

Student Name: Casey Stewart

P Number: 1800455

Programme of Study: BA/MArts Fine Art

Tutor(s) Name: Alex Duncan

Module: Research In Practise (ADAD5004)

Key Words; Consumption. Plastic. Information
Word Count; 2360

Dissertation Proposal - Explorations into the consumption of society

The objective of this proposal is to explore and research different extremities surrounding consumption. Looking at how consumption rates have changed over the years and reviewing different elements within productivity of consumed goods. When most people hear the word consumption they think of food, water and energy, while my initial thoughts are plastic consumption, how humans consume it and how it is a leading effect in ocean pollution. Another is Information. We constantly engross information throughout our lives. I want to analyse how we consume it, looking at how the dispense of information has changed through the years and the impact that it has caused on society. I will be looking into how the information age made an impact on the way people educate themselves and how artists transitioned from the industrial age into the modern day. My three key words are; consumption, plastic and information.

Keyword; Consumption

Consumption is 'the act of using energy, food or materials' (oxford learner's dictionary, 2020) it can almost be seen as a normality. There are many different subjects linked to consumption, it is historically known as the name of the infectious disease; Tuberculosis. Therefore, the medical definition of consumption is 'An old and once common term for wasting away of the body, particularly from pulmonary tuberculosis'. (Shiel,2020) where as in the modern day people now connect it with the consumption of food. The amount of food consumption over the past few decades has increased rapidly and the agriculture world we once saw as a need has become more of a production depot. Many exceed the limits of consumption and take advantage because it's easy to do so. 'While we eat 11.5 million pounds (or 5,133 tonnes) in one minute, we waste 2,472 tonnes'(Thompson, 2014) people buy more than needed as a precaution yet this results in production rate heightening causing more waste in the future. So how much has it changed? Since the end of world war II there has been a massive shift in the way people view food, it went from intense rationing to intense choice, the resilience shown is far removed from what it once was. 'Once rationing ended in 1954, it paved the way for a food and restaurant revolution driven by increased standards of living and technology. 'Eating out' has grown to become a leading leisure activity as people enjoyed rising levels of disposable income over the decades that followed the 1950s' (Nisbets, 2020).

Due to this 3 billion people overeat. And over a third of the world's population are obese. However it is not only humans that over consumption harms, it also damages our climate. When we think about climate change we don't usually consider how the food we eat contributes to the negative impact on our planet, but in reality it has a massive effect. All the food we don't consume is wasted, this waste then enters our oceans. However, it is not just the waste that's a problem. The food that we consume has to be produced, agriculture has been a way of living for centuries but the way in which it's harvested has now become problematic.

Many have commented on consumption, the marxist believe that it is related to capitalism, due to the fact that the philosopher Marx believed that capitalism was not a factor in over consumption but that 'consumption remains chronically under-developed in capitalism'(Leonard, 2019). However, the theory of consumer capitalism is controversial, When analysing contemporary capitalism, consumption is just a starting point of what production has done to the economy. For a long time the history of human culture was based around production. Yes, there has been a big shift from agriculture to factory which has caused humans to be addicted to consumption because of convenience and believing it is the right thing. This is due to advertising and other elements of society that make us believe that mass production is key to an easier life. Marxist theory suggests that 'not a collective fantasy injected into the body of the commodity, but the ideological expression of a particular mode of production' (Marx, 1983). So yes capitalism has expanded our needs and wants but at the same time adds restrictions and regulation policies on what we consume, in a sense Marx was critiquing capitalism for consumer rights.



(Hanson, 1970).

The artist Duane Hanson created a life size fibreglass sculpture to what I believe is visualising overconsumption of food. The piece 'supermarket shopper' was made in 1971 and has a controversial overview of what seems to be an outlandish look on modern days' relationship with food. The piece is a bit controversial, displaying an overweight lady with unhealthy food in her shopping cart depicting her bad habits that represent the overconsumption seen in most of today's supermarkets 'Hanson himself felt that the sculpture was too critical in it's depiction of an obese woman, piling up her trolley with unhealthy, processed food.'(Bark, 2012) but when reexamining the shopping cart many viewers can correlate their eating habits to the women in the sculpture. So when viewing the work the audience gets the sense of shock yet familiarity. However the consumption of food is not the only issue when it comes to the consumerists world. The consumption of plastic is a major leading factor when it comes to pollutants.

Keyword: Plastic

When speaking of pressing environmental issues my thought is plastic pollution due to the overwhelm of production rise. Asia and Africa are very clear plastic pollutants, this is because of the inefficient or nonexistent garbage collection systems. However, even developed

nations are having trouble with the proper discardment of plastic. What developed nations have often done is ship their excess waste to Africa and Asia to burn or pile up in exchange for money. This leads me onto my next keyword; plastic. Plastic means a lot of things to many people, some see it as a useful material, easy, cheap and efficient. While others see it as a pollutant, ruining our climate with its harmful chemicals. Plastic means 'any of a group of synthetic or natural organic materials that may be shaped when soft and then hardened'(Dictionary, 2020). What intrigued me about this definition was the word 'organic; 'horn' or bone were organic precursors to plastic'. However, many plastics contain levels of bisphenol A(BPA) and other dangerous chemicals. Plastic is a big factor in the evolution of production 'Our socioeconomic development models have led to an increased production of consumer goods of every type, facilitated by the petrochemical industry's ability to provide a range of cheap materials that are continuously becoming more varied'(Galgani, Pham and Reisser, 2017).for many years plastic has seemed to evolve immensely as it can be used for many purposes. Plastic is currently used in all major industries,yet there are some significant problems. These range from waste in the streets and oceans to toxicity of additives. We have a dependence that is fundamental on fossil resources for the production of the plastic material. Air pollutant emissions from the factories enter our environment and is a big contribution to greenhouse gasses. Plastic is also a big benefactor when it comes to ocean pollution 'A truckload of plastic enters the ocean every single minute and UK supermarkets produce 800,000 tonnes every year.'(GreenPeace, 2020) Over the decades we have seen the rise in plastic demand. After World War II, the acceleration of production and development of thousands of new plastic products arose transforming us to the modern world we see today. 'Production increased exponentially, from 2.3 million tons in 1950 to 448 million tons by 2015. Production is expected to double by 2050' (Parker, 2020) this shows that change is needed.



(Haseltine, 2010)

An artist who comments on this is Angela Haseltine. She is the co-founder of the non-profit organization 'washed ashore'. She is a sculptor who has created 66 giant pieces to bring awareness through art to the world's growing plastic pollution problem. The massive sculptures made up of marine debris have over 17 tons of ocean garbage. The organisation hoped to build aesthetically pleasing art with a powerful message, creating the connection between art and the ocean's plastic pollution problem that may influence consumer habits. Haseltine's art hasn't always been focussed towards plastic debris, her artistic expression shifted when she noticed the immense amounts of plastic on the beach in her hometown. she said "As the beaches around the world wash up more stuff from the land and less from the sea I believe we must examine our relationship to rivers and oceans. I attempt to scoop up part of what might be below the blue waters and place it in front of us. In some ways it may be an escape, but at the same time a confrontation." (Exploratorium, 2020) the projects brought together local areas with over 500 volunteers willing to help towards the collecting of the debris. I believe this symbolises the way in which art and culture link together when it comes to the greater good or belief .

Plastic has been a symbol of throwaway culture for a long time.

The shift started when our economy changed from an agricultural society to the industrial revolution, soon enough there was enough resources and knowledge to improve the way we all live. However the transition into the informative age provided us with more advanced research identifying the negative environmental impacts.

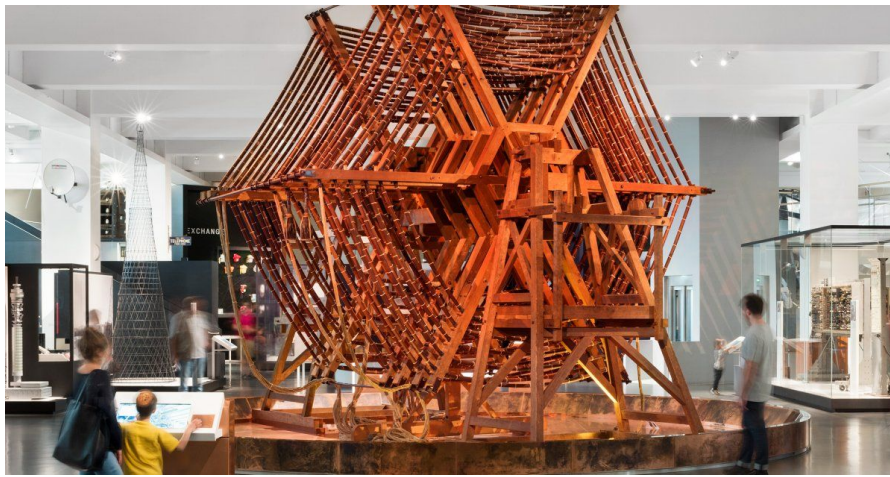
Keyword: Information

The 'Information Age' has gifted us with the best technologies ever known and with that it helps us connect with others, educate and learn from online resources and see the world from

different perspectives. My final keyword is information, meaning 'knowledge communicated or received concerning a particular fact or circumstance.'(dictionary, 2020). The amount of information humans consume in a lifetime is incredible. We are learning more today than ever thought possible. Since 1945 till now there has been a shift in the way millennials transition into adulthood. Society and culture has changed. Younger people are now more interested in major institutions such as political parties, education and the military. Ethnic and racial views of the world are progressing and women's place and participation in the nation's workforce has increased rapidly. 'information technology has clearly played a leading role in the recent acceleration of economic growth' (Torr, 2003)) The consumption of information has developed along with societal advances and this is primarily due to leaving the industrial age behind and introducing the information age. The 'Information Age' is 'the modern age regarded as a time in which information has become a commodity that is quickly and widely disseminated and easily available especially through the use of computer technology'(Webster, 2020) also known as the Computer Age, Digital Age, or New Media Age. The Information Age is arguably known as the greatest progress in human history, it has increased information consumption and creativity. 'Human evolution depends on an ever-increasing rate of information creation and consumption. From communication to entertainment to education, the more information we create and consume, the stronger our society in total'.(Clinton, 2018) the way in which we consume information has changed immensely, in the 1900s people got their information from the radio, books or newspapers. Whereas, today we consume our information differently. Statistics show that consumers get their information from tv, computers and mobile phones, also in less expected things such as computer games and music records. It has also helped the collective art practice as it brings more informative inspirations. We can now go online and look at artists from decades ago and see amazing pieces that many will never get the opportunity to see in real form. It helps artists get a better understanding of what other artists are trying to portray. The industrial age also introduced the world to digital art.

In 2014 an exhibition called 'the Information Age;six networks that changed our world' opened in the science museum in london. The exhibition took several years of planning as it is their biggest show to date. The piece is an aerial tuning inductor from Rugby Radio Station. built in the 1920s it was originally for the General Post Office, to carry radiotelephony between the United Kingdom and America. The piece now stands as an art piece as it no longer a functioning object representing the connection of then and now. It explores information and

communication technologies from over the past two hundred years, it is placed upon a circle podium that is divided into six zones. These zones represent key information and communication technology networks: The Cable, The Telephone Exchange, Broadcast, The Constellation, The Cell and The Web. The exhibition was popular due to The Queen attending the occasion and writing her first ever tweet “It is a pleasure to open the Information Age exhibition today at the @ScienceMuseum and I hope people will enjoy visiting. Elizabeth R.” (The Royal Family, 2014) this is a great representation of the silent generations acceptance into the transition from an industry ruled world to an informative one. (Bryant,2014)



(Information age, 2014)

Concluding this dissertation proposal I have deconstructed the way society uses and abuses consumption while commenting on the importances. The evolution of production has encouraged overuse while having positive effects such as educational values. I have explored industrial factors and negative impacts that humans have created on the environment over the past few decades. I understand the importance of the shift from the industrial revolution to the digital age and how artists have evolved with it. This proposal has made me think about evolution as a shift in idea rather than a change in a historical period. My keywords have allowed me to look at different explorations within my research. Therefore, this has led me to think about the evolution of art and how historical artists have informed us through their art without knowing the full knowledge of societal impacts like we do today. This has finally led me to a question for my dissertation:

**Will our evolving relationship with materials and their environmental impact,
affect better artistic practice today?**

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