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Three Keywords

I have chosen my three keywords based on my curiosity to develop these areas in practice. I will explore the application of the word “colour” in relation to design, its development and power to evoke hidden and key messages through semiotics and its availability with a sustainable view. Secondly I have chosen “decay” as I have a fascination with the lifecycle in particular to flowers where the change can be more beautiful than the bloom. The colour palette will change and the controversy assessed. Lastly, my third word is materiality where I want to investigate the availability, choice method and sustainability factors impacted on design.

Colour

My first keyword, could be explored in so many ways that I have narrowed the research down to its application in design. The definition of colour is “the property possessed by an object of producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way it reflects or emits light”, Oxford Dictionary of English (2010). This definition explains a focus on the designer’s intention to use colour and the audience to perceive the interpretation. Do they see the same colours and experience the same sensation on the eye? Colour theory dates back to the 15th Century with Aristotle being the first named colour theorist, suggesting “that all colours came from white and black (lightness and darkness) and related to the four elements – water, air, earth and fire” (Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, 2022). It was believed until Newton’s experiments with sunlight and prisms took over some 2000 years later, establishing a spectrum of 7 visible colours. This is also noted in the Colour Theory section where Perryman clearly explains that Aristotle developed the linear colour scale and Newton

developed the “relationship between colour and wavelength of light, identifying seven distinct colours in the visible light spectrum” (Perryman, 2021, p14). These colours being identified as ROYGBIV (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet) (Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, 2022). Namely, the colours we recognise in a rainbow.

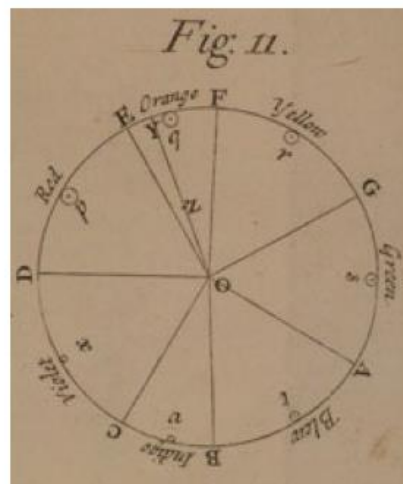


Fig.1 – Newton’s Colour Wheel

Further work developed from Newton’s experiments and we use practically today a colour wheel, versions below have developed over time (see Fig.1 and 2)



Fig 2. Developed versions of the Colour Wheel by Theorists

The idea of the colour wheel is to show the primary, secondary and tertiary colours. Perryman states the colour wheel is one of the most useful tools for understanding colour relationships” for which I agree (Perryman, 2021, p20). She explains clearly the pure primary colours that all other colours are derived from, secondary when two primary colours are mixed and tertiary when a primary and secondary are mixed and further combinations develop other hues. I like her simplicity as she introduces cool and warm tones, complimentary and tetrad colours suitable for industry, “a trick often used in fashion, tetradic groupings result in bold designs that offer both contrast and harmony” (Perryman, 2021, p24). Perryman is very knowledgeable with her cross-industry design history.

I first came across the colour wheel in practice in my career as a hairdresser. It is known as the ICC – The International Colour Chart. It’s a numerical system used worldwide to classify hair colour. Base colours are numbered 1 to 10 in a linear scale very much like Aristotle’s theory. Tones are then numbered from 1 to 9 following as a decimal point with a possibility of up to 3 additional tones.

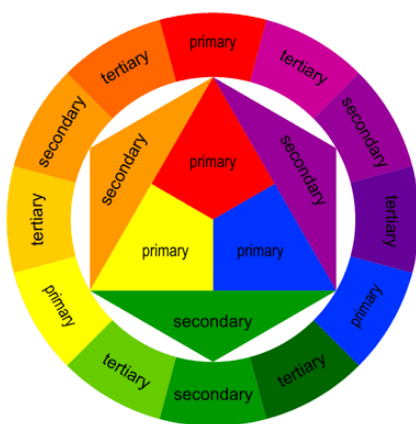


Figure 3. The colour Wheel Basics in Fashion

Figure 4. 10 levels or depths of hair colour

To design a hair colour, understanding your starting point – root colour as a base from 1 to 10, and then to add tone you choose your decimal numbers (or some brands have letters). For example, a black cherry colour would be 4.65 (medium brown.red mahogany).

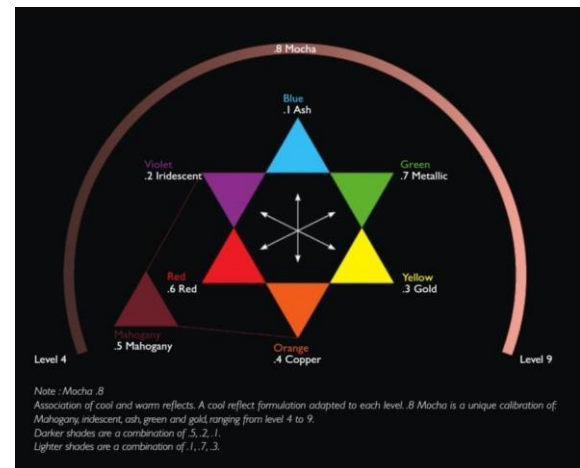


Figure 5 & 6
Extracts from the L'Oréal Hair Colour Chart Template

The numbering system is to help with the colour combination recipe to achieve the same results. Variance to the recipe will provide different results. The very much same way as dying fabric in the dye lab. Many colour coded systems are used cross industry for this reason to identify shades..

To avoid using non environmentally friendly chemicals, I have practiced dying fabric with natural dyes such as turmeric, beetroot and tea. I am yet to develop this skill and have found apart from turmeric, the other natural dyes gave subtle and pale shades. I can understand more so why synthetic dyes are used in order to achieve desired

colours on a diverse range of fabrics. Natural dyes lack punch power and therefore can constrain a design. Natural dyes only work with natural fabrics, again another barrier. The question I want to explore is the ethical balance of dyes and do they constrain design because of our new found sustainable consciousness? Perryman continues to say “leaps in science and technology, and knowledge the way colour is embedded in materials, have profoundly changed how we see, feel and relate to colour” (Perryman, 2021 p.19). We may find ways yet to discover ethical colour processing.

The majority of Perryman's book dives into a vast plethora of colours drilling down to their meaning, codes and industrial use. I want to include the study of semiotics in my exploration. I was exposed to Saussure in my first year of study and the science of signs for which I found intriguing. Previously in practice, my use of colour was to harmonise of experiment. Now I want to include purpose. Saussure's theory is that there is a signifier and a signified. Not necessarily by a word, language or sound but by an epistemological understanding of the sign (Buchanan, 2018, p.434). Going back to my opening paragraph on the definition of colour, the designer signs and the audience are signified. There is meaning and emotional stimulation in the use of colour, for example red can be passion and/or danger, white can mean purity and yellow, happiness. Will my work be constrained by the colours available to me under ethical practice?

Decay

Decay is defined as to “rot or decompose through the action of bacteria and fungi” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2015). It also has a colour connotation as the pallet changes over the time of the process. This I find curious as nature defines its lifecycle process but also has a very visual sign of stages.

During my late teens I became fascinated by the controversy of the works by the likes of Damien Hirst, Jenny Saville and Tracy Emin. Hirst’s “Mother and Child (Divided)” exhibition won the Turner Prize in 1995 and consisted of “a floor-based sculpture comprising four glass-walled tanks, containing the two halves of a cow and calf, each bisected and preserved in formaldehyde solution”, (Tate, 2022). Although the formaldehyde prevents decay, it preserves what is usually unseen that being the internal organs of the animals (Fig.7). The shock factor of these works made huge waves with critics and ethics.

Figure 7 -

Hirst’s “Mother and Child” (Divided)



Since maturing, I find the controversy less entertaining but still find the curious beauty in the lifecycle of living things. In particular I have been photographing the dying of a variety of flowers and recording the change in colour throughout the process (linking into the first keyword). My research introduced me to Valerie

Hegarty, an American artist “who makes paintings, sculptures and installations that explore issues of memory, place and history. Starting with a personal inspiration, Hegarty seeks out poetic connections between her personal history, art history and current events” (Valerie Hergarty, 2022). Her work interests me not only because of the use of semiotics but also the materiality and of course the subject matter in her 2020-2021 work - The Covid Diaries, a “series are works based on my journal entries during the past eight months and counting. In the series, mundane daily chores in isolation in my apartment collide with catastrophic world news”. Her website explains “she relishes the materiality of her process” using diverse materials in her installations. Some images are painted and other materials combined for a 3D effect.



Figure 8 (Above) – Fresh Start (The Covid Diaries Series)



Figure 9 (Right) – Weeping Tulips (Mixed Bouquet) (The Covid Diaries Series)

There are more powerful pieces shown on Hegarty’s website in terms of semiotics and key messages but I have chosen these as they align with my intrigue on the demonstration of the lifecycle. “Fresh Start” shows new growth, new life from decaying foliage symbolised by the pigeon holding new life following a period of sickness and

loss. The “Weeping Tulip” conveys the irony in the rapid price increase for this bloom only to be infected by a crimson disease destroying crops during the pandemic.

A presentation by Anna Lewis gave me the confidence that this could be a real source of enquiry as my interest never really matched any brief before. Lewis introduced us to her MA graduate collection also shown on her website. She explains her “exploration onto darkness, a deadly aesthetic that fuses beauty and death, fashion and the uncanny, animal and human” (Anna Lewis Design, 2022).



Figure 10 (left) & Figure 11 (above) – both from the Darkness collection

She is interested in the emotions evoked by decorating death, abjection of being “drawn to that which repels us”, (Buchanon, 2018, p1) wearing a headpiece consisted from a dead bird. Toying with our morality of wanting to look closer but knowing we might not like what we see. Kristeva has strong opinions on abjection and wrote about our own bodily fluids disgusting us, similarly to the Dr Pimple Popper videos we get

sucked into on our social media. We don't look for them but they appear through some algorithm and then 10 minutes of procrastination later we have witnessed a “wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not signify death” (Kristeva, 1982 p11). We can't help but watch one more, the curiosity gets the better of us but I want to be conscious that I am not enjoying the controversy over the subject matter. Lewis uses feathers of a dead bird in her designs and portrays the death in beauty.

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced.

(Kristeva, 1982, p.10)

Anya Gallacio is a British artist using organic matter in her site specific installations (Tate, 2022). Her biography on the website explains she “is unable to predict the end result of her installations” which again is intriguing to me but enlightens us to the reality that decay doesn't always smell nice and will this have an effect on an exhibition?



Figure 12 & 13 – preserve ‘beauty’

There will be a clear distinction between the viewer who witnesses the works at the beginning to when the works are viewed at the end of the lifecycle. Colour is largely responsible for this and curiosity to the natural process change. Do we turn away or do we want to know more? Lifecycle, decay and change in relation to colour intrigue me for further research.

Materiality

Like Valerie Hegarty, I too enjoy working with a range of materials and want to continue to explore and discover unique ways of using my subject in my work. To date I have ground dried daffodil petals to a powder and used inside epoxy resin beads to inject colour. It's the variety that keeps me enthused and whereas I have a natural tendency to re-use materials I haven't calculated the sustainability factor. Fry recognises "Design - the designer and designed objects, images, systems and things - shapes the form, operation, appearance and perceptions of the material world we occupy" and also confirms my reflection

"Yet most designers have so far failed to recognize, or take responsibility for this fundamental quality of design. This means that they have not been in a position to grasp the ethical implications and issues of designing and the designed. Of course this failure is mostly structural rather than individual. Design ethics is massively underdeveloped"

(Fry, 2009, p.3).

We have come a long way since 2009, we are learning the lessons from Fry and beginning to stop and think, does the cost factor which was usually paramount in choosing process and materiality now outweighed by ethics? We are exploring UK manufacturing rather than outsourcing to China. We are beginning to measure our carbon footprint but how has that had an impact on design? Are the same fabrics and colour dyes available? Do we need them to still be available or have an alternative method? Is showing the decay, lifecycle an acceptable part of the design? Has the lifecycle of a product reduced and the consideration of its end of life taken into account at design stage? Our processes have changed where we make less on mass but opt more for drop shipping, making to order, promoting collections.

In relation to my field of design for which I hope to pursue, I find that repurposing has been prominent now more than ever in the Interior Design industry. Upcycling and reusing are very familiar in this space but we are now making it a trend to repurpose. We would usually discard end of life objects but now we are giving them new life in a new guise. An example of this is my favourite maker Cotfield Mirrors. A husband and wife team I discovered in a Newcastle market and originally from Gateshead. Carol designs the mirrors and Alan carries out the woodwork. The base for the mirrors are pallet wood cast offs, still harbouring their stamps and quirks from being put to work. The mirrors are then framed with broken china tea sets, set within the wooden outer frame encapsulating the mirror. Once a tea set was traditionally chipped it would be discarded but now is showcased in a new light. They have mentioned in conversation, collecting tea sets to deconstruct and decorate mirrors which pushes the kilter over balance. Are we now prepared to use items in a different way to intended?



Figure 14 –
Cotfield Mirror

Synthesis

My three keywords have taken me on a journey of colour exploration, meaning and availability along with the change in pallet following the lifecycle of a decaying object and the choice of materiality and repurposing. All with a linked theme of sustainability and ethical decision making when making process choices. My study next year will explore and develop a sustainable colour pallet for a decaying collection of objects shown through repurposed materiality.

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