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Design: An Intelligent Evolution

There are many people on earth who believe they can accurately define the term design, but it's hardly likely that any two of those people will agree with each other. Depending on each individual's taste and style the term design is used in a varying way, some relating to aesthetics and some referencing the the efficiency of a system. If asked, an art student would say something along the lines that design is the composition of visual elements. On the other hand a user experience designer would probably mention that good design is dictated by the usability of a product. In order to better understand one's definition of design it is better to look at examples that they consider to be good design. Examples of good design help frame their definition of design and put the definition into context.

When I ask myself what are examples of good design I immediately think of the Apple Trackpad. The designers and engineers at Apple have managed to design a simple plate of glass that allows users to control nearly every aspect of their computer. As a finger is swiped back and forth across the surface, the cursor on the screen perfectly mirrors it's movement. It also allows for users to use gestures, an entirely new means of controlling the computer. Not only does the trackpad allow a user to touch their screen just like a touchscreen would, it doesn't require them to raise a hand from your keyboard every time they wish to do so. It's convienience and utility are what I believe makes the trackpad a great example of good design.

Another example of good design is the mobile game Monument Valley. It's a puzzling ad-

venture game in which the player overcomes barriers through M.C. Escher-esque impossibilities and altering perspectives. The challenging puzzles requires the player to consider an entirely new view of physics and possibilities which in turn sparks their imagination. When the imagination is engaged people begin to feel a sense of delight and happiness. The game's music and sounds are calming while the artwork mystifies the player. Not before long the player is racing to discover the next impossibly delightful level and continue on the game's journey. The sense of joy and wonder created by Monument Valley are why I believe it also is an example of good design.

With a base understanding of what I believe to be good design, I can begin to define the concept of design on it's own. The Apple Trackpad and Monument Valley have far different outcomes, one of which improves the user's ability to interact with their computer while the other one engages their imagination and invokes delight. At a basic level these two outcomes seem entirely unrelated but they share one aspect in common, the user. I consider both the trackpad and the game an example of good design because they both affect the user. They don't simply just affect the user though, they improve the user's life. I believe that design can be found in nearly everything humans interact with, but a design is only good when it improves the users life.

I can explain what differentiates good design from bad but it still begs the question, what is design? I believe that design is the construction and evolution of the surrounding environment in order to improve human life. Just as nature harnesses evolution to create stronger life forms, humans harness design to create stronger tools. Whether that means improving the controls of a computer or creating a delightful experience, design is the human equivalent to natural evolution. Not only are we evolving the world around us much quicker than nature ever would, we are doing so intelligently whereas nature only favors the strongest organisms. Natural selection "culled all but the most successful organisms from the tree of life, thereby creating the illusion

that a master intellect had designed the world" (Humes 119). Take for example the penguin, once capable of flying it's now too large to even leave the ground. Imagine if an engineer was asked to redesign the penguin from the ground up. I'm sure every detail of the animal would have a purpose and every decision was thoughtfully made as opposed to the penguin we see in nature today. People can intelligently pick and choose which designs work and which do not. This allows for us to rapidly evolve our surroundings far faster than nature ever could. I believe that design in the most universal sense is the intelligent evolution of the world around us.

Whether someone is claiming that design is purely aesthetic or entirely utilitarian, they are not wrong. As long as the design involves the intelligent evolution of our surroundings, meaning anything from a fashion trend to a new iPhone, it is design. The purpose of which is to improve the quality of human life. I believe the struggle to find one common definition of design stems directly from it's influence on everything and everyone. With an impact on that scale design becomes something far more than just a job or a passion, it becomes a part of every aspect of every day.

Works Cited

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