

Week 2 – Language and Dualism

This week's lecture highlights the historical tendency in Western thought to not only dichotomize the mind and body but also to establish a clear divide between 'Culture' and the remote concept of 'Nature.' This single notion ignites deep discussions around the power of language for division. Tim Ingold introduces the concept of 'Nature' with a capital N, highlighting its nuanced connotations compared to the environment. It's imperative to acknowledge the Western perspective and break free from the dualistic thinking we have imposed upon our culture. Furthermore, we can observe other dualisms such as male and female, emotional and rational. A thought-provoking quote from Philippe Descola and Gisli Palsson's work in 2013 [1996] emphasizes the idea that "Nature is a social construct, and conceptualizations of the environment are shaped by ever-changing historical contexts and cultural specificities."

The Anthropocene, marking an era of significant human impact on the environment, prompts scholars in design and environmental history to assess design's role in shaping environmental narratives, advocate for design activism in addressing environmental challenges, recognize the influence of nonhuman agents, and emphasize narratives of care and responsibility in an ever-changing world. The three case studies mentioned by Fallan and Jorgensen to demonstrate the renewal of understanding in environmental histories of design are: The Pink Plastic Flamingo, The SUV, and The Hoover Dam.



Zebra constrained in a building. Photo by Christina Yang.

In my discussion group, I've noticed the importance of the narrative being promoted, particularly how companies often shift the burden of responsibility onto consumers despite holding the greatest power for impactful change. Additionally, the distinction between genuine environmental efforts and greenwashing as a capitalist marketing tool has become evident. My discipline in Graphic Design encompasses packaging design which is essential to put environmental considerations at the forefront. I believe that making environmentally friendly choices more convenient and enhancing the user experience can encourage more people to opt for eco-friendly

alternatives. For example, replacing paper straws with durable options like wheat or corn stalk straws can improve user satisfaction and reduce environmental impact. Price's work on the Pink Plastic Flamingo suggests that nature can be commodified and reduced to a kitschy symbol, highlighting how consumer culture shapes our perception of the natural world. Rollins' study of the SUV reveals that nature is often manipulated to fit human desires and preferences, emphasizing the anthropocentric view that nature should serve human convenience, even at the expense of environmental concerns. Both works illustrate how human interactions with nature are deeply influenced by consumerism and societal values, prompting us to reevaluate what we view as the norm.

Reference list

Fallan, K. & Jørgensen, F.A. (2017) Environmental Histories of Design: Towards a New Research Agenda. *Journal of Design History*. 30 (2), 103–121. doi:10.1093/jdh/epx017.

Harkness, H. (2023) Theme 1_Lecture 1A [PDF], Experience and the Environment: *Design and the Senses, Making and Consuming*. University of Edinburgh.

Week 1 – Introduction

Greetings! Sending you a warm welcome as this marks the beginning of a journey filled with enriching learning and discoveries. My name is Christina Yang, my pronouns are

She/Her/Hers. I am a visiting student majoring in Graphic Design from OCAD University located in Toronto, Canada. One big deciding factor that led me to choose Edinburgh as the place to study abroad is my curiosity in its forward-thinking initiatives, specifically in areas such as recycling, air quality, pollution levels, waste management, and the green spaces. In fact, Edinburgh has earned the distinguished title of “the greenest city in the UK” (The City of Edinburgh Council, 2020).



Example of Graphic Design Brochure from my portfolio. Design by Christina Yang.

What fuels my interest to take this course in Environmental Design is the notion that humans can coexist harmoniously with nature, rather than exploiting it for our own gains. This curiosity has led me to explore indigenous practices that embody the wisdom of nature in sustainable ways. Additionally, I am eager to delve into the material aspects of environmental design, as I believe this knowledge will support my practice in graphic design, particularly in the context of packaging.

I'd like to shine a spotlight on an environmentally conscious design in the local Edinburgh community: the Union of Genius. This business has built its foundation on ethical principles, showcasing a commitment to sustainable practices, supporting local suppliers, recycling packaging, and engaging in initiatives that support the homeless. One standout feature is their take-out packaging and cutlery, crafted from plant starch by Vegware, a sustainability-focused company you can explore further at <https://www.vegware.com/uk-en>. This choice not only reduces environmental impact but also promotes the use of eco-friendly materials.



Soup from Union of Genius. Photo by Christina Yang.

The Union of Genius doesn't stop at packaging; they've also implemented a rewarding loyalty program that encourages reusability and composting. Customers earn loyalty stamps when

they bring their own soup containers or return the take-out containers for composting. This program promotes a circular economy, reduces waste, and attracts returning customers.

Furthermore, the Union of Genius demonstrates its commitment to the environment by opting for carbon-neutral deliveries using cargo bikes for their cafes. This choice aligns with their environmentally conscious ethos, reducing emissions associated with traditional delivery methods. All this to say, Union of Genius is noted as an example for businesses to promote sustainability by benefiting both the environment and the community. Plus, the soup is delicious! So it's a win in my books.

Reference list

The City of Edinburgh Council (2020) *Evergreen Edinburgh leads the way*, The City of Edinburgh Council. Available at: <https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/news/article/12744/evergreen-edinburgh-leads-the-way#:~:text=Edinburgh%20has%20been%20named%20'the,levels%20of%20disposable%20fashion%20consumption>. (Accessed: 23 September 2023).

Plant-based compostable foodservice packaging (2023) Vegware. Available at: <https://www.vegware.com/uk-en/> (Accessed: 23 September 2023).