

Running Down an American Dream: Tom Petty and the Tour T-Shirt

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Abstract

Tom Petty has often been described as an artist who pushed the boundaries of creativity. Whether through his videos, lyrics or album covers, Petty was never afraid to experiment, explore new concepts and challenge fans to search for their own personal meanings in his work. This paper explores an often neglected part of originality in the Tom Petty story: the tour t-shirt. Using multimodal analysis to investigate three tour t-shirts from 1991 to 2003 (*Touring the Great Wide Open*, *Dogs with Wings* and *The Last DJ*), the analysis will demonstrate how image, color and typography, as well as layout, design choices and materiality, were used innovatively to transmit symbolic meanings on a core aspect of Petty's recordings: the American Dream. The investigation concludes with a summary of the benefits of considering Tom Petty's work within the context of multimodality, and the lasting appeal of his tour t-shirts.

Biography

Lauren O' Hagan is a PhD student within the department of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University. Her current research project is entitled 'Class, Culture and Conflict in the Edwardian Book Inscription: A Multimodal Ethnohistoric Approach' and involves the study of 3,000 inscriptions present in books circulated between 1901 and 1914 in Britain. Alongside her PhD, Lauren works as a translator and EFL tutor.

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Whether it is used as an identity marker, a cultural signifier or a symbol of prestige, the tour t-shirt is a wardrobe staple for any die-hard fan of a particular artist. Unlike its band t-shirt counterpart, which has saturated the high street in recent years and become more about fashion than fandom, the tour t-shirt remains a firmly entrenched part of the practices of avid concertgoers and music lovers. While the band t-shirt creates a dichotomy between the owner's desire to be seen differently and their need to fit in, through its rituals of consumption and possession, the tour t-shirt conveys a 'secret identity' that is bound up with the notions of musical tribalism, collective experience and shared meanings, offering tangible proof of attendance at a particular concert. Tour t-shirts read like a biography of their owner, each becoming an entry on a timeline that marks age, place and state of mind at the moment of purchase. Their 'time-travelling' ability often means that tour t-shirts become the most cherished items of band merchandise, providing a direct link between the owner, the musician(s) in question, and the army of fans who shared the event together. Fonarow notes that tour t-shirts even have an unspoken etiquette; she cites immediately putting on a new tour t-shirt upon purchase as a rookie mistake because it communicates the status of a novice and unexperienced fan, while donning a t-shirt from a past tour is believed to give the wearer a certain prestige amongst other fans, as it is indicative of the longevity of their support for the band.

Despite their widespread popularity and well-established position in popular culture today, tour t-shirts are still generally considered to be little more than *curios* and, consequently, are yet to be addressed from an academic perspective. In this paper, I will use three Tom Petty tour t-shirts to demonstrate how a sociolinguistic approach can shed new light on their functions. While the creative mastery of Petty's videos, lyrics, and album covers is widely acknowledged, the tour t-shirt is a neglected part of originality in the Petty story. This paper offers a first effort to readdress this imbalance by conducting a multimodal analysis of three t-shirts from the 1991-92 *Touring the Great Wide Open* tour, the 1995 *Dogs*

with *Wings* tour and the 2002-03 *The Last DJ* tour. It will reveal how choices of imagery, color, typography and materiality are used as symbolic, visual representations of a theme that runs throughout all of Petty's work: the American Dream.

The Evolution of the T-Shirt: From Practical Undergarment to Vehicle of Expression

The t-shirt is generally believed to have started its life in 1898 when it was issued by the US Navy as an undergarment (Easby and Oliver 1). Its adoption by the US and UK armies in the early 20th century firmly established the t-shirt as a symbol of masculinity, and by 1920, it had earned its first entry in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, described as “a collarless short-sleeved or sleeveless usually cotton undershirt.” In the 1930s, the t-shirt became adopted as outerwear by dockworkers, farmers, miners, and construction workers who recognized the practicality of its lightweight and easy-to-clean fabric. Soon, manufacturers began to mass-produce t-shirts, selling them in mail order catalogues and department stores across the world.

Up until this point, t-shirts had been plain and unembellished garments. However, this trend soon changed following the outbreak of World War II. Realizing that their white t-shirts made them easily visible targets, soldiers began to dye them with coffee grinds. They also started to print their own t-shirts using stenciling to mark their station post, corps, and place of origin (Anticonformity USA 1).

Outside of the military, the plain t-shirt skyrocketed to its position as a fashionable outer garment following its use by Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *The Wild One* (1953), and James Dean in *A Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). The t-shirt epitomized a new American youth that was emerging (Easby and Oliver 2) and of which Petty was part. Struggling to find their place in post-war suburban society, the t-shirt enabled these adolescents to create their own sub-culture. As the 1960s arrived, the potential of the t-shirt as a vehicle of self-expression became recognized. Taking advantage of its blank and mobile

canvas, young adults used the t-shirt to write slogans, protests, and advertisements. Music festivals played an important role in this countercultural shift that swept America, leading manufacturers to think about using the t-shirt as a promotional device for bands. And so, the rock t-shirt was born.

The earliest example of a music t-shirt dates from 1956 when Elvis Presley's record company produced a promotional t-shirt alongside the release of one of his singles. However, the first known t-shirt to be sold at a concert was by The Beatles in 1964 followed by the Monkees in 1967. At this time, the t-shirt was one of many items of merchandise for sale and was considered to be just another fad (Easby and Oliver 4). Its permanent fixture at concerts is widely attributed to Bill Graham who established Winterland Productions in 1971, producing the first concert t-shirts for the Allman Brothers and the Grateful Dead. 1973 marked a new landmark in the history of the tour t-shirt, as the first festival t-shirt was made promoting three bands at once (the Allman Brothers, Grateful Dead and The Band). This established the classic characteristic of the tour t-shirt, which distinguishes it from the simple band t-shirt: the dates on its back.

Come the 1970s and the iron-on transfer increased the availability of mass-produced t-shirts. Since then, the t-shirt has firmly established its place as a defining feature of rock concerts no matter the size, venue, or location. Fans on the Tom Petty Nation (the largest Facebook group for Tom Petty fans) recall the existence of rock t-shirts at Petty concerts as early as 1977, the first design being the now-iconic Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers logo of a heart with a Gibson Flying V running through it (Figure 1). The 1981 *Hard Promises* tour was the first to have a name – a sure sign of the band's growing popularity. Their increasing recognition is reflected in

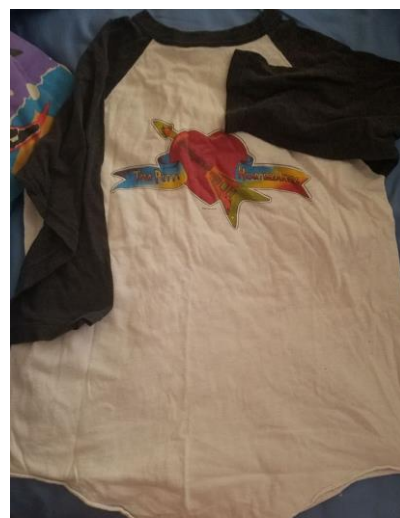


Figure 1 – Classic Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers T-Shirt Design

the change in t-shirt designs that occurred at this time, moving from simple album covers and images of Petty to clever puns, symbolism, and humor. The importance of the t-shirt to the Tom Petty story is even apparent in the fact that guests to his funeral were given their own personalized t-shirts in recognition of Petty's final swansong. The t-shirt shows an image of a young Petty foregrounded by the Latin 'nil desperandum' (no need to despair) from Horace's *Odes*.

Over the years, Petty's tour t-shirts continued to push boundaries, sitting on the cutting edge of design. They helped to expand the visual identity of the Heartbreakers beyond record sleeves and concert posters and enabled fans to integrate the band's aesthetic into their own. The result is a treasure trove of multimodality in which color, typography, image and texture all work together to represent the American Dream.

American Dream, Political Scheme?

Although the set of ideals that it evinces is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, the term 'American Dream' was first coined in 1931 by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*, described as "that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" (214-215). It was not a material dream of motor cars or high wages, but a dream of social order in which everybody was able to accomplish what they were innately capable of and recognized for what they were, regardless of social class or circumstances of birth. Indeed, Martin Luther King rooted the civil rights movements in the African-American quest for the American Dream.

Historically, the Dream originated in the mystique of frontier life. Writing in 1772, a British official declared that Americans "forever imagine the Lands further off are still better than those upon which they are already settled" (qtd. in Cavallo 83). By the 19th century, the frontier had become popularly romanticized as a barren landscape that provided an idealistic

way of living, which was in strong contrast to the harsh realities faced by those who inhabited the area. This concept of the American Dream ran deep in Petty's blood, his paternal grandmother having been a Cherokee who married a white man from Georgia and consequently, found themselves drifting from town to town in pursuit of happiness until they finally settled in Reddick, Florida (Zanes 10-12). It was a topic that Petty would revisit time and time again in his songs from *Two Gunslingers* and *Rebels* to *Time to Move On* and *Into the Great Wide Open*.

Over the past eighty years, the meaning of the American Dream has changed considerably. While Rank *et al.* argue that its fundamental aspect remains the expectation that the next generation should do better than the previous generation (98), Dixon equates the new American Dream with the possession of material items, as mythologized in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Since the 1980s, Hanson and Zogby have carried out a series of public opinion polls to examine trends in attitudes about the American Dream. They note that most Americans believe that the American Dream is becoming increasingly unattainable. Despite this skepticism, Blanden *et al.* affirm that "the idea of the US as 'the land of opportunity' persists" (33), albeit misplaced.

While the idea of the American Dream is complex and multifaceted, Petty created stories that struck at the soul of all of its aspects: frontier life, personal dreams, material aspirations, and even its rough and distorted reality. We see it in Eddie Rebel whose future was wide open, the American girl who thought there was a little more to life somewhere else, the loser who got lucky sometimes. Petty's music makes it clear that, although no single individual or group has an exclusive claim to the American Dream, everybody has a vision of what it is as a way of life.

In a 2014 interview with *The Sun* newspaper, Petty stated that the American Dream "is a very upfront issue for this generation." However, he also acknowledged the importance of balancing hope and belief with this new perverted view of America: "Young people have

been taught cynicism. They've been bred cynicism. So, I think it's important to give them hope and realism in the same package. You can be realistic but there should be hope in it. Because hope's what we're about. If we don't have hope, then we don't go on." With this in mind, Petty sets the scene nicely for a new type of American Dream. An American Dream that offers hope in the face of despair. An American Dream that recognizes the struggles of life, yet uses music to make sense of these pains, desires, pleasures, and fears. An American Dream Plan B.

Multimodality and Visual Grammar

Multimodality is a theory of communication that describes communicative practices in terms of the different semiotic modes (i.e. image, writing, layout, music, gesture etc.) used to compose messages. Jewitt and Oyama see multimodality as a form of visual grammar which involves "the description of semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images and how the things people say and do with images can be interpreted" (136). Multimodalists argue that modes have equal significance as ways of conveying meaning, and each shapes and carries the ontological, historical and social orientations of a society and its cultures with it into every sign (Kress, 79). Although texts have always been multimodal in nature, certain modes have not always been recognized as legitimate or culturally accepted forms of expression. However, in order to completely understand a text, the many modes used to communicate and their affordances, defined by van Leeuwen (4) as "the potential uses of a given object," must be observed and recognized.

Multimodality is a relatively new theory, having developed over the past twenty-five years within the field of 'social semiotics' to address many of the changes in society in relation to new media and technologies. The most important and influential work on multimodality was carried out in 1996 by Kress and van Leeuwen. They established the first social semiotic framework for analyzing images in their seminal work, *Reading Images: The*

Grammar of Visual Design. Within this framework, Kress and van Leeuwen recognize that an image simultaneously performs three metafunctions: the representational, the interpersonal and the compositional.

The representational metafunction is concerned with the people, places, and objects within an image and the actions or narratives in which they are involved, while the interpersonal metafunction deals with the relationships between the visual, the producer, and the viewer. Among the visual techniques that contribute to interpersonal meaning are the absence or presence of gaze towards the viewer, gestures which make offers or demands, degrees of social distance, and intimacy and perspective. The compositional metafunction, on the other hand, relates to the layout of a text (i.e. positioning, framing, salience) in order to determine the coherence between visual and verbal elements to the meaning-making of the entire unit.

Since Kress and van Leeuwen's framework for analyzing images was established, much work has been carried out on creating similar frameworks of analysis for other semiotic modes (i.e. van Leeuwen on music, Kress and van Leeuwen on color, Stenglin on space, Stöckl on typography, Djonov and van Leeuwen on texture and van Leeuwen and Djonov on kinetic typography). In my PhD thesis, I develop a model that draws together the most important elements of these frameworks when exploring visual artefacts and demonstrate how incorporating ethnographic methodologies into multimodal analysis can provide material evidence that strengthens the potential subjectivity of the arguments put forward. This model will be used to explore Petty's tour t-shirts.

Most work on multimodality has been principally concerned with the exploration of digital media, particularly the moving image (Burn and Parker; Rowsell), interactive CD-ROMS (Adam and Wild; Jewitt) and advertising (Gregorio-Godeo; Sørensen). Recently, there has also been an increase in research on the impact of multimodality on language pedagogy (Walsh; Kitson). Despite being a vast source of multimodality, musical artefacts,

such as album covers, promotional videos and tour t-shirts, have been widely overlooked by scholars. As a result, there is currently a lack of knowledge of the ways in which choices of imagery, color, typography, and materiality are used to transmit important messages about musicians and their ideas. Thus, it is apparent that there is an urgent need to explore the tour t-shirt within an academic context in order to change its perception from a walking billboard for a band to a significant medium of multimodal communication. Given the ingenuity of their designs, there is no better place to start exploring tour t-shirts than with those of Petty.

Methodology

Three Petty tour t-shirts have been chosen for multimodal analysis with the aim of establishing how words and images are used to convey the American Dream. The three tour t-shirts come from the 1991-92 *Touring the Great Wide Open* tour, the 1995 *Dogs with Wings* tour and the 2002-03 *The Last DJ* tour. They have been chosen for the fact that each offer a different interpretation of the American Dream (the allure of the frontier, personal aspirations and material prosperity) and the ways in which it has changed over time. Despite their varied perspectives of the American Dream, these t-shirts share some common factors that make them suitable comparable sources of analysis. Perhaps most obviously, the site of purchase was the same for all three t-shirts: the merchandise stand at a Tom Petty concert. Additionally, each t-shirt is made of the same cotton fabric and features a screen-printed image on its front and writing on its back.

The model for analysis can be seen in Figure 2. It compiles aspects from previous multimodal frameworks that are most important when exploring the tour t-shirt, as well as ethnographic information that helps to situate the tour t-shirts within their social context and to reconstruct the social practices involved in their creation. These two approaches offer a complementary way in which to think about tour t-shirts, as multimodality provides

ethnography with an analytical tool to understand artefacts, while ethnography gives an ideological quality to multimodality (Rowsell and Chen 176).

Under 'Image', Kress and van Leeuwen's three metafunctions are summarized in terms of what the image is about, how it engages the viewer, and how it is arranged to make sense to the viewer. 'Typography' encompasses two chief aspects: cultural connotation and style. Cultural connotation refers to the specific intentions, inherent associations and cultural references associated with the physical qualities of a typeface, while style is characterized by a type's weight, width, slope and orientation, which have vast meaning potential in terms of personalization. 'Color' comprises two features: value and modulation. Value is linked to the physical and emotional effect that a color's symbolism has on viewers, while modulation considers the importance of tints and shades in terms of cultural ideologies and positive/negative valuations. 'Materiality' is divided into three components: fabric, printing technique, and expression. While fabric and printing technique refer to the physical production of the tour t-shirt, expression relates to the metaphorical meaning of texture within images in terms of relief, density, regularity, and consistency.

'Context' draws upon the work of linguistic anthropologists Hymes and Saville-Troike to consider the production process and the key participants involved, the topic and purpose of the tour t-shirt, as well as its norms of interpretation. 'Ethnographic Resources' lists the most useful documents to consult for supporting information. Of these resources, the Petty Archives (<http://thepettyarchives.com>), a non-profit website dedicated to preserving Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers' related history, has been invaluable for its collection of original newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, tour information and setlists. The fans on the Facebook group, Tom Petty Nation, have also been an endless source of knowledge on all things Petty related. Warren Zanes' *Petty: The Biography*, Andrea Rotondo's *Tom Petty: Rock 'N' Roll Guardian* and Peter Bogdanovich's *Running Down a Dream* documentary film have also provided extremely useful supporting information.

The Tour T-Shirt			
Image	Typography	Colour	Materiality
<p>Representational What is this image about?</p> <p>Interpersonal How does the image engage the viewer?</p> <p>Compositional How is the image arranged to make sense to the viewer?</p>	<p>Cultural Connotations What specific intentions, inherent associations and cultural references are associated with the physical qualities of the typeface?</p> <p>Style How does the weight, width, slope and orientation of the type contribute to the text's meaning potential?</p>	<p>Value What physical and emotional effect does the colour's symbolism have on viewers?</p> <p>Modulation How do the use of tints and shades transmit particular cultural ideologies and positive/negative valuations?</p>	<p>Fabric What material was used to create the t-shirt?</p> <p>Printing Technique How was the image on the t-shirt printed?</p> <p>Expression How is texture used in the t-shirt to convey metaphorical meaning?</p>

Context	Ethnographic Resources
<p>Production Process How was the t-shirt produced?</p> <p>Participants Who was involved in the t-shirt's production?</p> <p>Topic What is the referential focus of the t-shirt?</p> <p>Purpose What is the t-shirt's aim in general and in terms of symbolic meaning?</p> <p>Norms of Interpretation What common knowledge or shared understandings are required to infer meaning from the t-shirt?</p>	<p>Petty Archives - Newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, tour information and setlists from 1971 to 2017.</p> <p>Tom Petty Nation - Interviews with fans</p> <p>Printed Material Warren Zanes – <i>Petty: The Biography</i> (2015) Andrea Rotondo's <i>Tom Petty: Rock 'N' Roll Guardian</i></p> <p>Visual Material Peter Bogdanovich – <i>Running Down a Dream</i> (2007) Documentary Film</p>

Touring the Great Wide Open 1991 Tour T-Shirt

In 1991, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers set out on a three-month American tour to promote the release of their eighth album, *Into the Great Wide Open*. The tour started on August 29th at Fiddler’s Green, Denver and ended at the Oakland Arena in Oakland, California on November 24th. In early 1992, the tour reached Europe, visiting Norway, Sweden, Germany, Ireland, UK, Switzerland, France, and Belgium. At this point, Petty was at the height of his career following the 1989 success of *Full Moon Fever*. However, it was also a time in which tensions were running high in the band as a result of Petty’s solo ventures.

According to Petty, *Into the Great Wide Open* was an album of reflection “about being young and old,” about looking at the promises of adolescence and what can become of dreams later in life. Rotondo considers its main theme to be the battle between staying true to oneself or giving in to temptation (166). Although the American Dream of open land and freedom had become a myth by the mid-20th century (Caldwell 123), through *Into the Great Wide Open*, Petty rebuilt the idea of “withdrawing from the great world and beginning a new life in a fresh green landscape” (Marx 3). In this way, the album represented an aural compass that guided those who were lost on the path of life. The t-shirt (Figure 3) designed for the tour explicitly highlights this message.

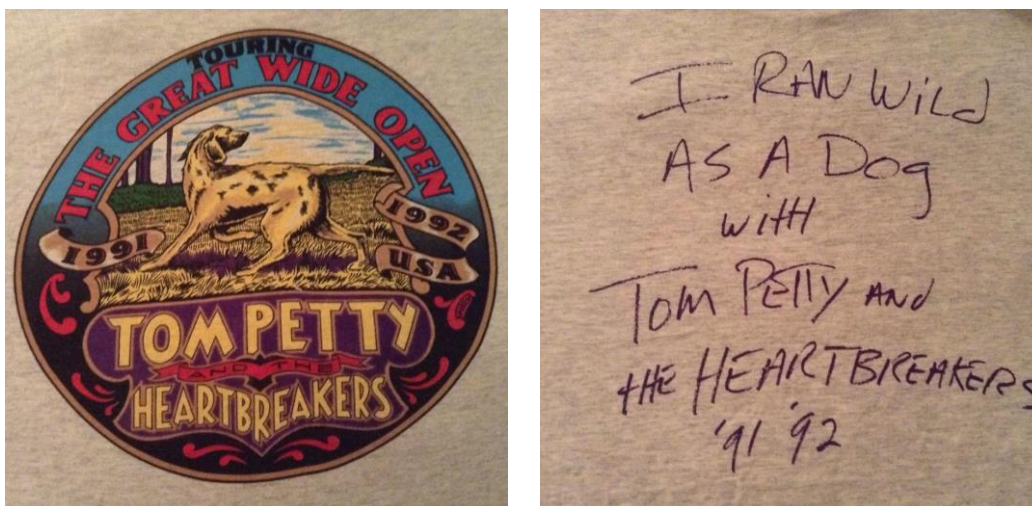


Figure 3 – *Touring the Great Wide Open 1991 Tour T-Shirt*

Made of grey cotton, the t-shirt shows an image of a Golden Retriever walking across a prairie. In the distance, behind the prairie, is a forest. The image offers a conceptual representation of the original American Dream, the dream of a place built on the shoulders of robust individualism “where the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant” (Turner 38). Here, the Golden Retriever symbolizes the prospect of freedom; it is looking back over its shoulder to the past while strolling on towards the future with the hope of a new beginning. The choice of the Golden Retriever is significant as, when conceptualizing the modern American Dream of a happy family with a picket-fenced house, the family is almost always accompanied by this type of dog (Heissenhuber Jr.). The Golden Retriever’s placement in this image suggests that it is turning its back on the new American Dream in search of its original and uncorrupted form. Despite its strong message about the American Dream, the Golden Retriever simultaneously reveals a subtler directive about Petty and his band. It was on the *Touring the Great Wide Open* tour that Scott Thurston was first drafted in. Petty viewed him as a “good buffer” between the rest of the band that represented a new and more optimistic direction. Thus, the dog can also be considered to be a symbol of Petty himself, who yearns to continue to use his music to pursue the original American Dream of happiness and prosperity.

Further significance is added to the image of the Golden Retriever when combined with the writing on the back of the t-shirt. Printed in a style that resembles hand-written permanent marker, it states, “I ran wild as a dog with Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers ’91 ’92.” This choice of words directly links the person who has bought the t-shirt with the image of the dog on its front, thus suggesting that buying the t-shirt is accompanied by a commitment to risking it all in search of a better life. Furthermore, the phrase conjures up a shared experience with Petty in which the date acts as visual proof that the event has taken place, while the faded lettering and hastily formed letters bring immediacy and personalization to the writing (Sassoon 76). The statement also makes a reference back to

Petty's song *Dogs on the Run*, a song whose lyrics clearly recount the trials and tribulations that come with the quest for the American Dream. Sperber and Wilson argue that readers use their pre-established knowledge to make sense of a text and understand its purpose (144). In reading this statement, Petty fans are likely to draw upon the lyrics of *Dogs on the Run* and link Petty with the image of the Golden Retriever. This interpretation brings additional meaning to the dog's position, as now, it can not only be said to be looking metaphorically back at the past, but also physically looking to the back of the t-shirt. In this way, the Golden Retriever as Petty is checking whether his fans are still with him and are going to continue to follow him on this new journey 'into the great wide open'. This grants the image with a pseudo-biblical dimension with Petty as the Messiah leading his people to the Promised Land.

The image on the t-shirt's front is printed within a circular frame, which acts almost as the window of a vehicle that looks out onto a passing landscape. Kress and van Leeuwen argue that the circle represents the unbroken completeness of time (55). Thus, its employment in this image suggests the possibility that, like all things, the American Dream will go full circle and return once more to a simple dream of happiness over a material dream of wealth. As the circle is also associated with the organic world of nature and creation (Kress and van Leeuwen 36), its shape further accentuates the main message of the image. The way in which 'Touring the Great Wide Open' is arranged in a semi-circle at the top of the image is also significant, as the writing has a "typopictoriality" (qtd. in Stöckl, 24) – a term used for when letters form visual signs which resemble objects – that physically represents the 'great wide open'. Here, the typeface is expanded with large spaces between each word. Van Leeuwen argues that this choice relates to our experience of space and is used to positively reflect the importance of having room to breathe and move (148). This idea is strengthened by the fact that the trees and sky of the image blur into the blue border, thus blending words and image together to create simultaneous meaning.

The banderoles on the side of the image and the name of the band at the bottom also show overlapping, which demonstrates that the words and image are intended to be seen as connected. The overlapping of the date emphasizes that the search for the American Dream must be undertaken today, while the overlapping of the band name highlights Petty's involvement in the quest. The yellow font of Petty's name also matches that of the Golden Retriever and the prairie, which further highlights his involvement. The fact that yellow has long been recognized for its "disturbing influence" (Kandinsky 37) and "intellect, ideas and a searching mind" (Lacy 36) also emphasizes Petty's leadership over his fans and the promise ahead.

***Dogs with Wings* 1995 Tour T-Shirt**

The *Dogs with Wings* tour took place in 1995 in support of Tom Petty's solo album *Wildflowers*. It consisted of a massive eighty-one tour dates across the US, as well as Vancouver and Toronto in Canada. The tour started in Louisville Gardens in Louisville on February 28th 1995 and ended eight months later in Lakefront Arena, New Orleans. The *Dogs with Wings* tour was the first to feature new drummer, Steve Ferrone, who had replaced Stan Lynch.

The *Wildflowers* album is often said to be Tom Petty's masterpiece. Written at a time in which his marriage was on the rocks, the album presented vivid stories about characters down on their luck and looking for a way to survive. "That's the divorce album," Petty stated in an interview with Warren Zanes, "It just came before I left." Reflecting Petty's own state of mind at the time, the songs constantly stress the need to cure self-doubt with optimism and make the necessary changes to live one's life with conviction – beliefs that are central to the American Dream. The importance of shooting for the stars is reflected in the t-shirt (Figure 4) designed for the tour, which emphasizes hope and the possibility of achieving the American Dream if only one is willing to look for it.



Figure 4 – *Dogs with Wings* 1995 Tour T-Shirt

The t-shirt is made of white cotton and, fitting with the title of the tour, shows a flag bearing an image of a dog with wings. The Chesapeake Bay Retriever, known as Leaper, is bounding upwards towards the golden crown in the sky. The image references the lyrics of *It's Good to Be King*, which state that Petty will become King when dogs get wings. Although 'when dogs get wings' bears a similarity to the well-known idiom 'pigs might fly', in this case, through self-belief, the impossible has actually become possible. According to Petty, this theme was central to his thinking at the time: "People get so obsessed with that drive to be king, as if that might solve their problems. Maybe a man's king when he's fallen in love and raised a family. Maybe that's the greatest reward there is in life and strangely enough, available to anyone." In this way, Petty is arguing that the barriers in life that we face are often created by us and, as such, we are the only ones who can overcome them. We must be more like the Chesapeake, who is not afraid to take a chance on the American Dream. The Chesapeake is a dog that is often described as having high intelligence, a happy disposition, courage, and a willingness to work (American Kennel Club 36). These qualities may have influenced the decision to choose this breed of dog over another.

The wings of the Chesapeake are also significant, as winged animals have long been recognized as symbols of aspiration and intelligence (Cirlot 374). Wings also signify mobility and enlightenment and can be seen as a form of spiritual evolution. Thus, the winged dog provides viewers with an avatar that represents a metaphor “for our personal and collective progress through life and history” (Medhurst 137). It embodies a figure that is aspiring for a universe that is similar to ours, yet grander, in which one is able to discover lessons of self-identity and knowledge of their existence. The use of gold (on the wings and the crown) adds strong value-laden meanings to the image, as the vision of America as the golden land of power and wealth is a myth that derived from the Pilgrim Fathers and the original American Dream (Pohl 87).

The fictional flag on which the dog features can be seen as a representation of a utopia that exists in the mind of viewers and to which they can escape. Flags belong to a semiotic domain in which the meaning of signs is fixed by precise rules (van Leeuwen 5). Thus, the horizontal bend across its middle that separates a green and blue triangle is significant. According to the Dictionary of Vexillology, green is a symbol of prosperity and fertility, while blue signifies determination and liberation. These qualities are essential to the American Dream and are used within the t-shirt to emphasize its key message. The green and blue colors also represent the dichotomy of earth and sky. The appearance of golden stars on the blue triangle further emphasizes this distinction and gives additional meaning to the Chesapeake who is elevated in the air. The five-pointed star is a common feature of flags and is often employed as a symbol of unity. Within this image, its usage suggests that dreams are more achievable if we work together. Samuel sees this as an important part of the American Dream: “It is a comforting belief that counters the many obstacles and limitations we all face on a daily basis. The idea that each of us can realize whatever it is we hope to in our lives is reason enough to get up in the morning and do whatever we have to in order to try to make that happen.” The position of the crown between the ‘earth’ and the ‘sky’ marks a return to

Petty's statement about *It's Good to Be King* that one must be realistic and recognize that being a king can simply be about having a happy and healthy family rather than wealth and prosperity. The American Dream is an optimistic, motivating force that propels people to achieve and accomplish things that they may otherwise not strive for.

Outside the borders of the flag, 'Tom Petty & the Heartbreakers' and 'Dogs with Wings Tour' are printed in an abstract red font. This stylized font is repeated on the back of the shirt, this time in blue. The repetition acts as a framing device that provides a "visual rhyme" (van Leeuwen 12) that brings connectivity, cohesion, and a sense of unity to the t-shirt. The combination of red and blue is thought-provoking, as both colors are deeply wired in our subconscious in terms of their opposing meanings – red as danger, revolution and fire, and blue as calm, water and peace (Kress and van Leeuwen 348). When combined together, they reflect a person's quest for the American Dream from the initial fear and apprehension at making a drastic life change followed by the reward and benefits reaped once it has been achieved.

The back of the t-shirt shows a more conventional tour t-shirt design, with the list of cities visited printed in blue capital letters in two columns. The spatial layout of the text is invaded with five green and red dogs with wings of various sizes, as well as stars. Their sporadic arrangement overlapping the writing blends the two messages, directly linking the fans who attend the concerts with the Chesapeake, therefore encouraging them to pursue their dream even if it may seem out of reach. Texture also plays an important role, as most of the lettering and the dogs are stitched on top of the original cotton fabric to create a 3D layer. Not only does this give the dogs an animate quality, bringing them to life, but the padded fabric also resembles that of a quilt. The quilt's association with beds and dreams, as well as its intimate connection to the everyday life of the 18th century Dutch and English settlers in America, further emphasizes the original notion of the American Dream.

The Last DJ 2002 Tour T-Shirt

Although *The Last DJ* album was not yet released, in 2002, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers decided to set out on a two-legged tour spread over six months. The first part began at the Van Andel Arena in Grand Rapids on June 27th and ended at the Chronicle Pavilion in Concord on September 1st. After the release of *The Last DJ* on October 8th, the band embarked on part two, starting on October 15th at the Grand Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles and finishing at the Fleet Center in Boston on December 13th.

The Last DJ album is often characterized as an indictment of the greed present in today's music industry, but Petty asserts that it was a commentary on the issue of American greed in general (Rotondo 218). In other words, the American Dream had turned sour, becoming more about the quest for material wealth than the pursuit of happiness. "It seems our whole American culture, if that's not an oxymoron, has become almost dangerous," Petty lamented in an interview with *The Gainesville Sun*. "It's this notion that we need to make all the money that is possible, of grabbing every cent. This attitude permeates every phase of life now. It's just so unhealthy." These frustrations are clearly manifested in the t-shirt (Figure 5) that was designed for *The Last DJ* tour.



Figure 5 – *The Last DJ* 2002 Tour T-Shirt

Made of black cotton, the t-shirt features a large black and white screen-print photograph on its front of Petty's Rickenbacker guitar leaning against a chair on top of a Persian rug. Underneath the image, almost reading like an advertisement, is the strapline 'Sell your computer buy a guitar.' Here, text and image stand together as separate but interdependent parts of a single whole in a complementary relationship, which Barthes terms "relay" (41). Their proximity, similarity and continuity provide a "visual beat" (Zakia 39) that establishes equilibrium and facilitates the connections between each element. Rather than telling a narrative, the image is conceptual; it shows a cynicism at the slow corruption of the American Dream in the face of capitalism, and specifically aims to encourage viewers to achieve something with their lives. By using the recognizable image of Petty's guitar, it implies that his success began with a simple six string, thus urging viewers that the same could be possible for them if they are willing to believe in the two fundamental and foundational underpinnings of the original American Dream – individualism and work ethic.

According to Caldwell, the American Dream has become eroded by people looking for short term solutions and 'get rich quick' schemes, and seeking self-realization in shallow entertainment and the cult of personality (48). Although the t-shirt's slogan clearly criticizes consumer society, there is a slight irony in the fact that one material item (the computer) is being replaced with another (the guitar). In a world in which success is now measured by material wealth, these two elements are juxtapositioned to convey the message that it is not wrong to have material goods, but we should make use of them to change our lives for the better rather than as a simple means of escapism. This was an integral belief of Petty's and runs throughout the interviews that he conducted at this time: "TV, I've quit watching it. People are already living their lives virtually, which ain't good." Through the message on this t-shirt, Petty reluctantly recognizes that, although the American Dream has changed, people have the potential to use material goods for meaningful purposes to achieve their goals.

Within the image, the rug, wires, chair and other guitar all act as “circumstances” that work together to “build up the material reality of the possible world” (Halliday 30), adding meaning and validity to the message (Cheng 172). By drawing upon their sociocultural knowledge of to whom the guitar belongs and Petty’s consistent use of Persian rugs on stage, viewers are able to infer that the voice of reason belongs to Petty himself. Thus, the image acts as a riddle with a ready-made solution that can only be solved by fans who are ‘in the know’. In this way, the tour t-shirt retains its status as an exclusive item of merchandise that is not for outsiders.

The fact that Petty is the person speaking is confirmed by his signature on the pickguard of the guitar. Jacoby calls the signature “the psychological visiting card of a person” (qtd. in Sassoon 76), as it develops as a personal hieroglyph that presents the writer and their character to the world. Here, Petty uses his signature as a seal of authenticity and, when coupled with the handwritten style of the strapline, it serves to create a bond with viewers. The use of direct speech written in an imperative form acts as candid advice from Petty, allowing no room for debate. His position as a respected figure of authority grants him the right to speak his mind and makes the advice more likely to be accepted by the targeted viewers – his fans. Block capitals also highlight the gravity of the message, as this style of writing is often associated with a raised tone of voice.

The choice to render the photograph in black and white rather than polychrome is significant, as the low modality and saturation of these colors is recognized as having a greater truth value and level of realness (Hodge and Kress 124). It also emphasizes nostalgia for a better past in which young people had a dream and chased it rather than becoming caught up in virtual reality and consumerism, what Lerner describes as “the new soil in which America has found its roots” (100). Kress and van Leeuwen also note that most viewers see a direct correlation between low saturation and moodiness (356). This symbolic meaning reflects the frustration that Petty feels at the “commodification of individualism” (Cowen 49).

The distorted view of the image is also meaningful. Displaying it in a landscape, as opposed to a portrait, position requires greater effort from viewers to interpret. From this angle, the guitar seems to be floating in the air, its neck acting as an arrow that orientates viewers, directing them to the verbal message below.

The back of the t-shirt simply bears three words – Tom Petty Rocks – written in white block capitals in a crawl text style that shows each line getting larger, thus accentuating its message. The letters show close connectivity, with the T of ‘Petty’ and the K of ‘Rocks’ overlapping and merging together. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that overlapping emphasizes the importance of a person, as they cannot be confined to one spatial position (214). The polysemy of the word ‘rocks’ – meaning ‘to be very good’ or ‘to play rock music’ – is also drawn upon to emphasize two of Petty’s qualities. These typographic and lexical choices serve to authenticate and underline Petty as a role model. The t-shirt’s expressive message requires fans not just to support Petty, but also to agree with his ideas. In buying and wearing the t-shirt, fans are also committing to an agreement with the sentiments expressed.

While the image of Petty’s guitar could be seen to contradict his main message, given that the new American Dream views the “images and symbols of success as more important than the actual achievement” (Caldwell 26), when combined with the accompanying text and the context of use, it stands as a visual testimony to the hard work, dedication, and determination that Petty put in to reach the stage he is at today and ultimately, achieve his American Dream.

Conclusion

Throughout his some forty years in show business, the American Dream was a central theme of Petty’s work. While its portrayal in song lyrics has long been recognized, this is the first study to turn attention to the tour t-shirt and the way in which image, color, typography, and materiality were used to convey meaning. Petty’s tour t-shirts read like a history of the American Dream, taking fans from the mystique and hope of frontier life (*Touring the Great*

Wide Open) to the boundless possibilities of success and happiness (*Dogs with Wings*) through to the corruption of materiality and consumerism (*The Last DJ*). Petty used the tour t-shirt as a microcosm of the general concerns that existed amongst people in American society. Whether through his symbols of the Golden Retriever, Chesapeake or Rickenbacker, his voice was always embedded within, urging fans to be realistic, while offering them hope. “I like things left ambiguous to some degree,” Petty once stated in reference to his song lyrics. The same can be said for his tour t-shirts. Their beauty lies in the fact that fans can draw whatever meaning they wish from them, whether it is simple proof that they attended the concert or a more spiritual connection with its metaphorical messages.

The eternal appeal of Petty’s tour t-shirts means that, although we will, sadly, never get to attend another Petty concert, his enduring and endearing personality will forever live on through the unique designs that he created. They form an unbreakable bond between fans that shared the live experience together; those who had literally been there, done that and got the t-shirt to prove it.

John F. Kennedy once said that “the problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by sceptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were.” Petty was one of these men. Perhaps that is why his loss is felt so greatly; it is not only a loss of an enormous talent but a loss of the American Dream.

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