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Question 3: 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.

Dictionary.com defines Graphic Design as “The art or profession of visual communication that combines images, words, and ideas to convey information to an audience...” (2024). Similarly, Richard Hollis says Graphic Images are “signs whose context gives them a unique meaning, and whose positioning can lend them a new significance” (2021). Graphic Design makes up everything around us and has done since the dawn of time and human existence. Formerly the Graphic Design industry was a predominantly hand-crafted profession, requiring more job roles than just the designer. Occupations like Type Setters that took years of skill and training to master. During the mid 1980s however, the Graphic Design industry completely changed with the introduction of new technologies which marked a new age in an ever-changing industry. The most notable of these new technologies the Apple Mac. While on the outside this development could be seen as a positive step and in ever-evolving industry, providing new technologies which could aid designers in achieving things which weren’t previously possible in their field., this advancement caused the loss of many jobs within the industry which were previously integral to the design process, jobs which were now taken over by a computer. This also caused many designers to have to retrain in their profession, and some to change jobs all together. Some however, decided to embrace the newfound technologies and used it to advance their careers in ways which others would not dare to. What was once an entirely handcrafted subject creating beautifully intricate pieces of art, would now not

be recognised due to the immense dependency on the technological advancements of the 1980s. Graphic Design is an ever-growing field, constantly changing due to new technologies, trends and new ideas from new generations of designers wanting to change the face of the industry and leave their mark.

Before delving into the world of Graphic Design post technology, I believe it is important to look at the roots of the art throughout the 19th century specifically. Design can be dated back as far as 38,000 BC (Monica Galvan, 2024) with humans creating early cave paintings which could now be understood to be an early form of visual communication. Skipping forward to the late 1800s and early 1900s, design in Europe became a form of art. An example of the would-be William Morris's production of literature. "More than fifty titles were produced in a variety of formats, often with woodcut decorations and borders, set in typefaces made to his own specifications" (Hollis, 2021, pg.25). This quote sums up exactly what Graphic Design was in the early 1900's, it was an intricate form of art which took multiple people and an extended period to create.

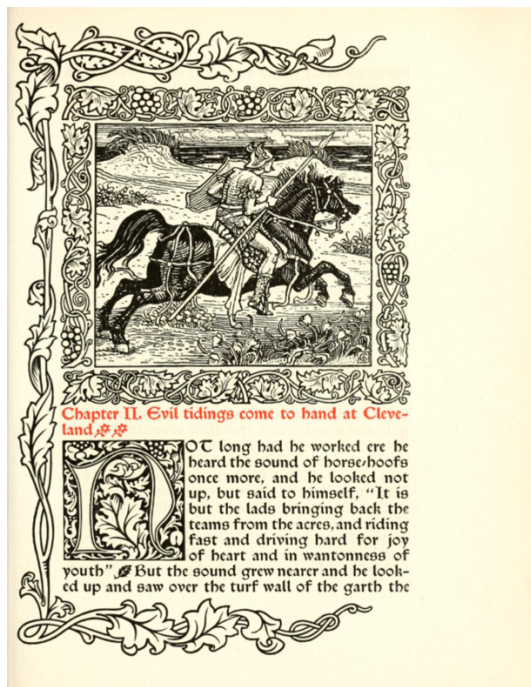


Fig 1, Chapter two of *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, Williams Morris

Following on from the artistic works of William Morris came the Bauhaus movement.

"Renowned for its unique look and principles based on the function of everyday

design elements." (Iakovlev, 2024). As well as the Bauhaus, Switzerland was

developing its own unique style to bring to the design world. Led by Swiss designer

Emil Ruder and Armin Hoffman after him, Swiss design focused on asymmetry, often

using a grid format to bring this into their work. Sans serif typefaces were also

incredibly important to this time in design which made it almost unrecognisable

compared to past works like William Morris's etched type and decorative borders.

Meanwhile, in the UK, a completely different genre of Design was beginning to find

its feet in the 1970s, Punk. Outside of its cultural importance among young people in

Britain at the time, punk was "rebellious and with a desire to shock" (Hollis, 2021, pg.

188) which was appealing to many designers who had grown tired of Swiss style and

being constrained to a gridded format. Punk encouraged a messy style, using torn

out words and pictures from newspapers and magazines to create new sets of

imagery which were unseen in previous years. Designers like Colin Fulcher (also known as Barney Bubbles) and Jamie Reid based their work entirely in this punk aesthetic, completely distancing themselves from the confinements of modernism.

While all these incredibly different styles were pivotal in the history of Graphic Design, nothing quite changed how Design is performed like the introduction of new technologies in the 1980s. More specifically the introduction of Apple's Macintosh Computer. A device which "foretold a Graphic Design revolution" (Meggs and Purvis, 2016, pg 571). Desktop computers along with the introduction of laser printing, software allowing for page layouts to be more easily managed and access to a wide library of typography completely changed the process of Design, streamlining it to allow for a more complete output from the designer. Before this, designers would have to give instructions to other members of the design process like the type setters or photographers, making it difficult to amend problems or make slight changes. With the introduction of this technology, the need for these instructions was eliminated, allowing the designer complete control over the process, and in turn speeding it up significantly. Where before a single project could take weeks from start to finish, it could now be completed in days. These technologies completely changed how design has been carried out, it introduced efficiency, and techniques to designers that before were either not possible or would take time to master.

One of the earliest designers to embrace these changes and use it to develop their work and make it a different sight to anyone else in the industry at that time was April Greiman. Greiman was born in New York in the late 1940s. During her education

years she enrolled in the Basel School of Design, working under legendary designers such as Armin Hoffman and Wolfgang Weinhart. While studying in Switzerland, Greiman would take great interest in international styles like Swiss Design and would eventually focus on 'New Wave' design, being one of the first to introduce and practice this design style back in the United States. Greiman is also hailed as one of the first designers to challenge the idea that technological advancements would be detrimental to the design process, instead embracing the digital age and using its many capabilities to challenge her contemporaries and create designs that were unheard of at the time. Greiman's signature style is to mix mediums of both digital and manual, manipulating imagery using the desktop computer, while integrating hand drawn type, or vice versa, to create a piece of work that defies all previous laws of Graphic Design. One of April Greiman's most recognisable works which perfectly showcases her design principles to create mixed media pieces mainly incorporating techniques only made possible using a computer. The design that I think showcases Greiman's ways of working the best is 'Does it Make Sense?' which was designed for Design Quarterly in 1986. This piece by Greiman "layers textures of pixilated video, text, and appropriated imagery" according to the Museum of Modern Art (2013). It was designed solely with a desktop computer and was one of the first pieces of design work to have been created in this way. Meggs and Purvis say, "She explored capturing images from video and digitizing them, layering images in space and integrating words and pictures into single computer files" (2016, pg. 573) which would have been unimaginable in an age before the desktop computer. Greiman is undoubtedly one of the pioneers of the technological age of Graphic Design and was undoubtedly ahead

of her time when it comes to the techniques she used, but also the ideas that she was able to convey through Graphic Design.

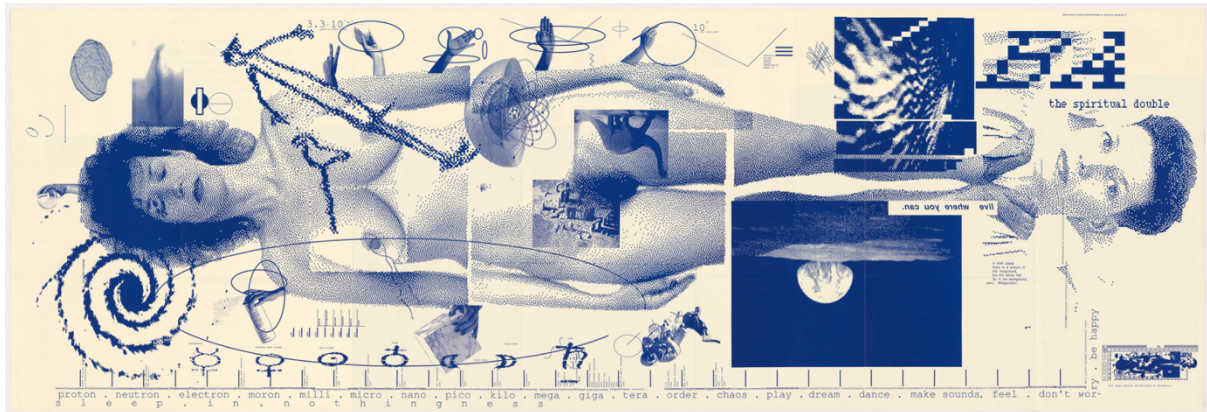


Fig 2, *DOES IT MAKE SENSE*, April Greiman

Another designer known for bending the traditional rules of graphic design and creating a style that has been replicated many times since he introduced it is David Carson. Hailed as the “Godfather of Grunge” (Shetty, 2012), David Carson’s approach to Graphic Design could be considered wrong to many Design traditionalists. Carson however sees design as a rulebook waiting to be broken, quoting “There’s so much slick, fine, professional, forgettable Graphic Design out there. It’s even more reason we need a few rebels to make something stand out” (Carson, 2021). This quote perfectly shows how David Carson has always approached design, especially in the late 80s and early 90s when he first began his career in Graphic Design. While Carson dabbled in magazine design in the late 80s, when he was appointed as art director at Ray Gun magazines, this was where his style came to full fruition. Ray Gun being an alt-rock magazine in America, Carson’s dark style of design played into the rule breaking aesthetic that Ray Gun surrounded

itself in as a magazine. Carson would manipulate typography atop of grungy images, giving a very punk like aesthetic, on the covers of his design, all this of course aided by the recent technology introduced to the design world making it easier to experiment with the positioning, size and shape of the type around the image it was framing. Carson was also a big advocate for using different forms of media, using pieces of crumpled up paper scanned into the computer to layer and create a collage with the already run-down imagery. It was revolutionary at the time to see this type of design be made accessible to the public eye. Carson's designs were always very raw and reflected the audience he was trying to reach very well, creating a sense of rebellion with the use of a non-traditional layout and the infamous grunge typography, his work would influence many designers around him such as Tibor Kalman, Paula Scher and Johnathan Barnbrook, all of whom pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable at the time in graphic design.



Fig 3, Raygun Magazine #50, David Carson

The final designers I will be mentioning in this essay are Nick Phillips and Ian Anderson, best known for their work for the graphic design studio The Designer's

Republic, founded by them both. Founded in 1986, Designer's Republic was best known for its work within the music industry, more specifically the electronic dance music scene, creating music logos and "nearly 5,000 record sleeves" (The Designers Republic, 2024). Similarly to David Carson, Designer's Republic are also known for their anti-establishment aesthetics, breaking Graphic Design trends and norms at the time of their founding. Designers Republic were one of the first design studios in the UK to embrace technological advancements in the late 80s and use things like Adobe studio and 3D software to advance their designs in different ways which studios at the time were not doing to create their work. I think the best example of Designers Republic work using new technologies during the 80s and 90s would be their work for the band Supergrass' self-titled album. This album cover features extensive use of scanning and layering within Photoshop. The cover uses a scan of the human skeleton atop the members of the band. The colour pallet is also distinctly 90s using a predominantly white background as well as a lucid green shade which gives the cover a very grungy feel, extremely like the work of David Carson and such who would use similar techniques in their work which was popular in the 90s.



Fig 4, Supergrass, The Designers Republic

Designers Republic were also well known for their use of typography in some of their other works. Another example of Designer's Republic expert use of layering within Photoshop would be their work for Fosters Ice in 1996. They created a banner for the campaign to promote their new beer, the design itself is made up of several layers expertly picked and sampled to best fit the advert. In an interview with Creative Review, Ian Anderson said "we were playing with this whole idea of layering at the time, and this was the ultimate expression of this whole thing." (Creative Review, 2009). At the time this form of design an experiment for Designers Republic and was very refreshing to see new techniques being used on the daily, this however caused a major chain reaction to people wanting to use this same style in their work, even when it's not applicable or would look better without the use of excessive layering. Ian Anderson said this in the same interview: "Now people do it just for the sake of doing it. It was an experiment; it wasn't meant to be a style that carried on for five years" (Creative Review, 2009). This quote shows however the magnitude and

how new this style was at the time, everybody wanted to use technologies in their work because they saw the work that studios like Designers Republic was producing, and it made them want to produce work to a similar standard and style.



Fig 5, Fosters Ice, The Designers Republic

To conclude this essay, I think it's best to picture a world where Technological advancements made in the world did not exist, and where the world of Graphic Design would be now without them. We would not have the billions of pieces of work created out of software's like Photoshop and Illustrator, styles would be completely different and how the Design Process is conducted would still be like how it was in the early to mid 1900s, a slow and meticulous process. We would not have the incredible works of designers like April Greiman, David Carson and The Designers Republic, as well as the millions of other designers that saw their work and wanted to replicate their style in their own work. I think the information in this essay accurately reflects how Graphic Design is an ever-growing field, and how the Graphic Design revolution was what I think the most important advancement to happen within the

Graphic Design field for generations, creating new trends for designers to replicate and incorporate into their own style. The only thing that could potentially rival this would be the current role that AI is playing in the industry, the introduction of AI could potentially be an advancement on the same scale, or bigger than that of technologies like the Macintosh in the 80s.

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