THE PHILOSOPHY OF DESIGN IN A NUTSHELL

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In Eastern Europe design as a new discipline is dismissed by some as something unnecessary, marvelled by others as something magical or is simply considered as the battering ram of the philosophy of consumer society. All these views arise from either not knowing the subject matter or from misunderstanding it. In this paper we shall attempt to show the process during which design became an organic part of life in the developed world and contributed extensively to the change in the quality of life, which makes its existence and function unquestionable nowadays. How does design work and affect us? Why is its role growing constantly and irresistibly both in technology and in our everyday routines?

1 Evolution and civilisation

We all live in a *primary natural environment*. Each phenomenon of nature takes a shape that will ensure its survival among the given conditions. All these phenomena are characterised by a permanent sequence and nature—nature relations. In other words, the survival instinct (REASON) is capable of creating a state that is necessary for continued existence (FORM) only out of the rational resource of the laws of nature (CONTENTS). The name of the rational phenomenon that can be represented in the form of a triangle with the above concepts at each tip is *evolution*. The role of information that activates the field of instincts is to force REASON to mobilise only those elements in its own CONTENTS that are suitable for creating its own ideal form, i.e. the ones that ensure survival. The system being dynamic, the information influencing REASON activates, reinforces or blocks the *energy* inherent in the evolutionary triangle.

After human communities came to existence evolutionary contents were supplemented with a new component: the laws of society. The world created by man is called *secondary natural environment* in which the logical order of evolution is a determinant aspect, but which is modified or sometimes even overshadowed by the rules of the community. The new factor that conceals the essence of the whole process and results in separation from nature is GOAL. By introducing it man no longer envisages his own existence as an ordinary being of nature but next to the drive provided by instinct (REASON) he places a component that he believes is rational. This new item is supposed to make human existence meaningful.

However, we have seen in the evolutionary system that existence is present without GOAL, thus it gains its inner dynamism from external information and not from this component. It is the external FORM in this case as well that activates REASON. Thus, GOAL is an imaginary drive, basically a psychological factor. By inserting GOAL our triangle becomes a rectangle by which we can represent all the activities of human communities. (See Fig. 1) The dynamism of the structure is still present but, because of this new component and of the psychological nature of the laws of society, its rationality disappears. The rectangle works in the following way: survival instinct (REASON) mobilises man's own emotions as an imaginary drive (GOAL) in order that, from CONTENTS, i.e. the rational resources of the laws of nature (intellect, healthy life) and from the emotional resources of the laws of society (morals, beauty), he can ensure a state necessary for survival (FORM). This basically irrational system is what we call civilisation.

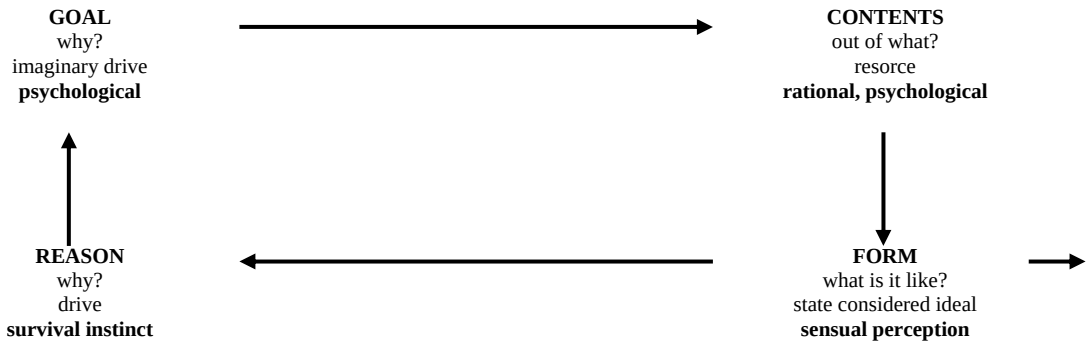

Fig.1 The rectangle of civilisation

2 Post-industrial manufacturing and design

Due to the perfection of electronics and optics and the modernisation of metal processing technologies and with the help of new materials products made by the post-industrial manufacturing of our days have become fit for unification and for integration in human communities. (See Fig. 2) Simple, logical use and looks that suggest safety have become major aspects of individual consumption. Technical approach has been completed by adapting the construction of objects to human features. This new field, *ergonomics* has become an orderly and rationally systematising science. Besides the assessment of human anthropometric data and the analysis of motorial motions it has started to use the findings of psychology as well. Post-industrial production, however, transformed the relationship between the individual and community by creating consumer society. In these societies buying is a part of mass culture.

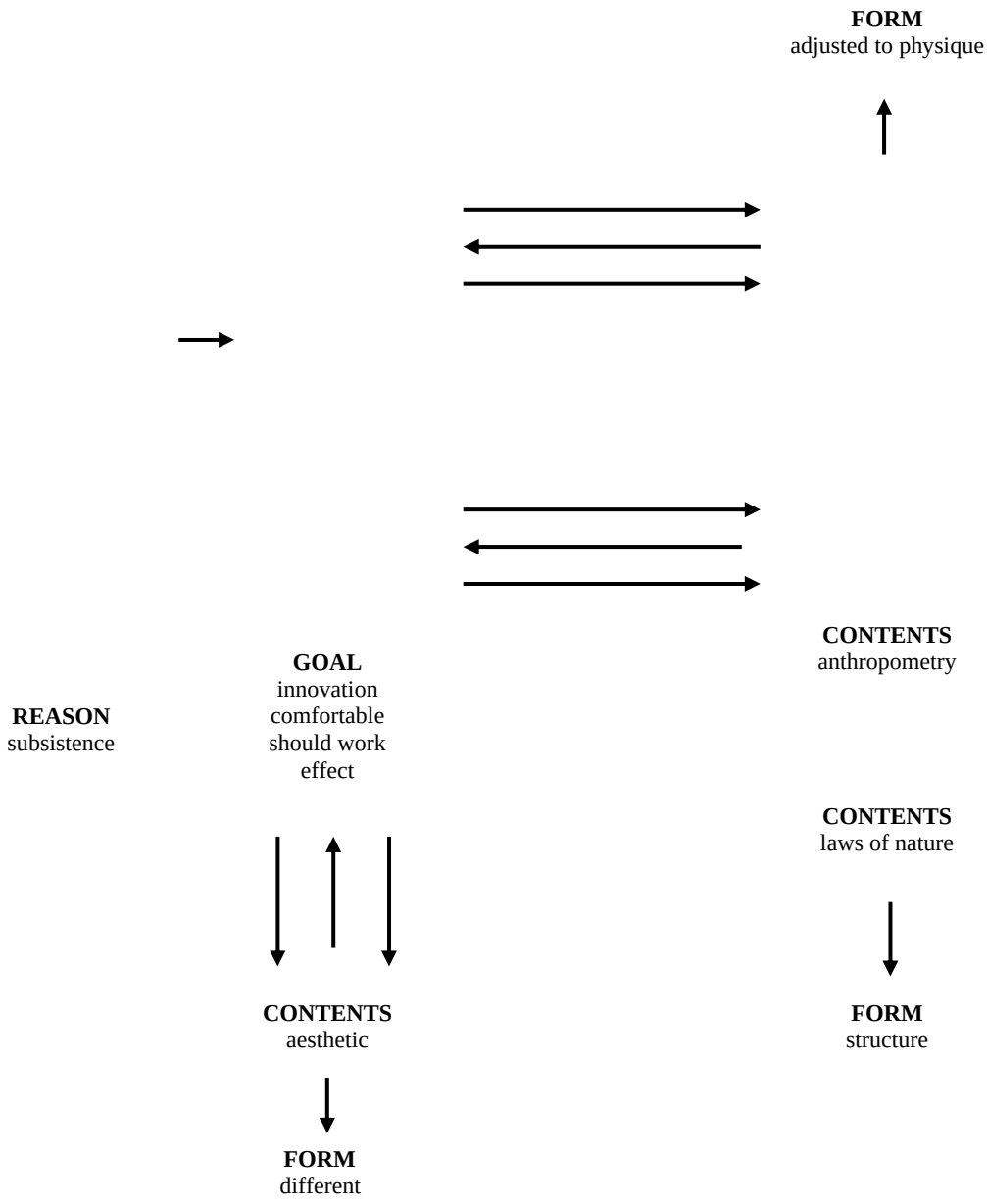

Fig. 2 The flow chart of post-industrial production

That means it is the manufacturing industry that, by ensuring its own growth, aims at satisfying imaginary individual needs generated by advertising. Yet, today emphasis is laid on success and quality is of secondary importance. The buzzwords of our days are marketability and quick recovery of investment. A product can be made profitable by publicity rather than by usefulness and it is achieved partly because the public are loyal to certain brand names. Industry also aims at distinguishing its own products from those of others by means of externals and design is the only discipline that can achieve that goal with the help of its own practical means.

Industrial design was brought to life by the manufacturing industry, by mass production and by mass culture. Today design, advertising and the manufacturing industry have such a great influence on one another and on life that they must co-exist. The developed world is so much interwoven with these three factors that they are identical with the culture of objects. Nowadays an attractive society should have a good design. In a consumer society it is the designer who can establish the contact between the seller and the buyer. Psychologists are trying to reveal the mechanisms underlying the influence of advertising and design on people but they do not seem to have got beyond empirical analyses.

Design is usually considered simply as a branch of traditional arts and crafts. However, the profession of design is related to them only in that a designer will also be driven by the desire of self-realisation and will conform to an aesthetic system of rules. The creative sovereignty, the independence of both the designer and the representative of arts and crafts (sometimes referred to as *applied artist*) stem from imagination but they are by no means identical.

3 The creative process of designing

Design is, of course, an activity closely connected to civilisation; its components can easily be fitted to the corner points of the rectangle representing civilisation, thus, it is worth looking at its mechanism in that context. The creative process of designing is as follows: (see Fig. 3)

Step one: The message from an external contact about fashion (information) arrives at the field of instincts (REASON), the task of which is to ensure the self-realisation of the individual while releasing inner energies.

Step two: The manufacturer mobilises his own emotions and specifies the desire of an imaginary marketability (GOAL). That is when the preliminary definition of the product and of the circle of potential buyers and their harmonisation takes place.

Step three: Preliminary assessment of the resources available (CONTENTS). The extent to which the goal can be achieved depends on the elasticity of the basic material of the contents. At this stage the designer has to draw on the components of culture (i.e. morals, intellect, beauty and health), and on the six principles of design. They cannot be ranked but certainly must be implemented as they constitute the designer's technical, economic and aesthetic aims. [Technological: maximum expediency (1), minimum weight (2), minimum volume (3). Economic: minimum costs (4) Aesthetic: appropriate form (5), imagination (6)]. He will also make use of the potentials that body shaping can offer.

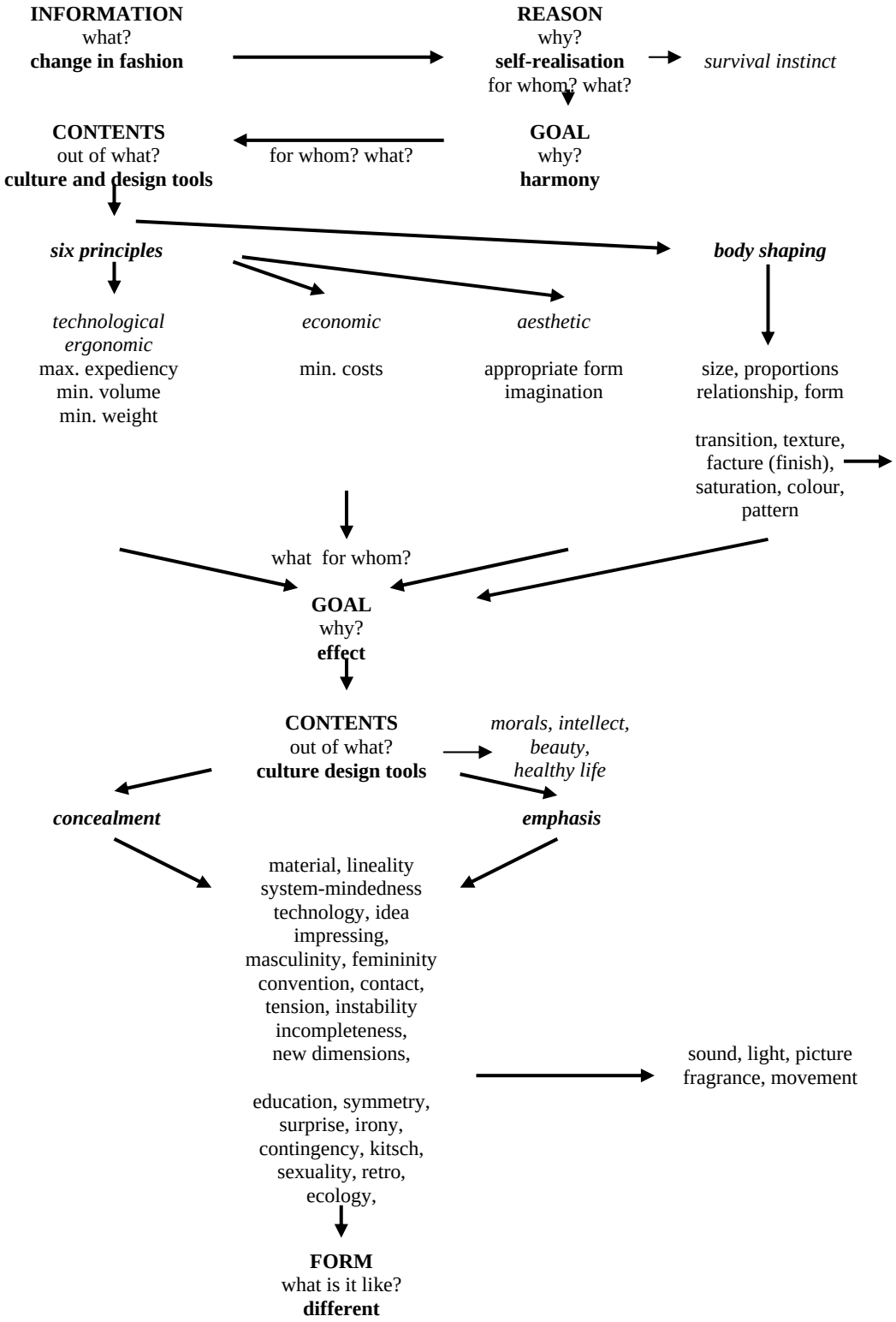

Fig. 3 The creative process of designing

The technological *principle* demanding *maximum expediency* means that the product should provide everything that technology and science of the given period are capable of in order to meet the expectations of the target public. The *principle of minimum weight* means the optimisation of the material and of the parameters of the active and inactive parts. By the *principle of minimum volume* we mean the harmony between size, feasibility, utility and profitability. The *principle of minimum costs* demands the optimal co-ordination of material consumption, technology, wage costs, co-operation, storability and movability. According to the aesthetic *principle of appropriate form* among the shapes that are in compliance with the rules of aesthetics that best is the one that perfectly expresses the essence of that very form. The *principle of imagination* means the ability by which the mind's eye (with the help of conscious and non-conscious means) combines existing phenomena in such a way that a new product with a clearly defined function is created that is clearly distinguishable from other similar products.

By body shaping we mean constructing from visible, invisible and tangible or non-tangible elements such as size, proportions, relationship, form transition, texture, facture (finish), saturation, colour and pattern. A designer will use these ordinary elements more consciously than somebody in a technical profession and will have in mind aspects very much different from those which, for example, an engineer would use. Among the above mentioned elements pattern is the only one that brings the designer near arts and crafts, although it is employed mainly in the design of packaging or logos.

Step four: Feedback to goal (see step two). The designer takes a final decision on the features of the product. The main aim is to impress the manufacturer, the connoisseur and the clearly defined circle of buyers.

Step five: Assessment of the second level of the basic resources (CONTENTS). The designer has at his disposal all the elements provided by culture but in fact he can only emphasise and/or conceal them. Design normally operates with visible, static 3D units, but it has started to consciously use new dimensions provided by technology such as dynamics, movement, shift of context, light, the virtual world, static pictures and also sound, fragrance and surface that require non-visual sensation.

Step six: Moulding. The goal takes shape (FORM) and becomes clearly distinguishable from other products with a similar function.