THE SOCIAL IMPLICATION OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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Abstract. The social function of design becomes indisputable. In order to define the social involvement/impact of form I shall therefore recall the manner in which products influence man. And I shall do this by focusing on the social involvement, which manifests itself as a result of the direct, interactive relationship between user and product.

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1.Introduction.

A new product of design communicates to its consumer inside this equation, by two ways:

- the surprise factor triggered by this visual perception, directly proportional to the design creativity built inside the shapes, reflecting the feeling, the impression which shapes create upon man,

- the psycho aesthetic factor, which defines, in fact, the way in which the product is consumed. The aesthetic perception and the possible pleasure created by this feature cannot be lived separately by the psychological effects which the shape and the color have on the human psychic.

The idea which I want to underline here is that the product itself can exist only within a social activity context, a context of its interaction with man/ the human kind, **nevertheless within the interaction between men using a certain product**. Considering that men generally manifest themselves within social groups, smaller or larger, and that their activity has mainly a social character, and considering that the product by its occurrence creates new relations between men, developed and sustained by the simple use of the product, defining themselves as **systems of communication and object oriented connection**. The product has the ability to create new bridges, sometimes connection bridges unforeseen by either the designer or the producer, nevertheless found by consumers by this use of the product, therefore **becoming a social vector**.

Thus, the interest focus in designing design products falls not only on their formal shape/image, but also on their use destination and on the relations thus generated, defining the use principles for new objects.

As I have already stated, the functional object appears at a first analysis as a use need of an individual, the object (let's call it product), confirmation relationship being defined by the need which this person feels; whether the need for this product to appear on the consumption market is of social level, as this is the definition of design understood as production, we refer to serial production, mass production, destined to everyone. Although the product directly answers to an initially defined individual need which is subsequently extended to the need of social groups of consumers, it becomes hard to anticipate exactly the effect derived by the occurrence of certain products, as well as of the relations generated by it, their amplitude, complexity and diversity.

Bicycles in themselves answer the human need of transportation, of movement, exploration, physical exercise, developing in the same time social relationships, grouping people urged by the same interest, initiating its practice in groups of people.

We shall distinctly define the quality of design by a deep social content, satisfying masses of people by its use, functioning as a social link, uniting, and creating new relationships by and through a certain product. In a direct manner this object oriented communication concept suggests that satisfying the functional needs, and the aesthetic perception function on a large scale, at a social level, design becoming therefore a **social vector,** supporting and developing new relationships between people, created by the occurrence and the use of that certain object.

This role regulates and maintains human social relationships, being not only a vector but also a regulator, a catalyst of social activities. Considering the social-psychological aspect, the purpose of design shall not be defined as satisfying individual demands and needs, regardless the definition of these needs as individual as occurrence, by a human – object direct relationship, but by the creation of certain **optimum object oriented mass connection systems**, which shall reflect direct and indirect relationships, individual and mass relationships generated as such. The object leaves the field of individual semantics meant to define its identity, extrapolating itself within a **social semantic expression**, finally becoming a status quo, a "brand", an illustration of the social state of a certain group. Design can appear at this moment not as a unifying social element, but as an **element of discrimination**, defining various states and social or material levels. It therefore becomes imperative that these object and sign-oriented mass connection valences be created naturally by the expression of the human individuality, non-hostile under the equation of a lifestyle psychology.

Moreover, the rich social content of design is even easier to be underlined by the parallelism between design and figurative art. The fundamental differentiation is relevant for both the analysis of the genesis of the two forms of aesthetic manifestation and for their final consumption.

The act of creation itself, in art and especially in the figurative art (visual arts) is most of the time accompanied by a state specific to the act of creation, an emotional plenitude, euphoric or dramatic, magnificent or consuming, described by the ancient Greeks as "catharsis". This emotional blending has an extremely heterogenic manifestation, each artistic personality having a strong expression and therefore, an individually differentiated manifestation.
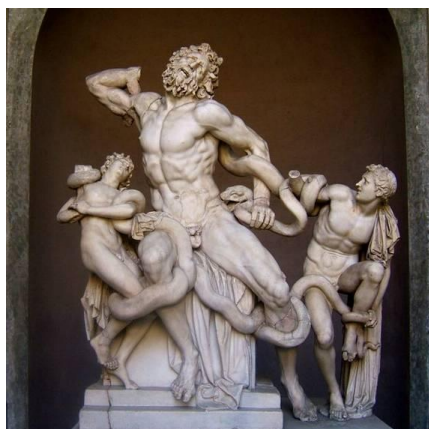
Laocoon, anul c. 175-150 BC

Artistic communication is of individual emotional nature, a message from the creating, sensitive abyss to the world outside the artist, it is possibly a desperate striving, it is often a decoding of certain experiences and realities by emotional religious, ethic, aesthetic filters, and their emotional individual encoding. Finality is usually hedonic, finding the joy of artistic expression, spiritual elevation, the artistic act being usually finalized by the creation of unique masterpieces. Considering the **consumption of this masterpiece in itself**, it shall be at first of **individual, contemplative nature,** which can be accepted or denied by viewers. This contemplation is of **passive** nature, detached by the work of art itself, with no

direct significant interaction, nevertheless and most important, contemplation being defined not as a direct mass phenomenon, as it does not finally offer any immediate practical utility. (Example: the Laocoon group).

Opposite to art, design (as architecture) genetically is an extremely complex process, cognitive and intuitive as well, a process of interaction and analysis, collective and compulsory interdisciplinary, a process of information decoding and encoding, where strictly technical elements, such as product function, its engineering and constructive nature, the production materials and the applied technologies, the ergonomics, the calculus of economic values, the consumption psychology and the market elements, the marketing get woven in some miraculous tissue within the designer's creative act, who, by using his "wand", defined by his sensitiveness and aesthetic intuition, nevertheless controlled by an analytic logics, conduct this orchestra creating in the end a product which contains a message, first of all visual, of visual perception, therefore aesthetic, which we identify. This identification takes place first of all because we like the product, (the surprise factor previously mentioned), but **at the same time** the product makes us think of its use. This makes the fundamental distinction and difference between the two manifestations from a genetic point of view. The finality of this complex process is not a unique creation; on the contrary it shall be defined as a mass production, serial production, **destined to satisfy the practical needs of large groups of people, the consumers**. The aesthetic consumption of this product, even if the first perception impact is of individual nature, whether we refer to products which are used by just one individual, generally manifests as a mass phenomenon, the product offering in a definite manner practical utility to all its users, answering the needs of a large group of people, therefore, its appreciation and recognition is a mass recognition, involving consumption of **social character**, the same as Architecture.

Chevrolet Kalos

The aesthetic content blended in the design product is consumed, perceived, appreciated **actively by its use** not passively by contemplation, such as art, being consumed **by the use of the object itself**, by the dynamics of its functionality. The same as architecture, design has a deep social character, nevertheless democratic by offering equality by its destination, whether we talk of identical products. For example, when using a car type Chevrolet or Kia, the consumers apply the same principle in the same way, the buying decision generally defining a group of buyers of the same material condition, the buying price being in fact the major factor of the buying decision. Moreover, the car connects the same social human category defining their need, and carrying the social image, which the car projects upon them.

In the same time, the car itself, appears as an extremely discriminating product by its variety of comfort, value, style and social class implied.
Of course that by using a Ferarri, Jaguar, Porsche 911, or a Pagani, discrimination becomes obvious, the decision and the possibility of buying this type of car reflecting a level, which just a small group of people can afford. It is apparently a paradox that the same functional program should equally reflect the comfort offer of the masses of consumers and the discriminating character, of social differentiation in the same time.

A relatively good watch can be bought for 50- 100 dollars. And again a watch, maybe a little better than the first, costs thousands of dollars. The functional quality in itself, the purpose of the product, which is to measure the time, is satisfied as compared to the real need of the theoretic consumer. Both watches are bought, the sellers of both products illustrating the extremes of social welfare, selling continuously, thus producing the desired profits.

New products determine social changes. They bring new habits in human life, they change the systems of values, lifestyle, moreover, the communication relationships and the reports between people. The new product, by answering specific well defined needs brings comfort in the consumer's life; as an immediate result, nevertheless collateral, comfort determines changes which shall project into the general life of the consumer, as well as into their interaction to the others.

I could illustrate this theory better by analyzing the big star in our life and design: the car. The car in itself has a spectacular evolution and trajectory in the history of design products. At the beginning, the car was thought of as a new type of transportation device, destined to be able to cover larger distances, in shorter periods of time, though having the privacy, the flexibility and the motion freedom, which the train could not offer. Nobody could imagine in the 40's 'that the car would become a social symbol of a certain extremely unique welfare, expressed by extravagant shapes, with chromate body types, extremely expensive. Two decades later, people began to fly, to rent cars for their jobs, the car beginning to lose its fashionable star place, and became less attractive. The implicit power, the social position were no longer reflected by the car in itself, which ceases being a unique symbol used to reflect the owner's social position, and becomes an average mass transportation means. The car gains its quality of generalized transportation means, a type of

individual and collective service and less a **"social label".** The extremely rich people who previously have publicly demonstrated their condition by buying cars started to buy ships, yachts, helicopters and other ephemerals. But, following the mass joy, which the car has offered for several decades, there has come the fear, which usually accompanies the joy: the carbon monoxide, which destroys the ecological balance and the lungs of the humans who have created the car. Over almost 100 years of existence, the car has gone from a product initially used with admiration, intimidation and respect, to a demonstration of power, speed, arrogance and especially the ability to consume fuel, equipped by extremely, unreasonable powerful engines, which have finally become instruments of destruction and pollution.

The new electric, hybrid cars appear timidly, suffocated by the powerful jackals of the automobile production who feel threatened, nevertheless these new vehicles are handicapped at the same time; the chance to rapidly conquer the market is limited by the low speed, unable to exceed 100 km per hour, speed which generally cannot satisfy the large community of car drivers. Mentioning their small dimensions as well, which determines a diminution of comfort – a factor being decisive in America -, the success becomes smaller.

Beyond these results impossibly to be predicted, there are other issues triggered by the creation of the car: a complete change of people's lifestyle, by dramatically increasing the stress level, by increasing the sacrifice of human lives to over 100.000 people a year. The car completely changes man's philosophy and lifestyle implicitly; it more and more replaces walks, man becoming more and more sedentary. As an immediate result of sedentariness, there are health problems also. The creation of the car has developed a mass movement in the USA, the "Wheel Houses" movement, which was initiated at first as a form of entertainment and recreational destination, but which rapidly turned into a social definition of those who do not have enough money to buy a real house and wish to live independently.

These people create communities, which are usually located at the peripheries of towns, equipped with electricity and common toilets. Unfortunately these people are of low education, where alcohol, prostitution and drugs are blooming, already defining a certain social category widely spread in America, commonly known as "trailer trash" .

The effects of television, of music devices and entertainment devices (entertainment centers), CD, DVD, MP3, computer games and everything representing the permanently innovating technology have determined a series of dramatic changes, even radical in the activities of the individual in themselves, in family and society. The TV programs bring everything human species desires, from information to music, concerts and movies, from western to classic movies, porno and thrillers, everything attracting man who loses their mobility as individuals, who does not read any longer, they receive information on the history or geography channels, who stays and remains on a surrogate Readers' Digest education type, "summaries on books" having an effect of immediate satisfaction. Nevertheless, beyond these aspects, which are the prices of the education of the individual caught in the TV age "net", there are even deeper consequences, which are paid by health. In America, the average time spent in front of the TV, namely unmoved on a relatively comfortable sofa, is of 3-5 hours a day per person! This lack of activity, besides the inherent "intellectual" slowdown generates obesity, heart diseases and other mental and physical deficiencies. Individual aspects trigger social communication issues, modifying the relationships between people. Romantic sideway walks have been rapidly replaced by watching a last minute movie, the owner of the house inviting their friends, offering fast food, drinking, and smoking. This could be enough to determine addiction: man in front of the TV set having an empty look, the remote- control in one hand, the fast food in the other, chips and the bottle of beer, Coca-Cola; he falls asleep

late at night, hoping to get what he does not know and cannot even imagine, this waiting paralyzing the thirst of information, as this media system brings on the sofa already digested information, generating, besides the physical obesity, a metal obesity, psychological obesity, a flattening of the generous definition of the human being spirituality ….Sleep loses much of its rest value and natural healing, its hygiene being completely neglected, the world stress transmitted by the TV shows being deeply rooted into the human psychic, humans who begin their night sleep on the coach, the first several hours, then tired, goes to bed (luckily!), thus generating diseases related to the lack of sleep...in the past, long ago, we had to move to switch channels, now we have remote control, so we do not have to lose energy by getting up at least for this …

Examples could have an infinite number. What is important is to understand the relationship between the new product and the consumer.

There is, obviously, a great **ethic responsibility: we invent and we change the product, which in its turn changes our life.** It becomes important that designers should responsibly think of this aspect; anticipate the issues created by the qualities of the product and their derivations. Should he be able to anticipate undesired changes? It is a question the answer of which I do not know exactly, but I wish with all my heart that all the designers should be aware of this moral responsibility and be able to stop the destruction of man and of the environment, they can save the planet or at least prolong its agony.

It is certain that the designer plays an educational role in civilizing the consumers, by the new level of comfort offered by the created products. We can dare say that design is a measure of civilization and this we can say by underlying the difference between the lifestyle of the city people, as compared to the lifestyle of the village people, despite the culture level, their behavior being influenced by the urbanization changes which influence the individual, by the comfort which forces people to manifest themselves in a certain way, although they do not have any merit in this, but simply reflect the level of civilization to which they have been taken by using products specific to urban civilization, it becomes a kind of floating into that civilization... Design can contribute to educating society not only by offering "civilizing by using" the most recently created objects, the most fashionable ones, indirectly educating though, by the communication content which the object itself displays. Being the result of the simultaneous synthesis of the culture moment and of the technical civilization, including besides the representative technical elements specific to the product aesthetic elements also, elements of art and fashion, design is in fact the answer, the aesthetic pulse, I should say, to a particular moment of that society. The educational role of design is indisputable. Sometimes the question is: do we wish this consumption society "civilization" where modern products and technologies manipulate us, consciously or unconsciously?