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How does Graphic Design evoke action or emotion through visual graphics?

This essay will discuss the following concepts; empowerment, colour and influence. I'm interested in the way that visual imagery is used to influence people's emotional and physical responses. Graphic design has been used in various settings to provoke different responses. In the first section I will investigate how graphics are used to empower marginalised groups of people. In the second section I will explore the use of colour to convey instant visual instructions and messages in the context of road designs and the London Underground map. Finally, I will focus on the visual techniques used in propaganda during the first world war to influence the nation.

Empowerment

Empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). It enables people to accomplish goals or speak up for people who can't do it themselves. "Empowerment is what we do when we give our children the confidence and skills to ride a bicycle" (Benzel, 2022, p.15). Empowerment, is used to build people's confidence and help them overcome obstacles.

Graphic design has been used effectively throughout history to help empower groups and individuals. Designers have created campaigns and posters to bring attention to certain subjects and to also increase a person's self-esteem. Posters are a good method of empowerment because they can communicate to certain audiences visually. People can relate and portray themselves in the graphics they're seeing. For

example, a woman may see a poster with a confident looking woman as the visual. The woman may see herself reflected in the poster and feel more confident and empowered as a result. Famous moments of historical female empowerment can be seen in the Suffragettes, who decided to take a stand against the inequality expressed towards women at the time. While a more modern example is modern day feminism, whereby a wider variety of platforms can be used to empower women, for instance sports brands using women in their adverts to empower them into sport and to buy their products. I will expand on this further on.



Figure 1: *What a woman may be and yet not have the vote.*

Posters were an important way of spreading messages and creating empowerment. The Suffragettes created block print posters (see figure 1) as a way of disseminating their message across large groups of people. Their posters however were considered unsophisticated due to using block printing, a cheaper method due to lack of funds. The Suffragettes poster (see figure 1) plays with the concept of the moral code by highlighting the unfair moral standards women were expected to live by at the time and argued that men should be expected to do the same. The idea of this poster is to enrage and thereby empower women through portraying the inequality of these standards, creating unity and solidarity.



Figure 2: *Sweating like a pig feeling like a fox*

The motive behind the *This Girl Can* campaign is to help inspire girls and women of all ages to go out and get fit. It promoted the image of 'real' women going out and getting fit to empower the everyday woman. Trier-Bieniek (2021) references Jacques Lacan in her book and states, "the realization that others may gaze upon us often

facilitates greater self-conscious and that this may be both unsettling and anxiety producing” (p.21). The *This Girl Can* campaign takes this concept but instead of portraying ‘the Gaze’ as ‘unsettling’ and ‘anxiety producing’ portrays the gaze in an empowering way, telling women, they shouldn't care about anyone's opinions of them or how they look. The woman portrayed in *This Girl Can* poster looks carefree and confident, providing the impression that she doesn't care for ‘the gaze’ of others, rather that she is enjoying herself regardless of how she looks.



Figure 3: *Know your place.*

The *Know Your Place* campaign was a brand launch for Allyson Felix's (Olympic Runner) new shoe company. The runner took to social media to expose Nike. "I was told to know my place. That runners should just run that it's just business" (Allyson Felix, 2021). Despite this Felix found a sense of empowerment and launched her business to inspire other women to gain confidence in standing against these established businesses. Women in media are constantly berated on their bodies and physical appearance. "Though 'surveillance of women's bodies constitutes perhaps the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms', it is the female celebrity body that receives the most 'excessive and punitive' criticism" (Brewster, 2020, pp.147–174).

Allyson Felix decided to use her negative experience of being a pregnant celebrity to empower and inspire other women, instead of conforming to social norms. "In this modern, panoptic framework of individuation and personal responsibility, a 'well-kept home and well-kept body' have become signifiers of 'achieved adult femininity'" (Brewster, 2020, pp.147–174). Felix is making the statement that women should be able to break societal norms and still consider themselves successful and empowered.

Colour

Colour is one of the most important devices used in graphic design to convey a mood or to send a particular message. “Colour is easily defined and understood, immediately connected to our sensory experience and broken down into the core components ‘red, blue, yellow’” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Colour conventions are highly influential within day-to-day decisions, with colour meaning taught and integrated within early education. This develops a subconscious understanding of what different colours mean and represent. Colours are instilled with specific meanings behind them; red is understood to hold several meanings, such as danger, stop, fire in addition to passion and love.

In early ages children are taught the traffic light system, red for stop, amber for warning and green for go. The colours are consistent, regardless of age and language; colours create a universal blueprint which can be used to display information, dependent on the meaning instilled behind that colour. Examples of this can be seen within road signs with the use of primary colours yellow, blue and red, being used to set the tone of delivery for the information displayed.



Figure 4: Give way sign



Figure 5: Stop sign

Regulatory signs are consistent in their use of red throughout all of their signage. Red is a prominent colour making it a striking visual for drivers who only have a few seconds to read the road signs. Red is a prominent colour and this level of red used on signs dictates the significance of the message that the sign displays. Examples of this are shown on *Stop* signs and *Give Way* (see figures 4 and 5). A *Give Way* sign only uses a red outline with a white centre whilst the stop sign is entirely red with white lettering. This method is arguably used to shock the viewer; the more red, the more you become aware of it and the implication. "Colour has long been a source of fascination to both scientists and philosophers. In one sense, colours are in the mind of the beholder, in another sense they belong to the external world" (Colour perception, 2003, abstract).

Yellow road signs are used for road works and would inform drivers of deviations from normal road conventions. Yellow is used as it's a vibrant colour that draws people's attention and is also used in other mediums such as hazard warning signs. Drivers have only seconds to respond to the oncoming traffic signs, making the bright colours very important to show what they mean. Like previously stated, the yellow in traffic signs are used for road works, diversions, instructions and information. Alongside directions, these could be considered the most important road signs as they directly impact the safety of the driver due to potentially closed off roads and potential hazards whilst driving. The colour yellow has various representations in art and design which may determine why it has been chosen in this context. Yellow is a very bright colour and can be easily viewed whilst driving which is why it is the prominent colour used in construction work also. These direct correlations help give the driver an understanding of what the sign will entail.



Figure 6: *Parking sign.*



Figure 7: *The old guitarist*

Blue signs display information that is less urgent. Blue conveys calmness and clarity to the driver, for example the purpose of a parking sign is to convey information rather than instructions. There is no urgency with the sign, so using a calming colour (blue) is more fitting than the more aggressive colours like red and yellow. Phaidon (2017) quotes Picasso on his opinion of the use of the colour; “Colours, like features, follow changes of the emotions”. Picasso used colour to convey his personal emotions in his paintings. For example, his period of blue paintings (see figure 7) reflected his melancholy and sadness during that period.

Altogether these different colours create their own language on the road creating an immediate message for drivers based on subconscious knowledge of colour meaning. Designers use icons and colours to convey messages quickly and efficiently to drivers.



Figure 8: *The Tube Map.*

Colour is also predominantly used in a Wayfinder, such as the map of the London Underground (see figure 8) . Designed by Henry Charles Beck, the design of the map strived towards making the underground easier to navigate. Although the map is not actually accurate by scale, it still serves its purpose of a 'journey planner'. The colours are used to highlight different train lines and make it easier for the user to visualise their location on their journey, in case they need to get several tube trains to get to their destination. The use of colour provides an immediate visual reference point without too much concentration and focus needed which makes it essential for use within our busy contemporary society.

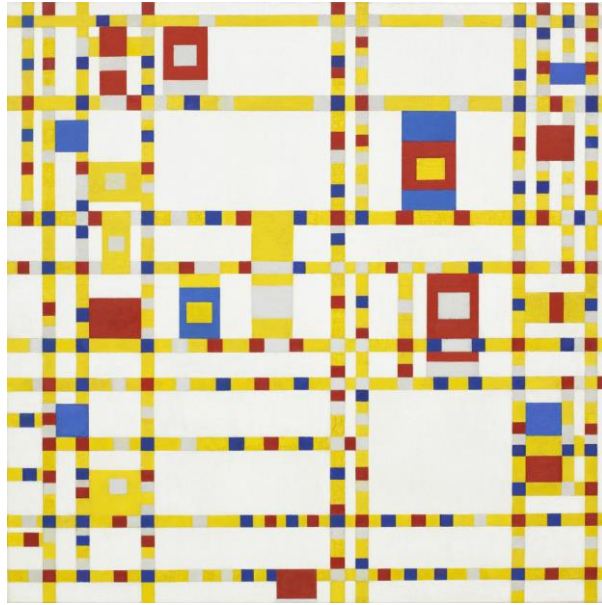


Figure 9: *Broadway Boogie Woogie*.

Piet Mondrian was a Dutch painter who is known for his compositions of primary colours and simple black lines. After Mondrian moved to the United States, he found a fondness for jazz music. From this he created the piece *Broadway Boogie Woogie*. (figure 9) using lines and blocks of primary colours, which almost reflect the busy American streets. The blocks of colour are rhythmic in their pattern and the yellow captures the bright busy life that is seen around Broadway. Similar to the London underground map, Mondrian breaks his pieces down into the key components, shapes, lines and colours and creates an interesting and yet simple looking visual.

Influence 548/600 words

Influence is defined as “to affect or change how someone or something develops, behaves, or thinks” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Mediums of graphic design like branding and propaganda use methods of manipulation to influence groups of

individuals, the impacts on which are differential dependent upon their circumstance and their audience. The use of images, colour and typeface can draw people in and create a subconscious need for something. Face cream or beauty products play on insecurities in your appearance and body image, with older women being influenced to keep looking as young as they possibly can (see figure 10).



Figure 10 : *L'Oreal Revitalift*

During World War 1 propaganda posters were used to great effect to convey government messages, for example, the need to recruit more soldiers. For these war recruitment posters, the effectiveness of the poster came from picking at people's weak spots and highlighting their vulnerability; this made the army bigger but also caused the death of millions. In comparison the consequences of being influenced to buy a certain brand of face cream from your local shop for its promised effect won't have any devastating consequences for the nation, however both deliberately make the consumer feel vulnerable, influencing them into decisions they may not have otherwise made.



Figure 11: *“Daddy what did you do in the great war?”*

During World War 1 propaganda posters helped influence millions of men to sign up for the war. The most influential poster was ‘Daddy what did you do during the great war?’ by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee in 1915 (figure 11). This poster’s intent is straightforward and hard to misinterpret as it appealed to people who had yet to enlist in the war. The man sat in the chair at home with the kids presents a very feminine portrayal of a man, as it is the woman who stereotypically cares for the children. He is shown in a gentle pose and looking troubled, as if he is in the wrong place. The male viewer would identify himself with the man in the poster and be uncomfortably feminised, with his masculinity publicly challenged as well as mentally as the young boy is playing with toy soldiers in front of him. The poster was very influential, and it became Britain's most reproduced recruiting poster. The posters colour pallet is overall very mundane, and this makes the red toy soldiers a striking visual that naturally draws the audience’s eye.

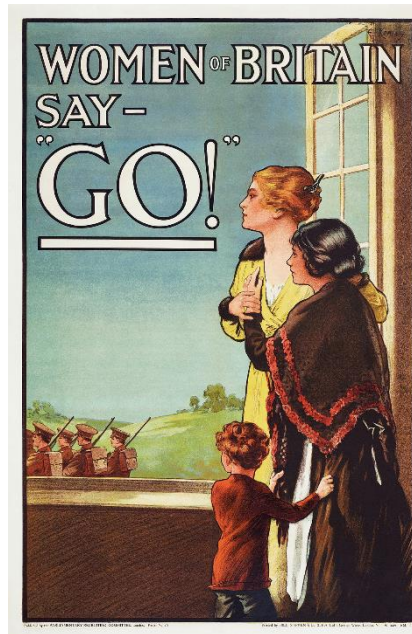


Figure 12: *Women of Britain say GO!*



Figure 13: *Women of Britain come into the factories*

Women were also portrayed in various manners in world war propaganda such as ‘*Women of Britain say GO!*’ (figure 12). The women are shown in their more traditional role, within a household with the children. The message of the poster differs for men and women, the men feel the need to fight for their wives and family while the women and children would be influenced to encourage their husbands to sign up to fight. ‘*Come to the factories*’ (figure 13) portray women in a different light; they are shown as strong and confident individuals who have a clear responsibility to play their part in the war effort by working in the factories while the men were away fighting. As there is a demand for more women (as there were less men), these posters started to portray the women in a more empowering way to effectively influence individuals as the war effort no longer required the role of the stay-at-home mother.

Conclusion:444

In conclusion, it can be seen that graphic design plays its part in conveying the message of empowerment through ad campaigns and web pages, shown throughout history from the suffragettes through to Allyson Felix. This message has been promoted in posters and artwork for generations. Regardless of budget and finances the message was still able to be pushed. Posters are a fantastic method of pushing the message of empowerment due to the fact that these are visual aids and they can be understood by anyone, no matter the language they speak or on the poster itself. The image of empowerment is enough to push the message of empowerment throughout all women and for any other message it may want to tell in the future. Posters and adverts are still used to this day as a powerful form of visual communication.

Colour is highly influential and essential within the world of graphic design. Without the use of colour there would not be posters to promote empowerment, or posters to influence the public. Colours have many different meanings and hidden messages. Road signs demonstrate the use of bright and eye-catching colours which grab the attention of drivers and deliver a message through signs and colours, with red often being used as regulatory signs, signs that give instructions that must be followed. Without colour graphic design work would have limited meaning or effect on the reader and would be much harder to achieve.

Influence is another great example of how graphic design and artwork can be used. Propaganda is the main instrument as an advocate of influence, using the artwork and stereotypes to push a way of thinking and self-belief to control the public. This was not just used in the early to mid 1900's, these can be found to this day still.

These ranged from degrading men to believe they should be fighting for their country and putting their lives at risk, to influencing women to work in factories to supply the men at war. This influence was pushed along both sides of the great wars, 'the allies and the axis', influencing them to get the public fighting and working for the country in the troubling times.

All three concepts discussed show how powerful graphic design can be and how far reaching the messages can go, the methods have developed over time and the platforms now used have become more varied, for example the use of social media and TV and it will continue to play a key role in influencing society into the future. These key words have led me to the question of, how does Graphic Design evoke action or emotion through visual graphics?

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