

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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In this essay I will be discussing what the role of the designer is, with a focus on textile design and I will do this by exploring relevant textile designers. Throughout the essay I will be looking at what the role of the designer is currently, and how these roles might change in the next ten years. Essentially, I understand that the role of the designer can take on many forms in different industries and roles are constantly evolving as technology and the world around us is changing. Therefore, I will firstly look at one of the most important changes for the textile designer, that of which is becoming a significant role of not only designers but everyone around the world. This is the ongoing issue of sustainability and Climate Change. To improve the sustainability of textiles, I will be looking into the impact that fast fashion has on the environment, and I will suggest ways in which designers can take inspiration from new techniques such as 'handicraft' and Visible Mending by Tom of Holland which is tackling clothing waste ending up in landfill. I will also be thinking about how this might develop in the years to come. In relation to sustainability and reducing waste, I will then look at the artist Celia Pym and her ways of prolonging the life of garments. Furthermore, as well as looking into sustainability being the significant role, I will also consider what the general role of the designer is by looking at traditional methods of making such as patchworking. Specifically, I will be looking at textile designers and I will explore what their role is in terms of making designs meaningful and how to build a more connected story to people and places.

Firstly, an important role of the textile designer that will ultimately grow in the next ten years due to the increasing worry of climate change is sustainability and the longevity of items, especially in the textile industry. Textile designers need to consider the impact of mass production, particularly when it comes to fast fashion and the waste of discarded textiles that this leads to. A quote taking from the book *'Meaningful Stuff: Design That Lasts'* sums up this thought, "never have capitalist societies owned so much, wanted so much and wasted so much" (Jonathan Chapman, (2021) p.1). This suggests that as a society we have all become more wasteful and materialistic in terms of what we choose to purchase which has led us to be less considerate of the environmental consequences of our actions. In textile industry the overproduction of clothing and constantly changing trends is often referred to as 'fast fashion', which is a negative term used frequently as the worry of climate change increases. Fast fashion is defined as "clothes that are made and sold cheaply, so that people can buy new clothes often" (Cambridge dictionary, 2022). This approach to fashion in terms of manufacturing results in a very large number of garments being made which are not meant to last long due to the everchanging trends. Consequently, garments are ending up in landfill and polluting our surroundings. Another problem in relation to designers in the fashion industry is that trends are predicted very early on and if this is not done correctly the clothing won't even sell, adding to the waste. According to the book *'Fashion Marketing: contemporary issues'*, "errors in forecasting can result in the lost sales and excess inventory... constant price reductions and sales in stores to get rid of unwanted stock" (Bruce, M. Hines, T. (2007) p.57). This error in trend prediction encourages consumers to buy more than what they need as the "constant sales" are often seen as a positive for buyers even though the reality is that it is adding to the overconsumption. Therefore, perhaps textile designers in the fashion industry need to rethink how trends are predicted

and maybe the role of the designer in the next ten years is to improve the longevity of trends in fashion so that trends last for a longer period. This will possibly encourage people to re-wear their clothes from previous seasons and trends which will help to prolong the life of the clothing garment.

To continue, a possible way in which the longevity of textiles can be improved without producing more garments is the idea of 'handicraft' and the skill of the hand. Handicraft is "a skilled activity in which something is made in a traditional way with the hands rather than being produced by machines in a factory" (Cambridge dictionary, 2022). Therefore, Handicraft is an activity everyone can do at home, and it focuses on mending items to prolong the items life. This will reduce unnecessary waste and the number of items ending up in landfill. An example of this comes from Tom of Holland who organizes handicraft workshops and visible mending. The Visible mending movement aims to challenge the way we consume clothing and embrace the visible mend on clothes to make the item more unique and individual as well as prolonging its life (McGovern, A. Barnes, C. (2022). This also links to the increasing popularity of upcycling, and it is a cheap and low craft way to repair clothing items. Tom of Holland embraces Visible Mending, and he holds his own workshops for people to learn how it works. This is called the 'Visible Mending Programme' whereby he talks about different visible mending techniques and invites students to bring in a pre-loved clothing item that they want to repair (Tom of Holland, 2013).



(Fig.1, *That Green Cardigan*, 2012, Tom of Holland)

Figure 1 is an item of clothing that Tom of Holland visibly mended called 'That Green Cardigan'. This image clearly shows that the visible mend is intentional and the contrast between the deep green and pale grey works well together to make the ordinary cardigan more unique. Maybe the incentive to make clothes more unique and one of a kind will encourage younger people to take up crafts like visible mending. For example, according to a survey done by the preloved clothing site Depop, "55% of Gen Z consumers said they use the site to access one-of-a-kind pieces" (Palmer, H. (2022). This shows that consumers are becoming more interested in buying unique clothes that have been previously worn. Primarily, this is one of the aims of visible mending, and it shows that the craft has the potential to increase in popularity and get more people involved. However, ultimately this is not resolving the issue of overconsumption and climate change, but it is a small step in the right direction. It raises more awareness of the issue in a lighthearted and enjoyable way.

Furthermore, it is interesting how mending clothes was common years ago when there was little money to buy new whereas more recently vintage fashion and buying from charity shops is increasing and becoming 'trendier', "originally the incentive to repair was economic. Labour was cheap" (Fletcher, K. (2014) p.120). This shows that buyers are being made more aware on the impact of fast fashion on the climate and even though mending is also economically beneficial, it is increasing in popularity since mending is making clothing garments different and more of a 'one off' clothing item. This links to the previous quote from the brand Depop about how the younger generation are wanting to buy unique items. Perhaps designers need to follow and think about ways to reuse and mend fabrics to create new, more interesting pieces. An example of an artist who encourages this is Celia Pym, "mending work builds on what is left behind. It's not replacing it, or remaking, or cutting apart and putting back together, instead it is slow work that makes things better" (Pym, C (2022). This quote from Celia Pym shows how mending is being portrayed in the 21st century and its associations are far from it being financially cheaper, instead people are not as ashamed of wearing mended clothing anymore. This is positive in terms of sustainability and reducing the number of textiles ending up in landfill. It also gives clothing items a deeper more meaningful story which is also important in terms of the role of the designer.



(Fig. 2)



(Fig. 3)

Figures 2 and 3 show 'The Norwegian Sweater' that Celia Pym mended in 2009, that in which she turned into a new reclaimed sweater (see fig. 3). Celia Pym is an example of a designer who uses old fabric to create new items that might have otherwise ended up in landfill, adding to the pollution of our earth. For example, Celia Pym has "amassed a one-tonne collection of secondhand knitwear" (Pym, C. (2022) p.39). Possibly the role of the designer in the next ten years is to reuse and source secondhand fabric which will improve the circularity and lifespan of fabric and it will also highlight the issue of waste and overproduction to buyers.

In continuation, perhaps the role of the designer in the next ten years is to teach people ways in which they can reuse preloved items or create products from old textiles. An example of a clothing brand that encourages this is Patagonia and the Common Threads Programme whereby they "collect unwanted polyester clothing" and "process the fibre into new garments using the eco circle fibre to fibre recycling system" (Fletcher, K (2014) p. 128). This shows that brands are choosing to be more environmentally conscious. A way in which designers could implement this idea on a smaller scale than a brand like Patagonia is by using off cut pieces of fabric to make something new. Similarly, another problem in the textile industry that is resulting in excess waste is the way in which textiles are being produced and the manufacturing of clothing and other forms of textiles. For example, "one of the most visible moments of waste production occurs in the cutting room" (Fletcher, K (2014) p.130). We often forget about the production of clothing and the negative impact this has to climate change and sustainability. Perhaps more needs to be done during the production stages to positively impact the way people are overly consuming clothing. Perhaps this can be achieved by designers being less wasteful and more conscious when

pattern cutting as “up to 15 per cent of the fabric is wasted through uncreative approaches to pattern-making” (Gwilt, A (2020) p.73). An example of how this can be improved is by using scraps of left-over fabric to make patchworks that can be used to make products in both the fashion and interior industry.



(Fig. 4, *Welsh Log Cabin Quilt*)

Figure 4 is an image of a patchworked quilt collected by Jen Jones who owns the ‘Jen Jones Welsh Quilts and Blanket’ shop in Wales. The image shows the array of different scraps of fabric that have been used to create this beautiful patchworked quilt. Perhaps the role of the designer is to look back at techniques and methods of making. Possibly, the traditional handmade ways of making may be more sustainable than the machinery and energy used to produce products in the 21st century.

Furthermore, patchworking seems to be less popular compared to what it was when fabric was limited. Furthermore, it was often done by the women of the family who would make quilts or blankets to be passed down the generations, “they insist we read the whole fabric to find the thread of women’s history stitching the shapes together” (Macheski, C. (1994) p.2). The story behind the fabrics used and the women who made the quilt is an important factor to remember if it has been passed down generations, “like a book, the quilt is a bound volume of hieroglyphics each of which is a key to some painful or pleasant remembrance” (Macheski, C. (1994) p.2). This indicates that for many people quilts are more than just scraps of fabric and there are often memories and a deeper meaning behind each quilt that is made. This brings me on to think about what the role of the designer is in terms of emotion and connection to the people who may purchase designers work. Possibly a way in which designers become successful is that they understand their clients and are

empathetic. With focus to textile and pattern design, perhaps the role of designers is to give meaning and a story to designs to make it connect to consumers. This links to the idea of sensemaking which is the “conscious” effort to understand connections, for example with people or places, (Kolko, J (2010) p.11). This principle of sensemaking highlights the importance of making connections and perhaps the role of the designer is to make connections to designs by revealing deeper meanings to pattern designs, which may not be clearly visible for viewers to see. For example, ‘...the goal is to find relationships or themes in the research data, and to uncover hidden meaning in the behaviour that is observed and that is applicable to the design task at hand’ (Jon Kolko, 2006). Therefore, the role of the designer is to consciously use research from the past and present to make designs more relatable and meaningful to people who may purchase designs. Perhaps textile designers should look back at past stories and ways of designing/making so that they can adapt the past to the 21st century, making it more relevant.

In conclusion, the role of the designer is constantly adapting to the changing issues regarding sustainability and climate change. This means that a fundamental role of the textile designer is to be more conscious of the impact that textiles have in terms of overconsumption and the buildup of waste that ends up in landfill. Designers need to adapt small but positive habits such as the ones displayed by Tom of Holland and Celia Pym. This can be implemented by designers, such as reusing old textiles and coming up with new ideas to transform old or unused garments. Therefore, the role of the designer in the next ten years will be encouraging non designers to become more aware of the sustainability and environmental issues in the textile industry that is contributing to Climate Change. Lastly, the role of the designer that has been present in the past and should remain equally important looking ahead to the future is to visually tell stories and uncover hidden meaning.

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Figure 4- Jen Jones. *Welsh Log Cabin Quilt 12317*. Available at: [Welsh Log Cabin Quilt \(jen-jones.com\)](#) (Accessed: 13 December 2022).

