

Name: Dela Ball

Student Number: 2004412

Course: BA (hons) Surface Pattern Design

Module Code: ADAD5003

Lecturer: Julia Lockheart

Word count: 2330

What is the role of the designer/maker in the 21st century and how might this role change in the next 10 years?

Understanding the role of the designer/maker allows you to see considering different perspectives. It gives you the tools to think creatively as opposed to being narrow minded, consequently opening yours. The exposure to their opinions and viewpoints exacerbates questions within us, nourishing the urge to learn and grow that human beings have. The current and evolving role of the designer/maker is one of utter importance. Though adaptable and everchanging, the onus of its importance never diminishes. This essay will largely look at the works of Jacques Lacan and Donald Norman to help deconstruct the assumed roles of the designer/maker in the 21st century. With the intent to underpin the key values that the designer/maker brings to society, emphasizing its position, a discussion of how these roles must progress in the future will be deliberated. This future progression is just as important as their current status within society, and its urgency is a concept that this essay will heighten.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2021), the designer is the person who decides how things look aesthetically and how they work practically. Deconstructing this idea leads to the concept that the designer considers, and considers deeply, in order to make artefacts and works that fulfil the enjoyment of the user. These considerations may be fuelled by emotion, an intuitive feeling and phenomena of the mind derived from one's circumstances or mood, desire, the urge to want, and need, the act of requiring those deemed as essential to you (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021). Emotion and desire are elements fundamental to the attraction of something, and it is this attraction that considers the designers/makers work a success. Need however, is that of survival; being an essential requirement needed to survive puts the onus on the designer/maker to ensure their design is dependable. Lacan (1957) explains that desire is something we discover retrospectively if we pursue our investigation far enough. This investigation within ourselves, and conducted by the designer, exposes emotion, and subsequently makes the needs we possess exigent. Norman (1988) highlights the importance of studying the consumers and their needs to the designer/maker. By taking their needs and interests into account when designing, the designer/maker will have a much wider knowledge and understanding of his viewers. It is this unravelling that fuels the designers process to ensure that what he makes is significant to his audience but also to himself. The manner of this unravelling becomes a certain function of language (Lacan, 1957), thus a certain relationship of the subject to the signifier. According to Saussure, the signifier is the interpretation of the signified, which is the mental concept created by the designer/maker in hope to connect with the viewer (Noth, 1995). The designer/maker has a role to connect and communicate with the viewer, a manufactured language of expression and complexity considering the designer/maker exists separately to their viewer; they exist arbitrary, as Saussure taught, to one another (Noth, 1995).

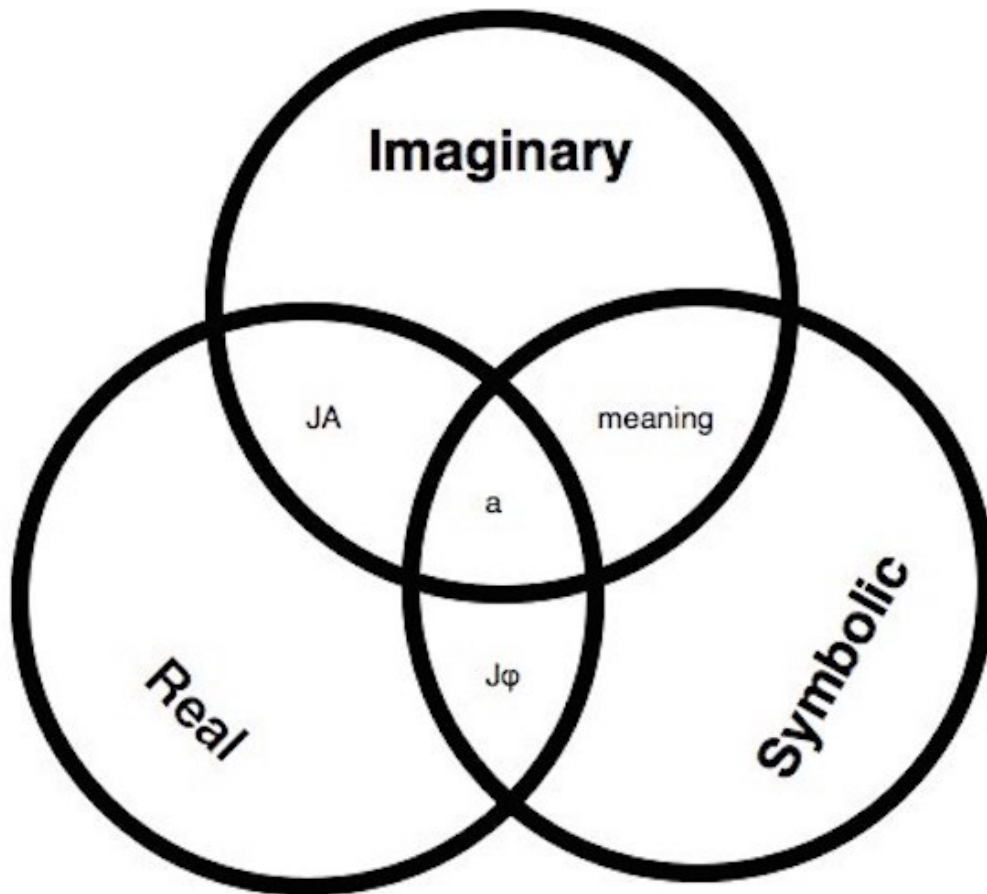


Figure 1: Lacans Concept of the Object-Cause of Desire (2019)

To design for aesthetics requires the designer/maker to understand the object cause of desire to the viewer and what it is they feel like they lack. Lacan labels this form of desire as 'object a' (figure 1) to illustrate the object-cause of desire (Lacan, 2003). Lacan (2003) decomposed 'object a' to require three elements that exists together: the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary. Once the designer/maker reveals to himself what 'object a' is and can understand and notice the three elements, he can fulfil the viewers desire with great success through his means of designing. Goffman (1959) explains that the role of material possessions and surroundings inspires and elevates the process of self-recognition. Such self-recognition can be seen as the epistemology of the designers/makers role in the 21st century, providing the viewers with the necessary tool kit to embark on a journey of self-expression and connect with their emotions. Goffman (1956) further explains that when an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed. It is the role of the designer/maker to unpick this information from the viewer, or from whom he predicts the viewer to be, to be able to create work both aesthetically and practically that speaks to them. The designer/maker is fundamental in order to gain a better understanding of yourself and grow.

William Morris states "If you want a golden rule that will fit everybody, this is it: Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful" (Norman, 2005, p.14). Artefacts and objects made for the home by the designer aesthetically consider personal taste but also account for the practicality of the design to

fulfil their function. This idea of design for aesthetics and practicality can be viewed from different perspectives. Design items for the home must of course serve a purpose but also reflect the individual's taste, character, and style; aesthetics versus practicality. "Over time, the quantity and complexity of accumulated knowledge led to increased specialization among designers, and breadth of knowledge was increasingly traded for depth of knowledge" (Lidwell, 2015, p.12). This idea of depth of knowledge echoes the notion that it is the designer/makers role within society to take time to fully understand their consumer and their surrounding environment. This depth of knowledge will enable the designer/maker to create an artefact that the viewer feels like represents themselves. Doing so without having any previous connection with them utterly defines the importance and power the designer/maker has in the 21st century. Self-expression and self-acceptance are concepts that are becoming much more widely acknowledged in today's society and people are wanting to express their individuality within their living spaces, modes of transport and fashion. Giving someone the means to do something so personal and important to them regarding their physical abilities or heritage, be that through a garment, ceramic artefact, or wallpaper, encourages the ever-growing respect for the designer/maker in being able to support uniqueness.



Figure 2: Rolls Royce Bespoke Phantom (2021)

A design team that prides themselves on providing their customer with a product that speaks nothing other than self-expression is Rolls Royce Motor Company (figure 2). The bespoke design team at Rolls Royce ask the customer what they want and "reveal their vision" (Rolls Royce, 2021) to give them a vehicle that radiates their character. Understanding that the consumers bespoke connection with your product as a designer/maker should be the underlying principle within your design approach. As human beings we have the urge to connect and relate, to speak our voice, and to be heard. Rolls Royce (2021) explain that bespoke design is a universe built upon utmost fantasy and unique proclivity. As a design team they prioritise their customers' needs and emotions in order to produce a vehicle that is highly satisfactory to them. This strengthens the

importance of emotional design by the designer/maker in order to create products that act as an alternate form of the self.

Norman (2005) explains how design is important to him, however the design style he gravitates towards depends on the occasion, context, and his mood. As a consumer, we want the design items that we purchase to bring an element of joy to us. Whether this is immediately obvious or not, the items we gravitated towards depends on the factors mentioned by Norman (2005). Our mood and well-being are hugely influential on our attitudes and behaviours, and this can influence our design decisions. The design items we are drawn to based on the connection or personal meaning we feel it conveys will vary each day. As a designer/maker, considering how the consumer may feel can be executed in several ways. Considering components such as materiality, manufacturing methods, how the product is marketed, its cost, and its practicality will enable the designer/maker to reach an understanding with the consumers to a certain point. This point is heightened as soon as they begin to incorporate the emotional component of design (Norman, 2005). The three main aspects of design as explained by Norman (2005) are visceral, concerns with appearance and aesthetics, behavioural, the pleasure and effectiveness of its use, and reflective, the rationalisation and intellectualisation of the product. Freud (1923) reveals to us that the visceral and behavioural components of emotional design resonate with the subconscious, and the reflective element echoes his idea of the super-ego; the conscious self. All three elements in conjunction with the differing components act as a means to create visual linguistics that also resonate with the consumer. The consumer's ego, as thought by Freud (1923), will make the decision as to whether or not the product appeals to their self-image and if they feel a strong enough connection to it.

Building on the methods of considering the customer's well-being within emotional design, Biophilia is being used more frequently in the 21st century to ensure this is a priority within design. Biophilia is a concept that demonstrates the human innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life. Typically, it is an "approach to architecture that seeks to connect building occupants closer to nature" (Sage Glass, 2016). The main purpose of Biophilic design is to create a productive environment that encourages growth and clarity of thought. Sage Glass (2016) explains that our bodies and minds appreciate the presence of water, as an example, and that it comes with several health benefits such as low blood pressure. Biophilic design is one of many design strategies that concentrate on the consumer and how they are going to feel on an emotional and physical level in an environment, or in possession of a product. Also supporting the idea of appreciating our natural environment, this eco-conscious design technique radiates the importance of sustainability and reinforces the pressing issue of global warming and climate change. "We do not need to be told that the world has problems. But what is to be done about them?" (Smith, 1976, p.108). The role of the designer/maker should consider all of these things; the emotional well-being of the consumer, the personal discovery and journey they will embark on with the product, and how they can push the unrelenting social, political, and economic issues that we currently face in the 21st century but that we will also continue to be faced with in the future. "The principle of accessibility asserts that designs should be usable by people of diverse abilities, without special adaptation or modification. Historically, accessibility in design focused on accommodating people with disabilities" (Lidwell, 2015, p.16). Being able to design with such influence, aside from the aesthetics and beauty within craftsmanship, "the skill of making things well" (Sennett, 2008, p.8), makes the

designer/maker a key participant in the well-being of the consumers and of the world we consume in. Their depth of knowledge and deep considerations mean that their consumer base will be far broader and that their works will relate to a variety of consumers. If these components aren't considered, or are actively ignored, the design industry will have an exceedingly negative impact on the environment consequently influencing the well-being of the people that live in it, of their customer. Fry (2009) believes that the design industry has the ability to prevent the exacerbation of the still accelerating defuturing condition of unsustainability, which he sees as the essence of any material condition of unsustainability as it acts to take futures away from ourselves and other living species. Hence, if the designer/maker isn't sustainable within their practice, they will eventually have no consumers to design for. It is their responsibility to consider the environmental impact their practice has on the natural environment. Fisher and Gamman (2019) notice that the design industry is becoming drastically more part of the problem of the unsustainable mode of the world. The role of recognising and taking responsibility for any ethical implications and issues of designing and the designed becomes an expectation of being a designer/maker. Although it seems the consumer is the priority, how the products are created for the consumer and manufactured is just as important.

To conclude, the state of our environment and the state of the design industry must be brought together. Fry (2009) explains that while the destruction of the planet's natural environments comes from many quarters, it is climate change that has most dramatically and recently entered public consciousness. For this situation to change, we and the designers themselves need to challenge what design designs as what design is typically understood to be has to be remade, redesigned (Fisher and Gamman, 2019). Within my own practice sustainability and delivering an eco-conscious design process will be fundamental. Reducing waste where possible, and using as many natural and ethical sourced materials as I can will ensure I'm participating in the efforts to redesign design. Reeves (2016) acknowledges that if the designer/maker invests in his research, of both the consumer and the environment, he will establish ever more detailed knowledge of what has happened previously thus developing a more refined ability to predict what will happen in the future within his design thinking. Actively searching for the consequences of design actions, material choices, and means of production provides the designer/maker with the tools to consider and therefore benefit the environment within their practice. Alongside this, my work often has a strong focus on the viewers experience. I aim to inspire that urge within them to connect with the pieces, through tactility and materiality. This concept will continue to be present within my practice in the future to support the idea of emotional connections with the designed. Dant (1996) illuminates that the material qualities of an object are often what brings the sensation of desire to the consumer. The role of the designer/maker is to constantly consider this in their means of designing in order to be able to emotionally design for consumers and create products that they want. "All designers have to grapple with the unknowability of the future" (Reeves, 2016, p.6). If there is no environment, there are no customers to consume the designed.

Bibliography

Chapman, J. (2009) *Emotionally Durable Design*. (2nd ed.) Routledge

Cixous, H. (1976) 'The Laugh of the Medusa', *The University of Chicago Press Journals*, 1(4), pp. 875-893 Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Dant, T. (1996) 'Fetishism and the social value of objects', *Sociological Review*, 44(3), pp. 495-616 Lancaster: Lancaster University Press

Dunne, A and Raby, F. (2013) *Speculative Everything*. Cambridge: MIT Press

Fancourt D, Garnett C, Spiro N, West R, Müllensiefen D (2019) 'How do artistic creative activities regulate our emotions?', *Validation of the Emotion Regulation Strategies for Artistic Creative Activities* 14(2) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211362> Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Fisher, T and Gamman, L (2019) *Tricky Design*. Online: Bloomsbury Collections. Available at: <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/tricky-design-the-ethics-of-things/> Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Freud, S. (1923). *The Ego and the Id*. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923- 1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works, 1-66. Available at: https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Freud_SE_Ego_Id_complete.pdf Accessed on: 2d December 2021

Fry, T. (2009) *Design Futuring*. London: Oxford International Publishers Ltd

Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.
Ingold, T. (2009) 'The Textility of Making', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 34(1), pp. 91–102 London: Oxford University Press

Lacan, J. (2003) 'Some Reflections on the Ego', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34, 11-17; reproduced in Furman and Levy (eds), *Influential Papers from the 1950s*, Karnac, p.295 –296

Lacan, J. (1957) *Desire and its Interpretation*. [Gallagher, C. Trans.] Available at: <http://www.lacaninireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-VI.pdf> Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Lidwell, W. (2015) *Universal Principles of Design*. Rockport Publishers

Norman, D. (2005) *Emotional Design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things*. New York: Basic Books

Norman, D. (2004) On Design and Emotion [TED Talk] Accessed from: https://www.ted.com/talks/don_norman_on_design_and_emotion Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Norman, D. (1988) *The Design of Everyday Things*. New York: Doubleday

Noth, W. (1995) *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Oxford English Dictionary (2021) Designer. (Online) Available from: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/designer_1?q=designer Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Oxford English Dictionary (2021) Desire. (Online) Available from: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/desire_1?q=desire Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Oxford English Dictionary (2021) Emotion. (Online) Available from: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/emotion?q=emotion> Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Oxford English Dictionary (2021) Need. (Online) Available from: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/need_1?q=need Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Reeves, S. (2016) 'The Future as a Design Problem', *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*, 32(3) pp. 6-17 Cambridge: MIT Press

Rolls Royce Motor Company (2021) *Phantom*. Available at: https://www.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/en_GB/showroom/phantom.html Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Sage Glass (2016) *Seven Principles of Biophilic Design*. Available at: <https://www.sageglass.com/en/article/seven-principles-biophilic-design> Accessed on: 2nd December 2021

Sennet, R. (2008) *The Craftsman*. London: Yale University Press

Smith, B. (1976) 'Conceptual Design – A Polemic', *Design for Need*, Ryal College of Art, London, April. Oxford: Pergamon Press

Figure List:

Figure 1. *Lacans Concept of the Object-Cause of Desire* (2019). Available at: <https://thedangerousmaybe.medium.com/lacans-concept-of-the-object-cause-of-desire-objet-petit-a-bd17b8f84e69> Accessed on: 4th December 2021

Figure 2. *Rolls Royce Bespoke Phantom*, Rolls Royce (2021). Available at: https://www.rolls-roycemotorcars.com/en_GB/showroom/phantom.html Accessed on: 2nd December 2021