British web design:
a brief history
by Nico Macdonald

In May 2000 in London's Regent Street, just a month after the Internet investment bubble burst, a hyperactive office with a multi-national staff finally closed its doors. Boo.com, the sports and outdoor-fashion online retailer, had been the most talked-up – and would become the most talked-down – dotcom of its era.

The 'start-up' became a byword for dotcom hubris and unchecked expenditure. But it also came to stand for design hubris, for an over-graphical and over-ambitious approach.[1] Among Boo.com's much vaunted, and criticized, features were rotatable product images, a persistent shopping basket that used images of selected items, and a pop-up 'Ms Boo' adviser. At Boo.com's demise, influential web design critic Jakob Nielsen argued that this 'proves that overly fancy design doesn't work'.[2] Although many critics of Boo.com's design had little idea about the nature of design, or were wilfully ignorant of the specifics of its situation, this event, and that period, marked a turning point for web design. 'Boo.com was a victory of concept of form over concept of use,' argues industry veteran Dorian Moore. 'That site killed conceptual design. After that the focus moved to usability and efficiency.'

Most of the discussion around Boo.com caricatured design in general, and graphic design in particular. Many of the same preconceptions about web design exist among graphic designers, serving sometimes to obscure the contribution of their field to the development of web design.

Design for interactive digital media is, however, arguably the most significant development in design in the UK in the last 20 years. It is comparable in scope to the flourishing of three-dimensional design – product, automotive and furniture – and is still in its infancy. Despite this, leading graphic designers in the UK, unlike their American counterparts, have been slow to engage with it and interactive designers, for their part, have been influenced by a diverse field of creative practice that extends well beyond the traditional boundaries of print media. Product design, architecture, gaming, and interface and interaction design have now all been assimilated.[3] The influence of graphic design (including televisual design) is the least understood influence on web design. It deserves particular examination in the context of the UK, where graphic design is in its element.

We can see the influence of graphic design on web design at three levels: aesthetics and typography; conceptual ways of thinking; and processes and methods. Sadly the early years of web design are more thinly documented than those of print – a copy of the Gutenberg Bible is in the British Library in London, but the ground-breaking

Niclas Sellebråten, retail website for Boo.com, 1999. Art direction: Sellebråten. Designers: Ida Wessel and Geneviève Gauckler. Flash programming: Farid Chaouki

1994 World Cup site designed at Sun Microsystems is nowhere to be found on the web – which brings the emphasis of this story's visual references closer to the present.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

Why then has web design taken off so differently in the US? For one, the high-tech companies and global corporations that first exploited the web were US-based and worked with US designers. In the UK, design institutions and the graphic design press have for the most part failed to understand or take seriously design for the web, and good design work in this area has not received the same kudos as graphic or advertising design. Publications such as *New Media Creative* and *Create Online* may have understood the web, but they lacked a deeper appreciation of design thinking and other design disciplines. Consequently they were unable to escape the web ghetto when the bottom fell out of the industry.

The British designers who did engage with web design sooner rather than later included Neville Brody and Research Studios (founded in 1994), Malcolm Garrett and AMX (founded in 1994), Tomato, The Designers Republic, Tim Fendley and Robin Richmond of MetaDesign London, and some corporate design consultancies, such as Wolff Olins. Despite these few admirable in-roads, the wider influence exerted by traditional practices of print media tended to be negative rather than positive. This was evident in the desire for fixity in web interfaces and an over-emphasis on imagery and traditional typography. It was also demonstrated by the treatment of the screen as a metaphorical page (reflected in the sequence and ordering of information as well as shape and size), a perception of the web as a static or linear medium, and a wariness about designing for an intangible medium – especially one in which it was difficult to leave a creative signature. Ignorance of the rules and patterns that laid the foundation for creativity in graphic design produced web design solutions lacking in usability.

There are a number of areas in which the influence of graphic design would have benefited web design had it been brought to bear earlier, perhaps facilitated by the greater engagement of established graphic designers. These include better appreciation of client communication and collaboration; understanding of client needs and constraints; a more dispassionate view of software tools (a product of the previous technical revolution); and effective assessment of and design around complex information and varied assets (encompassing text, database output, images and time-based material).

In 1984, the entanglement of graphic design and interactive digital media began with the New Year launch of the Apple Macintosh – sporting a graphical user interface. The design tool was now digital, but not the medium. In the 1990s, CD-ROM delivered the medium, although its full potential was not immediately grasped by the majority of designers. Nonetheless, CD-ROM inspired a flurry of creativity in the US, and also in the UK with the Multimedia Corporation and others. The eighth issue of 8vo's celebrated *Octavo* journal was an interactive CD-ROM.

Next stop, the Internet. By 1996, the salvos of the 'browser wars' had forced the development of graphical browsers and web coding (in the acronym HTML).[4] It was easy to connect a computer to the Internet, and low-cost access was proliferating. Companies and individuals were taking the web seriously. Designers needed to explore this brave new medium thoroughly.

FIRST STEPS IN WEB DESIGN

The slow pace of adaptation to the web in the UK graphic design and print sectors meant that individuals from other disciplines and backgrounds had plenty of opportunity to influence the field. 'There were a lot of people without formal design backgrounds around that were very influential in those early days of interactive design,' notes American-trained art director David Warner, formerly of Razorfish in New York and now working at Oyster Partners in London. Their backgrounds ranged from the rave or club scene to the arts and television production, and their diverse skills – including programming, architecture and human-computer interaction – reflected this. These first movers came to their new discipline with a less restricted view of its boundaries or possibilities than graphic designers. However, they also had to learn many of the approaches with which graphic designers were familiar, not least managing client relationships and project process. From this adhocracy, a number of pioneering studios emerged: Webmedia, nurtured by entrepreneur Steve Bowbrick and artist Ivan Pope in the basement of London's Cyberia café, used pared-down design work to make the most of bandwidth constraints; Online Magic, whose self-initiated *General Election 97* site was notable for its rich but controlled visual aesthetic and detailed icons; Oyster Partners, which adopted an elegant but minimal style, led by product design-trained art director Hugo Manassei; Clarity Communications, who brought a utilitarian approach to their work for corporate clients; and Obsolete, which created the Backspace gallery and pioneered formats such as the interstitial 'blipvert' – short and often animated adverts that appear as the user moves between site pages.[5]
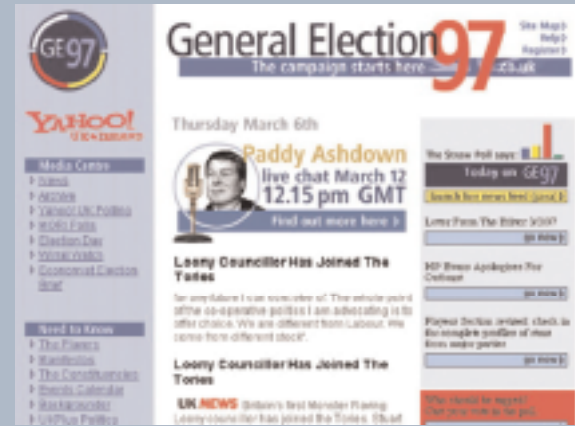
Top: **Online Magic**, *General Election 97*, political website, 1997. Executive producer: Michael Martin. Producer: Alistair Jeffs. Designer: John Dutton.

Sunbather, Spice Girls band website for Virgin, 1998. Creative director: Mike Bennett. Designers: Hilla Neske, Paul Sonley, Jeremy Mac Lynn and Rich Wallet.

Ad hoc combinations of skills produced ad hoc activity. Many of these studios initiated their own projects, some – such as Webmedia's *MovieWeb* film database – beyond the realm of design.[6] Bowbrick's company, in particular, grew quickly and hired many graphic designers. Bowbrick characterizes the skills challenge at this time as 'can't spell versus can't draw': designers were not sufficiently focused on detail and quality, and programmers – who often took on a design role – could not draw. In 1998, Webmedia hit the wall, undercut by one-kid-and-a-PC web designers and headed off by established players in the IT and consultancy sectors. Its alumni founded a number of new outfits, including Sunbather, started by Mike Bennett, which was responsible for the original Spice Girls site. It developed a style based on smooth shapes and organic forms and also used blurring and played with type and colour, referencing Neville Brody.

THE INTERNET BOOM

The end of the 1990s was characterized by an exuberant stock market, with hungry venture capitalists having nothing better to do than invest in Internet-related technologies. A boom in design work ensued, and – in larger organizations – designers were propelled into roles in which they had the ears of CEOs. Save for a few of our design heroes, this was a historical anomaly for an often retiring profession.

The upshot was an increase in the scale and ambition of projects. Web designers had to draw on more fundamental elements of British graphic design, and were aided by people with more graphic design experience entering the industry. These approaches were characterized by an independence of thought, where assumptions would be challenged and obvious routes not always taken. Increasingly, designers sought to establish the 'what, why, when, where and who' that informed a project. 'Graphic designers had to become more explicit about this as they engaged more with business, and designed for multiple content formats and the potential users of a service,' observes Giles Rollestone, former research fellow in computer related design at the Royal College of Art. Nykris co-founder Nikki Barton, whose employment encompassed the Multimedia Corporation and Neville Brody's Research Studios, notes that viewing a problem in different ways became increasingly important, as did 'questioning the assumptions behind the project, and getting customers to question them as well'.

Corporate branding and, more surprisingly, municipal design began to exert an influence on web design. Dorian Moore, formerly

at design and development studio Kleber, cites the British Rail signage and identity as an example of the former, with its focus on functionality and adaptability. Architecture-trained designer Matt Jones, who has worked for organizations including Sunbather, the BBC, web integrator Sapient and Nokia, notes that 'we went back to worthy municipal design, that only us, Northern Europeans and the Scandinavians can do well, and found a way to turn that into an aesthetic'. He presents the pre-war schools design of the Hampshire County Council architecture department as evidence. Municipal design he characterizes as low budget and robust, rational and information-focused, and produced for 'low bandwidth of attention'. It was constituted of flat colour, type and line, compared to high-budget, visually rich US design work. 'It was GIF versus JPEG,' he observes, referring to the low- and high-fidelity image formats. He cites the BBC News site, in which he was involved, and online retailing developments at Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsbury's.

The design process beyond the brief began to be considered more holistically and designers started to appreciate that design quality was as much a product of a thorough, multi-tiered approach as it was of individual creativity. 'I came in when there was no process,' says Bill Galloway of the Butterfly Effect, which evolved from Clarity. 'We learned process, and drew some of this from the technical side. Early sites were arty or functional. Now we are able to fuse the two.' Graphic design approaches to developing concepts and presenting solutions were adapted. Traditional graphic designer Frances O'Reilly of Recollective notes that they would typically present clients with two to three design pathways: 'way out, sober, and middle-of-the-road', not least to see where the client stood. Adaptation was key. 'Screenshot layouts were ineffective, they didn't give the clients the full picture,' explains art director Timo Arnall, who studied media, film and television. 'So how do you document temporal, hypertextual and spatial concepts?' He drew on his training, and he and others scoped resources beyond design, such as Kevin Mullet and Darrell Sano's 1995 book *Designing Visual Interfaces*, Jakob Nielsen's AlertBox mailings and the ACM SIGCHI (Computer-Human Interaction conferences).[7]

The kinds of information being communicated via the web were becoming more complex. Publishing systems were developed that could manage sites with multiple templates. The traditional concept of the grid in graphic design was revived. However, on the web grids had a third dimension, and templates needed to be designed explicitly with a view to production and publishing. As with trad-itional magazines, and particularly newspapers, they had to support
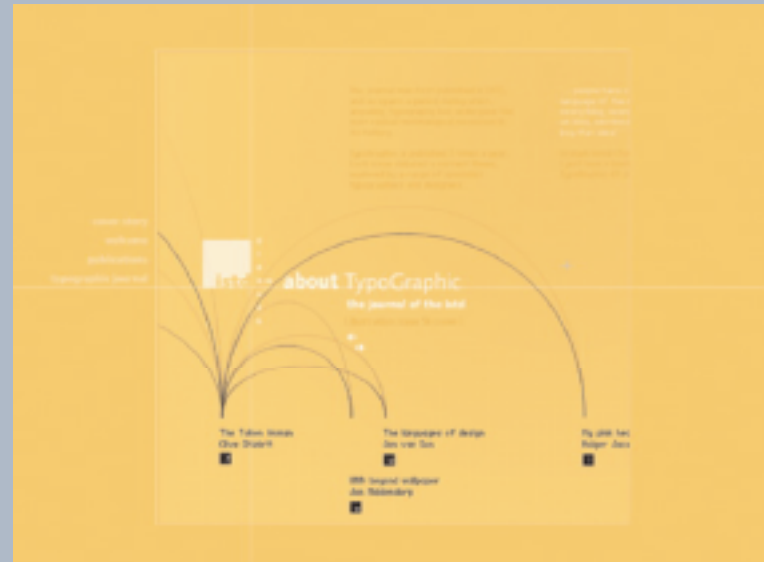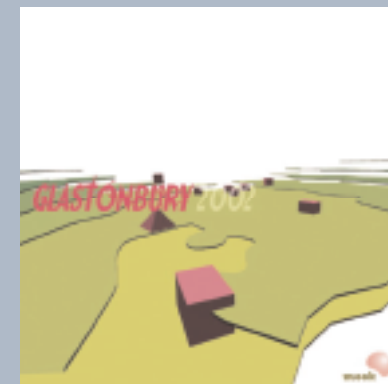
an appropriate variety of material but avoid a templated appearance. Some designers, such as London-based Mook (who 'approach things as a graphic design company') went beyond conventional graphic design use of the grid to incorporate rich illustration. The grid approach informed the need for navigation and location information, and designers looked to book and magazine semantics, as well as to environmental signage.

More detailed analysis of the kind of information to be published was required, taking into consideration the various ways in which information elements could be combined and presented, as well as publishing system constraints – all familiar challenges in catalogue and directory design. Such approaches became known as 'information architecture'. At the BBC and elsewhere designers also focused on the related areas of information graphics and maps. 'We really did go back to the old schools,' comments Matt Jones, then at BBC News Online, who cites as influences 'Nigel Holmes, information design in old magazines, such as *Time*, and the broadsheets, and internal broadcast designers,' as well as the more celebrated information design and visualization gurus Edward Tufte and Richard Saul Wurman.

Editorial design and strong use of photography began to inform web design, although as an information-driven and mass-to-mass communication tool the web had been taken to be a medium in which editorial control was less appropriate or desirable. Designers began to apply approaches that they had followed in print editorial design. David Curless, for example, previously an art director at *The Times*, moved to Interactive Bureau London, where he worked with his former employer to create a more flexible and accessible design for *The Times* site that supported greater editorial differentiation.

Designers also applied typographic styles from editorial design. Simon Esterson's 1997 design for *The Guardian* newspaper's football site used large Bureau Grot and flat bold colours for titling. These were not standard system fonts and had to be presented as images rather than text. Esterson's typographic style produced small file sizes, and did not significantly increase page loading time. Brody's Research Studios led the design of the succeeding Guardian Unlimited site, launched in 1999, and adopted an almost entirely typographic treatment, based on Helvetica and Helvetica Extended, with a modular approach anchored by low bandwidth one- or two-colour story 'sells' and cross-promotions. Again, this suited users' low-bandwidth connections.

In the mid- to late 1990s the browser software companies – primarily Netscape and Microsoft – turned to embedding fonts in

Digit,
retail website for
Habitat, 2001

web pages. These fonts would be downloaded from the server when a page was accessed, and could have transformed web design by making it easy to use any typeface – not just the standard Arial, Times and Courier – in headline or body copy without adding significantly to page download times. As Netscape steadily retreated in the browser wars, both sides lost interest in these initiatives, and Microsoft opted instead to commission Matthew Carter to create fonts – including Verdana and Georgia – suited to screen reading. These were included with Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser and Windows installers, and were thus available on users' computers – along with the other standard fonts – if they were referenced in the mark-up of a web page.

Macromedia's Flash browser plug-in was also gaining a foothold, and its vector-based model proved well suited to screen-based typography.[8] Designers were able to apply typographic styles developed in print, experiment with time- and user-based interaction, and play with sound. Type could be embedded and scaled on-the-fly rather than being presented as images. More elegant approaches to interaction with menus and other navigation elements – including aural feedback – could be applied. These features allowed for the creation of more immersive and richer environments. Digit London's celebrated Habitat site used simple vector images of people in interior environments.

Deepend, founded in 1994 by three Brunel and RCA graduates, pioneered motion-based interfaces, often with a televisual aesthetic. Motion graphics were also pioneered by New York-based Razorfish, which started its London office with the acquisition of the studios CHBi and Sunbather. It developed a signature style around simple oscillating graphical forms based on vertical lines, which also translated into still and print form. This form was reminiscent of film graphics, such as Tomato's contemporary titles for the 1996 film *Trainspotting*. Time-based change and user input in networked media was investigated by Tomato in the context of branding, with its Sony Connected_Identity project. Visitors to the Connected_Identity site could select a word, which was then rendered and mutated over time and presented via the web, mobile phones and on a display in the Sony Building in Tokyo. Selected clips of these animations were also used in Sony television commercials.

Elsewhere, illustration styles drawn from pop culture as well as late 1980s and early 1990s advertising and flyer design – bright, contrasting colours in minimalist or white environments – inspired many web designs, for instance Niclas Sellebråten's design for Boo.com, and worked well with the Flash vector-aesthetic. Some

illustrators, such as Anthony Burrill, found that their style already suited the medium and were then also able to experiment with movement and sound. Art and design also crossed over. British artists such as Damien Hirst, Julian Opie, Gary Hume, and Gilbert and George regularly borrowed from graphic design – though the last have a long established graphic style. This was re-appropriated for Gilbert and George's 1997 CD-ROM 'The Fundamental Pictures' (and for the accompanying website); MetaDesign London used their distinctive style of upper case, sanserif, white-on-black type for the CD-ROM navigation.

British web designers were more esoteric than their American cousins, less focused on functionality. The 2001 site for the Barbican's 'Jam:Tokyo–London' exhibition, for example, by London-based designers Airside, was inspired by early games design and exemplified the wry sense of humour that had long pervaded British graphic and advertising design. An element of fun and self-conscious silliness have characterized the work of many other designers, including Crispin Jones, Burrill and Mook (who talk about a light-hearted tone of interactivity and the intrinsic enjoyment of cause and effect). One iteration of the Nykris website displayed a fig-leafed man and woman logo while loading, with the text 'hold on a minute, we're just getting ourselves decent'. A later application, developed for use on mobile phones, helped people to find public conveniences in London – British toilet humour, but practical with it.

Some designers exploited the related states of intrigue and frustration felt by website users. The Hi-ReS! site for the 2000 film *Requiem for a Dream* offered visitors a selection of obscure paths, using 'reveals' of new paths and narratives to tempt them onward, yet leaving them unsatisfied and wanting to know more about the film. Moving still further away from functionality, some designers and artists developed projects solely to experiment with and investigate the nature of the medium. The most celebrated of these was mediagenic Liverpudlian Danny Brown, who acknowledges the influences of Japanese Manga and photography on his work and describes his projects – which include the much-acclaimed *Mr Noodlebox* (1997–2001) – as entertaining 'interactive music videos'.[9]

AFTER THE FALL
Then, as the new millennium took its first breaths, the Internet investment bubble burst. The 'irrational exuberance' (a phrase associated with Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve) of speculation in telecom and dotcom stocks lost its
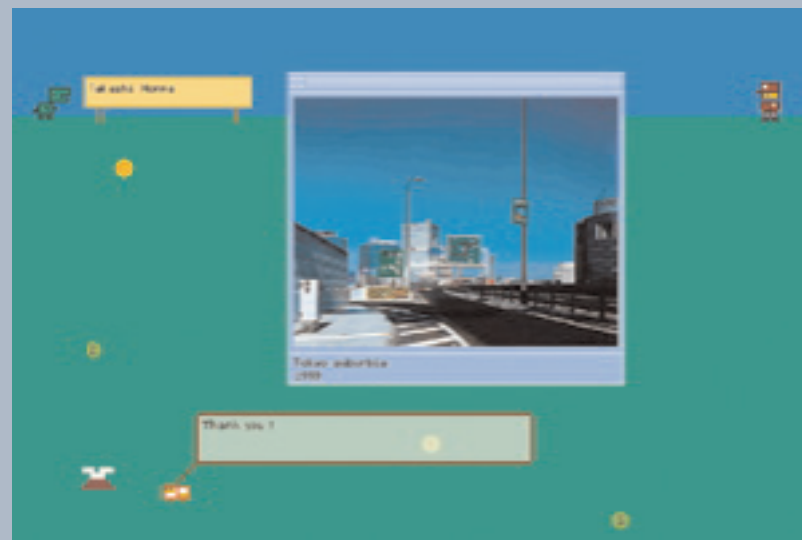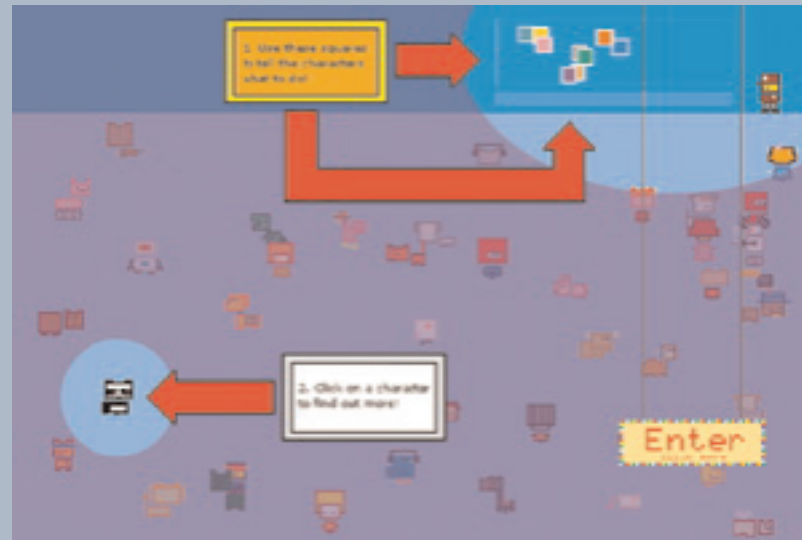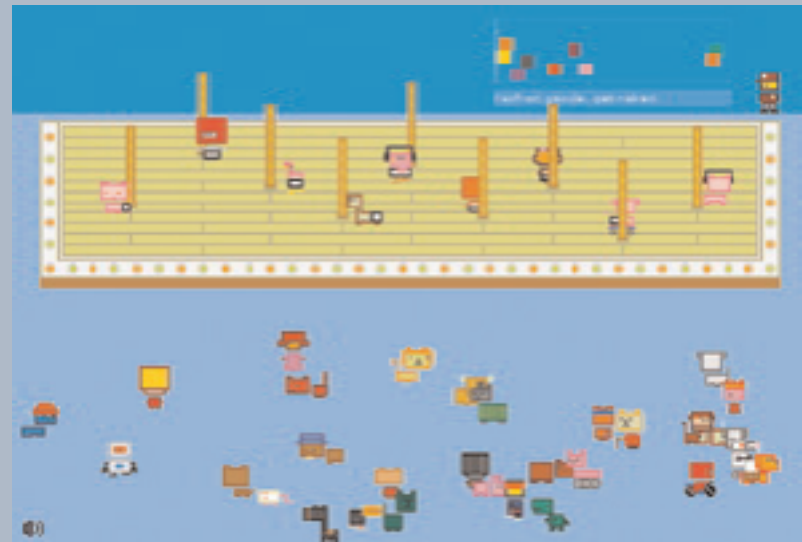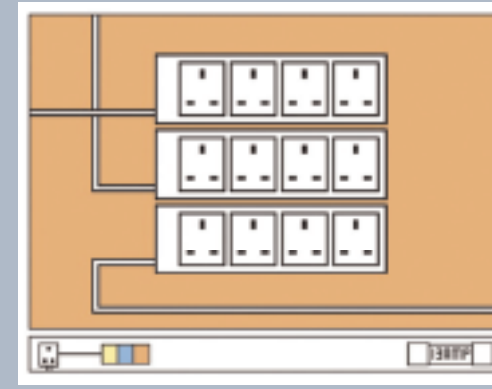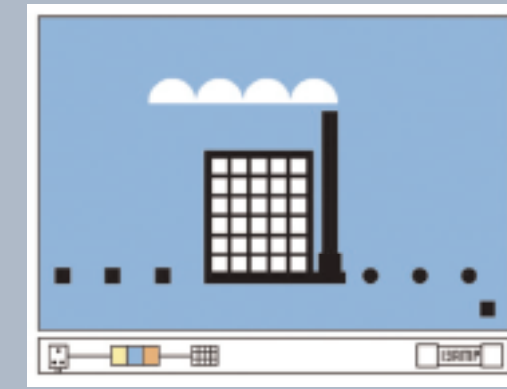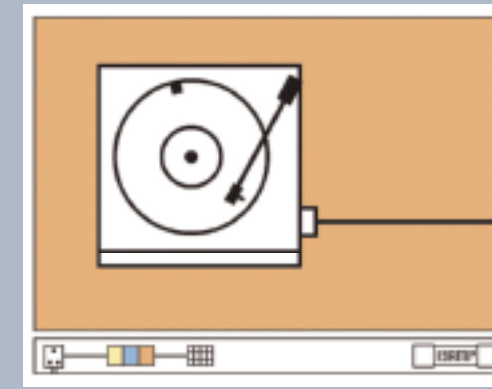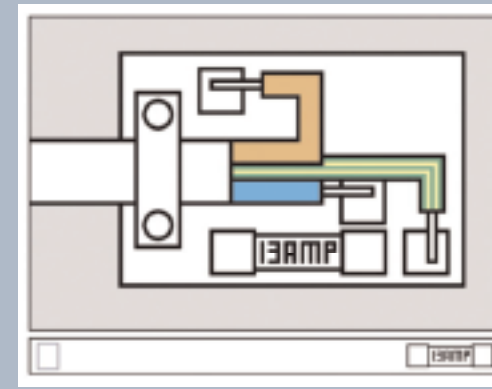

Tomato, corporate ident for Sony Connected_Identity, 2001. Creative direction: Tomato and One Sky Inc.
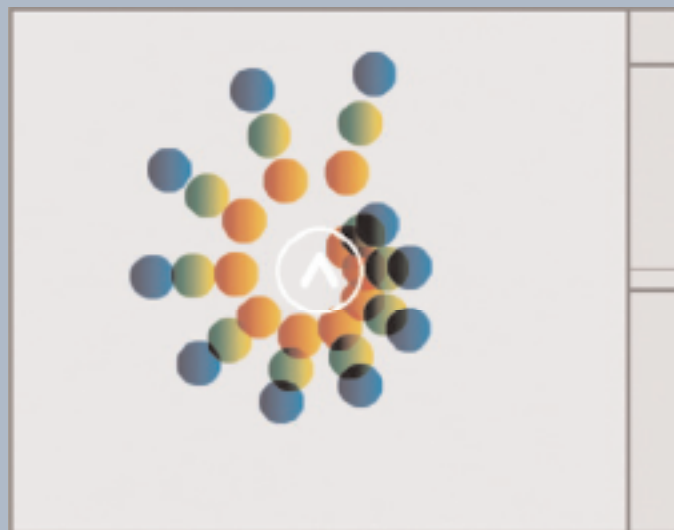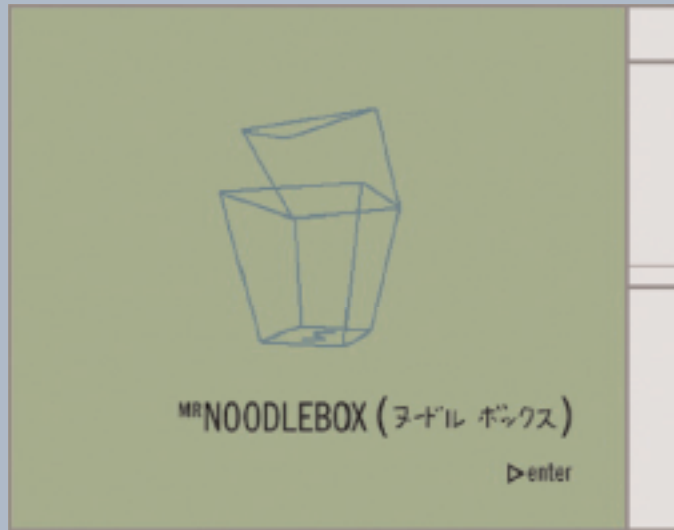
Top: **The Designers Republic**, websites for The Designers Republic, 2002

Airside, *Jam: Tokyo–London*, exhibition website for Barbican Art Gallery, 2001
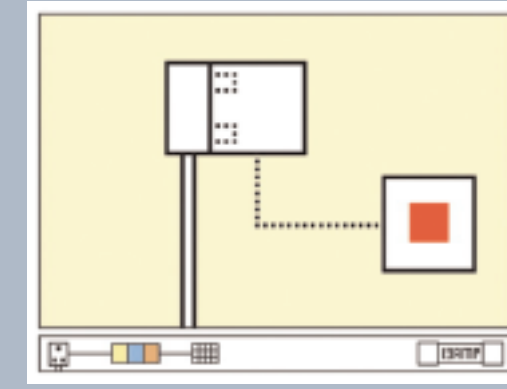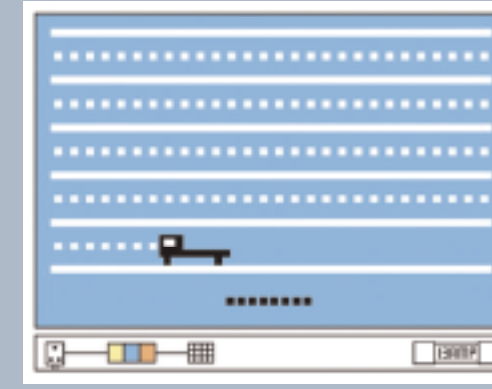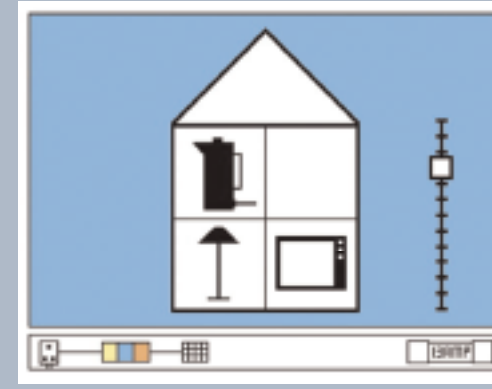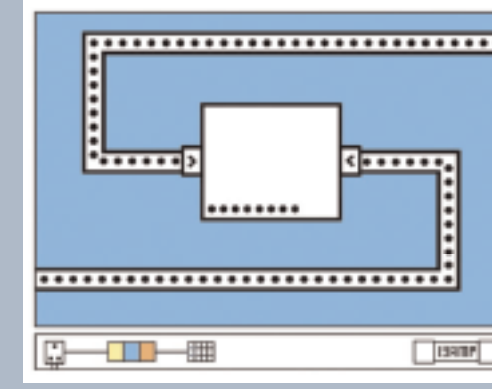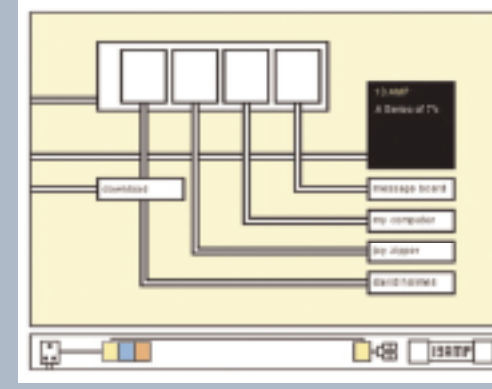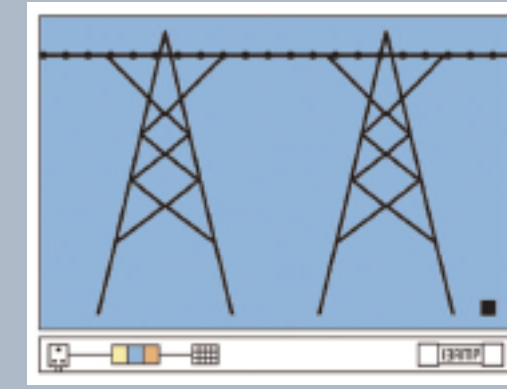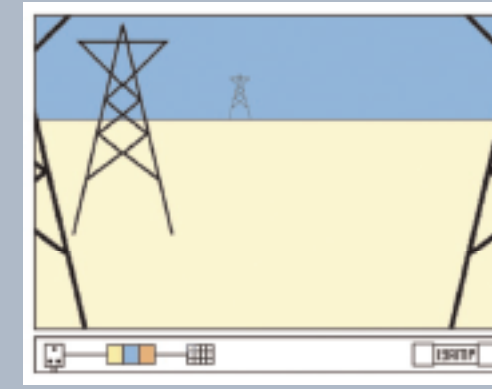
Friendchip (Anthony Burrill and Kip Parker), website for 13 Amp Records, 2002

bluster. In the web agency sector this led to a further round of mergers and acquisitions, while failures of studios such as Deepend later in 2001 served to produce many 'little acorns' such as Recollective – reminiscent of the fall-out from Webmedia's failure.[10] Some designers who left or were made redundant began working independently or set up other small studios. Many others moved to work for clients in-house.[11]

The charge of hubris was laid at the door of many designers and companies whose ambitions had risen with the stock market. Many engaged in self-flagellation. Some, such as Mark Hurst, evangelist for the importance of the 'user experience', argued that by treating the web as a 'graphic' medium, many designers had created an 'atrocious customer experience' – citing as examples sites such as Boo.com.[12] In their generalizations about design as a whole, and graphic design in particular, many commentators failed to appreciate that design is a process, rather than a thing in itself. To paraphrase one of communication theorist Paul Watzlawick's axioms, 'you cannot not design'.

With this utilitarian turn, web design did begin to diverge from one trend in graphic design at the time, the increasing focus on illustration, and to cleave instead to the historic concept in design thinking of truth to materials and simplicity. This design philosophy went on to characterize the work of many studios, such as Less Rain in London's Hoxton district, who note on their site that 'Less' is a byword for 'making a few design elements work more intelligently, unusually and 'organically' rather then encumbering a project with every off-the-shelf effect available'.[13] The truth to materials approach was epitomized by Friendchip collaborators Anthony Burrill and Kip Parker, whose early site 'Get Jet Set' employed a crude pixel aesthetic and digital sounds, not least because Burrill had no access to a scanner and artwork had to be originated on the computer.

Many designers who had been juniors in agencies during the dotcom boom were coming of age. Many of them had been influenced by designers such as Neville Brody, Peter Saville and Mark Farrow, whose work emphasized simplicity among other characteristics. The concept of truth to materials represented a recognition by designers that on the web – a 'deliver and print' medium – the final appearance of a design could not be fixed. At one level this resulted in a greater focus on the technical aspects of web technologies, at another a drive to map the characteristics of the web – the 'material' – to those of clients or their products and services. This approach can be seen in the design collaboration between Poke (whose partners include Deepend co-founder Simon

Danny Brown, *Mr Noodlebox*, personal website, 1997–2001
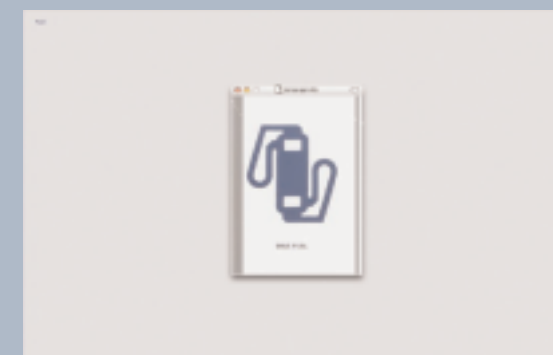
Top: **Less Rain**, website for Less Rain, 2003

Middle: **Less Rain**, website for Beck's Futures, 2003

Poke and Fuel, website for Fuel, 2000. Design and art direction: Peter Miles, Damon Murray and Stephen Sorrell, Fuel. Consultancy and construction: Poke

Waterfall) and Fuel on the Fuel site, in which the qualities of featured items, such as posters, are reflected in their technical implementation on the web.

The use of more traditional approaches to typography has also seen a renaissance, with designers exploiting the potential of Flash for presenting rich typographic compressions in dynamic environments, as seen in De-construct's site for graphic designer Vince Frost. Designs for the Hyphen Press design book website by Eric Kindel, and the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (RSA) site by Grundy & Northedge, were based on the elegant typography characteristic of classic editorial design. While there is no set of rules for typography on the web, many web designers have, like their counterparts in print, built on modernist thinking in typography. There is a tendency to use simple sanserif typography, not least because it is more readable on current low-quality screens. Deepend's 2001 site for the Design Museum in London used a recently designed sanserif typeface, adding movement and roll-over states to the site navigation.

A new appreciation for the virtues of simplicity and elegance, as well as attention to detail, could also be seen in website navigation, which revisited the graphic design approach to system design (for instance, the design of signage). When, for example, Nykris designed the interfaces for the MacOS X versions of a number of Microsoft products, including the Office software suite, Internet Explorer, MSN Messenger and Entourage, principal Nikki Barton chose to cite the information design work of Cartlidge Levene as an inspiration – particularly in view of their commitment to 'the tiny details that are so easily overlooked'.

Away from functional and navigation-driven design, a number of trends that had been evident in graphic design for a decade came to the fore. Web design drew on vernacular elements and street-culture aesthetics, and adopted a more 'rough around the edge' feel. The latter phenomenon was in response to the perfection of print and typography brought about by PostScript-based artworking, and a search for authenticity beyond the suspect veneer of corporations and brands. In this spirit, The Butterfly Effect developed a website in 2002 for music TV station VH1 using pastiched elements from the music industry such as a gig ticket and backstage pass. In 2003, Recollective's site design for Virgin Mobile's Virginmobilelouder campaign was based on the club flyer aesthetic, using manipulated photography to create rough two-tone images and visible dithered dots reminiscent of newsprint. Punk graphics, an older British street-culture aesthetic epitomized by Barney Bubbles and Jamie
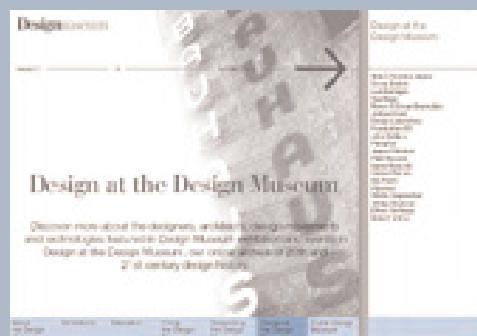
Top: **Grundy & Northedge**, website for Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (RSA), 2003

Middle: **Eric Kindel and Matt Patterson**, website for Hyphen Press. Original design: Kindel, 1998. Revised design: Patterson, 2000

Deepend, website for Design Museum, London, 2001

Reid, influenced the design of music fanzine site Playlouder. In a similar vein, Lateral described the style of its own site as 'a bit simple, amateur, not polished or shiny, and quite illustrative'. It is intended to show what Lateral staff like, and to be a bit of fun, with the only hard guideline being to 'make sure the font, colour and logo match'. This 'ground up' approach is distinctly British, in contrast to the more corporate and market-led approach of US organizations.[14]

Some of the more conceptual approaches of British graphic design, such as humour and story-telling, also reasserted themselves. As clients and agencies recognized that the web was a complementary medium to other media, such as print and television, they began to use it more appropriately and strategically, creating integrated campaigns based on one 'big idea'. Advertising agency Mother, for example, worked with its affiliated interactive studio Poke on the 2003 LiveSexy campaign for radio station Kiss, which was based on a watch that would tell its owner when they were going to die, and was inspired by evangelical teachings and religious websites.
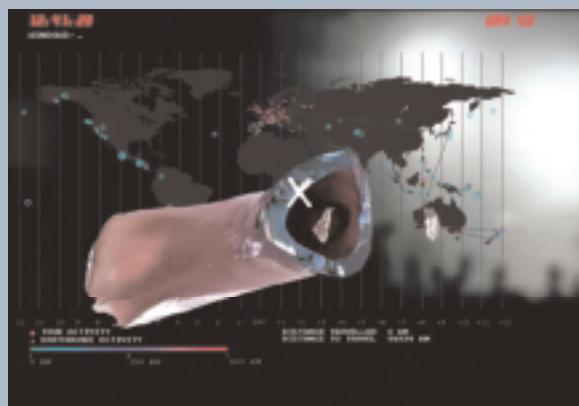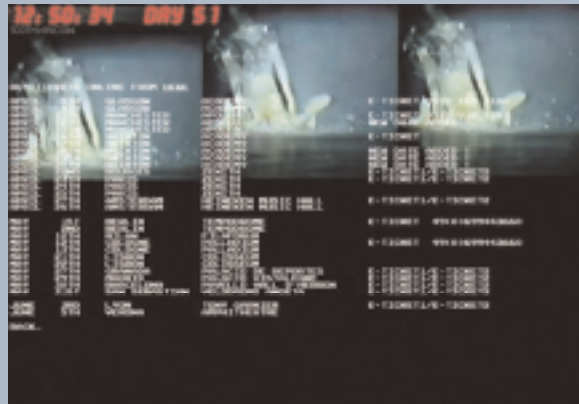
A TWO-WAY STREET
While graphic design has indeed had a substantial, if indirect, influence on web design, there are also many areas in which web design has gone beyond graphic design, and may therefore be able to shed new light on it.

Web designers are typically more involved in client strategy than graphic designers, and in the evaluation of the business benefits and return-on-investment of their work. They are also more likely to work across an organization, considering the specific needs of all those involved in a project. Their design and communication processes tend to be more consciously thought out and they generally think more carefully about the people for whom they are designing, conducting more user research and giving greater consideration to the usability of the final product.

In some respects these traits reflect the degree of professional self-consciousness that is required at the birth of a new discipline. However, we can also gain a better understanding of the graphic design process by examining it through the lens of web design. By adopting some of the processes and techniques made explicit by web design, graphic design could itself benefit.

Improvement or not, there is no doubt that the web and web design have already made a profound impact on graphic design. In the early days of digitally-based publishing, tools designed to

Top: **Nykris**, Microsoft Office v.X for Apple Macintosh, 2000

The Designers Republic, website for Manhattan Loft Corporation, 2004

facilitate existing processes, such as page make-up, had an influence in themselves. Designers started to exploit the pixelated nature of digital media, for example, and to investigate the possibilities of layering type and image. The vector-based Flash aesthetic has also been influential, encouraging flatter, more graphical forms in work as diverse as the Monkey Dust cartoons, interstitials for BBC Education, magazine cover illustrations (particularly in design and IT-related publications), the BBC Four identity (which modulates to the announcer's voice) and the Royksopp *Remind Me* video.[15]

The web 'look' can also be seen in the use of web-specific fonts, such as Verdana, in print. Internet and dotcom-style nomenclature (as well as SMS and email) have inspired the use of lowercase typography, concatenated words and new uses of punctuation, seen, for example, in Fibre Design's work on the identity of creative PR company The Fish Can Sing. Web and graphical user interface elements – particularly hypertext links and menus – are also widely used in graphic design.

Some of the influences have, of course, been less direct. While the ease of accessing and sharing information on the web has given graphic designers a rich source of inspiration, it has also forced some designers of books, magazines and other printed design artefacts to adopt a more tactile and idiosyncratic approach. This is evident in the use of dramatic photography and illustration; unconventional formats and finishes; and hand-lettering in place of commercial fonts.

This ease of access has also supported graphic design practice. Design consultant Heath Kane observes that 'designers of all practices are turning to the web as a source of inspiration, as well as utilising it to become content creators to share their ideas and work'. Resources such as *Kaliber10000* (subtitled 'The Designers Lunchbox'), and *Linkdup*, created by Hoxton-based digital media consultants Preloaded, reflect this disposition. In addition, mailing lists and, more recently, weblogs have become popular among designers and design commentators. Matt Jones's original and reflective *Blackbeltjones* journal is a popular example of the latter.

Web design and its related disciplines of interface and interaction design still have a long way to go before they can help us to realize the full potential of digital and networked environments. In many respects these disciplines are in a kind of stasis, an ironic result of the enormous success of the personal computer and the web. It is perhaps surprising that graphic design, founded in systems thinking and focused on the visual communication of ideas, has not had a more profound influence on British web design. However, it is not

too late. Graphic design thinking may be able to give momentum to the next leaps we need to make, particularly as we take the necessary steps of grounding these technologies in the physical and social worlds.

In the longer term, web design practice is likely to be subsumed by interface and interaction design, and we may then no longer distinguish interfaces – web, software, mobile phone – according to the technology behind them.[16] Even these distinct design skills may eventually disappear and become part of every other design discipline, including graphic design. If this happens, graphic design will have evolved as much as web design has needed to evolve.

Hi-Res!, Massive Attack band website for Virgin, 2003

Rob Corradi, Preloaded, website for *Linkdup*, 1999 (top) and updated version 2004 (bottom)