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BA Graphic Design

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Introduction to History of Art and Design

1. Select two case studies from an area of visual art or design practice (e.g. typography, book or poster illustration, photography, dress, textiles, jewellery, ceramics, furniture, architecture, interiors, painting, cinema, ect.), and discuss how they embody the aim of representing modernity. To address this brief, you will need to:
  - Research the aims and objectives of the modernist movement in art and design;
  - Define modernism, and discuss at some length the notions of ‘modernity’ and/or ‘modernism’;
  - Choose two case studies, and identify what it is about these artefacts that make it possible to call them modernist.

## **Modernism**

Modernism describes a range of cultural movements based in the changes in Western society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>. The period covers a series of changing movements in art, architecture, music, literature and the applied arts which emerge during this period. First known as “avant-garde” or “advance guard” Modernism meant the movements which identify themselves as attempting to overthrow some aspects of tradition, and represents a pushing of the boundaries of what is accepted as the norm.

Some divided the modernism movement is into two periods called Modernism and Postmodernism, but some people see them as two aspects of the same movement. It started in the very late 1800's, the environment in most parts of the world were affected, both in a positive and negative direction. It was a cultural movement that included the progressive art and architecture, music, literature and design, the movement was made by artist and designers who rebelled against the late 19<sup>th</sup> century academic and historical traditions, and were fond by the new economic, social and political aspects of the emerging modern world, they wanted to bring in modernist ideas into everyday urban life.

The modernist movement took place because the idea of traditional forms of art, social organisation and daily life had become tedious and unpleasing to the eye therefore outdated and it was time to move forward and force them aside and re-invent the culture for the better. Modernism changed most aspect of existing things, it started with trying to find out what was ‘holding back’ on possible areas in society which could be encouraged to re-examination modernised and improved for the similar if not better use replacing it with new, progressive and therefore better, ways of reaching the same end. People had to adapt to the thorough changes and accept that it was permanent and had to believe it's good and beautiful.

Embracing change and the present, modernism encompasses the works of thinkers who rebelled against nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions, believing the "traditional" forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith, social organization and daily life were becoming outdated; they directly confronted the new economic, social and political conditions of an emerging fully industrialized world.

Postmodernism literally means 'after the modernist movement', the following reaction of postmodernism era towards the modernist movement are defined by cultural perspectives. It is used in critical theories to refer to a point of departure ‘or lack of’ works of literature, drama, architecture, and design, as well as in marketing and business and in the interpretation of history, law and culture in the late 20th century.

## **Graphic Design**

The term graphic design can refer to a number of artistic and professional disciplines which focus on visual communication and presentation. Various methods are used to create and combine symbols, images and words to create a visual representation of ideas and messages. A graphic designer may utilize typography, visual arts and page layout techniques in varying degrees to produce the final result of the project. Graphic design often refers to both the process (designing) by which the communication is created and the products (designs) which are generated.

Common uses of graphic design include magazines, advertisements, product packaging and web design. For example, a product package might include a logo or other artwork, organized text and pure design elements such as shapes and color which unify the piece. Composition is one of the most important features of graphic design especially when utilizing pre-existing materials or using diverse elements.

Graphic Design spans the history of humankind from early man caves paintings to the dazzling neon's of Las Vegas. In both this lengthy history and in the relatively recent explosion of visual communication in the 20th and 21st centuries, there is sometimes a blurring distinction and overlapping of advertising art, graphic design and fine art. After all, they share many of the same elements, theories, principles, practices and languages, and sometimes the same benefactor or client. In advertising art the ultimate objective is the sale of goods and services. In graphic design, "the essence is to give order to information, form to ideas, expression and feeling to artifacts that document human experience.

In 1849, Henry Cole became one of the major forces in design education in Great Britain, informing the government of the importance of design in his (*Journal of Design and Manufactures*), and also organized The Great Exhibition as a celebration of modern industrial technology and Victorian design.

## **Piet Mondrian**

Europe's reach for modernity in late 19th century, especially in the United Kingdom, began to separate graphic design from fine art. Piet Mondrian is known as the father of graphic design. He was a fine artist, but his use of grids inspired the modern grid system used today in advertising, print and web layout.

The 20th century is renowned in art history for one invention above all, abstraction. The Dutch artist Piet Mondrian (1872 - 1944) was a pioneer in this development. His reputation rests on about 250

abstract paintings dating from 1917 to 1944, a modest number for over 25 years of work. Each painting was worked and reworked, built layer by layer toward an equilibrium of form, colour, and surface.

Mondrian named his style "neo-plasticism". That is how he translated his own Dutch phrase "*nieuwe beelding*", which also means "new form" or "new image." He explained that the style was based on an absolute harmony of straight lines and pure colours underlying and bring order to the visible world. By expressing this harmony, the painter could show a utopia where the fine arts would no longer be needed because life itself would be beautiful. Mondrian took a step in this direction by arranging rectangles of primary colour around his studio walls starting in 1919. He believed that the regularity of urban life, traffic, buildings, fashion, music, and dance also foretold his neo-plastic utopia.

The years Mondrian spent in Holland brought him close to like-minded artists. In 1917, under the guidance of Theo van Doesburg, they formed a group and began to publish a magazine called *De Stijl* (The Style), to which Mondrian often contributed until 1924. His work aesthetic became the guiding force of the movement, which embraced architecture, furniture design, typography, and many other fields. The international De Stijl artists were committed to purifying modern art and bringing it into daily life.

Truly dedicated to his work Mondrian travelled the world, he lived in Paris from (1919 - 1938), London from (1938 - 1940) and New York from (1940 - 1944), searching each metropolis for evidence of the harmony that he tried to manifest in painting. Throughout his career, which spanned the both world wars, he believed that art could redeem tragedy. 1941 and nearing the end of his career Mondrian wrote "If we cannot free ourselves, we can free our vision" a true testament to Modernism in all forms.

Mondrian's style of work showed typical balancing of large areas of non-colour against smaller accents of colour, creating a structure in which restless sliding is resolved in a stable whole bring harmony and order to the abstract art much unlike another abstract artist which was also largely inspired by the modernism movement but has a different approach to the abstraction art form.