

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

5-9-1981

Similarities between Chinese Taoism and Western graphic design

Lillian Yin-Ling Sung

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Sung, Lillian Yin-Ling, "Similarities between Chinese Taoism and Western graphic design" (1981). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CHINESE TAOISM AND
WESTERN GRAPHIC DESIGN

By

Lillian Yin-ling C. Sung

May 9, 1981

APPROVALS

Advisor: Illegible

Date: May 21, 1981

Associate Advisor: James C. Ver Hagne

Date: May 21, 1981

Associate Advisor: Ronald Prolybarn

Date: May 21, 1981

Graduate Academic
Council

Representative: Fred Meyer

Date: 5/22/81

Dean, College of
Fine & Applied Arts: Robert H. Johnston PhD.

Date: 6/1/1981

I, Lillian Yin-Ling Sung, prefer to be contacted each time a request for production is made. I can be reached at the following address.

Lillian Yin-ling Sung
89 Gebhardt Road
Penfield, N.Y. 14526

Date: May 21, 1981

G-927568

TO MY LOVING PARENTS
SHYAN-JU WONG AND SWEI-PO CHANG
AND
PARENTS-IN-LAW
YU-JE LIANG AND HSIEN-TING SUNG

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The presentation of this thesis was made possible through the efforts and advice of a great number of people. Foremost among these is Professor Roger Remington, without his indispensable guidance, and understanding this research would have been unachievable. To him, I wish to express heartfelt gratitude. My appreciation is also extended for many illuminating discussions and constructive suggestions provided through the personal attentions of Professors Ronald Padgham and James Ver Hague. Special thanks are due to Professor Robert Webster and Mr. Larry Pocobello. Their enthusiasm, expertise, and extensive assistance provided a great deal of help in the screen printing of the book. Many thanks are also owed to a very special person Mrs. Madeleine Jossem and my husband Dr. Kai Sung. They nurtured these efforts with personal encouragement and invaluable insight.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1. CHINESE TAOISM	2
1.1 Lao Tzu and Taoism - The Way of Life	2
1.2 Tao Follows What is Natural	3
1.3 Tao is a Conceptual Image	4
1.4 The Interaction of Yin and Yang	5
1.5 The Essence of Tao is Unchanging	7
CHAPTER 2. WESTERN GRAPHIC DESIGN	9
2.1 Graphic Design and Living	9
2.2 Design Based on Natural Growth and Order	10
2.3 The Conceptual Nature of Design	11
2.4 Contrast - The Dynamic Essence of Design	12
2.5 The Eternal Principle of Design	13
CHAPTER 3. SUMMARY	14
APPENDICES. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TAOISM AND GRAPHIC DESIGN	16
A.1 Contrast	16
A.2 Space	17
A.3 Rhythm	18
A.4 Positive and Negative Space	20
A.5 Harmony	21

	PAGE
A.6. Dominance	22
A.7 Unity	23
A.8 Balance	24
A.9 Pages spread from the book	25
A.10 "	26
A.11 "	27
A.12 "	28
A.13 "	29
A.14 "	30
A.15 "	31
A.16 "	32
CREDITS FOR ILLUSTRATIONS	33
FOOTNOTES	34
BIBLIOGRAPHY	35
A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION	36

INTRODUCTION

There is a unity - a principle functioning through life that, once understood, can give significance to all man's experience. While I have been studying Graphic Design here in the United States, I, as a native Chinese who is greatly influenced by the Taoist's philosophies, have sought to discover some of the close relationships between the philosophies of Taoism and the process of Graphic Design. Since both Taoism and Graphic Design are concerned with man and his environment, the harmony of life, and the unity of all the world, there is no doubt that Eastern and Western thought could meet together for the progress of enhancing the quality of life.

The purpose of this thesis is to serve as a bridge which links concepts of Graphic Design with Taoist's philosophies. My intent is to share a joyful experience of the wisdom of Lao Tzu with graphic designers as well as the general reader; and in so doing to enhance the appreciation and awareness of similarities which can be found between Taoism and Graphic Design.

The concepts derived from my research are presented through eight examples which included the following design principles: Contrast, Space, Rhythm, Positive and Negative Space, Harmony, Dominance, Unity and Balance. The order of these eight design principles, as shown in examples, does not indicate the degree of their importance, but rather the order of the sayings of Lao Tzu as found in the book of Tao Te Ching

CHAPTER 1

CHINESE TAOSIM

1.1 Lao Tzu and Taoism - The Way of Life

Chinese tradition has dated Lao Tzu, the most influential figure in Taoism, about fifty years before Confucius (551 B.C.-479 B.C.). The name Lao Tzu is interpreted as "old baby", because he is said to have been carried in his mother's womb for sixty years and was born with white hair (but we may rather suspect that the story was invented to explain the name).

The thoughts of Lao Tzu are embodied in a small volume of eighty-one chapters, composed of approximately 5,250 words. This piece of classic literature is called Tao Te Ching, which has provided one of the major influences in Chinese thoughts and culture for over 2,500 years. No other example of classic Chinese literature of such limited length has exercised such dominance.

Dr. Lin Yu-tang said in The Wisdom of India and China: "If there is one book in the whole of Oriental literature which one should read above all the others, it is, in my opinion, Lao Tzu's Book of Tao... It is one of the profoundest (sic) in the world's philosophy... clear, mystic and practical."¹

Lao Tzu's wisdom concentrates on simplicity, spontaneity and tranquility as a way of ideal life. Taoism's philosophy is based on the

fundamental principles inherent in nature, yet, it is so profound in its simplicity that it becomes mysticism for most people. Mysticism or not, it seems to be one of the most straightforward and logical explanation of the order of nature by which everything is governed. It also offers human beings explicit directions regarding ways of conducting themselves, so that they might remain continually in harmony with nature.

1.2 Tao Follows What is Natural

*Man follows the earth.
Earth follows heaven.
Heaven follows Tao.
Tao follows what is natural.*

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 25)

The word "Tao" can be translated as road, way or method. In some schools of Chinese philosophy, Tao means a system or moral truth; in Taoism it means "the one" or that which is natural, spontaneous and nameless. It is the beginning of nature and the order of nature indicating the way in which all things in nature pursue their course.

Since Tao signifies the order and course of nature, the question is, then, what kind of order. In Taoism, order in nature is not an imposed system of laws and commandments which beings are compelled to obey as the result of external forces.

*Tao created them (all things),
Te (virtue) nourished them,
Subject formed them,
Environment completed them,
Thus all things respect Tao
And honor Te.
Respect of Tao and honor of Te
are not demanded,
But they are in the nature of things.*

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 51)

In Taoism, creation of Tao is not an intellectual activity, rather it is an intuitive reflection. The following Chinese poem, from the eighth century, is a metaphor for the Taoist concept that creation is a process of instinctive expression.

*The wild geese fly across
The long sky above.
Their images are reflected upon
The chilly water below.
The geese do not mean to
Cast their image on the water;
Nor does the water mean to hold
The images of geese.²*

1.3 Tao is a Conceptual Image

There must be an essence from which everything in the universe was derived. But what is it? The ancient Greek philosophers explained the origin by using the four basic elements: earth, fire, water and air. This simple explanation could hardly unfold the mystery of the universe because the substances they used were too restrictive and too concrete. In comparison with the Greek philosophers, Lao Tzu did not limit himself by using elements. He chose to use a very abstract approach which he called "Tao". According to Lao Tzu, Tao is not something we can perceive with our senses, rather it is a conceptual image. He defined it in this way:

*Look, it cannot be seen,
It is Invisible.
Listen, it cannot be heard,
It is Inaudible.
Grasp, it cannot be reached,
It is Intangible.*

(Lao Tzu, Tai Te Ching, Chapter 14)

Thus, Tao is something we can not see, hear or touch. It is indefinable and beyond our imagination; yet, it is real, found everywhere and is everything. It is both the source and the evidence of creation.

1.4 The Interaction of Yin and Yang

*The Tao that can be told of
Is not the immortal Tao.
The names that can be given
Are not the immortal names.
The nameless is the origin of Heaven
The named is the mother of all things.*

[Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 1]

Here Lao Tzu emphasized the most important feature of Tao - it is beyond the power of words. In order to define it, terms may be used but none of them are absolute. Since the dynamic essence of Tao defies verbal description, it must be understood as a process of creation or becoming. Lao Tzu, of course, faced the same problem of definition. In one place he even used numbers in attempting to describe the process of creation:

*From the Tao, the one is created;
From the One, Two;
From the Two, Three;
From the Three, Ten Thousand Things.
The Ten Thousand Things carry
Yin and embrace Yang
Through the union of pervading principles
It reaches harmony.*

[Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42]

"One" is often understood as the ultimate essence or principle; "Two" as Yin and Yang, and "Three" as the blending of Yin and Yang with the original essence. The "Ten Thousand Things" are things carrying

Yin and embracing Yang. However, there is no need to be specific. The important point is the natural evolution from the simple to the complex.

Yin and Yang are opposite forces, Yin is negative, passive, female; Yang is positive, active, male. In speaking of these terms, Lao Tzu points out that Yin and Yang - life and death, black and white, good and evil - stem from each other.

*When the people all know beauty as beauty,
There arises ugliness.
When the people all know the good as good,
There arises evil.
Therefore:
Being and non-being produce each other;
Difficult and easy accomplish each other;
Long and short contrast each other;
High and low distinguish each other;
Pitch and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow each other.*

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2)

Yin and Yang cannot be understood separately, rather one defines the other - being cannot be understood unless its opposite, non-being, is understood. Nor should these terms be conceived of as static concepts; they, as life or being, are always in a process of change. Their respective definitions result from the apparent conflict between the two terms. Human nature tends to embrace the positives and reject the negatives. Lao Tzu, therefore, reminds us that in order to deal with the positives more effectively we should not bury our heads in the sand, but should fearlessly recognize the negatives, face them and deal with them directly.

1.5 The Essence of Tao is Unchanging

The essence of Tao is unchanging; that which is unchanging is the concept that all is in a continuous state of change. In Taoism, change proceeds in an orderly cycle.

*Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
In the silence and the void,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion.
Perhaps it is the mother of all things.
I do not know its name
Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word,
I call it great.
Being great, it flows.
It flows far away.
Having gone far,
It returns.*

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 25)

When Lao Tzu states, "Having gone far, it returns," he means, that which changes must always return to its original form.

*All things rise and fall
While I watch their return
They grow and flourish and
Then return to the source.
Returning to the source is tranquility
Which is the way of nature.
The way of nature is unchanging.*

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 16)

Therefore, Tao has two aspects: it is both static or unchanging, and dynamic or ever-changing. That which is ever-changing is the manifestation of that which is unchanging - that which is boundless in space and endless in time - the primordial source of all potentialities in all things. When the unchanging remains within itself it is oneness,

the ground, essence or reservoir of creation; it is the source of potentiality for all things to become at all times.

CHAPTER 2

WESTERN GRAPHIC DESIGN

2.1 Graphic Design and Living

The artists' concept of the word "design" refers to the process whereby communication of messages or feelings is enhanced through the organization of lines, forms and colors. Graphic design is an important force in creative visual communication, ranging from the simplicity of a poster to the complexity of a sign system. Graphic designers attempt to achieve visual solutions that deal aesthetically with information.

As life becomes more complex, more and more people begin to realize that basic problems such as congestion in cities, air pollution, and rapidly increasing traffic both can be solved only by creative and systematic design and planning. Gyorgy Kepes, former Professor of Visual Design at MIT, stated the situation as follows: "The extended world revealed by science and the technical world of man's own making both require mapping by our senses, the disposition of our activities and movements in conformity with their rhythms, the discovery of their potentialities for a richer, more orderly human life."³

There is no doubt that we live in a chaotic world dominated by the complex, harsh and impersonal face of industry and technology. It has been said that as buildings climb higher and higher, man grows farther and farther away from nature. This alienation is easy to understand as

we view the great cities, where from many angles no tree or even a patch of grass is visible. However, men remain biological beings, with a spirit geared to the natural rhythms of which they are a part.

Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus) said in 1955, "What the Bauhaus preached in practice was the common citizenship of all forms of creative work, and their logical interdependence on one another in the modern world. Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual nor a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilized society."⁴

Look around ! It will be noticed that most of life's activities rely upon design of one sort or another for no one can live in a chaotic, disordered and confused world mentally or physically. As soon as chaos gives way to order in any degree, design exists, - design for living, design for working, design for planning - is leading our life to the way of harmony, progress and satisfaction.

2.2 Design Based on Natural Growth and Order

Before a designer begins the basic design process he develops a systematic plan according to design principles. Although the design principles are rules created by man, their roots can be found in patterns of natural growth and order.

Nature is the supreme master of design - the changing seasons in nature reveal new designs and each of the stream-washed stones exhibits individual textural characteristics. Understanding the origins of forms and processes is of great value to the designer, for it helps him to

see beyond the harsh impersonality of the world today toward the eternal values and forms which outlast man's efforts. As a designer, it is very important to see life as a whole and to assign to it a sense of order.

The uses of design concepts is not limited to the artist and designer. The person who insists that he has no creative ability frequently builds his life on designs without being aware of the process of designing. The Watts Towers of California are the creative work of a poor Italian tile-setter named Simon Rodia. He spent thirty-three years building his towers out of steel rods, mesh and mortar in his backyard. He lovingly covered their surfaces with bits and pieces of broken tile, melted glass and other colorful junks he collected. Simon's work showed a designing process because his work is based on order and that order itself is pleasing him. To be creative is to be able to put things together in a unique way in order to produce new things of significance. The creative mind is simply an orderly mind - a mind that arranges and organizes for creative use - which is an expression of intuitive reflection.

2.3 The Conceptual Nature of Design

In some cases, a problem requires a graphic design image that is not a realistic representation. This is particularly true in corporate identity and packaging design. There are many effective graphic designs in which the image has been abstracted from a recognizable object.

"Abstract" means something that concentrates the essential quality of a larger, more detailed whole. An artist or designer often abstracts his original image to pinpoint the essential feeling or flavor and translates it into simple forms that may or may not resemble the original object. The process of abstraction for the designer is often one of a systematic, conceptual development of the visual or aesthetic elements to meet the design objectives.

2.4 Contrast - The Dynamic Essence of Design

Life contains similar and dissimilar things. Through contrast meaning in two dissimilar things is intensified and enhanced. Contrast, conflict or variety is the dynamic essence of all existence - and of all art forms that dramatize life.

In any design a certain amount of contrast is inevitable. Drawing a black line on a piece of white paper automatically produces a contrast of values - black against white. Contrast is the juxtaposition of opposite qualities. A composition of design with contrast often stimulates interest and arouses excitement. There may be a contrast of line, direction, size, shape, hue, value or any combinations of these such that contrasts vitalize design and spices composition. A design without contrast is like cooking without salt, it is insipid and monotonous.

2.5 The Eternal Principle of Design

It is a fundamental law of science that nothing new is ever created in the world. This is also true in design, for every design is based on age-old forms, whether these are found in nature or are simple geometric lines and shapes used in an abstract way. Nevertheless, a new approach to design is like a spring bubbling out of a hillside; the water is the same as the water that has been used and drunk for centuries, yet it is always new, always fresh. A talented designer, using the unchanging ages old elements and principles, is able to bring forth freshness in his design composition.

Paul Weiss, professor emeritus of Rockefeller University, once stated: "If there is one lesson to be learned from the study of organic nature, it is that there is order in the gross (or large) forms, with freedom and diversity in the small."⁵

The structure of a mineral deposit, the skeleton of a fish, and the veining of a leaf suggest designs of many varieties. However, underlying the individual characteristics are the eternal principles of growth and order. For example, birds have an orderly growth pattern and a definite vertebrate structure, but there is infinite variety in the color and design of their feathers.

In order to enhance the awareness and appreciation of the relationship between man and his environment, the designer learns to see and understand the unchanging principles of growth and order functioning through all life.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY

After some of the major Characteristics of Chinese Taoism and Western Graphic Design are discussed in Chapter One and Two the similarities between Taoism and Graphic Design can be summarized as follows:

1. Both Taoists and designers are concerned with man and his environment, the harmony of life and the unity of the world.
2. Both the creation of Tao and the process of design are based on natural growth and order.
3. Both Tao and design defy set rules or simple definitions. Being an expression of man's own reaction and experience, Tao and design are as individual as the person who creates them.
4. Both Taoists and designers are aware of the importance of the negative space (non-being) to its opposite, the positive space (being).
5. Both Tao and design have two aspects, they are both static or unchanging, and dynamic or ever-changing. An artist must train his eye to look underneath the surface of the variation of things which is ever-changing. The general principles that exist, i.e., the eternal law of growth and order, is unchanging.

At the completion of this research, I have gained a great deal of understanding about the close relationships between Chinese Taoism and Western Graphic Design. In addition, I have learned that design is not a product derived solely from technical skills but also a natural development arising from studying and putting into practice the natural principles of the universe.

Although it appears that modern civilization has been trying to bring about a separation between man and nature, man still remains an integral part of a natural system. How could man dominate a system of which he is only a part? The essence of Taoism and Graphic Design is found in the heart of the designer who sees through this problem and expresses his belief in the harmony between human life (or human dignity) and nature. Due to his sensitivity gained from training, the designer will be well-qualified to lead the way to greater understanding and better communication in the world today.

Some of the similarities found between Taoism and Graphic Design have been presented in detail in the production of the book designed as part of this thesis project. These are also presented in the appendix.

APPENDIXES

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TAOISM AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

A.1 Contrast

The contrast between two dissimilar things is woven the rhythm that is life.

"Life consists of things and the difference between things. By contrast opposites are intensified and derive their meaning."⁶

"Contrast, opposition, conflict, or variety is the dynamic essence of all existence - and all art forms that dramatize the life of man."⁷

(Western Design Concepts)

Being and non-being produce each other;
Difficult and easy accomplish each other;
Long and short contrast each other;
High and low distinguish each other;
Pitch and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow each other.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 2)

A.2 Space

Space is important in two-dimensional design, because it may create a symbolic representation of depth on a flat surface.

"Space is far more than just what is left over after the important things have been laid down."⁸

"Space is the indefinable, great, general receptacle of things. It is continuous and infinite and ever present."⁹

(Western Design Concepts)

Thirty spokes unite around the hub;
The void creates the essence of the wheel.
Mold clay into pots;
The void creates the essence of the vessel.
Cut out doors and windows in the wall:
The void creates the essence of the house.
The existence contains utility;
The non-existence contains essence.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 11)

A.3 Rhythm

In design as in nature, rhythm is the underlying principle. A natural rhythm is found in the changing of the seasons, with its repetition. A simple rhythmic theme can be achieved by repetition of one motif at regular intervals.

"A rhythm can repeat itself in a characteristic regular beat, in up and down, strong and weak, long and short. But it can also be irregular, continuous, in free flowing movement."¹⁰

"...flexible rhythmic pattern can do much to make the artist realize that these principles are not restrictions imposed upon the designer but basic truths blending all of existence into a related whole."¹¹

(Western Design Concepts)

Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth.
Silent, isolated,
Standing alone and unchanging,
Ever present and in motion.
Perhaps it is the mother of all things.
I do not know its name.

Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word,
I call it Great.
Being great, it flows.
It flows far away.
Having gone far,
It returns.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 25)

A.4 Positive and Negative Space

Any structure involves figure and ground - the figure is the art form itself which can be referred to as positive space; the ground is the area enclosed and shapes by the figures which can be referred to as negative space.

"In the creation of any art form negative space should be considered, for it is sensitive interaction of the negative space with the more pronounced positive space that make a successful design."¹²

(Western Design Concepts)

He who is aware of the male,
But keeps to the female
Becomes the ravine of the world.

He who is conscious of the white,
But keeps to the black
Becomes the model for the world.

He who is familiar with honor,
But keeps to obscurity
Becomes the valley of the world.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 28)

A.5 Harmony

Harmony is like the middle gray that is composed of two extremes of monotony and discord. It combines the character of both.

"To bring together in harmony two disparate systems necessarily presupposes a greater depth of artistic perception and the courage to embark upon new trains of thought and novel formulations."¹³

(Western Design Concepts)

Nature carries Yin and embraces Yang,
Through the union of the pervading principles,
It reaches harmony.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42)

A.6 Dominance

Dominance is produced by making one of the competing units larger and stronger. It is the oldest, simplest, and most effective way of creating aesthetic order.

"We are disturbed and unhappy when we are torn between two equally strong conflicting ideas and are incapable of action until we make up our minds,... and allow one idea to dominate."¹⁴

(Western Design Concepts)

The beginning of the universe
is the Mother of all things.
From the Mother (primary),
We may know her sons (secondary).
After knowing the sons,
Keep to the Mother.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 52)

A.7 Unity

Unity is the prime principle of composition. It is the quality that makes the design consistent and complete.

"In a perfect work of art all the elements are interrelated; they cohere to form a unity which has a value greater than the mere sum of these elements."¹⁵

(Western Design Concepts)

He who knows does not speak;
He who speaks does not know.
Close your mouth,
Guard your senses,
Temper your sharpness,
Simplify your problems,
Soften your brightness,
Become one with the dusty world.
This is called Unity.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 56)

A.8 Balance

Balance is equilibrium of opposing forces. There are two types of balance - formal or symmetrical and informal or asymmetrical. Formal balance produces a stately, dignified, and tranquil effect; informal balance suggests less peaceful, less obvious, but more interesting than formal balance.

"In working for balance in design, the artist should work for the same fluid treatment found with rhythm, for which principles are used as guides but not as rigid formulas."¹⁶

"Nature achieves balance in a varied and flexible manner."¹⁷

(Western Design Concepts)

The Tao (way) of heaven
Is like bending of a bow.
The top comes down,
The bottom goes up.
When it is excessive, reduce it.
When it is insufficient, supplement it.

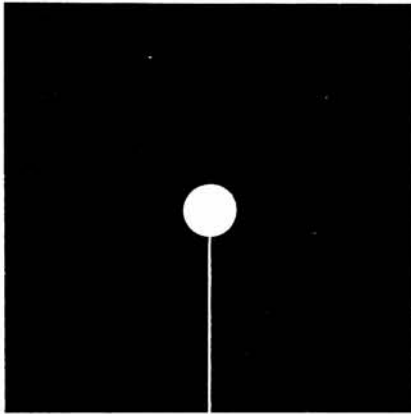
(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 77)

Contrast

The contrast between two dissimilar things is woven the rhythm that is life.

The coexistence of things and the difference between things: by contrast opposites are interrelated and derive their meaning.

"Contrast, opposition, conflict, or variety is the dynamic essence of all existence—and all art forms that dramatize the life of man."



Being and non-being produce each other;

Difficult and easy accomplish each other;

Long and short contrast each other;

High and low distinguish each other;

Rich and sound harmonize each other;

Front and back follow each other.

(Iao Fu, Ten Te Ching, Chapter 2)

養生

有無相生 難易相成
長短相形 高下相傾
音聲相和 前後相隨

Space

Space is important in two-dimensional design, because it may create a symbolic representation of depth on a flat surface.

"Space is far more than just what is left over after the important things have been laid down."

"Space is the indefinable, great, general receptacle of things. It is continuous and infinite and ever present."



They gobble up the air around the hub.
The void creates the essence of the wheel.

Mold clay into pots.

The void creates the essence of the vessel.

Carve out doors and windows in the wall.

The void creates the essence of the house.

The existence contains utility.

The non-existence contains essence.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 11)

空用

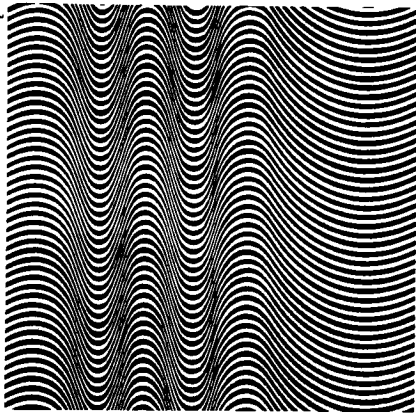
三十幅共一轂當其無
有車之用埴埴以為器
當其有器之用鑿
戶牖以為室當其有
室之用故有之以
為利無之以為用

Rhythm

In design as in nature, rhythm is the underlying principle. A natural rhythm is found in the changing of the seasons, with its repetition. A simple rhythmic theme can be achieved by repetition of one motif at regular intervals.

"A rhythm can repeat itself in a characteristic regular beat, in up and down, rising and falling, long and short, but it can also be irregular, continuous, in free flowing movement."

"...Readable rhythmic pattern can do much to make the artist realize that these principles are not restrictions imposed upon the designer but basic truths blending all of evidence into a related whole."



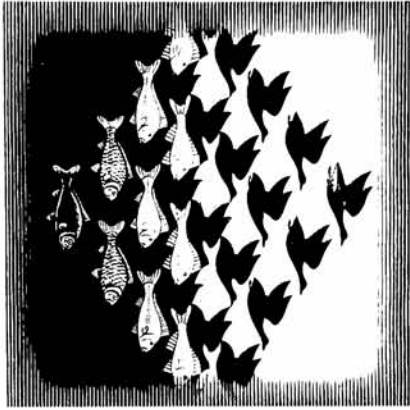
Something mysteriously formed,
Born before heaven and earth,
often, overlooked,
Standing alone and undaunted,
Ever present and in motion,
Perhaps it is the mother of all things,
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao.
For lack of a better word,
I call it Great.
Being great, it flows,
It flows far away,
Having gone far,
It returns.
I-tao Tzu, Tao Te Ching Chapter 25

有物混成先天地生寂
含寧之獨立不改周行
而不殆可以為天下母
吾不知其名字之曰道
強為之名曰大曰逝
逝曰遠遠曰反

Positive and Negative Space

Any abstract lineless figure and ground—the figure is the art form itself which can be referred to as positive space; the ground is the area enclosed and shaped by the figure which can be referred to as negative space.

“In the creation of any art form negative space should be considered for it is another factor of the creative space with the more pronounced positive space that make a successful design.”



He who is aware of the male,
But keeps to the female
Becomes the ruler of the world,
He who is conscious of the white,
But keeps to the black
Becomes the model for the world

He who is familiar with honor,
But keeps to obscurity
Becomes the savior of the world.

(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 28)

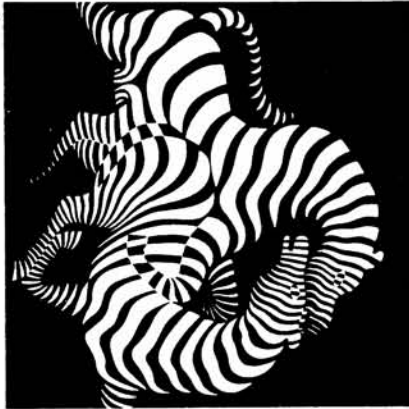
知其權守其雌為天
下豁知其白守其黑
為天下式知其榮守
其辱為天下谷

反樸

Harmony

Harmony is like the middle way that is composed of two extremes of monosity and discord. It combines the character of both.

"To bring together in harmony two disparate systems necessarily presupposes a greater depth of artistic perception and the courage to embark upon new trains of thought and novel formulations."



Nature unites Yin and embraces Yang. Through the union of the opposing principle, it reaches harmony. (Iao Fu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42)

道化
 萬物負陰而抱陽
 沖氣以爲和

A.14

Dominance

Dominance is produced by making one of the competing units larger and stronger. It is the odder, simpler, and most effective way of creating aesthetic order.

"We are disturbed and unhappy when we are torn between two equally strong conflicting ideas and are incapable of action until we make up our minds...and allow one idea to dominate."



The beginning of the universe
Is the Mother of all things.
(From the Mother (primary).
We may know her sons (secondary).
After knowing the sons,
Keep to the Mother.
(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 51)

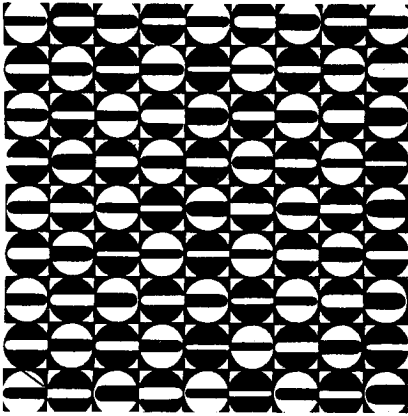
天下有始以爲天下母
既得其母以知其子
既知其子復守其母

歸元

Unity

Unity is the prime principle of composition. It is the quality that makes the design consistent and complete.

"In a perfect work of art all the elements are interrelated; they cohere to form a unity which has a value greater than the mere sum of these elements."



He who knows does not speak;
He who speaks does not know.

Close your mouth,
Guard your senses,
Temper your sharpness,
Simplify your problems,
Soften your brightness,
Become one with the dusty world.
This is called Unity.

(Tan Tzu, Tao Te Ching Chapter 56)

知者不言 不知
塞其兑 闭其门 挫其
锐 解其纷 和其光 同
其塵 是謂玄同

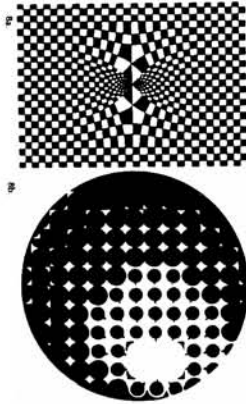
玄德

Balance

Balance is equilibrium of opposing forces. There are two types of balance—formal or symmetrical and informal or asymmetrical. Formal balance produces a stable, dignified, and tranquil effect; informal balance suggests less perfect, less obvious, but more interesting than formal balance.

"In working for balance in design, the artist should work for the same fluid equilibrium found with rhythm, for which principles are used as guides, but not as rigid formulas."

"Nature achieves balance in a varied and flexible manner."



The Dao (way) of Heaven
is like bending of a bow.
The top comes down,
The bottom goes up.
When it is excessive, reduce it.
When it is insufficient, supplement it.
(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Chapter 77)

天道其猶張弓與
高者抑之 下者舉之
有餘者損之 不足者補之

天道

CREDITS FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

- A9. Max Bill, Exhibit Catalog, Albright-Knox, P. 42.
- A10. Armin Hofmann, Graphic Design Manual, P. 171.
- A11. Rene Parola, Optical Art Theory and Practice, P.112.
- A12. M. C. Escher, The Graphic Work of M. C. Escher, No. 13.
- A13. John Lancaster, Introducing Op Art, P. 57.
- A14. Armin Hohmann, Graphic Design Manual, P. 127.
- A15. Wucius Wong, Principles of Two-Dimensional Design, P. 34.
- A16a. Wucius Wong, Principles of Two-Dimensional Design, P. 32.
- A16b. Anton Stankowski, Visual Presentation of Invisible Processws,
P. 116.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Lin, Wisdom of China and India, PP. 579-580.
- ²Chang, Creativity and Taoism, P. 57.
- ³Kepes, The Visual Arts Today, Introduction.
- ⁴Taylor, A Basic Course in Graphic Design, P. 20.
- ⁵Kepes, The Visual Arts Today, P. 184.
- ⁶Graves, The Art of Color and Design, P. 53.
- ⁷Graves, The Art of Color and Design, P. 53.
- ⁸Preble, Man creates Art Creates Man, P. 71.
- ⁹Preble, Man Creates Art Creates Man, P. 68.
- ¹⁰Itten, Design and Form, P. 129
- ¹¹Bevlin, Design through Discovery, P. 14.
- ¹²Bevlin, Design through Discovery, P. 86.
- ¹³Hofmann, Graphic Design Manual, P. 17
- ¹⁴Graves, The Art of Color and Design, PP.97-98.
- ¹⁵Read, The meaning of Art, P. 65.
- ¹⁶Bevlin, Design through Discovery, P. 56.
- ¹⁷Bevlin, Design through Discovery, P. 56.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barrett, Cyril, An introduction to Optical Art,
New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1971.
- Bevlin, Marjorie E., Design through Discovery,
New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1970.
- Chang, Chung-yuan, The Creativity and Taoism,
New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Escher, M. C., The Graphic Work of M. C. Escher,
New York: Meredith Press, 1967.
- Graves, Maitland, The Art of Color and Design,
New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1951.
- Hofmann, Armin, Graphic Design Manual,
New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1965.
- Itten, Johannes, Design and Form,
New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1964.
- Kepes, Gyorgy, The Visual Arts Today,
Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960.
- Lin, Yu-Tang, The Saying of Lao Tzu,
Taipei: Confucius Publishing Co., 1977.
- Lin, Yu-Tang, The Wisdom of China and India,
New York: Random House, 1955.
- Preble, Duane, Man Creates Art Creates Man,
New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Read, Herbert, The Meaning of Art,
London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1951.
- Stankowski, Anton, Visual Presentation of Invisible Processes,
Switzerland: Copyright Arthur Niggli Ltd., 1959.
- Watts, Alan, Tao the Watercourse Way,
New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- Wong, Wucius, Principles of Two-Dimensional Design,
New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1972.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The presentation of Lao Tzu's sayings is a composite of several translations which were based on verses found in the following books

Bynner, Witter, The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu,
New York: Capricorn Books, 1962.

Chan, Wing-Tsit, Chinese Philosophy,
New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Feng, Gia-Fu, Lao Tsu/Tao Te Ching,
New York: Random House, 1972.

Giles, Lionel, The Wisdom of the East,
Great Britain: Lewis Reprints Limited, 1972.

Lin, YU-Tang, The Sayings Of Lao Tzu,
Taipei: Confucious Publishing Co., 1977.

Lin, Yu-Tang, The Wisdom of China and India,
New York: Random House, 1955.