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Culture, Pattern, Sustainability

In this proposal for the 3rd year dissertation, I will be discussing 3 keywords that are personal to me, my experience and my passion within the Surface Pattern and Textile Design course at University of Wales Trinity Saint David. These keywords are *Culture*, looking at the impact of culture on a designer's or artist's design process and work; *Pattern*, the power of pattern in defining a space; and finally, *Sustainability*, looking forward in time and aiming for a zero waste, sustainable design culture and ethic which will link back to my other two keywords as design must become more sustainable for the future of our Earth.

As humans, we have learned that we are all unique in our thinking process, we all have different opinions, views and values, this is what has made us a super intelligent race. This is very interesting as we all have the same components that make up humanity, the same organs, two eyes above one nose, above one mouth framed by two ears. The wonders of the brain make us all unique and all work differently. But something that differs one group of humans from another is *Culture*. Culture impacts our everyday lives, our routines and our way of living, in fact "culture is one of the most important aspects of our everyday lives" (Razzaghi and Jr, no date) and "It has been well evidenced that culture and cultural values play influential roles over almost all aspects of human life"(Hofstede 2001 by Razzaghi and Jr, no date). One culture lives differently from another and creates different things in different ways. French culture for example, is stereotypically known for cheese and bread, especially baguettes, they are also known for wearing striped shirts and berets, and for the Eiffel tower. On the other hand, Japanese culture is associated with kimonos, cartoons called animé, cherry blossoms or Sakura and the samurai culture.



Fig.1 'French Culture'



Fig.2 'Japanese Culture'

For this first keywords, we will discuss the impact of culture on art and design. It is discussed that “design activity can be unconsciously influenced by the designers’ cultural values and preferences” (Razzaghi and Jr, no date). However, in order to best sell a product, designers are encouraged to make it as relatable as possible to any other culture than their own, “industrial designers are exhorted to implement the cultural wants, preferences and attributes of people into the products that they create, in order to make them culturally suitable and pleasurable for use by all” (Razzaghi and Jr, no date). This is an interesting demand as designers are not taught to design from their culture or for their culture and neither is taught the necessity of overcoming our own cultural values in order to design a good product (Razzaghi and Jr, no date). As an international student born and raised in France by an English mother and a Spanish father, I hardly find myself designing in a style or manner specific to these cultures. My finished designs don’t seem to have any of the particular style of either culture, the reason being that maybe, growing up, I have always experienced the influence of these three cultures at once. Being from such a rich cultural background, it is definitely I can explore on my own designs. However, from a buyer’s perspective, one design might be more desirable than another since “culturally oriented products create stronger bonds with users”(Razzaghi and Jr, no date). As humans, we are always looking for familiarities in order to feel safe. Finding a product culturally appropriate can “help people to locate something in common and in harmony with their own culture and lifestyle” (Razzaghi and Jr, no date). We can understand that culture impacts our problem-solving skills, and our design processes are instinctively related to our culture, we can really observe this throughout history as all cultures have had different styles of architecture, fashion, interior design and product design. Nowadays, as the Internet and social media

connects us all together, it is very easy to travel the world from our phones. This way is much easier for designers, companies and organizations to adapt their products and campaign to a specific group of people, “using the Internet to source creative ideas from across the globe to speed up their innovation cycles” (Chua, Roth and Lemoine, 2015). Unfortunately, this can also have an undesirable impact as this opportunity increases the business competitiveness and feeds into our growth economy and over consumption crisis we face today. As designers we need to always challenge our beliefs, design processes and problem-solving skills in order to fully explore the potential of our trade.

To further challenge our design process techniques, the next keyword is *Pattern*. Just like culture is a variable to our problem-solving skills and design processes, the space in which we design also needs to be challenged. From this keyword we can discuss the power of pattern as a space definer. It can alter our perception of the dimensions or spatial properties of a room in its entirety, “The placement of a pattern in a room affects spatiality, which means that it should be taken into consideration when designing patterns.” (Kristensen Johnstone, 2020). In a controlled setting, surface pattern is usually in direct correlation with its context, that being interior or fashion, as the term suggests ‘pattern’ needs a ‘surface’. As students, we are asked to choose a context and setting before creating our collection of motifs, before even started our design process. As this quote says, “the process starts with a need, which in turn involves research, and then continues with idea generation.” (Kristensen Johnstone, 2020). Therefore, we choose or are given a defined space with boundaries to respect. In this regard, pattern emphasizes and gives personality to a space, “they can be carriers of form, colour, and narrative” (Kristensen Johnstone, 2020). However, if pattern were to break from these standardised

boundaries and overwhelm a space, as designers we possess the power to redefine the properties of a space, creating a completely different world out of perceptions and perspectives. For example, if we were to cover a whole room with the same repeating pattern, walls, ceiling and floor, with the right lighting, the cubic space of a room can become spheric or tilted or textured or give the appearance of obstacles. These artists, Vincent Van Gogh, Yayoi Kusama and Mondrian, all use pattern and its typically associated qualities such as repetition, geometry, gestural strokes, to emphasize their message in their artwork. Each of these artists use these pattern qualities to define a spatial area that represents something in their work.



Fig.3 Vincent Van Gogh, 'The Starry Night', 1889

For example, in *The Starry Night* by Vincent Van Gogh, when looking at the background that is the sky, he uses very short gestural paint strokes and swirls which creates a pattern, to compose this starry night. It is only with the other half of his vision and his choice of colours; do we understand that it is a night sky. It's his use of pattern that will give his famously recognisable artwork its title, *The Starry Night*. Yayoi Kusama also, uses an essential quality of pattern making which is repetition. According to Tonje Kristensen Johnstone, in *Surface Patterns, spatiality and pattern relation in textile design*, "Repetition is essential for creating a pattern and the core of all pattern designs". Her installation artwork *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field*, is a room with all four walls mounted with mirrors to create a repetition of the space. In this room, Kusama filled the space with bulging fabric sculptures, white with red polka dots. These sculptures "deal with her anxieties regarding sex through repetition" (Yoshitake 2017 by Kristensen Johnstone, 2020). The artist uses the repetition of the sculptures, the polka dots and the mirrors to emphasize her anxieties and makes it hard for the viewer to walk through these sculptures, therefore making them go through what she probably feels every day.

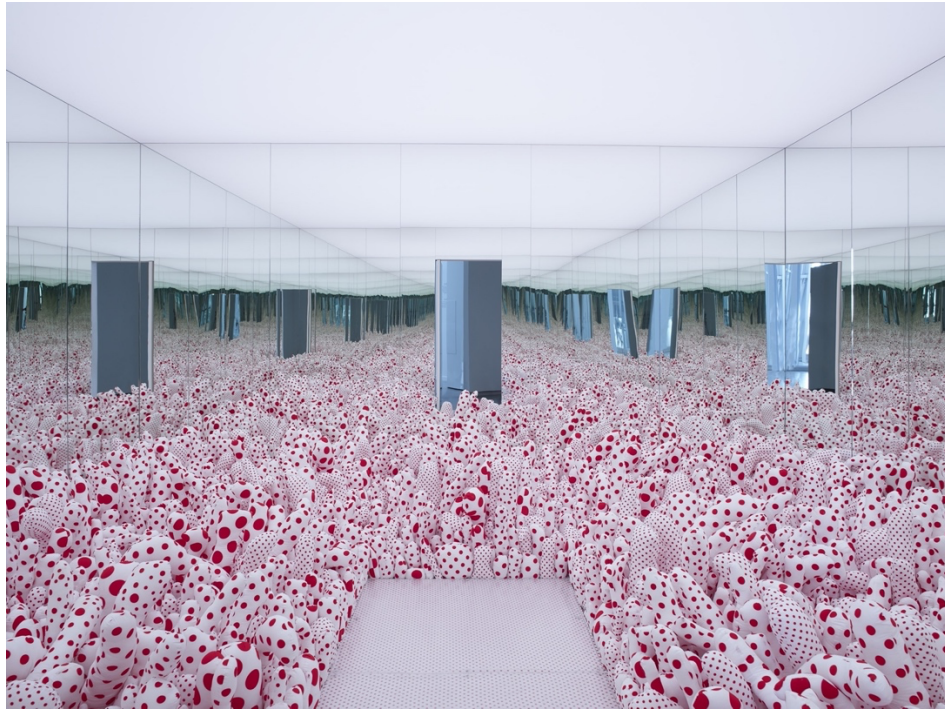


Fig.4 Yayoi Kusama, 'Infinity Mirror Room', 1965

Tonje Kristensen Johnstone quotes the Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2016 to give a definition of pattern, which Kusama strongly relates to her installation, “the regular and repeated way in which something happens or is done. [...] Something that happens in a regular and repeated way”. We can fully understand the message of her art from this definition. Tonje Kristensen Johnstone characterises this as “*Conceptual spatial determinations*”, the explorative ability of surface pattern as a tool for our understanding of space.

As we know the textile and fashion industry are some of the most detrimental industries to our pollution crisis and climate change crisis. The third keyword for this essay, *Sustainability*, is an important one as it concerns all our futures. We live in a time where we must act in order to sustain our future in making it a sustainable one. Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham reference the Global Fashion Agenda and Boston Consulting Group in their

research plan, *Earth logic*, talking about the estimated increase in numbers in the next decade: the “clothing consumption globally is projected to rise by 63 percent by 2030, from 62 million tons today to 102 million tons, an equivalent of an additional 500 billion T-Shirts” (2017). As this subject is more and more apparent to consumers and has become somewhat of a trend for businesses and brands, we often are given the same answers; reduce, reuse and recycle. Reduce the amount of garments we buy, reuse garments by shopping in charity shops and repairing any tears and recycle by upcycling any old piece of clothing or by visiting a recycling facility. This ‘3 Rs’ method is part of what we call the circular economy. “The circular economy is optimised to grow the circulation of materials” (Fletcher and Tham, 2019). This type of economy is efficient in treating our waste and prolonging the life of our garments however, we cannot rely on it as it is still reliant on our current high demand of fast fashion, over production and over consumption of fast fashion. It simply isn’t possible to resolve our current waste we face today using this method. “The circular economy has gained traction and substantial interest perhaps because it aligns with existing commercial practices, suggesting that business-(almost)-as-usual is possible” (Fletcher and Tham, 2019). The reason why businesses and brands are so inclined in using this method is because it changes very little to their original business plan. There will still be a high demand for new garments every season as well as the competitiveness between brands to make these low-quality garments at the lowest and most ‘affordable’ prices. But the population will still be discarding and renewing their wardrobes whenever feels like the right time. According to Kate Fletcher and Matilda Tham, this method has its limitations and won’t change the population’s general view and opinion on the impact of the fast fashion industry, it would only reassure and normalize the crisis we face today. Tony

Fry, design theorist and philosopher agrees with Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham in *Design Futuring*. In *Earth Logic*, the two authors' focus is growing out of the growth mindset of our economy and renew our vision by putting Earth first. According to them, this is where the crisis starts. Tony Fry adopts a more critical point of view, and states that whatever we human beings build and design, systematically comes from something that has been destroyed. "as human beings we are predisposed to destructive practices as part of the act of production" says Paul Denison in a review of *Design Futuring* in *Journal of Design History*, 2009. Tony Fry states that humanity has no problem in sacrificing our future for the pleasures of our present such as over-consumption in fashion as well as in any other industry (Fry, 2009). Unlike *Earth Logic*, Tony Fry seems to endorse a more radical change, needing new knowledge and abolishing completely our current beliefs, whereas Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham talk about a growth. He calls to education and makes an interesting choice of words, as if we would need to repent for having thoughts of excessive consumption of goods: we need to be lead "away from content that inducts the learner into unsustainable ways of thinking and acting" (Fry, 2009). Essentially, Tony Fry promotes the redirection of our mindsets and views along with our own baggage of guilt, along with a need for a new design culture.

In conclusion to this dissertation proposal, we have discussed three different aspects of our design process as designers. The first being cultural background, this is personal to any designer's identity and is a great opportunity for us to explore the past, present and future of our own culture in our work. But it is also an opportunity to challenge our values and belief than are more than likely to be influenced by our culture and passed down from our parents and close family when growing up. Secondly, we have discussed the

power of pattern in a defined space, challenging our design process but also challenging the customer or viewer standard and expected use of pattern. Lastly, the impact of production of our designs on the environment that is facing a critical need for care. Throughout history, the human race has abused of the planet's resources, and we seem to have an insatiable hunger for acquiring new things as soon as they are advertised to us. To come over this crisis, we need to all grow as individuals and understand this crisis that we face today. An intellectual and psychological growth that is not being 'advertised' as most organisations and companies feel a need to keep their businesses just as they are today. These three topics lead me to think about my values as a student designer and what I wish to achieve as a designer. The commonality of these three topics is the design process and its different aspects. For the 3rd year dissertation, these next questions come to mind to investigate further the keywords discussed in this essay: *What is the future of design in an ideal world? Will there always be a need for innovation and improvement in the design process? Will Culture still be relevant in design in the far future? Will pattern ever break free of the boundaries of interior and fashion? Does surface pattern help with our mental health as designers and how could we make this accessible to the world?*

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Image reference

Fig.1 'French Culture' available at <https://www.ila-france.com/blog/6-ideas-french-culture>

Fig.2 'Japanese Culture' available at <https://www.shutterstock.com/fr/image-vector/japan-vector-japanese-culture-geisha-kimono-1051597355>

Fig.3 Vincent Van Gogh, 'The Starry Night', 1889, available at <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79802>

Fig.4 Yayoi Kusama, 'Infinity Mirror Room', 1965, available at <https://www.vogue.fr/fashion-culture/article/why-the-new-yayoi-kusama-exhibition-at-the-fondation-louis-vuitton-in-paris-is-a-must-see>