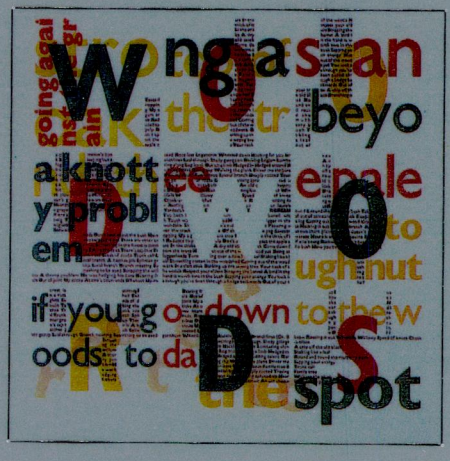
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National College of Art & Design

Contemporary Deconstructive Typography - A Revitalisation of Early Twentieth Century Avant-Garde Movements

by

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Contents

List of Illustrations

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Introduction

Historically typography has, for the most part, played a purely functional role. It has followed a set of laws, which enable us to communicate messages successfully. It has been an art form that is at its best when not seen as a work of art. Type that appeared designed distracted from the author's objectives. This traditional view point remains the mainstream approach, despite challenging experimental and anti-establishment movements of the past and present.

Within the last decade a situation has developed where new design is not understood or evaluated according to the traditional compact of craftsmanship. Since the middle of the eighties, a younger generation has gained success and influence in a way quite different from earlier experimental movements. Daring, know-how and fun in design are the mainsprings of this movement. This dissertation examines the state of deconstructivist typography arising from this contemporary approach. It does so, in part, by examining parallels with the theories and practices of the early twentieth century. An understanding of the initiatives behind today's movement is gained by highlighting differences and similarities in terms of approach and work produced.

Chapter one sets the historical perspective for the present period of change and contains a concise description of the origins and characteristics of deconstructive art. I explore the relationship between European art and typography which developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century. This relationship was to have a major effect on our perception of the graphic form. My concentration here is on major shifts and landmarks which have contributed to our current perception of typography.

In the early twentieth century, typography was very much interelated with the arts as a whole. It was a period of general artistic and social upheaval, where typography was only

one discipline in a general revolution. A number of thinkers, poets and artists rather than typographers turned to creative typography to express their aesthetic philosophies.

Chapter two examines the complex and expanding visual vocabulary of modern typography and considers its relationship with the early twentieth century art movements. Legibility, typographic propriety and a smooth transmission of information are all sacrificed for a mischievous and ambiguous mode of expression, informed as much by fine art as by typographic disciplines of optical organisation. This chapter also deals with new deconstructive typeface designs, that have opened up a whole new range of possibilities for subtle visual, syntactical and individual expression in typography. Prompted by the fragmented individualist nature of this movement, the structure of this chapter is such that several exponents are examined separately, under different headings, each relevant to the movement's characteristics.

The last chapter deals with the work of young British deconstructive typographer Phil Baines. Here I examine the emergence of early twentieth century influence on various elements of Baines typography and I evaluate the effects on his work. It was my meeting with Phil Baines and his subsequent tutoring while on an exchange at St. Martin's College, London, last year, that prompted the choice of subject for this dissertation. Through tutorials and lectures, I became intrigued by his unorthodox approach and was introduced to what the new deconstructivists are trying to achieve. They are not concerned with a stylistic approach but rather with a way of thinking, a dedication to and an enthusiasm for type. This is combined with a desire to expand the visual vocabulary of modern typographic design. While Baines is not the main focus of this paper, much of my source material comes from a series of recent personal interviews with him in both London and Dublin. As many of the designers discussed here remain, to date, relatively undocumented, some of the references are prompted by Baines personal opinions.

Chapter One Historical Perspective

Futurism-The Beginning of Experimental Typography

Dadaism

Constructivism

The importance of drawing an historical perspective is upmost in the examination of deconstructive typography. The relationship between European art and typography which developed during the first two decades of the twentieth century was to have a major effect on our perception of the graphic form. Avant garde typography in the early twentieth century was very much interelated with the arts as a whole. It was a period of general artistic and social upheavel, where typography was only one discipline in a general revolution. A number of thinkers and fine artists rather than typographers, turned to creative typography to express their aesthetic philosophies. By examining the path of avant garde typography and by considering the theories behind their deconstruction, an understanding of today's work may be found.

Futurism; The Beginning of Experimental Typography

At the beginning of the twentieth century, people were desperate for change. In politics, painting, poetry, psychology and philosophy, new ideas were in the air for a brave new world. At its most hysterical this new attitude was expressed by the Italian Futurist, Marinetti, who wished 'to consign all of his country's monuments and museums to the dustbin and to build up a new world based on steel, concrete and machine' (14, p. 58).

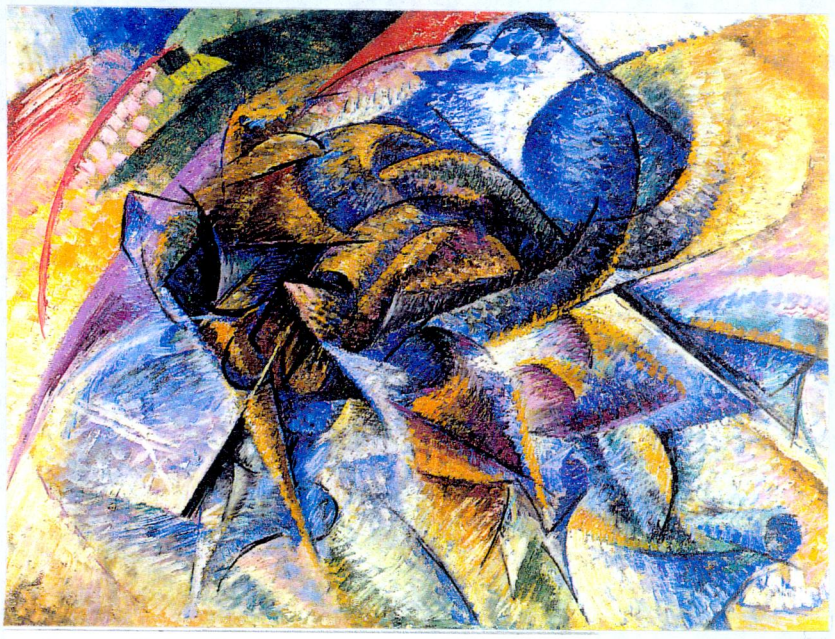
The car, the factory, the railway station, war itself were all seen as symbols of the energy and the force which would sweep away the outdated conventions and traditions of the contemporary world. For the Futurist, the medium became the message. Marinetti wrote:

> The Futurists intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness ..... We intend to exalt aggressive action and feverish insomnia. Except in struggle there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece (14, p. 21).

Soon the Futurists work was characterised by risk, innovation, energy, a rejection of the past and a reckless confidence which enabled them to break boundaries. Though painting, sculpture, theatre and literature they embraced modern civilisation and recognised the beauty of machines. Figure 1 demonstrates how the Futurists took up the Cubists' challenge and offered the world art that they believed was in keeping with the sensibilities of a modern age.

Typography could not escape the attention of such a media-centred group. This was the case for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of the importance of the manifesto as a means of generating and revitalising interest in Futurism and as a theoretical anticipation of events yet to take place. Secondly, the important role played by poetry in the movement neccesitated typographic concern. Lastly, and probably the most important reason was the fact that Futurism was as much a revolutionary statement as it was an art. To be successful it needed to address its public by means of a continuous flow of printed material which carried the message of Futurism in both its form and its content.

Nothing was sacred to the Futurists. Language itself came under attack in a paper published on May 11th, 1912 entitled The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature. The Manifesto was solely dedicated to the liberation of words from their latin prison. In this publication, Marinetti called for a complete abandonment of grammar, syntax and punctuation in pursuit of a more dynamic form of printed communication. He wanted a free and expressive orthography that would abbreviate or lengthen words. By increasing or diminishing the number of vowels or consonants, the poet would reinforce the sound of the words; and by means of these orthographical deformations the 'lyrical intoxication' (6, p. 43) inherent in the words would be coaxed onto the page. As will be illustrated later `in chapter 3, todays deconstructivists, have experimented in a very similar fashion .



1. Umberto Boccioni, Dynamism of a Cyclist, 1913.

Through Marinetti's typographical innovations, poetry became a visual rather than an auditory medium. By using typography creatively, poetry would acquire the additional status of visual art. 'In the evening, lying on her bed she reread the letter from her Artilleryman at the front' (Fig. 2) shows an example of Marinetti's creativity with typography. This work was done in 1915 and is considered one of his greatest creative achievements.

Here he is trying to create a visual interpretation of the poem by means of the positioning and size of the letter's. This deconstructed poem floats above the female figure in the right hand corner suggesting this is all taking place in her head. We are confronted immediately with a force that grabs our attention. The composition seems to be chaotic but in fact there is an order that leads our eye through it. The poem starts with 'ScrABrrRrraaNNG' which flows like a wave across the page. This wavelike movement is imitated underneath by three lines of small type, the large black 'G' shape, a curved 'GRAAG', the large deconstructed 'U' shape protrusion at the left side and the curvaceous female body on the right side. By making the arcs and bends dominant Marinetti captures the chaos of battle from a distance.

Whatever one may think of Marinetti's work or ideas, it cannot be denied that through constant experimentation he radically challenged the traditional form of the printed work. He removed typography from its conventional anonymity and neutrality and challenged the boundaries between art and communication.

2. F.T. Marinetti, Futurist poster 'In the evening, lying on her bed, she reread the letter from her Artilleryman at the front', 1915.

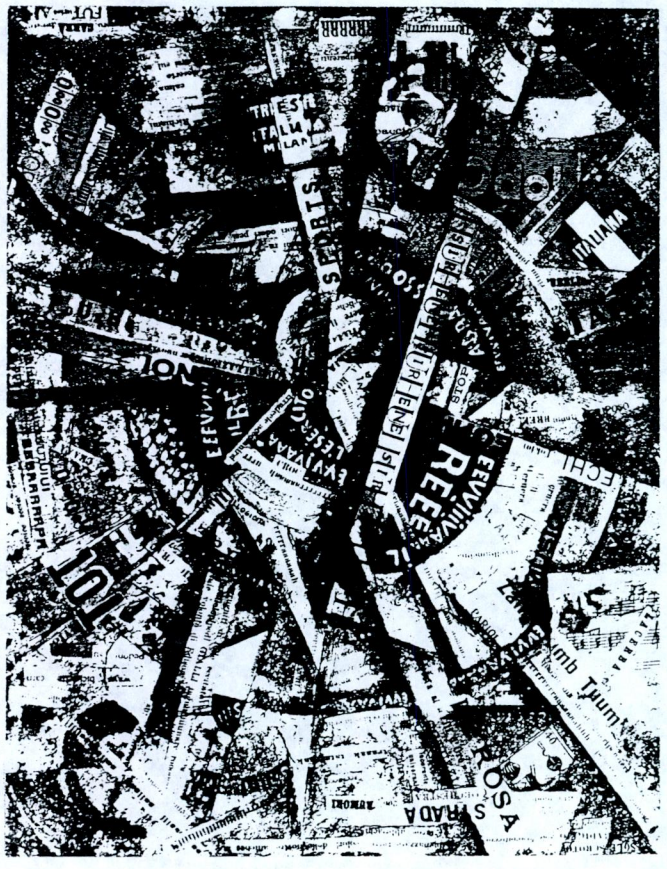
Dadaism

The reckless optimism of the Futurist movement could not endure the agonising reality or war or sustain the loss of so many members who, in keeping with their expressed beliefs, went to die in the 1914 - 1918 war. Marinetti survived however and participated in the early stages of the new Dada movement in Zurich, in 1918.

Dadaism was just as anarchic as Futurism, possibly more so, but its starting point was very different. Dadaism was a group born out of disillusionment with war and disgust at the slaughter of millions on the battlefields of Europe. The group believed that the world had turned insane and could not be dealt with in a rational way. The Dadaists confronted society with a picture of itself - wasteful, chaotic, violent and destructive. As figure 3 demonstrates, they did this by drawing upon the visual language of the Cubists and made extensive use of letterforms and collage in the construction of their work.

Poetry was an important form of typographic expression for the Dadaist. The poet Hausmann for example, saw the poem 'as an art consisting of respiratory and auditive combinations' (9). In order to express these elements typographically he used letters of varying size and thickness which took on the character of musical notation (Fig. 4). Although this piece is engaging in itself, it is successful only as long as it shocks the reader by virtue of its unconventionality.

A lot of Dadaist typography denied a structural quality and led to a jumbled, sometimes chaotic mass of words and letterforms. The typography practised by some of these Dadaist artists lack the control necessary for visual communication and seems to have got carried away with twentieth century revolutionary freedom (Fig. 5). However, I do not



3. Carlo Carra, Free-Word painting for the Patriotic Festival, 1914.

4. Racoil Hausman, Optophonetic poem, 1918.

5. Theo Van Doesburg, poster for Dada Soiree, 1920, 30.2 x 30 m.

feel that Futurism or Dadaism can be dismissed that easily. They may not have produced anything that could be said to be important *as* typography but they were very important *for* typography. They represent a dismissal of historical precedent as well as a courageous and imaginative response to the challenge which resulted. Even today they influence our perception of typography. We now have the ability to perceive typography as an art form which is expressive and communicative.

Futurism and Dadaism were constantly trying to erase the boundaries between art and design. Their major concern was not individual expressionism rather a united attempt to bridge the gap between art and society which they argued was democratic and uncontaminated. They paid scant regard to the conventions printing which had evolved over centuries and typography became primarily an important visual statement of their ideas about a world in change. In theory they intended to link language and form, but in practice the form very often did not relate very closely to the content of each job. This approach resulted in an over reaction which threatened to unbalance the world of typography. For the first time, a situation occured in which the graphic component of 'typographic' is in such a dominant relationship with the communication aspect of typography that their arises a need for a re-definition and clarification of terms. This imbalance took some years to recover from but, as is often the case 'even the most radical movements have within them the foundations of other, more considered and moderate approaches' (9, p. 36).

Constructivism

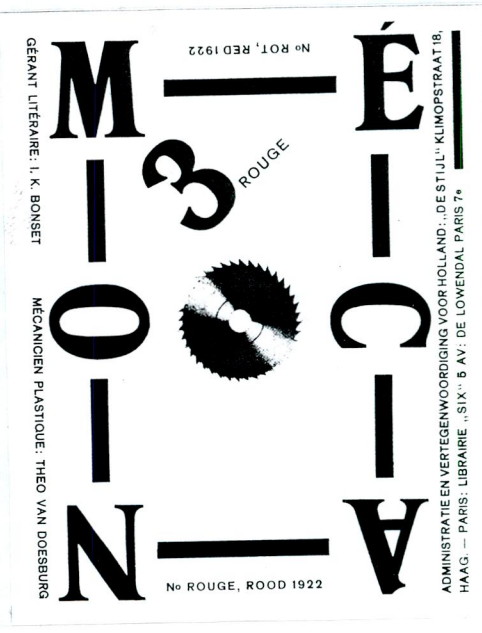
The years following World War 1 led to a certain amount of revolutionary euphoria in Europe which resulted in a greater degree of flexibility and co-operation between artists. Dadaism lost its radical edge and the focus moved away from the idea of a single aesthetic style and towards that of an international melting pot of ideas.

This proved to be very positive for those involved. Berlin had become by this time something of a vast railway station, with refugees from Russia and Eastern Europe and visitors from the low countries and from other cities in Germany. The Constructivist circle that emerged between 1920 - 1922 was an affirmatively international one. It included Richter (Fig. 6), Theo van Doesburg (Fig. 7) and Mondrian (Fig. 8), as well as El Lissitsky, Arp and Hausmann.

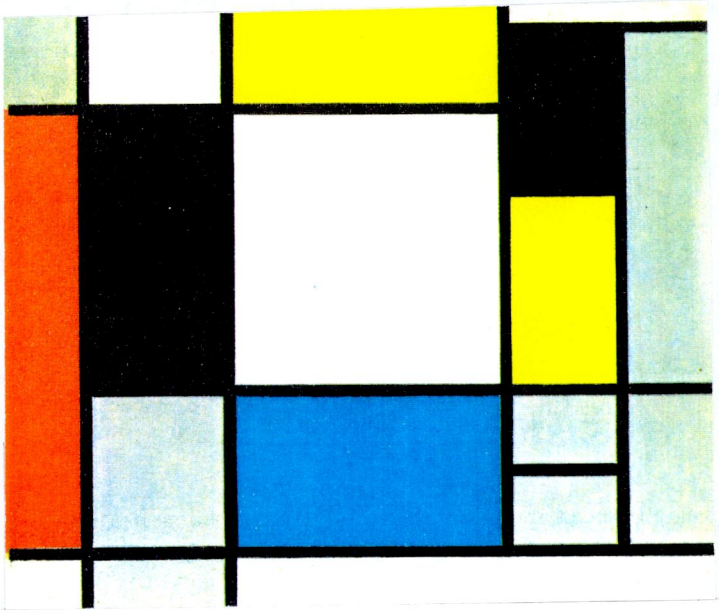
Constructivism can really be described as a child of the Russian Revolution. After 1917, artists were looking for a way to participate in the revolution. They began to formulate a view of art which was non-representational, non-painterly, objective and linked in some way to the industrial reality of post-revolutionary Russia. To do so they built upon Cubist and Futurist experiments while at the same time identifying common elements which they shared with other European art movements such as De Stijl, Vorticism and Dadaism.

Constructivism was a social, political and cultural movement. As such it readily embraced typography in order to give shape to its philosophy of visual form. Although typography is two-dimensional rather that three-dimensional, which was the prime concern of the Constructivists, typography clearly offered a chance for artists to become involved in 'intellectual production' in a manner compatible with the early statements of

6. Richter, Theodor Daubler, 1916, Linocut.



7. Theo Van Doesburg, Cover design for the third issue of Mecano, 1922.



8. Piet Mondrian, Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue, 1920, oil on canvas, 20.5 x 23.5 (52 x 60 cm).

the Constructivist movement. These argued that easel painting was dead and that the concept of composition was anachronistic because it was mere aesthetics. All new art, it was declared, arises from technology and engineering and moves towards organisation and construction (13, p. 27).

In the work of constructivist typographers there was a dramatic increase in the use of structural components such as rules and right angles. This was seen not only as more compatible with the technology of type than some of the Futurist and Dadaist work but was also more in keeping with the nature of modern manufacturing processes including printing. This structural feature is also evident in the way that the page is divided and the degree of rationalism in the placement of elements.

El Lissitzky was one of the major forces in this movement and exerted a powerful influence upon typograpic design. His breakthrough design for Mayakovsky's book of poems For The Voice (Fig. 9 a - c) in 1923 used the vocabulary of Constructivism as a potent language of graphic signs and symbols and proved to be one of Lissitzky's most influential designs. He sought to 'de-poetize' poetry with the ethic of the Constructivist group, whose proclamations called upon artists 'to construct art and change the world instead of merely depicting it' (27, p. 113).

Rather than fight the vertical/horizontal lock-up system of the letterpress, he worked with it and constructed the book working solely with the letterpress elements, wood and metal types, rules and bars. Each poem begins with a double-page spread containing the title and Lissitzky's Constructivist interpretation. The front cover of the book (Fig. 9a) reveals the resonance of the graphic approach used throughout the book. Mayakovsky's name runs horizontally and intersects the vertical placement of the title on a red bar.

(a)

(b)

(c)

9 a - c. El Lissitzky, page designs for Mayakousky, 'For the Voice' poems, 1923.

A large capital 'M' composed of typographic rules balances the lower right placement of concentric circles.

The second poem in the book is entitled 'Our March' (Fig. 9b) and is a homage to those who risked their lives in the early stages of the revolution. The poem evokes city squares washed with the blood of martyrs who gave their lives in the struggle against the Czarists regime. Lissitzky's large red square is like a symbol of martyrdom during public demonstrations. Responding to the 'A' and 'W' in both words of the title, Lissitzky layered these letterforms to create a staccato graphic rhythm, evoking the rhythmic beat of drums in the opening line. The type below the large red square is an interesting example of his typographic play. By taking either the top or bottom vowel, one can read two messages; 'bey' means fight and 'boy' means beat them. The placement of these words creates a lively counterpoint to the diagonal accent on the upper right-hand page. Lissitzky continues the theme of shared vowels in figure 9c by using large black type for each of the three letters common to all four words and again by using a big red 'O' as a common letter in the words for 'good' and 'treatment'.

Lissitzky did not feel that he illustrated or decorated the book in the traditional sense; rather he saw his role as a designer who 'constructed' the totality of the book in an architectural sense. By constructing and de-poetising the work in this way he created a dynamic yet rigourously stable composition. For The Voice is a beautiful combination of poetry and Constructivist ideals.

It is impossible in the present context to fully explore the complex relationships between the events taking place in Europe at this particularly exciting time. Similarly, it is impossible to discuss the evolution of creative typography without reference to the ideas

of the period and some understanding of the artistic roots of what developed into a major influence on typography and graphic design. It is important to note that in just a few years the Bauhaus and Jan Jschichold would present coherently formulated views about design and typography which were to a very large extent based upon these early twentieth century movements and which can only be understood in relation to them.

Dadaism, Futurism and Constructivism all originated in different countries and had different, often conflicting objectives, yet each in one way or another contributed significantly to the shaping of modern typography and the merging of word and image. Individuality was not as important to them as the idea of single aesthetic style and the development of a united movement.

In the hands of the Futurists and Dadaists the materials and processes of printing were plundered and manipulated. They gave us a freedom of expression and smashed the old conventions of typographic communication. For the first time the meaning shifted from content to form. It was left to the Constructivists to assert the order and objective control. Russian Constructivism was essentially a three-dimensional art, primarily concerned with the exploration of space as a fundamental element in all design. The most valuable contribution to typography made by Constructivism was the appreciation of controlled space. Taking from the new order set by Cubist artist, Mondrian, dynamically balanced grids, were used to reassemble the typographic chaos of the Dadaists. In other words, they organised experimentation. They probably came closest to an even balance of the aesthetic and functional in typography.

Together these movements were a major influence on design and more importantly are still a major influence on the way in which typography is perceived. They brought to

typography an energy and contemporary appropriateness which represents a statement of the age. As a result, typography would no longer be entirely objective or neutral.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to outline the major influences which shaped the discipline of typography in the early part of the twentieth century. I have avoided a chronicle of *events* and concentrated on ideas and attitudes to typography underlying those events. I feel that such a description is justified because of the importance European history had on typography. It is hard to think of any other design history where political, social and technological change have influenced its path so profoundly.

The early twentieth century was a period of accelerated change on a number of different fronts. Typography became a radical expression of the twentieth century aesthetic movements and has never reverted from this position. Art and design were wedded, interchangeable. The union between designer and artist became stronger than that between the designer and the craftsman and this resulted in a perception of the designer as a breaker of rules and as a creator. Typographers were now free and without allegiance to convention, author or reader.

Chapter 2 Contemporary Deconstructive Typography

Functional approach

The Modern Extension of Deconstructivism

Alternative Techniques Within Deconstructivism

Typeface Designs

Today there are two conflicting ideas about typography - type as function and type as expression. The Modernist Swiss school consists of orderly, linear, well-tempered messages using objective and somewhat inexpressive sanserif letterforms. The other is a small yet influential group of new typographers reacting against this bloodless neutrality, as they see it (12, p. 9). This group of 'deconstructors' can be crudely put together under the notion of throwing grit in the eyes of the reader, in order to demand a conscious appraisal of the text rather than an uncritical absorption. This is not part of the typographic mainstream, nor do they reach a particularly wide readership, yet they are exerting an influence well beyond their milieu. There are strong analogies between early twentieth century art and this new deconstructive typography, and they share almost identical objectives in their work, by trying to challenge and amuse the eye of the reader.

Mainstream typography seeks to reduce complexity and to clarify content. The deconstructivists relish ambiguity, preferring the provisional utterance, alternative typography and delayed punchline. This deconstructive typography is the main concern in this chapter, although I think it is necessary to also give a brief outline of functional typography to indicate what is being reacted against.

The Functional Approach

There is an important range of work in existence which may appear dull, yet extremely legible. Like architecture, typography can be related to the concern of providing firmness and commodity in a design. As advocates of this classical approach, the Swiss school define typographic design as a service profession, presenting but not interfering with the writer's words. Their principle mission is to achieve typographic clarity and legibility.
This rational and functional approach to modern design evolved at the German Bauhaus

school during the 1920's. The poster designed by Herbert Bayer for a guest lecture at the Bauhaus in 1926 demonstrates clearly the approach to which these modern designers are aspiring. In figure 10, Bayer carefully analysed the message and built a clear visual grading of information as follows: 1. Professor Hans Poelzig, 2. Architecture, 3. Slide Lecture. The information on the right provides the date and location in an ordered sequence. The red circle containing the word 'vortrag' (lecture), provides a strong focal point. No element is included that does not contribute to the effectiveness of the communication, and every decision made by the designer is based on a desire for functional communication.

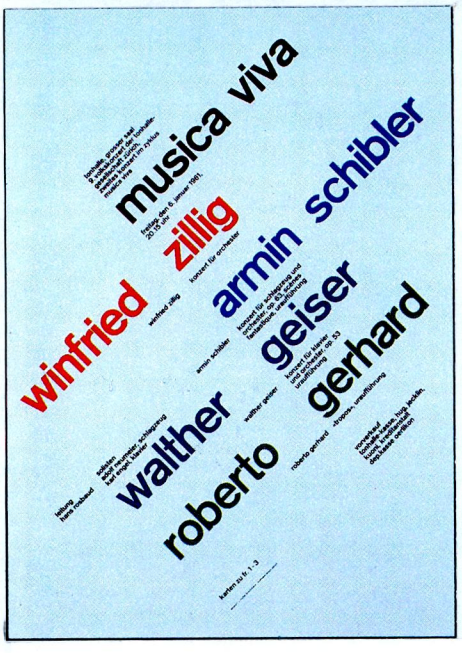
The Swiss school of design in Basel have pushed this logical order to the ultimate degree in modern typography. Designers such as Josef Muller - Brookmann (Fig. 11), believed that a designer should only use two sizes of type in design, one for display and one for text. He believed information should be organized on a geometric grid and exclude all decorative or textural elements inessential to the communication. Bradbury Thompson's format for Smithsonian Magazine (Fig. 12) is also a paradigm of this functional typographic clarity and legibility. Baskerville type is used with systematic attention to detail and does its job quietly and efficiently.

The Modern Extension of Deconstructivsm

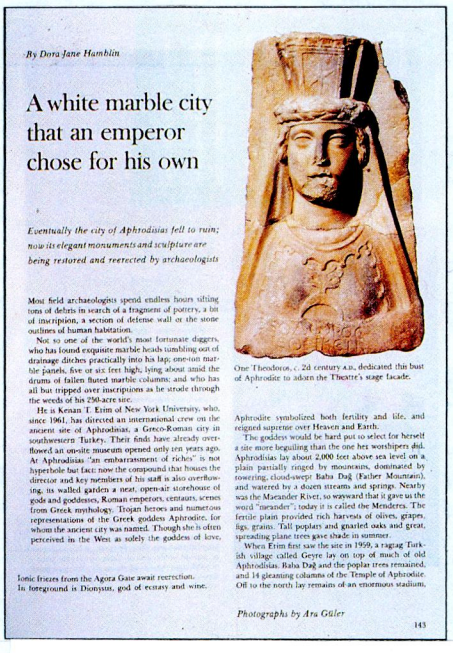
On the other hand, there is a small but influential group of designers who are trying to redefine our approach to typography with creative and innovative work. By destroying the horizontal alignment and harmony of the printed page, linear and orderly typography yields to a more chaotic and dynamic organisation of space.

10. Herbert Bayer, Poster design for a guest lecturer, Professor Hans Poelziz at the Bauhaus, 1923.

Figure 7. Although Part 2 of the book is oriented instead of horizontally, typographic pathways link items called out in bold Univers type in the Garal of the featured designers. If readers wish to obta can tip to Part 2 (Typographic Resources) where indexed glossary with correspondina Univers nu



11. Josef Muller - Brockmann, Poster Design.



By Dora Jane Hamblin

A white marble city that an emperor chose for his own

Eventually the city of Aphrodisias fell to ruin; now its elegant monuments and sculpture are being restored and reerected by archaeologists

Most field archaeologists spend endless hours sifting tons of debris in search of a fragment of pottery, a bit of inscription, a section of defense wall or the stone outlines of human habitation.

Not so one of the world's most fortunate diggers, who has found exquisite marble heads tumbling out of drainage ditches practically into his lap; one-ton marble panels, five or six feet high, lying about amid the drums of fallen fluted marble columns; and who has all but tripped over inscriptions as he strode through the weeds of his 250-acre site.

He is Kenan T. Erim of New York University, who, since 1961, has directed an international crew on the ancient site of Aphrodisias, a Greco-Roman city in southwestern Turkey. Their finds have already overflowed an on-site museum opened only ten years ago. At Aphrodisias "an embarrassment of riches" is not hyperbole but fact: now the compound that houses the director and key members of his staff is also overflowing, its walled garden a neat, open-air storehouse of gods and goddesses, Roman emperors, centaurs, scenes from Greek mythology, Trojan heroes and numerous representations of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, for whom the ancient city was named. Though she is often perceived in the West as solely the goddess of love,

Ionic friezes from the Agora Gate await reerection. In foreground is Dionysus, god of ecstasy and wine.

One Theodoros, c. 2d century A.D., dedicated this bust of Aphrodite to adorn the Theatre's stage facade.

Aphrodite symbolized both fertility and life, and reigned supreme over Heaven and Earth.

The goddess would be hard put to select for herself a site more beguiling than the one her worshipers did. Aphrodisias lay about 2,000 feet above sea level on a plain partially ringed by mountains, dominated by towering, cloud-swept Baba Dağ (Father Mountain), and watered by a dozen streams and springs. Nearby was the Maeander River, so wayward that it gave us the word "meander"; today it is called the Menderes. The fertile plain provided rich harvests of olives, grapes, figs, grains. Tall poplars and gnarled oaks and great, spreading plane trees gave shade in summer.

When Erim first saw the site in 1959, a ragtag Turkish village called Geyre lay on top of much of old Aphrodisias. Baba Dağ and the poplar trees remained, and 14 gleaming columns of the Temple of Aphrodite. Off to the north lay remains of an enormous stadium,

Photographs by Ara Güler

143

12. Bradbury Thompson, Format for Smithsonian Magazine.

'Deconstructivism' is an umbrella term commonly used recently to describe these new tendencies in typographic design. This term describes designers who are reluctant to accept conventional typography and who continue early twentieth century attempts to expand the visual vocabulary of modern typographic design.

The prefix 'de' means 'the reverse of' and 'construction' means 'the act of putting parts together to make an integrated whole', therefore deconstructive typography must mean taking the integrated whole apart, or destroying the underlying order that holds a graphic design together.

Some of the devices associated with deconstructivist typography are: mixed sizes and styles, layered and overlapped type even to the point of obscurity; computer-generated type is stretched, condensed, or expanded and sometimes left in its jagged bit-mapped state. Other deconstructivist devices include using extreme letter or line spacing, running type in different directions on the page, interlocking or overlapping text columns and setting text columns in random or stair-step shapes.

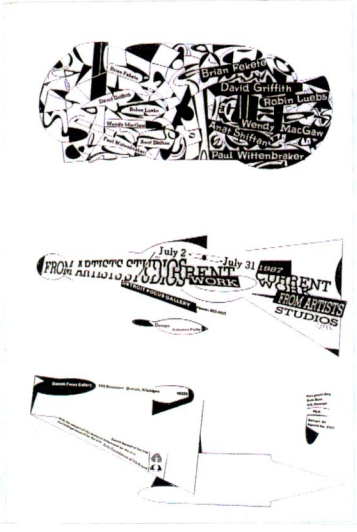
The term may be new, but many of the underlying concepts behind deconstructivist typography have been around since the Futurist and Dadaist art that I have discussed in chapter 1. These present day deconstructors are continuing the assault on tradition and mainstream work, regularly attacking the orderly syntax of typography.

Unlike the movements of the early twentieth century however, individuality is extremely important to them. Deconstructive typography is not a style philosophy, or cohesive movement, but tendencies present in several contemporary designer's work. Initiators of this approach include American designers such as Edward Fella (Fig. 13), Rudy

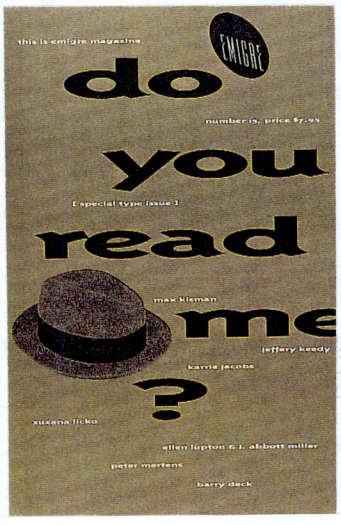
Vanderlans (Fig. 14), April Greiman (Fig. 15) and Cranbrook graduate P. Scott Makela (Fig. 16). Bright young British talent is also evident in the Why Not Associates (Fig. 17), 8vo (Fig. 18), Neville Brody (Fig. 19) and Phil Baines (see chapter 3). Also included are designers from mainland Europe such as Bernard Stein (Fig. 20) from Germany or Allen Hori (Fig. 21) from the Netherlands. While these designers all have very different and distinctive look, they all have a common desire to experiment radically with typography.

Some of these designers are almost entirely dependent on the new technology. For instance, in terms of production, 8vo's work (Fig. 18) would be simply too time consuming, costly or awkward to generate in any other way. Also the Why Not Associates sometimes tend to allow the Apple Macintosh (and other technologies) to dictate their work. For example in figure 17 the technology has become a visual end in itself. Others however, anticipate the aesthetic concerns of the new digital typography, or reflect the freedom that the technology makes possible, while still being produced at the drawing board, on a canvas or by letterpress. Phil Baines is a good example of this, along with Neville Brody (Fig. 19) and American Edward Fella (Fig. 22, 23).

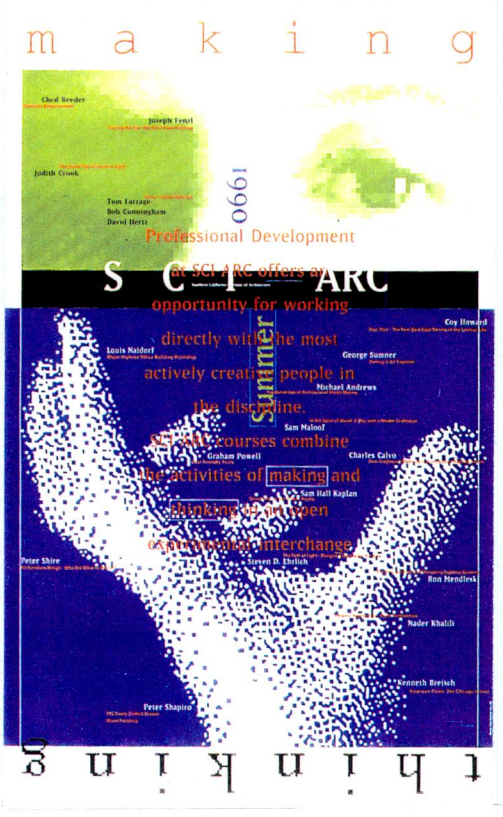
All these designers have at the root of their ideologies a desire to typify the digital era. Just as the work of the Futurists and Constructivists reflected the developing machine age in the early twentieth century, so too does this group wish to reflect the developing computer age.



13. Edward Fella, Poster for Detroit Focus Gallery, USA, 1987.



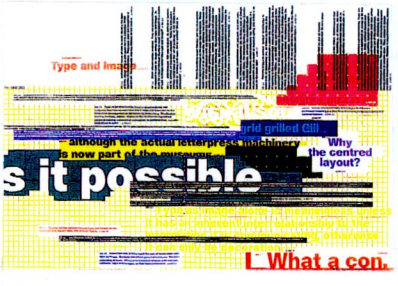
14. Rudy Vanderlans, Magazine cover, 'Do You Read Me?' Emigre Graphics, USA, 1990.



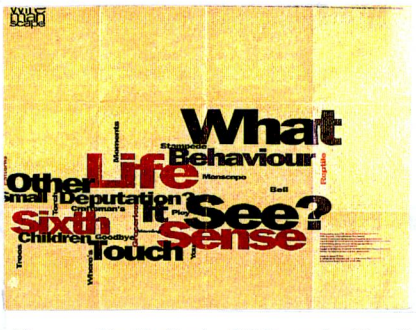
15. April Greiman, Poster, 'Sci Arc: making/thinking' for Southern California Institute of Architecture, USA, 1990.

16. P. Scott Makela, a Cranbrook design: 'The New Discourse', USA 1990.

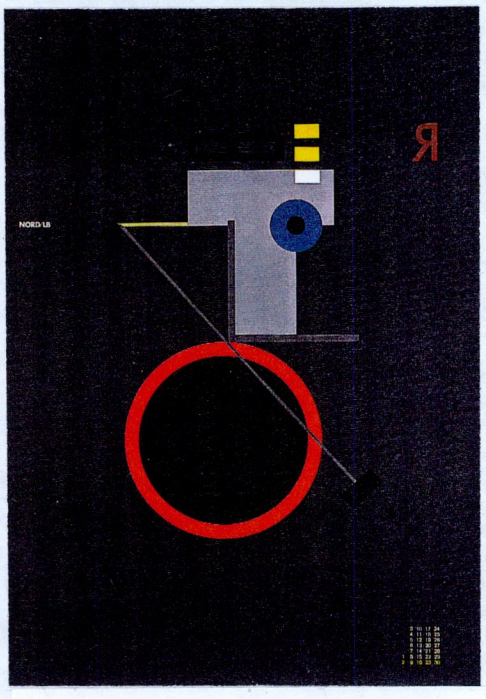
17. Why Not Associates, poster for computer related design, UK, 1991.



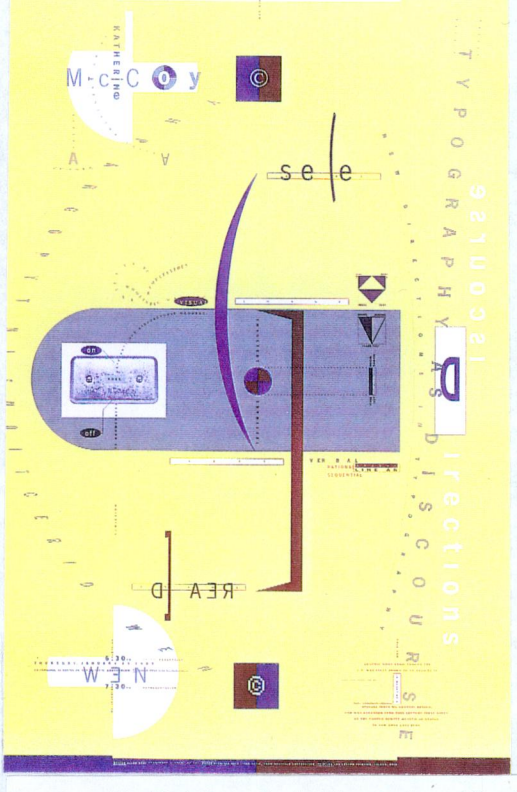
18. 8vo, Magazine page for Octavo, UK, 1990.



19. Neville Brody, CD Poster for Mute Records, Manscape, UK 1990.



20. Bernard Stein, 1991 Calender for Nord/LB, Germany, 1990.



21. Allen Hori, Poster for American Institute of Graphic Arts Detroit, 'Typography as discourse', USA, 1989.

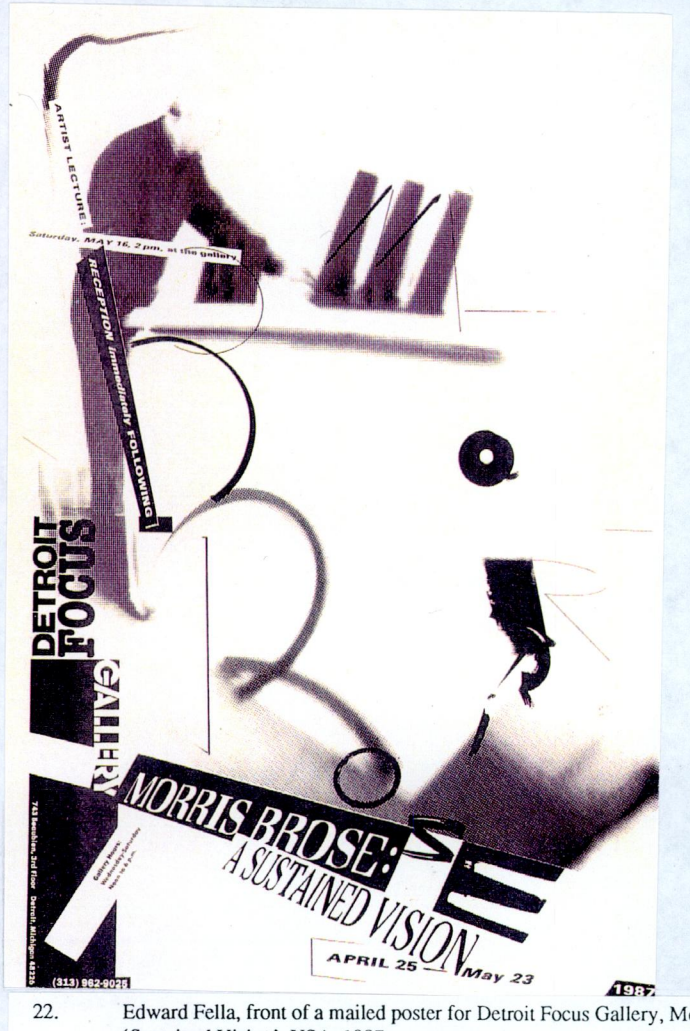
Alternative Techniques Within Deconstructivism

The exponents of modern deconstructivism generally demonstrate oppositional approaches in technique, while sharing similar objectives in terms of reaction against functionalism. In the context of deconstructivism, other disciplines exists along side the investigative use of computers. The disciplines of hand-rendered or hand-drawn type are practised by several de-constructivists, but are epitomised in Edward Fella's creative process.

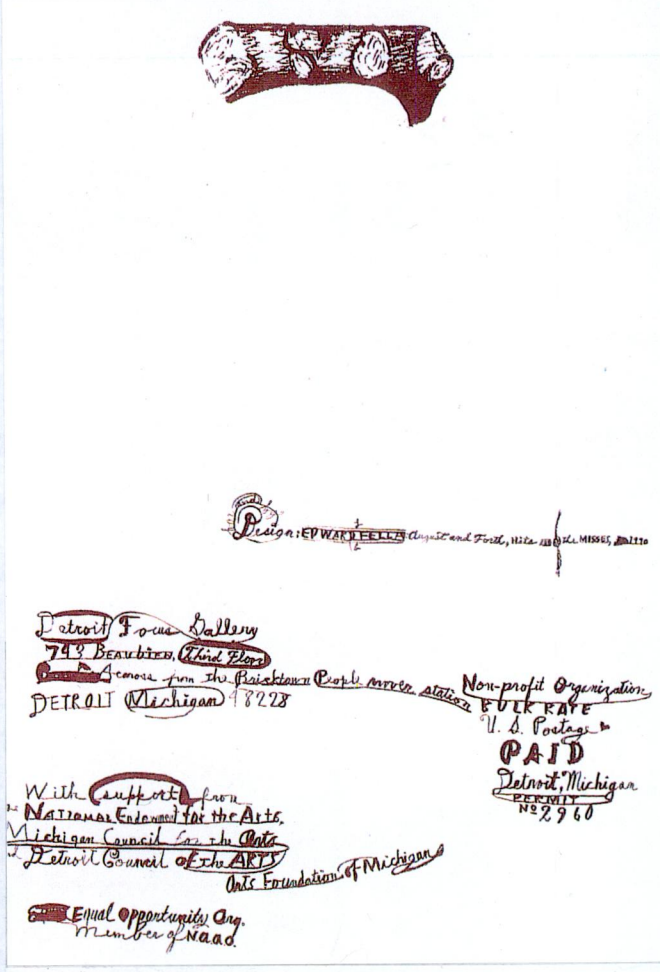
Fella relishes the imperfect language of hand-drawn type in nearly all his work and is perhaps the most extreme example of the typographer as artist. His designs are extremely sophisticated. He self-consciously disregards every known rule, including those of typographic decorum and designer good taste. Letters are sliced, distorted drawn in by hand, letterspacing is extended and linespacing collapsed. He allows doodles to spill across gridless layouts and type is brushed on with the freedom of paint.

Fella uses his clients at the Detroit Focus Gallery to explore typographic ideas, by doing exhibition catalogues, posters and promotional literature, (eg. Figs. 22, 23). By his own admission, these works have nothing to do with the artist he promotes. He exposes his own role and asserts the designers position as a creator in his own right.

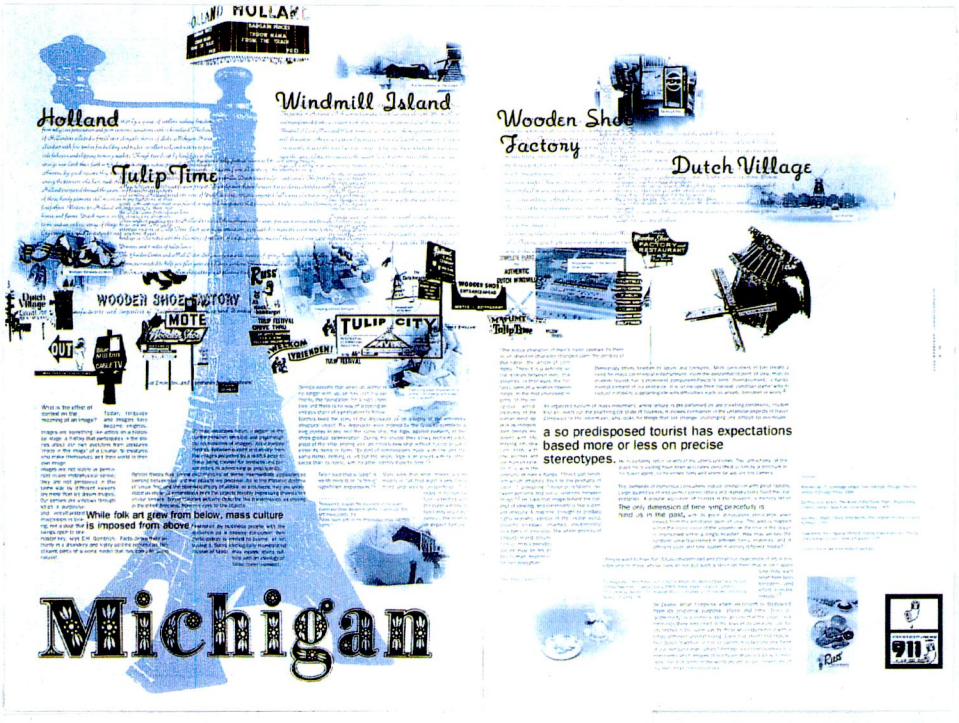
Fella, significantly, is a graduate of the Cranbrook Academy of Art. This academy is the source of many of the most interesting developments in new typography and its graduates are creating some of the most challenging and controversial graphics around. Cranbrook has been at the forefront in exploring the dense, complex layering of elements that is one of the most arresting (and most criticised) characteristics of the new typographic design. This can be seen in figure 24. This piece is part of a collaboration with Rudy Vanderlans,



22. Edward Fella, front of a mailed poster for Detroit Focus Gallery, Morris Brose; 'Sustained Vision', USA, 1987.



23. Edward Fella, Poster for Vickie Arndt and Peter Lenzo's exhibition in Detroit Focus Gallery, USA, 1990.



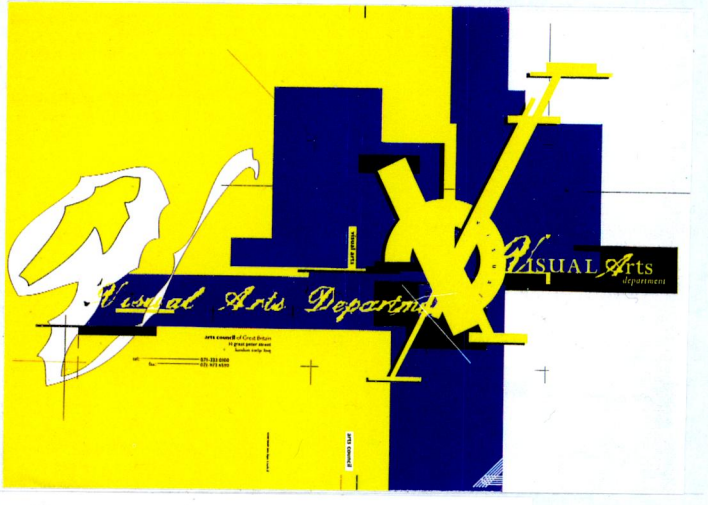
24. Lisa Anderson, Page design for Emigre Magazine, USA, 1988.

publisher of Emigre Magazine on a special issue on Holland, which was designed by Cranbrook students and several Dutch designers. A presentation of Dutch style tourist attractions in Holland, Michigan, designed by Lisa Anderson, layers and overlaps type, vignetted photographs and graphics. The work challenges the audience, who must learn to read these layered, allusive, open ended image/type constructions with the same close attention that they would bring to a difficult piece of text.

Ambitious publications such as this and Emigre magazine in general, suggest that the tradition of experimental typography initiated by Futurism, Dadaism and Constructivism and sustained by the work of Anderson and her colleagues is still being refreshed.

The Why Nots is a male dominated, London based design group, which has been in existence since 1987. The groups goal is to develop the kind of innovative designs that established firms could not produce. They have worked for clients such as Smirnoff Vodka, Next Clothing, The Arts Council and Crossfield Lightspeed Software. Through their innovative approach to these designs they have gained an international reputation and a very high profile amongst designers.

All three founding members, Andrew Altmann, David Ellis and Howard Greenhalgh trained with Phil Baines in St. Marints and later in the Royal College. While at the Royal College, Baines, Altmann and Ellis worked together on a small but influential magazine Yak (Fig. 25) inspired by Herbert Spencer's influential book Pioneers of Modern Typography. The magazine was one of the first indications of a revival of interest at the College in the compositional and pictorial possibilities of early twentieth century experimental typography, a quality that still dominates both Why Nots' and Baines' work. Like Baines, the Why Nots approach design intuitively rather than analytically.



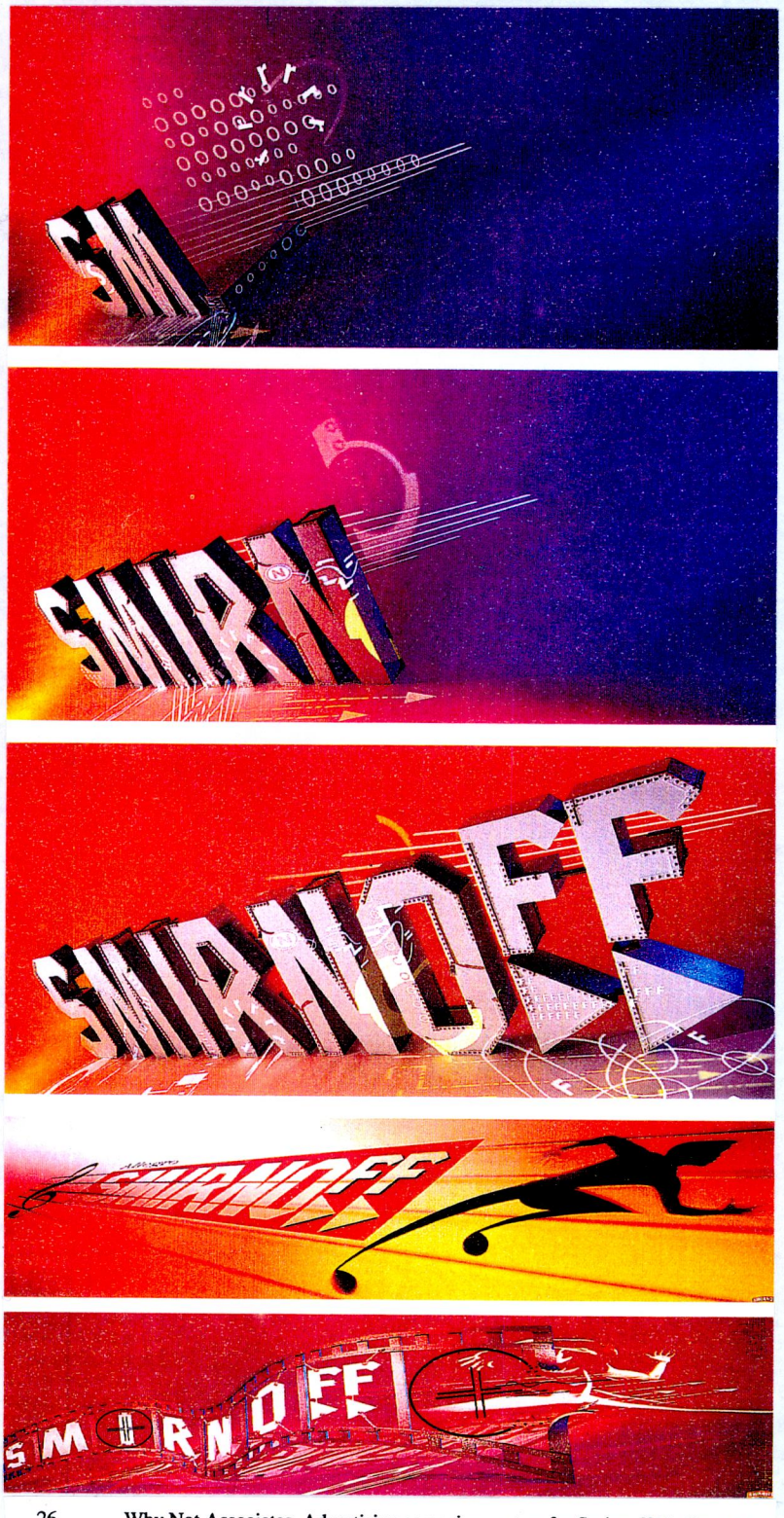
25. Why Not Associates, Yak Magazine, 1986.

> The way a thing looks is what counts for us. A particular bugbear of ours is the sort of ideas graphics ... we never allow the verbal idea to dictate the visual style (24, p. 9).

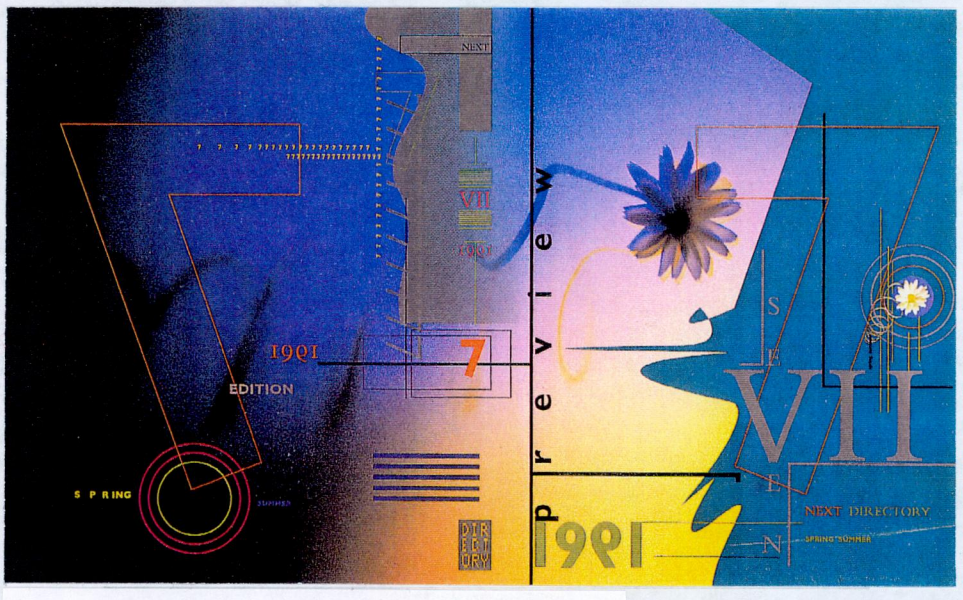
This attitude is apparent in figure 26, an experimental and inventive poster and advertising series for Smirnoff Vodka. The Why Nots took the brand name to exploit the final FF's for their 'fast forward, go for it' connotations. This flamboyant overhaul of Smirnoff is probably one of their most attractive and surprising solutions.

One of there most recent projects was for 'Next' mail order clothing catalogue (Figs. 27, 28). They designed the cover, introductory pages and section dividers with their characteristically colourful and outlandish type design. What is interesting about this work is the diverse approach they took to a theme usually handled in a very quaint manner. Visually and technically, this work could be described as 'striking', however its legibility and relevance to content is not always clear. The Why Nots' typography is, what deconstructivists commonly call, 'type as entertainment'. They design decoratively as a means of engaging, amusing and persuading (as well as infuriating the reader at times), rather than as a way of extending meaning or reading of the text. This approach bears comparison with the Futurist and Dadaist work even though, on a stylistic level, the results are in some ways at odds with each other. This would suggest that they have more in common theoretically than is visually apparent.

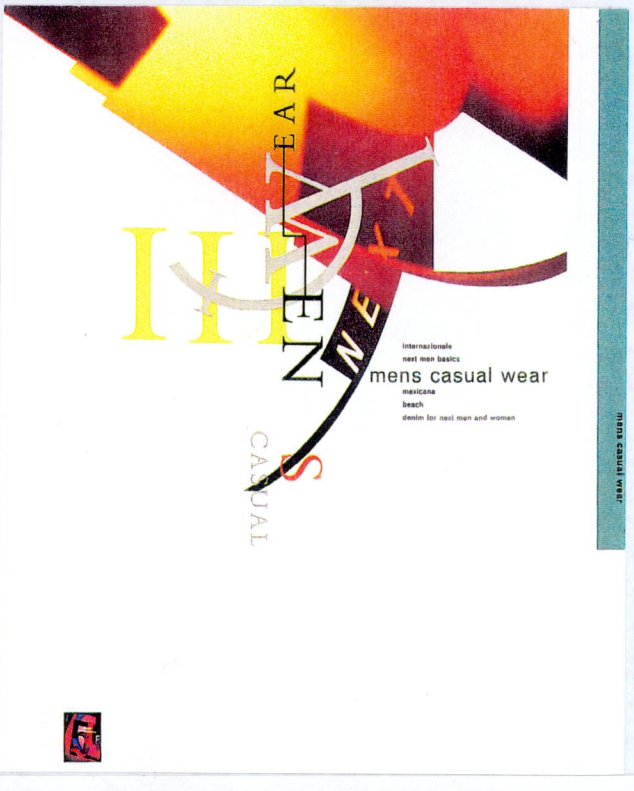
Both Phil Baines' and the Why Nots' work is very much in the deconstruction tradition, and shares rebellious attitudes to typography. However, while Baines' most experimental work is to be found almost exclusively in personal or special - edition projects, the Why Nots have developed their experimental principles in the public sphere and have established a thriving business.



26. Why Not Associates, Advertising campaign posters for Smirnoff Vodka, UK, 1990.



27. Why Not Associates, Catalogue cover for Next, UK, 1991.



28. Why Not Associates, section dividers for Next Directory UK, 1991.

There are strong analogies between this modern typography and the work of the Dadaist, Futurist and Constructivist even thought they are separated by a period of 60 years. They share an almost identical objective of experimentation in their work and both try to offer new insights into typography to include all means of creating written language. By returning to and acknowledging the recent roots of deconstructive typography, these modern typographers give the typographic word the ability to transcend didactic meaning.

Typeface Design

While early twentieth century deconstructivists obscured layout to achieve their objectives, todays' have taken a further step, employing a deconstruction of the typefaces themselves. The visual complexity of the modern world and the level of sophistication in todays audience, perhaps prompted this development in the quest for originality.

Through typeface design, today's deconstructivists have launched a combined assault on the dogmatic insistence on legibility by modern functionalism. They believed that no typeface is essentially legible, rather, in the words of type designer Zuzana Licko of Emigre Graphics, 'It is the readers familiarity with faces that accounts for their legibility' (12, p. 12).

This is an interesting and valid point when you consider that when the Baskerville typeface (Fig. 29) first appeared in 1757 it was heavily criticised for its illegibility and ugliness, for being 'fatiguing to the eye' and 'blinding the Nation' (22, p. 4). Now that we are so familiar with it, it is regarded as the epitome of a legible typeface and one of the most serviceable and visually appealing around.

Baskerville typeface

abcdeghijklmaopqurstwxyz

29. **Baskerville Typeface, 1757.**

For deconstructive designers such as Jeffery Keedy (Fig. 30), Barry Deck (Fig. 31) and British typographers such as Neville Brody and Jonathon Barnbrook (Fig. 32) the beauty of designing typefaces for personal use is that it offers them complete control. It ensures that their work carries its own identity, tone of voice and contains all their own idiosyncrasies.

Neville Brody's pre-digital typefaces for The Face Magazine, emphasised these new perspectives and functioned as a medium through which Brody could develop a cultural commentary of his own. Figure 33 shows how Brody manipulated the word 'styles' over four issues of The Face magazine. He progressively deconstructed the logo, yet each one retains a distinct Brody identity. In 1984, Brody designed Typeface Two (Fig. 34 a, b). This typefaces's geometric rigidity was persistently undermined by the light hearted, Brody manner in which it was applied.

Deconstructive designers also argue, with considerable logic, that typography will have to gradually develop and adapt to the requirements of new technology and new needs. They feel that the computer has not been fully utilized or applied to appropriate or quality typefaces. This is due to the new digitized generated characters trying to 'ape' those techniques and letterforms of old typefaces which conformed to the restrictions of the letterpress. They believe that historical revival and type designed for metal are unsuitable models for type printed by today's techniques. Imitating typefaces of the past can cause major problems in typographic quality, legibility and sensitivity. An example of poor imitation can be seen in Monotypes version of Times for the Apple Macintosh (Fig. 35 a), where something of the typefaces character has been lost. The original Times was designed specifically for metal type and when printed on letterpress (Fig. 35b) the letters have an impression which causes inkspread, impression marks and a crafted feel.

30. Jeffery Keedy, typeface design, Hard Times Regular, USA, 1990.

31. Barry Deck, typeface design, Template Gothic, USA, 1990.

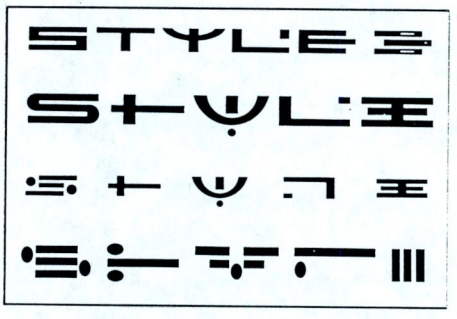
THIS IS PROTOTYPE. EACH LETTER IS UPPER AND LOWER CASE SERIF AND SANS SERIF. THE LETTERFORMS ARE CREATED BY COLLAGING PARTS FROM ABOUT TEN OTHER TYPEFACES INCLUDING GILL, PERPETUA, FUTURA AND BEMBO. IT WAS IMPORTANT TO KEEP ALL THE COMPONENTS THE SAME TO EMPHASISE THAT IT WAS 'BROUGHT TOGETHER' ON A COMPUTER RATHER THAN HAND DRAWN

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN

OPQRSTUVWXYZ

1234567890

32. Jonathan Barnbrook, typeface design, prototype, UK, 1990.



33. Neville Brody, 'Styles' Logo for The Face Magazine, UK.

34a. Neville Brody, Typeface design, Typeface Two, 1984.

34b. Neville Brody, Application of Typeface Two for The Face Magazine, 1984.

Modern photo set Times (Fig. 35a) printed from litho plates, has flattened the letters and made them slightly bland, characterless and diluted its distinguishability. Letterforms designed directly for digital typography would be more appropriate for they could exploit the new possibilities that the Macintosh has to offer.

Research has already been carried out to this end by some of the new 'designer' typefaces. Access to powerful type-drawing software that can be run on micro computers has renewed type design as a vocation and is sparking the creation of dozens of new typefaces that speak for our time.

Emigre Magazine demonstrates some of the computers' abstractional and compositional capabilities. Emigre fonts have been created on the Mac for the Mac. Totally Gothic and Totally Glyphic (Fig. 36) for example is based on the crude 'auto tracing' of scanned black letter images and is a bizarre but authentic product of the technology.

A personal favourite is Emigre Variex (Fig. 37). Zuzana Licko designed this typeface out of simple geometric shapes specifically for the computer. The face is of single case, and does not have an x-height. Licko described Variex as 'a stroke postscript typeface constructed from lines of uniform weight' (4, p. 190). She has reduced these letterforms to the basic powerful gestures of primitive writing hands. The alphabet is single case with alternative characters for optimal letter combinations. The bold is three times the weight of the light which is half the weight of the regular. Single case construction is an idea that was originally presented in 1920 by El Lissitzky (see Fig. 9 a - c) and perhaps now, in Variex, is a reality.

A further example of experimental typeface design is Erik Van Blakland's Beowolf

35a. Times typeface, generated on the letterpress.

35b. Times typeface, generated on computer.

Totally gothic

Totally Gothic Wide

TOTALLY GLYPHIC

36. Unknown Designers, Two Emigre Fonts, Totally Gothic and Totally Glyphic.

37. Licko, Zuzana, font design for Emigre, Variex, 1988.

(Fig. 38). He took his own old Antigua design and digitalised it in Postscript format. Instead of defining outlines which guarantee the agreed contours in any version, he selected his outline character positions for individual points which changed each time he used them. This resulted in an unpredictable random font whose broken, antique outlines shift and reform every time a letter is produced so that no character is ever the same twice.Similar to early twentieth century artists, Van Bloklands plays on his ability to shock or confuse the reader by virtue of his unconventionality, and the interest is often more in the ugliness rather than aesthetic appeal.

Another interesting typeface is Phil Baines' F Can You (Fig. 39). This piece is based on scientific research by Brian Coe into how much of a letter need be visible to be recognised. The original research was carried out on a monoline san serif. Baines however uses the more humanistic serifed typeface of Clarendon. The serifs give clues and greater weight to strong characters, thus allowing him to cut alot more away.

Many letterforms can be almost 75% cropped and still be legible. The key is to crop selectively in a way that retains important visual clues. Baines F Can You contains merely the areas of the characters that are necessary for recognition, such as the dot on the 'i', the cross on the 't' or the semi-circle of the 'e'. Each letter is handled sparingly and delicately to let its most interesting curve look like a solitaire in space. The eye rapidly determines what portion of the letterforms have been retained and explores the new shapes that are created. He ignores the objectivity of the original and looks at these letters from a purely subjective visual point of view. Unlike many of the contemporary new typefaces, it doesn't look like a product of the computer age. Here the computer is merely used as a useful tool. The type's aesthetics are governed not by the strait-jacket of technology but by human sensitivity and the eye as foolproof correcting agent.

38. Erik Van Blokland, font design for Fontshop, Beowolf 23, the Netherlands, 1990.

39. **Phil Baines, Poster for typographic magazine, 'Fuse' illustrating his new typeface 'F Can You?', UK, 1991.**

All three typefaces have embodied the Futurist and Dadaist urge for attacking order and beauty by exploring the potential the computer has for designing typefaces. As with twentieth century experimentalism, today's deconstructivists have radically departed from convention and are attempting to express more of the zest of their own time.

It would be interesting to see what someone like Marinetti would make of these computer aided typeface designs. He would probably admire their eagerness to reflect the spirit of the times through the unification of art and technology, as it is apparently in keeping with his own creative thinking towards technology. In fact the Futurist design philosophies have probably become more relevant to today's designers as the years have seen a boom in new technology.

Chapter 3 Phil Baines - Case Study

St. Martin's Deconstructive Approach

Historical Influences on Baines' Typography

Phil Baines was born in Dendal in the English Lake District in 1958. His early catholic education was geared towards his eventually entering the priesthood. However, after three of the intended six years at Ushaw Seminary, he decided to pursue a career in the applied arts instead. He moved to London to study graphic design at St. Martin's school of Art and at the Royal College of Art between 1982 and 1987. Since leaving college, Baines has worked as a freelance designer for various clients ranging from Monotype Typography to the Craft Council and also teaches letterpress techniques one day a week at Central St. Martin's.

Baines is a young unassuming character with a devotional obsession with typography who exploits type's potential as a medium for communication and visual expression. Although, his work so far has tended to keep these two themes distinct. His most publicised work and the majority of his output to date, is an exploration of some of the possibilities offered by type as an artist's medium. The roots of Baines radical approach to page structure and typographic hierarchy are entwined with those of early twentieth century ideals. He regenerates historically innovative periods, with an additional contemporary quirk.

St. Martin's Deconstructive Approach

A fundamental part of Baines make-up and a subject he still refers to consistently is his college education at St. Martin's. At only 28 years of age, he has spent more time in art school than he has in the design *industry*. His introduction to experimenting with typography began in St. Martin's College. His path from the graphic work of St. Martin's back to the Futurists, Dadaists and Constructivists can be clearly marked.

> Doing good work, original and imaginative, may make for some embarrassing client presentations, sticky tutorials or immediate firing. It won't kill you - the experience is actually liberating. (23, p. 89).

These sentiments recently expressed by St. Martin's tutor Geoff Fowle have an uncanny affinity to Marrinetti's of 1909 (12). Geoff Fowle and colleagues Tim Foster and Nick Biddulph have adopted many of Marrinetti's philosophies and attitudes. Their collective primary objective was to develop designers who could successfully communicate through a personal vocabulary. Reffering to the development of a student's visual vocabulary, and maintaining that experimentation must replace functional necessities, Fowle says:

> What is important is that the human spirit pervades, that the work springs from the hearts and minds of people and that it does not come out of formalism and convention.
> Really good work should be surprising, difficult, challenging, vigorous and have a quality that replenishes rather than merely entertains or informs. (23, p. 90).

Similar to early twentieth century movements, St. Martin's seek to reduce the intellectual gap between fine art and commercial graphic design, and the commercial viability of design is ignored. Experimentation is preferred to 'safe' economic strategies. A manifestation of this appears in almost all Baine's work, where graphic qualities of design dominate considerations of legibility and linear communication.

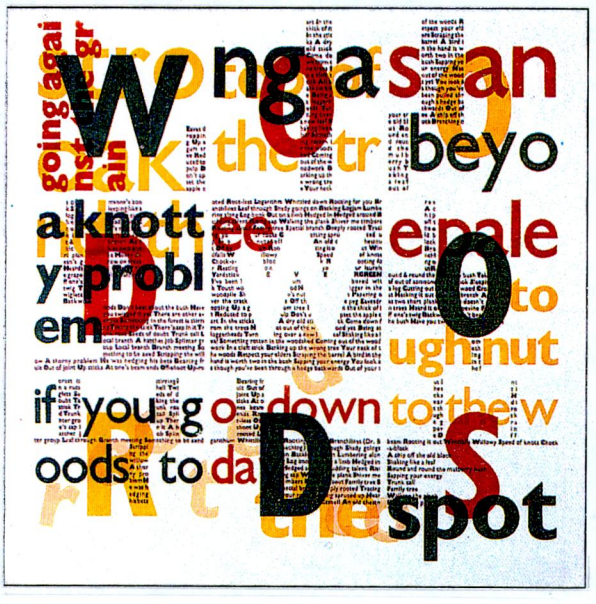
Baines revelled in this teaching approach. He learned that painting and printing offered great source material, both intellectually and visually for graphic design. Through fine art lectures he discovered a salvation in Futurist, Dadaist and Constructivist exercises.

For him these deconstructive artists were working with words to a compelling end; in particular Marrinetti and El Lissitzky intrigued him. Taking from their work a sense of textural quality Baines filled space rather than used it as a 'white area' design element, as demonstrated in figure 40. He adopted the Futurist convention of breaking text and chaotic structures. Experimentation with type size and the interweaving of lines of text became the hallmarks of his personal work. Such stylistic features predominate the design for his Monotype poster (Fig. 41) and also his design for Graphic World magazine cover (Fig. 42). Here he uses type to create interesting shapes on the page making the message less important than the pattern.

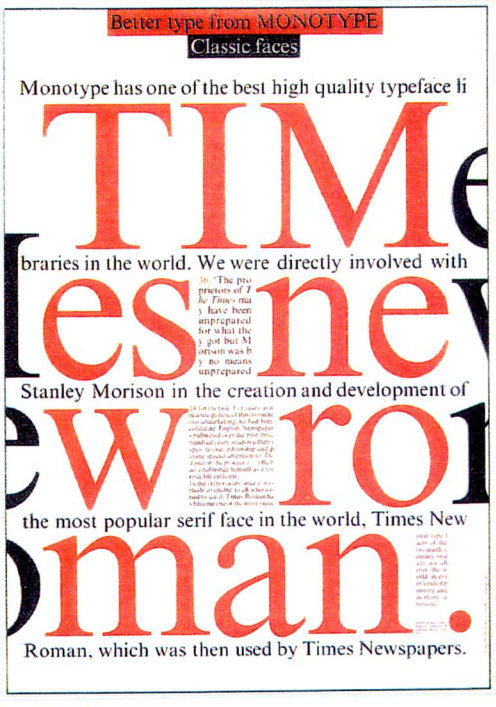
The Constructivism of El Lissitzky made a strong impression on Baines, and his work with letterpress bears a strong resemblance to El Lissitzky's sensitive approach (Fig. 9 a - c). Rather than fight the rigid lock-up system of the letterpress, they both work with it. The notion of experimenting with rigid rather formal pieces of metal type within an intended functional, law-abiding system appealed to both typographers. The rules that existed paradoxically afforded them freedom to invent.

Refusing to merely copy the work of early avant gardists, Baines takes from it a sense of dynamism, a sense of humanism and a non-acceptance of traditional rules and values. He consciously avoids the type of stylistic mimicking akin to some of his contemporaries.

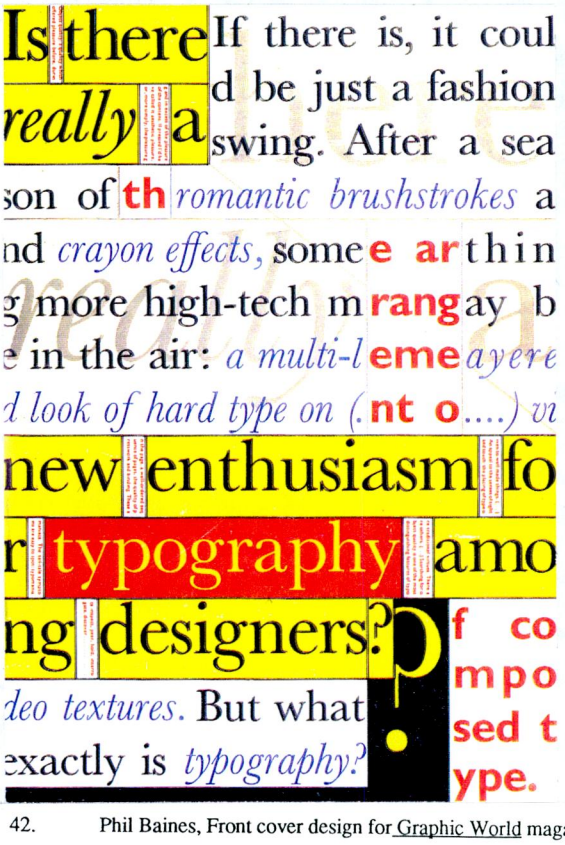
A characteristic unique to Baines is that he draws from another historic source in addition to that of the early twentieth century. He takes much of his inspiration from ancient manuscripts. His theological background has much to do with this aspect in his work. Direct reference to this culture is made in his paschal candle wrap designs (Fig. 43) which were produced in a limited edition, by hand, for priest friends, each year, as presents.



40. Phil Baines, personal project on letterpress, 1990.



41. Phil Baines, Poster design for Monotype, 1989.



42. Phil Baines, Front cover design for Graphic World magazine UK, 1989.

43. Phil Baines, Paschal candle wrap designs, 1987 - 91. Letterpress on silkscreen to fit 3" x 3" candles.

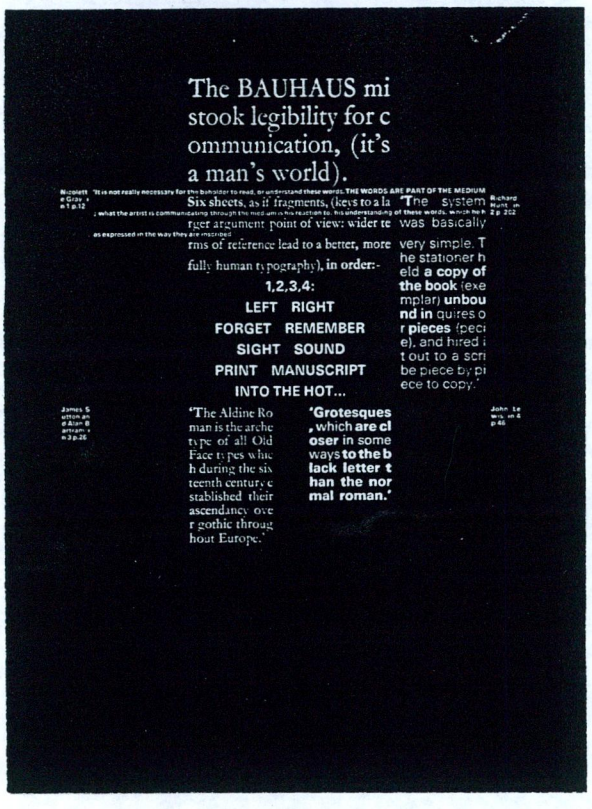
The most immediately noticeable feature is his adoption of an early manuscript convention of breaking words wherever they coincide with the end of a predetermined measure. These candle wraps also capture the intensely worked handcrafted feel of manuscripts by means of an experimental combination of letterpress techniques and silkscreen printing. Baines also tries to capture some of that 'oral' quality, characteristic of manuscripts. Manuscripts were written from dictation and intended to be read aloud in a slow fashion. Seeing this as a new and plausible means of communication , Baines wanted some of these qualities to appear in his own work. As well as the candle wraps, evidence of this appears in the layout of his college thesis.

Historical Influences on Baines' Typography

Baines thesis entitled 'The Bauhaus Mistook Legibility For Communication,(Fig. 44 a, b) is a good example of the manuscripts' oral influence on Baines. It is centered primarily around Marshall McLuhan's book, The Gutenberg Galaxy

> McLuhan's book and my thesis are based around the print manuscript duality, print; a visual experience for reading was aloud and slow. Communication was often by prior knowledge as well as by experience.[1]

Similar to ancient manuscripts, the decorative and structural qualities of the thesis receive at least as much attention as the context. There is an underlying structure, derived from Gutenburgs 42 line bible (the first printed bible), throughout its 6 pages. With very little original text by Baines himself, the majority of the thesis consist of extracts from 30 different authors, each representing conflicting ideas about typographic communication.



The BAUHAUS mi
stook legibility for c
ommunication, (it's
a man's world).

Nicolett e Gray, p 9,12

'It is not really necessary for the onlooker to read, or understand these words. THE WORDS ARE PART OF THE MEDIUM ; what the artist is communicating through the mind and the eye not just to. His understanding of these words, which he h as expressed in the way they are inscribed

Richard Hutt, p 202

Six sheets, as if fragments, (keys to a la rger argument point of view: wider te rms of reference lead to a better, more fully human typography), in order:-

1,2,3,4:

LEFT RIGHT

FORGET REMEMBER

SIGHT SOUND

PRINT MANUSCRIPT

INTO THE HOT...

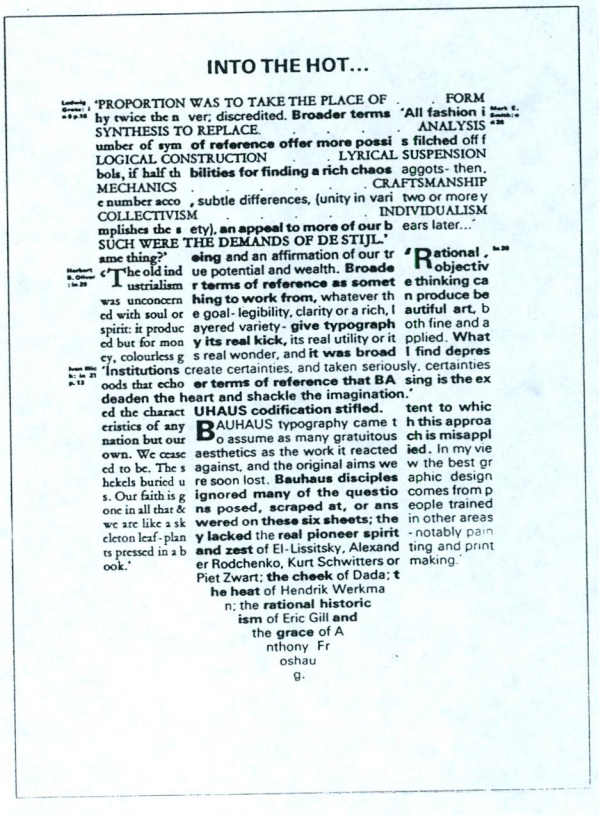
'The system was basically very simple. T he stationer h eld a copy of the book (exe mplar) unbou nd in quires o r pieces (peci e), and hired i t out to a scri be piece by pi ece to copy.'

James S utton an d Alan B ertram, p 2p.26

'The Aldine Ro man is the arche type of all Old Face types whic h during the six teenth century e stablished their ascendancy ove r gothic throug hout Europe.'

'Grotesques , which are cl oser in some ways to the b lack letter t han the nor mal roman.'

John. Le wis, on d, p 48.



INTO THE HOT...

Lodwick, Grimm, n 6 p.16

'PROPORTION WAS TO TAKE THE PLACE OF hy twice the n SYNTHESIS TO REPLACE. umber of sym bols, if half th e number acco mplishes the s ame thing?'

ver; discredited. **Broader terms of reference offer more possi bilities for finding a rich chaos** , subtle differences, (unity in vari ety), **an appeal to more of our b eing** and an affirmation of our tr ue potential and wealth. **Broade r terms of reference as somet hing to work from,** whatever th e goal- legibility, clarity or a rich, l ayered variety- **give typograph y its real kick,** its real utility or it s real wonder, and **it was broad er terms of reference that BA UHAUS codification stifled.**

. . . FORM ANALYSIS . . . LYRICAL . . . CRAFTSMANSHIP . . . INDIVIDUALISM

SUCH WERE THE DEMANDS OF DE STIJL.'

Mark. E. Swinbu rne p 28

'All fashion i s filched off f SUSPENSION aggots- then, two or more y ears later...'

Herbert, B. Ghent : p 28

'The old ind ustrialism was unconcern ed with soul or spirit: it produc ed but for mon ey, colourless g oods that echo deaden the heart and shackle the imagination.'

Jones Mike b: bs 21 p. 13

'Institutions create certainties, and taken seriously, certainties

BAUHAUS typography came t o assume as many gratuitous aesthetics as the work it reacted against, and the original aims we re soon lost. **Bauhaus disciples ignored many of the questio ns posed, scraped at, or ans wered on these six sheets; the y lacked** the **real pioneer spirit and zest** of El-Lissitsky, Alexand er Rodchenko, Kurt Schwitters or Piet Zwart; **the cheek** of Dada; **t he heat** of Hendrik Werkma n; the **rational historic ism** of Eric Gill **and** the **grace** of A nthony Fr oshau g.

'Rational , objectiv e thinking ca n produce be autiful art, b oth fine and a pplied. What I find depres sing is the ex tent to whic h this approa ch is misappl ied. In my vie w the best gr aphic design comes from p eople trained in other areas - notably pain ting and print making.'

44 a, b. Phil Baines, Cover and page from college thesis, UK, 1985.

The real 'writing' of this thesis was in the interweaving of these opposing opinions.While the structure is primarily based on the manuscript grid, there are very strong visual indications of early twentieth century influences. Baines' use of interweaving, fragmented, decentred type, all correlate to twentieth century techniques. Similar to that of the Futurists, the form of this piece has become integrated with the essence of the written word. Like Marinetti's poetry design (Fig. 2), Baines has tried, in a visual way to create typography that is full of sound. Here at times the text reads as a three-way dialogue. Baines' creative composition, while less chaotic and less aggresive than Marinetti's is equally expressive. A similarity in approach and technique may also be seen in the abandonment of grammer and punctuation. Although both compositions are rendered very differently, they both use type as a decorative elements and are both trying to communicate a visual rather than an auditory message.

Despite the similar philosophies of Marinetti and Baines, the structural form of this thesis probably has even more in common with El Lissitzky's designs (Fig. 9 a - c). By understanding and applying some of El Lissitzky's well *structured* typographic experiments, Baines has achieved a dynamic yet rigorously stable typogrphical composition. Looking at figure 44b, one sees how Baines uses bold text to indicate the introductory and fundamental centrepiece to his thesis. The shared letter feature recalls El Lissitzky's For The Voice (Fig. 9 a - c). El Lissitzky used large black type for each of the three letters common to all four words (Fig. 9c). He also uses a large 'O' as a common letter in the words for 'good' and 'treatment'.

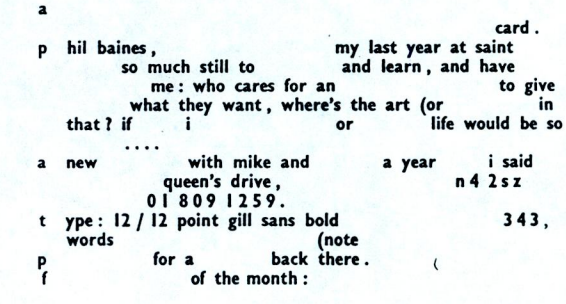
By revitalising and manipulating the inovative experiments of the past, Bines achieves a level of sophistication and confidence, showing him to be an artist carefully manipulating many influences, yet remaining autonomous. He has utilised the work of both ancient

manuscripts and early twentieth century art, without plagurising . Non-conforming arrangement of typography can also be seen in his postcard designs (Fig. 45). This purely typogpraphic series began as a personal project on the letterpress while still in college. These autobiographical cards often doubles as a platform from which Baines voices his opinions. They combine editorial rigour and sensitivity to language with a playful sense of typographic possibility. In relation to this series Baines proclaims.

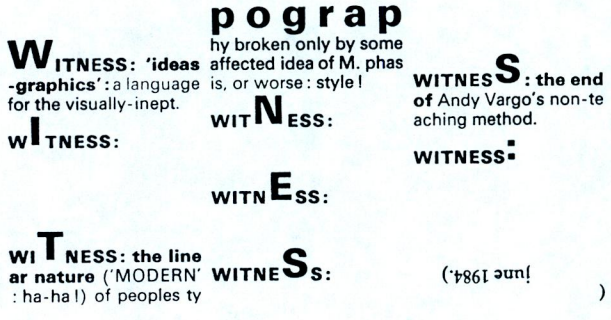
> The words were important but more important to use were the exercises in leading, spacing etc... I didn't worry too much about the text falling appart entirely at times[2].

Baines manipulates many Dadaist devices in order to create a textural and rythmical quality. This is evident in almost every card but is particularly effective in those shown in figure a and b, where a somewhat chaotic mass of words and letterfroms is produced. The success of these cards lie in their ability to shock or irritate the reader by virute of their unconventionality. In this project Baines shares the Dadaist and Futurist adherence to an ideal of experimenting and also their dismissal of the importance of legibility in a piece of text. He is similarly more interested in making the reader think and become involved in the communication process. He tries to sensitise the reader to the typography by forcing them to confront it. He concerned himself with promoting interest as well as challenging the reader.

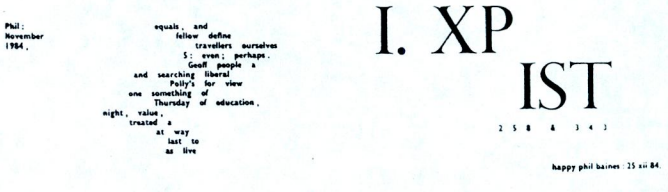
In general, I find that this typography both stimulates the senses and engages the intellect. Initially one might find this art form difficult to warm to. The rational side of the brain is frustrated and will remain unsatisfied until logic and linearity are suppressed. This is where design enters the realm of fine art. Expression, texture and rhythm reign over clarity. Unlike some of his contempories, Baines has a degree more respect for the viewer as audience.



(45a)



(45 b.)



45a , b Phil Baines, personal postcard designs, 1983 - 1985, letterpress.

He demonstrates a wish to make his pieces approachable when he says 'my work tends to get clearer the more public it gets'. His concern that the viewer be enticed into the reading process shows that he is not entirely elitist about his work as often it appears.

Footnote Chapter 3

(1) Interview with Phil Baines, December '91.

(2) Interview with Phil Baines, December '91.

Conclusion

While Modernism was truly radical its inheritors allowed it to become impoverished and sterile. The contemporary challenge on accepted dogmas by typographers such as Baines, Barnbrook and Brody stem from the legacy of Modernism and to some extent achieves a revitalisation of Modernist objectives. There is an additional dimension to the work of today's avant garde typographers which has been prompted by both the development of new technologies and the level of sophistication of the audience. The contemporary interest in pushing typography to the boundries of legibility is part of a broader cultural context - the post-modern condition. Challenging functionalism in typography has led to experimentation with the message rather than words, with type as image, with recognition rather than reading.

For Baines and his contemporaries, deconstructive typography is a channel into personal expression with subjective referential meaning. This group's elusive compositions rely on luring the beholder into a game of visual cat-and-mouse and leading them around grids, curves and through layers before the message is understood. The extreme to which these typographers are pushing the rules of syntax draws ridicule and rage from those still committed to an ideology of law-abiding, well tailored typography. The work yields delight, or frustration in proportion to the readers patience. They have been accused of formalism, theoretical obfuscation, impracticability and other crimes against the value of both classic modernism and the pragmatic professional mainstream. Many designers also dislike the new breed of typeface design, dismissing them as merely interfering with immediate readability.

While these accusations have some basis in fact, the question remains whether such transgressions are truly objectionable, or whether instead, they have broadened typography's formal range and its capacity for individuality and intellectual self-expression.

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