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Research Question: How can designers provide alternative methods of sustainability?

Explore alternative methods through the ontological assessment of objects within a surface pattern and design context.

The discourse of postmodern condition renounces all meaning, and rationale attached to art and design. Knowledge becomes inferior, the deprivation of value rids us of sentiment, and the objects that surround us are degraded as dispensable. *To what function do such notions set meaningful intentions within the subject of sustainability for the designer or spectator?*

The current zeitgeist acknowledges that as we evolve into the post-postmodern era, the emptiness of our resources and designs is an obsolete notion that serves no purpose to contemporary needs. The demographic has shifted and the specification for art and design has evolved. That specification now, is a requirement to sensemake, a desire for value, and a need to be resourceful. Designers must tread in mindful pursuit to inject intention, practicality, and function back into design. To cure the wasteful postmodern disjuncture, designers must redeem attitudes of the object and navigate sustainable trajectories for the spectator-consumer.

Current society will be referred to as the sustainability renaissance, as we are responsible for setting the prefix for economical habits to transform future object and design culture. As a reaction to the principles of postmodernism, this text will explore how designers can reinstall sentiment back into objects of design in order to make space for their extended lifecycle, which in turn will inform a more sustainable methodology for designers and consumers alike. As designers understand that, "objects create subjects more than the other way round" (Miller, 2008), by assessing the context of objects within the themes of phenomenology, hauntology and metanarratives through a lens of abductive reasoning, we can unpick what connects the consumer to the object. To establish a deeper understanding of the needs and desires of the human condition, and how designers can implement those needs. This will aid in producing sustainable trajectories and lifetimes for objects within design.

Sustain: cause to continue for an extended period or without interruption; uphold, affirm, or confirm the justice or validity of (OED, 2024). When considering language, 'sustain' lends itself to the formation of the word 'sustainability'. To *sustain* is to complete the action of

durability that allows something to be described as *sustainable*. Within the context of design, to be considered sustainable is to be resourceful when sourcing materials with production methods that cause little to no global detriment. However, the production of 'things', sustainable or otherwise, still creates congestion and does not discourage over-consumption. Objects may be designed in a sustainable fashion, however, this does reserve the right of an exclusively sustainable status. For the achievement of the *sustainable* status, Print Pattern Archive suggests that an object is reliant on the extended postproduction lifespan that transcends trend and remains relevant for at least a decade (O'Meara, 2024). With an emphasis on objects remaining in circulation for an extended period, designers must also consider that an object not produced by sustainable means prior to the sustainable revolution, is also inclusive of establishing sustainable render. As these objects have the ability to self-qualify through a sustained existence by withstanding the testament of time; and is valued by the spectator-consumer to the degree that outsourcing a (*sustainable*) alternative is not warranted.

Decoding the language of objects is a direct exploration into further understanding of the human condition and their interpretations. Object language is an expansive context beyond the physical form of the object. It is the narratives and concepts enmeshed within the object that form tacit affiliations interpreted subjectively by the spectator. It is the use of colour, form, materiality and motif that inform the language of the object to occupy meaning. Art critic, John Berger describes this tacit language as, "cultural lessons half learnt" (1972, p.140). This undercurrent of tacit knowledge is what forms engagement and connection. Dependent on what the message undertone provokes, a measure of value is imparted on the object by the spectator. By evaluating an object's dialogue, and the emotive needs of the spectator, designers are able to achieve valued design outcomes as, argued by (Klein, Moon and Hoffman, 2006, p.3), through the suggestion that understanding, "connections (which can be among people, places, and events)" can allow us, "to anticipate their trajectories and act effectively". By unpicking what connects us to external objects, designers are equipped with the tools to curate meaningful design that will surpass trend and era. Design that remains both emotionally connected and stylistically relevant to the spectator; or to circular fashions. Forecasting methods that support sustained objects,

unlimited by finite characteristics that contribute to uneconomical dispositions. The object, to rely on itself to be mutable of changing times. Objects have the capacity to provide external contemplation that the human condition cannot articulate for itself.

The study of apprehending earthly experiences within the human consciousness is the philosophical study of phenomenology. Objects can be utilised as a tool to directly embody these perceptions to support the theory of existence. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels proposed that, “the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with material activity and the material intercourse of men” (1970, p.52). There is an interdependent relationship between the object and the spectator. The spectator to object connection is the way in which the spectator’s abductive understanding of the world projects emotion and consciousness into the object by embedding a narrative, which is subjective to each individual spectator. The object therefore becomes a metaphorical expansion of the physical form it inhabits by the authority of the spectator. Paul Klee explains this as action as, ‘Formgiving’ and suggests that “formgiving is life” (1973, p.269). The onus is on the spectator to provide a sense of purpose for the object, that the object cannot supply for itself. When the spectator incarnates an object in this way, it holds a sustainable connection to the spectator that will always remain relevant; as it meets a tangible need that enriches the spectator’s existence.

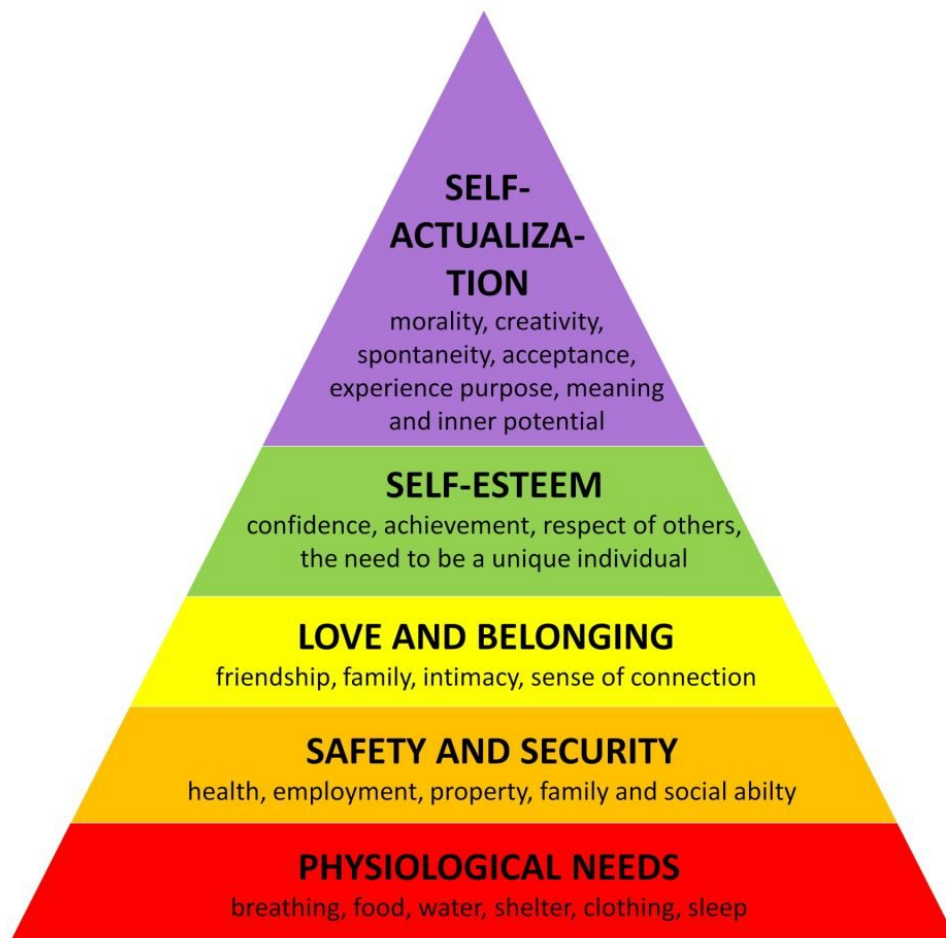


Fig 1. Abraham Maslow, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, 1943.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (fig 1), created by Abraham Maslow (1943) is a psychological construct that illustrates the levels of humanistic needs required to achieve the full ascension to total human fulfilment. The triangle informs us that only by achieving one need; beginning at the base of the triangle can we ascend to the next, each level enriches the human experience, which has a positive effect on the human psyche (Mcleod, 2024). The hierarchy can also be applied to the context of considering our phenomenological relations to the object and how we can utilise them to fulfil our needs. However, this theory can only be engaged at the point of achieving 'love and belonging' as 'physiological needs' must be fulfilled prior, as they encompass the necessities required for survival. Only then can the contemplation of object-connection be explored. The acquisition of objects

determines a connection between itself and the owner and how the objects are interpreted remains at both a conscious and subconscious interaction. When the object is owned, it is belonged, holding a subjective purpose to the owner. The object becomes a tool that awakens the human consciousness, a prerequisite element to enhancing the human experience. Maslow's hierarchy tells us that we need objects as a means of survival.



Fig 2. Barbera Kruger, *I shop therefore I am*, 1987.

Observing the work (1987) of graphic design artist Barbera Kruger illustrated in figure 2. This work highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between the consumer, and the 'thing'. Indicative of how consumers relate to their objects, by utilising them as a means for self-representation (Miller, 2008). The visual language of, '*I shop therefore I am*' acts as an advertisement to designers, projecting the message that to comprehend the mind of the consumer, is to *know* they are searching for a sense of self in what they consume. The tone of the image is intentionally confrontational, the red aggressively frames text, while

the monochromatic grasp of the consumer's hand illustrates a lifeless desperation prior to possession. The message is clear, it is not about the object, it is about what the object means to *them*; that only then in pursuit of the 'thing' desired, can the apprehension of the self be achieved, by formulating a space and authority that can be related to. The consumer now feels an innate sense of belonging as the object embodies a tool of representation to rationalise their own individual identity. The consumer has now accomplished 'love and belonging' within the hierarchy of needs and in achieving this they can now ascend to the next level of psychological fulfilment. For the need of the object obtained to remain relevant, and therefore sustainable, it must consistently uphold a value that is irrevocable to the consumer. By assessing the intention behind the purpose of the object that the consumer invests in, designers are able to distinguish if it will contribute to the improvement of the human existence. In essence, Kruger's work (1987) focuses on the superficial intentions behind object consumption. However, the subject of what value the object imparts upon the consumer to nurture earthly experiences is validated by the innate needs that are met.

To understand the concept of value is to know that it is subjective; but can be categorised objectively, by determining if the object is of intrinsic or extrinsic value. Objects of extrinsic origin can be identified as consumed to achieve higher social status, wealth and improve self-image. On the other hand, the elements of intrinsic value contribute towards objects that provide a sense of connection, enhance creativity and are inherently enriching to the human experience (Crowther, 2015). Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' supports the characteristics of intrinsic value, as acquiring objects of an intrinsic nature can fulfil the innate human need for connection. Which in turn assists in ascending to a fortified level of psychological accomplishment. Therefore, it is understood that achieving both self-esteem and self-actualisation is the true aspiration which motivates the human condition, to which intrinsic objects can aid in the process. When objects are made with intrinsic design intention, the warrant of the object's existence is infinitely self-affirming as it becomes continually relevant as a requirement to human need. This supports the theory that intrinsic objects are made to sustain, and can in fact, be acknowledged as sustainable. Designers must contemplate to which value ideal their design serves to uphold a sustained trajectory.

The specification of an intended sustainable design object must adhere to visual, metaphorical and physical intrinsic function.

Kruger's work (fig 2) explains how objects can direct the trajectories of our lives. How we direct the trajectories of objects, is reliant on the mode of value imparted upon the object. Extrinsically valued objects can only endure a fleeting existence, whereas intrinsic objects, synthesise function to meet a need that is continually affirming. Therefore, regarded with higher value. The degree of intrinsic value placed upon an object is determined by the way in which the language of the object communicates the inherent individual ideals of the spectator. An object's language is interpreted through the means of abductive assumption. Berger (1972, p.140) asserts that, designers are to recognise the needs and values of the consumer will evolve, but that the amorphous references of the object are still able to conform to the perceptions of the spectator. We are reminded that, "material objects are valued in cultural contexts" (Dant, 1996, p.4), in relation particularly to the psychological and social experiences of the spectator. The language of the object will present an amalgamation of perceptions which will be interpreted differently depending on cultural paradigms. These paradigms, known to be a set of concepts that different cultural societies acknowledge, hold a set of standards that are understood collectively and accepted in differing cultures and contexts. Therefore, the spectator's assumptions of the object precede any design intent placed upon the object by the designer. As these interpretations are underpinned by the paradigms that hold agency within their culture(s). To produce sustained objects is for the designer to accept that the object's language and value is multifaceted to the extent that differing cultures can access alternative paradigms, depending on cultural insight.

The relationship of the object to the spectator, is that the object is obliged to *be* interacted with to achieve a form of agency. This interaction can be described as *the ritual*. The object *needs* a spectator, like the spectator *needs* connection. For the act of the object ritual to be accomplished, an interaction between the object and spectator is required. The combining of both elements produces a tertiary outcome: the phenomenological consciousness of the

object, described as formgiving. This is the synthesis, “between artefact and belief system” (Howes, 2006, p.3) supplied by the spectator. Formgiving is exclusively achieved through the essential participation of the spectator-consumer. Dadaism artist Marcel Duchamp acknowledged this ritualistic methodology within his own work that the art or object is subservient in supporting the study and evidence of existence (ontology). Duchamp expressed the necessity of audience contribution through ritual (Elger, 2016, p.46), underpins the actualisation of the art or object by supplying ontological order. The value of the object is inferior to the value of the spectator as, “the Eye and the Spectator stand for that process, which continually restates the paradoxes of consciousness” (O’Doherty, 1999, p.61). For it is the phenomenological insight of the spectator which dictates if a deeper meaning can be to be imparted upon the object to form relevancy. Just as in Catholicism the holy trinity of the father, son and holy spirit represents the omnipresence of total faith, the tertiary elements of the ritual - the object, spectator and formgiving - allow actualisation of intrinsic value connection to be rooted within the object.

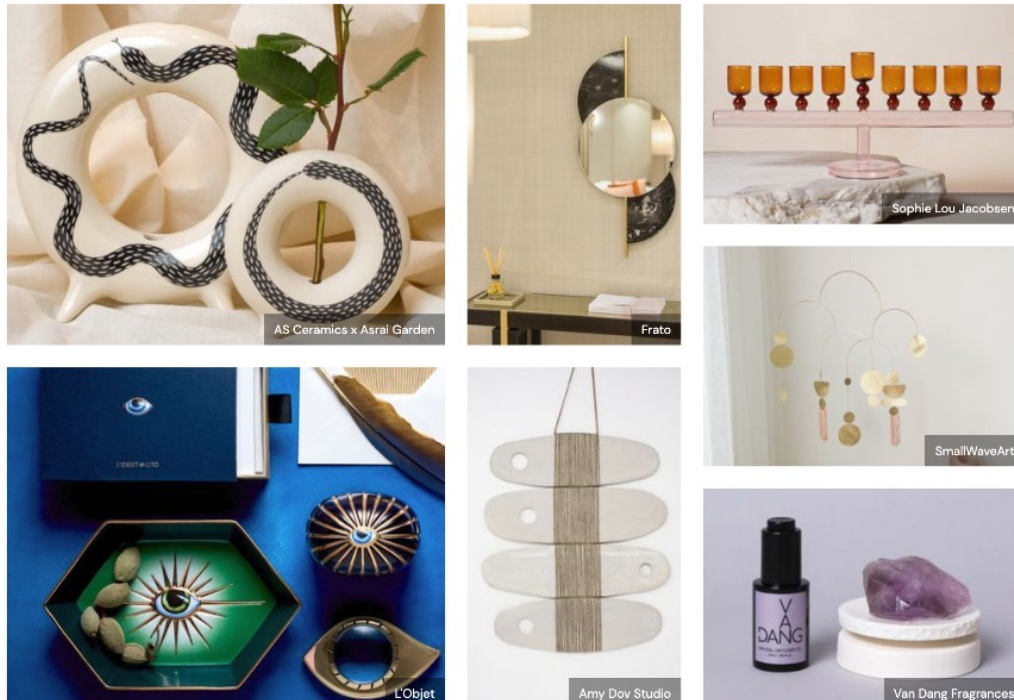


Fig 3. WGSN, *Modern Talismans*, 2023.

The ideologies of living and consuming sustainably are a current rhetoric for many institutions. As intentions of more ecological ways of production greenwash society, companies provide discourse of embellished mission statements with deadlines of distant futures.

Lindwall (2023) describes this as a deceptive marketing strategy... misleading consumers into believing something is produced in an ethical and environmentally favourable method when it is not. Resolving production methods of design in pursuit for more economical means, only addresses a limited proportion of the problem and masks the latter. *How* can designers create objects of constant sustained significance to the consumer to propose that objects can retain longevity. A WGSN concept forecast of 'Modern Talismans' (2023) looks to encourage and instil mindful rituals into newly designed objects, increasing usability and interaction (fig 3). Consistent interaction fulfils the humanistic need for deeper connections. Spiritual language within the object by referencing cultural metanarratives that are of intrinsic supply warrants a trajectory of deeply established value. The objective of this forecast relies on meaningful connections within objects to satisfy the consumer. The latter onus of the sustainable issue is the consumer's responsibility to preserve. For fewer objects to be made, the consumer demand becomes mindful cultivating the object to last is ritualistic as it enhances, "the value-relation between the products of labour" (Marx and Engles, 1970, p.51). The ritual imposes sentiment, for consumers to become custodians of these objects and the focus is on nurturing and preservation. By issuing such embedded connections encourages consumers to view these objects as investments, deterring expendable usage. The evolving consumer narrative advocates for the act of preservation, as an act of sustainability; rather than scouring sustainability in newness. Consumers greenwash themselves into the narratives of economical substitutions, when the ritual of preservation can be a resolve to the sustainability crisis.

Contrary to postmodern belief, the objective for the surface pattern designer is to create order and rhythm by means of repetition, "surface patterns were designed in order to assist

in examining pattern relations in spatial contexts” (Kristensen, 2017, p.27). Pattern motifs embedded within a visual language to articulate narratives within a stylised capacity. The decorative practice intends to summarise visual abundance and information by delivering it to the consumer through objects which are readily accessible to the consumer. Pattern “is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy” (Barthes, 1977, p.15) which is separate from objective function. Structures of pattern-making are embedded with narratives expressed through imagery. These narratives can be defined as metanarratives, by encompassing the explanation of knowledge through our ways of knowing - defined by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, in an act to rationalise theoretical models that support a wider conceptual construct. Patterns can emit knowledge as a visual method of storytelling that can articulate concepts in such a compelling manner that can precede words to a higher validity. For pattern designers to produce sustainable designs, the visual language must communicate metanarratives that will remain significant for the spectator beyond trend culture; securing valued connections. It is paramount that pattern autonomy possesses reproductive capabilities that can be tailored to a plethora of object forms to meet interchangeable domestic needs. When designers produce dynamic visual stories in a pattern that can appropriate themselves to differing metanarratives, this reinforces sustained relevancy to be considered a fully functional and resourceful print.

Our interpretations of the present are consistently in tandem with our lived past experiences. That assists with rationalising ontological truth. “The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production” (Fisher, 2012). Objects have the capacity to support the ontological narrative of memory when their visual language references the past. This reference to the past can be described as a haunting, a recurrence of familiarity that is subjective to the spectator. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida coined this term as, ‘hauntology’ (Fisher, 2012). This term suggests that objects can serve as visual reminders of the past with hauntological references, served upon them by the spectator. The hauntological narrative can be found within the visual language of an object that provides these haunting references as a recollection of memory. There is a significant difference

within remembering and memory, as suggested in the journal *Cloth and Culture* (Noble, 2018), recalling memories is invalidated by the accuracy to recall the truth of the past. Memories do not require to accurately regurgitate the past as a matter of factual hierarchy, instead, memories serve the purpose to rationalise the authorisation of ontological experiences connected to the past. Memory is driven by emotion, which provokes the senses; to allude to a feeling, situation or notion of the past. Sentiment is a product of memories when observing objects with past connections. Sentiment is the preferential glue that supplies intrinsic value to an object that advocates the innate need for humanly connection, allowing for a sustained object narrative that remains infinitely sustainable to the custodian-spectator.

The very nature of textility is an interwoven structure. Interwoven by means of process, narrative to form a tactile entity that interacts with the consumer in a domesticated setting. This form of interaction continues to uphold the narrative that fabricated objects interacting with their environments, serving the function of the ritual, evokes sentiment over time. The ritual of interaction is said to provide space for hauntological narratives to form within these textile objects as, “inert matter but of intervening in the fields of force and currents of material wherein forms are generated” (Ingold, 2009, p. 92). The fields of force imply spectator participation, in that the object is observed as the material and the formgiving becomes the hauntology that *is* associated with the object.



Fig 4. Sydney Swisher, *If It Comes to You, It Means Something*, 2023.

Artist Sydney Swisher's practice is motivated by the subject of memories and the power of nostalgia (Akdemir, 2023) which holds prospect to become embedded within textiles. Repurposing thrifted textiles to explicitly reference the past (Fisher, 2012), through visual depiction of what the paradigm of hauntology communicates, material reference and memory. Swisher illustrates visually (fig 4) what the capacity of a sustained hauntological object can imply. The connection to support phenomenological consciousness, familiarity and warmth accomplishes the humanistic need for connection, which makes these objects intrinsic assistants in the process. A tableau of a generically retrospective domestic scene emerging through the motifs of the period-specific textile, are the hallmarks for Swisher's work. Reinforcing the notion that narratives become enmeshed within objects that endure interaction and time. Patterns and objects hold memories as a kinetic energy that explains the past to the future simultaneously. The object, a signifier of the past revives sentiment

that is transcendent of trend. An omnipotent attribute that endorses sustained trajectories and deeply valued intrinsic relations.

Referencing visual language of the past inscribes a hauntological narrative, a duality of utilising the past to serve contemporary ontology. This form of visual appropriation is not a new method of artistic licence. Familiar language resonates with the spectator in the same way which hauntology evokes memory. The intention is suggestive and broad, by casting a wider net these vague interpretations render for increased success in connecting the spectator to the work. These hauntological references remain separate from objective function of the object as, “whatever the origin and the destination of the message, the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy” (Barthes, 1977, p.15). The reproductive format of visual narrative and motif that ceases direct objective translation but presents itself as a haunting, interdependent of the original narrative but retains an independence of establishing an individual trajectory for the object. Appropriating objects by fully assessing their metanarrative dialect can lead to a transformation of conceptual understanding and serving function of the item; pushing forth a reinstated value.



Fig 5. Kerri Simmons for House of Hackney, *Hollyhocks*, 2021.

Reproductions of past practices becomes the stepping stone of revival, breathing a renewed sense of creative life into designs that become more relative to the present day. In tandem with carrying forward hauntological practices and references of the past serving deeper intrinsic connection, Berger (1972, p.24) argues that, “in the age of pictorial reproduction the meaning of paintings is no longer attached to them”. Contrary to Berger’s beliefs, the craft of the surface pattern designer is underpinned by the reproductive quality that pattern design possess, the *need* is to be translatable and accessible, which makes the message more permeable. The patten design “Hollyhocks” from House Of Hackney (fig 5), designed by Kerry Simmons was directly influenced by the floral oil paintings (fig 6) of Art Nouveau artist Gustav Klimt (Phillips, 2021). This is the result of reproduction by appropriation, the work remains independent of itself, while reintroducing relevance of the original work through the undercurrents of the original narrative. Reproduction can provide reminiscence that supports the presence of hauntology within new designs.



Fig 6. Gustav Klimt, *Cottage Garden*, 1905.

The original, however, is never the origin. As the primary subject of Klimt's work (fig 6) was his garden, by incorporating references of the past, a *neo-Impressionist Pointillism technique* (Neret, 2015, p.52) alongside the blooming forms of his garden. Klimt rendered the emergence of an innovative painted handwriting through reproducing a familiar painted style of the time, by altering the typical subject used within the pointillist technique. Through the influence of Klimt's predecessors, he reconstructed by means of *reproducing* how floral landscapes were traditionally illustrated, that altered trajectories inclusive of the present day. Therefore, the meandering notion of the embedded message is not lost, it becomes subevent to serve a contempered purpose. Evolving with need, solidifies a sustained relevance to survive. Decoding the familiar language, informs designers how to achieve these relative connections to the audience within their practice. Designers must

understand that these methods of reproduction by appropriation carve pathways for innovation, the space that forms such pathways for reviving intrinsic design connection.

To understand the use of pattern objects within an interior context, is to know it is never independent of itself, "The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it." (Berger, 1972, p.29). The object remains in constant conversation with the environment it inhabits. Decoding the metanarratives of an interior space informs a deeper understanding of the visual agency pattern holds within a given environment. Each interior space is embedded with a unique "system of signs" (Saussure, 1916) which directly influences how we perceive pattern. These *signs* mean that, "an object is defined first and foremost by its context and is perceived differently in different environments." (Elger, 2016, p.46). Pattern holds a mutable licence dependent on the environment it inhabits. Interpreting the works of Barthes (1977) to be applied in this context reveals that the cultural metanarrative of the room becomes the signifier directing our interpretations. While the pattern that adorns the space within the parameters of the chosen environment, become the signified definition of establishing contextual narrative.



Fig 7. National Trust, *Wightwick Manor*
The Morning Room, 2024.

Fig 8. Megan Brackpool, *Bedroom*, 2022.

Knowing that the environment can alter the context of pattern, supports the notion that pattern can remain relevant by evolving; therefore, remaining sustainable. By understanding these *signs*, the designer knows the perception of pattern is completely interchangeable dependent by context. As by altering the environment can manipulate the patterns overall visual conversation within a space, “such authority as it retains, is distributed over the whole context in which it appears” (Berger J, 1972, p.29) and differs the interpretations presented to the spectator. This is evident in comparing the environments of figures seven and eight, which are both decorated with wallpaper design Leicester by arts and crafts pioneer William Morris. The systems of signs within the room, are conclusive of environment and domestic furniture that accessorises the space; describe two completely different pattern narratives of the print. The morning room of Wightwick Manor (fig 7) is a Victorian period style house. The mood of the room supplies a dark moody aesthetic, with gothic wooden embellishments that signify the print as retrospective and therefore not relevant to current interior fashions. Whereas in contrast, the use of the print in a contemporary bedroom setting (fig 8) of interior blogger Megan Brackpool denotes a fresh romantic and whimsical sense of decorative biophilic narrative. The print functions in

exactly the same way (wallpaper decoration) however, delivering entirely different narratives over the interpretation of print, which is entirely reliant on the signifying context of the space. The print achieves sustainable status as it remains relevant and fashioned to the present day. Upholding the notion that pattern is not limited to itself. By decoding the cultural myth of curating an interior space pattern can evolve with time while remaining the same; it is just the visual interpretation that alters. This is an example of how pattern handwriting possesses the capacity to retain a sustained trajectory, when the external environment alters itself to accommodate a continued relevancy.

The post-postmodern movement of the sustainability renaissance is contingent on education provided by designers. By referencing metanarratives and hauntological sentiment as a basic requirement to design specifications will unveil revolutionised trajectories back into objects and preexisting objects that echo the same paradigm. In an attempt to resolve the issue of creating finite pattern designs that are too trend specific, and therefore hold little to no sustainable trajectory. To slow down the fast-paced consumer discourse, Print Pattern Archive (2024) have presented the thesis of a new last trend, summarised by the term, "Hipstorical". This can be defined as, historical archived references reimagined in contemporary dictum (O'Meara, 2024). To set precedence for the end of trend by establishing a more circular economy for design language, when issuing newly designed objects. This text has established that retrospect hauntological references produce deeper design connections between the object and the spectator. The necessity to supply retrospective reference is because, "it would lack both confidence and credibility if it used a strictly contemporary language." (Berger, 1972, p.139). As in isolation, contemporary language offers no familiar perceptions that can be interpreted by the spectator, severing possible connections while creating redundant objects in the process.

Implementing a new ritual, that formgiving aids connection and enlightenment to serve function in achieving self-actualisation. The ritual although seemingly an act of worship, reaffirms custodianship and connection upon preserving object ontology as, "the democratisation of religious themes through their relocation within popular culture"

(Howes, 2006, p.41). Contemporary society is that of a secular one therefore, our worship within religious metanarratives is redirected toward the conservation of material objects to obtain a sustained existence. Preservation becomes *the* fashion. Outsourcing for extrinsic purpose is an outdated rhetoric as consumers rightfully, demand more from their objects. The demand is for designers to sensemake objects with true ontological intent. That equips the spectator with the referential hallmarks of metanarratives and hauntology to complete the ritual of formgiving. This will condition consumers to understand the systematic objectives of intrinsic value, by reevaluating what objects supply causation to achieve humanistic enrichment. That to dispose of objects ill-willingly is a regressive attitude of the past. The sustainability renaissance combats the emptiness of the postmodern disjuncture by reinstating sentiment, intrinsic value and connection. This is inclusive of objects and humanly interactions to restore ontological order as sustainable law; a manifesto that postmodernism credentials could never address.

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