

Achieving Unity Through Contrasts: Covering Music for the Masses by Depeche Mode

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Music as an art form based on sound and silence is recorded as actual sounds since the second half of the 19th century and developed in time according to the technical improvements. Covers both protecting and labeling recording mediums are graphic design spaces to organize. The pre-production design of two dimensional printed surfaces called the graphic design. Like every design field graphic design has its own elements and principles as guides. The aim of this paper is to analyze contrasts concluded in unity on the covers of the Depeche Mode's album Music for the Masses. Depeche Mode is a synth-pop, new wave, electronic and dance rock and alternative rock band established in 1980 and still active. Depeche Mode has 31 times nominated and 10 times won the highly prestigious worldwide prizes during those years, it is the most popular electronic band the world has ever known and in the list of the 50 bands that changed the world. The front cover of the album is a booklet with 6 pages/12 faces designed and a back side combined. This paper has 12 faces of the booklet and the backside analyzed according to the six main principles of graphic design and finds out that unity is achieved through contrasting elements.

Keywords: graphic design, album cover, unity, contrast, Depeche Mode

Introduction

Music as an art form based on sound and silence is recorded as actual sounds since the second half of the 19th century and developed in time according to the technical improvements (Frith, 2004, p. 8). Covers both protecting and labeling recording mediums are also graphic design spaces to organize. The pre-production design of two dimensional printed surfaces called the graphic design, under the concept of design, which is the decision making process of a product before production (Raizman, 2003, p. 375). Like every design field graphic design has its own elements and principles as guides. While line, shape, color, texture, value, and space are the six main graphic design elements, unity/harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale/proportion, dominance/emphasis, and similarity/contrast are the six main graphic design principles (Pipes, 2003, p. 13; Resnick, 2003, pp. 23-25).

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Unity as a Graphic Design Principle: Achieving Unity Through Contrast

Having visual or verbal messages to convey is another dimension of graphic design. Like many graphic design products, from an album cover it is expecting to reflect an audio expression visually. For a successful visualization some graphic design principles should have been considered by the graphic designers. The graphic design principles are used in order to organize visuals and typography—the art, design and technique of writing—after the design process has finished the final should be a whole, which is unite and harmonious: This means that the design at the end should be something different from the gathered elements, a graphic design product whose elements behave harmoniously in order to make it an album cover, etc. Harmony is a feature created by the design attitudes, how the elements organized as appearances and their interrelations. Every element of a graphic design product both visual and verbal has a unique shape, size, color, texture, tone, and location. The amounts of these ingredients determine the amount of harmony, so at the end unity. These concepts can be better understood by analysis of a sample (Golombisky & Hagen, 2013, p. 55; George-Palilonis, 2006, p. 178).

The Analysis of the Music for the Masses Album Cover

Music for the Masses is Depeche Mode's sixth studio album which was released on 28 September 1987 by Mute Records. As a musical genre it is labeled as electronic, post-punk, and synth-pop. While electronic music is defined as music made by electronic musical instruments and technology (T. B. Holmes & T. Holmes, 2002, p. 6), synth-pop also known as electro- or techno-pop used synthesizer as a dominant instrument (Kosmicki, 2009, p. 236). Synthesizer generates electric signals that are converted to sound through instrument amplifiers and loudspeakers or headphones (T. B. Holmes & T. Holmes, 2002, p. 207). On the other hand, post-punk is the heterogeneous type of rock music that emerged after the punk movement of the 1970s. Simply punk or punk rock is a rock music developed during 1974-1976 as a rejection to the mainstream rock. Punk music is typical with its short or fast-paced songs, with hard-edge melodies and singing styles, stripped down instrumentation, and often political, and has anti-establishment lyrics which are standing in opposition to the conventional social, political, and economic principles of the society (Wikipedians, 2010, pp. 55-57).

In between many, album covers are one of the graphic design products because they are two dimensional printouts, which consists of typographic elements like letters, numbers, words, texts, and visuals like illustrations and photographs (Stoltze, 2008, p. 18). These packages both protect and visualize musical expression. The genre of music and the expression of the musician show itself on these covers by using visuals and typographic combinations which are the main elements of graphic design. In order to access the data easily there is an organization. There is a booklet in front of the package with pictures, lyrics, additional info, the names of the performer and the album. At the back of the package there is a list of the songs with duration and other details like recording or production company name, logo, barcode, etc. In this paper the front cover, 12 faces of the front booklet, printed on the CD and the back of the cover analyzed according to the six main principles of graphic design and found out that unity is achieved through contrasting elements.

Music for the Masses

The front cover of the album is a booklet with six pages, 12 faces designed according to the characteristics of the whole. As size and proportions it is a square with 12 centimeters to 12 centimeters as equal as height and

width. Equality is something balanced and that's why it is calm and stress-free. Human lives in a world of balance in order not to fall, things should be balanced, or be vertical or horizontal, or should be attached to something. Because human used to live under this rule he or she feels stressed when encountering imbalanced things. The proportion of the cover of the album has no connection with this rule it is because of the shape of the recorded medium, the CD. CD produced as perfect circle whose diameter is 12 centimeters (Hepworth-Sawyer & Golding, 2010, p. 249). Functionality is a major characteristic which should be considered in the world of design in general.

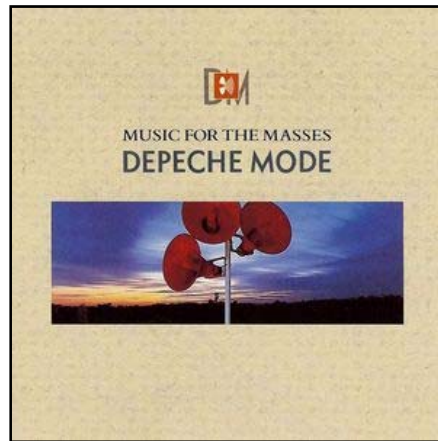


Figure 1. Cover of the front booklet. Source: Author's collection.

This calm equality of the square broke into pieces by putting a landscape formatted photograph, whose proportions contrasted into a level that keeps it still a rectangle with a visible photography in it. A flattened rectangle like a prison window in a cream surface makes a proportional contrast with the main square and positioned on the golden section horizontally, which is a little below the center of the cover. Golden ratio, also golden mean or section is a ratio derived from the nature which isn't equal—dull, but accepted as the most aesthetic. While calculating the ratio on a rectangle, the four golden sections, two vertical, two horizontal, and four infinity points can be found (Olsen, 2006, pp. 1-9).

The photograph shows an unusual trinity: three red megaphones in front of a sunset over a black land. While the proportion of the land and sky is contrasting as they can, the shady land balanced the bluish sky with its position and black tone. The metal pole with red megaphones on it is contrasting as a vertical with the horizontality of the whole sky scene. The sun shine coming from the left balanced with the two red megaphones on right. The general darker tones of the photograph are contrasting with the surrounding cream background. Textures of the cream background are also contrasting with the perfect smoothness of the photography.

After all of these over contrasting situations the middle positioning of the pole calmed down the scene but still contrasted as a vertical movement above all the horizontals. This centralization is supported by the alignment of all the typographic elements: the name of the band, the album and the special logo made for this recording: two initials of Depeche Mode, the band and a red negative megaphone stylization. The logo, with its squared entity is placed on top in order to balance the heaviness of the photography downwards. The name of the band and the album positioned on the golden section above the center and grouped as a whole.

In order not to dominate the colors of the photography and be harmonious as a color scheme, which every design product should have, the names of the band and the album are very dark grey on a cream surface. Cream

and grey are low saturated neutrals. The name of the band is bigger in size. Because during those years the band was very famous and the name of the band should be seen and read at first sight. A modern, sans serif font is used to create a contemporary and clean look on grained background. Grouping all the typographic elements prevents a chaos on the surface. The photography and the name of the band are sharing the leading role in the hierarchy among the elements.

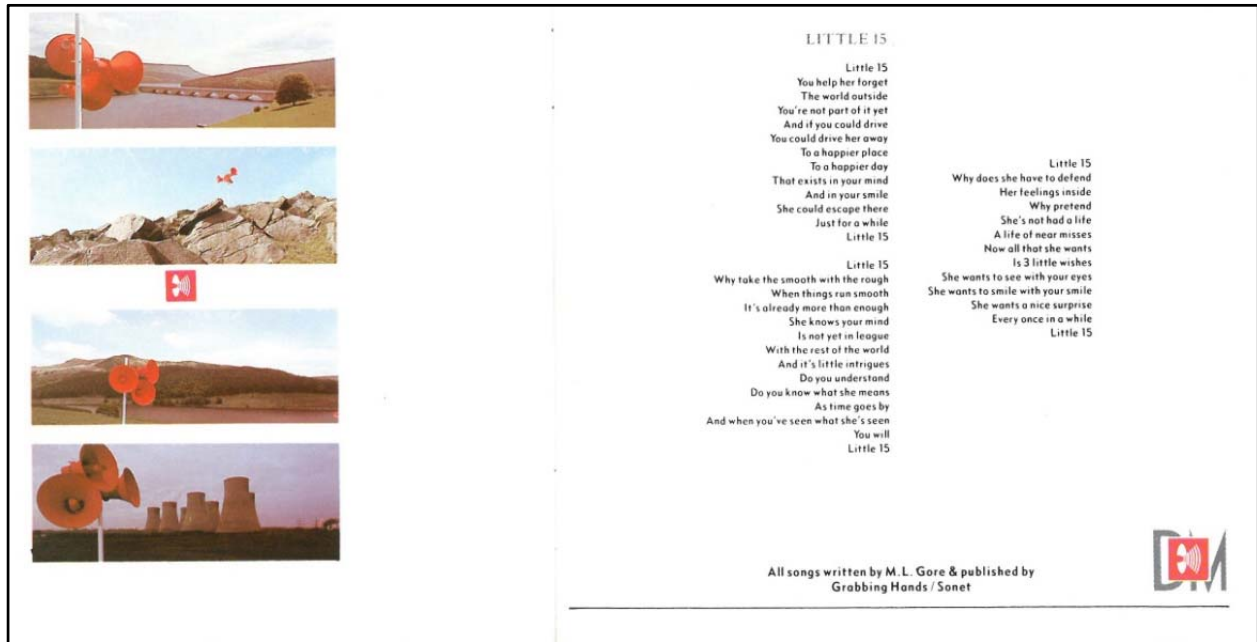


Figure 2. Inside of the booklet 1-2. Source: Author's collection.

The front cover should be designed according to two different eye sight distances; one for shelves in between many others, one when the CD is in both hands, which is the reading distance maximum 30 centimeters. The pages within the booklet with lyrics and other verbal messages have only one eye sight distance which is only for reading. Because of this the photography and the size of the typographic elements can be small as they can be seen or read.

Because of the equal amount of white background, the two pages together are perceived as one wide rectangle in landscape format. On left four different variations of the same theme are seen one above the other with the logo in the middle. All four are same as size, have real life color scheme except the red megaphones and proportioned like the one used on the cover. White background calms chaos and leads the attention to the photography. On every photograph metal pole is seen with the megaphones on it within a different environment like natural rocks or mountains, a stone bridge on a river, or in front of stone looking cooling towers. On every photograph the size, positioning, location, and direction of the megaphones differ according to the composition.

On the right only typographic elements are organized as verses in a way lyrics are generally written but this time from right aligned. Placing the photography on one side and typography on the other creates a contrast between the two pages balanced with the blackness of the typography, the logo, and a black thin line under them.

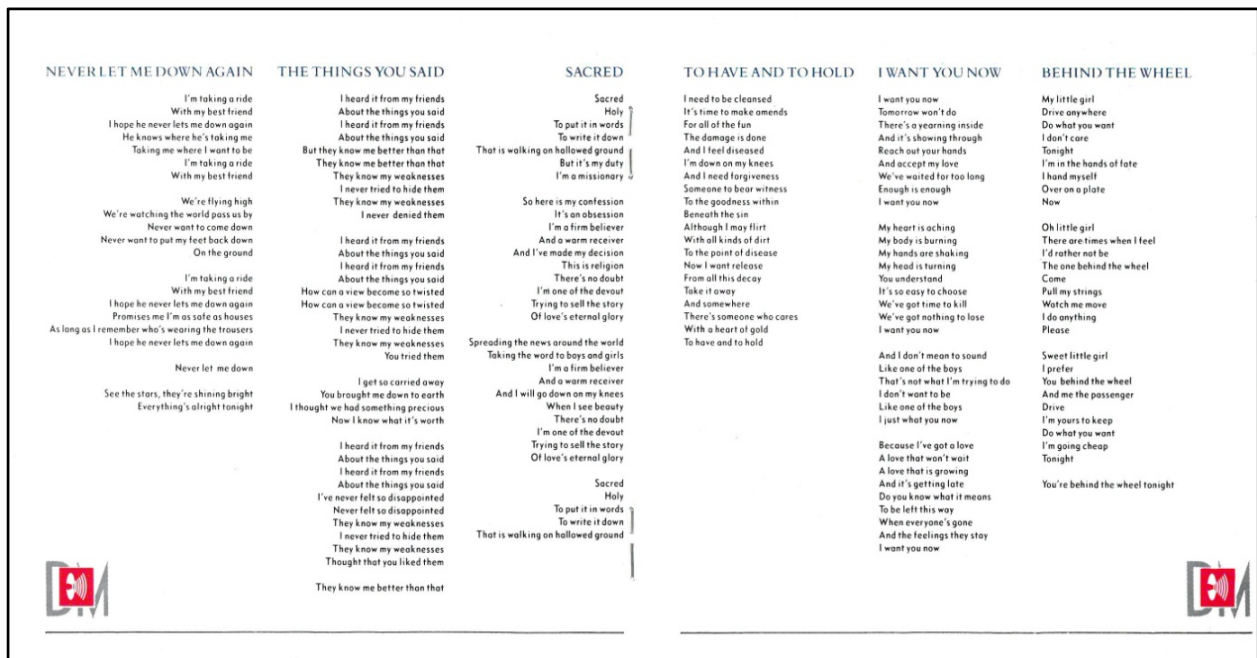


Figure 3. Middle of the booklet 2-3. Source: Author's collection.

Only typographic elements organized as verses placed with same logo on both corners down and a black thin line under them. All six songs' lyrics are typed in black as same sizes with uppercase names of the songs over them. While every six lyrics are aligned on top, the three on left are aligned vertically on right, the other three on right aligned vertically on left. The changing empty spaces under the verses are contrasting and balanced with the two logos. Like the only thing which is red on every photograph, the megaphones are the only thing which is red in the logos and the logos only.

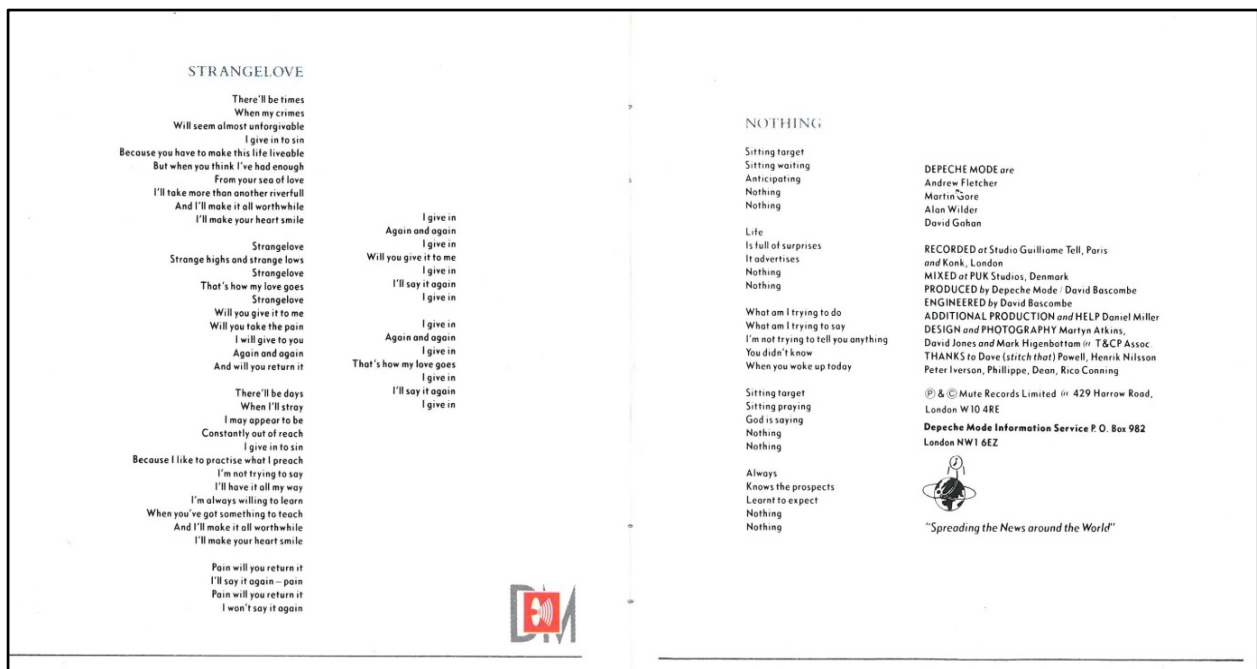


Figure 4. Inside of the booklet 5-6. Source: Author's collection.

In order to show that this booklet is ending something differs on these pages No. 5 and 6. While the writings are grouped and aligned like the others and under these there is a black thin line, there is only one logo in the bottom right corner of the left page balancing the crowd of the right page. Only typographic elements are organized as verses when they are lyrics; and additional information in a harmonious way with others.

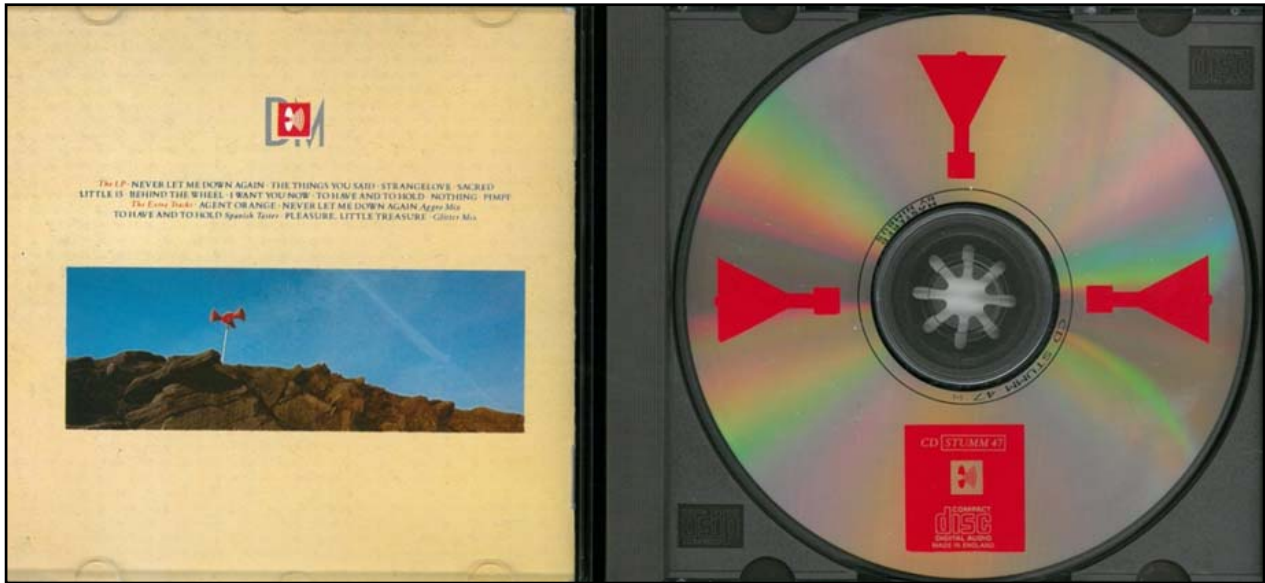


Figure 5. Back of the booklet and the CD. Source: Author's collection.

The back of the booklet has two functions: it is the back of the booklet and the first part with the CD faced when opened to get the CD out. The back of the booklet design should be united with both the surface of the CD which is a circle and the whole idea of the booklet itself. The back of the booklet is designed very similar to the front. The photograph is different. The pole with three megaphones is standing on rough rocks seen from far like departing. The names of the songs are written under the photograph. On the surface of the bare shining CD, three red giant megaphone shapes are placed looking into three different directions, with the addition of the red squared label a plus sign formed.



Figure 6. Back. Source: Author's collection.

The back of the cover designed is similar to the back of the booklet with additional information. This time the same photograph is placed on the upper golden section horizontally. The names of the songs are typed as four lines under the photograph aligned centered vertically. Some labels, signs, logotypes, and a barcode are placed up, down, and on the corner. The sizes of these are small and thin. Despite red and white megaphone sign, the others are black.

Conclusion

This unique design attitude is the sign showing the unity principle: unique but similar.

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