

**Thesis Proposal**

Jenna Zielinski

McMaster University

MEDIAART 4ST6

Instructor: Dr. Andrew Mactavish

## **Proposal Synopsis**

### ***Introduction***

The concept of my project is to explore the history of graphic design through packaging design for an imaginary product. The product will be a fictional soft drink advertising the ability to bring the consumer back in time to a specific decade. Seven individual “flavours” of the drink will correspond to seven decades, from the 1960s to the 2020s. The design of each pop can will reflect the movement that was most influential to the graphic design industry during each decade. The styles/movements selected are as follows: 1960s – Psychedelia, 1970s – Postmodernism, 1980s – Memphis Style, 1990s – Minimalism, 2000s – Pop Punk, 2010s – Vintage Design. The 2020s will include current trends in design. A promotional poster will accompany the pop can designs, adhering to the unique aesthetic of the products. To present the final project in a cohesive manner, a simple website coded using HTML and CSS will serve as a platform to exhibit the products. An individual page will be dedicated to each drink, designed following the characteristics of the particular styles and including a written portion on the decade’s history.

This project is an opportunity to develop a thorough understanding of how graphic design evolved and the factors that played a role in this progression. As an aspiring graphic designer, I believe this information is essential to improving my own design skills. Analyzing the interaction between society and design will demonstrate how design reflects the culture of its time and the significance of visual decisions in communicating meaning. Examining the principles underlying each decade’s style will provide me with the technical comprehension to mimic the styles in my project and incorporate the techniques in any later design work. This will provide me with the ability to effectively adapt my style to specific design prompts in my future career.

## *Form*

Invented in 1959, the aluminum can will serve as the carrier of the designs. Alterations to the pop can's engineering that have occurred since its commercial introduction will be represented in the design mock-ups. The designs on each of the seven cans will be completed by applying the design principles required to achieve the aesthetic of the style I am replicating. For instance, the style representing the 1960s



John Alcorn (1969)

will be psychedelia, characterized by contrasting, vivid colours, warped typography, and loud patterns. These same styles will also guide the designs of the accompanying posters and webpage for each product. General design principles will be considered for every design included, such as the 20 rules for good design (Samara, 2014).

## *Content*



Clifford Charles Sealey  
(1967)

Every design movement or trend is an amalgamation of the trends that came before it, and the political and social landscape of the era. My project will take an in-depth look into this history by researching notable events and artists that impacted the decades' designs. Once again using the 1960s to illustrate this, the rock and roll culture of the time spawned rebellious youth

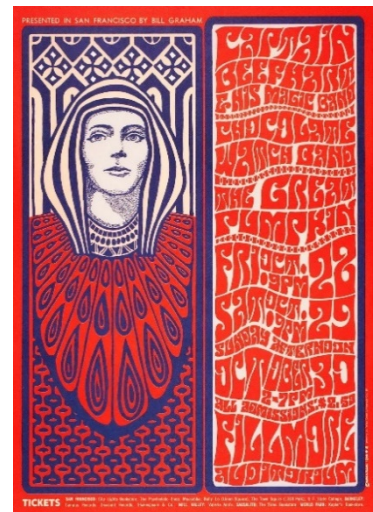
experimenting with drug usage. Psychedelia reflected this culture and became popularized in not only the music industry, but also art and design (Clark, 2020). How and why the messages conveyed by the designs change between each style will also be investigated and discussed in the written portions of the webpages.

## Review of Literature and Works

### *Form*

General principles can help guide design choices to ensure the final result is visually balanced. Although some goals require certain rules be disregarded, rules provide a reference for techniques that have been proven time and time again to lead to good design. These principles will inform the visual decisions made in every component of my project.

*Design Elements: Understanding the Rules and Knowing when to Break Them* by Timothy Samara (2014) discusses fundamentals regarding form, colour, and type before listing 20 rules of great design. These fundamentals form a guideline for things to consider in my designs, but can be overridden depending on the extent to which the decade's style requires rules to be broken to achieve the intended effect. For instance, rule 13 on Samara's list is "type is only type when it's friendly," meaning typography that cannot be read serves no purpose (Samara, 2014). However, a key component of psychedelic design is



Wes Wilson (1966)



April Greiman & Jayme Odgers  
(1979)

foregoing readability in favour of expressiveness, exemplified in Wes Wilson's poster for *Caption Beefhart & his Magic Band* (Eskilson, 2012). Rule-breaking defined the Postmodern movement popularized in design in the 1970s, with designers rejecting the constraints of modernism through experimentation and innovation. This movement encompasses a broad range of visual aesthetics, but works described as Postmodern share this characteristic of unconventionality. A challenge

of this project will be to discover which rules should be broken and how, and when the rules must apply.

Individual resources will be used to discover the characteristics that make each decade's style recognizable and distinct from one another. Aviva M. Cantor explains that psychedelic graphic design makes use of kaleidoscopic patterns, bright saturated colours, and distorted typography in the article *Unique Psychedelic Art Examples and How to Use Them in Design and Branding* (2021). Postmodern design disregards Samara's second rule of design "Communicate, Don't Decorate" by opting to "place a form in space because it "feels" right rather than to fulfill a rational communicative need" (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). Wolfgang Weingart was a postmodern graphic designer that turned to collage, layering a combination of typography, photography, and textures in his work. This layered quality juxtaposing textures will be incorporated in my Postmodern design.



Wolfgang Weingart (1974)

Emerging as part of the Postmodern era at the conclusion of the 70s and marking the beginning of the 1980s was Memphis style. This style made use of fun, colourful geometric patterns, and texture (Meggs & Purvis, 2012). An analysis of Memphis style titled *Memphis Patterns in Graphic Design* indicates that the goal of this patterning is to form a dynamic spatial composition with intricate shapes (Nemtchinova et al., 2021). An article on Medium discussed the aftermath of decades of maximalist, high-energy designs. Those styles were favoured so much to the point where this busy content eventually created a distressing sense of

oversaturation. (Sretović, 2019). The answer to this problem was the minimalism movement. Minimalism features simplicity, with limited colours and clean, legible fonts. Deceptively simple, balance, hierarchy, and negative space all need to be mastered to achieve a successful minimalist design. This will be the challenge of my 90's minimalism designs.

In the article titled *Food Packaging History and Innovations* by Sara J. Risch, the evolution of the aluminum can is considered. The aluminum cans, now the standard container for carbonated beverages, were first manufactured in the 1950s. The earliest model required a can opener in order to be opened, making the container inconvenient to use. The ring pull was a solution introduced in the 1960s to remedy this issue, but because it was not attached to the can, it was a choking hazard. It wasn't until the 1975 invention of the revolutionary stay tab that aluminum cans began to take off. This design was based on the ring pull prototype, but was affixed to the can, removing the safety concerns. (Risch, 2009). The stay tab has persisted since the 70s, although the aluminum can has gone through visual changes during that time. My project will include this history of aluminum can manufacturing by altering the shape and design of the cans in the mock-ups and posters to be consistent with how it appeared during each era.



A Ring Pull

These are some examples of the characteristics of the styles of the decades outlined by scholarly sources including textbooks and articles and describes what I will need to do to accurately reflect these styles.

## ***Content***

The content of my project will explore the intersection between culture and design. I will acknowledge how and why specific movements emerged from social and political events, and also from the trends in design that came before them. This background will be discussed in the write-ups that will accompany the design work.

In *Graphic Design: A New History* (2012), Eskilson described the direct ties psychedelic design has to the social culture of its time. The 1960s was a time of rebellion, with the young crowd developing a counterculture, rejecting the conventional middle-class world view and values set by their parents. They flocked to the music scene where drug use was commonplace. LSD in particular drove this idea of counterculture. The effect of LSD on the brain caused vivid hallucinations and were thought to expand the consciousness. Psychedelic style was essentially designer's visualizations of these hallucinatory experiences. This appealed to the young consumers that participated in this culture. This cultural sense of rebellion should be apparent in my 1960s designs.

In *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, Postmodernism is described as a complex movement, essentially spawning as the antithesis to the prevailing modernist movement. Where modern design required order, postmodern design required a rejection of that order. There is also an emphasis on the personal involvement within the work, and the text describes the designer as “an artist performing before an audience with the bravura of a street musician, and the audience either responds or passes on” (Meggs & Purvis, 2012).

An article on My Modern Met titled *How the Memphis Movement Went Against “Good Taste” to Inspire Designers Today* (2018) written by Sara Barnes covers the Memphis design movement

that occurred in 1981. Ettore Sottsass was an Italian designer that founded the Memphis Group, a group that included a combination of several designers and architects. The Memphis movement was a response to the typical orderly, and structural designs that were popular at the time.

Memphis style was built to dismiss the characteristics that were thought to be considered good, and instead feature radical and fun features. Memphis style was inspired by previous movements, utilizing the geometric shapes of Art Deco and vibrant colour palettes of Pop Art.

In the article *Less Is More, or How Minimalism Changed Graphic Design* by Dunja Sretović, covers the influence of minimalism on graphic design. The minimalism movement was originated in response to abstract expressionism and consumer mentality. Minimalism wanted to highlight the functional purpose of forms, dismissing purely decorative design choices. This style took off and still persists to this day thanks to its sophisticated and timeless quality, making it a common style used in branding. My minimalist design should ensure the function of the design is the primary consideration. The design should be reduced to the minimum required elements to convey the message intended.

This provides an overview of how many of these movements are intertwined with their culture. Design is often a reflection of the events happening at the time, and the social and political landscape that has an effect on the population. Looking into the individual movements, we can see specific concepts that are meant to be portrayed through these designs, and each movement has their own unique ideas being communicated. My designs will be created with this goal in mind, referring back to the sources reviewed here. We can also see how many movements emerged in response to a previous movement. This natural progression of design trends should be featured in my project. There should be a clear evolution across all seven designs.



## **Design Specification**

The elements of my project will include the brainstorming work for each decade. This entails moodboards created for inspiration, the iterations produced before finalization of both the pop can designs and the poster designs, and any additional work such as mind maps. Next, the completed pop can designs optimized for print will be produced for each decade. The pop can designs will also be applied to a mock-up of a can. If a mock-up that is accurate to the decades' designs cannot be found, I will draw the pop cans and apply the designs to the drawn versions. Seven posters advertising the beverages will be designed. The next element will be the website. Additional graphics may need to be created for this platform in order to present a cohesive appearance complementing the cans and posters, such as a pattern or design to span the background of the website pages.

## Timeline

<i>Date</i>	<i>Deliverable (Completed)</i>	<i>Description</i>
Nov. 13	1960s – Pop can design sketches	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions.
Nov. 20	1960s – Poster sketches	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions.
Nov. 27	1960s – Pop can design (Proof of Concept)	A refined design; should be near finalized but still able to make changes.
Dec. 4	1970s – Pop can design sketches	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions.
Dec. 11	Proof of Concept Video	Time lapsed screen-recording of the process of creating my proof of concept.
Dec. 18	1970s – Pop can design + Poster	Minimum 5 sketches each for the pop can and poster with various compositions, refined designs.
Dec. 25	N/A	Christmas break
Jan. 1	1980s – Pop can design + Written portion for 1960s and 1970s	Refined design. Short write-up describing the content of the 60s and 70s designs.

Jan. 8	1980s – Poster + Written portion	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design, and write-up.
Jan. 15	1990s – Pop can design	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design.
Jan. 22	1990s – Poster + Written portion	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design, and write-up.
Jan. 29	2000s – Pop can design	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design.
Feb. 5	2000s – Poster + Written portion	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design, and write-up.
Feb. 12	2010s – Pop can design	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design.
Feb. 19	Production Milestone	
Feb. 26	2010s – Poster + Written portion	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design, and write-up.
Mar. 5	2020s – Pop can design	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design.

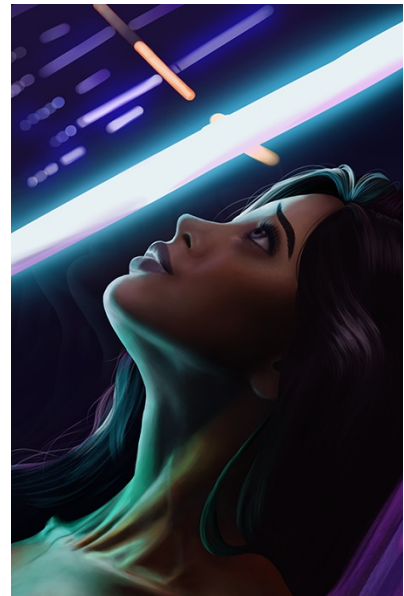
Mar. 12	2020s – Poster + Written portion	Minimum 5 sketches with various compositions, refined design, and write-up.
Mar. 19	Coded Website	HTML and CSS coding of the basic structure of the website.
Mar. 26	Website Design	Designing the coding the aesthetic of the website. Any additional graphics required should also be completed by Mar.26.
Apr. 2	Project Finalization	
Apr. 9	Preparation for the Final Thesis Presentation (due April 18)	

**Proof of Concept**

My proof of concept will consist of the brainstorming files and the pop can design for the first of the seven decades (1960s). The brainstorming files will include a moodboard conveying the aesthetic perpetuated by the decade's style and displaying examples of layouts, colour, typography, and illustrations that inspired my design. Also included will be examples of 2-3 rough sketches demonstrating the iteration process of the design development. The pop can design will be a refined version of the strongest iteration created from the initial sketches created using Photoshop. The design will be presented both flat as it would be designed for printing, and also using a mock-up on a can. The appearance of the can itself should follow the shape and ring pull of the aluminum cans that were in use during the 1960s, according to the research. I chose this as my proof of concept because the seven decades will follow a similar workflow, so this is an opportunity to figure out what is working and what isn't. This way, I will have time to resolve any issues in my approach before I begin working on the other designs. Also, this will sufficiently translate the concept to something more tangible, providing a solid visualization of what the final project might entail.

## Skill Assessment

The most relevant skills necessary to successfully complete this project are knowledge of graphic design fundamentals and illustration. In the Media Arts program, I have learned an array of techniques and rules of design in courses like Design & Code and Graphic Design. This includes fundamentals like colour theory, Gestalt principles, and use of the concepts of point, line, and plane, scale, framing, hierarchy, and more. I am also currently one of the Graphic Designers for The Communications and Media Arts Society and occasionally do art and design commissions for clients, giving me the chance to regularly apply these principles in practice. Regarding illustration skills, I have been drawing for nearly 10 years, working both traditionally and digitally. My recent work is done through the digital route, which is the method I will use for my project. My styles of drawing vary wildly, as I try to broaden my skills as much as possible to allow me to better alter my style when necessary. This will be essential in order to adapt my work to the distinct styles of the various decades.



Example of my digital painting based on a photo by Thaís Silva

Background knowledge of the art movements featured in my project will be beneficial. I am working as a teaching assistant for the course Making Art and Understanding Technology & Images in the School of the Arts. This experience, along with having previously completed the course and ending with an A+, has introduced me to a wide range of art movements and influential artists and works, and how art is intertwined with culture. While my project deals with certain movements I was previously unaware of, and my project will be diving much deeper

through research into the movements, this experience means I have a solid baseline of knowledge on the content of my project. Through grading student work and providing feedback, I have also developed a critical eye, which will allow me to better evaluate my own progress and accurately replicate the styles of the decades through observation in combination with the extensive research.

Photography may be another component necessary in certain styles like Postmodernism, which often collages photography into designs. While I have been introduced to photography in the course Time-Based Media and have done some personal photography, I am still a beginner in this domain. This could cause difficulties for certain designs. However, a few friends of mine are working photographers, and if I run into problems, I can reach out to them for assistance or to ask questions.

For the website, I did simple coding in my youth, and refreshed my memory in the course Design & Code, where we coded a website using HTML and CSS. My latest coding work was creating my online portfolio from scratch ([www.jennazdesign.com](http://www.jennazdesign.com)). As the website for my project will be fairly simplistic, this knowledge will be sufficient in order to complete the website.

In terms of software and hardware, I have extensive experience using Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign throughout the Media Arts program and in the other projects and jobs discussed above. My project will rely heavily on these programs when creating the posters and mock-ups. I also have a DSLR camera if photography is required. As previously mentioned, photography is a weaker point for me, but I have access to assistance if needed.

## Bibliography

Alcorn, J. (1969). *Pepsi* [Poster]. The Alcorn Studio & Gallery, Ossining, NY, United States.

[https://www.alcorngallery.com/John\\_Alcorn/JohnAlcorn\\_image.php?number=020](https://www.alcorngallery.com/John_Alcorn/JohnAlcorn_image.php?number=020)

Barnes, S. (2018). *How the Memphis Movement Went Against “Good Taste” to Inspire Designers Today*. My Modern Met. <https://mymodernmet.com/what-is-memphis-design/>

Cantor, A. M. (2021). *Unique psychedelic art examples and how to use them in design and branding*. 99Designs. <https://99designs.ca/blog/design-history-movements/psychedelic-design/>

Clark, C. (2020). *Design through the decades*. Hello Creative Agency.

<https://www.hellocreativeagency.com/blog/design-through-the-decades-the-1960s>.

Eskilson, S. J. (2012). *Graphic Design: A New History* (2nd ed.). Laurence King Publishing.

Greiman, A., & Odgers, J. (1979). [Magazine Cover]. WET Magazine.

Silva, T. (2019). *Lying Woman Inside Dark Room* [Photograph]. Pexels.

<https://www.pexels.com/photo/lying-woman-inside-dark-room-2204724/>



Nemtchinova, E. E., Popov, S. A., Kepa, Y. N., Ermilova, D. Y., & Lyakhova, N. B. (2021).

Memphis Patterns in Graphic Design. *Laplage em Revista*, 7, 427-433.

Risch, S. J. (2009). Food Packaging History and Innovations. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, 57, 8089–8092, DOI:10.1021/jf900040r

Samara, T. (2014). *Design elements: Understanding the rules and knowing when to break them - updated and expanded* (2nd ed.). Quarto Publishing Group USA.

Seeley, C. C. (1967). *Jefferson Airplane, Garbor Szabo, Jimi Hendrix, June 20 - 25, Fillmore Auditorium* [Print]. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, United States.

<https://art.famsf.org/clifford-charles-seeley/jefferson-airplane-garbor-szabo-jimi-hendrix-june-20-25-fillmore-auditorium>

Weingart, W. (1974). [Collage]. *Typografische Monatsblätter* magazine.

Wilson, W. (1966). *Caption Beefhart & his Magic Band* [Poster]. Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich, Switzerland. <https://www.emuseum.ch/objects/13686/presented-in-san-francisco-by-bill-graham--captain-beefhart>