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Within this proposal for my dissertation I will be exploring three keywords that I think are relevant to my practice, which is graphic design. I will be researching the three keywords, unconscious, Gestalt and logo. I intend to explore these words by researching and contextualising them; through this discussion I hope to learn more about the relationship between psychology and design. I hope that this discussion, through critically investigating these keywords will bring up some interesting topics that perhaps I could use to inform my dissertation.

The first keyword that I will be discussing is unconscious. I am interested in exploring this idea because despite us believing that it influences the way that we act in our everyday lives; we still do not know much about it in comparison to what we know about the conscious mind. Before looking at the unconscious, I believe that it is important to define the conscious mind to give it some context. Being conscious can be defined as, “awake, thinking, and knowing what is happening around you” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). For example, it is a conscious thought process when we are planning where we want to go on holiday or reflecting on something that happened a week ago. On the other hand, we have the unconscious, which is difficult to define, and can be seen as an abstract concept. However, a dictionary definition would describe it as “the part of your mind that contains feelings and thoughts that you do not know about, and that influences the way you behave” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020), this suggests that unconscious has a presence in everyday life, and has an impact on the decisions we make, without us realising. As the unconscious is such a broad topic, with many interpretations, I will be exploring a variety of theories from different psychologists so that I can gain a greater understanding.

I will start with exploring the ideas of Freud, as although his views can be seen as outdated today, his theories are still talked in modern psychology as they played an important role in exploring the topic of unconscious. Freud developed the idea that the mind is split into three levels, the conscious mind, the preconscious mind, and the unconscious mind. He argued that if a memory of an individual was too painful to think about consciously, it would be stored in the unconscious, though he believed that this information would somehow have an effect on how we act and behave, “the unconscious is the real psychic” (Freud, 1900). This suggests that the unconscious knows more than our conscious mind, which might show how it can influence our behaviour without us being aware of it. It could be interesting to explore this idea further, but in a design context.

Next, I am going to explore the ideas of Jung, as some of his theories oppose those of Freud, which may bring up some interesting discussion. Jung believed in the idea of the collective unconscious, which opposes Freud, who believed the unconscious was unique to the individual. The theory is that all humans are born with a collection of knowledge and imagery from our ancestral experience, “decisions of human life have as a rule far more to do with the instincts and other mysterious unconscious factors than with conscious will and well-meaning reasonableness” (Jung, 1933). This suggests that our instincts come from our unconscious, and that they play a greater role in dictating our life than our conscious decisions. Jung believed that instincts and archetypes make up our collective unconscious, these take the form of basic symbols which our conscious mind represses. He defined twelve key archetypes that exist in our unconscious, which could perhaps form a topic of discussion for my dissertation.

Finally, I will be exploring the unconscious from a modern perspective, for this I am going to look into the dual-processing theory. This is the idea that we simultaneously process information on separate conscious and unconscious tracks. For example, you could be observing a cat and consciously thinking ‘that is a good looking cat’, while your unconscious is noting down that it is black in colour, it is moving slowly, it has long fur, and you have a cat allergy. All of this unconscious information, that you are not actively aware of, may affect how you would behave after seeing the

cat. "the human body transmits 11 million bits of information per second to the brain, but our conscious mind can only process a portion of this capacity" (Fan, 2014) The suggestion that our conscious mind can only process a small amount of information could make for some interesting discussion. For example, what happens to this information that cannot be processed by the conscious mind, is it instead stored in our unconscious? Does this information then effect how we act and behave? I like the idea of exploring more in-depth into these ideas, perhaps I can develop this in my dissertation.

The unconscious is such an abstract concept, and it has been insightful researching the different theories and ideas that surround it to gain some understanding. I would like to research the unconscious further, in a design context as I think that there is still a substantial amount left to explore. The idea that "the unconscious mind is a pervasive, powerful influence over such higher mental processes" (Bargh, 2013) is an interesting idea that I could potential explore in relation to graphic design, as it seems like the unconscious could be utilised in a way to persuade and influence people, which could be achieve through use of good design. I could analyse this idea, potentially developing it into something I could look at in my dissertation.

The second keyword that I will be discussing is Gestalt, "something such as a structure or experience that, when considered as a whole, has qualities that are more than the total of all its parts" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). This refers to the Gestalt psychology that comes from the German word 'Gestaltqualität', this directly translates to English as 'form' or 'shape'. The word Gestalt has a range of applications in everyday life, for example it is often used in psychotherapy, however for my proposal I will be focusing on its use in a design context as this relates to my practice. The Gestalt psychology consists of six key principles: similarity, continuity, closure, proximity, figure/ground, and symmetry/order. Even though there are six individual principles, they can all be linked together with the common idea that, "the whole is other than the sum of the parts." (Koffka, 1935). This suggests that when a viewer sees an object or form, they see the entire object before they see the individual elements that construct it. Even when the parts are separated, we will still subconsciously group them together to see them as a whole if they are close enough, as this is how our mind interprets things. A combination of these principles can often be seen in the work of a designer, whether this was a conscious decision or purely coincidental. Gestalt links in with my first keyword, unconscious, as the principles are not something that you would be actively thinking about while looking at a design, instead this is an unconscious process. In this proposal I will be discussing two out of the six principles, taking two examples from different areas of art, to show that examples of Gestalt can be found in all kinds of design. I plan to discuss these principles further in my dissertation with more in-depth research and exploration, perhaps looking into the other four principles, and applying the theory further.

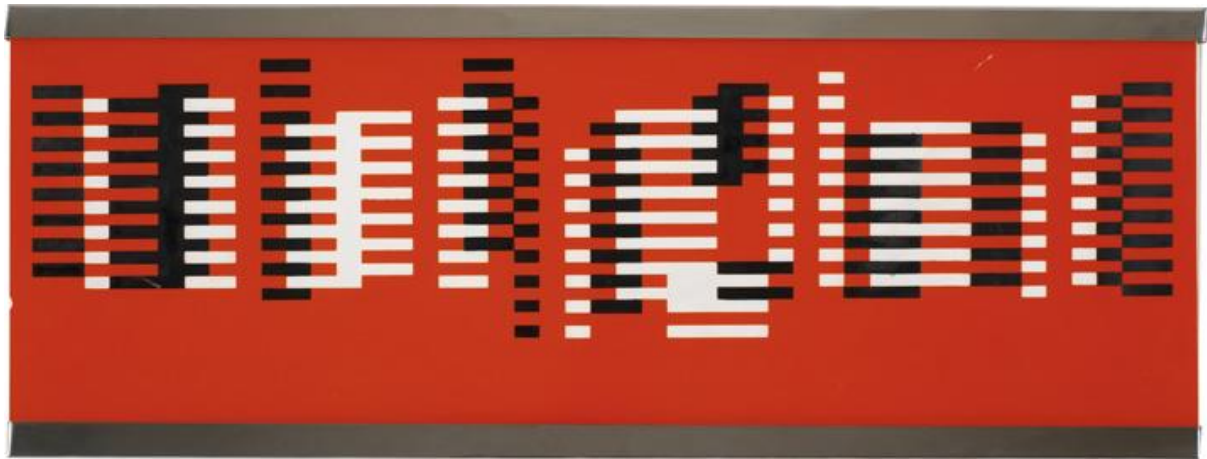


Figure 1 – 'Fugue' by Josef Albers, 1926

The first Gestalt principle that I will be discussing is proximity. This is the idea that when elements in a design are close together our mind perceives them as being linked and forms a relationship between them. On the other hand, when these elements are far apart together, we do not establish a relationship between them, and we see them as separate. Figure 1 depicts the work of Josef Albers, who was famously an artist who was involved with Bauhaus, both as a student and as a teacher. This is an early example of Gestalt being used in design, as the theory was created in 1912, while the design in figure 1 was created in 1926. I believe that this design shows a good example of the Gestalt principle, proximity. This design consists of black and white rectangles on a red background. The black rectangles are placed in vertical lines, with gaps in between them where you can see the red background behind them. Even though these black rectangles are not touching each other, we still see them as being part of the same shape, due to their close proximity. As a result of this we see each stack of vertical lines as one form, this makes the design resemble skyscrapers even though in reality it just shows individual rectangles stacked above one another.



Figure 2 – 'Brooklyn Bridge' by Alejandro Cupi, 2017

The second Gestalt principle that I am going to discuss in this proposal is the law of continuity. This is the theory that our eyes like to follow lines or closely linked shapes, as we like to see a flow of

elements in a design, instead of seeing separated elements with no relationship. "The eye, following the line, acts as if it were on the path of a moving thing" (Kepes, 1944), this suggests that our eyes will automatically follow lines, as if we were walking along a path. I believe that figure 2 shows the law of continuity quite well, despite it being a photograph and not something that a graphic designer has created. Although this bridge does not go on forever, our mind fills in the gaps, and we do not perceive it as having an end point. We instinctively follow the lines of the bridge because of the continuous patterns that form. This makes for a more visually pleasing image, that captures the viewers' attention for a longer period of time.

The final keyword that I will be discussing is 'logo', as this is a specific area of graphic design that I am currently interested in. Logo can be defined as "a design or symbol used by a company to advertise its products" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). This suggests that a logo is mainly used as a way to sell products; while I believe that a logo becomes the identity and the main representation of a brand, "a logo doesn't sell (directly), it identifies" (Rand, 1991). A logo is where the branding for a company should start and the style chosen in the logo should be reflected throughout the branding to keep it consistent. The logo is very important as this is how a company can make an impression on people, and the logo will become what people associate with the company. A good logo will be remembered, while a poor logo will be forgotten. The term logo relates to the previous keywords that I explored, unconscious and Gestalt, as these two concepts can be applied to this type of design. I would like to explore what psychological principles can be utilised while creating a logo that is well designed, and potentially identify some questions that could lead to further discussion.



Figure 3 – 'Unilever' Wolff Olins, 2004



Figure 4 – 'Unilever' Edited by author, 2020

The first logo that I am going to discuss is the Unilever logo, that can be seen in figure 3. This logo is made up of 25 individual icons, each supposedly representing an aspect of their company. "Humans think visually. A picture is really worth a million words." (Peters, 1999). As each icon represents a different aspect of the company, there can be many different interpretations for each icon in the logo. I believe that the Unilever logo, like I explored previously, is a good example of the Gestalt law of proximity. I believe that when we see this logo on the back of packaging, we do not consciously think about all of the symbols that make it up, we instead see them as one form. We see all the icons together as a 'U' and without them being close together we see them individually, as separate icons. I have edited the Unilever logo, as shown in figure 4, to show the importance of this principle. I think it would be interesting to explore what other psychological principles were used in creating this logo, for example why did they choose that font? It could also be insightful to explore the reasons behind

the colour choice, is there a particular reason why they have chosen dark blue? These are all questions that I could apply to looking in-depth into logos for my dissertation.



Figure 5 – ‘Amazon’ Turner Duckworth, 2000

The second logo that I will be discussing, is the widely recognised Amazon logo, depicted in figure 5. This logo is meant to represent the idea that Amazon sells everything, that is why there is an orange arrow connecting the letters ‘a’ to ‘z’. The idea of connecting these letters could be an example of the Gestalt law of continuity, as your eyes unconsciously follow the curved line, this is not a process that you are actively aware of. This same orange arrow can also be interpreted as a smile, I wonder whether the unconscious mind associates this with Amazon being a trusted company “the unconscious mind is a pervasive, powerful influence over such higher mental processes” (Bargh, 2013), perhaps the suggestion of a smile would be enough to convince someone to use their service, as it is a friendly symbol. This is something that I could look further into for my dissertation, in exploring the relationship between design and psychology, where I could break down elements within the logo and discuss their relationship with psychology.

In summary, through critically investigating the three keywords unconscious, Gestalt, and logo by researching and contextualising them I have developed a better understanding of how psychological principles can be used within design. My research into unconscious was insightful and has inspired me to want to develop it further in a design context, perhaps looking at a specific area of graphic design; whereas I only looked at it in a general sense in this proposal, so that I could gain an understanding of the word, through researching multiple theories. This discussion has also influenced me into wanting to explore the laws of Gestalt further, where perhaps this could be looked at more in-depth in my dissertation. This overall discussion has led me to want to carry out ‘an investigation exploring the relationship between psychology and design thinking’, as my proposed question for independent inquiry, where I can use my research from this proposal as a starting point in writing my dissertation.

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