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Surface Pattern Design

Research in Practice

2499

Dyslexia, Colour, Pattern

This dissertation proposal will investigate three keywords, Colour, Pattern, and Dyslexia. The works of artists with dyslexia will be discussed through their use of colour and style to recognise the patterns and traits of the condition in their work.

"Dyslexia is a common learning difficulty that mainly causes problems with reading, writing and spelling." (NHS, 2018). With the term dyslexia originating from "'dys' for difficulty and '-lexia' for words" (West, 1997, pp., 17) However, is not an obstacle that cannot be overcome, or that will stop an individual from reaching their full potential when used to capitalise on their strengths. Despite the opinions of many, in thinking that dyslexia affects levels of intelligence, or think that those who have it are less able, "unlike a learning disability, intelligence isn't affected." (NHS, 2018). This is a common misconception, as many who suffer with dyslexia "appear to be among the most successful in their career" (West, 1997, pp., 17). "It's estimated up to 1 in every 10 people in the UK has some degree of dyslexia." (NHS, 2018). It is also more apparent that "the condition affects a significant number of children, and is seen in one or both parents, and other family members as well." (West, 1997, pp., 17).

Firstly, the diagnostic traits of dyslexia will be investigated, and the different ways the mind with a learning disability think, compared to a thinker without a learning disability. To follow, looking at the ways that these are interpreted through colour, and how they apply to design, later in the essay.

Dyslexia can present itself differently in individuals. It will not be the same for every person that has it. However, they will all showcase it through a combination of the same traits. These are a difficulty with, handwriting, organisation, concentration, mathematics, excessive daydreaming, arithmetic, speech, coordination, athletic ability, memory, and concept of time (West, 1997, p.17).

Furthermore, these traits can all be "paradoxical" (West, 1997, p.17). Meaning that someone who suffers from dyslexia could have a lack of organisation skills, that may eventually result in "extreme orderliness" (West, 1997, p.11), or where one individual may suffer with their athletic abilities, another may have superior athletic abilities. This also creates a pattern in the learning difficulties and advantages of those who suffer with the condition.

This then leads into investigating the Pathology of Superiority. This is that "dyslexia's advantages may outweigh disadvantages" (Geschwind, 1982b, pp. 20-23). Individuals who have been diagnosed with dyslexia may have "achieved success or even greatness not in spite of, but because of their apparent disability" (West, 1997, p.19). Not due to "compensating to their handicaps, but rather that they succeed because they could not fully compensate." (West, 1997, p.19). This implies that due to not fully understanding or seeing things in the conventional 'correct' way due to dyslexia, people who have dyslexia can see opportunity in a different way, where someone who

does not have dyslexia would necessarily not be able to see or think of. Therefore, dyslexia can be referred to as a gift and as some consider it, a superpower. For example, many dyslexics are known to have "superior talents in certain areas of non-verbal skill, such as art, architecture, engineering and athletics." (Geschwind, 1982, pp. 20-23). This is apparent due to not focusing on their weaknesses, having confidence to try, and capitalising off their strengths.

"Some of the most original thinkers in fields ranging from physical science and mathematics to politics and poetry have relied heavily on visual modes of thought." (West, 1997, p.11). Some of these thinkers, nevertheless, have shown evidence of a "striking range of difficulties in their early schooling, including problems with reading, speaking, spelling, calculation, and memory" (West, 1997, p.11). These figures are claimed to have suffered with dyslexia, "Albert Einstein, Andy Warhol, Leonardo da Vinci" and "Pablo Picasso" (Dyslexia Association International, n.d.). The work of those mentioned will be discussed later in the essay to portray colour pattern in design through the mind of a dyslexic.

Other learning disabilities and mental health illnesses are often diagnosed alongside learning difficulties such as dyslexia. "ADHD and dyslexia can co-exist. Although one disorder doesn't cause the other, people who have one often have both" (Healthline, 2019). ADHD is a chronic condition that creates people who suffer from it to have difficulties with "organisation, attention and following instructions." (Healthline, 2019).

As a result of this “people with learning difficulties are more likely to experience feelings of anxiety, depression and low self-esteem”. (Association, n.d.). This then creates a link between learning difficulties and mental health struggles.

Colour is “the appearance that things have that results from the way in which they reflect light” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). Colours are firstly separated into three categories, the primary colours. “Red, yellow, and blue” (Armstrong, 1996, p.8). The secondary colours are “green, orange, and purple” (Adobe, n.d.), and these are created by mixing two primary colours. “The combination of a primary colour and secondary colour is known as a tertiary colour” (Adobe, n.d.). This leads to research further colour theory and how it can be recognised in artist’s work. Colour theory is “the collection of rules and guidelines which designers use to communicate with users through appealing colour schemes in visual interfaces” (Interaction Design Foundation, 2008). This theory and the way it is used can be what makes a successful piece of art as it effectively uses colour to portray feeling and emotion by the artists. Different colour theories will be discussed alongside the work of artists to portray colour theory.

The colours that are used in everyday life, from pieces of art, elements of design in interior are all chosen carefully to convey a certain type of feeling. Different colours are chosen to portray different emotions. Colours will be looked at how they are used to portray and create feeling in art, how they are used in credible pieces of art, and

how it has been used to show the feelings of the artist at that time. This is then further researched by highlighting the different interpretations of colour through religion.

Red is a colour with a "range of symbolic meaning through many different cultures, these include life, health, war, courage, and religious fervour" (Wolchover, 2011). Religious fervour is to have "strong and sincere beliefs" as defined by the Cambridge dictionary (2022) and is related to religion. (Wolchover, 2011). It is important to consider that all colours hold different meanings throughout different cultures, therefore an artist's religion can influence how they perceive a certain colour, and furthermore, how they use it in their work. Colour has a far more "powerful meaning in the context of the Holy Scriptures" (Crier, 2014).

Isaiah 1:18 "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" (Crier, 2014)

This is a verse quoted from the bible, it is clear that red 'scarlet' is seen as a negative colour in the way it is described as 'red like sin', whereas 'white as snow', is being used to describe the erasing of the sin. To conclude, in Christian Holy scriptures these colours have meaning and purpose, red for sin, and white for virtue. Below in figure 1 "The Good and Evil Angels" (Tate, n.d.) by English "poet, painter and printmaker" and "committed Christian" (Tate 2012), William Blake, is shown and how he uses this exact colour palette in his work.



Fig.1 The Good and Evil Angels, William Blake, 1795

Red has been used to paint the angel on the left to suggest the "evil" (Tate, n.d.) of the figure, contradictory to the figure on the right, who has "fair hair and light skin of the 'good' angel" (Tate, n.d.). This is a great example of a Christian artist whose use of colour is influenced by his personal religion and his Holy scripture, The Bible, to convey the 'good' and 'bad'. Contradictory to this, red is the national colour of China and a prime colour in Chinese culture. It symbolises "luck, happiness and joy" (Olesen, 2015). It is also the traditional colour worn by Chinese brides as it is known to be an "auspicious colour for warding off evil" (Olesen, 2015), which is conflicting the interpretation of the colour red in Christian religion. Similarly, the meaning of the

colour white symbolises death in Chinese culture, as opposed to white in Christian religion which conveys virtue. Religion is important to consider when analysing a piece of art through its use of colour and then further recognising a pattern and relationship between the use of colour, mental health, and possible learning difficulty the artist may have.

Pattern is a word that can have many meanings determined on the context and word class it is being used in. For example a pattern as a noun is "a particular way in which something is done, is organized, or happens" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Thus, meaning a pattern is beginning to emerge due to the circumstances, for example, a pattern in behaviour or career path due to learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. A pattern as a "noun arrangement" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), is any regularly repeated arrangement, especially a design made from repeated lines, shapes, or colours on a surface" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.), for example a repeat pattern of a motif on a fabric or product. Pattern can also be interpreted differently depending on the placement of the pattern. Pattern is something that is found in everyday life, natural and manmade. Pattern can be found everywhere in nature, architecture, and ornaments for some examples. "The secret of success in all ornaments is the production of a broad general effect by the repetition of a few simple elements," (Jones, 1986, p.15), meaning that the repetition of a motif, creating a pattern is what "London-born architect and designer and one of the most influential design

theorists of the nineteenth century, Owen Jones" (Richard Wilding, n.d.), believes to be the 'secret to success' in all ornaments.

Through looking at work by artists that suffer from learning disabilities, specifically dyslexia, patterns, using colour, and how and why specifically it has been used in their work will be analysed. Whilst doing this, religion will also be considered through examining a design.

Firstly, in analysing the work of Van Gough, who is "today one of the most popular of the Post-Impressionist painters" (The National Gallery, 2019), and the "son of a pastor" (The National Gallery, 2019), which immediately links him to Christianity and their symbolism of colour. Van Gough is also claimed to be a "famous dyslexic" (The Creative Mind, 2021), and is known to have had suffered from "seizures" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019), caused by "temporal lobe epilepsy" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019). Van Gough also suffered a "nervous breakdown" (The National Gallery, 2019) in "1888" (The National Gallery, 2019) because of his struggle with his mental health. Due to Van Gogh's extreme enthusiasm and dedication" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019) towards first his "religion and then art" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019), mania was believed to be a prominent condition, followed by "exhaustion and depression." (Van Gough Gallery, 2019). This links his learning disability, health, religion, and mental health. These struggles can be recognised as a pattern through colour and marks in Van Gogh's work.

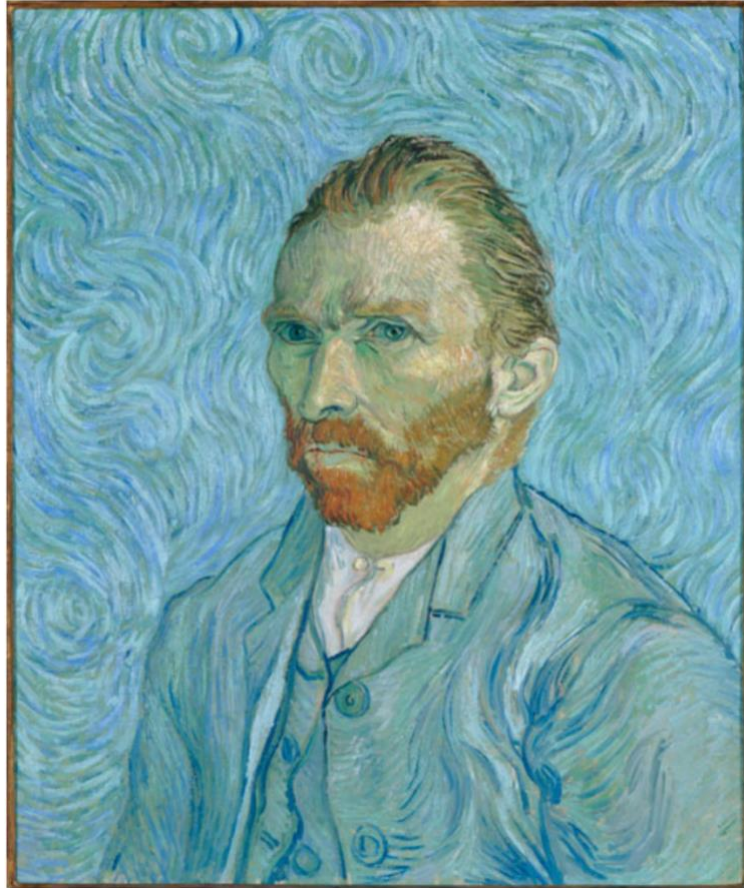


Fig.2 Vincent Van Gogh, Self-Portrait, 1889

This blue hued self-portrait was painted by Van Gogh at an asylum in St-Rémy, where he had “admitted himself following a mental breakdown” (National Gallery of Art, 2000). He served “twelve months 1889-1890” there. (MoMa, 2000). Blue is a fascinating and telling colour in Van Goghs work, it represents who he was as an artist, Christian, and someone who struggled with his mental health. Blue symbolises “wisdom and depth of understanding” (Smith, 2017), yet it is also a symbol of “depression, sadness and the depth of human psyche” (Smith, 2017). This correlates heavily to Van Goghs work as he struggled with depression and many of his most famous paintings

consisted of blue hues and tones, as seen in figure 3 below, *Starry Night*. Inspired by the view from his window at the "Saint-Paul-de-Mausole asylum in Saint-Rémy, in southern France" (MoMa, 2000), where he also painted his self-portrait seen in figure 2.



Fig 3. The Starry Night, Vincent van Gogh, 1889

At first glance the yellow motifs in the sky are assumed to represent the stars in the sky, hence the name *Starry Night*. However, Van Gogh was thought to have treated his epilepsy, thought to have been "caused by his prolonged use of absinthe" with "digitalis" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019), given to him by his physician. Digitalis can be

known to cause one to "see in yellow or see yellow spots" (Van Gough Gallery, 2019). This may be one of the reasons why Van Gogh used this colour. However, Van Goghs religion can be considered when analysing his work as the colours blue and yellow also have deeper meaning. In Holy scriptures the colour yellow is "associated with fire, which in turn, has always been associated with the purification process" (Olesen, 2016), and blue signifies the "healing power of God" (Olesen, 2016). As a believer in God, it is possible that the use of these colours meant something significant to Van Gogh in his paintings. Recent studies show correlation and questioning between religion, and mental health illnesses. As "classification of mental illness often relies on subjective criteria, and conclusions frequently stem from the behaviours we see before us" (Morris, 2016), meaning that a mental illness is diagnosed due to the events beforehand. Therefore, presented in front of a mental health professional, someone who hears voices could be diagnosed as a schizophrenic. However, presented to a man of religion, it could be concluded that the individual was hearing God. This makes a connection between religion and mental health illnesses, and specifically Van Goghs schizophrenia, and his deep devotion to his faith. This creates a pattern in Van Goghs work. Starting from his younger life, he struggled with a learning disability, that could have influenced his depression and mania. As well as his devotion to his religion and his art, to his struggle with his mental illness. This can all be seen through his work due to a reoccurring pattern in the use of colour in his work.

Research will continue in looking at dyslexia, colour, and the way it is interpreted differently through culture and religion. Van Goghs work will be analysed by referring to reoccurring arrangement in his artwork. Further research will be made into the connections between dyslexia, religion, mental health illnesses, and how they are not only shown through a variety of patterns by artists, but how they have also influenced the design world today. In researching this topic, it has led me to the following question to investigate further:

Reoccurring patterns in art/ design: are they linked to the religious beliefs of individuals with mental health issues and dyslexia?

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