

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

Danielle Maskery (1451073)

Surface Pattern Design

Module: ADAD5003

Word count: 2560

Introduction

Within this essay I will explore the grounds in which what it has previously meant to be an Artist, Designer and Maker in the past. By examining the themes and opinions of various writers I am to help gain a better understanding as to the role of the maker within the twenty-first century. The essay argues the values of each creative disciplines and sets to other a more modern outlook on these subject areas. In doing so we will discuss the influence of the Industrial Revolution had on 18th Century Europe. Themes of publicity and advertisement will be discussed in the efforts to divulge, the creative history that has led to Contemporary practices today. How our attitudes towards materials has changed over the course of this history.

Arts, Crafts and Design

To understand the posing question of the designer/makers role in the Twenty-first Century, we must first understand the work of a craftsmen and the work of a designer both by analogy and by connotation vis-à-vis our relationship as the viewer and the environmental regression we face today as a result of industrial progression in Eighteenth Century Europe. Howard Rissatti asks the question, “What is a craft object?” and although to some on face value this may seem an easily answered question moreover, a question of which does not hold much value in the contemporary society. However as we begin to unpick the metaphoric weave of craft, fine art and design we can begin to understand the importance the question holds. The Oxford English Dictionary describes craft as “an activity involving skill in making things by hand”. In note to the objects created through these skilled activities carried out by hand we refer to them as ‘craftsmanship’ Risatti believed that “making distinctions about how objects are made is important because the process of making is closely tied to an object’s meaning” in this he is referring to the relationship the objects have in relation to the hand and body, for before the industrial revolution objects came into existence through means of skilled hands. He goes on to say “ today more than ever, maintaining such distinctions must be done because of industrial production.” An important topic, that I will later come back to. Risatti believes “We must find a way to go beyond simply looking at craft objects as things that have function or are made of certain material... we must begin to see and recognise them in the sense of their essence” (Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft : Function and Aesthetic Expression*, 2007). He invites the notion for craft objects to be viewed for more than just their material value but for their intrinsically artistic value. However throughout the decades arts and crafts has been somewhat pit against one another, with Fine Art often coming out on top. “If a work is inventive, creative, it is art; if not it must be a work of craft.” (R.G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art*, 1938). It could be argued that Art, Craft and Design within modern constructs, intersect one another without either one standing for a distinct and independent ideology. “Design does not involve a dialogical/dialectical engagement with material because it separates the conceptualization of form done during the design stage from the actual materialization of form done during the making stage.” (Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft : Function and Aesthetic Expression*, 2007). The expression “Domain Shift” first coined by Sennett, refers to how the principle guiding one practice can also be applied to another, or equally how a tool initially used for one purpose can be applied to different task.

If we take a look briefly at the history of silks-screen printing we can recognise it as a utilitarian process or “domain shift”. Commonly used in the manipulation and decoration of cloth surfaces; most likely to have been its original purpose. Silk-screen printing is thought to pre-date as far as 500. AD from Asia. Would this then be considered as a craft “an activity involving skill in making things by hand”? Before the preconceived idea of design work? Furthermore as said above, the processes offers varied possibilities of use. Artists such as Andy Warhol and Josef Albers, a leading figure of the Bauhaus movement, both used the processes flat colour qualities to create their artworks.

In furthering my argument of this domaine shift, the process of Multi Component Devore also known as burn-out was first developed in the



Campbell’s Soup Can (Tomato) 1964

19TH Century at the heart of France’s silk production, Lyon. The processes is as the name suggests; using a chemical substance that devours one fibre



Example of a devore scarf from Liberty London

of a mixed textiles such as silk velvet – a mixture of rayon and silk fibre – through a designed area of pattern. The two key factors of this processes is, the practice of screen-printing that is required and the reference to ‘pattern design’ in which the processes takes on form of ‘applied art’, without the pattern design the process would not ‘create’ but simply generate an unattractive surface to the textile. The entire processes requires tentative creative thinking as well as technical knowledge and skill.

The cultivation of a design requires knowledge about the type of fibre essential for the process to not only work, but work effectively in cohesion with the design. Often discovered through trial and error and resulting in inventive creations and cross overs of processes to occur. “Every good craftsmen conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking; this thinking evolves into

sustainable habits, and these habits establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding” (Richard Sennett, *The Craftsmen*, 2008)

The idea that craft cannot be art, possess personal reflection of my own stance as young creative, I had never considered whether what I was producing was a classification of Art, Design or Craft, furthermore it has invited me to reflect on the values I wish to uphold within my future endeavours as a creative in the Twenty-first Century.

Objects of Desire



Alphonse Mucha, Gismonda, 1894

In the wake of industrialism throughout Europe the term ‘design and applied art’ became a prominent feature in the manufacturing of objects. The meaning design gives context to two meanings, for instance if one were to say “I adore the design” - a more fluid meaning - one would be referring to the aesthetics of the object, yet could also refer to the functionality of the design like the latest Dyson Hoover. The second more structured meaning as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, “A plan or drawing produced to show the look and function or workings of the building, garment or other object before it is made”. With the efficiency new technology provided manufacturers were now able to churn out material goods, cheaper and faster than any hand-work could ever do. Although these goods were not necessarily of the highest of quality in construction and so design became the tool in which to sell these products. Embellishing them with ‘applied art’ to make the objects more desirable to the consumer and to keep ahead of competitors.

Known for his influence on the Art Nouveau movement, artist and later designer Alphonse Mucha, provides a great insight into commercial practice of the time.

Mucha first gained notoriety as an artist after the great success of his poster *Gismonda* in 1894. The poster reflected the beauty of nature shrouding a beautifully clothed woman, crowned in peonies gives the woman an almost otherworldliness, a deity of sorts. This success led Mucha to be commissioned by Société des Usines Chimiques du Rhône in Lyon, to design the advertisement poster alongside the packaging for their fragrance, *Lance Parfum ‘Rodo’*. In doing so he created a branding for the product, using the same woman on the poster to the packaging, the consumer could easily recognise the fragrance in a store. Just as we recognise modern branding of today, in the likes of Nike or Chanel.

As print became less expensive and more accessible the opportunities for packaging opened up for manufacturers. This meant that the decoration could be applied to packaging in order to make the objects more desirable.

As we recognise the correlation in branding to modern commodities, it's also important to recognise the use of beautiful women within Mucha's designs. "His posters commodified the women, making them the ultimate symbol of modern consumer world" (Ghislaine Wood, *At Nouvea and the Erotic*, 2000) the idea of the commodified women is a publicity strategy still used in modern day publicity. A subject that has come under a great deal of discussion in recent years.

"The spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself" (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972) Berger suggests that publicity plays on the insecurities of the 'spectator-buyer' that it implies to them that their self-worth will be made fuller without guilt, when they buy this product. "Within publicity choices are offered between this cream and that cream, that car and this car, but publicity as a system only makes a single proposal. It proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or

our lives by buying something more. This more, it proposes, will make us in some ways richer – even though we will be poorer by having spent our money." (John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 1972).

In this exchange Commodity Fetishism is introduced, the term first coined by Karl Marx explains how inanimate objects take on a higher value than in its physical "use-value".

"A commodity appears at first sight and extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties." (Karl Marx, *A Critique of Political Economy*, 1990).

Sustainability

We fill our home's and life's with objects that we believe reflect us individuals and yet, the same furnishings could also be found in a neighbouring home, or the awkward moment your friend turns up to a party wearing the same dress. The primary objective of the manufactured objects is to produce revenue and through design and publicity this is achieved. "When we encounter multiples, we encountering the same object(s) again and again and our experience of it/them is repeated again and again, suggesting that it is a true experience and an essential aspect of the world" (Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft : Function and Aesthetic Expression*, 2007) What's more is that this Capitalist Culture we all feed into, there lies an inherent truth. A truth our society has become desensitized as "normal state of affairs, the truth of which we are producing more waste than the time it takes for that waste to decompose. A "self-made", "self-harm" paradox that has occurred in our endeavours for progression, self-worth and money.

"One explanation for this waste is that consumers buy the potential power of new objects rather than the power they actually use; the new automobile can speed at 100mph, even though the driver is usually stuck in traffic." (Richard Sennett, *The Craftsmen*, 2008)

An article in the Creative Review, noted that "many designers are asking where their professions is heading." Asking the question "should they be willing agents of the manufacturing process that makes products obsolescent before their time?" (Rebecca Eliacho, Creative Review: *Design Ethics*, March 1984) furthermore, astoundingly thirty-five years later the same question is being asked in the same publication, 'do we need a code of ethics for design?' (Emily Gosling, Creative Review, April 2019). It seems to me that these are somewhat inept questions to be asking within the 21st Century.

“In the efforts to combat material waste designers, makers and scientists are at the forefront, leading the way to change in attitudes around materials. Together they are discovering new systemic innovations to replace plastic based products with biodegradable and ethically affable



Residential Interior designed by Lovely Gays.
Photos by Megan Taylor

solutions. In South Wales, the materials company Smile Plastics, prides themselves on one-hundred percent recycled waste plastic with zero percent VOC off setting. “Our mission is to change people’s perceptions around waste via innovation – to use art and technology to unlock the hidden potential in recycling, and open their eyes to the unexpected beauty of scrap. In doing so, we hope to inspire more people about sustainability and recycling.” (<https://smile-plastics.com/about>).

The versatile and sublime beauty of their panels have inspired design from commercial province, interior design and décor as well as exterior and building projects.

However this design house in South Wales aren’t the only ones thinking big when it comes to sustainable and renewal of waste materials.

The large clothing brand H&M has influenced much of world of fashion in terms of sustainable practices and sets to continue its exemplar in the world of fast fashion, as they launch they’re *Conscious Collection*. The collection features vegan leather pieces made from the by-product of wine production, the vegan leather was created by Halian Tech Company Vegea, through which H&M

discovered through their Global Change Awards in 2017.

By the year 2030, the Highstreet brand aim for all products to be produced from sustainably sourced materials.

“these collections are here to help enable the scale of these new innovations and making them more commercial [to us and to other brands]”

(Emily Farra, Runway, Vouge, Jan 2020)



Vegea – Vegan Leather



From the Conscious Collection: dress is made from Circulose, a new material innovation made from recovered cotton and viscose – making it 100% natural.

Conclusion

With the ever-growing concern of environmental conservation it is clear that the role of the designer / maker has never before been more important. The creative out look of the world and understanding of materials makes for a playground for systemic innovation that, can help towards sustaining the future of biological intelligence on The Earth. I may well be thinking ambitiously - as it is with in my nature as a creative - I hope the Twenty-first Century will be written essay's such as this, as the 'Conscious Movement' whereby creative minds of all disciplines, worked together harmoniously in a conscious effort to rectify the human influence on the planet. Furthermore I believe the word 'conscious' can also describe the design of human environments such as, urban spaces, offices, schools and suburbs that will begin to see within the next 10 years. Not only are more aware of the environmental issues, but of social ones. "The power of the aesthetics of joy is that they speak directly to our unconscious minds, bringing out the best in us without our even being aware of it." (Ingrid Fetell, Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness, 2018) In this Ingrid is not motioning to way commodity objects speak to us, but the surprise in everyday life through such things as abundance, freedom, and energy furthermore how might these seemingly overlooked 'aesthetics of joy' can be applied to design. Bettering our mental health and experience of the world as our shared home.

Bibliography

- Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of Seeing*. New York: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books.
- Cumming, E. and Kaplan, W. (1991). *The arts and craft movement*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Farra, E. (2020). *H&M Is Experimenting With Natural Coffee Dyes and "Leather" Made From Wine Waste*. [online] Vogue. Available at: <https://www.vogue.com/slideshow/hm-conscious-exclusive-collection-2020-recycled-bio-based-materials> [Accessed 29 Jan. 2020].
- Forty, A. (1986). *Objects of desire*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Gosling, E. (2020). *Do we need a code of ethics for design? – Creative Review*. [online] Creative Review. Available at: <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/do-we-need-a-code-of-ethics-for-design/> [Accessed 11 Apr. 2019].
- Marx, K., Engels, F., Mandel, E. and Fowkes, B. (1990). *Capital*. London: Penguin in association with New Left Review.
- Norman, D. (2007). *Emotional design*. New York: Basic Books.
- Risatti, H. (n.d.). *A theory of craft*.
- Sennett, R. (2009). *The craftsman*. London: Penguin Books.
- Style, M. (2020). *Smile Plastics!*. [online] Maison Bentley Style. Available at: <https://maisonbentleystyle.com/2019/06/05/smile-plastics/> [Accessed 17 Feb. 2020].
- Whiteley, N. (2009). *Design for society*. London: Reaktion Books.