

Sustainable Innovation 2010

What does sustainability look like?

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Sustainability is arguably moving steadily towards the mainstream, a movement increasingly driven by legislation and encouraged by consumer expectation, to the point that it is becoming a context within which all products are inescapably produced.

Products are often themselves products of the society they serve, a society inhabited by consumers who in the west justifiably expect variety and choice, creating an almost inevitable demand for change evidenced by the historic and continued growth of consumerism.

Designers influence consumer choices by using their own influence over aesthetics to create desire, manipulating shape and form to trigger the often intangible and irrational emotional connections to products that ultimately lead to a purchase.

Combining these simultaneously distinct but related factors, the question is raised of how the relationship between product, more specifically product form, designer and consumer will be affected by sustainability.

What does sustainability look like?

Considering the implications of sustainability on the relationship of consumers, and more fundamentally of humans, to form and to shape raises many questions relevant to the role of the designer, and to how they can successfully carry consumers towards sustainability.

What is the current relationship of consumers to product form? Do we react to form in isolation?

Is there a 'green' aesthetic? Does sustainability have a 'shape'?

Are current designed forms compatible with sustainability?

How will sustainable technologies affect future designs? From increasing product longevity and intimacy to disposable, recyclable variety and novelty.

Could any changes in product aesthetic instigate change in consumer habits?

These and any other questions raised during the course of the investigation will be explored by drawing on research undertaken during MA studies, and presenting related conclusions, through observation of both complimentary and opposing influences, and by the compilation of a more theoretical body of research in to the emotional and psychological foundations of how we react to form.

The papers' investigations will be related both to automotive design in particular and to design practice more generally, whilst wider contexts and opinions surrounding the paper will also be outlined.

Investigating just one aspect of a design future concerned with sustainability, the paper is intended as a formative exploration, with resulting conclusions or observations summarised to highlight any scope, opportunity or stimulus for future discourse about sustainable aesthetics and designs response to the sustainable mandate.