

Thoughts on a manifesto for design.

1. The Obvious

Good design is innovative.

Good design makes a product useful.

Good design is aesthetic.

Good design helps a product to be understood.

Good design is unobtrusive.

Good design is honest.

Good design is durable.

Good design is thorough - to the last detail.

Good design is concerned with the environment.

Good design is as little design as possible.

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Good design thinks big.

Good design is interesting.

Good design polarizes.

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Good design can be stored underneath a bed.

Good design can be dish washed.

Good design has as many cup holders as possible.

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Good design can be affordably produced and assembled by the local population of African, third-world countries.

Good design helps autistic children overcome their disabilities and learn to better interact with the world around them.

Good design appeals to elderly Dutch women and allows for easy wrapping during christmastime to serve as a present for Dutch grandchildren.

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Good design is user-tested.

Good design has roots in academic research.

Good design involves intelligent products, systems and services.

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Good design is ... common sense?

In his 1980 “ten principles to ‘good design’ “, Dieter Rams is said to list the fundamental rules for doing good design. What he actually does is list *his* fundamental principles for good design. By “design”, he means “industrial design” which is actually “product design” which comes down to “consumer product design” but in the end applies mainly to the design of consumer electronics and furniture for use in West-Europe and North-America by the middle- to higher class. After some scrutiny, a seemingly universal list of “commandments” may turn out to be a very personal reminder of a working style, applicable to the man who wrote it and a small group of individuals concerned with the same exact professional field.

2. The Extreme

Good design may be stolen.

Good design may be useless.

Good design may be ugly.

Good design may be puzzling.

Good design may be bold.

Good design may be deceitful.

Good design may break.

Good design may be rushed.

Good design may pollute.

Good design may be over-designed.

As long as it sells.

In a different context, a complete reversal of Rams' principles makes perfect sense. Ethics aside, the "commandments" that seem to appropriate and obvious in one situation are all but negated when a different goal is presented to a designer.

3. The Conclusion

In the end, it is ridiculous to consider a manifesto for "design".

Design is not art.
Design is not politics.
Design is not opinion.

Art is fashion
Politics are fashion
Opinion is fashion.

Design is not fashion.

I like to think that I am being educated to be a designer. A designer lead by reason, logical thought, experimentation, evaluation, awareness of the world around him and the specific context he is designing for. It is impossible to set up guidelines for every design problem as every solution must be different. Art, politics, opinion, in general the subjects to which the construction of a manifesto applies are all subject to great change over space and over time. The political views of even 10 years ago have changed radically since. The art of today's Dutch schools is unlike that of China, Mexico or even Germany. The opinions of people vary by generation, by location and even from moment to moment.

Design must be flexible enough to cope with every context, every situation and every goal presented. In this, there is no place for principles and opinions, which dilute the core goals of design itself and can make a designer stubborn, myopic and uncreative.

To quote Oscar Wilde, which seems appropriate in most occasions:

"I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world."