

Question 4: The future is ours: What does the phrase “design for the planet mean to you? Outline your discussion with reference to current environmental, political or social design issues that urgently require addressing, and discuss the tools and approaches you might use to consider these issues over the duration of your future design/making career

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This essay will be discussing the major environment issues shown in the current designing world and how as designers we can try and overcome these issues in our own practices. Designers and companies today are very set on satisfying the consumers needs and making sure they come back to buy more. This then leads to overproduction of products and then an overwhelming amount of waste and environmental harm that designers and companies do not consider or care to solve when creating products. John Locke and Robert K Mertons theories on the unintended/unanticipated consequences highlight the importance of decision making and the consequences of the lack of thought put into a decision which is also highlighted in Edward Lorenz theory on the butterfly effect. These concepts can highlight the importance that one decision can make to a society and the planet as a whole. The fashion industry and its lack of consideration for its textile waste and it cause of overconsumption has caused our societies most difficult environmental issues. These companies would rather hide their practices under false eco-friendly claims than actually sort the issue out itself. These terrible practises need to be addressed and then changed as soon as possible if we are ever to overcome these environmental problems.

Jon locked talked about his theory on the unintended consequences which discusses the long-term effects of certain actions or decisions that may not have necessarily been intended. This theory came after he opposed a parliamentary bill which aimed to reducing the maximum permissible rate of interest. He states that ‘the idea of unintended consequences dates a discussion about interest rate regulation’ (Locke 1692). While the context of this theory does not fully relate to the argument at hand it can still be applied to today’s environmental issues with fast fashion and plastic

pollution. The initial idea to these issues were to find affordable materials that were durable and suitable for all to buy. Robert K Merton then developed Lockes concept further by stating that there were 5 causes to the unintended/unanticipated consequences which consist of our ignorance to the future long-term consequences and our error of predicting future problems or the effects our decisions may have. He writes that ‘purposive acts often fail to achieve their intended results, and at the same time they may produce consequences which were not anticipates” (Merton, 1936, pg 895). This highlights the fact that not all designers or practices have malice intentions with their designs and products to begin with, but bad consequences do still happen and cause major issues down the line which we as a society now have manage and solve. This should be something designer should take note of when designing and be aware of when making decisions in their practices. This is explained well in Edward Lorenz theory called the Butterfly effect which states the idea that everything is somehow connected. He explains in his theory how something so insignificant can happen on one side of the world and how this can lead to major consequences elsewhere. The example given here is of a butterfly who may flap its wings in one place and can cause something major to happening on the other side of the world: “the flap of a butterfly’s wings can be instrumental in generating a tornado (Lorenzo 1995). This concept highlights how easy it is for us to cause worldwide problem with one singular decision. No decision should be made quickly or rashly in design as that decision may have major consequences later down the line. These issues we can be see in today’s society with pollution and how our modern-day design choices have had a larger impacting on the world than we anticipated.

Overconsumption and textile waste, especially in the fashion industry, is another major issue that needs to be addressed in modern day society. However, to address these issues we need to look further into the initial causes of these problems which are corrupting most practices within fast fashion companies and their designing of clothing. In the book Clothing poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes by Andrew Brooks it’s talks about how the industry has this constant need for new styles and ideas stating that ‘trends are never static’ (Brooks 2019 pg.233-52). It pushes this idea that there are always new trends and styles of clothing that are being pushed onto consumers by social media or people around then which therefore urges consumers to constantly purchase new clothing they like but do not necessarily need. It states that ‘the fact that good use clothing, which can be worn again, is regularly disposed of in the global North demonstrates that the marked is very successful in simulating the consumption of new clothing principally for the sake of appearance and not for practical use.’(Brooks 2019, pg233-52). This leads to a devastating amount of waste that we have no way or space to dispose. This is made worse by fashion companies who use use a high amount of polyester/plastic in these products which do

not decompose. Plastic was an affordable, long-lasting product first introduced in the early 1900s. It has now become one of the hardest worldwide issues to solve stated in the book *Confronting the Plastic Pollution Pandemic* by Tallash Kantai. Plastic is being 'found on even the most remote, uninhabited islands and in the deepest parts of the ocean; (Kantai 2020, pg2) it also says that there's 'eight billion tonnes of plastic in circulation and more virgin plastic produced each day' (Kantai 2020, pg3). This has major impacts that not only effects the wildlife and the environment around us but also the effects of our own health too. The same article mentions the fact that plastic particles have been detected in our drinking water and in the food, we eat which some studies have found to have negative health impacts and may cause endocrine disruption (Kantai 2020 pg2). Textile and plastic pollution have caused a lot of the major problems we see in society today and it can no longer be ignored, "This is a crisis we can see with the naked eye, day in, day out' (Kantai 2020 pg1). Fast fashion brands contribute to this crisis everyday with very little backlash. Not only do they fill our food and water with chemicals and harmful substance, but they let us dress in it too on a day-to-day basis. This irresponsible practice is killing our planet and must be stopped as soon as possible.

While some companies have tried to overcome the problem plastic pollution and created a brand that is more eco friendly, there are many more companies that have fallen into the bad habit of greenwashing. Greenwashing is a term used when a company, particularly fashion companies, appear to be selling products that are so called "eco-friendly" but are still contributing to the pollution of the environment. Greenwashing is one of the key issues that society has to deal with in modern day living. Consumers believe that they are benefitting the planet by buying these products not knowing that its no better than any fast fashion product being sold. The only benefit this has is to the company selling them when their profits increase because more people are buying the so called "eco-friendly" products which just ends up increasing the textile/plastic waste in landfills. According to the article *GreenWashing: Do you know what you're buying?* By Richard Dahl greenwashing has been a concept since the mid 1980s with a large increase in popularity with companies in the past few years as they 'have strived to meet escalating consumer demands for greener products' (Dahl 2010 pg2). This clearly highlights the issue that Don Norman raises in his book *The Design of Everyday things* where he comments on the fact that designers create with only the consumers satisfaction in mind. He states that 'cognition and emotion are tightly intertwined, which means that the designer must design with both in mind' (Norman 1988, pg27-9). This highlighted the corrupted practices many companies and designers have when designing new products. There is no care for long term effects these products have on the environment nor on the creatures we are damaging buy using or disposing of said products. The book *Confronting the Plastic pollution Pandemic* by

Tallash Kantai mention the impact that plastic pollution has on marine creatures and seabirds who 'starve to death' (Kantai 2020 pg3) and the pollution that 'wreaks havoc on land, clogging drains and preventing rainwater from soaking into the soil, which leads to flooding' (Kantai 2020 pg 3). This can link back to John Lockes theory on unintended consequences and the butterfly effect and how something so small as not telling the truth about materials in products can lead to starvation and flooding. As designer we must be more concerned about the impact our designs are having on the world around us and the consequences it has on the future as these actions can lead to life threatening consequences for all.

As a designer it is important to take current trends and consumer satisfaction into account when designing but it should not be the only major factor considered when designing. We as designers must think of the future and how we can combat current environmental problems such as reducing textile waste and turning them into items of clothing that are timeless and therefore more unlikely to be disregarded into landfills.

Fast fashion brands have the power of the media so it's important that it's turned against harmful brands by giving eco-friendly brands a bigger platform to showcase their work and designs. In the Article In the book Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second clothes by Andrew Brooks it comments on the importance of fashion week and the runway events that majorly influences fashion styles and trends. It states that 'fashion shows in London, as well as in Milan... herald much broader fast-fashion systems of provision (Brooks 2019, pg233-52). With this in mind it is important to showcase more eco friendly brands and designers in major fashion events to make them well known and therefore more popular to consumers. This then diverts the attention away from less eco-friendly brands making them less successful and therefore less harmful to the environment. Many eco-friendly fashion brands have become popular in recent years such as as Lucy and Yak and Eileen Fisher. Who both on their website promote their clothing to be made from sustainable and recyclable materials. Their success as companies should inspire designers and show them that sustainable clothing is possible and can be successful. While their companies and quality of items are of a high standard, some of their products are seeming to be more high-end fashion pieces meaning they cost a fair amount more than other companies on the market. While these pieces are of good quality and can last you a fair amount of time, it may not be as accessible to all as some of these fast fashion brands. As a designer, its important to be creating products that are not only sustainable but are affordable to all which is why it is crucial to weigh in all factors equally when designing and make decisions that are going to positively benefit all.

Overall, the design and fashion industry focuses far too much of their attention on power and money which they are achieving from their customers loyalty to consume and satisfaction with their products. Brands spend too much of their time focusing on how to make the most profit and keep their consumers constantly purchasing from their brand that they don't realise or even care that their actions/decisions are irresponsible and are causing the collapse of the planet. As designers it's our responsibility to keep consumers trust and give them our best quality of work. Large scale companies are dominating and destroying that trust and quality. It's important ,now more than ever, that designers and brands do their part in supporting the environment and take a step back and have a look at how their practices and their processes and see how its effecting others and how they can best overcome problems with the least amount of fallout. If all designers and companies made ethical and conscious decisions when designing our economical issues would rapidly decreases and create a more sustainable environment to live in.

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