



Right: Mathias Augustyniak (on left) and Michael Amzalag at the M/M (Paris) studio. Far right and below: the new book *M to M of M/M (Paris) Volume II*. Left: the front and back of Saville's sleeve for New Order's *Power, Corruption & Lies*



The type set

A new book celebrates the friendship forged between graphic designers Peter Saville and M/M (Paris) in the crosswinds of fashion, music and art. *Harriet Quick* reports

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KATJA RAHLWES

The old adage about the danger of meeting one's heroes did not apply when Mathias Augustyniak and Michael Amzalag of design and art direction agency M/M (Paris) were introduced to British graphic artist Peter Saville at a conference in Barcelona in 2003. The French duo, best known for their abstract, multilayered graphic art in the fashion, music and art worlds, encountered a kindred spirit. Indeed Saville, who thrust graphic art into the public consciousness via his record covers for New Order and Joy Division, had paved the way for their own practice. The trio have made graphic art a vital part of visual culture.

They see each other regularly and worked together when Augustyniak and Amzalag invited Saville to contribute an essay for their new book *M to M of M/M (Paris) Volume II* (Thames & Hudson), which accompanies their current exhibition at Paris' Musée des Arts Décoratifs and Musée d'Orsay (both temporarily closed) and Shanghai's Power Station of Art. Saville's chapter takes the form of an interview with writer and creative director Jo-Ann Furniss and discusses Paris, high art vs pop culture and Saville's beginnings as a founding partner at Factory Records.

Amzalag started his record collection in his teens. "I was 13 when I first heard New Order on the radio, and the next day I bought the album. That discovery fired up my interest in graphic design. It was a bright spot, an illuminating moment," he says. In 1986, he entered the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, where he met his future creative partner, Augustyniak. "I leave him to write the lyrics; somehow he is the lead singer and I play the keyboard" is how Amzalag describes the dynamic behind M/M, one of fashion's most sought-after creative agencies.

Saville's own awakening to the potential of graphic art happened at Manchester Polytechnic. He was awarded a

first-class degree in 1978. One of his first creations upon leaving was a poster for Factory Records, the label he set up with Tony Wilson, Alan Erasmus and Martin Hannett that championed emergent Manchester bands including Joy Division and The Durutti Column. Saville's impactful poster Fac.1, with its thick rules and a sans-serif type, led to prolific record-cover work for Factory artists and The Hacienda club.

"The remarkable thing about graphics in the context of music is that it does not matter what is on the cover. I had relative autonomy to create the covers that I wanted, and I would send them to the printers without anyone seeing them," says Saville, adding that he was never able to replicate that level of autonomy again. It was Saville's extraordinarily beautiful postmodern transfusion of art and design history into pop culture that struck a chord. Henri Fantin-Latour's still-life *A Basket of Roses* (1890) appeared on New Order's *Power, Corruption & Lies*, released in 1983; a photographic version of a de Chirico painting shot by chief collaborator Trevor Key adorned *Thieves Like Us* (1984); and a blown-up tapestry pattern and book-title-style graphics were on OMD's *Talking Loud and Clear* (also 1984). This seminal work flew in the face of clichéd "portrait of a band" cover art.

Saville's appropriation of fine art into pop culture was an astonishing riposte to the cultural hierarchies embedded in Thatcherite Britain. "It was new to me, and it turned out that other young people were happy to discover it through this remarkable platform of Factory Records and Joy Division and New Order," says Saville, who continued to create Factory covers for another 10 years.

As Saville developed new visual lexicons, he also expressed the mood of the time through his lifestyle and dress code (silk robes, polonecks and lounge jackets). Handsome and enigmatic, Saville came to hold a mythic status in the fashion, music and art worlds as he found himself at the vanguard of popular culture that was imploding through MTV and style magazines such as *The Face* and *i-D* in the late '80s and early '90s.

Ten years younger, Amzalag and Augustyniak share Saville's predictive antennae. Augustyniak's breakthrough happened while studying at the RCA in London. "In France, art-school training is based on expression of the artistic self. The transdisciplinary, applied-art approach at the RCA introduced me to the idea of art direction and learning how to articulate and interlink the specificity of someone else – a photographer, designer, typographer, musician or a writer," says Augustyniak, who was raised in the south of France. The mission at M/M was to further the cross-disciplinary approach pioneered by Saville and ultimately create graphic art as an end in itself.



Right: interviewing Amzalag, Augustyniak and Saville. Below: Saville's hand-drawn work. Left: pages from *M to M of M/M (Paris) Volume II*



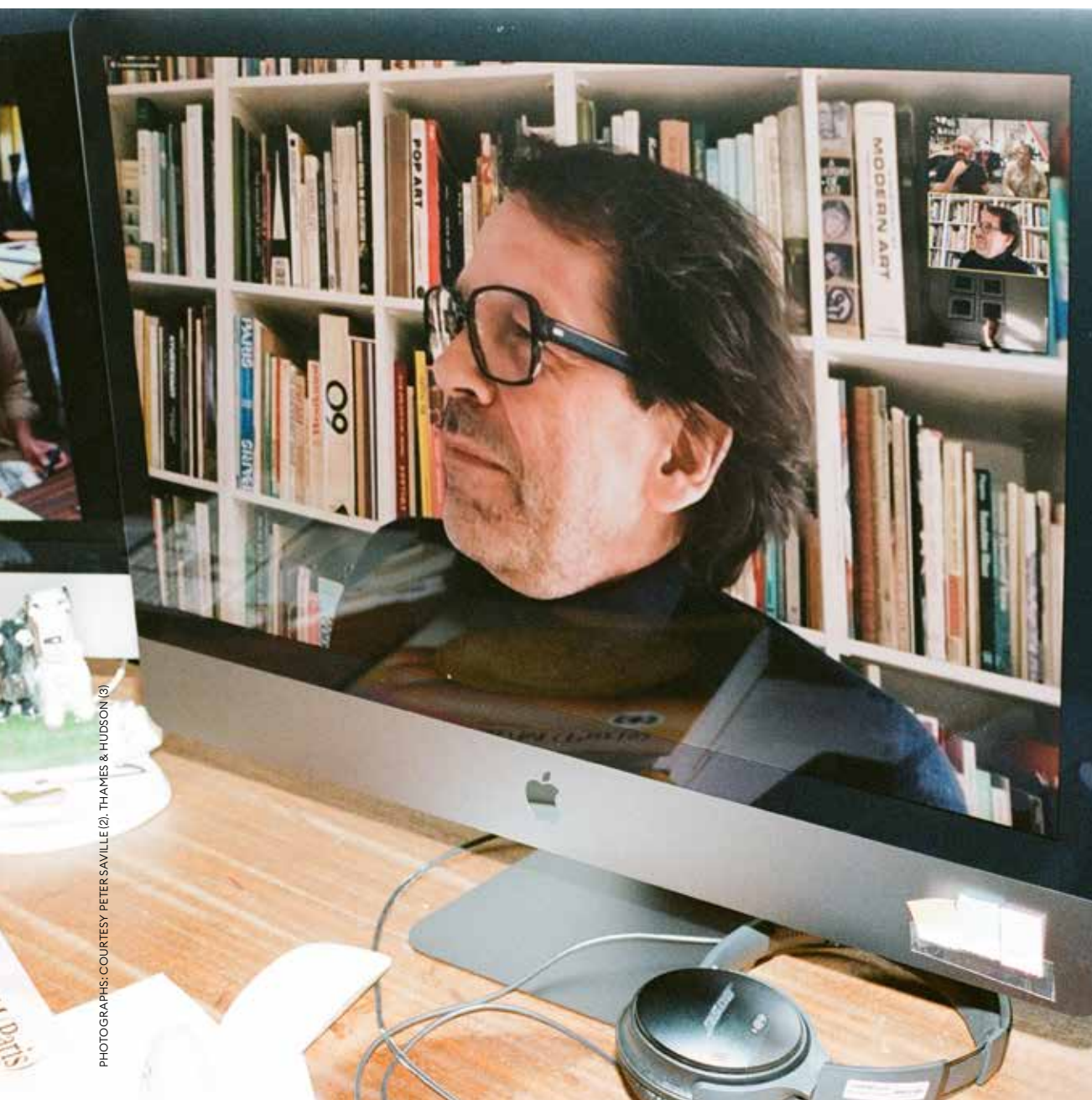


All three have been instinctively drawn to the fertile world of fashion. It was Yohji Yamamoto, the avant-garde Japanese designer, who first gave both sides a platform there. The introduction for Saville happened via art director Marc Ascoli and Nick Knight, who were shooting a Yohji Yamamoto catalogue. Knight suggested bringing a graphic artist on board to add another dimension.

“Without Marc Ascoli, without Nick Knight we would not be having this conversation today,” says Saville of the resulting collaboration, a catalogue that is still used as a reference point. “The contribution that could be made through graphic media – through graphic, type, layout and



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PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY PETERSAVILLE (2), THAMES & HUDSON (3)

materiality – was not practised in fashion. Now, it is standard, and creative directors might appoint a graphic designer before a photographer. That was unheard of 30 years ago.” He adds: “Yohji allowed me freedom. He said, ‘I want to see what you want to see.’ The only rule being that he needed to like it.”

Ascoli later enlisted M/M, who had been blown away by the audacity of Saville’s series. M/M worked on campaigns and catalogues for Jil Sander, as well as Yamamoto. In time, more brands sought out their distinctive, unorthodox approach. In the case of Balenciaga, then helmed by Nicolas Ghesquière, they layered collage, photography, hand-drawn typography and symbolism in dense imagery that was as intricate and multireferential as Ghesquière’s distinctive design.

“We found the freedom to express ideas and a vision through the medium of fashion. When we were studying in Paris in the late ’80s and early ’90s, fashion was seen as a kind of capitalist, frivolous evil,” says Amzalag. Like Saville, the duo wanted to reignite the relationship between art and fashion that flourished at the turn of the 20th century in the writings of Roland Barthes and Marcel Duchamp or the collaborations between designers and artists, including Chanel and Cocteau, Schiaparelli and Dalí.

Observes Saville: “Even now, talking to Michael and Mathias, it strikes me again that the conversation around fashion, style and the art of living is totally different in London, which is so pragmatic, to Paris, which is romantic. I remember Ascoli talking about this red dress as ‘la robe rouge’. Between the two terms there is a difference, something enigmatic. Fashion is essential to the French art of being. The Brits don’t have that.”

Both M/M and Saville have also worked on civic projects. Saville became the art director of Manchester just before turning 50 and worked with the council on the creative regeneration of the city. He founded ShowStudio with Nick Knight in 2000 and also worked with Nicholas Serota at the Whitechapel Gallery.

For 20 years, M/M worked with Théâtre de Lorient on posters and stage sets that are now being rediscovered by a young generation. Alongside major fashion campaigns for Loewe, Stella McCartney and Calvin Klein, M/M have also worked for artists including Sarah Morris and Philippe Parreno. This extraordinary body of work features in the new monograph *M to M*, and is also spread across the Paris and Shanghai exhibitions; the City of Lights is immersed in M/M’s exuberant landscape of artefacts, posters, sculptures, visuals and 3D M/M hieroglyphs. Now cultural luminaries, Amzalag and Augustyniak were awarded Chevaliers des Arts et des Lettres in 2012.

In the UK, Saville’s aesthetic imprint has also been honoured in a CBE (2019), and a monographic exhibition at the Design Museum.

But when it comes to authoring and art directing their own books, all three have preferred to enlist other graphic artists. Saville asked Christopher Wilson to work on his *Designed by Peter Saville* book, while Paul Neale, co-founder of British agency GTF, had a hand in M/M’s tomes. The cover features two fingers holding coins with M/M hieroglyphs.

Now 65, Saville says he only wants to take on work that interests him. And for clients who will be patient. “Nothing much happens in my world until noon,” he smiles. Recent projects have included the rebranding for Calvin Klein (music aficionado Raf Simons also reached out to him to use Factory covers on parkas), and a collaboration with Riccardo Tisci on Burberry’s new logo and monogram. “I want to step back a little and spend time on my legacy, my own work. As a graphic artist, you constantly exist in other people’s worlds. The work out there is a fraction of the boxes and boxes of unseen work I have.” He continues to draw with pen and paper in his live/work London studio. “Michael and Mathias have another decade to contribute to,” he says.

Would a joint exhibition be in the offing? “We could stage it at Agincourt,” jests Saville. Amzalag and Augustyniak agree that would be a fine idea. ■HTSI