

ACHIEVING UNITY THROUGH CONTRASTS: COVERING MUSIC FOR THE MASSES BY DEPECHE MODE

Cinla Seker

DokuzEylul University
Buca Faculty of Education Department of Fine Arts Education
UgurMumcu Cad. 135 Sk. No.5 Buca
35150 Izmir
Turkey
e-mail: cinla.seker@deu.edu.tr
telephone: +90 532 465 09 53

Abstract

Music as an art form based on sound and silence recorded as actual sounds since the second half of the 19th century and developed in time according to the technical improvements. Covers both protecting and labeling recording mediums are graphic design spaces to organize. The pre-production design of 2 dimensional printed surfaces called the graphic design. Like every design field graphic design has its own elements and principles as guides. The aim of this paper is to analyze contrasts concluded in unity on the covers of the Depeche Mode's album Music for the Masses. Depeche Mode is a synth-pop, new wave, electronic and dance rock and alternative rock band established in 1980 and still active. Depeche Mode has 31 times nominated and 10 times won the highly prestigious worldwide prizes during those years, it is the most popular electronic band the world has ever known and in the list of the 50 bands that changed the world. The front cover of the album is a booklet with 6 pages / 12 faces designed and a back side combined. In this paper 12 faces of the booklet and the backside analyzed according to the 6 main principles of graphic design and find out that unity achieved through contrasting elements.

Keywords: *graphic design; album cover; unity; contrast; Depeche Mode*

1. Introduction

Music as an art form based on sound and silence recorded as actual sounds since the second half of the 19th century and developed in time according to the technical improvements (Frith, 8). Covers both protecting and labeling recording mediums are also graphic design spaces to organize. The pre-production design of 2 dimensional printed surfaces called the graphic design, under the concept of design, which is the decision making process of a product before production (Raizman, 375). Like every design field graphic design has its own elements and principles as guides. While line, shape, color, texture, value and space are the

six main graphic design elements, unity / harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale / proportion, dominance / emphasis and, similarity / contrast are the six main graphic design principles (Pipes, 13; Resnick, 23-25).

Depeche Mode is a synth-pop, new wave, electronic, dance- and alternative rock band established in 1980 and still active. Depeche Mode has 31 times nominated and 10 times won the highly prestigious worldwide prizes. It is the most popular electronic band the world has ever known and it is in the list of the 50 bands that changed the world. The aim of this paper is to analyze contrasts concluded in unity on the cover of the Depeche Mode's album Music for the Masses. (Moskowitz, 210)

2. Unity as a Graphic Design Principle: Achieving Unity Through Contrast

Having visual or verbal messages to convey is another dimension of graphic design. Like many graphic design products, from an album cover it is expected to reflect an audio expression visually. For a successful visualization some graphic design principles should have been considered by the graphic designers. The graphic design principles guide the designer while the organization process of visuals and typography -the art, design and technique of writing- (Baines & Haslam, 7).

After the design process has finished the final should be a whole, which is united and harmonious: This means that the design at the end should be something different than the gathered elements, a graphic design product which's elements behave harmoniously in order to make it an album cover, etc...Harmony is a feature created by the design attitudes, how the elements are organized as appearances and their interrelations. Every element of a graphic design product both visual and verbal has a unique shape, size, color, texture, tone and location. The amounts of these ingredients determine the amount of harmony, so finally determine unity. These concepts can be better understood by analysis of a sample. (Golombisky & Hagen, 55; George-Palilonis, 178)

3. The Analysis of the Music for the Masses Album Cover

Music for the Masses is Depeche Mode's sixth studio album which was released on 28 September 1987 by Mute Records. As a musical genre it is labeled as electronic, post-punk and synth-pop. While electronic music is defined as music made by electronic musical instruments and technology (Holmes & Holmes, 6), synth-pop is also known as electro-pop or techno-pop made by synthesizer as a dominant instrument (Kosmicki, 236). Synthesizer

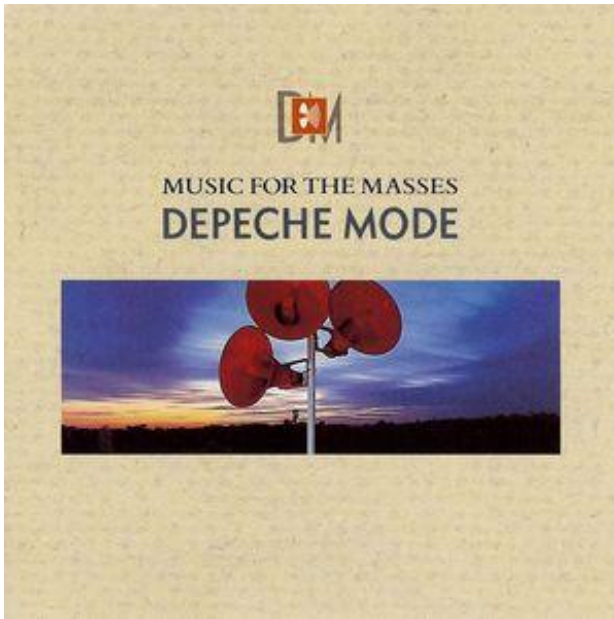
generates electric signals that are converted to sound through instrument amplifiers and loudspeakers or headphones (Holmes & Holmes, 2007). On the other hand, post-punk is the heterogeneous type of rock music that emerged after the punk movement of the 1970s. Simply punk or punk rock is a rock music developed during 1974-76 as a rejection to the mainstream rock. Punk music is typical with its short or fast-paced songs, with hard-edge melodies and singing styles, stripped down instrumentation, and often political, and has anti-establishment lyrics which are standing in opposition to the conventional social, political, and economic principles of the society. (Wikipedians, 55-57)

In between many, album covers are one of the graphic design products because they are two dimensional printouts, which consists typographic elements like letters, numbers, words, and texts, and visuals like illustrations and photographs (Stoltze, 18). These packages both protect and visualize musical expression. The genre of music and the expression of the musician show itself on these covers by using visuals and typographic combinations which are the main elements of graphic design. In order to access the data easily there is an organization. There is a booklet in front of the package with pictures, lyrics, additional info, the names of the performer and the album. At the back of the package there is a list of the songs with duration and other details like recording or production company name, logo, barcode...etc. In this paper the front cover, 12 faces of the front booklet, print on the CD and the back of the cover analyzed according to the 6 main principles of graphic design and found out that on every designed piece and the package as a product, unity achieved through contrasting elements.

The front cover of the album seen on figure 1 is a booklet with 6 pages, 12 faces designed according to the characteristics of the whole. When it is on the cover of the CD the booklet is a 12 centimeters to 12 centimeters square equal as height and width. Equality is something balanced and that's why something calm and stress-free. Because human lives in a world of balance things should be balanced also. Because human used to live under this rule, he or she feels stressed when encountering imbalanced things. The format of the cover is based on the shape of the recorded medium, the CD. CDs produced as perfect circles which's diameter is 12 centimeters (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding, 249). Functionality is the major characteristic which should considered in the world of design, which limits but defines at the same time. This limitation – definition lead the design into another level: fill in the blanks.

3.1.1 Music for the Masses

Figure 1 Cover of the Front Booklet



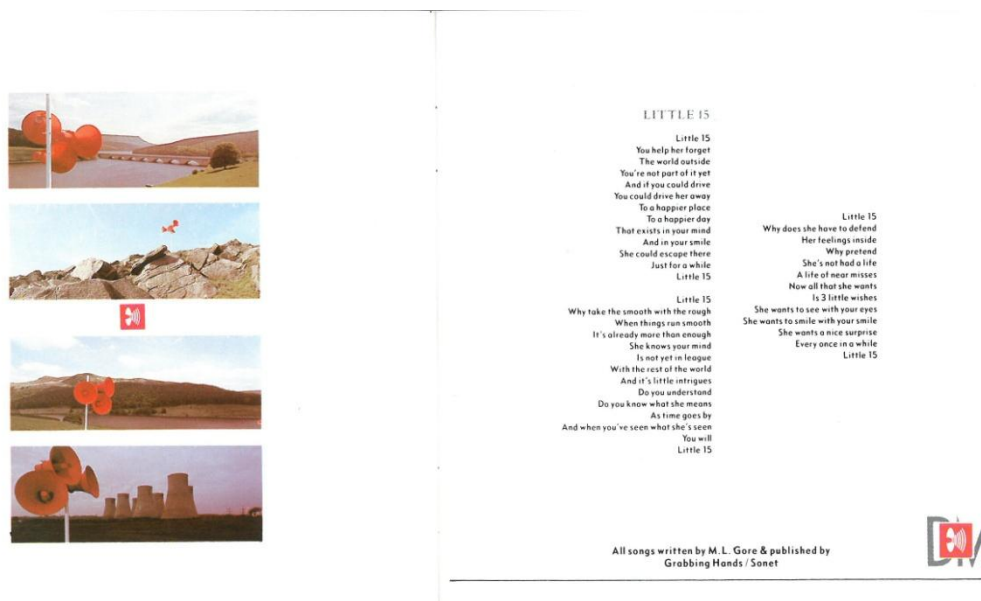
Source: Author's Collection

This calm equality of the square broke into pieces by putting a landscape formatted photograph, which proportions contrasted into a level that keeps it still a rectangle with a visible photography in it. A flattened rectangle like a prison window on a cream surface makes a proportional contrast with the main square and positioned on the golden section horizontally, which is a little below the center of the cover. *Golden ratio*, also golden mean or section is a ratio derived from the nature which isn't equal – dull, but accepted as the most aesthetic; while calculating the ratio on a rectangle, the four golden sections two vertical two horizontal and four infinity points can find (Olsen, 1-9).

The photograph shows an unusual trinity: three red megaphones in front of a sunset over a shady land. While the proportion of the land and sky is contrasting with each other, the shady land balanced the bluish sky with its position and dark tone. The metal pole with red megaphones on it is contrasting as a vertical with the horizontality of the whole skyscene. The sun shine coming from the left and the two red megaphones on right balanced each other. The general darker tones of the photograph are contrasting with the surrounding cream background. Textures of the cream background are also contrasting with the perfect smoothness of the photography.

After all of these over contrasting situations the middle positioning of the pole calmed down the scene but still contrasting as a vertical movement above all the horizontals. This centralization supported by the alignment of all the typographic elements: the name of the band, the album and the special logo made for this recording: two initials of Depeche Mode - the band and are negative megaphone stylization. The logo, with its squared entity placed on top in order to balance the heaviness of the photography lays down. The name of the band and the album positioned on the golden section above the center and grouped as a whole.

Figure 2 Inside of the Booklet 1-2



Source: Author's Collection

The typographic elements on the cover are very dark grey on cream color. Cream and grey are low saturated neutrals, which suit every color schemes. On the other hand, dark grey doesn't dominate the colors of the photography, on the contrary it emphasizes the feeling, the colors of the photography create. The name of the band typed in bigger sizes. Because the band was very famous and the name of the band better be seen and read at first sight. A modern, sans serif font used to create a contemporary and clean look on grained background. Grouping all of the typographic elements prevents a chaos on the surface. The photography in a combination with the name of the band has the leading role in the hierarchy among all the elements.

The front cover should design according to two different eye sight distances; one for shelves in between many others, one when the CD is in both hands, which is the reading distance- maximum thirty centimeters. The pages within the booklet with lyrics and other verbal messages have only one eye sight distance which is only for reading. The photography and the size of the typographic elements can be small as they can be seen or read. Because of the white background the two pages perceived as onewide rectangle in landscape format. On left, four different variations of the same theme are seen one above the other with the logo in the middle. All four are same as size, have real life color scheme except the red megaphones and have a proportion like the one used on the cover. White background as a space leads the attention to the photography. On every photograph metal pole is seen with the megaphones on it in a different environment like natural rocks or mountains, a stone bridge on a river or in front of stone looking cooling towers. And every time the size, positioning, location and direction of the megaphones differ according to the composition.

On the right only typographic elements organized as verses in a way lyrics generally written but this time from right aligned. Placing the photography on one side and typography on the other creates a contrast between the two pages balanced with the darkness of the typography, the logo and a black thin line under them.

Figure 3 Middle of the Booklet 2-3



Source: Author's Collection

Only typographic elements organized as verses placed in the middle of the booklet. Two identical logos placed on both corners and a black thin line has drawn under them. All six songs typed in black as same sizes with uppercase titles over them as a line. While every six lyrics aligned on top, the three on left aligned vertically on right, the other three on right aligned vertically on left. The changing amount of empty spaces under the verses are contrasting to each other and this contrast balanced with the two logos. Like the only color dominating all of the photographs, red is the only color dominating the logos and the surface.

Figure 4 Inside of the Booklet 5-6



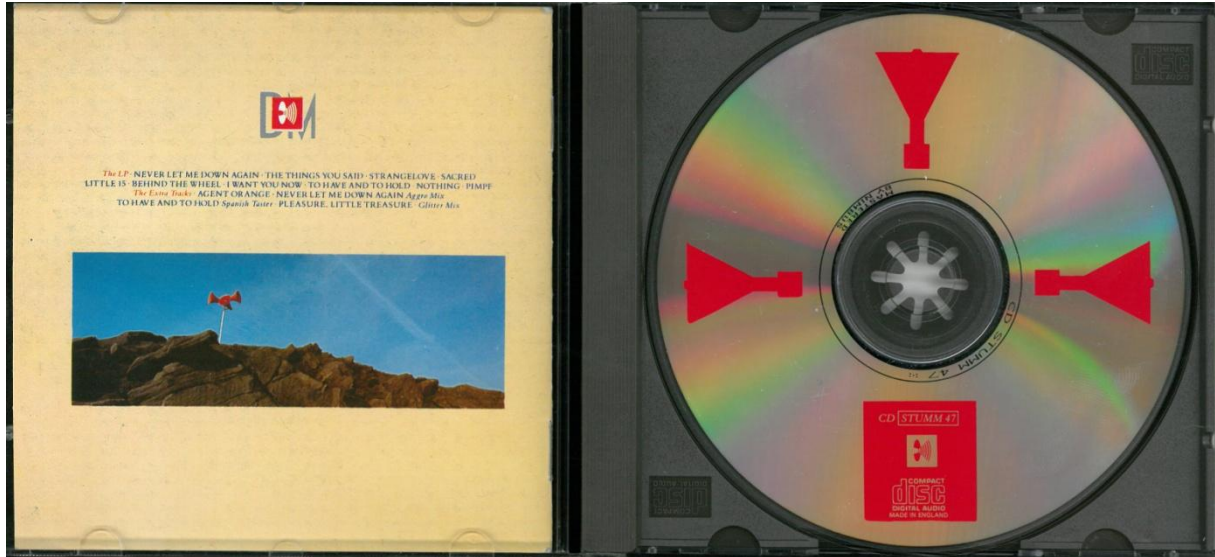
Source: Author's Collection

In order to show that this booklet is ending something different seen on these pages in figure 4. While the text grouped and aligned like the others, there is only one logo placed in the bottom right corner of the left page. The place and the features of the logo balanced the right page which is full. Like previous pages these texts also aligned from right when they are on left, from left when they are on right.

The back of the booklet design should be united with both the design of the CD, with the whole design of the booklet and with the whole package's design. The back and the front of the booklet designed very similarly. The photograph is another version of the same theme again. The pole with three megaphones is standing on rough rocks seen from far. The names of the songs are written under the photograph in form of a text aligned from center. On the

surface of the bare shining CD, three giant red megaphone stylization placed looking into three different directions and as a base a label placed bottom.

Figure 5Back of the Booklet and the CD



Source: Author's Collection

Figure 7Back



Source: Author's Collection

The back of the cover designed similar like the back of the booklet but this time with additional information. Same photograph is placed on the upper golden section horizontally. The names of the songs typed as lines under the photograph aligned centered vertically. Some

labels, signs, logotypes and a barcode placed around. The sizes of these are small and thin. Despite red and white megaphone sign, the others are in black.

4. Conclusion

The unique design attitude of the cover depends on unity achieving through contrasts. There can be seen contrasts of size, proportion, color, tone, location. Size contrasts can be seen on photography and typography. Proportion contrasts can be seen on photography and the placement of the photography. Color contrasts can be seen on background and typographic elements. Logos also consist color contrasts with the background. Tone contrasts can be seen among background and typographic elements. Location is the most contrasting element. Location of the typographic elements contrasting with the photographs. Location of the photographs contrasting with the cover itself which is a square. All of these contrasts concluded in unity. The cover unites as sizes, proportions, colors, tones and locations. The cover unites as interrelations of the elements. The cover unites as the usage of the photographs as the themes, location, proportions, framing and color scheme. The cover unites as the usage of the typographic elements as size, color, font, location, grouping and interrelations. The cover unites as backgrounds as color, tone, texture. The cover unites as the usage of space. Full and empty spaces contrasting each other. The sizes of the full and empty spaces are contrasting each other. With this contrasts continuing the cover unites.

References

- [1] BAINES, P. & HASLAM, A. *Type & Typography*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005.
- [2] FRITH, S. *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Vol. III*. London: Routledge, 2004.
- [3] GEORGE-PALILONIS, J. *A Practical Guide to Graphics Reporting: Information Graphics for Print, Web & Broadcast*. Burlington: Elsevier, 2006.
- [4] GOLOMBISKY, K. & HAGEN, R. *White Space is not Your Enemy: A Beginner's Guide to Communicating Visually Through Graphic, Web and Multimedia Design*. Burlington: Taylor & Francis, 2013.
- [5] HEPWORTH-SAWYER, R. & GOLDING, C. *What is Music Production: Professional Techniques to Make a Good Recording Great*. Burlington: Elsevier, 2010.
- [6] HOLMES, T.B. & HOLMES, T. *Electronic and Experimental Music: Pioneers in Technology and Composition*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

[7]KOSMICKI, G. *MusiquesElectroniques: des Avant-Gardes Aux Dance Floors*. Marseille: Mot et le Reste, 2009.

[8]MOSKOWITZ, D.V. *The 100 Greatest Bands of All Time: A Guide to the Legends Who Rockedthe World*.Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2015.

[9] OLSEN, S. *The Golden Section: Nature's Greatest Secret*. New York: Walker Publishing, 2006.

[10] PIPES, A. *Foundations of Art and Design:A History of the Analog Record*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2003

[11]RAIZMAN, D. *History of Modern Design: Graphics and Products since the Industrial Revolution*.London:Laurence King Publishing, 2003.

[12] RESNICK, E. *Design for Communication: Conceptual Graphic Design Basics*.Hoboken:John Wiley & Sons., 2003.

[13] STOLTZE, C. *1,000 Music Graphics: A Compilation of Packaging, Posters, and Other Sound Solutions*. Beverly: Rockport Publishing, 2008.

[14] WIKIPEDIANS, (Eds.). *Alternative Rock: A Complete Guide*. Mainz: Pedia Press, 2010.