

On Environment & Things



Image Credits: Kirsten Korosec

I was struck by the section in this week's reading about Jennifer Price and her view that "...the connections to nature are highly mediated." (Fallan 2017: 104) Further to that statement, the work of William Rollins and his reflections on the SUV. Coming from the United States, I can see these views clearly... now. The US has such an extreme materialistic culture that you have to try very hard to separate need from want and what you might think of as "sustainable" from marketing "ideology" as Rollins says. (Fallan 2017: 105)

For the past two years I have been "eyeing" Rivian, an all-electric truck company. Built in Detroit Michigan, Rivian trucks have a clientele seeking adventure in an environmentally friendly way. At face value this seems pretty great. The trucks are beautiful (to me) and have a ruggedness and capability exceeding anything currently on the market. I feel like purchasing a Rivian is making a statement that I care about the environment and wish to perpetuate a move away from fossil fuels. While this is true, stepping outside of my

American consumer mentality forces me to view this product and need more critically.

The paradox of the SUV as stated by Rollins is not solved by the move to electric. This may solve the issue of emissions but does little to account for the environmental impact of the Lithium mining for the batteries or the energy consumption from a plant generating power from natural gas or worse, coal.

One facet of the American consumer mentality that is prevalent across industries is the idea that behavior is a constant and thus special products are required to aid whatever behavior I exhibit. In the case of the SUV the behavior is that I want to drive a large vehicle with room for all of the items that are needed for the many activities I associate with my personality. I also want to have the ability to drive to remote areas and really be "a part of nature". (Fallan 2017: 105) The paradox Rollins mentioned is quite funny and surprising that such a simple statement can leave such an impression. The issue is that we're conditioned to never ask whether or not we *need* to carry so much cargo or be able to drive off-road, wherever we feel like going.

In terms of behavior modification for more conscious consumerism, getting the public to determine *need* from *want* would be great first step. I still want a Rivian, but I also want to be sure that I am paying adequate attention to whether or not the need carries adequate weight in the decision making process. Until then I hope to assess my own behaviors against Price and Rollins' ideas on the intersection of the environment and things.

Fallan, Kjetil, Jørgensen, Finn Arne. (2017) 'Environmental Histories of Design: Towards a New Research Agenda'. *Journal of Design History*, 30 (2), 103-121

On an Introduction



“On Fire” 2013 KC
Green

Hi there –

I’m Brandon from the United States and like many people I find myself thinking about this comic more and more. The amusing (tragic, depressing, etc) thing is, this feeling can relate to different aspects of modern society, the environment, places of work, governments, or all-around daily life. While this is a humorous take, meant to be a logo or visual representation of our collective dread, I discovered that I was thinking about this comic more and more; like I was on some kind of ride to a place I didn’t want to go. It was this realization that snapped me out of my post-pandemic stupor and got me to begin evaluating the path my life (and career) were on.

Living and working in New York City is more than just going about your daily life in a set location. The City impacts everything you do; it informs how you structure your day and it can simultaneously energize you and wear you out. It can

seem a bit abusive at times but The City never hides its true self and it's an attribute that I personally love because you always know where you stand.

The post-pandemic years saw people and money come flowing back to New York City like a dam had burst. It was easy to get carried away with this new influx of "energy" and the demand for products and services reached an all-time high. A hard thing to make sense of is watching catastrophic events unfold around the world while you're debating the merits of Calcutta Gold marble – it's beautiful but it's not saving lives. Luckily for me, enough of these conversations had that "awakening" effect that I mentioned in the first paragraph and I found myself actively planning the path for the second half of my career.

I love to fabricate and I believe it goes hand-in-hand with being a good designer. I don't exactly know if my post-university career will involve fabrication or if it will be resigned to hobby status but I do know that I want to make sustainability a tenet of my practice. Further to fabrication, I find materials and bio-driven new materials really fascinating. While "zero waste", recycled, up-cycled, etc are all worthy goals, for me, environmental design is about using nature as a jumping off point. In my perfect future, there would be no waste or need for recycling as the organic nature of my designs would decompose at the end of their life-cycle.

This is my vision for an ideal future in the abstract but I did once splice an orchid with a small LED and managed to keep the orchid alive for some time so perhaps it's possible. Whatever path I move toward I know sustainability will be a driving force and hopefully I'll have a chance to make something in this world "fine".