

What is Design?

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Is it simply the aesthetic refinement of a (luxury) product by a specialized designer?

Not at all.

It's an intrinsic part of everyone's everyday, Hidden everywhere and executed by all of us.

The narrow assumption that design is simply aesthetic refinement limits the discipline to its formal, shaping aspect and neglects its analytical, strategic, and functional foundations. It overlooks a significant, socially relevant potential: design has always been an integral part of our lives and, therefore, our societal interactions. Yet this perspective that design can only be executed by a specialized designer persists in large parts of the population in one form or another.

Design is the translation of thought into action

But what is design? Essentially, design begins with a problem and ends with its solution. Between these two poles of the process, is the power to imagine the desired future, the development of a strategy that can best achieve the vision, and finally, its (systematic) implementation. In other words: design is the act of making conscious decisions by weighing all the discernible pros and cons. Design is the translation of thought into action.



The image was inspired by the documentary film "Monobloc"¹.

Design can be ultra-simple. But it can also be complex to the brink of impossibility. It is present everywhere, from the micro to the macro, in personal contexts as well as on a global scale. From the seemingly trivial daily decision of choosing the right outfit (consider how many factors can influence even this simple choice), to selecting the furniture you buy and the conditions under which these items are produced by the manufacturer. Design goes all the way to intergenerational questions about how we can reshape the global economy into an emissions- and resource-neutral society that respects planetary boundaries.

Each of us designs every day. Whatever our role or job title may be, we all solve small and large problems on a daily basis. Design is an invisible meta-discipline of humanity. To be human is to be a designer. Those who have been formally trained in this discipline have simply learned to navigate various problem-solving processes more systematically, and often with the involvement of diverse stakeholders.

“How do we want to live?”

The fundamental question in design is always “Where do we want to go?” or, to echo the guiding principle of the Bauhaus — the ultimate design school — “How do we want to live?”, (both on a personal and societal level). These questions are based on individual preferences, desires, and values, and can only be answered subjectively, informed by one’s knowledge, life experience, and emotions. This means that for any given problem, there can be — and often is — more than one, and even vastly different, solutions. A non-living algorithm cannot answer these individual questions.



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At best, it can synthesize them. The essence of design, however, is deeply humanistic; it focuses on life itself. Properly understood, the discipline is fully dedicated to being human.

In the future, the moderating abilities of designers will arguably be increasingly needed in growing global tension, and the simultaneous rise of artificial intelligence. It will be — if it is not already — a societal force. Design can continue to be a powerful tool for progress, achieving far more than just the superficial polishing of dubious movements — provided both our needs of today and the needs of those living 10, 20, and 100+ years from now are placed at the center. And then, over time, society's perspective on design will evolve. [SV]

¹ "Monobloc" documentary film (German):
www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZz4jxJPbqE

The documentary by Hauke Wendler examines the global dominance of the cheap white plastic chair, with over a billion units worldwide. Despite its plain design, it has become essential for millions, shaping both lives and economies. The film explores its environmental impact, the tension between function and beauty, and questions what is truly needed for happiness, offering a critique of globalization, consumption, and recycling.



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This text is part of the *ȝyhw*-series, published by NAMENAME Creative Partners. It is an invitation to explore ways of thinking and creating — beyond business specialisations and job roles. We share perspectives on questions and phenomena we observe: all around the belief systems, narratives, and thinking patterns in business.

Let's allow ourselves to turn things on their head and reconsider the thought qualities and creative approaches these present times call for.

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