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The graphic designer in television news presentation

When we think of design we generally associate it with subjects such as women's fashion, cars, furniture and architecture. These are the obvious design fields and their social importance is clearly illustrated by the great interest taken in the Paris fashion shows, the many national and international exhibitions of cars, furniture, and the like. The popularity of the *Daily Mail* 'Ideal Homes' exhibition speaks for itself. Indeed, the publication of so many glossy colour magazines clearly shows what public interest there is in reading about, if not being able to necessarily own, newly-marketed products.

If we reflect more deeply, however, upon our everyday surroundings whether in the home, at work, or merely travelling to work, we have to conclude that virtually everything is designed. Less obvious items are cooking utensils, table linen, bottles, the telephone, street lamps, traffic signs, even the tube you ride in – the list is endless. The latest subway seat armrests, for example, are specifically curved so as to allow people sitting either side to share the arm between them. Jack Howe, RDI, FRIBA, FSIA in a Presidential Address of the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers concerning 'The Responsibility of the Designer' states: 'Industrial design alters people's surroundings and affects people's attitude and visual standards. It also alters people's physical patterns, and produces different ways of living and different ways of doing things. The redesign of chairs affects people's comfort; the redesign of a classroom or office – people's behaviour, learning or work, reaction and attitude; the redesign of a hotel interior or train –

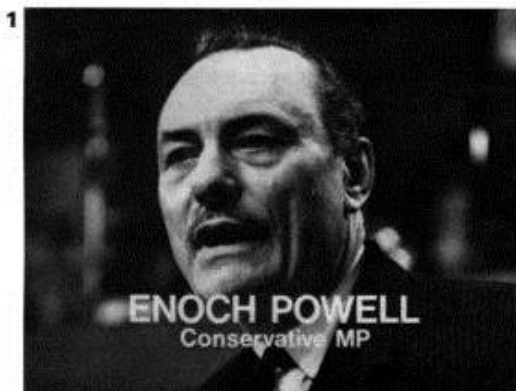
people's social attitude to one another. . . . Taken as a group, engineers, architects and designers cannot help altering people's lives. In fact, that is what they are asked to do – to make life better, fuller, easier and less drab.'

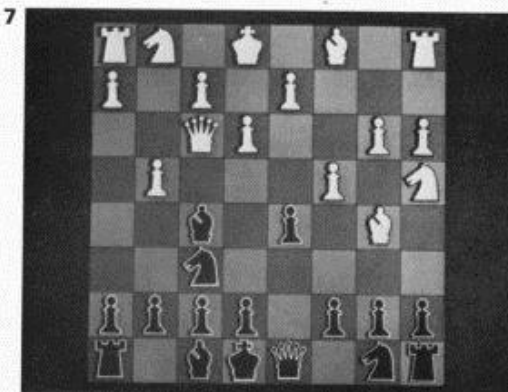
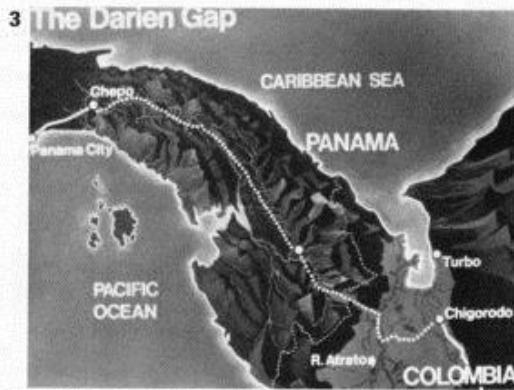
It seems an obvious truth, therefore, that whilst design is all around us some items are consciously observed while others go unnoticed. The specialized field of design in which I work possibly falls into the latter for you have seen the work of ITN's graphic design department many times in ITN programmes but you may not have consciously realized that it was designed. In a way we hope this is so, because our design object is to put over news points clearly, simply and fully-integrated with other audio/visual material and not just to produce pretty pictures.

This relationship of programme material is clearly defined by Sir Geoffrey Cox, former Editor of ITN:

- 1 'Direct "live" news, where the news is shown in pictures as it happens. This can be done by an outside broadcast, or by a studio interview
- 2 News on film or recorded on videotape
- 3 News in words, read or spoken by the newscaster, reporter or commentator
- 4 News in diagrams, maps, animated designs and still pictures.'

In order to understand the demands made upon the design department it is essential to relate ITN's statutory transmission hours for everything revolves around these. There are three national news programmes each weekday – *First Report* from





12.40p.m to 1.00p.m, the 10 minute *ITN News* at 5.50p.m and the half-hour *News At Ten*. On Saturdays and Sundays we have tea-time and late evening bulletins, with the addition of a lunch-time news on Saturday.

The nature of ITN's news coverage can be divided into two categories. These are the daily scheduled programmes and special programmes which cover important events in much greater detail – the Apollo missions for example. The obvious difference is the amount of time available to plan and produce the work. Since daily transmissions command the bulk of our time let us first examine the method of procedure.

Through a process of analysis and elimination by the editorial staff the contents of any one programme are established. When graphics are considered necessary the director, scriptwriter and

designer discuss the visual possibilities and mutually agree upon the best method of presentation. In some cases the presentation is obvious whilst in others careful planning is required.

The most common request is for name captions which identify for the viewer the various people who appear on the screen during a programme. These will consist of ITN reporters and interviewees (Fig.1). Such names are neatly displayed over them at the bottom of the screen where they are effective but not over obtrusive.

This technique of combining two entities (in this case picture and wording) is termed 'superimposition' and since they appear in the lower third of the screen they are referred to as 'lower-frame supers'. Similarly, where wording fills the screen they are termed 'full-frame supers', and so on.

To produce such captions a hot-press machine is

used. Basically we put a 12in × 9in card, surface upwards, onto a moveable metal bed. Over this we lay a thin sheet of plastic foil onto which is placed metal type, face downwards. The bed is then moved under a hot plate which, once pressure is applied, heats the type, melts the foil and leaves a permanent impression. The process is both dry and speedy, a simple caption taking about three minutes to produce which enables requests to be accepted even through transmission. An average of twenty-five 'supers' are provided each day but those which appear frequently are automatically filed.

For technical reasons 'supers' must be printed white on black, and, although we can be selective from a wide range of coloured card and foil to produce colour captions, this is often quite unnecessary since black and white captions can be ingeniously coloured synthetically. To save time eight standard colour schemes have been established, one of which is yellow on blue commonly used for ITN's corporate identity.

The next type of request which is fundamental to news coverage is that related to maps. When it is considered necessary to clarify circumstances by this means we have access to a fully comprehensive system which has been devised in the following way. As far as possible we have utilized the Mercator projection as it is the most widely accepted in atlases today. The world has been divided into sixty sections varying in scale. For example, figure 2 illustrates a close-up of the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland. A wider area will also include parts of Europe.

All the maps are printed by silkscreen in sets of 50. Before finalizing the present colours of dark green land and light blue sea several colour combinations were camera tested, not only to produce an aesthetically pleasing colour scheme, but also to determine the grey-scale values for black and white receivers. Our colours which have satisfactory mid-tonal resolutions allow us to add information in lighter and darker colours by means of paint, paper and dry transfer lettering. A standard size of 20in × 25in was chosen for three reasons. First the initial stock of 3,000 maps have to be stored effectively, second, it is a convenient size for us to work on and last, it permits the director to 'move' (pan across and zoom in and out) on them for often a wide shot has to be established in the viewers mind before moving closer to the action area which, by itself, may be difficult to recognize.

On average a simple map takes about twenty minutes to produce although this time factor can be considerably increased if complicated animations are required. Because of time and cost, certain film techniques cannot be considered and the majority of our animations are a combination of intricate artwork and the versatile capabilities of the electronic equipment. Occasionally, however, an unusual request may involve a special application (Fig.3). Here the detailed physical features were most important and they had to be meticulously painted by hand.

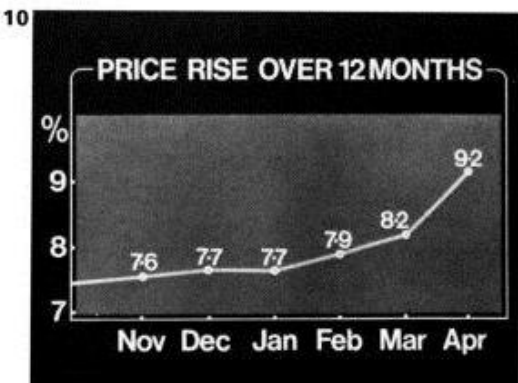
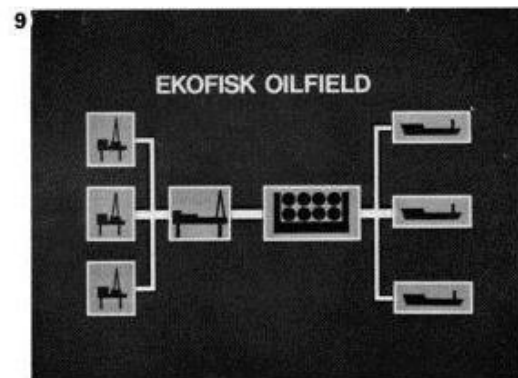
For recurring themes other graphic systems have been devised. On *First Report*, for example, ITN provides daily information about the Financial Times Index and the weather forecast (Figs.4 and 5). For technical reasons magnetic units which are extremely quick and versatile to assemble are used. Further applications of this system for 'up-dating' events are obvious from figure 6 when voting was taking place, and figure 7, when the Fischer v Spasky tournament was dominating the headlines.

Another recurrent subject is the British monthly trade figures. In this case the new facts are superimposed over prepared backgrounds depicting Imports, Exports and Trade Balance (Fig.8).

Not all our work can be resolved by systems, however, and a large proportion of the daily output is of a purely transient nature for which planning is impossible. We may be asked to illustrate a method of shipping oil in the North Sea (Fig.9), the rise in prices during 1973 (Fig.10) or experiments to be carried out by Skylab (Fig.11). Once we are aware of the technical facilities available steps are taken to resolve the problems in the most practical and, hopefully, imaginative way possible.

Generally captions are transmitted full-screen but occasionally they are 'inlaid' electronically into a blue chromakey screen in the studio behind the newscaster or correspondent. This technique enables the newscaster to remain in vision whilst selected pictures are cut in to clarify and support the script.

Figures 12-15 were produced specifically for this purpose, figure 14 being further adapted into



a title sequence and promotion material for a special programme.

This brings me onto the second category of graphic involvement. Whenever important events cannot be adequately covered by normal schedules additional 'airtime' is made available. This has been used for such programmes as Budgets, State Visits, major Athletic Competitions, Elections and Space Missions. Of these the latter two items made the greatest demands upon the graphics department.

The General Election in 1970 was an epic production for ITN, the entire operation being geared to giving the results as soon as they were declared. Reporters throughout the country phoned these through to the ITN Election Newsroom where they were analysed by computers and reduced to their simplest terms which the viewers could

readily understand. Two graphic systems were developed to present these facts.

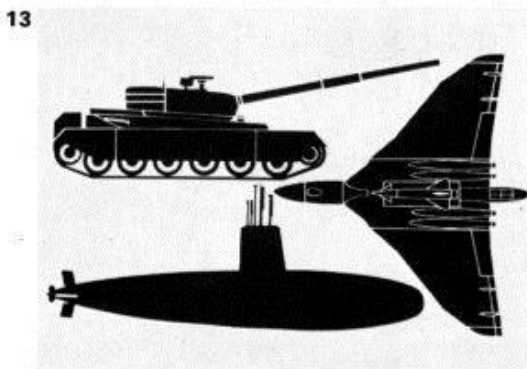
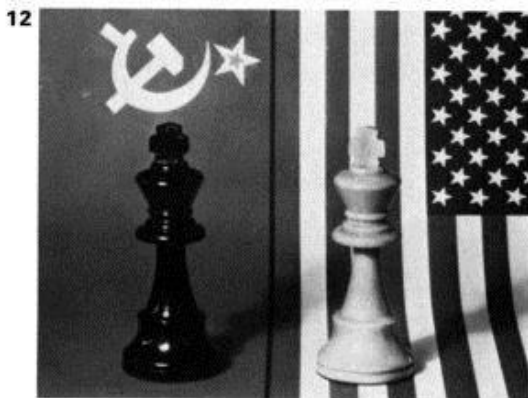
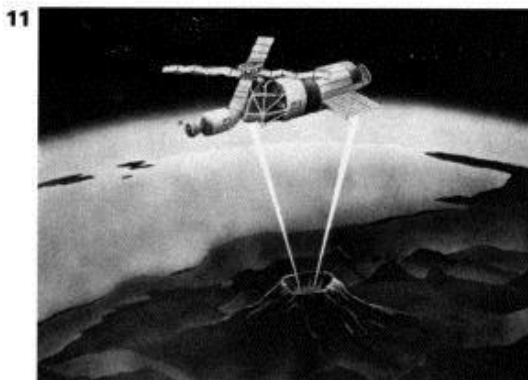
First, a large studio scoreboard was constructed (referred to loosely as the 'graphics wall') which showed such details as Gains and Losses, Percentage Swing and Computer Predictions (Fig.16). Since it was part of the set we had to work very closely with the set designers and it was so designed as to be legible both in close-ups and long shot. The various units were changed either manually or electro-magnetically using Solari equipment – the same principle as the changeable display boards at major railway stations.

The second system was to present the specific results of the candidates and their votes. It was necessary to display in each caption the name of the constituency, the results and, for viewers with colour sets, a means of colour coding which would clarify to which political party the winning candidate belonged, i.e blue for Conservative, red for Labour, orange for Liberal, etc. This was technically solved by printing solid bands of these colours on the top half of light grey cards over which the constituency was printed. Since it was impossible to know the results in advance and allowing for all eventualities we printed the constituency on each of the three major party colours. This system was further complicated when we had to allow for the smaller parties such as Welsh Nationalists, Scottish Nationalists, etc. As there were 630 constituencies we eventually produced a filing system of over 2,000 blank caption cards.

In addition to providing a range of miscellaneous captions for a title sequence, end of parts, credits and promotion material, we also supplied designs for moulded friezes which decorated the set, either on desk fronts or around the studio.

Equally demanding and satisfying have been the many Space Missions covered by ITN. Throughout these programmes a style of presentation evolved. NASA gave each mission a number (Apollo 7–17) and from this a symbol was produced (Fig.17). This was applied to American film and slides for a title and promotions, to the set as a decorative frieze on the desk front and to a large roller blind positioned behind the presenters; other items painted on this roller were the official NASA symbol and a chromakey blue area for inlaying any other visual material.

To explain the technical developments of the moon missions large three-dimensional lunar dioramas were made upon which were placed models of the Lunar Module, Lunar Rover, Astronauts and scientific equipment. These proved most useful when no visual material was available from the moon. Working to a different scale, Jennifer Grumbridge volunteered to make a full scale space-suit with all its accessories and in figure 18 you can see it being discussed during Apollo 16 by Astronaut Dick Gordon of Apollo 12 fame and Wing Commander Gordon Sharp, a doctor in the R.A.F specializing in space aviation. Although NASA supplied a large quantity of excellent colour material, nevertheless, ITN produced an equal volume of



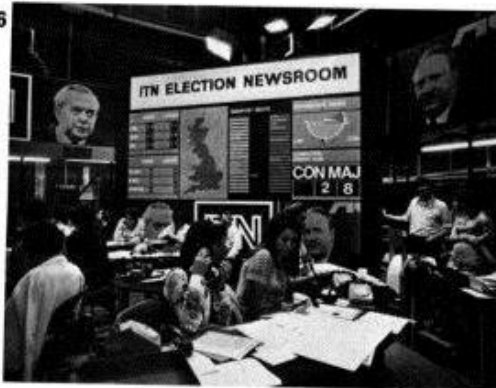
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illustrations, diagrams and charts dealing with flight paths, tests on human behaviour, lunar experiments, and so on.

As the Apollo series progressed so the quality of sound and picture improved but, in many instances, it was important to inform the viewer exactly who was talking and what was taking place. This was resolved by using an electronic machine which rapidly punched up such information. The best example I can remember was the ITN coverage of the first landing of man on the moon, Apollo 11.

It was a guarded secret that the producer, David Nicholas, made a decision in the early planning of the programme to have complete studio silence during the final minutes of the moon landing. 'There can be no greater sound than that of two men landing on the moon for the first time in the history of man'.

But it posed problems which could only be solved with captions by someone who totally understood the space age and could react quickly. That man was Frank Miles who had followed the entire Apollo programme and had really absorbed the Apollo 11 flight plan. He worked out nearly a thousand captions giving information and phrases which Astronauts Armstrong and Aldrin would use and could be stored in the machine's memory bank. Frank could identify their voices so when one spoke the Readifile operator (that was the system used) pressed a particular button to who was speaking and what was happening every 15 seconds of the 11 minute descent, to the moment of touchdown.

Solari equipment was used to relate the distance to landing and time to descent. The units flicked over silently to make it the most exciting and truly memorable programme on television.

The use of electronic equipment for producing captions has become progressively more sophisticated. Subsequently, ITN has used *Divcon* and *Titlefile*, the latter having been further developed into an even more flexible system – *Chiron 2*. At present this is being adapted by our engineers to meet ITN's specialized needs but it will soon be fully operational. Basically it is a character generator with a keyboard and can be programmed to take many typefaces; this has enormous advantages for the designer. Other refinements include: perfect letter spacing, a large memory bank, messages can be positioned in any part of the screen, these can also roll up the screen at variable speeds or move from right to left in a single row, individual letters can be flashed, words can be coloured, plus a range of other facilities.

It is hoped that the system will eventually supercede our present method of using the hot-press machine. Indeed, it is ITN's policy always to examine any equipment which may be beneficial to the improvement of news presentation. Such electronic aids serve a double function for the designer. Whilst they are creative tools themselves permitting totally new methods of presentation, they also leave the designer more time for the other creative aspects of programme content and promotion (Figs.19 and 20).

In addition to the news work a service to com-

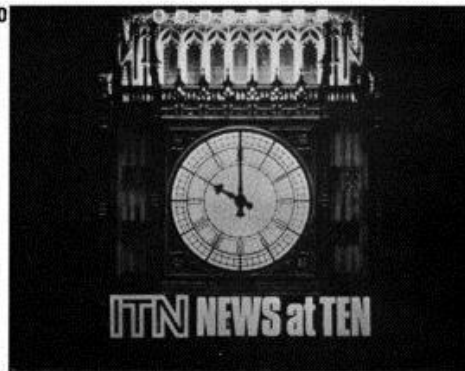
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panies making programmes and commercials is also provided. Produced through ITN House, the facilities company of ITN, this is dovetailed with the news requirements and the amalgamation presents a variety of approach which is very stimulating. In fact, it is during these occasions that we can experiment with the incredible versatility of the video equipment and what knowledge is acquired is automatically utilized, where possible, on news programmes: of course, the reverse process equally applies. The interests of the designer and engineer are totally compatible for both must become fully aware of the inherent capabilities of the television medium. Cyril Jackson, a supervisory engineer, states, 'We have only uncovered the tip of the iceberg in realizing the truly creative potential of the video medium'.

Surely there is no greater challenge for a designer than to realize that he is working in the most immediate and creative medium yet open to man, and that his efforts will help 15 million viewers watching *News at Ten* to understand world events a little better.

The future role of the television designer may be gleaned from the communication satellites of today. It is still difficult to realize that the world received live pictures from the moon with excellent colour resolution and that The World Cup and Olympic Games were simultaneously seen by hundreds of millions of viewers. It is the rule and not the exception that we got live transmission from Washington on the Watergate Hearings and from Ottawa on the Conference of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers.

Arthur C. Clarke, in his paper 'The Social Consequences of the Communications Satellites' discusses the glamorous possibility of global television: 'Men can enjoy pictures even when they cannot understand the words that go with them. Moreover, the picture may encourage them to understand those words. If it is used properly, global television could be the greatest force yet discovered for breaking down the linguistic barriers that prevent communication between men'.

Whatever the outcome of such technological progress I am fully confident that the designer will serve an increasingly important role with his many colleagues in all facets of the medium to feed man's inexhaustible thirst for knowledge and entertainment.

REFERENCE

- 1 F. Duesbury: 'NEWS AT TEN', *Sound and Vision broadcasting*, Vol. 12, No. 3 Winter 1971.