

Owain Tomos Jon Davies – 2003725

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Tutor – Martin Bush

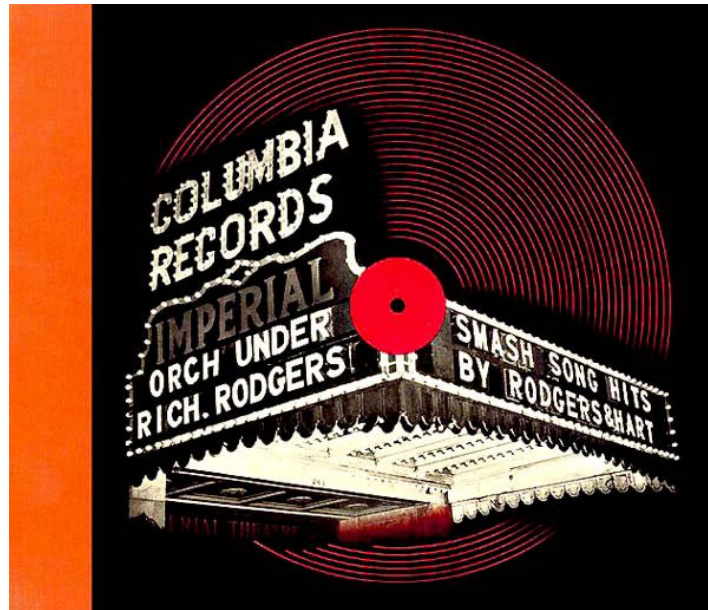
Exhibition of Modernistic Album/Single Covers

“Modernism is an inclusive name applied to the many forms of rebellion against the accepted and the traditional.” (DOW, 1917)

Following acquiring knowledge of modernism, I decided to apply this concept to album cover art. Having previous interest in the relativity and relationship between art and music, the vibrant and intricate subject of album cover design seemed an appropriate avenue of exploration and selection. Modernism is the breaking of boundaries and historical conservative values, especially in a post-war era. Music and art are both expressions where modernism is undoubtably displayed. My exhibition will exemplify how modernistic developments are represented within album cover art, taking place in the in The Toast Rack (a modernistic building in Fallowfield, Manchester); having considered Manchester’s connection with the developing music scene, and the modernist architecture of the building itself.



Curation is ‘adding a performative dimension to whatever kinds of meanings art-works might already possess’ (Sutton, 2003), essentially to select an exhibition successfully, there must be an element of conveying meaning that can be done without words through the selection of design pieces. In this case, creating an exemplar of modernism and developments through the selection is key. Through thorough understanding of conceptual factors and research, the exhibition can be curated effectively, and we can then identify the meanings and connections of the artwork via the selection. The exhibition is as follows...



(Steinweiss, 1939)

The first artist that deserves recognition is Alex Steinweiss for his innovative invention – the first album cover. Steinweiss is regarded to be the first person to have envisioned that “artwork is as much a part of the identity of a record as the spiralling grooves that make a vinyl sing.” ... “Without his pioneering work the music industry may never have evolved in the same way.” (Ediriwira, 2014) Before 1939 vinyl’s were wrapped in plain paper or binding, a peculiar concept to consider given the impact of cover art in modern culture. Thus, this addition of printed cover art to encourage a listener base disregards conservative values and embraces modernism and creativity to reflect the music, encourage sales and attract listeners using the power of graphic design.

This cover also features a bright and colourful enticing design, which provides great contrast to the initial practice of plainly wrapping vinyl, providing a pathway to breaking down conservative values and initialising the creative connection between visuals and audio from a modernistic perspective. Featuring bright lights seems an appropriate way to break conservative conventions, again asserting the impact of culture change. Change in attitudes to a more experimental and creative outlook paved the way for design.



(Harak, 1965.)

Rudolph de Harak was one of many designers who gave modernism a brilliant, eloquent attitude during the 60's and 70's. This piece for Fou Ts'ong's LP demonstrates modernism through its grid structures and asymmetrical balance in which was an influence from Swiss designs of the 50's. The album was one of many de Harak made for Westminster Records which brought an essence of minimal experimentation with its form of rectangles blending with one another.

This piece also draws similarities with Picasso's cubist geometric style, exhibiting a true modernistic, rule breaking concept. The cover art here seems to have taken some inspiration from phases of cubism which utilise contrasting colours and overlapping to create an experimental nature within the feel of the artwork. The contrast of this unconventional style of design and the classical music it is representing is a revolutionary concept which is an exemplary piece of modernism. For that reason, this cover deserves to be featured within a curation of modernistic album covers.



(Clyne, 1957)

Ronald Clyne's Cover for 'Saint Saens: Symphony No. 3 in C Minor' was far ahead of its time. Having designed approximately 500 album covers for Folkways Records, this 1957 cover stands out the most for its "Keen attention to detail, precision, craft skills, system of education and technical training..." and "...a high standard of printing" (Terror, 2009).

Toying with experimental concepts is what defines modernism, given how early this piece is, the futuristic style of design, highlights the boundaries that were broken during the period of modernism.

Despite modernists often avoiding symmetry, the simplicity and use of symmetry of this piece is reflective of the modernists of the 50s who did eventually harness the evocative power of symmetry, drawing the attention to a record using this pleasing visual concept. This piece of cover art deserves to be recognised as it shows development within the concept of modernism and is reflective of the developments of print being made. The designer of this

cover was a modernist by nature, experimenting with minimalistic styles, the designer became known for his work with the label Folkways. The effectiveness of this modern and minimal approach to design and aesthetic choices is evident in his prevalence and success within this label. Therefore, this piece is an important early example of modernistic album covers, as it emphasises the relevance of minimalism and modernism within the aim of attracting an audience and a listener base in terms of music.



(Unknown, 1974)

Kraftwerk are a band which encapsulate modernistic concepts, their technology-based sound was a revolutionary move within music. The simplicity of their melodies paired with their complicated use of technology is accentuated and perfectly represented by the design of an uncredited artist, who redesigned the original cover. The original 1974 cover by Emil Shultz, although created by an accredited and esteemed artist with links with the band and a creative concept (the feature of a Volkswagen and a Mercedes, to represent the French and German connections of the Autobahn), it was deemed retrospectively as unsuitable for Kraftwerk's style, as it featured a sweeping landscape and a more natural and traditional depiction of the beauty of Germany. Band member Ralf Hutter, upon noticing the white stripes on the Autobahn decided to incorporate car-like sounds into songs, the cover was then inspired and updated on its UK release by record label Vertigo. A choice which moves from realism to modernism.

The stripped back version of the original cover features a simplistic design of two white stripes, creating a symbol of Germany's Autobahn, and perhaps in essence reclaiming German culture, and modern Germany as a positive and progressive place following the events of World War Two. Therefore, this cover art deserves to be recognised as it represents the aspect of modernism which shows post-war progression and the feeling amongst youth of looking toward the future and leaving the past behind. As Robert Harland says graphic design "must now be thought of as a tool for social as well as economic development." (Harland, 2011) This proves the impact of designing with a modernistic approach, as the song achieved global success and dissolved some of the negative feelings towards Germany. The cover art had a major role in presenting a symbol of modern Germany that is to be praised, a major post-war development. So, this cover is important to include because it shows the culturally developmental impact of design and modernism.



(Saville, 1981)

This New Order cover deserves to be recognised as an important modernistic album cover due to its use of Italian futurism, the designer Peter Saville used Fortunato Depero's poster Futurismo Trentino for inspiration. However, cleverly, Saville makes a feature of the letters F and L representing the "fact" and the Roman numeral for 50, which is within the album title. However, these are featured within the clean lines that surround the title.

Italian futurism is characterised by its influence of youth, modernism, violence, and technology. Beginning in 1909, it was inspired by the changes that are the pinnacle of modernity- industrialisation and technology. As Italy seemed to seek for its identity in the past, this new form of thinking and creation shows a branch of modernism which became part of its new culture. It also celebrates war in terms of its opportunity to consequently rebuild, modernism is a post war concept which harnesses change and experimentation. This

influence on New Order's Fact. 50 cover shows its modernistic style. Swapping conservative and realist styles for "clear volumes, mechanical figures, and precise contours" (Fergonzi, 2019) is a feature of both Italian Futurism and modernism that is a present influence of Saville when designing this cover art. Therefore, it deserves to be exhibited among important modernistic covers.

It's important to note that upon curation of modernistic album covers, the influence of cultural change and modernism is present upon each other, making it an important style of design to consider when approaching a new audience, development of music and what the design is representing. The minimalist modernism exemplified in many of these covers is still a prevalent influence today, and will continue to be an inspiration to future designers, as well as the modernistic concepts of experimentation and expanding boundaries from the norm.

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