



Aesthetic Principles in Graphic Design: A Comparative Study of Modern and Postmodern Approaches

Tri C. Kusumandyoko^{1*} and Muhammad W. Ardani¹

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: tricaHYO@unesa.ac.id

Abstract. Through a comparative assessment of classic and contemporary techniques, this article examines aesthetic concepts in graphic design. The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast the aesthetic principles and characteristics of contemporary and traditional graphic design methods. A comprehensive literature review, historical examples of graphic design, and a comparison of works by contemporary and traditional graphic designers were all part of the research methodology. The discoveries of this study will give significant knowledge into how tasteful standards have advanced over the time. It will shed light on how aesthetic choices made by graphic designers are influenced by technological advancements, cultural shifts, and artistic movements. This examination adds to the field of visual communication design by upgrading how we might interpret the stylish standards basic the discipline. These discoveries won't just be useful to visual creators who wish to make outwardly engaging plans, yet in addition give an establishment to additional innovative work in the field of visual communication design.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Graphic Design, Principles.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Concept of Beauty Before the 20th Century

The early advancement of the stylish way of thinking can be followed back to antiquated times when scholars and rationalists started to consider the magnificence idea and its relationship to nature, craftsmanship, and human insight. In ancient Greece, the first ideas about aesthetics, also known as the philosophy of beauty, can be found. Scholars, for example, Plato and Aristotle, investigated the excellence idea and its connection to human experience [1]. Aristotle, on the other hand, emphasized the subjective experience of beauty and the emotions it evokes while Plato argued and believed that beauty is an objective and transcendent form that exists independently of objects [2].

Aesthetic philosophy was interwoven with Christian religious and theological concepts throughout the Middle Ages [3]. Beauty was viewed as a mirror of heavenly perfection during the time, and works of art were made for religious purposes and to stimulate spiritual introspection. During this time, ideas of artistic representation emerged, such as Plato's concept of mimesis (imitation), which was later refined and enlarged by scholars such as Saint Thomas Aquinas.

The Renaissance era saw a substantial movement in aesthetic perception. Particularly since the advent of humanism and the reinterpretation of classical art from ancient Greece and Rome sparked renewed interest in the study of beauty and aesthetic expression [4]. Renaissance thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci highlighted the value of individual creativity and the artist's capacity to convey the essence of beauty.

Meanwhile, the 18th century Enlightenment elevated aesthetics to a more methodical approach. Immanuel Kant and David Hume were among the first philosophers to investigate the basis of aesthetic judgment and the principles underlying our beauty experience. Kant argued for aesthetic judgment's autonomy, claiming that the perception of beauty was a disinterested pleasure based on subjective assessments of taste [5].

Various philosophical systems evolved in the 19th and 20th centuries, including Romanticism, Idealism, and Existentialism, which affected the development of aesthetics [6]. The Romanticism art movement stressed the emotional qualities and subjective significance of art, whereas the Idealism art movement highlighted the function of art in disclosing the world's reality. Existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty investigated the nature of aesthetic perception and its relationship to human life.

Advertising's development in the late 19th century resulted in the fast growth of mass manufacturing and consumer culture. Advertising is a kind of persuasion, and graphic design plays a significant part in making aesthetically appealing commercials. Color, composition, typography, and imagery are used to make effective and convincing commercials, and aesthetics play a vital role in their creation.

Today's aesthetics is evolving and includes a variety of ideas and philosophies. Philosophers investigate aesthetics in everyday life, popular culture, digital media, and conventional art genres. Aesthetic philosophers nowadays look at subjects including the link between aesthetics, the function of aesthetics in establishing social and cultural values, and the influence of technology on artistic activity and aesthetic experience [7]. In conclusion, various philosophical movements throughout history contributed to the early development of aesthetic philosophy, which can be traced back to ancient times. In contemporary philosophy, investigating beauty, art, and the nature of aesthetic experience is still a lively and ongoing field of inquiry.

2 Aesthetics After the 20th Century

The area of aesthetics witnessed substantial advancements and expansions after the 20th century, reflecting the shifting cultural, artistic, and technical environment of the modern and postmodern eras. These advances included a diverse spectrum of

viewpoints and explored new levels of aesthetics beyond traditional art forms. Here are some significant features of aesthetic progress since the 20th century.

2.1 Pluralism and Diversity

The postmodern era saw the rise of several often contradictory aesthetic philosophies and movements. Pluralism emerged as a distinguishing feature, with several schools of thought coexisting and questioning traditional concepts of beauty, art, and aesthetic experience. Poststructuralism, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism were movements that questioned the authority of established aesthetic standards and tried to disrupt existing hierarchies [8], [9].

2.2 Expanded Definition of Art

Art's boundaries were pushed, and new forms of artistic expression arose. Conceptual, performance, installation, and digital arts challenged established aesthetic concepts by emphasizing the significance of ideas, processes, and involvement. Artists began experimenting with new materials and methods, including found things, ordinary objects, and technology in their work [10].

2.3 Social and Political Dimensions

Aesthetics got increasingly entwined with social and political problems. Critical theory and cultural studies provided fresh insights into the link between aesthetics and power systems, challenging prevailing ideas and supporting social change. Gender, racism, identity, colonialism, and environmental problems were addressed in aesthetic practices and ideas to create work that had a transformational influence on society [10].

2.4 Emphasis on Experience

The emphasis shifted from the formal elements of artworks to the sensory components of aesthetics. Phenomenology, embodied cognition, and affect theory evolved as prominent frameworks for investigating how physiological sensations, emotions, and environmental elements create aesthetic experiences. This viewpoint opens up possibilities for investigating multimodal experiences, immersive installations, and interactive artworks [11].

2.5 Technological Advancements

Technology's fast growth in the late 20th and early 21st centuries significantly influenced aesthetics. The digital revolution opened up new avenues for artistic production, diffusion, and participation. Artists began experimenting with digital media, virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive installations, pushing aesthetic limits and questioning traditional concepts of materiality, space, and temporality [10].

2.6 Globalization and Intercultural Exchange

The greater interconnection and globalization of civilizations encouraged the transmission of aesthetic ideas and practices across the globe. Aesthetic theories and movements from other cultural backgrounds emerged, opposing Eurocentric aesthetic supremacy and demanding a more inclusive and multicultural view of beauty and art [12].

2.7 Environmental Aesthetics

As people became more conscious of environmental issues, environmental aesthetics evolved as an essential topic of study. It investigates nature's aesthetic qualities, sustainability, and the link between humans and the environment. Environmental artists and thinkers use creative interventions and ecological design to create an aesthetic appreciation of the natural world and to address environmental challenges [10].

Finally, the development of aesthetics since the 20th century has seen a pluralistic and diverse landscape, embracing new forms of art, addressing social and political concerns, emphasizing experiential aspects, incorporating technology, promoting intercultural exchange, and engaging with environmental issues. The discipline is still evolving and adapting to the ever-changing creative and cultural changes, reflecting the complexities and dynamism of modern aesthetic debate.

3 Graphic Design Tension: Between Modern and Postmodern

Graphic design styles have changed dramatically between the modern and current eras, reflecting shifting cultural, technical, and creative environments. While both modern and contemporary graphic design styles strive to create aesthetically appealing and successful designs, they have specific traits that distinguish them.

3.1 Aesthetics of Modern Graphic Design

Modern graphic design aesthetics have their roots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and movements like Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, and Swiss Style strongly influenced them. This period emphasized functionalism, clarity, and simplicity in design. Modern graphic designers favored clear lines, geometric shapes, and a minimalistic approach to visual communication.

Modern graphic design aesthetics heavily rely on typography, with sans-serif and readable fonts being preferred by designers. The readability and effective dissemination of information were emphasized. The use of primary colors and stark contrast to generate eye-catching designs resulted in restricted and constrained color palettes.

Modern graphic design is founded on the Louis Sullivan-introduced principle that form follows function, which holds that the aesthetics of a design are impacted by its intended use and purpose. Visual elements were precisely and logically arranged to create a balanced, unified design. Logic and a rigorous approach were commonly

used to guide the design process. The finished artwork reflects objectivity, seriousness, precise structure, and reason. The use of a mathematical grid with an asymmetrical composition, exposing white space, using sans serif fonts (particularly Helvetica), and using black and white photographs as the primary illustration are all examples of modernism in graphic design [9].

Instead of pictures of models wearing the clothes, 19th-century clothing ads frequently used images or drawings of the apparel being offered (figure 1). Photography was still a relatively new and costly technique in the early to mid-19th century. The public didn't have easier access to photography until the latter half of the 19th century. Compared to photography, illustrations were a more useful and economical method to display apparel in advertising. A mix of technological constraints, creative expression, and the necessity for wide dissemination to meet the demands of the expanding consumer market for mass-produced garments led to the employment of pictures in 19th-century clothing ads.



Figure 1. Monochrome image of clothing advertisement taken from *The Royal*, March 1900.

3.2 Aesthetics of Contemporary Graphic Design

On the other hand, contemporary graphic design aesthetics emerged in the latter decades of the 20th century and have been influenced by postmodernism, digital technology, and globalization ever since. Designers' exposure to a wide range of styles, cultures, and historical eras is what characterizes current graphic design as eclectic and diverse.

Postmodern graphic designers use more inventive typography, fusing many typefaces to create one-of-a-kind lettering and experimenting with text hierarchy. There is a lot of expressive and beautiful typography, which promotes design inventiveness and originality.

Contemporary graphic designers commonly use colorful and unusual color palettes, experimenting with fresh color schemes and gradients. Modern designs now have more visual impact because of the enhanced possibilities for mixing dynamic and animated elements made possible by digital technologies.

Postmodern graphic design aesthetics are typically more lighthearted, humorous, or even subversive. Designers buck convention, experiment with novel layouts, and include cultural allusions and symbols. Storytelling and emotional engagement are given more priority, which appeals to the feelings and experiences of the viewer.

The designer's encounter with postmodern thought produces visual features that are diametrically opposed to the norm. Design historian Steven Heller offers an intriguing look at the intersections between postmodern philosophy and graphic design. He contends that deconstructivist graphic designers have a different perspective concerning the many meanings of beauty than modernist designers. "Beauty is the chaos born of piles of letters over random patterns and shapes," they observe. Meanwhile, modernism's theory of beauty is a mirror of the truth attained with the appearance of the nature of things, demonstrated by abandoning aspects that are not essence (ornaments, decorations, visual effects), symbolized by the phrase less is more [9].

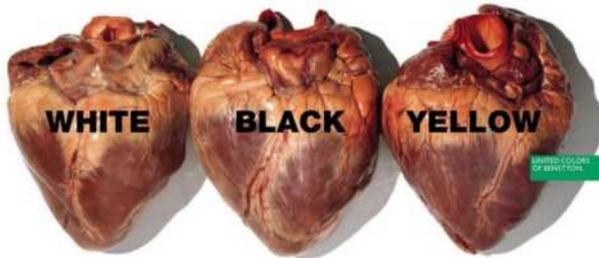


Figure 2. Benetton brand clothing advertisement, 1996.

The two paradigms described above are polar opposites. Heller even characterized the deconstructivist graphic designer's paradigm as a cult against anything unpleasant (cult of the ugly). It becomes hideous as a result of their purposefully undermining agreements or traditions regarding the idea of beauty at the same time as they present an alternative worldview. The consequence is art with distinct qualities, such as little respect for grids, stacked drawings and typography, vernacular style, poor resolution, and the reintroduction of ornamentation, which was previously undervalued (ornament is a crime). Furthermore, in order to explore new possibilities, their design principles employ it in work, which is contradictory to contemporary design concepts, such as more is hipper than less (the opposite of the principle of less is more), confusion is better than simplicity, and fragmentation is smarter than continuity [9].

Changes in technology are significant. Postmodern clothes advertising do not like those from the early 20th century, which displayed the variety of apparel available through hand drawings as examples. The United Colors of Benetton advertisement

exhibits postmodern graphic design traits. The apparel company is widely recognized for its socially conscious advertising campaigns (**figure. 2**), but it has progressed beyond just releasing controversial posters and since 2015 concentrating its efforts on bringing about genuine change, especially in the area of female empowerment [13]. To coincide with International Women's Day (8 March), the Italian company Benetton is launching a new worldwide gender equality campaign today. This is the first time a global effort based on a local campaign has been launched by Benetton.

United Colors of Benetton is able to deliver messages and increase social awareness on significant topics in society by bringing up social concerns in its advertising. Such advertisements can stimulate in-depth contemplation and discussion of these concerns. By tackling social concerns, United Colors of Benetton may be attempting to position itself as a brand acting as a change agent in society. The brand's ideals and social objectives may be supported by customers as a result of this emotional connection.

Additionally, postmodern graphic design trends usually place more of a focus on social consciousness, diversity, and inclusiveness. Designers use their work to advocate for change, promote sustainability, and bring attention to significant social concerns.

4 Conclusion

The findings draw attention to different changes and advances in the cultural settings, design philosophies, and creative methods that characterize these two periods.

Aesthetics were strongly entwined with utility and functionality in modern graphic design. Harmonious shapes, organic designs, and the fusion of art and design were prioritized. The guiding idea of "form follows function" allowed designers to create beautiful items that successfully served their intended purposes.

Postmodern graphic design, on the other hand, demonstrated a more pluralistic and diverse approach. In modern design, aesthetics valued variety, innovation, and the blending of age-old skill with cutting-edge technology. By utilizing a variety of styles and materials and addressing social and cultural concerns in their work, designers questioned conventional ideas of beauty.

The study showed that whereas contemporary aesthetic principles favored complexity, user-centered design, and social significance, modern aesthetic principles championed simplicity, unity, and a deep connection to nature. These variations reflect the shifting social expectations and desires as well as the changing cultural and technical contexts. For designers, educators, and researchers, it is essential to comprehend the distinctions in aesthetic principles between modern and contemporary graphic design. They are more able to understand the historical background of design, adjust to modern trends and consumer expectations, and investigate fresh avenues for artistic expression. Designers may make wise judgments and produce works that appeal to their target market by understanding the distinctive traits and influences of each era.

Additional investigation can focus on particular case studies, compare various design examples, or investigate how technology improvements affect the aesthetic standards of graphic design. Such research would provide more light on how aesthetic principles are dynamic and how they develop in response to societal, cultural, and technological advancements.

The study's conclusion emphasizes the distinctive aesthetic elements that set modern graphic design apart from contemporary graphic design. Designers may traverse the always evolving design world and produce aesthetically arresting and culturally pertinent works that connect with their target audience by identifying and comprehending these distinctions.

References

1. C. Sartwell, *Six Names of Beauty*. New York: Routledge (2020).
2. N. Smith, *Introduction to Philosophy*. Texas: OpenStax (2022).
3. G. Boas, "The esthetics of the middle ages by Edgar de Bruyne, Eileen B. Hennessy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 29(1), 131-132 (1970).
4. F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers, *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*. New York: Routledge (2019).
5. B. Watkins, "The subjective basis of Kant's judgment of taste," *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 54(4), 315-336 (2011).
6. K. Gorodeisky, "Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy," June, (2016). [Online]. Available: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aesthetics-19th-romantic/>. [Accessed July 12, 2023].
7. I. Brinck, "Empathy, engagement, entrainment: The interaction dynamics of aesthetic experience," *Cognitive Processing*, 19(2), 201-213 (2018).
8. I. Hassan, "Pluralism in postmodern perspective," *Critical Inquiry*, 12(3), 503-520 (1986).
9. T. C. Kusumandyoko, "Jejak dekonstruksi Derrida dalam desain grafis," *J. Seni Rupa URNA*, 3(1), 43-54 (2014).
10. G. Hoffmann, "Postmodern culture, aesthetics, and the arts," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, G. Hoffmann, Eds. Brill Rodopi (2005), pp. 33-104.
11. G. Hoffmann, "Situationalism," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, G. Hoffmann, Eds. Brill Rodopi (2005), pp. 105-162.
12. G. Hoffmann, "The novel after postmodernism," in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, G. Hoffmann, Eds. Brill Rodopi (2005), pp. 623-657.
13. N. Mortimer, "News," Carnyx Group Limited, 6 March 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2017/03/06/united-colors-benetton-how-it-moved-driving-social-awareness-social-change>. [Accessed 6 August 2023].

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

