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## Defining Style, Making i-D: An Interview with Terry Jones

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*i-D*, the influential British fashion and culture magazine, founded, published, edited and designed by Terry Jones, turned 25 years old this year and celebrated with a retrospective exhibition. While not rare for a fashion magazine to live longer than the fashions it covers, it is unusual for the founder to remain at the helm. So we decided to ask Jones, known for the introduction of D.I.Y. to consumer magazines, to comment on the formation, continuation and viability of his creation.

**Steven Heller: You had been a designer at Good Housekeeping and Vanity Fair, and then art director at Vogue. What prompted you to start the zine you named i-D? And what does i-D stand for?**

Terry Jones: *i-D* was christened when Tricia [his wife] and I had our morning board meeting in our double bath “boardroom” back in 1979. The name derived from the initials of my studio name “Informat Design.” I had started calling my job “informat designer” while I was a student in Bristol in the 1960s. After leaving British Vogue as a freelance art director in 1977, I wanted to realize the idea of making a magazine that took inspiration from the street and the multi-faceted ephemera that bombards us daily. My design approach was to use whatever I had in my studio, and “Instant Design” had become the studio name.

The design style I had evolved after leaving Vogue utilized a “handmade” feeling, and the toolbox of graphic devices came from handwriting, stencils, typewriters or hand-drawn, free-form collage layouts. I tried to create the illusion of instant rationale with a gestalt aimed at catching the energy of throwing type and images onto the pages or cut-and-pasted ideas that evolved from the process of commercial art and design. “Instant” was always an illusion because the time spent on each layout of *i-D* was never instantaneous.

Apart from information design, instant design, and infantile disorder. *i-D* most obviously stands for identity. For 25 years, the magazine has created, documented and recreated numerous individuals and ideas that provide a collage for each month. The exhibition “*i-D*entity” has put the ideas into a three dimensional space with soundtracks and perfumes as additional triggers to evoke time and place.

**Heller: Its hard to believe that *i-D* has been publishing since you first stapled a few pages together back in 1980, a quarter century ago. The magazine was a design landmark of its time and those early issues are icons of the new wave and post modern design aesthetic. How do you feel *i-D* has aged? Is it as relevant from a design perspective now as it was back in 1984 when you transformed it into a newsstand magazine?**

Jones: Reinvention is more an organic process with *i-D*. Design has always been part of the magazine's identity. Type and technique in image manipulation is part of our history. Design evolution progressed with computers, scanners and digital downloads. As photographers and fashion stylists started their careers with *i-D*, their input into the mix of the magazine was a big part of the visual communication and style. As an art director, I treated each issue like a movie with themes that could give a focus to each edition. This is part of our original identity and has been now copied by many different international titles. The themes throughout 2005 related to identity, like the visa or passport, all 12 issues can be bound into a single-year-worth of ideas.

**Heller: *i-D* has enjoyed a unique longevity—not unlike magazines such as *Vogue* and *Bazaar*. But when it launched, at least on this side of the pond, it was competing with Brody's *Face* for which of the magazines would have the most impact on contemporary design. After Brody left *Face*, *i-D* continued to make inroads. Would you agree there was a creative competition? And do you think you won?**

Jones: I think the difference between *i-D* and the *Face* is that I created a framework that many editors and contributors could be involved in without the design overshadowing the content. While I always question whether *i-D* has relevance, I find a visual solution that personally gives me a rationale to continue. The business of producing each issue has made taking chances all the more risky. That has become a privilege that sets us apart from our mainstream rivals. The difference with *i-D* is that we have become a collectable, and I consider it my responsibility to try and keep the ethos whilst at the same time pay the print bills each month.

**Heller: I understand that Richard Hollis was one of your teachers. He is, of course, a respected design historian. How much of your work, past and present, is a conscious reference to history? And as unfair as it may seem to make you answer this, where do you feel *i-D* fits into the historical continuum?**

Jones: Richard Hollis came to Bristol as head of graphics and encouraged me to stay on after my two-year commercial art course at the West of England College of Art. He was a major inspiration in opening my eyes to graphics, typography and art, but he also put up with (what I can only suspect were) pain-in-the-arse attitudes to the discipline aspects of graphics. I never forgot his advice: calligraphy was about the space around the letters. As I left after two years to work for Ivan Dodd, I got the best mentors around at that time to understand details count.

**Heller: So you learned the details before you broke the grid?**

Jones: Going to the Rauchenberg exhibition at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] in January confirmed how much of an impression his 1960s show at the Whitechapel had on me. I've continued to try to keep my eyes open to any stimulus that triggers emotions in the brain; sound, smell, taste, touch and sight all have a role, and I've tried to include these elements in the exhibition "*i-Dentity*" as markers in time.

*i-D* has evolved its identity through the people I have chosen to work with. My role is "visual agitator," where I set the framework for all our contributors. I particularly take care with *i-D*'s covers. At their most successful they have become visual barometers, marking out the months and years with a strong visual graphic, which I believe to be the main challenge each issue.

I always wanted to make a magazine with an archival reference point rather than be used as landfill.

**Heller: Many magazines developed their own typefaces to underscore their respective uniqueness. What about you? Has there been i-D Bold, Medium, and light?**

Jones: I never felt the need to invent a typeface because there were so many great types around that served the functional purpose of the magazine. I might recycle an idea, use up the old Letraset, or photocopy-morph the font we got out of my first studio Apple IIe computer. I might harness to death the golf ball on my IBM electric, or double typing on the manual "Imperial" until we got our first Apple Mac. Then we found a math student from Cambridge University who wanted to learn how to design. Steve Male, my art director, began working as a student when he didn't even know what a typeface was. I loved working with people who had an illustrator's skill and no formal knowledge of type because they would balance out my purist disciplines and I could steer the results into controlled chaos. It goes back to the concept of creating rules only to stretch them to their limit. Like the floating column idea where it wasn't possible to fit all the columns into the width of the page. Or the time when we were perfecting the art of illegibility when Moira Bogue and Steve were in my studio and Sytex scanners had only just arrived in London.

The art issue cover was our repro houses most expensive cover ever (and almost gave the owner a breakdown.)

**Heller: It is always tempting to ask the "form-givers" (rather than the followers) to explain how their innovations derived. When I used to pour over your book *Instant Design: A Manual of Graphic Techniques*, I used to feel it was something of an anti-manual. I was used to Armin Hoffmann's or Josef Muller-Brockmann's regimented and disciplined manuals. But yours on the surface was very D.I.Y., punkish but also something else—expressive perhaps. What were your motivations? Was it simply the idea that in fashion styles must be fluid and this was the era for anarchy?**

Jones: I responded to structured design by attempting to deconstruct. I was more inspired by Dada, Russian Constructivism and Pop Art than a rigid, geometric structure. I followed a gut instinct that still had behind it a rationale based on Gestalt design. I applied the grids in a more dynamic and anarchic system. By applying the ideas of controlled chaos I used a different set of rules. Chaos follows a cyclical pattern, so my design ideas continue to work in the same way that a circle works as in the chaos theory. I continue to just react to my own gut instinct, which confuses quite a lot of people.

**Heller: You once told John Walters of Eye Magazine that you wanted to “get under the skin of fashion.” Isn’t fashion just layer upon layer of skin? Is “getting underneath” just adding another layer?**

Jones: I don’t remember the exact context of the John Waters interview, but getting under the skin of fashion was an editorial aim. Particularly with *i-D*’s invention of the straight up. An honest fashion/portrait ideally head to toe, where we had a basic Q & A to give an editorial exchange with each person. This has now evolved into environmental portraits and has been imitated by numerous magazines, so the idea of infiltration into the mainstream continues. And we haven’t even started on the web yet, although Matthew Hawker has been putting in the plumbing when he’s found time between deadlines. You can see the idea works on [myspace.com](http://myspace.com).

**Heller: You’ve said that “fashion is a game.” So, shifting the metaphor a bit, what is the Holy Grail of designing for and being in fashion? Some people can do it—and do it continually—while others cannot. You’ve created a design style and language that hits the right marks. How?**

Jones: I’ve always seen fashion as the excuse for what we do, and in the broad view, graphics is part of that fashion. Because you can find most of the ideas in “The Manual of Graphic Techniques,” the cyclical changes tend to work organically and depending who comes into my studio. Each individual is guided by me to exploit *i-D*’s graphic instant design toolbox. Throughout 2005, I collaborated with different people and dipped into *i-D*’s design heritage with the current team, Kate Law and Dean Langley. They got to meet up with Alex McDowell, who worked on the art for the first three issues (his Rocking Russian Design Studio was where Neville Brody began his career before he went to the Face). Then Steve Male came in to collaborate on the “Name” issue with the stylist Simon Foxton and again with Nick Knight’s collaboration for the “Nationality” issue. Peter Saville and I brainstormed for the “Home” issue, and after the constant chaos of 2005, I put back tighter type rules at the start of 2006 because it felt right. I only go on instinct and always try to follow my gut. I’ve never believed that market research would provide me with the satisfaction of making *i-D*. The risk is probably the rush that makes it addictive. My downside is that I am never fully satisfied when the issue comes off the press.

**Heller: Alexander Liberman once told me that he didn't care about typefaces—or the nuances of graphic design for that matter—but he did care about communicating directly with his audience, which he acknowledged was in continual flux. What are the details that you most care about when designing, art directing and editing? And do you have a picture of the audience?**

Jones: I've always thought that the reader is the same as the people that work for the magazine. Which means a good cross-section of opinion makers and people who are constantly inquisitive about other people who want to capitalize on whatever talents they have. One of my roles is to be a catalyst; putting people or ideas into the same pot and hoping the result will be an inspiring surprise. I always hope that people can exceed their own expectations, but I've been called a ball breaker after I've given someone their first break. I'd like to change that reputation. Art/editorial direction is what I spend most of my time on currently but I often yearn to find the time to slice up a layout or two that's from the past and for the future.

**Heller: After all your years in fashion establishing looks, tones, mannerisms, has fashion given you all you want and need as artist and designer? Did you get under the skin?**

Jones: Fashion has provided me with a good excuse to do what I do, but I'm looking forward to finding the time to develop an idea I started back in '89. It was too early to get the backing I needed, but today the concept is right, and I've got a greater network of contributors and collaborators to take part in the ideas.

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**About the Author.** Steven Heller, co-chair of MFA "Designer As Author" at School of Visual Arts, is the author of *Merz to Emigre and Beyond: Avant Garde Magazine Design of the Twentieth Century* (Phaidon Press), *The Education of a Comics Artist* co-edited with Michael Dooley (Allworth Press), *The Education of a Graphic Designer, Second Edition* and *The Education of an Art Director* (with Veronique Vienne) (Allworth Press).