
RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

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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.”

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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.

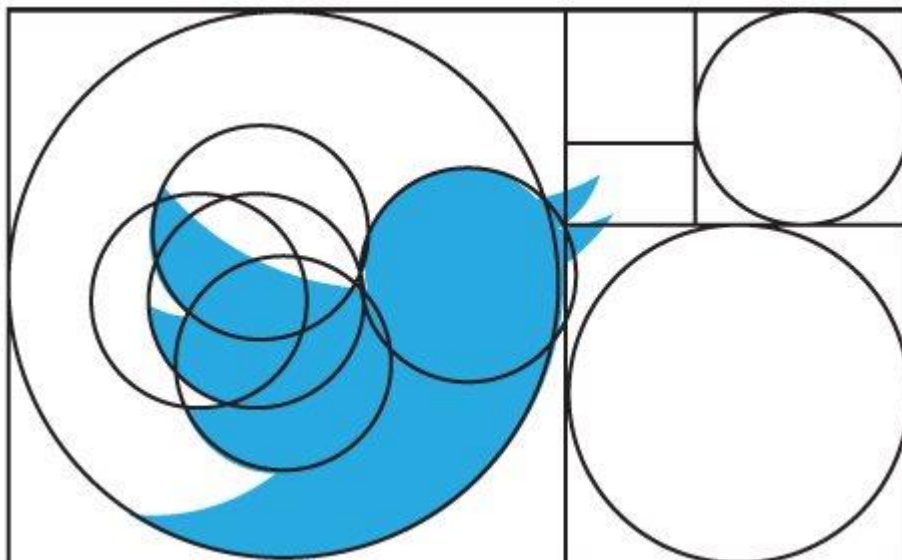
In this essay, I will discuss the building blocks of modern design via the use of new and emerging technologies, and artists that helped push these new techniques out into the modern world of graphic design. It is safe to say that a lot of graphic design you see today is born due to the fact that technologies like these exist, and this article will explore these technologies and the timeline of their existence correlating with their contribution to modern graphic design but most importantly the difference of graphic design before these technologies allowed us to do what they allow us to do.

A critical part in the new and emerging world of graphic design would be Swiss design. The term Swiss design as we see it today reflects modernism, can often be associated with minimalist design and in fact is a what a lot of graphic design today is based off of. 'During the 1950s a design movement emerged from Switzerland and Germany that designers call Swiss Design, and historians call the International Typographic Style. Its objective of clarity won converts throughout the world' (Visual Arts Department, 2011). Back then, the term was not only used to define a certain, specific style, but also in many variations to describe graphic design from Switzerland in general, or design produced by Swiss graphic designers (Fornari, et al., 2021). Led by designers Josef Müller-Brockmann at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts and Armin Hofmann at the Basel School of Design, the style favored simplicity, legibility and objectivity (Dominic Flask, 2010). Swiss design expresses designs via the use of grids, most of the time limited colour palettes to promote simplicity, and most importantly a dominant feature of Swiss designs in the 1950/60s were sans-serif typefaces. Sans serif typefaces were a dominant part of the swiss design movement, as previously mentioned the swiss design movement is based upon the idea of design being objective, prominent, to the point and it also emphasises neatness. Sans-Serif typefaces were the building blocks of swiss design in these times, the two most prominent typefaces being Akzidenz-Grotesk and of course Helvetica. In fact it was called Neue Haas Grotesk, but for marketing reasons the name was changed to Helvetica in 1960 (Eye Magazine, 2007). Helvetica was not completely original though, as it was based from the founding father typeface of Swiss Graphic design, Akzidenz-Grotesk. Helvetica was created within the swiss design movement to be the most simple but attractive typefaces suited directly for swiss design. It was of course when established, used in most pieces from the swiss design movement, like the ones you'll see below.



(Vivarelli) (1958)

Akzidenz-Grotesk was used to begin with when the swiss design movement started, as it used only the basic shapes to construct its characters, making it a very minimalist typeface, perfect when being used in the swiss design movement as the movement promote minimalism - it's most obvious features - Sans serif type range within a grid – were widely imitated across the world and, with the Swiss–designed type faces Helvetica and Univers, its influence has survived into the Digital age (Hollis, 2006). Helvetica was to follow suit to swiss design, had to be designed in typical swiss design fashion, using grids and geometric shapes as a foundation. The grid structure was a staple for graphic design and is used in a lot of modern logos to date. One prominent one being the twitter logo:



Quite a significant number of digital technologies have helped the creation of modern day graphic design, one significant one being the linotype machine. One majorly significant use of the linotype machine was the creation of Helvetica Neue, the modern day advancement of Helvetica. in 1983, D. Stempel AG, Linotype's daughter company, released the Neue Helvetica® font design, which was a

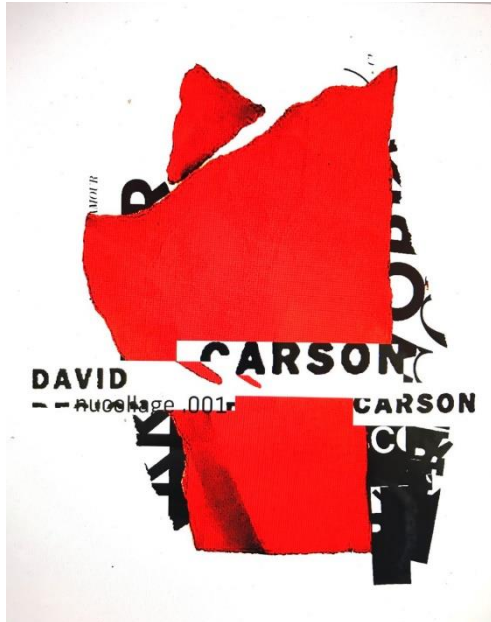
re-working of the 1957 original. In addition, Linotype released the Neue Helvetica Pro design in 2004, which is an OpenType version with expanded foreign language support (Strizver, 2021). Helvetica was adjusted so it was slightly wider, and the curves were made less complicated/exaggerated, to make it even more simple.

One technology helping the advancement of Swiss design would be the technical software, programmes and tools that can now be used in this day and age to form the finest of details in design that sometimes would not be possible in the very start of the swiss design era. For example the use of refined and incredibly powerful cameras that are able to generate high fidelity images. Swiss design's key principles are based from the relationship and shared canvas of typography and photography/imagery, and the advancement of photographic technologies such as cameras would make the images more refined and much better for the audience's viewing pleasure. By far the biggest modern revolution that has come from technology in the modern era of graphic design would be the creative software, such as Adobe, CorelDraw, Affinity etc. To begin with, photoshop being the biggest technological advancement in graphic design in its time. One that has allowed people to freely edit images to their full creative potential and there isn't much room for things that you aren't able to do in adobe photoshop.

This program, digital graphics software was taken advantage of by one David Carson. Ingrained within the surfing sub-culture of southern California, Carson started experimenting with graphic design during the mid 1980s. His interest in the world of surfing gave him the opportunities to experiment with design, working on several different publications related to the profession. Transworld Skateboarding, Beach Culture, How Magazine and RayGun were among the primary publications on which he worked. However, it was RayGun where he gained perhaps the most recognition and was able to share his design style, characterized by "dirty" type which adheres to none of the standard practices of typography and is often illegible, with the widest audience (Design Is History, 2010). A of work that was made possible without the technology representing the just mentioned original style of barely legible typography was the wall design that Carson did for Ace Hotel in Portland, in January 2014. This would be made possible by ink strokes across a page, and there's nothing about this image that shows its been digitally enhanced, and even though that he has made it without digital enhancement it is still a great piece of work.

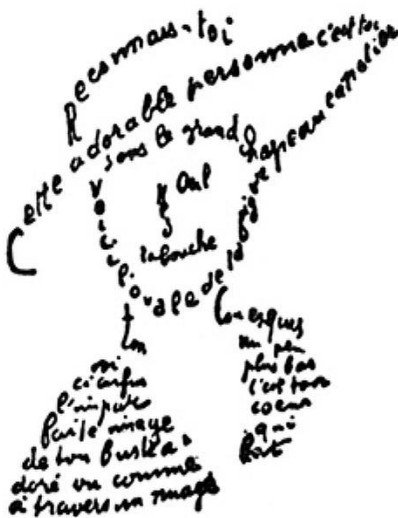


In his works as you can reference below, were created from the use of these very technologies. It allowed him to combine his photography and typography and make a piece that became the staple of his portfolio and even creating a style that others took inspiration from, by taking photos with refined cameras and using digital software to turn them into shapes, change their colour, and digitally layer them as you can see here. It is highly unlikely that without the help of these digital technologies that David Carson would not have been able to create such a piece.

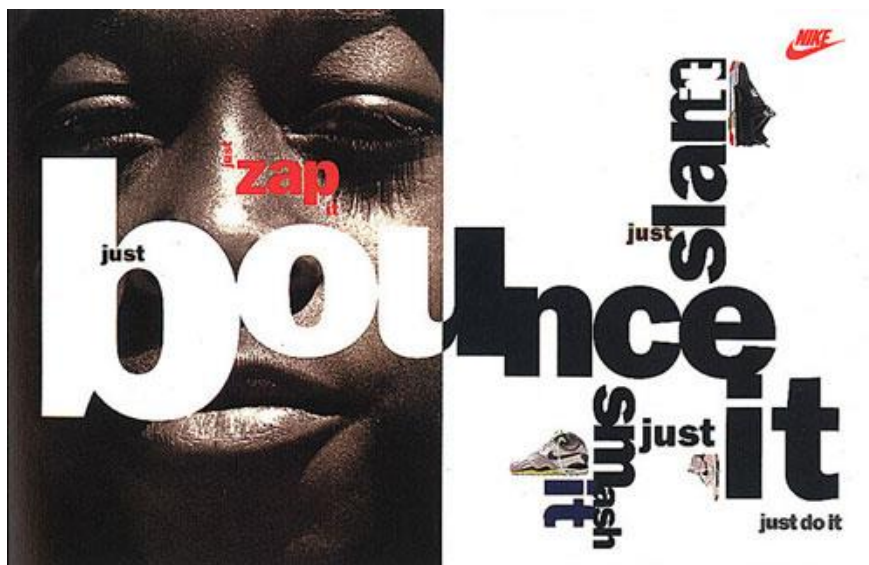


(Carson)

Previous works indicate that Carson did not use any type of technology, and he used simple hand drawn type to contrast his pieces. One being the one below, where he constructed the shape of a human figure with handwritten words. But as you can see, it was made very high quality and shadowless by some form of digital rendering.



However, compared to the artworks he was able to create with digital technology, it seems as if using digital advancements, he was able to further capture the depth of his creativity. For example, this piece, the photography would have had to have been potentially altered in photoshop, the typeface would have to have been typed in a piece of software, or at the very least, he would have had to have to have had them digitally cut with CAD software and printed on paper, for them to have then be scanned using a digital scanner or at the very least them being photographed, and then enhanced in a software. The rip textures would have to have been made in real life, but then put into a software to be altered and cut the way it appears in the artwork, put in via a digital photograph or scanner. In addition to this, quite obviously the shoe images would have had to be imported from Nike to create this collage piece.

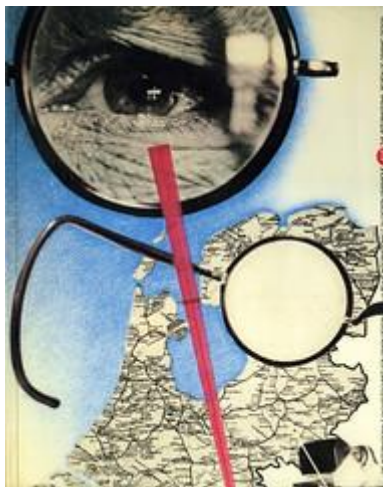


In terms of industry and the general start-up of design projects, as well as creative software, designers are also able to browse the internet freely in search for creative inspiration in order to have an idea to base their project from, or to see similar works to understand how other designers have approached a similar project. They can use search engines, look on portfolio websites of any designer that has one, look on creative communities such as Behance (Adobe) or 3dots to help their efforts to search for inspiration. In terms of commissioning, designers are able to communicate effectively with anyone from around the world, meaning not only more opportunities for design, but they're also able to use their communication with their client to generate a better design that suits the client more, with instant responses being highly possible. In addition to this, designers are able to rework their piece an infinity amount of times, as their software allows them to go over mistakes and adapt to different design pathways that they may create, while still having previous pathways saved ready to be used.

By far the biggest advancement of digital design in the 1980s was the invention of the Macintosh computer, where the first bit of digital art started to take life. While the computer has allowed for infinitely new developments of design techniques and mediums as well as increased efficiency of both the conception and production phases of design, it has also saturated the market with ineffective and misguided design produced by people with little or no education in graphic design.

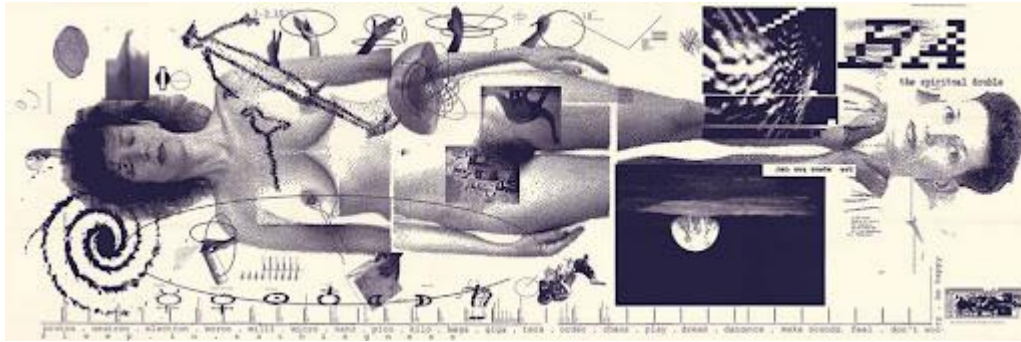
The development of cost-effective graphics driven software has allowed anyone with an interest in design to start exploring its application. It has also proven to be an effective collaboration tool allowing individuals from across the world to work and design together in partnerships that could not have otherwise existed. Allowing for the development of new fields of design, such as interactive design, and providing new ways of distributing traditional design mediums, such as advertising, the personal computer has provided a vast amount of opportunities for modern designers (Design Is History, 2010). Apple brought out the graphic software 'MacPaint', a piece of software where one could use a digital paintbrush and paint over the screen, change the colour of brushes, and create digital art.

Another artist that took advantage of the digital revolution of graphic design was British design writer, Rick Poyner, who founded Eye Magazine in 1990. The figure below being the first cover, as you can see, would not be possible to create physically without it being hand sketched, to which it is evident that it is not. The list of contributors over the past 20 years has included many important figures in the design community including Erik Spiekermann, Ellen Lupton, and Stefan Sagmeister. The quarterly publication is an international review of graphic design and, as of June 2010, it is on its 75th issue (Design In History, 2010). An important publication series that is prominent in the world of modern design would simply not exist without this revolution of digital design. Since Rick Poyner, there are technological changes: color throughout, digital photography and platemaking; more efficient, greener printing at Pureprint. And the content always changes, because graphic design itself is always changing (Walters, 2011).



(Eye)

Effects and textures would not have been possible in the above image without the technological revolution of the 1980s, as programmes such as Adobe PageMaker allowed designers to collage the elements of their work into one publication. "As a professional activity, graphic design faces an uncertain future now that new technology has opened up graphic production and expression to many more people," (Poyner, 2003), speaking about new technologies that are changing the graphic design world and the methods that designers used to work. A famous designer that did this, was one April Greiman. Greiman is regarded as one of the first ever designers to embrace and use computer technology as a design tool, as her famous technique of typelaying, would heavily require the use of computer technology in order to be created efficiently, a style that she made a trend when people began to realise the full capabilities of computers in design. According to design historian Steven Heller, "April Greiman was a bridge between the modern and postmodern, the analog and the digital." "She is a pivotal proponent of the 'new typography' and new wave that defined late twentieth-century graphic design." (School of Visual Arts (SVA), 2008).



(Greiman)

Greiman saw the future of design in computers, making some famous pieces of work showing why they were going to be important to the world of design and how powerful, and captivating computers can allow you to be. Greiman bought her first Macintosh and later received the Grand Prize in Mac World's First Macintosh Masters in Art Competition. In 1986, she published an issue for a magazine, notable for its development of graphic design, Design Quarterly. The Walker Art Center published her edition, titled Does it Make Sense (Famous Graphic Designers, 2014), to which the work featured above makes an appearance.. Not possible without the use of the technological revolution of the 1980s, again referring the Macintosh, the computer that kickstarted her passion for computer design. Design using computer technology opened up a lot different pathways for designers, ones that Greiman took advantage of. The idea of integrating the computer into design was an intimidating notion for many artists during the '80s. But Greiman was one of the few visionaries who wanted to go against the grain and recognise the potential of this new medium. As such, she established herself as a pioneer of digital communications design. Her bravery in exploring this field has inspired and encouraged the acceptance and use of technology in graphic design and the arts. With her curiosity and fascination with everything digital, she was able to produce cutting-edge design work that placed her at the helm of integrated design (Hello Creative Agency, 2020).

To conclude, it is justifiable to say that practically all graphic design that exists now is all down to the technological advancement of the 1980s. Whether it be the digital typographic style by April Greiman, the use of dirty type and collaboration of real life textures by David Carson, or creating digitally created and published Magazine issues by Eye Magazine, the world was changed forever by these new advancements and because of it, new techniques, new styles of design and new inspirational graphic designers will continue to be made.

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