

Acknowledgments

The idea for this book originated during the 1960s at the West of England College of Art (particularly stimulated by discussions with the late Paul Schuitema) and at the Central School of Art in London; much of its visual material was assembled at the same time. The author's work would have been impossible without the help of many designer colleagues. Their names would make a list of unmanageable length, but among them particular thanks are due to Nicholas Biddulph, Sheila Bull, the late Mel Calman, Jon Corpe, Robin Fior, the late F.H.K. Henrion, David King, Robin Kinross, Guillaume Lefébure, Giovanni Lussu, Ruedi Rüegg, Philip Thompson and Marion Wesel.

The library staff at Central St Martins College of Art and Design and the St Bride's Printing Institute in London and the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich were especially helpful. Ann Creed Books and the David King Collection have generously lent material for illustration; Julian Hawkins was unfailingly co-operative in its photography, and the text has benefited from the editorial attention of Debbie Radcliffe and the typographical expertise of Adam Hay.

The author is also grateful to his clients for their patience during the book's long incubation and also particularly to his wife, Posy Simmonds.

Author's note

The illustrations are intended to function in the same way as projected images at a lecture, and are for reference only, or for the reader's own further research. The scale of the original work is indicated by its description ('poster' or 'leaflet'); the size at which it is reproduced is sufficient only to convey the way in which words and images have been employed. Rather than giving individual credits, each image has been identified only by designer and title or description. The format of the captions has been devised to avoid distraction. They serve as references, and translations are given only where necessary.

Beware wild animals
British road sign



Campaign for
Nuclear Disarmament
poster 1960
(F.H.K. Henrion)



New York State
Department of Commerce
promotional logo
(Charles Moss /
Wells, Rich, Greene)



Introduction

Visual communication in its widest sense has a long history. When early man hunted for food, and spotted the imprint of an animal in the mud, he was looking at a graphic sign.



His mind's eye saw the animal itself.

Graphics can be signs, like the letters of the alphabet, or form part of another system of signs, like road markings. Put together, graphic marks – the lines of a drawing or dots of a photograph – form images. Graphic design is the business of making or choosing marks and arranging them on a surface to convey an idea.

A sign is not a picture. Graphic images are more than descriptive illustrations of things seen or imagined. They are signs whose context gives them a unique meaning, and whose positioning can lend them a new significance.

Most usually words and images are used together; either text or image may dominate, or each have its meaning determined by the other. Some of the most sophisticated examples of graphic design have relied on the precision of words to give an exact meaning to an ambiguous image.

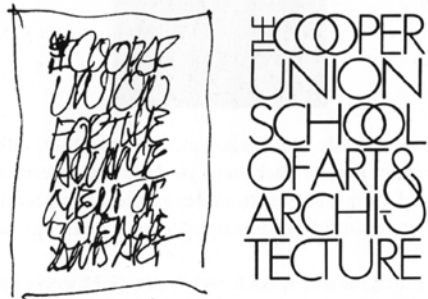
When printed, the word, as a form of recorded speech, loses a whole range of expression and inflection. Contemporary graphic designers (and particularly their precursors, the Futurists) have tried to break this limitation. Their work gives sound to typographic expression through the size, weight and position of the letters. Indeed the urge to do more than merely convey a message, to give it a unique character, is instinctive.

Context also determines the sense of the design and how it is read. One of the best-known modern graphic designs – 'I love New York' – a mixture of pictogram and alphabetic signs, depends for its message on an agreed understanding of meaning and convention. We recognize

the image as a heart because that is how hearts are represented. When it is a textbook diagram the heart is no longer a metaphor for love.



The meaning that images and alphabetic signs convey has little to do with who made or chose them: they do not express their designers' ideas. The designer's message serves the expressed needs of the client who is paying for it. Although its form may be determined or modified by the designer's aesthetic preferences or prejudice, the message has to be put in a language recognized and understood by its intended audience. This is the first way in which graphic design is significantly different from art (even though a large number of the early pioneers of graphic design were themselves artists). Secondly, unlike the artist, the designer plans for mechanical production. After commissioning, designs begin as rough layouts on paper or on a computer screen. The designer often acts as an art director, supervising commissioned photography or other illustrative material. Proposals discussed with the client are often revised in several stages, before the final form of the design is prepared with instructions for production.



As a profession, graphic design has existed only since the middle of the twentieth century; until then, advertisers and their agents used the services provided by 'commercial artists'. These specialists were visualizers (layout artists); typographers who did the detailed planning of the headline and text, and gave instructions for typesetting; illustrators of all kinds, producing anything from mechanical diagrams to fashion sketches; retouchers; lettering artists and others who prepared finished designs for reproduction. Many commercial artists – such as poster designers – combined several of these skills.

'Charity for German prisoners of war and civilian internees' poster 1918 [Ludwig Hohlwein]



above, left
19th century medical illustration

'Kaffee Hag looks after your heart' advertisement 1920s (pack design 1906) [Eduard Scotland]

National Blood Transfusion Service symbol 1948 [F.H.K.Henrión]

rough sketch for logotype and completed design 1960s [Herb Lubalin]

Physical supports and structures for graphics:

the single sheet printed one side



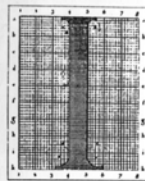
the single sheet printed both sides and folded



a number of sheets folded and fastened with or without a cover



construction of the letter 'R' Venice 1509



construction of the letter 'I' Paris 1692

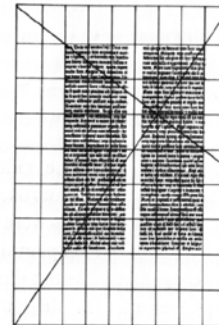
right
'42-line Bible' 1445
left-hand page
fitting a grid of rectangles 9x9
based on the page proportion

The principle of letterpress printing from the raised surface of individual letters of moveable type from Diderot's *Encyclopédie* 1745-72

Graphic design has overlapped the work of the agencies and studios and now embraces not only advertisements, but also the design of the magazines and newspapers they appear in. The lone designer has become part of a team in the communications industry – the world of advertising, magazine and newspaper publishing, marketing and public relations.

Until the late nineteenth century, graphics were essentially black and white, print on paper. The relationship of the image and background, the inked and the non-inked, positive and negative space, became crucial to the aesthetics of the whole. The non-inked area can be just as important visually as the inked, and thus the background, its proportions and dimensions, its colour and texture, is an integral part of graphic design. At the same time, the background provides the physical support for the images and signs. The most common support is paper. The single sheet, printed on one side, may be a poster or a letter. As the sheet is folded once, it becomes a leaflet; folded again and fastened, it becomes a booklet; multiples of folded sheets, when trimmed, make a magazine or book. These – the poster, leaflet, booklet, magazine and book – are the physical structures on which graphic designers must organize their information. The content of the individual page, the double-page spread and subsequent pages must be arranged and structured to be viewed in sequence, as the narrative literally unfolds.

Graphic designers in the West inherited the Roman alphabet, whose forms had changed little for centuries. Initially imitating the letters made by the pen of the scribes, the letterforms evolved as variations of those in Roman inscriptions. Different versions of this historic prototype developed between the fifteenth and the twentieth centuries; the geometry of letters, their symmetry and proportions, attracted almost obsessive debate. Such preoccupations exemplify the changing pressures on designers from aesthetic fashion and technical progress in each period.



GLOIRE à DIEU.
Honneur au ROI.
Salut aux ARMES.

Over several centuries, the three basic functions of graphics have changed as little as the Roman alphabet, and any one design may be

used in all three ways. The primary role of graphic design is that of **identification**: to say what something is, or where it came from (inn signs, banners and shields, masons' marks, publishers' and printers' symbols, company logos, labels on packaging). Its second function, known in the profession as Information Design, is for **information and instruction**, indicating the relationship of one thing to another in direction, position and scale (maps, diagrams, directional signs). Most distinct from this is its third use, **presentation and promotion** (posters, advertisements), where it aims to catch the eye and make its message memorable.

Graphic design is now part of the culture and economy of the industrialized countries. However, despite progress in technology since the 1960s, allowing messages to be bounced off orbiting satellites and giving shared access to images, developments are still surprisingly localized and, though most designers work as part of a team, change is still associated with individual pioneers. New forms are nurtured in response to commercial pressures and changing technology, yet at the same time graphic design continues to feed off its own traditions. Although many images are created by designers themselves, many more are ready-made, like the old woodblocks re-used by medieval printers from earlier jobs, old engravings or stock photographs from a picture agency. The electronic revolution has given us the possibility of storing images from earlier periods and recycling them, manipulating and assembling them in contemporary design.

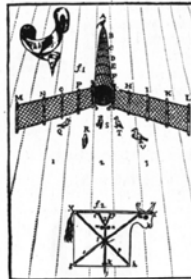
These factors have led to a chronological organization of this book, by developments in countries that have influenced graphic design internationally. The book uses the example of those designers who have most obviously contributed to the development of graphic design or are the most typical practitioners of their period. It charts the transformation of printed communication, and the role of new techniques and technology – photography and the computer – which have given the designer increasing control over the means by which graphics are produced and reproduced.

Graphic design constitutes a kind of language with an uncertain grammar and a continuously expanding vocabulary; the imprecise nature of its rules means that it can only be studied, not learnt. We cannot properly understand a piece of graphic design unless we can read the words. This book tries to make clear why alphabet and image look as they do. Its primary concern is not with what they look like, but what, together, they can be made to mean. It begins with the poster. As a single sheet, unfolded and printed only on one side, it is the simplest medium for graphic design. It exemplifies its essential elements – alphabet and image – and its means of reproduction.

Identification:
tabard, shield and plumed helmet of
Bertrand du Guesclin,
constable of France
woodcut book illustration 1487



Information and instruction:
How to trap birds
woodcut illustration, Paris 1660



presentation and promotion:
'Globéol' tonic
advertisement 1912
photomontage
(R. Ehrmann)

From Graphic Art to Design 1890 to 1914

1

The Art Poster

As graphic design, posters belong to the category of presentation and promotion, where image and word need to be economical, connected in a single meaning, and memorable. In the streets of the expanding cities at the end of the nineteenth century, posters were an expression of economic, social and cultural life, competing to attract buyers for goods and audiences for entertainments. The attention of the passers-by was grabbed by the posters' colour, made possible by the development of lithographic printing. Their illustrations, given a precise context by the text, reflected the artistic fashion of the day, and introduced a new aesthetic of simplified, economical images which derived from their means of reproduction.

Before lithography, posters were printed by letterpress, like books, in black ink from type with occasional woodblock illustrations. It was the printer who chose the type and arranged it, usually to fill the printed sheet. Although photography had existed for some decades, its images could not be reproduced in a large size, nor in large numbers. Artists now painted poster designs, which were transferred by hand to the flat surface of lithographic printing stones – one for each colour, sometimes using as many as fifteen – a technique which survived until well after the Second World War. This 'chromolithography' allowed the reproduction of the complete range of tone and colour of oil paintings like *Bubbles* (1886), the famous painting of a child by Sir John Millais, bought by Pears and used to advertise their soap.

The integration of artistic and industrial production is exemplified in the career of Jules Chéret. Son of a type compositor and apprenticed to a lithographer in Paris, he went to London to study the latest techniques. Back in Paris in the 1860s, Chéret gradually developed a system of three- or four-colour printing: a black drawing on a graduated, pale background colour, usually blue at the top, with the addition of strong red and delicate yellow. Chéret and those artists who followed his example in the 1890s could themselves draw with ink or chalk or paint freely on the printing stone to give large areas of solid colour, or they could spatter the surface to achieve a broken texture. The stone on which they drew gave a dense or open texture to the marks they chalked on it, providing a photographic range of tone. In this way, the artist had direct access to the process of reproduction, without the technical demands and graphic limitations of engraving in metal and wood.

From 1866, Chéret's studio and printing factory carried out the reproduction and printing of his own designs, sometimes on a scale of up to 2.5 metres (8ft) high, which required more than one sheet of paper. Almost without variation, they consisted of the single life-size figure of

Bubbles
chromolithograph
advertisement 1886
(J. E. Millais)



'Madrid International Exhibition'
advertisement 1893
(Théophile Alexandre Steinlen)

