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Power, Justice and Faith: Using Environmental and Autobiographical Design Psychology in Garment Creation

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In her book “Some Place like Home” Dr. Toby Israel (2003) writes of adapting environmental design psychology to include autobiographically designed interiors. “Environmental psychology combines the study of the psych with that of environmental components.” (Kopec, 2006, p. xv) According to Israel (2003) “each of us possesses our own, unique environmental autobiography. Each of us has a treasure chest of memories and impressions of places we have lived...that lay the foundation for future choices when selecting [our home].” (p viii) Perhaps this also is true of the clothing we wear. The choices we have made in the past could influence the choices we make for future purchases or design ideas.

The purpose of this project is to adapt design psychology tools and Toby Israel’s’ auto bibliographic design process into the creation of an original garment.



Her book details a thorough design process using autobiographical analysis of personal experiences and locations and how to use them in new design endeavors. To narrow down my design problem I decided to design a garment to fit a Mardi Gras theme. Specifically I wanted to design around the meanings behind the Mardi Gras colors: purple, green and gold. The meanings of the colors were established “in the Rex parade of 1892...purple was identified with justice, green with faith, and gold with power.” (Huber, 1977, p. 16) The end result would be a garment that satisfied and represented my own personal feelings of justice, faith and power.



Before starting my design process I researched various definitions of power, justice and faith and used them to help build my own personal definition. I then referenced Israel’s questions and adapted them

to investigate my past associations with these words. I created an additional list of questions like “What does power mean to you?” “What item of clothing has made you feel the most powerful?”, “Think back on your favorite items of clothing from your past and sketch them.”, “How did you feel when you wore these favorite items?”, Through these questions I was able to delve deep into my past and discover how influential my clothing choices have been to my personal feelings of power, faith and justice. I also noticed patterns in silhouettes, colors, and fit between the garments I chose.

During the entire design process I wanted to be as “just” to my natural design process as possible. I created a design journal to document my process. I sketched many designs that took inspiration from garments I wore in the past. I used the same technique throughout the garment construction. Details of the fit, design and motion of the garment reflected specific memorable garments worn in my past: floor length trench coats, ruffled knee length skirts, a pair of jeans covered in doodles and signatures by friends and family, and corseted ball gowns. They brought back feelings when I felt confident and “powerful” in my clothing. The end garment was a celebration of my own relationship with clothing and the way clothes affect my psyche.

The patterns for the garment were developed using flat patterning and draping techniques. The garment includes a corset, petticoat and jacket. The corset is lined, boned, and has a padded bra. It is embellished with hand-sewn beads, pearls and chain. The petticoat is gathered tulle with a sequin chiffon overlay and decorative ribbon waistband. The jacket is lined, has a stand-up collar, raglan sleeves, and clasp closures. The ruffles on the jacket are hand painted with Jacquard Lumiere fabric paint.

The beading of the corset was done with no patterns or set design. Each bead was placed where I felt it needed to be. The gold painted ruffles on the jacket were painted like a doodle on a piece of paper. The bottommost “foundation” ruffle on the jacket was painted by family, friends, colleagues and students from my university and across the country. Ruffle panels were present for painting at family weddings and parties, and shipped across the country to reach distant family members. The communal portion reflected the pair of jeans worn in years past and reflected my support from friends and family in my life. The end result was a garment that was “just” and “faithful” to myself as a designer and felt *right* when worn.

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Kopec, D. A. (2006). *Environmental psychology for design*. New York: Fairchild