

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 will you use and discuss how and why.

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An environmental issue within design would be the manufacturing process and sustainability of design waste from the industry as a result of consumerism. As designers we should be striving to help combat the amount of wastage from design and look to improve the future of material usage and reuse but also how we think as consumers as to why we cause this effect of consumer product waste being created and left for landfill after only a short period of time. If a customer loves a product this much to spend a large amount, then the industry brands should be making these products to last for a long time rather than making and then knowing you will be redesigning months later. Within my essay I will be discussing the fundamental issues surrounding textiles waste, why we consume so much globally and how this affects the environment but also the needs and wants of a consumer. I know that creating my own solution for this issue will not combat this overriding global issue, but I hope by doing my part over the duration of my career within design will improve a small section of this environmental burden. I will be researching where this waste is coming from, what effects does it cause, and which improvements could I implement for the future. I think change does start with you, and then by everyone changing something personally, gradually this will create a significant difference. Consumerism will be the overarching theme to my research, as I hope to be able to understand and investigate why society has a materialistic approach to wanting the next desired product such as the next iPhone or the next designer bag.

Firstly, in order to solve a problem, the cause needs to be identified. This starts with the idea that our textiles and design industry realise on the consumer, the consumer being the person who wants. Wants and needs are vastly different when it comes to design such as a need would be shelter, a want would be choosing for that shelter to be the most expensive made which either requires a large number of raw materials or materials which cost in other ways such as air pollution as they are bought in from abroad, 'Think about it: you may be referred to as a consumer, but there is very little that you actually consume- some food, some liquids. Everything else is designed for you to throw away when you are finished with it..... "away" does not really exist' (McDonough and Braungart, 2009, p. 16). As humans there is a constant desire for the next best thing, desire, and emotion link to an overall attraction to an item, this feeling of wanting can grow and almost feel like a need (Stevenson, 2011), this leads to an over judgment of the number of products needed for shops. Having that emotional and desirable connection to objects can result in a constant battle with overbuying and disposing of perfectly usable products, we must question whether there was a real need for that item in the first place, if we can so easily and happily dispose of it into landfill without the question of what it is doing to the environment. Should we be asking whether these products such as textiles can even be recycled if they have such a quick lifespan from being made to being thrown.

As we are all consumers, we should be questioning the real need of any products we buy, we should be thinking about the longevity of the products, as could there be a better option, one that will last longer. Many companies and businesses know that if they can

make a product almost trend worthy, making it the next best things, keeping the consumer happy with their desirable item until they create something new and then the cycle starts again. As Jonathen Chapman said, “we must ask ourselves what-beyond a conventional understanding of utility-is all this meaningful stuff really for, and why does it transform into meaningless rubbish so quickly?” (Chapman, 2021, p. 1). If we as consumers get completely mesmerised by such an amazing product, how can we look to disregard it so quickly after a singular or handful of uses, Chapman continues to discuss the overarching issues within this design process of extracting, designing, making then destroying. One could almost argue that as this is a constant cycle of design, destroying could be the starting point as well as the end point as many products or machinery from the industries are using materials which would take 1000s of years to regenerate themselves within the environment such as natural materials like coal and oil. Yet as soon as the consumer, sees the next product or newest addition, no matter the time and energy gone into the previous item the focus is on the new, designers know this, they are trained to look at trends, competitors, and capital.

“Consumerism is cultural as well as economic, that is, it is imbued with meaning” (McGuigan, 2009, p. 86), capital has a huge role within consumerism as the desires of a customer wanting the newest car for example, does have underlying factors which effect the environment. Jim McGuigan discusses the idea that simply wanting the newest product is not just going to create an economic value for that time and place but also globally as value across the world is different, consuming a certain amount of one item in one country could result in a totally different value elsewhere. This can be understood in the story of how Manhattan was bought, the value to one culture could have contrasting meanings to other cultures. I think money is the main cause of devastating environmental effects of consumerism, such as more renewable materials or sustainable resources can have a more expensive value as they can last longer however, customers will purchase the cheaper option as there is no consideration for feeding forward and anticipating for the future.

Secondly, when researching the waste coming from the textiles industry, there is a large amount of post product waste either perfectly usable but instantly thrown into landfill, waste which cannot be recycled, or chemicals being released into the atmosphere or environment because it cannot be disposed of correctly. ‘This linear fashion system (make, use, dispose) of inexpensive fashions has led to massive overconsumption and textile waste, depleting both natural and human resources and resulting in environmental and social systems that are not only unsustainable but are inherently damaging to societies and natural environments’ (Carver and Burns, 2021, pp. 2-29). This is a result of consumerism within the textiles industry, such as within fashion, there are many fast fashion retailers currently marketing clothing for events such as Christmas, for example, fashion for Christmas does contain a large amount of glitter or sequins, which there are not many alternatives for recyclable or sustainable sequins. As sequins can be made from materials which have been discarded such as plastic waste, but this still means they are using plastic, which is not good for the environment, neither is it correcting the idea of singular use plastic.

Waste does not always mean products which are broken or no longer usable, but it can mean a remainder of fabric which did not get used due to a one time collection being brought out. This is known as post production waste, this can be in the form of perfectly usable fabric from a role which as a brand has made their required number of garments or textile, they no longer need to make more therefore the fabric or materials are wasted. Kate Fletcher talks about the overall percentage of textiles waste is on average '30kg per person per year goes to landfill' (Fletcher, 2008, p. 98), this is a huge amount especially for a singular person, I think this could definitely be reduced if we all looked at the overall effect caused by just one person. I understand this figure is on average and not everyone may waste this amount, but there is still roughly this amount to each person.

As a student studying directly into the textiles industry, I hear first hand what we should be implementing into everyday designing and manufacturing. I know my course and possibly other universities will look to communicate with brands and companies over concerns for the industries effect on the environment. My course receives donated post production waste such as fabric on a roll which will not be used, but also products such as tiles and harder surfaces from brands such as Smile. Smile uses wasted plastic into new hard surfaces such as tiles, I think as a solution we should require any waste like this as a starting point to work with. However, this could mean that the brands and companies will always be producing too much and always need to give it away, therefore a solution for this environmental issue would be for the companies or brands to calculate the exact amount with a percentage of excess to be made and then only requiring this amount of fabric with a slight excess. Therefore, the waste amount will not be that grand. Understanding the amount needed for production should be a continuous thought for the retailers and manufacturers as 'one could argue that short production lead times should increase the efficacy of creating trendy products by allowing designs to be finalized closer to the selling season' (CACHON, Gerard, Swinney, 2011, p. 781). I think this idea of producing closer to the time for the products to be put in stores, would allow for brands and companies to have produced a certain amount with the aim that it sells and then knowing that they have either produced enough or they can then make more. Rather than the products being made a few seasons in advance and then having produced too much stock resulting in landfill, incineration or disposed of incorrectly, harming the environment even more or creating a bad label for itself as a company with large environmental issue due to overestimates therefore contributing to consumerism.

Thirdly, as society has this attraction to always having something new and the next best thing, we lose sight on the real history of an object or product, something such as a new iPhone. Although the brand Apple is a huge successful company, should we be questioning the idea that Apple have this underlying motive of knowing consumers love their products, so they almost add materialistic values to the newest device coming out to draw people into buying when they have a perfectly usable phone. 'Books become books become books over and over again, each incarnation a sparkling new vehicle for fresh images and ideas. Form follows not just function but the evolution of the medium itself, in the endlessly propagating spirit of the printed word' (McDonough and Braungart, 2009, p.

30), cradle to cradle looks at this idea of design repeating itself but with slight change, all are good designs with a use but initially the same object for example, the book or phone.

I think we have lost the idea of reusing or repurposing the unused, objects such as garments, cars, technologies, or other materialistic things are huge contributors to design waste going into the environment. Jason Dressler mentions in an interview 'people like to think that it's always gonna to be better if it's new.....people don't want to have.....people history attached to things.....It's more interesting and it actually brings much more character life' (Dziama, M and Batista, C, 2017). The idea of having history attached to products brings the idea of story, I think design starts with a story and passing garments and objects through generations, similar to how a Welsh dresser, is passed through generations to hold prized Welsh kitchen ware. The knowledge of history told through generations adds value to these products, I think this almost creates a different materialistic society. This is different to the idea of consumerism, I think as a solution to the environmental issue of consumers especially through the textiles industry, we should be looking for ways to reuse or regenerate design into new without disposing of perfectly usable products and materials which are sent to landfill.

Understanding the continuous contributors to consumerism such as wanting new or the best, I think we should be looking into more sustainable options which appreciate the beauty within the broken, such as Kintsugi, 'a Japanese tradition of repairing broken ceramic with gold, silver, or platinum-a process of refining the "scars" instead of hiding them. As a philosophy it treats breakage as part of the object's history rather than as an error or a failure to be covered up or discarded' (Anonymous, 2018, p. 55). Or the idea of Boro, using patchwork or fabric repairing methods to mend garments. These processes are beautiful and would eradicate many items within design being discarded into landfill due to no longer fulfilling a purpose, I know this may not simplify consumerism, but it may allow people to think of new ways to use their unwanted possessions. It would also create beautiful histories within the design as a stitch patchwork quilt passed down through generations would bring families together and create the idea of story but also sustainability as society will not be consuming as much if we look for more recyclable methods rather than buying first hand in stores or online.

In conclusion, I have looked at many ways in which consumerism has come into effect within society but also globally, it was interesting to understand how we consume across the world but also how we look at the idea of recycling or repurposing items we no longer need. I believe in order to solve the issue of consumerism, we should be questioning when purchasing whether we really need it but also how it will be discarded, then we should be using our creative minds such as how a company can donate fabric to education, animal centres, other smaller businesses which would need unique fabric as the majority of the work is handmade. Looking at solutions like Kintsugi and Boro, techniques which does not throw away the broken but thinks of ways it can be fixed without covering its history or journey through life. Overall, if we were to all do our part in chipping away at a small section of the overriding environmental issues around the world, we would see small but momentous changes taking place and be able to start reversing the devastating effects

caused by our desires to always want the next or newest design and therefore help combat consumerism and materialism.

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