

Question 4: Outline a current environmental, political, or social issue that requires redesign. Explain how you'll solve this issue over the duration of your future design career. Underline the tools and approaches you will use and discuss how and why.

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This essay will be discussing the current fast-fashion issues that require a significant amount of thought and redesign. Will the design industry ever be sustainable or eco-friendly in their work?

Being the most polluting, wasteful and unethical industry on earth, the textile world is only getting worse in it's impact. It is 'the second most polluting industry after oil and before the livestock industry' (Batelier, 2018). The disposal, use and production of clothes has been proven to have a significant environmental effect. 'After transport, utilities, construction, and food, the clothing industry represents the fifth-biggest environmental footprint of any UK business sector.' (WRAP, 2020). Even though sustainability and eco-friendly ways are a hot-topic this year, the fact that the clothing industry has been proven to have the fifth biggest and most harmful environmental footprint of all other industries suggests that fashion manufacturers and retailers still have a significant amount of work to do.

		Yearly Textile waste	Yearly textile waste per person	Of which recycled	Of which landfilled	Annual spending on clothing	Final score
1	Italy	465.925 t	7,7 kg	0,8 kg	4,4 kg	£920,80	100,0
2	Portugal	81.715 t	8,0 kg	0,8 kg	4,6 kg	£682,10	96,9
3	Austria	62.446 t	7,0 kg	0,7 kg	4,0 kg	£1.082,80	84,9
4	United Kingdom	206.456 t	3,1 kg	0,3 kg	1,7 kg	£980,50	59,1
5	Belgium	169.949 t	14,8 kg	1,5 kg	8,4 kg	£810,00	51,7
6	Czech Republic.	108.273 t	10,2 kg	1,0 kg	5,8 kg	£298,40	49,7
7	Denmark	18.134 t	3,1 kg	0,3 kg	1,8 kg	£844,10	47,0
8	Spain	98.881 t	2,1 kg	0,2 kg	1,2 kg	£578,80	45,7
9	Finland	14.934 t	2,7 kg	0,3 kg	1,5 kg	£750,30	44,4
10	Germany	391.752 t	4,7 kg	0,5 kg	2,7 kg	£775,90	43,5
11	Netherlands	102.261 t	5,9 kg	0,6 kg	3,4 kg	£869,70	41,6
12	France	210.001 t	3,1 kg	0,3 kg	1,8 kg	£571,20	39,0
13	Ireland	22.944 t	4,7 kg	0,5 kg	2,7 kg	£648,00	34,1
14	Poland	103.683 t	2,7 kg	0,3 kg	1,6 kg	£341,00	28,3
15	Hungary	23.190 t	2,4 kg	0,2 kg	1,4 kg	£213,20	0,0

Fig. 1 - 'Ranking of the biggest textile polluting nations'

This intriguing chart from a Circular article proves the fact that the United Kingdom is the 4th biggest textile polluting nation with a figure of 206,456 tonnes of annual textile waste. The yearly textile waste per head is 3,1 kg but only 0,3kg is recycled. 1,7kg is landfilled. Although the UK's 'final score' is quite a significant amount less than the first three nations according to this chart, the United Kingdom still proves to be producing a lot more waste than the other 11 nations shown in this chart (fig. 1).

According to the WRAP organisation, 'an estimated £140 million worth (around 350,000 tonnes) of used clothing goes to landfill in the UK every year.' This shocking statement is not mentioned often, but it distinctly needs to be. 'Two-thirds of UK consumers buy or receive pre-owned (or second-hand) clothes, and there is a willingness to wear more, especially if a better range were available.' (WRAP, 2020). Perhaps the general public need to become aware of this drastic situation the textiles industry has put us in and need to be reusing and recycling their clothes if unwanted rather than choosing the easier option, disposing of them in bins. Future designers could be the mediators who communicate this with the general public.

Many established fashion designers have taken action on the issue of sustainability and being eco-friendly whilst designing and making their garments. Stella McCartney has proven to be extremely passionate about her work being this way. Motif said 'she is one of the pioneers of eco-friendly fashion and offers sustainable wardrobe alternatives. The materials used by this designer include organic cotton, ethically sourced wool, recycled textiles while excluding fur and leather.'

The fast-fashion issues on Earth are dramatically increasing. Take Missguided's '£1 bikini':



Figure 2: Missguided '£1 bikini' (2019)

Nicola Davis from TheGuardian wrote about some issues our world is experiencing: 'among the developments deemed to be exacerbating the

problems, is fast fashion – cheap clothes bought and cast aside in rapid succession as trends change – such as the £1 bikini sold by Missguided last year.’ (Davis, 2020). Missguided have unintentionally explained the fast-fashion issue extremely clearly through launching one of their extremely low-priced products, this bikini. The fact that Missguided are able to sell garments at such low prices brings a few thoughts to mind: Missguided cannot be making profit on these extremely low-priced garments if they’re paying and treating their workers fairly. I believe the ‘affordable’ online brands (much like Missguided) such as Boohoo, Prettylittlething, Shein and IntheStyle are all disturbingly massive factors of the current fast-fashion issues we have. First and foremost, these companies sell extremely low-priced garments that are more often than not extremely bad quality in their materials and fits. Not only are they maybe treating their workers poorly in terms of wages, but the price of these garments, for example, the ‘£1 bikini’ is so low that customers will not care for it because of the fact it was so cheap to buy. The customer will most likely wear it once or twice on holiday, then find that it is of poor quality (if they haven’t already) and dispose of it. This is an extremely clear example of fast fashion. These cheaply sold garments are hardly used/worn before being disposed of and ending up in landfill soon after being bought because of their cost and value.

Companies such as Missguided and Prettylittlething are continuously releasing new items: ‘An essential aspect of the fast fashion business model is the offering of hundreds of new products, every week, or even every day. At the time of writing, Pretty Little Thing’s website listed an incredible 284 items under ‘New In Today’, while Missguided listed 639 under ‘New This Week’ (Crumbie, A. 2019). The amount of ‘New In Today’ products that were listed at the time Crumbie was writing this article is quite unbelievable to say the least. If the number of 284 is the average amount of new products listed per day, this would mean on average there are over 1,400 brand new products listed per week (assuming that new products are listed 5 days a week). This would mean that over 68,000 different products are listed by PrettyLittleThing every single year. Fast-fashion brands such as these also consistently have hundreds of products on sale or on offer at a time. This tends to convince those customers who have had garments they desire to buy in mind to go ahead and make their order and checkout at an even lower price. These brands are already damaging our environment by selling their garments and items dirt cheap. But it gets worse. The purchasing of garments is now easier than ever, with a click of a few buttons. They often offer a ‘free returns’ policy, meaning customers are tending to buy lots of items at once (especially when they’re on sale) because if

something in their order arrives and they don't like it, they know that they are able to send it back to the company with no hassle and receive their refund. Due to the often very poor quality of garment fabrics and construction, the likeliness of customers using the free returns and refunds service is high. So this means twice the transport, resulting in twice the damage to the environment in pollution. The offering of free returns is supposedly brilliant and extremely convenient for the customer, but I believe the impact it's having on our world's environment is unacceptable.

Another sustainability issue that currently occurs in the fashion world is the fact that 'wearing an outfit more than once is seen as a fashion crime' (Benzakour, S. 2019). I believe celebrities have made this a feeling that the public encounters. Famous women such as the Kardashian and Jenner families have been recognised as some of the most-loved and inspirational women in the fashion world, but they have hardly ever been seen wearing the same item of clothing more than once. Their instagram accounts prove this. This is why I think young girls are so paranoid and weary of wearing the same outfit twice.

Sophie Benson writes a quote from 24 year old Benzakour ' "I only wear clothes once because usually if I have bought an outfit and gone out in it then I would've most definitely taken a picture in it," Benzakour says. "I don't like to be seen in the same outfit" ' (Benson, S. 2019).

One in three young British women consider clothes to be 'old' after just one or two wears. Research carried out for Barnardo's earlier this year revealed that Brits were set to spend £2.7 billion on 50 million summer outfits that would be worn only once – on holiday or at events such as festivals and weddings. More than half of those surveyed admitted throwing away perfectly wearable garments, rather than salvaging them for future use or donating them to friends, family or charity shops. One in ten said they threw away clothes after a few wears because they were cheap to buy and one in twenty admitted ditching unused items because they could not be bothered to return. (Benson, S. 2019).

The fact that the public can afford to buy a new outfit every time they've worn one is a problem in itself. It proves the fact that because clothes can be purchased so cheaply, the majority of customers do not care for them. They are often worn

once, then most likely thrown in the bin and never worn again because of the pressure that comes from society, especially social media platforms.

Mass-producing clothing brands can afford to keep up with this constant need for new clothing, so they are often found to be releasing hundreds of brand new products weekly - 'An essential aspect of the fast fashion business model is the offering of hundreds of new products, every week, or even every day. At the time of writing, Pretty Little Thing's website listed an incredible 284 items under 'New In Today', while Missguided listed 639 under 'New This Week' (Crumbie, A. 2019). On the other hand, handmade items are one-of-a-kind and are seen as more valuable than the items that are mass-produced, especially if the design is bespoke and unique to the customer. Handmade products and garments take much more time and effort to produce, therefore most handmade buyers will take good care of their garments and objects like decor and homeware. They realise and appreciate the time, thought and effort that has been put into their item by the maker, so therefore more likely to treasure that item. If it breaks, the customer will most likely want to repair it.

Zoella, an internet and youtube sensation, has been well known and loved for her beauty and fashion 'haul' videos often titled with words such as 'HUGE SUMMER HAUL' since around 2011. 'Zoella's most watched video – entitled Huge Spring Primark Haul, in which she talks the viewer through 24 purchases from the cheap high street store – has had more than 4.25 million views; she says things such as "You can never have too many pyjama bottoms, especially from Primark because they are such good value for money and you get a lot. A lot." ' (Saner, E. 2018). With over 11.2 million subscribers on Youtube and 9.1 million followers on Instagram, Zoella is a social media influencer. After watching 'haul' videos such as these, viewers too feel the need to update their wardrobes depending on the season. Spring is the worst season for this happening because the majority of people tend to enjoy updating their wardrobes for their summer holidays. 'Haul' videos from influencers and vloggers much like Zoella almost always include new fashion trends and prices which are often 'steals', inspiring any viewer to indulge in a shopping spree too. Zoella is just one example of an 'influencer', there are so many and the majority of them are not kind to the environment. The public look up to figures such as Zoella, so want to be like them. Zoella is successful, the public wants to be too. Recently, trends seem to be extremely influenced by celebrities and social media influencers posting photographs of themselves wearing them. 'While most consumer goods suffer from similar issues, what makes the fashion industry particularly problematic is the frenetic pace of change

it not only undergoes, but encourages. With each passing season (or microseason), consumers are pushed into buying the latest items to stay on trend' (Ro, C. 2020). Due to the rise in social media use, applications such as Instagram are definitely now the biggest fashion influence the public have. They are accessible, free and easy to use.

During my future design career, I will be taking precautions and giving plentiful thought before making. I will be considering the impact I make on the world and its environment.

As and when I'm looking for a job in the design industry, I would much rather work for a company with eco-friendly, sustainable values and ethics rather than one that's not because I want to be given the opportunity to be as sustainable in my practices as possible. I crave to have a low carbon footprint, therefore seeking information about the brand and its priorities/qualities before applying for any job is absolutely essential to me.

As I make, I will be sure to take the choice of material into consideration; is it sustainable and eco-friendly? Or better, has it been recycled and reused? I will also take the overall design of the items into consideration, asking myself: Is the design timeless, or is it just a one-off trend resulting in people 'growing out' of loving them? If so, these items could conclude in wasteful materials, in landfill or lost at sea in a few short months/years. I will limit myself to solely using non toxic or even better so - natural dyes to colour fabrics and any other materials I might work with. I pledge to make sure that items I have made are durable, strong and long-wearing to ensure they do not end up in landfill shortly after being made. Eager to take into consideration what the life will be like for the garment, I will examine and assess whether it is best to be able to wash in a domestic washing machine or if it is better to need to be professionally cleaned. The toll and impact these decisions are expected to have on the environment will always affect my decision. Make sure garment tags have the appropriate care instructions on them. Consumers need this to take care of the garment and give it a long life, preventing the garment from ending up in landfill much earlier than intended.

No matter what I'm making or designing, in order to be as ethical and efficient as possible, I will aim to minimise waste and re-use the things that may not have been used the first time around. This is more difficult with patterned fabrics

because of the repeat system, but if carefully and thoroughly thought through the first time around, I can and will minimise waste massively. In terms of packaging, I will ensure I am able to package items plastic-free, reducing the amount of plastics that result in oceans, therefore reducing my carbon footprint. I will actively re-assess packaging plans and will aim to regularly update if needed.



Fig. 3

I recently launched a handmade jewellery business in the summer of 2020 and have been eco-friendly and conscious of the impact I'm making on the world since. I only ever use eco-friendly plastic-free packaging. The only times I use plastic is if I've received bubble wrap or packaging in one of my personal or earring supply orders that can be re-used because I prefer to re-use rather than dispose wherever I can. Even the tape I use to seal the postal boxes is 'kraft paper' tape and plastic-free. I plan to continue this thought and consideration for however long my business is still existent because this is one of the qualities my business has. Not only am I being kind to the environment, but customers seem to admire the fact that I only use recyclable materials to package my handmade earrings resulting in more repeated buyers.

When making my clay earring designs and patterns, I never waste ANY excess clay, no matter what colour mix it is. I know I will reuse it someday, so have a draw in my desk organiser dedicated to scrap clay to minimise waste and re-use materials wherever I can.

I have personally found that handmade businesses tend to take the environment into consideration a lot more than corporate, established brands. If corporate

brands had an outlook like most one-person handmade businesses do, our world would be in a much better position than it is now.

In my personal life, I will try my best in the future to only buy pre-loved clothing where I can. I won't support big brands that don't support our world in the way they should. I currently and will continue to sell any unwanted clothing or garments I've grown out of on platforms like depop and ebay so as clothing gets another life and hopefully doesn't end up in landfill (at least for the time being). When a person buys an item rather than have it given to them, they're more likely to take care of it resulting in a longer lifespan for the garment.

I realise that I am one person, but I hope I will be one that will inspire others to take their impact they make on the world into consideration too.

Figures:

Fig 1: Batelier, M. (2018) *Ranking of the biggest textile waste producers*
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Fig. 3: Apte, S. (2020) *Seven Advantages of Using Eco-Friendly Packaging*
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