

Section 1

Theory of Design

1.1 What is Design?

1.1.1 No One Really Knows

1.1.1 ¶1 1Well, actually, there are any number of people who could give a valid argument as to what design is today, what it was yesterday and even what it might be tomorrow.

1.1.1 ¶2 1I, however, am not one of them. 2We're only interested in it from a relatively functional point of view. 3If you want to talk about the philosophy, there are any number of books entirely consumed with the task (some are in the bibliography if you are interested).

1.1.2 Good Design, or Functional Design?

1.1.2 ¶1 1So, a good start to determining what design is might be to determine what it means to the designer, from a functional, effective, end-product point of view.

1.1.2 ¶2 1 Kauffman's twelve precepts of Good Design (1950, MoMA) are informative to review for designers even today:

1. Fulfill the practical needs of modern life
2. Express the spirit of our times
3. Benefit by contemporary advances in the fine arts and pure sciences
4. Take advantage of new materials and techniques and develop familiar ones
5. Develop the forms, textures and colours that spring from the direct fulfilment of requirements in appropriate materials and techniques
6. Express the purpose of an object, never making it seem to be what it is not
7. Express the qualities and beauties of the materials used, never making the materials seem to be what they are not
8. Express the methods used to make an object, not disguising mass production as handcraft or simulating a technique not used
9. Blend the expression of utility, materials and process into a visually satisfactory whole
10. It should be simple – its structure evident in

1.1.2 ¶2
Edgar Kaufmann Jr., Director of Industrial Design at MOMA in New York spoke out against a 'style follows sales' mentality by putting on a series of Good Design exhibitions at the museum between 1950 and 1955. This emphasized the European Modernist aesthetic and built upon the design tendencies that had been apparent since the establishment of the Department of Architecture and Industrial Art at the Museum in 1932.

its appearance, avoiding extraneous enrichment

11. Master the machine for the service of people
12. Serve as wide a public as possible, considering modest needs and limited costs no less challenging than the requirements of pomp and luxury

1.1.2 ¶3

A reflection on the Good Design ethic, and its place in modern craft, design and culture occupies George Marcus' book *What is Design Today*, 2002, Harry N. Abrams

1.1.2 ¶3

1A lot of these still make a lot of sense, — furniture designers working today put these to good use in their day-to-day work — but they also imply a specific style of design. 2Of course, this was intentional at the time, and guides a specific style of design in furniture, interior design and decoration.

1.1.2 ¶4

1For interaction design, I am personally unconcerned with additional adornment, or the style of the design, as long as it does not interfere with the primary functionality. 2There's room to argue what involves adornment that interferes, hence the original Good Design movement, and many others.

1.1.2 ¶5

1But much of the concepts, of both design and that designed products are mass-distributed (by factories originally, now by that as well as time-sharing on computer networks) I might modify these precepts, therefore, as follows for contemporary interactive design purposes:

1. Fulfill the practical needs of your users
2. Express the spirit of our times
3. Benefit by contemporary advances in technology and the understandings of human behaviors
4. Take advantage of new technologies and techniques and develop new ones
5. Allow the form, and position of each element to spring naturally from the direct fulfillment of requirements, using appropriate techniques and methods
6. Express the purpose of an element, never making it seem to be what it is not
7. Express the qualities and truth of the information presented, never making information seem to be what it is not
8. Emphasize transparency in process, intent and information processing, to gain the faith

- and trust of your users
- 9. Blend the expression of utility, technology and process into a visually satisfactory whole
- 10. It should be simple – its meaning and content evident by its appearance, avoiding extraneous enrichment
- 11. The system should work for the end user, instead of for its own means
- 12. Serve as wide a public as possible, considering modest or specialized needs, and limited capabilities as no less challenging than the requirements of your most expected or profitable users

1.1.2 ¶6 1These are still pretty esoteric-sounding, so what does that mean? 2Well, basically, that functionality should never be degraded, obscured or damaged by the design of the information.

1.1.3
Populism in social or political discourse, at least today, is not exactly applicable to the understanding I have always had of populist design. I might mean something more like “egalitarian design,” where every user’s opinion is valid and important to meet.

1.1.2 ¶7 1I’ll have a lot more to say about information, presentation and design later.

1.1.3 **Populist Design Today**

1.1.3 ¶1 1The original Modern Design movements ended up with a few good results (e.g. Isamu Noguchi’s Akari lamps), but mostly by creating high-end, relatively unachievable items (practically anything by the Eameses).

1.1.3 ¶2 1A few modern retailers, like IKEA and Target, are becoming relatively successful at offering good design (if not Good Design) to the masses. 2Sometimes this works because the populace is aware of the design ethic on some level, and sometimes it’s just is a side effect of convenience and price.

1.1.3 ¶3 1However, interactive systems, especially as a result of internet technologies, present an unprecedented opportunity to offer design to the people, not to mention of and for them. 2Interactive systems are used by many people, often very frequently, in very personal ways.

1.1.3 ¶4 1Much interactive design is terrible, of course, but good design tends to pay off, and simple, easy-to-use systems tend to attract more users than complex, difficult interfaces.

1.1.3 ¶3
You should talk about the five different kinds of design (Accidental, et. al.) that you referred to before -- from Spool’s article at http://www.uie.com/articles/five_design_decision_styles – Christopher Nemeth Designer

Good point. I’ll add that in next time, since I blogged about it even: <http://www.littlesprings-design.com/blog/blog/2009/01/23/style-procedure-and-success/> – SH