

On a conclusion...

Overall I really enjoyed this course. I felt like my ideas were challenged and I came out of it with a different, but more importantly, a better way of thinking about and practicing design. For the final blog post I wanted to look at stakeholders and responsibility as this theme came up more than once throughout the semester.

While the final debate topic was different, the debate framing what role/responsibility designers have in this current day and age felt similar to debate 1 and it affected our argument as the “against” side. As established in debate 1, designers have a diminished ability to affect change within a capitalistic system. This is not always the case but I think that those examples could be classified as outliers and speak more to the fluidity of agency than a move toward real change in the system. The final debate argument phrased the topic as future humans looking back favorably upon “us” as designers which effectively puts the onus back onto a group that was demonstrated early on to not have much control over the system. I think my teammate made an argument tangentially related to this saying that future humans will condemn the policies and institutions as well as designers but this was a difficult position to defend. It is most likely that future generations will condemn this and previous generations as whole with little distinction between who was doing what. I would be satisfied with people looking back favorably on the fact that designers did their best to not exacerbate the current crisis and to push for real change when they could.

In preparing my debate points I was browsing the COP28 website and although the location was a bit incongruous, they mentioned a gathering of people from politicians to scientists. Researching from the perspective of a designer I found that odd that our profession wasn't mentioned as an integral part of the conference. A quick scan of the Advisory

Committee reveals a solid lineup of politicians and business people but very few design industry professionals. My thought on our profession metaphorically is that we act as a bridge between scientists and policy makers. Designers are the only ones who can enact or make real the policies that are created and without us, they will definitely fail.



cartoonsbyjosh.com

I appreciated the debate topics as they did broaden my perspective on design as a whole. In the US design disciplines are siloed and interdisciplinary work is viewed skeptically so thinking about problems from the perspective of a furniture designer isn't terribly helpful until you realize that all design operates from a shared foundation of principles that can be applied to various areas. When dealing with a crisis on the scale of climate change, there needs to be a vast collaboration of shared expertise from across all design fields. Developing a worldwide accepted approach to protect the "sustainability of ecosystems" is an all-hands task (Stoermer and Crutzen 2000, 18). A 2010 report from the UK Design Council called for more education in this area in order to begin building this "worldwide consensus" and more locally the multidisciplinary element is why I wanted to be apart of D4C. Hopefully future generations of humans will understand the responsibilities of the key stakeholders and be kind enough to separate those doing the work from those

perpetuating the cycle.

Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer: "The 'Anthropocene'",
in: *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (May 2000): 17-18.

On social bite & design...

On a recent walk through St Andrews Square in New Town I happened across Social Bite, a homeless outreach charity. I remembered them from our dLab1 project regarding homelessness but only knew about their coffee shop and donation arm. However, today I learned about their "Recovery Village", which has one location in Edinburgh and a new one planned for Dundee. What was so interesting was that they had one of the actual accommodation pods in St Andrews Square for the public to view.

While showing the proposed home is in fact an exciting way to garner public support, I was curious to know more about the infrastructure of support that the residents could expect. The Social Bite website has a good explanation of the services they will provide and great renderings of the village, highlighting the social component that is so crucial in recovery. They call the residences "modular homes", with 15 of these units gathered around a central community hub with pathways connecting the homes to give the setup a real community feel.



Courtesy of Social Bite

<https://www.social-bite.co.uk/what-we-do/dundee-village/>



Courtesy of Social Bite

<https://www.social-bite.co.uk/what-we-do/dundee-village/>

Being inside the model unit was a pleasant experience. The finishes were sturdy and sustainable, and the details were well considered. The website talks about providing a shelter with dignity and you can really feel that when you're in the

space. It appeared the structure would meet the new Passivhaus Equivalent Standards Scotland has pledged to adopt (www.gov.scot, n.d.) but the volunteers were not sure and my research could find anything definitive. That aside, the interior was warm, the natural light was great and it felt cozy without feeling cramped.

I know this is an environmental design course but with social design being such a heavy influence this semester I was curious to see if this project would be considered "social design". In my summative assignment 1 for dLab1 we were asked the question, "what is social design?" My argument was for three criteria to be applied to any given project, beginning with Armstrong et al's (2014) criteria, *modus operandi* and *aim*. I have been fascinated by this idea of removing the designer as expert (Design, 2019) for a truly collaborative effort so my argument was to include this as the third criteria for defining social design. In the few project I have analyzed with my "criteria" I have found that most do not satisfy all three, with most stumbling over the designer as expert in the process. The reason I think this is important is that it confirms the process to be truly social since the *modus operandi* and *aim* cannot eliminate the potential self-interest of the designer. I pleasantly surprised to find that this rehabilitation village did in fact reflect all three criteria when analyzed. Of course the goal of the project is social, as well as how they went about instituting it but most crucially, they displayed a truly collaborative spirit by including not only NHS workers in the process but also current and former homeless persons. This does not mean the project or process is perfect but I do think that employing true social design gives it its best chance for success.

Armstrong, L., Bailey, J., Julier, G. and Kimbell, L. (2014). Social Design Futures: HEI Research and the AHRC. *University of Brighton*. [online] Available at: <http://mappingsocialdesign.org>.

Design, D.I.B. (2019). *Designing For and With Society*. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/grandstudio/designing-for-and-with-society-b644f4cd66e4>.

www.gov.scot. (n.d.). *Energy Standards Review – Scottish Passivhaus Equivalent: Working Group*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/groups/energy-standards-review-scottish-passivhaus-equivalent-working-group/>.

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On tasting...

One element of Scottish culture that I am consistently surprised by is the food. From discussions I've had with Scots, I know this is a relatively new trend and that historically there was not a lot of attention given to innovation in the cuisine. However, as long as I've been visiting Scotland I have had many memorable meals at restaurants that I continue to patronize as a resident – with more being added frequently to my “must try” list. There are many different types of restaurants that fit this bill but the ones that I am going to focus on here are the ones that specialize in “tasting menus”. These menus are updated periodically in order to showcase meat and vegetables that are most in season and are delivered to the patron in courses. It is not uncommon for a meal to last hours as each dish is brought out and presented by the servers. Course portions can be small or even bite-sized, but quantity is not the point here. The talent of the chef is on display and the way they play with ingredients and combinations in new and innovative ways is why I visit these places.



Courtesy of
Timberyard



Courtesy of
Timberyard

As the semester comes to an end, we're looking at the Slow Food movement and I realized that these restaurants are practicing this to a high degree. A true collaboration between chef and producer is taking place of which I am reaping the benefits of their talents. In establishments like Timberyard, Heron, and Lyla, a shift to highlighting not only the ingredients but also the producers and the farmers is indicative of this movement (Petrini 2003, 51). In her piece titled *Speed*, Carolyn Strauss argues that the 'Slow paradigm' (of which slow food is a part) is not about speed but instead

allows designers a more “robust repertoire” to engage with richness and complexity (Fletcher et al 2016). Even applying that description on a surface level to an experience at any of the aforementioned places, I can recall the subtleties in the components of the dishes. Layers and complexities of flavor are presented alongside details of where the ingredients were sourced and produced. There is also a strong connection to Vibrancy of Matter here as well in the basic sense that acknowledgment of the ingredients, the special attention paid, not only by the chef but also myself, highlights them in a way that is greater than parts of a whole.

On the social side I know that my ability to connect these types of restaurants to the Slow food movement comes from a place of privilege. Having only begun reading about this movement I might argue that even being able to think about food in this way is privileged. I would be interested to research more on how this might work from the perspective of food insecure people.

Petrini, C. (2004). *Slow food : the case for taste*. New York ; Chichester: Columbia University Press.

Fletcher, K. and Tham, M. (2016). *Routledge handbook of sustainability and fashion*. London New York, Ny Routledge.

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On vibrancy, religion, &

economics

This week I am reflecting on our discussion from reading group, specifically my question about whether or not humans provide matter with agency by being aware. Working through the answer to that question, I quite liked the idea that matter demands our attention and it led me to think more about the question our group did not get a chance to discuss regarding vital materialism and its tension with religion. Because we did not get a chance to talk about this, the following are my thoughts as it relates to religion and environmentalism.

First, looking back at the passages from *Vibrant Matter*, the very rough main point I think Jane Bennet makes is that this idea of vibrancy and agency of matter through assemblages allows one to look at the world from a different perspective. A deeper, more thoughtful perspective, which should remove the person from the center of the observation and instill more empathy for all life and matter. One element of analyzing this work that I cannot quite figure out is who the audience is, but I can assuredly say that it is not religious folks en masse. While the question from our reading group precipitated my thoughts on the soul/religion, it was her question, "...what is the relationship between environmental protection and capitalist markets..." that began to connect economic and religious threads (Bennet 2010, 111).

As mentioned before, I come from a very capitalistic society and one where all aspect of American "values" are heavily tied to religion. As early as *Manifest Destiny*, religion has been the justification of our (white people) exploitation of non-white people. Bringing these ideas into the modern era and speaking as someone raised in a fundamentalist christian household, America's prosperity is tied to our relationship with God. This is completely nuts but it did make me wonder a while back why, if our economic prosperity is tied to God and

he gave people the earth, would we want to continue our destructive ways. Wouldn't God be upset with us for destroying the planet and thus punish us? Christians are notorious for not believing in most science but climate change is one that they actively rail against. So I've questioned this for a while because I thought if I could figure it out, maybe there would be an "in" for an argument for environmental stewardship within a religious framework that might spur them to action. This long-standing question was answered a couple of years ago after hearing a religious leader's thoughts on climate change and his justification for not taking action based on "dominion" in Genesis 1:26-28.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Basically, God gave man dominion over the animals and the earth so he can do whatever he wants, including destroying the planet. The real issue is that the Bible can be interpreted in so many ways but the most common interpretation is one that confirms the reader's bias. Combine that with their belief that there is an afterlife and there is absolutely no motivation for action. While Bennet's work is full of interesting ideas that I will utilize, the idea that matter can have agency, perhaps even a soul, will consistently be at odds with religion's views on the subject. My worry is that environmental stewardship requires buy-in from the United States of which the religious faction make up a large part. While we apply Bennet's theories, a large population of people will continue to hinder progress until an new argument can be made which supersedes their interpretation. While this seems impossible, I am still hoping to uncover one.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: a Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

On stakeholders...

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society.”

-Karl Marx, Communist Manifesto

Personally I lean socialist and draw the line at communism. For reasons I will expand on later, communism has always had a negative connotation in the US but the irony is that watching the attempted regulation of our hyper-capitalist society by the government is the exact reason why I would never trust a communist system. Over the past few weeks I have begun to think more about globalization and economies of scale as it pertains to our current environmental crisis. More precisely I have begun to see the emergence of two distinct stakeholder groups and their roles in globalization and “progress”.

First, this idea was brought into focus after this week’s debate on enforcing the circular economy. The role of enforcer and specifically who that might be was a point made to address the ambiguity of our current situation. Maybe better described as the incongruity of environmental policy within the framework of globalization. Yesterday I wrote a wholly despondent draft post and sat with it overnight to think through my pessimism. It was along the lines of a mass con being perpetrated by “capitalists” on the rest of the population, manifesting in the paper straw and sorting plastic movements while billionaires shoot rockets off at their leisure. Revising this post today in a more optimistic and pragmatic head space, I still believe there is a tension

between the population at large and the billionaire class, but instead of spiraling into an apocalyptic scenario, I am resolved to look more closely at this gap. The outcome of this will in fact be a question but first I need to expand on the idea of enforcement and why the irony I referenced earlier exists.

Using my home political system as basis for this observation, I only need to look back to the previous administration to explain the irony. In terms of enforcement, I did wonder *who* would enforce and the logical answer is the government. This prompted a follow up question of how effective is the government at enforcement? From 2016-2020, 114 EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) policies were dismantled (Popovich, Albeck-Ripka and Pierre-Louis, 2020). The reversal of these policies was not done for any other reason except to benefit the oil industry. This is one of many examples but how can one trust a government to enforce systems when we watch them consistently work within their own self-interests? This is also the reason I would distrust a communist government – at the end of the day power anywhere but in the people's hands is misplaced. To be clear not all governments fall into this trap as easily but I am more concerned with governments and markets like the US where their influence and impact on a global scale is greater than in most other countries. The question I have been asking myself over the past weeks is how can environmental stewardship surpass profit has the main driver of markets? I'm not sure that it can so then the question becomes how can the two become symbiotic? Ideally, we would be able to find a way to remove their perceived mutual exclusivity in order to have each driver exert a proportioned pressure on the markets. Until then, I would expect to see more profit over planet governing, especially by one particular political party...

Popovich, N., Albeck-Ripka, L. and Pierre-Louis, K. (2020). The Trump Administration Is Reversing Nearly 100 Environmental

Rules. Here's the Full List. *The New York Times*. [online] 16 Oct. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks-list.html>. [Accessed 3 Nov].

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On an annotated bibliography...

The following annotated bibliography deals with 3D Printing, from its polymers to its future in the manufacturing industry.

As a continuation to our reading of *Cradle to Cradle*, 3D printing with the correct polymers can result in a more ideal product lifecycle. The advancement of biopolymers and the hyperlocal manufacturing offered by the additive making process allow designers to reduce manufacturing's footprint.

This follows my post from last week, notably the products made by Batch.Works.

Gary Chinga Carrasco (2019). *Novel Biocomposite Engineering and Bio-Applications*. [online] MDPI. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/books978-3-0365-1737-7>.

This book is a collection of articles by various researchers and details advances in 3D printing nanotechnology as it relates to the biomedical field. More examples are provided on grafts and prothesis with many authors delving into the chemical compositions of the inks they are researching for these procedures. These articles are a very in-depth and require a higher knowledge of medicine and chemical engineering but even with a base understanding, the exciting possibilities are apparent.

Izdebska-Podsiadły, J. (2022). *Polymers for 3D Printing*.

William Andrew.

The author introduces 3D printing, from the basics to the more advanced. While the other books detail processes and procedures associated with additive manufacturing, this book differs in that it delves into more depth with the polymers used in the printing. Written by a collection of scientists and professors, each contributing to their field of study. Of particular note is chapter 18 on polymer biomaterials which could allow for the printing of artificial skin to act as wound treatment. This chapter details not only the applications, but also the requirements of the polymers and the properties necessary for printing of this complexity. □

Ralf Anderhofstadt and Disselkamp, M. (2023). *Disruptive 3D Printing*. [online] Carl Hanser Verlag GmbH Co KG. Available at:

<https://app.knovel.com/hotlink/toc/id:kpDDP00001/disruptive-3d-printing/disruptive-3d-printing>.

□ *This book covers two sides of the additive manufacturing industry, written by a business coach and the Head of Additive Manufacturing for Daimler trucks. The first is a very top down introduction to 3D printing detailing the technical aspects involved in additive manufacturing (vs more common subtractive). Multiple interview segments with various industry CEO's discuss the advantages of this type of manufacturing. Different materials are also discussed at length in this first chapter. The second part looks at industry disruptions as a consequence of using 3D printing. Due to its unique business model, logistics and warehousing among others risk losing their place in the business status quo as consumers become "prosumers", a term used to describe a customer more involved in the product manufacturing process. The authors believe in 3D printing's ability to seriously change the way products are made and role in which consumers will play in their manufacturing. It is written to introduce additive manufacturing and to predict the disruption to the*

supply chain to come if more companies choose to employ this business model.

Sheng, R. (2022). *3D Printing*. [online] Woodhead Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/C2021-0-02154-4>.

While still a large proponent of 3D printing, this book is less about the disruption to existing industries and more about introducing the various industries that currently utilize 3D printing. Written by an engineer with 30 years of experience at companies like Boeing and GE, the goal is to help fellow engineers possess the skills necessary to apply existing additive manufacturing techniques to their industries. 18 different industries are profiled – from fashion to aerospace. The challenges of 3D printing are also discussed.

On Contribution

Upon receiving knighthood, Terry Pratchett maintained that his greatest service to literature was to avoid writing any (Sir Terry Pratchett, 2023). On leaving reading group this week I was thinking a lot about that comment because after discussing *Cradle to Cradle* (Braungart and McDonough, 2009), as a product designer discussing consumerism, I can't help but think my greatest service is to avoid producing anything.

I've had a long enough career in the design industry to come up against the term "value engineering" (VE) more than I care to remember. If this term is unfamiliar, it is best described as the whittling away of any part of a design that made said design interesting or unique. This is usually done to conform to a client's shrinking and shifting budget but it can also happen when designer's lose the will to fight for elements of

a design they truly believe in. I have been guilty of this in the past.

It just so happened that I caught Dr. Harkness (Rachel) as I was leaving the building and we had a quick chat about this dilemma. Her take was that “de-growth” has to be explored and implemented in certain areas but that people need products so from a designer’s perspective it’s more about being judicious with what you’re putting into the world. This is a great place to start and for me that means when faced with VE, one has to be firm and ready to avoid producing anything.

Further to this, I was able to catch two very good talks regarding products and materials through the Design for Planet Festival this week. The first was an introduction to Batch.Works, a company using on demand fabrication techniques via 3D printing. Partnering with Morrama industrial design, Batch.Works are developing repairable



Image by Batch.Works

headphones for kids. Made from agricultural feed plastic, each part will have an identifier so that it can be replaced and utilizes biomaterial circuit boards that dissolve in hot water. The second talk featured a panel of companies using natural materials but the participant that stood out was Smile Plastics. 100% post consumer plastics in sheet form that can be fabricated using traditional wood working tools. The panels made from yogurt cups still have bits of foil present,

which I found interesting. They also allow designers and fabricators the ability to send scrap pieces back to the company for processing into new sheets.



Image by Smile
Plastics



Image by Smile
Plastics

It was a week of reflection and motivation but I am really enjoying the challenges to my field and my preconceived notions about how things should be done. It's why I'm studying and I'm looking forward to the challenges to come.

Braungart, M. and McDonough, W. (2009). *Cradle to Cradle : Remaking the Way We Make Things*. London Vintage.

Sir Terry Pratchett. (2023). *About Sir Terry*. [online] Available at: <https://www.terrypratchettbooks.com/about-sir-terry/> [Accessed 20 Oct. 2023].

Smile Plastics. (n.d.). *Smile Plastics – Recycled Plastic Materials Design*. [online] Available at: <https://smile-plastics.com>.

www.batch.works. (n.d.). *Batch.Works*. [online] Available at: https://www.batch.works/article?article_id=4fed2a8c-1cab-4a1d-9a88-7d5a2cd8a209 [Accessed 20 Oct. 2023].

On Complicity & Fashion

I left Wednesday's debate feeling slightly conflicted. My team was meant to argue in favor of the proposal, *have designers come to terms with their impact on the environment...* What I found interesting about the process of preparing my arguments was that I actually agreed (quite strongly) with the opposition. While researching I uncovered both appalling and hopeful practices, but what I really enjoyed was the exposure to some really fascinating ideas and products stemming from designers' actions regarding the environment.



Calum Heath / NY Times

Looking at the fashion industry seemed like a good place to start finding deplorable standards, practices, and designers shirking their responsibilities. Beginning with an opinion piece in the New York Times about “fast-fashion”, I learned that in this new business model 66% of textiles end up in a landfill while another 19% are destroyed at the end of their lifecycle. (Greenley 2022). While I was able to find loads of information on damaging areas of the business, no one person was named as the culprit. I continued to find more damning statistics regarding emissions, with 10% of global emissions being released by the fashion industry. (news.cgtn.com) But again, no mention of a name or a single person (or group) to blame. The more I researched the more I began to see the real culprit is the Capitalist machine driving commerce at the expense of the planet and people.

The hopeful part of my research came from the innumerable people doing innovative things on the small and large scale. One of my opposing classmates mentioned designer Stella McCartney who embraces all aspects of environmental stewardship – from biodegradable material made from banana plants to forest-friendly viscose. (McCartney 2023) Each area of focus is clearly stated on the website with substantial descriptions devoted to evidencing that this is not a marketing ploy. Another company that I thought of and

personally support is Edinburgh-based Meander Apparel. Their business is built around sustainability, ethics, and lifecycle, (Meander 2023) but while their clothing is quality, they don't charge an arm and a leg for pieces.



Stella McCartney /
stellamccartney.com



Stella McCartney /
stellamccartney.com

While it's comforting to know that designers all over the world seem to understand their role in perpetuating eco driven products, I am still concerned by the vast corporations churning out junk. I know we will be discussing capital and labor's role in the economy in the next couple of weeks but

for now, my thought is this: In a corporation, designers could be viewed as one part of a machine. The real power lies with the informed consumer so it is highly likely that they will need to come to terms with their complicity in order for large companies to change their course.

□Greenley, R. (2022). Opinion | This Is the Reality of America's Fast-Fashion Addiction. *The New York Times*. [online] 25 Nov. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/25/opinion/warehouse-fast-fashion-return.html#:~:text=When%20we%20buy%20fast%20fashion> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2023].

McCartney, S. (2023). *Sustainability*. [online] www.stellamccartney.com. Available at: <https://www.stellamccartney.com/gb/en/sustainability/sustainability.html>.

MeanderApparel (n.d.). *Buy Sustainable Outdoor lifestyle Clothing Online | Meander Apparel*. [online] MeanderApparel. Available at: <https://meanderapparel.com> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2023].

news.cgtn.com. (n.d.). *Haute couture in the midst of a climate crisis: Does the fashion world care?* [online] Available at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-02-22/Fashion-vs-climate-Are-luxury-brands-doing-enough-0ivPbLBVHa/index.html#:~:text=Even%20where%20companies%20are%20implementing> [Accessed 12 Oct. 2023].

On Patterns & Entanglements



Westend61 / Getty Images

Apophenia (coined by Klaus Conrad in 1958), and more recently Patternicity (coined by Michael Shermer in 2008), are defined as the inclination to find patterns in seemingly unrelated information, object, or things as illustrated in the top image. In an article in *Scientific American*, Shermer argues that while some scientists dismiss patternicity as an error in cognition, he believes that:

Our brains are belief engines: evolved pattern-recognition machines that connect dots and create meaning out of the patterns that we think we see in nature. (Shermer 2008)

Upon reading the excerpt from *Patterned Ground*, I kept thinking that patternicity helps to explain the need of historical figures like John Dee to decipher and order *the true nature of things*. (Harrison 2004: 21) I did find it amusing that many of these figures began this work on the basis of Divine Creation. Religion's impact on science, or rather its hindrance of progress, is widely seen throughout history. I could argue that in this single instance, belief in a higher power prompted a desire to "decipher God's playbook" and led to the scientific grounding and the entanglements of their findings.

Entanglements is a term being woven throughout all of my classes in these early weeks. In a very “meta” way I am employing patternicity to find commonalities in seemingly different fields of design – or at least areas over overlap. Our “treasure hunt” workshop this week began with a sheet of different animate and inanimate items, but what I found most interesting was that many of these items could be connected when the classification was defined in a broader way. For example, an image I took of a pub satisfied the requirement of a pub. But because of the location in which I took the picture, I was able to identify, an island, radio, viruses, boundaries, and more if I diffused the definition of the categories.



Entanglement Treasure Hunt by LeNoir

Finally, I think it would be simple to take these ideas of order and classification into the modern age and wonder why then are so many people unconvinced of our connections and entanglements with nature. I find the notion of entanglements comforting and connected to empathy which I believe is crucial in changing behaviours. It would seem that an understanding of how we and nature are intertwined would cause a person to see from a perspective outside of their own. However as Harrison

states, pattern recognition is a long way from explanation (Harrison 2004: 31) and paraphrasing Mead, the order we place upon the world may not be the way the world is ordered. (Harrison 2004: 27) I am beginning to see the role of a designer, at a base level, is to interpret/explain connections and entanglements in order to foster consensus action to address modern problems.

Harrison, S. (Stephan), Steve Pile, and N. J. Thrift, eds. 2004. *Patterned Ground : Entanglements of Nature and Culture*. London: Reaktion Books.

Shermer, M. (2008). *Patternicity: Finding Meaningful Patterns in Meaningless Noise*. [online] Scientific American . Available at:
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/patternicity-finding-meaningful-patterns/> [Accessed 6 Oct. 2023].

□

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