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Investigate the digital graphic design revolution of the mid 1980s. Discuss the work of 3 designers who embraced this new technology to challenge the past and define the future.

Over the last 50 years, graphic design has established itself as one of the most influential and conventional ways of visually communicating on earth. From post-war modernism onwards, graphic design has been shaped from Swiss Design, Suprematism, Constructivism, Modernism and Early Postmodernism, each providing their own specialties to creating an idiosyncratic way of communication and a huge range of design styles.

In particular, the 1980s denoted the early beginnings of the digital revolution, and the introduction of personal computers and business. The eighties were all about bold colours that grabbed people's attention. Computers became more affordable for the general public, which made design a lot more accessible for all. It wasn't until 1984 that Apple released MacPaint for Macintosh computers, 1985 that Microsoft introduced Windows, allowing many more designers to use digital graphic design effortlessly.

With the establishment of design software, graphic designers were enabled to create three-dimensional images and could easily manipulate the layouts, colours, and the form of their designs. The influx of technology combined with the advancement of graphical software meant that graphic designers were more free to experiment and test new things, which had a major impact on graphic design forever. It led designers to move on from previous fonts and create their own new font families of all different weights and sizes, creating a random, unplanned look. Each designer had their own unique style, with use of many different geometrical shapes, bold colour schemes and their newfound digital software, designers were able to create a sense of futurism in their work. This period of design was called the "new wave" approach which resultingly made graphic design in the eighties seem more trendy and cool.

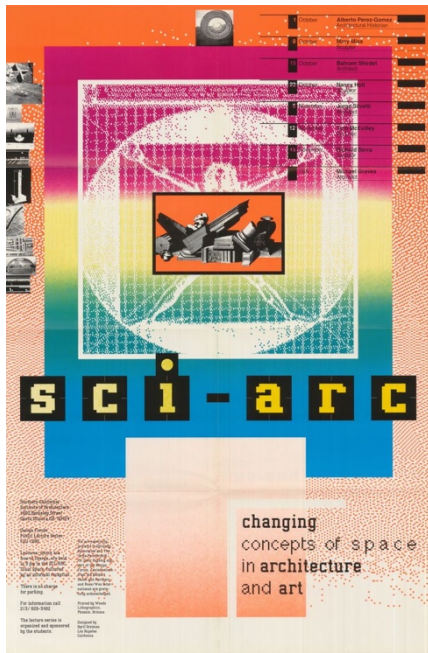
"New Wave" design was influenced by Punk and the postmodernism movement. The embracement of the New Wave in the United States came through multiple channels. Wolfgang Weingart presented a lecture on the trend, encouraging a lot of young graphic designers who travelled there to the Basel

School to take their new knowledge back with them to the United States. One of these designers was April Greiman, said to be one of the pioneers of this "New wave".

Integrating the computer into design was a daunting idea for many designers during the eighties. However, Greiman was one of the very few of them that did not work with the grain, and saw the potential of the new medium, in April's words, "If you have a good idea there aren't any boundaries" (Greiman, 2018).

Greiman is an influential contemporary American graphic designer, who established herself as a pioneer of digital communication design. Her innovative ideas and bravery in exploring this field have taken the world by storm, she inspired and boosted the acceptance and use of technology in graphic design and the arts. Born on September 10, 1948, April Greiman grew up in New York City. From 1966-1970, she attended the Kansas City Art Institute and began her studies in graphic design for the first time, which is where her curiosity of the art began. It was during the early seventies that she went to Basel, Switzerland, where she enrolled herself at the Allgemeine Kunstgewerberschule Basel (now the Basel School of Design). Under Weingart's supervision, Greiman developed interest in the Swiss Style; the style that caused a huge reaction in the world of design, marking the start of the graphic design revolution. With her fascination and interest in digital design, she was able to create incredible pieces of artwork, which remain iconic to this day.

Greiman uses very bright, bold colours in her work, giving off a very happy, positive feel for the viewers. The number of different colours displayed throughout her work could potentially be a lot for some people to take in, which it was. A lot of people hugely critiqued Greiman throughout her career for relentlessly pushing the graphic design boundaries, however, this did not phase her. She carried on making artwork that she approved of herself, which in hindsight, has completely paid off.

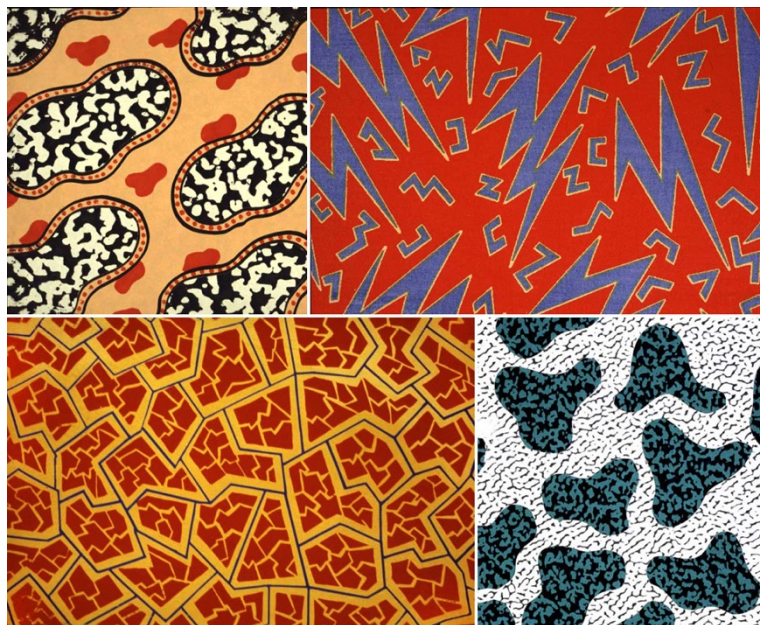


As you can see above, Greiman focuses on the playfulness of the composition, rather than a simple grid structure. She created her own new kind of form for her design, adding more intuitive to the layout. Greiman achieves a sense of depth within many of her designs by overlapping a range of different objects such as diagonal lines, geometrical shapes, circles, typographic elements and colours, as seen in the 'WET' magazine and 'Sci-Arc' adobe. The diagonal lines in the "WET' magazine show perspective in her layout, floating elements have shadows behind them to create the illusion that some are more prominent than others. She uses these techniques to enhance certain elements from the surface of the page, giving a three-dimensional effect. The number of different elements dispersed over her work could potentially confuse the design, however, she has planned it so well to make it seem unplanned that it is not chaotic at all.

She is now seen to be one of the very first designers to have seen computers in a different light, realising their potential as a design tool. After being influenced by punk and postmodernism herself, she created a whole new area of style, and now it's her that influences the current designers of the world and without a doubt, will influence the future as well.

A style created by a crew of Milan-based designers, commonly known as “Memphis” style, also dominated the decade. The Memphis Style is one of the most instantly recognisable styles of design, known for its use of bright neon, primary and pastel colours, geometric shapes, and bold, repetitive patterns.

In 1981, Italian designer Ettore Sottsass established a group of artists and designers called the Memphis Group. Like a lot of design-related reactions, it began as a way for the designers to express themselves, a way to go against the current design sensibilities. On their first meeting, the members brought over 100 drawings with them, displaying a variety of bold, colourful designs with a range of stylistic influences. Instead of electing one style out of the huge variety, they decided to merge the lot and create a mishmash, creating the Memphis style.



The Memphis group had a loud, bold, colourful taste. As seen in the examples above, it can seem confusing at first as it has what some people may say, too many elements. The style incorporates some characteristics of pop art with explosive, bold primary colours, funky lines, striking geometric shapes and an asymmetric design. Considering the style was supposedly a rebellious reaction act,

not resonating with the accepted design standards of the time, it radiates a lot of joy and happiness.

The Initial reaction to the designs of the Memphis group were not positive in the slightest. However, in hindsight, the population now recognise that they were revolutionary. They marked a complete separation from the gloomy, overly refined and serious design styles of the 1970s. Their fresh approach to graphic design, hugely influenced by humour and creativity, came to be a lasting stylistic trend of the eighties. The influence of the Memphis Group on graphic design and interior design today is undeniable. It undoubtedly welcomes eclectic, optimistic design, which could be why they are said to have “opened many doors to an individualistic postmodern approach, demonstrated now by the freedom designers have today” (Glancey, 1982).



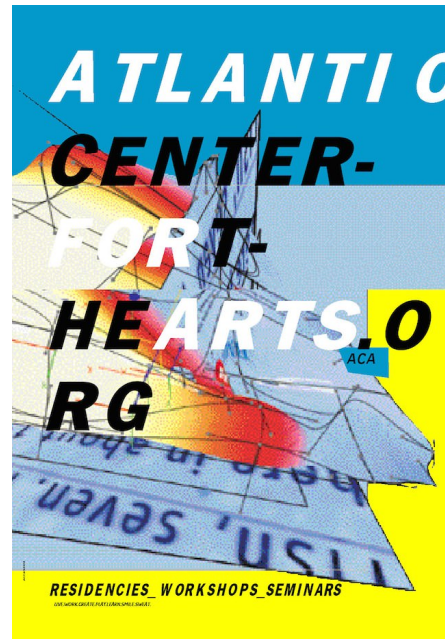
After six years of creating incredible designs, in 1987 the Memphis Group went separate ways. Despite not being popular at the time, their trademark style is now under revival. Former group member Nathalie Du Pasquier recently collaborated with the design company 'HAY' to create a few Memphis-inspired

products. The fashion world has been one of the quickest design fields to bring back the style, with houses like Dior and Missoni creating collections and show sets that take inspiration from the Memphis Group. Dior's 2001 Autumn/Winter Couture collection paid tribute to the Memphis Group, by working their famous geometric shapes and pastel colours into their pieces. British designer Jasper Morrison portrays the feelings of many about Memphis best: "It was the weirdest feeling—you were in one sense repulsed by the objects, but also freed by this sort of total rule-breaking.", which is one of the reasons why the trend is so actively relevant in today's graphic design and why the trend set up designers to feel more free and able to create more work that 'pushed the boundaries' today. Although the movement only lasted a relatively short time, the impact of Memphis is still very much felt today.

The last designer I'd like to mention is David Carson, arguably the most innovative and influential graphic designer of the era. David Carson is not only an American graphic designer, but an art director and surfer too, best known for his experimental layout designs for magazines and use of experimental typography.

David Carson was born on September 8, 1955 in Texas, often moving around a lot as a child, he attended a lot of different schools and colleges. His first time experiencing the art of graphic design was in 1980, when he first attended a two-week graphics course at the University of Arizona. His first real design job was working at 'Self and Musician' which he did whilst working as a part-time designer for the Transworld Skateboarding magazine. These jobs are what began his design profession, they enabled him to experiment with design and develop his own unique style.

His work for the magazines Beach Culture and Ray Gun, which can be seen below, had shown a new approach to type and the design of page layouts that broke the tradition systems which people saw as 'rules'.



He is a powerful catalyst for design change. His recurring reinvention of the connection between typography and design has changed the course of graphic design and changed the opinion of the generation. Carson's work has many postmodernism characteristics, especially designs that he has incorporated the theory "form follows function". This approach to design creates an object whose form should be informed and shaped by the function of the object. This theory is evident due to his unique, visually driven arrangement of type in his designs.

Although Carson did use this theory on some occasions, there wasn't much more academic planning behind his work. The text he used often required reverse reading, columns stuck together with no gutter, forced justification, and inconsistent letter spacing across images, arranged in artistic ways rather than systematic. A lot of his work consisted of distorted type, layered blocks of colour and a lot of white space.

He had a huge following of designers who loved this about his designs, however, it did actually irritate a massive amount of people, mainly design professionals, who claimed he had 'crossed the line between order and chaos' (Meggs, 1998: p.463b). Even though his work does lack the original design

'rules' and set ways, his work is still easily understandable if you pay close enough attention, it challenges conventional design practices, which have helped steer graphic design to the way it is today.

Carson also did a lot of simple, minimalistic designs. For example, for one of his most recent commissions, he had to design a poster for a tsunami relief benefit show where he needed to entice people to donate to all of the countries that were affected. In the poster, which you can see below, Carson has created a simplistic wave with one word on it: 'help'. The minimalist approach was very straight to the point and probably got more attention than a full, chaotic design would have. His judgement of what works for different audiences and circumstances was always on point.

"David Carson is a man who has transformed the field of graphic design throughout his career" (AIGA, Eye on Design, 2019) and has therefore inspired me to be more fearless when it comes to designing myself. He has taught me that no matter how many people judge your work, it's your own value and opinion that matters so be as bold as you like. In Paul Arden's words: "Do not seek praise, seek criticism."

To conclude, the 1980's digital revolution had a huge impact on how we see graphic design today. Being the starting point of the world beginning its slow approach to the digital era we're currently in, we have a lot to thank the decade for. Not just the era, but the amazing designers that were a part of it. With improving technology, new emerging styles, the art of graphic design is always evolving and ever-changing. But we can't forget artists like April Greiman and David Carson that really pushed the design boundaries and challenged the conventional design practices, which have helped steer graphic design to the way it is today, despite the number of critiques they both received. Design group 'Memphis' also had a huge role to play in the rise of digital design, they rebelliously reacted and did not resonate with the accepted design standards of

the time, marking a separation from the gloomy, overly refined and serious design styles of the seventies. Their impact, as well as the combination of powerful technology and freedom to experiment, influenced the field of graphic design in ways that are still with us today. "Digital design is like painting, except the paint never dries." (Brody, 2014)

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