

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?

Name: Cassidy Jayne Mackenzie

Student number: 1903597

Module Course: Research in Context ADAD5003

Course: BA (hons) Surface Pattern Design

Word count: 2,485

Lecture: Julia Lockheart

The original meaning for the word *designer* initially meant the ‘one who schemes’ and came into English in the seventeenth century (Vocabulary.com, 2020). It also states a more current meaning that it is “someone who creates plans to be used in making something”. Regarding the role of a *maker*, it is “a person, company or piece of equipment that makes or produces something” (Oxford’s Learner Dictionary, 2020). In this essay I will be discussing how the role of the designer/maker might change in the next 10 years, mostly considering how environmental factors will impact and reform their aims and objectives. I am firstly going to explore the role of a designer:

In the design industry, those who decide what and how something will be designed make decisions that will affect all of us and the non-human natural world who has no voice to protest the life destroying conditions that are created.

(Boehnert, 2018, pg. 17).

This has been identified in the fashion industry especially, up until recently a designer's role has been to compose a product that meets a brief given to them, not accounting for the impact of the materials and resources they are using to create that product. From personal experience I know that designer roles are observed as inferior to others and a lot of students are pushed towards more academic routes rather than designing routes. “Schools need to do more to encourage young people to embrace creativity, including trips to art studios in the curriculum and inviting industry speakers to come in” Dawood.S(2017). The role of the designer has been frowned upon until recently, it is becoming apparent that designers and makers are needed to use their initiative and creativity to create environmentally friendly products; this makes the role of the designer a crucial part of society today and for the future. Having a global aim that will impact the future also gives them a sense of direction and something to feel passionate about, Bell Hooks stated in her book *Belonging*:

I am stunned by how many citizens in our nation feel lost...though they cannot see what they are going...feel no sense of place. What they know, what they have is a sense of crisis of impending doom. The old, the elders, who have lived from decade to decade and beyond say life is different in this time ‘way strange’ that our world today is a world of ‘too much’... creates a wilderness.

(Hooks.B,2008, Chapter.1)

Designers need to acknowledge many things when making sustainable decisions this includes the use of water during the growing, dying and making processes, how they make and distribute their products (as this has an impact on Co2 emissions), what their products are made of and how they sourced the materials (to minimise the damage the fashion industry is contributing to global warming). Most of these areas concern the designers and makers of a brand so you can see how their role is going to be affected drastically in the next ten years, having to make all these changes to the way they work. To put how many people this will affect in perspective, the fashion sector recruits approximately 60 million people worldwide and is only growing - that is nearly the entire United Kingdom.

The fashion industry is responsible for 10 % of annual global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined. At this pace, the fashion industry's greenhouse gas emissions will surge more than 50 % by 2030.

(The World Bank,2019).

These are concerning figures that all designers and makers, in any industry, need to think about and what changes they are going to implement going into the future. A brand that I have noticed is taking their role as a designer/maker to the next step in introducing sustainable clothing is Zara. They stated in an interview with Vogue that they are:

Always looking for ways in which we can do better: working on new technologies, new ways to work with recycled materials, and helping create new fabrics that our designers, as well as others in the industry, can work with in the future.

Holgate.M(2019).

As mentioned, one of the main concerns that designers are now having to consider in their process is the amount of water each garment needs to be made, the availability of fresh water is decreasing at an unsettling rate. "From growing the cotton to the dyeing process, it can take an estimated 20,000 litres of water to make just one pair of jeans and one t-shirt" (Oxfam Online Shop, 2019). They go onto say that it would take "13 years to drink that amount". Zara have been tackling this issue by using; organic farming methods, using natural pesticides and fertilisers that help to preserve freshwater resources, using natural farming techniques that help to preserve biodiversity and products are produced without

genetically modified seeds. During the making process, they are also considering Co2 emissions by reducing their energy consumption and sustainably managed forests “ensuring that old-growth and endangered forests are respected” Zara (2020). Not only are Zara’s designers/makers ensuring their products are environmentally friendly, but they are also taking awareness of the packaging they are sold in. Instead of using plastic bags and wrapping, everything is packed in paper and cardboard, this being the bags that are used in their shops and online deliveries. The packaging they use is also 100% recycled and reusable paper, which is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). If their logo appears on packaging, then it contains/made with materials that are forest base and from their forests or certified reclaimed sources. So, as you can see Zara's designers and makers are already using their role to make a significant difference in the way their products are planned, made, and delivered to have a positive impact on the environment. Even though Zara have made these huge steps in making a difference, they are one of the few brands that has done this meaning that designers/makers from other brands need to follow in Zara’s footsteps to make a significant difference – it is not enough just for a handful of brands to evolve.

Another brand that has taken extreme action to become as sustainable as possible is Levis. As I have previously mentioned the making of a pair of jeans uses a significant amount of water, and as this brands material is mainly denim, they would need *a lot* of water to create their products. To tackle this, they have come up with the idea of Cottonized Hemp - “it needs less water, less pesticides to grow, reducing up to 96% water” Levis (2020), whilst still creating the cotton feel. Due to certain fibres being indissoluble in oceans, designers in Levis have made sure that “every thread is designed to be recycled”, ensuring that all products can be recycled and reused. They also state on their website that “For us, thoughtful design means considering water conservation when choosing our materials, designing each garment to be recycled, and choosing factories that value their workers and communities”. It's clear that the designer and maker roles in Levis are truly valued and cared for, they care not only for the environment but also their workers – not using fast fashion factories. The roles here have evolved by not just caring for the products and consumers but caring for sustainability which is something I believe all brands are going to have to execute this method of designing and making if they want to tackle their contribution to global warming. Furthermore, brands are going to find it difficult to compete if they don’t evolve as consumers will be looking to buy

more sustainability to do their part in helping climate change.



Fig:1 Levis Sustainable Choices

The designer role has a lot of power to make the changes that need to be implemented, but it seems a lot of brands are not implementing these changes. An example of this is Pretty Little Thing, they stated that “We’re constantly thinking of ways to be more environmentally friendly at our warehouse, that’s why our pink delivery packaging is now made from 100% recycled materials” Pretty Little Thing (2020). Despite this, for me this is the bare minimum a brand can do. Their designers are still using harmful materials in their design processes, and then selling them as little as 40p in their sales just to clear stock. This will only add to landfill waste, an increase in carbon emissions during distribution and production and encourages fast fashion which includes the usage of dyes that are cheap and toxic- contributing to the “20% of industrial wastewater pollution worldwide” (UN Alliance For Sustainable Fashion,2020) created by the Fashion Sector. This just outlines to me one of the serious issues about the role of the designer of the 21st century, this being that they are mostly concerned about the economic value of a product rather than the environmental value. Furthermore, I feel that makers do get abused in many brands especially in fast – fashion factories as they create what designers provide them with and have little power over what materials are used. However, Pretty Little Thing have improved on their sustainability values by giving customers the option to send them their worn clothing, shoes, and accessories so they can recycle and reuse to make recycled products of their own. This is going to be the biggest change for makers in the next ten years, the use of recycled materials instead of freshly sourced- this will not just be for the fashion industry but all industries that will be able to source and use recyclable materials for their products.

Another key issues that designers are facing is the increasing amount of landfill waste the fashion industry is creating. The purpose for this is society are always looking for something new, even when there is nothing wrong with what they already have. Their *old* clothing gets disposed of quickly, usually in the waste bin, without them even realising what harm they are doing to the environment.

Fashion is consumption, materialism, commercialisation, and marketing... Fashion becomes anything that is emerged from a consumerist machine... This is, predictably, also the view of fashion of many within the sustainability lobby, where there persists a reluctance to imagine fashion outside a commercial context that trades on novelty and anxiety for economic return.

(Fletcher and Tham, 2014, pg. 18)

Up until recently, a designer and makers role has been to create a product for the customers wants, rather than the needs of the environment. Due to this, the materials and processes of a product have not really been a concern to them as they are just doing their job- which is what any one of us has been doing. It is only in the last couple of years we are all noticing the negative impact we are having on the world. This means that the new generation of designers and current ones will have a different role to just meeting the wants of the customer, they are now going to have to consider the needs of the environment. "A role for designers in the new realm where they regard themselves as in service of cares instead of wants... notion of being instead of having" (Fletcher and Tham, 2014, pg. 53). Not only is it the role of the designer to care for the environment but it is also a duty of care for us consumers. Our roles are also going to change, even though we are still going to be materialistic (that's just how human beings are) we are going to start considering what we are doing with our old clothes and what brands we are buying from- we should only buy from designers who are environmentally aware if they are changing how they work then we should change the way we buy. However, being environmentally aware does come at the extra cost of increased expenses for a business- especially those who use fast fashion for their making process. Brands use fast fashion because it is the cheapest way to create clothing at a fast pace, despite this, to comply with sustainable standards these brands are going to have to start using environmentally friendly fabrics and dyes, using natural resources, and choosing renewable energy all of which will increase their costs. This is going to impact the way clothes are made in the next ten years as a lot more time and effort is going to be put into each garment making them as environmentally friendly as possible. Makers aims and objectives right now is the speed at which they produce, over the next ten years this will become more about the quality of the products. Having high quality clothing will also increase its life expectancy

and its quality to be reused and reworked into something new in the future, this that cannot happen with fast fashion items as much because they are cheap, toxic materials- the reason they get thrown out so fast and are filling up our landfills.

It's clear that during the 21st century a lot has changed regarding the role of the designer/maker. The main purpose for them up until recently was to keep up with trends and deliver to customers what they desired, these trends have been constantly changing and rotating as of peoples tastes. "Real design is a language whose meaning can be best deciphered under extreme conditions- want of knowledge, of resources, of materials, of time" (Flusser.V,2013, pg.9). This outlines that designers have always taken into consideration these aspects when designing products, just not the impact- this may be due to the lack of knowledge provided to them. However, the challenges that designers face going further into the 21st century is an opportunity to explore new ideas and issues, opening endless possibilities. "This potential to use the language of design to pose questions, provoke, and inspire is conceptual designs defining feature" (Dunne and Raby, 2013, pg.12). The book goes onto mention that "we're not talking about experimenting with how things are now, making them better or different but about other possibilities all together". This demonstrates that going into the next decade designers will be thinking about new ideas completely that could tackle environmental issues in the design industry. They will be using their initiative and creative mindsets not only to comply with trends of fashion but with trends of sustainability - and hopefully this will result in a designer's job being taken more seriously by the public and by educational institutes, especially as it's becoming the job of a designer to deliver solutions. Designers over the next ten years will be coming together to aid each other in finding solutions to address and tackle global warming and make a better future for all of us – as said by Curran.S(2014) "Design is problem solving, it is a process and we do not embark upon the journey of design alone".

Bibliography

Books

- Boehnert.J (2018) *Design, Ecology, Politics- Towards the Ecocene*. 1st edn. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dunne and Raby (2013) *Speculative Everything Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. 1st Edn. MIT Press
- Fletcher and Tham (2014) *Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion*. 1st edn. Taylor & Francis.
- Flusser.V (2013) *Shape of Things A Philosophy of Design*. 1st edn. Reaktion Books.
- Hooks.B (2008) *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. 1st illustrated edition. Taylor & Francis

Websites

- Curran.S (2014) *Medium* [The 3 Responsibilities of Being a Designer] Available at: <https://medium.com/@stewartsc/the-3-responsibilities-of-being-a-designer-d36fdd4e466a> (Accessed:09/12/2020)
- Dawood.S (2017) *Design Week* [Why are fewer students taking on art and design at university?] Available at: <https://www.designweek.co.uk/issues/6-12-february-2017/why-are-less-students-taking-on-art-design-at-university/> (Accessed:07/12/2020)
- Holgate.M (2019) *VOGUE* [As Zara Announces Its Latest Sustainability Goals, Three of Its Design Team Weigh in on Going Slower and Creating Responsibly] Available at: <https://www.vogue.com/article/zara-sustainable-initiatives> (Accessed:08/12/2020)
- Levis (2020) *LET'S MAKE THINGS BETTER*. Available at: https://www.levi.com/GB/en_GB/features/sustainability.(Accessed:09/12/2020)

- Oxford's Learner Dictionary (2020) *Maker Definition*. Available at:
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/maker> .
(Accessed: 07/12/2020).
- Pretty Little Thing (2020) *Sustainability*. Available at:
<https://www.prettylittlething.com/sustainability> (Accessed:08/12/2020)
- The World Bank (2019) *How Much Do Our Wardrobes Cost to the Environment?* Available
at:<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/09/23/costo-moda-medioambiente#:~:text=The%20fashion%20industry%20is%20responsible,more%20than%2050%20%25%20by%202030>. (Accessed: 07/12/2020)
- Vocabulary.com (2020) *Designer definition*. Available at:
<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/designer#:~:text=The%20word%20designer%20came%20into,should%20look%2C%20especially%20something%20artistic>. (Accessed: 07/12/2020).

- Zara (2020) *ZW PREMIUM '90S FULL LENGTH JEANS*. Available at:
<https://www.zara.com/uk/en/zw-premium-%E2%80%9990s-full-length-jeans-p02553254.html?v1=87513395&v2=1549248> (Accessed: 08/12/2020)

List of Figures

- Fig:1 - Levis (2020) *LET'S MAKE THINGS BETTER*. Available at:
https://www.levi.com/GB/en_GB/features/sustainability. (Accessed: 09/12/2020)