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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?

In this essay I will be discussing Greta Thunberg, Olafur Eliasson and Banksy's work in how they tackle climate change. So, what is the meaning of climate change? The Oxford English Dictionary ("Climate Change") definition is: "A change in global or regional climate patterns, in particular a change apparent from the mid to late 20th century onwards and attributed largely to the increased levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide produced by the use of fossil fuels". A person who is majorly interested with in this field is Greta Thunberg. At just the age of seventeen she is the youngest activist to have challenged world leaders to open their eyes to the seriousness of climate change. You could say Thunberg felt she had to take that roll as people who were in much higher and greater power than her were not making it aware to the public. Due to this she felt it was her responsibility to make everyone across the globe to be aware of the current crisis which can impact us all. The sole purpose of an activist is to see something that needs to be changed for the greater good whether it's political or for social change regarding our future. Thunberg saw a problem that needed to be fixed and does not plan on stopping until things improve.



Fig 1

Thunberg wanted to spread awareness of climate change so by using her social media platform, she decided to take everyone on a journey. As a young lady who could see the bigger picture, she knew it was not enough to just talk about, it was necessary to visit these countries and spread awareness in person in hopes it would create a bigger impact. During this time Thunberg was only sixteen and to travel to these places she decided to use a boat as a way of transport. Why a boat? According to the BBC she stated, *"Travelling by boat sends a signal that climate change crisis is a real thing"* (BBC,2019). With that she added *"Electricity on the boat will solely come from wind turbines and solar panels, meaning the journey has a zero-carbon footprint"* (BBC, 2019). In addition to this, she was at sea for 14 days without showering, going to the bathroom in a bucket and consumed freeze-dried food to avoid boarding a plane (kids right,2019). This suggests that she was willing to go to the extreme lengths to prove that there are alternative ways to do things without harming the environment. *"Thunberg needed to cross the Atlantic Ocean so she could appear for two large climate change conferences in the US. It was estimated her travel time was going to be around two weeks on a high-speed yacht that was called the Malizia II"* (BBC, 2019). It was believed she had a lot of publicity surrounding this event which come to her advantage as it was forcing people to discuss the matter. Furthermore. She decided to document her travels and post them on social media, so it could reach a mass amount of people.



Fig 2, speech

The conference was held at the UN climate action summit where she gives a passionate and emotional speech about climate change. In the speech Thunberg talks about *"how shocked she is through learning how adults didn't seem to take the crisis seriously enough"* (kids right, 2019). As a result of this she states *"This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here, I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean, yet you came to us young people for hope, how dare you"* (world leader, 2019, 0.21). This implies that the older generation have let down the new and young upcoming adults to carry a huge responsibility. It is burden that has carried on Thunberg's shoulder since she was eight years old, she states *"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words and yet I am one of the lucky ones"* (world leader, 2019, 0.21).

Some might disagree that an individual like Thunberg is 'one of the lucky ones,' because of this they have robbed her of her education. Why is a young lady of that age not experiencing everyday teenage things but instead, she is sacrificing her crucial precious time to make change in the world. Despite the sadness it brings there have been some positive changes with the sacrifices she has made. *"Greta Thunberg has mobilized over seven million children across the world to strike, like her, for climate justice"* (kids rights, 2019). Greta's words of advice are: *"fine words about the climate are not enough. Share my panic, and take action now"* (kids rights, 2019). Following this it shows without taking risks and willing to work hard there is no pay off. Thunberg has received many awards for her efforts being a self-driven and committed activist which she has earned in her very own right. One of the biggest achievements in the more recent time was being nominated for the 2020 Nobel peace prize.

In the recent year we have all been struggling and trying to support each other through a pandemic caused by the virus covid-19. Due to that we were strictly advised from the government to be self-isolating which meant we didn't leave the house for just under 6 months. The only exception you were able to leave the house is if you needed to buy necessities. What has this got to do with the climate change crisis? Well the entire time we were isolating it meant we gave the planet a break from human destruction. With that being said, the BBC reported *"Residents of Venice are noticing a vast improvement in the quality of the famous canals that run through the city, which are running clear for the first time in years, and fish can even be seen in the usually murky waters"* (BBC news, 2020). Due to lockdown the streets of Venice became a ghost town but alternatively it has improved the environment vastly as they reported *"Lockdown has left Venice streets empty, and a drastic drop in water traffic means sediment in the canals has been able to settle"* (BBC News, 2020). This is showing that if we left the environment as it was without our input, it started to correct itself.



Fig 3: The weather project

Olafur Eliasson is an advocate against the issues regarding climate change. Just like Greta Thunberg he wanted to make change within the world but approached it through art. The exhibition he exhibited was back in 2003 which was called The Weather Project. Eliasson was interested by the wind, rain, and sun. These were a few elements he would face daily which he could experiment with due to being engrossed by the idea of how weather can shape a city (Tate Modern, 2003).

The idea of the exhibition stemmed from in what context do we talk about the weather. Eliasson stated: *"He conducted a survey of staff at the museum, posing a series of questions ranging from the everyday to the abstract ('How often do you discuss the weather?', 'Do you think the idea of the weather in our society is based on nature or culture?')"* (Tate Modern, 2003). This implies that he wanted to do something with purpose that came along with impact to the public to get them discussing the importance of climate change. Eliasson used this as a promotional campaign to further his target audience. He was consciously being strategic in how much information he was releasing whether it was via internet, magazines, or vehicles in hopes of not swaying their opinions of the matter before seeing the exhibition themselves (Tate Modern, 2003). As art is a subjective topic, I believe he wanted you to form your own opinion before letting the write up determine them for you. People might have thought this as Eliasson states: *"I think there is often a discrepancy between the experience of seeing and the knowledge or expectation of what we are seeing"* (Tate Modern, 2003).

To catch people's attention, he needed to beautify the portrayal of climate change as humans are more responsive and receptive to things that look 'pretty' by making the connection to nature. This is believed as *"Eliasson's works harness the precarious and fleeting aspects of the natural world might initially evoke the spiritual and emotional attachment to nature found in the Romantic tradition"* (Tate modern, 2003). In the exhibition he wanted to be transparent with the audience so he decided to centralise the sun so that people could see it from all angles which would expose the structure and apparatus (Tate modern,2003). Why was there need to expose the sculpture? Eliasson adds *"the benefit in disclosing the means with which I am working is that it enables the viewer to understand the experience itself as a construction and so, to a higher extent, allow them to question and evaluate the impact this experience has on them"* (Tate Modern,2003). Our thoughts and opinions almost act like the weather due to the uncertainty and changeability within the factor. Neither the less it is our choice if we want to change the course of climate change for better or worse as Eliasson discusses *"The Weather Project parallel the unpredictability of the weather outside, which despite the efforts and sabotage of humankind still remains beyond our control"* (Tate Modern, 2003).



Fig 4: Little sun project

The little sun project was an extension of the weather exhibition. What was the aim of the project? *"Little sun is a wedge that opens up the urgent discussion about bringing sustainable energy to all from the perspective of art to raise awareness about unequal distribution of energy today"* (Olafur Eliasson, 2012). What does sustainability mean? The Oxford English Dictionary (sustainability) definition is: "The use of natural products and energy in a way that does not harm the environment". Climate change affects certain parts of the world more vastly than others so when designing a solution *"sustainability provides a common language and goal for diverse peoples and nations"* (Paul, L., 2013). The idea was to form a small project to put a solution to Ethiopia's lack of electricity, which came as a surprise because it went so popular and got turned into a global project. Just by the power of the sun Eliasson was able to change over two million lives (Little Sun, 2012). The popularity surrounding the Little Sun business brought clean, reliable, and affordable energy in places of poverty that did not have electricity which put immediate attention on surrounding the awareness of energy access and climate action. He wanted to shine a light on those countries who have been hurt by climate change such as Refugees, school children and people who have been affected by natural disasters. His solar panels are sold online in partner stores globally and in addition to that each person who buys his product is helping another person out. As a company they send a Little Sun and deliver one to someone that is living off-the-grid for a much affordable price (Little Sun, 2012).

They are being sold at the price of £30. So, what are the figures? There have been 1,100,941 lamps distributed worldwide, 647,574 lamps distributed off-grid, 2,826,661 lives changed off-grid, 2,671 African sales agents trained, 36,485,160 extra study hours for school children off-grid, \$130,654,530 saved on energy expenses in off-grid household and finally 697,243 tonnes of CO₂ reduced (Little Sun, 2012). It is thought that targeting young people to make a stance as we are the upcoming future is the next best thing to bring awareness to climate change as Eliasson says *"Educating young people about the importance of solar energy plays a critical role in creating a more sustainable future for our planet"* (Little Sun, 2012). People who have been privileged have never even considered the impact on not having light, we have not thought how this might affect on one's education. *"Without energy, children cannot study after dark, compromising their education"* (Little Sun, 2012). On the contrary Greta Thunberg is sacrificing her education to make a stand towards this movement.



Fig 4: Banksy, Port Talbot, 2019

Another artist that contributes to show continuous support and raising awareness for climate change is Banksy. His most recent artwork that blew up was done in Neath Port Talbot on a local mans shed back in 2019. It gained a lot of attention and due to that there were a large amount of local people queuing to see this iconic work of art. It brought the community together and started the discussion of pollution as Tata steel is known to pollute the area quite heavily.

Banksy posted a video on his Instagram account calling it “seasons greetings” which was fitting as it was done around December of that year. The artwork was strategically planned out as one side of the wall is depicting a young boy appears to be playing in the snow and trying to eat the snowflakes. However, the entire concept of the imagery changes as when you slowly look to the left you discover what was meant to be snowflake is the reality of human waste consumption being burned adding harmful gases to the environment. In the video he made, towards the end he zoomed out and behind the shed was directly Tata steel which was implying towards the climate change crisis. When viewing the video, he used a cover of a song of a young child singing about playing in the snow but something as pure and innocent as that was very fitting to the subject he was trying to portray. On the other hand, it was very haunting as you had this sweet virginal voice singing along to something that was not as innocent and quite frankly disturbing. This might be believed as people were outraged as when climate change is discussed its usual talking about somewhere else so when this hit local communities they were outraged as in a way Banksy had exposed the to the reality of things.

What is the role of the designer? Through taking you on a journey discussing Greta Thunberg, Olafur Eliasson and Banksy I have learned it takes a special person to see a problem and find a solution. It is their job to tackle these issues and to put their own unique spin on it by elevating an idea and making it a reality. Look at Olafur Eliasson, he got people excited and interested with sustainability by using solar panels in a shape of a sun. The fact that this was meant to raise awareness towards energy saving has exceeded its expectation as this project has blown up worldwide and made a path of its own. Will this role change within the next 10 years? I believe it will be impossible for these roles not to change because as a nation we are constantly moving on to the new best thing. However, these roles will change in context to the new problem that we will have to face. With hope I believe there will be more people willing to take a stand for what is right and is eager to problem solve to come up with a solution that will forever change our ongoing problem, climate change.

To conclude this essay, analysing three intelligent and courageous active role designers shows that as a society if we work together, we can make change for the greater good. We know that climate change is not going to stop unless we think of alternative ways in which we can slow down or change our living habits. It is something we

will be conscious for the time being until we put an end to it. I believe in time we will be faced with new challenges regarding the environment and when tackling those issues there will always be a designer trying to resolve/ fix it.

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