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Surface Pattern Design

Module: ADAD5003

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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.

Word Count: 2612

As time goes on and the textile and fashion industries continue to grow and develop, the environmental issue we face is the amount of waste that is accumulating in landfill is majorly increasing and having a negative impact on the environment today. An article from the BBC states “13.6% of clothes and shoes thrown away in the US end up being recycled – while the average American throws away 37kg of clothes every year.” (Beall, 2020) This supports my argument that the fashion and textile industry is developing at a faster rate than ideas and suggestions are being made to help reduce the textile waste, and how we can overcome this global issue. Textile waste is causing major harm and damage to our environment and is negatively impacting individuals and families in third world countries. As citizens of the United Kingdom, we have the luxury of walking into a shop, grabbing the clothes we like and continuing with our day. We never think twice about the cheap labour, hard work and pressures that go into making the clothes we have on our back. If society was made aware of the impact our cheap clothes have on the environment and third world countries, would that help impact positive change?

A main battle in society today, is materialism. This is the “philosophy or world outlook that treats reality as independent of human thought” (The Marxist Project, 2019). Many people in society see value and worth in the things they buy, and one of the main things this wealth can be seen through is clothing. According to an online article, “materialism is associated with difficulty holding back one’s desires to buy stuff.” (Kasser, 2016). This shows that fast fashion is an issue and is developing each day due to us not being able to have self-control. With the money we earn, it is easy for us to say that we deserve the items we are treating ourselves to, we also often buy items of value to show off and impress others with. The issue is that fast fashion is not a problem that shops want to advertise because they want to keep their income and profit. Many large retail stores will not share their view on fast fashion and often are not interested in trying to make items sustainable. This is where, as individuals we should make the effort to shop small and local. A British local mum, Victoria Shuttleworth has seen the impact fashion and textiles has on the environment and made the confident decision to create sustainable and eco-friendly clothing for her child, and others to wear. She states, “Organic cotton is a more sustainable option, as it is made in a safer environment which incurs less pollution and toxic damage.” (Shuttleworth, 2020) As a future designer I am going to take inspiration from small business, companies and organisations and make the effort to ensure any textile products are made using sustainable and environmentally friendly materials. I will also encourage handing down items of clothing or giving them away to charity shops, clothing banks or to those in need so each item of textile will have optimum use.



Figure 1 – ‘Tega Akinola by Senem Ak’.

There is lots of inspiration from young designers and new graduates who have recognised the issue of fast and unsustainable fashion. Recent graduate and designer Tega Akinola has shown a perfect example (see figure one) of how up and coming designers have a whole new view on fashion, textiles, and the impact it has on the environment. An online interview shared, “Tega finds resourceful ways to include even some of the most mundane items into her designs, such as Apple phone chargers.” (Akinola, 2021) Clearly the development of new, up and coming designers is looking more positive for the environment. Akinola has a passion for recycling and reusing different types of materials to create new and improved designs. As designers, we need to have a broad creative mindset to come up with design ideas that are out of the ordinary and sustainable to ensure we gain an interested audience who also want to have a positive impact on the environment today. A way to develop our knowledge in this area as designers is to deepen our understanding of the environmental issue in fashion by carrying out research projects. We can also start using and looking into sustainable materials in our practical work that we create for our current submissions. The sooner we begin using preloved, recycled, and sustainable materials the more positive our impact will be on textile waste in landfill.

Fashion forecasting is a major part of the fashion industry, this is where designers and companies get an idea and head start of what trends are up and coming and will be popular in the new season. There are many different fashion forecasts that happen each year, however recently we are starting to see similarities of fashion trends from previous era’s coming back into style. An article online shares “there's been a big push for the return of puffed-up '80s sleeve silhouettes” (Kliest, 2021) This shows that clearly there is a huge cycle in fashion taking place where old trends are becoming new and different styles such as tie

dye, flares and baggy jeans are becoming more popular. As a design student I understand the negative impact textile landfill is having on the environment. A way to prevent this issue is to encourage people to keep their clothes even after a fashion trend has passed. By doing this, they will be able to keep items of clothing for when the trend comes around again or will be able to pass down their clothes to friends, children or to charity shops. This suggestion may not be an option to take on board for some, due to lack of storage space and uncertainty of the future. It is important to understand that not all suggestions and ideas will work for everyone.

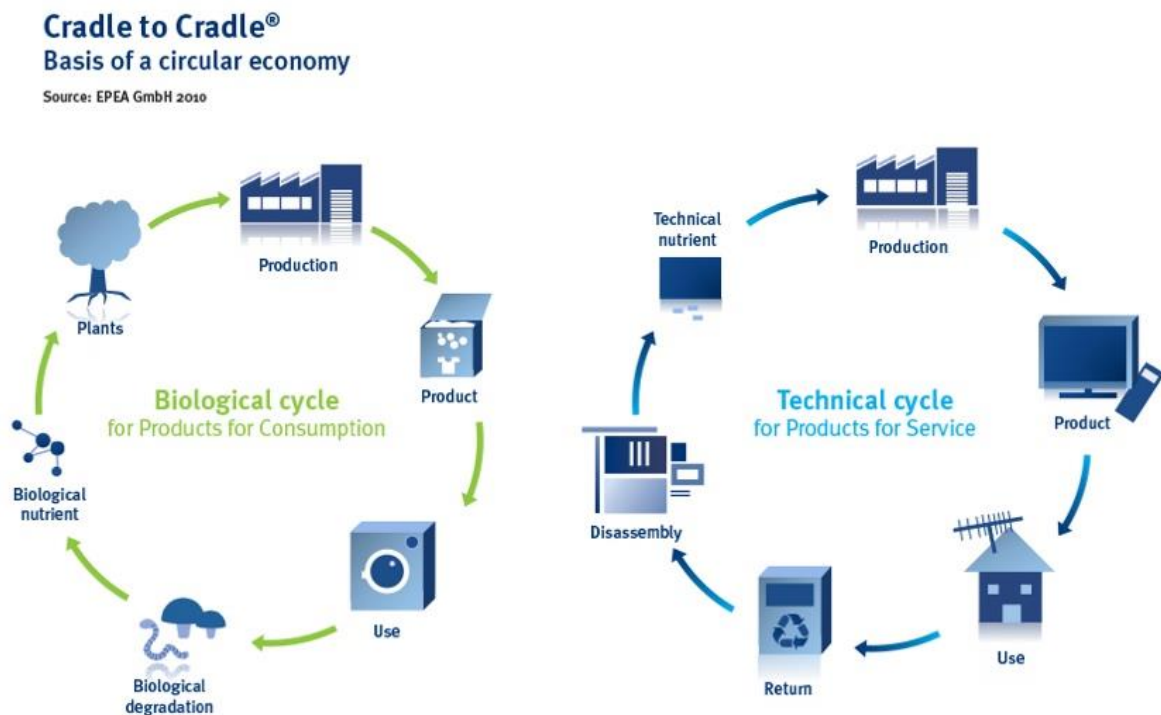


Figure 2 – 'Cradle to Cradle® as a basis for circular economy'

As we can clearly see that fashion cycles and trends become popular again over time. It is important for new, up and coming designers to ensure that in our future design careers we are creating products which comply to the cradle-to-cradle theory. This theory supports the use of products that can be made, broken down after use and consumption and then turned into a beneficial product such as biological nutrient or technical nutrient as shown in the diagram from figure two. The cradle-to-cradle book states "It is about being beneficial, about not panicking and destroying resources that we can pass onto our grandchildren and their grandchildren." (Braungart and McDonough, 2009, p.9). We can take inspiration from this attitude both as designers and customers. In my future design career, I am going to ensure the quality of material I use is to a professional standard but also has a positive impact on the environment. Ultimately, the idea of having clothing brands that are sustainable, long lasting and do not negatively impact the earth when their lease of life come to an end is a way we are going to prevent the climate crisis from getting worse. Thinking about the long-term impact is so important, we cannot focus on the now, we need to wake up and recognise the damage we are causing and have a positive change for the future generations we will be bringing into the world. The cradle-to-cradle theory has had a positive impact on my inspiration and will be a theory I refer to in my future design career.

Furthermore, an idea that comes to mind when thinking about how to lessen the issue of textile waste increasing in landfill is to create free or low costing online and digital content that encourages, inspires, and teaches others how to upcycle and create clothing from pre-loved and recycled textiles which would usually go to waste. One of the big inspirations which is starting to encourage others to sew and be creative with textile waste is the BBC programme 'The Great British Sewing Bee'. A local artist shares her inspiration from this programme online, "The Great British Sewing Bee started last week and inspired me to do a bit of my own! ... after a while I decided, I didn't like to wear polo necks anymore but I still liked the top and didn't just want to chuck it." (Liz Plummer, 2013). Clearly the television programme has had success on encouraging professional and amateur sewers to upcycle old items of clothing instead of throwing them away. If, as designers we can produce more valuable resources which give detailed guides and instructions on how to upcycle old clothes into new, it is likely more people will have the motivation to want to create new pieces from old materials.

Upcycling, repairing, and fixing our own clothes used to be a popular and well-known skill within the household going back a few decades. Over time, the textile industry has found ways to produce clothing quickly and at a low price. "The financial incentive to repair has largely disappeared, mainly because the price of new garments and textiles has fallen dramatically relative to the cost of labour." (Fletcher, 2008, p.101) If more sustainable materials and processes came into the production of clothing, the price of clothing will begin to increase and more, meaning the demand to have a skill to fix and repair garments will develop. This is where the idea of creating videos, online documents, and instructions on how to upcycle and recreate new items of clothing will become a relevant and useful source for many people.



Figure 3 – 'Stella McCartney, Winter 2017 Collection, Ad Campaign Shot in a Scottish Landfill'

Stella McCartney is a popular designer in which we can take inspiration from to create long lasting, sustainable textile fashion. She famously states her idea that all her designs are created to last. An online article shares, “the designer doesn’t just say it but really implements it.” (Agrawal, 2021). We can see this passion shown in figure 3, where McCartney decided to shoot an advertisement campaign in a landfill site to show and make consumers aware of the landfill waste their single use textile items are contributing towards. This campaign is so inspiring and eye opening to me as an up-and-coming designer, as it is boldly showing the environmental issue we are facing and isn’t trying to hide the problem. McCartney is making people aware and bringing the issue to the consumers attention. For developing artists and designers it is so important for us to take on board this determined attitude, we need to prove ourselves to our audience and portray our ambition towards sustainable design. Our use of more expensive, sustainable, and long-lasting materials should become more popular, meaning garments will last longer and there will be an urge for people at home to repair or upcycle these clothes when they are either broken or out of fashion like I previously stated.

As a student designer, another suggestion which can positively impact the textile industry is for any small, up and coming businesses to create an environmental profit and loss account through Kering. The reason why this is a positive path to go down and is better advice to take is because they “measure, quantify and compare the environmental impacts arising from the activities in the luxury business model” (Gwilt, 2020, p.42). This means that any product that is made it will be ensured it is sustainable and not causing any added negative impact to the environment. If small businesses and designers begin to show that they care about the cycle of textiles and how fast they go to waste, it is hopeful that the customer will begin to see how beneficial it is for them to shop more sustainable. As small businesses start to care more about the earth, larger companies will likely feel the need to compete and want to widen their range of sustainable textiles.



Figure 4 - 'Primark, unlike other retailers who have admitted to a presence in the Rana Plaza factory, has contributed to the compensation fund.'

An important factor I will focus on and prioritise in my future design career is the health, wellbeing and welfare of the workers producing the items that are being sold. "Sustainable fashion is about a strong and nurturing relationship between consumer and producer." (Chapman and Gant, 2007, p.123). There are many stories and news articles that we often hear of regarding the workers in mass production lines and it is appalling the way they are treated, and the conditions they work in are unheard of in countries like the United Kingdom. "Fast fashion relies on globalisation and like all exploitative industries, it is powered by cheap labour used to generate huge profits with low production costs." (Leach, 2020). These are the stories we often hear a lot; however, we do not really recognise and understand quite how severe and intense these working conditions are. An eye-opening situation that happened in 2014, shown in figure 4, is when a sweatshop worker cried out to customers of Primark by creating a label that shares how 'degrading' sweatshop work is. The people involved in cheap labour work long, draining hours and are expected to keep up an acceptable standard of work. They often work continuously with no breaks and still don't earn half as much as UK citizens would on minimum wage. When we are having a look around shops, trying to find the best deal or bargain, we need to remember the reasons behind why textile items can be sold at such a low price, and reconsider whether it is sustainable and ethical to support large companies which use cheap labour in third world countries. Cheap clothing and textile items have a negative impact on the environment as well as the people involved in making the garments. Large businesses are so focussed on using cheap materials to lower the price, meaning all the products being sold will likely have a lifespan of less than 3 years. This is a very damaging realisation; the amount of textile waste is only going to increase as the years go on. Therefore, as a textile design student I am going to focus on sustainable materials, decent working conditions for workers and research economically safe processes to use to dye and print designs, both now and in my future design career.

To conclude, fast fashion and the negative impact it has on the environment and landfill has clearly been increasing dramatically over the past few years and if nothing is done about it now, it will only continue to get worse. As an up-and-coming textile designer, I have outlined many of the issues society is facing regarding the textile waste and I have used this information to outline a few different ways in which I can positively impact the environment when I pursue my design career. As this is such an important issue which needs change, I am going to start using more economic materials, processes, and techniques to build my portfolio. A designer who inspires me to do so is Kate Fletcher, her passion to research and write about sustainability in fashion is so encouraging and I will continue to investigate her research to help educate myself and make my design processes more sustainable. The more we come together as designers and choose to make a more positive impact on the environment, the faster the positive impact on textile waste in landfill will appear. This issue will not go away on its own, we need to make the effort to make a difference.

Figures

Figure 1 – ‘Tega Akinola by Senem Ak’, 2021. Available at: <https://culted.com/meet-tega-akinola-the-creative-bringing-new-meaning-to-upcycling/> [Accessed on 8 December 2021]

Figure 2 – ‘Cradle to Cradle® as a basis for circular economy’, 2010. Available at: <https://www.dreso.ch/en-CH/topics/cradle-to-cradler/> [Accessed on 8 December 2021]

Figure 3 – ‘Stella McCartney, Winter 2017 Collection, Ad Campaign Shot in a Scottish Landfill’. Available at: <https://lilianarodrigues-pr.medium.com/stellamccartneysustainability-d6992c001ad2> [Accessed on 8 December 2021]

Figure 4 - ‘Primark, unlike other retailers who have admitted to a presence in the Rana Plaza factory, has contributed to the compensation fund.’, 2014. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/25/primark-label-swaneasa-textile-industry-rana-plaza> [Accessed on 8 December 2021]

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