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Research in Context ADAD5003

BA Surface Pattern Design

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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.

The role of the designer has changed and design has developed especially in the technology industry. In 1936 Peter Carl Goldmark invented the first colour television system (Cattell, 1976). Whilst 1989 saw the invention of the World Wide Web invented by Tim Berners-Lee (Brooker, 2018). Since the creation of the World Wide Web design has surged, companies such as Wacom introduced technology which captured designs electronically through a pen-based system which enabled designers to draw freely (Beyond, 2014). This new form of technology made it quicker and more convenient to communicate ideas. Communication amongst design is ever more critical as designers are beginning to consciously consider the impact they make on the world. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'sustainability' as " the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level " or " avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance " (Oxford, 2010). The introduction of the World Wide Web acted as a new tool for discussion and debate, global communication triggered concern over global warming and sustainability of our resources (Ghomeshei, 2009). Web platforms such as Facebook brought a real time response to these issues, significantly raising awareness but not solving the issues.

Web platforms act as a 'writing space' and work as feedback culture. In *Limited Language: rewriting design* it assesses the affiliation between traditional printed formats such as the book and new digital ones, blogging (Davies and Parrinder, 2009). Having this online space generates an alternative and innovative way of communicating ideas. Advance in design has meant that blogging shortly turned into vlogging by the creation of *YouTube*, which saw people go from reading online to watching online. This new way of expressing ideas, beliefs and opinions grew

greater awareness of the impact made by our consumer culture. The David Attenborough effect has been a powerful tool for change, *Blue Planet II* aired in 2017 and was widely documented in the press and social media. It's reaction caused outrage as people saw for themselves the mass of plastic pollution cluttering our Oceans (Martinko, 2019). Society has become more aware of the impact of our consumer culture and are implementing ways to create a more sustainable and ecological way of living. Instead of buying plastic bags people started to buy and use their reusable bags, but this is just a small change and won't reduce the production of plastic.

Designers hold great responsibility in terms of the ways things are produced and what materials are used. A more serious considered approach to the material and process used will be vital in the next 10 years. *Norman Potter* stated that "Every human being is a designer", we warrant that title by our grounds which earn us careful consideration and between the relationship of the action and moulding of the means to convey it. Design is evolving and everchanging and for that to happen designers have to evolve and change to keep up with social demands and development (Potter, 2009). Whilst social demands are increasing so are demands for designers themselves, there is a great need for creative people in every field. For demands to be met design/designers must progress in order for them to conform to change. Design creates change as designers impose their own values based upon the world we live in and the ideals of their client. To be a designer is a cultural option as designers create culture, involvement and significance for people (Press and Cooper, 2003). A designer is essentially a maker and the initial part of the design

process is to craft a concept which adheres to the client's brief. Being adaptable is key because beliefs, values, behaviours and circumstances will change and evolve.

The importance of design and perception of being a designer has changed throughout the 21st century and this has contributed in the advancement of technology. *Harry Dreyfuss* who designed the first desk telephone describes in his book *Designing for People* that people have a perception of a designer, a suave character and brimming with confidence. But this is only a caricature of a designer as the profession has come of age. Designers are entrepreneurs, a keen observer of public taste and have their own cultivated taste. They accept responsibility of their position as liaison management and engineering (Dreyfuss, 2003). Speaking to Jane Willis director of Willis Newson an arts and health consultancy, when asked how she got to where she is today her reply was, "I was persuaded out of pursuing my dreams of attending art school due to my parents believing that I would never get a 'proper' job in art and design" (Willis, 2019). The perception of being a designer has changed and so has the importance and demand of design. Design is growing rapidly and this creates higher expectation for the next 10 years.

Design in the 21st century has changed as there have been technological advances in the textile industry including digital print which is a much more manageable way to bring thought to reality. Digital printers are time efficient, low cost and result in a much richer and vibrant image (Apex Mills, 2018). However, the way we design and produce clothes has major drawbacks. We have adapted a throw-away society which is strongly influenced by consumerism. As a planet we have finite materials, whether we use these more sparingly or more slowly it will only slightly delay the

date that we exhaust them. Textile production produces 1.2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually (MacArthur, 2018). Design is damaging our planet, using less is not an option nor solution. Society has a take-make-dispose ideal that has detrimental negative environmental and societal impact.

Incentives need to be introduced sooner rather than later to progress towards a sustainable future, this needs to be implemented now so that in 10 years' time we have significantly reduced the amount of greenhouse gas emissions we produce.

Over the past 5 years the value of goods destroyed is more than £90 million. In 2017 Burberry destroyed unsold clothes worth £28.6 million to protect its brand, by burning these items they state it is to prevent them being stolen or sold cheaply. However, Burberry said that the way they burn it's products generates energy which makes it environmentally friendly but this is angrily disputed by environmental activists (BBC News, 2018). For this to continue would be disastrous.

The Fashion industry has come under significant scrutiny in more recent years, as shops no longer drop seasonal pieces but often drop new products each week which lures consumers into buying into fast fashion (Sanghani, 2018). Brands such as ASOS and Primark have been criticised for their part in fast fashion. Primark were asked to justify their sale of the £2 T-shirt which spokesman Paul Lister commented on stating that Primark do not spend anything on advertising enabling them to have tight profit margins (BBC News, 2018). Design must change and designers need to maximise their knowledge of sustainability and vastly incorporate this into all that they do.

According to the *World Summit* there are 3 pillars of sustainability that we should follow that will help us to implement change in order to prevent our planet from being destroyed. The first pillar of sustainability is economic development and this issue is the most problematic. There needs to be provisions of incentives given to businesses and organisations so that they adhere to sustainability guidelines. But not only businesses but every day people who can too play their part. The second part is the importance of awareness of legislation protection from pollution and other harmful activities caused by civilisation. In the developed world there are tight legislations put in place to ensure that we maintain access to basic resources without compromising the world. The final element is education, we must teach the importance of environmental sustainability and the dangers of not adhering to it. The last pillar is environmental protection, and this is a primary concern for the future of humanity. Technology will drive us to a greener future but we must also develop in every aspect of our lives (World Summit, 2005). Not everyone agrees with the political ideology of what is and what isn't economically right and that inevitably going to cause some issues in the next 10 years.

More recently we have become more aware of the impact of our consumer culture and are implementing ways to create a more sustainable and ecological way of living. Instagram influencer and multiple business owner Grace Beverley this year launched her own sustainable activewear brand TALA, it's affordable and 92% sustainable. A lot of her activewear is made from upcycled materials such as plastic bottles while her CORE collection is made from factory offcuts. During the manufacturing process the brand is extremely conscious of water usage, avoiding harmful chemicals and reducing co2 emissions (Campbell, 2019). TALA is marketed

as a sustainable, ethical and affordable activewear brand, it's incentive is to prevent our planet from being destroyed. There is no greater incentive than limiting as much as possible the damage we inflict on our environment.

As humans the reason we create environmental problems is because everyone is competing for income and power. Conflict theory states that the primary source of the conflict is due to the capitalist economic system. Over pollution continues as the polluters do not see the affected environment. Environmental problems make life hostile but this will be tolerated for the benefits that are associated with, for example a developed industrial economy (Davies, 1970). Designers now have the opportunity to design a system which deters society from greed and power, over the next 10 years I think this will be achievable as we are already changing our habits.

As a society we need to put sustainability at the core of everything we do and another company hot on sustainability is *Reformation*. This clothing brand aims to give back to the environment in a positive way by investing into green building infrastructure to minimise their waste, water and energy footprints. They invest in people and provide on the job training and opportunities for growth, as well as programs which substitute the sources they've spent. The lifecycle of the clothes are considered at every stage, from growing the fibres for textiles to making the fabric. Dyeing to transport of material and manufacturing, as well as packaging, shipping, care of the product and the recycling of the clothes after you use them (Reformation, 2019). Every process from beginning to end needs to be considered and this shouldn't just apply to clothing brands.

For most of society saving the planet is determined as morally and ethically the correct thing to do, however this ideology of sustaining the planet is not always a consideration for everyone. *The Dark Mountain manifesto* (2009) suggests that we should accept reality in order to begin to think more seriously about the future (Kingsnorth and Hine, 2009). But many design companies are implementing and creating new ways to offer new sustainable products for its consumers. From product to packaging every stage of the life-cycle should be considered, even the end of life of the product and how it could be recycled or re-used (Donato, 2019). Over the next 10 years introduction into the cause and effect of these issues needs to be introduced into the education system, educating people young will underpin attitudes for the future.

Through design, designers have the ability and power to change the world and solves it's problems. Babette Porcelijn who is a Dutch designer and environmentalist says that we need to create more systems and less stuff, we are better equipped than any other profession (Frearson, 2017). Designers are actively thinking about how they can lead design in order to address the issue of sustainability. *Design for Sustainable Change* discusses the ways designers are evolving and how their design thinking is being applied to a much wider spectrum rather than just professional territory. The book talks of design thinking and considers the issues of sustainability and the strive for ecological and societal change and through the system of design we can transform our society (Chick and Micklethwaite, 2011). Design will develop and progress because designers continuously consider the needs and experience to their service or product. Service design is used to improve performance of existing services and create new ones.

In the next 10 years the role of the designer will hold greater responsibility in society as a whole, the use of their design process will bring about social change. The expectation of designers will surge as they are also thinkers. *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology* conveys the idea that designers have the responsibility to change the world through design. Being very selective of the materials and processes they use and designing for needs rather than wants. Designers will become more strategic, and design systems that focuses on the foundations of new product development, communication and the environment (Papanek, 1985). The design process for products will undergo major redesign and the process will change. Designers and companies may have to compromise their aims and objectives in order to reduce their carbon footprints.

One example of how design will change is making fabric from recycled plastic, this will be the most sustainable fabric available. Making polyester from recycled plastic bottles cuts out coal and petroleum extraction. Machines which can be run on renewable energy shred the bottles into flakes and the flakes are melted down so they can be made into yarn (Webb, 2019). Design will become more recyclable and consideration to minimise variation of materials within products to single material will be the way forward to sustaining our environment in 10 years' time. Historically, companies have deliberately planned, produced and designed products with a limited life (Donato, 2019). Producing products with short life spans or are made to become obsolete ensure that customers repurchase their products.

Designers will design for longevity and move away from obsolescence, this way products can be made for bio-degradability or composability. Consumer ability to

compost will need to be extensively considered as there's no purpose for these products if the end goal isn't achieved. Transport efficiency also should be measured, packaging items in a way which will interlock or stack in a way which allows more products to be transported more efficiently (Environmental Science, 2019). Technology will be the driving force for innovative design, luckily as a community designers are already ahead of the curve. Stand-alone designers will not have the capacity or capability to combat complex global issues alone but are important players in the fight for critical change. In the next 10 years designers will be more mindful in regards to what they do and how they do it.

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