

Hermann August Weizenegger

Design work(s)

1. Method: design cosmos

The focus is not on the product to be designed. What is important here is entireties or ensembles, something I call *design works*. The items as such, with their formal and functional peculiarities, are only created as an integral part of an autonomous design cosmos. This kind of cosmos has a life of its own in terms of design, it is an independent system. These design works form the core of my design oeuvre. What they represent is self-contained paradigms, stylistically and formally independent of one another, in each of which there is an interplay between fictionality and cultural reality. The genesis of HAW objects is always discursive and they are situated within the above kind of design cosmos. The projects “Digital Couture” (2009), “Hotel Dresden” (2010), “Valse Automatique” (2010), “Merkwürdigkeiten des Sehens” (2013) and “Prinz von Amundo” (2013) plus one other project which is currently still a work in progress, “August in Dresden” (2015), are design works. They are good examples of the principles behind my manner of proceeding.

An holistic and, at the same time, differentiated approach distinguishes my work, it is a recurring element, something that accompanies me. It is unmistakable and represents the essential part of my design activities, although this does not mean that I strive for a uniform stylistic vocabulary. My objective is not the creation of a particular style. Instead, my focus is on method, this is a set of rules which continues to develop with every design work and lends every project its own language, rhythm and identity.

There is always a conceptual starting point. The concept itself then unfolds by evoking relations between the various objects, their particular dynamics, growing beyond the original idea. For example, the shape of an insect’s wing was the starting point for “Hotel Dresden”. It is, in a manner of speaking, the “conceptual DNA” of all objects – from earrings, lamps, chairs and model dresses all the way to the design of the hotel’s façade. A pentagonal leaf shape, in turn, started off the collection that took its inspiration from the vocabulary of fashion “Merkwürdigkeiten des Sehens” (Oddities of seeing), putting things together following an internal rule, with the result that every product finds its own unmistakable shape and position.

The design work complexes are communicated narratively, they are based on a fictitious story. It is the fictitious element that is responsible for the fact that the products designed can assume the guise of actors and be placed in cultural environments. Accordingly, in “Prinz von Amundo” (a collection of luxurious home and fashion objects) it is the fiction of a novel written in the 1930s – the story of the sunken town Amundo and its valuable treasures – by means of which the individual products are staged and set in relation with one another. With “Hotel Dresden” it is, amongst other things, references to trends in art at the transitional period between the 19th and the 20th century that effect the imaginary spatial and temporal concretization of the whole. In this case, a fictitious architect and design artist and the hotel’s history are the elements that design and structure the relevant design cosmos.

I should mention one important influence on the artistic gesture that characterizes all of my design works, making them a kind of total artwork – the Jugendstil architect Joseph Maria Olbrich. Olbrich synthesized progress and history, designing not only buildings but also items of furnishing, embroidery, ceramics and cutlery.

2. Objects: positions in the network of relationships

When a designer’s focus is not on the individual product but on the work as a whole – the design work – the significance of the designed object changes. The object has now become part of a complex network of relationships. Even as an individual item, it still carries inside it its formal family similarities. Within the system of a design work, the individual objects behave like figures in a novel. Similarly to the situation in family constellations, their mutual affinities allow them to progress beyond their spatial limitations and stand in formal interdependency with one another. This creates artistic scope in the designer’s work, giving him room to move. The elements involved in this – narration, design, shape, objects and those concerned with production – carry the whole thing beyond itself, as if in an experiment. All the system’s possibilities are played out in the design process, unexpectedly new things can be generated. It is important in this context for a dynamization of the inner idea outwards to occur in the sense that, for example, Rudolph Steiner insisted on a determination of inner and outer relationships.

Strictly speaking, nothing is done about the shape. It creates itself by accepting the conditions of its context and its fictitious scenario. Accordingly, design becomes a medium that conveys stories and cultural environments. The narratives alert us to the fact that things always have a history and a social value.

3. Production: the work of social art

In matters relating to the design works two time axes intersect – firstly the above-mentioned diachronic one whose subject matter is fictitious and real pasts and futures and secondly the synchronous one of the “here and now”, which is a localization within the actual momentary production conditions and methods. Although I am assuming fictitious product scenarios, at the same time I really do collaborate with industry and research to develop materials and make innovative use of the latter. Something that is at least equally important to me is for skilled craft and manufacturing contexts to be taken into account in the design process. Involvement in design works makes it possible, in a special way, for both traditional craft skills and high-tech processes to work in cooperation with the design itself. In this context, design is hybridization. It is the basis of a new kind of translation and allows for unexpected transferrals.

The cosmos of my design works always creates innovative and alternative manufacturing scenarios. This approach lends a new emphasis to regional peculiarities as far as manufacturing is concerned. Such idiosyncrasies are incorporated into the narration and lend it meaning. Companies, operations with long-standing traditions and craft manufacturers thus become part of a network that explains the *story* behind a design work. A design cosmos is also always a platform for the manufacturers who can thus present themselves as independent actors and who do not disappear, nameless and lost, behind a design label. In my design process, local production traditions and regionally specific cultures such as the art of glassmaking in the Bavarian Forest or the manufacture of artificial flowers in the Dresden region are lent an updated presence. The resulting products, which practically design themselves, carry the story of regions in them, they bring competences together. They render craft and technical skills visible. Manufacturers large and small are revitalized. A win-win situation is created for the companies involved. In this way, design can counter the equalizing trends on the market.

In this respect, the designer has a cultural brief and a responsibility. He must be aware of the latter in the production context and must want to intervene in social reality. Indeed, as a designer he is, himself, part of the manufacturing company. He is able to change, control, stimulate its conditions. He creates relationships, making them conscious and visible within our complex consumer society. I see it as one of my central duties to include the manufacturing contexts in the design process and to allow them to structure the latter as if in a kind of social artwork – in a similar way to Joseph Beuys who used art to intervene in social and political processes. The aim is to open up a cultural space, as well as to go beyond pure function and shape. After all, consumer goods structure the spaces in which actions are performed. As a designer, I shape these places of activity. The user in turn is provided with the opportunity of forming a cognitive, emotional and personal bond with an object, he finds out something about the manufacturing context and about what is beyond this. A consciousness is created in him of the existing manufacturing conditions, perhaps even a sense of responsibility. In this way, design creates cultural and social value-added.