

[ADAD5003] Research in Context
The Digital Graphic Design Revolution of the mid 1980s.
Past Present and Future

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Since the dawn of time, visual art has evolved. From petroglyphs of cave paintings that tell stories (*Nps.gov, 2016*); to posters wanting you to join the world war(s). (*Schweb Design, 2021*). Although the term 'Graphic Design' was introduced in the 1920s by American type designer William Dwiggins (1880-1956) (*Meggs, 2019*), it was not until the 1980s that the graphic design industry gained popularity; when the digital revolution began.

For this assignment, I will explain how the digital revolution changed the creative industry nearly thirty years ago and how it's still being used today. I will discuss how the Mac was the primary use of technology for designers; and I am also including three artists of that era that used this revolutionary technology and the impact their work had within the industry.

What is the Digital Revolution?

The Digital Revolution (aka the Third Industrial Revolution or the Digital Era) refers to the shift of working with technological advancements from the 1980s to the present day. (*Charlesworth, 2009*). The word 'Revolution' refers to its impact on the world by branching out and boosting productivity across various industries. (*IntelligentHQ, 2022*). The 'Digital' label emerged in the 1990s from the revolutionary changes in computer technology. (*Graphic Design History, 2011*).

Until the late 20th century, many designers created their works by hand, a delicate process that can cause a number of unintentional mistakes. Layouts were drawn by hand, fonts were ordered from a typesetter, and images were assembled in position through means of industrial machinery. However, the graphic design industry grew in popularity when digital computers and software became more accessible for designers to create their work. Digital computers allowed designers to change the layout of their images, font styles, and more; all in one monitor, which saved a lot of time and additional expenses.

What did the Digital Revolution do for Designers?

The Digital Revolution allowed designers and artists to experiment with new technologies and grow, expand, and evolve their work in a new digital way that had never been done before. It positively impacted visual communication and graphic design, improving new ways of being creative and publishing work to the world much faster. It made designers create new work, such as professional logo images, digital advertising and more.

Prior to computers, designers used other technologies for their work. During the 1960s, Fax machines were used to scan and send images, documents, etc., through a telephone network. (Coopersmith, 2015). Whilst Fax machines' primary roles were to send and receive images; floppy disks were used to store countless data information and files that would be used for virtual machines located in a few facilities. (Amankwah-Amoah, 2016).

When the Internet was launched in 1983, designers learned very quickly that they could send out copies of their work by Email to potential new employers or clients rather than sending their original works by post. Emails were also much quicker, as they could be received in minutes, compared to postal mail, which could take days or even weeks to arrive at their destination and have a high chance of being lost or damaged during transport.

In 1991, computer scientist Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web; and Graphic Designers quickly learned that they could expand their working field by designing websites for organisations and businesses that were desperate to get their voices heard online. However, web-design at the time required much concentration, as designers would have to learn new skills independently. Designers had to learn how to place images and text and use links to add additional information by coding. (Meggs, 2019). Nowadays, we have web-building sites such as Wix, which do the heavy lifting coding for designers and use click-and-drag technology to allow designers to change parts of the site as they please. (Meggs, 2019).

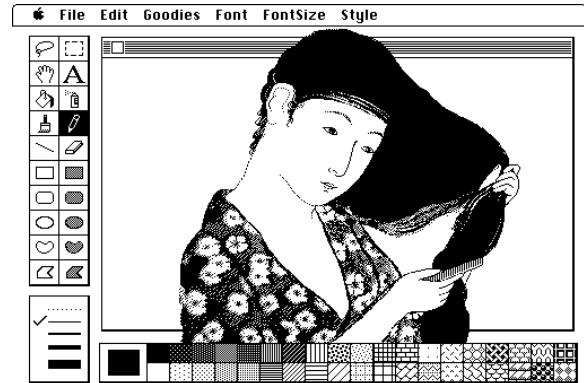
Today, over 1.98 billion websites are online. (Djuraskovic, 2021), compared to just 100,000 websites in 1998 when Google was founded. (TECH MUSINGS, 2008).

System and Software

The Mac, named at the time Macintosh. (Galvan, 2020), introduced new design techniques within their software, which made designers instantly hooked.

MacPaint was the first program to be launched with the Mac (KNAPP, 2019) and was created by computer programmer Bill Atkinson. (Meggs, 2019). However,

David Ramsey modified his original programming in 1988, creating MacPaint 2.0. (Mejia, 2016). The app has tool icons that can be controlled by a mouse or drawing tablet (Meggs, 2019), allowing creative people to extend their industry through computer graphics.



[Fig 1] Susan Kare 'Woodblock' 1984

Graphic designer Susan Kare is known to have drawn the earliest drawing on MacPaint (1.0 ver) called 'Woodblock' in 1984 (Behance, 2015), inspired by the pointillistic art movement.

Susan also created icon symbols for MacPaint, including the Grabber, the Lasso, and the Paint Bucket, which other art software uses today. (Gerlinger, 2022).



[Fig 2] Susan Kare 'Paint Icon'
Every grid square represents one pixel

Soon after, other creative software started to dominate the digital design market.

Before Adobe conquered the digital market, we used other software like Aldus, Altsys, Macromedia, QuarkXPress, and Xerox PARC. (*Designs, 2019*). At one stage, Aldus rivalled Adobe's Illustrator as they used Vector graphics to create smooth and non-pixelated designs.

Nowadays, many of these programs mentioned here have disappeared or been superseded by Adobe. (*Designs, 2019*). Regardless, this new tech also made it cheaper for designers, as there was no need to buy expensive paint or tools anymore, as everything they required was simply on the screen page. Software made it easier for designers to manipulate the art elements and even create 3D images and models with creative freedom.

As a result of this new technology, the future of art and design has never been so positive. Today, graphic designers are needed more than ever. The world has become more visual than at any point in time, from visually delivered information to producing identification, entertainment, and persuasive messages.

Artist 1 - David Carson

David Carson, who is well known as the godfather of the Grunge style, is an American and typographer and arguably the influential graphic designer during the 1990s. (*Blackwell and Carson, 2000*).



[Fig 3] David Carson Pepsi Cola - N.D

Punk, rock, and heavy metal music genres inspired the term 'Grunge'. (*Roberts, 2013*). The style was popular during the 1990s and is often characterised as having a dirty vibe from stains from droplets and sprays to rips and tears, as well as a hand-made style such as torn images of creased pieces of paper. These are the most common elements within the grunge style. (*Toxboe, 2010*).

Many designers consider Grunge the opposite of Flat, today's graphic style. In contrast, the flat style is clean and simple, while Grunge is messy and gives off a rebellious vibe, as designers at the time would break rules of design that had been around for years.

Before Carson's graphic design career, he studied Sociology at San Diego State University and competed in professional surfing, which ranked him the ninth-best surfer in the world in 1989. He then discovered graphic design during a two-week course at the University of Arizona in 1980 (*Norval, 2018*). He first worked for a magazine company called 'Self and Musician', a popular read for surfers. However, Carson's unique style and typography skills grabbed the attention of one of the publishers at Ray Gun Magazine, who offered him a job in 1992. Carson's time in Ray Gun designs earned him over hundred design awards and got his name out to the design world. (*FamousGraphicDesigners.Org, 2018*).

Carson later quit Ray Gun after landing a job as an Art Director for Transworld Skateboarding magazine. His grungy style not only helped the company to gain their own identity, but he even made skateboards more popular; while gathering a mainstream audience during his time working for Transworld.



[Fig 4] David Carson Transworld Magazine - N.D

Carson's style is often characterised as chaotic. Photos were overlapping, with bold text that stood out and bright colours that tended to clash with one another. Because he did not have a full graphic design education, he created magazines that were unique and stood out from others at the time, as he did not know the design rules. Designs at the time had a functional discipline, but Carson's designs were seen as chaotic and edgy, which was very new at the time. Apple, the creator of the Mac, even voted him as one of the 30 most innovative designers on their 30th anniversary. Carson's hand-made punk aesthetic made his designs a D-I-Y masterpiece. (Norval, 2018).

Artist 2 - Neville Brody

Neville Brody is a British graphic designer and typographer (Anderson, 2014) who worked with The Face and Arena magazines between the 1980s and 1990s. (Rütschlin, n.d).

Brody also designed several covers for famous singers and bands, including Cabaret Voltaire and Depeche Mode.

(Neville Brody Interview, n.d).



[Fig 5] Neville Brody Typography - N.D

Neville went to Minchenden Grammar school to study A-Level Art and later graduated from Hornsey College of Art in 1975. (Anderson, 2014). A year later, Brody enrolled at the London College of Printing (Anderson, 2014) for his three-year Bachelor of Arts degree. Unfortunately, his time in college was a poor experience for the young artist; his teachers constantly gave him negative feedback for his work being, quote: 'uncommercial'. At the time, the grunge style rose in popularity from punk and rock music, and Brody experimented with this style in his works. However, because he attended a very traditional art school, his work nearly got him expelled for failing to meet standards. Neville focused on comparing Dadaism and the Pop-Art movement during his first-year thesis. (FamousGraphicDesigners.Org, 2011), Furthermore, despite the threat, he persisted in pushing the boundaries of graphic design.

Brody became successful when he landed a job as an Art Director for The Face magazine (*FamousGraphicDesigners.Org, 2011*) from 1981 to 1993. (*Neville Brody Font Shop, 2019*). Face Magazine was trendy for designers during the 1980s, showing successful trends or styles of design. Neville soon gained clients from famous companies to work for, including The Guardian, The Observer, Apple, BBC online, The Times, Channel 4 and the England football team. (*Gray, 2017*). His achievements, with his constant drive to experiment and challenge the art world, gave a new meaning to the visual language.

In 1994, Brody created his studio named 'Research Studios', previously called 'Neville Brody Studio', in London in partnership with Fwa Richards. (*FamousGraphicDesigners.Org, 2011*). The studio's mission is to create unique visual languages within the creative industry and spread the word about design, web-design, on-screen graphics and corporate identity. (*FamousGraphicDesigners.Org, 2011*). The studio was a success; multiple establishments had been stretched around Europe, including Paris, Barcelona and Berlin.

In 2012, James Binns interviewed Neville Brody to discuss his views on computers and how they changed the graphic design industry. (*Staff Published, 2012*). Brody explained that computers helped save time more than if you just made the design by hand, but computers also give designers something to experiment with, as the software installed has tools that are used differently. Brody then talked about typography and how back in the day, you had to create type by a Typesetter through rough pencils and what the size of each letter was supposed to look like. He explained in the interview that it was a nightmare to progress; as soon as you have sent your font details, you realise you have rejected something, such as the height, weight, style, etc. So you have to send it repeatedly until you are finally satisfied, which takes a lot of money to complete. This was one of the many things Brody was grateful computers had solved, as now you can create your own fonts and change them without extra payment.

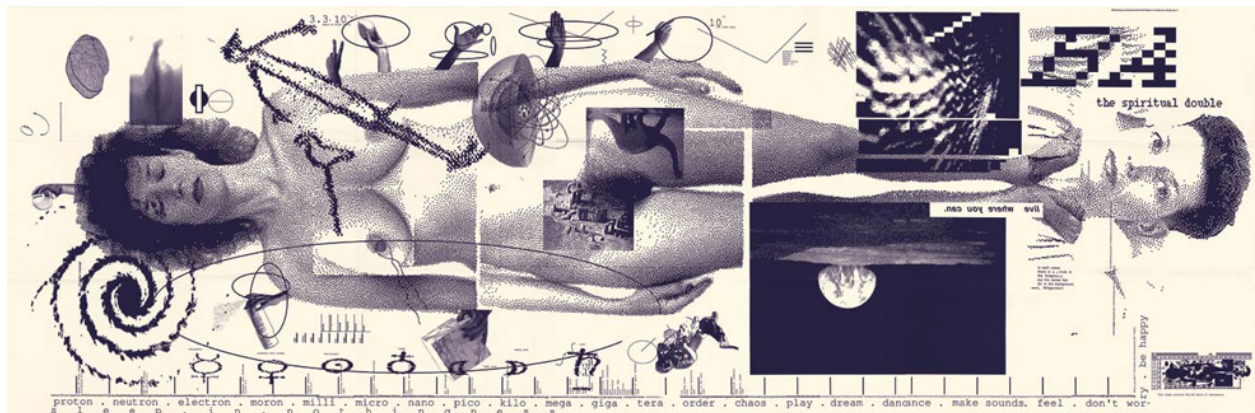
Artist 3- April Greiman

April Greiman is an American graphic designer and was one of the first designers to embrace computer technology as a design tool during the Third Industrial Revolution. (*FamousGraphicDesigners.org*, 2019).

April studied at Kansas City Art Institute for her graphic design degree in 1966. (*Eslogan Magazine*, 2018). She later enrolled at the Basel School of Design in Basel, Switzerland (*Barndt*, 2014); one of her tutors was Wolfgang Weingart, a German graphic designer (*Alan*, 2014) known as the father of an early 1980s International Style called New Wave. (*Designhistory.org*, 2011). New Wave was inspired by different movements, including Swiss and Postmodern, that contained elements of grids and shapes and letter spacing for text. (*Heller*, 2016).

During the 1970s, computers were slowly gaining popularity within various industries, including the creative field. While most were sceptical or even afraid that this new tech would take their jobs, traditional artists, especially; Greiman, saw this as an opportunity rather than a threat. (*Opus Design*, 2019). She then experimented and explored the digital world to see what it could do to her works, such as designing for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. (*Eslogan Magazine*, 2018). Soon after, April became one of the many designers to voice the importance of Macintosh in the graphic design industry (*Opus Design*, 2019) when they were first released in 1984. She then won the grand prize in the Mac World's First Macintosh Masters in Art Competition. (*FamousGraphicDesigners.org*, 2019).

In 1986, The Walker Art Center published a magazine of Greiman's design titled 'Does it Make Sense' (*FamousGraphicDesigners.org*, 2019). It was a digital six-foot foldable poster of a woman's naked body in a collage-layered style featuring shape and text elements. The poster's file, which contained bitmapped format photos, was so large that April would send her design to be printed during the evening and would be finished when she returned to her studio in the morning. (*Dill*, 2019). It is the kind of image that might have broken the internet if it had been popular in 1986. While many criticise the work for being thoughtless and lewd, others have praised it for extreme advancement in the digital era. (*Eye on Design*, 2019).



[Fig 6] April Greiman 'Does it make sense?' 1986

Conclusion

The Digital Revolution that started over thirty years ago was a remarkable time for the creative industry. Not only did it save designers time and money, but it also brought a new movement that is still being used today. The invention of the Mac and the Internet helped designers to display their work to the world audiences and gave graphic designers opportunities to expand their working field even more.

Whilst many feared at the time that the Digital Revolution would cause job losses within the industry, or that old art methods were going to be abandoned, this was not the case..

In reality, computers helped make our jobs much more accessible. Computers help us by doing the heavy lifting work and publishing outcomes much faster. Designers can use old art methods to create their works, and traditional artists can send photocopies of their designs by digital email rather than risk their work being damaged or lost by post.

The Digital Revolution pushed the boundaries of design in a positive light, giving designers a new way to experiment with their work with just a few clicks and publish their work to the world faster than ever.

Despite the Digital Revolution still going on today, there are speculations that a new movement will come sooner rather than later. Artificial intelligence (AI) is now gaining popularity across various industries, including the creative field.

However, once again many designers are concerned that AI will take over the industry someday. Because not only can Artificial Intelligence practically think like a human, it can also design as one, meaning creative people may not be required as much as they used to.

As for the time being, AI will **not** take over the creative industries just yet. Nevertheless, the reality is that technology has helped humans in various industries in many ways. However, the threat of lost jobs is still there, but the digital revolution did cause the same panic among people when it first began.

Let us hope in the future that there will be a fair balance between AI and passionate human designers.

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