

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Essay/Assignment Cover Sheet

Name of Student: Shannon Dowdall

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Lecturer/tutor: Denis Kehoe

Essay/Assignment title: The world is full of useless things - we need to make less and make better

Criteria	Ex	VG	Good	Fair	Poor	Comment
Introduction (statement of problem, response to task)						
Range and use of appropriate sources						
Development of argument (analysis, interpretation)						
Conclusions (application, findings, outcomes)						
Presentation, language, academic conventions						

Please tick Y/N for Profile of Needs

General comment:

Indicative grade:

Tutor: _____

Date: _____

The world is full of useless things - we need to make less and make better.

In this essay I am going to be discussing and examining the topic of excess and the useless things we acquire in our lives and in doing so I will touch upon the subjects of overspending and the psychology behind it, sustainability in relation to the amount of 'stuff' produced in this world and in correlation, the quality at which they are produced and also artists who use the topic of excess to their advantage and to highlight issues surrounding excess in the world.

When thinking about excess, my thoughts immediately transplant to the image of masses of clothing and items piled up and left to decompose in landfill in a hot and humid country, filling the air for miles with Methane gas. Considering it takes 2,700 litres of water to make just one cotton shirt it is evident that a number of environmental factors are at risk, not only from the hands of the fashion industry but also from the transportation industry, the agricultural industry and so many more. One group of people that contradict more or less everything recommended to us on sustainability is the 'Rich Kids of Instagram'. These are a group of young socialites whose main focus is materialism and more importantly, flaunting it in any way possible. Their hobbies include collecting jewellery from prestigious brands such as Rolex and Cartier and of course taking private plane trips across the world, but in their eyes these objects and excursions would mean nothing if it wasn't posted on the 'gram. "Their lives are summer every day, and although they may be leeching off their folks they seem to have taken the Instagram Effect to a whole new level because luxury car brands are seeing an increase in new generation car buyers just from this phenomenon." (A Blog on Blogging, 2018).

While looking from afar at these young people on the cusp of life spending more money than they can count up to, it is interesting to me to think about the mental wellbeing and psychology behind it all. Overspending and over consumption of materialistic goods and services seems to be an ever rising trend the past few years and I am interested whether there are any psychological effects of this overspending and excessive lifestyle. Money seems to be a more is more situation from the outside, more money equals more years added onto your life with less signs of those years showing on your face, more comfort in your home and car and more time to spend with family and friends but does it mean more happiness and a more fulfilling life? The relationship between money and happiness is ever ongoing research being conducted by scientists all over the world and the results are clear - wealth does bring happiness but not *that* much more than the people who have less. 'Money is an opportunity for happiness but it is an opportunity that people usually squander because the things they think will make them happy often don't' (Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson, 2011).

Is this a way of life that is so normalised and envied it is hard to necessarily diagnose and treat as an addiction? 'Oniomania is a behavioural disorder characterised by an obsession with spending money and an insatiable urge to buy things, typically resulting in adverse consequences' (Smith, 2018). It has been significantly shown that people who struggle with compulsive shopping are often engulfing themselves in the act to counteract feelings of depression, anger, loneliness or low self-esteem through an emotional "high" and momentary bliss provided by compulsive shopping. Purchases can also sometimes act as a symbol for the person's self ideal. In her book 'To Buy or Not to Buy: Why we overshop and how to stop', (April Lane Benson, 2008) suggests that, 'The more you believe that happiness comes from material

wealth, the more likely you are to be depressed, distressed and anxious - and the less actual well-being you are likely to experience.' Overall overshopping, overspending and excess are all derived from the same lack of sense of security in the more emotional and non physical aspects of life. These needs are trying to be met by filling the void with an abundance of objects, but what we truly need in our lives is a strong sense of self and an appreciation for the people who we have in our lives and more relating, the objects we already have in our lives.

Excess seems to have crept into every corner of our lives, our wardrobe, bathroom cabinets in other inherently sneaky ways. Excess has also become prevalent in artwork in the past decade and more and more artists are using this 'maximalist' approach in their artwork. 'Excessivism' is an extremely new movement which tends to create a commentary on economic materialism. Introduced to the world by American artist and curator, Kaloust Guedel which draws attention to the effects of a population under the foot of a materialistic influence. Excessivism uses notions of abstraction to express the absurdity of a world driven by consumerism and money. 'The movement draws our attention to a capitalist system where it's all about profits at all, or better yet, minimal costs, meaning there's absolutely no consideration of aspects like the human and the environmental ones. While one part of our world squanders precious natural resources, the other suffers on the edge of survival, neglected and in isolation, and proof of such a situation inevitably appears on a daily basis.' (www.widewalls.ch, n.d.)

In German born artist Isa Genzken's work, she uses an excessive and intricate application of colour, pattern shape and texture to create an overall overwhelming but visually pleasing experience within her work, especially in her 2013 exhibition 'Retrospective'. 'Genzken's work has been part of the artistic discourse since she began exhibiting in the mid-1970s, but over the last decade a new generation has been inspired by her radical inventiveness. The past 10 years have been particularly productive for Genzken, who, with a new language of found objects and collage, has created several bodies of work that have redefined assemblage for a new era. These groups of sculptures range from smaller, diorama-like works to room-filling installations.' Genzken's work is a perfect example of an artist who uses excess and maximalism to their advantage creating unusual pieces evoking a deep interest in the viewer. (Museum of Modern Art, 2013)



Isa Genzken, 'Hospital', 2008, Dallas Museum of Art.

Thinking of useless, desolate objects in this world we cannot forget to recognise and shed light on the immense presence of fast fashion and the excess clothing and overall waste that is created in the industry. How can it be that an industry that uses up so much natural resources and gives out so much pollution be creating disposable semi lasting articles of clothing that people are constantly adding to their life long cycle of purchasing, wearing for a relatively short time frame, and then adding to a pile of rubbish or moving up to the attic to make room for more?

As I touched on earlier, the concept of overspending and overshopping is a main problem in itself but along with the fact that clothing companies are purposefully fabricating these clothes to have short lifespans made in terrible quality is absolutely disastrous. First on the list of the many offences is the low wage and terrible working conditions provided in fast fashion factories. Workers have been exploited and mistreated in the forms of abuse, low wages, unsanitary poor working conditions and forced overtime. As a moral pledge to ourselves we should research these companies that we were buying from before we buy, because yes while that might be just the colour t-shirt you were looking for, a woman and child may have been put at physical and emotional risk to produce it. Child labour is not something to be supported and by consciously choosing not to shop from companies that use this form of labour, we are helping a lot more than we think. 'The term "**child labour**" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.' (www.ilo.org, n.d.)

Polyester pollution is also another environmental risk we need to educate ourselves on, this occurs when microfibers from synthetic fabrics are released into our waterways and from there into our oceans, rivers and lakes - every time they are

washed using a domestic washing machine and because of their small size are being consumed by fish and other sea life. By shopping more sustainably, buying more organic materials such as organic cotton and linen we are preventing this immense plastic waste. 'It is time for the fashion industry to change the current fast fashion model of clothes that don't last and put efforts into the design of better-quality clothing: producing garments that are dangerous to the environment and human health is not acceptable.' (Sánchez, 2020). Even though we can highlight everything wrong with the world of excess and its dangerous environmental impact we have to also ask ourselves if its possible to live a fully sustainable life and consume ethically under this capitalist society with advertisements purposefully using psychology techniques to shove products down our throats.

A thought that came to me while looking into sustainability is the thought of good and evil within these companies. For example; How much of an impact does it really make to these companies if I buy a compostable toothbrush instead of a plastic one? Does that make them stop producing as many plastic toothbrushes as they were before? Assumably not because there is obviously a market for plastic toothbrushes and even though more people are becoming aware of the importance of shopping eco more people in the world use plastic toothbrushes than compostable and will continue to buy them over and over again. So is sustainability just another market ploy for already offending companies to hop on the bandwagon and market to a new range of customers and therefore make more money without having to explain the other half of their non ethical company?. 'Is it even possible to live sustainably in an unsustainable society?' (Pratt, 2020)

Art has an ability to draw light to these issues and makes people question the everyday. Michael Landy is one of the young British artists and is best known for his performance piece installation 'Break Down' which creates a message about consumerism in everyday life. Landy held the piece in an old department store on Oxford Street, one of the busiest and well-known streets for fashion and many fast fashion brands are located there. He gathered all his possessions 'ranging from postage stamps to his car, and including all his clothes and works of art by himself and others' (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019). He catalogued all 7,227 of them in detail and then destroyed them all on a conveyor belt in the middle of the empty building. There were ten workers involved who in replication of a mass production line, reduced each item down to its basic forms and then shredded them all. Following the project, Landy had made no money from it and had no possessions left. This provoked a strong message about objects and their significance in our lives and that as owners of these objects we have the right to use them, not use them or destroy them.

Overall, excess has a prevalent presence in our lives in many forms, through art, media, fashion and culture. It should be our jobs as a society to pick our place within this void of excess and stand by the morals we have on waste in the world by shopping more sustainably and not contributing to the ongoing production of excess. We should continue to question the significance of these objects in our lives and try to appreciate everything we already have instead of wasting time dwelling and lusting over things we don't. Excess is something we see every day in our homes and on social media and we need to take the steps in reducing this for the wellbeing of ourselves and the planet, now and in the future.

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