

The Graphic  
Language of  
Neville  
Brody

2

Brody



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Language of** **2**  
**Neville  
Brody**  
**Jon Wozencroft**



THAMES AND HUDSON



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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0-500-27770-2

Printed and bound in Singapore by CS Graphics (Pte) Ltd.

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**7. Channel**

Frontispiece.

**8. Research Development**

Following five years of analogue to digital transition, the Neville Brody Studio has embarked on a new direction and identity, *Research Development*.

# INTRODUCTION



In 1994, we are at the crux of a social revolution in communications. The transition from analogue to digital technology and the advent of the personal computer are innovations whose effect will be as profound as Gutenberg's movable type. This has already become a commonplace analogy as people become more aware of the power of digital communication. We cannot let this obscure the depth of the revolution that is taking place, since so much of it is being presented to us on the surface, in the world of entertainment with its sanctified amnesia. This makes it even more difficult to pin down.

Our Western civilization is markedly different from a world dominated by religious and royal authority. Materials were in scarce supply and it took hundreds of years before the implementation of new print technology was accepted as commonplace. Only in recent times has access to the printing press been relatively straightforward.

Past leaders were quick to recognise the threat posed by the free exchange of printed information. Until the Licensing Act was revoked in 1695, every printer and typefounder in England was controlled by the ruling class. Censorship of the printed word was widespread across Europe; in 1543 Cardinal Carafa decreed that no book could be printed or sold without the permission of the Papal Inquisition – offenders were burnt at the stake. To avoid incrimination, the origin of publication was concealed – computer hacking in reverse. Today's use of passwords harks back to the cover-up colophons of the past: Dutch printers in the 16th century, for example, marked their publications 'Printed in Utopia' (such was the popularity of Thomas More's book). Censorship was not lifted in Germany until 1848 and, despite the Revolution, France did not definitively legislate to remove controls until 1872.

The development of the written word in the West, from symbol and pictogram to alphabet and book, took place over thousands of years. The computer has the power to reverse this process in less than thirty. Because the personal computer has so quickly changed the *modus operandi* in almost every area of communication in the space of only five years, we tend to believe that the digital revolution is over and done with. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to Goethe, "The second part of the history of the world begins with the invention of printing." We have just entered the third phase. The Electronic Revolution is upon us.

"A language is an implement quite as much as an implement of stone or steel; its use involves social consequences; it does things to you just as a metal or a machine does things to you. It makes new precision and also new errors possible." HG Wells, *In Search of Hot Water*, c.1898, quoted in Frederick Bodmer, *The Loom of Language*, 1943.

"We cannot prohibit that which we cannot name."  
George Steiner, "The Language Animal", in *Extraterritorial*, Faber and Faber 1972.



### 9. Business cards for Digitalogue, Tokyo 1993

Opposite:

### 10. Font for Digitalogue, 1993

Digitalogue is the world's first "digital gallery", since branching out to become a CD-ROM publisher. Started by Akira Gomi and Naomi Enami, whom Brody had met whilst working with Propeller Art Works, Digitalogue is a rare example of Anglo-Japanese collaboration. The computer processed typeface is used to contrast the digital clarity of the original font, different characters being selected to publicise different events.

### 11–14. Background images for the *Floriade* stamps, PTT, The Netherlands 1991

The introduction of the image-manipulation programme for the Macintosh, Adobe Photoshop, enabled Brody to continue to pursue the idea of "painting through technology", an approach that he had first followed with the use of the PMT camera at the LCP, and in his designs for *Fetish*, *Touch* and the "Hitting Town" poster shown in the first book. Discovering Photoshop's potential involved climbing through a steep learning curve and, as a fulfilment of an original ambition, it was a regeneration.

Previous revolutions prove that technology changes language. The printing press made mass distribution of information possible, encouraging the steady erosion of oral traditions like storytelling, based on myth and individual recall, but it facilitated the spread of knowledge that led to the Renaissance in the arts and the establishment of an education system. The invention of the camera challenged the perception of the distance between recorded experience and reality, depriving Fine Art of its traditional representational role, forcing artists to look for a new and more expressive language to redefine their realm. A context was created for painters like Cézanne to experiment with colour and light. Kandinsky and Klee pushed the limits of shape and symbolism even further. The quest for a pure language of visual abstraction will continue beyond the work of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. Photography made an impact on Fine Art just as the computer has undermined the design industry. But the time-frame is far more compressed in the rapidly changing environment of digital design.

We do not yet fully appreciate how other technologies like cinema affect our perceptions, or what the long-term effects of television might be. The impact and widespread application of the telephone provides another rarely considered precedent to the computer. What will happen next to the printed word? Language and information are not stable commodities. Our interpretation of information and thereby our behaviour when we come to act upon it is always defined by its presentation, whether consciously acknowledged or otherwise. This difficulty is compounded by the computer's ability to combine and relocate all the internal, invisible language structures and processes of previous information technologies.

One factor that differentiates the computer from previous inventions is its long period of gestation. The common man was not prepared for printing, for photography, for film; the element of "Eureka!" remained intact, so that upon first exposure, readers, viewers and audiences were usually enraptured, excited by their gain and quickly overlooked what they might have lost in the process. Secondly, before the PC, it was never assumed that these readers would swiftly become writers, the viewers photographers and every member of the audience a film director. Through popular culture and the Science Fiction genre, however, we have been prepared for the computer revolution for nigh on one hundred years. As a result, we have a conditioned set of responses to new technology – the most basic is to become passive subjects of its endless development.

As Steiner and Wells insist, any new conditions affecting the way we use language will inevitably have social and psychological consequences. As well as looking back to specific inventions for clues that help us to understand how computer technology will shape the future, we should also compare the Industrial Revolution to the present. For the great majority, the first machine age came as a massive shock to the conventional way of life. Against the backdrop of the French Revolution, urbanisation and the imposition of the factory system catalysed the most turbulent period in modern British history; any outbreaks of civil disorder and machine breaking quickly met with a draconian response from government who, in the days before a police force was established, freely deployed the army to quell disturbances.

With technological change come demands for social reform. The Luddite uprising... The Peterloo massacre<sup>1</sup>. In 1984, the introduction of computers was used as a pretext to destroy the power of the print trades unions in Britain, again a deliberate policy that, alongside rising unemployment, has sent working peoples' hard-won advances into recession. The

current climate is not brightened by the prospect of imminent reforms, but clouded by the fight for survival and the "inevitability" of technological takeover.

For much of this century, we have been living out future predictions – artificial intelligence, fast food, faster transport systems, videophones, space travel, urban breakdown, hi-tech warfare. We have been well briefed by popular culture for one set of eventualities. However, it has not turned out as envisaged. We are neither liberated nor controlled by robots. If anything, those in employment work longer hours and harder than ever. The machine age has not simply acted as an external force upon humankind. Instead, the revolution operates on our sense of inner space. The great changes will take place on a linguistic and biological level. We have subjected our physical reality to technology, and now we are in the process of mutating our mental reality. What new names will our new minds come up with to define the impending chaos? In digital terms, a rose is not a rose is not a rose.

Computer games are popular because they impose a sense of order. They give a glimpse of the intensified perceptual fields of the digital, whose worlds approximate the chaotic contours of an LSD trip, yet the drug is interrupted by the message "Game Over". In reality, there is no dry land from which to observe and quantify the full effects of the computer. The new technology has set us off on a limitless conversation with the limitations of our own brains.

Today, we have no idea what the future will look like. The previous ground we walked upon has been levelled out by digital technology, leaving us in a state of uncertainty. Society and its institutions have changed so dramatically since the Second World War due to other mass-applied technologies and forms of distribution (principally television and advertising) that society seems in a poor state to accommodate further transformations. "The Shock of the New" has been downgraded by the dull repetition of marketing slogans trying to fire our enthusiasm for the latest update.

There is an urgent need for us to challenge the currently perceived central role of computers – as control machines in a brave new world of surveillance and escapism. The prime drawback is the present lack of any language of optimism. The new possibilities the personal computer might offer are seldom seen as potential benefits.

**FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS**, Neville Brody and his studio have embraced the computer as a new medium that allows the artist to explore and create a completely new set of activities and codes in visual language. This has involved a series of translation processes – from publicity to invisibility, solo to studio, analogue to digital. The work in the first volume of *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody* was based around the categories of BOOKS/MAGAZINES/RECORD COVERS. The content of this second book is more chaotic, with fewer fixed statements. The new categories have yet to be set, and may never be; nor does the client format fit so easily to an obvious and immediate function. This is because the computer gives new meaning to the process of publishing – in digital form, any software is not a consumer durable but increasingly a professional and consumer bendable. "Digital design is like painting, except the paint never dries. It is like a clay sculpture that is always being twisted into new shapes without ever being fired."

Digital technology also accelerates and intensifies the publishing process, promising us the power to send or access information instantaneously. We are already building personalised networks for this; corporations are constructing information superhighways that can send data at the speed of

light, yet it is still far from clear exactly what the traffic will consist of, or even what it will look like. Telecom companies have formed consortiums with the manufacturers of technological hardware, pledging their futures to the potentially massive revenues of this traffic.

Inevitably, our lives will be played out from our living rooms. Digital distribution will further compound the process of domestication initiated by television, rising crime and the loss of public space. Home shopping has already been established in the USA by the cable TV channel QVC. As a contrast to this calculated commerce, will networks be used to provide a wealth of specialised knowledge that could form the basis of a new education system? Or will an endless flow of weather reports, news updates, and electronic quiz-shows punctuate a fattening diet of escapist entertainment that tries to compete with the sensational possibilities of another imminent technology, virtual reality? It will be difficult for any methodical, tutorial ambitions to compete with the 'fresh horizons' of cyberspace, a computerised yet playful version of reality that anyone can, theoretically, design for themselves and then take refuge in.

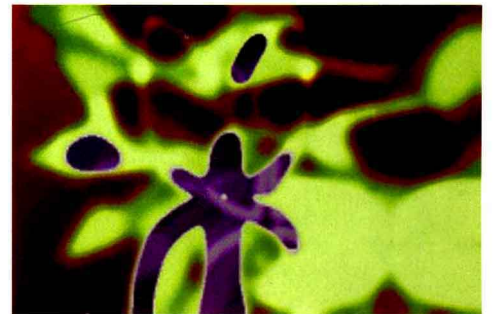
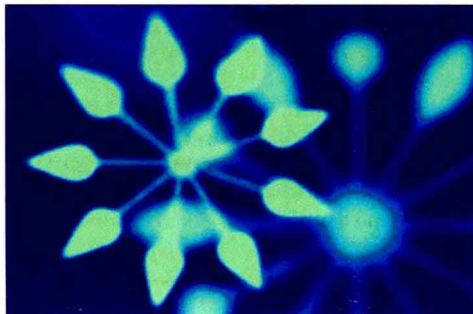
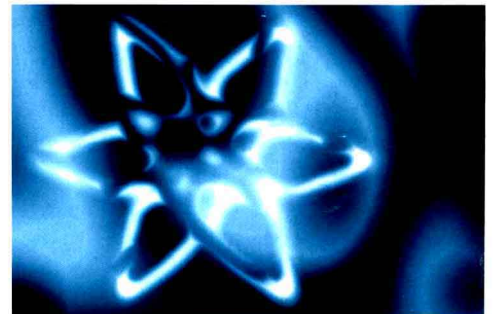
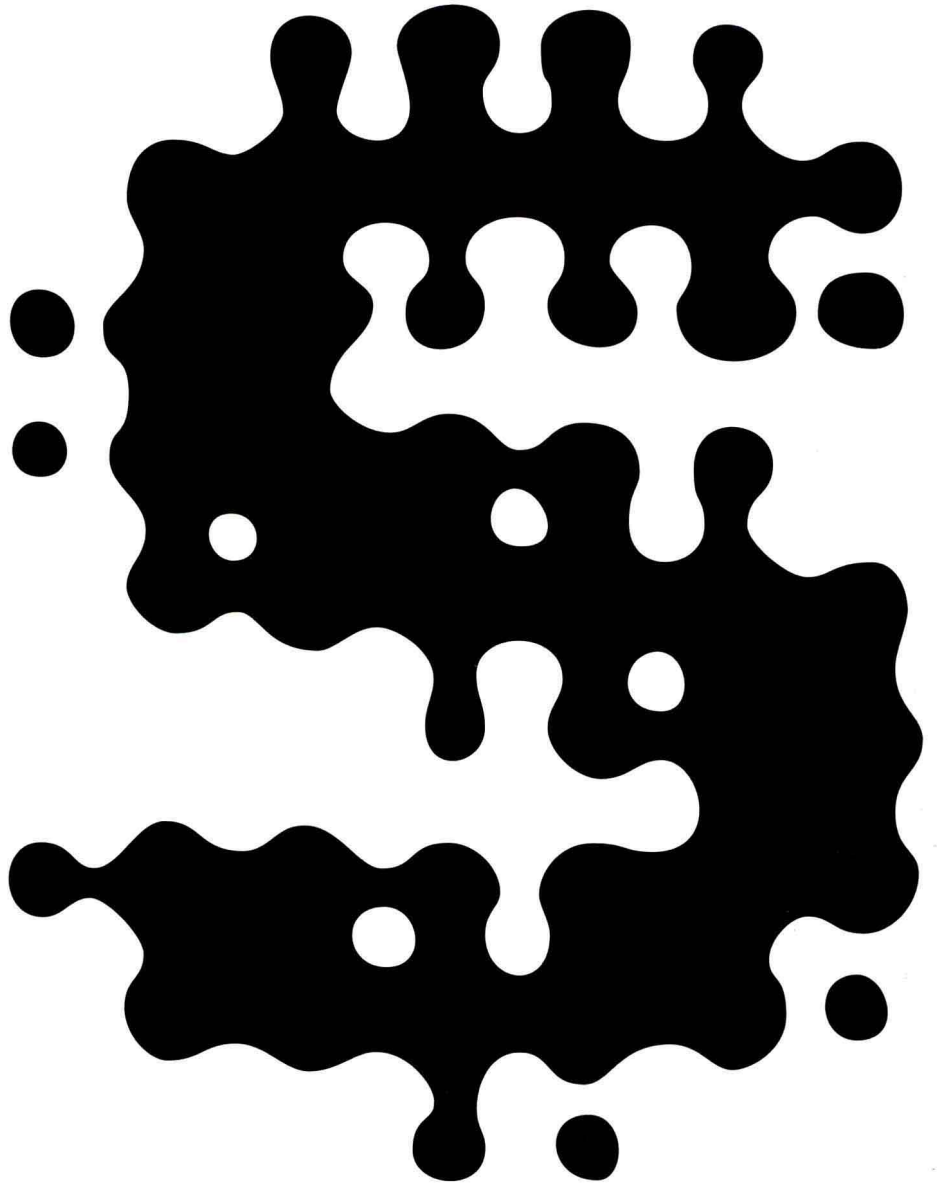
Clearly, in the very near future our relationship to institutions and to the organisation of the outside world will be fixed to and by the screen. However, this clearly defined endpoint of focus does not hide the lack of any coherent planning. We have no idea how the data banks will be organised, nor how the options will be displayed. We take it for granted that the networks and superhighways will be patrolled by some form of Traffic Police, but how and by whom remains a mystery.

The design world is disintegrating thanks to the power of the PC, and is failing to take the initiative. The once steady relationship between client, designer and general public is being dissolved by the ease of access that any disseminator of information now has to the current tool of the trade. The wall of protectionist professional practice has been blown open. There is no longer the same need for specialist designers and precious presentations. Companies are increasingly taking care of their needs in-house.

Design as we knew it is dead. Split between established practices and the guerilla deviations of younger designers, its function of making invisible ideas tangible has been eroded by the computer's tendency to turn tangible forms into ether. Design's new state as a formless medium brings opportunities for the research and development of new ways of communicating. Just as the camera challenged artists to develop new forms of abstraction, so the breakdown of the designer's traditional role allows for the birth of a new visual language.

**THE IDEA TO START A STUDIO** came about in 1985. I was working on a new edition of *Touch*, the audio-visual magazine I had edited since 1982: the theme was media ritual. Brody had contributed to *Touch* since its first edition and was working on a new design, *The Death of Typography*, which was also to be the title of a lecture he had been asked to give to coincide with *The Face* magazine's "First Five Years" exhibition at the Watershed Gallery in Bristol. Apprehensive, nervous, Brody suggested we do the talk together. On the train to Bristol, we talked about his plans to start a studio which would act as a point of focus for other freelance designers wishing to pursue a collective but also independent vision. The structure was linked to the same concept as *Touch*, which brought together and encouraged new combinations between musicians, artists, writers and designers.

The first Neville Brody Studio was a small second floor office in Tottenham Court Road, opposite the YMCA, sandwiched between hi-fi stores, record shops and fast food out-



Below:

**15. Cover for *Sex Money Freaks*, Cabaret Voltaire, Parlophone Records 1988**  
 Brody's first use of computer-generated type. Before the development of the PostScript standard by Adobe, type could only be output from the Mac at "bitmap" resolution, and until ATM (Adobe Type Manager) arrived, output was always printer-dependent. The type for this 12" single was printed out on an ImageWriter, then retouched and PMTed for artwork.

Opposite:

**18–22. College briefs, 1978/79**

The crossword and photomontage bottom right show the influence of Punk and Dadaism on Brody's college work. *British Writers and the Sea* rejects the landscape photography tradition of the travel book in favour of a more turbulent design. The background for the book cover at the top of the page indicates that Brody's approach to image processing has remained consistent – only the means of execution has changed. Sand-papered details from a map were photographed, scratched out again and then recoloured with felt-tip pens.



**16, 17. Illustrations for *Graphics World* and *LetraStudio* software package, London 1988**

Designs which are not so good and a reminder to beware the first steps when using new technology... Brody's early work on a colour Mac cannot escape the obvious computer tricks, which seem impressive at first, making these illustrations now look like something out of a manual.

lets. Initially, Grant Gilbert helped out with the administration. Fwa Richards made up the team, using her organisation skills as studio manager which she remains to this day. It was March 1987. The first major project was to write, design and artwork volume one of *The Graphic Language*: before that could happen, the three of us had to collate and edit ten years' work. During the day, jobs were followed through as usual: after dark, record covers, letterheads, posters and magazine spreads quickly covered every table-top as the rough layouts for the book took shape.

It was an on/off routine strangely mirrored by the activity outside. Many of the retailers, banks and services that straddled nearby Oxford Street were chopping and changing their logos, their signage systems and their advertising strategies in a frantic attempt to appear 'youthful', such had been the success of *The Face* magazine and its contemporaries. Design agencies fell over themselves to become financial institutions, hoping to regulate the distribution of the new look. Because we had been so thoroughly prepared for it, less glaringly obvious was the way in which the hi-fi stores were gradually taking their turntables from window displays and replacing them with compact disc players. An increasing number of computer stores were starting up along the street. A more fundamental revolution had filtered down to the consumer market, following decades of development by military and industrial concerns – the conversion from analogue to digital methods of information storage.

Apple's first home computer became available in 1984, around the same time as compact discs arrived in the shops. The change was highlighted in terms of the enhanced sound and everlasting quality of the compact disc (both these improvements have since been called into question), as if the digital conversion were little more than a change of formats in the entertainment business. With CD-ROM, it has since become apparent that the format is a far more effective carrier of text and image rather than music.

This was a turning-point that would lead to a long period of transition. Britain and the rest of the world was already experiencing great upheaval. The social and political disintegration caused by the stylish redecoration undertaken by the Conservative government was packaged to look like an urgent economic objective – this in itself brought confusion and disbelief. The feverish pursuit of new trading images gave the impression of dynamic change, yet this cosmetic front was in fact a classic case of strategic deception. State-owned industries and welfare services were progressively being taken apart and sold off to the private sector. Each change was presented as an evolutionary improvement.

The essential kit used to produce the work for the first *Graphic Language* book was as follows: paints, paintbrushes, sketchbook, Rotring pen, straight edge, blue pencil, graph pad, compass, casting-off rule, typesetters' catalogues, Letraset, felt-tip pens, Tippex, photocopier, scalpel, Electro-Stik waxer, art board, Stanley knife, Ronsonol lighter fuel, PMT machine<sup>2</sup>, drawing board, tracing paper, cover paper, clay, plaster, chicken wire... and an intuitive sense of how to apply ideas laterally.

Once made public, the ideas, let alone the simple techniques that were used to give form to them, were often smothered by the success of the style culture in England with which Brody had been associated. Here, style is used as an ointment to seal in any 'difficult' material that might interfere with the gloss finish. The principal ideas behind Brody's work are to encourage an understanding of the way language affects our lives and to demonstrate how technological

processes affect language – to question the growing power of the media, to promote a dialogue on the techniques that corporations use to present information – as Brody said of his earliest college work in 1976, "following the idea of design to reveal, not to conceal".

The essential kit for the greater part of this second volume is the personal computer – namely, Apple Macintosh, scanners and laser printers. The ideas have had to be matched to the new technology and its effects – late-night sessions spent fathoming the computer's less obvious possibilities, hours of research in a quest to get behind its defaults, its index of fixed linguistic styles and standardised commands, like cracking a safe.

"Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks."

Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin Books 1978.

**BORN IN 1957**, Brody grew up in Southgate, North London. From an early age he set his sights on being an artist and chose to enrol on a Fine Art foundation course at Hornsey College of Art in 1975. He felt the Fine Art world to be elitist, however, and switched his attention to graphic design: "I wanted to communicate to as many people as possible, but also to make a popular form of art that was more personal and less manipulative." So went the theory. Brody began a three-year degree course at the London College of Printing, but found its atmosphere and the attitude of most of his tutors dull and inhibiting. They, in turn, branded his work "uncommercial" and failed him.

Underpinning all Brody's work is his belief in the possibilities that come from adopting a painterly approach to design, whether analogue or digital. This comes through clearly in his cover designs for Fetish Records, and rings equally true in his most recent computer-generated work for *Fuse* and *Graphic Arts Message* (see p.26 and p.15).

Brody felt strongly that his three years at college should be used to push ideas as far as possible, to experiment and take risks that it would be more difficult to find time for in a commercial context. In spite of its hard technical background, the LCP was more interested in turning out traditional art directors for the traditional design and advertising industries. This narrow educational ambition is still with us, despite the decline in new jobs in the design industry. Coupled to their dwindling resources, most design colleges offer only the most rudimentary exposure to the implications of new technology, or indeed, enough time spent using it.

Luckily, in 1977 Brody was able to take his inspiration from the Punk movement which gave him the confidence he needed and spearheaded a new graphic vitality which connected with Brody's interest in Dadaism and Pop Art, which had formed the subject of his first-year thesis. Brody was also exposed to the work of William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, who in 1959 had invented the "cut-up" technique – dividing a text into strips or sections that could be rearranged to create new meanings – a device that could also be applied to visual media, extending Eisenstein's cinematic use of montage and the Dadaist development of photomontage (notably by artists such as John Heartfield and Hannah Höch). Gysin's innovation grew into a long-term collaboration with Burroughs which they called *The Third Mind*.

Other important influences for Brody were the poetic photographers of the 1920s, Man Ray and László Moholy-Nagy, whose 'paintings with light' supported his own belief in trans-

media commercial art; none more so than the Soviet designer Alexander Rodchenko, who subverted the whole notion of artist as specialist by experimenting across a variety of media, questioning the boundaries between them.

"The record shop was just as valid a showcase as the framed environment of art galleries...I thought this area was the only one that would offer any chance of experimentation." On leaving college, Brody spent the best part of two years working first for Rocking Russian, a design company run by Al McDowell, whose work he had greatly admired – "a time of absolute poverty, living in a squat in Covent Garden, washing dishes in the evening at Peppermint Park" – and subsequently for Stiff, who introduced him to the seamier side of the music business. Luckily he had met 23 Skidoo, and through them, Rod Pearce, who was setting up the independent label, Fetish Records. The group would be one of Fetish's first signings. In 1981, Brody became the label's art director.

"Fetish gave me total freedom, within the obvious limitations of its budget. A lot of the work represents a reaction to the commercial marketplace where the human form has become plastic. The sleeves all revolve around my intention to reintroduce human markings into commercial art – putting man back into the picture." Brody was able to use this freedom – numerous cover designs for Clock DVA (*Thirst...*), 8 Eyed Spy, the Bongos, 23 Skidoo and Z'EV combine ritualistic paintings, clay sculptures and macabre shapes with vivid exploitations of the two-colour printing process.

Process was the overriding concern of another major collaboration in which he had become involved. The Sheffield-based group Cabaret Voltaire worked with Brody on ten records between 1979 and 1987. Brody's dominant theme was: "The loss of human identity that results from communication being transmitted through machines that condition, not serve, human interaction." The group were among the first exponents of video experiments; stills would be passed on to Brody for adaptation to the print medium. Here he had the opportunity to develop typographic structures. The cover and inner sleeve for the 1983 release *The Crackdown* include circular type formations executed entirely with Letraset – hours of work that today's computer programmes can achieve in a few minutes. For *2X45* (1982), *Microphonies* (1984) and *Dont Argue* (1987) Brody chose to use specially hand-drawn type. By this time he had become art director for *The Face*.

"I never in my wildest dreams intended working on magazines. I'd always dealt with images. I found myself out of necessity having to get the same emotive impetus from the way I used type. I hated type. It was out of frustration, because I was falling into the trap of treating type in the same way as everybody else. I thought typography was boring, overladen with traditions that would repel change."

**ACCESS TO BASIC EQUIPMENT** like a drawing board or PMT machine with which to transform designs into camera-ready artwork for printing was not always easy. Conventional typesetting was expensive. In the UK typesetting was craftily contained within an occult language and a trades union closed shop, forcing typographers and designers to "mark-up" copy. Instructions had to be specified in em measures, picas, point sizes and leading, using "casting off" rulers and tables, just as accountants once used adding machines, slide rules and log' books before pocket calculators took the toil out of square roots and long division. Letraset was by no means cheap and quickly ran out.

Conventional type did not always supply the language designers wanted to use. This is one reason why Brody's



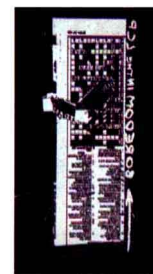
early work revolves around image-making, closer to painting and illustration than graphic design – an apprenticeship to the approach Brody brings to his later typographic work.

Brody showed Nick Logan his portfolio when Logan was editor of *Smash Hits*, Britain's biggest-selling pop magazine. Seeking a fresh challenge, Logan set up *The Face* in 1980 on a miniscule budget of £7000, and, remembering Brody's work, invited him to become art director 18 months later. In spite of (or because of) his initial typographic ignorance, Brody made a great impact by combining existing typefaces but was even more influential later, designing his own typefaces and intercepting the imminent outcome of digital type design. During his five years there, Brody revolutionised magazine design and developed a new graphic language which was applied to any outlet or item of packaging that wished to appear *ahead*. Shop fronts, restaurants, advertisements for British Rail... it made no difference.

The new magazine became the uniform of a culture on the never-never. The more successful *The Face* became, the more it was looked upon as a 'Style Bible', which provided a monthly graphics phrase book that enabled imitators to make the right visual noises. Such was the business demand for 'style culture' to exploit new patterns of consumer behaviour, few took the time to reflect or even care whether or not they were getting the genuine article.

"I wanted people to challenge *The Face*. The argument was this – how can design bring a greater dynamism to the content, now that we live in a predominantly visual age? In many ways, *The Face*'s commercial success took the impetus out of this and forced people into a corner where the easiest choice was to adopt the style. People had no option but to ignore what was really happening because the information was being presented to them second-hand." Design was used as camouflage. "I was pointing out the means to a way of thinking and a way of working, not the solution. But you can see the same misconceptions being applied today to David Carson's *RayGun* magazine."

In the divisive social climate of the mid-80s, you were either "in" or "out". Such was the hunger for certainties that any subtlety or nuance was swiftly glossed over. As it is with television, the more mass the media, the more generalised



the audience, the more irony, satire and paradox tend to evaporate as the ink dries on the page.

One irony has survived. The most successful of these typefaces – the hand-drawn *Typeface 3*, now known as *Industria* – is commonly used in computer advertising and to package ‘techno’ products. “The geometric quality of the type was authoritarian, drawing a parallel between the social climate of the 1930s and 1980s.” Carefully outlined with a Rotring and then laboriously filled in with a felt-tip, the masters that Brody drew up for monthly use in *The Face* had to be completed so fast that blemishes were touched up with Tippex, if there was time: because the letters were drawn large enough, once they been reduced by a PMT camera the print process disguised any defects. *Typeface 6* was adapted by CNN for the logotype used for their Gulf War coverage in 1991. The contextual leaps from magazine to High Street to warfare went unquestioned.

Towards the end of his time at *The Face*, Brody reacted to his own experimentation and tried to refine it into a more interwoven structure of image and text. The design of *Arena* aimed to get expressive results out of a much tighter range of devices. His starting-point was the straightforward language of information design, intentionally boring, and never intended to carry a strong personality – “I wanted to suggest that some of the hysteria should be taken out of contemporary design.”

In effect, the simple and elegant structure of *Arena* was even easier to appropriate and copy. Lowercase-only *Helvetica Black* was soon everywhere. Gradually, the kerning of headlines was reduced and words began to burst in on themselves, one of the first “new looks” of Mac-generated typesetting. The compressed shape of a word was taken to signify fashionable information, usually liberated from any content... Once again, this typographic style gave the impression of a bold, dynamic culture, aware of change but still in command of its future. Not according to many: the Green issue was taking centre stage.

**THE FIRST VOLUME** of *The Graphic Language* was ready to go into production at the end of September 1987. Shortly after this, Brody was approached by The Body Shop to design their annual report. The Body Shop brochure was all determinedly analogue-produced. Brody refused to go anywhere near a computer, feeling that if any work could be done by hand, then it should be done by hand. The brief required a double-page spread of a Body Shop interior; conveniently, Ian McKinnell, who specialised in architecture and product photography, rented studio space just upstairs. It turned out that McKinnell had purchased one of the first Mac Plus computers in the country, which he finally persuaded Brody to borrow and play around with.

Typographically this early model was best suited to low resolution ‘bitmaps’. The coarse edges of early computer-generated typefaces were so obviously illustrations of the machine’s limitations; nevertheless, they found their champion thanks to an independently produced magazine from California, *Emigre*, which quickly recognised that computers would revolutionise the way type could be used. The magazine became a quarterly advertisement of this fact and from this *Emigre* became the first independent type label.

For the cover of *Sex Money Freaks*, a 12" single by Cabaret Voltaire, Brody used a computer-bitmapped type design for the first time. The Paris fashion company, Repetto, and their artistic director Elisabeth Djian commissioned him to design an A3 brochure, which combined freestyle computer-generated typography with a freestyle setting of *Franklin Gothic Heavy*, similar to the way that type was being stag-

gered in *Arena*. The studio had not yet reached the stage of directly outputting from disk to bromide or film. Dot matrix print-outs from an ImageWriter were still being PMTed, retouched and cut to size for artwork.

The removal of union constraints and the alignment of design and print media to the broader church of ‘Service Industry’ during 1987 and 1988 did however encourage the emergence of numerous typesetting agencies in central London. Increased competition meant a greater choice of fonts but Brody and his studio never relied upon traditional typesetting techniques. If a hand-drawn headline was thought unsuitable, then individual letters would be photocopied large from an old hot-metal typesetter’s catalogue, pasted together one by one onto a graph pad, retouched, and then reduced to size under a PMT machine. 3D letters were sculpted and then photographed. An IBM golf-ball or Canon Typestar typewriter was often used. At this point, the computer could not compete with the flexibility and range of these techniques. Nevertheless, Brody was always keen to control as many stages of the process from design to print as possible and it was clear that computers would soon allow designers to do this more easily. Brody had to buy a Mac and got an SE, a small but then relatively powerful black-and-white machine whose hard disk capacity was a meagre 20 megabytes.

Before he could disappear behind a screen, a great deal of preparation was necessary for an exhibition of his work at London’s Victoria and Albert Museum, planned to coincide with the publication of the *Graphic Language* book. March, April and May 1988 were crazy months. An increasing amount of work was commissioned from abroad. Brody had stopped designing covers for *City Limits* and was now art director for the Milan-based Condé Nast magazines *Per Lui* and *Lei*. He had also worked for the New York department store, Bloomingdales, and had just completed designs for his first Japanese client, Mens Bigi.

Work from Japan had come thanks to the efforts of Grant Gilbert, who was Brody’s agent in Tokyo for the next five years. In London, the studio had quickly expanded from a nucleus of three, and had employed Jon Crossland, a student from St Martin’s, and Mark Mattock, Robin Derrick’s assistant at *The Face*. In the summer of 1987 Cornel Windlin arrived from Switzerland having decided to work as a designer rather than pursue his other option to become a professional footballer. David Davies and Tony Cooper joined the studio at the end of ‘87. Ian Swift, designer at *The Face* and *Arena*, helped out and soon became a full-time employee. Simon Staines, still at the London College of Printing, arrived on a student placement in good time to help organise the work for the exhibition and joined the studio six months later.

The V & A exhibition featured a massive type-mosaic mounted on the floor of the new 20th Century Gallery, type designs screen-printed onto plexiglass “windows”, *The Death of Typography* printed onto a huge canvas, and a soundtrack played through a hidden sound system. It was attended by nearly 40,000 people. However, the consequences of the show and the book’s publication were not totally positive. Work from British clients soon dried up for the now familiar reason – it was thought to be much easier and cheaper to imitate Brody’s design, rather than commission it direct. In any event, Brody was seen to be over-exposed and too successful for his own good. The gap between public perception and personal reality was wider than ever. Because of the amount of preparatory work that had gone into the book and exhibition, the studio was struggling to break even. New commissions were few and far between. A year later, it narrowly escaped going bankrupt.

### 23. Advert for Plein Sud, Paris 1988

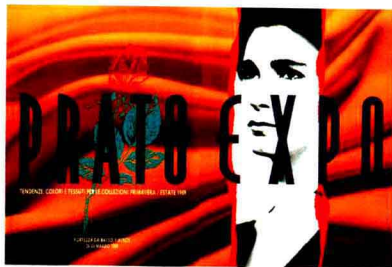
This design for a French fashion company was never printed. The film work was incorrectly processed by a London printing company, and the Brody Studio left in a financial limbo that nearly resulted in its bankruptcy.

DESIGNED WITH TONY COOPER

### 24. Advert for Prato Expo, Milan 1987

Brody linked the type design he had drawn for *The Face* to a more experimental use of imagery for Prato Expo, an Italian fashion company.

DESIGNED WITH JAMIE MORGAN / BUFFALO



In July the exhibition moved to the Fruitmarket Gallery as part of the Edinburgh Festival. Shortly after this Brody was approached by Greenpeace to design a new image for their *Breakthrough* project in the Soviet Union. Later in the year Brody received a timely commission from the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, an arts institution similar to London's Commonwealth Institute, based at the Kongresshalle in Germany – a building that had been donated to the Berlin people by the United States in 1945. HdKdW wanted the Brody Studio to design a new identity and to art-direct a series of posters that promoted their exhibitions and events. This meant regular work that could be organised alongside a design for the German magazine *Tempo*, which Brody completed with Cornel Windlin at the end of 1989. Visits to Berlin also allowed regular contact with MetaDesign, whose chief designer, Erik Spiekermann, Brody had met at the "Type '87" conference in New York. Spiekermann and his partner, Joan, had set up the first FontShop, a mail-order digital type distributor with whom Brody would later become centrally involved.

**BY THE SUMMER OF '88** the Tottenham Court Road studio had become so cramped that another move was essential – to an old Victorian furniture warehouse in East Road, near the Old Street roundabout – a strange environment in which to learn how to use the computer, situated in an area of London bombed in the Second World War and still half-derelict. One by one, everyone did learn the Macintosh. David Davies, Mark Mattock and Jon Crossland no longer worked at the studio. Patrick Glover, Giles Dunn and John Critchley joined soon after moving to East Road. Two Japanese students, Yuki Miyake and Nana Shiomi, helped bridge the gap. Dawn Clenton and Simon Emery arrived in 1991 after Windlin, Swift and Cooper had gone freelance. Paula Nessick worked on TV graphics. Simon Staines and Fwa Richards ran the studio. Brody was increasingly abroad.



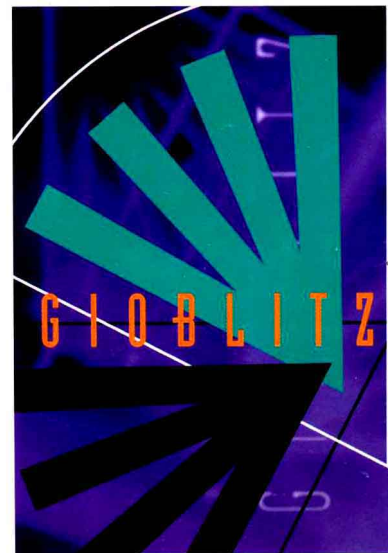
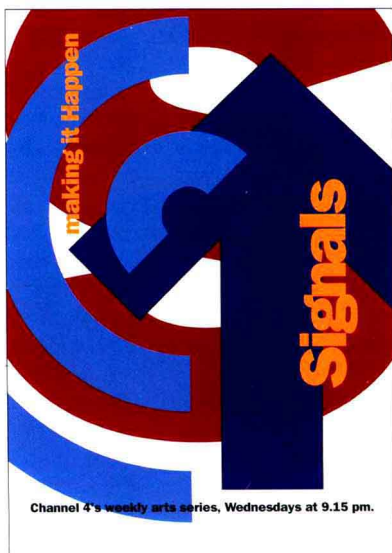
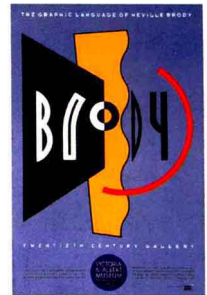
**25, 26. The installation of *The Graphic Language of Neville Brody*, 20th Century Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, London 1988**

The first photo shows the wall of logos, and on both can be seen the large letterforms produced in lino and fastened to the floor.

**27, 28. Poster and Bookmark for *The Graphic Language of Neville***

**Brody, 20th Century Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum 1988**

Mont Blanc, the sponsors of the V & A exhibition, commissioned Brody to come up with a special item to commemorate its opening. The bookmark was produced in brass, and its shape combined with the type used for the front cover of the first book to produce the promotional poster.



**29. Poster for *Signals*, Channel 4 TV, London 1988**

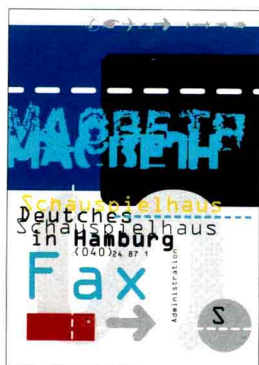
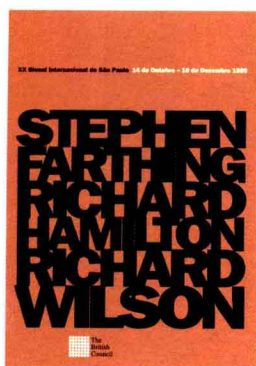
One of Brody's first designs using Adobe FreeHand 1.0.

**30. Poster for *Die Zeichensprache des Neville Brody*, Kongresshalle, Berlin 1988**

Using both digitally output and photocopied type against a background created by PMTing a clay sculpture, the poster was supplied as flat artwork. The German printers completely misinterpreted the mark-up; this time, the mistakes were a vast improvement on Brody's original specifications.

**31. Poster and logo for Gioblitz, Asics Corporation, Japan 1991**

Gioblitz was a new shoe and sportswear range introduced by Asics. The logo, based on a wing, was developed after a long list of image "projections" had been supplied by the client.



After producing an illustration and software review for *Graphics World*, Brody was able to get Apple Computers to loan him a colour Macintosh II, a black-and-white scanner and a laserprinter (all still in use). Much discussion went into the choice of a name for the new studio. "Concrete" was a favourite and the laserprinter was initialised as such, but the idea got lost in the workload and never went any further.

In November, Brody was offered the opportunity to design the front page of the *Guardian Review*. In 1980, the total advertising expenditure in England was £2815 million: by 1988 it had risen to £7309 million. The *Guardian* article was a critique of the design industry's greedy collusion in this massive increase, largely the result of the Government's reliance on advertising to press through its policies. At this time, 9 of the world's 10 biggest design groups were based in London. This large agency form of design was being presented as a key to national salvation. The *Guardian* received a big response and felt bound to publish a full-page riposte. The original article was later developed with Stuart Ewan for the US *Print* magazine in December 1988.

"Design consultancy Fitch RS have produced a grim reaper lookalike for Southern Electric. The hollow eye sockets and the dynamic horizontal bars clearly mean 'Business or Death' and God help anybody who ignores a Final Reminder. Going further, the John Michael logo for the London Electricity Board's Power Stores omits the human touch altogether and offers a variant on the SS insignia. If this logo fails to invite customers into the shop, it may at least be depended upon to deter shoplifters."

Graham Vickers, 'Design: signs of the times', *The Sunday Correspondent*, 17 September 1989.

**THE GUARDIAN ARTICLE** marked the end of an era for Brody and the studio. Increasingly isolated from the design industry, for the next four years the studio embarked on an exploration of the computer's wider possibilities and Brody looked to make links with companies who shared a global vision. He decided to work with few clients but on a long-term basis, preferably on a one-to-one collaboration where 'service' could be replaced by an new emphasis on evolutionary process. Rather than design more logos, he wanted to create a language and system for each company that would enable them improve the content of their communications and control their design in-house, working as a consultant with clients receptive to this intention – almost none were based in Britain.

Alongside the Photographers' Gallery, Vitsoe and Pilcher Hershmann, one of the studio's few remaining London-based supporters in 1989 was Mike Collins, who ran a management company representing, amongst others, the German group Propaganda, composer Steve Martland and long-time associates Wire, for all of whom Brody's studio created designs.

A chief ambassador at this time was Brody's exhibition, which travelled to Berlin, Frankfurt and Hamburg. In London, Brody made plans with FontShop to broaden its international scope. Following FontShop Canada, by April 1990 a London-

based outlet was registered, having had to change its name for copyright reasons to FontWorks UK. Sited downstairs from the East Road studio, it opened in June on a shoestring budget and now stocks over 9000 fonts. In 1990 to buy one involved a wait of between four and fourteen days. In 1994 a font can be delivered in central London within an hour.

For the Brody studio, understanding how to use the Macintosh was a slow struggle. The studio had also leased a photocopier that could produce brilliant results by pushing its halftone, reverse-out and contrast functions. Different paper stocks were always being experimented with. The fax machine could produce some startling visual effects. When work was slow, everybody would take turns playing the computer game *Crystal Quest*, which for a few months became an addiction. You had to be quick to avoid the pacmen, mines and crawlers, but the game not only provided a lesson in how to use the mouse and keyboard at speed – it served as an example of the need to battle with the computer, and then to call a halt. Working on the Mac, it is easy to come up with infinite variations of a single design, and then lose sight of any qualitative differences.

As a complete contrast to *The Face* and *Arena*, Brody worked for a year as art director of the French magazine *Actuel*, giving it a new masthead and altering the editorial sequence. At *The Face*, everything was done quickly and discreetly. At *Actuel*, night-long discussions, debates and dialectic were the order of the day... plus the last-minute panic to meet the printer's deadline.

Following the job for Nike and a series of one-off UK commissions, in 1990 Brody finally got the chance to delve deeper into television graphics with a commission from a new Hamburg-based cable TV company, Premiere. He then completed his first totally digital design work for print during the summer – a calendar for the Tokyo department store, Parco. The commission gave Brody the chance to redefine his computer experimentations. Emphasising an interplay and tension between organic and inorganic shapes, the Parco Calendar also utilised recycled paper for fluorescent printing inks. Its production coincided with the Tokyo "UK90" Festival. In its latest and best-arranged incarnation, the *Graphic Language* exhibition was displayed in the largest available space on the top floor of Parco's store in Shibuya.

This collaboration with Parco entailed extended visits to Tokyo which further underlined the need to embrace and transform new technologies. Brody and Gilbert's agent in Tokyo, Junko Wong, arranged commissions from Asics and Gioblitz. It was clear that while Japan was highly advanced in developing hardware, the opportunity to create new software to exploit this was still wide open. An attempt was made to set up an Anglo-Japanese multimedia foundation, Global Force. Plans were also developed for a new digital publishing project, *Fuse*, which FontShop International would produce and distribute. *Fuse* would be a 'magazine' that promoted a dialogue on the state of digital typography and its effect on language by contrasting print and digital media, with a copyright waiver that encouraged purchasers to adapt and abuse the given typefaces.

The then-new Macintosh programme, Adobe Photoshop, enabled designers to distress image and type, manipulating shape, density, detail – and letters as if they were photographs, or more accurately, dabs of digital paint. Programmes like Altsys Fontographer and Letraset FontStudio allow anyone to draw typefaces, but this is often electronic graffiti, not necessarily type design. With Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator, anyone can mess up the existing typefaces, turning typography into performance art.

**32. Catalogue cover for Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, The British Council 1989**

DESIGNED WITH SIMON STAINES

**33. Proposed Image poster, Schauspielspielhaus, Hamburg 1992**

Chaos.

**34. Signations for Bodystyles, Channel 4 TV, London 1989**

For this series of four programmes on how clothes express cultural ideas, Brody projected slides of hand-drawn type onto moving bodies.

DESIGNED WITH FWA RICHARDS

Programmes like QuarkXPress and PageMaker were developed as extensions of the printing press. Macromind Director and Adobe Premiere are extensions of the very different media of film, photography, video and television rolled into one. Design for the screen insists upon different precepts to design for print. Clarity and legibility are to the page as impact and metamorphosis are to the screen.

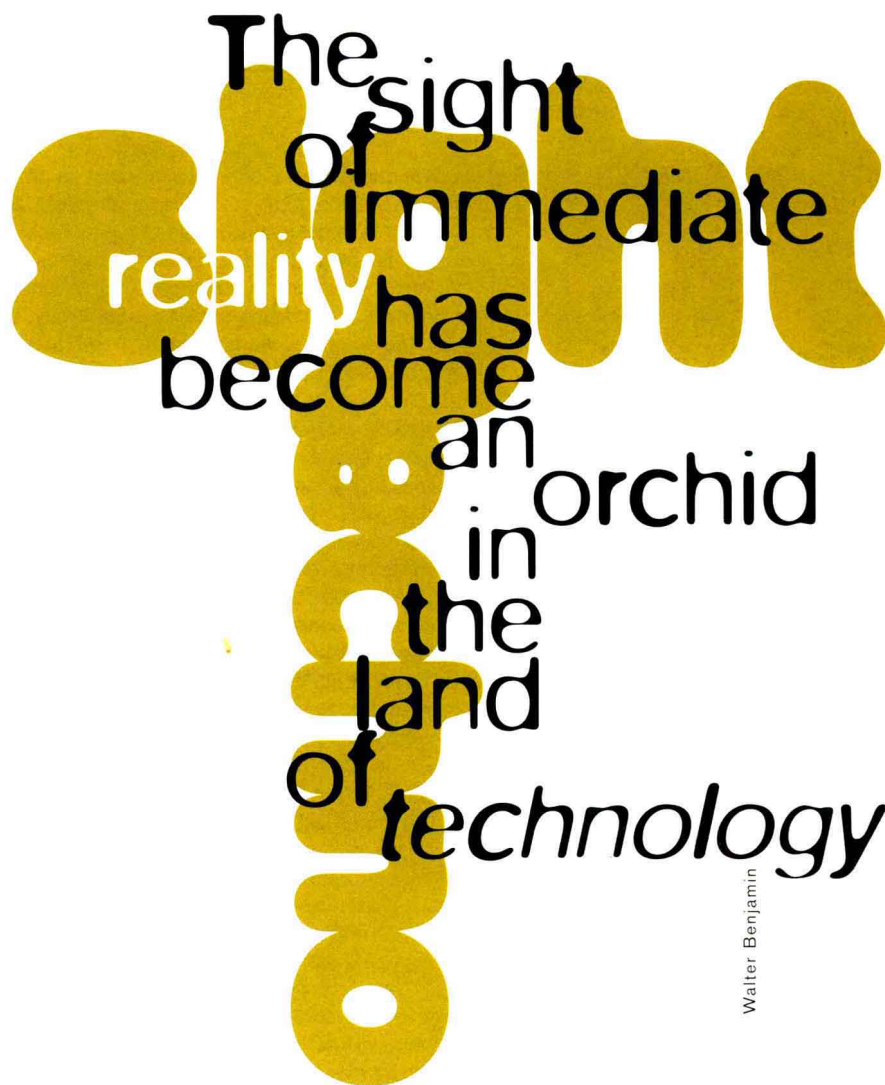
The traditional pillars of design language – typographic specifications, legibility, the grid – have quickly been forgotten. The typesetter, once central to the early stages of any design work, has become the output bureau, the last port of call before printing. In the main, a service that was once interpretive, requiring a high degree of professional skill, has become increasingly mechanical – a question of checking the settings and pressing the appropriate buttons. Using a desktop publishing programme, a scanner and a printer, a magazine can be designed from the comfort of your own home; the disks can then be sent direct to the printer. Like service bureaux, printers are struggling to catch up with the demands of new technology. Technical Support Services and Software Clinics set up to cure malfunctions are often as much in the dark as their confused clients. High quality digital scans are only now managing to compete with conventional hi-end repro. This situation will improve, but so far, the burden has fallen on designers to direct the pre-press process. Computers have cut out the typesetter middle-man but they have not been a labour-saving device for designers.

While it is now possible to produce the best quality highest resolution typesetting since the invention of printing, distressed letterforms appear everywhere – on billboards and flyposters, in magazines, no doubt soon in annual reports. The development from the Daguerrotype, the first photographic image, to the abstraction of Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon* took seventy years. Digital typography has passed through its Cubist phase in just three years. This demonstrates how type users have been empowered by the computer but it also suggests that language is out of control – we may need to come up with a new definition of 'Anarchy'.

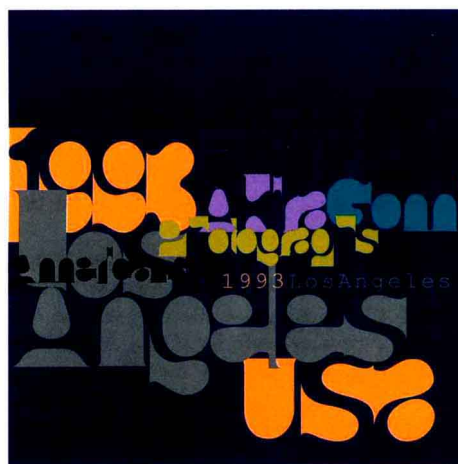
We now have the opportunity to develop Freeform designs. Not only can elements of language be sampled like drum sounds off a record and manipulated in any direction – the dislocation of the written word from its traditions and the global range of communication networks insist upon new ways of using language. More than ever before, the assumptions we make about our mother tongues are challenged by their continual contact with different linguistic concepts. The picture language of Chinese and Japanese Kanji characters embrace the spiritual dimension of human expression, highlighted by the movement of the brush-stroke. We now have the chance to move towards a language which is more intuitive than the linear mould of Western constructions.

*Fuse* is both a forum wherein such present concerns can be raised, and a language laboratory for the future. The editorial and promotional posters that come with *Fuse* are used to push the limits of digital processing. Combining complicated Photoshop images with both standard and experimental typefaces in QuarkXPress is a sure recipe to make the computer crash: getting them to print is a major headache. "All along we've been challenging the machine, trying to force it to do things it really wasn't supposed to do."

Brody designed a new type family in 1991, *Blur*, reflecting the present transitional period. A frequently-used technique had been to create softer edges on 'classic' typefaces by experimenting with the focus and exposure settings on the PMT camera. This was unpredictable and time-consuming, but often produced brilliant results. It also made headlines



Walter Benjamin



### 35. Page for *Vagabond, Touch*, London 1991

The début of *Blur*... the quotation taken from Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". The typeface *Blur* is an analogue-digital collision, a mechanised version of previous practice whereby type was shot out of focus using the PMT camera, and the visual voice of a new language emerging from the keyboard.

*Vagabond* updated the idea of the almanac – Kandinsky's *Blue Rider* is an example – and pursued a similar hybrid, combining criticism, short stories, interviews, photographs and poetry with specially commissioned pages that took design processes to the limit. The main motive was to give a voice to ideas that fell outside the narrow mainstream agenda.

### 36. Cover for *Photo-CD* by Akira Gomi, *Digitologue*, Tokyo 1993

Originally drawn for *Fuse 9* (see p.33 and p.173), *Autosuggestion* is based on the negative space of *Blur*.