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From
Pens & Needles;
Robert Brownjohn

Introduction

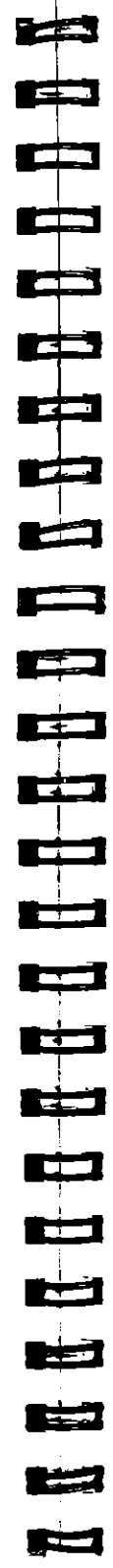
Robert Brownjohn was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1925 and died in London in 1970. In a short but intense working career, on both sides of the Atlantic, he helped to re-define graphic design from a formal to a conceptual art, by replacing a concern for shape, color and typography with a concern for the idea behind the work at hand. He switched from a graphic design firm in New York to an ad agency when he moved to London in 1961, and in 1965 he joined a commercial film production company. Each step brought him closer to dealing exclusively with ideas, and how most directly to express them.

He left little finished work behind, aside from a few spectacular ad campaigns on film and in print, titles for two James Bond films, a Rolling Stones album jacket. He might only be considered a magnificent gagster - both from a study of what work can be found, and from a knowledge of his life style, particularly the last ten years spent in London. However, those who taught him, worked with him, studied under him claim that he changed their thoughts and inspired their work greatly. All who knew him speak of an aura of brilliance about him: his obituary in Architectural Forum notes that he "may have been the most talented student ever to have graduated from Chicago's Institute of Design." Serge Chermayeff, an extremely influential teacher and friend, describes him as "the most brilliant boy of his generation."

It might not seem as relevant to study the life and career of a graphic designer as it is to study those of a fine artist. The designer works, after all, for a client, not himself, and his work will be remembered in the light of how successfully he met the requirements of a particular job. Brownjohn himself stated in an interview in 1965:

Brownjohn
London, late 60's

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"I'm not a painter or a sculptor. I'm a graphic designer. I've got to have a client. I can't just sit down and work because I feel like it." His moods, the ups and downs of his personal life, should have little bearing on his memory, for it is only his work - that which is finished and printed or filmed for posterity - by which we remember and judge him. But Brownjohn's theory of design focussed on the eradication of boundaries between commonplace experience and art, and thus his art cannot be studied separately from his life. Furthermore, Brownjohn was for most of his life a heroin addict, and it would be impossible to study his work without taking into account the erratic working patterns into which his addiction - and the hidden causes of his addiction - led him.

With these considerations in mind, Brownjohn's life and career can be viewed as portrait of the swinging 60's in London. He developed and exploited an outrageous personality - even physical appearance - that made him attractive to a British audience clamoring for new and stimulating ideas, styles, outlooks on society in general as well as in art. Just emerging from the depression of the war years and the relatively conservative reaction displayed, for example, in the Festival of Britain of 1951, England welcomed a madman with talent. Brownjohn ate, drank, smoked, dressed, spoke, acted extravagantly; commanded the highest wages from his employers and enormous fees from his clients. He helped to create the image of the graphic designer, photographer or commercial filmmaker as that of a glamorous, highly paid original individual - a 'beautiful person' along with the rock stars, fashion designers, models, actors that were his contemporaries and friends. Like the photographer in the film Blow-up, he maintained a fast-paced and expensive lifestyle; that was integral (he would have had it appear), to his art, his theory of graphic design, and his method of working.

Brownjohn
New York, mid to late 50's

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Few of his admirers in London may have perceived that he derived this style from Moholy-Nagy's and later Serge Chermayeff's teaching in Chicago. He personified Moholy's ultimate goal, that art and life be integrated. He lived out the view "we observe art because of its basic and common roots permeating life." He fulfilled to excess Moholy's prediction in Vision in Motion that it is "the task of this generation to search for its roots... The arts, for example, can take the individual by storm through sensory experiences, directly by feelings, without involving much intellectual participation." Most importantly, "the true artist is the grindstone of the senses; he sharpens eyes, mind, feeling; he interprets ideas and concepts through his own media."

Brownjohn's last project typifies every aspect of his relationship to design: his lack of interest or ability to carry his ideas to completion (the project was never finished); his outrageousness (the client never accepted it); his stress on content over form; and his belief in the use of ordinary and personal images. A forestry conservation society needed a short film to describe their program and the urgent need to preserve the forests in England. Before the camera, a beautiful blonde shaves off her long hair. The parallel is obvious, its emotional impact - even in the form of a mere verbal description - too violent to have been approved. That the film clip which was shown at Brownjohn's memorial service, and with it any accompanying words, were lost only underscores the powerful nature of conceptual design. We do not need to witness the specific visual form of the film to understand and respond to the effectiveness of the idea. Perhaps his client would have preferred a reference to the trees and forests themselves; but Brownjohn chose to emphasize the concept of destruction. The devastation of that head of hair was the most direct realization of that concept because it evoked fear far more intimate - and therefore universal - than could trees and forests.

Brownjohn
London, mid to late 60's
with Kiki Byrne
below and middle right

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Was Brownjohn ahead of his time? Or had he simply expanded upon a theory of graphic design introduced to him early on? His life and work were one in that he drew heavily from his experience and bitter interpretation of the world around him. Brownjohn brought to his work and introduced to his contemporaries an approach to graphic design worthy of Moholy-Nagy's 'experiment in totality,' but in the spirit of cynicism, instead of the optimism of his teacher.



Brownjohn
London, late 60's
with Kiki Byrne, left

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Newark: 1925-43
Chicago: 1943-51

Little is known of Brownjohn's early years except that he was born and grew up in Newark, New Jersey. His father Herbert Brownjohn, originally British from Highgate, was a city transport inspector, so his background must have been fairly simple and his move to Chicago in 1944 a major one.

The New Bauhaus had been established in Chicago in 1937 with Walter Gropius as consultant and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy as director. Moholy had left the Bauhaus at Dessau in 1928 to spend the intervening years in London. His original Chicago faculty included Alexander Archipenko, Gyorgy Kepes, Robert J. Wolff among others. Due to lack of continued support from his sponsor, the Association of Arts and Industries, the New Bauhaus closed in 1938, and the following year he founded the School of Design with members of the faculty. In 1944 the School's name was changed to the Institute of Design and it obtained college status. The student body increased substantially as the war ended.

Herbert Read, a missionary of the modern movement, was a guest lecturer in 1946. He wrote of the Institute, "Some people might question its underlying principles, its methods of teaching, but I think they would be flying in the face of all evidence. These methods and principles have stood the test of more than twenty-five years experience... since 1919, the founding by Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus in Weimer. All that is most fruitful in modern design can be traced to this fountainhead. I would say that the Institute of Design is the best school of its kind that exists in the world today." ¹

Certainly Brownjohn owed a great deal to a high school teacher who recognized his talent so early and who suggested such a relatively unconventional school as the Institute.

airial view of Chicago
late 30's (?)
from The Bauhaus

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His next important teacher then, was Moholy himself, who believed that "man must have the insight and the intellectual power to utilize the entire body of culture and civilization." The foundation course, lasting two years in Brownjohn's case, included problems in painting, sculpture, space-time, motion pictures, literature and group poetry. Ideally the students would be trained in history, art history and literature; in manual skills for dealing with basic materials; and in a more complex understanding of the machinery of mass production, for "the machine must be directed by the artistic mind."

Moholy wrote of the philosophy behind the program and teaching at the New Bauhaus and the Institute of Design, based on principles established at the Bauhaus in Germany where he had taught. The literature program included readings by the Futurists, the Surrealists, the Dadaists; Whitman, Joyce, Freud; a study of the 'new poetry,' and children's verse. Much of his writing and references apply directly to Brownjohn's approach later to graphic design. Of Gertrude Stein he wrote, "the commonplace, pebbles worn smooth by the streams and waves of routine talk acquires... a polished, well-shaped quality. Through the relationship which she discovers between such fragments she exposes - like the cubist collages and the motion picture - all their discreet connotations and deeply characterizing values." Synthesizing this view he quoted from Baudelaire, "'Great Style? Nothing is more beautiful than the commonplace.'"

This fascination with the commonplace would become one of the most important principles behind Brownjohn's theory of advertising design. The other important principle, that idea matters more than form - derives from Moholy-Nagy's enthusiasm for the rapid, simultaneous communication of several messages at once, as in Apollinaire's ideograms and Marinetti's concrete poetry. Through appa-

clockwise starting
upper left:

Kurt Schwitters, 'Poem'

James Joyce, diagram for
'Finnegans Wake'

Marcel Duchamps,
'Self Portrait'

Marinetti,
from 'les mots en liberte'

reproduced from
Vision in Motion

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rently startling contrasts, these artists called attention to underlying conceptual similarities and thus created a system of visual symbolism. The humor that intrigued him might be traced to the Dadaists and the Surrealists who, relying on the same principles of conceptual art, brought together mundane elements visually to create a complex, contradictory, often ironic whole.

Formally, Brownjohn would have been exposed to the art of Moholy's friends and contemporaries working in Europe in the 20's and 30's. In Vision in Motion he mentions or illustrates paintings, sculpture, photographs by Braque, Picasso, Leger, Feininger, Brancusi, Moore, Mondrian, Schwitters, Man Ray, Bruguere, among others. The aesthetic quality of this work must have impressed students introduced to it for the first time. The spirit of invention, of design for living within the potential of the machine age, must constantly have been tempered or balanced by reference to the aesthetic models that Moholy admired.

Two further interests of Moholy's should be mentioned in connection with Brownjohn's subsequent development of graphic design: light in general, and motion pictures in specific. Moholy's own work demonstrates his fascination with light: the photograms that he invented simultaneously with Man Ray in the 20's, and the sculptures that he created from plexiglas and other transparent or translucent materials. He originally called the workshop in which photography and film-making were taught, the 'Light-Workshop:' stating, "light must be used according to its basic characteristics and the film architect will have to conform to its new orientation." About the potential for motion pictures he wrote: "the impact of the new film on the public has to come from a new 'content' adequate to the advanced tools used for its realization." Instead of simply filming stage sets for movies - even if the objects and backgrounds were real - the film designer must discover content appropriate

Laszlo Moholy-Nagy
light sculpture
'Space Modulator'
Chicago, 1940

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specifically to the range of this new and unexplored medium. It is certain that Moholy's ideas in these areas made a lasting impression on Brownjohn. The last work to which he was drawn producing commercial films, designing movie titles, and even acting in films, affirms his interest. He was to challenge formally as well as conceptually the limits of the medium as he came to it in the 60's, carrying out in his own style the teachings and the predictions of Moholy-Nagy.

It is interesting that in discussing his approach to film he would use architecture, as Moholy had, as comparison and model. In 1965 he stated in an interview: "Architecture is the greatest catalyst in design. It provides a structural sense and discipline to your composition. I like working with film because it is a very architectonic medium. Making a movie is building in space, just like architecture." At the Institute, despite Moholy's insistence that there can be no hierarchy in the arts, architecture was considered the culmination, or goal of the skills and theories developed there. In the New Education he wrote: "the fundamentals of drawing, colors, modeling, mechanical drafting, photography, mathematics, physics, chemistry and the humanities are the same... in architecture." It was the architect after all who would definitively create the humane environment in which art and life could become united.

When Moholy died in the winter of 1946, he was replaced by Serge Chermayeff, an architect and designer who had studied and worked in London before coming to the United States at the outset of World War II. Before his appointment he had been chairman of the Department of Design at Brooklyn College, and had taught at least one summer course in architecture at the Institute in 1942. By the academic year of his arrival, students were graduating with college degrees, prepared for (and encouraged to attend) graduate schools. The training these students

above:
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1943

below:
Serge Chermayeff, 1946

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received should have ideally suited them for further study in architecture. It was only natural that the aim of many would be Harvard's School of Design directed by Walter Gropius, the leader and founder of the Bauhaus in Germany, and consultant to Moholy's New Bauhaus.

Chermayeff, after Moholy-Nagy, was to become Brownjohn's next great influence, personally as well as artistically. Significantly, Brownjohn chose not to continue in architecture, although his training would have prepared him for it, and he was to refer to it later as a source or structure for much of his later work. The reasons for his decision to abandon architecture as a profession are important for an understanding of his approach to graphic design, and conceptual design.

Brownjohn arrived at the Institute in the fall of 1944, about three weeks late for registration. Because of the war, the class was small, only about fifteen students. Bj - the nickname he came with - had been classified 4F by the army and thus missed service both in World War II and later in the Korean War. Bob Cato, a classmate and friend, who would remain close for the rest of Brownjohn's life, describes him as looking physically awful: slouched, clothes too big, pale; his only exercise, striking matches. He was a chain smoker already at the age of nineteen, and, precociously, a heavy marijuana smoker.

Cato and another student, David Aaron, took Bj in to share their attic apartment and their cat, Hawthorne. According to Cato Bj was "belligerent, anti-social... wanted you to find out about him, wouldn't give anything away... had one of the keenest wits, an extraordinary sense of humor... he was very quick, facile, lazy, a thief, a liar, a cheat; but absolutely wonderful and adorable... we had terrible fights..." A difficult roommate. With him

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he brought a collection of records and a profound admiration for the pianist Walter Giesecking, a complete unknown to most at that time. He put on Giesecking evenings at which his fellow students were enraptured, for Brownjohn "lived, breathed and felt" Giesecking, and was able to convey and share his enthusiasm. Another great love was the cat, who lived only in the apartment and outside on the rooftops and had never set foot on the ground. Bj thought it was wonderful, fantastic: the idea of a cat who lived exclusively five stories above the street.

In school, Brownjohn was hard to keep up with. He had "a keen and available mind... an extraordinary IQ." His work, always produced at the last minute, was always the best. While other students, however intelligent, still had to work hard, Bj "worked hard not to work."

The teachers, among others, for this class were Moholy-Nagy in the light workshop; Johannes Molzen in color; Ralph Rapsen and George Fred Keck in architecture. In addition to these workshops were the woodshop, history (of the movement surrounding the Bauhaus in Europe), and literature. Brownjohn excelled in everything although he absorbed more from some instructors than from others. He had little patience with Molzen for example, who had recently escaped Germany with great hardship, and whose English was difficult to understand. Rapsen, a tough disciplinarian, deplored Bj's work habits, although he with the others could not help but admire Brownjohn's superb draftsmanship and the fluidity of his mind.

Moholy was perhaps more friendly with other students at this time, but had a tremendous respect for Bj's abilities, and his humor. He was the only one of the students and other admirers who would not hesitate to chide Moholy as well as joke with him, as he drew no lines for differences in age. In Vision in Motion Moholy published a 'Tactile chart in bent plastic' that Brownjohn must have

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Bj

produced in that first year. It is similar to a photograph of one - among other sculptures - reproduced on the front page of Moholy's prospectus 'the new bauhaus' of 1937. Brownjohn's sculpture differs from its predecessor, and from other work reproduced in Vision in Motion in its roughness. To our eye it recalls more recent abstract sculpture rather than the 'streamlined' exercises more commonly produced at the Institute.

Outside of school Bj spent a lot of time on the South Side with Cato, who had been a band boy for Count Basie. He liked the music and the people - he appreciated the truth sung, spoken and played at the black clubs he frequented. Drugs were a problem both at the Institute and outside. He had experimented with hard drugs even before his Chicago days, with needle marks on his arms to prove it. According to Cato he seemed "always the man that struggled with phantoms within... always angry and torn." This was the beginning, the avant garde of drug peddling among artists particularly. With his interest in jazz, the company he kept, and his often depressed temperament, Brownjohn must have been especially susceptible.

To support himself he freelanced graphic design. He was employed by Coronet/Esquire for layouts and spot drawings; and by Ed Bartolucci and Jack Waldheim, final year students at the Institute who had set up a partnership together. Both offices hired Bj for his "incredible" facility at rendering, Bartolucci and Waldheim had also offered space to Gyorgy Kepes who had left the Institute previously to teach students in photography independently, Brownjohn among them.

After the first year at the Institute many of the students in Bj's class left Chicago, for the army or elsewhere. Brownjohn stayed for the next year and the following, during which time he assisted Moholy in advertising and exhibition work. When Serge Chermayeff

above:
Moholy-Nagy,
cover for 'the new bauhaus'

below:
Brownjohn,
'Tactile chart in bent plastic'
from Vision in Motion

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arrived in the winter of 1946/47 he made Bj and Robert Kessler, both of whom had completed their basic workshop training, special students in architecture. Kessler had just returned from the War, having spent the two years previous to Bj's at the Institute, and having attended Chermayeff's summer course in 1942. Kessler and Brownjohn shared an office adjacent to that of Crombie Taylor, who was assistant director. Both students assisted Chermayeff in teaching, and taught night classes on their own. They were set one complex problem to be completed by the spring of 1947, the design of a museum/cultural center.

Kessler remembers Bj at this time as extremely lonely, highly competitive, and with an enormous ego. He was not popular with fellow students, with a reputation as "a rotten personality... put people down easily... nasty." The faculty was impressed, however; Chermayeff and he took a liking to each other, and the Chermayeff family unofficially adopted him into their household. A dentist named Rapoport not only fixed Bj's ruined teeth, but also fed him every time he came, to put some weight on him. There is no doubt of his charm: an intelligent young man with the appearance of a lost soul, he quickly endeared himself to both of these families.

The architecture problem must have served as a turning point in Brownjohn's career, as he was never able to finish it. Kessler recalls that what he did put down on paper was done well; that he was clearly a superb draughtsman; but that he had an inability to layout in an organized manner, follow through, or finish such a large scale and complex problem. He seemed competitive and secretive, full of ideas but unable to sit down and develop any of them. The reasons might have been personal - his involvement with drugs, and his life outside school in jazz clubs - or perhaps he was simply not cut out for architecture. Judging by his later affinity for short-term projects in

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graphic design, and his reputation for a high turnover of ideas, it is not surprising that he failed at or was not interested in this part of what the Institute had to offer him.

In any case, Brownjohn did not go on to Harvard the following year with Kessler, even though both were being prepared to go. He visited Kessler once in Cambridge in 1950, partly to lend a hand with Kessler's final project, partly to check on what he had missed. Instead, Bj remained in Chicago after leaving the Institute in 1947. During the next two years he freelanced for several advertising as well as architectural offices, and for a year worked at the Chicago Planning Commission. In the fall of 1949 Chermayeff invited him to come back to the Institute to teach full time: to become a professor, without a degree, at the age of 24.

It must have been at this time that Brownjohn became more seriously involved with drugs. Many explanations have been offered: was it Charlie Parker himself who introduced him finally to heroin? Was it a girlfriend? The most plausible account may be that it was a cab driver who frequently ferried Bj from his daytime classes at the Institute to night school where he taught as well. He was exhausted, under terrific pressure as Chermayeff's protege and friend, so young to be teaching. Many of his students would have been ex-GI's, older, tougher than Bj. Beneath his facade of cynicism he hid an extremely vulnerable and insecure side to his character.

Sue Allen, who was a night school student in graphics in 1950/51, remembers Brownjohn as a "remarkable man... a good critic - very tough, sarcastic," also decadent... a zombie." He was markedly on drugs, or very sick; he would sit hunched up in a corner acting as if the teaching and his presence in the classroom were a ter-

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rible chore. The entire class would be riveted to the cigarette he held in his hand, as it burned down to where it must have hurt his fingers. Was his mind so far away, or could he actually not feel the pain? Two thirds of the way through the year, in the spring of 1951, he was replaced, presumably having been asked to resign. He left Chicago "due to personal difficulties" to move to New York.



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New York: 1951-1960

Brownjohn actually moved to New Jersey to live with his married sister in order to work in New York. He was hired in April as a graphic designer by George Nelson, on the recommendation of Serge Chermayeff. There he worked on various jobs, including perhaps, graphics for Herman Miller furniture. Nelson recalls a project to design a new surface texture for a table top material like formica. Brownjohn came up with countless original ideas, including bringing to the office a box of corn flakes which he emptied on his desk to make a rubbing.

Apparently to support his addiction, Bj worked around the clock doing freelance jobs in all of his spare time. Nelson describes him at this period as "very talented and attractive - thin, young, vulnerable." Either the drugs, or the long hours or both prevented him from keeping regular hours at work. His performance was so erratic that despite his skills and intelligence Nelson was forced to ask him to leave in February of 1952.

Robert Cato picked Brownjohn out of the gutter, literally, one rainy night in Greenwich Village later that year. He invited Bj to come work for the office he had started with Ed Bartolucci. BC Associates paid top wages - \$350 per week - but Brownjohn seldom worked a full week. "He did good work, always finished a job, but he wouldn't come in unless there was a job to be done." The steady employment ended when Cato discovered that Bj had broken into his apartment and stolen everything to sell for drugs. Cato pressed charges; Brownjohn was arrested and stayed in prison for several months. It was Cato who brought him home the day after New Year's, and they remained friends. The drugs made him impossible to live or work with, and those who were to remain his

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24 sheet 2 color 238 x 106 inch outdoor billboard poster

Newspaper advertising mat with space for your location and dates of revival to be imprinted



WHOSE SLAVE ARE YOU



BUCKNER FANNING'S SERMON

location & dates of revival imprinted here



WHOSE SLAVE ARE YOU

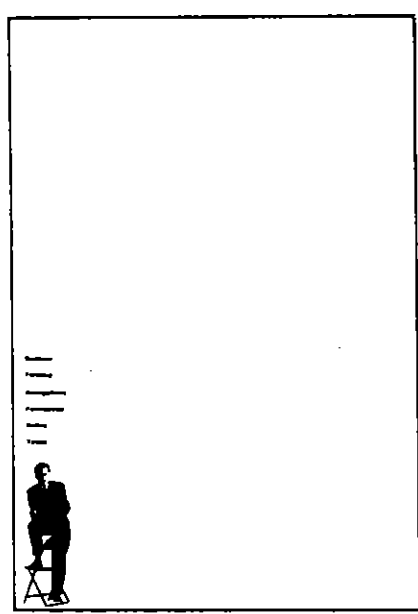
BUCKNER FANNING'S SERMON



location & dates of revival imprinted here



Buckner Fanning Evangelistic Foundation stationery available for direct mail use



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close friends had to consider the drugs to be outside of Bj's true character.

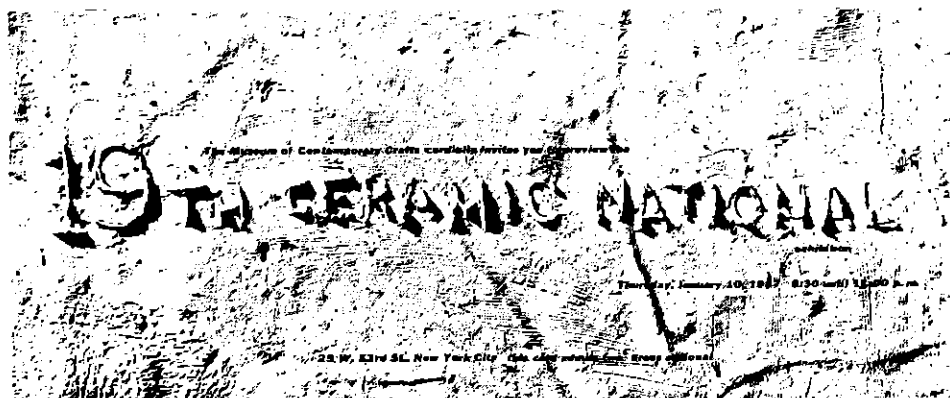
During the years 1953 to 1957, Brownjohn worked in various offices for brief periods, freelanced and taught at Cooper Union and Pratt Institute. His clients included Columbia Records, where Cato was now art director; the American Crafts Museum; and Pepsi Cola World, the in-house magazine for the Pepsi Cola Company. Among his supporters were Bill Brown, the editor of Pepsi-Cola World, and Dick Davidson who owned Colorcraft, the printing company that produced much of Bj's work.

Another interesting client was Bruckner Fanning, an evangelist minister for whom Brownjohn designed posters, leaflets, billboards; all of the paraphernalia for a traveling evangelist missionary. The reasons for taking on such a strange project remain a mystery. Certainly he needed the income from any job that came along, but also he must have been fascinated by the challenge, and enjoyed employing sophisticated graphics for such a popular audience. The focus in all of the pieces is on the enormous question mark, larger than Fanning himself who stands beside it, pointing at YOU. The large area devoted to white space emphasizes the monumentality of the question, as if this were the only question worth asking. The choice of colors, red and black, hints at the possibility of hell-fire. Fanning stands silhouetted against the white void, beside a simple metal folding chair easily recognizable as the kind inevitably to be found at a revivalist meeting; it signals a direct, 'of the people' approach. All of the graphic elements, however spontaneously conceived, are carefully combined for an effect of stark simplicity. The message on the billboard would be impossible to miss driving fast along the highway, and the leaflets too compelling to put down. Brownjohn, always interested in street graphics, kept a wall-sized

Brownjohn
publicity material
for Bruckner Fanning
New York, mid 50's

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NEW YORK
BIRDLAND
COMPOSER
BASIN STREET
MEMBERS
EDDIE CONDON'S
HICKORY HOUSE
JIMMY BYANS



poster in his apartment, amused perhaps by the irony of his own contribution to such a broad audience. Cato cited this example of Bj's work in an exhibit and later an article in Print in 1957 called "Sources of Inspiration." Also included was work by such important artists and designers as Paul Rand, Alexis Brodovitch, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenburg, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, and others.

In 1956 Brownjohn was employed by Jacques Willaumez Associates. Out of this office and with Cato, who was working freelance, he helped to design an American Jazz Annual, the edition for the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival. The marriage of music and design was ideal for Bj. His cover in red, white and blue for American uses the grid of the piano keyboard for his composition combined with a shadowy photograph of real hands playing. Inside the magazine are spot illustrations by Brownjohn - their playful linear quality a translation of the music to be performed at this festival.

For the American Crafts Museum he designed leaflets, invitations, and catalogues. The invitation to the 19th Ceramic National Exhibition visually recalls tactile exercises he would have produced at the Institute of Design. The letters, represented as being roughly tooled from clay, describe the exhibit at two levels at once: the literal physical presence of clay complements the arbitrary symbolism of verbal description.

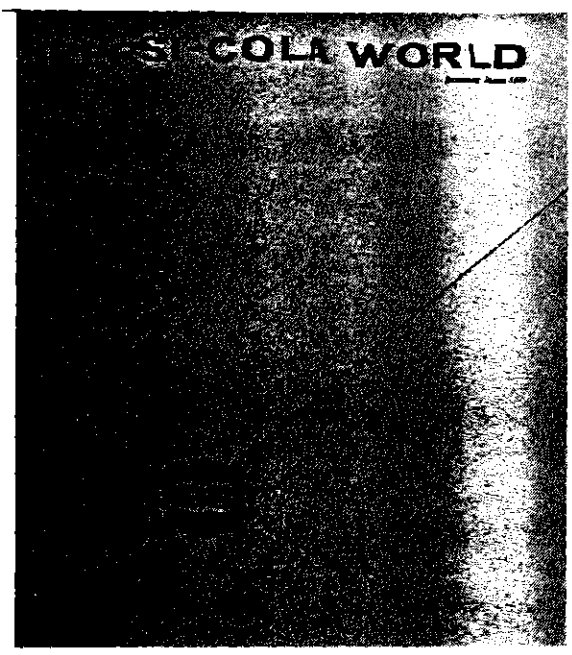
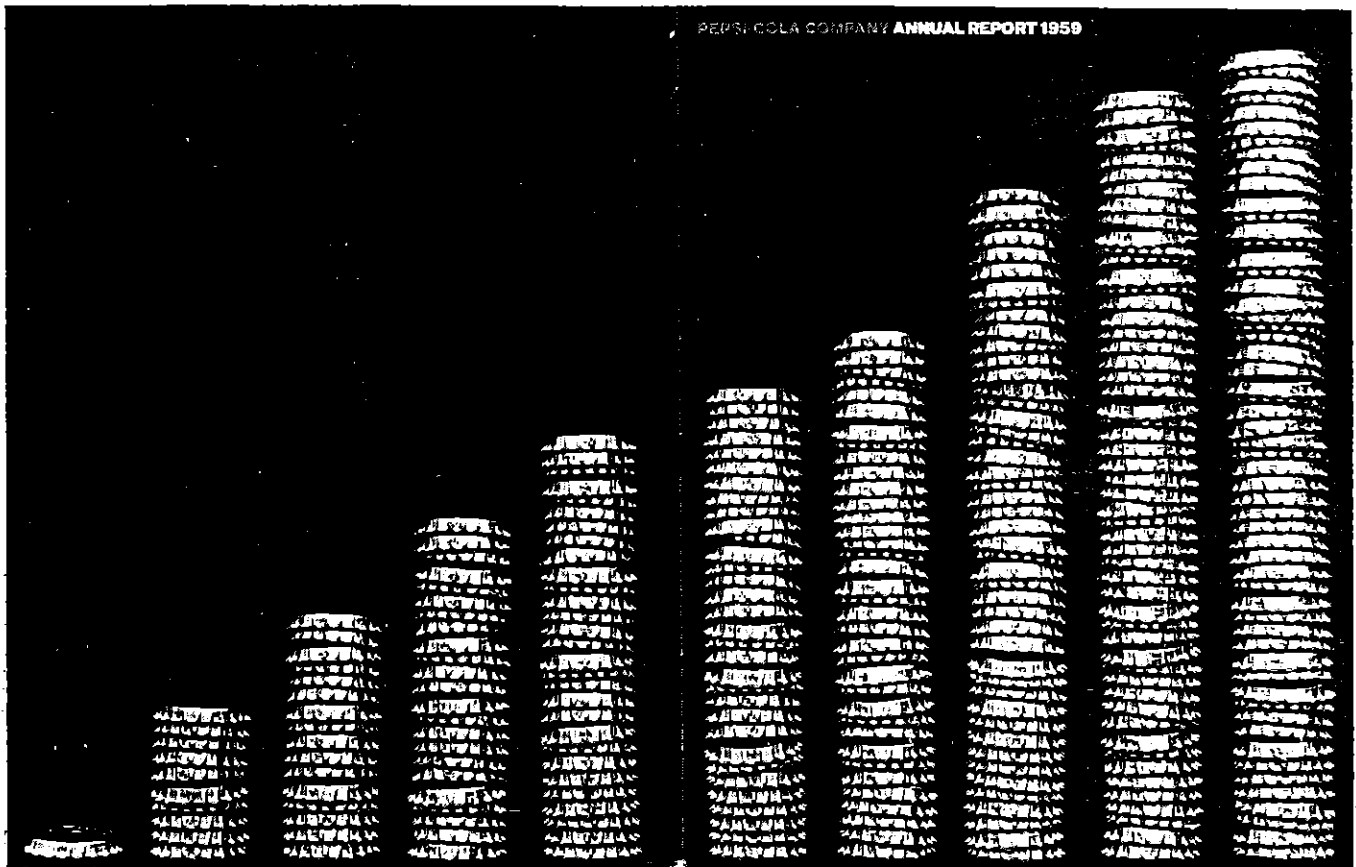
The Pepsi covers and record jackets display Brownjohn's (or his associates') imagination and humor. What visual parallel could translate the idea of Pepsi Cola in the summer time? The bottle cap as fish bait is colored by the water in which it is suspended, which affects the lettering above and which alludes to the thirst-quenching attraction of a Pepsi. The concept of fishing on a hot summer's day encompasses the entire cover, conveying

upper left:
Brownjohn
Jacques Willaumez Assoc.
Jazz handbill
New York, mid 50's

upper right:
Brownjohn
Jacques Willaumez Assoc.
cover for
1956 Newport Jazz Festival
Jazz Annual
New York

below:
Brownjohn
invitation to an
exhibition,
American Crafts Museum
New York, 1957

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several messages at once. Stacked bottle caps for the 1959 Annual Report present an informal but meaningful graph. More bottle caps equal more Pepsi drunk each year equal more profit if we read the caps as coins. A visual pun describes humorously Pepsi's financial success.

The repetition of bright colors on black on a record jacket for Machito and his Orchestra evokes the rhythm and style of Machito's latin music, and the repetition of the title itself, "Si-si, No-no." The rows of heavy block letters are not mechanically perfect, only slightly irregular, reflecting the rough, raw quality of the music. Similarly, the cool white telephone for a J.J. Johnson Quintet cover creates another rhythm, set off by the minimal typography of a telephone book listing for the title, "dial JJ5."

In the summer of 1955 Brownjohn had married Donna Walters with Robert Cato as best man, and the following year their daughter Eliza was born. He wrote to Serge Chermayeff, "Looks just like me... she's going to be a musical comedy star. Two hits with Eliza this month, musical version of Pygmalion and now this." In the same letter he included news of Ivan and Sara Chermayeff: "You have a wonderful son and daughter-in-law by the way... Ivan is doing just great at his jobs and he starts his new one at Columbia Records April 1st which should be an excellent chance." The young Chermayeff family and the Brownjohns were evidently good friends, and Brownjohn proud of the friendship. Sara had stayed up with Bj at the hospital when Eliza was born and they had talked the night through about everything, music, books, ideas, plans. She remembers: "He could do that... he was really charming... Bj could get anybody do anything."

He must have been at a peak in his career that year

above:
Brownjohn
BCG
Pepsi Cola Annual Report
New York, 1958

below:
Pepsi Cola World cover
New York, late 50's

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with plenty of interesting work and friends in all directions. He still hung out in the Village in clubs. Bob Gill, then one of a group of enthusiastic young designers and artists that included Bj recalls, "I was a pretty good bee-bop pianist myself, but Bj was friends with those guys... he was friends with Miles Davis." Whether or not Brownjohn was on drugs at this point is unclear. He kept 'bad' company, but was steadily employed, with a wife and now a daughter to support. He looked for trouble, but more in the nature of pranks than desperate, serious crime. Sara Chermayeff describes an incident that occurred when Bj was working for an architect (probably Jacques Willaumez) who had framed on his walls a number of fine, abstract line drawings. Brownjohn, who didn't think much of the art, went into the office one night and opened the frames to add a few lines of his own. To the delight of those who were in on the joke, the new details were never noticed.

Brownjohn and Ivan Chermayeff had known each other for years, from Bj's part in the Chermayeff family in Chicago. In the spring of 1957 they joined forces to form Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar with Tom Geismar expected the following fall. Chermayeff had studied at Harvard, the Institute of Design, and finally at the Yale school of Art, where he had met Geismar in the design program. Before starting the partnership he had worked as an assistant to Alvin Lustig and as an assistant art director for Columbia Records. Geismar had attended Brown University before going to Yale, and had worked as an exhibition designer for the army before joining Brownjohn and Chermayeff. The three men started the partnership primarily for convenience, but Brownjohn and Chermayeff must also have been motivated by long acquaintance with and respect for each other's work.

Chermayeff and Geismar were five or six years younger than Bj and their backgrounds and interests less mysterious than his. He was considered somewhat the ringleader of the

Brownjohn
Christmas card, 1956

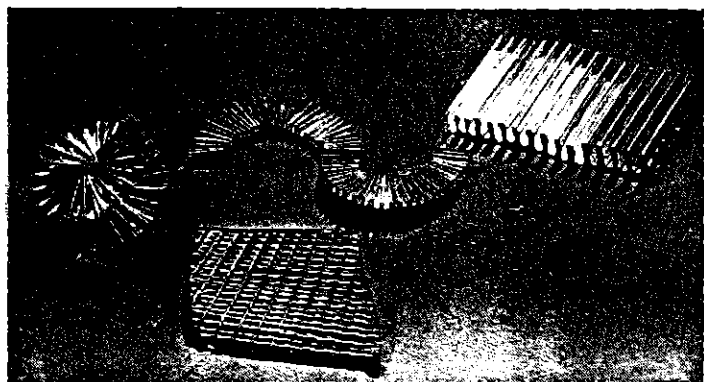
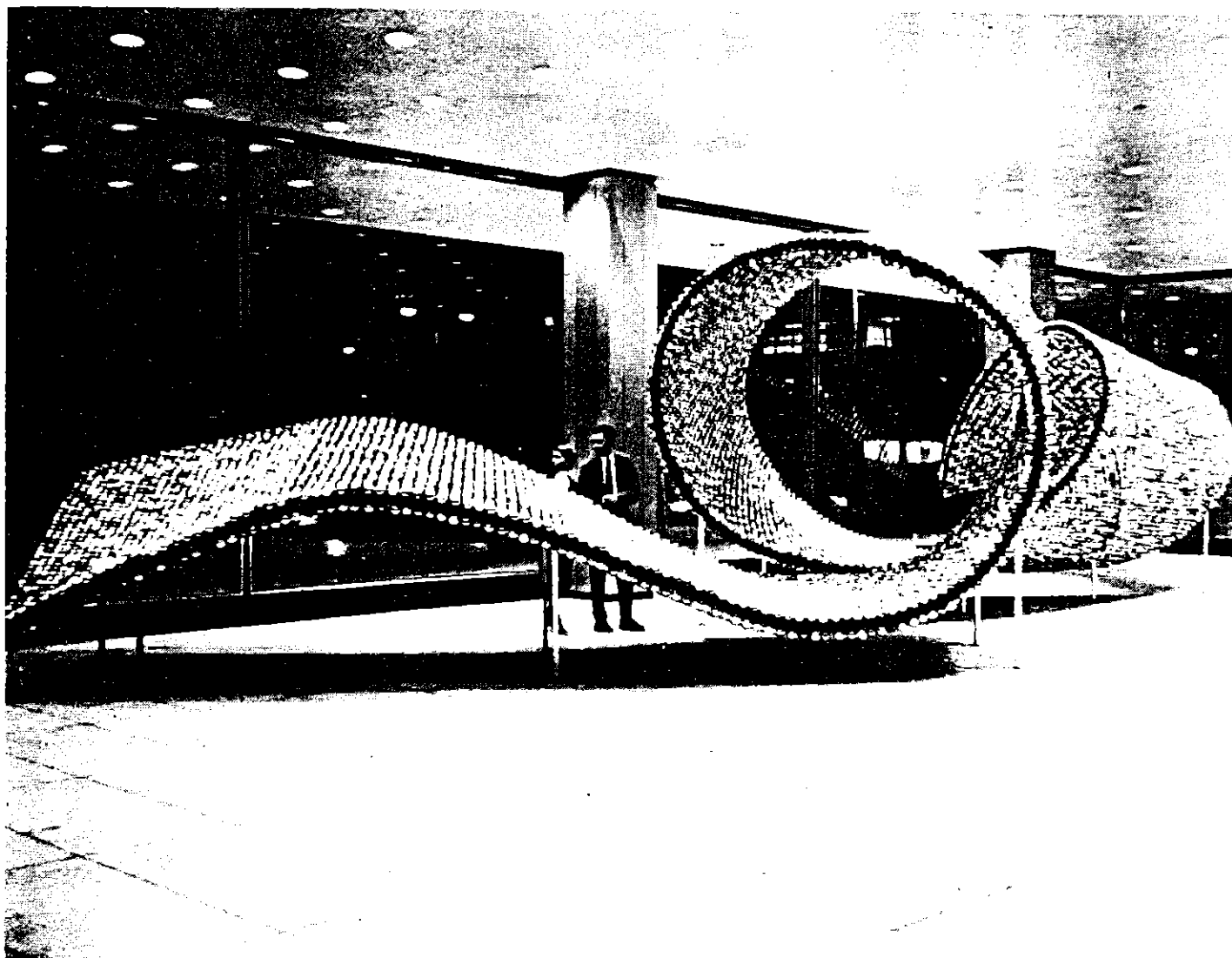
group, insisting always on new ideas, fresh imagery, the best conceptual solution to the problem at hand. According to Geismar they all got along well, but Brownjohn, the most severe critic, the most meticulous and perhaps the least productive of the three, was often "infuriating" to work with. Stanley Eisenman, who had studied painting with Chermayeff at Brooklyn College, was hired as the first assistant, and David Enoch arrived about a year later. Eisenman and Enoch are now partners and consider that it was Brownjohn who taught them that the graphic designer "must create concepts and ideas rather than abstractions of decorations." The solution to a problem was not to make things pretty but to discover its underlying idea and then to arrive at a design that would translate the problem both conceptually and, inevitably, formally. Sara Chermayeff remembers Brownjohn's work at this time with great admiration. "He didn't reduce things. He made them more."

Bj was friendly with a group of young designers working in New York, all as interested in conceptual graphics as he was. Their heroes were Paul Rand ('The President'), Alvin Lustig, Lou Dorfsman, Herb Lubalin. These men had set the stage for the acceptance of the graphic designer as professional by establishing a genre of design for advertising that reflected the trends, spirit, style, art of their generation. Brownjohn and his contemporaries were striving after the same goal, translated into the terms of their own period, the present.

They looked to the physical world around them for inspiration and fresh ideas. Tony Palladino, Bob Gill, George Tscherny, Bj and his partners took a trip to Coney Island to take pictures, to record the plethora of visual material in such concentration. Palladino describes the occasion: "We were looking for graphic turn-ons that later we could apply to jobs... the fresher the essence, the better the job was." A sidewalk artist sketched their portrait together;

BC
poster for an
exhibition at the
Composing Room
New York, late 50's

159 229



107 160
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then they took turns drawing him. They were trying to discover, explore and develop "a conceptual orientation where the involvement goes deeper. It doesn't become art, it becomes a touch... it's a communication, art isn't an issue. It becomes a life style."

Gill remembers that they used to call each others constantly, "to reserve ideas." According to Palladino they could "transport an idea in mind conversation... which then became a whole niche in the design industry in the 60's." Brownjohn and his group believed that if they couldn't describe an idea over the telephone, it wasn't simple, clear and direct enough to work. "There is no style. Style is set by concept. Anything goes."

Moholy-Nagy had also used the telephone to create images, with a different motive perhaps, but with the same effect. To demonstrate the validity of mechanical, technological production, he ordered by telephone in 1923 three enamel paintings from a sign factory. "I had the factory's color chart before me and I sketched my paintings on graph paper. At the other end of the telephone the factory supervisor had the same kind of paper, divided into squares. He took down the dictated shapes in the correct position." ² The end results did have a mechanical quality, but a review of the 'telephone paintings' in the Frankfurter Zeitung said, "don't talk about coldness, mechanization; this is sensuality refined to its most sublimated expression. It is emotion made world-wide and world-binding." ³ Had Brownjohn heard Moholy talk about this use for the telephone? Certainly the results that both Moholy and Bj and his friends were searching for were the same: visual forms or ideas so simple but universal as to be communicable only by verbal description, and understood by the man on the street.

Moholy-Nagy wrote of "integration through a conscious search for relationships... the flash-like act of connecting elements not obviously belonging together. Their construc-

above:
Brownjohn
BCG
sculpture for
Pepsi Cola Company
Christmas lobby display
Bj with Donna Brownjohn
New York, late 50's

below:
students at the
Institute of Design
metal sculptures
Chicago, mid 40's
from Vision in Motion

122 224 161
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tive relationships, unnoticed before, produce the new result," and "... emotional decisions are brought to an organic relationship with the relatively slower process of the critical mind." This approach to design could well describe Brownjohn's and his colleagues'. For Palladino, their design "had to have like five dimensions to it. Is it a good idea? Is it beautiful? Does it communicate? Does it communicate fresh? A good idea was easy to do, inexpensive; it just slides."

Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar did well in its first year. Sara Chermayeff remembers the first anniversary celebration: "Donna cooked up a very fancy dinner and Bj made the dessert which was a big bowl of jello full of nickels and dimes. He was the original pop artist for sure." The work produced in the office reflected a spirit of innovation and breaking new ground with the design principles they believed in; and the prospect of making a big success. Brownjohn had brought with him his account with Pepsi Cola World, and they all continued to the design for Columbia Records. Over the next couple of years they worked closely on a range of projects: stationery, announcements and Christmas cards for friends, clients and themselves; book and record jackets; magazine covers; advertisements; symbols for large corporations; and major exhibition design. They won prizes in all of the New York graphic design shows: the AIGA, Art Directors Club of New York, and the Type Directors Club. The Composing Room had mounted at least two shows of their work, promoted by its director Aaron Burns, another important patron and supporter.

In the meantime Bj produced sculptures and collages independent of work for clients. Ivan Chermayeff owns a structure of rusted objects (conceived and designed by Brownjohn, but actually put together by Stanley Eisenman under Bj's supervision), and Tom Geismar received as a wedding present a collage of different gradations of sandpaper. Even for his own purposes Brownjohn's interest was in common ob-

BCG
letterhead,
Christmas card,
invitation
New York, late 50's

195 252 162
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jects, found, assembled, or re-assembled. His apartment in London, and probably in New York as well, was full of typographic 'junk' collected in the street: broken signs, individual letters, torn paper with unusual printing. Did he know Walker Evans and his fascination for such objects? According to a story he told in London, he once had the idea for a client's Christmas card of wrapping the Seagram building in gift paper, tying a big bow around it and photographing it from a helicopter. This idea may sound old-hat to us today, but in the late 50's this extreme of conceptual art was not yet in fashion; Christo produced his first wrapped object only in 1961.

In 1959 Brownjohn's behavior in the office began to change radically. He would stay away for days, miss meetings and deadlines; even at work he spent hours locked in the bathroom, and more hours at his desk producing nothing. Physically, he would grow rapidly from strikingly thin to bloated, and then as suddenly his weight would go down again. In retrospect it seems clear that he had either taken up heroin again or was trying to withdraw on his own. Finally that winter he checked himself into a private hospital. Chermayeff and Geismar were unaware of the reasons for such erratic behavior, and saw only that Bj in his present irresponsible state could no longer share in shaping the direction of their business. The partnership was ended one evening in Brownjohn's hospital room, and about six months later he left for England.

London was an obvious choice for Bj. His most influential mentors, Moholy-Nagy and Serge Chermayeff had lived and worked there; his own father and Donna were originally British. More urgently, heroin and other hard drugs were available by prescription through clinics in England at this time. Serge Chermayeff, who had been aware of Brownjohn's addiction since the beginning in Chicago,

upper left:
Brownjohn
BCG
cover for 'Art Direction'
New York, 1958

upper right:
BCG
packaging for
Wash-up cubes
New York, late 50's

middle right:
Brownjohn
stationery for
Raymond Jacobs (photographer)
New York, late 50's

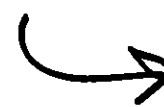
below right:
Brownjohn (?)
BCG
Christmas card for
Warren Weil
New York, late 50's

below left:
Brownjohn (?)
BCG
Pepsi-Cola Company
Christmas lobby display
New York, late 50's

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122 233
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encouraged him to go especially for this reason. He would stand a better chance of being cured, and if not, would at least avoid the risk, humiliation and degradation of the addict in the United States.

Bj's friend Bob Gill had taken a summer job the previous year as an art director for a London ad agency, and found the British so receptive that he had stayed on. Brownjohn wrote him to ask for a job, which Gill, knowing Bj's habits, refused, but he answered: "come to England if you can get out of bed in the morning."



100-2000
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London: 1961-1970

Brownjohn had no trouble finding a job in London. Alan Fletcher and Colin Forbes, young British designers who had met Bj in New York, welcomed the Brownjohn family at Paddington station. They suggested that he try the ad agencies as they had no extra work for him themselves. He went to work for J. Walter Thompson as an art director, sharing an office with Willie Landels. J.W. was a gentleman's agency at the time, with mahogany, protocol and good manners. The directors must have wanted to bring new life to the inner workings of their firm and to their 'image' by hiring this bright young American whose work in the States had already won wide acclaim.

In 1961, just as Brownjohn arrived, articles in Graphis, Communication Arts and Lund Humphries' Typographica had appeared about the energetic new firm of Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar. In Graphis 87, Hortense Mendel had written of the three partners and their assistants that they operated "on the principle that design is a solution to problems, incorporating ideas in relation to the given problem rather than a stylistic or modish solution. Working as a closely knit group on the same project, they find that an interchange of ideas not only helps to bring out fresh solutions but also is invaluable in finding the best way to present the final idea in visual terms..." British designers were not used to the nature of conceptual graphics practised by BCG, nor to their method of working collectively: copywriters and designers at J.W. and elsewhere worked separately.

In Typographica 2 of December 1960 Gene Federico had been quoted describing 'the designer' of today as represented by Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar. "The aware designer's intuitive and acquired knowledge invests

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125 235

in him a... sense of his times and the needs of the people. Sensing these, he is able to 'talk' directly." British agencies complained that they had tried everything to sell their clients' products: sex, violence, large type, bright colors. What was the secret of the American designers' success? Lou Klein, another American designer remembering his experience in London at about the same time says, "We told the truth."

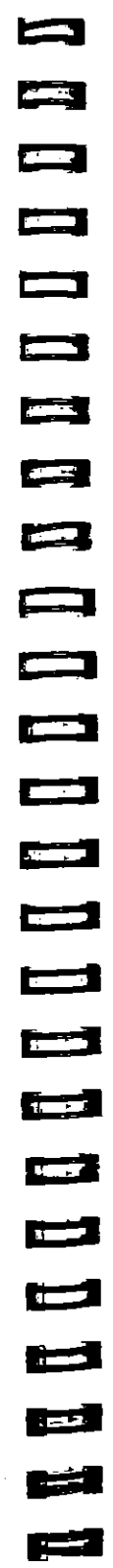
In the 60's, graphic design had come to be fully accepted as a legitimate medium, practised by a new generation of trained professionals with Brownjohn among them, emerging from accredited degree programs not only in the United States, but also in England. At the Royal College of Art, the Slade, the Central School of Art, graphic designers rubbed shoulders with musicians, painters, fashion designers, illustrators, photographers, film-makers. The status of the 'commercial artist' had risen to a level as popular, fashionable, 'hip,' as the other arts. New trends in music, fashion and film would inevitably bias the aware designer, and his work would in turn influence the other media.

Brownjohn's style was a new experience for the staff at J.W. Thompson. He kept odd hours and was often absent. Almost 90 percent of the work he did was never used, although he was prolific in ideas, many of which reached presentation stage. During the day Landels would constantly hear from Bj's side of the office, "Willie come here, look at this, I'm a fucking genius." of his presentations, the best known is a series for Bachelors cigarettes, in which the cigarettes themselves were to be printed on the outside of the packs, as if the packs were invisible. The presentation failed partly as a result of the conservative nature of cigarette companies in England, but also because Bj could not resist boasting of his brilliant new idea all over London.

Brownjohn
J. Walter Thompson
proposal for
Batchelor cigarette packaging
London, early 60's

And she deserves attention! Clever to choose Lifelon nylons. For their sheer good looks (she'll get the looks!). And the fact they'll be around in her life for a long, long time. You see, Lifelons are no ordinary stockings. Smooth, fine and delicate, Taylor-Woods designed them specially for a long life and a gay one! A clever little lock is knitted into every stitch. So they resist snags and stop runs where they would start. ~~Perfect~~ Perfect Twist and Madison-proof. Party girl. Office girl. Country girl. Lifelons take naturally to a cosmopolitan life. And every pair is guaranteed. Ten lively shades, seamed or seamfree. **Lifelons** Day and Gay Lifelons, reduced to 12/11. Night Lifelons, reduced to 14/11. Seamfree Lifelons, 12/11.

As you will have heard, the last few months have been very busy for me. I have been very busy with my work and have not had time to write to you. I have been very busy with my work and have not had time to write to you. I have been very busy with my work and have not had time to write to you.



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After a brief stint at J.W. Thompson, Bj was wooed away by McCann-Erickson, a competitor. David Burnstein, Creative Director, and Bill Free had been put in charge of upgrading and updating the capabilities of the agency. They "needed to show we meant business," so they threw a huge party at the Connaught and invited all of the important creative people in London. Brownjohn, with his reputation, was one of the people they simply had to have; he was offered an enormous salary and the promise that his jobs at McCann's would actually go through to production. His first important commission was for Taylor-Woods' Lifelon stockings which won every award possible in England and abroad. Lifelons were an extremely highly priced support stocking, and the problem was to convince exhausted women with bad legs to buy such expensive hosiery. Instead of concentrating on the condition of women, or of the limbs that might require such stockings, Brownjohn had the idea of showing only the most glamorous legs in black and white, cropped to a point of sensuous abstraction. Burnstein wrote the copy - 'a girl who would spend 12/11 on a pair of stocking ought to have her legs examined' - and variation after variation of this ad was printed. Some were double exposures, but most, the simplest sculptural forms. The series could be seen as a progressive study of form, and in looking at the photographs who could not be reminded of Brancusi's sculpture or other aesthetic models prevalent at the Institute of Design in the 40's.

Another very successful campaign which could never technically be attributed to Brownjohn was for Yardley cosmetics. The account belonged to Angela Landels, Willie's wife, whose brief was to design an advertisement for their lipsticks. It was Bj's idea to put the 16 lipsticks in a gun belt as bullets - 'a woman's ammunition...' - and the striking full page full color ad won acclaim and

Brownjohn
McCann-Erickson
Lifelon stocking ads
London, early 60's

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awards. Within Brownjohn's circle he was credited with the idea, although it is perhaps typical that someone else should have followed through the art direction and production of his concept with such success.

Bj was resented at work, at first, because he was paid so much more than anyone else, and because he kept such irregular hours. He was soon accepted and loved for his eccentricities, and respected for his work - or his ideas. In Burnstein's words, he was "the guy who could get through to the basic problem... he was a simplifier... a terrible word, but if you simplify correctly that's what it's about." Departing from the accepted mode of operations in most agencies, Brownjohn would often write his own copy, as well as design. "The words and the design came together. Bj would say words and design are the same thing. He was a great synthesizer, that's better than simplifier... he loved accidents, making accidents, he was a walking accident." Certainly this is a reflection of Moholy-Nagy's emphasis in Vision in Motion on integration, "the flash-like act of connecting elements... the key to our age - seeing everything in relationship."

Drugs continued as a problem. Landels remembers calls in the middle of the night from Bj, needing a ride somewhere. Willing to indulge this crazy American, Landels discovered later that the errands were always for drugs. Brownjohn was never completely off heroin except for one year of the ten he spent in London. He never registered at a clinic for treatment, but drugs were undoubtedly easier to come by and cheaper in England than they had been in the States. A particularly malicious doctor introduced him to the combination of heroin and cocaine. She had many artists and musicians under her care, or power, and was ready to supply them with whatever their need, at any hour.

Whether or not he was on drugs, Brownjohn drank and smoked heavily. Piers Jessop, with whom Bj worked later

Brownjohn
McCann-Erickson
trade ad
London, early 60's
(see page 57)

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198 237
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and named 'Jock Strap,' remembers "five Guinesses in one hand and 170 Gauloises in the other." Andy Arghyron, an assistant at McCann's, once had to hold up traffic to get Brownjohn across the road, drunk as a lord in the middle of the day. He grew so heavy as to resemble Orson Welles, and cultivated his image of the cynical, rough-spoken, surly American.

Schools and design groups invited Bj to lecture and teach. His famous "collection of 2,000 slides of unused ideas," mentioned in an article in the 1965 D&AD Annual held audiences enthralled for hours. Brian Tattersfield, a student at the Royal College of Art in the early 60's, wrote of his first encounter with Brownjohn. "One of Bj's first appointments on his arrival in London was to come to the Graphic Workshop (an organization of young designers run by Bob Gill) to talk about and show his work. Needless to say, we were all absolutely staggered by it - so much so that one friend was moved to tears, knowing he would never be able to equal it. That's how involved we were in those days."

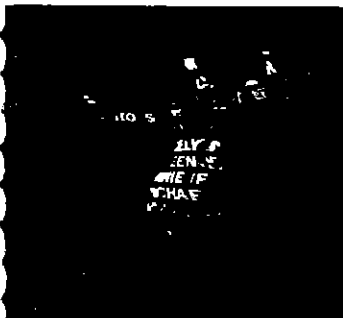
In Typographica 4 of December 1961, Brownjohn had published a photographic essay entitled "Street Level." Formalizing what he and his friends had practised in New York on their trips to Coney Island and around Manhattan, he put into print a sample of what careful observation in the street might have to offer the graphic designer. In the opening statement he wrote: "until now... everything of any interest in this wide open area of social uplift the city has been done by dead men or or by amateurs or vandals or politicians or accident or neglect or dirty old men or the makers of big, busy neon signs... The photographs on the following 31 pages were harvested on one trip round London. The things they show have very little to do with Design, apart from achieving its object." With the photographs of examples of design

Brownjohn
McCann-Erickson (?)
Life-guard ad proposals
and finished art (?)
London, early 60's

following pages:
Brownjohn
spreads from
'Street Level'
Typographica 4 (new series)
London, December 1961

170
~~170~~
~~199-240~~

LA
FR 7163
RUSIA WIT ILC



171
260 241

created by accident or necessity he included samples of his own work and that of his friends, demonstrating how effectively professionals could put these images to use. This 'street level' approach to graphic design impressed and influenced his British audience. The phenomenon of odd juxtaposition, chance meeting of unlikely but familiar elements, was to be a keynote of this period; the 'happening' after all, was the social embodiment of the visual accidents that interested Brownjohn and his followers.

While still at McCann's, Brownjohn was commissioned on a freelance basis to do the titles for the James Bond film From Russia with Love. His assistant John Brimacombe remembers Bj's inspiration for these ground-breaking credits. He had noticed one evening at a slide presentation the fascinating effect of the slides of still type on moving bodies of people arriving late and walking in front of the projector. He embellished the idea for the film by substituting a belly-dancer for the moving bodies. Alan Fletcher describes Bj's original presentation of the concept to the film's producers. "Bj set up the projector, everyone filed in and sat down. Bj turned off the lights, took off his jacket and shirt, and wiggled in front of the titles from the lit projector. 'It'll be just like this, only we'll use a pretty girl.'"

Largely on the strength of From Russia with Love, Brownjohn left McCann-Erickson in 1964 to join a film production company, Cammell Hudson. David Cammell and Hugh Hudson were young Cambridge graduates who had started their business as photographers' representatives. They had launched their film company with an innovative, perhaps naive perspective on the potential for commercial film. Cammell recalls, "... imagery, commercial television, were still being run by old filmmakers. We were young and enthusiastic with the very dif-

Brownjohn
stills from
'From Russia with Love'
film titles
London, 1963 (?)

ferent point of view that commercials should be in the province of designers and stills photographers, more about imagery than about stories." They were flattered that that Bj would be interested, and changed their name to Cammell, Hudson and Brownjohn.

Through the new company, Bj produced titles for the next Bond film, Goldfinger, best described in Brownjohn's own words printed in an article in Typographica 10 of December 1964, "Sex and Typography." "I decided to adopt the fairly obvious follow-up solution, continuing with the use of projection... I wanted now to try projecting moving pictures on to a still figure while the camera tracked and panned... I painted a girl with gold make-up, had a gold leather bikini made for her... (she) became, in effect, a three-dimensional gold screen..."

The titles for both films had been created in front of the camera, without the complication of double exposures or special effects. In a review of the credits later that year Bj was quoted as saying, "it was all done in the camera, which is the way I like to do films, you know. I hate story boards and scripts. It's nice just to have an idea and go on the floor and play around with the camera and lights, and then shoot what you want." Moholy-Nagy had already written of the attitude of the new filmmaker in Vision in Motion, which describes Brownjohn: "he tries to develop not only a photogenic, but a creative mind. He will not only select what he finds, but he will produce situations..." By taking advantage of the simplest technical capabilities of the camera, Bj had expanded the conceptual limitations of film-making. In Cammell's words, "he was of course completely inexperienced... he was so experimental and restless that he gave the impression of being an amateur."

Putting his creative energies into film, Brownjohn was able to develop his earlier principles of design into

above:
Brownjohn
CHB
still from
'Goldfinger'
film titles
London, mid 60's

below:
Kiki Byrne with
'Goldfinger' model on set

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three dimensions, and into motion. Money flowed in the 60's in England and the age of publicity by film had begun in earnest. Companies looked for ideas that would attract attention as much for their own sake as for the promotion of a specific product. Herbert Spencer wrote in his introduction to "Typography in Britain," an article published in Typographica 7 of May 1963, "In a prosperous society, energetic and ambitious young executives and editors have emerged, determined to establish their reputations by the impact they can make, rather than, as so often in the past, by the economies they can introduce."

Goldfinger won awards in England and abroad, and Cammell, Hudson and Brownjohn "took off like a rocket." The company was unusual in that they initiated most of their own films. Their client would approach them with a problem, or simply a need for publicity, and a large budget, and the partners themselves would come up with a concept and the story board.

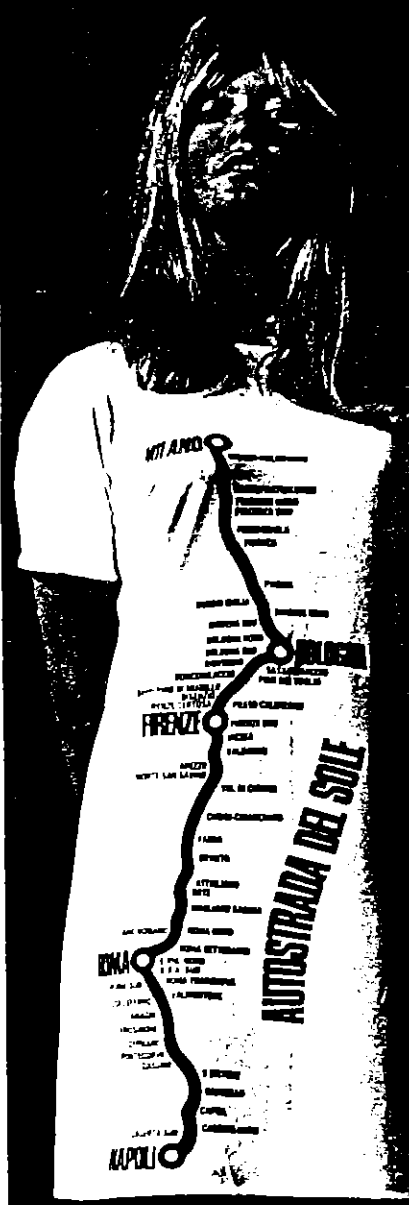
For Pirelli Limited they produced The Tortoise and the Hare, a race from Milan to Naples between a beautiful woman in a Jaguar, and a big, slow truck. Derek Forsyth, Pirelli's advertising manager, had agreed to an idea that had been stored in CHB's files; the film had less to do with tires than with the daring idea of creating a jet-set version of an ancient fable - that the public would never forget. Brownjohn designed an elaborate map/brochure to accompany the film, to explain its conception and the adventure of its production. The introduction begins, "Pirelli have presented films before, but never one like this, which was sparked off by the clash of two flint-keen enterprises. The earliest document ever filed in the archives of Cammell, Hudson and Brownjohn Associates is a two-page dog-eared typescript marked The Tortoise and the Hare: An Idea... This was a film the associates had always wanted to make. Pirelli had a rare reputation for

CHB

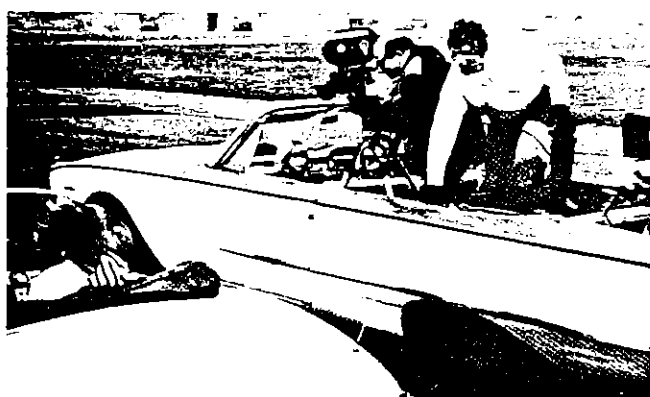
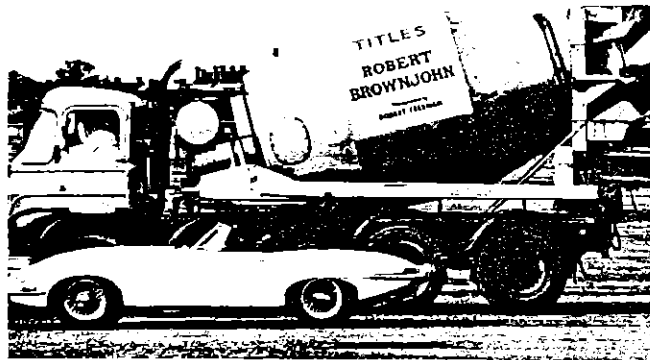
'The Tortoise and the Hare'
(Brownjohn: film titles)
publicity brochure cover
London, mid 60's

174
2031 244

THE TOPICS & THE ART



175
20th 245



CHB
'The Tortoise and the Hare'
publicity brochure
London, mid 60's

left:
opening spread

right:
photos from inside pages

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205-246

courage in admitting art into their publicity. Could the directors of Pirelli sanction this arguably daring leap ahead?" In the language of the day the piece ends, "Can such a simple relationship make a memorable film? Can an old fable approach the fabulous? You are the judge."

Bj designed magnificent titles for this production, painted in brilliant colors on the sides of dump trucks, moving vans, cement mixers. His companion at this time, Kiki Byrne, created the costumes, including a map in the form of a mini-dress for the heroine. The film's display of affluence, international flare and unrestrained innovation and adventure required all of the trappings of the 60's flamboyant London, from daring fashion to extravagant graphics.

Another Cammell, Hudson and Brownjohn masterpiece was a series of commercial films to be shown in cinemas for the Midland Bank called Money Walks, Money Talks. Inspired by a small booklet that Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar had created in 1959, Watching Words Move, each film showed animated type where the letters and the words as 'characters' described their meaning and the story visually as well as verbally. The idea was so novel and cleverly presented that cinema audiences would stand up and applaud. These commercials had little to do with money, or even the Midland Bank. It was the idea of type talking, a simple typographic exercise enlivened by the imaginations of the film-makers that the public would forever associate with the bank.

Brownjohn continued to design for print as well as film. He had created Cammell Hudson's letterhead before he joined them, perforating their names to reflect the edges of a film strip. When he became a partner he was asked to design new stationery, and he came into the office to get ideas. He left without coming up with anything, but phoned later with the concept. Instead of

above:
Brownjohn
Cammell Hudson stationery
London, mid 60's

below:
Bob Gill
trade ad for CHB
London, 1967

watching words move

EXPENSIVE ..

r e g i m e n t e d

economical

top half

blo + + o

os < c < oana < s < s

inflation

telesoapvisbeerion

left:
Brownjohn
CHB
Midland Bank
television commercial
London, mid 60's

right:
BCG
'watching words move'
New York, late 50's
a reduced version
reproduced in
Typographica 6 (new series)
London, December 1962

179
202 249

**Robert Brownjohn
designed this letterheading
for Michael Cooper of
4 Chelsea Manor Studios
Flood Street London SW3
FLAxman 9762**

Robert Brownjohn
designed this Business Card
for Michael Cooper of
4 Chelsea Manor Studios
Flood Street London SW3
FLAxman 9762



180 #60
20/250

printing typeset copy on regular stock, they were to simply typewrite the information, but "the typewriting will be engraved, and the paper will be Bible paper." Cammell and Hudson were kept busy searching for the stock, and looking for a printer that would handle it and the engraving.

Michael Cooper, the well-known photographer of the Beatles, insisted that Bj design his letterheading. Finally Brownjohn agreed. The result, featuring Bj's name in gigantic type as large as Michael Cooper's, is not only funny but also formally quite beautiful; and it is indicative of Brownjohn's own reputation at that time. Compared to Bj's stationery designs of the 50's, his London solution could be seen as a baroque development, reflecting the flamboyant 60's image that his clients wished to project. The letterheadings are bigger, flashier. Brownjohn's immersion in advertising and film expanded or exploded the limits to his creativity. His ideas for graphic design evolved to meet the demands of over-blown, over-rich, over-stimulated swinging London.

At the same time that he was breaking new ground in design, Bj had cultivated a larger-than-life character, as well as physique, taking advantage of a mysterious past. Piers Jessop, employed as a film editor at CHB remembers, "you never really knew how much of Bj you were knowing." Brownjohn told stories such as dressing up as a nun with Lenny Bruce and going to Florida to hustle money. He let it be known that his idea for the American pavilion at the 1958 Brussels Worlds Fair had been to set up a life-sized international diplomacy game; push the wrong button and you started World War III. A clever actor himself, Brownjohn had a feature role in the film Otley; and he produced, directed and starred in a movie of his own, Bj's Party.

His favorite film was The Tangler, in Jessop's words,

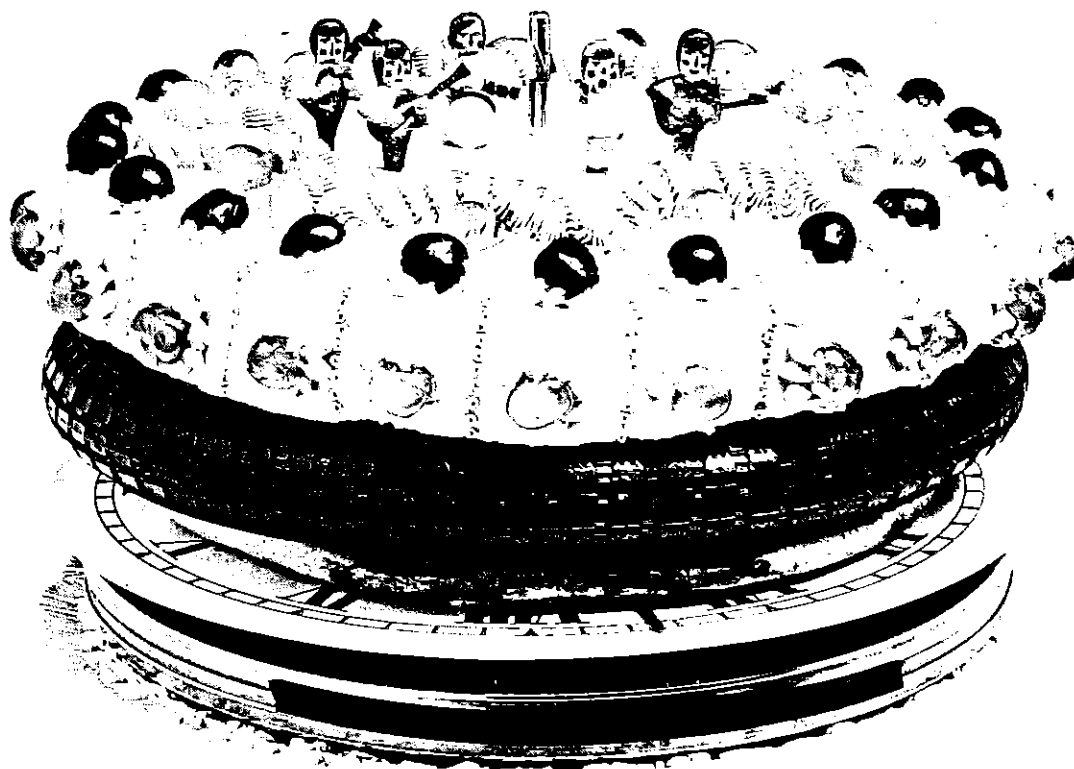
Brownjohn
letterheading and
business card for
Michael Cooper
London, 1967

following pages:
Brownjohn
record jacket, front and back
Rolling Stones,
'Let it Bleed'
London, mid 60's

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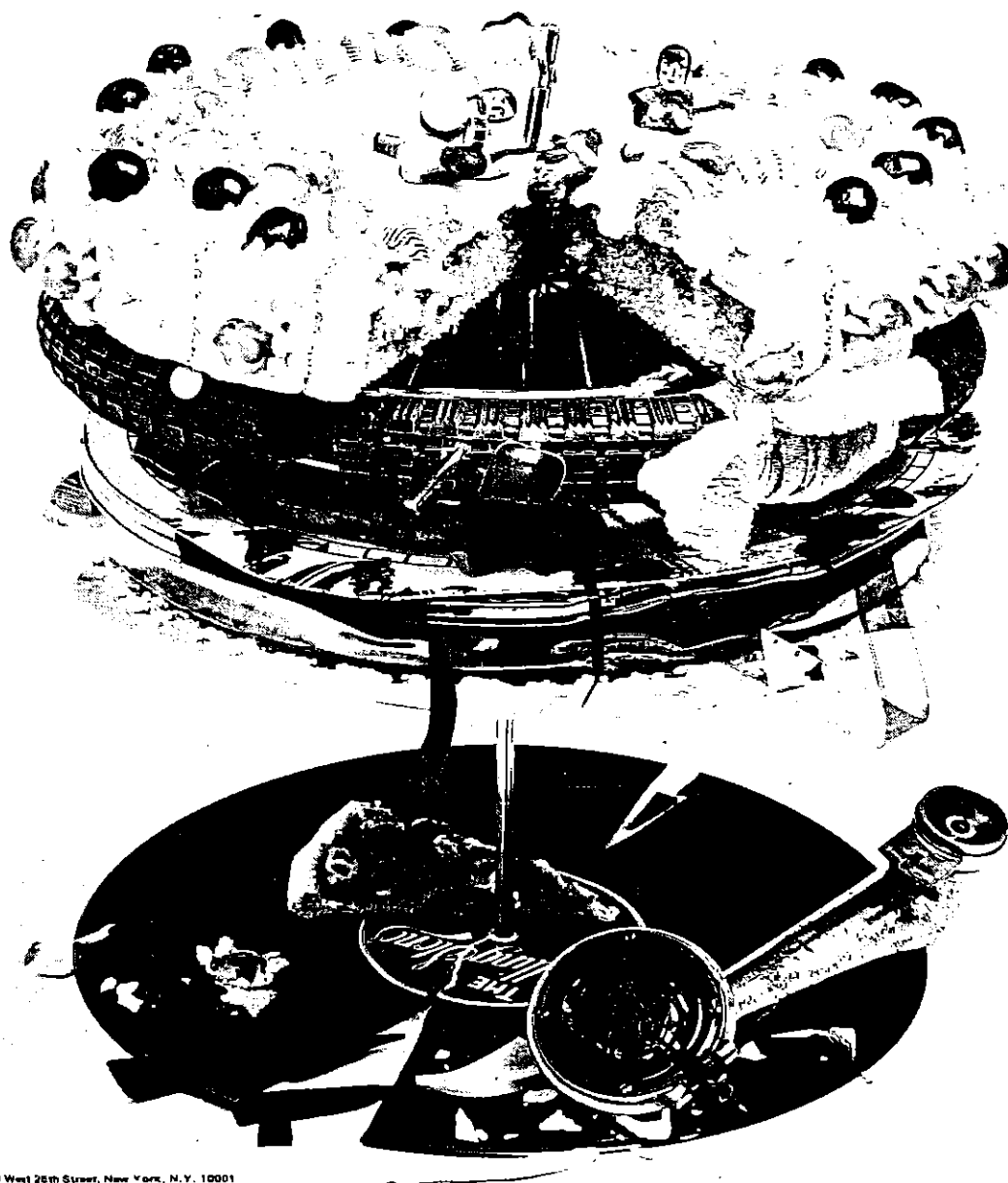
ROLLING STONES LET IT BLEED

LONDON
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LET IT BLEED □ LOVE IN VAIN □ MIDNIGHT RAMBLER □ GIMMIE SHELTER □ YOU GOT THE SILVER
YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT □ LIVE WITH ME □ MONKEY MAN □ COUNTRY HONK



London Records Inc. 538 West 26th Street, New York, N.Y. 10001

Linear: NPS-4

Printed in U.S.A.

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"... a much underrated piece - according to Bj - centered around a block-like creature that attached the backs of people's necks and sucked out their spines. The climax occurred when the Tingle attacked the projectionist and entered the theatre..."

Everyone remembers some version of an incident involving Bj in one of the many Italian restaurants he frequented. He arrived late one evening with Kiki, enormous in the raccoon coat he wore for his role in Otley. A friend at a table near the entrance introduced Brownjohn to his guest, an important personage in the film industry. Throughout Bj's meal at another table, the guest could not resist staring at the gigantic Brownjohn - whose importance and reputation he seemed to fail to recognize - making audible comments to his host. When Bj and Kiki got up to leave, Brownjohn put on his coat, and, towering over the guest, picked up the bowl of spaghetti in front of him and dumped it on his head. "Next time you'll know who I am," he said, and left.

Brownjohn's outrageous character became increasingly difficult to deal with at work, and outside. He quarreled with all of his friends and with Kiki; Donna and Eliza spent much of the time Bj was in England living abroad. The last straw for Cammell, Hudson and Brownjohn was getting Bj out of trouble for breaking into a pharmacy late one night "to make a phone call." It was not the first incident of its kind, and drugs and alcohol had dulled his effectiveness at work.

He left CHB to set up his own film production/ design office with David Nagata, another American. He continued to work, sporadically, often relying on successful ideas from the past. The Nagata Brownjohn stationery is a negative copy of the Michael Cooper design, and might assume that his present clientele would be already familiar with the earlier solution. A poster

Brownjohn
Nagata and Brownjohn
poster and letterheading
London, late 60's

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for the new office imitates both conceptually and formally a version done for Brownjohn, Chermayeff and Geismar. Was Brownjohn claiming this idea as his own by repeating it ten years later? Or had he simply run out of ideas?

Brian Tattersfield recorded a last encounter with Bj at the Graphic Workshop, several years after his first appearance. "... Bj was once again an honoured guest, but by now unfortunately he was going down hill, not as a designer, but physically.

"I remember him arriving an hour late, looking ill and more or less asleep standing up...

"When he came round he talked as lucidly as ever about design, and had the class completely entranced. Out of some kind of hysteria, a student (I believe he was an architect) stood up and quite seriously asked Bj the question: 'What is graphic design?' Brownjohn, just as seriously, but beginning to fall asleep (and still in his raincoat) replied: 'I am.' And he was, God rest his soul."

By the summer of 1970, Bj was completely alone. Donna and Eliza were away, and Kiki, his companion for many years, had left. On a visit to the Palladinos in New York, watching planes take off from Kennedy Airport, he said to Tony, "isn't life beautiful," or words to that effect, an uncharacteristic remark from Bj the cynic and clown. On his return to London he sent typed letters to his closest friends in the States telling them how much he had liked knowing them, that he would see them later on.

Whatever Brownjohn was thinking, he must have known he was going - the persistent excess of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, obesity was, after all, a form of suicide. Bj died in his flat in London one week short of his 45th birthday, on August 1, 1970.

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Conclusion

Who remembers Robert Brownjohn? Is he significant to the next generation, or generations to come, of graphic designers? His memory, certainly as an individual, as a talker, a joker, a judge of work, is important to those who knew him, studied under him, worked with him. He carried with him, and left behind a sense of brilliance, burnt out too quickly, but inevitably. Is this enough to have studied his work, or even to have traced his career?

John Brimacombe, a successful commercial graphic designer with his own firm off Regent Street, claims to owe much of his career and success to Brownjohn, for whom he worked as assistant and gopher at McCann-Erickson. He was "Bj's aid, helped with research, brought up his sandwiches, fed him pills, put him in cabs, lent him money..." In his own office, Brimacombe keeps a framed collage - or ready-made - given him in payment for the mechanicals for the From Russia with Love film titles that he produced freelance, at night, on an unbalanced table in the middle of a party in Brownjohn's living room. The work serves not only as a personal memento of a friend, but also as a reminder of Brownjohn's teaching, and example. With Bj, "concept was number one." Brimacombe's own work in advertising reflects the lessons he learned from Brownjohn and he feels that he carries on legacy.

The collage is a damaged fragment of a sign warning FIRE, faded, peeling and cracked from its cardboard base, and mounted on a clean white background bearing the message in block letters, NO SMOKING. Below, Brownjohn signed his initials, 'Bj.' Did he find the bit of wallboard and attach it himself to the lettered sheet? Did he choose the type and letter it himself? Or did he find the whole thing as a piece and simply add his own signature? Regardless, the work as a whole is typical of Bj's humor: such an

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obvious redundancy, ambiguous as to its origin, plucked from the surroundings of everyday life. There is no attempt at the complexity of the levels of a Cubist or Dadaist collage, yet the elements are similar. Brownjohn was fascinated by what he could find around him to incorporate, by adding some juxtaposition of meaning or humor, into a larger idea. At the same time, the rough sign fragment with its magnificent Egyptian letters, isolated and framed, is beautiful to look at in itself particularly as it is balanced by the more mechanical lettering below.

Brimacombe also keeps in his office Bj's copy of a catalogue of Brancusi sculpture. The elegant forms illustrated might have inspired, for example, the Lifelon stocking ads, or the James Bond film titles. Despite his apparent intuitive style, Brownjohn must constantly have referred to his early training and influences. A final memento is the address book Bj kept from his years in New York, which bears tribute to the variety and complexity of his life there. His friends included not only graphic designers, industrial designers and architects, but also musicians, actors, writers and painters. He brought a wide array of personal influences to his work; "his personal life and his work life were one."

John Brimacombe's small collection of Brownjohn's art, library and memorabilia could be seen to epitomize his teacher/hero's approach to graphic design and conceptual design; and his legacy to the next generation. Not only in his work but also in his life, Brownjohn had demonstrated the use and appreciation of the beauty of common objects; the acceptance of the influence of other media; and an awareness of the art of the past, of the early twenty century in particular. His contribution to graphic design, his belief in the importance of concept over form, was an integration of these elements

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to which he in turn had been exposed by Moholy-Nagy and his early training at the Institute of Design.

Brownjohn's last completed project was for Dick Davidson, his long-time friend from New York, who had commissioned a series of peace posters to be designed by well-known artists in New York and abroad. Bj's design uses his own handwriting scrawled in the middle of a blank white sheet, and the last three letters of the word 'peace' are represented by the ace of spades, followed by a question mark. It is signed, as if to his friends, "Love, Bj." The death card, the question, the lack of color and the emptiness imply the peace Brownjohn saw for the world around him, and for himself. The poster met all of the criteria that he and his friends had set up to judge the quality and effectiveness of their work: Was it beautiful? Did it communicate? Did it communicate fresh?

Tragically, this poster also realizes Moholy-Nagy's pronouncement, "designing is not a profession but an attitude... the designer must anchor his special job in the complex whole..." The concept of despair is Bj's resolution to the "complexity of life," expressed graphically, simply, beautifully, and in common language both visual and verbal. It is significant that this poster that might be read as a suicide note hangs in the office of Chermayeff and Geismar in New York, and over Alan Fletcher's desk at Pentagram in London. Even Brownjohn's death could be seen as the inevitable result of a life spent pushing the limits of his field, and his own creative energies.

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