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Research in Context

ADAD5003

Surface Pattern Design

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Question 1 - What is the role of the designer/maker in the 21st century and how might that change in the next 10 years? Discuss your idea with references to two practitioners or thinkers discussed in you lecture strand.

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

Climate change is one of the biggest problems society is currently facing. This essay will address the steps that can be taken by designers so that they can combat the issues with the greatest efficiency. The first section of the essay will establish how the 21st century shaped the way designers address global issues. Then over the next few paragraphs the writing moves on to discuss the notion of sustainability and how designers can maximise recyclable material and design strategies to lower their carbon emissions. During this section of discussion the writing will look at pre-existing projects that are changing the way we manufacture and reuse products, as well as looking at the ideas of Jonathan Chapman. Moving on, over the last section of the essay the writing will explore the tangible link between designer and consumer and how they influence each others decisions. Firstly, how the designer has to make a continuing effort to be as sustainable as possible within their practice, due to a more informed and concerned customer, and how this works both ways because of how many consumers are now purchasing products based solely on its sustainability which is forcing the designer to come up with new solutions for their practice to satisfy the want of the customer. During this section the writing will consider the ideas of Tony Fry as well as revisiting work by Jonathan Chapman.

“No matter the practice, its nature cannot be assumed to be transparent - it is never just what it appears to be”

(Fry, 2009, p.21)

It is first important to acknowledge the difference between the designer and the maker as the deferences can be confusing and often unclear. However, it is important to note that despite various overlapping factors they are two different distinctions within the creative process. Firstly ‘the maker’ a term that covers a wide verity of creatives such as product developers, artist and craftspeople. The term in its most basic form means people who make and produces things. The designer differs from the maker because of the difference in approach. *(Electric productions, 2019)* A designer is someone who creates an in depth plans to create a product or design solution that has both purpose and function, because of the in-depth approach taken by the designer they are

often able to change culture with their work. Due in large because of the tremendous care taken researching at the start of the design process. (*Press and Cooper, 2003, p. 6*) The designer has played an important role within the 21st century as their work contributes to the health, development and well being of modern day society. (*Quora, 2019*) A significant change to design and art in general is the acceleration of how humans now interact (the development of more efficient internet) and how a simple uploaded picture can now put every designer on a world wide stage. This however has opened designers up to greater criticism forcing designers to make a much greater conscious effort to think about and address global issues, such as climate change, within their work. (*oxford art online, 2019*)

“ Love it or Loath it, design has a central role to play in achieving a sustainable Future”

(*Champan and Gant, 2007, p. 13*)

These few words sum up the entirety of the essay the ‘sustainable design context’ written by Jonathan chapman which is included in the book ‘designers, visionaries + other stories’. It has become imperative that modern day designers more so now than ever consider the implication of the current and ever threatening climate crisis, as it has been predicted that the planet on average is becoming 0.8° warmer each year, Although that number is increasing. (*global climate change, 2019*) Therefore designers moving forward should strive to manufacture and or produce products and materials that have as little impact on the planet as possible. Whether that be by using recycled materials or more natural resources that are less wasteful and use less harmful chemicals in there making process. An example of a great initiative to combat the reduction of wasted material, is the project run by Adidas in collaboration with Parley, where shoes are made using plastic found in the ocean and on the shore lines. Customers that purchase these shoes are asked to send back the products to the company once they no longer want or need them, these shoes are then made into a second generation shoe, Adidas will continue this process until the raw materials are considered no longer fit for purpose. (*Adidas, 2019*) This prolongs the shelf life of each individual component and eradicates the need to produce more harmful and wasteful materials. This is just one example of a company using a proactive approach to the design process. Similar approaches must be taken across a wide verity of disciplines to insure a more sustainable future for design. By introducing a more sustainable design approach this should also

have a positive impact on society as a whole, because people 'lead by example' and with every product's journey starting with designers trying to optimise its sustainability this may lead to more proactive environmentally conscious decisions down the line, this could mean starting with finding a manufacturer that optimise energy consumption, looking for retailers that are working towards a waste free shopping experience e.g no plastic bags or packaging, and finally leading to a customer who thinks more carefully about the choices they make in regards to their consumer consumption. All because of the decisions made by the designer.

“ The idea of 100 per cent sustainability is the ultimate ambition of the sustainable designer; it is the direction we all face, but should do so in the awareness that the term 100 per cent sustainable is as exclusive as it is inclusive”

(Champan and Gant, 2007, p. 8)

When considering a sustainable design strategy it is important for designers to consider what they can realistically achieve. The harsh reality is that technology has not yet got to the point where everything can be made to be everlasting, environmentally friendly and a sustainable product or material. *(National academic press, 2019)* It then falls on the designer to find the right balance between using recyclable and non-recyclable materials in all aspects of their work. One way that designers can combat the challenge of 'balancing' the ambition of 100% sustainability is to approach it through design activism, this is when people with a common goal or purpose use “design thinking to create products, environment, solutions or services that enhance the quality of life for the other 99%” *(design indaba, 2019)*. As 100% sustainability is a common goal among many modern designers, using design activism to approach their work in a collaborative way that will surely speed up the process of finding a realistic solution to the moral problem of sustainability much faster than if they each split and worked separately, innovation in any context does not happen in isolation therefore it is important perhaps vital to approach this issue in a collaborative manner.

“ If we were to take a look into almost any wardrobe, garage, kitchen, garden shed, living room, bedroom or bathroom of anyone in employment in any of the worlds moderately to very wealthy nations, we would discover, to varying degrees certainly, the same situation - excess”

(Fry, 2009, p. 111)

These next three paragraphs are less about the designer and more about the consumer. However, the paragraphs will identify what the designer needs to change within their practice to accomplish a sustainable future. As the designer is the first piece of any 'products' journey, it falls on the designer to make changes that will shape the way the consumer views any product, and change the way they choose and buy these products. The difficulty for a designer is as once said by evolutionary biologist "sustainability doesn't come naturally" to the human species. (*the guardian*, 2019) It is the truth in this statement that creates the societal problem of excess. Designers can use the idea of sense-making to understand the connection between the consumer and the problem of excess to anticipate how bad the problem may get in the future and the implications this may have on the planet, with the ultimate goal being, that the designer will change that trajectory and turn it into a more positive and sustainable future for design. (*Cognitive-edge*, 2019) The most obvious way for designers to combat the problem of excess is to adopt a minimalistic aesthetic. For example a fashion designer, conscious about the problems of over buying has on the environment, may create a collection that consists of a colour palette that contains three colours of a similar tone as well as including an optional simple pattern. A consumer will be able to mix and match items within the collection creating a variety of looks with fewer items limiting their excessive shopping habits.

"As climate change will increasingly prompt the need for large-scale adaptive actions, necessity of community will become an ever more crucial factor of sustainability"

(*Fry*, 2009, p.114)

The term community can be referred to as "the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common" (*Lexico*, 2019). This would be an accurate description of both the designer and consumer. The description will likely have an impact on the future of both the designer and consumer alike. Firstly as the consumer becomes more aware of the dangers of climate change more and more of them will abandon consumer culture of always having the newest and latest trends in favour of buying used. (*YouGov*, 2018) This ideology has already become a trend in its self as buying vintage items has become increasingly popular in recent years, with a recent survey showing 64% of people are willing to buy pre-owned items opposed to 45% in 2016 this shows

vintage shopping will not be going away anytime soon. (*The Guardian*, 2019) This will change the process and thoughts of the designer drastically. If you take a fashion or interior designer for example, designers will now have to consider the product life cycle of everything they design, because consumers will be less willing to buy their latest products based on their new understanding of the effects that climate change is having on our planet. The consumer will increasingly want products that last, products that can be passed around from person to person to eradicate the need for new purchases. Going forward the designer will likely have to adopt a more minimal aesthetic as trends become less important for the customer. (*Sitepoint*, 2019) As mentioned earlier community will also become important for designers as they strive to realise a more sustainable future in terms of finding raw materials to create their products and how it will be made in a sustainable way.

“A revolutionary consumer is born, catalysed by new and provocative genres of emotionally durable objects and experiences that are designed with empathy”

(*Chapman*, 2005, p. 18)

Using theories previously discussed such as sense-making and design activism, this statement would be the ultimate goal of any designer whose goal it is to create a sustainable working method. This essay has discussed throughout, the idea of making sustainable products by designers going out and finding different raw components which increases a product's recyclability. However another approach is to create a design that increases the odds of the product lasting for many years. If durability is the aim for the designer, they will have to consider designing a product that is either completely unique and for a niche market or creating something in a style that comes into trend frequently to keep the product desirable. Making something long lasting is what adds it 'emotional durability' a customer grows attached to the product, whatever that might be, they associate valuable memories to it and then become less willing to get rid of it or throw it out. (*Design Longevity*, 2019) Keeping something for a long time, as previously mentioned, also decreases the chance of a customer buying a new product to replace their old one. For a designer designing something that they hope will last a long time will also add their own emotional attachment to the product which gives it 'empathy'. The feeling of 'empathy' will

hopefully be something that is passed from designer to customer which will form a strong emotional attachment. The most obvious product that uses the idea of 'emotional durability' in its is a house. The designer, in this case an architect, visualises an idea, they design the idea, they continuously tweak and change certain aspects until they are happy to hand it over to the builders and contractor (makers) to create their design in the real world. The design process for this type of project likely would have taken months, and every aspect would have been looked over including how sustainable and durable it would be during which time the designer would have become emotionally invested in the project. By the time a new home owner purchased the project, a silent transaction would have happened, the designer would have passed on the emotion, good and bad, they had invested into the project to the customer. They in turn would become emotionally invested in the home. (*New York Times*, 2019)

In conclusion designers who have always played a crucial role in shaping the values and behaviour of most of society, now more than ever have to make a conscious effort to combat the effects on climate change, by changing their approach to the design process whether that means finding new materials, new ways of making or by changing their design process all together by adopting a minimalist aesthetics. Designers are also helping to change the way their customers view and respond to the effects of climate change. Whether that be by making them more aware of the problem of excess in terms of mass production or mass consumption. As well as leading their customers by example by adopting a more sustainable approach in the hope that it will translate to the customer making them think more carefully about the environment and their effects on it. On a more personal level the research undertaken during this essay has made me more aware of the current climate crises. As well as making me look more carefully at the choices I make as a designer and as a consumer. In the future I hope I will make more informed decisions in regard to sustainability because of the research I have undertaken during the process of writing this essay.

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