

Title – 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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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.

Historically the pioneering forefathers of the designers and makers of the 21st century busied themselves with creating functional and aesthetically pleasing pieces that were favoured or requested by the clients of their time. Less consideration would have been given to the abundance of materials or the impact of or on the resources used. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, which enable the production of a new range of commodities and a wealth of goods to circulate around the world easily, artisans would have had to source their materials locally. Items such as varieties of wood and animal skin such as wool and leather would have been bought or traded from near neighbours owning land and animals. These utilities would be reworked in to textiles for clothing or home wares and individualised with pattern and colour. Dyes would be made by foraging for plants and insects, with recipes passed down through generations to create pleasant and appealing colours. Crafts people of all ages would learn these techniques to create generations of master producers. As these businesses would usually be made up of local people or family members and with their resources found in this way, there would not have been the scope to mass produce. There-fore, there would have been a negligible impact on to the planet.

The 20th Century saw many changes to the manufacturing of materials and wares. With the invention of fast and ever developing intelligent machinery and computers, the attitudes and demands from the public changed. Personal wealth improved with the abundance of work in factories and shops which led to the need for mass production. Large department stores, fashion and home magazines, along with the access to television, all brought about a new attitude. Instead of the need for clothing or furniture, everyone wanted to own the same as their peers. Ignorance to the affect that this was having to the welfare of the planet would later be recognised on a grand scale. Towards the end of the 20th Century scientists began to find proof of how, born as a product of capitalism, components to the manufacturing processes, such as chemical use, disposal of any excess and the energy required to run such a way of life, were leading to a catastrophic effect on the environment and climate. (Guerrero, 2018, p30).

I will look at how, since the 21st Century began, we have and will have to continue to change the thought processes, working ways of the designer/maker and how they can continue to create in a more smart and prudent way. I will also discuss the way that some practices continue to mass produce for what, I believe, is purely profitable reasons.

Since the 1990's a demographic of shoppers have invested their money in to a business model known as Fast Fashion. The idea of purchasing vast amounts of items so to create many current fashionable outfits quickly from the catwalk, in different colour choices and materials is appealing to many. The material is cheap and not designed to last for their intended use. The garments are usually made by employing cheap labour who are maltreated and are made to work in buildings of poor standards. Only in 2013 did the collapse of a clothing factory in Bangladesh claim more than 11,000 lives (McConnachie, 2013). This all with large profits being kept by the owners of the sales companies. Currently these companies do not appear to be being held accountable for their actions. In a bit to sell

more garments, these businesses collaborate with many popular internet influencers or reality television stars in order to appeal to the younger generation. Discussions need to be had to reduce production of their collections in a bid to slow down the process. There are strategists who are behind the scenes working with collaborators to help them make better ethical decisions. Some social media sites are also beginning to bring awareness to overproduction. (Rositsh,2021). Their need to speed up production and capacity eventually leads to an excess of clothing which are made by cutting corners to fulfil demand. This is referred to as garment pollution or textile waste. As they are unable to degrade in any way, they end up contributing to water pollution, with the toxic chemicals used to produce the cheap fabric entering the atmosphere (What is Fast Fashion Industry and the Best Alternatives, 2021).

In the current climate it is very difficult to for an individual designer/maker to run a business on their own. Overhead costs, along with materials, are very expensive. The unpredictable cost of living has also affected the consumer. As unemployment rates for aged 16 years and over are currently at 3.7% of the population (ONS, 2022) and inflation for Q4 2022 at 11%, (British Chambers, 2022) disposable income is low if it exists at all. This has encouraged the public to be frugal with the excess money that it does have. I believe that with the combination of financial, global and mental health issues in the world today, the face of fashion will turn to the internet and the Metaverse in particular. Data shows that 92% of adults in the UK have access to the internet (ONS, 2021). This will enable the access to a new way of designing which is quickly taking hold within the Metaverse. The Metaverse is a virtual reality platform for which developers are selling land. One such 3D company called Decentraland was created by Ari Meilich and Esteban Ordano in 2017 and sold pieces of their land for \$20 each. For approximately \$1m a virtual real estate company purchased a vast amount of this land with the intention of creating a virtual shopping area. Global brands such as Adidas and Nike have bought in to the arena and plan to sell avatars that can be dressed in virtual wearables. These designs can be bought by using NFT's (non-fungible tokens) which certify ownership. (Goldstruck,2022). This fantasy land replicates the world as we already know it and has few restrictions. An Avatar can be created to look however the owner wishes enabling them to fulfil their aesthetic desires of who they themselves would ideally wish to be. One such avatar project developer, RTKFT (pronounced artifact), owned by Nike, have created their images known as CloneX. The CloneX avatars went on public sale on 30th November 2022 via auction in the Netherlands selling all of the 20,000 available at that time. (Ellis, 2022).

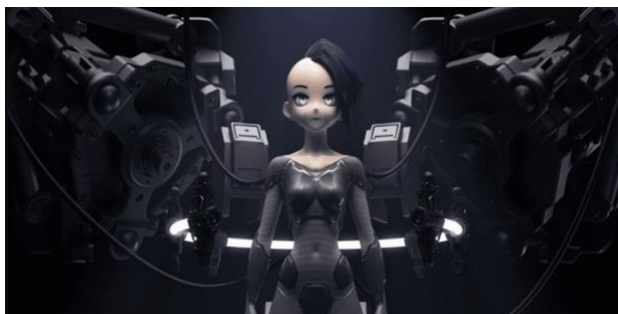


Fig 1. RTKFT Studios CloneX Avatar



Fig 2. A virtual sneaker made by digital fashion company RTFKT in collaboration with the fund A16z

Decentraland have created a Metaverse Fashion Week within its platform with its own avatar super model. As wearables are now able to be purchased across platforms, the online catwalk fashion shows will increase.

A new era of used clothing marketplaces has also begun where unused and unwanted items of clothing can be sold on to the public. It is resemblant to the jumble sales of the past. The popularity of these sites is quickly increasing with many items for sale that have never been worn.

In conclusion to my research and personal views the role of the designer/maker will change dramatically for the majority. There will always be customers, where cost is of no concern, that will be willing to pay extra for a unique hand-made item of quality but I fear that they will be in the minority. Some may create designs that they will sell to larger companies who have the resources to reproduce them at a lesser cost. Upcycling or refashioning of recycled items such as clothing, furniture and interiors will become very popular and common place. A twist on the post-war era of make do and mend. Items can be easily bought as previously mentioned from vintage stores online and in the many charity shops that now adorn our high streets. Along with current online marketplaces, I envisage that new ones will be created purely for that reason. But, for me the biggest impact on the future will be online. During the Covid19 Pandemic, many turned to the internet as a reaction to the lockdown. With teaching, doctor's appointments and family catch ups turning to the internet new applications were born then used out of necessity. This created a familiarity with life online that has become part of our everyday lives. Issues with mental health and poor self-esteem mean many shy away from public life. It is for those reasons that I believe that the future of the Metaverse will grow quickly as it will allow people to create avatar images of who they want to be. They can wear whatever they want, however they want which will create a sense of freedom. Digital designers will be in demand to create more innovative looks for

clothing and interiors in ways that we probably can't even imagine right at this moment but the Pandemic has shown us how quickly technology can change.

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Figures

Figure 1 – *CloneX* (2022) Available at: https://nftnewspro.com/clonex-nft-collection-explained/#CloneX_NFT_collection_first_auction (Accessed: 13 December 2022).

Figure 2 - *RTFKT INC/Handout* (2021) Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/crypto-fashion-why-people-pay-real-money-virtual-clothes-2021-08-12/> (Accessed: 13 December 2022).