

adaptable {1/2}

Adaptability in three-dimensional design seems to take two forms. The first is in objects that are sensitive to their environment and therefore might possess features that allow them to be used in modifiable forms, be pieced together or are flexible with their user's needs. The second form of adaptability in the design industry is that in the role of a designer, they are required to be sensitive to changing circumstances and needs. {April 2012}

Consumers have become accustomed to change. Powerful advertising leads consumers to believe that they are entitled to better their environment with materialistic objects. However, at what point does the rate of change become a problem? Consumer culture has reached a position where our short attention spans and short-lived interests mean that we no longer have a sustained relationship with and strong attachment to our possessions.⁽ⁱ⁾ This seems to run in direct contradiction to the interests and motivations of designers who wish to create objects that are durable; consider the changing needs of consumers' lifestyles; encourage a long-term bond between object and consumer; and avoid consumers getting bored of them in a short space of time. This might be addressed by allowing the object to have changeable features or parts.

In cities such as London, space in domestic environments and offices is a luxury. Increasingly, spaces are made open plan and adaptable for different activities such as dining, watching television and working. To make the room suitable for these different activities, furniture that is modular and/or multifunctional make for attractive solutions.⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ They can be cost effective space saving options. Children's furniture is also key area where adaptable design can occur because there is an obvious need to cater for the growth of a child.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

Architect Miles Kemp's project, 'Spatial Robot' explores the idea of creating a modular system, consisting of two parts, one male and one female, that can attach to one another and become larger temporary structures, such as a chair. When their current use becomes redundant, the small robots can be reprogrammed to create something else, such as, a table. The concept of having components that can be constructed and deconstructed to make objects need not be so technological. The parts could be paired with simple tools to form a kit that allows consumers to build furniture according to their needs.^(iv) The transfer of authorship to the consumer might develop a consumer's knowledge of making processes, a greater appreciation of materials, some scope for repair and a better and more prolonged relationship with their possessions because they would have built them.

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- {i} Any attachment to our possessions is usually on the verge of becoming a mild addiction as opposed to a sentimental relationship. Ofcom's 2011 Communications Market Report indicated that possessions such as smart phones are beginning to affect social behavior. Our possessions are designed to be adaptable to daily life; they can be used for various purposes, such as an alarm clock, calendar and camera.
 - {ii} Studio Gorm created 'Peg' in 2010, a set of tables and benches that can be disassembled and mounted on wall pegs. And Royal College of Art graduate, Jonathan Harrison's ongoing project, 'Dual-Purpose' looks at how everyday objects might incorporate two functions, an example from this collection is a hand held torch that is also a candle holder. To cater for changing spaces in the workplace, design companies such as Unifor and Spaceoasis specialise in modular office furniture that is designed for a variety of work activities, such as independent work and meetings. The furniture is made to divide spaces and provide tailored workstations for users with features such as, height adjustable tables.
 - {iii} Children furniture and accessories retailer Stokke's 'Tripp Trapp' highchairs have grooves that allow the foot support of the chair to adjust as a child grows. The chair is designed so that a seat for toddlers can be attached and can then be removed as the child grows up, the chair can eventually be turned into a chair that an adult could sit on. Another example is the design of children's cots that have removable parts to transform it into a bed for a young child.
 - {iv} Flat-pack furniture does this to a certain extent but Swedish designer Pål Rodenius' 2010 project 'Saw, Assemble' took this concept a step further. He provides a piece of plywood printed with the patterns for various pieces of furniture, such as, a table, a chair and a shelving unit, for consumers to cut out and assemble the furniture they need.

Prolonging the lifecycle of objects is a key factor in the discussion about sustainability. It seems that as temporary consumer culture peaks we have short-lived relationships with the objects and spaces that surround us.^{v} The advantages of this trend are that costs can be kept low, temporary structures and materials can be explored and that there can be an element of light heartedness and non-preciousness about the object or space.^{vi} Designers influence and are influenced by shifts and trends like these in consumer culture, they find themselves adapting to change and creating for new scenarios.

By stepping back and understanding the anatomy of an object, it is evident that several processes and skills are part of its construction, therefore it is difficult to label where the role of designer ends and engineer, maker or manufacturer begins. A designer requires the skills and knowledge to address changing factors, such as, clients' needs, sustainability issues, economical circumstances and existing and/or emerging manufacturing processes.

Although the role of a designer is understood by the design industry to be that of a multidisciplinary nature, in reality it seems that job titles still cover a small area of practice. When studying at university, students are encouraged to develop a portfolio of skills yet young graduates are inevitably recruited for one function, such as, CAD technician or model maker.

Another aspect that makes the role of designer dynamic is when an individual is able to design for various strands of the design industry.^{vii}

Be it through a broad range of expertise to design an object or the knowledge to work across disciplines, it seems that being an adaptable designer with transferable skills is advantageous. Designing for a changing audience and context is why the design industry is constantly evolving.

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- {v}** This mentality has fuelled a 'pop-up' phenomenon, there has been a surge in pop-up architecture, studios, events, shops, exhibitions and objects that are all made to last for a short period of time.
 - {vi}** Does this then encourage little consideration for consequences of materials used for objects or events of this nature? The experience does not allow for a long-term attachment or relationships to develop because the concept of the short term and temporary is being pushed.
 - {vii}** Designer Marcel Wanders is an example of this, not only has he worked across design disciplines but he has also catered for a wide audience span. For example, in 2011: he launched the high-end AQ MW skincare collection with Cosme Decorte for the Asian market, in addition to developing the skincare product line, he took on the role of Art Director and designed the AQ MW logo, the packaging, store-fronts and advertising visuals; for Christmas 2011, he launched the 'Marcel Wanders for M&S' collection, which included men's and women's accessories, cakes and confectionary, cosmetics and home wares; and he also launched 'Whispers', a wallpaper collection.