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### Textualising visual stimulus: A visual methodology to encourage innovation in fashion design education

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#### Abstract

Fashion design and its pedagogy is fundamentally centred around visual representation. A core conceptual component of the fashion industry and design education is mood boards, concept boards or trend boards, which purpose is to communicate design direction or intent and to provide a starting point for the design process. Content for these boards relies predominantly on visual data; due to the internet and social media, students and designers have unlimited access to visual stimulus. Reflecting on personal design constraints and teaching experiences in fashion design at a leading South African design education institution, it became clear that the influx of visual data, both through the use of these boards and freely available images on social media, affects original design thinking. The overwhelming quantity of visual stimulus tends to encourage reproduction rather than fuel innovative design. This often occurs sub-consciously as students are immersed in the content, without critically distilling what is seen. Furthermore, it fosters a sense of inferiority among students, as they often cannot reproduce the same quality of design as seen online.

To address this issue, an alternative method of using these boards and/or visual stimulus is proposed. Traditionally, fashion design education requires students to develop designs directly from these boards. The proposed method requires an intermediate step, where the visual data is analysed based on design elements and principles and converted to textual descriptors that become the criteria for designing. This textualisation of images, aims to provoke design ideas, removed from the initial visual stimulus. This proposed method does not only aim to increase innovative design practice, but simultaneously develop critical engagement with visual data and enhance visual literacy. As students become more skilled in translating, interpreting, analysing, and understanding visual stimulus, this method could become intrinsic to their design practice and lead to more innovation, originality and individualised/personalised designer signatures that avoid the trap of reproduction and imitation.

The accessibility of influential and inspirational images should be celebrated, especially considering the rate at which technological advancements are being developed, however how designers and students utilise these images needs consideration. By introducing a simple method within the way students use visual data, critical thinking can be developed, visual literacy improved, and innovative design encouraged.

**Keywords:** Fashion design education, innovative design, mood board, textualising visual stimulus, visual methodology, visual literacy.

## Introduction

In the field of applied design, the design process and outcome revolve around the action of visual problem solving and becomes a visual act in itself (Boradkar & Dhedphale 2019, p. 220). Fashion design is no different and is fundamentally grounded in visual representation. Therefore, teaching and learning techniques employed in fashion education, are reliant on visual methodologies. Within fashion design, mood boards are often employed as a design tool, an inherent visual methodology, embedded in the design process.

Mood boards are widely used in fashion pedagogy and the fashion industry. Various forms of visual boards can be used such as mood, trend, colour or trims and fabrication boards. This paper focuses on visual boards that aim to represent the collective design intention, rather than boards that depict specific design elements. For the purpose of this paper, visual boards capturing a broader perspective of design intention are referred to as mood boards. This term should be understood as an umbrella term for visual boards that aim to communicate design intention, including terminology such as presentation boards (Cassidy 2011, p. 230 and Hopkins 2018, p. 147), concept boards (Aspelund 2015, p. 109; Cassidy 2011, p. 230; Gaimster 2015, p. 166) and theme boards (Sorger & Udale 2020, p. 24). Although this paper is aimed at the mood board, the method could be applied to any visual board, regardless of its purpose within the design process.

Various research has been conducted pertaining to mood boards, such as analysis methods in selecting mood board content (De Wet 2017), mood boards' role as a qualitative research method (Cassidy 2011) and the assessment and evaluation of the mood board (Freeman, Marcketti & Karpova 2017). However, what is in question is how should the mood board be used in the design process? And how to navigate creative thinking in a visually saturated context? Reflecting on personal experiences in fashion design education, as a student and lecturer, it was established that there is a missing component in teaching and learning regarding the application of the mood board within the later stages of the design process. Furthermore, postgraduate students tend to struggle less with utilising the mood board as a design departure point, compared to undergraduate students. Kędra and Źakevičiūtė (2019, p. 1) explain that although students live in a highly visual-focused world, they are "often visually illiterate", struggling to interpret and understand images. Often experienced designers interpret the mood instinctively (Cassidy 2021, p. 235), which could explain why postgraduates apply mood boards more effectively than undergraduates. Time is invested in training students on layout, visual impact, and coherency, as ultimately the hope is to achieve a clear, concise, and uniform message that guides the design process. However, exploration in applying and using the information communicated in the mood board are lacking. How does one translate, dismantle, and integrate the content presented in the mood board? How does one use the mood board information without replicating what is seen? How does one move from the design intention to the act of meaning making, and fashion design making?

This paper is proposing a mood board analysis framework that decodes the image-based content of the mood board into text. Through shifting the modality from visual to text, the hope is to propel design-intention into design-action, revitalise the mood board as a core component of the design process, encourage innovation, and avoid duplication of visual stimuli.

## The role of the mood board

Mood boards encompass a visual synthesis of design intention and serve as a non-verbal communication tool within the design process. In a field where visual representation takes central

focus, it is vital that modes of investigation and communication follow a similar modality. McDonagh and Storer (2004, p. 17) highlight why mood boards are an effective communication tool by stating that:

Verbo-centric approaches for gathering data and design communication (e.g., interviews, focus groups, questionnaires) are well developed. Research indicates that individuals tend to lie on a bipolar scale between verbalist and images (Riding and Rayner, 1998). This indicates that if we restrict our communications to one media (i.e., words), we are potentially reducing the effectiveness of communication [...] mood boards can offer a visual-centric approach.

Mood boards are important in fashion design education, not only as a means of assessment, but also to prepare students for industry practice, as these boards are widely used within the professional arena (Freeman, Marcketti & Karpova 2017, p. 3). In a survey conducted with practising designers by McDonagh and Storer (2005, p. 20), a participant indicated that even if mood board creation is not practically executed in industry the process thereof is inherently explored “in their heads”. Aspelund (2015, p. 97) argues that mood boards serve a vital role in conceptualisation, where possible design solutions are explored visually, by collecting and curating images. The purpose of the mood board has been indicated as:

- Visually conveying design intention (Aspelund 2015, p. 97; Gaimster 2015, p. 166)
- Communicating complexities difficult to verbally communicate, i.e., evoking emotion, feelings and moods (McDonagh & Storer 2005, p. 18)
- Informing and presenting creative thinking (Aspelund 2015, p. 97; McDonagh 2005, p. 37)
- Enabling innovative thinking and application (Cassidy 2011, p. 225)
- Providing visual and creative stimulus (Aspelund 2015, p. 97; Sikarskie 2020, p. 176)
- Capturing traceability of ideas, visualising their origin (McDonagh & Storer 2005, p. 20)

These purposes emphasise the valuable contribution mood boards provide to concept development within the design process, combining multiple images to collectively communicate a singular coherent message relating to the design intention. Therefore, the purpose of the mood board could be synthesised as: to translate the intangible to tangible and provide guidance or inspiration to the designer. McDonagh and Storer (2005, p. 18) explain that source material for these boards loses their initial meaning through reconstruction and application within the mood board to ultimately communicate the design concept constructed by the designer. Consequently, becoming a new “singular” image, or as stated by De Wet (2017, p. 17) a “complete picture”, rather than multiple components. This process might sound simple, however, students often struggle with mood board creation and use, the following section will explore some of these challenges.

## Challenges in mood board creation and use

As with all modes of teaching and learning, there are challenges to consider. Reflecting on personal teaching experience within the context of mood boards, the following challenges emerged: overwhelming access to visual stimuli, lack of visual literacy and duplication of online content. These are by no means the only challenges; however, these relate directly to the proposed method of this paper. It is vital to consider challenges as to best tailor the proposed method to address relevant challenges that are currently evident.

### Overwhelming influx of visual stimuli

The careful consideration of source material for mood boards has become an increasing necessity due to the influx of freely available online visual stimulus. Meeker (in Li & Xie 2020, p. 1) indicates that in

2015 an average of 3.2 billion digital images were shared daily via social media platforms. Whereas in 2021, Instagram and Facebook collectively recorded an average of 305,000 images shared every minute (Ali 2021). Li and Xie (2020, p. 1) argue that online platforms have shifted its focus from text to visual and the fashion industry is not an exception. Accessibility to visual content has opened the fashion industry to a wider audience. As Lascity (2021, p. 179) points out, the internet and social media have been the “fall of the gatekeepers” in the fashion industry.

Livestreaming and global sharing of online content enable audiences to access fashion shows historically reserved for elite society. Access to trends, ranges, and fashion shows has democratised fashion, allowing equal accessibility across socioeconomic groups (Barnard 2017, p. 4). Thus, students are now able to view the latest fashion designs almost immediately, as some brands livestream fashion shows, whereas others share video recordings shortly after launch events concluded (Bendon 2017, p. 43). Access boundaries are being redefined by instantaneous sharing and global connectivity offered by the internet and social media.

Access to more design solutions and fashion innovation sounds euphoric, as it opens avenues of exposure to design sophistication, which is challenging to convey in the classroom. Wider access provides a broader basis for exploration and research into possible design solutions. However, freedom in access has fostered a generation where instant gratification is normative (Halliday 2022, p. 83), making engagement and exploration seem obsolete in comparison to the instantaneous culture that media has adopted. Amidst overwhelming accessibility to visual content how should students navigate the influx of images to select appropriate and effective content for their mood boards?

De Wet’s (2017, p. 21) research addresses this concern, using a short analysis questionnaire which aims to aid students in identifying relevant and meaningful source material for their mood board. Figure 1 shows the resulting questionnaire from De Wet’s research.

Identify the criteria for the visual analysis:	
<b>1a) Identify and list the sensory design elements of the intended design concept that you are looking for in the images in terms of:</b> Image subject: Colours: Lines: Forms and shapes: Texture and detail:  <b>Image number:</b> <b>2) Carefully analyse and describe the sensory content of an image:</b>  Image subject: Colours: Lines: Forms and shapes: Texture and detail:  <b>4) Write down one connecting sensory and one connecting symbolic aspect between all the images.</b> <b>5) Evaluate and rate the relevance of each image:</b> Based the above analysis, use the four-scale descriptions below to evaluate and rate the representational relevance of an image against the identified analysis criteria.  <b>Encircle/highlight the relevant choice:</b> 1. Not relevant at all – the image needs to be excluded. 2. Several aspects are not relevant – the image needs to be excluded. 3. Most aspects relate – the image can remain for final consideration. 4. Excellent representational relevance – the image is a definite choice.	<b>1b) List and describe symbolic elements of the intended design concept that you are looking for in the images:</b>      <b>Attach the image here:</b> <b>3) Interpret the analysis of the sensory elements of an image and link possible symbolic meanings to the content:</b>      

**Figure 1: Identify the criteria for the visual analysis (De Wet 2017, p. 21)**

In the context of textualising the mood board, which this paper is proposing, De Wet’s questionnaire focuses on similar criteria outlined in Table 3 (**Proposed method**). By completing De Wet’s

questionnaire, students can identify relevant source material that supports their design concept. However, if there is a lack of visual literacy, identifying relevant source material could be difficult.

### Visual literacy

In the most simplistic form, visual literacy refers to the ability to understand visual content. For higher education, visual literacy becomes an effective teaching tool to enhance critical engagement because it is “closely related to critical thinking as it involves a set of cognitive processes that range from simple identification to complex interpretation at contextual, metaphorical, and philosophical levels” (Romero & Bobkina 2021, p. 1). According to Hope (2020, p. 11) visual literacy can be categorised as functional, narratorial or aesthetic. Functional visual literacy refers to images that convey instruction, narratorial convey sequential progress of stories and aesthetic entails understanding and interpreting images based on cultural and social values (Hope 2020, pp. 12-15). The literacy required for mood board creation and the proposed analysis method of this paper, would form part of the latter category. Aesthetic visual literacy also coincides with the visual literacy required to interpret the meaning of clothing and fashion.

Visual literacy lies at the core of mood board creation, requiring the creator to understand, interpret, and apply various images into a unified message. Although this understanding of “multiple-to-singular” is fundamental to mood board creation, achieving a coherent message across various images in a single board is challenging. De Wet’s (2017) research highlights that critical analysis of source material could enhance coherency, since the selection process would be guided to identify appropriate images when constructing a mood board. Cassidy (2011, p. 232) explains that these images should not be viewed literally, but rather as conceptual or symbolic, which could shed light on why this process is problematic to those lacking visual literacy.

Lack of visual literacy is often overlooked, since understanding and translating visual information is a constant factor of life. Images and symbols form part of contemporary society and are entrenched in communication (Hope 2020, p. 26). It has mobilised communication beyond language, cultural and geographical barriers, for example washing instruction icons on clothing labels allows for international communication without a single word. Society’s natural inclination to resort to imagery in communication is evident in how text messages are conveyed, with emojis becoming common practice in texting. Although the use and understanding of visuals have become embedded in contemporary life, there is still a disconnect among students (Kędra & Žakevičiūtė 2019, p. 1). De Wet (2017, p. 17) argues that a deeper level of design thinking is required to achieve visual literacy among students and outlines the following sequential steps to develop sound visual literacy when selecting source material for mood boards:

1. Develop source material evaluation criteria
2. Evaluate source material sensory design elements
3. Interpret symbolic connotations of source material based on sensory design elements
4. Based on the previous steps develop an educated opinion and assess the symbolic relevance of images
5. Synthesise the symbolic connections between images and group coherent meanings together
6. Groupings that support the overarching design concept would be the most appropriate.

Cassidy (2011, p. 235) notes that the above process could be substituted by intuition when designers are accustomed to mood board creation or have advanced visual literacy skills. Understanding what is seen seems like an arbitrary act, inherently processed; however, it is far more complex. There is an interrelationship of constant negotiation between the image and the reader of that image. Reilly

(2021, p. 64) explains that this negotiation is influenced by context and the interpreter. Both play a vital role in constructing meaning. In the case of a mood board, the interpreter is the designer. The context is more fluid, but controlled by the designer, as it is constructed through the juxtaposition of images within the mood board. This again highlights the importance of selecting appropriate and meaningful source material for the mood board. Hope (2020, p. 6) points out that the image-reader negotiation becomes more prominent and complex when referring to abstract notions and symbolic representation. Considering this complexity, another concern is raised: the articulation of what is seen.

In a time where access to visuals is seemingly limitless, the ability to discuss images is unexpectedly lacking (Romero & Bobkina 2021, p. 4). This emphasises the necessity to focus on multimodal (visual and text) engagements in education. The challenge to discuss visual content could be due to articulation difficulties, exasperated in the South African context, with eleven official languages and English as the predominant academic language. This becomes especially challenging to ESL (English as second language) students. In some cases, English is a third language, therefore conveying design intention in text becomes particularly challenging. Pineteh (2014, p. 20) explains that in South Africa, there is a disparity in literacy skills when students enter higher education, which negatively impact students' ability to communicate ideas in a language that is not their mother tongue. The materiality of the mood board inherently addresses this core challenge faced by ESL students, as the boards provide a platform to visually communicate design intention, aiding students who face articulation challenges. Hope (2020, p. 21) poses that merging text and visuals provides a synergy that propels imagination and creativity; and bridges the gap when complexities in articulation occur. The benefit of visual communication is undoubtedly assisting in language barriers; however, this should be an opportunity to develop and improve idea articulation, rather than a substitute or solution for language difficulties.

Consequently, mood boards should be a learning opportunity to assist students in developing their design articulation and vocabulary, by explaining what they intend to design, both visually and verbally. Cassidy (2011, p. 235) poses that experience is vital to the learning process and that "doing" proves to be the most valuable teacher as it enables new skill development, engagement with materials and requires students to take ownership of their projects. Ownership of the project is vital for innovation to take place, as it inherently contradicts notions of duplication.

### Duplication of visual stimuli

Using design solutions (already designed garments) in the mood board becomes problematic, especially when students struggle with visual literacy. Rather than including their own voice into designs, students rely on these visuals to offer solutions, hindering design exploration and limiting the creative process. Designers undoubtedly use finished products or designs as inspiration, but how does one teach future designers to work beyond this inspiration? Inspiration should be a starting point or catalyst to design, and not an end-product in itself. Reproduction of visual stimuli occur intentionally and unintentionally. Often questions arise in a lecture, *how do I make this? I want to design this*, with a snapshot of a design on a smartphone. This instinctive question, innocently posed, is ensuing the act of duplication and not design. This opens the debate, are we educating designers or dressmakers?

Besides a need for a mind-shift, from re-making to designing, more complexities arise from this duplication problem. Students cannot replicate what is seen online, due to a lack of experience, knowledge, and resources, causing an emotional response of inferiority. Considering the South African context, students lack access to resources such as specialised textiles and machinery, as well as

finances. According to the *2021 NSFAS Status Report* (2021, pp. 3, 6), 839,130 applications were processed, and their budget increased from R441 million to almost R42 billion, since the fund was founded in 1999. The budgetary growth and number of applications reflect the financial difficulties of students. Besides general costs of higher education, the increasing costs of art and design materials have placed immense pressure on visual arts students. The lack of knowledge and financial restrictions result in students feeling discouraged, ill equipped, and inferior; however, their focus should not be to replicate but rather to innovate, reiterating the need for a mind-shift.

The proposed method of analysis does not aim to solve concerns of visual literacy, over-exposure to visual content or design duplication; however, it poses a low-tech method that could possibly alleviate pressures of these challenges. Consequently, it aims to propose a visual analysis method that provides guidance to students to think creatively beyond visual stimuli; provides analysis tools to simplify the understanding of what is seen (visual literacy) and through applying this technique, avoid duplication.

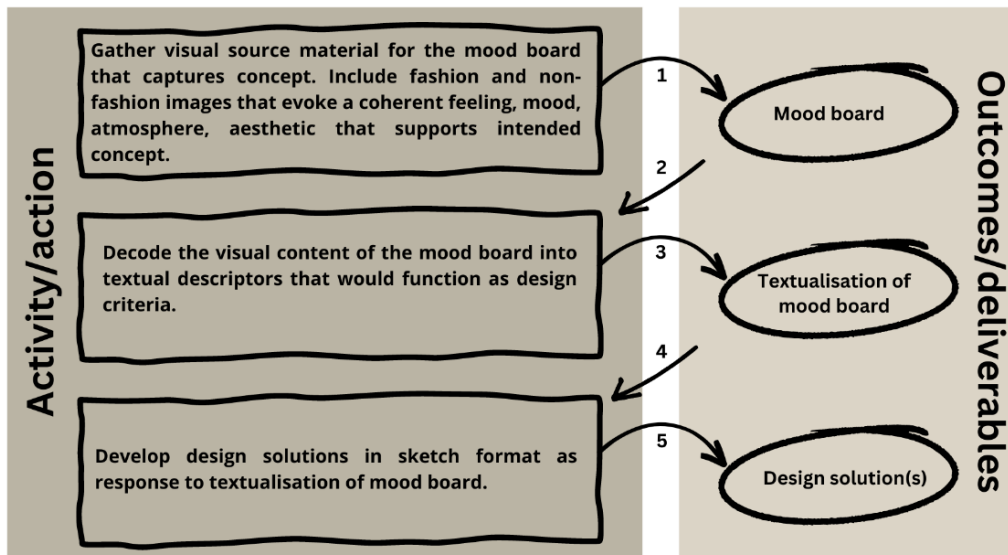
## Research design of the proposed method

The proposed mood board analysis framework is grounded in an interpretivist view and follows an inductive process, where the design direction is deduced from the mood board to inform the design process. An interpretivist grounding is advantageous to the process as its ontological assumptions define the positionality of the mood board analysis. Although fashion research is often framed from a symbolic interactionist paradigm, when investigating its role in nonverbal communication (Kawamura 2020, p. 27; Lascity 2020, p. 78), Flick (2020, p. 28) poses that there is a close relationship between the two paradigms as both are framed from similar ontological assumptions. Interpretivism (Collins 2018, p. 42) and symbolic interactionism (Flick 2020, p. 28) rely on the ontological understanding that meaning is constructed socially, constantly changes and that multiple perspectives are omnipresent. Consequently, meaning is assigned because of the lived experience of the interpreter. The proposed mood board analysis requires the student to reflect on their perspective of what they see, which supports the ontological assumptions outlined by Collins and Flick. Therefore, the subjectivity of the designer cannot be avoided within the analysis. This, however, does not imply that the analysis should be unvalidated. Suggested validation techniques will be discussed within the proposed method.

## Proposed method: textualising the mood board

Within fashion pedagogy, the mood board is often created in isolation, approached as a brief requirement, rather than an integral part of the design process. This siloed-approach perpetuates a disconnection between design-intention and design-outcome. This paper is proposing an analysis method to decode the visual content of the mood board into text that could act as design criteria. By interpreting the mood board into textual design criteria, the hope is to separate the act of visualising design solutions from found visual stimuli, to promote innovative design practices, without undermining the symbiotic relationship between the mood board and the design process.

By textualising the mood board, the students' focus is shifted away from visual stimuli, subsequently relying on memory, which is less defined. Santini (in Sikarskie 2020, p. 52) explains that visual memory is processed either fragmented or holistic. Holistic memory recalls vividly and emotionally but without detail, whereas fragmented memory recalls detail, disjoint from the complete image. Both forms of memory are beneficial in mood board interpretation as it avoids full recollection of the complete picture. By relying solely on memory, the mood board becomes inspirational rather than dictating, encouraging innovation, and addressing the challenge of duplication. Figure 2 illustrates the sequential process suggested.



**Figure 2: Sequential process of proposed method (developed by author)**

Although this process might sound counterproductive, as it is proposing the conceptualisation phase to develop a “visual-text-visual” sequence, it provides intermediate steps to the design process. The intermediate steps hope to improve students’ visual literacy and encourage innovative design solutions, while still maintaining coherency to the design intention depicted in the mood board.

Barnard (2017, p. 73) poses a similar model in her research, where descriptors were assigned to collected visual data during first-cycle coding. The focus of Barnard’s research entailed designing ranges for participants based on social media fashion content. When comparing Barnard’s research to the traditional design process taught in fashion education, the online fashion content fulfilled the role of the mood board. Consequently, Barnard’s design process was reversed as design solutions acted as inspiration instead of a traditional mood board. In order to address this unconventional process, a visual analysis technique was employed, where images were analysed to develop textual descriptors. An extract of the method is seen in Figure 3.





Figure 3: First-cycle coding of visual data – Rue (Barnard 2017, p. 73)

The first-cycle coding produced a variety of textual descriptions the researcher observed and identified within the images. Barnard (2017, p. 73) applied second-cycle coding to the analysis where the first-cycle codes (Figure 3) were grouped into two categories: descriptors and colour palette. Within second-cycle coding the descriptors were synthesised to a limit of five descriptors, based on similarity and repetitive representation. An example of the second-cycle codes is seen below:

Table 1: Second-cycle coding for participant Rue (Barnard 2017, p. 73)

Participant	Descriptive words and phrases	Colour palette
Rue	Japanese aesthetic, Goth or punk, layering, simplicity, androgyny, balanced with suggestions of femininity	Shades from black to white

Barnard proceeded to design a fashion collection for the participant, solely using the second-cycle codes (Table 1), without consulting the images originally provided (Figure 3). The codes were validated through crosschecking textual feedback from participants to ensure that it aligns with the participant’s view of their personal style (Barnard 2017, p. 74). This paper proposes to apply a similar visual analysis to mood boards. This method requires engagement with visual data and poses the opportunity to integrate visual methodologies in students’ teaching and learning experiences. Antoine (2020, p. 117) poses another method, where redrawing components of the visual research is encouraged; however, he cautions against drawing finalised garments as this would limit creative thinking. The immediate response to visuals stimuli aims to foster engagement, comprehension, and appreciation of the creative value of source material (ibid.). In support, Barnard (2017, p. 74) explains that designing removed from initial visual stimuli enhanced creative practice, as the visual data became design guides rather than dictating the aesthetics of the design outcome, which in turn promotes creativity, innovation and prevent bias during the design process. Following this method underpins and supports

the purpose of the mood board, namely, to provide visual stimulus for creative thinking and problem solving (Apelund 2015, p. 97). Furthermore, it coincides with what this paper aims to offer through introducing mood board textualisation.

To ensure validity and apply a manner of control within the analysis process, sound criteria for analysis should be applied. Structured criteria provide a scaffolded approach to the textualisation, guiding learning practices. The intention is that over time, as students gain experience, improve visual literacy, and develop “intuitive judgement” (Cassidy 2011, p. 235), the criteria should adapt and adjust to accommodate their own personal design process.

Applying Barnard’s method in fashion design pedagogy requires adaptations to suit the purpose of teaching. In order to investigate the necessary changes, the following comparison was constructed (Table 2):

**Table 2: Barnard’s research versus the proposed method**

	<b>Barnard’s research</b>	<b>Proposed method</b>
<b>Visual stimuli</b>	Participant images	Mood board
<b>Analysis process: First-cycle</b>	Analysing images into text	Develop criteria to guide analysis process, suitable to undergraduate programme
<b>Analysis process: Second-cycle</b>	Categorising analysis into descriptors (maximum of five) and colour palette	
<b>Validation</b>	Compare descriptors to participants’ textual responses	Compare emerging themes to initial design intention
<b>Outcome</b>	Fashion collection depicting aspects of second-cycle coding	Fashion design adhering to specific design or project brief, and depicting aspects identified in analysis

Barnard’s method focused on content received from participants that only included finished designs. Student mood boards, in contrast, include non-fashion images. Students are encouraged to limit fashion images for mood boards, since the board should encapsulate more than just fashion, communicating and evoking emotion, mood, and atmosphere, highlighting conceptual content (Cassidy 2011, p. 229) rather than obvious design solutions. This in turn, would also avoid duplicating designs, intentionally or unintentionally. Student mood boards will include considered layout and presentation supporting the overarching design concept, whereas Barnard’s source material was seemingly unrelated fashion images found online. The process of creating the mood board would effectively function as a filter, removing outlining visuals that undermine the overall aesthetic intention of the concept.

As a starting point to guide students in textualisation, design principles and elements are suggested as a basis for analysis. Using the taxonomic system of art and design as criteria, allows students the platform to develop analytical skills and reiterate the importance of incorporating fundamental design elements and principles in the design process. Any form of art is constructed through a combination of these components (Field 2018, p. 1). Challenging students to re-evaluate visuals from the perspective of design elements and principles, students are encouraged to dismantle the images to its basic form. This categorically strips the layers of the mood board composition to unfold which design elements and principles, when used collectively, allow the creator to symbolically or conceptually communicate. This analysis will uncover the combination of principles necessary to evoke the desired response one hopes to achieve through the identified concept of the mood board. Antoine’s (2020, p. 117) suggestion of immediate redrawing could benefit this part of the process, to allow students to

focus on individual design components observed within source material. Arguably, this would only contribute if focusing on specific aspects, and not redrawing a full composition.

The traditional design elements and principles, although considered fundamental in art and design making, could evolve into in-depth decoding of images, such as Field (2018) has done in his book *An illustrated field guide to elements and principles of art + design*. For this proposed textualisation of the mood board to optimally function in the fashion pedagogy, it is important to equip students with an understanding of the fundamental design elements and principles (listed in Table 3).

**Table 3: Design elements and principles (adapted from Field 2018)**

Elements	Principles
Point	Balance
Line	Proportion
Shape	Contrast
Value	Rhythm
Form	Pattern
Texture	Emphasis
Space	Unity
Colour	Variety

The taxonomic system of art and design (Table 3) should be considered as a guideline that could be adapted and tailored to meet the need of the student, brief or institution. It is not meant to function as an ultimatum for analysis, merely to guide the student in decoding what is observed within their own mood board. For example, one specific element or principle might be more prominent than others or not contribute as strongly to the overall concept. The process should remain flexible, allowing the student's voice to emerge. Saldaña (2021, p. 74) suggests for visual analysis to use basic elements and principles as "primary codes" (i.e., line) and develop "subcodes" (i.e., curved) for each primary code to increase depth in analysis.

Once the mood board has been textually captured in a descriptive manner under the headings of the design elements and principles, the textual descriptors are synthesised where similarities are found. Commonalities and repetitive aspects shed light on the components that should receive more attention during designing. At this point in the method, the mood board should be removed. The textual analysis should be the only source of design direction. It is useful to apply validation methods after textualising is complete to ensure that the analysis supports the overarching concept and design intention.

Validation and trustworthiness of the analysis can be verified through applying qualitative coding methods. From the analysis similarities, commonalities and recurring themes should be identified. This could include versus codes or descriptive codes (Saldaña 2021, p. 174,134). From these codes, reoccurring aspects should unfold, demonstrating or symbolising similar ideas, indicating that themes are emerging (Saldaña 2021, p. 18). If the analysis is trustworthy, the emerging themes should support conceptual components of the initial design intention. For example, a mood board designed to communicate mental health issues, could reflect themes of fragility, vulnerability, and sombreness; opposed to a childhood innocence concept, which could reflect playful, fun, and colourful. If there is a disconnect, the mood board or analysis process derailed from the initial intention and implies that

rethinking and intervention is necessary to refocus the design process. However, if the textual analysis themes support the concept, the process of designing can commence.

Designing from the textual analysis only, the students should include design elements and principles identified in the analysis in their designs. For example, the identified subcode of organic line could be translated into curved panels. These identified components should become the active building blocks of garment designs. Through using the textual descriptors, instead of the mood board, innovative incorporation of design elements and principles can be applied.

This proposed method theoretically addresses the identified challenges and has been successfully applied in Barnard's (2017) research, however, evidence is still lacking to determine its feasibility in the educational space. Further research could shed light on possible adjustments necessary. The application of the taxonomic system as a basis of analysis could also be examined, specifically from the perspective of undergraduates, as additional criteria might be required to guide students that are less experienced in visual analysis.

## Conclusion

Mood boards lose their primary purpose if not integrated into the design process. When considered as a project brief, isolated from the creation of design, it has no function and appears disjoint from the design solution(s) presented. Through literature, it is established that the role of the mood board lies in the conceptualisation phases of the design process, solidifying its place as an extension of the process and not siloed. Furthermore, it highlighted its function as a design catalyst aimed to fuel deeper creative thinking.

Through reflecting on teaching experiences, it was found that visual literacy, overexposure to design solutions and images, and replication of visual stimuli are challenges students face when engaging with mood board creation and application. The paper proposed to apply a visual analysis framework to the mood board that results in textual descriptors, rather than visual representation. This process translates the mood board's visual materiality to textual content. The analysis is framed from the perspective of art and design elements and principles, to provide structure to the analysis. It is proposed that the analysis process be verified through applying coding. Coding aims to draw parallels between the themes arising in the textual outcome of the analysis and the overarching design concept of the mood board. This verification process allows one to confirm if the initial design message is still conveyed, ensuring coherency throughout the design process.

The proposed taxonomic system as a basis of analysis can be tailored and adapted to the student, project, or institutional requirements as to best suit the aimed outcome. The textual outcome of the analysis, if deemed coherent with the design concept, then becomes the basis from which students should approach the design process. This ensures that the design elements and principles applied in the design solutions align conceptually and are coherent. The method addresses the challenges posed in the paper as follows:

- *Visual literacy*: the method requires student engagement with fundamental design concepts, to further their understanding of meaning making through visuals. The intermediate step to dismantle images into text provides opportunities to enhance articulation of ideas, especially for ESL students.
- *Overwhelming influx of visual stimuli*: applying a filtering system, such as the questionnaire developed by De Wet in Figure 1, students can systematically develop and enhance their intuition (Cassidy 2011, p. 325) in identifying relevant and coherent visual content.

- *Duplication*: the method encourages the act of designing to be removed from visual stimuli and only focus on textual descriptors.

By including this proposed textualisation of the mood board, the learning experiences of students can be enhanced as it indirectly addresses challenges that are often difficult to teach in a one-size-fits-all approach. The flexibility in analysis allows students to engage critically with visuals in a semi-structured method, encouraging innovative thinking beyond source material, while still balancing creative freedom with control methods to ensure validity.

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