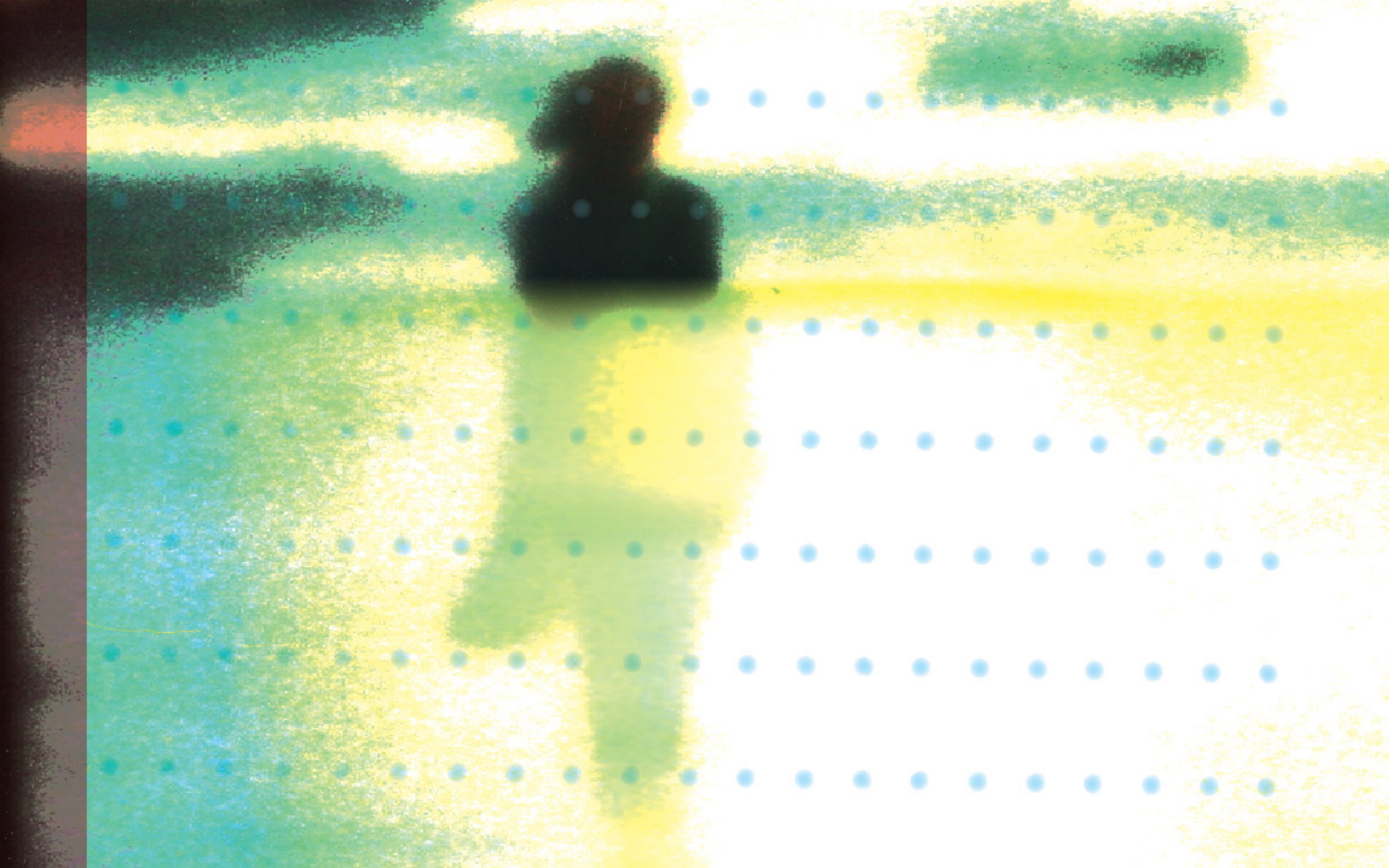


# cOOl, BUT...

april greiman +++ neville brody +++

david carson +++ marian bantjes

+++ the new face of design



COOL, BUT...

arty williams || paul barkshire || scott garner || gaelyn wolf  
phil greiman || neville brody || david carson || marian bantje

[[eDiTioN 3/4]]



and Marlan (pg 25)  
and DAVID (pg 17)  
NEVILLE (pages)  
about April (pg 1)  
SCOTT and gALEY  
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COOL, BUT...

A book by

KARLY

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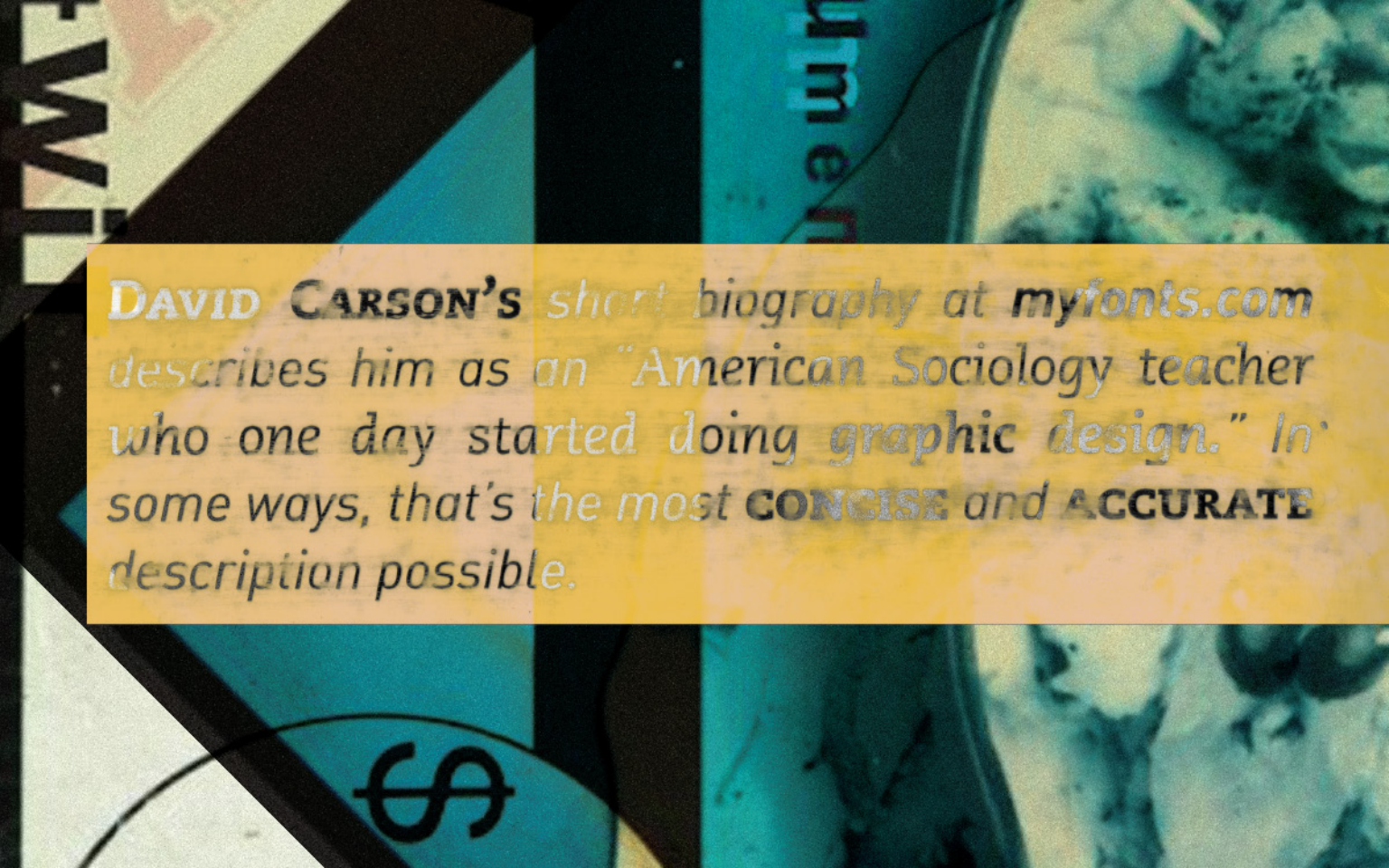
about APRIL (pg. 1)

NEVILLE (page 9)

and DAVID (pg. 17)

and MARIAN (pg. 25)





**DAVID CARSON'S** *short biography at [myfonts.com](http://myfonts.com) describes him as an "American Sociology teacher who one day started doing graphic design."* In some ways, that's the most **CONCISE** and **ACCURATE** description possible.

DAVID  
C SAORIN

006911



# davi- DCAR- S O

“Don’t mistake legibility for communication.”

David Carson was born on September 8th, 1952 in Corpus Christi, Texas and moved with his family to New York City four years later. He eventually made his way to the West Coast, where he made a name for himself in the late 1970s as a professional surfer, at one point ranking eight in the world. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 1977, graduating “with honors and distinction” from San Diego State University. He then spent several years teaching high school students in Grants Pass, Oregon. In 1980, after taking a two-week

workshop in graphic design, Carson re-enrolled at San Diego State to study it. He then transferred to Oregon College of Commercial Art after only one month and dropped out entirely within a year to take an internship in Dana Point, California at Surfer Publications.

The job folded, so Carson returned to teaching from 1982 to 1987, this time at Torrey Pines High School in Del Mar, California. During this time he spent evenings and weekends working on the fanzine, *Transworld Skateboarding*.

The first widespread exposure of Carson’s unique style came with the 1989 publication of the surf magazine, *Beach Culture*. The look and attitude of the magazine, with its near-undecipherable text and visuals, were unprecedented in a mainstream publication and lead to some confusion as to whether it should be classified as a surf magazine or an art/culture magazine. This uncertainty lead many advertisers to drop support, but enough funding remained to continue for five more issues. Carson’s real success began with the music and



# chronicle books

ation.”

fashion magazine *Ray Gun*, which he headed from 1992 to 1995. *Ray Gun*'s success led to many large-scale commercial design projects with international corporations.

While intuitively composed, highly distressed typography and graphics are often considered the signature style of David Carson, graphic design experiments of this type were already part of academic explorations by individuals like Edward Fella of the California Institute of the Arts. Carson is credited with popularizing the

approach, however, and in 1995 he set up David Carson Design in New York to meet the increasing demand for his work. In November of that year, he released a compilation of his work entitled *The End of Print*, which became one of the best selling graphic design books of all time. The title, as much as the work within, is extremely significant in that it summarizes one of the key driving elements of Carson's design philosophy. The idea was that with mankind's transition into the Digital Age, traditional media presented in a conventional way

was becoming less and less relevant. In this way, one can begin to see the work of David Carson not so much as a new era of print design, but as part of print's prolonged death—perhaps, even, as a kind of violent lashing out as the medium suffered its death throes.

Another of Carson's core beliefs is illustrated by his now-famous quote, "Don't mistake legibility for communication." As Carson sees it, traditional design requires the medium to be subservient to the message, the delivery of which is the function of design in the first place. This notion is seen particularly clearly in conventional typography where the purpose of the type is to convey specific words, which in turn convey specific concepts. However, there then exists the possibility that the nature of the letterforms themselves can begin to

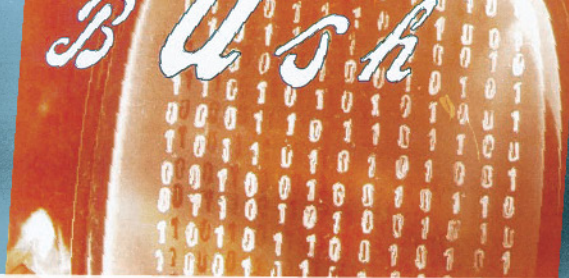
supplement the message. Heavy and italic type can emphasize, for example, which is a more denotative, utilitarian function, while using a script can convey elegance, a more connotative function. Even with this second layer of possibility, however, long-standing design conventions demand that these kinds of embellishments must not overpower the core message. David Carson, either through ignorance, innovation or irreverence, had a different philosophy—that the vehicle used to deliver a message was just as important (if not more so) than the message itself.

With this belief in mind, Carson made a career of breaking virtually every graphic design rule in the book—though there is the possibility that, having had no formal design education, he simply didn't know the rules existed in the first place. Some of Carson's adventures (and misadventures) in magazine layout included overlapping blocks of copy, dark text against dark backgrounds, lines of text running across page gutters and stories that were set to be read horizontally across columns (the reader had to

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*"The starting point is to interpret the article, and doing that, some of them get harder to read."*



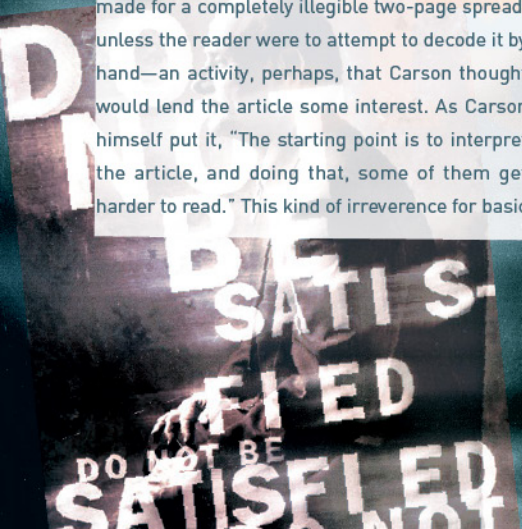


simply ignore the gutter in between). He set an entire 1994 interview with musician Brian Ferry in Zapf Dingbats (a symbols-only font) because he considered the text to be too dull. This, of course, made for a completely illegible two-page spread, unless the reader were to attempt to decode it by hand—an activity, perhaps, that Carson thought would lend the article some interest. As Carson himself put it, “The starting point is to interpret the article, and doing that, some of them get harder to read.” This kind of irreverence for basic

communication principals shocked some but was received gratefully by many, both in and out of the design world, and particularly by those involved in the emerging grunge and alternative scenes.

Quite aside from the rise of early-nineties “alternative culture”, another vital development aided in Carson’s rise to fame—the advent of desktop publishing. With the release of software packages like Aldus Pagemaker and Quark Xpress, an individual was for the first time able to do complex graphic design and layout tasks on

a home computer. This afforded Carson a great deal of freedom, allowing him a more hands-on and personal approach in the creation of his early magazine work than would have otherwise been possible. Not surprisingly, Carson’s typical irreverence for old-style methods were equally applied to new technology and at one point he even created an advertisement for Aldus Pagemaker—which name-dropped him as a major user—using Quark Xpress.





A large flock of seagulls is flying over a sandy beach. In the background, a person is standing near the water's edge. The sky is blue, and the water is a deep greenish-blue. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Individuals that once praised Carson are now calling him “increasingly irrelevant” and “a meta-personality famous for being famous.”

Despite his interest in digital publishing, Carson stayed away from web-based work for many years, finding it too restrictive in speed and flexibility. Instead, he began shifting his focus toward motion graphics, video direction and film—an unsurprising transition for the man behind “the end of print.” However, with the emergence of cheap broadband, Carson has stated in interviews that he’s recently grown more interested in the medium. Curiously, his own web presence ([davidcarsondesign.com](http://davidcarsondesign.com)) seems largely devoid of his “signature style”.

Generous use of whitespace and a relatively straightforward hierarchical structure make it somewhat reminiscent of 1960’s Swiss layout rather than early 90’s American deconstruction. Perhaps Carson’s form-before-function philosophy only applies to other peoples’ information.

As someone who came of age in the 1990’s, I was able to witness firsthand the proliferation of the design sensibilities made popular by David Carson. Interestingly, though, his influences on the print world never really reached me in my hometown

of Amarillo, Texas, but unquestionably Carson-esque work made its way inward from both coasts through another medium—television. Particularly obvious in the motion graphics of networks like MTV, Carson’s notion of presentation over content seemed perfectly suited for a channel dedicated to airing videos from pioneering bands in new early-nineties genres described as “grunge” and “alternative”. His disdain for conventional design practices mirrored perfectly these musicians’ irreverence for conventional pop music formulas.






The question, however, is whether Carson was one of the driving forces behind these new ideals, or simply part of a sea-change as a new generation's worldview replaced the old.

Carson continues to work today, still applying many of the design methodologies that gained him so much fame in the last decade. However, his role as a driving force in the world of design has been passed on to a new generation of innovators. Additionally, a number of the individuals that once praised him, such as author Joe Clark, are

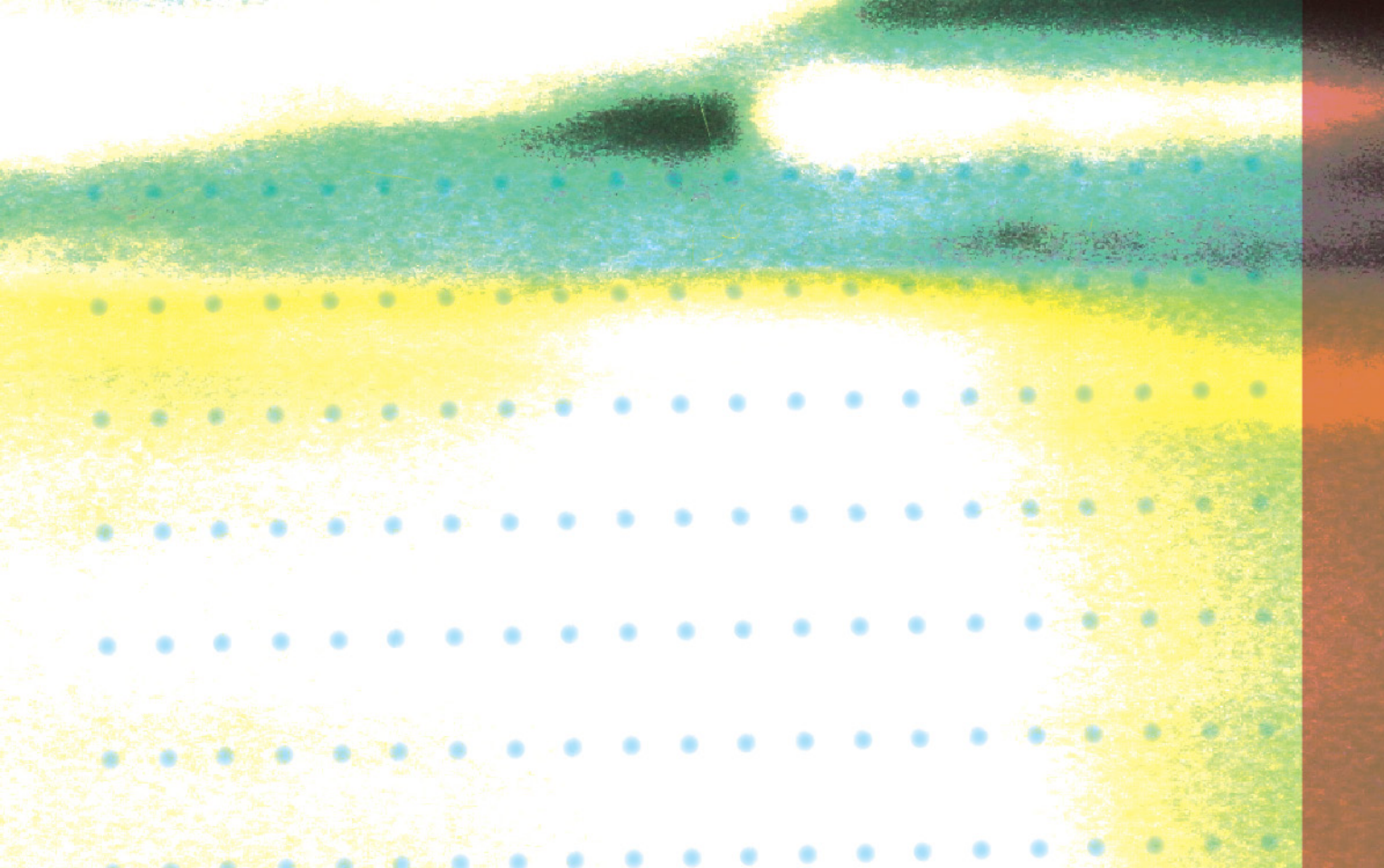
now calling him "increasingly irrelevant" and "a meta-personality famous for being famous." With this shift comes the question of how Carson will be remembered in the history of graphic design. Frankly, as I began to research the man, I felt inclined to dismiss him as an untrained hack that happened to find himself in the right place at the right time. Doing this, however, would completely disregard the many truly innovative things he created as well as the fact that his work and methods were certainly part of a drastic


change in the world of design. There is no question that Carson is a highly creative innovator and if nothing else, his methods forced a much needed reevaluation of age-old principles. However, my personal belief is that Carson is more of a "fine artist" whose medium happens to be layout and typography. He works more through intuition than intent, and having worked by no true set of rules (except through occasional hypocrisy), his legacy is not a sustainable new school of design. Thus, his fate in the history of graphic design may be as an interesting footnote rather than a true design legend.

A vertical strip of a beach scene, showing waves crashing onto a sandy shore under a sky that transitions from a bright yellow at the top to a deep blue at the bottom. The image is slightly blurred, giving it a dreamy, artistic quality.

DESIGN AND COPY  
BY KARLY WILLIAMS  
AND PAUL BARKSHIRE  
AND SCOTT GARNE  
AND GAELYN WOLTZ  
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IN SEATTLE  
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FOR TYPOGRAPHY II  
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CAMERON D. NEAT  
TYPE SET IN  
DIN AND CAECILIA







david carson edition [[3/4]] +++

designed by scott garner +++

typography [[two]] +++

spring 2008