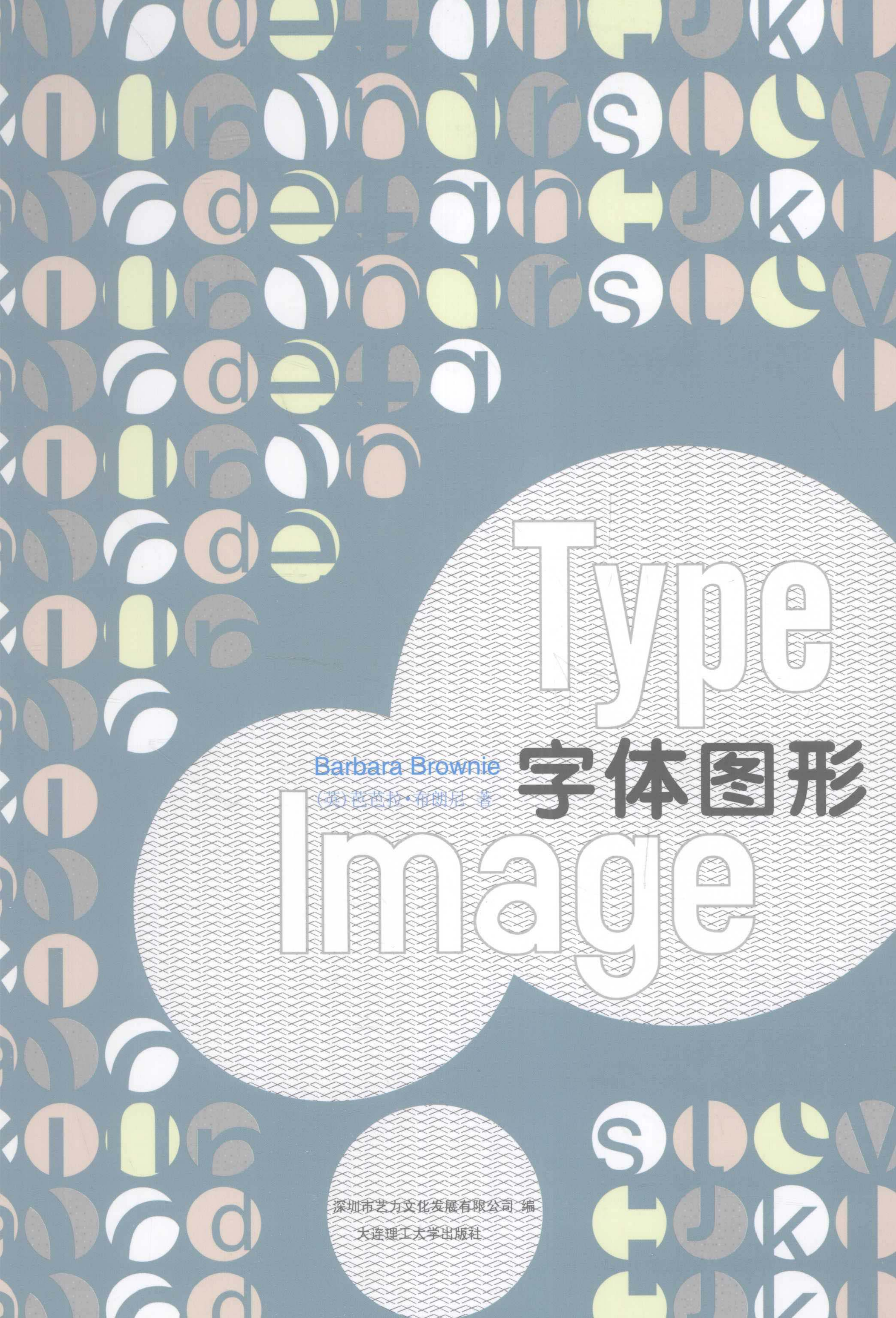

Type Image

字体图形

Barbara Brownie

（英）芭芭拉•布朗尼 著

深圳市艺力文化发展有限公司 编

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In recent years, the alphabetic keyboard has become a tool for image-making. Alphabetic characters are now not only considered in terms of their potential to display linguistic information, but also their potential to act as artists' marks. *Type Image* presents a collection of contemporary works which challenge the divide between type and image. These examples use typed characters in the construction of pictorial forms. Distinct from other forms of experimental typography, the aim of these works is not to decorate letterforms, but to utilise them as the component parts of a more significant pictorial whole.

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1

Introduction

For Ferdinand de Saussure, the founding father of modern semiology, the sole purpose of type was to convey linguistic meaning[1]. Numerous typographers have designed type according to Saussure's assertion that the typed or written word should be solely a representation of speech. During the Modernist era, it was felt that the most ideal type directly and efficiently referred to spoken language[2]. In 1930, Beatrice Ward compared type to a crystal goblet: an invisible container for language. Both Ward and Saussure felt that the form and appearance of written word should go unnoticed: that its linguistic content should be prioritized over visual style.

At the Bauhaus, Herbert Bayer designed his *Universal* typeface (1925), specifically absent of ornamentation. His type was a blank canvas, expressing nothing, refusing to distract from linguistic function. Meanwhile Jan Tschichold's *The New Typography* (1928) asserted that "a good typeface has no purpose beyond being of the highest clarity"[3]. It should be simple, clear, and above all, should not distract from linguistic signification. All personal expression should be removed, and any element of decoration eliminated.

By this time, however, the typed word had already demonstrated its potential to communicate pictorially as well as linguistically, and even as Bayer, Tschichold and Ward asserted the supremacy of function over aesthetics, designers were creating type that had more in common with image than with speech. Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1913-1916) present both pictorial and linguistic meaning simultaneously. They communicate two messages: iconic and linguistic. Having parallel interpretations, they can be read as type or viewed as image, and the audience may switch between the two alternative readings[4]. The first reading, at a micro level, is narrative type, and the second reading, at a macro level, is an image. The image component may draw attention to a particular part or particular interpretation of the linguistic content, thereby reinforcing the linguistic message, or, on other occasions, it may be independent of the linguistic meaning, communicating an entirely different message.

The De Stijl movement helped to distance the printed word from the perception of type as a mechanised version of written script. De Stijl type was not constructed from strokes, but from geometric forms. More significantly to this investigation into the typed image, De Stijl's geometric primitives were the same as those used to construct images. Designers including Theo van Doesburg used an interchangeable array of polygons to construct text and image, proving that, at least at the point of construction, type and image can be considered in the same terms. Van Doesburg's cover for the first edition of De Stijl magazine (published from 1917 to 1931) presents type constructed from rectangular primitives. The same primitives are used in the construction of the abstract pictorial arrangement beneath the type. This type operates in an opposite manner to Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, by communicating pictorially at a micro level, and linguistically at a macro level.

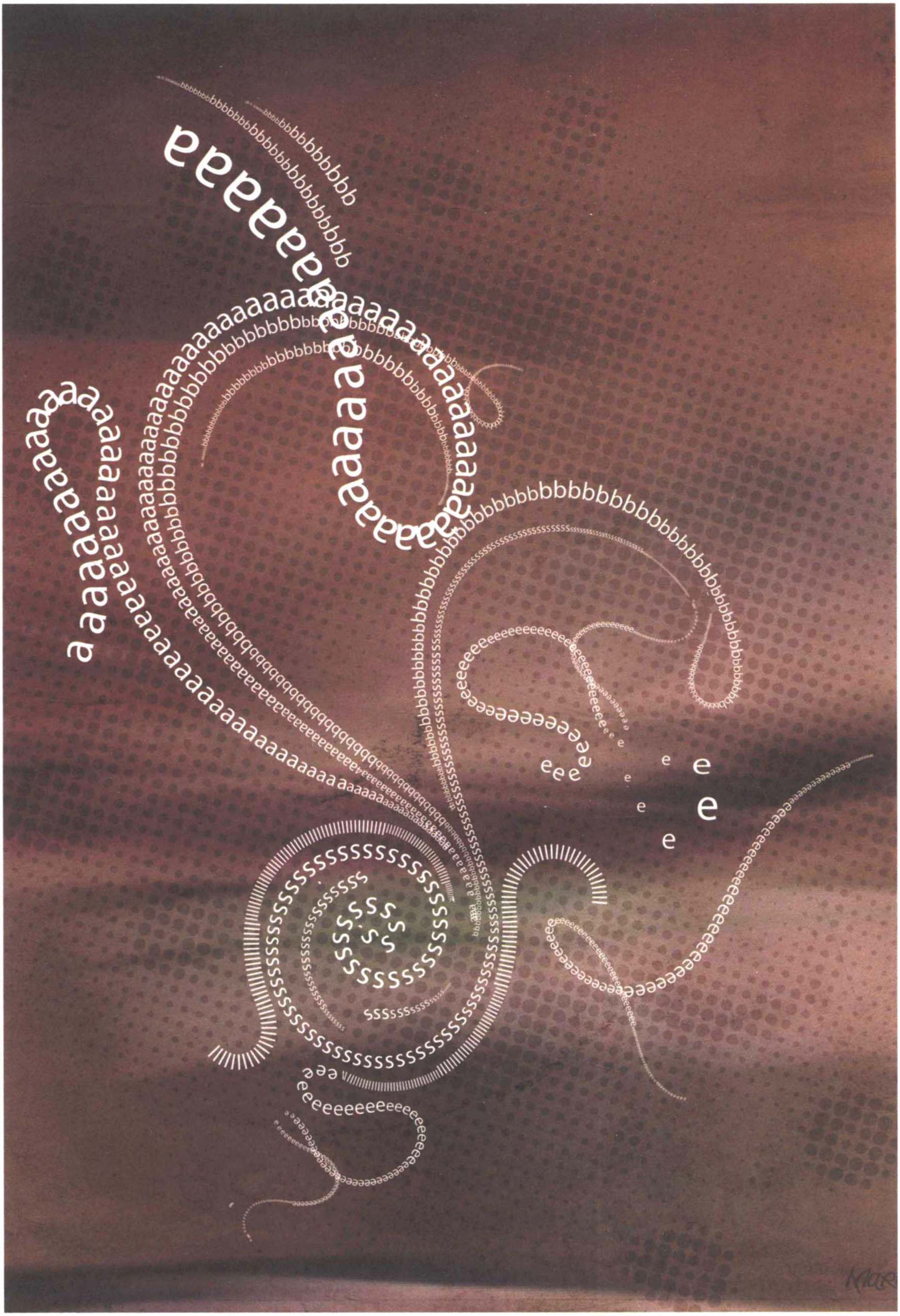
---

[1] Saussure, Ferdinand de, Harris, Roy (translator), Course in General Linguistics, Duckworth, London, 1983, p. 24.

[2] Warde, Beatrice, 'The Crystal Goblet', 1930, in Armstrong, Helen (ed.), Graphic Design Theory, Princeton Architectural Press, NY, 2009, pp. 39-43.

[3] Tschichold, Jan, 'The Principles of the New Typography', 1928, in Heller, Steven and Meggs, Philip B. (eds), Texts on Type, Allworth Press, 2001, pp. 115-128. p. 118.

[4] Gross, Sabine, 'The Word Turned Image: Reading Pattern Poems', Poetics Today, Vol. 128, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 15-32, p. 17.



Mara Hernandez
Assemble
2009
avantexte.com

In interwar Europe, communication across language barriers demanded more than clear typefaces. In order to effectively convey a message to an international audience, an intuitive method of communication needed to be developed: a diagrammatic language which could transcend linguistic and educational boundaries. In 1936, Otto Neurath published *ISOTYPE*, a system of pictures intended as a substitute for written language, wherever the audience was likely to be international or illiterate[5]. *ISOTYPE* is as structured as other languages, but is distinct from conventional spoken or written language in that it contains iconic rather than arbitrary signs. Like words in a written sentence, *ISOTYPE* symbols can be grouped to convey a cumulative message, and, like written words, symbols must be presented in the correct order to make sense. An arrow next to another symbol could suggest motion, but an arrow alone would be meaningless (much like written or spoken verbs, which commonly require association with a noun in order to be made concrete). Like much conventional language, *ISOTYPE* is referential, describing objects and events beyond itself. It is entirely informative, designed to communicate concrete data. Other forms of language, particularly poetic language, communicate abstract ideas which are more difficult to convey through diagrammatic systems. Poetic language, rather than directly describing events beyond itself, aims to draw attention to the word itself. This elevates the written or typed word from a "vehicle for thoughts" to an "object in [its] own right[6]".

Much like poetic language (such as metaphor or rhyme), visual properties can be used to intervene in the relationship between the typed word and its linguistic meaning. American posters of the 1960s and 1970s embraced the hippy culture that began to emerge in San Francisco. When incorporating typography, these posters often did not use type, favouring hand-drawn writing. In imitation of Art Nouveau typography, this hand-drawn lettering was ornate and often irregular. In many examples, it was distorted to fill the silhouette of an image. Legibility was sacrificed in favour of style. Although the linguistic content is referential, this lettering draws attention to itself by operating pictorially, asserting its difference from "plain" type.

From the 1970s, typographers began to reassert their desire to express individuality through type, and to treat typographic design as a creative rather than logical process. Wolfgang Weingart proposed that typography should be considered an art, not a science, and that "understanding the message was less dependent on reading" than typographers had previously thought[7]. Weingart, and among others, Edward Fella, broke away from the grid and began to treat the printed page as a free canvas, producing unconventional typographic compositions using unpredictable combinations of typefaces.

In the 1980s, letterforms became distorted or simplified until their linguistic identities were jeopardized. At *The Face* magazine, Brody systematically reduced linguistic forms to abstract shapes. He replaced the "A" in *The Face* with a triangle, and over six consecutive issues, gradually reduced the word "contents" to an arrangement of lines and crosses[8]. Brody had previously avoided the field typography, assuming it to be too restrictive[9]. This attitude manifested itself in the treatment of type as image. For each edition of *Fuse*, Brody created a new font, many of which were barely legible. Some occupied an awkward void between recognisable lettering and abstract forms: somehow familiar and seemingly typographic at first glance, but ultimately linguistically empty. With variations in size and colour, these fonts could be used in the construction of abstract pictorial compositions.

---

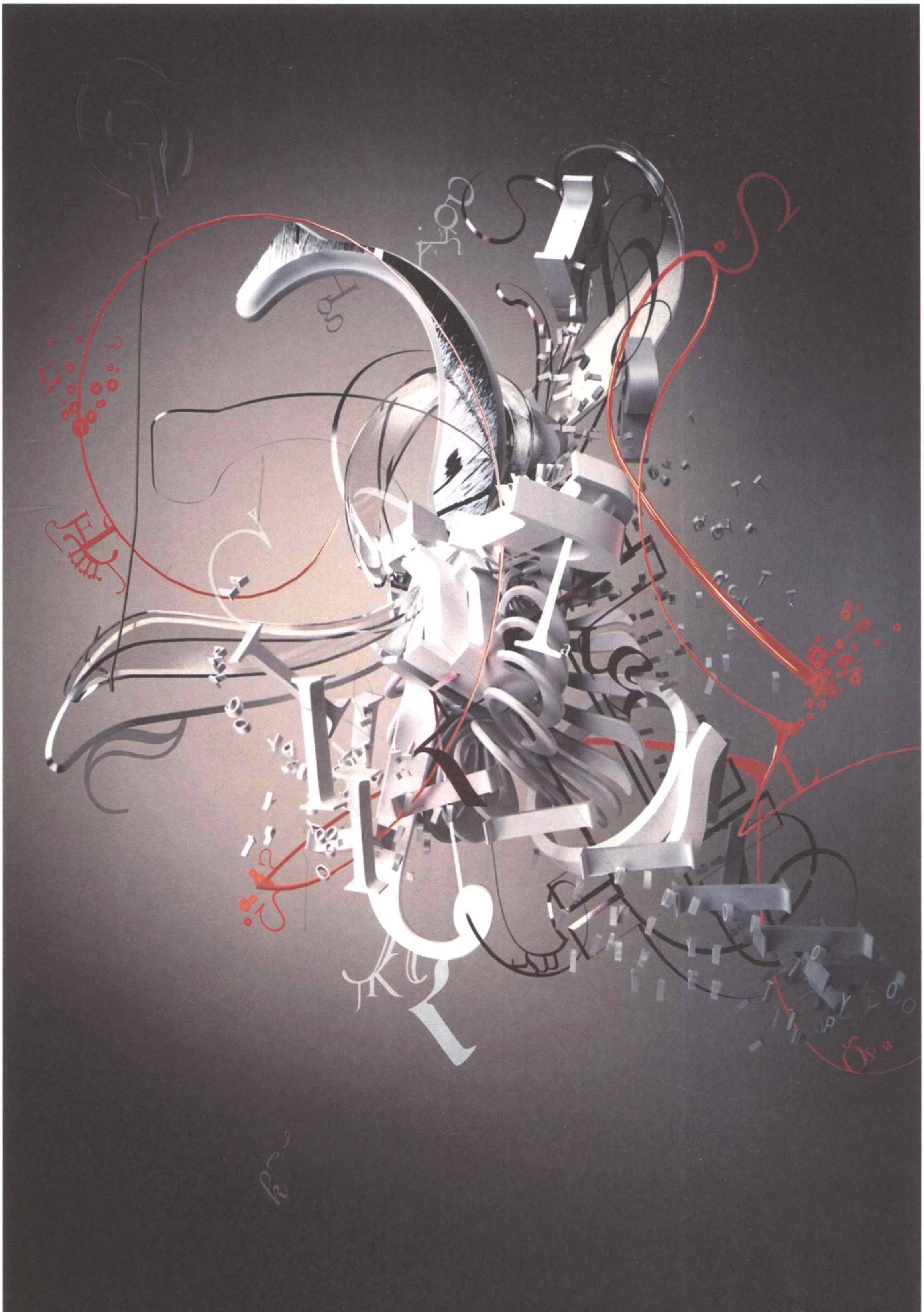
5 Crow, David, Left to Right: the Cultural Shift from Words to Pictures, AVA, Switzerland, 2006, p. 60.

6 Hawkes, Terrence, Structuralism and Semiotics, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1977, p. 63.

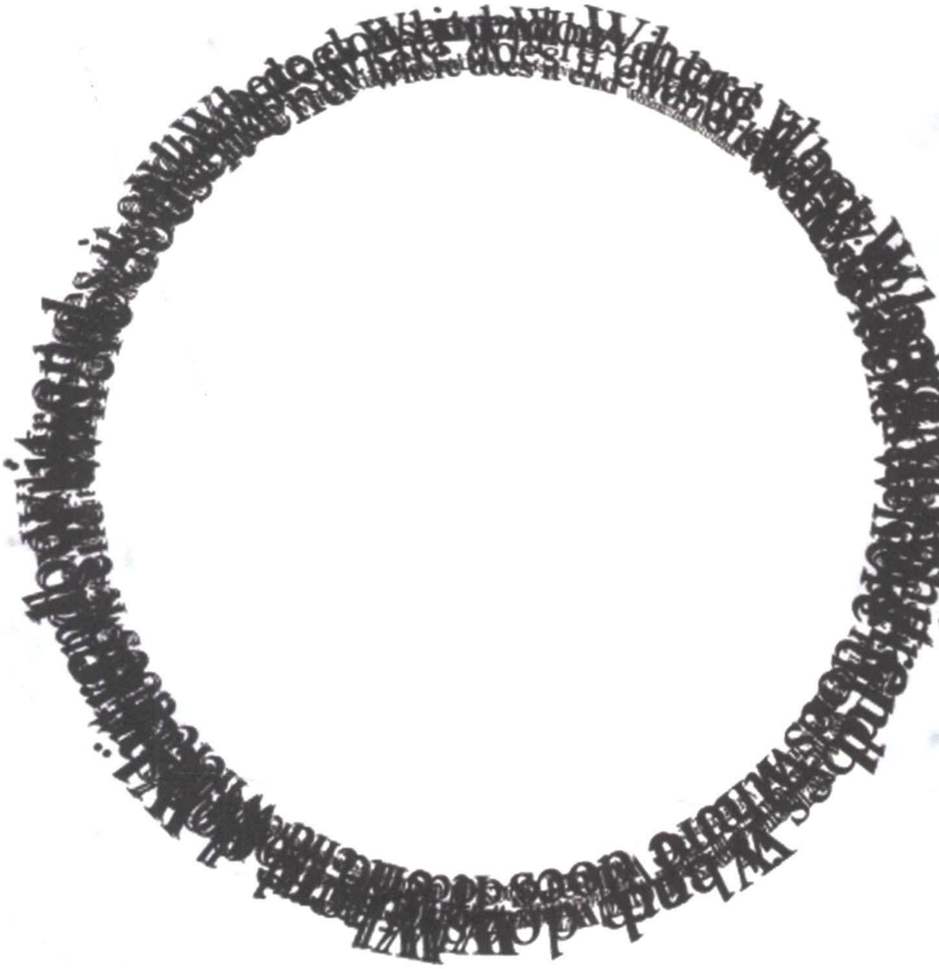
7 Weingart, Wolfgang, 'My Way to Typography', 2000, in Armstrong, Helen (ed.), Graphic Design Theory, Princeton Architectural Press, NY, 2009, pp. 77-80, p. 78.

8 Poynor, Rick, No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism, Laurence King Publishing, London, 2003, p. 49.

9 Brody, Neville, cited in Wozencroft, Jon, The Graphic Language of Neville Brody, Thames & Hudson, London, 1988, pp. 15-18.



Christoph Bader
Letters are More than Words
2007
www.depotvisuals.de



WHERE DOES IT END?

Mohammed Alshoaiby
Where Does It End?
2008

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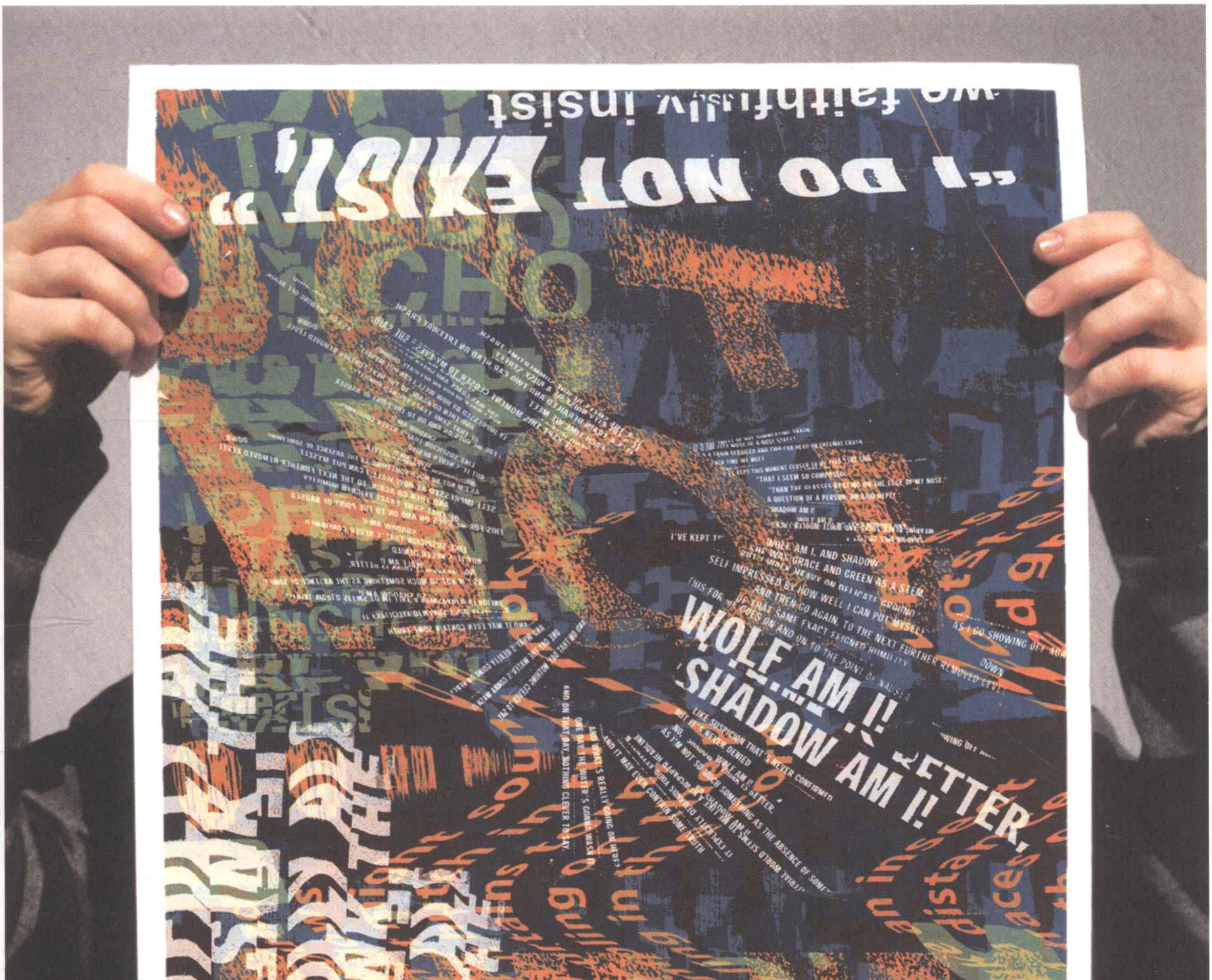
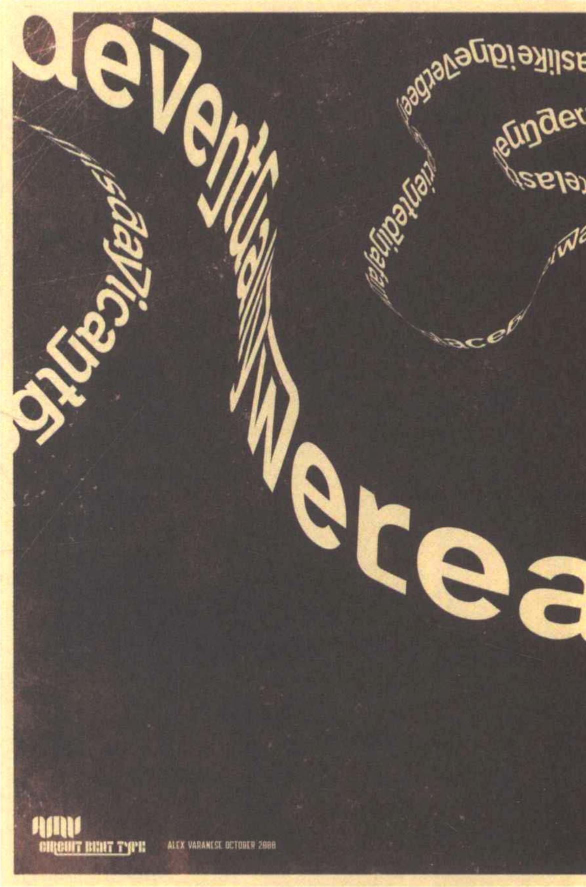

we faithfully insist
"I DO NOT EXIST,"
WOLF AM I!
SHADOW AM I!
BETTER,
1/5

Andrew Dernavich
Brother Sister
2008
andrewdernavich.com

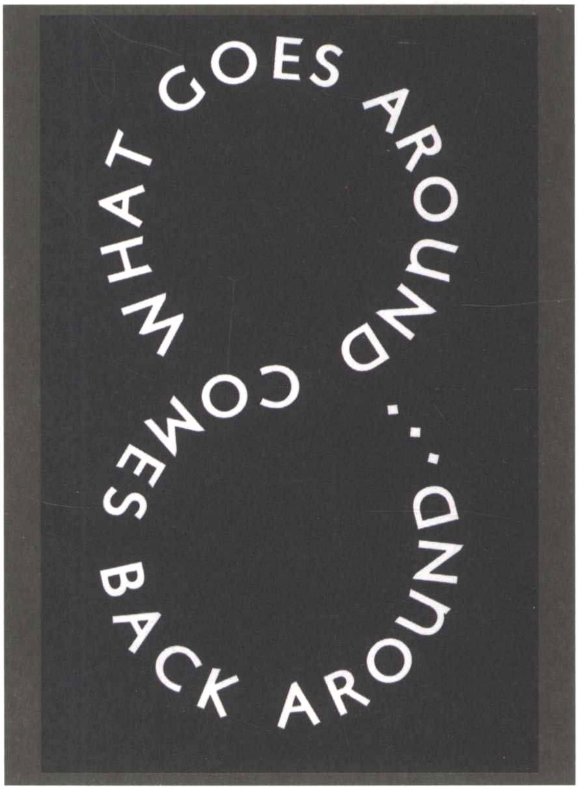


Alex Varaese
Secret Identity
2009
www.alexvaraese.com

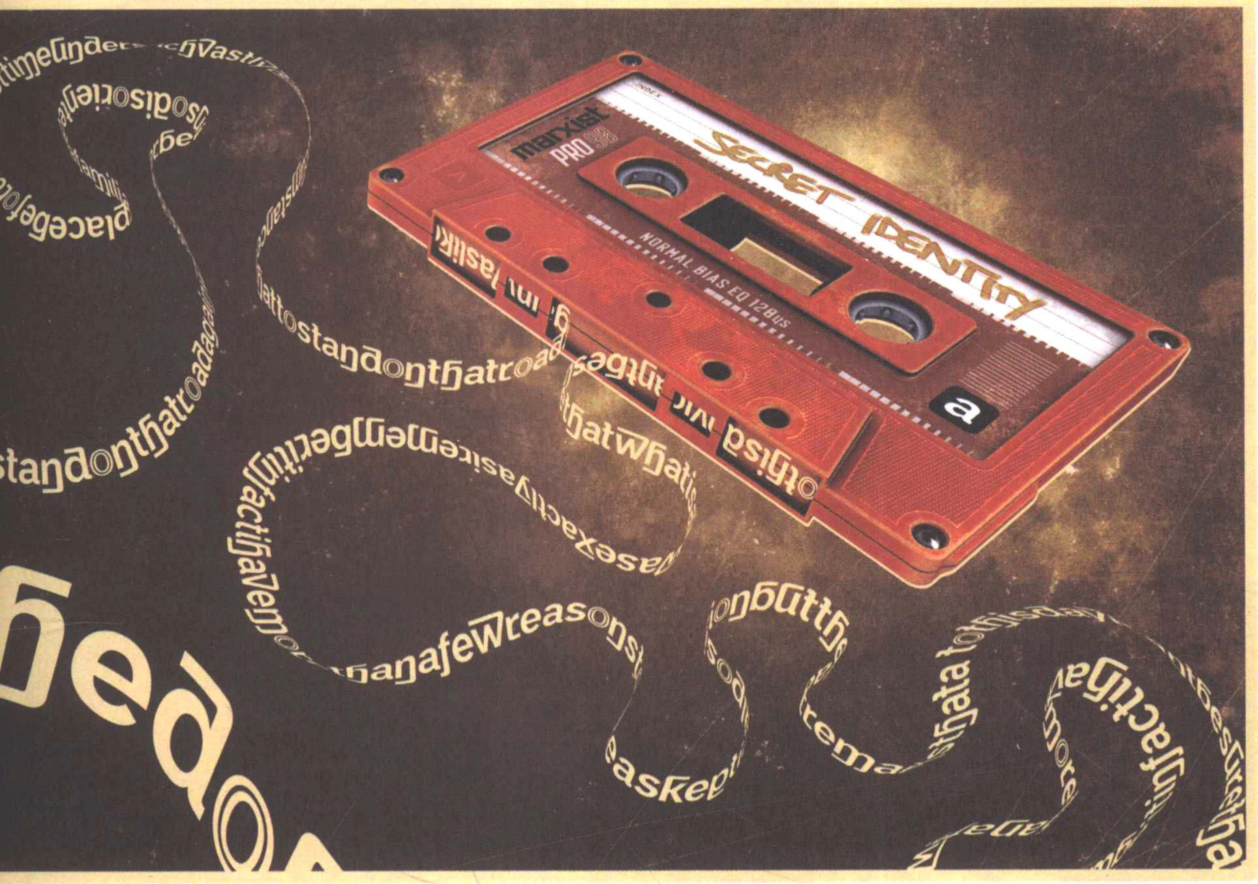
David Carson, as art director of *Beach Culture* and *Ray Gun* magazines, experimented extensively with layout. With no design training, Carson worked intuitively, challenging or even contradicting established rules of "good design". Sliced, distorted and layered type ensured that Carson's typography expressed pictorially as well as linguistically. In many cases, type was completely illegible, denying any linguistic interpretation, forcing the type to perform as pattern, texture or image. His untitled 1993 poster, announcing a talk in Cincinnati, provides viewer with only the minimum information required for attendance at Carson's talk: the date and location. All other information is obscured by Carson's distortion of the type. Even Carson's own name is barely legible—the style alone signifies Carson's involvement to those who are familiar with his work. This chaotic arrangement is typical of Carson's typography, providing enough typographic information to indicate the presence of type, but not so much as to allow for that type to communicate linguistically. This simultaneously establishes and destroys expectations about how the poster should be received. Viewers attempt to seek out words within the chaos, but must settle for a confusing frenzy of overlapping letterforms.

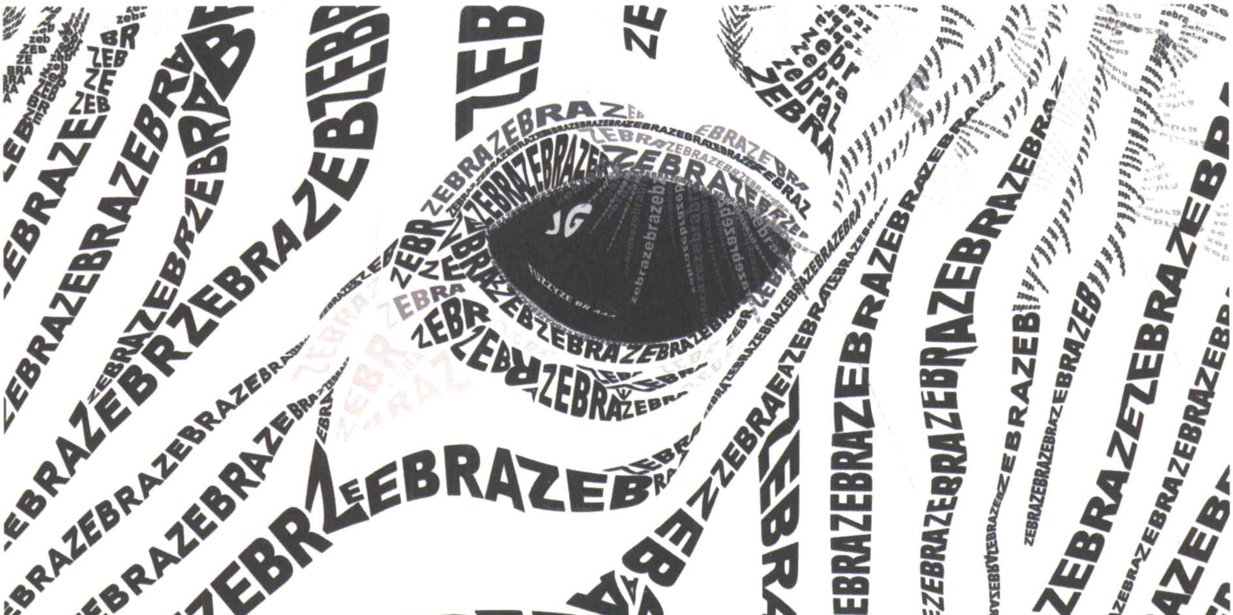
Thanks to typographers such as Carson and Brody, and their willingness to challenge convention, our notion of type has come a long way since the days of Bayer and Tschichold. Contemporary practitioners are now able to challenge expectations: to present type with unexpected characteristics, in unlikely contexts. Type has been removed from the mundane domain of the monotone print, transposed into the dynamic worlds of image and screen. Contemporary type performs two functions simultaneously: it can operate as type and image, shifting between paradigms, and defying expectations.

Contained within the following pages are numerous examples of contemporary practice which challenge the conventional understanding of type, and blur the boundaries between type and image. These works are built on a foundation of experimental typography laid by the Postmodern typographers of the late twentieth century, who have understood that type can communicate pictorially as well as (or even instead of) linguistically. Many of these contemporary examples use pictorial form to reinforce linguistic meaning (as in *Karma* and *The Zebra Eye*, right), while others treat letterforms as entirely abstract (as in *Assemble* and *Letters Are More Than Words*, previous pages). However differently they may treat the letter, these images have a common goal, to turn type into image.

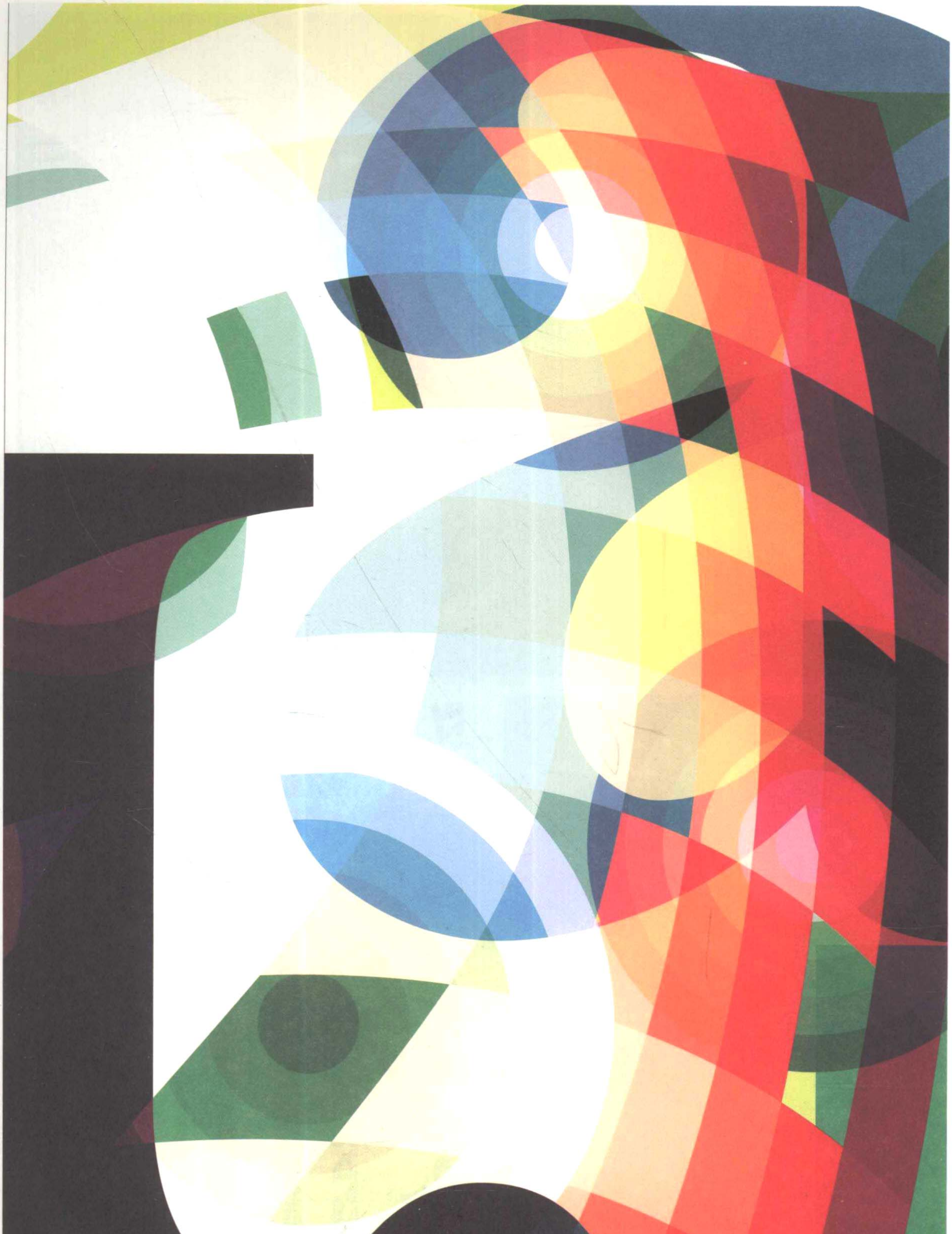

WHAT GOES AROUND... COMES BACK AROUND...

Amy Fedeska
Karma
2009
www.3LambsGraphics.Etsy.com

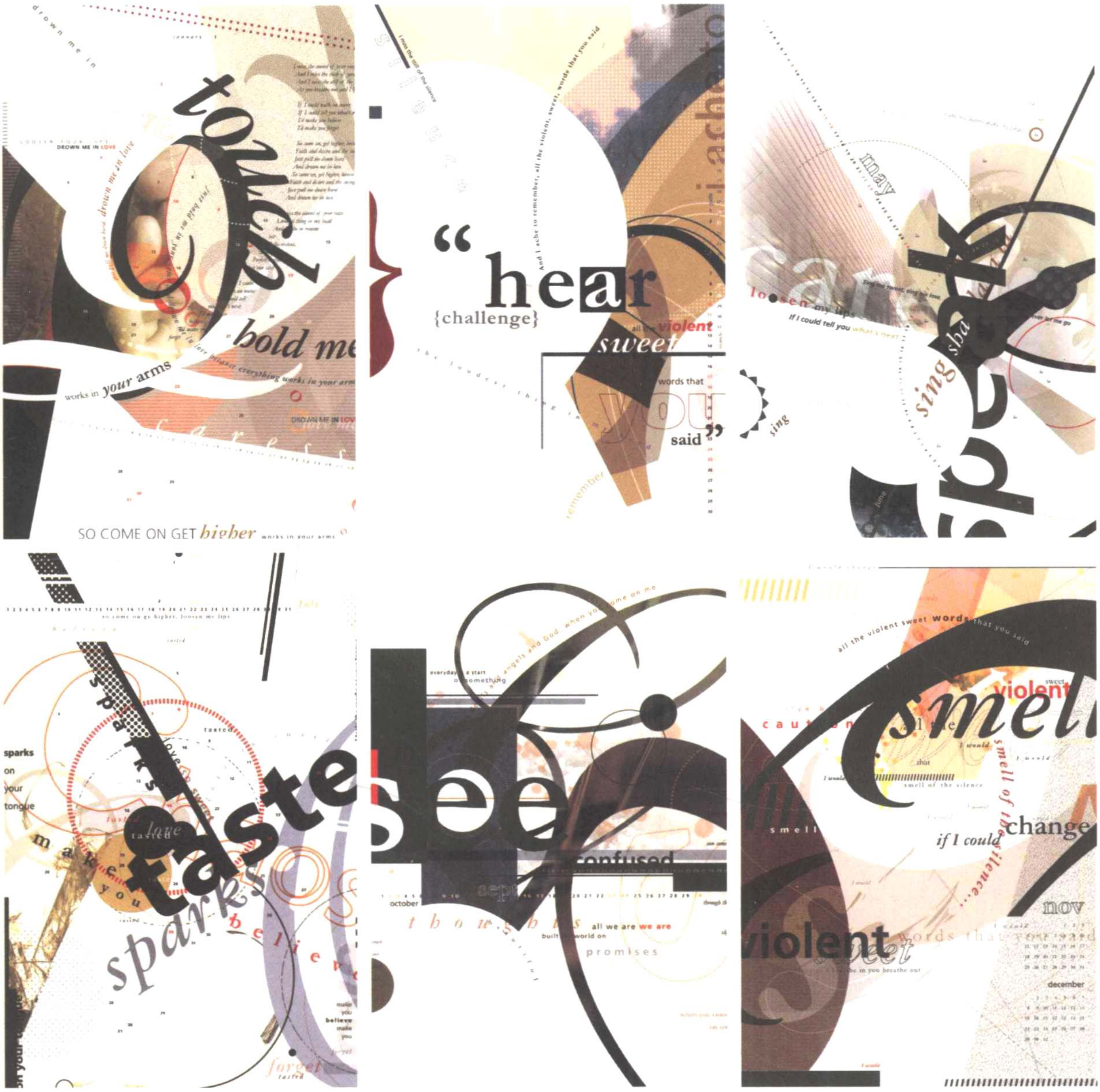

marxist PRO 90
SECRET IDENTITY
NORMAL BIAS EQ 120µs
a
standonthatroad
anafewreasons


ZEBRAZEBRAZEBRA
JG

Jarrell Goh
The Zebra Eye
2007
fuzzyzebra.deviantart.com



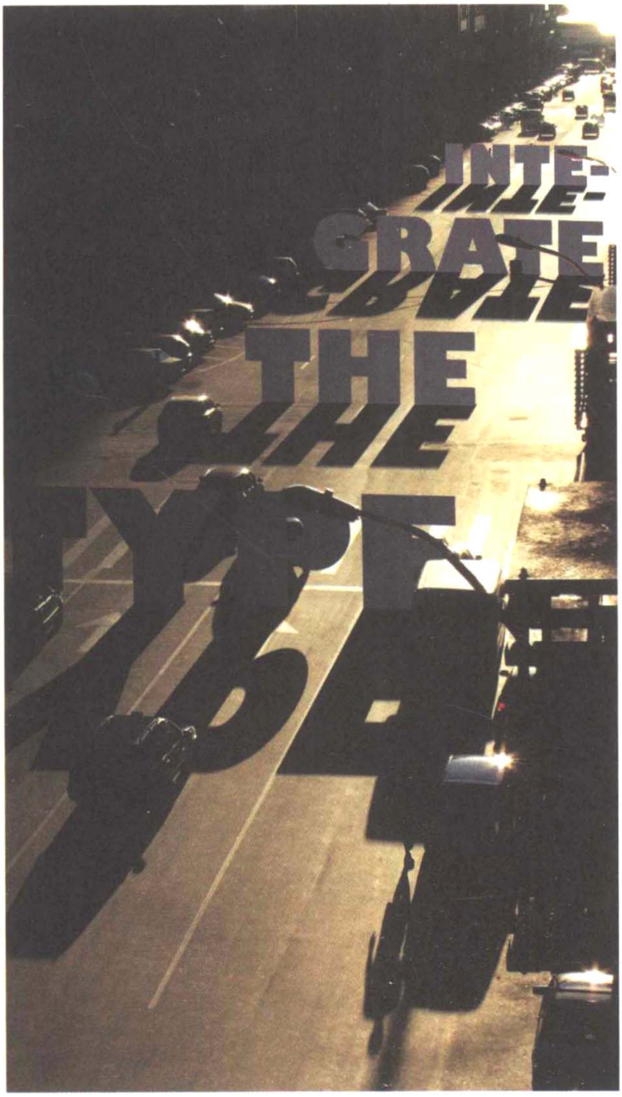
Maria Piva
Grid Assignment
2008
mariapiva.deviantart.com


touch
hold me
works in your arms
SO COME ON GET higher
"hear
{challenge}
violent
sweet
words that
you
said"
speak
may
loosen my lips
sing
taste
sparks
sparks on your tongue
love
see
confused
sept
october
all we are we are
built a world on
promises
smell
violent
sweet
if I could
change
nov
december

Jorunn Musil
Calendar
2010
www.jorunnmusil.com

2

Typographic Landscapes



Chris Blakely
Integrate the Type
2007
www.groggie.com

Type has long been integrated into our environment. Particularly in urban environments, wayfinding is extensively aided by typographic information[1]. Text labels on maps and street signs, as well as business signage, allow us to locate ourselves and others, and to assess the nature of the landscape. Most signage, however vital in our understanding of space, is superficial. It exists only on the surface, to decorate and label the more significant buildings and objects which are constructed beneath. In typographic practice, the more fundamental parts of the landscape can be substituted for type. Type can form the very foundations of landscape, indeed an entire scene can be moulded and constructed from lettering. Here, type is more than superficial signage: the landscape is type through and through.

In Alex Engelmann's series of typography posters (right and overleaf), and Tang Yau Hoong's *I See The World in Three Dimensions* (overleaf), landscapes are constructed entirely of three-dimensional letterforms. In Engelmann's *Tower*, tall buildings are constructed from lines of type, stacked and wrapped into imposing cylindrical towers. Each letterform operates linguistically, remaining legible despite the unconventional use, but also functions as a load-bearing object, supporting the rows of letters which sit above it. This image draws parallels between the process of building and the process of writing.

Both writing and building involve stacking rows of forms in a meaningful order: in building, rows of bricks are stacked to form a larger construction, and in writing, rows of letters are arranged to form a narrative.

---

[1] Silva Gouveia, A. P., Farias, P. L., and Souza Gatto, P. , 'Letters and Cities: reading the urban environment with the help of perception theories', Visual Communication, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2009, pp. 339-348, p. 344-345.

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