Transformationdesign as a discipline of social system design
or: how to establish "Heimat"
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Why "heimat"? Why "design"? The motivation to use the capabilities of design to establish heimat arises not solely from the pretty picture vision of a 'better' world, but at the same time starts pragmatically in the here and now: A 'better' world corresponds not necessarily with the individual's interpretation of a 'better' world. And this is most likely the crux of the issue: we have to imagine, to design and to live "heimat" as an emerging effect of social systems.

We have been promised everywhere that in order to have a better life we'll just have to consume more. Design plays a big part in the solidification of these conditions. If we follow this logic though we are destroying our socially created, natural and therefore limited livelihood, the 'context of life'. This is first and foremost what enables life, including a 'better' one, including "heimat". Are we prepared to even start a change? Does it lead anywhere, and especially to a 'better' life, to so called "harmony" within the social system?

Let us dare in our deliberations about the possibilities and functions of transformation design. As designers we ask ourselves in view of the urgent questions of our time: How can we focus on the context of life instead of just products that are strewn around and over which our society increasingly stumbles? Of course we love comforts. Comforts, often thoughtless consumption and mobility, are based on the depletion of the resources that feed them. We are surrounded by comforts. They are making our undertaking quite tricky. Transformation design, which puts itself at the service of the notion of "heimat", can't have its eye on the abrupt relinquishment of the comforts of the Western lifestyle. What are these comforts? And do they make us happier? What is contained in the wish to own a new smartphone? What is concealed in the attraction to use it constantly? What is behind it all?

If, on a design level, we can understand what is hidden here, if we could literally discover the underlying promise, we wouldn't be doomed any longer to design gadgets, which drain our resources, make us tolerate exploitative working conditions and force us to buy products that destroy capital and time, but instead could… yes – what?

If we consider social transformation from a design perspective, we'll find ourselves in two movements: The first reaches far towards a vision of "heimat" as a future state of society – what it could be like, how it could be designed. That is design work. The second movement is considerably smaller, more delicate and being modestly carried out: Looking towards ones neighbour, a fellow human being, caught up in his desire for comforts. Social transformation won't succeed without him, without the social system. It is not solely a design vision, but takes place through the cooperation of the many individuals with their many individual visions and hopes.

Against the background of the post-growth society vision let's now deal with the individual and his comforts – for him this is: Not saving the world, but rather his private happiness. We believe that this is where we'll find the solution – in little steps, little changes.

The individual, who we depend on if we want transformation, diminishes in his approach to the consumer and in his actions into an operator of programs - not to mention his skills or talents. A common picture: Reduced to a swiping motion he stiffens, equipped with blinkers, at best with a completely receptive attitude. Zero action. Zero point zero transformation. A fixed stare towards the neatly packaged gadget box, an obedient response towards every plea to consume, a stubborn conformity of ones own communications culture to the possibilities of the gadgets and structures of purely commercial logic that follows network offerings, corresponds with holding onto to the so-called progress that has nothing in common with humanism that aims for freedom, but rather amounts to slavery. Are they the comforts?

Let us dare to briefly pause and not just examine what we do or consume, or how we behave. Let's ignore those perfectly designed products – including any technical aspects that certainly dominate and direct our daily life. Let's examine what makes us human beings. We are entering a slippery slope and bravely question, what we are used to declare as genuinely human achievements. We come across the thought of why, despite all this wonderful progress, we are so sick, so unhappy and so unable to transform. Let's assume happiness can be found somewhere between what we are and what we do, an approximate congruence of the symbolic and meaning, then we are exactly where things becomes human. And this, we claim, we relinquish more and more: freedom. We are walking on a leash. Polemic should be permitted, just to show what we can find while thinking about freedom: Experience, dirty but beautiful – human gold. If we go treasure hunting for this gold we will realise: We don't have to get our hands dirty anymore to collect a potato. We don't have to sweat anymore while we build our home, nor scream during childbirth or jointly cry while someone is dying. Looking after our smallest, caring for the elderly – and within it the potential, as if sealed in amber, of genuine human experience. This is rapidly being institutionalised and soon maybe even automated: Existence incomplete.

And this offers many creative challenges that could keep us designers busy forever and a day: Apart from products we could design institutions and even its automats, equipped with a promising human face. The more perfect the plastic visage, the more distorted its reality underneath. Do these designed objects really contain the potential for social transformation, of social system design? We are capable of a lot, institutions are efficient. That is good and often very handy. But where is human activity, inspiration, potential? Screaming, sweating, giving birth, bringing up children, caring for the elderly, experiencing death – it can all be, yes, even beautiful, and definitely human. And anyway: decisions and free will? Hogwash says brain research - condition of a potential for humanness we respond. Humanism – where did it slip away to?

No, we don't want to complain, we have to deal with it. Our motivation is clear – where is the material? We believe: experience is the material of the future. If as designers we have created products meanwhile as well as the behaviour of the individual towards them, of the individual who perceives these products as a consumer or user, receives, buys and uses them, then we are turning post-materialistically or trans-materialistically from product to system, from behaviour to experience. We try to take this individual into view

and with that the possibility of authentic experience, the capacity to act, creativity. We try to reflect product independent comfort and to view experiences as artefacts that can be designed.

Transformation design that seizes our issue by the collar ceases to work with products, but it works instead with possibilities that turn through their implementation into experiences. Where it concerns design, unless we mean visual communication or industrial products or other, tangible material, we also use the term 'System'. Is the system the new product? And is this where we will find "heimat"? Not just design – this term is rampant everywhere, not least as 'system critique', which puts the principal blame on anything that isn't quite right with this world. In our request for social transformation we will attempt a systemic positioning - which, as we will see, will be an ambiguous undertaking typical of creative conducts within systems.

Even though we are expected to view everything critically, we don't agree with a system critique that relieves the individual from his responsibilities. Even if much goes wrong inside 'the system', from a design perspective we can still imagine proper conduct within it.

To think of transformation as an object of design we use the term 'system', not so much as viewed result of a design process, but rather as scene, stage, road network. The system therefore turns into a permeably perceived playing field of designer concepts and planning competence, into an area for treasure hunters.

We will have to think about what specifically design can shape. In this maybe (still) false system we might be able to realise part-systems where real, in our case authentic, experiences can emerge (Niko Paech: "Reallabore"). What we can consequently design does basically not differ from classic design objects. We design cognition, communication, resulting in cooperation. Only through this triad will we be able to actually bring about transformation. The design of social systems, we believe, does not start with a master plan but with the cognitive composure of the individual, inter-subjectively transmitted – discursive through communication, creatively through cooperation.

How can we cooperatively renounce the paradigm of growth? Only if the individual creates original self-aware experiences that are therefore independent of the production of comforts. The self-awareness of the individual, equipped with the finest senses, is placed on wobbly legs because of a current focus on surface programming. While we potter around, when we deal with matter, when we communicate, deal with others, we have the chance to become aware of the essentiality of matter and our social immediacy. No theory can impart this, no app can replace it. Where it concerns the design of a post-growth society, it is about the whole issue. What arrives in a pathetic fashion is, rationally speaking, quite plain: With this realisation it is hardly possible to create an image of a fellow human being and nature that makes it possible to view it solely as a means and not also as a purpose in itself. This insight is of course not new. And: It doesn't seem to help anything! What philosophy, literature, social, humanities and natural sciences have recognised and communicated does not lead to the desired paradigm shift. For transformation design this can mean that it can position itself at a different, design specific point: Not through the realisation

of experience but through experience itself. What do we mean by that? An example: Human rights don't get realised through formulation and demands on the political stage, but through the actual realisation of human dignity – of others. Actual experiences with your fellow citizens, concrete dealings with them, challenge the paradigm of speed and growth, not the Kyoto protocol. Theoretical dancing? Not possible.

Let us look further into our design material: To design the potential of experience as a base for social transformation, we are considering objects that we can design: Social environments, relationships and contexts. Important here is the design of relationships, rather than the design of things, gadgets and institutions that we use to communicate, but relationships themselves. We attempt this by way of enabling experience and generating potential for discourse – with continued focus on the triad of cognition, communication and cooperation, which rhythmically underlie the design of social systems.

The enabling of experience takes place in virtual space. Virtual space doesn't mean the world wide web, which sucks up our experience, but literally the virtual space of possibilities where the experiences of the individual unfold as existential realisations. The human with his intrinsically projective disposition is always ahead of himself and moves openly and permanently around in this virtual space. He does not have to forcibly lose himself completely within it, he can find his way in his virtual movements, especially regarding cooperation, to which he has been fatally doomed. This is his opportunity – his good fortune. Searching for good fortune and a 'better' life he withdraws into his world of comfort because the terrain is so unclear. The size of the space of possibilities tends to confuse us on an existential level – biographies have cracks, life stories follow curves, nearly all role patterns appear to be melting – masks cease to function. Design certainly does take part in the establishment of new masks. We build perfectly designed alternative role patterns that are beautiful to look at and whose demands we are failing – even if we consume everything that is deemed necessary for the fulfilment of endlessly new role requirements. This failure is luxurious in comparison. Let us dare to take a broader view: Elsewhere, self-proclaimed despots are cutting a path of violence and oppression in the name of lifestyle conformity and cementation of roles, compressing the space of possibilities down to a small box into which existence has to fold itself. Not even failure is a possibility. The individual space of possibilities here does not seem to be developed further, movements within it are not getting freer. As Cassirer clearly worked out, there seem to be two paths on offer: the hardening path of conditions or the softening path that pays tribute to permanent insecurity – dictatorship or freedom.

To move around in the net of relationships by letting go of the old masks, the emergence from old roles not the cognition accompanied question "who am I?'", not the question of status and acknowledgement as a "what do I have?" is brought into view, but the question that initiates cooperation: "what am I going to do and with whom?" New fields of activity for design and new design

products certainly arise from this human questioning: Design products that don't cement social relations but soften them. Artefacts/ design products, which sometimes aren't tangible anymore but get realised, eco-logically, through relationships. New design tasks arise based on these assumptions around cognition and communication as enabling components of transformation-in-cooperation.

Regarding cognition we see our effective range in the enabling of experience, regarding cooperation the design of systems and networks come to the fore – we will call it the design of ecology. In this case we understand ecology not just as something that we associate with the colour green, but rather as a system structure that makes transformation possible. We see ecology as relationships within a system that is based on cooperation. Designing ecology starts by imagining space, network, cognition, communication and cooperation as one, and to consciously move as a designer around in this systemic entanglement, knowing that he/she can't fully see through any of it.

Despite the conscious knowledge of the fact that it is nearly impossible to comprehensively design all relationships, transformation design still likes to tamper with it. We can forget about a complete control over the design process – this fairytale of omnipotence might be attractive but it won't lead to anything. We are certainly still trying to understand what designers actually do. With that in mind we are so far moving along a notional meta level, where we are attempting to conceptually abstract activities and design objects. We tear them from their tangles – and therefore change them. In practice this involves taking the design object, manipulating it, informing it, fiddling with it, playing with it. Transformation design entangles itself in the system, not so that it can grasp it, but in order to design it. Transformation is unlikely to succeed by abstracting single elements of a system. Transformation design transcends form.

To not be form fixated but to think eco - logically means for design to be ecologically active, meaning to create relations and relationships.

Projects that, in the broadest possible sense of social transformation, focus on a post-growth society, are essentially about designing transformation itself, rather than (just) communicate its gaze towards it. To design transformation towards a post-growth society and to create it is a complex process that involves numerous stakeholders. They neither always know of each other's existence, nor are they capable of keeping each other informed. Design is heading into quite a hazy affair here.

Where we don't want to rely on statistics and algorithms anymore, on brain research and economic analysis, we can look at what humans have always practised relatively successfully, and where we are simultaneously approaching the problem of the incoherence of reflection and action, as well as the attempted identity of the symbolic and the actual.

There lies, we think, design's strength:

Designing over and across the gaps of knowledge. It is often based on intuition. To keep intuition alive we depend on a manifold of experiences.

Focussing on the individual – this is a real challenge; the search for experience and autonomy is really complex. What can be achieved, how can one even generate relevance, something that at least vain designers are quite attached to. It has to be worth it what one is doing, and preferably even look good. Post-growth, even designers have to make sacrifices in terms of comforts and kudos. We dare to risk the focus on the small wheel in a large system, and immediately this huge contradiction becomes apparent that we have to deal with and change.

Of course, we can't quite live without products (yet). But if we design products – then preferably those that are attuned to the human way of being, that generate experiences and also make them visible. Where processes, manufacturing techniques and included resources have to hide behind the marketing screen, the focus on the designed object solidifies, and it either works and is available or is broken and being thrown out. Fully packaged, narratively air-tight products aren't just differently received than incomplete, unfinished, narrating objects, but also work back to the responsiveness of the viewer and the user, who shies away from handling, comprehending, understanding to operating on a predominantly uniform user interface. The experience with such a thing becomes shallow and barely useful, we think, for social transformation.

The question for design in a post-materialistic era arises of how beautiful things can be created without being captured by materialism. We considered a solution for design in the development of experiences with a focus on communication and cooperation that needs to be supported, as well as a solution for humans which aren't primarily or even entirely consumers anymore. Design has the capacity to create the awareness that many of the experienced defects can't be solved by consumerism. This can only be experienced. Design can therefore also make its contribution in a post-growth economy (N. Paech), by raising the awareness that something is missing that can't be bought or calculated, but only experienced. To sharpen the focus and sensitivity for the rampant degeneration of genuinely human experience can likewise be a task for design, just like it has so far focussed on consumable products and has been able to awaken consumer desire.

Experience can't be serially produced like an industry product – once the accolade for good design. Experience is never completed, it usually is uncontrollable, organic, individual, in constant flux. Post-materialistically, design releases what it used to love: universal models, control, finished products. Design therefore stops being a fetish, no secret product, it loses its cult status, it is normal. And this is the best that design can be: normal, common property, part of the social system, tool for establishing "heimat" as a common project.