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.

Names: Lauren Stokes

Student Number: 2305024

Module Course: Research in Context ADAD5003

Course: BA (hons) Surface Pattern Design

Word Count: 2256

Lecturer: Julia Lockheart

Thinking Making

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.*

In this essay, I will explore the environmental issues throughout the fashion industry, in particular fast fashion, and how these can be tackled using a number of different processes such as slow fashion and circular fashion. I will touch on the works of Kate Fletcher and Hikaru Noguchi, a knitted textiles artist, as well as Mara Hoffman and Stewart Brand, as part of The Whole Earth Movement. I will also explore what we as designers can do to aid this growing cause.

One of the major faults of the fashion industry is its impact on the world around us. As of August 2024, 10% of the worlds carbon emissions and 20% of the worlds water waste is down to the fashion industry (GreenMatch, 2024). Fast fashion (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) is one largest contributors to this issue, with the UK being referred to as "the epicentre of fast fashion in Europe" (Chinasamy, 2019), as high street retailers produce inexpensive clothing rapidly in response to the latest trends (Algamal, 2019). Whilst there are many issues with the fast fashion market such as how these garments are made and transported on such a large scale and with such high demand one of the largest issues is the fabric production and the waste that is created, with 15 to 45 billion garments that have been produced going unsold every year (Hardy, 2024). Cotton is one the most highly used fabrics is this industry due to its softness and breathability as well as its versatility and its ability to be blended with other fibres increasing its versatility (Alifa Putri, 2024); however, the production of cotton creates a lot of waste even before the garment has been made. On average, a single cotton t-shirt uses 2,700 litres of water during its production, and this can have a detrimental effect on the area where the cotton is being produced causing droughts and soil degradation (Malone, 2013). Whilst cotton is a natural fibre, therefore meaning it can be recycled, less than 30% of it is actually recycled, which contributes to the 100million tons of cotton waste produced (Wang et al., 2023). China has the highest level of cotton production in world at 24%, equating to 27.35 million bales, closely followed by India at 22% and then Brazil at 13% of global production (fas.usda.gov, 2024).

Figure 1

Over the duration of my design career, I want to tackle the sustainability and environmental issues faced by the textiles industry; one of the most effective ways to do this is through educating the customer as well as doing whatever we can as designers. One such campaign aiming to educate the public about these issues was "The Whole Earth Movement". This was a catalogue published from 1968 to 1971 by Stewart Brand of the Portola Institute (Werner, 2018), a non-profit educational organisation based in California. This catalogue pushed the idea of "a new social order through individual empowerment and the acquisition of skills and tools" (Werner, 2018). Whilst it was only around for a short time, it has had a large impact on us now as its followers went on to found Airbnb, a web-based platform that allows travellers to rent spaces from property owners which promotes initiatives like the Green Results program and its community fund (Airbnb, 2023), and

Figure 2

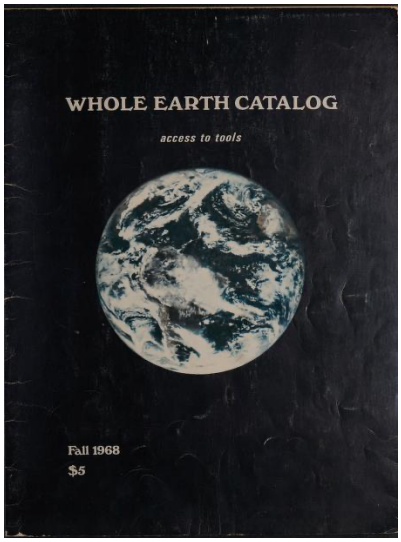
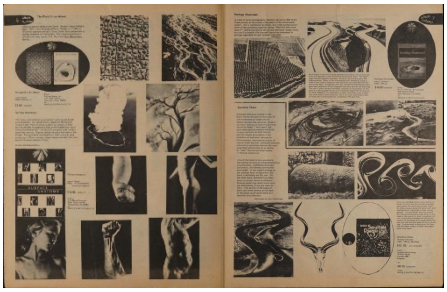


Figure 3



Stripe, a multinational financial service and software that uses small portions of the money transferred to remove carbon from the atmosphere (Stripe, n.d.). Also, in some issues of the catalogue, they sent out weaving kits, for its followers to use to repair their clothes rather than discarding them, and explored the idea of "everyday environmentalism". Everyday environmentalism is described as doing acts constantly to try and make your everyday life more environmentally friendly, whether that be changing out cleaning products to make them more friendly, repairing your clothes to extend their lifetime, or ensuring your waste is properly recycled as well as composting, using a rain barrel or having a vegetable plot (Kennedy, 2016).

Kate Fletcher, in her book "Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Fashion Journeys" (2014), puts forward the idea of "slow fashion" (Symons, 2023), stating that "the challenge of sustainability is to learn to live better, enriching the ties that bind us together as a society and regenerating environments while also consuming much less" (Fletcher, 2014, p.222). Slow fashion is the process of design garments with ethical and environmental issues in mind. As designers, we must work hard to provide our customers with ethically conscious products as well as a high level of social equity. One way in which we as designers can make this happen is through interdisciplinary collaboration; by working alongside engineers, scientists and community leaders we can create garments that are not only beautiful but also sustainable. This collaborative design process also avoids creating heuristic products. The heuristic process involves designing a product that is not guaranteed to be optimal but is sufficient for immediate goals; when designers create this way it can lead to large amounts of waste, under paid workers and garments poorly made that will not last the season meaning the customer is then forced to buy more and more items, causing this never ending cycle. As Kate Fletcher says "to move out of the 'safe' sustainability territory of small makers and 'slow' production and begin to explore what needs might mean for the large-scale rapid fashion rhythms of the high street" (Fletcher, 2014, p.159) and another way we as designers can begin tackle these environmental issues on a larger scale is through promoting circular fashion over fast fashion.

Circular fashion is an approach that aims to reduce waste and maximises the lifetime of clothing and textiles (The Sustainable Fashion Forum, 2023). In the design industry, this means creating products using high quality construction and materials to increase the durability of each garment leading to a longer lifetime. As consumers this means caring for each piece of clothing; repairing it when it gets damaged, reusing the material when it is no longer wearable and recycling the items correctly when it has come to the end of its life. This idea was promoted by The Whole Earth Movement, but has also been explored through art by Hikaru Noguchi, a knitted textiles designer, who travels around the world mending damaged items and asks the owner "why do you want to repair this garment?"; by travelling and spreading word of how important it is to hold on to these items not only for sentimental reasons but environmental ones too it reinforces the idea that our clothes should last forever (Hikaru Noguchi, 2024). She also goes further and sells "Darning Mushroom Kits" which allow people to repair their own knitwear using traditional haberdashery tools at home. Noguchi does this as she believes in cultivating the relationship between garments and their owners and making this last a lifetime. Despite this push to give unwanted garments a new lease of life, many consumers can be bombarded with incorrect information when looking at purchasing clothing; one of the biggest of these issues is green washing. Green washing is "an unsubstantiated claim to deceive customers into believing that a company's products are environmentally friendly or have a greater positive environmental impact than they actually do" (Hayes, 2024) ; this

Figure 4

has been seen a lot in the media where fast fashion brands have been caught in this scheme, including H&M Conscious, Decathlon Ecodesign and Tesco F&F Made Faithfully (Abelvik-Lawson, 2023). The popular clothing brand based in China, Shein, has time and time again faced these greenwashing allegations after promoting its "eco-friendly products" and "decent working conditions"; they also promoted that they have a certificate from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) for compliance, however this organization does not issue any such certificates (Singh, 2023). This type of advertising can blind consumer into thinking they are making ethically conscious decisions and by purchasing these products it reinforces to the company that this is a viable way to sell products and attract customers. To avoid these traps and to allow customers to purchase clothing under no false pretences, designers need to: be transparent on where the materials come from, push for fair prices and ethical working conditions, as well as instilling traceability schemes, allowing the consumer to check that a product aligns with their own ethical principles.

Figure 5

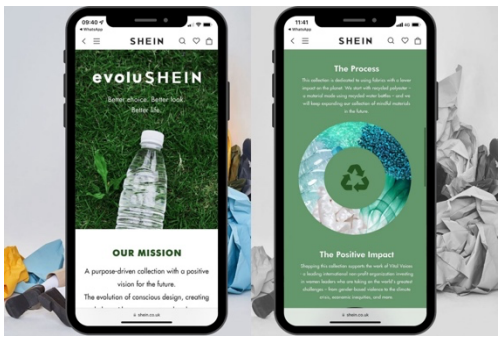


Figure 6

Looking into the future is so important as a designer so we can repair mistakes made in the past. One such designer that does this is Mara Hoffman and her company's "framework of sustainability". Mara Hoffman is a women's clothing label founded in 2000 by the Parsons School of Design graduate. Her work is known for bright and bold colours and patterns as well as her push for a more ecological fashion industry. Hoffman was the third recipient to be awarded the *CFDA Fashion Award for Environmental Sustainability,* in 2023, for her company's work. As she states on her website, their sustainability structure consists of "innovative design and manufacturing practices, responsible fabric and material selection, and increased contributions to, and participation in, social justice movements". One area in which they are pioneering is the responsible fabric and material selection. Currently in their collections, they use organic cotton, recycled cotton, regenerative cotton, linen, hemp, wool, manmade cellulose fibres, 100% Circ® Lyocell, TENCEL™ Lyocell, TENCEL™ Luxe, TENCEL™ with REFIBRA™, TENCEL™ Modal, BIRLA Modal, recycled nylon, recycled polyester, PYRATEX® POWER 3. The company is partnered in the circular technology company, Circ, to create garments incorporating Circ Lyocell Fibre. This material is made using 50% cellulosic pulp from textiles waste and 50% cellulosic pulp from regenerative forests. This innovation also uses 50% less raw materials than regular lyocell and reuses 90% of the water used during the production of the material. Hoffman considers the sustainability of every single part of the garment, including the 100% organic cotton sew-in labels and tag strings, as well as the hang tags that are created using soy-based inks and composed of 80% recycled paper. Previously, all of the buttons on their garments were made using a blend of bio-resin, recycled paper and recycled polyester, however, they have transitioned, as of Fall 2023, into using Corozo buttons, a natural material derived from the Tagua tree (Corozo Buttons, n.d.). Hoffman also uses "archive fabrics"; whilst they aim to only produce the amount of fabric needed for a collection, sometimes there is excess, this fabric is then repurposed into new products, however, where this cannot be achieved, they partner with a number of fabric reuse organisations to ensure the waste is properly recycled or repurposed in other ways. They also state that they do not use any fur, feathers or leather on any of their products. When producing knitwear and

Figure 7

Figure 8

woollen accessories, they sure Climate Beneficial wool sourced from Northern California at the Emigh ranch. This initiative is part of Fibershed's Climate Beneficial Agriculture Program, which was created by community organisers and scientists who assess how fibre ecosystems might adapt to and lessen the effects of climate change. This program aims to support healthy soils by using carbon farming practices, prescribed grazing and the restoration of freshwater creeks which all lead to removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, allowing restored ecosystems to thrive. On Hoffman's website, they make it clear for customers so they can be educated on every part of their products including their materials, manufacturing and guidelines as well as how to properly care for their garments to prolong their life and reduce textiles in landfills. Whilst also using more sustainable resources to create their garments, they are showing transparency and traceability for their customers by displaying all of the material information on their website while also acknowledging that improvements can still be made to their company, allowing for consumers to make educated choices on the clothes they purchase. They also educate consumers through "The Journal", a collection of articles that explain the meaning and innovation behind each of the collections produced (Mara Hoffman, n.d.). Despite all their work making strides in the fashion industry, making environmentally conscious clothing more available for customers, Mara Hoffman announced she would be shutting down her label. During an interview with Vogue explaining her reasons behind shutting down her iconic brand, she explains how if she wanted to grow her business this would lead to her taking in high order numbers meaning she would need high stockpiles of garments which would in turn create more waste. She felt that she could no longer do this while fast fashion still has such a hold on the fashion industry, which may a reason why many other brands aren't following in her footsteps due to the costs of making their garments more environmentally friendly (Hardy, 2024).

In conclusion, there are many faults environmentally in the fashion industry that we as designers must own up to and aim to tackle over the breadth of our careers. Whilst there are some innovative designers and companies out there currently producing garments that are a lot less harmful to the planet, there is still so much more to be done through changes in materials or changes in the design and manufacturing process as a whole. Companies need to taking accountability for the processes they use and must educate the consumer as the forefront of their business. But until the demand for fast fashion items is less, many high street brands will continue to find the need to produce cheap garments on large scales, or may fall into an economic pitfall.

References:

Abelvik-Lawson, H. (2023). *Fashion greenwash: how companies are hiding the true environmental costs of fast fashion*. [online] Greenpeace UK. Available at: https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/fashion-greenwash-report-companies-hiding-true-environmental-costs-fast-fashion/.

Airbnb (2023). *Airbnb Community Fund grants support sustainability & conservation programs*. [online] Airbnb Newsroom. Available at: https://news.airbnb.com/en-uk/airbnb-community-fund-grants-support-sustainability-conservation-programs-2/.

Algamal, A. (2019). *New Shocking Facts about the Impact of Fast Fashion on Our Climate*. [online] Oxfam. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/new-shocking-facts-about-the-impact-of-fast-fashion-on-our-climate/.

Alifa Putri (2024). *Exploring the Most Popular Types of Fabrics for Fashion*. [online] SwapUp. Available at: https://swapup.com.au/blogs/journal/exploring-the-most-popular-types-of-fabrics-for-fashion?srsltid=AfmBOopiV0MbKEgETkGdNEJSZxUn5r-ffL_QD6v40TI8fvOo_HiH3lhe [Accessed 30 Nov. 2024].

Chinasamy, J. (2019). *London Fashion Week: Fast facts about fast fashion*. [online] Unearthed. Available at: https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2019/09/12/fast-facts-about-fast-fashion/.

Corozo Buttons. (n.d.). *What is Corozo*. [online] Available at: https://corozobuttons.com/pages/what-is-corozo.

fas.usda.gov. (2024). *Cotton | USDA Foreign Agricultural Service*. [online] Available at: https://fas.usda.gov/data/production/commodity/2631000.

Fletcher, K. (2014). *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles : Design Journeys*. London ; New York: Earthscan from Routledge.

GreenMatch.co.uk. (2024). *UK Fast Fashion: The Textile Recycling Crisis*. [online] Available at: https://www.greenmatch.co.uk/blog/textile-recycling-crisis.

Hardy, A. (2024). *'It's The Hardest Thing I've Ever Had To Do': Mara Hoffman Is Shuttering Her Namesake Label*. [online] British Vogue. Available at: https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/mara-hoffman-closing-brand.

Hayes, A. (2024). *What Is Greenwashing? How It Works, Examples, and Statistics*. [online] Investopedia. Available at: https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp.

Hikaru Noguchi. (2024). *hikaru noguchi – for very special furnishings, fashion accessories and knitwear*. [online] Available at: http://hikarunoguchi.com/ [Accessed 1 Dec. 2024].

Kennedy, C.F. and B. (2016). *3. Everyday environmentalism*. [online] Pew Research Center. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2016/10/04/everyday-environmentalism/.

Malone, J. (2013). *It takes 2,700 liters of water to make a t-shirt*. [online] Triple Pundit. Available at: https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2013/it-takes-2700-liters-water-make-t-shirt/54321.

Mara Hoffman. (n.d.). *Mara Hoffman | Our Story*. [online] Available at: https://marahoffman.com/pages/our-story.

Oxford English Dictionary. (2023). *Oed.com*. [online] doi:https://doi.org/10.1093//OED//7959962629.

Singh, S. (2024). *Greenwashing In The Fashion Industry*. [online] Carbon Trail. Available at: https://carbontrail.net/blog/greenwashing-in-the-fashion-industry/.

Stripe. (n.d.). *Stripe Climate*. [online] Available at: https://stripe.com/gb/climate.

Symons, F. (2023). *What Is Slow fashion?* [online] Oxfam GB. Available at: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/what-is-slow-fashion/.

The Accommodation Club (n.d.). *Going Green: How Airbnb is Making their Services More Sustainable*. [online] Available at: https://www.theaccommodation.club/blog/going-green-how-airbnb-is-making-their-services-more-sustainable/.

The Sustainable Fashion Forum (2023). *What is Circular Fashion?* [online] The Sustainable Fashion Forum. Available at: https://www.thesustainablefashionforum.com/pages/what-is-circular-fashion.

Wang, C., Su, J., Liu, T.J., Ge, S., Rock Keey Liew, Zhang, H., Mu. Naushad, Su Shiung Lam, Hui Suan Ng, Sonne, C. and Fan, W. (2023). A sustainable strategy to transform cotton waste into renewable cellulose fiber self-reinforcing composite paper. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 429, pp.139567–139567. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.139567.

Wiener, A. (2018). *The Complicated Legacy of Stewart Brand's 'Whole Earth Catalog'*. [online] The New Yorker. Available at: https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-silicon-valley/the-complicated-legacy-of-stewart-brands-whole-earth-catalog.

Figures:

Figure 1: Krishi Jagran. (2024). *Cotton Farming, Cotton Farming Guide, Cotton Farming in India*. [online] Available at: https://krishijagran.com/crop-calendar/cotton/#google_vignette [Accessed 11 Dec. 2024].

Figure 2: Whole Earth Index. (2024). *Whole Earth Catalog, Fall 1968*. [online] Available at: https://wholeearth.info/p/whole-earth-catalog-fall-1968?format=grid&index=5 [Accessed 11 Dec. 2024].

Figure 3: Whole Earth Index. (2024). *Whole Earth Catalog, Fall 1968*. [online] Available at: https://wholeearth.info/p/whole-earth-catalog-fall-1968?format=grid&index=5 [Accessed 11 Dec. 2024].

Figure 4: Hikarunoguchi.com. (2024). *hikaru noguchi – for very special furnishings, fashion accessories and knitwear*. [online] Available at: http://hikarunoguchi.com/.

Figure 5: Phillips, S. (2022). *SHEIN launches purpose-driven clothing line – Thred Website*. [online] Thred.com. Available at: https://thred.com/style/shein-launches-purpose-driven-clothing-line/.

Figure 6: Mara Hoffman. (n.d.). *Spring 2023*. [online] Available at: https://marahoffman.com/pages/spring-collection-2023.

Figure 7: Mara Hoffman. (2021). *Pre Fall 2021*. [online] Available at: https://marahoffman.com/pages/pre-fall-2021 [Accessed 11 Dec. 2024].

Figure 8: Emighlivestock.com. (2020). *Who We Are*. [online] Available at: https://www.emighlivestock.com/about [Accessed 11 Dec. 2024].