

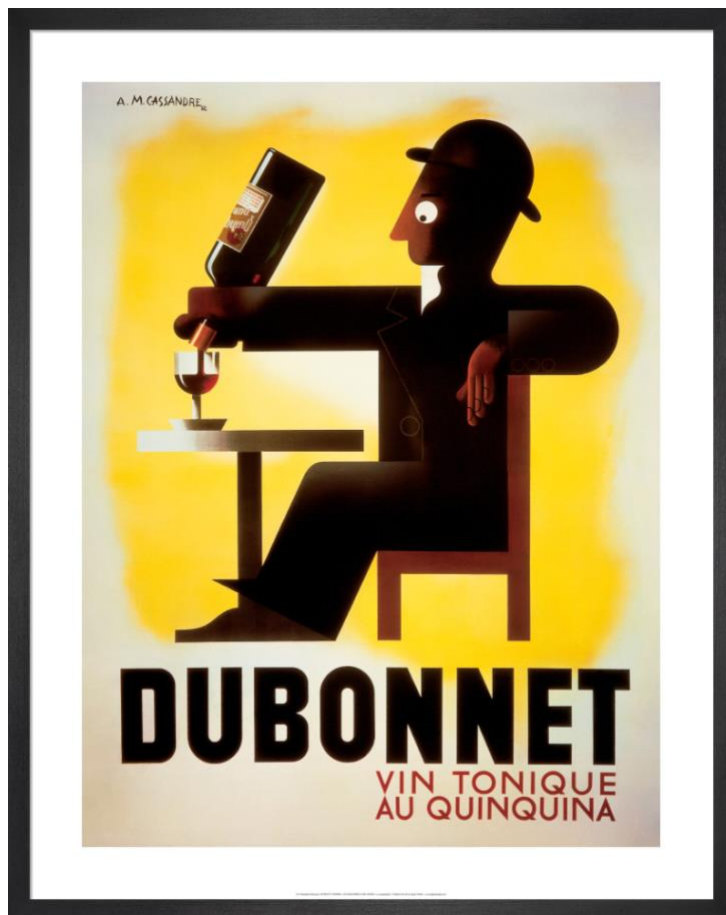
Research in Practice
Independent Project Proposal
Queer, Fashion, Neurodivergent

In this essay I will exploring 3 keywords that reflect my interests and passions. The first keyword I will be discussing is fashion, with the aim of highlighting how the graphic design and fashion trends reflecting our culture, have influenced one another throughout history. I will then investigate the word 'neurodivergent' with the aim of discovering how graphic design can be adjusted to accommodate the needs of those whose brains work in different ways. My final discussion will be exploring the word 'queer', in which I will be highlighting the way that graphic design has impacted the queer movement through protest throughout history. By discussing these topics, I aim to discover the effect that graphic design has had on varying aspects of society and determine what area I intend to explore further in third year.

My first topic I will be discussing is fashion. Fashion is viewed by many as a superficial industry that aids in nothing more than the aesthetics of clothing we buy as a necessity, while not fully understanding the impact that fashion has on society, and vice versa. Throughout history, fashion has developed trends that mirror the culture of society at that time and has been impacted by major issues such as economy, politics, and environmental issues. These trends have also been mirrored in the graphic design styles, meaning that graphic design and fashion often go hand in hand.

A prime example of how design trends, both in fashion and communication design, have been impacted by societal issues would be the era of art deco. Art deco,

characterised by geometric patterns and symmetrical compositions, emerged in the early 20th century, in the aftermath of World War I, as a celebration of progress and modernity. Art nouveau, a more romanticised trend conveying whimsy and mystique, became far less popular due to the horrors of the war, allowing opportunity for art deco to become popular, which provided an aesthetic that highlighted uniformity and order, in a society that had suffered through chaos. 'It symbolised the visual embodiment of modernist principles, celebrating the success of technological advancements.' (Museum Selection, n.d.).



Dubonnet, A.M. Cassandre, 1932

This trend was reflected in both graphic design and fashion design, with the likes of A.M. Cassandre paving the way with the advertising art that defined the visual style of the era, and embodied the same boldness and elegance seen in the fashion

designs of Paul Poiret and later Coco Chanel, who's take on art deco through her unique clothing design was revolutionary in the early 1920s.

Punk was a culture and music era that emerged in the mid-1970s and remained prevalent through to the early 80s. This movement was recognised by its loud, aggressive music, its unique image, and its rebellious attitude. It was a statement reflecting the political and economic climate of the time - rising unemployment, youth disenchantment and standing up to consumerism, while rejecting societal norms and defending the right to exist beyond mainstream standards. It was intentionally ugly, uncomfortable, and confrontational, but celebrated imperfection, aggression, and individuality.



Janette Beckman (British, born 1959). Punks gathered at King's Road in London, 1979.

This unconventional nature was mirrored in the visual identity of the movement, with its devotees opting to sport outlandish fashion choices, such as ripped clothing held

together by safety pins, trousers and skirts crafted from tartan material, Doc Martens boots or converse shoes, heavy eye makeup and unique hairstyles, such as bright coloured hair dye or mohawks. Another staple of the punk era was the leather jacket, a piece that would often be adorned with the individual wearer's customisation by adding spikes, patches, and band logos – this being one way that graphic design played a major role in the punk aesthetic.



Bill Kennedy (British, 1947-2018).

Malcom McLaren and Vivienne Westwood, 1977.

Photographed for The Daily Mirror.

Vivienne Westwood helped visually brand the punk movement in fashion. The Sex Pistols wore her designs on stage and in promotional material, broadcasting the punk ethos of anti-establishment defiance, wearing the iconic "God Save the Queen" T-shirt, which featured a defaced image of Queen Elizabeth II, became a potent symbol of punk's rejection of British nationalism and authority (Polhemus, 1994).

This fashion statement became one of the most widely recognised pieces of graphic design today and is still celebrated for its bold statement many years later.



Yotka, S. (2018) *'Riccardo Tisci Rebrands Burberry With a New Peter Saville Logo'*, *Vogue*, 2 August.

Graphic design has not only reflected fashion but has actively shaped it, especially through branding. One of the most famous examples is the collaboration between designer Peter Saville and the fashion world. Saville, known for his iconic album covers for Joy Division and New Order, brought a minimalist yet sensibility to fashion branding when he began working with labels like Christian Dior and Raf Simons. His ability to fuse cool detachment with cultural commentary helped redefine how fashion brands communicated identity, making graphic design an essential part of fashion's storytelling.

The next keyword that I will be investigating is Queer. Graphic design has played a major role in the LGBTQ+ movement throughout history, from protest signage to gaining visibility, to social graphics to digital campaigns in the present day.

In the aftermath of the Stonewall Riots in 1969, graphic design was an essential tool used by the Gay Liberation Front, having been utilised in the making of banners, leaflets and posters to raise awareness and gain visibility for upcoming rallies and protests. The earlier posters designed, often by hand, by the Gay Liberation Front, would feature bold typography and symbols to convey politically charged messages, calling to action a new era of activism in the LGBT community. Brown and Reimer (2002, p. 45) state that “early posters and flyers from the gay rights movement were critical in shaping the visual identity of the movement, rallying people to action.” The GLF also used graphic design to create a visual identity that could represent the diverse spectrum of the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than focusing on a narrow representation of gay identity, the GLF aimed to represent all sexual orientations and gender identities within their graphic materials, symbolizing inclusivity and unity.



Design likely Jim Fouratt (American, b. 1945); photograph Peter Hujar (American, 1934–1987)

The most notable and recognisable visual identity of the LGBTQ+ community is the pride flag. The pride flag with the rainbow design was designed in 1978 by Gilbert Baker - a drag queen, artist, and activist, and has now become the universal symbol for the queer community, that symbolises acceptance, diversity, and love. The flag was debuted at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade 1978, and resonated strongly with the queer community, and was therefore permanently adopted as the official pride flag.



The Pride flag was initially designed with eight colours as opposed to six. Each colour was chosen to symbolize a different specific value of the community; hot pink represented sexuality, red symbolised life, orange portrays healing, yellow portrays sunlight, green represents nature, turquoise symbolizes art, indigo represents serenity, and violet was chosen to mean spirit. Baker designed this flag with the goal of creating a symbol that was bright and eye-catching, while also ensuring that it maintained a deeper meaning to the community it represented.



SILENCE = DEATH Project (Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston, Charles Krelloff, Chris Li.

Social graphic design was essential in the advancement of the gay rights movement, such as the campaign 'Silence = Death' which tackled the stigma surrounding the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s. This was a pivotal moment for graphic design in the LGBT movement. The designers of this project established it with the aim of protecting one another and designed as a collaboration taking inspiration from the Art Workers Coalition and the Guerrilla Girls. The use of the pink triangle became the most striking aspect of this piece, due to the dark nature of its origin, as the symbol used was reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community, after the Nazis had used the symbol to identify homosexuals to slaughter in World War II. Reclaiming the pink triangle symbol as their own was a powerful use of design to demonstrate resistance against oppression. Brown and Reimer (2002) discuss how graphic design was instrumental in communicating anger, urgency, and solidarity within the AIDS activism movement, stating that the "Silence = Death" campaign became one of the most influential uses of graphic design in AIDS activism.



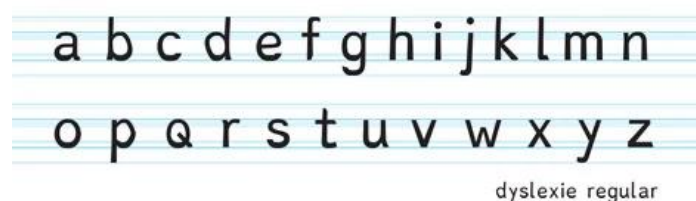
Zackary Drucker: At Least You Know You Exist

In the 21st century, graphic design continues to evolve alongside LGBT culture. Contemporary designers such as Zackary Drucker and Jason Jones use visual media to explore diverse gender identities, craft inclusive imagery, and enhance the visibility of queer communities. Drucker's work, which centres on gender nonconformity and visual identity, has been instrumental in reshaping public perceptions of gender and sexuality. Brown and Reimer (2002) highlight that modern queer designers are not solely focused on creating visually appealing work; they are equally committed to challenging societal expectations and promoting awareness around issues such as gender fluidity and intersectionality. Drucker's designs exemplify the ongoing fight for visibility, illustrating how graphic design can reclaim queer identities and celebrate diversity (Brown and Reimer, 2002).

For the final keyword, I will be exploring how graphic design can be adjusted to accommodate the sensory input needs of neurodiverse individuals. Graphic design is

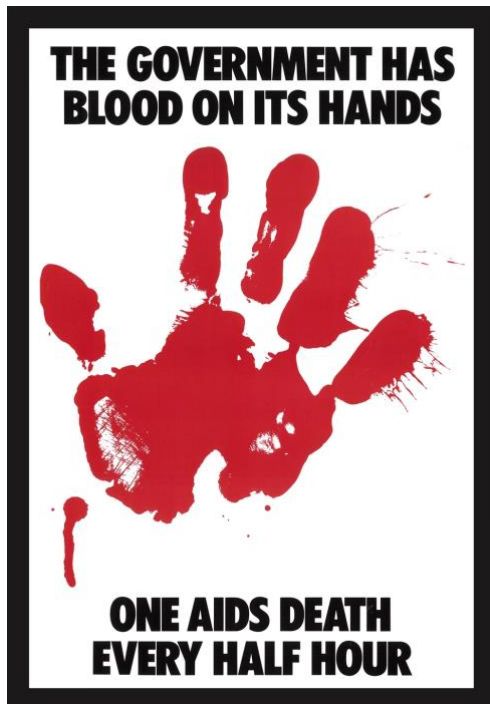
an essential part of day-to-day life, whether that is reading text, signage, labels, or advertisements. Roughly 1 in 7, or 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent, yet when designing communication centred artwork, this demographic of people are rarely taken into account, despite the fact that these are the people that struggle with communication the most. There are a number of ways in which neurodivergent brains can be taken into account and catered for when designing, such as studying the colour theory of neurodiverse minds and what colour combinations can be the most stimulating, as well as being mindful with font choices when placing large bodies of text.

One key approach is reducing cognitive load. Neurodivergent users often experience sensory overload or difficulty prioritizing information when designs are cluttered or overly complex. As Kat Holmes (2018) explains in *Mismatch*, inclusive design is about identifying points where a mismatch between a user's needs and the environment occurs. For graphic design, this means prioritizing simplicity: clean layouts, limited colour palettes, generous white space, and consistent iconography help users focus without becoming overwhelmed (Holmes, 2018).



Typography also plays a critical role. Dyslexic users, for instance, may find traditional fonts challenging. Designers like Christian Boer have developed specialized typefaces, such as Dyslexie Font, which slightly exaggerate the shapes of letters to reduce common reading errors (Boer, 2011). Other fonts like OpenDyslexic and Lexend focus on increasing letter spacing and weight to make text more accessible.

For neurodivergent audiences broadly, avoiding italics, ensuring high contrast between text and background, and using left-aligned text improves readability (British Dyslexia Association, 2018).



Gran Fury

Colour use must also be carefully considered. While bold colours can create visual interest, designers should avoid chaotic patterns and ensure colour is never the sole method of conveying important information (WebAIM, 2022). This is crucial for users with sensory sensitivities or visual processing difficulties. Gran Fury's 1980s activist posters, while graphically intense, exemplify how limited, high-contrast palettes can deliver a clear, emotional message without overwhelming the viewer (Finkelstein, 2018).

After researching my three keywords, and their individual impacts on graphic design, I have discovered plenty of fascinating sub areas of each individual topic. I am interested in learning more about how graphic design and fashion as a combination can determine the visual identity of a rebellion, and what significant causes that may have affected in the past. I would like to look further into how specific flag design can resonate with a community, particularly in social movements. The use of the pink triangle symbol in the 'Silence = Death' campaign has inspired me to look further into how symbols that once a negative connotation, have been reclaimed to become a symbol of empowerment for the demographic that once would have victimised by it. I also have a desire to look further into how specific colour combinations elicit different emotions from neurodivergent individuals, and how design of public service graphics, such as maps, can be altered for this purpose.

I have found that my three keywords all heavily influence each other. A large portion of neurodivergent individuals are also members of the LGBTQ+ community, and vice versa, meaning that the impact that graphic design can have on both areas could have a significant overlap. This also applies to fashion, as fashion can be linked to style choices of those who are not neurotypical, due to sensory issues. Fashion also heavily links to LGBTQ+ history and can play a significant role in the use of graphic design to further the movement.

This multitude of tangents that have developed from my research on these topics, have led me to the question;

How has graphic design supported rebellion in the LGBTQ+ community using social design and fashion combined?

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