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Within graphic design, the relationship between aesthetics, meaning, and personal expression has become increasingly significant. As my own creative disciplines continue to evolve, I try to look beyond solely the form, but also how my work communicates values, experience and identity. As Roland Barthes reminds us, images carry layers of meaning, the literal and the symbolic, which viewers actively construct. “The image is a message without a code” (1977, p.17). For this essay, the three key words I will be focusing on are *Cymreictod*, Tradition, and Environment. Each of these keywords resonates with me on a personal level, while also playing a significant role in shaping both my work as a graphic designer and my development as a designer. Throughout the essay I will be discussing the keywords in the context of graphic design and visual communication, while also touching on themes such as culture, influence, and identity.



Fig 1 (Smorgasbord Studio, 2015, Cymru/Wales National Brand)

The first keyword I will be discussing is *Cymreictod*, the quality or state of being Welsh (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). I chose this word because the Welsh culture, heritage, and language are very close to my heart and are elements I consistently reference within my graphic design work. For this reason, I believe *Cymreictod*, and culture itself, holds significance within the world of design and beyond my own personal work. This idea of *Cymreictod* and the culture and heritage it holds within it, aligns with Stuart Hall's theory of Cultural Identity, which suggests that cultural identity is never fixed in place, and is always adapting with time, history, and representation. "This second sense of difference challenges the fixed binaries which stabilise meaning and representation and show how meaning is never finished or completed, but keeps on moving to encompass other, additional or supplementary meanings." (1990, p.229). When applied to the concept of *Cymreictod*, Hall's theory suggests that the culture and heritage of Wales are actively

constructed through time and the opportunities of representation rather than simply inherited through blood. But how does this relate to graphic design? A result of effective graphic design is recognition, something that many cultures crave. Unfortunately, through history, Wales and its culture have been put down and overshadowed by England and its government. As noted by Raymond Williams, the British cultural identity was largely defined by “the assumptions of an English history”, leaving Welsh experience pushed to the margins (Williams, 2003). For this reason, *Cymreictod* and Welsh culture can often go unnoticed, which then leads to the risk of it being lost. One example of a design studio that uses graphic design to bring recognition to the country’s culture and language is Smorgasbord Studio, a design studio based in Cardiff that has worked on some of the most well-known bilingual graphic design projects. Their use of bilingual design across several high-profile projects – such as the branding for Transport for Wales and the branding for Cymru/Wales National Brand – demonstrates how effectively and seamlessly the language can be integrated into graphic design. Rather than interrupting the visual outcome, the addition of Welsh alongside English shows accessibility and strengthens their cultural meaning. In addition to its visual effectiveness, bilingual design also contributes to wider outcomes, including increased recognition to the language, cultural visibility, and a stronger sense of *Cymreictod*. By including the Welsh language into national branding, Smorgasbord Studio strengthens Welsh identity through everyday visual communication and utilises Cymraeg as a visual feature.

“Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, we should think of it as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.” (Hall, 1990, p.222)

Communication is a fundamental value of graphic design, more particularly in relation to visual communication. A core responsibility of a graphic designer is to express messages clearly and effectively to a wide audience. However, communication is never culturally neutral; it is shaped by language, context, and identity which are constantly being altered and added to. Here is another example where graphic design and *Cymreictod* intersect again and work together significantly, as design becomes a form of communicating Welsh Identity through both visual and linguistic choices. As stated by visual communication and multimodality key thinker Gunther Kress, “Meaning is made in social contexts, and the resources for making meaning are culturally shaped.” (2010). It shows us that what may communicate clearly to one culture may not be as clear in another; a Welsh speaking audience can interpret a piece of work so differently to another. Here is where design comes into the picture again, being used as a mediator between culturally different audiences. Although we cannot expect design and visual elements alone to be culturally neutral, it is very easy for the graphic designers themselves to bridge that gap and take cultural context into consideration when communicating visually. “...take cultural context into consideration when communicating visually.” Graphic design-based key-thinker Katherine McCoy argues that graphic design is never culturally neutral but instead works as a form of cultural development

that both reflects and shapes societal values. “Design is not a neutral, value-free process. It is always informed by cultural and social forces.” (McCoy, 1994). From this perspective, applying McCoy’s view of design to *Cymreictod*, it then turns *Cymreictod* into a form of responsibility within graphic design, requiring designers working in Wales and working with the Welsh language to acknowledge cultural context rather than defaulting to culturally neutral solutions. As well as this, it positions the Welsh Language as an essential component of visual communication when designing bilingually, rather than a secondary or decorative element. This highlights how graphic design can go beyond aesthetic function to play an active role in shaping and maintaining *Cymreictod* as a strong cultural identity.



Fig 2 (Schmidt, 1923, Poster for the Bauhaus Exhibition in Weimar)

My next keyword that I will be focusing on is *Tradition*. I chose this word due to my interest in the history and traditions of graphic design, particularly how techniques and principles established centuries ago continue to influence contemporary design practice. Despite the constant evolution of graphic design, many traditional methods remain used, demonstrating how historical approaches continue to shape modern visual communication. Although graphic design continues to evolve alongside technology, many of its core principles originate from traditional practices that still underpin modern visual communication – modern design did not appear suddenly. When looking deeper into the subject you can see that modern graphic communication is deeply rooted in traditional graphic design principles, which established the rules of composition, hierarchy, and legibility that designers continue to rely on and reference today. This progression of traditional principles within modern practice is seen in the work of Jan Tschichold, who argued that precision, order, and legibility in modern typography are rooted in classical design traditions. “The classical rules of typography are applicable to all periods. They are not tied to a particular style.” (Tschichold, 1991). While Tschichold provides a historical foundation, Ellen Lupton also brings up this idea within contemporary design practice, suggesting that although tools and technologies evolve, the original principles of visual communication remain consistent (Lupton, 2014). By considering both Tschichold’s historical outline and Lupton’s contemporary perspective, it highlights how traditional graphic design does not limit modern practice,

and instead provides the structure that enables depth, consistency, and effective communication within modern graphic design.

Rather than limiting contemporary practice, traditional graphic design principles provide the structural foundation that acts as framework and allows modern visual communication to function clearly and effectively. These principles, as mentioned before, are most evident in the ongoing use of typographic hierarchy, grid systems, and compositional balance. An example of this being done to a high degree within its style, method and philosophy is within the Bauhaus movement, where traditional ways of composition and structure were refined into systematic design methods that still uphold modern visual communication. When looking at work produced during this movement, the influence of traditional principles such as hierarchy, grid systems, and compositional balance becomes clearly visible, as designers sought to create structured and functional visual communication. In a sense, they saw design as a functional tool to create clarity within their designs, elements such as grid-based layouts and sans-serif typefaces allowed for this. In today's age, these traditional practices still hold such value, their inclusion within modern work will elevate the piece, because not only does it preserve design knowledge, but it also contributes to visual literacy among designers and even audiences. "The history of graphic design is the record of visual communication, linking the past to the present and shaping the future." (Meggs, 1998). This shows that *Tradition* is seen as a backbone within the world of design, if utilized correctly within design practice it can really be a core contributor of credibility, authority and trust. When thinking about *Tradition* from this perspective, you can really tell how it can have such an impact on the maturity and depth of a piece of design work. But how exactly

does it achieve this? It creates familiarity within audiences with established visual conventions over time, learning to associate structured layouts, clear hierarchy, and balanced composition with professionalism and reliability. As a result, design that draws upon traditional principles is often perceived as more credible and authoritative, as it aligns with visual systems that are already understood. In this sense, tradition within graphic design is not restrictive or outdated but instead functions as a stabilising force that enhances clarity, maturity, and confidence within contemporary visual communication.



Fig 3 (Myerscough, 2017, Power)

The final keyword I will be discussing is *Environment*. Within the context of graphic design and visual communication, *Environment* plays a significant role in shaping how designers observe, interpret, and respond to the world around them. The physical,

cultural, and social environments that designers exist within inevitably influence the visual language, themes, and messages present in their work. A designer's immediate environment – including landscapes, architecture, culture and everyday visuals – can strongly shape their creative output. Elements such as colour palettes, textures, typography, and compositional choices are often informed by what creatives encounter in their daily lives. As visual communication is rooted in observation, the environment becomes a key source of inspiration and reference within the design process. This idea is supported by key thinker Tim Ingold, who argues that the environment of a creative is not a backdrop, but an active influence on the approach of work and how work is produced.

“We do not make things as though we were inserting form into inert matter.

Rather, making is a process of growth, in which the maker is continually responding to the materials and the environment in which they are embedded. To make is to join forces with materials and surroundings, following the paths they lay down rather than imposing form upon them.” (2013, p.13)

Ingold's view reinforces the idea that design practice does not exist in isolation from its surroundings, but is shaped through ongoing interaction and observation with the environment. It also demonstrates how creative practice is shaped by living experiences; however, each living experience is different, and different living environments can evoke different visual inspiration, effectively creating more originality and uniqueness within the design world.

A strong example of environmental influence within creative practice can be seen in the work of Morag Myerscough, where her work is deeply influenced by her surrounding urban space, community, and landscape. Not only does she take inspiration from her surroundings, but she uses the environment of her site-specific designs to strengthen the final piece – rather than seeing the environment around her as a backdrop she sees it and utilises it as a collaborator. Her use of bold colours, prominent typography, and geometric shapes bring an additional sense of life and energy to these urban spaces, that are often seen as concrete filled and grey. As mentioned on her website [MoragMyerscough], (2020), as an artist she “creates specific local responses to each distinct audience that will see and experience the work, using it to create community and build identity”. This supports the idea that each different environment can evoke different visuals, as well as different responses from the residents of that specific area. Which also shows the importance of originality within the art and design world.

In addition to influencing the creation of design work, as mentioned briefly, environment also plays a crucial role in shaping how visual communication is experienced and interpreted by its audience. When graphic design exists within public spaces, it becomes part of the existing environment rather than a standalone visual object, meaning its impact is directly affected by location, scale, and surrounding context. A similar perspective is offered by Petković et al, “Experiential graphic design... combines multiple design disciplines to enhance user experience through the visual interpretation of ideas in physical spaces.” (2025), reinforcing the idea that environment is central to how design is experienced. In site-specific work such as Morag Myerscough’s; colour, typography, and form interact with architecture and space to encourage movement,

engagement, and emotional response from the audience. This interaction allows design to transform environments that might otherwise feel impersonal, creating moments of connection between place and community. As a result, visual communication that is influenced by and is responsive to its environment can feel more meaningful and authentic, reinforcing the idea that successful graphic design is inseparable from the context in which it exists.

This demonstrates that, responding to environment as an active influence rather than a passive backdrop, graphic design is able to create work that feels more relevant, engaging, and meaningful to the public within the context of contemporary visual communication.

This essay has explored graphic design and visual communication through the distinct yet connected keywords *Cymreictod*, *Tradition*, and *Environment*, allowing me to examine three different areas of analysis within design and to view design as a tool for a variety of practices. *Cymreictod* presented design as a form of cultural identity and representation, *Tradition* highlighted design as a structured practice rooted in historical continuity, and *Environment* demonstrated design as contextual, site-responsive communication. This was very interesting as it allowed me to see the critical distinctions between all three keywords. Conceptually *Cymreictod* focused on the people, and who design represents, *Tradition* focused on how design is constructed and its origins, and *Environment* focused on where and for who design exists.

When considering the essay as a whole, it showed me that design is not neutral in any sense, and context behind a piece of work is very important. The research also showed that effective visual communication emerges from the interaction of all three keywords

and the themes surrounding them. This exploration has certainly opened new doors for future study, encouraging me to engage deeper with theories and practices that underpin graphic design, rather than focusing solely on visual outcomes.

When considering areas to explore further next year, I am certainly drawn to themes of Communication, Culture, and Context. These are all themes that often operate behind the scenes within graphic design, shaping meaning and interpretation, and it would be interesting to see how they could be combined with visual elements. Reflecting on my own practice as a designer, this research has encouraged me to think more critically about the reasoning and theoretical foundations behind design decisions, strengthening both my understanding and approach to graphic design.

Looking ahead to my independent project next year, I have been inspired by all three areas of research, however, I have so much passion towards my culture and identity as a Welsh person, I am leaning towards *Cymreictod* to be a central focus within my research. Taking this into consideration, the research question I intend to take forward is: *How do designers draw upon their own cultural experiences, historical knowledge, and environmental awareness to create meaningful visual communication?* This question allows me to connect the themes explored throughout this essay while grounding future research in my own cultural experience, Welsh history, and local environments within Wales.

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