

Emily Parkins

1900657

Surface Pattern Design

Module: ADAD5004

Julia Lockheart

Three Key Words

Word Count: 2730

Throughout this essay, I will be exploring three key words which interest and intrigue me to research and explore further into my area of design, surface pattern. The three key words I will be exploring are culture, design, and sustainability. Although these words do not have immediate connection, each word is interesting and has a deeper meaning. Each of these words can apply differently and specifically to art and design, and they can also have different meanings to them to everyone. This essay will highlight some of the ways in which culture, design and sustainability can relate to the art and design world and how they tend to work in relation to creative fields. Some of the artists, designers, and theorists I will be looking at throughout this essay are El Anatsui, Stuart Hall, Alastair Fuad-Luke and the cradle to grave and cradle to cradle theory discovered by William McDonough and Michael Braungart.

Culture is “the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society” (Stevenson, 2010). There are over 3000 different cultures across the world today, meaning there is a wide range of different ideas, customs and social behaviours that take place each day. It is fascinating to experience and witness the way in which different cultures go about their daily lives and how they overcome challenges in different ways to how we personally may deal with them. “Culture is a man’s medium; there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture.” (Hall, 1976, p.16) This gives an insight to how much of an influence our own culture has on our lives. Culture impacts daily decisions and actions, sometimes without us even realising. Almost every aspect of the way we think and do things is motivated by our culture and the society claims acceptable. “how people express themselves ... , the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved ... ” (Hall, 1976, p.16) This suggests the way in which we design and create is influenced by the culture we have been brought up with and surrounded by. Design can have an impact on culture also. Design is a creative aspect of an individual and is continuously changing. The more design created in different countries and cultures, the more impact it will have. A sense of modernity and revolutionary ideas can stem from thinking in a designing mindset.



Figure 1 – “Earth’s Skin

El Anatsui is a designer from Ghana. "He transforms simple, everyday materials into striking large-scale installations." (Tate, 2016) In Ghana, the amount of waste and single use materials which are dumped and left to landfill is increasing rapidly. Around "1 million tonnes of plastic waste" (Chasant, 2020) is produced yearly. It is suggested that the generalised culture and society of Ghana is unaware of recycling and reusing materials which is resulting in landfill waste increasing. "In many cases, lack of awareness and/or complacency for proper disposal habits among residents in these communities exacerbates the problem." (Oteng-Ababio, et al, 2013) This shows that a lot of people in the Ghanaian culture have grown up and will continue to bring up their children with a sense of unawareness towards proper disposal habits due to the culture and society they are surrounded by. El Anatsui however, was aware of the waste surrounding his environment and decided that for his design ideas "He has always experimented with space and the unpredictability of form in response to environment" (Binder, 2008). As shown in figure 1, El Anatsui integrates both culture and sustainability into his designs. In the piece 'Earth's Skin', there are many scrap metal pieces from bottle tops used to create the structure of the instalment, however the clear, visual cultural representation behind the piece shines through the "kente cloth" (Cotter, 2013). There is also a background on the reason why Anatsui's pieces are made from recycled bottle tops, and that is because "The bottle caps, for Anatsui, signify a fraught history of trade between Africa and Europe." (Young, 2014). The culture in which Anatsui was brought up in has clearly influenced the way in which his design ideas are processed. As stated previously, culture influences the way we live and make decisions and with Anatsui's cultural background and understanding, he has been able to create successful art instalments with a meaningful, cultural story behind each individual piece. Not only does he focus on his culture and background by using meaningful materials and resources, he is also aware of the lack of understanding in recycling. According to (Hall, 1997, p.2) "culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world", this indicates that people can be influenced by culture in the way they understand society. If we take Anatsui for example, he was aware of the environmental issues surrounding Ghana, he understood that the way in which his culture and society worked, the single-use material consumption was going to increase. Therefore, he started to use the issue, which was pieces of single-use material found from waste to create large art instalments which express the cultural story from his personal life experience. Instead of viewing his culture's attitude towards waste in a negative way, he decided to act upon it and make a public positive change to his culture's view and environment.

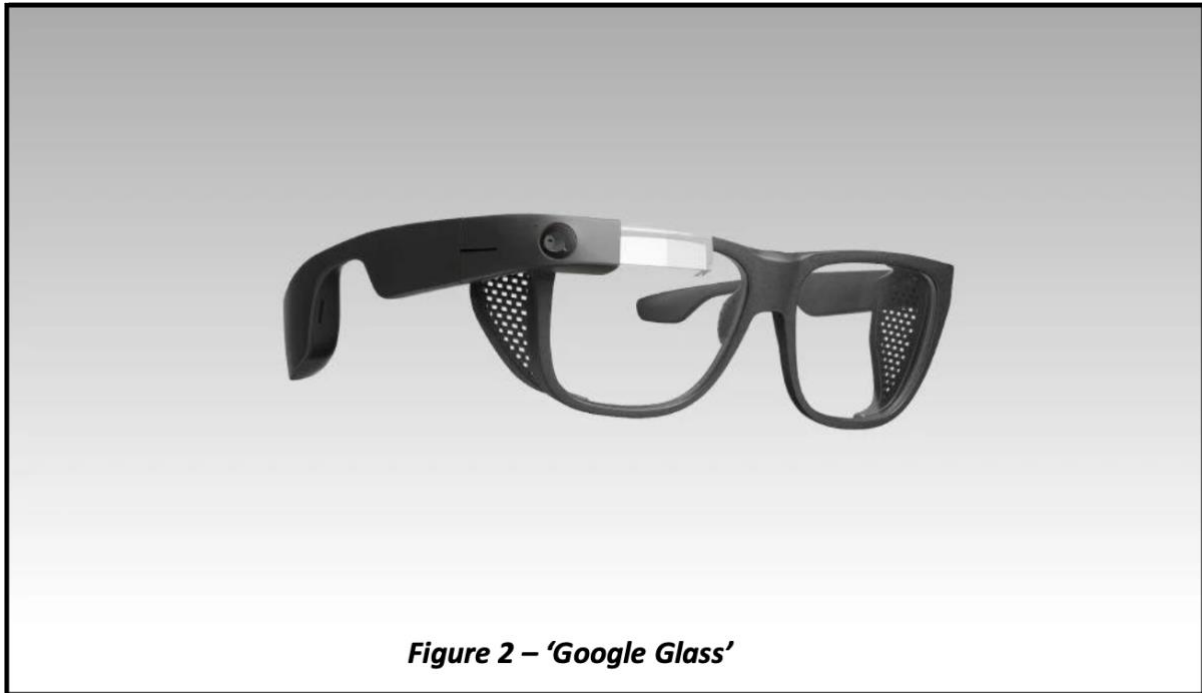


Figure 2 – ‘Google Glass’

According to the Oxford Dictionary of English, design is “purpose or planning that exists behind an action, fact, or object” (Stevenson, 2010). Behind any creation, object or item in the world, there is a design idea in which the creation has generated from. As designers, we all have our own individual, unique and sometimes conflicting design ideas. Ultimately, being a designer is a constant competition of trying to win over the consumers approval. The reason for this is because “If a design fails to deliver satisfaction it fails as a design.” (Gregory, 1966, p.7) When coming up with design ideas the goal we are striving for is ultimately success.

As a designer, creating an item which fails will not give a good reputation on design ideas and can potentially damage future career paths and opportunities. For example, figure 2 shows a design idea created by one of the largest companies in the world, Google. Due to Google being such a successful and large company, it is assumed that their design ideas would immediately be successful due to the large, worldwide audience they have. This, however, is not the case. An online article shared “A fascinating, promising, sometimes brilliant product - but a failure nonetheless.” (Cellan-Jones, 2014) Referring back to the quote from the author Gregory, this shows that due to the design of the Google Glass being unsatisfactory to the consumer, the design idea has immediately failed.

Designers must work in a way which isn’t self-explanatory and obvious. In the book *Designing Ways of Knowing* it is quoted, “design is not a search for the optimum solution to the given problem, but that design is exploratory.” (Cross, 2010, p.32) This suggests that consumers want to see that a designer has come up with creative ways to overcome problems and bring a sense of newness and excitement to a new design. Denys Lasdun (1965) says “Our job is to give the client ... not what he wants, but what he never dreamed he wanted; and when he gets it, he recognizes it as something he wanted all the time.” (Cross, 2010, p.32) Consumers enjoy exploration and being enlightened to a new design idea which they were oblivious to before seeing and quickly realise it is something they could not

live without. This shows a specific motive in which designers potentially use to fuel their ideas and motives behind their designs. Designs need to be futuristic, relevant, and advanced to become popular, well-advertised and high in demand today. If a designer comes up with an idea which is a copy of an existing design or a combination of designs, it is not new and exciting and will not catch the consumers attention. Being a designer means you must be innovative, creative, and original.

A well-known which we are all familiar with, is the mobile phone. Martin Cooper already knew and saw the design idea of the telephone, which was connected to a cord, so he came up with an unimaginable new design idea which was to create a cordless mobile phone. Consumers were astonished by this new design idea. As stated previously, it became a product society didn't realise could exist, but now couldn't live without. A journalist in 1973 had the opportunity to try out the new mobile phone and her reaction was as stated, "she couldn't imagine how this little phone could reach more than halfway around the world, and talk to her mother who actually answered the phone." (Anjarwalla, 2010). This indicates that successful design ideas, like the mobile phone, must be unimaginable in order for the consumer to be fully satisfied and eager to purchase the product designed. The mobile phone was an extremely successful design idea, as we can still prove today. Figure 3 shows the design idea of the first mobile phone and current mobile phone's today.

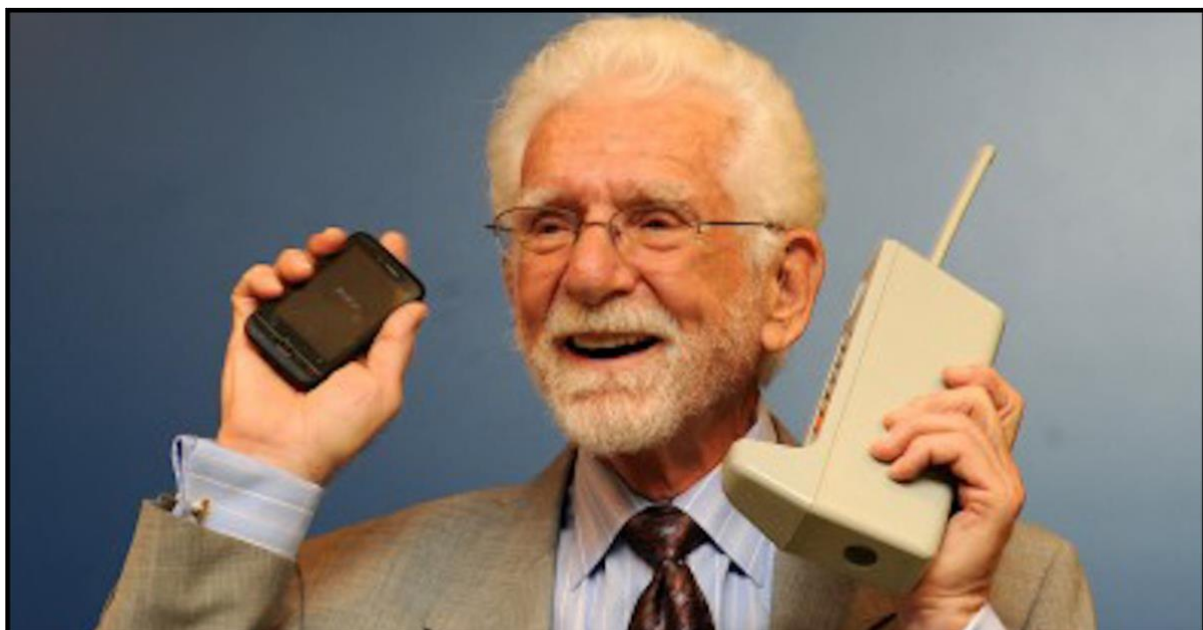


Figure 3 – 'Martin Cooper First Mobile Phone'

This image indicates that design ideas are continuously developing, and design ideas are constantly improving to impress customers. The design idea started out basic and over 40 years on, the design ideas and tweaks are continuing to update and satisfy society today as most people today are mobile phone users.

The definition of the type of sustainability I will be looking into is "the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level." And "avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance" (Stevenson, 2010). The idea of sustainability is to have more of a positive impact on the environment as the amount of damage that has already been caused to the environment today is devastating. Over the years, becoming

more sustainable and environmentally aware is a trait that has been becoming more popular. This is beneficial and shows that individuals want to make a change, it just needs to continue and show development over the coming years to make a real impact in the world.

One of the main issues we face in society today regarding being sustainable is the amount of unsustainable consumption and production there currently is. Due to sustainability and being more economic has started to become more demanding in society, designers have realised this and have had to start thinking about how they can be sustainable in their designs. “The response by designers to the consumption and production agenda is diverse, ranging from discussions about system change ... ‘cradle-to-cradle’, ‘life cycle thinking’ and ‘industrial ecology’ to detailed design for the environment or eco-design approaches” (Alastair Fuad-Luke, 2009, p.67) The reason why the cradle-to-cradle movement is an important part of changing the consumption of goods is because the normal, unsustainable life cycle of single use materials is cradle-to-grave. This means “Resources are extracted, shaped into products, sold, and eventually disposed of in a “grave” of some kind, usually a landfill or incinerator.” (Braungart and McDonough, 2002, pp.15–16). To prevent this from happening so much, being sustainable and consciously making the effort to buy and use economically safe materials and items will prevent as much waste and single use materials ending up in landfill and taking thousands of years to decompose.



Figure 4 ‘Pyramids of Garbage’

An artist and designer who takes sustainability as an important factor in her work is Bahia Shehab. She lived in Cairo for some time and realised the issue the city had with waste and litter. Instead of ignoring this issue and imagining someone else would deal with the problem, she took it into her own hands to create an art project. Shehab did this by combining the waste and popular monuments, the Pyramids of Giza, to make a statement. “Now is the time for us to rethink our legacy on this planet. Are we going to come together to build a sustainable future for all of us — or will our new legacy be pyramids of garbage?” (Khan, 2020). This art project was designed to make people more aware of the damage single use materials is causing to the environment. As you can see in figure 4, the pyramids were a large, structural piece and seem to stand out like an uncomfortable and unsatisfying

object amongst some of the world's most famous and popular monuments. This design movement is so powerful as it is a physical representation of how much landfill waste there is and will continue to be if we as individuals do not start to make a difference. Although this art movement was very large scale and a bold, physical representation, it can inspire us as up and coming artists and designers to focus on making our work and design ideas sustainable and environmentally friendly.

As stated previously, sustainability is becoming more popular and a higher concern in society today. However, although this is a positive realisation, it is also important for society, designers, and companies to understand and research the ways in which they can genuinely make a positive change to the environment. Sometimes the way in which sustainable products and materials are being consumed is still causing a negative impact on the environment. "By failing to understand the actual drivers underpinning the human consumption and waste of goods, sustainable design resigns itself to a peripheral activity, rather than the central pioneer of positive social change that it potentially could be." (Chapman, 2005, p.10) It is easy to label a movement, design, or product as sustainable, however there needs to be true and genuine research behind the idea in order for the sustainable label to be true and have a genuine, positive impact on the world today.

Each key word outlined and researched is broad. Culture is a broad topic and there are so many different cultures around the world. No culture is the same and they constantly change and develop over time. In the art and design world, this can be beneficial as there is always something different to be looking into and creating. Design is also a very wide-ranging area to explore. Each designer in the world is unique and there are different reasons and meanings behind why things are being made. After researching the word design, it is important to understand the ideas behind creating new and successful products. Also designers need to be unique and different to make a design popular and successful, thinking beyond the imagination is a skill that is well respected. Sustainability, as defined in this writing as human development without the care for the planet, is the main existential issue faced by humanity today. We are living in a generation which can make a change. In everyday life it is important to remember that in any situation we may be placed in, or a part of we can put the effort in to make a difference to the rate of sustainability. By making small but impactful changes, we will be able to have a positive impact towards global warming and mass waste.

Culture, design, and sustainability are each so broad and general. However, the further you investigate and research each of the key words, the more links, and relations you can find. Every culture has a different way to be creative, this can link to design as different cultures have different needs and ideas of successful designs so researching these words together can be intriguing. Adding sustainability into the mix of these two key words can also be relevant as understanding the issue of sustainability and how different cultures attempt to use sustainable design can be beneficial to design ideas in our own culture.

A likely area of study for next year will be to research further into sustainability in the textile, art, and design industry. I find sustainability very interesting and beneficial to learn about. I will link aspects of culture and design to my research, but I will mainly focus on sustainability. The research question I am going to look further into is "why is sustainability

such an issue in the textile industry?" I want to explore how sustainability has impacted the environment, how it will impact the world if we don't make a change and how can designers foster a more positive impact on the environment when working with textiles.

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Figures:

Figure 1 – “Earth’s Skin”, 2007. Available at:

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Figure 2 – ‘Google Glass’, 2021. Available at: <https://screenrant.com/google-glass-smart-glasses-what-happened-explained/> [Accessed 5th April 2022]

Figure 3 – ‘Martin Cooper First Mobile Phone’, 2021. Available at:

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Figure 4 – ‘Pyramids of Garbage’, 2020. Available at: <https://fineacts.co/pyramids-of-garbage> [Accessed on 6th April 2022]