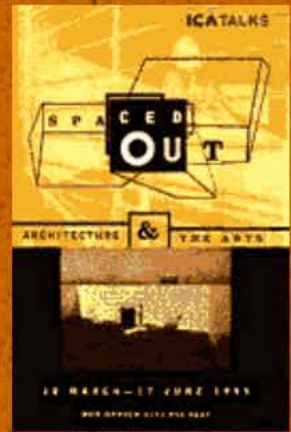


Sterile is

A WORD YOU WOULD USE IN DESCRIBING THE

not

MAVERICK DESIGNS AND TYPOGRAPHY
OF LONDONER JONATHAN BARNBROOK



Shadowplay, à la French semiotician Roland Barthes, is essential to his work -- the "necessary clouds" inherent in his creativity. And somehow this resulting complexity/multiplicity functions, and functions well, in the commercial sphere of our free-market world pushing toward a kinetic new millennium and further global interconnectivity. Barnbrook is disinclined to talk about his graphic design work in terms of a career; it is simply an "interest" he has been able to pursue. "The important thing," he says, "is to be creative in the way I want to be."

With his own font house, The Virus Foundry, an upcoming collaborative coffee-table book with radical-chic artist Damien Hirst, various design projects and television-commercial work, Barnbrook's noncareer is rife with fecundity and remarkable feats of productivity. Far from personifying a soul-destroying self-contradiction in thought vs. action, Barnbrook, a realist with a penchant for Marx, works within the system to comment on the system. "I remember a time when artists could live outside of commercial society," he says. "Now they are very much a part of it."



"I think a lot of people have been educated not to see the ludicrous contradictions and absurdities of everyday life, and breaking through this is what I'm trying to do. But it doesn't have to affect loads of people; one or two is enough. I am only a designer and maybe it can't make a difference, but when you stop trying, then it means the people who would like you to be an inert zombie have won."

A world without varietal shadow -- that is, anesthetized corporate culture, signifying nothing and, at the same time, everything. To Barnbrook, this is an apocalyptic nightmare not outside the realm of possibility. "Politics and social criticism," he points out, "should mix with anything you want them to if you believe in what you are saying." Conviction, unquestionably, Barnbrook has in abundance. And talent, too -- with the expert manipulation of type and images, on page and on screen; and with the creation of fonts, both satiric and ironic, that carry critical meaning even further simply by being.

