

Research in Practice:
Personality, History and Nature.

Name: Valentina Kromholc

Student number: 2204973

Module course: Research in Practice ADAD5004

Course: BA (Hons) Product and Furniture Design

Lecturer: Julia Lockheart

Word count: 2535

The three keywords I will be exploring are **Personality**, **History** and **Nature** in relation to the world of design and how they are implemented. Within **Personality**, I have looked into Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's and Sigmund Freud's psychological theories within the context of creativity, and how the designer's personality can be passed on to their creations. Within the topic of **History**, I have spoken about historic events such as the Renaissance and the first and second World War and their influences on the modern world as we know it specific to developments. Lastly, I investigated **Nature's** influence in architecture, specific to Eden Project, and the effects of being exposed to nature in context to mental health, as well as design inspiration and creativity.

According to the American Psychological Association (2022), **Personality** can be described as the "enduring characteristics and behaviour that comprise a person's unique adjustment to life", like "major traits, interests [and] values" as well as their "abilities and emotional patterns". Though there are a variety of theories related to how we understand personality, "all agree that personality helps determine behaviour". The development of an individual's personality is influenced by various factors like genetics, environment including culture and the individual's experiences.

Some of these mentioned theories include Sigmund Freud's (late 19th century) Psychoanalytic Theory, which can be summarised as a method of therapies exploring the unconscious mind, concentrating on the repressed and conflicted memories which can interplay and influence human behaviour. This was done through techniques such as free association, dream analysis and transference. With the goal of retrieving unconscious material into conscious awareness, leading to insight. Erik Erikson's Psychological Development Theory, where he expands on Freud's beliefs "that personality is shaped only in childhood", proposing that "personality development takes place all though the lifespan" and further suggesting "that how we interact with others is what affects our sense of self" (University of Central Florida, no date), and thirdly The Big Five theory, also known as the Five-Factor Model (FFM) is a theory which emerged through the efforts of many psychologists over many decades where "individuals are ranked on a [spectrum] scale between the two extreme ends of five broad dimensions" (Lim, 2023): neuroticism (calm, confident vs. anxious, pessimistic), extraversion (reserved vs. sociable), openness (routine vs. spontaneous), agreeableness (suspicious vs. trusting) and conscientiousness (impulsive vs. disciplined and careful). It is believed the big five remain "relatively stable throughout most of one's lifetime" and are "influenced significantly by genes and the environment" (Lim, 2023). Other theories which are prominent on the development of personality include behavioural, social learning, cognitive developments and trait theory which focuses on identifying personality traits that characterise individuals. These theories all offer different perspectives on how personalities are formed and developed.

Equally to personality, originality and "creativity share an essential commonality: emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual" (Feist, 1998). In this study, a system of personality description was obtained through classifying traits onto the previously mentioned Big Five theory (FFM) from artists vs. non-artists and creative vs less-creative individuals and through this spectrum ranking it was found in general "creative people are more open to new experiences and less conventional, are more self-confident and accepting, driven, ambitious, dominant, hostile and impulsive" showing "creativity, like most complex behaviours, requires an intra- as well as interdisciplinary view" (Feist, 1998). Intradisciplinary view refers to exploring a topic within a single discipline, whereas interdisciplinary views perspectives and methods across various disciplines.

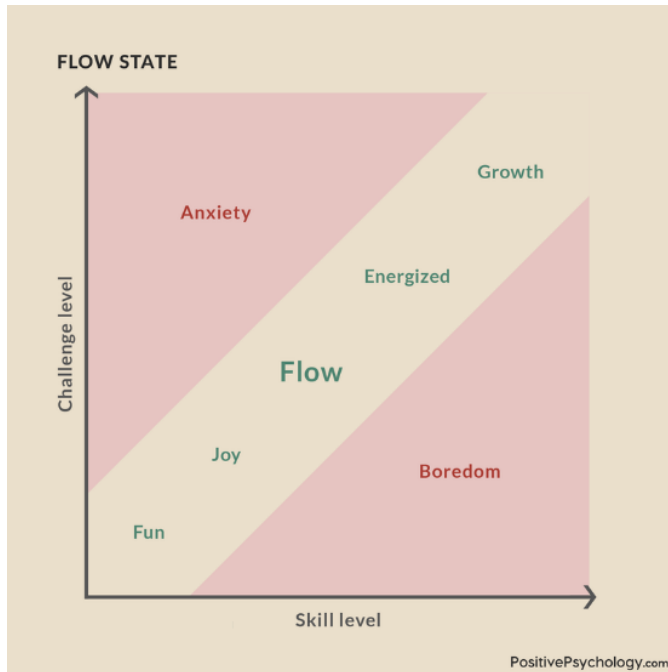


Fig.1 8 Traits of Flow

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was a psychologist who discussed this link between personality with creativity in the context of originality and design, with his research exploring the psychological processes which happen during creative activities such as art, science and design. Best known for his work concept “flow”, Csikszentmihalyi captured the “positive mental state of being completely absorbed, focused and involved” in the person’s activities at a certain time, and so “deriving enjoyment from being engaged” (Moore, 2019) as well as obtaining high levels of productivity and creativity. His studies on flow included various interviews with “particularly creative professionals”, learning from them when “they experienced optimal performance

levels and how they felt” this research allowed him to “conclude that happiness is an internal state of being”, with these individuals being in “their most creative, productive and happy when in a state of flow” (Steimer, 2021) Csikszentmihalyi further explains how “nothing else seems to matter” when an individual is involved in an activity they are passionate over, and “will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it”, later on focusing his studies on “motivation and the factors that contribute to motivation, challenge, and overall success in an individual” (Steimer, 2021). Overall Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s research has provided significant findings of the psychology of creativity and the significance of personality in cultivating originality, continually influencing research within the practices of psychology and design.

As previously stated, creative people were found to have specific personality traits that differs them from non-creative people. Within this group of creative individuals, they can often, consciously and subconsciously, integrate their personality into their creations through a wide range of processes making an impact on their work and creating something entirely new and original, as although some personality traits are shared, it is a spectrum and so making it near impossible for these artists or scientists to make an identical impact.

Specific to creative designers, one of the factors which help shape their creations to something entirely original is the individuals’ aesthetic and style preference, such as specific colours, techniques, textures and patterns. These factors would be considered as the conscious ones, whereas subconscious factors, referring “to the part of the mind and personality a person is not aware of” (Fakhri, 2022) -an idea originally developed by Sigmund Freud- are based on the individual’s childhood experiences, cultural background and emotional associations, to name a few, which reflect on the individual’s taste and sensibilities. Additionally, these can influence the designer’s conscious choices as some design elements can evoke emotions, personal memories or have symbolic meaning, resonating with the designer on an even deeper level, and thus evoking emotion within the observer. Aside from aesthetics, design philosophy will dictate the creative process as the designer incorporates their beliefs over sustainability, social responsibility and accessibility, reflecting on the designer’s priorities in context of form and function all the while integrating their innovative skills and ingenuity into their creation.

These conscious and subconscious factors which are infused with their own personality and character reflect unique identity making each an authentic personal expression, and form of communication.

As stated by Talekau, Nayak and Harichandan (n.d.) and Francesca Morphakis (2020) **History** is a broad umbrella of things; the study of life, people and society in the past, among actions, decisions and interactions, in relation to present developments and future hopes. “it is an inquiry into what happened in the past, when it happened, and how it happened” (Talekau, Nayak and Harichandan, n.d.) based on evidence such as witnesses, and primary sources like original documents or artifacts, influencing the societal patterns of life based on “the inevitable changes in human affairs in the past” (Talekau, Nayak and Harichandan, n.d.).

History can branch out into various sub-categories, each dedicated to a particular time period or geographical region. According to Puri (2021) some of the major branches include political history and the analysis of political leaders and movements, social history focusing on the history of people and their customs and traditions, cultural history which targets language, traditions and beliefs, art history which deals with the study and analysis of visual art forms and the evolution and meaning behind the art forms, and environmental history, studying the effects and influences of human interaction on the shaping of the environment and vice versa.

These branches can be interlinked with one another through events: for example, from History.com Editors’ research (2018)’s, following the era of the Middle Ages and generally taking place from the 14th century to the 17th century, the Renaissance materialised as a transformative period which caused a rebirth within the cultural, artistic, political and economic climate within the European history. This surgency brought new beginnings for the modern world through the rediscovery and reimagination of classical philosophy, literature and art, leaving behind the fixed ideas of the Middle Ages and further paving the way for innovation and progress, though the Middle Ages continue to influence modern society in many ways; from cultural heritage, architectural landmarks like cathedrals and monasteries such as the Notre Dame and the Canterbury, to technological

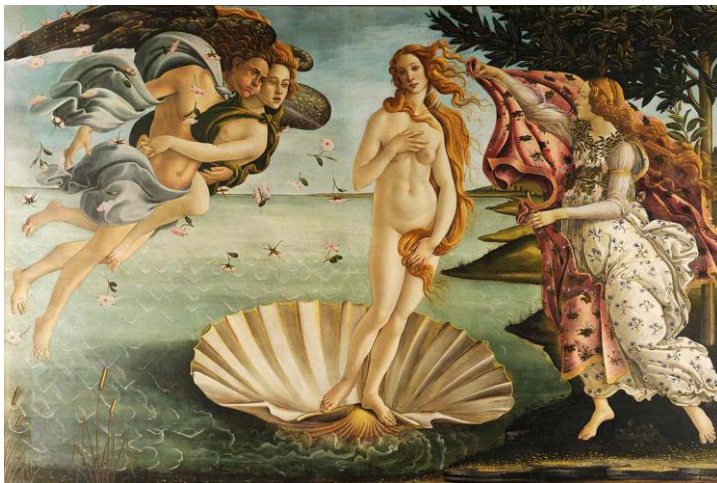


Fig.2 The Birth of Venus, by Sandro Botticelli (1480)

innovations, such as developments in agriculture and the introduction to gunpowder which revolutionised wars, the Renaissance left an incomparable mark on modern society, with the creations that came out of this period being witness of human creativity and ingenuity, furthermore inspiring admiration as they serve as symbols of artistic achievement. It could then be argued that the Renaissance had a significant impact primarily on the subcategory of art history, in addition to political and social history, and other historical contexts.

World War I (1914) and World War II (1939) took a similar effect, in the context of affecting many if not all aspects of history. Both World Wars had overpowering effects on “not only social but also technological, political and economic change” including design and culture (Royal British Legion,

2020). The aftermath of World War I brought significant changes such as political landscape and economic impact as according to Holocaust Encyclopaedia (n.d.) the Treaty of Versailles held Germany entirely responsible for starting the War and was held liable for the cost of material damages, as well as the loss of 13% of Germany's prewar territories, additionally leading to widespread economic dislocation leaving many countries in debt. Social changes and cultural changes were brought; challenging authorities and gender-specified roles with the participation of women in the workplace increasing and leading to "Politicians and the general public alike recognised that women deserved greater political rights" (BBC Bitesize, n.d.) giving women the right to vote, and impacting culture and the arts due to the trauma of the war which inspired new literary, musical and artistic movements. As described by the Royal British Legion (2020), World War II was the most destructive war in history, as well as a massive driver of not only social change but also technological advances, political change and economic recovery as well as its expansion. It brought major global power shifts transforming "the United States from a midlevel global power to the leader of the 'free world'" (Burton, 2020), which resulted in significant social and cultural changes like migration patterns and attitudes towards race and ethnicities. In addition, the atrocities of The Holocaust, mass genocides of other targeted groups such as disabled individuals and war crimes among other, led to greater awareness of human rights, and international cooperation promoting economic social and cultural development around the globe as stated by CINFO (n.d.).

Through these cultural, political, social, economic and technological changes and advances, history and its events have profoundly shaped and evolved the world of design, continuously adapting to changing circumstances and perspectives. During the first World War, there was a focus shift toward simpler and more functional designs, prioritising efficiency and functionality over ornamentation and aesthetics which was influenced by the need of efficiency, most evident in industrial design where products like uniforms, weapons and equipment were optimised for durability and easy use. From The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica (2017), the "Lost Generation" of writers such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos among others, they managed to capture the sense of alienation felt by many after the war, as its inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world; while others such as Picasso experimented with new aesthetics and styles and "began to reject avant-garde styles, such as cubism and futurism" and so exploring "new forms of classicism [and] abstraction" (Oxford Art Online, n.d.) along with the Bauhaus movement which emerged postwar advocating for the integration of technology and art.

During the second World War, new materials and technologies emerged having lasting impacts on design experimentation and innovation, further accelerating technology and later on causing a shift in design thinking as the "less is more" approach surged promoting the idea of simplicity and functionality which affected general aesthetics and advocated minimalist approaches.

Nature encompasses all which exists in the physical world, from plants to animals, to air and water; it forms Earth's ecosystems and landscapes, and is all around us. "It is an incredible wonder which inspires us all" (WWF, n.d.) with its beauty and diversity, all the while sustaining life on Earth.

Within the world of design, nature's vibrant landscapes and intricate ecosystems have served profound inspiration within creators' designs, leading to developments that seamlessly blend functional efficiency with aesthetic appeal as it comprises with rich palette colours, intriguing textures and highly efficient structures, resulting in developments in fashion and functional designs alike. Additionally, as noted by S (2023), nature's self-adaptation and coping processes have provided

enormous insights for Biomimicry Architectural designs, where buildings are not just inspired by nature's forms but also emulate its functions, not only mimicking nature's aesthetics, but inheriting their efficiency and sustainability.



Fig.3 Eden Project

The Eden Project is an innovative design located in Cornwall, England, and a prime example of Biomimicry in Architecture. Tim Smit, the original concept and co-founder of Eden Project, drew “inspiration from natural forms such as dragonfly wings and soap bubbles”, “was constructed with responsibly sourced materials and designed to be energy efficient” (Never Enough Architecture, n.d.). moreover, nature's efficient structures have inspired advancements in functional designs such as aerodynamic vehicles being modelled after birds.

Designers often draw inspiration from nature due to frequently observing natural phenomena and organisms; from natural disasters, eclipses and rainbows, to plants, animals and insects, allowing creators to derive insights and ideas for their designs- an ability which stems from humanity's innate capacity to explore and understand our surroundings. During this process, designers have acquired experience and developed skills that would allow them to interpret and use the opportunities of nature, leading to similarities being observed between man-made structures and structures found in the natural world.

Additionally, according to research by Getaway (2021), scientists believe the state of “soft fascination” involving reflection and providing introspect, which can be triggered by naturally beautiful and calming surroundings such as sitting at the beach, can lead to insights and new ideas, eventually leading to “expansive thinking” which allows to consider different perspectives and lead to innovative ideas.

Aside from this, exposure to nature reduces negative emotions as well as contributing to your physical health, which seemingly links to my first keyword **Personality**, such as emotion and personality are deeply interconnected aspects of human psychology, and designers are constantly inputting their emotions and personalities to their creations. While on the other hand, **Nature** has had an effect in **History** through structural developments, allowing inventors to produce more

efficient and durable designs for the first and second World Wars, which emotionally devastated society causing new creations and forms of artistic expression to flourish.

Proposed question for independent project: how does human psychology have effect on creative design?

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