

Question 4:

Outline a current environmental, political, or social issue that requires redesign. Explain how you will 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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During the 21st century, people are entirely responsible for the degradation of the world. An impactful factor of this is fast fashion, not only from the manufacturer but also the consumer. Because of the abundance of readily available apparel, society is no longer as considerate of skill or quality: we increasingly rely on how quick and fast we can find these products. Today, the third biggest manufacturing industry is the fast fashion industry. (Ioanna Papasolomou, Yioula Melanthiou & Anestis Tsamouridi, 2022). Despite some advantages, such as jobs, they are significantly outweighed by cons. Low prices and over-production encourage over-consumption, which is why we call this 'fast fashion' (Kate Fletcher, Mathilda Tham, 2019).

This issue is in urgent need of a re-think. We need to learn how to create more sustainable fashion that is accessible to everyone. In this essay, I will examine the harm caused by the 'fast fashion' industry in the context of today's 'throwaway society'. Communicating how designers play a crucial role in the 21st century fashion industry, I will explore the negatives of these manufacturers and designers, and will investigate the changes they can make to improve this industry. I will also explain my intentions to help solve this issue throughout my future career as a designer.

Clothing pollution is at an all-time high: by the end of a year, three fifths of all our garments end up in landfill (Anastasia Denvisoa, 2021, p. 6). This is one of the biggest issues 'fast fashion' is facing. Many consumers are ignorant of the 'throwaway' culture they are helping to sustain, and they do not see the effects that they are having on our environment. Manufacturers are producing such vast amounts of clothing that consumers are purchasing clothes they do not really need, instead defining their spending habits as 'therapy' or 'excitement' (Anastasia Denvisoa, 2021, p. 7) In reality, consumers are often wasting their money on unsatisfactory items, and having a negative impact on the planet in the process.

We are all part of the problem. We all buy clothes, and as much as we do not like to admit it we all ideally prefer when these items are delivered quickly, and that they are inexpensive. Despite being conscious of, and educated about, the consequences, through the sheer amount of readily-available research, we appear unwilling or unable to change our habits in order to have a positive impact on the environment. The environmental harm we are causing has not yet reduced, and as a society we need to find a way to start making an impact on this problem.

The first step is to start to understand the amount that society will have to change to make an impact. Humans must recognise that we are the only cause of the destruction of our planet. It is crucial that we leave behind our convenient habits and start to act and find new systems that make the fashion industry work harmoniously with the environment (Kate Fletcher, Mathilda Tham, 2019, p. 29).

The fast fashion industry is not only having effects on the environment, but people too. Manufacturers are not thinking about the huge health effects that could be harming workers. Jeans manufacturers in Japan sand down denim as a means to make them desirable for a consumer, but by doing this they are breathing in harmful toxins from the dust of jeans, which is a heavy irritant of the lungs.(Claudio, 2007, p. 5). We are all so blind to this industry that we do not see the many ways we are killing the planet and humans too. This vicious cycle hooks people in without realising and causes devastating consequences. This issue is in urgent need of redesign. We can begin with the consumers, we are consuming these items however we are not caring about them. 'The origins of the term 'consumption' are found in the act of wasting, of destroying by its use' (Castro, 2021, p. 61).

A significant element encouraging the growth of the fast fashion industry is the use of the internet and 'trends'. Influencers are convincing their viewers products that they seemingly 'need' or 'want'. Social media is having a direct impact on consumers' thinking and the choices they make. People aspire to living the same kinds of lives portrayed by the influencers, and the result is a high demand for certain products. (Agarwal, Jaiwant, 2023, p. 203). Once the buyer has finished with these items, and the influencer has moved on to the next 'trend', they simply throw them away. Consumers are perfectly aware of what they are doing, therefore some are kind enough to give to charity in hopes of them finding a new home. Although well-intentioned, only one-fifth of donated clothes are given to charity. Some clothes that are not up to the store standard are sold to textile recyclers, in the hope of these items being used again or the chance that they will go to someone who is in actual need of clothing (Claudio, 2007, pg.6).

This rapidly changing market is making it difficult for street stores to keep up. People find it much more convenient, with their busy lives, to shop online. They can scroll through their phones and have their products delivered the very next day without leaving the comfort of their sofas. As much as most of us acknowledge that fast fashion is a bad thing, we must admit it is a very practical way to shop, and it is

understandable why people shop online as an alternative to shopping in person. Consumers like how quickly trends are up to date online, and have no problem with items being unavailable, or 'last season'. They can scroll for hours and hours looking for one type of garment, rather than them taking their time going to a shop and only having a small variety to choose from. High street stores are seeing a decline in sales and traditional shopping. An estimated 100,000 shops will most likely close between the years 2020-30 (Gwilt, Payne and Ruthschilling, 2019, p. 88).

Society needs to stop and think for a second. Where are all of these clothes going? This vicious cycle is what is creating this vast amount of textile waste, with the US alone throwing away 85% of its textiles (Beall, 2020).

Delving deeper into the mind of a purchaser, we see how the consumer does not prioritise skill. Many independent businesses, which sell better made items at a necessary premium, cannot compete on price. Yet the benefit of a better-made garment seldom filters through to the general consumer, never mind the environmental benefits. Independent businesses tend to be more aware of the costs of manufacturing and producing a product, which can help to drastically reduce their carbon footprint.

The central issue we are presented with is how to explain to customers what skill is, and why it is worth investing in. In Richard Sennett's work (2008), he asks this exact question "what exactly is a skill?" (Sennett, 2008, p. 37). Skill is simply trained practice, the development of which relies on education and repetition. Sennett talks about the use of machinery in the modern day, which he believes "deprives people from learning" (Sennett, 2008, p. 39). Showing to us how important a process is, skill is gained over a long period of time, which includes trial and error, and resulting in a quality item constructed through that acquired knowledge. This cannot be gained from a piece of machinery that has been programmed to do its job (Sennett, 2008, p. 37).

Without consumer spending habits, 'fast fashion' would fail. Simply put: society needs to stop purchasing clothing. The re-design of the fast fashion industry, which began to flourish in the early 2000s through newly-available technology which enabled low costs of production (Papasolomou, Melanthiou and Tsamouridis, 2022, p.5) is drastically needed. But the challenge is in changing the habits of the consumer.

In theory, the media should not be telling consumers what they have done wrong, and instead they should be stating what the next steps are

to improve this industry. By re-thinking the way people view clothes, we will hopefully see an improvement in sustainability in the fast fashion industry in years to come.

Orsola de Castro (2021) speaks about how the price of an item does not necessarily determine the conditions or how well made the product is. In many cases, customers are simply paying for the brand name. (Castro, 2021, p. 9). In fact, notwithstanding independent exceptions, it is likely that 'brand name' clothing is being made in the same circumstances as its much-cheaper alternatives. Castro (2021) speaks about how we should love an item of clothing and wear this item forever, we should not just 'own' it.

One way of changing our attitude to clothing is by encouraging the purchase of something we well and truly love and is one of a kind; something we will covet and look after. We don't want it to rip or break and we will wash it with care, because we regard it as irreplaceable. And when the time comes and it eventually does rip, you will simply mend it. The stigma once attached to mending or 'patching' old clothes can be changed by encouraging the consumer to instead see such alterations as part of the personalisation of items, for example as encouraged in programmes such as the BBC's 'Sewing Bee'.

It begins with a small gesture from everyone to start this sustainable chain:

society should not only be mending expensive items, but their affordable items of clothing too. By doing this we are cutting down on the amount of unnecessary waste the industry produces. We are then shortening the demand for these products which will in theory, start to phase out the unhealthy obsession with 'fast fashion'. This should then make the manufacturers question how they can create more sustainable versions of these items, like providing free repairs on clothing and cutting down on their carbon footprint.

In my future career, I believe the most important thing I can do is to subconsciously think of the environment when making decisions that could affect it, from making sustainable choices when purchasing fabrics, to using reusable cloths as an alternative to paper towels. I believe that to make a change you cannot be half hearted: 'Adopting a "more like this, less like that" mindset' (Chapman, 2021, p. 163). If you believe you can make a difference then you will. I will help resolve this issue over my future career by advocating for the importance of the environment, through my work and in my day to day life, by changing the way I view the environment.

As a textile designer it is inevitable that I will produce waste, I will learn to adapt to the issues that I face, and think of ways I can reuse items, such as using fabric scraps as stuffing or using them as reusable cloths. As mentioned earlier, I am encouraged that there is a move towards changing the perception of repurposing old items, and this is something I will encourage and embrace. Thinking of small changes I can make that may be simple, but in the long run will have a positive effect on the world. I will pass my knowledge on and teach people about the effects of the fast fashion industry through my practice, as I believe it is important to educate on the issues in the world otherwise they will never be resolved. I will think of impactful ways I can help the environment from the fast fashion industry throughout my career. By researching sustainable ways I can source items and make products, but also by looking into ways we all can help the industry so it will finally change for the good.

I will use methods such as creating patches to cover broken clothes, as well as mending my friends' and family's clothing. Rewear, repair, commit (Castro, 2021, p. 14). I think this is a lovely thing to do to express your gratitude for someone, and shows their love for you when they wear that item. Every time they wear this they will think of you, prolonging the life of this garment as it holds memories through the means of upcycling.

Upcycling is an emerging trend in which people are increasingly inspired to fix their clothes; they are loving and cherishing these garments, which maybe one day will be passed down generations. As mentioned before, upcycling has become very popular on 'The Sewing Bee', and this is a potentially huge factor in helping shift the mindset of the consumer with regard to fashion.

By harnessing this shift-change through the design, production and celebration of upcycled items, I hope to play a role in continuing to shift those perceptions throughout my career. Instead of influencers using social media to sustain costly 'fast fashion' ideas, hopefully I can go some way to reclaiming that space to promote upcycling alternatives. I think it is so important to show your personality through your work (and your wearing) in such one-of-a-kind ways.

I will also strive to help this industry in the most beneficial way I can by changing simple aspects of my life as well as being open to new ideas. Throughout my career I hope to see a change in this industry and I hope that I will help to make an impact, to educate people how to care about their garments, not just merely wanting them. There is an enjoyment from buying new clothes, almost a spark of excitement. This may be why people are so afraid to stop buying from fast fashion brands, and they

are concerned they will lose this happiness they gain when buying something new. If this cycle does not stop, who knows what the state of the world will be by 2050. That is why I believe it is important to educate society on the world now so we can live alongside nature in the future.(Fletcher and Tham, 2019, p. 65).

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