

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? Discuss your ideas with reference to two of the practitioners or thinkers discussed in your lecture strand

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Module Course: Research in Context ADAD5003

Course: BA(hons) Surface Pattern Design

Word Count: 2311

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In the 21st century, and moving forward into the next ten years, an important obligation of a designer is to 'design against the still accelerating defuturing condition of unsustainability' (Fry, 2009, p.1). This is because 'According to the IPCC, we are less than twelve years away from not being able to undo our mistakes' (Thunberg, 2018, p.19) due to high emissions and waste. It is inferred that change needs to be made to the way that we treat the planet or we will face huge consequences as a human race because 'design impacts on the viability of our future' (Fry, 2009, p.29). Designers are a huge part of this change as I feel that the role of a designer is to innovate while appealing to a consumer with the creativity or beauty of the product.

Sustainability originally was a huge part of design due to the importance of longevity of a product as people would purchase items so that they would last. This changed when mass production became about pumping out as many products as possible while sacrificing the quality of the object; whether that be an item of clothing or a household appliance. The industry became more about making as much profit as possible while the demand increased for goods therefore 'a crucial part of any understanding of the emergence of the economic basis of modern societies lies in an appreciation of those forces which brought about a dramatic increase in demand or, in Perkin's words, that 'consumer demand was the ultimate key to the industrial revolution'.' (Campbell, 1989, p.17). Although it is explained that it was an important shift for more people to want and need products, the demand continued to increase to this day which allowed companies to cut corners and only focus on the amount of items being produced and not the quality or ethics of the production line.

In recent years there has been increasingly more talk of sustainability as we have come full circle as a society. It used to be common to go to a tailor to pick up bespoke clothing and go to your local butchers and green grocer to buy meat and vegetables. You can now buy all of these things at a large multitude of places such as online, supermarkets or large high street shopping centres. This availability at any time of day adds a lot of steps to the production line and therefore creates large amounts of waste; 'Many industries contribute to greenhouse gases, Electricity, meaning power generation, is responsible for 31 percent of greenhouse gases; transportation, 27 percent; industry, 21 percent; commercial and residential activities, 12 percent; and agriculture 9 percent, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).' (Brumley, 2019) and within the

fashion industry 'one garbage truck of textiles is dumped to landfills or burned each second!' (The Pretty Planeteer, 2019). This is an unbelievably immense amount of waste produced and polluting the atmosphere which is why designers and makers need to be progressing.

On the flip side, because the clothing that we buy is so cheap we care less for it and therefore a throwaway culture has been established. In other words 'When your T-shirt costs less than your coffee you don't expect it to last longer than your coffee.' (The Pretty Planeteer, 2019). Implying that consumers know and understand the liability of the mass produced clothing that is sold by large corporate companies and will still purchase the garments, feeding the industry in a negative way.

Trend forecasting in the 21st century has started to include strong references to sustainability to keep the fashion industry and the planet alive. For example, fig.1 is taken from a trend forecast for Autumn Winter 2020/2021 on the WGSN website; WGSN being essentially the bible for trend in the fashion and textiles industry and is therefore followed by most big brands and designers. This trend explicitly suggests the concept of recycling old clothing and silhouettes to create new styles and outfits while the image used in the background is a recycled plastic, woven carrier bag to reinforce the idea of recycling a non fabric to make a textile. By presenting this idea from an influential company, it forces change to happen as companies will still follow these trends to be cool and have the edge on the high street. In turn customers will see the big name brands working with sustainable concepts and begin to think for themselves.

This is ironic as previously it would have been seen as a lower class way of living while higher class people could afford to constantly replace their clothing rather than mending the holes. It became more normalised during WWII when the book 'Make Do and Mend' came out to provide solutions to saving money and making clothing last longer while their husbands, fathers and brothers were fighting at war. It writes the idea that if you have 'Worn sleeves. Unpick at the shoulder seams, and put in new sleeves knitted in a contrasting colour or, using the best part of the old wool with some new, knit in stripes, panels or a half-and-half design.' (Great Britain. Ministry Of Information and Great Britain. Board Of Trade, 1943) reiterating the ideas showcased in the WGSN trend to update the clothing that you already own rather than replacing and adding to the waste.



Fig 1. Screenshot of WGSN trend forecast.

Trends that dictate sustainability, are really important going forward into the next ten years of designers because trends are already predicted two years in advance and I feel that planting the seed of rethinking how we produce products could stem a huge innovative generation of designers. New designers will most likely become solely interested in saving the earth and trying to fix the problems that previous generations of unconsciousness have caused. Within trend itself, they look at history to predict what will be in fashion and examine 'original research using information from forecast databases as well as historic and current magazines' (Ballmer and Tobias, 2016) as a result, the history that the generation of the next ten years will look back on will be the mistakes and disaster of the pollution and misconduct of the planet. 'By the time social actions are available for study, they have already passed the moment in which they are enacted.' (Reeves, Goulden and Dingwall, 2016) so designers and makers alike must be aware of social and environmental issues happening around them in current stories to think ahead. From this they can see what not to do or even find imaginative ways of using the vast amounts of waste for good.

There are many designers that are already innovating with waste to create funky new and sustainable products. Fig. 2 shows an array of bioplastics that the company 'Chip[s] Board' have

manufactured; completely biodegradable plastics made from the waste of a potato and other natural components. They work closely with McCains potato farm as they share similar ethics that 'they care both about using simple ingredients in their products and about the people who make them.' (Chip[s] Board, 2016) The company already sells these plastics worldwide to a variety of different artists and companies to replace the environmentally harming, chemical plastics that are used. Moreover, Fig. 3 displays a pair of glasses created by a company called 'Cubitts' in London using the manufactured bio-plastic to create the frames. In my opinion, these are very stylish and the way in which the material is used, seems easily achievable, therefore this is a great company to inspire the future of design. Fry says 'we have to define problems pragmatically and act in relation to them but with rigour in how we define, analyse and seek solutions.' (Fry, 2009, p.181) relating strongly to how this company has considered and acted on the problem of a large amount of food waste and how this could be rectified without having the power to stop people from buying more food than is consumed. This plastic supports the notion of a circular economy as it utilises the waste of a predominant vegetable in most restaurants/eateries and family kitchens and flips it into something that can be sustained. When this product is finished with, it can be made back into the product again or biodegrade into the earth. Taking this into mass production could mean that many single use plastics could be replaced and a start to fixing the mistakes that have been made can begin because of the designers.



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Jorge Penadés is another designer/maker using waste products to curate beautiful and imaginative products. He is a Spanish designer who makes sturdy furniture from recycled offcuts of leather mixed with bone glue for a solid and colourful structure. The image in Fig. 4 shows off one of the functional tables that he has built using the sculpted solidified leather composites. In 2018 'EPA estimated that the recycling rate for textiles in clothing and footwear was 13 percent based on information from the American Textile Recycling Service.' (US EPA, 2018) consequently there is an enormous percentage that was not recycled at all. Penadés' invention could potentially mean that for all of the huge amounts of wasted textiles, they can be used to create items that are more than just stitching a patchwork garment together so it broadens the solutions. Moreover, this could be revolutionary to fix two problems in one, it could use all the textile waste we have to replace the consumption of wood which generates the negative demand for deforestation.

People in the middle class generally have more influence due to their high pay bracket. The table in the image could be seen in a middle class home as a functional table or even a decorative art piece because 'a crucial role is attributed to the strengthening of the emulative desires of the middle classes' (Campbell, 1989, p.161) hence the role of a designer can be to convince the consumer of better ways of living or teach them to invest their money more wisely to advocate the exposition of recycling and show that it can be stylish...



Fig. 4

Hair Highway recycles human hair offcuts to create beautiful combs and furniture, as seen in Fig.5 and Fig.6, to supersede the culling of tortoises and deforestation of tropical wood. They could see that there was and still is a flow of unnecessary waste being produced by our bodies on a regular basis when we get hair cuts. Combining this with the desire to reduce the needless murder of animals and trees, they produced a solution that mimics the design that would have been constructed unethically. The company has thought about how to make a product that is functional while having a sleek finish; 'corporate sustainability and user-centred design - are partly a reaction to another more longstanding change, which is the intensification of aestheticised design since the late 1980s, manifested throughout the rise of designer products, art typography, fashion as art and postmodern high-style architecture.' (Fry, 2009, p.54). Showcasing how they have thoroughly considered their target customer.

Waste recourses have been reinvented for a beautifully considered design to grab the attention of the consumers while "romantic' beliefs, aspirations and attitudes are put to work in the interest of a 'consumer society'.' (Campbell, 1989, p.2) the essence of the tortoise shell effect has truly been recreated in an ethically stable manor while feeding the aesthetic needs of their customers as it is

unrecognisably hair but brings such naturally vibrant tones and fun patterns for a high quality look overall.

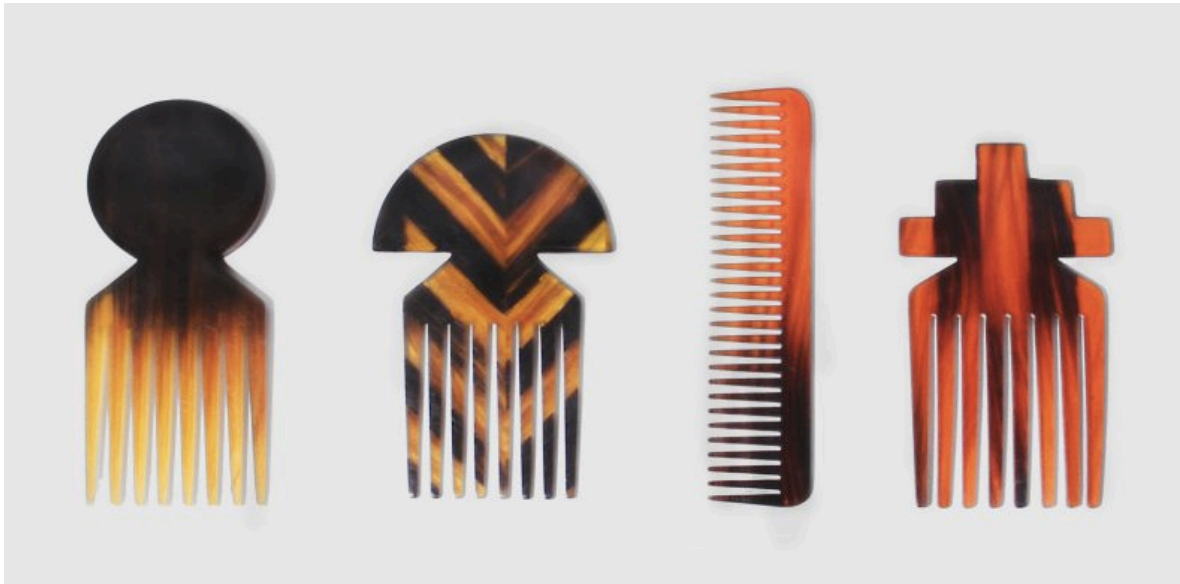


Fig.5



Fig.6

Within the 21st century I will argue that designers/makers have a responsibility to make and promote change using their work whether that be spreading a message of sustainability or innovating from learned lessons to curate new materials, products and designs that showcase bioplastics or solutions to major environmental issues. 'Individuals, organisations, and nations may all have made significant commitments of material or symbolic resources that could have been

applied to other objectives that might have been more productive.’ (Reeves, Goulden and Dingwall, 2016) therefore designers should be resourceful to find new uses for materials that have no other use as of yet. Furthermore, I feel that designers and makers have an obligation to create a start. A start that fuels further ideas. A start that allows others to feed on and produce their own interpretations that could lead them to find a resolution that no-one has conjured up before and that could change the way that corporations mass produce. ‘This means that design does not actually create a finalised object or product’ (Fry, 2009, p.30) but pushes themselves and others to continue to experiment, play and test new ideas and learn to be able to teach through their medium.

Progressing into the next ten years, I feel this concept should continue to be fluid and designers should ‘treat the climate crisis like the acute crisis it is and give us a future.’ (Thunberg, 2018, p.5). The type of design that should be taken on board should be that of a restorative and preventative nature to back track on the damage that humans have already made to the planet while allowing people to think into the future with hope. There are still ‘enormous changes required to establish the ‘sustainable design’, of the artifactual world we create, use and occupy has hardly begun.’ (Fry, 2009, p.7). Thus the role of the designer/maker of the coming decade is to design and manifest change while inspiring others with different skill sets to take on the challenge themselves. Additionally, collaboration is key to the progression of new ideas and breakthroughs in invention and experimentation for the solidarity of difference.

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images:

Figure.1:

screenshot from WGSN trend forecast

Figure.2 & Figure.3:

Board, C. (2019). Chip[s] Board®. [online] Chip[s] Board®. Available at: <https://www.chipsboard.com/>. [Assessed 7 Dec. 2020].

Figure.4:

Morby, A. (2015). Jorge Penadés creates furniture from waste leather. [online] Dezeen. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2015/06/16/jorge-penades-creates-furniture-from-waste-leather/> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2020].

Figure.5 & Figure.6:

Studio Swine (2011). Hair Highway. [online] Studio Swine. Available at: <https://studioswine.com/work/hair-highway/> [Accessed 8 Dec. 2020].

