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A designer's purpose is often questioned within modern society, as there appears to be an influx of designers and their products with little advancements being made in comparison. Due to this, I will explore what it means to have true purpose to design by exploring the words *responsible*, *experience*, and *reflection*. I will discuss the need for accountability as designers to serve society's needs, as well as the importance of tacit knowledge and its value within design. I will also discuss the role of introspection and proper reflective practice within design. These elements will all determine my view on design and why designers in the world are important to humanity and its progression.

To be *responsible* means "having the job or duty of doing something or taking care of somebody/something, so that you might be blamed if something goes wrong" (Oxford Learner's Dictionary 2025). In the context of designing, it means to take accountability of what the designer is creating, and whether they are designing with the intention of solving a problem or contributing to it. The designer is *responsible* for their creation, and how their product affects society. No matter what the designer's original intent for their creation is, it is ultimately how the product interacts with its surroundings that determines how beneficial said product can be. Victor Papanek details this in his book *Design for the Real World*, stating "Design must become an innovative, highly creative, cross disciplinary tool responsive to the true needs of men" (Papanek, 1985, pg. x). The search for solutions to humanity's problems has become overcrowded with designs that have been under researched and overcomplicated. The market has become oversaturated with designs that yield little functionality, and not enough aesthetic value to compensate. Design researchers Adam Thorpe and Lorraine

Gamman discuss the concept of *socially responsive design*, and how the design population can view designing against problems in a more positive perspective. Rather than feeling an obligation to design, they can choose to create a product that promotes more social discourse around these problems and how solutions can be developed. In their article "What is "Socially Responsive Design and Innovation?" Thorpe and Gamman describe how the Karrysafe project developed a bag to address issues around the increase of property theft, which can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Karrysafe bag

The project not only provided their own response to the problem, but also “demonstrated the commercial viability and demand for such products to other designers and brands in the hope of promoting other designed responses that might further reduce the incidence and impact of property theft” (Gamman and Thorpe, 2015, pg. 3). Extending an invitation to other designers to create their own response to this problem fosters a sense of community and collaboration that makes designers want to contribute, rather than feel pressured and shamed if they do not. Collaboration for purposeful design means society must consult all the people who wish to contribute to

the solution. The Index Project, a nonprofit organization that promotes innovative designs towards problem solving, has explained how Karrysafe's success was partly due to the multitude of occupations that contributed to the design. Prototypes of the design were "presented for review by a panel of stakeholders including police, architectural liaison officers and crime prevention design advisors, designers, personal security NGO's, victims and perpetrators" (The Index Project, 2005). The design was successful because it considered all the possible viewpoints, from the consumer to the offenders of the problem. With a multifaceted approach, and an encouragement for collaboration, Karrysafe is a prime example of how people want to help when they feel their input is wanted, rather than morally required. However, there must be some sense of selectiveness and exclusivity around design. While this concept is beneficial to increase the amount of people working towards solving a problem, it does not address the efficiency or moral questions around their designs. Papanek encourages society to realize how impactful designing can be, which means it "demands high social and moral responsibility from the designer" (Papanek, 1985, pg. ix). The designer must take initiative around the ethical implications of the design before moving forward with consulting potential consumers and or collaborations.

While I understand the general population of designers needing to feel agency around their decision to design for a particular problem, I recognize my personal privilege and feel as though I do in fact have an obligation to respond to these problems. Those who recognize this privilege may also acknowledge the fact that with certain

privileges also comes the consequences of accountability. To contribute to the growth of these problems rather than the solution is to abuse said design power.

Designers often lack the passion to solve problems if they have not experienced them firsthand. Our *experiences* are what shape our perspective of the world, and how we function within our lives. It is within human nature to want to find solutions to make life as easy as possible. For a designer to want to respond to a problem, there is a high likelihood of personal experience being a part of the motivation to solve said problem. Not only is experience important in revealing a problem to a designer, but so is their experience working towards a solution. This often involves tacit knowledge, the invaluable knowledge that comes through performing and practicing whichever skill. This constitutes any skill that is difficult to lecture on and is rather learned through doing. One can read all they want about how to create a piece of clothing, but until they have gone through the motions of creating a garment, their lack of experience will show in the finished product. Researcher Neelam Raina details in the book *Creative Economies of Culture in South Asia* how the women of Kashmir have utilized tacit knowledge of weaving and crafting for generations to sustain themselves through war and political conflicts. Tacit knowledge has provided them economic stability and dignified work, which Raina acknowledges by explaining how “In the long term, crafts could thus be a source of economic reconstruction of this post-conflict area” (Raina, 2024 pg. 138). The knowledge of craft is only transferrable through demonstration and practice. Without experiencing the problem, one will lack a true understanding of how harmful it can truly be. Within the same discussion, one will be unable to find an

impactful solution without experience within the designated field of which the solution lies.

A common experience many people share that is a prevalent problem is the need for more durable and practical clothing, specifically within womenswear. To craft a piece of clothing suitable for women, it must be durable, functional, and aesthetically pleasing enough to uphold society's standards for how women must present themselves. Richard Malone, a new and emerging fashion designer from Ireland appears to combine all these elements into his clothing designs. Vogue describes his work as "designs incorporate elements like pockets or well-positioned fastenings, that they wrap around and flatter the body... another of Malone's remarkably compelling characteristics is that he is dedicated to sustainability" (Vogue, 2017). In addition to Malone's impressive runway collections, his work provides functionality – garments that hold their shape while being washable, virtually unheard of in runway fashion. Malone promotes women's voices by allowing them to vocalize their experiences and takes them into consideration when designing.

Seeing as women often find themselves a more vulnerable group of people, one would assume they should be able to hold their possessions close to them. The closest and safest part to holding one's phone or wallet would be of course the front pocket of their trousers, or skirt/dress. Ironically, women seem to have the smallest pockets, forcing them to put their valuables in either their back pocket or in a separate bag, making them vulnerable to theft and robbery. While bags are widely used by everyone, it has become necessary for women to have a bag to hold practically anything. Even worse is a garment having the illusion of a pocket, something that very rarely occurs in

menswear. Despite needing bags to carry their items, women have lacked bags with enough practicality and quality to compensate for the lack of carrying space within their clothing. This experience for many women has led to some special bags to be made however, for example the influence of Jane Birkin, and how the iconic Birkin bag was created in response to her needing a bag that had enough space and pockets for functionality. Birkin was next to the CEO of Hermes Louis Dumas to whom she “explained how hard it was to find a spacious, secure, and stylish bag she liked” (Madison Avenue Couture, 2022). In response, Dumas created the notorious Birkin bag, in which Jane Birkin utilized its maximum potential, as seen in figure 2.



Figure 2. Jane Birkin (2013) *Jane Birkin Press Conference*

While Dumas himself had not personally experienced the lack of carrying capacity, he listened to Birkin's personal experience and designed a product that was sufficient to meet her needs. It is yet another example of how a designer can create a product that works when they listen and do genuine research on how to solve a supposed problem. Experience drives productivity and genuine change, as it is an extremely important element within design. The designer's ability to listen and empathize with their consumer puts their designs in a more personal lens.

Taking into consideration the experiences and responsibilities of a designer, one must also acknowledge the reflection required in order to produce an effective product. Introspection is an important part of the design process as it allows for the designer to reevaluate the flaws and troubles within the design as well as the problem they are designing for. The problems of interest are always shifting, which means a designer's perspective should be as well. Since design is ever-changing, as is the context in which designers design, there is a certain level of flexibility required to be successful. With this, their design process must include reflection, reflecting on what difficulties are present, and what elements of their design are working. Professors Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham are highly aware of this, which they discuss the important elements of designing for a problem, including reflection, within their book *Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan*. Their exploration into how the design process has led them to create an effective action plan is explained throughout the book, in which they acknowledge the importance of reevaluation and reflection to critique and amend into a more effective outcome. Fletcher and Tham discuss the need for a thorough design process in which

they “regard the systemic approach efficacy of action research – generating knowledge and change synergistically whilst practicing thoughtfulness and questioning ideas to be vital dimensions of conducting research with an uncompromising deadline in mind” (Fletcher and Tham, 2019, pg. 23). Within design there is very rarely a time when a designer achieves the intended outcome within the first draft. Instead, they are constantly reflecting and trialing their designs, with reevaluation in consistent action. With reflection, the designer may be moving forward with a plan that does not align with their desired outcomes. Designer Phoebe English embraces this design cycle. She explains in an interview with Weleda Magazine how she has utilized the time from the pandemic to reevaluate her brand, and how it “allowed us the time to take a further step back from the seasons of fashion and to consider how, as a studio, we want to make and present our work, allowing us the time to commit to further research” (English 2021). Not only has this allowed her to reflect on what she has done well so that she can further it but has allowed reevaluation in areas that may need improvement. Her designs exude a sense of structure and invoke an organic aura, as seen in figure 3, which seems fitting as one of the brand’s main values is sustainability.



Figure 3. Nothing New Part Two

Reflection and introspection go hand in hand within the design process, as looking inward often requires reflection upon oneself. The design process can be delicate, especially if there is not enough thought behind the creation, as it is setting the designer up for failure. Lack of research and introspection within design makes for poor outcomes.

My interest between the design process and the importance of purpose when designing will be the main motivation within my dissertation. This will allow me to explore more about how observing the responsibilities as designers through socially responsive design and the obligation we as designers may or may not feel. It will allow me to research the importance of experience and how tacit knowledge within creation is utilized in order to develop solutions that wholly address the problem. I will look deeper into the importance of reflection within the design process, which will explain how designers utilize samples and prototypes to test before presenting their product to the market. These are all important aspects of how the designer can contribute the highest of outcomes to society. By following these guidelines, designers can be more purposeful within their design as well as sustainable and allow effective designs to thrive. The connections between my words have allowed for a pathway towards the research around design yet are different enough to where I will explore several facets of designing, all of which are diverse within their own right. With this being said, I will explore the question '*How does my personal experience as a designer influence the responsibility I feel to design for a specific purpose*'?

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