

**When does
minimalist
graphic design
become classed
as minimalist?**

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“Design is a relationship between form and content.” – Paul Rand

The quote above, from the well-known graphic designer Paul Rand, who was best known for his corporate logo designs, best describes what graphic design is about: the relationship between form and content (Kroeger, Burton and Rand, 2008, p. 18). This thesis will explore minimalist graphic design, from defining the term minimalist graphic design, to discussing the principles and fundamentals behind minimalist graphic design, and how it becomes minimalist. It will provide a brief history to minimalist design overall, with its origins and influences which include the art movement De Stijl, the Bauhaus, Swiss Style, and modern architecture. It will also explore influential minimalist designers such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Dieter Rams, and graphic designers such as Experimental Jetset and Mash Creative. The thesis will provide detailed discussions with visual examples of influential graphic designers within this subject, including their own opinions on minimalist graphic design, from interviews which were taken specifically for this thesis title. The interviews taken were vital for research, which have proven very valuable in terms of discussing the subject of minimalist graphic design from different approaches and perspectives. These interviews have also provided further knowledge and depth into what can be classed as minimalist graphic design. The design of the thesis combines minimalist graphic design with elegant aesthetics to provide a timeless outcome. Every detail has been considered, including the material base by collaborating with Arjowiggins Creative Papers to supply the highly professional fine papers for the thesis.

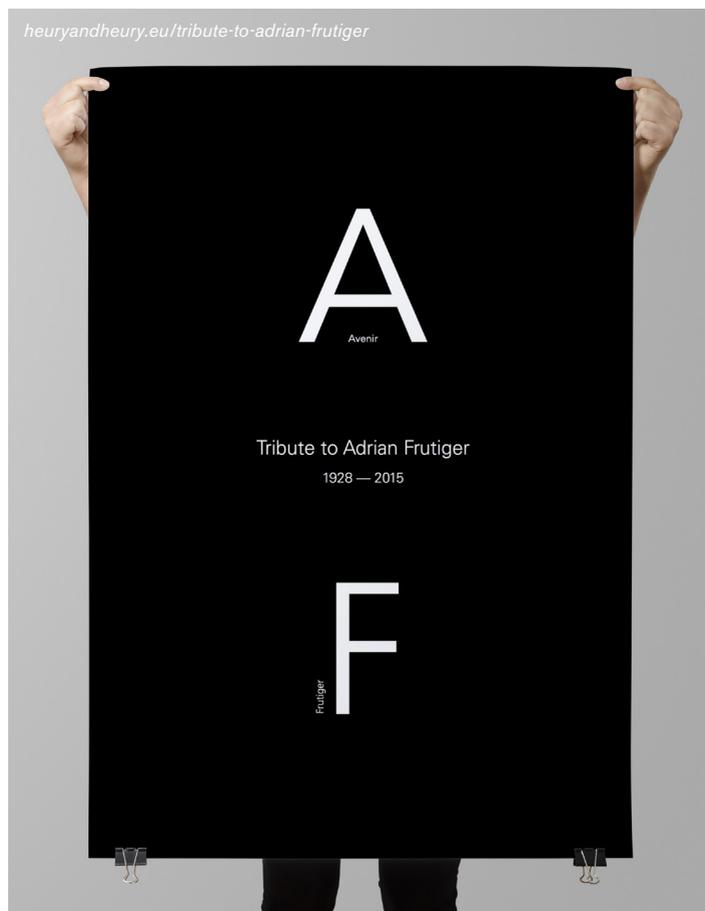
**“Minimalist graphic design
portrays a message in its
simplest form.”
– Matt Adams**

Minimalist graphic design is complex, it is only achieved through an effective message. The message needs to be portrayed in its simplest form, stated from Matt Adams, senior designer at Apple (Schonlau, 2011, p. 10). Whilst the process is about reduction, the form has to be as clear as the content, using only the core elements which visually communicates a clear, strong, and simple message. One of the most influential typographers of the 20th century, Jan Tschichold, said: “simplicity of form is never a poverty, it is a great virtue”, quoted by the editors in *Octavo 86.1 International Journal Of Typography* (Johnston, 1986, p. 2.3).

Adrien & Clotilde Heury

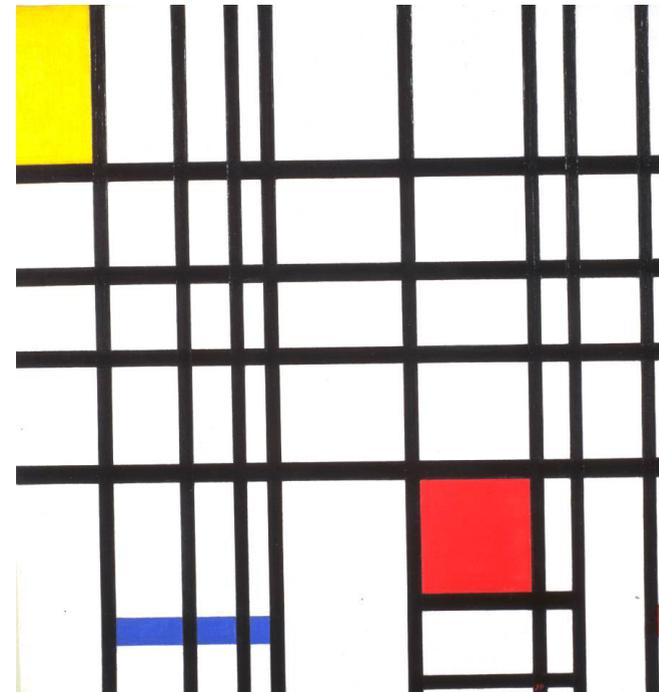
Brother & Sister

Both Designers



Adrien & Clotilde Heury, are both minimalist graphic designers who were featured within the widely respected minimalist design blog and magazine, *Minimalissimo*, for their series of tribute posters to Swiss typeface designer, Adrian Frutiger. The two posters are selected designs from their collection. Frutiger was the creator of some of the most prolific typefaces, such as Univers, Frutiger and Avenir. Heury and Heury best described minimalist graphic design with the following words: "simple, radical, light, clear, obvious, modest, honest, confident" (Medium, 2015). See Appendix A for full interview.

Minimalist design overall was influenced by the De Stijl art movement, the Bauhaus, Swiss Style, and modern architecture. De Stijl, meaning style in Dutch, first emerged just before World War I ended, in 1917. It was a circle of Dutch abstract artists, which included Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg, who promoted a style of art based on a strict geometry of horizontals and verticals, with clear defined primary colours (Tate.org.uk, 2015). The art below is by Mondrian, Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red, 1937–42 (Tate: 2013). Mondrian's expression was applied by the abstraction of form and colour, with straight lines forming the painting. Influences towards minimalist design can be made towards the De Stijl movement by its fundamentals and principles based around ultimate simplicity and abstraction.



Piet Mondrian
Composition with Yellow, Blue and Red
1937–42
[tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mondrian-composition-with-yellow-blue-and-red-t00648](https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/mondrian-composition-with-yellow-blue-and-red-t00648)

Van Doesburg, who was a leader in De Stijl art, moved to Germany in 1922 to join the Bauhaus and spread the principles of the movement (Schonlau, 2011). Abstract art movements such as De Stijl influenced the Bauhaus through minimal fundamentals of the abstraction explored through clean and considered forms. The Bauhaus was the most influential modernist art school of the 20th century, which saw the growth of modernist, abstract, geometric, constructivist, and De Stijl art. The principles taught at the Bauhaus inspired designers such as Jan Tschichold, who revolutionised the use of typography in his book: 'Die neue Typographie (The New Typography)' published in 1928 (Schonlau, 2011). Tschichold, a leader in the modernist art movement, defined the principles of an emerging art form, graphic design, which focused on the elements of visual communication and layout design (Schonlau, 2011). Several Swiss designers studied the principles taught at the Bauhaus, and this is where the fundamentals for minimalist graphic design first began. The Swiss Style, or otherwise known as The International Typographic Style, follows influences from the Bauhaus, and De Stijl, for fundamentals such as the grid layout, white space, and typography; this shows how minimalist graphic design is closely linked to the modernist Swiss Style. The differentiation however is the reductive process within minimalist graphic design. Minimalism is about designing smarter by doing more with less, but the form still being as clear as the content. Instead of delving into the wealth of filters and colours, minimalist designers put concepts first, not just ones that are pleasing to look at (Schonlau, 2011).

"Regarded as one of the most important figures in the history of modern architecture, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's 'less-is-more' approach to design was the gold standard for many generations of modern architecture" (Knoll.com, 2015). Mies served as the director of the Bauhaus before he moved to America and produced furniture such as the Barcelona Collection, including "one of the most recognised objects of the last century, and an icon of the modern movement, the Barcelona Chair", for Knoll (Knoll.com, 2016).

Adolf Loos was an architect and theorist, who became known for his controversial theoretical essays, including: Ornament and Crime (Loos, 1908). "Ornament does not increase the pleasures of life... The ornament that is produced today bears no relation to us, or to any other human or the world at large. It has no potential for development" (Loos, 1908). Loos goes on to talk about how ornamentation is wasted manpower, health, material, and capital; therefore proclaiming that architectural 'ornament was a crime', and Mies van der Rohe adopted this modernist principle to his architectural and furniture designs (Loos, 1908). The Barcelona Chair, pictured below, indicates how Mies van der Rohe, uses his 'less-is-more' approach by no decoration included within the furniture design. The modernist design is aesthetically pleasing without decoration because of its curvature and bold presence. The chair's number one function is to provide comfort. As a substitute for an uncomfortable chair with a hard and wooden material, the chair provides luxurious comfort from the leather cushions. The material choice and overall form of the design provides this luxurious comfort. The modernist theories from Loos relate back to the fundamentals of minimalist design, by ornament, or decoration being unnecessary to how a design functions.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe
Barcelona® Chair
1929
design-corps.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Barcelona-Chair-BG.jpg



- Reduce** The simplest way to achieve simplicity is through thoughtful reduction.
- Organize** Organization makes a system of many appear fewer.
- Time** Savings in time feel like simplicity.
- Learn** Knowledge makes everything simpler.
- Differences** Simplicity and complexity need each other.
- Context** What lies in the periphery of simplicity is definitely not peripheral.
- Emotion** More emotions are better than less.
- Trust** In simplicity we trust.
- Failure** Some things can never be made simple.
- The One** Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious, and adding the meaningful.

This leads onto the principles of influential designers Jonathan Ive and John Maeda. "It's all about removing the unnecessary" (Hawn, 2004). Jonathan Ive, who is Apple's chief design officer, is responsible for all design at Apple. Ive, since 1996, has lead Apple's design team, which is widely regarded as one of the world's best (Apple.com, 2015). Apple follow minimalist design values across its brand, from product design to graphic design. Apple's brand personality is also about the removal of complexity in peoples lives, created from simplicity (Marketingminds, 2015). Although simplicity and minimalism are different principles, they both share close fundamentals such as designing without it being any simpler, clearer or more beautiful. The minimalist design style from Apple still has to be understood by its audience and customers in order to be successful.

John Maeda, the former president of the Rhode Island School of Design, is dedicated to linking design and technology, as he spreads his philosophy of elegant simplicity (Maeda, 2016). "Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful" (Maeda, 2006, p. 6). This quote also works for minimalist design from the reductive process within its principles, subtracting the obvious, and only working with the designs core elements and values, adding the meaningful. Maeda, a designer, computer scientist, academic and author, wrote 'The Laws of Simplicity' (Maeda, 2006), which outlines ten laws into achieving simplicity. The ten laws can be read on the left hand page.

John Maeda
The ten 'Laws of Simplicity'
2006

These fundamental laws which Maeda discusses are principles on how to successfully achieve simplicity in design. Simplicity is not just targeted towards graphic design, it can be as far away as your lifestyle and the way one lives their life, for example how Apple portray their brand to their audience. Maeda's ten laws are useful for how the design should effect lives from interacting with the design. In Apple Stores, they stage an experience for the customer by using a spectacle as their own products. Apple has all their products on display and all turned on, which means people can play on an App from an iPad for example for as long as they would like. This makes Apple's customer experience simpler, and more enjoyable, to be able to test and play on the products by the products being switched on and available to them. If this experience was to be formed around minimalism, for example the products in the store were switched off instead of on, this could potentially be argued that this adds complexity to the store as their audience cannot test and play on the products in store. The customers would not have the simple and easy experience of quickly testing a product before purchasing. Therefore adding this minimalist element to Apple Store's could put off their customers and audience, because they enjoy playing on the products and testing them out. So for Apple, simplicity works instead of minimalism. However it could also be argued that the products being switched on in Apple Store's adds complexity; this is from requiring power and electricity to keep the products switched on and fully charged, for the audience and customers to use. Although for Apple, it is viewed as a simple experience for its audience and customers to be able to walk into a store and play on its products. This simplicity experience is what connects Apple's brand to their audience. As mentioned previously, both simplicity and minimalism are quite different, although they do both share similar values such as being simple and clear.

**“Good design is innovative.
 Good design makes a product useful.
 Good design is aesthetic.
 Good design helps to understand a product.
 Good design is unobtrusive
 Good design is honest.
 Good design is durable.
 Good design is consequent to the last detail.
 Good design is concerned with environment.
 Good design is as little design as possible.”**

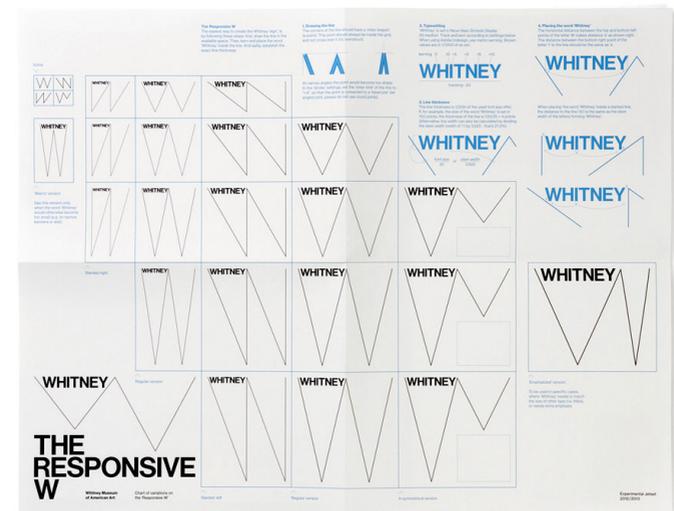
Dieter Rams
 Ten Principles for Good Design
 1970's

Dieter Rams, mostly known as being the head of design at Braun from 1961 to 1995, is a well-known and common influence to minimal design. These two sources: Dieter Rams: As Little Design As Possible (Lovell, 2011) and the Design Museum's profile on Dieter Rams (Design Museum, 2015), provide great context for his beliefs and principles, sometimes known as the ten commandments, for 'good design'. Rams' ten commandments can be read on the right hand page.

There is a video which states that Dieter Rams' ten principles for 'good design' were a result of his process (A Conversation With Designer Dieter Rams at Art Center College of Design, 2013). This video was a key influence for myself to undertake interviews with influential graphic designers; so that this thesis could discuss different designers processes who are connected with minimalist graphic design. An influential graphic designers process is what makes them influential to the world of graphic design, and others surrounding it.

–Dieter Rams

Although many graphic designers feel connected to Dieter Rams' ten principles for 'good design', in an interview with Experimental Jetset, they mentioned how they find more inspiration in Dieter Roth than in Dieter Rams. This is because, in their own work, they do not feel connected to the sort of minimalism that is associated with slick design, 'functionalist' chic, or elegant aesthetics (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). Jetset see the design always as an essential part of the content; this sees their own design language as a disruptive language, rather than an affirmative one (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). In the interview with Jetset, they used their Whitney Museum of Modern Art as a good example to visualise a disruptive gesture, rather than an invisible one. In the image below, it shows how a chart designed to map some possible variations of the 'Responsible W' – the line-drawing, which always wraps itself around the image, in awkward, angular ways (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). Although the identity for the Whitney Museum of Modern Art appears to look rather minimal in terms of aesthetics, instead, the 'Responsible W' in particular, is quite a complex design element to the identity. It responds to all applications and wraps around the content in all kinds of different ways to work around the content. This in fact makes the identity very complex by actually having a number of different possibilities. The identity could start to become minimal however if the identity were not as responsive; if the identity was one consistent shape, and just differentiated by scale, then the identity overall could start to become more minimal.



Experimental Jetset are a design studio from Amsterdam, who focus on printed matter and typography, describing their methodology as “turning language into objects” (Experimentaljetset.nl, 2015). Jetset described minimalist design as making something out of nothing, or the other way around as making nothing out of something (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). Although they feel their work does exist somewhere between these two poles, they claim to not necessarily describe their own work as ‘minimalist design’ – at least, not in the way in which a lot of people seem to use that term (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). See Appendix C for the full interview with Experimental Jetset. The reason behind interviewing Experimental Jetset, aside from being a strong influential studio to the world of graphic design, and myself in particular, was to understand their typographic approach and influences to find connections with minimalist graphic design. Jetset certainly apply the term ‘minimalist design’ as a personal response and issue, rather than putting across a set definition to what minimalist design is.

Typography is a key fundamental within minimalist graphic design, and the typeface choice is vital to a design's communication. The simple use of typography could be seen as minimalist graphic design. Because Jetset produce many of their projects solely with a typographic approach, it could argue that their style of work is minimalist. Jetset's work heavily features Swiss Style typography, including fonts such as Neue Haas Grotesk, Univers and Helvetica. One weblog went as far as describing Jetset as ‘convicted users of Helvetica’, claiming that they purely use Helvetica alone; Jetset say the idea of “always using Helvetica” is a total myth in an interview with ‘Confessions of a Design Geek’ (Experimentaljetset.nl, 2016). If the myth was true and Jetset did only design using Helvetica, then perhaps it could be argued that describing their work as minimalist design would be more appropriate; the use of one font throughout all work would be a very unique, but certainly a minimalist approach.

Jetset are convinced that their work has very little in common with the ‘Form Follows Function’ notion of Minimalism (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). “We understand that some of our methods (methods that we see ourselves as ‘disruptive’), seem quite similar to some of the methods used by certain minimalist designers – for example, the use of empty space, a certain use of type, etc. But the principles behind it are very different – they are almost opposites” (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). Minimalist graphic design has the ability to expose white space to provide full exposure to the core elements of the design. This expose of clear, empty and white space, however, is not intended to just

be space which is unfilled on a design or page within editorial. Jetset use empty space to expose/reveal the material base, in such a way that the reader will be constantly reminded that he/she is ‘just’ looking at a piece of paper (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). Therefore the material choices of their work are essential to the outcomes designs and communication. “An unpainted space should not be seen as an information-free area: the foundation of Japanese aesthetics lies in that empty space and a host of meanings have been built upon it” (Hara, 2010, p.21). The theories of Kenya Hara, a Japanese graphic designer and author who has been the art director of Muji since 2001, are similar to those of Experimental Jetset's by using empty/white space for communicating the material base, and therefore having meanings built upon it. White space, especially in minimalist graphic design, is a design element in its own right. It holds the responsibility of exposing the material. “White steps forward or back in relation to the colours surrounding it. The reason it may appear more or less ‘white’ is not physical; rather, it is contrast that causes it to appear brighter, fade into the background, or seem dull” (Hara, 2010, p.21). Jetset's simple typographic approach means that limited colour and fundamentals require the white space to step forward into exposing/revealing the material base surrounding it. “An important level of communication thus exists within the dimensions we call ‘white’” (Hara, 2010, p. 39).

As mentioned previously, Jetset do not feel connected to minimalism associated with in-trend and elegant aesthetics. Instead, they use typography and white space to communicate the form and content through language and material. These two fundamentals, language and materials, are key to minimalist graphic design because without the content and material itself, there would be no design. For a design to be successful, it needs to communicate content with material (form). The form and content in its most pure and essential core elements are how Experimental Jetset create their typographic, but still minimalist outcomes. However, when Jetset are being disruptive in their designs, rather than invisible, such as in their Whitney Museum of Modern Art identity, this does not become a minimalist outcome because of its movement and philosophy. Although the forms aesthetics may seem minimal in the identity, the disruptive philosophy ends the design becoming minimalist. Every detail in minimalist graphic design has to be essential to the design's meaning and communication; when the meaning and communication of the design is not a principle of minimalist graphic design, such as the Whitney Museum of Modern Art identity, the aesthetics of the form might seem visually minimalist, but the design does not actually communicate a minimalist meaning.

Hugely inspired by Swiss Style grids and modernist design, Mark Bloom, or otherwise known as Mash Creative, is a graphic designer, author, and design director at London creative studio, Socio Design. Bloom's 'design heroes' are Wim Crouwel, Josef Müller-Brockmann and Massimo Vignelli; he often looks to their work for inspiration (designboom, 2015).

Famed for its use of typography and the development of the grid system, the Swiss Style graphic design developed during World War II by designers such as Josef Müller-Brockmann (1914-1996) marked the true beginning of contemporary minimalist graphic design (Schonlau, 2011, p.8). Although modernist design and minimalist design share similar fundamentals and principles, minimalist graphic design has the principle of reduction by only using the core elements within its design.



M L T
A



Mark Tessier
— Landscape
Architecture™

Mash Creative, Mark Bloom
Mark Tessier Landscape Architecture
2014
mashcreative.co.uk/project/mtla

unique and creative way he can (designboom, 2015). Bloom's minimal approach to the client's needs, means that every fundamental within the design is required to mean something, or play a part in the essential communication of the design. Bloom however does not limit himself to a fully minimalist approach, but instead, listens to the client's requirements and answers the brief in a clean and considered style. One project to showcase this is Bloom's brand identity design for Mark Tessier Landscape Architecture (MTLA). "Passionate about how the landscape evolves with time and use, MTLA design exterior spaces that unveil a sense of beauty, accessibility, environmental responsibility and usability" (Mash Creative, 2016). The MTLA creative identity has two logotypes. The two logotypes, on the left hand page, identify a minimal approach, and a more considered modernist approach, both working perfectly for the brand which is passionate about 'evolving'. These two logotypes could be visualised as great examples for identifying the differences between minimalist graphic design and modernist graphic design. The logotype with the 'MTLA' initials signifying the minimalist design, and the logotype with the full wording of 'Mark Tessier Landscape Architecture' signifying the modernist design. The sans-serif typography and layout works within the modernist Swiss design style. However, within the 'MTLA' initials logotype, the reductive process has simplified the full wording 'Mark Tessier Landscape Architecture' logotype for a minimal approach. The layout is consistent and the 'MTLA' initials logotype works well with empty space for the minimal design.

"As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said: 'Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away'" (Medium, 2015). In Bloom's identity for Mark Tessier Landscape Architecture, the two logotypes visualise this brilliantly. Bloom always tries to adhere to a particular set of rules; these self enforced rules are what he strongly believes are the key to creating a simple, memorable logo. See Appendix B for the five rules. "If you think of the game Chinese Whispers, it becomes clear that even simple messages easily become distorted" (Baldwin and Roberts, 2006, p. 33). Bloom's minimal approach is based more on the minimal visual aesthetics working with the client's needs, compared to Jetset's more meaningful typographic approach, which can sometimes come across minimalist.

Adrian Shaughnessy is a graphic designer, author, and senior tutor at the Royal College of Art, who with Tony Brook – Spin director, founded Unit Editions – a progressive publishing venture producing high-quality and good value books on graphic design and visual culture (designboom, 2014). For Eye Magazine, Shaughnessy wrote an essay called 'Reduction'. "As designers, we urge our client's to use restraint, we extol the virtues of "white space" and we remind ourselves that "less is more" [...] In graphic design, especially in its contemporary practice, every mark, every colour, every font, every reflex, is required to mean something" (Eyemagazine.com, 2016). By taking a minimal, clean and considered approach to his design work, Bloom listens to what the client wants and will try to answer the brief in the most

JKR

Ian Ritchie

Executive Creative Director

Minimalist graphic design is not just about the design. The content is just as important as the form. If the content is complex, the design will not become minimalist. If the form is complex to understand, it will not become minimalist. As previously mentioned with Experimental Jetset's approach, minimal aesthetics does not necessarily mean a design is minimalist. On a studio visit to global design agency JKR, Ian Ritchie, the 'R' in JKR, and executive creative director, talks about minimal design being in-trend and all about reduction. "Minimal design is definitely in-trend, it's about the reduction; with PG Tips, it's being reductive, and that's not just the design" (Ritchie, 2015). Ritchie states that the PG tips re-brand is being reductive, but not just in the design – by this, Ritchie means being reductive with the brand itself and its content.

JKR

PG tips

2015

jkrglobal.com/our-work/pg-tips





JKR
PG tips
2015
jkrglobal.com/our-work/pg-tips

As previously mentioned, minimalist design is not just about the design. The content within minimalist graphic design is arguably more important than the form itself. JKR have re-branded PG tips by visualising the iconic British brand with its noticeable green and red colours, which form its distinctive brand mark. This playful interaction with the green and red became the foundations of a distinctive visual brand language (Jkrglobal.com, 2015). The reductive approach means more white space within the PG tips brand and packaging, rather than added decorations such as clouds and sky textures, as was included in PG tips design previously before the JKR re-brand. Textured design, with added extras such as gradients, are good examples which do not stand as a timeless and sophisticated method of design. Minimalist graphic design is “the definition of a timeless method in design” (Schonlau, 2011, p. 9). The reductive visual brand language for PG tips therefore provides the market leader with a timelessly new visual communication, which will stand strong against its competitors with authority for many years to come. Although minimal design is currently in-trend, this does not mean that it is not timeless. It means that currently the style of minimalism is being used heavily throughout major brands and design studios across the world to create timeless brands.

Major brands such as Google have recently re-branded to a more minimal approach to their visual language, by removing all added extras such as gradients, bevel and embossed effects. This has resulted in a solid coloured logotype, although because the Google logo includes more than one colour, some could argue that this is not a minimal logotype as the different colours add a level of complexity to the design. This results in personal opinion on minimalism and when they believe a design become minimalist.



Google
Google Logotype
2015
google.co.uk/press/images.html

In graphic design overall, different designers will have different approaches to their work. Although some approaches could end up being good or bad design, there is no set approach in which every designer must follow to produce graphic design. This also works for a specific style of design. Therefore it is evident that different graphic designers will have different approaches to minimalist graphic design, resulting in different views and principles. Mark Hurrell, designer at UK Government digital service, which in 2013 won the Design Museum's Design of the Year, summarises minimalism in a way in which this thesis relates to. "Without sounding really pretentious, it's hard to discuss minimalism" (Hurrell, 2015). Minimalist graphic design is a question of approach to design, based around views and principles from the designer. Experimental Jetset, for instance, claim not to be minimalist designers that are associated with slick design, 'functionalist' chic, or elegant aesthetics; but instead, the design is always an essential part of the content (van Dungen, Brinkers and Stolk, 2015). It is only possible to associate a designer with minimalism based on personal opinion, and the designers opinion and principle. This makes minimalist graphic design a challenging subject for all to agree on. "What we consider minimalist design will not be for others and vice versa" (Schonlau, 2011, p. 11). Minimalist graphic design could be explored a great deal further, as this is of a considerable interest to myself, calling myself a modernist designer with a passion for minimalist design. Maybe in the future, having discussions with graphic designers all over the world to identify what minimalist graphic design is and looks like, could better help categorise what can be classed as minimalist.

There are certain fundamentals and principles however which do create minimalist graphic design outcomes. For example, "any decoration has to be

strictly avoided; yet, on the other hand, the design should not become too simplistic" (Schonlau, 2011, p. 11). Combining reductive thinking, with both content and fundamental forms, can produce minimalist outcomes. In particular, the works from Mash Creative, Mark Bloom, as discussed earlier, bases his approach on minimal visual aesthetics working with the client's needs, compared to Experimental Jetset's more meaningful typographic approach, which can sometimes come across as minimalist. Experimental Jetset's typographic poster designs are being selective with the content, which appears to become minimalist. Although there is no point when the design starts to become minimalist, as elements such as colour, type size and repetition all add its part to becoming added extras within the design; these would not be associated with minimalist principles. There is no right or wrong answer to when either approach becomes minimal, but both approaches do signify minimalist graphic design. With Mash Creative's identity for MTLA, the identity becomes minimalist when the logotype transforms into its initials identity, hiding the other letter forms creating white space around the form. So for this instance, the MTLA identity nicely visualises a point where the identity becomes classed as minimalist.

When speaking with tutors, and fellow students, everyone has different views on what can be classed as minimalist graphic design. Perhaps minimalist graphic design stops being minimalist after the first dot of ink is first applied to a white piece of paper.

Appendix A

Minimalist Graphic Design

Heury and Heury

How would you define minimalist graphic design in a few words or sentence?

Simple, radical, light, clear, obvious, modest, honest, confident.

As well as you can't hide in an empty room, minimalist graphic design is not hesitant or elusive, nor does it intend to impress or dupe with some trickeries. Accordingly, to be efficient, the form has to be as clear as the content.

In a way, a minimalist design says:
"That's my message. That's all."

At what point do you believe a piece of graphic design starts to become minimalist?

As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said:
"Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

Graphic design becomes minimalist when you have removed all the superfluous and irrelevant material.

Graphic design becomes minimalist when there is no visual clutter, no frills, no noise or redundancy.

Graphic design becomes minimalist when you feel it without even noticing it. It has to be obvious without imagining it simpler, clearer or more beautiful.

By the way, John Gruber gives us a tip:
"If your UI [design] even vaguely resembles an airplane cockpit, you're doing it wrong."

How simple or complex would you say your own approach is to determine what the core elements are to include within a design?

Making something minimalist is complex. The first step is to determine clearly the message to convey. That sounds obvious, but if we are not able to formulate it simply in few words, we will not be able to formulate it simply with our graphic design. Once it is done, we focus on it during the whole creative process.

When a solution seems to be valid, it is time to proceed to a methodical reduction.

As Jonathan Ive said:
"It's all about removing the unnecessary."
Which means everything that is redundant, anecdotal or expendable.

John Maeda also said:
"Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful."

Whereas for the design agency Heydays, it's about:
"Removing noise to add value."

We always keep that in mind as mantras. It helps us to determine what to keep and what to cut. Like Milton Glaser, we don't think necessarily that "less is more" but rather that "just enough is more". The nuance seems to be slight but it suggests to not fall into an extreme that would become meaningless.

Influenced by the Japanese traditional design, Minimalism is first and foremost to cultivate the beauty of emptiness. Emptiness, space, blank, white, light are the same notion.

Adrian Frutiger explained:
"When I put my pen to a blank sheet, black isn't added but rather the white sheet is deprived of light [...] Thus I also grasped that empty spaces are the

most important aspect of a typeface." In a way, our role as designers is to safeguard this light.

To borrow again the words of John Maeda:

"The opportunity lost by increasing the amount of blank space is gained back with enhanced attention on what remains. More white space means that less information is presented. In turn, proportionately more attention shall be paid to that which is made less available. When there is less, we appreciate everything much more."

Thus, emptiness is a powerful tool for establishing clear design arrangements.

What would you define as the key minimalist graphic design fundamentals?

A simple design for a simple idea—

The message has to be clear, simple and strong.

A minimalist design is only achieved through an effective message. Inversely, if the message is lame or obscure, a minimalist design will not help.

The result will be confused, poor, even worthless.

Through a minimalist design, it is a simple idea that becomes obvious.

Remove, remove, remove... but not everything—

A minimalist design has to be simple but not simplistic. A minimalist design does not occur to the detriment of the message that it supports. Facilitating the reading and giving meaning is what minimalist design is all about.

Emptiness not nothingness—

Minimalism embraces the concept of emptiness. Emptiness is not nothing, laziness or a space that is wasted. It is a powerful something that permits to highlight a limited number of elements that are necessary and sufficient.

Minimalism is a commitment—

In order to make minimalist design, a calm, considered, organised work is necessary. But it is something you can practice everyday and not just in design application. It is an attitude. Whatever you do, try to make it simple, without hysteria.

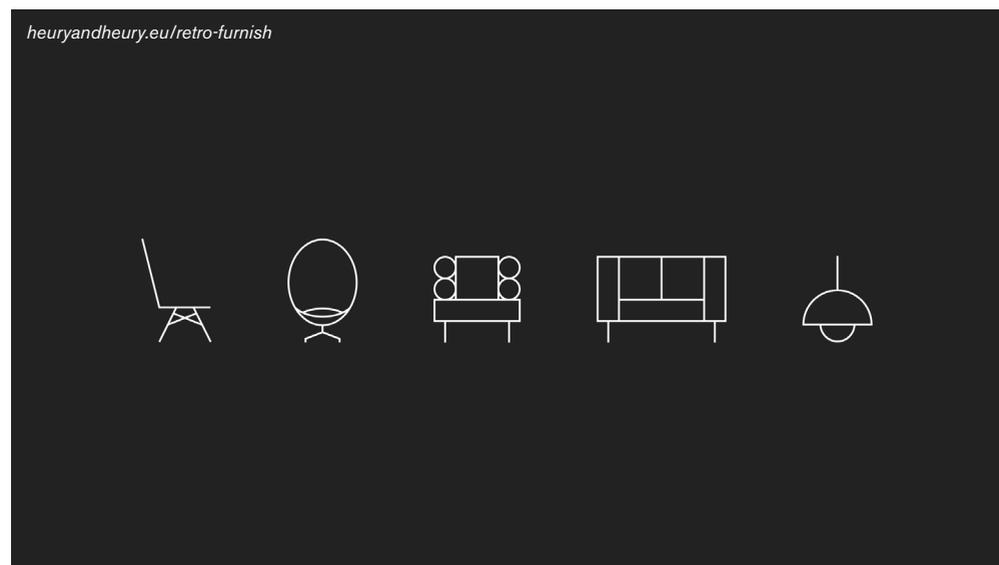
Adrien & Clotilde Heury

Heury & Heury

Brother & Sister

Both designers

www.heuryandheury.eu



Heury & Heury
Retro Furnish
2015

Appendix B

Set of Rules for Designing Logos

Mash Creative

- 1 Less is more – some of the most recognisable brands in the world use a simple marque or logo type – for example, think how simple the Nike tick/swoosh is. When I create an identity I want the marque to be recognisable in its own right.
- 2 If in doubt – simplify! (see rule 1). Strip away anything that may make the logo look fussy or overly complicated.
- 3 For me a good logo should remain timeless. It is all too easy to design to a trend but a logo should have longevity.
- 4 Scalability – consider how the logo will look large and small. It is important that it remains legible, even when scaled down small – on a website for example.
- 5 If it works in black, it should work in any colour.

Appendix C

Minimalist Graphic Design

Experimental Jetset

How would you define minimalist graphic design in a few words or sentence?

Quite while ago, we read an interview with a contemporary artist – we think it might have been Jonathan Monk, but we aren't exactly sure. Anyway – in that interview the artist defined Conceptual Art as “making nothing out of something”, and Minimal Art as “making something out of nothing”. (But now that we think about it, he might have also said it the other way around...)

So that might be a good definition for minimalist graphic design as well – making something out of nothing. (But then again, it could also be the other way around: making nothing out of something...).

Either way – although we do feel that our own work exists somewhere in-between these two poles (making something out of nothing, and making nothing out of something – in other words, in-between 'materialization' and 'de-materialization'), we wouldn't necessarily describe our own work as 'minimalist design' – at least, not in the way in which a lot of people seem to use that term.

We don't really feel connected to the sort of minimalism that is associated with slick design, or 'functionalist' chic, or that sort of safe, elegant aesthetics. We are much more interested in the sort of minimalism that can be found in movements such as Zero, or Arte Povera, or Punk. Something a bit stripped-down, a bit brutal(ist), a bit unheimlich.

In that sense, we find more inspiration in Dieter Roth than in Dieter Rams.
– Dieter-wise.

We also aren't really adherents of the notion of the 'Crystal Goblet' – that whole idea that design should

be 'invisible', to let the 'content speak for itself'. We simply don't differentiate between form and content in such a way. For us, the design is always an essential part of the content. And in our case, this means that we see our own design language as a disruptive language, rather than affirmative one.

A good example is the graphic identity we developed in 2012, for the Whitney Museum of Modern Art. That whole motif of the 'Responsible W' – the line-drawing that always wraps itself around the image, in awkward, angular ways: it is a disruptive gesture, rather than an invisible one. It's literally a crack in the surface:
www.experimentaljetset.nl/images/2013/busshelter-poster.jpg

At what point do you believe a piece of graphic design starts to become minimalist?

How simple or complex is your own approach to a poster design to determine what the core elements are to include within the design?
Typography in your work is often used creatively as the most dominant element (acting as the image), would you define typography as the key minimalist graphic design fundamental?

Reading the above questions, we try to find the right words to answer them – but it seems impossible. The more we think about it, the more we are convinced that our work has very little in common with this whole 'Form Follows Function' notion of Minimalism.

Our whole graphic language is based on the idea that we want to keep the reader constantly aware that he/she is looking at a human-made object: ink printed on paper. By using more or less 'disruptive' (as in: Brechtian) graphic methods (tearing, folding, perforating, overprinting, a certain use of type, a certain use of empty space, etc.), we try to

emphasize the fact that we are living in a constructed world – a world that is made by humans, and thus also can be changed by humans.

We see our own language as a (more or less) Marxist one – it's a language that very much refers to the principle that we are shaped by our material environment – and that, in return, we have to shape that material environment ourselves.

We understand that some of our methods (methods that we see ourselves as 'disruptive'), seem quite similar to some of the methods used by certain Minimalist designers – for example, the use of empty space, a certain use of type, etc. But the principles behind it are very different – they are almost opposites. For example – when we use empty space, it is because we want to expose/reveal the material base (the paper), in such a way that the reader will be constantly reminded that he/she is 'just' looking at a piece a paper. We don't want to keep the reader locked into some sort of illusion – the reader should be constantly aware of his/her own material situation. This is the opposite of the sort of minimalism where empty space is being used to keep the reader locked in some sort of illusion of spacious chic, or luxury.

What we are trying to do is the exact opposite.

Experimental Jetset
Danny, Erwin, Marieke
www.experimentaljetset.nl



www.experimentaljetset.nl/archive/whitney-museum-identity

Experimental Jetset
 Whitney Museum of Modern Art
 2012

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