

UPCYCLING RECYCLING

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Due to advancements of technology within design the act of designing has become far more complicated. A large part of this complication is the life cycle of a product, in which all necessary parts of a products life need to be catered for. The reason for this is to make us as designers think about the environmental impact created when designing a product. And cater for what effect it will have on its surroundings, from the beginning to the end of its life. When the phenomenon of global warming and the heating of the world became apparent the government pushed for people to recognise where they can save waste, but also to recycle where they can. Through persistent messages from the government and media about pollution and the introduction of a nationwide recycling system, people begun taking notice of the message that was being spread. Since that time humungous leaps have been made in technology, giving designers the versatility and means to design products using newer materials and processes that will create a much smaller carbon footprint. However, the introduction of new technology and the new ideology of how we can preserve our environment has still not given us a direct solution to our problems, making people aware of the situation is the first part of the problem. We then need to make sure people are consistently recycling and using the systems that have been supplied to homes across the UK. Technology has a very positive effect, but can only come from the people who can afford the costs of new tech. If a smaller company decided to look into a move towards mass production they would be looking at current technology rather than newer or future technology, as this would be a more realistic goal. Which means that even if the technology exists, it doesn't necessarily mean that it can or will be utilised. This also does not help with the situation of our waste ending up in landfill, in our oceans and then everywhere inbetween as

litter.



(D'Alessandro2014)

This problem of over usage of materials comes from the designing stage of a lot of commercial products. The products that we encounter on a day to day basis, for example food packaging is mainly designed to be used once and then thrown away or recycled. This dramatically affects how we use the product, it becomes fickle, small and unimportant once it has been used it is of no use to us anymore and thrown away. Therefore, how we distribute and dispose of our waste also becomes the same, overindulging in things we don't need just because we can, is a gross misuse of the resource. Interacting with it for such a short amount of time allows us to forget the effects it has and had on the environment through its production and disposal. Due to this, it makes me question the validity of recycling being the main way that we dispose of our products. As a country we have been recycling successfully since the early 90s, but the material that has caused the most difficulty in recycling is plastic. Plastic is in very high demand as a material and is produced at higher rates due to manufacturing processes being faster and cheaper. This is evident due to the fact that 'by 2015, humans had produced 6.3 billion metric tonnes of plastic.' However, plastics have proved to be the most difficult to dispose of correctly and this is in part, due to how long it takes for plastics to naturally break down. Plastic has been in production since 1950, and takes more than 400 years to degrade, whilst more and more plastic is still being produced and used all of the time with nowhere to go it's no surprise to me that, '79% of plastics have ended up in landfill or sloughing off in the natural environment as litter.' In total only 9% of plastics have been successfully recycled and 12% of plastics incinerated. Due to the volume of plastic being produced we simply can't keep up with this level of wastage and if production continues in the same way that it is going now, by 2050 there is potential for us to have created 12 billion metric tons of plastic waste. 'Thanks to its top-notch waste management

structure, the Netherlands is able to recycle no less than 64% of its waste – and most of the re-mainder is incinerated to generate electricity. As a result, only a small percentage ends up in landfill. In the realm of recycling this is country which is practically unique.’ The Netherlands has created a system in which waste is eliminated, using waste as a source of power rather than a source of a problem. The system that they introduced in 1994 is a system that should be sought after. As a country that has stopped importing waste, the issue of waste build up will come tall, fast and unstoppable with our current systems not being adapted. In my opinion this system is a very utilitarian approach, all waste has a purpose and a very small amount of waste goes untouched. This system was introduced very early compared to many other countries including ours, the Netherlands were able to foresee the ‘big picture.’ It made for a better system from the beginning. This system allowed the people of the Netherlands to utilise their waste from when recycling was implemented rather than when the damage had already been done. I feel that our government should seek the assistance of another country to create a new recycling system. Creating a system that utilises our waste for something, similarly to how the Netherlands system doesn’t let the any waste go to waste. The reason our system doesn’t work is due to a lack of purpose for our waste, if we were able to make use of our waste then we would have more of a chance of reducing how much we over indulge. With this problem looming the Scottish government have invented a system in which waste that is sent to be sorted, shredded, melted and re-formed in to a pellet for re using in mass production. This being a system to reduce the amount of non-renewable resources being used as oil-based materials will soon run out. This system is successful in terms of finding a way to deal with overconsumption, it offers manufacturers the opportunity to buy recycled material rather than sourcing more materials, but it still doesn’t offer all of the answers. This process of recycling is far more efficient than standard recycling, using far less core resources whilst creating less pollution due to reduction in manufactured products. However, to shred, wash, melt and re pellet these plastics is a considerably big operation and will still heavily involve the usage of renewable resources and will still be contributing to the pollution of the environment. Up cycling as a process is a way to create more from less by cutting out the middle man. The process of up cycling allows the consumer to repurpose money that they have invested, there is

no need for any new material to be created or wasted as we are constantly surrounded by products, that can be manipulated and repurposed to our benefit. Upcycling products is a very cheap, efficient and imaginative way to reuse a product that is ready to be discarded. As there is no transportation, re-fabrication or redistribution of products being remade from the upcycled materials, the amount of harmful pollutants being produced are significantly reduced, this in turn reduces the number of products that need to be produced and the number of products being bought. Upcycling is a cycle that works in a completely different way to recycling, offering the task of preservation of the environment to anyone in society that feels they can make a difference. Recycling is a cycle that fundamentally cannot offer complete preservation for the environment as large scale production is still necessary at each step of the process for it to work adequately. Upcycling is a process in which it is accessible to everyone, in my opinion it is also about redefining a product to give it new meaning, fulfilling a purpose for the foreseeable future. Creating a product that is durable and functional, and completely tailored to the viewers imagination. Showing what they see in the product and how they think it could be repurposed. Recycling and upcycling offer two very different methods of a very similar process. Recycling being a process that has been interpreted very practically in many different ways by different countries and has vast media coverage. This coverage helps people to understand the importance of recycling and the best ways to contribute to it. Upcycling is slightly more complex as it is a process in which there are no guidelines. Mainstream media coverage and public announcements would greatly increase the spread of knowledge and importance of refusing, reusing and recycling. I feel that it us underutilised as a credible way of reducing waste. Creating another process of recycling that could work alongside recycling would give our landfill sites and surrounding environments a relief in pressure. This creates an opportunity for change in our recycling process allowing us to finesse the methods we use.

To try to counter the problems that we are having with recycling, I believe that we should be looking at how other countries have set up their systems. Looking at how they utilise or dispose of waste and how we might do the same. It seems that we are a country that is very far behind in this area. However, I also think that we as a society are equally to blame for these problems, the amount we indulge in luxuries we don’t need is too high, which then also

leads to a very large amount of waste being discarded. The system that is in place for the moment is not up to standard and cannot cope with the volume that is being produced, however, we as a nation should be very conscious of the fact that we indulge in so much that we have been able to break a system of that scale fairly easily.

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