

Until what extent does the designer has reasonability on what he/she has designed?

Designing necessities.

Why we design?

Everyone should be responsible designer/consumer.

Carlota Rubí Hernández

Sometimes I wonder if there was something really wrong with the TV we had at home when I was a kid. I loved that TV. I think it was a SONY tube TV, I don't have more technical details. Then the flat TVs appeared and everyone started changing their tube TV for a flat one because it was better. The resolution was better, sound was probably better etc. My mom wanted to change our old TV for a new one, because it was the future, perhaps because it was better? Did we need that new TV? Yes, because it was better. It makes sense. If new it's better, we directly get it. Look at future and human technological improvements. But, the truth is, it was better compared to the old one. So we would have never known that our TV could be in fact better, if a new one was never made. Why was it made then? A TV is non as essential thing. I like to think that designers and engineers are looking for ways to make humans lives easier and better. But until what extent is a television a real improvement for life? Are these inventors doing things to upgrade the condition of humanity or to upgrade their own wallet?

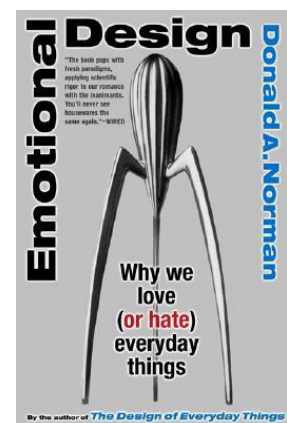
I've always considered designers as problems solvers. That's why I want to be a designer myself. It's something sharp and clear for me. If there's a problem, then I take action, responsible action. Taking the TV example, I feel like sometimes, instead of being problems solvers, designers can be problems creators, or desire creators. My mother didn't have a problem with our TV. She had a problem when a new one came out. I merely wonder if a person has the skills and knowledge to make things right, why don't they take the responsibility of doing so? Not designing to meet societies problem, as Whiteley (1993) talks in his book *Design For Society*. When Whiteley is introducing consumer-led concept says something I could not agree more; "designers can no longer repackage the same old type of consumer good at a time when issues about consuming and it's relationship to the world's resources and energy need urgently to be acted upon. Consumer-led design in a market economy goes far beyond the idea of meeting human needs: it seeks to create and constantly to stimulate human desires". Are designers attending societies desires or making them up? Victor Papanek explains how there is a direct link between society's design and its social health and how design is actually a manifestation of the social, political and economic situation.

According to Whiteley, it's time for a reassessment of the role and status of design in society.

On the following essay I want to discuss the role of designers in our society. I want to make a distinction between the designers who, are not taking for granted their role in society and perform their role in a responsible way, and those designers victims of the consumer-led and ornament design that focuses more on the object outlook than its functionality and materials that are being used.

Here comes the second kind of designer I introduced.

It is a fact, that humans are more attracted to beautiful things. It's always nicer to have something aesthetically and visually pleasant than dummy and rough. The designer job is to do so. But we must not forget that, at the end, what matters is that the object itself works and made its function. "Do you want it to look good, or to work?" Asks Papanek (1974) in *Design for the Real World*. Humans like to buy nice things and sometimes the functionality of it, doesn't matter as much. Donald Norman (2003) explains on a TED talk how he bought an orange squeezer by Alessi, the one on that appear on the fron cover of his book, *Emotional Design*, (Norman, 2004, cover) as it is shown on the next picture. But because it was the gold edition, he will not use it to make orange juice, but as an ornament instead. He is obviously being sarcastic about it. So this object is not doing its function, but it is been designed very beautifully.



Cover from *Emotional Design*, from Donald A. Norman. 2004.

Aesthetics can meet function in the process of designing. Papanek explained very well on the following diagram The Function Complex, (Papanek, 1974, pp 20).. But the designer cannot remain on the surface. Papanek compares the designer with a doctor, and how its performance started to look like if a medical doctor forgot about the general practice and only concentrated on dermatology, plastic surgery and cosmetics.

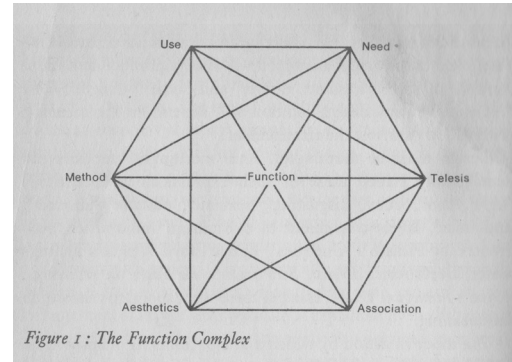
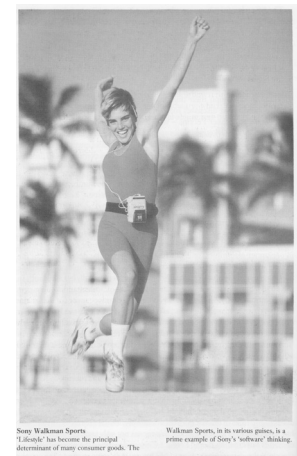


Figure explaining The Function Complex from Victor Papanek from Design for the Real world, 1974.

It's not only about making beautiful things or to change the aesthetic of existing objects, but also to add more options to existing designs. To create a new product that would make people want to buy it. Once in a while a new iPhone is released with new functions that were missing on the prior one. If there is a brand to exemplify how design is turning accessories and product into human lifestyle, that's SONY. This is a brand that responds to what the consumer want or they think they want. In the 80s, they released a waterproof Walkman. They made people think they needed one, because people actually bought it. With the Waterproof Walkman they were offering a new lifestyle. People who had one, will be automatically related to outdoors people, sporty, young, fresh. Like in the following picture, (Whiteley, 2009, London : Reaktion Books, pp 22, picture). where it is shown a young girl, spory and happy. Living this lifestyle they want to sell you.



Picture from Design For Society from Nigel Whiteley.

If we go even earlier on the time, we can discover how this added style value on designs started to have matter. Back on the Bauhaus days, the style added value didn't exist. Anny Albers clearly said of the good object can offer only one unambiguous solution. No distinctions between the objects, therefore, between the people. The type, she said, would remain unchanged until new materials or process of manufacture could improve it. That was the only reason, the style had nothing to do with it.

The modernist will be inventing from their own perception of how people should live, not how they do live, explains Whiteley. The moment that added value appeared was on the cars industry, more specifically on the 20s with the Ford car. While at the beginning they were all the same, new designers and engineers gave to the cars eye appeal and releasing new models every once in a while. It was the beginning of style obsolescence. Now the product was not anymore something impersonal from the designer to the consumer, now the product says who you, the consumer, are. The American way said Sheldon and Arens (1930) "Consumer design as an economic system but also as a cultural one too." They didn't even care, by then, about the end of natural resources or the damage all this industrial process could create to the earth. Industrial designers.

Papanek has a point when saying that designers are satisfying only evanescent wants and desires rather than genuine needs and comparing how people seem to prefer the ornate to the plain just as they prefer day-dreaming to rationalism. It makes it easy. Also, at this point, not much people would reject their non-essentials goods to start living a more austere life. Thought it starts to be a trend, especially in young people.

One might think, everything is already been designed. It's impossible to come up with new things. But there is always the option to make existing things better by adding new options on it, or changing the colour, the form etc. And consumers will want this new thing, because it is been made in a way that they think they want it. As Whiteley says, there is an apparently endless process of replacement, which ensure that when one wants it fulfilled, several more usually pop up to take its place. And this is just how it is. It seems important for humans to always be in trend. Have the last released car model.

Whilst, in one hand, design is been focused on consumer-led and for the part of society who can afford to have options and succumb to programmed obsolescence, there is a small percentage of the population who can not even afford the basics needs living with \$2 dollars a day. Design for the other 90% (2007) talks through all this designers that are now acting to make a change and using design and technology for matters like rebuilding cities after natural disasters such as hurricane, helping people to get clean water or new ways of cooking. Amy Smith, a MIT instructor and her D-Lab students are trying, through design, to develop countries to better formulate designs that meet the criteria for "appropriate technologies", which are simple, cheap, easy to produce and distribute, and meet and direct need. It is highly increasing the number of institutions that are now focusing their aim of interest on solving social challenges through design, explains Cynthia E. Smith (2007) on "World designs end of poverty" essay contained on Designing for the other 90%.

Smith work it is focus on find solutions on the developing world, by cheap, low-tech devices using local resources. There is one specific project that Smith did with her students, she explains it on a TED talk called Simple designs to save lives (2004). She found out that the fumes from indoor cooking fires kill more than 2 million children a year in the developing world. By finding the local resources of the area of working, they found a better way to get cleaner-burning charcoal to cook.

Another interesting project, where design was used as a solution is the Heineken WOBO project, on the 60s. But it was never released. This project, thought, was a controversy. Bottles were designed as puzzles pices, that worked as bricks. Just as the way it is shown on the picture from the WOBO project on Heineken website. Ince they were empty, they had a second live as bricks, responding to an existing problem. When Alfred Heineken visited the Curaçao island realized on the bad house condition of the place and the amount of rubbish on the street, including Heineken bottles. This project would give to the bottles the chance to be bricks to build houses, like on the picture below. And also would reducevisual waste. Whiteley, not wrong, discuss how this project was in between responsible design and social irresponsibility because it's also meeting consumerism. But at least, this company, while being part of the consumerism society, where trying to take something of good of it.



Pictures of the prototype of the WOBO bottle and a house made of the bottles. Available at: <https://www.heinekencollection.com/stories/the-story-behind-the-wobo/>

Design, designers, industrial designers and engineers, could, indeed, if they wanted to, save the world problems, if, as Whiteley says, they dealt with the real issues and concerns, rather than phoney desires dreamt up by capitalist manufactures and their “lackeys” industrial designers.”

To end, I would like to introduce another kind of designer that perform into our society. They are not problem solver, neither problem makers, but a producer of questions and starter of discussion. The designer as an instigator of changes, says Giulia Cordin (2016) the speculative designer. Is a new kind of designer, that instead of designing a product that responds an existing problem, will design to pose something that he or she sees that need to take action in his or her environment. It's not much about the final outcome, but the process. The work of design, said Paola Antonelli (2007) is much closer to imagining possible and plausible futures, rather than generate useful items. It is an interesting way of focus design, as everything is already been invented. Design as a tool to think, not just to act. Art and design are not the same; Sam Hecht differentiated them pointing how art is a presentation of thoughts that cannot be compromised while design is a communication of thoughts that can never not be compromised. We should not mix the meaning of these two concepts and treat the speculative designer as an artist, but we can, perhaps, use both subjects to communicate something.

As a designer, I understand the importance of style and form when making things. I like to pay attention to the aesthetics of products. I frankly just do not see fair to forget about the matter and functionality of the object, and I agree when Whiteley says that, just as function or style are part of every design problem, so should, as well, the green factor, as an integral central part. Because we are running out of resources. We are exploiting until the end the natural earth resources. Instead of keeping on designing beautiful ornamental things, or adding style value to existing things, or desires, let's do something good. It might be naïve, but it's an urge. We have to be responsible. Not only as producers, but mostly as consumers. As a consumer, I sometimes ask to myself, do I need it, or do I just wanted?

Designers should design for the good of society and real necessities. Not to succumb into the capitalist society lifestyle. But if they want to, at least be responsible with the material they use and their way to produce, because we are destroying the Earth, our home.

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Stage of action. How we do things?

17th of October of 2017

How do we do things? What happens? Imagine I need to show to my friend my new shoes. That's my **goal**. I then make a **plan**: I can face time my friend or take a train, bike or bus to go find my friend. From these different options I **planned**, I have to choose one, to specify, I've decided to call my friend with face time. Once I've **specified**, I need to **perform**, I get my shoes and call this person with my phone. If this friend is answering to my call, and so I can show my shoes to him/her, I'm feeling that I succeed because I **perceived** it. My **interpretation** is that the call was picked up and my friend liked the shoes. If I **compare** my actual situation from the beginning, I can notice that I showed to this person my shoes. These are the 7 stages of action when doing something.

According to Don Norman, there are 3 levels of processing when doing things: REFLECTIVE, BEHAVIOURAL AND REFLECTIVE

The actions of **perform** and **perceive** the state of the world is **visceral**, because it's something you do fast, subconsciously and received an immediate reaction. To form a **goal**, **plan** an action and **compare** the outcome with the goal is a **reflective** action. It's subconscious but at the same time you have expectations, you just make it automatically. And finally, the action of **specify** and **interpret** the perception is **behavioural**, is a slow process and conscious, you use judgements and take decisions.

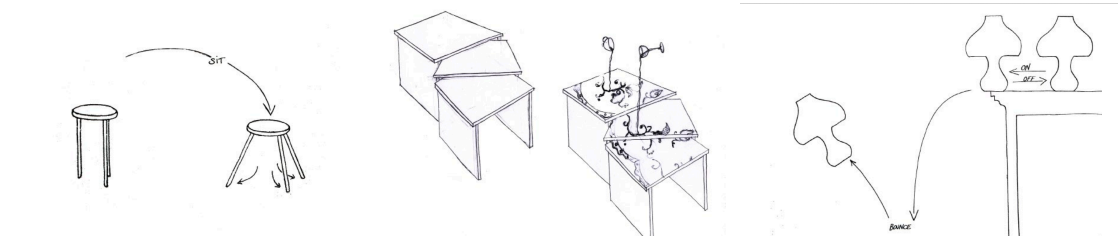
In terms of root cause, when you want to know something, when you want to get to the main problem to then perform, always need to keep asking **why 5 times**. In my life I've acknowledged different ways of defining a problem, this is just one of them. If I would like to find a solution through design I could use it to get to the main problem and then react and do something. The knowledge we have and the way we know things could be because of **knowledge in the head or in the hearth**. The first one are things you know for yourself while the second one, you find it physically on the earth. But also there is the kind of knowledge you just know because is information you have, and you can transmit it or someone has tell it to you, this is the **knowledge of**, but also, there is **knowledge how**, and is how to do something, not an specific information, you have to do an action to acquire this knowledge.

Design for Narrative Experience

14th of November of 2017

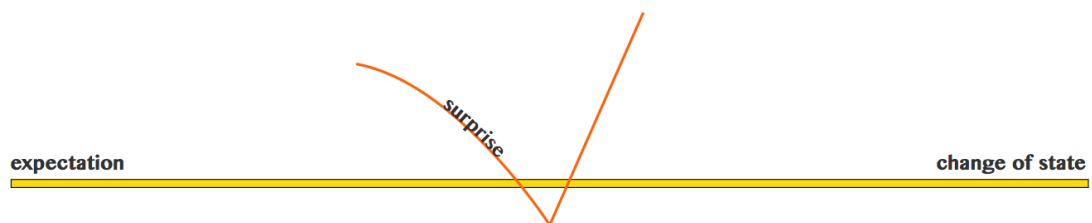
Today we had as a guest Silvia Grimaldi, who talked us through his thesis on design narratives.

I found very interesting the idea of how she experiments within design trying to find a surprise factor. Not design as something functional but as a concept to explain something.



Pictures from Silvia's presentation.

This surprise factor is a change in the time line that challenge the person so there is an interaction between the person and the object.



Pictures from Silvia's presentation.

For her thesis she is been researching on narratives and interpretation of art works based on Mieke Bal and adapted to design. There are 4 ways to interpret art or in this case design: By the artist **intention**, by the **agency** of the object, so what does the work does to you as a viewer, by the **narrative** of the object and how you experienced and remembered later. The narrative of an object can't be designed, but you can design how to make the narrative happens. And by last the **tellability** of the object.

I didn't understood very much at the beginning what was narrative design about. I thought it was useless. But as the lecture was going on, I realized that it has anything to do with usefulness of the object or the meaning of the final outcome, but more about the process and the meaning of this one.

On authorship.

24th of October of 2017

Who owns the authorship?

Talking about the authorship on something and ended up talking about the responsibility on it.

When you sign a project and you are the author, until what extent you are responsible of the usage of this thing?

Who is the author of a film? There are many people involved, not just the director is the author, but someone need to put his/her name to the project, people goes to the cinema to watch a movie because of the director or the actor. If someone doesn't like the movie, they would then blame the author.

But when designing things, it's a bit more different, because the author gets blamed and not just because the consumer didn't like the product, but maybe because it's not responsible or safe.

Jan Van Toorn says that, regarding authorship on design, even though there is a client and a contract, the designer is fully responsible of the final outcome, even though he/she is not the manufacturer and the company has the authorship. On the other hand, Wim Crowel says that the consumer is the one with the responsibility of the good.

I think, that as a designer, you can't avoid your responsibility to do what's right. You have the right to do what you want, but also can't ignore what is right and what's not. Research for what company you are working, and where the money for the project comes from is the designers first responsibility. If you work for Marlboro, even though you are not putting the cigarettes to peoples mouth neither fabricating them, you are designing something for them, there for, you are responsible at least in a small percentage of people smoking. Or if you decide to work for Inditex, even though you are not the one who rules the manufacturing workshops on south east Asia, you are earning money because of those people working there. And I also think that, as consumers, we also have to be responsible of what we buy and to who we buy it.

There is also another fact, the usage of your design. You can design something in a responsible way, for a responsible company, you are the author and responsible of the product, but if the consumer decides to use it with mean purposes, but that's not the nature of your design, then is not your responsibility.

I think that in this subject there is no white or black, there is a wide range of greys on the middle and each case has to be treated according to the context. Myself, as a future designer, I will always do my best to be responsible with the clients I will work for, the things I design and make sure the consumer understands well the usage of it.