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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.

‘A graphic designer without a computer and an email address is an endangered species’ (Pipes, 2001, p.9) Graphic designers are creatures that are reliant upon the development of technology and thrive when able to produce their work. For example, if you were to deprive a dog of food and water, they would simply no longer be able to exist. This is the same with graphic designers, take away their tools (computer) and source of communication (email) and they would become lost and without meaning. For designers, the biggest groundbreaking invention since the pen and paper is the computer. History shows nothing but the cold-hard facts that with time and moving into the future, the development of new technology is embraced by the creative community and they aren’t afraid of these changes. This can be seen strongly in the 1980’s where the digital revolution decided to remould the world.



Figure 1: The first Apple Mac computer created by Designed and made by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak.

Firstly, we'll start with one of the most influential designers to embrace digital design, Susan Kare. Now seen as an icon of her time just like the icons she created, Susan Kare is a name that all digital developers and graphic designers should know and love. 'Like many designers who go on to achieve great things, Kare fell into her speciality.' (Ashcroft, 2006, p.48). With the development of the digital era, came the promise and demand of new jobs, opening more doors than anyone knew would be opened. For Kare, this would change her life forever. Her employment repertoire is like no other, with a history of working by hand as a curator, moving on to working for Steve Jobs on more than one occasion, being part of the original Apple Mac design team and designing for the most famous and problematic social media site of all time, Facebook.



Figure 2: Susan Kare, Apple Macintosh OS icon sketchbook, 1982.

Kare's start in designing for the digital world began when she was hired to work for Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak creating the interface elements for the new soon-to-be revolutionary company Apple and their new Macintosh computer, all thanks to a school friend Andy Hertzfeld who already working for Job's and Wozniak as a programmer. While there, she went on to design iconic symbols like the command symbol (⌘) and the paint bucket icon. Still today '19 of the 20 symbols in the Kare-designed MacPaint tool palette... appear in some form in today's Photoshop Tools.' (Ashcroft, 2006, p.48). With this, she had expanded her portfolio of work to include the future of digital design as well as typographic design after creating notable typefaces like Chicago, Monaco,

Gothic and Geneva. As we can see here, good design lasts forever. I really feel that even the smallest elements can have the biggest impact on us as seen by Kare's icon designs more than 40 years on. Going back to the question, Kare's creations have defined the future that we are currently in and set boundaries and marks that we as designers constantly feel that we have to meet.

"The smiling Mac appeared at start-up to let users know everything was A-OK. "This was one of my favourites, because it summarized the problem I had to solve: making a friendlier computer.'" (Weiss and Kare, 2004). Here we see that Kare already had something in mind with her designs, making sure that the interface was usable was one problem, but then getting people to like it? This was a brand-new design challenge that nobody had ever seen or faced before and she had to do it. I guess that part of her design choices were made for her, being limited by the ways in which she could create due to screen and software being made of pixels. By embracing the pixel problem, she ended up with what we would probably consider as the cliché and stereotypical 'digital design look', where everything is a little blocky and at small scale, very simple. What I find most interesting about her quotation is this – 'Making a friendlier computer'. Considering that the Apple Mac was the first home computer of its time, I understand the idea of this new technology being intimidating and scary to use. By designing images and icons, it created a feeling to enhance the users experience, adding humour and excitement to this new venture, to the digital world.

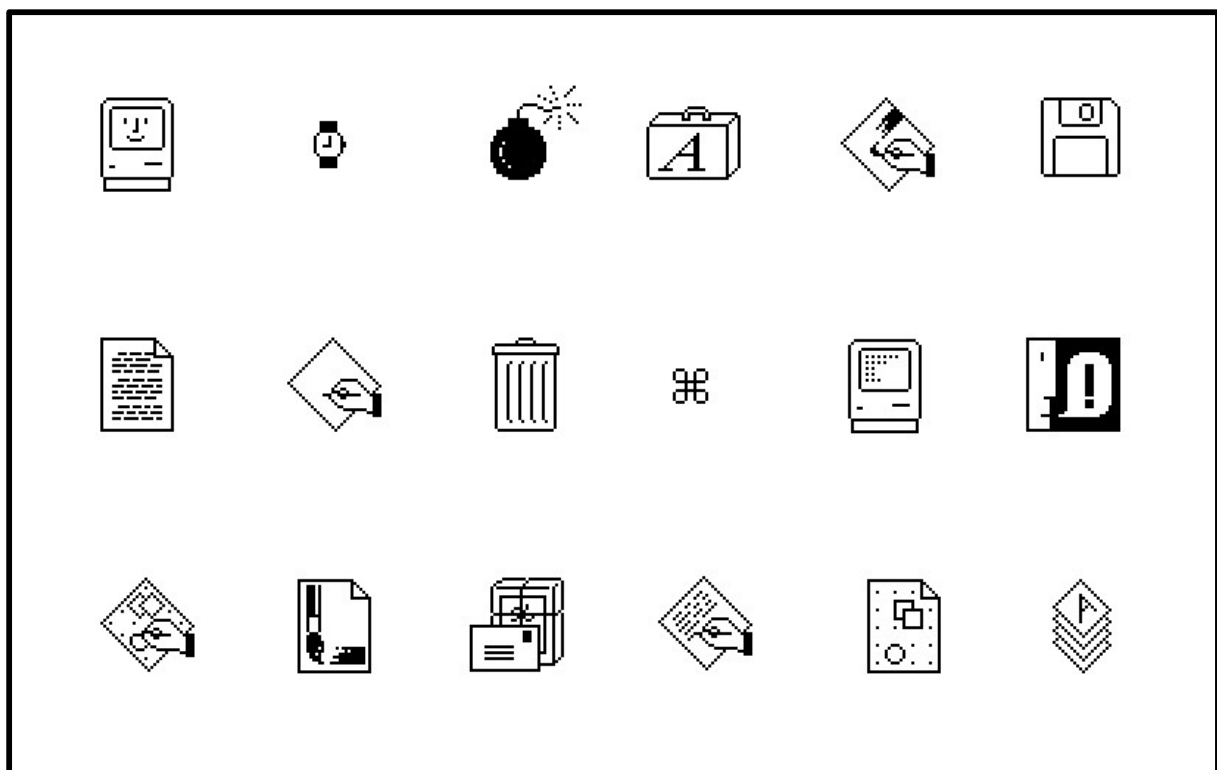


Figure 3: Susan Kare, Pixel art icons made for the Apple Macintosh system, 1980's.

From Ashcroft 'A Life in Pixels', he highlights the development of digital icons in today's Apple Mac display quoting Kare's view on how her original designs were intended to be used:

'Although her work with Apple still informs much that's in today's Mac OS X GUI, Kare believes the nature of Mac icons has changed. "The current icons are more illustrative and detailed, whereas mine function more as symbols, like traffic signs"'

(Ashcroft and Kare, 2006, p.50)

From this quote, we can see that even now, years on after the development of the Mac, the digital revolution is still ongoing. When interfaces for computers were first being developed, everything was simple, the basics of the basics. But now as time goes on and with it the digital world that we have now become consumed by, tastes become more refined and to keep up with it the aesthetic and look of design has grown to accommodate it. 'Kare's innovative work operated in parallel with her vision. Her designs were intuitive, meant to communicate ideas rather than being realistic' (Kohlstedt, 2018). She wanted the designs to be easily understood almost like their own language. I want to say her creations were ahead of their time, I can't as they were the start of something more to come. Her design for digital interface set in motion more than just design for screen or web, it was a call to all designers to say 'Hey! Look what I can do and this is where the design world is heading.' Kare and her work for me are the pinnacle of innovation.

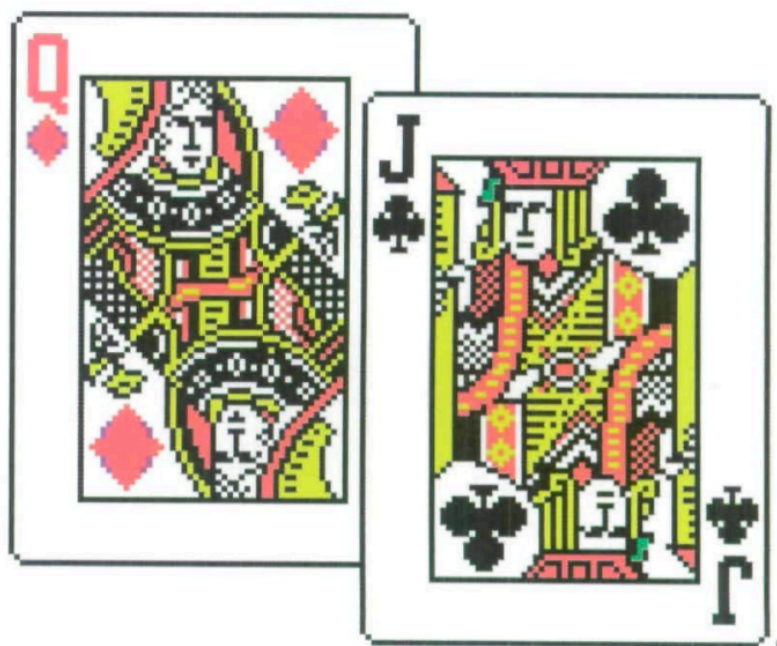


Figure 4: Susan Kare, Solitaire card designs for Apple Mac game, 1980's.

‘No longer did people need a degree in computer science to operate such a machine, and users could afford to buy the tools to add functions to their computers.’ (Blackwell, 1998, p.130). Because of how easy to access and mainstream the computer was becoming, being able to experiment was more of a possibility than ever. The design revolution had opened a portal to a different dimension, one that would definitely never be shut. And when leaping into new dimensions, you should always expect the unexpected and never underestimate what you could see. This brings me onto my second design choice for the development and acceptance of digital design. The Designers Republic (TDR) was founded by Ian Anderson in Sheffield, England. Just like not needing a degree to operate and navigate a computer system, having formal training in design wasn’t necessary for Anderson and his design career, with him leaving what we would consider the traditional and natural progression of entering the design world at the door. Ultimately TDR’s aim for when they develop their work is to solve a problem by creatively filling up a hole within the design and their solution was to through a new form of technology.



Figure 5: The Designers Republic, The Orb, A huge ever growing pulsating brain that rules from the centre of the Ultraworld, 1989.

‘What do you think was TDR reason of success? - Right place, right time... and the fact that there's always thinking and problem solving at the heart of everything I or we do.’ (Monaco and Anderson, 2019). The reason for success may have been ‘right place, right time’ as Anderson puts it, and in some ways, that’s true.

For him, the right time was being in the middle of the design revolution era, and the right place was in the midst of the UK music scene in the 70's and 80's. TDR themselves see their work as against the grain and I think this is down to a couple reasons, the main one being the reason for their existence – Band Art. For them this was their biggest source of clientele and the style of art that bands were drawn to was Anderson's digital designs. They were unusual and other worldly, something that hadn't been seen before and with the rise in rock and alternative music in the country, this turned out to be the perfect selection of people to design for. His designs were new, fresh and unique, which made it all the more appealing. From Figure 5, it's easy to say that a pink monochrome cut out photo of Battersea power station floating upside-down through space surrounded by six moons is unusual and wouldn't have been a possibility of getting created let alone have been an idea before the new wave of digital design. I don't think it was hard to challenge the past history of design as all of these album covers and poster designs that were being produced and sent out into the public eye at such a high quantity, this made it easy to gain people's attention. I see TDR's designs as small pieces of art that were being produced on a massive scale. This coupled with their client base set in stone the entire identity of what a 1980's British Punk/Rock band looked like and somewhat directly influenced how that entire genre of music is viewed in today's society.

With the design revolution, new styles were emerging and being explored, and at this time the most prevalent was postmodernism. With the development of technology, more possibilities and design dreams were becoming realities. From 'Graphic Design, reproduction and representation since 1800', we see the concept of a 'post' world where in which design and style norms (in this case for modernism) are now coming into the opposing side and will be challenged against what's considered the norm or a trend.

'In the world of the *Post*... no hierarchies of representation or cultural differences stand: it is, as it is often noted, a flat terrain where all things as *images* are treated equally, and everything is vulnerable to pastiche.'

(Jobling & Crowley, 1996, p.276)

In this case, TDR lent into this new emerging style at the right time which I feel helped them secure their place in design history. The pastiche of post modernism is so used and is true and tried that when you look back at its origin, TDR is one of the designers that's front and centre. The flat terrain that is spoken of is the digital screen, rendering everything at face value, all elements have the same opportunities and are seen together on even footing.



Figure 6: The Designers Republic, PlayStation game design 'Wipeout', 1996.

The effects of TDR's work also expanded into different subjects, and here I'm focusing on games design. If we were talking about moving into the future, then computer and digital gaming is one of the biggest categories to stumble out of the invention of the computer. To combine the gaming world with what it's stemmed from, the influence of digital art was bound to make its appearance on the cover of gaming products. For TDR, this happened with one of their biggest clients Psygnosis. With new developments in human advancement, you're going to run into some problems. Because so many design possibilities could be made very quickly and without much hassle, clients could ask for amendments and changes without worrying about the cost of time. From TDR's website, it gives some background of the changes made to the Wipeout project.

'When we eventually presented the final packaging designs, the slightly disappointed reaction (from the top) was that there wasn't any of the Japanese influence they'd seen in other TDR designs on their cover... all we had to hand on a zip was "The Designers Republic" in Japanese. "Use that," they said. "No-one who can read it will know..." Except in Japan...'

(Anderson, 1996)

I picked this quotation because it's a great example of how quickly changes can be made to digital work and how expectations from clients are made based on work they've seen from their designer.

The final designer(s) I have chosen to look at are Zuzana Licko and Rudy Vanderlans. Working as a couple, the two had much in common, being born in Europe, the switch to graphic design from other creative subjects and loving the integration and creation of the mac all contributed to the harmonious work environment they created together. To put it plainly, they created a digital typographic empire. If you could have a baby that wasn't human, it would be something like *Emigre* I imagine. Between the two of them, they created *Emigre* which was a design company founded in 1984, when the Apple Mac really started to take off and turn heads, whether it be good or bad. The original premise of the self-produced *Emigre* magazine was to showcase Zuzana's work to the world and let people see what was capable of being produce between them and the Mac through his (Vanderlands') layouts and compositions. Further down the line, the magazine 'provided an international forum for scrutinizing new and experimental graphic design, focusing on design philosophy and the impact of visual communication on society.' (Harper, 1999, p.50).

From an interview between Licko, Vanderlands and Dover, she asks the question on how they have become influenced and the influences between the two of them.

'We started our design careers at the same time the Apple Macintosh was introduced, and unlike many designers at the time, we both loved it! We used the computer in very different ways, though. Zuzana has a rather methodical, almost mathematical, approach and she was immediately interested in the possibility of creating type. I was more interested at the time in chance encounters and computer glitches and how those would influence a layout. The computer was able to accommodate us both. So, it wasn't so much that we influenced each other, but that the computer provided a working environment that allowed each of us to do work that complemented the other perfectly.'

(Vanderlands, 2010)

This quotation show the complete embrace and lack of fear the two of them had by the introduction of the Mac. I think it was thanks to this curiosity and willingness to embrace change and a new uncharted design element that they were able to reach the heights they got to with making an impact on the design community and the future societies that have felt its effects.

For the two of them, the Mac 'was a primitive tool during those first years'. (*Emigre*, 1993). Especially with a lot of designers nowadays, I think a computer is to heavily relied upon to complete one's work, not that I'm saying we should go back to a time before the digital revolution, but rather to point out the fact that some of the essence of being a designer has become lost along the way with the development in technology. For Licko and Vanderlans, they understood that they were the ones still in charge of the designs and that the computer was just another object for them to manipulate for the true aim of design.



Figure 7: Zuzana Licko, Base Monospace typeface, 1997.



Figure 8: Page spread from Emigre magazine, issue No. 43 called Designers are People Too, 1997.

Above in Figures 7 & 8 are some examples of Licko and Vanderlands' work in combination together. 'Through the years the Emigre partners have endured their fair share of criticism from the design community' (Harper, 1999, p.53), 'Some things are always misunderstood by people...to deny a signal interpretation. That's what drives many designers' crazy...if innovative work is misunderstood... it's been granted more meaning than

was put in it.' (Vanderlands, 1999, p.53). While researching I also looked at Peter Saville. I read both of their views on visual communication and how it's used through technology, and I feel that together, they all belong to the same coin, with Saville being tails – the negative and pessimist about it - and Licko and Vanderlands being heads, always optimistic about what's to come. Over all Emigre's digital effect on society is wide spread with them influencing a range of people like the media sector as well as bits of religion and philosophy not just designers. They've also had a powerful influence in print, production and business and they showed other artists that it's possible to produce your own work without the use of external help.

To conclude, each of the designers all have something different that's made them a leader in the advancement of design technology. For Kare, she set the tone of all the possibilities, TDR saw the potential it had to mould cultural aspects and *Emigre* showed us what technology could do and to provide a self-sufficient future in design. Because of their willingness to learn and explore the digital world, we have opportunities to continue to change the future through design.

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