New Spirit, New Wave, New Romanticism—call it what you will, there is a new style in graphics. Neville Brody, art director of The Face, is one of its original exponents and one of the most eminently imitable figures in graphic design today.

Not that style is a word he would willingly apply, regarding it as a 'superficial thing, just something you use to express ideas. The really important thing is not the style itself, but that you keep moving, keep questioning your own assumptions, breaking your own rules.' For there, he says—in typography as in other things—no real rules, what we habitually regard as rules are really just assumptions too often unexamined. And as one who, like the punk movement itself, has gone a long way on breaking with convention, he should know.

Nor is it strictly speaking new, numbering amongst its sources many of the early modern movements such as Dadaism, Constructivism, Futurism, Expressionism and Neo-Primitivism as well as the American '50s, the Situationists, and punk itself.

Brody studied initially at Hornsey College of Art (now Middlesex Poly), renowned for its political and artistic ferment of the late '60s, but by the mid-'70s a much quieter place. After a year's foundation course at Hornsey he went to the London College of Printing, choosing design over fine art because he 'disagreed with the gallery world', feeling that it was no more than a 'financial larking-place with little real efficacy outside itself'. He wanted to reach people and feel, moreover, morally against the manipulativeness of advertising, so went into design partly to understand how the form worked, and to use it against itself. I wanted to manipulate people too, but into querying, into questioning what they were being told... .

Brody felt the atmosphere at the college to be repressive and stifling. In his first couple of years there he started to feel the influence of punk—Itself then emerging from a sort of fusion between the art colleges and the street (the Clash, Adam Ant and others grew out of Hornsey, and the Sex Pistols were all 'more or less' at art colleges too). The movement was by no means entirely anti-commercial ('McLaren says Brody 'was always, ALWAYS aware of the possibility of commercial exploitation of any idea. I think this is one of the things people found so shocking about the punk movement, it blantly embraced commercialism, and played the marketing games very openly') but it was, nevertheless, anti-establishment and, more importantly, anti-taste. It broke the rules. If you have no taste, you can do anything and to Brody it seemed to show that anything was possible. 'That was the great liberation, that you didn't have to accept the way things were just because they were written down.'

To his tutors, however, he must have seemed perverse. If there was anything they liked about his work, he would change it. In his second year he was nearly expelled for putting the Queen's head sideways on a stamp. Now, of course, they're all teaching it—the style, not the ability to question—but then they wanted to throw him out. 'No commercial potential was what they said. Naturally he was inspired to prove them wrong, to show that it could be done, and to help those others with the same ideals not to lose faith.'