

NEVILLE BRODY / JON WOZENCROFT

FUSE 1-20

From Invention to Antimatter : Twenty years of FUSE

F U S

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藏书



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About this book

FUSE 1-20 is an anthology of the FUSE project since its initial edition in 1991.

This is the first time that all editions of FUSE have been collected and published in one place, a point of visual and historical reference. Limited print runs, obsolete technologies and 20 years of software developments have meant that before now FUSE has never been seen in its complete form.

We have decided to stay true to the various editions as they first appeared, and for this reason the book has been split into two main sections. Part 1 features FUSE editions 1-18. The editorial essays and font descriptions are faithful to the text as it appeared on the original editorial posters. Any editorial changes made illustrate the shifting versions of desktop publishing standards.

FUSE editions 19 and 20 accompany this book in poster form, with the fonts and editorial content downloadable online with the key card included in the box.

380	Einleitungen in Deutsch
396	Introductions en Français

FUS

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What is FUSE

Launched in 1990, FUSE is ostensibly a quarterly magazine, assembled in London and originally published by FontShop International. Each issue is comprised of a plain carton box containing a disc with four or more fonts on it, plus five printed posters. Each issue is given a theme related to various underlying tendencies in communications and the consequences of them. Four designers, from both the type industry plus other fields, are commissioned to explore the given theme through the design of a typeface. Each designer then takes that typeface into creative application through the design of a poster or animation. The four designs are accompanied by a written editorial, and the addition of any number of unpredicted extra fonts.

That is the pragmatic description of FUSE as a material product. But that doesn't say anything about FUSE.

At its root, FUSE has always been intended to be an exploration. It is a laboratory, a space where practitioners and non-practitioners are invited to enter and experiment with the visual language forms we use. In a way, it is little more than a catalyst, and each publication is like a white paper, a research document revealing new explorations.

FUSE takes as its base the concept that all language is fluid, not fixed, that digital distribution systems allow us to disseminate ideas that are alterable, especially in the visual form.

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FUSE 1-20: Foreword Neville Brody

20 years, 20 issues, 100 printed posters, 114 fonts!

From its inception 21 years ago, FUSE has always been a battleground of experimentation, a laboratory of thought and language where discussion of far wider issues would find form in form, in the very structures in which we place our systems for the distribution of expression and fact. Edging continually between familiarity and abstraction, this liquid space allowed new configurations to erupt through the intense questioning and dismantling of conventional tools and structures of communication. If society is to be fluid, it demands constant evolutionary language systems which are able to undermine all attempts to fix the status quo in an exploitative stasis through hypnosis. 'Anti' matters.

In a world of generic mediocrity and corporate obedience, new flowers of exuberance bloom in dark crevices. FUSE is a breach in the wall, a genetic mutation from which new lifeforms can spring. Our language is our being, and our thoughts are conditioned by our languages; only by extension can we expand our boundaries of possibility. What started out as a raw, explosive exploration of typographic language enabled by digital technology, later developed sophistication and layering.

The twenty years of FUSE feels like an unexpected burst of creative shards. Some fonts were vandalistic, some decorative, some playful. Some were investigative, some architectural, some joyful... All were intrinsically both questions and possibilities. Alternating between the emotive and formalistic, they offered visions into new spaces enabled by new languages. Their forms were aligned in structures and motives that allow new thoughts. Many succeeded, some failed, and the experiment continues. Never before has FUSE been so relevant and so necessary.

Introduction 1

This aspect of “the sacred” can seem to feel sacred because no equivalent in the modern world seems to be – this is a setback. Is it true that we experience disembodiment, alienation, a psychic loss of power... the slow disappearance of poetry? Few would admit it, for to do so would be a heresy in the space shuttle of contemporary communication.

FUSE 1-20: The Circle and the Square Jon Wozencroft

The difference between analogue and digital is most often framed around a change of formats – from vinyl to CD, celluloid and VHS to DVD, and most recently paperback to Kindle. This glosses over a more fundamental switch in terms of reproduction and pattern generation, and points to the reason why typography became a crucial context in which to investigate this.

One might start with a demonstration of what has happened to the letter 'O'. In *Garamond*, the curve and harmonic structure feeds off centuries of development, in digital, a set of squares/pixels gives the eye the illusion that it is not seeing pixels... It looks like an 'O' but it isn't an 'O'. It's a different order of construction, resolving itself to look like the letter 'O'. Blame the sans serif precedent that took less than 40 years to become *Helvetica* and *Univers*, whose 'O' uses a perfect circle just asking to be smashed!

Digital systems are based on a high order of optical illusion. It is some kind of magic, but put to the wrong purpose... In the realm of the fantastic, the scheme of contemporary life makes you see one thing when you've actually seen another, and it extends everywhere and forms the root point of our perceptual malaise. Instinctively we don't believe in anything any more. Who would – who except the religious? For the rest of us, the world was meant to have ended on 21 May 2011, but it didn't. We are living in a world of Endless Change.

“The technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition”.¹

Following the publication of the first *Graphic Language* book, I spent a good year in 1989/90 researching and writing outlines for what we proposed as its follow-up – *The Death of Typography*. This had as its genesis

a page Brody had done for the *Touch Ritual* project in 1986; it was also, for us, a riposte to the flame of fame that fell over our studio practice following the busy year of publication and the V&A exhibition in 1988... In that short interval, we'd been experimenting with what the PC and the dot-matrix printer had to offer. Not a great deal as far as we were concerned, and it still seems to me the strangest accident that computers first fell upon graphic designers, before film-makers, musicians and artists.

We were interested in print processing – moving between type specimen book and photocopier, to graph paper and Rotring, pushing typographic forms into various distressed states. The project being a passion, Brody would mention *The Death of Typography* in interviews while I sat under a tree on Hampstead Heath looking for clues in history, philosophy and in particular the communication strategies of WW2: between Goebbels and Churchill's 'Black Propaganda' unit, this was a time of great resonance with what we see happening in today's culture.

I just googled "Death of Typography". It's out there on repeat, and there is of course no mention of the 1986 version, which is poetic justice. The real challenge was to form some update of Walter Benjamin's seminal text, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Substitute 'Digital Experience' for 'Mechanical Reproduction' and the conclusion is/was that it is a nigh impossible task when communications systems mutate at such a speed.

Digital typography seemed a backwards step from what we were doing by hand and it took many months before we saw how it could be turned into another dimension. The work, all of a sudden, was reinvigorated by the direct challenge to how we should understand visual language.

Some would take *The Death of Typography* literally and like T.S. Eliot's 'idiot questioner' demand "What do you mean?". We were never able to come up with an effective one liner. At the same time, dialogues were opening up concerning the paperless office, the end of the book and virtual reality; the first synopsis of nanotechnology had just been published by Drexler;² to say nothing of the *End of History* and *A Thousand Plateaus*.³

Theory went into overdrive at this point, but it had as much in common with the aftermath of WW2 as it did a way forward with digital. Adorno and Warhol would both understand 'rhizomes', they just failed to use that word.

In printed media, words that once had to be sent into the future could all of a sudden be sent in real-time. The fax machine, born to us in 1987, was a marriage between printing and digital/telephony, more than a telegram, as instant as TV.

There was no email, no Internet, aside from the localised JANET system used in academia. The fax machine seemed to be the future, and look what happened to that.

It was nevertheless a catalyst... The fax, not the facts – heat-sensitive paper, square formations like the earlier gravure printing process, which upon contact with the paper stock blurred, and on enlargement became a new aesthetic of seductive fragmentation, as soft-edged as today's imagery is hard and virtually lifeless.

FUSE is a buried narrative of this wild time, when "you know something is happening but you don't know what it is" (B. Dylan).

An intention we tried to insist upon was for the project to be "a forum" for discussion; we hoped for a vigorous debate – this was always abbreviated and any perspective has not been possible until now. Criticisms came from traditionalists who never acknowledged that we were fully aware of tradition. Instead, it turned viral, and for the time we managed to do it, FUSE was fairly out of control and always a last-minute panic to finish.

The hare became a tortoise. No longer do "all roads lead to Rome". The lines to cyberspace go round in circles.

"Limit gives form to the limitless".⁴

In older civilisations, its people prized a circular formation over the square. There was such a thing as a square circle, made up of the harmonic alignment of measurement and number – this much can be divined from an analysis of the mathematics and sacred geometry that gave rise to the Golden Section and the Pythagorean notion of cosmic harmony, which graphic designers can still call upon despite the modern world of metric values and DIN sizes. "It also led to their endeavours to realise the harmonies of such proportions in the patterns of daily life, thereby elevating life to an art".⁵ Actually, not many contemporary graphic designers have the first idea about the Golden Section, and why should they, if it is no longer a key module of every Foundation course?

Stone circles can be visited across the British Isles that pay testament to an earlier perception of what is radiant and progressive concerning the human relationship with forms. Astronomy, astral projection, ritual... such practices point to intuition and divination as essential survival skills. "Every stone circle had an affinity with a certain part of the human body... and forms a common feature of poetic expression".⁶

This aspect of "the sacred" can seem to feel sacred because no equivalent in the modern world seems to be – this is a setback. Is it true that we experience disembodiment, alienation, a psychic loss of power... the slow disappearance of poetry? Few would admit it, for to do so would be a heresy in the space shuttle of contemporary communication. A pixel can never claim to be anything but a drop in the ocean, but it causes ripples, forms circles in its wake, and we have yet to find the best way of living in a liquid state.

This recent transition from the circle to the square is as crucial a turning point in terms of "the future" as the Romans were to Ancient Britain. It questions everything in its wake, and has this amazing new

We are still no closer to being “digitally literate” than we were 20 years ago. So it’s not so much about intuition, it’s about processing power and the coverage you can get across networks, Facebook and Twitter, where in spite of the supposed ease of connectivity, everything has got more “random” and ephemeral in depth.

quality of being able to be drowned by itself, without ever actually disappearing. It’s not so much the End of History as the Beginning of the Endless Change. Facts and figures get mutated in the ongoing dialogue of reality and its fictions.

The ancients must have been short-sighted, given the ease with which the Roman invaders of Britain in 43AD used square formations to conquer tribal chieftains and clans, with their ‘tortoise’ formations in battle, and town squares and straight roads in peacetime... Or far-sighted, in relation to what would develop thousands of years later. The Romans built their roads on the existing “straight tracks” of the prehistoric way of connecting each sacred site to the other. In doing so, they set the template for horse and cart, for railways, for tarmac, where the old could smother the new in its latest form – power becomes diluted – but the power is still there nonetheless, struggling to break through the cracks in the paving stones.

Before PC, nobody got their hands on the modelling tools easily except the select few. The personal computer changed everything in a way the typewriter and electric guitar once promised to, but never did on the same scale. We are still no closer to being “digitally literate” than we were 20 years ago. So it’s not so much about intuition, it’s about processing power and the coverage you can get across networks, Facebook and Twitter, where in spite of the supposed ease of connectivity, everything has got more “random” and ephemeral in depth.

A culture of pixels and cut-off corners is a very different proposition to the Roman idea of city squares, the forum, and even the later garden cities of post-war modernism. These were also designed on the grand scale, visible and practical to every citizen and a testament to a hopeful future. Nowadays our pixellated universe is more like a vanishing point that everybody has their way of searching for, however they might feel their way through the antimatter.

We had a conversation in Tokyo in 1990 when we were starting FUSE: Tokyo is for the London eye a city of complete craziness just as speed-dominated then as

***Moonbase Alpha* was a frequent choice for techno flyers in the 1990s and *Reactor* a favourite of fine art contexts; ... the fonts ended up in the most surreal of contexts, from corporate logos to doctors' surgeries.**

it is now :) – the level of information surrealism... an extraordinary wonderland of what was going on and what might come out on screen. You could see speed and time folding in on itself. Later I found out it was a lot to do with the benzene petrol fumes in the air. We concluded that the solution to working together was to work in parallel, and FUSE was an exemplar of this.

FUSE 1 is basically a blast against the universe. It's naïve as all manifestos generally are; but from FUSE 2 *RUNES* onwards we dedicated ourselves to pursuing the work into something more enduring than a magazine. In any respect we shot ourselves in the foot; we started to release editions on a regular basis, but this soon became unsustainable and in the end FUSE has the legacy of still being a work in progress.

We always had a problem... Thinking of who to ask... trying to invite women designers... You can see where this situation was by looking at FUSE 3/9/12... It can look like a club but this was just the reality of getting FUSE out. We had the difficulty of trying to convince many people to make work for us beyond a few allies, and (you're not going to believe this), quite a few of the designers included in this collection didn't want to do it at first. If you're thinking of "why didn't so-and-so do a font for FUSE?", well there's a good chance we asked them and they declined!

Looking back on these works there is also a strong undercurrent to what has subsequently become an obsession in graphic design, from "The Designer as Author" argument of the late '90s to all these recent concentrations on Design History of who's who and what's forgotten.

When we started, we got acres of press, and sold out the 3000 editions with ease. As the project deepened, we'd struggle to sell 500 because everyone wanted it for free.

The time-based nature of FUSE is our biggest achievement. It is still in flower, and not properly recorded; though *Moonbase Alpha* was a frequent choice for techno flyers in the 1990s and *Reactor* a favourite of fine art contexts; *White No Sugar* was one of many that won an award for type design and the fonts ended up in the most surreal of contexts, from corporate logos to doctors' surgeries.

Revisiting the texts one would be forgiven for assuming that FUSE represents a pessimistic vision of the future. The surrealism of the situation – concerning representation and reproduction we felt ours to be a moment on a par with the photography/painting schism of the beginning of the last century – should not obscure the sense of adventure we felt. As for the future, when we look at our children we can see signs of a digital awareness we never had, nor could ever have had. So we hold our breath.

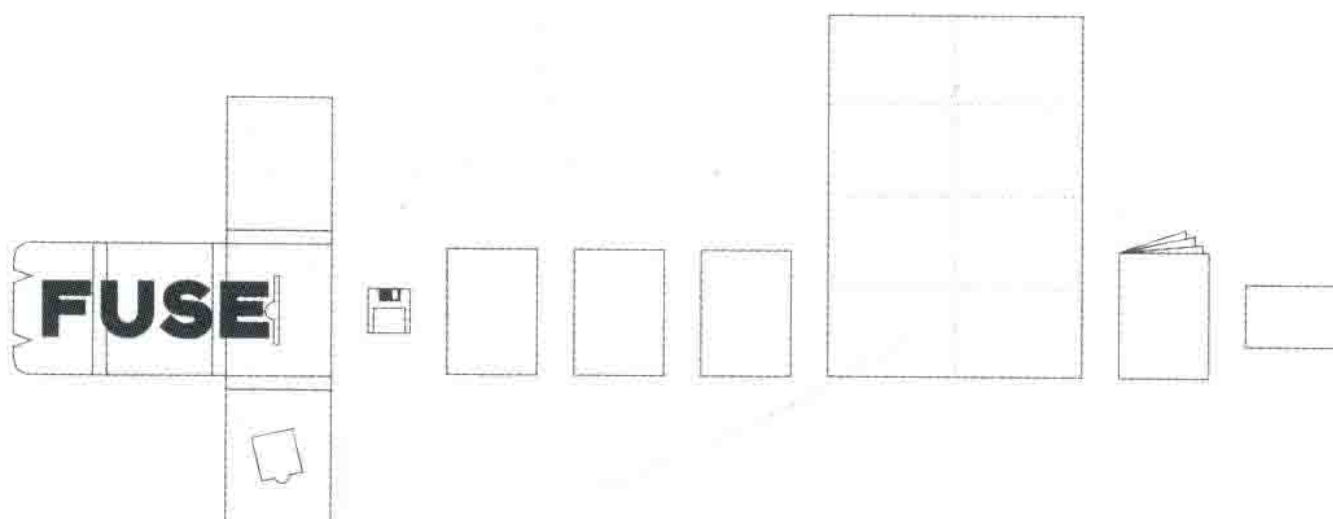
One day in 1991, I was abstracting the *Akzidenz Grotesk* font under the PMT machine for a logo I was doing for Kudos Productions, a London-based TV company. Brody said to me, "What are you doing, I can do that on the computer"...

Blur, a font that Brody configured overnight, became a guiding form of the FUSE project. I saw it recently in a foreign country, being used as the typeface for an optician's shop frontage.

Reference:

1. *Illuminations*, Walter Benjamin, Harcourt, Brace and World Inc. 1968
2. *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology*, Erik Drexler, Fourth Estate 1987
3. *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama, Penguin 1993; *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Continuum (New Ed.) 2004
4. & 5. *The Power of Limits*, György Doczi, Shambhala Publications 1981
6. *The New View Over Atlantis*, John Michell, Thames and Hudson 1983; *The Dimensions of Paradise*, John Michell, Thames and Hudson 1988

The FUSE box, the set of four posters, the editorial insert, postcard and the 700K floppy disk for FUSE 1 *INVENTION*



FUSE 1-20: Wreckers of Typographic Civilisation **Adrian Shaughnessy**

For graphic designers encountering the first issues of FUSE, there was a sense of new terrain being opened up: a sense of two explorers – Brody and Wozencroft – striding out into the icy steppes of the new digital kingdom. The reports they sent back – housed in modest cardboard boxes – were prophetic and often shocking.

Wozencroft's texts fizzed with provocations that sometimes read like science fiction, but which now, more than 20 years later, demonstrate an uncanny ability to define the big questions that preoccupy us currently – the cultural impact of information technology, surveillance, propaganda, genetics and the Internet, amongst other topics. At the same time, under Brody's art direction, early FUSE stuck pins in the eyes of typo traditionalists and gleefully invited the displeasure of graphic design's self-appointed ruling elite by simultaneously showing how typography, thanks to the computer, had become open to all-comers *and* showing how it had been freed from its traditional purpose of conveying linguistic meaning.

The visuals in early editions of FUSE derived their power to shock from the attempts by Brody, Wozencroft and their collaborators to coerce the new tools – software, keyboards, output systems – into making the statements they so urgently wanted to broadcast. The work was often raw and unpolished, and some of it shows immaturity, but something happened around the publication of FUSE 10: graphic expression jumped the digital firebreak and crossed from haphazard experimentation into controlled expression. It's there for all to see in the pages of this book: a moment of digital transubstantiation when the users achieved mastery of the tools and conjured up visual statements of substance and integrity that can be compared with other peak moments in graphic design history.

Writing in FUSE 10, Wozencroft identified the reasons for this breakthrough: "For some time we have been talking about our intention to create an outlet that uses the keyboard more as a musical instrument or palette of colours, and not to restrict its potential to the endless refinement, sophistication or abstraction of Roman letterforms." From then onwards, Brody and Wozencroft – and the many designers and typographers they invited to collaborate with them – demonstrated a new mastery of the digital tools and networks; they showed, more compellingly than ever before, how computerised design could be used to make a new future for visual and semantic communication that went beyond Roman letterforms and which species-jumped from the printed page to the electronic screen.

Brody has also spoken about this moment: interviewed by Rick Poynor in *Eye* (No. 6, 1992), he was asked if he had reached a "point of fluency with the computer where you are the master..." Brody replied: "Absolutely. I even remember the night it happened. It was 11:30 and I had been sitting attacking the machine. I suddenly realised that I was in control and there had been a definite switchover."

Amongst today's designers, the role of digital technology has gained almost universal acceptance. To be against the computer in design now is to be heretical, but there was a time when the digital way – the DTP revolution – was seen as evidence that the barbarians had entered the citadel. Paul Rand, in an essay called 'Computer, Pencils and Brushes' (1992) noted that "... the language of the computer is the language of technology, not the language of design. It is also the language of production. It enters the world of creativity only as an adjunct, as a tool – a time-saving device, a means of investigating, retrieving, and executing tedious jobs – but not the principal player." Brody, in the pages of FUSE and

They showed, more compellingly than ever before, how computerised design could be used to make a new future for visual and semantic communication that went beyond Roman letterforms and which species-jumped from the printed page to the electronic screen.

elsewhere, set about proving that the computer could play a far more central role in design than Rand envisaged.

Even an astute commentator such as the American designer Michael Rock – hardly a warp and weft traditionalist – could allow himself a bat-squeak of regret at the prospect of typography falling into the hands of the new digital infidels. Writing about FUSE in *Eye* (No. 15, 1994), he said: “Type will never again be produced by a guild-like fraternity; the craft republicanism and labour unionism that characterised letter-making are gone forever. But as exciting as the results of the type revolution have been, it is hard not to feel a speck of remorse for the decimation of another craft, and another organised group of craftsmen, by a handful of young punks with personal computers.”

Hallowed notions of type as secret craft and as an ‘invisible’ vessel tasked only with imparting linguistic meaning (the ‘crystal goblet’ of typographic lore) were elbowed aside by the flailing geometric elbows of Brody and other ‘young punks with personal computers’. More than anyone working in graphic design in the 1980s and ‘90s, Brody contributed to the foregrounding of typography. He turned type into visual expression. This is not to say that expressive type did not exist in the pre-Brody era. The Constructivists of the 1920s and the psychedelic poster artists of the 1960s both made use of outrageous letterforms in ways that challenged notions of typographic orthodoxy. But these anti-formalist conceits were used primarily as a transportation system for messages, instructions and announcements. What Brody and others did was to create – in the words of Michael Rock – “a new typographic rhetoric ... that sees the letterform as a site for visual experimentation and the alphabet as a screen on to which designers project their creativity.”

But they did something else. They showed how it was possible to be a designer of typefaces and, at the same time, a graphic designer. Up until this pivotal moment, practitioners were mostly one or the other. But new software such as Fontographer gave designers the tools to avoid the laborious process of creating entire fonts by hand, with their numerous