

Student Name: Susan Down

P Number: 2100786

Programme of Study: Surface Pattern and Textiles Design

Module: Research in Practice (ADAD5004/C)

Lectures Name: Julia Lockheart

Word Count: 2288

UNCONCIOUS | CONNECTION | RITUAL

This context of writing is to explore three words in a variety of contexts and concepts, using key thinkers and philosophers to help develop critically analyse ideas and support enquiries in the chosen areas of research. This research will attempt to link the chosen key terms, unconscious, connection and ritual to form a question for my independent project.

Investigations into Freud, Lacan, and Jung, whose research into the collective unconscious discussed theories on underlying causes of our behaviours that are hidden in the unconscious mind, will help come to an understanding of the unconscious. Researching Bourdieu's theories on the correlation between emotional attachment between products and consumers in design culture, as well as looking at designer McNish's work, would aid in understanding the concept of the term connection. Douglas and Isherwood, whose studies into mass consumerism in industries such as fashion and textiles specifically consumption as a ritual process, will be used to deconstruct and define the word ritual.



Figure 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, Pieta, c. 1498-1500

The term unconscious has been explored in a variety of contexts and concepts; the psychoanalytic theory of the word was first investigated by Sigmund Freud who developed the two notions of conscious and subconscious, with the unconscious or subconscious referring to the part of the mind that is not currently in full awareness. The *Art of Meaningful Living* introduces Freud's notion of 'The mind is like an iceberg; it floats with one-seventh of its bulk above water' (Brown and Palmer, 2009, p.24) arguing that conscious behaviour is merely the visible part that lies 'above water' whereas the underlying motivations of our behaviours are submerged in the unconscious mind. Through this quote, Freud is implying that the subconscious side consists of suppressed emotions, thoughts and urges that are judged socially unacceptable from where they continue to exert positive and negative influences on our lives despite being repressed. 'The unconscious contains material beyond your awareness. Hold Freud's concept of multi-layered mind in your consciousness while you reflect on another' (Brown and Palmer, 2009, p.25) further emphasises that the unseen, submerged part of the 'iceberg' the unconscious, has a considerable impact on influences and therefore can even be argued to be the most important part of the mind. It is now an accepted belief that the unconscious holds influence over people's behaviour, thoughts and emotions as much as the subconscious part.

Other theorists such as Jacques Lacan Carl Jung have taken Freud's findings on the unconscious as a foundation for their own works. Both Freud and Lacan analyse the concept of the unconscious in regard to the human mind, however while Freud focuses entirely on this element Lacan goes beyond the human mind and further investigates the relationship between the unconscious and language. He uses the fundamentals of Freud's ideologies to address the question of what the unconscious is, describing it in the *Introduction to the Reading of Lacan* as 'the unconscious is structured like a language, the unconscious is made up of chains of repressed signifiers' (Dor, Gurewich, Fairfield, 1998 p.3) denoting that repressed signifiers, 'any material thing that signifies, eg: words, a facial expression, an image. Together the signifier and signified make up the sign, the smallest unit of meaning' (uvm.edu, n.d) unknowingly are expressed and communicated with language either through speech or writing.

Unlike both Freud and Lacan, Carl Jung's ideologies were based on the unconscious being more than a collection of suppressed signifiers, arguing against the use of term as it implied to the inferiority of the subconscious in comparison to the conscious part. 'At first the concept of the unconscious was limited to denoting the state of repressed or forgotten contents, a superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal I call it the personal unconscious. The deeper layer I call the collective unconscious' (Jung, 1959, p.3) establishing the concept of the unconscious being divided into a 'personal' and 'collective' unconscious. Jung suggests that unlike the personal unconscious the collective extends deeper and is comprised of 'memories, emotions, and behavioural patterns inherited from our ancestors. These are patterns that have been repeating for hundreds of thousands of years.' (Fakhiri, 2022) From this quote it can be inferred Lacan believed that these unaware inherited patterns are profoundly ingrained in every individual and that these memories, emotions and behaviour can be unknowingly triggered under particular circumstances. An example of this can be seen in Michelangelo Buonarroti's sculptures, specifically The Pieta shown in figure 1. The symbolism of Mary, a mother clutching the body of Jesus, her son evokes a strong emotional response.

By understanding Jung's theory, it can be argued that artists and designers use an awareness of the collective unconscious to create work that deeply effects the viewers by stimulating our ingrained 'behavioural patterns inherited from our ancestors' (Fakhiri, 2022) and activating these emotions. Clearly the unconscious plays a fundamental role in the creative process and in design. Using the ideas and ideologies of Freud, Lacan, and Jung, the question of, can our understanding of the unconscious assist design to create better experiences for the users? has been developed in this preliminary exploration of the term unconscious.



Figure 2. Gilia, furnishing fabric, designed by Althea McNish for Hull Traders, 1960.

Many of the decisions and experiences we have as consumers are connected to design culture and are directly influenced by the outcomes and implementation of these decisions. Design culture is the intersection of disciplines, in which many domains from designing, production and consumption are networked together with in which values and practises are question. The book *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory Critical Investigations* outlines Bourdieu's view of connections between good design and consumerism 'Formal achievement as the only guarantee of genuine art is signified, first in the authentic artist's experience of suffering, which itself offers proof of talent, and, secondly, in resignation in the face of the work's impenetrability by the uneducated popular gaze' (Fowler, 1998 p.103) The act of consumerism plays a fundamental role in society; it is reliant on the practice of design where the growth in expenditure corresponds to service users experience. It is essential for artists to produce good designs and create works that link to our thoughts, emotions and perceptions.

This connection of positive experience and good consumer association has a significant impact on the work produced; the value of the relationship between the piece made and the

customer is undeniably important. Bourdieu's theory on Culture Capital reflects this notion that consumerism and production both have a strong correlation to the perceptions towards something, 'habitus, as the product of social conditionings, and thus of history . . . is endlessly transformed, either in a direction that reinforces it, when embodied structures of expectation encounter structures of objective chances in harmony with these expectations, or in a direction that transforms it and, for instance, raises or lowers the level of expectations and aspirations.' (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014) Bourdieu synthesises that evoked emotions and thoughts can be strategically used and that these connections we have as consumers are played upon by industries. Using an understanding of Culture Capital, it can be argued that industries and corporations utilise society's habitus as a form of resource in marketing to create powerful connections between products and users.

Althea McNish is a core example of a creative practitioner whose use of colour and painterly style within her textiles and interior designs, defied the rules of mid-century textiles influencing both the creative industry as well as capturing recognition within society. 'Colour shape and pattern are my medium of expression to produce spontaneous reaction' (Wmgallery.org, 2022) her silk screen-printed fabrics were a symbolism of means to portray herself and connect with others, For McNish this connection to her audience was made through her use of riotous colour palettes and layered patterned designs.

An argument can be made that textile is all about connections, not just how materials are physically connected through weaved and stitched threads but also how fabrics are linked a certain place and identity. In *Cloth and The Human Experience*, Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider discuss this notion that materials such as fabrics, cloth and textiles are permeable; it is embedded with history of stories and memories. 'Throughout history, cloth has furthered the organisation of social and political life... cloth helps social groups to reproduce to achieve autonomy or advantage in interactions with others' (Weiner and Schneider, 1988:1) The practice of textiles connects us all in some way, it can bring individuals together through the making of cloth and materials as well as connect others through the similar garments we wear, both connections we have to textiles bring us back to being human, 'Equally important are the human actions that make cloth politically and socially salient, people use cloth to consolidate social relations.' (Weiner and Schneider, 1988:1)

This exploration into the term connection has led to the discussion of how the word is defined in various contexts in correlation to society as well as individually. Researching key theorists such as Bourdieu, Weiner, and Schneider, as well as looking at the textile works of designer Althea McNish has now generated the questions of, can an understanding of design culture and culture capital help connect design to consumers, will a good design that evokes a response bring in more consumers?



Figure 3. Collinge, 2021. Image from HarpersBazaar online article.

The term ritual can be read under numerous contexts and concepts, often defined as some specific symbolic meaning or an act that is repeated regularly. As humans we unknowingly practice ritualistic behaviours, such as the use of an object daily or the continuation of purchasing products also known as consumption. The book *A History of Western Art Market* introduces Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's concept surrounding ritualistic consumption within society, 'Goods are ritual adjust, consumption is a ritual process' (Hulst, 2017, p. 252) is a quote used to explain how businesses and brands embed meaning into their advertisements to often frequently encourage brand ritualistic behaviour. This is often

seen with luxury brands that offer exclusive products or one-of-a-kind items to entice consumers to buy and buy again, these customers are seen as brand loyal. This notion of ritualistic retail and the significance of the goods purchased by consumers, was a key concept to Douglas and Isherwood's theories, 'that false distinction leaves a mass of unnecessary luxuries to be accounted for by mixture of consumer gullibility and sinister advertising. The counterargument proposed here is that all goods carry meaning, just one gesture cannot be interpreted by itself' (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979, p.49). Indicating the belief that a consumer's choice of items purchased mirrored their moral judgements, that these bought goods serve as a symbol to an insight and reflection of an individual. Design is being driven by consumerism, creating a connection between a product and the consumer can be heavily utilised in promotion and marketing and are considered key in advertising and the success of a business.

'In past societies, textiles played a very important part in many spheres: social, economic, technological and aesthetic. An understanding of textiles and its role in older cultures is important not only for everyone interested in the past but also as a link in the chain from past to present.' (Gillis and Nosch, 2007)

In a design sense the passing of traditional techniques is a ritual process, the transfer of ideas, methods and knowledge of tradition such as those within handcrafted practices or sustainably made fashion is repetitively taught and learnt from one generation to another. Handcrafted sustainable fashion made from organic fabrics have become an increasingly popular trend in the fashion industry. The mass consumption of textiles and fashion is a leading factor that effects sustainability, being one of the greatest polluters harmfully impacting the environment and people where many brands newly created or large successful corporations, have adapted their methods to suit this shift in consumer trend. As consumers turn to ethically sourced products and use of second-hand materials it is evident that sustainability is not as passing trend.

The examination into the construction of the word ritual has led to the exploration of the term being interpreted in various ways, in the beginning researching Douglas and Isherwood's theory on ritual consumption led to an exploration of understanding consumer purchasing patterns. This analysis of the key term led to the investigation of the word in a

design sense, focusing more on production patterns and sustainable trends. From look at the term these two perspectives, the question of, how important is ritual in the preservation and development of design, art and textiles?

Upon exploring the three key words, unconscious, connection and ritual, contextualising these have led to numerous questions in relation to the proposed question. Despite initially having little correlation, after the research into theorists and designers such as Freud, Lacan, Jung, Bourdieu, McNish, Douglas and Isherwood, a link can be formed. Design encompasses us everywhere, it is a fundamental part of our material culture functionally and symbolically. Unconscious connections are utilised by designers to produce works that deeply effects the viewers, creating powerful connections between products and users. This response between good design and consumerism in culture capital has led to connection of the concept known as ritualistic consumption, where corporations and businesses embed meaning into their advertisements to encourage brand loyalty and the purchase of goods.

From the exploration into the key terms and investigation into areas of interest such as consumer behaviourism, culture capital, traditional textiles processes and sustainability within practices, the working research question of 'How important is the relationship between unconscious connection of consumers and designs that evoke strong responses, in the preservation and development of textiles, and can an understanding of design culture and culture capital help connect design to consumers?' is proposed.

Bibliography:

Brown, C.F. and Palmer, J. (2009). *The art of meaningful living*. Austin, Tex.: Synergy Books.

Dor, J., Judith Feher Gurewich and Fairfield, S. (1998). *Introduction to the reading of Lacan : the unconscious structured like a language*. New York: Other Press.

Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. (2021). *The World of Goods*. Routledge.

Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B.C. (1979). *The world of goods : towards an anthropology of consumption*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Edgerton, J.D. and Roberts, L.W. (2014). Cultural capital or habitus? Bourdieu and beyond in the explanation of enduring educational inequality. *School Field*, 12(2), pp.193–220. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878514530231>. (Accessed 5 May 2023)

FAKHRI, A. (2022). *Design for the subconscious*. Medium. Available at: <https://uxdesign.cc/design-for-the-subconscious-48ad2a5c9b76>. (Accessed 7 May 2023)

Fowler, B. (1998). *Pierre Bourdieu and cultural theory : Critical investigations*. London: Sage.

Freud, S. (2005). *The Unconscious*. Penguin UK.

Gillis, C. and Nosch, M.-L.B. (2007). *Ancient Textiles: Production, Crafts and Society*. JSTOR, Oxbow Books. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cd0nxj> (Accessed 9 May 2023)

Hulst, T. (2017). *A history of the western art market : a sourcebook of writings on artists, dealers, and markets*. Oakland, Calif.: University Of California Press.

Jean-Michel Rabat   (2010). *The cambridge companion to Lacan*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

Jung, C. (1959). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*. Princeton, Nj: Princeton University Press.

Lacan, J. and Fink, B. (2004). *Ecrits : a selection*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Lemaire, A. (1977). *Jacques Lacan*. London ; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Thanusha.K (2020). *Consuming Consumerism*. Medium. Available at: <https://thanushakanagendran17.medium.com/consuming-consumerism-4e45661d528c> (Accessed 2 May 2023).

Weiner, A.B. and Schneider, J. (2013). *Cloth and Human Experience*. Smithsonian Institution.

Wmgallery.org (2022). *In Focus: Althea McNish | William Morris Gallery*. Available at: <https://wmgallery.org.uk/whats-on/events-calendar/in-focus-althea-mcnish> (Accessed 8 May 2023).

Uvm.edu. (n.d.). *Definitions of Semiotic Terms*. Available at: https://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html#:~:text=Signifier%3A%20any%20material%20thing%20that. (Accessed 7 May 2023)

Figure List / Image References:

Figure 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, Pieta, c. 1498-1500. Available at:
<https://uxdesign.cc/design-for-the-subconscious-48ad2a5c9b76> (Accessed 23 April 2023)

Figure 2. Gilia, furnishing fabric, designed by Althea McNish for Hull Traders, 1960. Available at: <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/althea-mcnish-an-introduction> (Accessed 2 May 2023)

Figure 3. Collinge, 2021. Image from HarpersBazaar online article. Available at:
<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/fashion/a36050764/fast-fashion-shame-comment/>
(Accessed 9 May 2023)