

## THE FORMAL AND CONTEXTUAL RELATION OF TYPOGRAPHIC AND VISUAL ELEMENTS OF PJ HARVEY ALBUM COVERS

**Cinla Seker**

Dokuz Eylul University  
Buca Faculty of Education, Department of Fine Arts Education  
Ugur Mumcu Caddesi 135 Sokak No:5 Buca  
35150 Izmir  
Turkey  
[cinla.seker@deu.edu.tr](mailto:cinla.seker@deu.edu.tr)  
+90 532 465 09 53

### Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine 21st century's formal and contextual design solutions with the guidance of graphic design principles by analyzing design products. Twenty-nine times nominated and six times winner for the international worldwide music awards Pj Harvey's eight alternative rock studio album covers have chosen; *Dry* (1992), *Rid of Me* (1993), *To Bring You My Love* (1995), *Is this Desire?*(1998), *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* (2000), *Uh Huh Her* (2004), *White Chalk* (2007), *Let England Shake* (2011). Graphic design as a design discipline in special means determining the formals of a 2d before production process according to the context. Album covers are one of the many graphic design products of 21st century. With the help of an album cover the artist reflects an audial expression visually. For a successful visualization some graphic design principles should have been considered by the designers. Design principles are the guides of organizing elements like visuals, typography and color .In this research five design principles are looked for; unity/harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale/proportion, dominance/emphasis and, similarity and contrast. On Pj Harvey's album covers it is determined that every five of these principles were considered by the graphic designer during the design process as outlined.

**Keywords:** *Graphic Design, Album Cover, Visual, Design Principles, Typography*

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## 1. Introduction

Formal and functional features determination process called *the design* made before the production process of a product. Like many production items printed 2d materials are one of a many design fields and it's called *graphic design*. With an extended meaning today graphic designer organizes *the artistic elements* under the consideration of *design principles* according to the context. The aim of this research is to determine 21st century's formal and contextual design solutions with the guidance of graphic design principles by analyzing design products. Album covers are one of the many graphic design products of 21st century. With the help of an album cover the artist reflects an audio expression visually. For a successful visualization some *graphic design principles* should have been considered by the designers. In this research six design principles are looked for organizing visuals, typography -the art, design and technique of writing- and color; unity/harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale/proportion, dominance/emphasis and, similarity and contrast.

1969 born Polly Jean Harvey is an English musician, singer-songwriter, composer, writer and poet. Twenty-nine times nominated and six times winner for the international worldwide music awards Pj Harvey's eight alternative rock studio album covers have chosen; *Dry* (1992), *Rid of Me* (1993), *Is this Desire?*(1998), *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* (2000), *Uh Huh Her* (2004), *To Bring You My Love* (2007), *White Chalk* (2007), *Let England Shake* (2011). Pj Harvey has received the 2001 and 2011 Mercury Prize for *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* and *Let England Shake* respectively -the only artist to have been awarded the prize twice- eight BRIT Award nominations, six Grammy Award nominations and two further Mercury Prize nominations. *Rolling Stone* awarded her 1992's Best New Artist and Best Singer Songwriter and 1995's Artist of the Year, and listed *Rid of Me, To Bring You My Love* and *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* on its 500 Greatest Albums of All Time list. In 2011, she was awarded for Outstanding Contribution To Music at the NME -New Musical Express- Awards. In June 2013, she was awarded an MBE – Most Excellent Order of the British Empire- for services to music and became a female knight *Dame*.

## 2. Album Covers As A Graphic Design Product

As a graphic design product album covers are the packages of music. These packages both protect and visualize musical expression. The genre of music and the expression of the

musicians show itself on these covers by using visuals and typographic combinations which are the elements of graphic design. On these album covers forms follow functions.

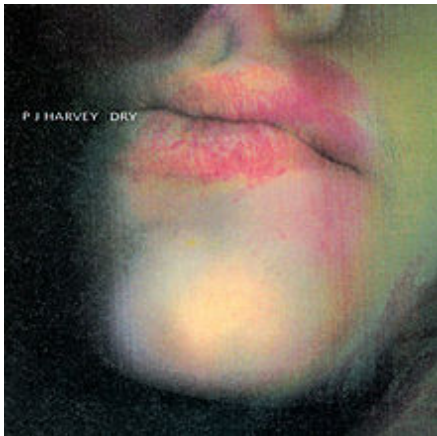
On the turning points to new millennium a new version of vinyl records -analog sound storage medium- invented as *CD audio (compact disc)* –digital optical disc data storage- and developed for data storage of different types. With higher capability in smaller size 12 cm diameter and again circular shape it is called compact disc. Industrial design world created a few ergonomic and regular shaped packages for these CDs; a square for music and movies, a circle for rewritable and a novel like rectangle for movies.

In order to access the data easily there is an accepted organization. Every time there is a booklet in front, pictures and lyrics in and the name of the performer and the album name only on and the two sides. At the back there is a list of the songs/compositions and other details like recording company name, logo, barcode...etc. In this research only the 11 to 12 cm front covers of the booklets are analyzing because all sides designed in unity and it is the main and the most important part.

## ***2.1 Analysis of Pj Harvey Album Covers***

### **2.1.1 Dry (1992)**

**Figure 1 Dry Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

1992 released studio album cover *Dry* has two verbal written as small as can be red on the darkest ground as white figures. They are contrasting the most as size and color. A blurred and unusual cropped photograph has been chosen for its attraction. When the viewer divide

the surface into two halves downwards can find out that the two halves are balanced asymmetrically by using full and empty spaces. While on the right hand side it is seen a part of a face in huge scale, on the left hand side it is seen a small size writing on a black space aligned to the mouth like a speech bubble announcing that “she” is the singer itself. Words are dividing the surface in two horizontally at the golden section of “the” rectangle. All the colors seen are in between the boundaries of the two contrast red and green, and neutrals like grey, black and white. As a typographic element a very plain and simple sans serif modern font has been chosen again contrasting with the curved and blurred outlines of the facial planes. The areal proportions of the face and the black space around have also 1/3 proportion which again attractive inequality.

### 2.1.2 Rid of Me (1993)

**Figure 2 Rid of Me Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

1993 released studio album “Rid of Me” has a black and white color scheme which is neutral colors harmony. The typographic elements are small as they can in order to contrast with the visual. An odd portrait of Harvey naked in front of a textured wall is the scene. Human skin texture and material is contrasting with the wall's grey grain behind. Very light wall's grey contrasting with the black letters too. Flying hairs of Harvey energized the symmetric setup of the portrait on the plain wall. Only light grey tiles and their edges tranquilized the movement and make the scene well organized. There is huge proportion contrast and it is the golden ratio. It is unequal and very contrast in order to take attraction.

### 2.1.3 To Bring You My Love (1995)

Figure 3 To Bring You My Love Album Cover



*Source: Author's Collection*

1995 released studio album “To Bring You My Love” cover photograph has two contrasting colors turquoise and bright red to form a contrasting color harmony. In order to emphasize the woman figure she has the bright red on, as a dress in flames and as a lipstick on her lips. A floating figure on turquoise water is the theme. The asymmetrical balance established with the red dress and black floating hair as strong as the red dress. Because a graceful young woman is seen a graceful font for the name of the album and the musician has been chosen. To make the figure and the scene glorious the smallest size has the typography. The visual features of the font and the figure are similar as curves and proportion. Lying figure balanced with a blurred air effect on the upper part of the rectangle and the dark grey typography.

### 2.1.4 Is This Desire? (1998)

1998 released studio album “Is This Desire?” has a black and white color scheme which is a neutral harmony. The typography is making a contrast with the rest of the surface in size, color and position. But this time the name of the musician and album separated in size and position. On the black and white photo a double effect irritates the viewer. The symmetrical balance formed full and empty spaces. And has a tonal richness with million tones of grey. The figural duality made the scenery timeless and dynamic at the same time. While the name of the musician still small and plain. The name of the album is bigger, fast, loud and written by directly. The figure is communicating with the viewer. Because the eye

scans the rectangle from top left corner and after scanning line by line like reading leaves the surface from bottom right. Placing the typographic elements at these two places isn't accidental. Eye also follow the skinny arms and feels a movement and dynamism because of changing point of views.

**Figure 4 Is This Desire? Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

**2.1.5 Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea (2000)**

**Figure 5 Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

2000 released studio album “Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea” has bright colors balanced with wide black areas. On a city street’s grey space positioned typography as small in size. Because of the size it should have the highest contrasting tone which is white. A

plain modern font has chosen. Dynamic effect has the photo and the framing of a behind looking figure in between a fast walk in a big city.

### 2.1.6 Uh Huh Her (2004)

2004 released studio album “Uh Huh Her” cover has only neutrals as colors contrasting with black areas. Positive and negative areas divides surface into areas. Viewer failed to understand which is front which is back. Size contrasts, tonal contrasts and the free style typography makes the cover as dynamic as it can be. The handwriting and hand drawing letters are floating on a dark space and differentiates the musician and the name of the album.

**Figure 6 Uh Huh Her Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

### 2.1.7 White Chalk (2007)

**Figure 7 White Chalk Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

2007 released studio album “White Chalk” has its romantic and timeless style on the white dressed Pj on its cover sitting directly and calm. Neutral color harmony it has. The semi angled light and slight shadow again asymmetrically balanced with the typographic elements. Forming a unity as color the dressed figure and typography are contrasting with the dark ground and by their sizes. Plain modern font suites the plain ground and contrasting curly hair and flounces of the dress.

### **2.1.8 Let England Shake (2011)**

**Figure 8 Let England Shake Album Cover**



*Source: Author's Collection*

2011 released studio album “Let England Shake” has a very contrasting design attitude by letting out the Pj figure. Have only two neutrals – black and white- it is still contrasting. On a white space black birds made a black fog. By putting the white typography on this black fog turned this into a black hole deepens into far away. A huge size contrast between the name of the musician and its position makes the illustration leading role. A very plain font makes contrast with the birds and the tone and the thickness makes it readable.

## **3. Conclusion**

On Pj Harvey’s album covers it is determined that every six of these principles were considered by the graphic designer during the design process as outlined above. All covers have a color scheme in harmony. These schemes consists more neutrals less pure colors; because she is doing alternative rock music protesting the mainstream rock which is also protesting. Neutral and dark pale visuals have negative effects on the viewer unlike bright



saturated colors. All covers designed in united manner like this. Covers balanced asymmetrically by using full and empty spaces. Visually asymmetrical balance has an unrest effect on the viewer which is symmetric with the unrest life of the musician. Using typography in very tiny sizes is something unusual. This unusual attitude towards these words put emphasis on them. From old to newer the figure emphasis decreased; typography increased as scale and form. Only “White Chalk” doesn’t suite to this order. This album is unexpectedly different as style of instruments and vocals. Again from older to newer divine proportion turned into equality and centralized on “White Chalk” also. Contrasts in color, size, form and positioning have been used the most because the genre of music Pj Harvey is doing. Every contrast has high stress in it. On every cover except “Let England Shake” is her odd photo looking directly on the viewer. On the “Let England Shake” this time she became the object and the subject, the proposer and the doer at the same time. This time acting is emphasizing. Every cover there are references to the musicians self and the world inside her again because she is an expressive one. As a conclusion of these factors it can be said that all covers are relevant as form and context.

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