

Research in Context (ADAD5003)

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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?

The Collins English Dictionary (collinsdictionary.com.*Designer*), defines a designer 'as a person whose job is to design and make things'. Designing is a means of communication in simplified form which large numbers of people can understand.

Edward Tufte (1983) in *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* states that 'good design is a lot like clear thinking made visual', meaning the designer has clearly expressed what they are trying to understand. These visual communication skills are essential when presenting a design or product to a client or consumer. Leonardo Da Vinci's well-known quote, that 'art is never finished, only abandoned', suggests a need for us to question what we mean by considering the action of finishing work because the context of an artist's work and therefore the work itself changes overtime.

Over the last century, art and design evolved massively. Artists and designers have turned away from traditional methods and processes and have embraced new digital media. Also, art historians have moved their focus from analysis of the work to the interpretation of its cultural meaning. Furthermore, modern artists have a new way of seeing things and there has been a change from the narrative focus in traditional arts towards abstraction in modern arts. Art and creativity is evolving all the time and particularly so in the 21st century.

Designers in the 21st century have had to apply their focus on addressing the current issues going on in the world. This is a shift from previously traditional design methods, we now use design as a way of solving complex issues within society through working together. Steve Jobs, the founder and long-standing CEO of Apple Inc., stated that 'design is not just what it looks like and feels like, design is how it works', which conveys how today's designers look at all aspects of design and make products that last and can develop further in future. Norman (2021), in the book, *The Design of Everyday Things*, states that 'design is really an act of communication, which means having a deep understanding of the person with whom the designer is communicating', emphasising the need for a design to serve as communication between the object and the user and to optimise the user's experience of using the object. Norman also states the *Principals of Design*, as including visibility, feedback, affordance, mapping, constraints and consistency. These rules are essential for designers to follow when creating effective and successful work. These principals are very important today in the 21st century.

Design has evolved rapidly in the 21st century, (Hall, 2022) *How much the iPhone has Changed*. The Apple iPhone first went on sale in 2007, changing history with the first smart phone; essential items today. Apple have adapted the iPhone tremendously since 2007, the original iPhone did not even feature functions like 'copy' and 'paste', and had just 500 Apps available, contrasting with the nearly 2 million Apps today. The most recent model, the iPhone 14 Pro Max, has the longest battery life and storage and exceptional camera quality. The iPhone and other smart phones are effectively platforms designed to deliver the products of other designers to the user, software, games, lifestyle and even design tools. Any user of an iPhone can be a designer. There are Apps to undertake sophisticated photo editing, interior design, garden design etc, enabling people with no formal design training to

be 'designers'. The advent of digital design technology and the ever-increasing simplicity of design tools is giving everybody the opportunity to make design choices for themselves. Some might see this as a threat to professional designers, but really this is an opportunity for the work of professional designers to be better understood and appreciated, as whilst everyone can be a designer, not everyone can be a good designer. The next ten years, will, I believe, see more and more digital design tools become available to everyone. It will be the job of the professional designer to ensure that good design is understood and appreciated.

Another design tool that has evolved enormously, is 3D printing. The concept was first imagined back in the 1970s, with the first experiments in 1981. In 2000, the first 3D printed kidney was developed, and has been transplanted into patients since 2013. New updated printers are being issued regularly, printing ever faster and giving access to new 3D printing materials. The environmental impact of devices like this can be significant, through their consumption of materials and energy and the proliferation of more 3D printed plastic-based products, which if produced wastefully could end up contributing to plastic pollution. However, Wigdahl (2018), states that 'polylactic acid, a very common filament plastic for 3D printing, is usually made from organic plant matter with high starch content. It is biodegradable, and is derived from corn and sugarcane, which can easily be broken down'. The choice of more environmentally friendly filament is therefore of great importance in reducing the product lifetime environmental impacts.

3D printing also offers a bespoke solution to production, where the final product can be tailored to meet specific needs and therefore is perhaps more likely to last longer compared with a product that is sourced from mass manufacturing which is less likely to meet user needs as precisely. Compared with mass manufacturing, the number of items produced is more likely to meet the actual market size; if one item is required, then one item is produced. This is really important as it can reduce process waste and also avoids the waste from unwanted products, for example mass produced garments that are no longer fashionable. 3D printing can bring manufacturing, nearer to the products point of use, and at its extreme literally into someone's home saving on transportation costs and energy. The designer can have a direct relationship with the consumer in this future scenario. Where designers sell digital designs to users rather to manufacturers. This could have significant implications for the viability of traditional manufactures and retailers. Over the next ten years it is possible therefore that the distance of the supply chain between design and consumption could be dramatically reduced, giving designers greater recognition and perhaps a greater share of the financial benefits from their design.

Understanding and reducing the environmental impact of products is best addressed at the design stage. The theme of design for environment, or environmental design has become bigger and bigger throughout the first quarter of the 21st century. As we have come to understand more and more about the unintended consequences of product consumption on our planet, from issues of microplastic pollution to the rapidly changing global climate. Designers have an enormously important role to play in helping to reduce and address the damage to the earth by humans. The role of designers over the next ten years will be to continue to design products people want and need, but to do so in a way that helps to reduce the lifetime impact of the products through better design.

In my practise of textiles and fashion, the industry has changed enormously in the 21st century but it is important to look at some of the key changes in the last century that have influenced design today and will continue to be an influence over the last ten years and beyond.

An important time period in history for the textile and fashion industry was World War 1 (WW1) and World War 2 (WW2), (V&A, 2022). These wars changed how people dressed both at work and at home and were driven by practicality and materials shortages. Clothing for the public needed to be practical yet still stylish, even during wars, people needed to express their individuality. Clothing and accessories manufacturers were quick to see commercial potential from some of the wars biggest and greatest threats. The designer's role here was to react quickly and design with efficient use of resources at a time when fabric choices and availability was limited and often rationed.

The Collins English Dictionary ([collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com). *Rationing*) defines 'rationing as a system of limiting the amount of necessary substances a person is allowed to purchase'. Clothes were rationed in Britain from 1 June 1941, this drastically limited the number of new garments people were allowed to buy until 1949, four years after the war ended (Imperial War Museum, 2022). Despite this huge limitation, clothing retailers still needed to retain their customers. The government intervened in the mass manufacture of high street fashions, coming up with the Utility Clothing Scheme in 1942. This kept designers and retailers in business which obviously was very important during this severe time of hardship.

People were given precious clothing coupons to spend on new clothes, they were told to make sure that their purchases would be suitable through all the seasons. This rationing sought to ensure a more equal distribution of clothing and improve the availability of clothing in shops. Due to this, clothes were seen as much more of a luxury and an essential need than they had done before. (Textile Details, 2022). The rationing of clothes did however, encourage individual creativity, the 'Make Do and Mend' campaign was launched by government to encourage people to make their existing clothes last longer. Posters and leaflets were produced showing how to make shoes last longer, prevent moth damage to woollen garments and how to care for different fabrics. This 'Make Do and Mend' way of thinking continues today though the emergence of the 'fixer' movement (IFIXIT, 2022), which advocates that products should be mendable and mended rather than disposed of and aims to teach people how to repair things and encourage manufacturers to design products that can be repaired more easily. The 'fixer' movement aims to challenge the existence of what is can be seen as the 'Throw Away Society' and wants the value in products to be maintained as long as possible before the products become waste. The same trend is seen fashion in today through upcycling and the growing popularity of knitting and sewing in recent years. Over the next ten years designers will, I think have to embrace these issues of design for environment in new products and how to ensure that the value in garments and textiles is maintained for longer. Designers will need to understand what good environmental design means and I think that the training of new designers will continue to grow in this area. The designer's role will have to expand to consider the lifetime environmental cost of their products, to move away from today's other trend of 'fast fashion'.

The desire and need for 'fast fashion' have never been stronger. The Collins English Dictionary ([collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com). *Fast Fashion*) defines 'fast fashion' as an approach to design, create and market clothes that emphasizes making trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers'. The concept of 'fast fashion' began with the mass production of cheap clothing, where clothing designs inspired by runway shows were quickly taken to stores for anyone to purchase at cheap prices. Fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M and Topshop were big innovators in this new concept of consumerism. The fast fashion industry is made possible by innovations in the supply chain market within retailers. The goal is to quickly produce cost effective clothing in response to the consumers high demands. The assumption is that we the consumers want high fashion at a low cost to our pockets, and an assumption that the garment will only be worn once or a few times. Young, (1930), states that 'fashion is the desire for change and is an ego – expansion of an individual'. This desire for change is related to our need for social approval, fashion can be used to define what type of person one is. Therefore, fashion can be an essential tool for people to make a statement about themselves, as appearances are the source of first impressions within society.

Fast fashion is profitable for manufacturers and retailers, and the industry employs 'more than seventy-five million workers worldwide' (Investopedia.com. *Fast Fashion*). The constant introduction of new products, often weekly within some high street fashion retailers, encourages customers to go to stores more frequently, leading to making more purchases; it's easy to get the public back into stores or online due the clothing being cheap. For the consumer there are also many advantages, fast fashion enables people to get the clothes they want quickly. It has made stylish clothing styles inspired by the runway cheap for the everyday public to buy.

The environmentally impact of Fast Fashion is, however, catastrophic. The *World Bank* (2019) states that the industry uses ninety-three billion cubic meters of water per year and 10% of the worlds carbon emissions. Also, it takes three thousand seven hundred and eighty-one litres of water to make one pair of jeans. Of all this extreme water waste, twenty percent is from textile dying and is highly toxic. Many of the countries where these clothes are made, in for example, Asia, the Far East and Indonesia have reduced or no regulations for wastewater disposal. Microplastic fibres used in the garments end up in the ocean amounting to about five hundred thousand tons a year, with microplastics entering the food chain which has been linked to hormonal problems in marine animals and also in humans.

The fast fashion industry is highly associated with exploitative and abusive working conditions. With most high street retailers basing their factories in developing countries such as, China and India (Good on You, 2022). The companies can employ thousands of local workers but unfortunately these workers are often underpaid, work extremely long hours and work in very poor working conditions, where they are often exposed to harmful chemicals, (Li, 2020). In addition, 'the size of the fast fashion industry is projected to reach \$39.84 billion in 2025'. However, this growth in the industry is unlikely to positively impact the fast fashion industry workers, the revenues are recognized in countries where the company's headquarters are based rather than the local manufacturing economies.

Sadly, fast fashion isn't going to stop anytime soon, according to Business Research Company (2022) *with* the growing youth population expected to keep the rise of the fast – fashion market growing.

As society becomes more and more aware of the negative impacts of fast fashion, I hope that people will become more 'conscious consumers'. The designer does have a role to play here. Good design, I think will be more and more defined by its consideration of environmental and social impacts. Over the next years, the world needs designers to embrace these concepts and to find the power to influence others on the supply chain.

Social media is also having a major influence on design. Fashion designers used to look at what consumers were wearing on the streets to get a sense of the market for future designs. Facebook launched in 2004, since then social media sites like Instagram and Tik Tok have come, changing the way designers work and advertise. Millennials who make up a huge percentage of social media users, expect brands to constantly renew their collections. This puts pressure on brands to reduce their designing to stock time frame. Designers now use social media eg Flaunter.com to trend forecast (*the process of researching and formulating predictions on consumers future buying habits*) to understand what the consumers wants. Social media is a great way for brands to quickly advertise their products to the consumer, for example Instagram now has a feature which allows customers to click a link to the seller's website leading to a quick sell for the company. This concept is only going to evolve and develop further in future, which will be interesting to see.

Moreover, the role of a designer has changed dramatically in recent years due to the growth in digital technology, the rise of informed environmentalism and the advent of social media. Because of this the variety and need for jobs in the design industry has grown, jobs in graphic design, CAD design, animation and game design, user experience design and social media design have grown in popularity in the 21st century allowing more creative people into the industry, giving it a fresher younger look. It really is incredible how much design roles have changed since the WW2.

It will be intriguing to see how the fashion design industry changes in the next ten years, in my opinion I hope to see a much more sustainable way of designing, with greater designer influence and an ever-growing range of jobs.

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