

INTENTION IN DESIGN

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David Hutama

What is design?

It is a simple question yet difficult to answer firmly. Usually people answer it by mentioning many fancy-good looking objects without further explanation, which means not giving any answer at all. What is design? What is designed-object? How do we know that we are designing something or just making something? Then, how to measure a good design from a bad one? In order to understand architecture as a design subject, these questions need to be answered. This short writing aims to provide insights that hopefully can help us to make our own answer on that question.

Etymologically, there are many definitions on the term 'design'. One of them is '*designare*' or to mark out. We can trace back this definition to a long history of human civilization. In human early domestic civilization, human need to make a separation between the wild-world and domesticated world. They thought of ideas to make this distinction firm through modifying and making objects and spaces. They designed something. In this context, design was very close to the concept of existence and hierarchy. Through designed-object, man defined their Cosmos from Chaos. However we also know that before man established domesticated life, they also had things made. So can we also say that this pre-domesticated man had tried to designed things? This is an interesting question and important for us to understand the term 'design'.

The very distinction between the processes of making in those two eras is its intention. In pre-domesticated era, man made things or tools to defend themselves; to gather food in order to survive. After they established domesticated life, things/tools had more purpose than merely to sustaining their life. They had more awareness of territoriality, social hierarchy/system and abstract meanings. Their life is not about running around hunting beast but to establish Cosmos as an order or system so that they could have a sustainable collaborating life. In order to create and to maintain this cosmos, designed-objects were the instrument. Of course, maybe some of you begin to wonder that somehow designed-object in this description differ from what we thought. And you are not wrong. In this description, designed-object covered almost all-human life aspect. It was not just an object moreover fancy objects but also social system, law, architecture, etc. Actually, this definition does not change. It is only the terms that have undergone distortion in its usage and refer to something more pragmatic.

Coming back to our discourse on how we define design and making in these two eras, we can begin to notice that the intention between those two making process/happenings was different. For the first one, man tends to have intention not more than their survival. It is also not sure whether we could categorize that as 'intention' since it was probably driven and are reactive responses by external factors such as wild beasts and geography obstacles. Intention needs awareness and clarity. As the word also embed the meaning 'projection', that in the first era, this was none. In the second era (domesticated-life), their making processes were ignited

by certain 'projection' of what we ought to do/to make/to have/to be. Therefore in this era, the needs to define man civilization existed. And design – necessity to make a 'sign' – was born.

Christopher Alexander in 'Notes on the Synthesis of Form' makes a distinction between unconscious process and conscious process in design context. The unconscious process referred to an operation that does not followed by a critical/analytical manner. Yet this process also can produce a refined object. The other process is the opposite. It is an operation that follows by a certain critical/analytical manner before it arrives to the making process. This process is what Alexander believes as the representation of design process. The first process is an artisan process. The refinement that produces in the first process is a refinement in terms of craftsmanship, not in terms of innovation.

From those depictions, now we can start to make a conclusion of general ideas of 'design'. Firstly, design is always intentional. The object of design always possessed objective(s) to increase value not merely to react to something. Secondly, the process of design requires critical/analytical thinking. It means there are logics being applied in its making process.

So what do you think 'design' is now?