

Question 2:

Define skill in the context of your own practice and the work of two artists/makers/designers from the lecture series.

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Within design, a skillset is referred to an individual's unique combination and "range of skills and abilities" (Oxford University Press, 2023) which they may possess, reflecting on what each individual could bring to a potential setting, and their "capability of accomplishing something with precision and certainty, [furthermore combining] practical knowledge with [physical] ability" (O'Connor and Kellerman, 2014).

New abilities within skillsets are typically divided into two primary categories: "hard" and "soft". These are acquired through an array of experiences, such as cognitive, physical, emotional, and social. While "soft skills are general personality traits, such as teamwork, communication [and adaptability, which are] relevant across various roles" (Pavlou, 2019) meanwhile "hard skills are those that are gained through hands-on experience, training, or education" (Long, 2022), such as mathematical, analytical, and technical skills. Additionally, any designer's personal growth, besides their work environment, is made possible by both hard and soft skill sets, enhancing their general aptitude and capacities in various settings.

Since design is a multidisciplinary subject, designers have a variety of skill sets that enable them to plan, investigate, and carry out projects in their particular area of design, such as interior design, industrial design, and graphic design. Each branch of design specialises in different skillsets, however a designer's ability to detail, problem solve and adapt can be considered as transferrable skillsets, as they are interrelated throughout all areas of design, meaning they can develop these skillsets in one context but can be applied to other allowing designers to create innovative and influential pieces of work using various skillsets from various design branches.

Within the previously mentioned field, product and furniture design subside industrial design, alongside "transportation design, environmental design, and interaction design" (Plumb, 2023). Product design best "describes the process of imagining, creating and iterating products that solve users' problems or address specific needs in a given market" (Product Plan, no date) the ability to design and develop products is a skillset any product designer must have in order to deliver efficient and accurate designs, through using a wide range of materials and machinery which are to be usually found in design workshops. Furthermore, the "key to successful product design is understanding the end-user customer" (Product Plan, no date); showing how these designers problem solve through the use of empathy and the "knowledge of their prospective customers' habits, behaviours, needs and wants" (Product Plan, no date).

On the other hand, Furniture design is a specialised field that combines utility and style, all the while focusing on aesthetics, function, and ergonomics in order to create contemporary furniture and in result satisfying the client's needs, as well as complimenting its surroundings. A broad range of skillsets are demonstrated throughout furniture designers; nonetheless, the comprehension of client's needs, inventiveness and technical versatility, are three skillsets which all furniture designers possess.

Furthermore, Product design demands knowledge on countless different types of materials as well as manufacturing techniques, machineries and various design styles; such as Memphis, Contemporary and the Bauhaus Movements, allowing designers to "not only [add] functionality and utility to a space, but also style and personality" (uni.xyz, 2023). Additional to product design requiring creators to have knowledge on design styles, also known as movements, it is essential for designers to explore other designers and their pieces of work in order to gain inspiration and creativity, as analysing different and new styles can allow the designer to evolve their idea-generating skill, which as a designer, it is one of the most precious skills any artist could have.

Personally, the previously mentioned movements; Memphis and Bauhaus, are two of the most influential movements for my own practice, furniture design, due to their revolutionary aesthetics, as “at the time, objects were usually designed to be functional, not decorative” (The Design Museum, no date). Having studied furniture design for 4 years, and explored a comfortable variety of materials such as softwoods, hardwoods, polymers, metalwork and electronics- additional to other forms of exploration non-related to the workshop (graphic work, photography, fine art, textiles); as well as having studied and researched a numerous amount of furniture designers, design movements and other artists within other branches of design, these two movements have stuck out to me the most due to their artists’ abilities to add personality and challenge modern maximalism details through unusual shapes, celebrating a playful, emotion-evoking and non-traditional artistic freedom, which inspires me to create cartoon-like furniture and challenge the everyday designs, as well as the public; puzzling them with furniture that doesn’t look like it should, after all, there are no rules which say all chairs are meant to look like chairs, furthermore, I’ve found that one of the most enriching experiences as a designer to be observing someone interact with an object or furniture, having no previous knowledge on what it could be, or what it is used for- every person will interact with it in a different manner, never mind wrong or right.

Stepping away from minimalism, (by 1919), the Memphis movement challenges not only the usual standard look of furniture, accompanied by bolder colours and busier patterns, but also the user, as they are presented with a piece of furniture which has been completely reimagined. Unseen before, “their use of clashing colours, haphazard arrangements and brightly coloured plastic laminate” (The Design Museum, no date), alongside their experimentation with “unconventional materials and unorthodox design approaches” (Roseberys London, 2023), and even though the design style only lasted six years before the group went separate ways, the Memphis group changed the approach of design by “poking fun at everyday objects by designing them in a way that’s unusual” (The Design Museum, no date).

In the early 80s, Ettore Sottsass, an Italian architect and “one of the most distinguished designers” (Alexander Street, 2023), helped co-found the Memphis movement, and in so revolutionised design as a whole. Sottsass left an everlasting impact in the world of design, being a “multifaceted architect and designer whose creative genius drove the Memphis Group to international acclaim” (Rosebery’s London, 2023). Through his diverse background within design, including architecture, industrial design and photography; as well as through his extensive travels and “exposure to various cultures and art forms” (Roseberys London, 2023), Ettore Sottsass was enriched in experiences which enhanced his soft and hard skillsets, and so making him one of the few designers which have made an incredible impact in the world of design. This designer’s skillset is put together through a combination of traditional design skills, a willingness to experiment and explore with new areas of design including materials and techniques, as well as his ability to balance creative thinking, effective communication and technical expertise.

The previously mentioned Bauhaus movement, was “arguably the most influential architecture, art and design school of the 20th century” (Victoria and Albert Museum, no date) mainly differentiates from Memphis design in that Bauhaus stands for function, whilst Memphis believes “that decor alone serves a justified purpose in design” (Seidel, 2022). Even though Bauhaus contrasts Memphis in the sense of they believe form follows function, the aesthetics within this movement still compliment the ones of Memphis, as they are both “geometric shape [oriented], combined with primary-coloured chromatic palettes and breaking completely the rules of classic German style” (Lafuma Mobilier, no date) however Bauhaus is aimed more at a minimalistic aesthetic, whilst Memphis, maximalist.

Expanding on The Bauhaus school, founded by Walter Gropius in 1919, its main goals were to abolish the separation between artists and craftsmen, ultimately bridging the gap between all art forms- as well as bringing together artists, designers, craftsmen and architects, in order to create a total design and collaborative environment, getting rid of the hierarchy between different branches of design resulting in individuals from different branches of design being able to work together. Similarly, to the Bauhaus school, my end goal with my practice is to acquire inspiration from a wide range of movements, artists and different branches of design in order to create new and revolutionary designs.

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