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## Full or Empty Mode: The Organization of the Full or Empty Spaces on the Covers of the Singles of Depeche Mode between the Years of 1981 and 1998

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**Abstract-** Music as an art form based on sound and silence 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 2 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 the full and empty space organizations on the covers of the Depeche Mode Singles 81-98 Set. 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. In the Singles 81-98 Set there are totally 36 covers which grouped as 6 packages each consisting 6 covers. In this paper 6 of the 36 covers have analyzed according to the 6 main graphic design principles. On the 6 cover the full and empty spaces organized according to the 6 main principles to create an extraordinary effect which is consistent to the music in them.

**Keywords:** *graphic design, cover design, depeche mode, design, music album.*

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# Full or Empty Mode: The Organization of the Full or Empty Spaces on the Covers of the Singles of Depeche Mode between the Years of 1981 and 1998

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Music as an art form based on sound and silence. Music has recorded since 1880s and the recording styles and system developed according to the technical improvements. Covers created to protect and label recording mediums are graphic design spaces to organize. Graphic design is the pre-production decision-making process of a two-dimensional printed surface. Graphic design has its own elements and principles as guides like every other design field. The aim of this paper is to analyze the full and empty space organizations on the covers of the Depeche Mode Singles 81-98 Set.

Depeche Mode is a synth pop, new wave, electronic and dance- 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. It is the most popular

electronic band of the world and in the list of the 50 bands that changed the world. In the Singles 81-98 Set there are totally 36 singles CDs, which grouped in 6 packages each consisting 6 CDs. In this paper 6 of the 36 covers have analyzed according to the 6 main graphic design principles. On the 6 cover the full and empty spaces organized to create an extraordinary effect which is suits the music of Depeche Mode.

## II. SPACE AS A DESIGN ELEMENT

Your Human lives in a world consists figures and grounds which surround. Human eye tries to perceive the figure in front of a ground first as an entity he or she lives and communicate with. This feature of the natural environment forms the visual perception principles. Human attracted with figures and immediately discern. The elements which help human eye perceive something as figure are the elements of grouping. Figure - ground perception is independent from colors or tones. Proximity as horizontal or vertical rows, as symmetry, as continuation and as similarity are different attitudes of organization concluded in perceiving something as a whole, and differ it what is behind (Gordon, 2004 p.15-21). Closure is another characteristic of human eye - brain double: showing things as they are closed shapes by indicating only (Dabner, Calvert & Casey, 2012 p.39).

Graphic design deals with predefined empty spaces as size and shape according to the characteristics of the product. Placing an element in a space as an entity creates figure - ground relationship. Good design takes into consideration all relations between all elements and every element with space. Both space and elements affect each other. Figure - ground is one of the basics of graphic design (Lupton & Phillips, 2008 p.87-88). This means that both the figure and the ground which lay behind are the elements to handle, an integral part of the whole. Figure - ground perceived as negative and positive or full and empty spaces on 2 dimensional surfaces (Landa, 2013 p.21). There are three kinds of figure-ground relationship: stable, reversible and ambiguous (Arnston, 2011 p. 44).

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a) *Analysis of the Policy of Truth Cover, Nr.25*

Your First cover analyzed which's number is 25 is the single CD of *Policy of Truth*. 1990 released single CD labeled as synth pop and alternative rock. Synth pop is a pop music made by the synthesizer, which generate electric signals that are converted to sound through instrument amplifiers and loudspeakers or headphones, as dominant instrument besides drum machine and sequencer. It is characterized by a broad set of values that eschewed rock playing styles, rhythms and structures, which were replaced by synthetic textures, robotic rigidity often defined by the limitations of the new technology, including monophonic synthesizers (Borthwick & Moy, 2004 p.121-123; Parker, 2009 p.213). On the other hand, alternative rock is a genre of rock music that emerged from the independent music underground of the 1980s and became widely popular in the 1990s and 2000s. The meaning is obvious in its name: being an alternative is being totally not what is mainstream.

The Singles 91-98 Set has a design attitude which based on black background and white thin circles which derived from the shape of the CD as music recorded medium. A chain made of these circles symbolizes the set concept, which consist 36 CDs. A special numbering system designed as a down going chain made of 6 white thin circles. 6 has a connection with the 6s of the set. The chain placed on top left every time caused a set design attitude. On every CD the number placed on the first circle on top. The plain sans serif font chosen has a visual resemblance with the thickness and color of the lines of the circles. Sans serif fonts are a font group which letters don't have ticks at the end of their lines (Horobin(Ed.), 2003 p.627).

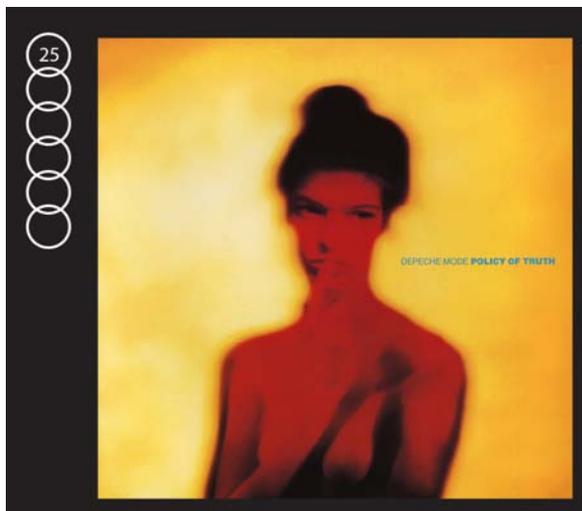


Fig. 1: Policy of Truth Cover Nr.25

Graphic designers often play with figure – ground relationships to add interest and intrigue to their work, active figure – ground conditions churn and interweave form and space, creating tension and

ambiguity (Lupton & Philips, 2008 p.106). An over blurred photograph seen on the cover over the black background. Another background lies behind a nude brunette woman figure as a very bright yellow. While the bright yellow accepted as a figure in front of a black background, it is also accepted as a background of the figure. This setup has a reversible figure – ground relation. Because the figure is attached from bottom to the black background and the darker tones she has on her body is accepted parts of the background. According to the perception rules, things, which is close to each other and similar as some features, perceived as a united whole. On two-dimensional surface yellow color has the closest effect to the human eye. This characteristic of the yellow color and dark framing around helps the yellow ground with its million tones in it to perceive as figure. Yellow area as empty space is contrasting with the figure as size and irregular form inwards. The usage of warm colors only and reduced number of colors contrasting with the world human lives in. The typographic elements formed the names contrasting as size but harmonious as style of the font used to type the number on the left. The small the letters, the big perceived the area around them. Placing the typographic elements on the right middle as a line balanced verticality of the chains and the figure asymmetrically. Because of all these features cover is highly striking and extraordinary like the music in it.

b) *Analysis of World in my Eyes Cover, Nr.26*

Second cover analyzed which's number is 26 is the single CD of *World in my Eyes*. 1990 released single CD labeled as synth pop and alternative dance. Dance as a musical genre in 1980s is the new name of the disco music which was the dominant sound of 1970s; with the help of its new name the term neutralized (Fikentscher, 2000 p.11). Like being an alternative in rock music, being an alternative in dance means being distinct from mainstream. While listening to the music it can be find out that this distinction lays in a fusion of electronic dance, which is a percussive version of electronic and various subgenres of rock.

Like every cover on the set the black background and numbering style in chains continues for this cover. In the lyrics of the song an imaginary journey offered to show the world as the writer sees. This offer symbolized in time with a gesture made by hands. On the cover a blurred black silhouette made this special gesture, which makes an immediate connection with the song. The important part of the black silhouette is both hands placed as big as they can be. The silhouette's black and the black background melted into each other, as a conclusion a blue sky left only as an entity. This organization is concluded in reversible figure – ground relation. Because human eye - brain double knows that the black silhouette is a figure, and a figure is always in front of a ground. The silhouette became a part of the

background because of its color. Besides this millions of tones light blue perceived closer than black. This situation changed the perception and blue parts as a united whole accepted as figure on a black background. Reversible figure – ground, as empty and full spaces take the attention of the viewer with its dynamism.



Fig. 2: World in my Eyes Cover Nr.26

Besides all these features of attraction the eye follows the movement of the arm until the glasses shaped fingers and jumped to the sunglasses silhouette on face of the male. The chain on the head led the eye down. The orangey red typographic elements take the eye on and the unstoppable movement began with the direction of the arm through the fingers. Both rebatements used as guides while placing the black silhouette. Rebatement is an unequal but aesthetic division of every kind of rectangle derived from golden ratio, the divine proportion (Olsen, 2006 p.9). These unequal divisions made by head and arm creates an effect of dynamism, because being unequal is something contrasting and challenging. Another contrast the design has is the color scheme of it. Every design product has a color scheme to be a harmonious whole, which is not the sum of the elements only. Orangey red and blue are complementary colors, when using together creates a color scheme which is harmonious. Except neutrals like black and white no other color used to brake the powerful effect of the scheme. Size contrasts between the name of the band and the name of the single CD are also creating dynamism. The high contrast between the two makes them as different as they can be. But the same color they have and the closer positioning as same long lines makes them two inseparable parts of a whole again.

c) *Analysis of I Feel You Cover, Nr.27*

The third cover analyzed which's number 27 is the single CD of *I Feel You*. This song belongs to the album *Songs of Faith and Devotion*, released in a period

which music of Depeche Mode hardened with guitar riffs. As a conclusion of this, this album and this single CD labeled as synth rock also known as electro-rock, rock music made by electronic equipment. The album is also the first and only one, on which's cover the faces of the band members seen in a square format like mug shots. The portraits also roughened with some visual effects and the backgrounds left as flat surfaces colored light grey like hard natural stones.

The portraits of the band members turned into a four- piece logo as seen on the cover of the single CD. The rough crack black lines divided the four. Rough black lines perceived parts of the background because they are the same color. Four cutout shapes as figures colored as dark purples in front of light grayish grounds. Dark purple is tonally very close to the black. The three-layered placement collapsed with the tonal grading and a reversible figure – ground relation occurred: four grayish spaces perceived as figures.

Like every human the four members of the band looks different than each other. As a conclusion the cutout figures has different size, proportion and shapes. But human has a feeling of balance comes from its nature. To balance the cover asymmetrically the name of the band and the single CD should be somewhere in some size and some color. Freestyle typography used based on the album cover. White typography placed on the cutout shape which is on top right to balance the chained number 27 on top left. The typographic element has grouped within some rules: the name of the band is much bigger than the name of the single CD and placed above to show the dominant element. But the two have the same color, style and line thickness.



Fig. 3: I Feel You Cover Nr.27

d) *Analysis of Walking in my Shoes Cover, Nr.28*

The fourth cover analyzed which's number 28 is the single CD of *Walking in my Shoes* labeled as synth pop, alternative rock and alternative dance. The cover has a connection with the striking music video of the

song directed by Anton Corbijn based on Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (Wikipedians, p.204). The black silhouette of the bird-head creature from the video seen from side view. Huge beak and feathers filled the top of the visual. Like every cover black background is also seen on this cover. Black bird-head figure seen standing as a silhouette on a black ground in front of a dark blue sun set. Like previous covers black figure perceived as part of the black background because of its color. This togetherness let the blue space perceived as a figure despite it is a ground. Third layer comes on the two backgrounds as an eye – typography combination. Like the shine in the eye, name of the band and the name of the single CD shines as white on dark grounds with white thin linear framing. Freehand typography suits with the freestyle silhouette of the bird-head. The name of the band is bigger than the name of the album, but this time the two are small as they can be. Tiny sizes help to create a huge sky feeling. The dark red and navy under the typography helps the words seen and read better.

The chain with the number 28 on top is still standing at the same place. The bird-head figure turned left, looking forward and waiting on one leg together with the chain asymmetrically balanced by the placement and size of the typographic elements. Placing the elements in the middle like flying creates tension concluded in dynamism.

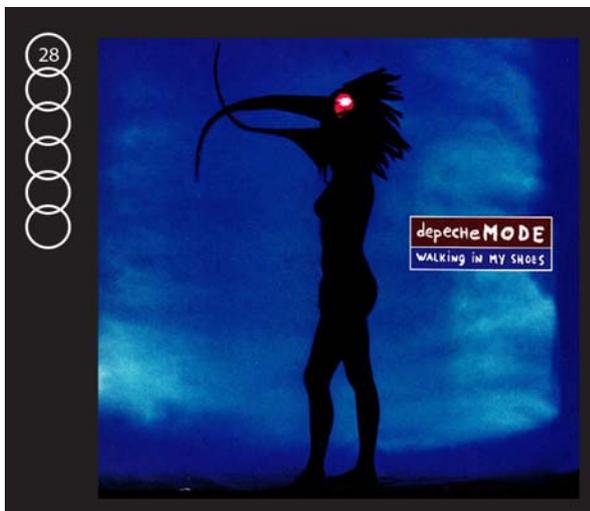


Fig. 4: Walking in my Shoes Cover Nr.28

e) Analysis of Condemnation Cover, Nr.29

The fifth cover analyzed which's number 29 is the single CD of *Condemnation* labeled as gospel, alternative rock and piano rock. A new point of view came to Depeche Mode music with the gospel, which is a genre in Christian music designate African-American style (Cusic, 2002 p.viii). On the cover of the single CD, which belongs to the album *Songs of Faith and Devotion* like the previous two, a praying gesture of Christianity is seen in huge size. A symbol of wishes and

being in a statement of in need. The hands are seen in a dark environment under the effect of holy light. This kind of local illumination seen in Baroque painting and defined as exaggerated lightening (Hopkins & Witte, 2010 p.95). Because of the bright light coming the surface of the hand lost in the dark. It lights a little part in the background but nothing. There is a huge tone contrast between the light and shadow as black and white. On the cover there is three main layers: first black background, a rectangle cover with the chain and square visual on. Second layer is the background of the hands as a semi dark wall. And as the last layer hands' dark surface united with the other two at many points because of the black color and perceived as a united whole irregular space. But at the same time the brain knows that these three couldn't be one. Then the name of the single CD seen in front with its indefinite borders as same tone as the blurring light. These similarities also unite the two as a white layer. Then comes the dark brownish red rectangle with its thin white framing and typography as a fourth layer in between the name of the CD and hands and separated them. Both typographic elements placed into middle aligned with the bottom of the chain to balance the huge diagonal movement asymmetrically. Huge direction, size, tone contrasts and black as a sign of African-American gospel dominates the cover.

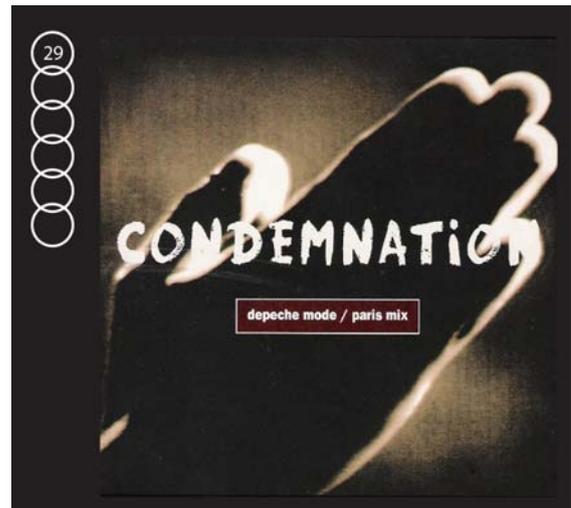


Fig. 5: Condemnation Cover Nr.30

f) Analysis of In your Room Cover, Nr.30

The sixth cover analyzed which's number 30 is the single CD of *In Your Room* labeled as synth pop and alternative rock. Like many other Depeche Mode songs, *In Your Room* is about love. The music video directed by Anton Corbijn, who directed many famous music videos of the band (Wood, 2014 p.20). With a feeling of that this will be the last, Corbijn directed the video as a retrospective, which consist many references from the previous videos. As a uniting element between different scenes he used a huge very bright bulb shape standing on the top of the frame symbolizes his witness. The very

bright white bulb is the main element of the cover of the single CD "In Your Room". A metropolitan view with its millions of rooms seen on black background as usual to the singles set. The city is getting dark under the orangey sunset. The yellow lights coming from windows formed a sea of gold because all blacks united and perceived as a united whole background: a space.

The brain independently knows that the sunset should be behind the city. But the uniting blacks bring the orangey sky front. Then comes the huge bright bulb shape in front of everything as a white space. White is the sign of empty spaces. But being in front of everything creates an extraordinary contradiction. As composition the higher buildings on left half create an asymmetric setup balanced with the typographic elements on top right. Light colors combined these typographic elements with the bulb and modern sans serif font suits with the metropolitan concept. Inequalities on the cover ended in dynamism.

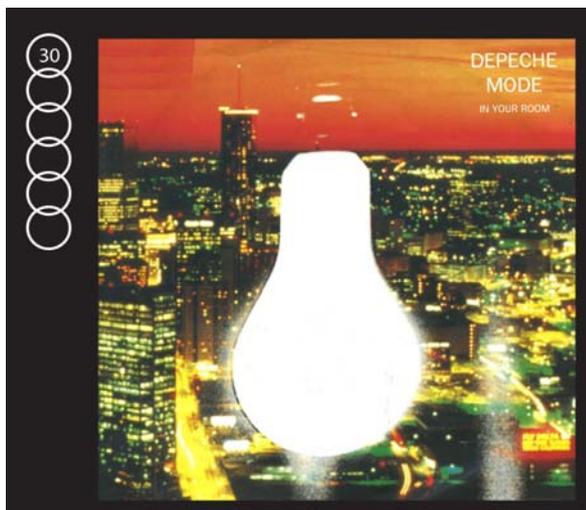


Fig. 6: In your Room Cover Nr.30

### III. CONCLUSION

Your Six single CD covers of the band Depeche Mode have chosen as sample unit. The chosen six belongs to the 1993 released Single CD Box Set number 5, CDs numbered as from 25 to 30. The names of the CDs are number 25 - Policy of Truth, number 26 - World in My Eyes, number 27 - I Feel You, number 28 - Walking in My Shoes, number 29 - Condemnation and number 30 - In Your Room. As a general concept all covers has a black background and a chain on top left. Chain formed with 6 white thin circles, indicating that every 6 single CD grouped. The chain divided the height of the CD into two full and empty parts. On every cover a square formatted illustration used. The three side of this square left equal in size only left part is thicker and the chain seen on top. On every cover the black background merged with blacks of the illustrations, in a combination with different colors it creates extraordinary

figure - ground relations, empty – full spaces like the music of Depeche Mode.

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