IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE CHAIR

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

the throne of man

mass production and the designer

i love the smell of mechanised reproduction in the morning

we loves the precious [values]

CHAPTER TWO

everyone screws designers over

i communicate therefore i am

that’s a bit right wing isn’t?

CHAPTER THREE

i, me, you mac

they’ve got it! so i want one!

you grubby, little, anti designer

‘next saturday night, we’re sending you back to the future.’

CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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I like sitting down. Generally I prefer to lie down, but I’ll take a chair over standing when I can. When the chair you are sitting in is a design icon, it makes the experience even more special. For me, one such chair is the Barcelona chair. It is such an icon and inspirational piece of furniture that had an incredible impact upon society. When I first discovered the chair I was intrigued by the reverence that was shown to it by artists, designers and architects alike. My aim is to use the chair as a centrepiece for my written work, as I explore how designers effect society and influence it. I am keen to follow the different aspects of how we as designers can influence the world around us; I felt it necessary to explore the challenges that Van Der Rohe experienced when he was creating the chair, and the new techniques that were emerging in industry. As this can be applied to the process that designers go through to this day. One such process was mass-production, which is now essential to all manufactured products. I want to follow this process and note the trends and styles that it is responsible for to this day.

My motivation for this work is an interest in social behaviour. One notable product is the iPod. I am intrigued by the way in which society embraces it and makes it so popular. I pondered how a small and seemingly insignificant step forward in design, can have such massive effects on society. This is partly the reason for me choosing the Barcelona chair. This and other work of Van Der Rohe stimulated the growth of the modernist movement that changed the 20th century, as we know it. I am constantly wondering if the work that any of us are doing right now will create a sensation, or a new movement in art and design that will change the forthcoming century. I am excited by this time and see it as a time for revolution and change.

I want to take the reader on a journey throughout my work, and explore with them the different ideas and process that have enabled artists and designers to influence the world around them. I want to structure my writing into 3 chapters, each following a loose chronological flow of events from when the chair was
made, in 1929 to today. In chapter 1 I want to explore the history of the chair and the techniques that were used to make it. Firstly I want to set the scene and position the chair for the reader within the history. I then intend to explore mass-production as a tool used in the early 20th century. I believe that it is a vital to trace this as I mentioned earlier. I believe that when talking about the reproduced object I also need to mention the values associated with each item and the response of society to the replication.

In chapter 2 I then want to go on and explore how designers interact with society and how their work influences through specific mediums. With mass-production also comes mass-communication, which I believe is imperative, in our modern age, for designers to use mass media and communication to spread their work and therefore influence society. Allot of the work in the early 19th century was influenced by politics, I want to look at this political influence and how it shaped the art forms of the last Century.

In Chapter 3 I would like to talk about a contemporary example of design that has affected society. As the chair is an object, not just an image or advert, I feel that the iPod and iMac are amazing examples of how design can influence and set trends. Following on from this I would like to talk about how popular culture works within trends and fashion and how as designers, we influence this popular culture. To end my written work I would like to talk about the current debate, put forward by Brody and Evans, on anti design versus corporation led design. I feel this is a very current issue, which needs to be discussed, by designers and design students today. Finally I want to talk about the revolution that we are going through right now, and look back through history to similar periods in our century. Such as Dadaism and punk, both of which were born out of political and economical problems.

A key piece of writing I will quote in reference to my work is Walter Benjamin’s The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. I believe that Benjamin is
the foremost important philosopher of modern times in regards to mass-production and the work of art. I will use his ideas as a springboard in my first chapter on mass-production. One piece of terminology, that I feel I should explore in this work, is Benjamins idea of ‘the aura of the work of art’ I aim to explore this terminology in my writing and explore how it can be applied to mass-produced items today. Later on, in chapter 3, I aim to engage with the anti-design vs corporate design debate that Neville Brody is heading up right now. I will break up the argument between Brody and Ben Evans (London Design Week) and look at how this will affect design today. I want to make note of this video debate, because I believe it marks a time of change, much like the changes that occurred in the 1980s and 1920s, eventually proposing that from this we could see another icon being created, like the chair.
At the beginning of the 20th century there was a creative revolution, which rocked the world of art, design and architecture until the present. This revolution enabled the designer to be a major influence on society, through the designs that we create and release. One particular design that was created during this time of turmoil and turbulence was the Barcelona Pavilion chair, created by Ludwig Miles Van Der Rohe, as part of Germany’s entry to the 1929 Wolds Art Fair, that was to be hosted in Barcelona [McDermot, C 1997:115]. The chair was created for one purpose, to add to the space inside the pavilion and through its design supplement the interior of the Pavilion, which was decked in three types of marble. Van Der Rohe knew that he would not only have to create furniture that would stand out but also compliment the building itself. He then created the Barcelona chair that echoed back in time to Roman and Egyptian designs, also new and fresh. Design like this had never been seen before. It was a revolution. Incorporating a modern sense of ergonomics and comfort that was new and fresh. Design like this had never been seen before. It was a revolution.

This was not a standard chair it was made with elegance and beauty, something that not only fulfilled the brief, that all chairs must be functional, but something that could be looked upon with reverence in regard to its shape and form. The 1920s were tempestuous times, Economically, socially and politically; speaking things were moving forward at a faster rate. These were times of modernism and it was Modernistic values that motivated the ‘creatives’. Politically (fascism and communism) were marching with ever increasing support in Europe. After the First World War, Germany and England were competing to be the most advanced industrial country in the world. Through this race was born an industrial technique that played an important role in the story of this chair. It is the reason we design the way we do today. The industrial practice is mass-production.
Everything around us in the 21st century is mass-produced. From the clothes we wear to the tools we use, our lives are made upon the conveyer belt of production that constantly churns out the products we need to make our lives what they are; lavish. [1] Before this method of production, items that were sold were unique; either hand made or produced using old archaic methods that were time and energy consuming. Walter Benjamin describes the process of mass production through art in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction; he describes how the technique of reproduction removes the reproduced object from the realm of tradition. [1992:215] Mass-production is a modern process; it is the backbone of capitalism, it was the foothold for the emergence of the great United States of America to be the world superpower. I agree with Benjamin, as he states that the object, or art form, is removed from tradition. Traditionally we would have to buy a unique item from a craftsman that was purpose built for our needs, and unique in nature. Then, through mass-production, our items and needs were impersonalised, taken from the realm of hand-made items, to hundreds of thousands of the same object being replicated. So from tradition, we extract ourselves and move to the modern. It is at this juncture that I would like to point to the chair; the chair that was designed for the very purpose of mass-production, yet retained style and elegance. There were many other items at this time that used the same process, but they lack the iconic status that came along with this chair.

It was a change, the beginnings of hope for the proletariat, who were now able to purchase an item, which was identical to the one that a Royal was using for instance. “Miles displayed his famous chair as thrones for the Spanish king and queen” McDermott, C [2001:115] When the King and Queen viewed the German pavilion it is said that they sat in the chairs, this added to the ‘cult’ value of the chair. It was, in a sense, a celebrity endorsement. Before mass production no item was the same. The maker’s mark was unique to each item he made, unique to each wealthy owner that it was made for; now there was an item that the wealthy desired and
an equal item that the middle class man could own. It is an idea that Penny Sparke explores in An Introduction to Design & Culture in the Twentieth Century, she states that “…the period before mass-production and mass-consumption when taste had been controlled by a landed and intellectual aristocracy whose values, in that socially stable context, had provided the model for the rest of society to emulate.” [2000:108] I agree with Sparke in this statement, I believe that it was certainly the aristocracy that controlled popular trends. On a contemporary level I believe that contextually the same can be said about celebrity culture. Today we have the same values and objects; the celebrities are just the face of the item and we impute our values on that product based on the celebrity that endorses it. We want it, because they have it, and look so good with it. In reference to this Adrian Palmer states that “Celebrities are often used to endorse a product or an organization. We have a tendency to impute to the endorsed product the qualities that we have come to like about our favourite celebrity characters.” Introduction to Marketing, Theory and Practice [2004:404]

The customers knew that the items they were buying were the same as the original. This was revolutionary, this was modernism and everything it stood for; simplicity and beauty in the homes of the people. Benjamin describes this process, he states that by allowing the reproduction to be owned by the end user in their own particular situation, reactivated and gave, the object reproduced, a special meaning to that user. [1992:215] I know that Benjamin was referencing art forms, and popular paintings when he wrote this, but I believe that this observation on the reproduced item is so true in many different ways. I believe that people view their items as unique. Even though, that person’s item is no different than the hundreds of others that were made, the user still views it as unique and nothing can replace it. This attachment to the object, in Benjamin’s words, reactivates it, making the object as meaningful to the owner as one of a kind.
This wonderful technique that allowed good design to spread into the homes of the people was refined in the most negative of places, in the foundries of war. It was mass production that was the beating heart of war and ultimately was the key to success in the theatres of war during World War 1 and World War 2; the techniques that were used for everyday items were refined through the production of munitions, machine guns, and tanks. How far has society come, where every item is made using this method of production? It is clear that it was war that drove technology to the point it is today, without it I feel it would have taken much longer for man to discover many of the great innovations of the 20th century. I find it very interesting that Walter Benjamin made the observation in Illuminations, “Only War makes it possible to mobilize all of today’s technical resources while maintaining the property system” [1992:234] It strikes me that he was aware of the pace and effect that technology had at that time, for even as he wrote the Fascist party in Germany was gaining political ground and taking control of systems, pushing towards the Second World War.

The technique of mass production itself has many pro’s and cons, like any technology its birth was one of helping mankind to better itself; but through the walk of time it has come with many associations of greed, enslavement and ecological destruction. When mass production was created it was seen as positive, emancipating the public and offering products and items that they never would have dreamed of owning before. In relation to the Barcelona chair, we see that such items would have before been unattainable by the proletarian, but after this process they were able to have their own, well-crafted items. It was Serge Chermayeff who wrote in Design and the Public Good, “Mass production and maximum prefabrication are the good result of the machine” [1994:23-24] I think he was wrong; this process wasn’t just the good result of the machine, but the full and entire purpose of the machine. It opened up products to the home in a way that never before could have been accomplished for companies or consumers. It’s certainly true that the benefit of mass production is priceless for the company, but what about the negative effects on...
society? To make a product en masse requires incredible amounts of energy; it produces incredible amounts of waste and ultimately puts the craftsman and artist out of work as Chermayeff summarizes “on the other side we find that profit-making has been responsible for the commercial expedient of turning the machine into competing with the artist and craftsman by reproducing hand-work.” [ibid] This is a very true observation and we can see it all around us, as the small businessman suffers the giant corporation grows, take for instance the situation of the local small food shop being shut down by the large Tesco; just one example of a plethora of similar cases. Regardless of these facts, we still need and will use mass production forever, it was truly a revolutionary discovery that enabled and advanced mankind.
The Barcelona Pavilion chair is a great example of this advancement; a piece of design of simplicity and ergonomic attributes that enabled it to stand out amongst all others, a design that even to this day is still marked for being great; but above all a design that was created so that it could be produced for all to have. I think this highlights the importance of a designer’s work, the importance of a designer’s impact upon society and our role as caretakers of good design. We have the power to create trends and destroy them, to make statements and influence the public. When looking at the chair, we see the impact of Van Der Rohe through the simplicity of it. He played a massive role in the modernism movement, a movement that shaped our entire world as we know it is there a greater claim than that? Chermayeff explored how we as designers can snow-ball our work into the public realm, “the responsibility of the designer who’s design will be mass produced by thousands, tens or hundreds of thousands whether it be a piece of furniture or an advertising layout, as compared to the very limited production of an eighteenth century chair maker” [1994:247] Chermayeff is stating that before mass production, a craftsman or designer would just create one thing, one item that would be placed in, the clients home, or office, now as a designer our designs can be placed in hundreds of thousands if not millions of homes. A good example might be the Apple iPod or iMac, items that were fantastically designed but so functional, so ergonomic that they became instant hits with the public, and became centrepieces of the home. There are certainly specific requirements that are put down on a design, that must be essential for it to work, again Chermayeff states “…the furniture for today and tomorrow must be strong, cheap and mass-produced, of good, simple and machine-indicated design. To serve the special and peculiar needs of our time, a new style is evolving.” [1994:230] Even though he refers to furniture I believe that he is making a statement here that spans more than that specific field of design. All design must be simple, and it is the simply designed items that work and are still remembered, like Van Der Rohe’s chair. We celebrate the mass produced designs that take pride of place in our lives. We owe much of our principle in
design to the designers and architects of the early 20th century, their methods and philosophy has enabled a revolution to take place in the last decade. Above all it is mass production that plays a vital role in our position as designers and our influence on the world around us; it is the doorway that gives our work access to society.
It is fair to say that popular culture and social ‘life’ have changed dramatically since mass-production was conceived. As consumers, life has evolved at an incredible rate since mass-production was first introduced. Our very society has been shaped around it. What an incredible process we have at our fingertips. For consumers mass-production means cheaper products, a massive amount of products, and mass-consumerism as a result. In his book Henry Ford, Mass Production, Modernism and Design Ray Batchelor discusses this very issue of value within our society. The value of social life increased with the introduction of mass production. Batchelor states “consumerism is a more democratic form of the sins or luxuriousness and materialism previously confined to the wealthy.” [1994:135] Suddenly items were available to anyone, cheaply and instantly. I want to explore the value though, the values of society but most of all the values of the designer and the need for them in this new time. It is Sparke who summarizes that due to rapid developments in mass production, and a sudden increase in population, which provided new scales of manufacturing and consumption that ‘design’ took on a new and unparalleled role in contemporary life. [2000:3] It was clear that from this process the designer’s role became increasingly important and I agree with Sparke in that.

I believe that the designer’s role took on a deeper level of involvement that hadn’t been thought through before. Today we are aware that a product can change society [fn], as Sparke rightly states, “design initiatives can modify social behaviour” [2000:xxii] and this is something that today can be accomplished fairly easily. We as consumers are very open to change. At the turn of the century, it was a very different matter indeed. An item would carry more significance, than it does now. It would be an icon, a showpiece, even from cutlery to the very house you lived in. Every item had an ‘aura’ and air around it that people wanted to show off. Benjamin writes about the aura that a piece of art holds. He describes this ‘aura’; a very old statue of Venus, as an example, had a very different context with the Greeks, who upheld it as an item of veneration, than with the clerics of the
middle ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol. Both, however, were equally confronted with its uniqueness, or in other terms, confronted with its ‘aura’. [1992:217] Here Benjamin is showing us that the aura of an item is unique and cannot be replaced, it is something that withers in the age of mechanical reproduction [1992:215]

I believe that Benjamin himself was limited, he didn’t have the benefit of time on his side. I believe that had he lived through pop culture to today his view off the aura of an object would differ. At the time that Benjamin was talking about the aura of art being lost Van Der Rohe was creating his chair; which I believe had an aura, and every duplicate still has an aura today.

I think that Benjamin didn’t fully consider the movements that were happening in his time. Modernism was being born, and Bauhaus played a massive role, which in turn helped mass-production to become an integral part of society today. Sparke explains how Bauhaus and its members helped in the modernist movement and added the aura to the object again, “…Breuer’s designs were highly suitable for mass-production and were indeed later mass-produced in large numbers…The Work of Miles Van Der Rohe at the Bauhaus, also in tubular steel, has had a similar effect on the twentieth-century environment, making Modernism a reality as well as an abstract idea.” [2000:49] I believe that more than just a modernist movement it was designers like Van Der Rohe, who gave items the aura that Benjamin said was lost. As Sparke summarises, it clearly displays how, for Modernist Designers, objects became symbols in their own right. [2000:48] This symbolic value is what we have today; the items we own each have their aura, and to own that item is to be unique; just as we are told that we are individuals even though there are billions of us.
Every person is unique. Every person is an individual. In the 20th & 21st century the ideal of individuality is promoted, we are constantly told we are unique, that we are special individuals. But are we truly able to be individuals in this culture? It was Edward Bernays who identified that we cannot be targeted in mass media as individuals but as a whole, appealing to our desires as a group. This is summarised in the film Edward Bernays On Propaganda and Public Relations, “it was a form of Democracy, that depended on treating people not as active citizens, as Roosevelt did, but as passive consumers, because this, Bernays believed, “was the key to control in a mass Democracy”” [2007: 7.00] With regard to the mass media we are most certainly treated in a blanket way, whilst the message is one that seems specifically targeted to us. When we look at the method of mass production and products such as the Barcelona chair, we see that there is no individuality involved in it, it’s just an object, which can be replicated over and over, enabling all consumers to enjoy the same item. I think that which has withered in the age of mechanical reproduction is the individual. I find it interesting how people who try to be individual, look to the past, and seek ‘vintage’ items. This is because these items are rare and therefore if they own one, they establish themselves as individualistic.

In a way I believe that is how the Barcelona chair still holds a large amount of acclaim amongst designers and architects today; as it is fairly hard to come across the chair now, and it would have to be specially made for order. So by owning one, you are setting yourself higher than others; Tom Wolfe describes this process in 20th Century Design “When you saw that Holy object on the sisal rug you knew you were in a household where a fledgling architect and his wife had sacrificed everything to bring the symbol of the godly mission into their home.” [2001:115] The mass media plays a large part in this deception of society. “The sociologist Michael Schudson has argued that the opposite is true, that advertising fails to persuade the American public. Instead, he claims, advertisers merely follow and encourage existing buying trends. Additionally, we can
recognise that advertising is not able to simply celebrate individualism. For it’s primary task, the promotion of products on a mass scale, is not always congruent with the promotion of individualism.” Lavin, M [2001:73] but can it be said that rather than the media forcing fashions upon people it’s just the celebrity culture, where the masses just sway to the trends that are laid down by the rich and famous? I find the above observation by Maud Lavin really interesting, that it could just be everyone wanting to fit in with everyone else that drives the values of consumerism. It reminds me of the famous quote “everyone belongs to everyone else” that we all instinctively want to be the same. It becomes ever clearer then that our role as a designer is far more complicated than we first thought. If the consumer only wants one certain style then how as Designers can we influence that social group?

Lavin continues and explains the example of Ivan Chermayeff who designed the logo for Mobil, he was happy to design their company image, but when probed about the company and what they do as a cooperation, he “…grew uneasy” [2001:3] I find this very interesting, that designers can be so cornered by our own profession. When it comes to work that reaches every consumer, on the breakfast table, in the front room on their night out, our work only can communicate what the corporation dictates; in a sense it is a subdued fraction of the voice that the designer is supposed to have. Lavin goes on “Because graphic design is so powerful and so warped (in most commercial practice) in it’s ability to communicate, it provides an exaggerated model for the same questions that dog other communication fields like photography, film, the Internet, and my own field, writing. Who really has a voice in our culture?” [ibid] This is a very true statement, who really does have a voice in our culture? In the Edward Bernays documentary Steven Pinker states, “it’s not that the people are in charge, but the peoples desires are in charge.” [2007:7.10] So the commercial realm only echoes what the public want, the designer has to do what the commercial company wants, and the public are only driven by their desire to be the same. Who then has control of what is said?
I honestly believe that it is the designers who have the power to determine this voice within society. As designers we have a financial need to work for the commercial cooperations and supply them with their need, but on the side designers will also create self generated projects. Lavin, M [2001:3] Within society is an underground movement of early adopters that start the trends that snow-ball into the popular cultural realm, items like the Barcelona chair. It is the designers and ‘creatives’ who are responsible for these trends and the birth of ideas that channel throughout society. Stephen Heller explains, “design has an important role, and that design practice should be anchored in the very reality of its social consequences.”[2003:26] So designers do have an impact on society, and not just through the main commercial channels that are dictated by the client. I believe it is the edgy, self-generated work, which has considerable influence on the social audience.
With the evolution of mass-production came many advancements of man. One such development was mass-communication. This was the transference of information within society, allowing taste and styles to be communicated. Suddenly the Designer’s role had changed and we would now have to reach people on many different levels. Sparke comments on this, “Through style, objects and society communicate with each; and through the manipulation of style, the designer plays an essential role in satisfying the tastes of his markets.” [2000:109] It was another aspect of the constantly evolving role of design that had to be taken into account. I think as well, on another level that the actual object can be taken as a device for mass communication. For example, when we look at an item such as the iPod, it comes with a certain aura surrounding it. This aura is communicated to others who can see it being used. This aura has a specific message, one, which might communicate, trend, style and social standing. The definition of the aura as a ‘individual phenomenon of a distance no matter how close you are’ shows nothing but the formation of the cult value of the object in space and time perception [Benjamin, W 1992:236] Benjamin explains the way an object reacts in the environment by the viewer. Even though he was applying this to the painting and photograph, I believe that his thesis can be applied to objects such as the iPod or iMac.

One massive change in art was during the 1960s and the era of Pop culture. This was a time when communication to society was being completely changed. One artist who revolutionised the way society viewed art was Andy Warhol, who used mass-production as a medium for sharing his art. Warhol even called his studio ‘The Factory’ playing on the social meaning of production, and twisting it into a term associated with art. Andy Warhol pushed his factory to produce his public and saleable identity, as much as his artworks to enhance a social ideology. [Mavin, L 2001:171] Today we are extremely knowing about displays of marketable personas and celebrities using their name to promote products. But Warhol’s stance was very revolutionary. He changed social views through his work.
The work of art reproduced is seen as a negative connotation by many traditionalists, such as Walter Benjamin. As I have talked about in chapter one, he believed that the work of art lost its aura. Yet Andy Warhol conceived an idea and gave it to others to create on an assembly line. So how then is each work of art unique, if it is being reproduced over and over? Jean Baudrillard explores the meaning of the work of art in Simulacra and Simulation, he quotes Littre, and explains whoever fakes an illness and stays in bed can make everyone think that he is ill. Yet whoever simulates an illness in himself creates some of the symptoms. [2010:3] Here Baudrillard is using a real world example of how a piece of duplicated art can be viewed. The ill person is a piece of Warhol art; the end result is that the duplicate actually replicates the aura of the original. This for me links back to my previous statements of the aura and art. I believe that Warhol knew the reproduction would be as wanted as the original by the masses. Rather than targeting just one rich customer he targeted society as a whole, using his ‘factory’ as a device for mass communication; therefore making him and his art a product rather than just a singular item. When we consider this and look at the chair, we can now see why the chair is so popular today. It was because of movements like pop culture that created this ideological value over art forms. I believe that because of this celebrity persona people saw the chair as almost a celebrity in its own right. Baudrillard goes on to explain that “A simulation that can last indefinitely, because, as distinct from “true” power – which is, or was, a structure, a strategy, a relation of force, a stake – it is nothing but the object of a social demand, and thus as the object of the law of supply and demand...” [2010:26] Here Baudrillard explores how the “simulation” or object can become in its own right an object of demand socially. This is how I view the chair today, it is sustained by the ideology behind it, which constantly cycles through society, in mass communication, and ever increases its status.
Graphic design within politics, for me, falls into two separate categories, that of the left, socialism and communism, and that of the right conservatism and fascism. As I mentioned in chapter 1 the 1920s were an amazing time, the development of technology, sociology and creativity were increasing at an amazing rate. Politically though, the movements of both communism and fascism were forming and taking hold in Germany and Russia. Oliviero noted the political propaganda of National Socialism and Communism, and what a massive affect this had on art, design and advertising. In many ways the creative arts of the early 1900s all had a strong rooting in Socialist views and Marxism, with many of the popular forms of art dissecting the establishment and corporations. The reason for such a strong influence is the ideologies that the Soviet Revolution started, freeing the working man, creating something better, a new world, a modern world, made by the workers and created by those who were creative and passionate, the revolution supposed to be a step in a positive direction. A notable resource, and often regarded as one of the primary statements of the movement was Tarabukins Constructivism 1922 [Hayward Gallery 1971: 9] The graphic styles of communism follow the ideals of freedom and hope, in reality those ideological values were lost to subjection and control.

Fascism had a very strong rooting in the creative arts; one notable example was Hitler’s campaign in the 30’s to take control of Germany. The fascinating aspect of this regime was that Fascism in Germany too had deep creative roots, using new media and advertising techniques to reach the audience. For example; “Hitler’s penchant for politics as theatre, his coaching by an actor in how most effectively to strike oratorical poses, and his preference for the stage settings of Wagnerian opera as decorative models for Nazi festivities have often been remarked on. Assisted by the media, Hitler cultivated certain role models in the presentation of his public persona: the lover of serious music, art and architecture, the unsung ordinary soldier of world war 1, the heroic fighter for the ‘decent’ German cause within the treachery of the Weimar party jungle, the deep thinker
and instrument of providence as a statesman, and so on.” [Taylor, van der Will 1990: 1] the same can be said again about Fascism as Communism, two ideologically different views, yet so similar when it comes to creative values and actions taken upon those ‘creatives’. It is true that those in power have a massive effect upon society. Imagine what would happen if a political leader was also an artist or a designer. Adolf Hitler was both, a poster artist and a water-colourist who created one of the most effective and venal national identity programs the world has ever seen. [Heller 2001:273] it is amazing to think of the power that just one image created over a whole world. Hitler used this to the greatest effect.

Walter Benjamin explains about fascism in Illuminations: “The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom fascism, with its Fuhrer cult, forces to their knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values.” [1992:234] I find Benjamin’s analysis of Fascism really interesting, as he wrote this at a time of political turbulence and he could see the forthcoming trials that Germany would face. In a sense I feel that a lot of the values that both political views took were taken from the creative explorations of people like Miles Van De Rohe, and the Bauhaus movement. In a way it was creative projects like the Barcelona chair that helped to shape the way politicians designed graphic campaigns in the time after. The designer’s role in politics is very similar to that of the media. They have no say, and their message is lost by the needs of the client, i.e. the political message. As mentioned above it comes down to the artists self-generated work before their own view can be spread on a social level, for instance Banksy is a great example of a graphic artist who uses his own views as a political device, on a social platform. But I feel that Penny Sparke sums it up perfectly, “The increasing importance of fashion to design means that all new trends, whether they emerge at street level or in the designers studio, are open to commercial manipulation. While many subcultural groups now create their own styles, they are almost always appropriated by commerce and...
mass production and are thus rendered fashionable.”

[1986:121] I like this statement, it’s true that items come in and out of fashion, but it’s the small items that have aura, that are picked up and made into objects with symbolic value. Case in point is the Barcelona pavilion chair; which holds immense symbolic and cultural value.
I look back through my life and I can see how much design has changed, when I think back to the 80’s and early 90’s, being a child, I seem to remember everything more as colours and shapes from that time. [1] I got older I started to notice design that made a difference, I could see the products that created trends. Over this time, I think there is one particular piece of design that stands out, and that is the 1996 Apple iMac, designed by Jonathan Ive. For me the iMac represents one of the most iconic contemporary examples of design in the home. It was the way in which it introduced colour and light to the drab world of computing in the home and the office. [Design Museum: 2007]

I make the point of choosing the iMac because I believe that it is a perfect example of how design can directly influence the home and peoples lives. In a way this product is an example of design that has changed society since its creation. Catherin McDermott explains that it was “A detailed approach to every aspect of the product, from materials to the marketing, had made the i-Mac a turning point in accessible design and technology.” [2001:364] I definitely agree with her on this, the iMac was a revolution of technology and design. I would even go a step further, I think that the iMac is a design revolution; it was a product that changed society. In the same way that the Barcelona chair was a revolution of the modernist, the iMac is a revolution of the post post modernist. Both items were forged on the ideals of usability, purity and simplicity, both were mass produced for the end user, and more importantly, both became icons that people will now pay thousands of pounds for to have in their homes. If ever there were examples of designs affecting society, I would propose these are they.
We see everything around is now emulating the branding that Apple really started to hone in the late 90’s. It’s all, i-something this, and i-something that. When I travel I see the thin white lines of headphone cables, a tell tale sign that the person has an iPod or iPhone. [2] Who would have guessed that the impact of the original iPod and iMac designs would have made such a cultural change? It was a revolution of technology and design that spoke to the people. There is certainly a need in people to follow trends, to follow what others do and say. I think this is where companies like Apple excel; they target the early adopters, the cool and the trendsetters. It is in its essence the most superior of marketing plans. The public doesn’t care about anything other than look, style and cost when purchases are made, especially with regard to trends. Roland Barthes talks about the public in his book Mythologies, he states that the public do not care if the contest has been rigged, they just abandon themselves to the spectacle of the show, by doing so they remove any motives or consequences from their minds, in essence they just focus on what they see. [2009:3] I really agree with Barthes in his summary of the public, I really believe that people consider all things in regards to image.

Today we see a multitude of sins that get overshadowed because a product or person is fashionable. These can be, sustainable issues, health issues or even as far as slave labour [3] I mean we see these skinny celebrities everywhere, and everyone always comments on how bad it is that they are a size 0, but it still goes on, because the public still want to achieve that ‘perfection’, and still demand it in the celebrity culture which they worship. The public push aside the thought process behind the object:

- Where did it come from?
- Is it ethical?
- Do I really need it?
- Can I afford it?

They seem to just focus on the image of the object:

- I need it because it makes me feel good
- I want it because that celebrity has it
- I want it so I can be better than my friends [4]
In addition to this Chris Riley adds, in Citizen Designer, "It turns out that buying stuff because it satisfies a desire is O.K. In fact, it is rather pleasing." He goes on to say, "And before we run off in an apoplectic rage about the sinfulness of desire I am afraid to tell you that it is a basic human truth. We want as well as need. The experience of desire is nice! We love it!" [2003:77] He’s definitely not wrong, I mean it does feel nice to be impulsive, and just own that item you want. I know that I have done it, just bought something that I want, not thinking about the consequences, or anything other than it’s look.

I do not think that Apple products are at all unethical, but certainly the products are marketed using the technics of "the spectacle" [Barthes, R 2009:3]. We see this in the way they are designed; in the way people treasure them. It is the fact that Apple is premium, expensive and well made; it raises them above the piffle that everyone else might own. We see that it is the rich who use the products, but you don’t have to be rich to own an Apple product, that’s the beauty behind it all. This brings me back to the Chair, it was an item that was premium, but in all aspects was attainable by anyone. I believe that this is what design should be. Design in itself should make items attainable to anyone. It should be able to influence the end user on an emotive level. More importantly though, I believe that it is on this level that we as designers directly influence the public and have lasting effects on society. Take Jonathan Ives for example, I really doubt that he thought his work would have been such a major icon in the world scene. But he is a great example of a designer who has affected society and changed it, bringing good design to the homes and businesses of the world.
We want, society wants, and takes what it wants. We live in a world of things and objects, mass-consumption rules everything and everyone. We live in a ‘throw away society’. Mass-consumerism is a natural bi-product of mass-production. For the last 25 years we have lived in a ‘ME’ era, where people have lived beyond their means, decking their homes with the rewards of wealth, whilst their bank accounts are those of abject poverty. Neville Brody [5] seems to be an advocate for challenging the society in which we live. I find it really interesting to follow this social change we are in right now; I am excited by it. Brody states in his ADF (Anti Design Festival) manifesto, that the credit card culture has now come to a head. For the last 25 years our culture and society has been in a state of ‘deep freeze’. We have forgotten as designers, and a society, what it was like before the explosion of banking deregulation, before the ‘me’ era started. [‘Anti design manifesto’2010:3] I completely agree with Brody in his manifesto statement, I believe that we need to change the way we have been thinking. [6] As designers we need to influence society and make an impact upon it, Brody comments that design has become distilled and weak, it’s time to make design strong, to be anarchistic, to go back to the core values of what design is, not to make money, but to be simple, to work and to stand out. [2010:2] Much like the values that the chair brought to the public eye, we must try and emulate these design values in our work.

It is clear that we reached a point in the 1980s when we were focusing on the profit and gain that was ahead of us; the credit card culture was born. More importantly, as designers, we became subject to the corporations in terms of design for money. “Design has become ‘commoditised, prettified, over-commercialised and safe’, it has forgotten it’s roots and become a sorry adjunct to the world of business” Brody, N [Design Week 09/09/2010:13] This is definitely true, but I would argue that it’s the world of business that is now dictating the way our designs take shape and form. I think in essence the purity and innocence of design has been lost in the culture of mass-consumption. Equally though, there is an argument to make for the ‘corporate’ image. In
an interview between Brody, and Ben Evans on 13th September 2010 the interviewer makes a comment about the centre piece of the London Design Festival being sponsored by Audi, who provided the robots from their assembly line, his comment was that it was almost a corporate advert. Not design! In defence of this Ben Evans [7] states that it is the big companies, such as Audi that bring the money to designers and enable them to create these designs that the public embrace. [Dickson, A, 13/09/2010] This for me is the fault in the Anti Design Debate that Brody is pushing, we really see how, through mass-production, mass-consumption and corporations, these factors can enable designers rather than hold them back. I think of Jonathan Ives, his corporation, Apple, allowed him to create one of the most iconic designs of the late 20th century. It was after all the designer of the Barcelona Chair, Van De Rohe, who created the Seagram Building 1954-58, an icon for corporate America. If he can create something that was seen as an icon in the chair, which was about freedom and design purity, to the Seagram building. Then surely it is okay for us designers to be free and pure in our designs, regardless, whether it is self initiated work, or corporate work.
We find ourselves at a crossroads socially, politically and in the world of design. I think I agree with Ben Evans when he says we are at the beginning of a revolution, “I think we have seen a kind of revolution actually, where in a generation, somehow the Great British Public has found a confidence in their own taste.” [Dickson, A 13/09/2010]

I mentioned earlier that I was excited by this revolution that was taking place; I meant it. Yet there is a certain amount of trepidation that comes with it, we are in a very sensitive time. I find it interesting that Evans made this comment about the Public; it’s certainly true that people are interested in better-designed items these days. I would attribute this to the evolution of communication to the public, the constant improvements to technology and the fact that people are more adaptive to these different aspects.

What does the revolution have in store for society? Is it a good future we have to look forward to in terms of design? I believe that we need to focus on the direction which design should now be taking. And as any good civilisation knows, we should look to the past to secure our future. I make this point because we have been at these crossroads in the past several times. The two most notable times, I believe, were in the early 1900’s during the Dada movement, and in the 1980’s during the punk movement. Both movements were born out of economic troubles. Much like today it was artists and designers expressing themselves in a very negative social time. Generally when there is a poor economical time, artists turn their art into political statements. Dada was a tool invented by group of artists to make this statement. One artist who made a statement was Marcel DuChamp. His most famous Dada work was Urinal, where he placed a Urinal in a gallery and called it art. At the time it caused a furore and people were disgusted, now it is cited as a piece of art which is inspirational for generations of visual artists. [Crow, D, 2003:157] Maud Lavin explains the Dada position, “In a general sense, all Dada art can be considered political in that it addresses issues of language and representation. Berlin Dada, however, was the one Dada group overtly involved in political struggle, specifically societal events during and after
This is a very similar position we find ourselves in today, with a growing proportion of society growing angry with the government. I always feel that the social entities that manage to express themselves the most are the artists. This is particularly cemented by the fact that the government plan to make significant cuts to the arts in the UK. With this I expect a movement of artists to form and create art that has its own style and following. As Heller states, “Political imagery is an essential component of the ongoing democratic debate.” [2001:281] It is essential, in every way; these art forms benefit society as a whole. Encouraging alternative views and opinions.

After the Dada movement I believe that another notable time in history was in the early 1980’s. Much of the same conditions of the early 1900’s existed at this time too. Corporations were overshadowing design, there was an economic crisis, and the young artists and musicians were making statements against the authorities. Yet it was the sheer lack of government responsibility, the harshness of Reagan’s hand’s off approach, which spurred many artists, designers and intellectuals to fill the political void – or at least try to. [Lavin, M 2001:95] In Britain it was the same political situation, a strong right wing leader who pushed ‘the creatives’ into a similar position. A political void, which I think, was filled, and their voice was heard across the world! It was of course the beginning of the punk movement. I believe that the punk movement was an amalgamation of Warhol’s media focused mass-producing ideal of art, and very much the ideals of the Dadaist and the Weimar revolution. Lavin explores this idea, “But in the mid-1980’s, access to the mass media for artists seemed harder to achieve, and in retrospect I think this difficulty informed some of the Left art world’s nostalgia for and interest in the Weimar artists who did enjoy a media soapbox.” [2001:100] In a sense I believe that the artists were pushed aside politically, and weren’t allowed to express themselves. From this action, is a reaction, the reaction being that of people (artists) making an expression. Then were born artists like Jamie Reid, and the Sex Pistols, who wanted to make a statement and didn’t care about the result of
their actions. They didn’t care about the law & order, and therefore broke the rules and regulations that were laid down, much like DuChamp 60 years before.

And so we find ourselves in a similar position today. There is economical turmoil, the governments are denying peoples rights and there is a rise in aggression; namely in the students and creatives of today. So I think that we as designers should be looking to the past, we should take note from the Weimar Dadaists and the punk rockers. I believe that what Neville Brody says is correct; we need to challenge design and art as a whole. This is the time to create a movement that can change art and design for the next 30 years. So with regard to the anti-design festival, I believe that it is such events that will spur the young artists and designers to take a stand and create something that will be remembered. This brings me back to the Barcelona Chair which I feel is an amazing design, which stood out at the time and made a such a statement.

1 Just to note that I remember in particular a strong purple and yellow tie with a peculiar assortment of triangles on it. Odd that I should remember such a horrid example of 1980s fashion, maybe I’m storing it in my mind for future projects.

2 I was at school/college when the first iPod came out, I remember the tentative way in which everyone talked about them. No one really knew what they were or what they did, we were not even sure if MP3 players would take off, as the minidisk had died a death just a few years before. All we knew was that these things looked amazing and we wanted one!

3 I think it’s really interesting to look at the latest smear campaign against Primark who use sweatshops to make some of their clothes. http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jul/07/fashion.hadleyfreeman

4 I’d like to just comment on this subject of marketing, there’s a really great film about it called The Joneses, where a group of strong sales people are brought together to pretend to be a family unit and sell to the rich neighbours and friends they accumulate in their fake lives. It obviously ends badly, but I think it is a great parallel of the way people live.

5 Neville Brody is an ‘old punk rock’ designer. Yet he has managed to keep his work fresh relevant and spikey over the years. He is soon to be Head of Communication Art and Design at the royal college of art.

6 just to add, I think that what Brody did through the Anti Design Festival is very admirable, but I’m not sure that things will change where they need too. I believe that the basic qualities of what he is doing are good; yet unattainable I really believe that people wont change, I believe that the ‘Credit Card’ culture will still continue. Here’s hoping that as designers we can make a social change.

7 Ben Evans is a prominent designer, with connections to the London Design Festival since 2004, when he donated allot of time and money to the event. He is made a villain by Brody as the face of corporate design in the UK.
CONCLUSION

Now I am at the end of the dissertation process I really feel as if I have gained allot. For me this end point is quite far from where I expected to be. I always wanted to look at the social affects of design, but I wasn’t sure of how I would approach the topic. I am glad now though, that I have used the example of the Barcelona chair to feed throughout the dissertation. I believe that it was a good way of binding my subjects together throughout the dissertation. Overall I am happy with the topics that I cover in my dissertation; hopefully they show the different paths I have researched to get to my conclusion.

In chapter one, I have aimed to summarise the chair and mass-production. My goal when writing this chapter was to explore how mass-production has changed the 20th century. Firstly though my point was to set the history of the chair for the reader, explaining it and setting the scene for the rest of the dissertation. There is a slight sense of chronology to my writing, flowing from the early 1900s to present. I wanted to do this so that the dissertation had a flow to it, giving it structure. Finally I wanted to discuss the values associated with mass-production and explore how they changed in that early period of time. Chapter 1 for me was a technical basis for looking at the chair and its construction. But on a wider point I wanted to look at a tool that designers use to influence in the biggest way.

Chapter 2 was about flowing on from the views that I wrote about in chapter one, really focussing on the effect the designer has on society. For me I feel one of the mains forms of communication is through advertising and the media. I wanted to look at how, through advertising and the media, society reacts to the designers work. In relation to this I studied how the public received the chair. In retrospect I also wanted to discuss who really has a voice in our culture is it the designer? Or the person who commissions the designer? In a sense if the corporation has control over our work, then isn’t really theirs? In the end I believe that the only work that has a true voice is the designers own self initiated work. After exploring this I believe that I needed to discuss with the reader, how mass-communication plays a massive role
in this society. It is the medium that spreads a designer’s work internationally. It was my intention to play on the word used by Benjamin, the ‘aura’ of the work of art. I felt that this needed to be explored more, and I wanted to discover its meaning on a social scale. Finally I discussed how the work of art is a very political device. The point of this was to describe the thought process behind a work of art or design. I believe that a statement can be made and given to the viewer. Although allot of modern design has no meaning, it just has the purpose of telling the viewer one view point, that of the commissioner, or business behind it. This is why I find the work of artists such as Banksy so liberating.

Chapter 3 is the contemporary chapter, it’s about the now, and things that are happening right now in the world of design. One of the main objects I wanted to talk about was the iMac. I believe that, like the chair, it is a design object that holds certain ideals and has an ‘aura’. It was important for me to use a contemporary example to the chair, so that I can further back up my points against and for it. After this I wanted to see how these products had a social impact and how, socially, they are viewed. In a way I wanted to have a look at the consumer and see the motivations behind why these items can become icons in their own right, and what makes them so desirable. My next point was to raise the anti design festival debate between Neville Brody and Ben Evans. I believe that this debate is really relevant today, as it brought up good points about where contemporary design is heading. For me this debate needs to be taken seriously as we are leaving the age of the corporation and the credit card, we need to really think about what design means. I wanted to discuss this and raise the points of both sides of the argument. From this topic also arose the historical perspective, I wanted to show previous points in this century where similar economic and political situations led to a change in art and a birth in a new style.

If i was to improve my dissertation, i think i would like to explore with the layout of the chapters, I think perhaps not such a linear style is necessary. I instead would try to make the text more looping, flowing back and forth from
subject to subject. Another thing I would change is my choice of subjects. I believe that I have only just scraped the surface of topics to talk about on this subject matter. I feel that given more time I would be able to explore in even more detail my subject matter. I believe that the topic I have chosen holds much more relevance in this modern environment. If anything I think that there is more to discover and more to look at. Personally, chapter 3 could have been longer, in fact I would have loved to have taken more time on that particular chapter, as the contemporary examples are what excite me the most. I believe that the future of design, and our very society is changing rapidly, this is a subject in its own right and something that I believe could make a very interesting dissertation.

The best part of this dissertation has been looking at the subjects in Chapter 3. I really feel like I have engaged with the Anti Design debate that Brody and Evans headed up. I feel that it is really important for design students to take note of such developments and get involved. On a personal note I feel it has given me direction for my future and grounded me in areas where I was struggling to find inspiration. My motivation was to explore the social behaviour that happens around us. I wanted to know how we as designers made an impact upon this behaviour. Through the anti design debate I think I have found a way of making a social change, much as the Dadaists and punks did in the last Century, we are at another cross roads where we can look to the future and say that we can make a difference, and our work will be recognised as ground breaking ass DeChamp, or Reid. In conclusion I feel that this process has given me insight to what the future can hold, and it has taught me that, yes!, a designer can impact society and change it's views and fashions. And just to think, we could achieve all of this from just sitting in a comfortable, well-designed and modernist chair.


Lavin, M [2001] Clean new world, MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts


Baudrillard, J [2010] Simulacra And Simulation, The University of Michigan Press, USA

Davis, J [2010] Profile: Neville Brody, Design Week volume 25, number 36, September 9th, pg 13

ONLINE


Citizen Design – Perspectives on design responsibility – Heller & Vienne

It is clear after reading this book that as Designers we have a great responsibility to the social arena. The opening sentence summarises this, “Milton Glaser often says, “Good design is good citizenship.”” Heller [2006:ix] As we look at Design we have to appreciate that our actions have reactions and the Design we create really influences the world in which we are working, “A designer must be professionally, culturally, and socially responsible for the impact his or her Design has on the citizenry.” Heller [2006:x] This book explores the consequences Designers have in the world around them, and encourages us as Designers to change the world around us, politically and socially, helping to add to society and influence it in a positive way, “Let us instead give Designers their voices so they may participate and contribute more fully in the world around them” McCoy [2006:8]

An Introduction to Design & Culture in the Twentieth Century – Chapter 7 From Mass Taste to Mass Style - Penny Sparke

When reading chapter 7 in this book it is clear that Design has its roots in consumerism and mass culture. This stemming from the aspirations that the public had towards the aristocracy following the Art Deco period in the 20s. “In his statement of 1953 Paul Reilly [q.v.], soon to become the director of the British Design Council, was expressing a heartfelt belief that taste values move automatically down through society” Sparke [1986:108] The items that were once exclusive for the elite in the Deco period, thanks to mass-production were now being made available for everyone. Design and fashion were now open to the Designers, having the influence to change the fashionable tastes of the day. “The increasing importance of Fashion to Design means that all new trends, whether they emerge at street level or in the Designers studio, are open to commercial manipulation. While many subcultural groups now create their own
styles, they are almost always appropriated by commerce and mass production and are thus rendered fashionable.” [1986:121]

**Graphic Design History – A History of design, a history of concerns – Heller & Ballance**

This chapter isn’t as informed towards my subject matter, but it does discuss an interesting subject matter, of how it is important to recognise the importance of culture and society within design. “I would hope that today, instead of trying to keep on inventing style superheroes in design shows, it would be refreshing to pay attention to social and cultural relevance, to the effectiveness of design solutions, and to the contributions that design makes to its highest possible function: supporting and fostering the welfare of people.” Frascara [2001:18]

**Illuminations – Benjamin, W – 1973 Fontana Press London**

This essay is a detailed look at the progression of Art through technology. Benjamin looks at the process of portraits and paintings, looking how, though the evolution of the Photograph portraits and pictures have changed, ultimately focusing on Film and Cinema. It is an interesting argument that explores the different factors affecting the creative arts at the turn of the century. Ultimately he predicts that technology will play an even greater role in the arts as time progresses. “for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from it’s particular dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the of art reproduced becomes the work of art design for reproducibility” Benjamin, w [Illuminations,218] His observations on mass production are, in particular, interesting as he discusses how art can be reproduced en masse, and that piece of arts status as a reproduction in it’s environment. I am interested in this essay because of some of the conclusions that Benjamin comes too in his work through exploring mass production and it’s role.
Design and the Public Good – Chermayeff, S – 1982 The MIT press Cambridge Massachusetts

Very interesting observations on architecture in more detail though, Chermayeff explores the role of the designer in the 20th century and where we stand, looking from the perspective of industrialization and mass production. It’s main focus is on our responsibility and effect on society. “The contemporary society with industrial means of production has to employ entirely new tools, instruments, for living consonant with our needs, spiritual, intellectual and materia. The needs of an industrial society are in many respects without precedent and certainly the means at our disposal with which to meet the needs have been extended and enriched immeasurably.” Chermayeff, S [1980:246] He makes interesting conclusions of industry and it’s effect on design.

Clean new world, Lavin, M, 2001, MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts

This book is politically, socially and graphically challenging. It follows the trends and movements within Design that have had a major impact on society and the people with in society and graphic design. I am particularly interested in how graphic designs can have an impact on society, this book clearly covers that statement and shows that designers do have a voice. Lavin describes this herself “I aim to stir discussion, talk that does not merely react to the state of design as it is commonly practiced but instead is generative: encouraging designers to recognize and deal creatively with the power they do, in fact, have.” [2001:6] She goes to describe the work of designers in the 20th century who have had such an impact, and also describes the binding factor of working for a commercial company, and the restraints they place upon a designer, silencing the messages we want to send into society.
This is a fantastic resource for any graphic designer interested in the social effects of our work on society. I have become a great fan of Stephen Heller in my research process, using a couple of his books. Much like me, he is interested in documenting the design process in culture. I believe that this is a subject that will keep becoming more prominent in the next few years than ever before. I want to discuss this in my dissertation looking at designers like Neville Brody who is also interested in questioning the social effect of design, and where we stand at these turbulent economic times. This book is a must for my subject matter, and essential to my research.

Simulacra & Simulation, Baudrillard, J, 2010, The University of Michigan, USA

This book is essential to me when reading Walter Benjamins, Illuminations. I feel that Simulacra and Simulation is almost a sequel to Illuminations. Baudrillard again explores the nature of the clone, of the work of art. Much like Benjamin he explains this process of reproduction. For me this book is critical when I come to look at my dissertation, and the idea of mass-production. Baudrillard is a hard author to understand, but this book is very essential for any artist, who is interested in discovering new knowledge about art. It was one of the main texts read by artists in the 80s who wanted to look back to the Dadaist movement which they felt was true expressionism.
ILLUSTRATIONS
I want to explore using colourful paper. To bring the book to life. I also want to try printing on plain paper, to see what the final outcome will be. I think that this kind of layout is quite conservative, I will try to experiment with more interesting layouts. But for a start I think that this works. In terms of the typeface I like the contrast between the three. I think I will aim to experiment with the body type more.

The images I want to use will be a mix of illustrations and actual images. Much like the illustration I have used in these examples from my D&AD Brief.

This is just a start, to give you an idea of where I am going.