

Question 1

What is the role of the designer/maker in the 21st Century and how might this role change in the next 10 years? Discuss your ideas with reference to two of the practitioners or thinkers discussed in your lecture strand.

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Throughout this essay I will be addressing how the demands of a designer has altered in connection with political and social issues and how the role will continue to change over the next 10 years. A designer can be defined as “a person who devises or executes designs, especially one who creates forms, structures, and patterns, as for works of art or machines.” (dictionary.com, 2020) With the current situation with our society the role of a person within the design world is to correspond with current circumstances bringing innovation. This correspondence between society and design allows a designer to develop, suggesting improvement or advancement in their work, (Thorpe, 2007, p.5)

Continuing with the idea of development in the design world, in 1987 the World Commission on Environment and Development published a report entitled “our common future” This report detailed how the united nations should abide by the principles that development and sustainability should be recognised together, “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future, 1987) This report was intended to provide an understanding for the 3 key areas in society, social equity, environmental issues and economic growth, and introduce policies that combined all 3 areas creating a more sustainable industry.

Acknowledging these 3 areas and responding with an idea that recognises the current issues in society to bring innovation is vital. The most challenging area to take into account is the environmental impact, I believe that environmental issues will be the main reason for the changing role of a designer due to the increasing impact of global warming.

As a surface pattern and design student, I will be exploring the consequences of fast fashion and how the role of a fashion designer will change over the next 10 years.

Impact of fast fashion

Fast fashion can be explained as “an approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing fashions that emphasizes making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers” (Merriam Webster, 2020) Fast-fashion derives the name for ultimately having a fast production time, fast purchase, fast delivery, and also having a fast life span, meaning that most garments are typically only worn a

few times before being discarded. (Crumbie, 2019) These discarded garments amount to nearly 350,000 tonnes estimating a value of £140 million British pounds, ending up in landfill per year in the UK alone. (Traid, 2020) 10% of greenhouse gas emissions comes from the production of these garments. (Environmental impacts of fast fashion, The pretty planter, 2020) These emissions add to the increasing issues of the greenhouse effect,

“The greenhouse effect is the way in which heat is trapped close to the surface of the Earth by “greenhouse gases.” These heat-trapping gases can be thought of as a blanket wrapped around the Earth, which keeps it toastier than it would be without them” (Nasa, 2020)

To understand how the greenhouse effect works, the atmosphere around the earth naturally acts as an insulation, emitting infrared radiation, and trapping enough solar energy from the sun to keep the earth at a comfortable temperature allowing the support of human life. This insulating blanket is a combination of natural atmospheric gasses. (Casper, 2010 P.5) The problem that arises with the greenhouse effect is when the activity of humans results in the emissions of gasses such as water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrus oxide and chlorofluorocarbons, which are mainly emitted through the burning of fossil fuels. These gasses have adapted the name ‘greenhouse gasses’ as they block heat from escaping the atmosphere, which results in more solar energy being trapped in the atmosphere causing the earth’s temperature to rise causing damaging impacts to the earth such as: melting ice caps, increased vaporisations, flooding due to rising sea levels and loss of species. (maple creek & southwest advance times, 2019)

In addition to contributing a large proportion of greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere, fast fashion also has a huge impact on our oceans. As fast fashion sets out to deliver catwalk fashion at a low cost and high speed, the quality of the fabric is mainly made from polyester and acrylic as they are cheaper and can be manufactured quickly. However, these fabrics release small plastic fibres also known as microplastics through the wash. One load of washing can release up to 700,000 microplastic fibres, potentially entering our oceans. “A marine conservation organization, estimated in October 2019, that U.S. and Canadian households release over 870 tons of plastic microfibers into the ocean every year from laundry alone. Eight hundred seventy tons is the equivalent weight of ten massive blue whales, which is the largest species of whale that exists.” (Steffen, 2020) The presence of microplastics in the oceans not only has a damaging effect to water sources for humans, they are also causing huge impacts for the fertility, reproduction and survival of marine life. “Microplastic pollution has

contaminated the whole planet, from Arctic snow and mountain soils to many rivers and the deepest oceans. It is also being consumed and inhaled by people, and the health impacts are as yet unknown.” (guardian, 2020)

The damages of having these pollutants enter our water systems is clear in the movie named “RIVERBLUE” created by Mark Angela showcasing “one of the world’s most pollutive industries, fashion.” (riverblue, 2020) The movie discusses how the disposal of toxic chemicals and waste from the fashion industry has had a monumental impact on the survival of humans, largely for those who live in less developed areas.

After outlining some of the issues that surround fast-fashion, I believe that the role of a fashion designer over the next 10 years should change in accordance with the current environmental issues we are faced with, issues that have been created by human activity.

These are some responses from fashion designers, and other workers within the fashion industry after they were asked how they would like to see the fashion Industry in 10 years. Adam Wrey, REDEF fashion curator said "In ten years, I hope we'll have made at least some progress towards eliminating exploitative labor practices and environmentally-abusive production techniques." Fern Mallis, creator of New York fashion week also answered this question, stating "I'd like to see an industry that has truly become committed to sustainability and fair labor practices. No longer making clothes in factories with children and despicable working conditions, and no longer polluting our planet." (Fumo, 2015) These responses clearly demonstrate how designers are aware of the current circumstances surrounding the fashion industry and the detrimental effect it is having on the environment, and how they hope that within the next 10 years, changes can be made to create a more sustainable fashion industry.

In recent years, some fashion designers have taken steps towards creating a more sustainable fashion brand. I believe that these steps taken by a handful of fashion designers today will become more common in the fashion industry over the next 10 years due to the factors I previously listed. One designer who has taken steps towards sustainability in fashion is Stella McCartney.

Stella McCartney aims to create a more circular, innovative and cutting-edge brand that has a minimal impact on the environment. McCartney’s conscious decision to maintain a cruelty-free and ethical brand means that every decision from sourcing the raw materials, to creating the garments and subsequently selling in stores needs thorough consideration and evaluation. (Luxiders, 2020) Opting for processes that are less exploitive of natural resources, McCartney has sourced a number of raw materials that support her aim of creating a more

sustainable brand. Choices of raw materials include, bio-engineered spider silk, recycled ocean plastics, mushroom leather, choosing organic cotton that is sourced from licensed forests in Sweden. All these choices of materials support her concept of creating a circular and sustainable fashion industry. (Rodrigues, 2019)

McCartney has also engaged with more affordable brands, in order to gain more awareness of her conscious efforts in aid of the welfare of the environment. Brands include adidas, where she opted to work with a marine protection organisation in 2017 that sourced yarn and thread from recycled plastics found in the oceans to create trainers. In addition to this, she also collaborated with fashion brand H&M in 2005, McCartney designed a small collection which she insisted were made from organic cotton rather than conventional cotton. (Thomas, 2019, p. 115) Taking these steps within her company was a very distinct move for Stella McCartney's brand, it separated the concept of her brand to other designers. Since establishing her brand as the "first vegetarian luxury brand" (Stellamccartney.com, 2020) in 2001, her concept and passion for creating an innovative brand that lasts has since gone on to adapt even larger concepts of sourcing natural materials, her extensive work in sustainability has been progressing and evolving since the beginning of her brand and is an inspiring hypothesis for other designers to follow in her footsteps.

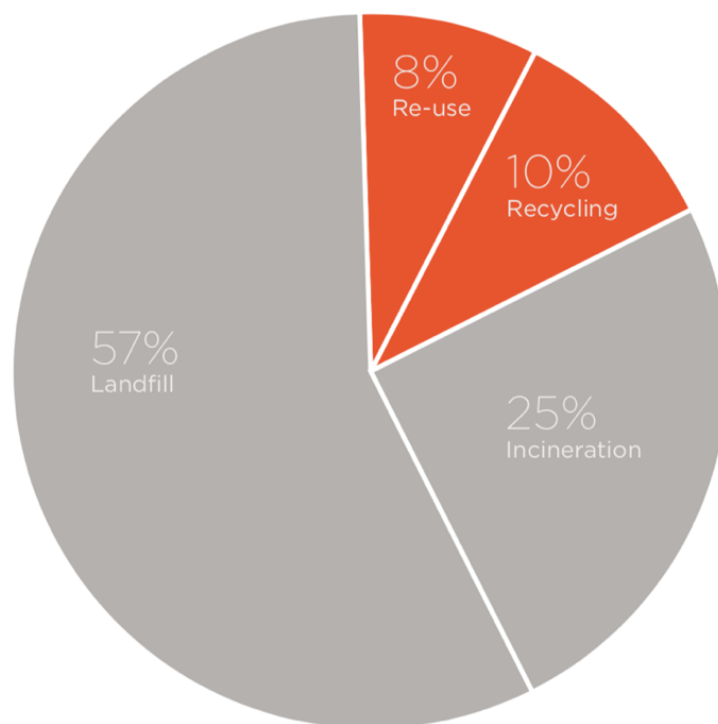
As a designer in the 21st century, McCartney has persisted to follow a sustainable and circular brand beginning from sourcing the materials to wearing the garments. I believe her take on the fashion industry is what other designers will strive towards in the next 10 years in order to correspond with the demand for sustainable living due to the ongoing climate crisis.

Similar to Stella McCartney, Steph Gabriel the founder of swimwear brand 'OceanZen' has also adopted a sustainable concept with her business. Gabriel founded her swimwear line in 2014, After spending 3 years traveling, she became more aware of the direct impact the fashion industry was having on the environment, mainly on the oceans. Taking this into account, she designed her swimwear using a revolutionary material which involves shredding wasted fishing nets and plastic found in the oceans. In a youtube video, Steph discusses more in depth of how her passion for conservation and sea life inspired her to create a brand that raised awareness for the harrowing effects human activity is having on the oceans. (Oceanzen ft Steph Gabriel, 2018)

Sustainable fashion doesn't have to mean that the clothing are created from sustainable materials, the meaning of sustainable is broad. "sustainable fashion has a few names such as, repurposed clothing, reused clothing, and recycled clothing" (Pandit, 2020, p.152) An example

of making efforts towards a more circular fashion industry is making efforts to prevent clothing ending up in landfills through recycling/ re-using or re-purposing.

“More garments are bought and discarded than ever – 57% of these go to landfill.”



Source: Pulse Report, 2017

(commonobjective.com, 2018)

According to this pie chart created in 2018, the figures demonstrate that only 18% of all clothing are re-purposed. Leaving a percentage of 82% of all clothing to be wasted. 57% of which ending up in landfill, which takes years to decompose:

- Cotton glove: 3 months
- Wool: 1 to 5 years

- Leather shoes: 25 to 40 years
- Nylon: 30 to 40 years
- Rubber boot sole: 50 to 80 years”

(Brady, 2015)

However, the alternative to disposing in landfill is incineration as stated in the pie chart. Burning discarded clothing emits large volumes of greenhouse gases which further intensifies the current issues surrounding global warming. Unfortunately, it isn't just discarded clothing that ends up being incinerated, a British and luxury clothing brand named Burberry, came into huge backlash in 2018 as it was reported that the clothing brand had incinerated £28.6m pounds worth of unsold clothing the previous year, to avoid the stock being sold off at a reduced price in order to maintain its 'exclusive' status. (parliament, 2020)

Some clothing companies have begun taking action to reduce the amount of clothes ending in either landfill or incineration each year, one company being Rag & Bone. Rag & bone pride themselves in creating fashion that is high quality and timeless, they refrain from making disposable garments and design clothing to last for years. In addition to creating clothing to last avoiding the fast fashion chain, Rag & Bone have also created a scheme where customers can receive a 20% discount on their shop if the customer trades in a pair of jeans that they no longer want. (Rag & Bone, 2020) This scheme is partnered with Blue Jeans Go Green, which was established in 2006. The aim of Blue Jeans Go Green is to recycle discarded denim to create insulation which is then distributed to different organisations in aid of rebuilding efforts. (Lockwood, 2017)

Other ways of reducing the amount of clothes being disposed is rental services. An exclusive rental service named 'Rent the Runway' which was established in order to offer exclusive brands at reduced prices, whilst also re-using the same garments for multiple clients instead of disposing them.

“Renting things you'd only wear a few times is a more sustainable answer because more people sharing clothing means less clothing waste.” (renttherunway.com, 2020)

According to an article in the daily mail in 2015, most garments are typically only worn 7 times before being discarded, therefore services like rent the runway can offer that amount of usage without the downfall

of the clothing ending up in landfill, and instead being re-used for the next client.

After evaluating the effects and causes of global warming and how the fashion industry holds a large responsibility for it, I believe that the role of a designer in the next 10 years will change due to climate change. The examples I have provided of designers who have already begun making changes to create a more sustainable industry in fashion, are paving the way for other designers to follow in their steps. The role of a fashion designer will become dependable on sustainability in the future as the current issues surrounding the fashion industry cannot be contained forever, There will be a turning point for designers where the seriousness of their actions will be taken into account and they will be forced to identify how their role in delivering on trend fashion can either work within the circular economy or be listed as fast-fashion and add to the already mounting discarded fashion and issues that surround it.

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