenging the design aesthetics being presented by the post-punk designers of the early 'Eighties such as Garrett, Saville and Brody. Unlike these designers 8vo did not come from a predominantly music base. Though they did design for music companies such as Factory Records, they came from a broader design base. Companies such as Friedland (a manufacturing company that specialised in door bells) commissioned them to design informational schemes and packaging for an international market. *Wim Crowel*, formerly of *Total Design*, Amsterdam, but more recently director of the *Boymans Museum* in Rotterdam, commissioned the group to design a series of posters and promotional material for the Museum. These posters and brochures were dominated by the use of sans serif type and curiously cropped images. They were bound together by various structural devices.

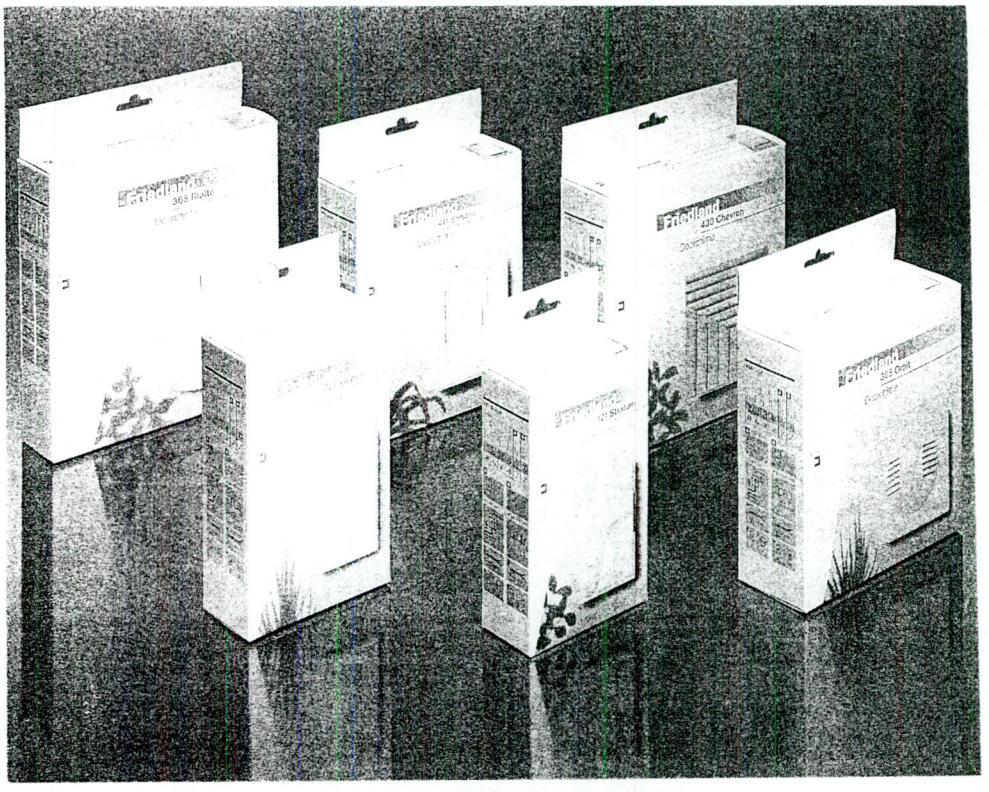
8vo represented the new breed of designer who had not been directly affected by the happenings of the 'seventies. They were not enamoured by the 'ruleless' approach and sought out direction through a return to modernist principles. As designers who effectively started during the 'Eighties, they seemed to have a desire for order. Could this be seen as a

Fig. 48
8vo

Examples of work executed for Friedland, the British bell and chime company,
1989

This project did not just include packaging and identity. 8vo were involved in the redesign of Friedland's technical data in thirteen languages. It is this involvement in functional design that is central to 8vo:

"Our arguement is that things can be aesthetically wonderfull, but solve functional problems too."
(Blueprint, May 1989, p. 14)



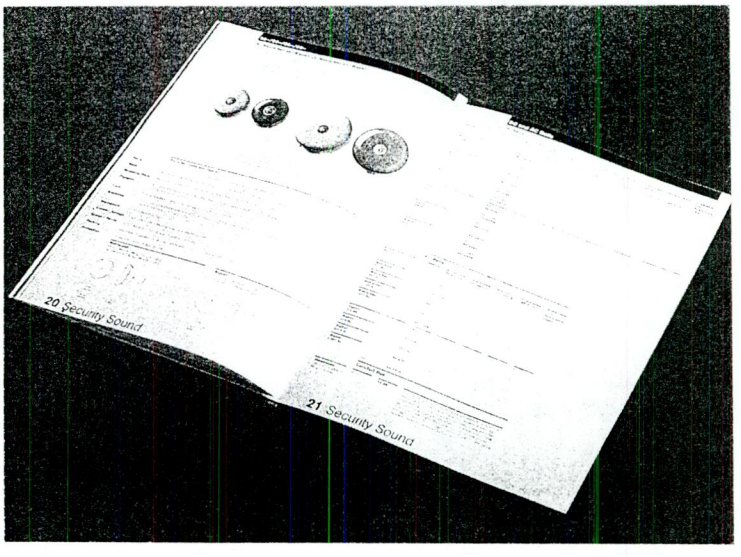


Fig. 49
8vo

Posters designed for Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam
1989-1990

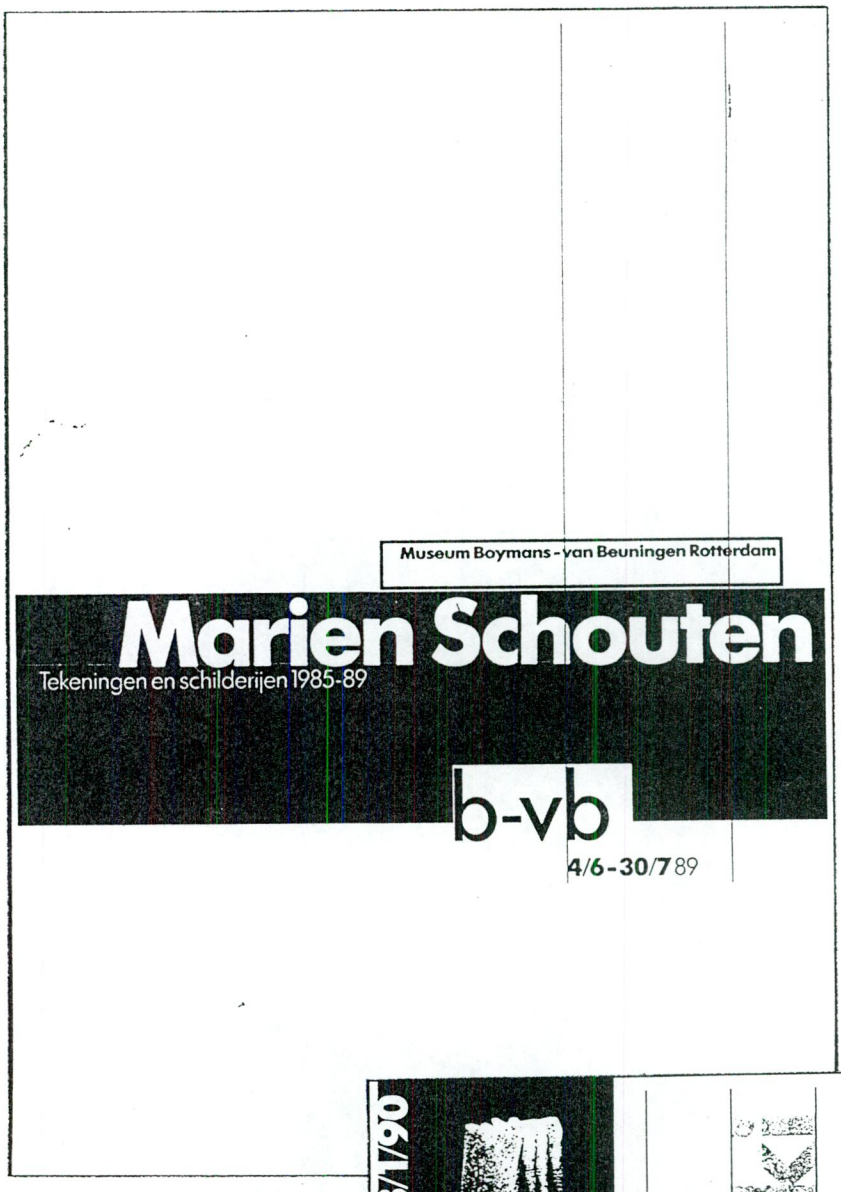


Fig. 50
8vo

Cover of Octave 86.1
1986

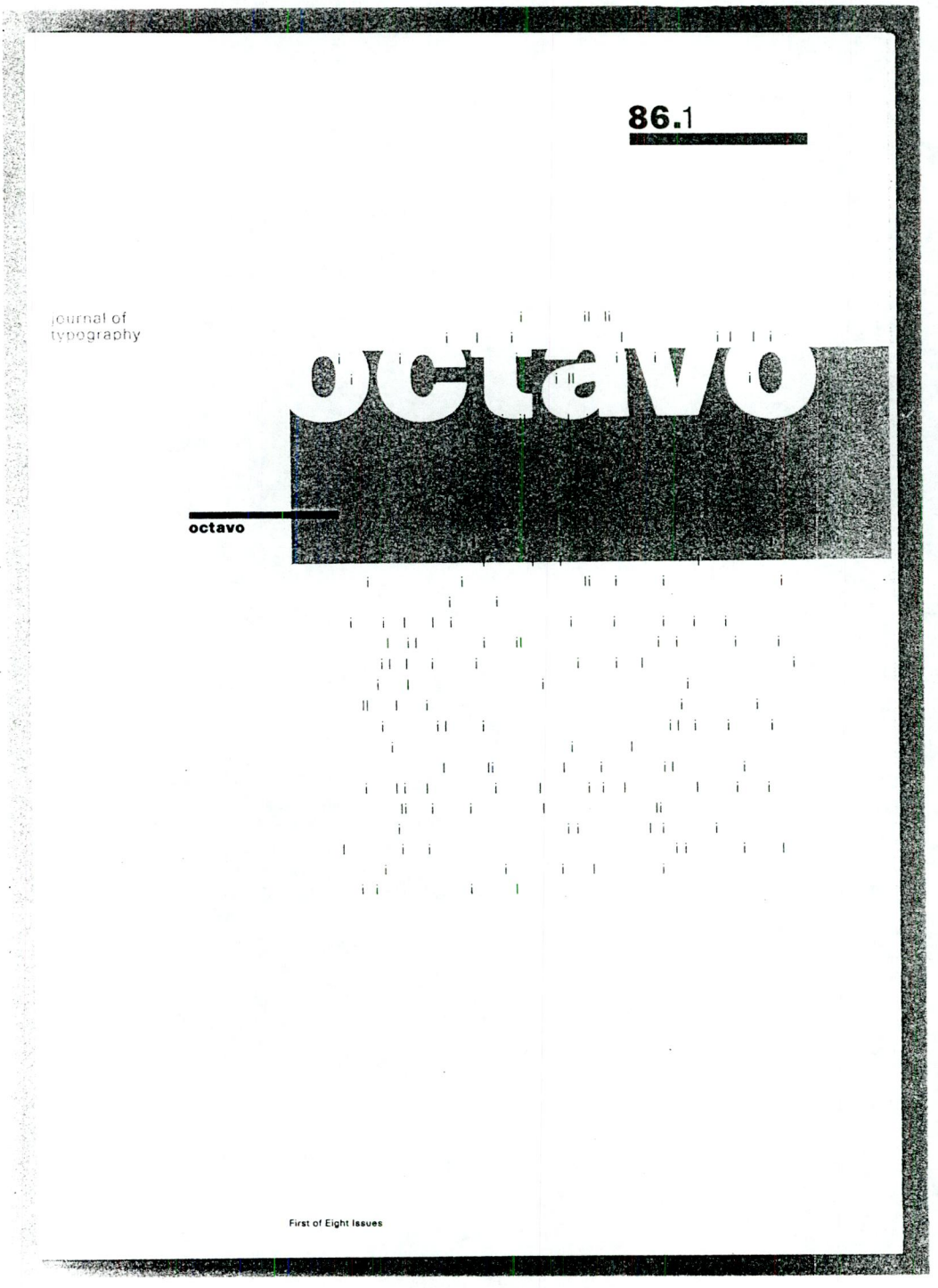


Fig. 51
8vo

Cover of Octavo 88.5
1985

truer reflection of attitudes in the mid to late 'Eighties. To some extent it could be said that unlike the previously mentioned designers, most of 8vo's work, though used by the public, seemed not to enter a design dialogue with them. Their points of reference seem void of many of the obvious decorative elements. Where Brody and Garrett had provided decorated and attractive 'popular' design in the mid 'Eighties, 8vo seemed aloof to titillating the public with visual tricks, concentrating more on the structure and semantics of typography. This more introspective and self-referencing approach to typographic aesthetics is what separated them from the more popular designers.

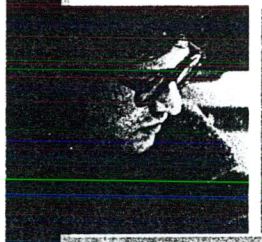
Fig. 52
8vo

Double page spread introducing Wolfgang Weingart in Octavo 87.4, 1984

Wolfgang Weingart: How Can One Make Swiss Typography? Theoretical and practical typographic results from the teaching period 1968-1973 at the School of Design, Basle.

Summary of contents: What is Swiss Typography?; Technical Work and Elementary Typography; The Syntactic Dimension in Typography; The Semantic Dimension in Typography; The Formation of Signs as a Syntactic Process; Pure Design - Typography as 'Painting'; How Does Basle Differ from Other Schools?; Conclusion: What Should the Correct Typography Education Contain?

Editorial



Introduction

At that time, almost twenty years ago, no one thought that this new visual attitude and method of experimentation could be the beginning of today's so-called 'New Wave' style.

During the past two decades there have been students from about twenty-five different nations in our Advanced Class for Graphic Design. These former students are now scattered all over the continents. They have used their school experience in different ways. For them typography was not the only subject at the Basle School of Design; there were other disciplines as well. The thoughts and reactions to my course were so strong that many former students, especially those from 1968 to 1975, put the typographic vocabulary into practice in either a positive and constructive way, or in a very misunderstood way. It was never my intention to create a commercial 'style' at Basle. Because certain aspects of my experimentation, such as letter-spacing, were becoming more and more copied and misused in commercial work, I radically changed my teaching strategy in the mid-seventies to a quieter method. I returned to more basic problems and principles, including those of 'Swiss Typography', from which each student could find his or her own expression. At first we worked using only conventional printing techniques, but during recent years we have begun to incorporate new technological possibilities such as computers. We now have the exciting opportunity to combine the use of different equipment: metal composition, a professional darkroom, a photocopy machine, and five Macintosh computers with two kinds of printer.

There are several reasons why we are republishing the manuscript 'How Can One Make Swiss Typography?' in this issue of Octavo: Firstly, to present the historical background of the particular way in which I teach typography. Secondly, to republish thoughts which have nothing to do with current design fashion, in order to show that new developments in theory and in practice can be built up in an organized and consistent way. Thirdly, to demonstrate that the discipline of typography need not be boring, inflexible, cold, or stiff. Typography can be a pleasure. And finally, to clarify the confusion about the origins of some of today's graphic and typographic trends, and to explain just what happened in Basle within the field of typography: the ice of the fifties and sixties was broken, creating a world of new and crazy design possibilities.

In the coming decades we need an exchange of ideas and information between trained designers, whether written by hand, printed on paper, or transmitted via new electronic media. Furthermore, what is now needed more than ever are educational institutions where a designer's training develops from the most elementary problems through to the most complex, using simple tools as well as the most advanced electronic technology. Only in this way can we alter the current criteria for what constitutes good and bad in design, and begin to change radically the chaos which exists in our visual environment.

I would like to thank all my past students, as well as Peter von Kornatzki for his editorial contribution to the original German manuscript, and William Schorner for the translation into English.

Wolfgang Weingart,
Basle, November 1987

Fig. 53
8vo

Double page spread in Octavo 88.6, 1988

Most architects, even those who are successful in achieving massive image replication for themselves, are unaware of the effect of this image cascade and the irrelevance of any coherent theoretical position they may take to their performance within it. Late 20th century architects may be seen trying to externalize a form from the formless technologies that have already ephemeralized their art. Some, regarded as the most advanced, seek inspiration in those few incontrovertible structural demands that the information economy does make. The need to support microwave and satellite antennae, for example, was heavily dramatized in the original competition-winning design by architect Richard Horden for the £30 million Stag Place office building project of 1987 – even though much publicity about the miniaturization of dish antenna technology coincided with the publication of his scheme. In the same way the ostentatious expression of all the equipment needed to maintain the exacting indoor environment required by information processing machines provides a rationale for the 'inside out' appearance of the Lloyd's building. Though often praised in professional magazines, in the context of the true impact of information on buildings this 'loyal functionalism' is little more than a pathetic cargo-culting of the obsolete methodology of the Modern era. Like the pioneers of prefabricated housing, who exposed the limitations of the logic of mechanized construction by aligning their six storey walk-ups so as to require the minimum movement from their mobile steam cranes, today's structural expressionists have missed the essence of the information economy and must perforce concentrate on the crumbs that drop from its table.

No burden of antennae, however vastly exaggerated, and no tonnage of climate control can make sufficiently challenging formal demands to incontrovertibly determine the appearance of a new building in the way that the mighty Gothic window did for the medieval master builders, or the tower crane for the prefabricators of Modern architecture. On the contrary, the new semiology of electronic 'functional demands' can be hidden with equal ease behind mirror-glass or classical facades. The rapidly miniaturizing dish aerial can already be lost inside a Renaissance dome; the climate control equipment neatly immured in a blind-windowed antechamber.

Signs are information, part of the new logic that is superseding this arbitrary architecture. Vast areas of the built environment are buildings in the retail sector – shops and supermarkets, restaurants, pubs, bars and breweries, leisure centres, filling stations, garages and showrooms – are as unimaginable without signs as Christianity without the cross. The most extreme common visual sign-conquest, the filling station, is an incredibly complex high-tech building in miniature that rises far above the status of architecture because it is literally made of energy and information.

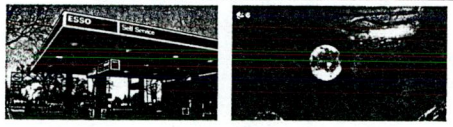
Filling stations are of unique interest, they are the prototype unmanned buildings of tomorrow, even though they still have a skeleton crew. They relate to conventional buildings in the way unmanned space probes relate to manned space craft. In space parlance architecture means manned extra-terrestrial vehicles, like the DC-3 look-alike Space Shuttle, or the tiny fraction of the up of the massive Apollo rocket that put two men in a bundle of aluminium and kitchen foil on the Moon a few times. Signs are different, they are the unmanned probes that have already been all over the universe. This is a brief description by John Low, commercial director of Oldham Claudgen, of how filling stations are designed that illuminates this difference perfectly:

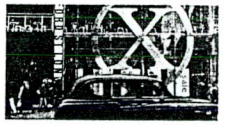
'If it's a green field site, the oil company does a traffic survey to measure the throughput of vehicles on the road. That gives them the amount of petrol they can expect to sell, and that determines the number of pumps and the canopy size. Then their engineers produce a standard steel canopy and that is covered with back-lit, colour-coded acrylic signs designed by the company's design consultants - one type 'A' here, one type 'B' on top, three type 'C' there and so on. The pumps are panelled with signs and the roadside sign is an illuminated gantry that carries the price of the petrol down to tenths of a penny. That price, and the price on the pumps, can be changed instantaneously by a telephone command from head office'.

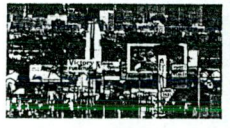
This near-robot design process already puts most architects in the stone age. Filling stations, like the electronic dealing rooms of the City superbanks, are energy + information, not architecture. Unlike most back to the future architects, the people who design them wallow in millions of pounds' worth of computer-aided design and printing equipment adapted from the publishing industry, and use numerically controlled manufacturing tools and advanced materials ranging from superplastic aluminium to polyolefines. Unlike most buildings, nearly all signs are designed on VDUs, made by robots and installed by trucks with power-operated articulated arms.

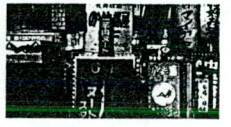
Look around you. Signs emerge unscathed from the passionate debate about heritage and history, views of Saint Paul's and the agony of the Prince of Wales. When you first start to see them it is almost as though the buildings they are fixed to cease to exist. Rendered invisible by a conspiracy of architectural appreciation that somehow agrees to filter them out of critical discourse, signs range from estate agents boards to the forests of cryptic indicators that obliterate traffic intersections, overwhelm Heathrow Airport and the Barbican Arts Centre, and make a glittering acrylic mockery of the money-no-object restoration of venerable banks and castles.

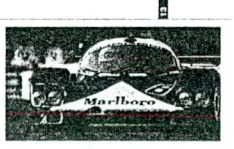
Under the impact of information, buildings are evolving into important electronically serviced floorspace, inside important engineering structures, clad in important signs – with architecture off the case forever. Trained to think slowly, the corporate sign people reluctantly agree that information could overtake architecture in this way, but none of them really wants to predict it. Tom Mason, MD of a firm called Panel Signs comes nearest: 'In the filling stations you can see a blurring of the dividing line between building and signs. It is all being pushed forward by the design consultancies'. But even Mason can't see the extent of the revolution that is coming. 'I can't see Las Vegas coming to England'., he adds opaquely. 'The planners would never allow it'.











7 Letterform extracted from a street name sign and incorporated into a store front. Oxford Street, London.
8 Esso petrol filling station by Heinz Isler, Switzerland. An experimental unmanned building of tomorrow. Looking like Le Corbusier's idea of a simple concrete shell, only like the filling station is planned by traffic measurement, designed by robots, and made of energy and signs.
9 The NASA unmanned space probe Voyager penetrated further into space than all the other manned spacecraft well in the next few hundred years. It sent back this image of Jupiter and four moons.
10 Los Angeles, with rise signs above low rise buildings.
11 Tokyo street. A mass of signs compete for attention.
12 Signs project at right angles to the street, standing signs grow out of a parking lot in Las Vegas.
13 Marlboro Man. Porsche. Marlboro? The static image of the moving object makes the advertising more important than the product, more important than the car is more important than the information. Car advertising is meant to be seen standing still in a magazine.

Summary

The designers that emerged in the early eighties, carried with them a healthy disregard for the rules as well as a desire to learn from the past. They were given the freedom to express themselves through the independent music industry as well as the flourishing 'lifestyle' magazines.

Disregard for the rules expressed itself through the deconstruction of typeforms ad the use of oblique imagery. Existing values and attitudes were questioned. In some instances legibility was disregarded as secondary to the style.

Retrospection was in a way a type of style source book in the early eighties. *'The age of plunder'* [29] as it was called in The Face. Design *seen to be design* and style became part of the consumerist bandwagon.

29
Savage, 'The age of plunder', The Face, January 1983. pp. 45–9.

As styles changed as quick as new ones emerged, designers started to become disillusioned and revert back to basics. Anti-design and a new sense of functionalism emerged. Typefaces started to be used in their 'pure' unaltered form once again.

Along side these approaches to design there was the emergence of the more art-based approach. This has remained more or less constant throughout the decade. All that has changed in this genre is the possibilities open to designers as new technology, such as the paintbox, has become more accessible.

According to Roger Dean and David Howells, in their Second Album Cover Album, Punk was a prelude to certain developments in record sleeve design. These developments are evident in the work of the designers which were discused in this chapter.

(i) A movement away from image into construction, a movement which saw the sleeve as an item of possession rather than just a thing to look at.

We saw this in the work of all the designers mentioned in this chapter.

(ii) A growing awareness of, and enthusiasm for, corporate identity. Every facet of the original sleeve was to become more carefully correlated with general merchandising. In addition the sleeve itself was to include every element including logos, catalogue numbers and other necessary minutia in the overall design.

The way in which Malcolm Garrett presented many of his bands is a classic example of this approach.

(iii) A movement toward classicism and simplicity. Conscious use of type, either by itself or in conjunction with a single photograph, nearly pretentious on occasions, but invariably tasteful.

This classical approach was most evident in the work of Peter Saville

(iv) The main drift has been towards more painterly, more overtly arty sleeves - less use of hard edged imagery (and photography in general), more use of all kinds of painting and illustration, lino and woodcuts, printing ticks, weird drawing utensils, plain graphics and found pictures. More a sense of the fleeting than the clearly seen or permanently fixed image. Less a sense of meaning more a sense of feeling.[30]

30
The Album Cover Album 3

Though this approach could be seen in most of the designers work, such as Brodys early record designs, it best describes the direction taken by designers such as Russell Mills and Vaughan Oliver.

Chapter Three

Style and 'designerism'

In the one hundredth issue of The Face magazine, in September 1988, it described what it entitled the '100 Inventions of the 'Eighties.' Listed number eighty three was 'Designer Everything'.

> **"From Adland's ideal home (Mont blanc pen, Braun calculator, Tizo lamp) to Sainsbury's fresh food counter (why buy Radicchio rather than Iceburg? kos it says much more than ordinary lettuce can)... Design is everything and everything is design. Designer death on your television screen; designer condoms between your sheets. The designer lifestyle can be yours... if the price is right!"[31]**

31
The Face,
one hundredth issue,
September 1988

Design in the 'Eighties appeared to take on a renewed status. It was the decade where appearance was everything. Style became more important as the new designers asserted their own particular approach. Designers, such as those discussed in the previous chapter, designed with post-punk inspired individuality. This individuality was what seemed to be the deciding factor in the 'Eighties, but why did it have such broad appeal. How did these designers' work come to have such influence in the 'Eighties?

Youth culture and the 'Fifties

Many comparisons have been made between the 'Fifties and the 'Eighties. Both were periods of apparent economic expansion with large youth populations. With such a large youth population in the 'Fifties we saw the emergence of teenagers as an economic force with spending power, and with this influence the emergence of youth culture. Youth culture was also a dominant force in the 'Eighties, where, as we have seen, the young started once again to become more vocal in the wake of punk and the pessimism of the 'Seventies.

Another major link is the influence of music. The 'Fifties

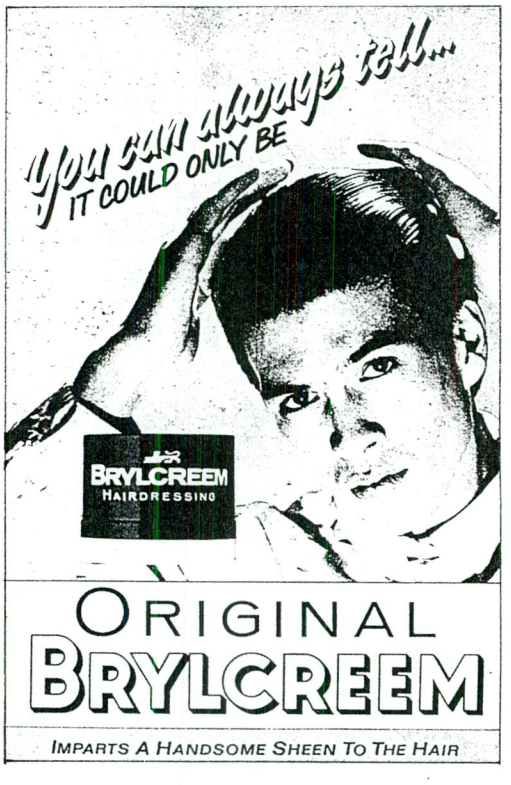
Fig. 54
Young Spivs

Taken for the Picture Post magazine in 1954, this photograph was part of a series highlighting the 'youth problem'. Its romantic style highlights the priorities of working-class teenagers: stylish dress and a distinctive visual image.
(McDermott,
London 1989
p. 10)

Fig. 55

Brylcreem advertisment, 1986

Here we see the revival of 'Fifties imagery to update the public image of Brylcreem



saw advances in recording technology such as magnetic tape in 1950 and stereo in 1958. This helped strengthen the influence of music to make it both a binding force for various youth sub-cultures, such as *the Rockers* or *the Teddy Boys*, or a force with which to express their independence. The 'Eighties was a time that saw the emergence of music as a serious force to be reckoned with, not only on a sociological level but on a financial and business level also. Small independent record companies showed how they could be successful, even after the record sales slump at the start of the decade. They were successful by doing their own thing, by asserting their individuality. New developments such as the three minute 'pop' video started to give the music scene even more influence, as well as making people more aware of visual merchandising in the industry. This expressed itself in the use of picture sleeves on 7" single records and the introduction of 12" mixes and 'picture discs' (records with pictures laminated by the pressed vinyl - the music and the graphics were one and the same).

Just as style had been important among the emerging youth culture in the 'Fifties, it resumed the same importance in the 'Eighties. In the 'Fifties the young looked to America, its movie stars and its music, for their visual style. In the late 'Fifties they looked to Italian fashion. For stylistic references in the 'Eighties, the young did not look abroad, they looked back to the 'Thirties, the 'Forties and the 'Fifties. The look in the early 'Eighties seemed to be retro'.

The way in which people dressed, and the symbols that they surrounded themselves with, became a way of life in the 'Eighties. The emergence of the *Yuppie* (Young Urban Professional) was symptematic of this image based lifestyle.

Consumerism

There was one good result that came out of the re-emergence of a youth market as a dominant force, as far as the retailers were concerned, and that was that for the kids to stay *'hip', 'cool'* or *'trendy'* they

Fig. 56
Go! magazine for the Midland Bank, designed by David Davies Associates

Streetwise, a magazine insert from Top Shop

Promotional booklet designed for Brylcreem by Terry Jones

All these show the way in which street base youth design was used to sell every thing from clothes and cosmetics to bank accounts.

had to buy whatever was considered to be 'hip', 'cool', or 'trendy'. By the mid-'Eighties, after the Falklands War and the trouble of the early 'Eighties, Margaret Thatcher's Britain entered a retail boom, encouraged by low interest rates and the conservative government in total power, crushing the power of the trade unions (such as the Miners' strike and their defeat), and then privitising public companies such as *British Telecom*. She created an environment where anything was possible once you had the cash, and sure if you didn't zero per cent financing could be arranged![32] It appeared that until *'Black Monday'* in 1987 you could have whatever you wanted. Thatcher set about putting power in the hands of the consumer. It could be argued that she opened the consumer up to the exploitation of their own greed by the retailers. The bottom line was, however, that people were out there on the high street... buying.

32
In 1986 £30.7 billion was bought on credit.

Black Monday was the day in 1987 when stock prices world wide crashed, marking the end of the short-lived economic boom.

"I SHOP THEREFORE I AM."[33]

33
Barbara Kruger, quoted in The Face, June 1989, p. 29

With the new economic boom and the emphasis on consuming, the designers rolled into action. The desire to tap into the new markets and consumers made the retailers look to design as a way of making their goods look better and their shops into cathedrals worthy of the new religion of 'consumerism'.

"Appearances are everything. Now that technical achievement and low prices no longer determine competition, quality and style are the twin focal points in marketing. And what is 'design' about if not these two elements?"[34]

34
Huygen, London 1989, p. 87

To what extent did designers such as Neville Brody, Peter Saville and Malcolm Garrett contribute to the rise of consumerism, and to what extent were they a part of it? Each of these designers were involved in the music industry. It should not be forgotten that despite its *'drugs and sex and Rock'n' Roll'* image it is still an industry and it was these people that were packaging that industry. It should also be noted that these designers were

Fig. 57
Margret Thatcher

British Prime Minister
from 1979 - 1990.

The mother of consumerism
and every Yuppies' favourite
aunty.

successful at what they were doing, the success being reflected in the sales that their respective record companies or clients attained. In 1980, as we have seen , the only companies doing well in the recording industry were the independents. it was these companies that employed the young acts, the young designers and were the companies that let their people have free reign. It was this independence of thought and business risk-taking, as well as entrepreneurial skills that were to become the traits of the sub-culture for the 'Eighties - the Yuppies. These companies, and through them their designers, were expressing many of these Yuppie traits even before the term was coined. Just as style and the 'correct' visual references were important to the Yuppies, they were also important to the designers.

The use and abuse of style

"The first stylistic rule goes
when you see the wrong people doing it,
move on." [35]

35
Peter York,
Modern Times
p. 76

Designers such as Saville as we have seen were meticulous in their design referencing and this lead to a very cool, classical and stylish presentation. But what was the importance of style within their design? In the 'Fifties style gave one credibility amongst one's peers. Through the use of various references such as the right haircut, length and width of trouser leg or even stance, information could be transmitted about your interests or what sub-culture you belonged to. The young were sensitive to every detail of visual coding. Style was about saying the 'right' things visually to those who could understand. It was about wearing the 'right' things. The 'right' things being determined by what your music idol or movie star was being dressed in for the promo' shots. The various stylistic references were only seen to be right or wrong according to their associations. As their associations changed they would go out of fashion, out of style.

When Brody, Saville and Garrett started in design they wanted to redefine the way in which people perceived record covers, this

being the medium in which they all got their break. They used various techniques and approaches to do this, whether it was returning to a sort of design classicism or deconstructing and codifying various graphic symbols. What they all had in common was that they wanted to change things, they wanted to make people question, they wanted to be innovative. In order to do this they had to develop their own visual vocabulary. For the purpose of this chapter I will concentrate on the work of Neville Brody to illustrate the use and exploitation of style in 'Eighties graphic design.

36
Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 94

> **'Style has become increasingly imperative. It is a movement away from 'who you are' towards 'what you might become' or 'what you could appear to be'; but this is no adventurous form of travel, rather a visual tourism that confirms the common desire to escape urban anonymity.'** [36]

Neville Brody's visual style developed out of his desire to make people more aware of the use of design and its effect on the people that used it.

37, 38
Neville Brody
quoted by Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 5

> **'I wanted to make people more aware rather than less aware, and with the design that I started to do, I was following the idea of design to reveal, not to conceal.**
> **' I wanted to communicate to as many people as possible, but also make a popular form of art that was more personal and less manipulative.'** [37]

In order to develop the skills to be able to do this Brody made a conscious decision to study graphic design at the London College of Printing because *'it had a reputation for being one of the hardest graphic design colleges in Europe, not hard as in difficult, but pure'.* [38] He believed that in order to react against something you had to know all about it first. When Punk emerged as a dominant force in London in 1977 it gave Brody the confidence to do what he wanted.

Fig. 58
Neville Brody

Album Cover
8 Eyed Spy
Fetish Records
1981

39
Neville Brody
quoted by Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 5

'... you should pursue an idea, do it, stop, then go on to the next one.' 39

It was this constant doing and changing that was to become the hallmark of Brody's approach. Through his experimentation and work with independent record companies such as *Fetish* and *Stiff* he developed a recognisable style based upon his experiments using the PMT camera and various painterly images. The typography, being an integral part of the whole design, was almost organic in its use and positioning. In his cover for the group *8 Eyed Spy*, in 1981,Brody used his own hand drawn type for the first time. The image for this cover was based on the work of the French film poster artists of the 'Fifties. It was however Brody's hand drawn type that was to become his most recognisable stylistic element.

For his work on The Face magazine, the work with which he was to become most renowned, Brody's use of type and especially his own hand drawn faces gave the magazine a distinctive look and questioned the traditional structure of magazine design.

40
Neville Brody
quoted by Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 96

'Everything in The Face was reasoned; every single mark on the page was either an emotive response or a logical extension of the ideas. If I was bleeding a headline off the page, it wasn't a case of "Oh, let's bleed type off the page". I was wanting 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 only to section out *one small part of that*; and lastly, 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.' 40

Brody used his own hand drawn type in conjunction with carefully cropped photographs to create exiting, engaging page spreads. He

Fig. 59
Neville Brody

The Face No. 40,
Joseph Beuys
August 1983

Fig. 60
Neville Brody

The Face No. 42,
'The perfect Beat'
October1983

also designed in such a way as to make the reader look twice at a page. This approach was often critisized by those who felt that the headlines or the articles themselves should be readable at first glance. Their criticisms were not reflected in sales however as The Face became the 'Style Bible'.It was for those who wanted to use it, an instruction book with a set of rules that were constantly being changed. [41]

41
Neville Brody discusses this view of The Face in Wozencroft, London 1988 p. 99

The Face, and indeed Brody's design itself, did not set out to make The Face a 'style' magazine, a label given to other magazines at the time including i-D. It was a label that was *'foisted upon them'* [42]. They started to represent, to those in business, the visual language of the trendy youth market. Not everyone understood the meaning behind Brody's design. For example he would use his own hand drawn type, *'very geometric, austere and non-emotive',* [42] based upon a 'Thirties style in order to make the parallel, in graphic terms, between what happened in the 'Thirties and the the situation in the 'Eighties: *'the divided nation, the class division, the economic recession, and a highly authoritarian government.'* [43]

42, 43
Neville Brody
Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 102

44
Dennis Collins, manager at Cogent Typesetters, Kilburn, quoted in Lithoweek Supplement, 23 October 1985

'Very often people will see a headline in The Face and say 'we want that".' [44]

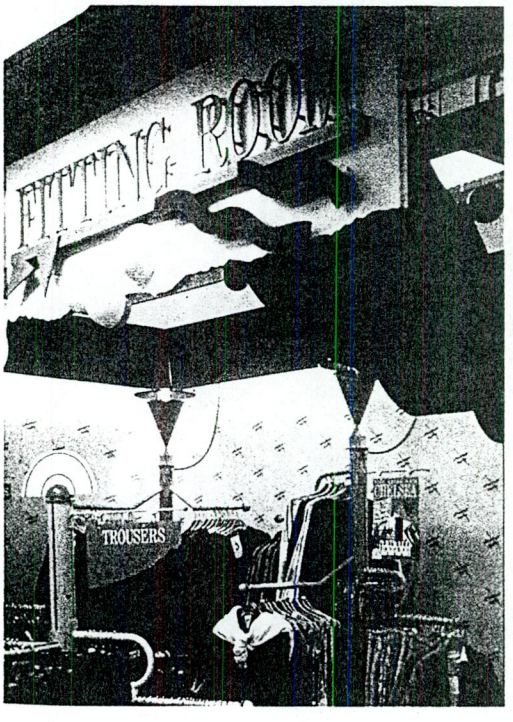
Because of his stated intention to make design accessible Brody evolved a style that was very popular among the readers of The Face. His use of symbols and codified graphic shapes, each with its own significance, made the magazine one which was both interesting to read and interesting to look at. It became in itself a symbol for the times, constantly updating itself and staying ahead of the competition, ahead of the readers expectations. Unfortuneatly when anything is possible nothing is surprising. Brody had created his own visual style but it would appear that he was starting to feel a slave to it and the level on which many people looked at his work.

'There were times when I felt that my work had been ripped off so much that I didn't want to make any new statement on

Fig. 61
Dorothy Perkins
The Jenkins Group

Design for Chelsea Girl retail chain, 1986

Here we see design for the youth market taking its references from the pages of The Face.



the page whatsoever.' [45]

45
Neville Brody
Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 102

Brody, it seemed was too successful for his own good. Once his visual style became recognisable, it was the style of his design that would be seen rather than its meaning read. His work, while employing his own deconstructionist style, would be tainted by the 'style credibility' that it attained. Indeed it would seem that designers in general were becoming gurus for Thatcher's consumerist Britain. Design was the panacea for all ills. A new identity would change your company's fortunes, a new package would improve your product. Brody stated that he wanted to '*turn advertising back on itself*' [46] but it seemed that advertising was turning Brody back on his. They used versions of his typefaces to sell bank accounts. What had been intended as a graphic statement about authoritarian government was now just part of a visual style which represented a young population obsessed with image. As his style of work was plagiarised, Brody was forced to reassess his own design philosophy.

46, 47
Neville Brody
Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 106

> **'Most of the design at the moment seems to hold no personal meaning to its exponents beyond its price-tag promise of Culture. The commercial world is as responsible for this as individual designers – they need the work. You should not confuse this financial imperative with your true intentions, and simply become a prostitute to market forces.'** [47]

Brody set about moving away from his very 'designed' look when he came to design *Arena* magazine for the publishers of The Face. This was a magazine that was aimed a slightly older age group, for those who had grown out of The Face. More emphasis was placed on the photographic content and text by elegant use of white space and less distracting typefaces. After the first few issues the typeface *Helvetica* was adopted as the main heading face for the magazine. Brody considered this typeface to be one that had very little character and was one with few stylistic references.

'I did not believe that people would discover things in the design worth ripping off, but they have.' [48]

48
Neville Brody
Wozencroft,
The Graphic Language
of Neville Brody,
London 1988
p. 140

It is this commercial imitation that is the bane of Brody's graphic career. Being a media designer and personality in his own right, he could not but have a strong effect on commercial graphics. It is the notion that people imitated his visual style rather than his approach is what seemed to have annoyed him the most. With Arena he moved towards what he called 'anti-design', somewhat of a misnomer, which was actually a move back to typographic orthodoxy. He moved back to a use of type that was more objective, an approach that de-mystified the designer by making graphics into a process for conveying information rather than some sort of highly-creative all encompassing solution to suburban boredom.

Malcolm Garrett seemed not to be as upset by plagiarism as he claimed himself he *'will use any style'*. [49] This was probably because he had a certain irreverence for commercial design (he expressed this in the quote on page 20). Saville, too, acknowledged that there are dozens of designers who *"do Peter Saville"* better than he does himself, so why not leave them to it? He also recognises that it is no longer a case of simply choosing an exotic typeface and relying on it for effect. When everybody knows the references, and everybody can make the graphics look good, the only way left for designers is to distinguish themselves is in the regard that they pay to the content.[50] As design started to represent merely surface decoration and style designers started to become sensitive of their position within the commercial world.

49
Malcolm Garrett

Quoted in McDermott,
London 1989
p. 71

50
Peter Saville joined Pentagram, the design company, in late 1990. Saville's approach to graphics and his apparant move away from styling is discussed in Blueprint, November 1990, by Rick Poynor, pp.30-33.

Designerism

The term 'designerism' has been used in reference to the design blitz of the mid-'Eighties. This term grew out of the ceaseless deluge of visual information and images that were being presented to the public. Designs seemed to become out of date even before they were off the presses. Commercial design looked for newer and newer ways to present

their client's products or services to the public. It seemed as if design was becoming an end in itself.

5, 52
Huygen,
London, 1989
p.90

'Design' will sell anything - including, at times, next to nothing. [51]

It was the link between the role of the designer and the retail boom of the mid-'Eighties that lead to the rise of 'designerism'. The post-punk designers such as Brody and Saville provided a rich source of exiting and innovative styles with which to attract the potential customer. The difference between design and advertising became blurred as design was used to sell everything from cars to kiwi fruit. The latter of these becoming a gastronomic symbol for the state of high-street graphics at the time: it looked great, but was bland and had no substance. The designer Robin Kinross names as the most striking characteristic of designing in the 'Eighties *'the process by which everything aspires to the condition of graphics: not just print or screens, but architecture, interiors and products'.* [52]

It could be claimed that designerism would not have taken hold in these years were not for what could be considered a general acceptance of *post-modernism.*

Post-modernism

53
Walker
Art in the Age of Mass Media
London 1983
p. 82

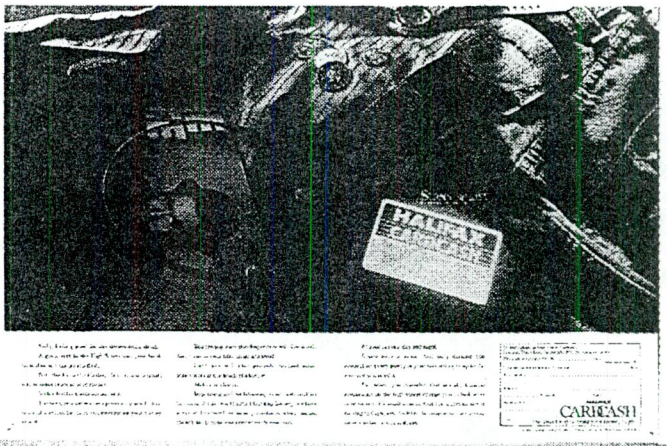
'Post-modern' is a term that has been used to describe the design approach of many designers in the 'Eighties. In order to come to an understanding of its influence we must first understand its meaning. John Walker lists the typical features of post-modernism as follows: [53]

1. The modernist idea that each age has only one style is rejected in favour of the idea that a plurality of style exists. Ecleticism, hybrid styles, becomes fashionable. No single style appears to be dominant.

Fig. 62

Even The Face itself became a status symbol used to sell other products. In this instance we see the face being included in campaigns to sell accounts for the Halifax Building society, or 501 jeans for Levi's. In the top poster for the Halifax we see the bank being associated with the young by way of placing it's card alongside Denim, a Walkman and a copy of The Face. In the lower poster we see denim being associated with the Style magazines and other 'Yuppie' accessories. Through these poster we can see how all these symbols of the time were inter-dependent each feeding off the next for associated credibility.

Finance–Music–Denim–Style



This eclectic and pluralist approach can be seen right the way through 'Eighties design. From a retail point of view pluralist graphics (i.e. those which did not present one dogmatic style) would not alienate any potential customers.

2. History and tradition (including the history of modernism) become available again - hence 'retro-style' via the use of 'quotations' and the technique of collage, involving recyclings, parodies and pastiches of old styles.

The work of Peter Saville's work especially illustrates the use of retro' style. The use of collage was used to a great extent by Terry Jones in i-D magazine.

3. Ornament and decoration become acceptable again.

It could be argued that this trait sums up mid-'Eighties design as ornament and decoration took precedence over structure and content.

4. Complexity and contradiction (the title of a book by the American architect, Robert Venture) and ambiguity are the values which replace simplicity, purity and rationality. Mixtures of high and low culture, fine art and commercial art styles are encouraged as a way of producing buildings capable of yielding multi-layered readings appealing to audiences on different levels of sophistication and knowledge.

The work of Vaughan Oliver and Russell Mills' more art based approach are perfectly in keeping with post-modernism's multi-layered meanings. Their work is art based, but functions in a commercial, mass produced medium. They place their work in the context of packaging yet do not set out create images or designs whose primary function is to sell. Their work is open to many different interpretations, due to the subjective and intuitive manner in which they work as well as the physical layers they create in their work. Brody's work also works in this multi-layered way. With his

deconstruction of type forms he sets about giving them a more specific meaning but at the same time making them engage the reader on a visual level. They become both decorative and semantic[54] at the same time.

54
By *semantic* I mean that they help give the word or phrase a more specific meaning. Brody's process of de-construction creates some-thing which is decorative and functional–apparent opposites within the modernist ethic.

5. Post-modernists are concerned with meaning - i.e. they treat architecture and design as "language" which can be used to construct all kinds of different statements.

To understand and see this in practice in 'Eighties design one need only look to the title of Wozencroft's book on Neville Brody: 'The Graphic *Language* of Neville Brody'.

6. The basic characteristic of art, inter-textuality, is heightened in post-modernism. "Inter-textuality"' is a term which indicates that every literary text or work of art relates to, or alludes to, or comments upon (either implicitly or explicitly) various other texts or works.

When designers such as Malcolm Garrett or Peter Saville used references for their design they were aware of the connotations that these references would create. The people who came in contact with these designs did not have to recognise the original reference and see it within an historical light to be influenced by them. To a certain extent by using these retro' references or influences these designers were undermining the credibility of these design movements by relegating them to nothing more than a surface style. Every design in the 'Eighties seemed openly to allude to the past.

The one main attribute of post-modernism is that it is not dogmatic. It does not follow any single rule such as, for example, Mies van der Rohe's maxim, 'less is more'. Because of this you would not find many designers within the post-modern tradition claiming to be post-modern in their work. Indeed it could be critisized for being a non-committal philosophy, where no ideas as such are presented to the viewer, other than a variety of options. This can help us to come to understand the way that 'Eighties designers were so concerned with the style of their work. Through the use of

style the designers could deflect peoples attention away from the fact that there wasn't much content. To a certain extent style is all the substance there is in post-modern design. Post-modernism re-introduced the notion of decoration. This went all the way form pediments on shopping centres to the use of shapes and symbols in Brodys design for The Face.

What post-modernism does represent, however, is a move away from dogma and the belief tradition to a more pluralist form of expression. When post-modernism emerged in the 'Seventies it was a reaction against what many people saw as the failure of modernism. Modernism was not friendly to the man in the street. It was seen as brutal, authoritarian and many of its egalitarian aspirations were lost among the concrete tower blocks erected in its style and in the name of progress. What modernism did have was a goal, a standard, a sense of right and wrong. As problems such as the stock market crash ('Black Monday') in 1987, global warming, debt, AIDS and rising unemployment emerged in the late 'Eighties people started to reassess the post-modern 'anything goes' aesthetic. There had to some sense of right and wrong. In looking for a new code of conduct the designers lead the way as they returned to a type of design orthodoxy. In 1986 the first issue of a new typographic journal was published. This journal rejected the stylistic anarchism of the time in favour of a very Swiss objective presentation.

Summary

Just as in the 'Fifties, the 'Eighties was a time when the young exercised a strong economic influence. This lead to the re-emergence of youth culture with a very strong emphasis on style. The youth style was incorporated into marketing strategies as companies expanded with the retail-boom of the mid-'Eighties

Designers such as Neville Brody found their work being plagiarised and used to appeal to the youth market. With the emphasis on consuming, design went into overdrive trying to keep the consumers entertained an buying the 'right' brands and in the 'right' places. The designer became the high priest for the retailers as design could give appeal to or re-invent a product. Design for designs sake was a feature of this period of the 'Eighties.

It was Punk that could be seen as the first graphic manifestation of post-modernism. It layered, tore, parodied and presented no real ideas as such. This followed through in the post-modernist early and mid-'Eighties. It was a period that had no coherent idea other than there were no rules, no rights and no wrongs.

As consumerism became tiring, and people started to think about the ecological consequences of having fifty seven carrier bags (each with a different design) stuffed behind their fridge, they started to question themselves as to what the spending spree was all about. Designers, too, started to question their role in developments and sought a new moral ground on which to stand after the high spending mid-'Eighties. Purpose and function in design was on the way back...

Chapter Four

Structure - the return to function?

By the mid to late-'Eighties many designers were beginning to become disillusioned with the domination of style in design. With plagiarism rife and the distinction between advertising and design blurred, designers started to move away from style-based solutions. As we have seen Neville Brody reverted to a sort of design orthodoxy when he started to design *Arena* magazine. He did this as a reaction against his imitators, just as his earlier style was a reaction against dogma and design complacency.

There were those however who, without being reactionary, seemed to be attracted to a more structure based design. This view is represented by the work of the design group *8vo*, the publishers of *Octavo.* As we saw in chapter two, they claimed to take a modernist stance. But what did their work express, both to the public, and, about design during this period? What was the role of structure in their design and why did they take a more structured based approach. Was the work produced by 8vo just another style within the realm of post-modernism or can it be seen as the emergence of what could be described as neo-modernism?

55
See chapter six of Art in the age of Mass Media by John Walker for more about Cultural Pluralism.

Neo-modernism

The term post-modernism was described in the last chapter, and as we saw it was the dominant movement (if it can be called a movement) in the early 'Eighties. It was a philosophy based, to a certain extent, on the idea of cultural pluralism[55]. It was also a reaction against modernism. But why anyone want to stand against such a non-committal, 'anything goes' philosophy? What is there to stand against if your views are accepted and absorbed? To find an answer to this we need only look back to Brody once more. He wanted to redefine, as Garrett, Saville et al wanted to, the use and expectations of graphic design. When you get to the stage, as he did, where anything is acceptable and your work is being constantly imitated

you are going to want to say STOP! When there is no sense of good or bad design, or questioning within the process, the only way for him to call a halt was to revert to the orthodoxy from which everyone knew he rebelled. However, Brody was trapped by his own notoriety and as he claimed himself his work for Arena was broken down and used by others as a another Brody style. What was needed was someone outside the post-punk design scene to re-introduce the modernist principles.

But what are these modernist principles? Modernism has been an aesthetic ideology in existence since the late nineteenth century. J.A. Walker summarised its central assumptions and themes as follows: [56]

56
Walker
Art in the Age of Mass Media
London 1983
p. 80

1. Modernists rejected the stylistic anarchism and ecleticism of Victorian art and design on the grounds that a new age of machines and technology had been born. They therefore considered it necessary to develop new forms appropriate to the new situation. some modernists believed that it was necessary to create a new style, a modern style, based upon such principles as 'form follows function' and the dictates of new materials,machines and techniques; others believed that any art and design based upon such principles would be styleless.

2. Since modernists believed that a new age had dawned- the modern age- they insisted on a complete break with the past, with history and tradition. Novelty and originality became overriding values. 'Reject what has gone before' became the rule which the new generations of modernists are expected to obey. Soon it became a tradition in itself (which explains Harold Rosenberg's paradoxical phrase 'the tradition of the new').

3. Modernists rejected decoration and ornament on the grounds that they were, first, a residue of primitivism, and, second, superfluous. They preferred geometric to organic

forms; they espoused the values of simplicity, clarity, uniformity, purity, order and rationality.

4. Modernists rejected national, regional and vernacular styles. They were in favour of an international style, claiming that the tenets of modernism were universally acceptable.

5. Modernist architects and designers professed to be producing art for the future. They were frequently inspired by socialist ideals and wished to sweep away the old order to create a brave new world which would in itself improve human behaviour. But modernists saw themselves as experts who knew best. Consequently, they tended to impose their solutions upon the masses without regard to popular tastes or preferences

Did these ideas re-emerge in the late-'Eighties? Are they evident in the work of 8vo and the sentiments expressed in Octavo? Is the application of any of these ideas an extension of post-modernism or the emergence of neo-modernism?

War was been declared on the aesthetic of chaos. An order that has entered fully into consciousness is called for. [57]

57
El Lizzitzky
quoted in Octavo, issue 86.1
p. 3

El Lizzitzky, the constructivist artist and designer, made this statement about seventy years before it was reproduced in the first issue of Octavo in 1986. It was a call that had as much relevance in the 'Eighties as it had earlier in the century. Octavo presented articles concerning typography but all with a modernist or structure based slant. They looked to typographic gurus such as Jan Tschichold or Emil Ruder for modern typographic orthodoxy while presenting the intuitive questioning philosophy of Wolfgang Weingart. The look of the Octavo's first issue gave us a very strong flavour of what they were promoting. The layout was grid-based, incorporating small sizes of sans serif type ranged left. It had all the look of orthodox *'Swiss'*

Fig 63
8vo

Octavo, 86.1
Page spread.

Note the use of sans serif type and white space structured in a very ordered and clear manner.

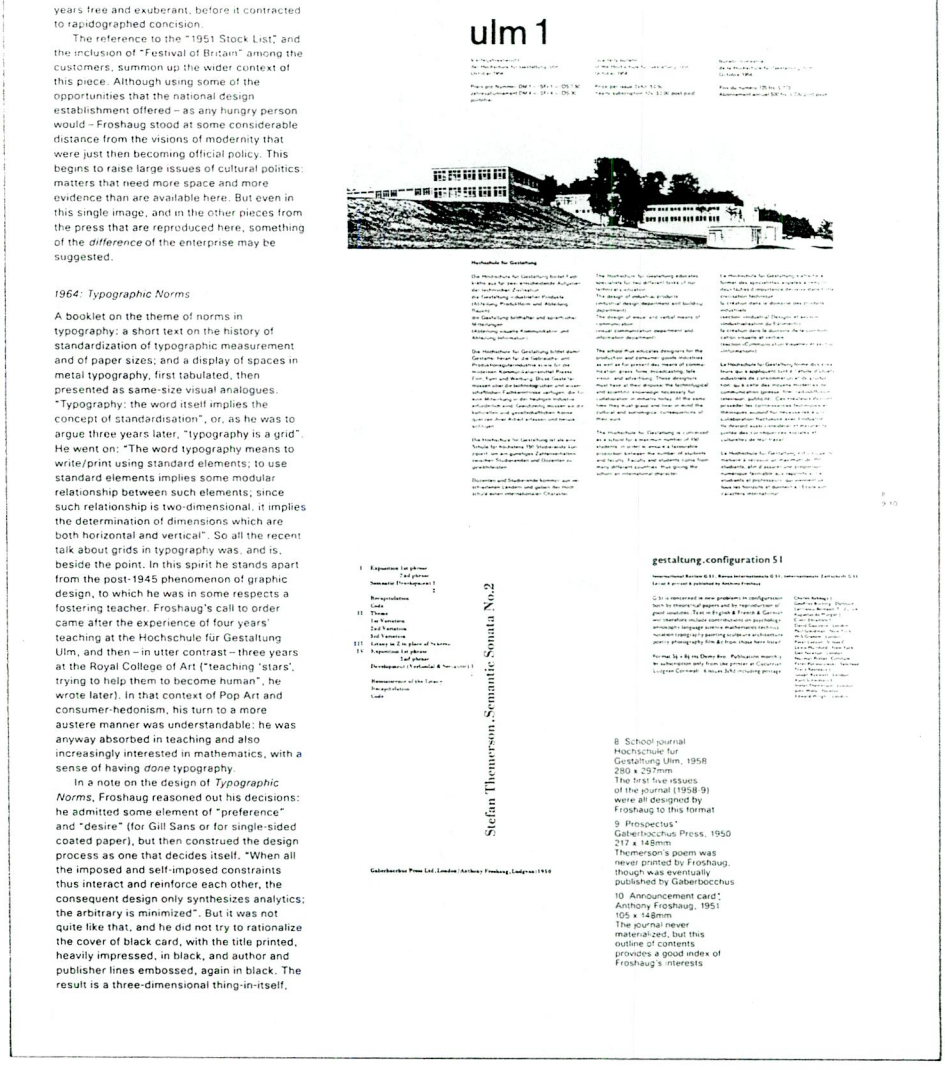
years free and exuberant, before it contracted to rapidographed concision.

The reference to the "1951 Stock List," and the inclusion of "Festival of Britain" among the customers, summon up the wider context of this piece. Although using some of the opportunities that the national design establishment offered – as any hungry person would – Froshaug stood at some considerable distance from the visions of modernity that were just then becoming official policy. This begins to raise large issues of cultural politics: matters that need more space and more evidence than are available here. But even in this single image, and in the other pieces from the press that are reproduced here, something of the *difference* of the enterprise may be suggested.

1964: Typographic Norms

A booklet on the theme of norms in typography: a short text on the history of standardization of typographic measurement and of paper sizes; and a display of spaces in metal typography, first tabulated, then presented as same-size visual analogues. "Typography: the word itself implies the concept of standardisation", or, as he was to argue three years later, "typography is a grid". He went on: "The word typography means to write/print using standard elements; to use standard elements implies some modular relationship between such elements; since such relationship is two-dimensional, it implies the determination of dimensions which are both horizontal and vertical". So all the recent talk about grids in typography was, and is, beside the point. In this spirit he stands apart from the post-1945 phenomenon of graphic design, to which he was in some respects a fostering teacher. Froshaug's call to order came after the experience of four years' teaching at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, and then – in utter contrast – three years at the Royal College of Art ("teaching 'stars', trying to help them to become human", he wrote later). In that context of Pop Art and consumer-hedonism, his turn to a more austere manner was understandable: he was anyway absorbed in teaching and also increasingly interested in mathematics, with a sense of having *done* typography.

In a note on the design of *Typographic Norms*, Froshaug reasoned out his decisions: he admitted some element of "preference" and "desire" (for Gill Sans or for single-sided coated paper), but then construed the design process as one that decides itself. "When all the imposed and self-imposed constraints thus interact and reinforce each other, the consequent design only synthesizes analytics; the arbitrary is minimized". But it was not quite like that, and he did not try to rationalize the cover of black card, with the title printed, heavily impressed, in black, and author and publisher lines embossed, again in black. The result is a three-dimensional thing-in-itself.



8 School journal
Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm, 1958
280 x 297mm
The first five issues of the journal (1958-9) were all designed by Froshaug to this format

9 Prospectus*
Gaberbocchus Press, 1950
217 x 148mm
Themerson's poem was never printed by Froshaug, though was eventually published by Gaberbocchus

10 Announcement card*
Anthony Froshaug, 1951
105 x 148mm
The journal never materialized, but this outline of contents provides a good index of Froshaug's interests

typography. Swiss typography is a term used to describe the dominant style of typography developed in the 'Fifties by Swiss designers such as *Armin Hoffmann* and *Emil Ruder*. It was an approach to typography based upon the objective analysis of information and the application of that information to a pre-determined mathematical grid. Among its characteristics were the use of range left, ragged right sans serif type, the use of white space and different weights of the same typeface for emphasis. It was to become a dogma for typographic designers. It was typographic modernism.

It is this Swiss approach to design and type that Brody rebelled against at the beginning of the decade. However by 1986 such a simple, clear and functional approach to design must have become appealing. As a reaction against styling what better solution than to revert to design based upon function? This way the look or form of the design would, as the saying goes, follow the function. The designer would remove the expectations for ornament and styling by placing himself secondary to the function of the design.

The orthodox use of structure in 8vo's early issues of Octavo is what makes their work stand out. 8vo were not slaves to dogma and this was illustrated as their worked progress. Their work, though still staying with the basic principles of modernist typography, became more and more layered and complex. Just as brody had deconstructed forms, 8vo constructed complex typographical layouts around the grid. In fact it could be said that the grid came to represent a lot of what this approach to design was about.

> **Physical structure must be analogous to semantical structure; analysis of the content of the material will suggest a suitable basis for the typographic formulation. The discipline of structure, however, must not be regarded as a limitation, but as a dynamic, expressive tool, a liberating device, used to animate as well as to order.** [58]

58
Introduction to Octavo 87.3

Fig. 64
8vo

Cover of Octavo 87.3

Note the use of the rules on the right hand side. These are used to accentuate the grid. By making the grid apparent information can be layered and placed on the page without appearing to 'float'.

With the emergence of AIDS, and peoples' reassessment of their own behaviour, safe sex and the condom were promoted as better, safer and more fun while 8vo were presenting their structure based aesthetic and the functional grid as a safer and more appropriate way to design. The analogy is not a flippant one, to a certain extent, in design terms 8vo represented the emergence of a new morality. They seemed evangelical about the use of structure as a liberating force.

The principles of modernism would have been very appealing at this time. With visual pollution in the high streets as well as global pollution it is not surprising that designers such as those in 8vo looked to 'the tradition of the new'. I believe that we can consider this re-emergence in modernist thought as neo-modernism, and not some style within the post-modern movement. Because of the perceived need for order and function within design (for aesthetic as well as ecological issues) the stylistic aspects of post-modernism seem to have become redundant.

Structure and Image

We have seen that Octavo used structure as a stance against chaos and as a device to give them certain creative freedoms, but what are the *rhetorical* aspects to the use of structural devices within design? We have to ask ourselves what is the underlying message being conveyed through the use of structural elements?

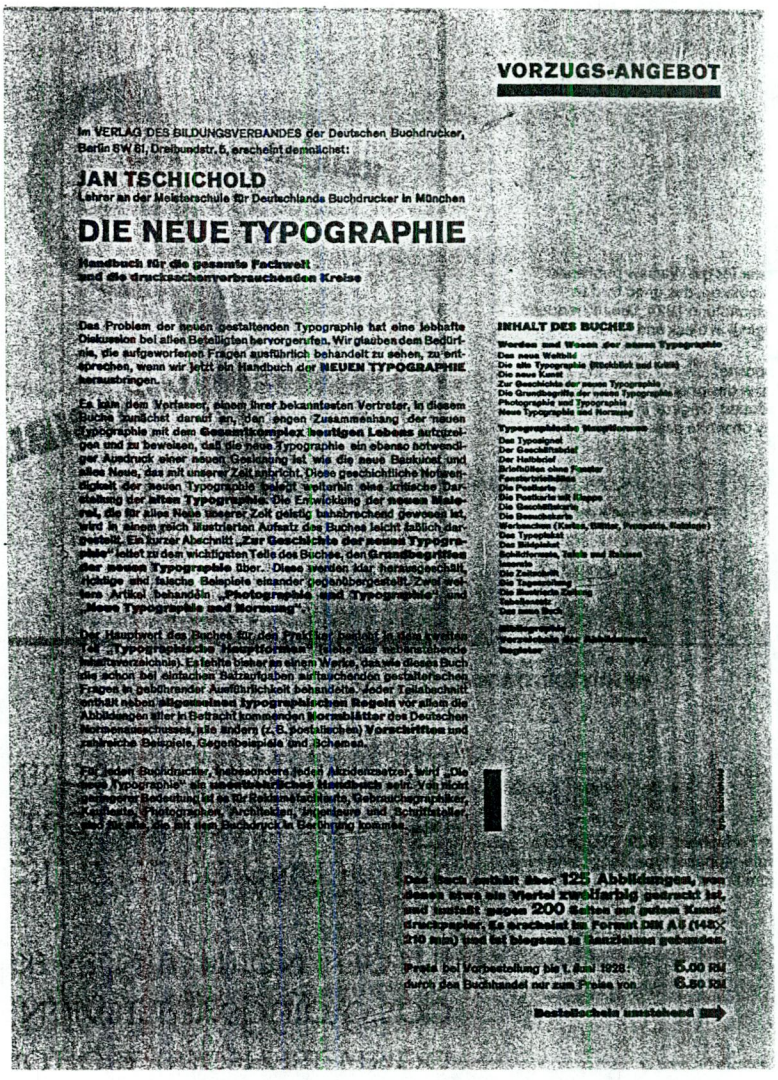
59
Rhetoric is a term that is used in relation to speech but in this instance it relates to *visual* rhetoric. By the use images in certain ways to 'say' something by visual means. Rhetorical devices such as hyperbole, irony and metaphors can all be translated into visual solutions

Since the emergence of the modern mathematicaly based grid, as promoted by *Jan Tschichold* in *Die Neue Typographie* (1928), it had always held the same meaning, that is, *'as a continuous field of rational law which underlay the physical universe much the way the grid itself remained invisible "beneath" the final design composition'.* [60] It is not surprising that the grid would come back into use (not that it had ever left as such) as a statement in itself. With the possibility that the world might have no future, if present ecological trends persist, it comes to represent a vision of order, universality and objectivity.

60
Williamson, J.H.
'The Grid: History Use and Meaning',
Essay in Design Discourse,
London 1990
edit. Margolin, V.
p. 180

Fig. 65
Jan Tschichold

Cover for Die Newe Typographie, 1928



61,
Williamson, J.H.
'The Grid: History
Use and Meaning',

Essay in Design Discourse,
London 1990
edit. Margolin, V.
p. 186

It wasn't until Wolfgang Weingart started his teaching in 1968 that anyone seriously questioned the slavish use of the grid. Weingart exposed the grid and used it as a subordinate decorative element. He established grids and then violated them, this was to become a feature of post-modern typography. In *The Grid: History, Use and Meaning',* Jack Williamson discusses the significance of the grid in post-modern iconography and how its use took meanings other than their immediate graphic references. In his conclusion [61] he states:

> **'... with few apparent alterations to the basic form itself, the grid has shifted in its meaning from a threshold between physical and superphysical worlds, to a representation of the surface of a physical world and the rational cognition which beholds it, to a threshold to the submaterial world and irrationality. In each period, the grid has thus expressed a leading conception of man and world prevalent at that time.'**

The use of the grid and the return to a more modernist approach to design expressed late-'Eighties desire for order. It is for this reason that I see the work of 8vo and the ideas presented in Octavo as being neo-modernist.This use of structural elements in British design is not exclusive to the late-'Eighties or just to the likes of Brody and 8vo escaping style-based solutions. Designers such as Vaughan Oliver, coming from a more painterly tradition were using various structural devices in their work.

The images that Vaughan Oliver used were evocative, painterly, textured and organic. The way in which he uses type is expressive through the use of idiosyncratic typefaces is in a very illustrative manner. To gel both of these elements, and produce a *'harmonious whole'*,Oliver uses structural and framing devices in his designs. But why does he feel the need to structure his images? I would see his use of these devices as having a similar rhetorical value as the use of the grid in modernist typography. It

Fig. 66
Wolfgang Weingart

State Aid poster and cover for Typografische Monatsblatter 1979

On the cover of the magazine Weingart combined rational clarity typical of Swiss modernism with a contradictory use of rules which cut into lines of type to produce various levels of illegibility

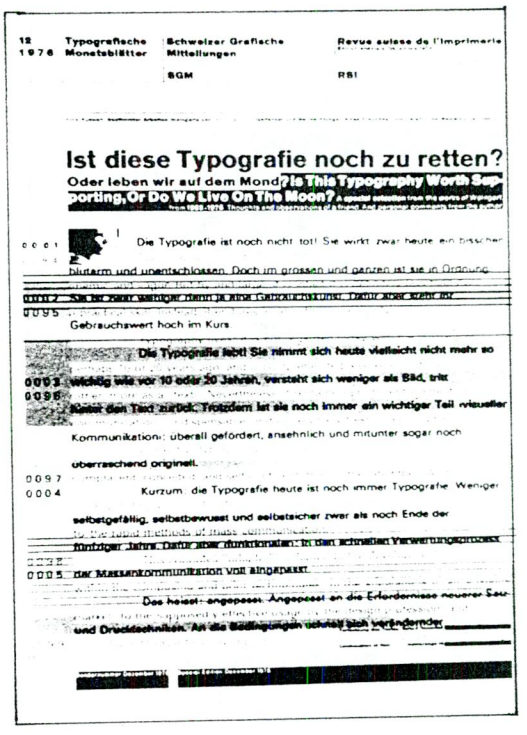
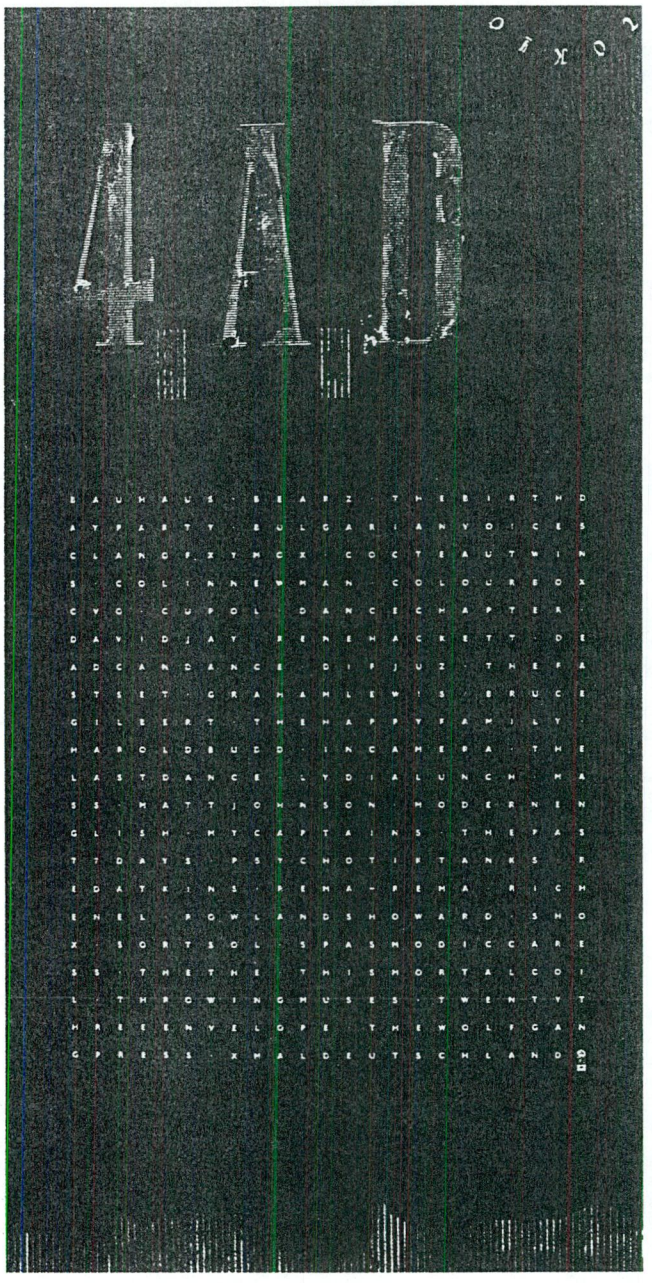


Fig. 67
Vaughan Oliver

Tokyo
Exhibition poster for 4AD
1986

Note the use of the type to create a grid. This grid gives a sense of structure to an otherwise degraded image.



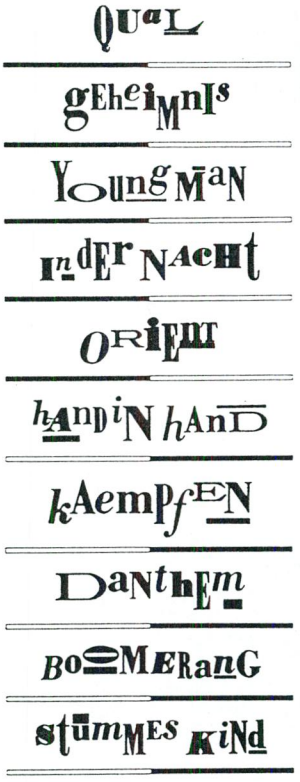


Fig. 68
Vaughan Oliver

Song listing for back of album by Xmal Deutschland, 4AD 1983

The use of the bars between the song titles illustrates Oliver's desire to give order to very eclectic use of type. The type is reminiscent of Jamie Reid but the centre axis harks back to traditional layout while the bars emphasise the structural qualities of the design, and through their black-white sequence differentiate the record's sides.

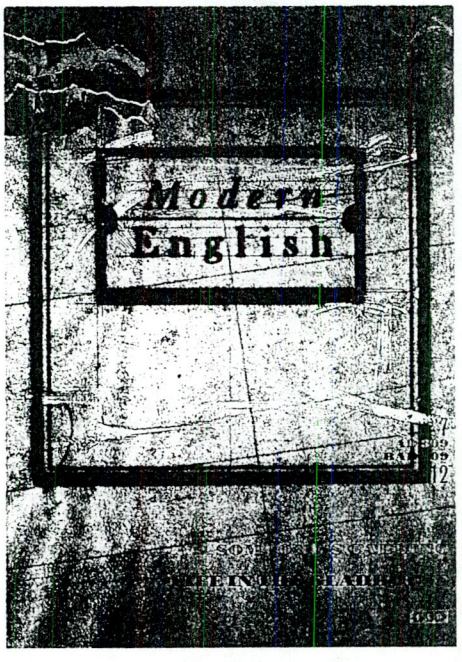
Fig. 69
Vaughan Oliver

Pieter Nooten/Michael Brook
'Sleeps With the Fishes'
4AD, 1987

On this album cover fine rules are used to both contain the caligraphic image and anchor the typography

Fig. 70
Vaughan Oliver

Modern English
Someone's Calling
Poster
1983



should be understood that Vaughan Oliver came to design from an illustration base and 'is a self-thought typographer. As such he treats type in an illustrative manner. When he wishes to ground a section of type to give it a certain order he reverts to marks as opposed to orthodox typographic structures or rules. What interests me is the way he feels compelled to structure his images. I would see his use of these structural devices as expressing an underlying desire for a rational solution and binding structure within an apparently organic and intuitive image or layout.

Whether used by 8vo in hard-edged typographical layouts or by Vaughan Oliver in evocative album covers, structure as a design element conveys its own message. The decision by certain designers to make structural devices apparent should be recognised as a being an expression about chaos or order. The way in which these structural devices are used can express either a contempt for order (when the apparent structure is deviated from) or the need for it.

Summary

Post-modernism had provided an environment where no one style or belief was dominant. Because of this there were no 'truths' and design had no particular direction to go in other than to produce various styles. As a reaction to this in the second half of the decade, we saw the re-emergence of modernist ideas. The typographic journal Octavo became the flag-ship for typographic neo-modernism. Functionalism became the new emphasis for creative typographic ideas. Sans serif type, grid structures and a more distant objective approach to design came to the fore.

This re-newed interest in structure expossed an underlying trend in British society. After the high living Yuppie lifestyle of the mid-'eighties people started to look for more substance. Also the profile of problems such as AIDS and the ecological questions made people look for a sense of order in their lives. This desire for order was reflected in the design of the late 'Eighties.

Conclusion

Graphic design in the 'Eighties grew out of the questioning energy of Punk. Punk left some of its visual style behind in the form of Terry Jones' i-D magazine but more importantly its legacy was the freedom it left to those in its wake.

In the post-punk era of the early 'Eighties designers cut their teeth in the flourishing young independent record companies, themselves another punk legacy. While working with the freedom afforded to them in the music industry these designers set about questioning and experimenting with various individual styles. The lack of any set rules lead to the rise of style as a form of identity. Their designs appealed to the young and were assimilated by those hoping to attract the large youth market.

The 'Eighties was Margaret Thatcher's decade. As fate would have it the daughter of a corner shop-keeper was to create a retail boom that would help make design a sought after commodity. The innovative design produced in the early part of the decade was hyped up and churned out by those in the ad' agencies to sell to the growing number of consumers. Design came to encompass everything from vegetables to condoms, everything, that is, except design itself.

It was almost inevitable that design would end up loosing itself in a deluge of junk mail. Designers such as Neville Brody sowed the seeds of designerism by making design accessible to the public. As he said himself he wanted to *'reveal not conceal'*. Brody and his counterparts were successful in their attempt to 'reveal', but what exactly did they reveal?

In design terms these designers opened their trenchcoats and dropped their Levi 501s to reveal a wimp wearing lingerie. What they presented to the public was stylish, accessible, titillating and enjoyable. They revealed something that would help SELL the products they enclosed. But

where was the substance? Where was the integrity?

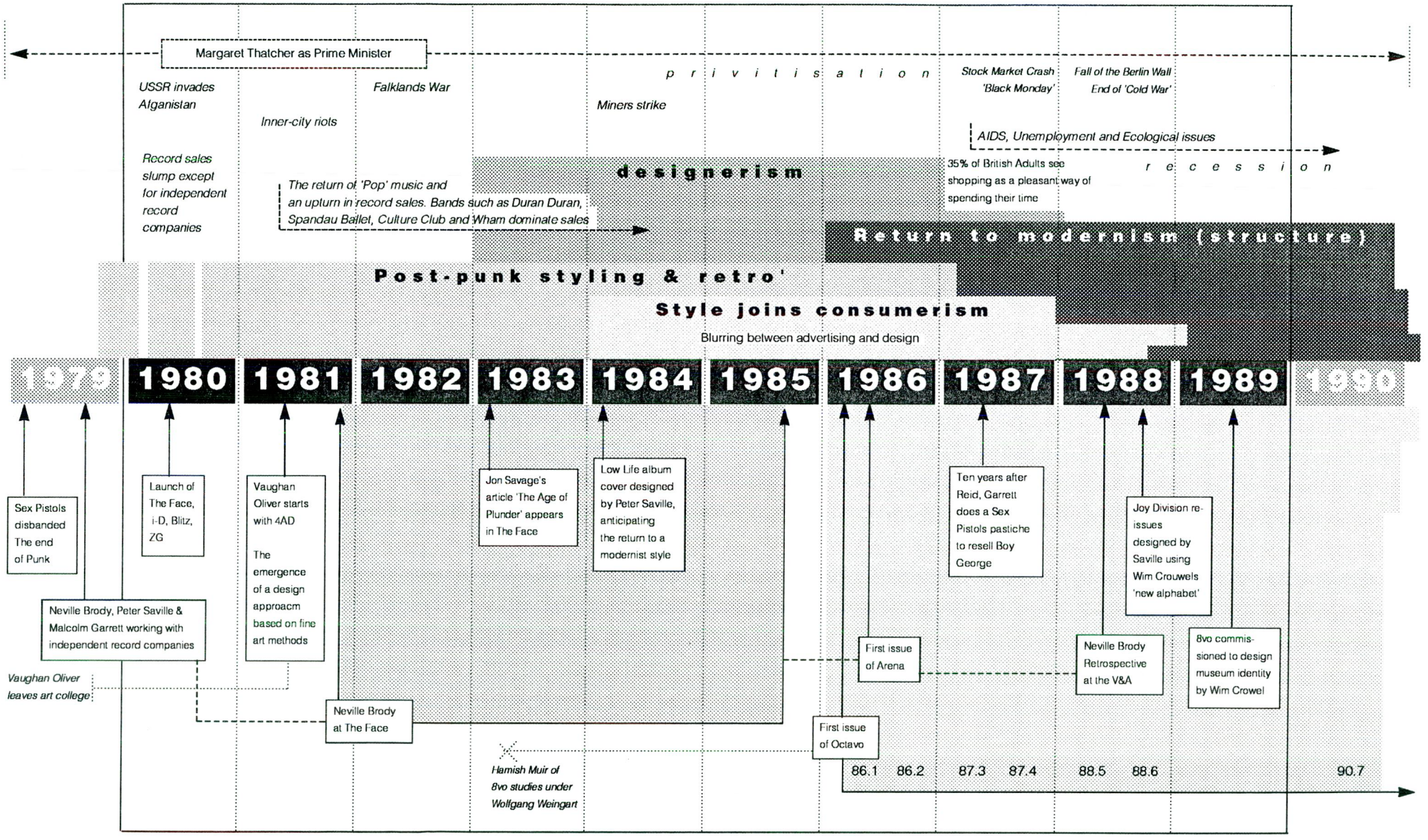
These designers found themselves being plagiarised. Through their questioning of what could be considered acceptable they helped to make anything acceptable. It wasn"t until they saw others running around in the same style lingerie did they realise how stupid it looked. The penny dropped for Brody when one cheap clothes shop to many copied his style. He threw away the skimpy little red number with ribbons in favour of the reliable Y-fronts and T-shirt (*no typographic pun intended*). He and many other designers reverted to orthodoxy to escape being associated with those still mimicking their styles.

There were also climactic reasons as to why you should stop revealing your lingerie in public. Firstly, when it became cold the goose-bumps didn't look to good, and secondly, you could catch your death of cold! The same was true for design.When consumerism wore thin, slick styling started to look as shallow as it actually was, and when ecological and world health issues loomed, style based design solutions appeared ironic and inappropriate.

After this second phase of design, the consumer lead design glut, there came the third phase in the 'Eighties. This was the re-emergence of modernist principles. This return to a sense of purpose in design as well as a re-affirmation of the need for functionalism is one that will flourish as the ecological issues become more than a marketing strategy. The neo-modernist attitude of design groups such as 8vo seems to be the way forward once their modernist zeal does not make them buy an ivory tower with their profits.

This return to modernism, though it echoes an underlying trend in society as a whole, would, it seems, be bringing design back to a self referencing practice. The dialogue that was created between the public and the designer during the mid-'eighties was one of the most important

Fig. 71
Diagram showing some of the changes and highlights during the 'Eighties.



developments. Now that the public has been introduced to some of the factors and terms within design it is important that they are not shut out as the designers return to their respective ivory towers.

If British design in the 'Eighties has left a legacy other than stylish looking junk mail, it is that the public is more aware of design issues than it ever was. It is a word, at least, that they are familiar with. This is of greater importance now as design reasserts itself as a process that can aid conservation as opposed to one which primes the consumer for exploitation.

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