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Research in Context ADAD5003

BA Set Design

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

2729 words

The designer is someone who protects and expands "the authenticity and independence of human experience" (Pallasmaa, 2009, p.148) through creativity and innovation. They keep an individual's personal participation with art real, meaningful and truthful to them, which can be perceived in many different ways.

The designer maker creates almost everything man made that you see within the world. In order to do this, they must understand what is needed within the marketplace and design accordingly, taking this into consideration so the design doesn't take away from its intended use.

These two words, designer and maker mean different things and can be considered as separate jobs; a designer maker incorporates the key aspects of these titles. The designer "a person who devises or executes designs, especially one who creates forms, structures, and patterns, as for works of art or machines" (Dictionary.com). They think up initial plans and ideas and develop those ideas into a working design that can then be made within the 3D world. The maker "a person that makes. A manufacturer" (Dictionary.com); they take the designs from the designer and create it in the 3D world/ environment, usually on a large scale, with hundreds of the product constantly coming out of factories. The designer maker "create[s] products that bring together art, form and functionality for commercial purposes... manufacture products for

mass production, small-scale batch production and bespoke retail." (Gradireland)

They both think of ideas of what things could look like, for example jewellery, the design and style, materials and shapes. The designer maker would then make the piece of jewellery from the materials they thought best, in the design that they thought of and would then sell it, whether it be 10 of these pieces or one hundred.

The designer maker can either self-teach their desired craft or learn from the masters who came before them; study their techniques and learn the basics before they can then find their own style and way of creating. "The work becomes a journey that may take one to places and continents which one has never visited before" (Pallasmaa, 2009, pp.111-112). Throughout the development of the designer makers craft they are forever changing and adapting the way they go about things, which in turn, takes them to new areas of design and new ways of creating things that they hadn't known before. This exploration then cultivates change within the craft thus developing how things are done over time, sometimes losing the original ways of the craft.

Art is a fluid thing, it's constantly changing, through the way art is made and the way it is viewed. When speculating how the role of the designer maker might

change within the next 10 years, the ways that design has already changed throughout history must be considered, as well as what is happening in the world today, within the 21st Century, that could trigger change.

Design in the past has often had this symbiosis with events happening in the world. For example, an economic boom of 35% in the 1920s gave way to the extravagant designs of Art Deco, which reached its peak in 1933. "The history of the West shows times when a move forward in one hemisphere 'releases' a move forward in the other" (McGilchrist, 2010, p.240). McGilchrist is discussing the left and right hemispheres of the brain. He argues that when a move forward in society occurs, it usually creates a move forward in the design world; the economic boom was a move forward for the logical left hemisphere of the brain and then in turn created the right hemisphere to move forward with the creation of Art Deco.

It's the same with designs from different cultures and eras; Greek and Roman designs are similar because the Romans invaded Greece so they have that connection within their design world. Within contemporary culture however designs have altered and become less organic and more square in representation. This shift into designs being less organic has happened across the western

world. "we have now reached a point where... the balance has swung too far... towards the Apollonian left hemisphere" (McGilchrist, 2010, p.240). The western world has become very fixated on aspects relating to the left side of the brain, with science, mathematics and technology, and has drifted away from culture, music and creative imagination. It is arguable that future design, within the western world will become mathematical, losing its fluidity and natural beauty. As McGilchrist suggests the left side is becoming more dominant over the right dictating a possible societal change, whereby the new emerging design culture becomes as beautiful if not more than that of past design.

Production Design is a film and TV industry-based design discipline that is "rapidly changing thanks to technological advances" (Halligan, 2012, pp.8-9) and this has both positives and negatives. With these technological advancements within the film industry, films themselves, when made right are becoming more fantastical, imaginative and real, keeping the viewer believing in the world on screen and the possibilities they create. However, technology used in the industry, especially when used too much can make films lose their impact on the viewer and have a sense of fabrication. Although films are fabricated, the art of them is to not appear that way, so if they do come across like that, then the reason of the art is lost. "Production designers create worlds for us to believe in and when it all works, we accept the finished product as 'real'" (Halligan, 2012,

p.8). Production designers are like magicians when it comes to films, they know all the tricks of the trade and when they're effective at their job they trick our eyes into believing what we see is real; it was filmed on a location and nothing has been made or added, it just always was.

The film industry seems to be relying more on the use of Computer-Generated Imagery for sets and scenes rather than real, tangible sets and special effects. The overuse of CGI makes the actors struggle to get in character and act according to the scene surroundings, when all they have to work with are inanimate green shapes. Actor Maisie Williams talking about her green screen experience during *Game of Thrones*, "Particularly when you're working with someone else, as you're both imagining something totally different" (Bundel, 2016). It seems that a lot of actors aren't that fond of acting with green screen and as Williams discusses, when you're acting from your imagination, the actors may not give the same facial expressions or look to the same area and it won't look right on screen, making unnatural, forced reactions.

There's a lot of controversy over its ability versus the over-use of CGI within films in the 21st Century. CGI is increasing in use because it's cheaper and makes corrections easier in post. CGI enables a film to have amazing and 'cool' real

looking effects that the special effects department couldn't necessarily create in real life without putting lives in serious danger; stunts and VFX have a lot more health and safety regulations now than they did at the beginning of Hollywood filmmaking.

Filmmakers also use filmed footage as a starting point for CGI. Wajsbrot states "they did good to shoot it because we used it as a reference, and we could not have achieved the same result if they did not shoot it, for lighting reference, for everything" (Fullerton, 2018). Wajsbrot is talking about how they used the 'shoot' to help the CGI look the way the shoot does and so help it look more realistic and not computer generated. This seems to be happening more in the film industry, especially within the Marvel cinematic universe and Hollywood as a whole. "There are times... when audiences are essentially just watching a photorealistic animated movie, free from real life actors except for voiceovers" (Fullerton, 2018). The difference between real sets and computer-generated sets can be minimal to the viewer, and it's happening more to actors themselves as well, with many simply not reacting.

An additional reason CGI is used so much is because, in this fast-paced world, people don't have the same patience or attention span they did 30 years ago and

so traditional special effects don't amaze audiences as much as they used to. "the only difference between us and them [meaning previous generations] is that we're rarely wowed by cutting edge VFX anymore, just fooled by it" (Fullerton, 2018). VFX seen on screen now feels normal. It's been seen before and we're numb to it, so it doesn't have the same effect on audiences as it did when it was first introduced. The rise in technology and the appearance of CGI in film has renewed that awe the screen gives audiences, however, this presents the additional issue of CGI being overused.

Over the past decade CGI has become overused and instead of being something to amplify the scene, it has become a base line for the way films are being made. This overuse has started to make filmmakers lazy. "There's no dedication to the craft when you can endlessly fix imperfections on a computer screen" (James, 2015). CGI has made filmmakers take the attitude that what they film in live action doesn't need to be perfect because they have CGI to fall back on and correct anything. This sometimes means taking away footage altogether and having over half of the film computer generated; the audience are essentially only seeing ones and zeros with voice overs instead of pure constant acting. As a result of all this it seems to have taken away the creative nature, the innovative

ways of using their surroundings and the problem-solving abilities from those in the industry.

When the film industry started out using *CGI*, they used it to amplify the reality of the story and the scenes. For example, throughout the Jurassic Park films the use of Computer-Generated Imagery helped audiences to believe the dinosaurs were real. They used animatronics for the close-up scenes and that gave the impression that they were in the scenes with the actors, using *CGI* for the wide shots; the fluid movement from the *CGI* effects made them appear as actual Dinosaurs. "One of the reasons *CGI* outshined techniques like stop-motion was movement. It got the physics right" (James, 2015). They used it for scenes that they may not be able to film but they kept the physics of the world the way it should be and didn't stray from it into the unbelievable. This made films better than they might have been without it. *CGI* is now being used in a way that defies physics; the scenes cannot be created with an actual human being.

It now seems that *CGI* is taking over the film industry completely, being used so much that the other aspects of the industry are slowly becoming unnecessary.

"it's taking over production time, budgets, story, and even replacing real characters" (James, 2015); it also seems to be taking over the art department, the sets, props and costumes, every design aspect of films that used to be built

and created for the production are being replaced in post-production by Computer-Generated Imagery. The work that the designers and makers of the art department create (who are not a part of post-production) is being copied digitally. Their designs are still seen on screen by audiences except any props, sets or costumes made for the production become a reference point and are not seen by the audience; the work of the CGI team is seen instead.

It is arguable that an overreliance on CGI means that the level of detail the art department go into when designing and making sets is neglected and more focus on this would increase quality for the viewer. "if we allocated the amount of resources we spend on CGI towards hiring better writers, creating cooler set designs, and minimizing post production, we'd have better cinema" (James, 2015). With the amount of detail that cameras pick up now, with 4K and HD, audiences are able to tell if something doesn't look right on a design level; and it is arguably easier to build in high detail than trying to render this using an extremely high powered computer to create pixel perfect CGI.

On the side of minimizing post-production, it could potentially reduce production time in general as the amount of time spent on pre-production will mostly likely stay the same, dependent on the type and length of the film. The building of props, costumes and sets is an ongoing aspect of producing a film and things are

being changed and added all the time. If all this is then sent to post-production, it's just adding more for them to render and this takes up more time setting back the release date of films, which seems to be happening more often, as the time allocated for the production is not enough. This is most likely due to post-production taking longer than originally thought.

Unfortunately, CGI is also changing what filmmakers want out of their films, which in turn removes the quality of the story. "Filmmakers try to create engagement with more explosions rather than letting story, plot and character development produce interest" (James, 2015). Filmmakers think audiences want films with more wow factor than the last, so are always trying to improve; this ultimately takes away from the story telling that films started with. Instead of amazing stories that films could give us, they instead revert to big bangs and amazing stunts when they're done for real. These can be included within the story line if needed. For a film to be classified as great worldwide, it must make a large profit at the American box office and this therefore must include out of control CGI effects.

Over the next 10 years, with the environmental crisis happening within the world, like all other art disciplines, the film industry is having to become more

environmentally aware. "Environmentally aware art is essential and must be held to much higher regard" (Amund, 2019). Film sets will need to reuse as much as they can or use recycled materials when building sets, cleaning up after filming when shooting on location. Sometimes it will be cheaper and more environmentally friendly to use green screens and CGI however it is still essential to the heart of filmmaking to keep the use of physical sets and props or risk losing the beauty and character of films.

Art has the capacity to live throughout the ages and tell future generations what it was like in the world when the piece was created. Artists could be enabled to set the standard for environmentally friendly work however this could reduce the quality of their own designs and the ability to tell their stories effectively; "would it be morally right to restrict artists to only environmentally friendly products" (Dunn, 2012). It is questionable whether having to use recycled or reused sets would take away from the design and feel of the film, especially if it may reduce the quality of the work produced, if they cannot access the traditional mediums they have used as they are now unsafe for the environment.

To conclude, the role of the Designer Maker is to protect people's experiences of the world, whilst inspiring creativity and innovation within the public. They are forever improving their work so they can continue to inspire next generations. Art has changed over time and artists have to adapt their craft, often being influenced by economic and environmental factors, especially with the western world experiencing a shift towards the left side of the brain, continuing to change the Art World over the next decade. Production Design is facing technological advancements within film and tv, both helping them in their work but also hindering most of the creative qualities of the industry. CGI being the main issue; with a lot of debate over the uses and avenues it opens for the industry versus the overuse and lazy filmmaking it brings out of filmmakers. Like the art world, the film and television industry are having to factor in economic and environmental issues when producing anything, meaning CGI is something they fall to as it is cheaper and more environmentally friendly than making things for the production. Over the next decade, filmmakers cannot afford to overuse CGI, or risk losing the beauty of films.

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