

# Glasgow school of art singapore cultural studies essay



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HIGC Term 2 Assignment Dr Tudor Vladescu, Dr Terence Heng Glasgow School

Of Art Singapore Glasses are one of the most important accessories I wore every day. Having myopia since I was 10 years old, glasses have been part of my life, it aids my vision and allows me to see things and view things much clearer. Although nowadays there is laser technology and contact lens, I still prefer wearing glasses as I see it as a fashion accessory whereby I could actually choose which pair of glasses to wear to suit the occasions or events I am attending. Throughout history and even today, eyeglasses have served as one of the oldest and improved upon accessories around the world. One is conscious of the way he looks and the way one are perceived by others, knowing that eyeglasses can drastically improve the appearance and the way others view us. The first glasses was believed to be invented with the co-relation between ' the increase in literacy and the start of Renaissance' (Lipow, 2011: 10) and was invented by an Italian monk named Salvino Degli Armati in 1287. The glasses is made up of two magnifier bolted with a rivet and it required usage of hand to hold the glasses as it is hard for one to hold the glasses by using the nose bridge. In early years, glasses were not just simple accessories which aids in one's reading. The one who owns it, ' the literacy and the ability to afford precisely ground lenses were both sign of rank and prestige.' (Lipow, 10: 2011). Glasses were seen as a measurement of inequality where ' unequal social relations occur along lines of prestige, reputation, property, income, occupation, education, skill'. (Bottero, 2005: 5) Glasses has since then been constantly improving in terms of the usage of material. Material ranged from wood to ivory to silver to gold are were used. During the 15th and 16th century, there is advancement in the production of glasses as a frame invented in Nuremberg Germany, where <https://assignbuster.com/glasgow-school-of-art-singapore-cultural-studies-essay/>

glasses were made of flat rolled metal cord which could be produced inexpensively and in large quantities. With the invention of movable type in around 1650, glasses are being sold by pushcarts in every city of Europe. As the glasses are sold at a cheap price due to mass production and usage of less costly material, it became popular. As more and more lower class and middle class starts to wear glasses, the mystique of eyewear was gone and people no longer associated spectacles with the upper class. The definition of glasses also since then changed at this time, using Barthes concept of 'the signifier, the signified and the sign' (Barthes, 1972: 113), the glasses signifies 'physical inadequacy and weakness' (Lipow, 2011: 12) The development of the glasses has another breakthrough during the 18th century as the London opticians had invented the temple arms on glasses and it could be worn on face without usage of hand to hold it. During this period, spectacles were made using metal by ironsmith or being crafted out by craftsman out of tortoiseshell or horn. During the 19th century, Chinese adopted the western style of eyewear design and their glasses tended to be bigger and much flamboyant than Western spectacles. Chinese eyeglasses were made up of tortoiseshell where they believe that tortoiseshell signifies luck and long life to the wearer. The bridge of the spectacles had ornate carvings which represent everything ranging from wealth to marital happiness. It is interesting to see that during this period, a similar object has different significance in Western and Chinese context. In Western context, a person who wore glasses was seen as one who is physically deficient and weak and wearing glasses out was seen as a 'disfigurement, often an injury, seldom a necessity' (Corson, 1980: 199). However in Chinese context, due to Confucian influence and Chinese belief that 'great status in society could be

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achieved through aptitude at learning' (pg 14 , Lipow 2011) , a person who wore glasses in China was seen as a ' potential Mandarin bureaucrat who could make any bully future life miserable'. (pg 14 , Lipow 2011). The attitude towards wearing spectacles has change in the Western countries significantly. After the First World War, fashion had gone through a revolution and entered a modern age, the frame has become fashionable and there is more choice for individual to choose from to distinguish themselves from others. This is the period where mass culture flourish with the introduction of flim, advertisement and posters and ' the triumph of advertising in culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them.' (Adorno, 2010: 167). During this time, sunglasses were also invented and film industry used them as a fashion accessory for the actors and stars. Actors wore them off-set to conceal their eyes and somehow they made sunglasses look glamorous and exclusive which makes fans keen on imitating their look. Besides that, during this period of time, the upper class have ' more freedom and choices than others' (Bottero, 2005: 4) as they are the ones who initiates a fashion and class aesthetics. Wearing sunglasses were seen as good taste and the upper class also wore them during their travels to other countries especially exotic countries whereby it is ' an opportunity for the rich and famous to parade their new fashion and be seen' (Murray, 2012: 36) As the rise of film industry and the revolution in fashion, personal choices during that time were ' influenced by hierarchy and social difference' (Bottero, 2005: 10) and fashion becomes a form of ' both imitation and social equalisation' (Kawamura, 2005: 22) With the invention of sunglasses, sunbathing and swimming has since then become a popular pastime in that age of leisure where ' the fetish

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character of the commodity lay claim to the actual people'. (Adorno, 2001: 191). During the 1930s, the Great Depression has caused the design development of glasses to put on hold and as also caused many to struggle to make ends meet, glasses became an unaffordable luxury. Towards the end of Great Depression, ornaments and floral patterns were crafted and commonly seen in the frames of the glasses. During the Second World War, pilots wore aviators for the war which 'bestowed a sense of heroism on their wearers' (Lipow, 2011: 76) and its popularity has spread around the world and continues to this day. The war itself also changed the perception of plastic as the material were being hugely utilized during the war and was much more user friendly. Before the war, manufacturers have been trying to make plastic to look like tortoiseshell and horn which was a much popular material during that time. After the war, manufacturers started to embrace the material and make plastic to be the main material on their eyewear design. Since then, plastic glasses are the main trend in the design of the eyewear during the 1950s. Spectacle frame was seen as a much-have fashion accessory. The design of the frame instead of suiting both sexes, it aims to design for individual sex where the design aims to bring out the intellectual image of the man and the feminine, soft side of the woman. Black horn rim glasses where there are no decorations on the frame were designed for the man. As for the female, accessories played an important role in fashion in 1950s and women were encouraged to treat their spectacles as a piece of jewellery. The design of the frame was influenced by the patterns of the ornamental hair combs. Elements found in the design of jewellery such as 'pearls and diamante, metallic flowers and animals, studs and engraving' (Murray, 2012: 89) are commonly seen in the design of the <https://assignbuster.com/glasgow-school-of-art-singapore-cultural-studies-essay/>

frame. One of the popular frames during that period was the cat-eye shaped frame. The eyeglasses were designed with detachable lenses which encouraged women to own several pairs of spectacles in different styles to complement different outfit just like a fashion accessory. In the 1960s, the design of the eyewear was linked to the aesthetic of the era. Modernism flourished during this period and the 'heavily festooned style so ubiquitous in the previous decades' (Lipow, 2012: 189) was dropped out in favour of the Modernism design. The key feature of Modernism art such as 'geometric shapes and bright colours' (Lipow, 2012: 189) were rendered into the design of the frames of the eyewear. During the mid-1960s, with the influence of pop art, the design of the frame became more experimental. Eye wears reflected the trend for all things in space age. Repetitive motifs such as 'asymmetrical design, contrasting black and white geometric patterns and the optical illusions' (Murray, 2012: 112) were key elements in the design of the eyewear frame. Lenses were coloured and it used mainly bold colours to reflect the trend of all things space-age. During the late 1960s, the futuristic theme gave way to the design which was reminiscent of the past such as romanticism and exoticism. Frames were designed in hexagonal or square which recalled 'spectacles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'. (Murray, 2012: 123). During the 1970s, plastic lenses were introduced to replace the fragile glass lenses and it was a breakthrough in the development of the eyewear design as the glasses became lighter. During this time, the emphasis of the frame is to design according to the contour of the face. The colour used for the frame complements with the skin tones. During the 1980s, the design of the glasses reflects the 'wider trend through the rich diversity of original style on offer' (Murray, 2012: 176). Memphis, a <https://assignbuster.com/glasgow-school-of-art-singapore-cultural-studies-essay/>

design group founded by Italian architect Ettore Sottsass, played a significant role during the 1980s. The eyewear designs during this period were inspired by Kitsch, Pop Art and futuristic design. Sharp angles, bright colours and contrasting patterns were seen in some glasses designed in 1980s. Besides this trend, there is another trend on eyewear design during this period where outrageously designed frames which took the form of everything such as buildings and animals. The design of the frame was 'asymmetrical, diagonal, angular or geometric' and 'were reminiscent of the graffiti pieces and comic strips that were strong influence in art at this time' (Murray, 2012: 176). During this time, eyewear starts to establish brand value and brands signifies an image of wealth and power and also shows good taste. During the 1990s, the glasses were commonly seen with the brands logo or label on their frames which makes the arms of the frame become thicker as all this logos starts to overtake the decorative detail. This also influence the choice of the consumer where they start to choose brand image instead of the aesthetics of the glasses as wearing a glasses from the luxury brands such as Burberry and Armani signifies class and good taste. Media also play a huge impact of the choice of glasses as advertising becomes information where 'there is no longer anything to choose from' (Adorno, 2001: 85) and 'the recognition of brand names has taken the place of choice.' (Adorno, 2001: 85). It also 'forces everyone who wishes to survive into consciously going with the process.' (Adorno, 2001: 85)The 21th century saw the emerging of new brands which starts to come out with new and distinctive design and it challenged the boundaries of good design. As technology advances, the focus of the glasses is no longer just only on design, but also the function and the unique solutions to optical issues. The <https://assignbuster.com/glasgow-school-of-art-singapore-cultural-studies-essay/>

consumer also comes to have an expectation in the quality of spectacle design and also its craftsmanship. Manufacturers during this era besides continues to refine the product, also work out of the work of art which is too outrageous to make it into the mainstream market which makes it a trademark for stars such as Lady Gaga. Glasses also portray ' a character or persona is as strong as it ever was.' (Murray, 2012: 226)The development of glasses not only raises the quality of life for many people but also thru different influence in different era, it represents a different social status. However, style still remains the key element for the design and development for glasses for the past, present and even the future.

## **Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies**