



Transforming Grounds

Interaction Design, Technology and Society, Philosophical Reflections

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2011

The need for theoretical and philosophical books on design as a "big" thing and the passing of Kees Overbeeke and Steve Jobs

I have earlier written on this blog on topics similar to this post. The reason for writing about it again is my four latest blogposts. They are all about books that approach design as a "big" thing. These books examine design as something at the same level as science and art and of the same importance. There are of course many books out there about design and that has the word design in the title, but so many of them are about some specific approach, skill, competence, or tool. This is all good and well but in times when design is seen as the approach that will save business, a much deeper understanding is needed. And we do not have enough books at that level. We need many more. Write one.

When Steve jobs was asked about what design is and what his "obsession" about quality was all about, he answered something that supports the idea that we need more books that can provide a language and an understanding. [Steve Jobs answered](#) "'We don't have good language to talk about this kind of thing,"

and he continued

"In most people's vocabularies, design means veneer. It's interior decorating. It's the fabric of the curtains and the sofa. But to me, nothing could be further from the meaning of design. *Design is the fundamental soul of a man-made creation that ends up expressing itself in successive outer layers of the product or service.* The iMac is not just the color or translucence or the shape of the shell. The essence of the iMac is to be the finest possible consumer computer in which each element plays together. ... That is the furthest thing from veneer. It was at the core of the product the day we started. This is what customers pay us for — to sweat all these details so it's easy and pleasant for them to use our computers. We're supposed to be really good at this. That doesn't mean we don't listen to customers, but it's hard for them to tell you what they want when they've never seen anything remotely like it." [my italics]

Jobs gives a condense and distinct definition of what design is all about in this quote. To me, this is an extremely brief theoretical and philosophical formulation of design at the level we need to see more of.

My post is also triggered by the passing of Kees Overbeeke. Kees was one of the most influential thinkers when it comes to design as a "big" thing. He did see design as an alternative approach to change in its broadest sense. He did not hesitate to take on big questions and topics, such as "fun", emotion, or aesthetics. He did inspire many and we will miss his insights. He did write about his thinking but unfortunately what could have become his major book presenting his understanding of design in its deepest and broadest way will never be written. And this at a time when we really need books from thinkers like Overbeeke.

Posted by Erik Stolterman at 12:19 PM



Labels: [design education](#), [design research](#), [design theory](#), [philosophy of design](#)

1 comment:



Stoffel said...

<http://dqi.id.tue.nl/kees/>

Tuesday, October 11, 2011 4:49:00 AM

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ABOUT ME



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