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History of Graphic Design

Midterm Paper

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A Comparison of Gutenberg and Morris styles and objectives in Design

All aspects of art and design open us to a world of beauty and knowledge. More often than not, these concepts of beauty and knowledge are mingled with one another in a work of art. Making the piece that the designer composed become a rather important and memorable work to the viewers of their time and the viewers far after them. These “Immortal” pieces have happened in many forms and throughout different time periods; making us further understand beauty, knowledge and their relationship with one another as well as their divergence. However, it is truly remarkable when you find two designs from different time periods and persons that are very similar in both style and composition having the same theory and meaning. These ideologies of beauty and knowledge intermingled is presented in the works of Bible printing press and illuminated Manuscript creator Johannas Gutenberg and Pioneer of what was one of the more influential art movements in history Mister William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement. Presented in both of these works, they capture the same styles and ideas. Yet the works are from different time periods, movements and people.

Gutenberg, German born had been a heavy influence on how we see typography as a source of both knowledge and beauty in the design world today. For if it wasn't for the creation of moveable type and its mass production benefits with the written language, we wouldn't be as progressed as we are today as well cultured with things like beautiful forms of art, literature and education at our access. Gutenberg's “Immortal” piece had began in 1455 creating the “*Biblia Sacra*” through the process of moveable type. The concept of getting pre-fitted letter blocks made of iron that were dipped in ink then transferred to cloth or paper. Tedious, yet doable (British Library, 2009.) The bible, being of double folio size was a undertaking of forty two lines worth of letters in an effort to save on paper. This effort however made the transferring and

process of moving the type even more difficult. In a design sense; this had made the Bible look sleek, clean, leaving tons of white space open making the viewer direct their attention to the forty two lines of work. This is easily done because of the typeface alone, Gutenberg using a typeface known as “Textualis” and “Schwabacher” referring to the letters texture of vertical strokes and lines almost giving the illusion of woven letters. Gutenberg also added to its beauty by using what is known as Hanging punctuation which is a style that when written, gives a denser appearance to the eye (“The Machine that Made Us”, Stephen Fry.)

From an Illuminated standpoint the use of white space makes us focus on not just the typeface, but the colored pieces of the Bible, showing hierarchy and circumstance of the letters that are made of red and blue ink, introducing us to the first findings of color printing (Meggs' 1998.) The designs within the letters are delicate and carefully arranged; designs of patterns, shapes, animals and flowers having a simple elegance and little color palette. Yet there is something very stunning about them, we could surmise that the illuminations were put on the bibles illuminated letter not only because beauty is directly intertwined with knowledge, but how things of beauty can lead us down a road of curiosity and knowledge we are drawn to see a hidden message thus appreciating each letter with its beautiful curve. As well as a typeface making you feel a certain way, so much so that it pertains beauty, and the beauty and knowledge of the sacred Bible, which is indeed something that people cherish and hold on to in their homes and for generations to come.

In a similar fashion; years later, during a design movement called the Arts and crafts Movement originating in England circa 1860 had yet another “immortal” work from the mind of William Morris, the founder and thinker of the movement that was brought on by his belief of

how the growth of industry, big business and advanced technology leads its consumers to become mindless, lacking a sense of creativity and self. Feeling this way, Morris had started to utilize early printing forms and production focusing on heavy detail believing that a labor of love is better in any product you are selling. Morris believed in “harmonious living” and one must always surround themselves in beautiful things in order to pursue a more comfortable and happier life. Things such as lamps as well as books were covered in some form of illumination things of nature or something more delicate such as the beauty of typeface, heavy blank space and hierarchy of lettering with its delicate forms perform both an ascetic duty as well as an educational duty to the viewers. This concept was an inspiration for everything in the arts and crafts movement (graphic-design.com.)

Referred to as “Golden typeface” circa 1888-90 this piece was originally entitled “The Golden Legend” and was inspired by Venetian and old style typography. Morris’ goal was to have a sort of revival of medieval manuscripts having the main focus on a medieval blackletter style writing with a heavy appearance (Alexander S. Lawson 1990. David R. Godine. pp. 47–51.) The type was then cut into metal in a single size, very similar to Gutenberg’s style of production, then dipped into ink and manufactured. These works; having the exact same writing execution of typography, heavy use of blank space, hierarchy of lettering as well as a very limited color palette. Another similarity in both works is the inner meaning of how beauty and knowledge go hand and hand. Morris’ work is a more literal form of knowledge and art, presenting the viewers with a statement on the concept of “applied art” and how society feels about it. Stating that society looks at it as “Ornamental quality which men choose to add to articles of utility” and that this whole piece, this entire statement he is writing can in fact be done without making the art

cease to be applied. But with all of this controversy and thoughts of discarding the thought of applied art, “Man up to the present time has never done without it.” Meaning without this statement Morris wrote or without any other thoughts of people and their forms of expression throughout time, what would we as humans be knowledgeable of? What would we discover, what would we think was profound or beautiful or even the contrary? (Meggs’ 1998) This directly demonstrates our need for the relationship of art and beauty because with it, Morris had shared knowledge and most importantly, shared his voice with the public. Which I believe is a major aspect of art because we in turn as a society share our voices and we share our knowledge with one another as well as our opinions on beauty.

In restating the similarities and differences between both Gutenberg’s and Morris work, you can see that there is a similar style in typography, both design and production and their uses of medieval or gothic typefaces. Uses of or lack there of color, thus focusing more on the typestyle rather than deep attention to color. Though Gutenberg’s bible has more color and illumination than the Morris piece of discussion. They both share a placement in hierarchy lettering, dragging the viewers attention to a certain phrase or word of importance. A heavy use of blank space, yet another tactic in putting focus on text and the text only and finally, they share a deeper common idea of spreading knowledge and beauty. It holds true that both designers wanted the pathways of learning and things that we hold dear to us; be it a bible or a statement, become a pathway to higher learning and that life should look and be beautiful. Only then will we be not afraid or hesitant to discover something when we come across it. It is astonishing however, that the pieces only true differences are the time period it comes from, its designated movement and the designers who had composed them. Showing us as art lovers and enthusiasts

alike that no matter where it comes from, art has the ability to give us both knowledge and beauty of its own design.



**THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF TODAY,
BEING AN ADDRESS DELIVERED IN
EDINBURGH IN OCTOBER, 1889, BY
WILLIAM MORRIS.**

'Applied Art' is the title which the Society has chosen for that portion of the arts which I have to speak to you about. What are we to understand by that title? I should answer that what the Society means by applied art is the ornamental quality which men choose to add to articles of utility. Theoretically this ornament can be done without, and art would then cease to be 'applied' ... would exist as a kind of abstraction, I suppose. But though this ornament to articles of utility may be done without, man up to the present time has never done without it, and perhaps never will; at any rate he does not propose to do so at present, although, as we shall

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