

Student Name: Brennan Davies

Student Number: 2005171

Course: Graphics Design

Module: Research in Practice
(ADAD5004)

Word Count: 2,461

Lecturer: Donna Williams

Graphic Design can fall under multiple different names, words, visuals and keywords in ways to understand its individuality and authenticity clearly. In this essay, I will be conducting research into three keywords and how they compare to each other, link to graphics design and the effects they have on my own work; these keywords are Liberty, Conform and Culture. To back up my research, I will be covering artists such as Raymond Pettibon, Keith Haring, Dave Rubinstein, David Choe together with touching upon politics, punk music and theories of propaganda.

Liberty:

To define liberty; it is a state of freedom while being opposed to a political subjection, having an independence or a way of self-expression against situations involving political or creative views. Art expression is a universal and self-expressed right, whether the piece itself goes against a political standpoint or controversially explains the views of the artist, it is still a valid form of liberty and helps create a platform for the viewer in a different manner. Farida Shaheed (2013) explains she is “convinced that freedom of artistic expression and creativity cannot be dissociated from the right of all persons to enjoy the arts, as in many cases restrictions on artistic freedoms aim at denying people access to specific artworks. Hence, removing creative expressions from public access is a way to restrict artistic freedom.” (Shaheed, 2013, p.3) A remarkably interesting and looked-over period in art is post-war Cold-War; there was a momentous time within New York where a cultural wave was ready to wash over Europe, in which political propaganda had become mainstream; almost deafening. (Serge Guilbaut, 1981, p.5) This is an interesting take and judgement on self-expression and liberty since it brings in a form of artistic expression under political standpoints, using propaganda under a government regime to better understand the views coming straight out of New York following the effects of the Cold War.

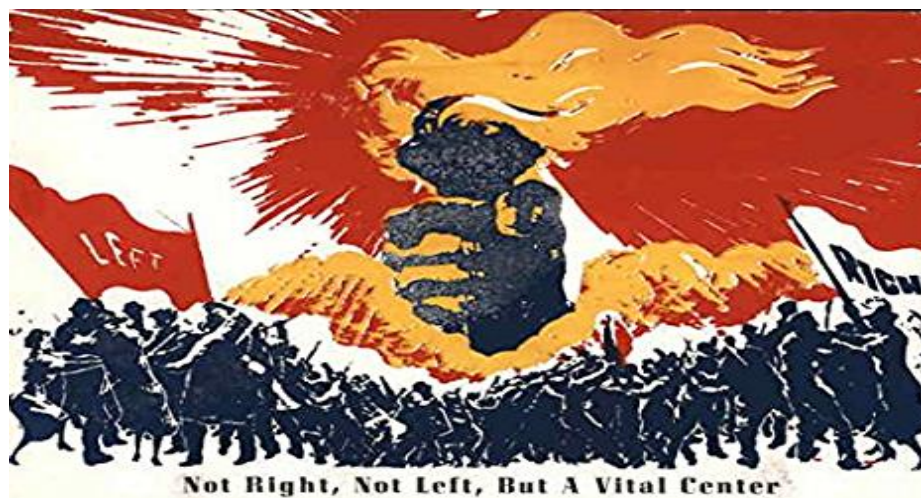


Figure 1: “Not Left, Not Right, But a Vital Center,” B. Zadig, *New York Times Magazine*, April 4, 1948.

Above is an illustration directly from the *New York Times* from 1948 hand-drawn by Bertrand Zadig which imposed the struggle-fight that took place involving politics; the left, the right, coming together to form a ‘vital center’. Within the news report, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr (1948) wrote, “The hope of the future lies in the widening and deepening of the democratic middle ground.” (A. Schlesinger Jr, 1948). The freedom of being able to create such a political and significant piece of art so potent that it was released within a favoured and infamous news-article that thousands upon thousands would witness. The ‘liberty’ this would bring is being able to converse with the public through creative expression as well as

constructing a political view visually so eye-catching that it could provoke argumentative thought processes – as art is subjective. Another political and form of artistic freedom comes from the punk scene originating in the 1970-1980s. Most punk bands such as Black Flag (1976), Dead Kennedys (1978) and Crass (1977) used very provocative and insightful imagery and art within their band covers in forms of shock-humour or actual political views that went against police, right-wing government, capitalism etc. This was a way to bring in their selective audience and listen to music that correlates with the imagery they were portraying.

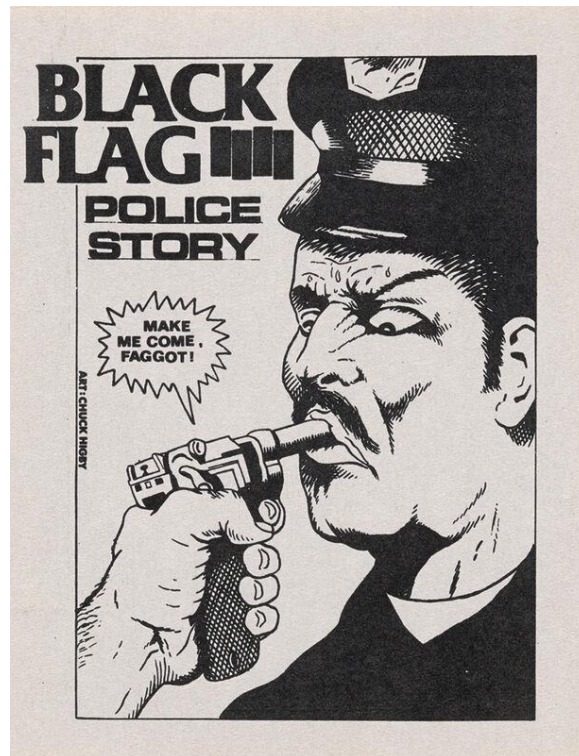


Figure 2: Raymond Pettibon, “Police Story” - Black Flag, 1984.



Figure 3: Dave Rubinstein, *Reagon Youth*, 1984

Propaganda defines itself as a theory that corporate media is structured and creates conflict of interest that pushes towards anti-democratic elements. These two figures above both represent forms of shock-valued political standpoints in music that are made through creative, authentic ideologies that are either anti-racist, anti-government and overall left winged imagery. For example, in Figure 1, it displays “Police Story” (1984) by Raymond Pettibon for the band Black

Flag which shows a gun pointed in the mouth of a police officer, which represents the political view of '1312' or hatred towards conforming police officers. While in Figure 2, it highlights an album cover for the band *Reagon Youth* with an actual photo that is used by the KKK; an infamous racist group as well as using a lot of Nazi imagery. The shock value within this image is staggering considering the band itself is an anti-racist, anti-Nazi band – the lead singer, Dave Rubinstein, is the son of a Nazi-survivor and merely use the imagery for a political satirical standpoint in media.

The entire theory and ideology that surrounds the feeling of liberty, whether its artistic freedom, political or being able to creatively express myself; I can easily and successfully factor it into my work with a history of knowledge behind the topic.

Conform:

The definition of conform/conforming is the state in which a person behaves under a set of rules or authority that is given to them by a group, higher-up or society. Just like forms of liberty, there are acts of conforming and acts *against* conforming, such as propaganda and 'going against the grain'. The difference that conforming has, is that you are restricted. There's much less freedom and more following a set of rules and being on your better behaviour.

Propaganda stems heavily from ideologies that go against something. Pieces of artwork that go against a society or government are usually met with large amount of negative feedback or judgement due to the controversy and argumentative views that strive with it. Michael Parenti (2007) explains, "there are limits to the efficacy of propaganda. Sometimes people taking it the wrong way can be exposed through examples of feedback, as when subsequent events fail to fulfil the full image." (Michael Parenti, 2007, pg. 37.) which points back to the statement I made; anytime that a controversial art piece is made that goes against a set of rules, social-norms or outright disagreed with are usually met with a down-sided feedback that leaves the artist constricted or boxed in the art world. Yet, without conformity, we wouldn't have working businesses since we're under a set of rules that follow a routine that allows that business to be successful. Then again, an artist that is strictly working under a set of rules without the freedom to do their own ideas risks getting terminated if they decide to break that wall of 'social normality'.

Conformity can strike under multiple different sections. Conforming to a 9-5 job, schooling, law etc. but when looking into the educational system, statistically more money goes into subjects such as sports teams or science classes than artistic elements. In a blog, Hayley Rose (2012) wrote, "society doesn't make room for undiscovered talent that makes up the large majority. The way society views art and artists is evident by the public school's syllabus. Not a fraction of countless money that schools pour into sports program ever go into art programs." (2012). By conforming to something, you are evidently losing your grip of individuality and ability to critically think on a matter that you're creating; initially starting off by making your own work, then working under a successful business that construct you to do what *they* want with you not having a say in what happens.

The act of conforming to an idea or theme in art is usually a good thing, since it helps breach a larger audience, sticks to social normality and follows a routine that made other artists successful. Although, there are times in which non-conforming acts of ideologies have helped artists in the long run. Allowing artists to branch their creativity into different aspects to break the conformity.



Figure 4: Roy Lichtenstein, "*Washington Crossing the Delaware*", 1951.

Conforming within art and graphics design can usually mean sticking to one significant style of expression, for example, Roy Lichtenstein was very popular for creating the iconic "POW" and female comic art pieces but felt conformed to establishing just those styles; so, he stemmed out to abstract expressionism. His surroundings were cartoon characters that resembled an abstract background and wanted to replicate them by using 'Benday dots', a mechanical patterning and work that into his oil canvas's, mentioning "it came to me to mimic the style of cartoons without using paint textures, modulation or calligraphic lines – all things used in expressionism." (R. Lichtenstein, 1961.)

Within my own work, I find myself falling to conformity a lot. These forms of conformity could stem through art-blocks (lack of individuality), following rules or sticking to social normalities for my pieces especially in my university work and work outside of university, my work usually gets given under a routine or a brief in which I must 'remain inside the box' for. This allows my work to be graded fairly amongst others within the course.

Culture:

The definition of culture derives from achievements of human intellectual manifestations that have been gathered through art and history. There are situations in everyday life or within art aspects where cultures are taken advantage of, misunderstood or mistreated. “Attacks on cultural expression from individuals and groups, hate-speech, racism, among others denote the denial of one of the fundamental propositions of democracy; the right of everyone to participate in debate as free and equal individuals.” (Nordic Ministers of Culture, 2016). Culture itself pushes the mindset of behaviours in order to provide results, a book by American Football coach Urban Meyer mentions, “Culture drives behaviour, behaviour produces results. The power of culture lies in its ability to engage hearts and minds.” (Urban Meyer, 2015, pg. 83.) In this section, I will focus on two cultures: Urban and LGBT culture.

Urban culture bases around the exploration into behavioural patterns in different cities/urban areas both in the past and in current time. What’s interesting about urban culture is the way artists can use this to fluctuate the behavioural pattern through forms of art such as murals, graffiti, paintings etc. Artists would switch up styles, throw out different murals in order to see the effect of the public’s tastes. Alan C Turley (2015) mentions, “to further understand how the area affects this cultural influence on its art producers... we have to analyse the intersection of where the city’s structure and the city’s art worlds meet.” (A C. Turley, 2015, pg. 40.) Many different artists were putting out sub-culture awareness to the busy streets of cities in order to change the behavioural surroundings of the general public. One of these artists was David Choe.



Figure 5: David Choe, “*NO MEANS NO*” mural, June 18th, 2017.

David Choe, an extremely talented muralist, painter and writer dedicated a wall in the streets of New York titled “NO MEANS NO”, which is a reference to anti-rape and rape culture in general. The self-proclaimed “boring artist” became popular within the streets of New York for his ‘dirty style’ which gained attention of many companies before VICE took him on for a job. During his time, Facebook saw his urban pieces, asking him to do a mural for their headquarters, earning him \$38 in shares for the company. It’s estimated those shares are now worth \$200 million.

A large culture that supports individuality and acceptance is the LGBT culture, many artists from the community have been an extreme factor to the awareness such as RuPaul, Rauschenberg etc. Dating back to the 1960's, queer artists embraced a situation to create a platform of self-expression and validation that helped understandings of LGBT and their struggles. Robert Giard did an exhibition and devoted a portion of his life photographing gay writers in 1985, during the wake of Stonewall and the AIDS crisis. It allowed awareness and voices within the 80's for gay and lesbians writers to have a voice about their life and experiences. An artist that links with the LGBT culture and raised a lot of awareness to the situations in a homophobic time period was Keith Haring.



Figure 6: Keith Haring, *"Once Upon a Time"* Manhattan, 1989.

During a time where acts of vandalism and prolific brushes were rubbed off walls all over America, one still stands today by Keith Haring in a public bathroom. The mural itself portrays a vulgar scene but celebrates the LGBT awareness and 'free love' in the 80s. Keith Haring himself was openly gay during the 80's movement, creating posters that advocated for safe sex during the HIV and AIDS scarce, which eventually led to his demise in 1989 during his battle with AIDS. In an article written by Alexxa Gotthardt (2017), it reads "he and his community feared death but also the antagonization from Ronald Reagans administration which ultimately blamed the gay community and put a halt on the research towards the cure for AIDS." (A. Gotthardt, 2017.) In a lighter note, the awareness that Keith Haring brought to the table allowed for a healthier growth in the LGBT community during the 80's through to the modern day in which his art still lives on. The way in which I would link this culture into my own practices is by being myself, advocating creations and subjects that bring awareness to the everyday struggles of being homosexual and celebrating individuality in my own work. Every single day, the gay community is becoming closer and closer to acceptance through means of awareness, art, speeches, events etc. and I will be help project future projects towards those fields.

Conclusion:

Through my research, I've conducted those three keywords both heavily contradict each other while also making subtle similarities with each other. Within liberty and conform, they both resemble sections of propaganda and aspects of politics in order to relate to artistic forms of self-expression. Liberty leans heavily to the freedom of voicing and creating art pieces and gaining a positive effect off the matter while conform takes the elements that restrict the artist from *fully* showing their potential due to laws, rules and routines that we follow daily. As for culture, it links back into both keywords as the gay community push forward every-day in forms in liberty but are still conformed by those who are still against the culture itself, such as the 'Reagon administration'. In terms of relationships, liberty and conform completely bounce off each other but constantly overlap each other in a way, but cultural ideologies help balance and bind them together. The behavioural results from urban art forms made by the general public help mould the 'conformity' that is needed to gain the liberty within the art world. Looking at this essay, I'd say it's clear that I'd like to focus more on the political side of art knowledge in my next year of study but still carrying the elements of cultural beliefs on-top of those. After reviewing my essay, I've come up with a proposal question that ties in with my entire essay:

How do you convey cultural views in Graphics Design without the restrictions of social conformity?

Figures

Figure 1: B. Zadig. "Not Left, Not Right, But a Vital Center," *New York Times Magazine*, April 4, 1948.

Figure 2: Raymond Pettibon, "*Police Story*" - *Black Flag*, 1984.

Figure 3: Dave Rubinstein, *Reagon Youth*, 1984

Figure 4: Roy Lichtenstein, "*Washington Crossing the Delaware*", 1951.

Figure 5: David Choe, "*NO MEANS NO*" mural, June 18th, 2017.

Figure 6: Keith Haring, "*Once Upon a Time*" Manhattan, 1989.

Bibliography

Gotthardt, Alexxa. (2017). Keith Haring's Most Risqué Mural Is Hidden in a Public Bathroom. Available at: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-keith-harings-risque-mural-hidden-public-bathroom>. (Accessed at: 4/05/22)

Guilbaut, Serge. (1983). *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. University of Chicago Press, Illinois.

Helsinki Declaration on Promoting Diversity of Cultural Expressions and Artistic Freedom in a Digital Age. (2016) Nordic Ministers of Culture.

Meyer, Urban. (2015). *Lessons in Leadership and Life from a Championship Program*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Parenti, Michael. (2007). *Contrary Notion*, 2007, City Lights Publisher, San Francisco.

Rose, Hayley. (2012). Artists and the Culture of Conformity. Available at: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/post_3185_b_1385526 (Accessed: 4/05/22)

Schlesinger Jr, Arthur. (1948). *The New York Times Magazine*, Section SM, New York.

Shaheed, Farida. (2013). Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights,
The right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity

Turley, Alan. (2015). *Urban Culture*. Taylor and Francis, Austin, Texas.