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SURFACE PATTERN DESIGN

RESEARCH IN PRACTISE

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2590 Words

In this essay three words will be presented the words are Meraki, Wisdom and Joy, I will then discuss how these words can join together to lead to a further research question to explore in my final year project.

MERAKI

The first word I am going to discuss the word Meraki. “According to NPR, Urban Dictionary, and Darling Magazine, the word meraki (pronunciation: merak-kee) is a Greek adjective that describes doing something with soul, creativity, love and passion. The Modern Greeks describe this as putting yourself into whatever you are going” (Miller, K, 2021) The word is not directly translatable into English but can be described as doing something with the essence of yourself or soul and leaving an impression of yourself in the work. This can apply to anything, such as organising a home, looking after a restaurant but when it applies to the arts and creative endeavours such as art, poetry or design it is especially poignant. In the arts we can do things with passion and soul when we create putting our whole selves into the work. When artwork is done with meraki it could be argued the contents or the self or soul of the artist and their innermost passions and dreams are reflected in the artwork.

To produce art with meraki is to operate from the place of optimal experience or as M. Csikszentmihalyi, 1990 explains, as flow. “When a person is able to organize his or her consciousness so as to experience flow as often as possible their quality of life is going to improve”

In design work produced with meraki the guiding light of the artwork is the inner self or soul. Which leads us to discuss the nature of the soul. The Bible describes the soul as “The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.—The spirit of man, breathed into him at first by the Creator (Genesis 2:7), and afterwards quickened and illumined by the Divine Spirit, is the “candle of the Lord,” given to man as an inward light and guide”(Proverbs 20:27) In eastern philosophy the soul is known as “Atma” and it too is full of light consciousness and bliss (Sat Chit Ananda) For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain.” (Bhagavad Gita 2.20)

If one was going to approach the question on what is the self or soul that is reflected in the artwork from a more scientific perspective, one may look to Psychology. Psychology was originally the study of the soul – as the word Psyche which is in the words etymology comes from “*Classical Mythology*. a personification of the soul, which in the form of a beautiful girl was loved by Eros” (dictionary.com,2023) which is now in modern times more commonly thought of as the totality of mind self conscious and unconscious and -ology as the study of.

The soul (inner self) and mind has been studied by numerous philosophers and psychologists throughout history but for this essay we will focus on the work of Carl Jung. Carl Jung described the self as the totality of the whole psyche in order to distinguish it from the ego which constitutes only a small part of the psyche – see figure

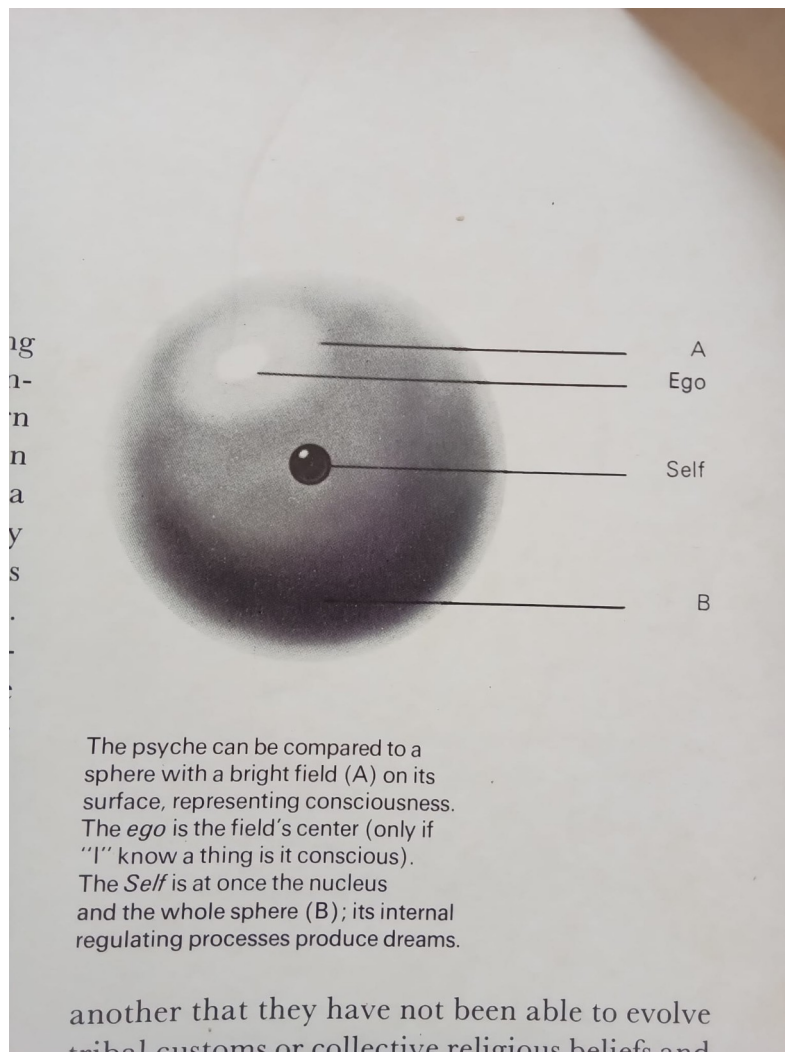


FIGURE 1 – The Self according to Carl Jung (Von Franz, M.L 1976)

The soul or inner centre of the self can also be called the daimon of man. "throughout the ages men have been intuitively aware of such an inner centre. The greeks called it mans inner daimon; in Egypt it was expressed by the concept of the "Ba-soul" and the Romans worshipped it as the "genius" native to each individual" (Von Franz, M. L, 1976pp 161) So it can be said that the self that we express when we do things with soul or meraki comes from a spiritual part of ourselves which could be considered to be full of light and wisdom, is older than our physical lives and is comprised of much more than just simply our conscious self or I (ego)

In design work the artists style could be said to come from this part of themselves which is independent of any exterior objects drawn. "The poet and potter M.C. Richards describes the experience of the daimon well when she says, "There lives a creative being inside all of us and we must get out of its way for it will give us no peace unless we do." (Jungian centre for spiritual sciences, 2023)

Carl Jung fully explored the psyche and his daimon or genius which he felt could be represented by archetypes such as the wise old man in his artwork (see figure 2) and his

work in his Red and Black books are invaluable to explore the sort of images which come from the depths of the soul.



FIGURE 2 – The wise old man Archetype as a personification of the Self.

Carl Jung is not the only pioneer to explore the inner self or soul in their art and design work. Modern artists and designers such as Catalina Estrada, Alena Hennesey and Laura Hollick use the soul for inspiration in their work choosing images in their designs which has come from the free expression of the soul so the artwork is done with Meraki. Catalina Estrada runs a design course on an online platform called Domestika called "Patterns with Soul" and in this course she explains how she gets her images using the expressive imagery from children's poetry. These children have expressed their inner spiritual self or soul in their poetry which is done with meraki and this is used to design Catalina Estradas designs which she also does with meraki . (figure 3)



Figure 3 – An example of Caralina Estrada's soulful designs

WISDOM

The second word we will be exploring is Wisdom. The Oxford English Dictionary, 2012 defines wisdom as “the quality of having experience, knowledge and good judgement 2 the body of knowledge and experience that develops within a society or period”. In design wisdom is different to knowledge or information, its not just having the right information or knowledge to complete our design work but having the right application and wise insight on how to apply the knowledge effectively to the greater benefit of the designer, the world and those we design for,

Design itself can be thought of as “the wise regulation of dynamic elements such as flow, integration, awareness, and value.(J. Woods, 2023) So wisdom is essential to design but there raises “the question as to whether wisdom can ever be transferred, therefore whether it can viably be represented as ‘data’ or ‘information” (J.Woods, 2023) Wisdom comes from experience but if we want to be wise before we become old we can start by emulating the wise, finding someone with good judgement and discernment in their design work and becoming inspired by their work.

To design with wisdom, not simply knowledge would be to design for the highest good of all and is linked with virtue. “In looking for a North Star to guide practice, I’d like to offer the old Greek term eudaemonia . In its original and ancient context, it was an ethical and political notion to refer to the highest human good and often linked with the ideas of virtue and practical wisdom” (Dalladay-Simpson, J, 2022. pp 42) So to be wise in design would be to be ethical and to benefit humanity in some way.

For guidance, we can also look at the wisdom traditions around the world where known wise leaders have written down their insights and good judgements for the benefit of mankind and incorporate their wisdoms into our designs. Indigenous wisdom includes insights from observing and working with nature over many generations. Being curious about our world and seeing through different cultural lenses, wisdom can be gleaned for artistic inspiration. Some wisdom traditions to learn from include such gems as the japanese aesthetic of wabi sabi of finding beauty in imperfection, which allows us to embrace our imperfections and the imperfections of the world and find the beauty in it. Of if we were experimenting with light and shadow and need to come to terms with the shadows in our world we can find much in the wisdom traditions in praise of light but we may too wish to explore some of the worlds wisdom around shadows which can be found in books like “In Praise of Shadows by Junichiro Tanizaki. Artworks designed and

made with cultural wisdom are often more innovative and can help illuminate the minds of the viewers to different perspectives to their own, helping to enhance the wisdom, insight and better judgement of humanity leading to more prosperous lives for all.

It may not just be people we can choose to emulate for wise design but nature also. Nature has many wise designs in it having gone through billions of years of evolution- where errors in design and bad judgements have been discarded by natural selection. By looking at the designs in nature we can better see what works for our own designs, this is the wisdom of bio-mimicry. There are many examples of successful design from bio-mimicry such as the design of Velcro which “was invented by George de Mestral in 1941 and was inspired by the burrs he found on himself and on his dog. Being an engineer and entrepreneur, Mr. de Mestral examined the burr under a microscope and realized the small hooks of the burr and loops of the fur/fabric allowed the burr to adhere exceedingly well. This sparked his idea to mimic the structure as a potential fastener” (Micro Photonics, 2020)

This principle of learning from the wisdom of nature can be used to apply to modern design of the world especially sustainable design. Nature's wisdom being used in sustainable design can be seen in the Cardboard to Caviar Project by Graham Wiles where it was observed in nature that one organisms waste products are another organisms fuel or food found in complex ecosystems. This was applied to a fish restaurants cardboard waste which was recycled to be used as horse bedding, which was in turn collected and used as compost for worms and then these worms were in turn fed to sturgeon which produce caviar for the fish restaurant. This leads to zero waste and a sustainable and prosperous future through the wise design of our waste systems via bio mimicry. (cited by Pawlyn, M, 2011)

Wisdom then comes from curiosity, keen observation and insight, mimicking the wise or with experience, coupled with an ability think critically about knowledge, to then design with courage, to make something new and innovative that benefits the world. It comes from being in right relationship with ourselves and the natural world around us. Knowledge and information can only take us so far where how to best apply it comes from within as a creative leap from knowledge to practical wisdom

JOY

The last word to explore is Joy. Joy is defined as “an emotion of great pleasure or happiness” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012) This emotion is especially important in design as this is a feeling that would be wonderful to evoke when a design is viewed and would be especially important for commercial success as a designer. Design which made people feel happier, healthier and therefore more productive would undoubtedly sell well and lead to greater harmony in society. So the question is how can joy be evoked in viewers and what kind of elements would a design need to include to bring about feelings of happiness and joy? This question was asked by Ingrid Fetell Lee who is a design consultant and one of the leading speaker and writer about the power of joy. In her book Joyful she documented what she called the aesthetics of joy which include the following:

“Energy – Vibrant colour and light
Abundance- lushness, multiplicity and variety
Freedom – nature, wildness, and open space
Harmony – balance, symmetry and flow

Play – circles; spheres and bubbly forms
Surprise – contrast and whimsy
Transcendence – elevation and lightness
Magic – invisible forces and illusions
Celebration- synchrony, sparkle and bursting shapes
Renewal – blossoming, expansion and curves”
(Fetell Lee, I, 2018)

Joy is important not just in our pursuit of happiness in pleasure but because it relates to wisdom and virtue, more as eudaimonia. In ancient Greek, the word for the highest degree of human happiness is eudaimonia, (Gilbert E, 2016). This is the joy not related to hedonism where joy is found simply in consuming things but in wise living and practical tasks such as making our environment clean and decluttered. Marie Kondo, the organisation expert talks of the sparkling joy of decluttering, where her KonMarie Method describes decluttering everything in the environment and only keeping minimal items which are meaningful and bring you greater joy creating a happy home environment.

Joy can be described as an inner state which is mirrored in the world around us, either the joy in the environment sparks a change within us or the joy within us is mirrored in the world in joyful design. “External conditions mirror internal conditions, so straightening your room settles internal disorder” affirms authors Charlene Belitz and Meg Lundstrom in, *The Power of Flow: Practical Ways to Transform Your Life with Meaningful Coincidence.* (Cited in Fahkry 2018)

Inrid Fetell Lee in her book Joyful, 2018, pp 13 – 14 describes how Joyful design in the environment can inspire greater or wiser actions in people. She mentions the instance of a town which to all accounts was dead and grey and rife with crime but when the mayor started to paint the buildings joyful bright colours an inner change was brought to the towns inhabitants and they felt safer and paid their taxes and people started to care for the town better since the inclusion of joyful design. Joyful design helps people live happier, healthier lives and can make drab depressing or cluttered environments more inclusive to health. If all doctors surgeries and hospitals and educational establishments were designed with joy in mind, then real benefits may be harnessed for the people who used these environments on a regular basis.

To link the three words Meraki, Wisdom and Happiness we can see both wisdom and happiness are a state of the soul or true self and a way of being called *Eudaemonia*. “It “is a key concept in ancient Greek ethical and political philosophy...*eudaimonic* well-being insights from the Greek wisdom tradition equates well-being with living a virtuous life; that is, a life lived in accordance with four cardinal virtues – wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage.” (Dhiman, S 2021)) The etymology of this word being Eu meaning good and daimon or genius. To have meraki wise joyful design is to have an eudaemonic design and this can come from within, while being influenced by and being in right attitude with our environment and world. It stems from a state of flow and having a curiosity about our inner lives and the natural world, learning practical wisdom and virtue from them which leads to joy and benefits the world. To this end, for a final project question I would like to further research,”How can we create Eudaimonic design as ethical designers for a better world?

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Figure 2 Wise old Man Archetype as symbol of self Jung, C.G. and Franz, M.-L.von (1976) *Man and his symbols*. New York, NY: Doubleday & Co. pp 198

Figure 3 Catalina Estradas designs (2023) *Colorfull illustrations of Catalina Estrada*. Available at: <http://coralicon.blogspot.com/2009/11/mimo-tego-ze-ze-o-ilustracjach-tej.html> (Accessed: April 26, 2023).

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