

FOREWORD

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# NOT AT YOUR SERVICE MANIFESTOS FOR DESIGN

This is not a unanimous manifesto for design. The days of simple dogmas and intellectual dictatorship are over—bad news for all those who do not appreciate complexity and contradictions. Things were easier in the past: “form follows function” and “die gute Form” (Max Bill’s concept of “good design”) were compelling formulas. They provided meaning, order and orientation against the background of the industrial revolution; design was precise, reductionist, unambiguous. The Landi Chair, the Helvetica script or the “Spar-schäler” vegetable peeler are used to this day as shining examples for the purpose of globally marketing Switzerland as a place of innovation. Yet nobody considers the opportunity costs of this. As a matter of fact, design is currently venturing much further, and is taking more exciting and innovative turns.

As a discipline, design no longer revolves around mere beautification. The arts, in which I generously include design, offer diverse methods and practices which are also relevant to other disciplines. Education, Engineering, Social Work, Life Sciences, to name but a few, can all benefit from lived expertise in the arts.

The future is VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. <sup>VUCA</sup> Simple instructions are no longer adequate. Societies and systems are becoming increasingly complex; dig-

itisation, globalisation, diversity and immigration have entered the readily manageable ecosystem of design we once knew, making many feel uncertain. Traditional slogans conjure up the good old days—but new ones give us the courage to go further, even though we do not yet know who will become our future heroines and heroes of design. The future requires spirited, critical, creative and communicative designers. That is reason enough for venturing into the unknown, and it is very important to me to provide the space needed for these new opportunities.

The project *Not at Your Service: Manifestos for Design* brings together a wide range of voices in order to illustrate the ways in which design mutates, infects unfamiliar territories and sometimes turns into an empty word devoid of meaning, but also to show how it can open up innovative, socially relevant and cross-disciplinary fields for sustainability, technological innovation and aesthetic practices, and have a positive effect on society. Design is dangerous—but in order to discover the future it will be necessary to take risks.

Art colleges are hotbeds of creativity where intrinsically motivated people act on their beliefs and completely dedicate themselves to their cause “with no ifs and buts.” This creative, critically-minded and courageous

energy should be acknowledged and appreciated. *Manifestos* creates a space for this and represents the many facets of the current discourse at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

The present book, which has emerged from this project, consolidates the wide variety of beliefs, subjects and practices of contemporary designers at ZHdK. The publication offers different approaches and insights regarding the present-day role and nature of design, and the impact it can have. It is not conceived as a finished project, but as a free-thinking testimony of its time.

Collaborative design, interaction within complex systems, attention economics, visual literacy, the ecological shift, gender-neutral design, environmentally detrimental design, “quick and dirty” design ethnography, presence and trust, social responsibility, the value of ugliness, death futures, immersive technologies, identity and crises, design as a transformative discipline, Design Your Future—all of these topics are presented in this reader in random order but with passion, personal conviction and professional expertise, and presented for debate.

Dear reader, shed your certainties, take inspiration and join the discourse. This works best by meeting the designers behind these texts.



