Changing the Rhythm of Design Capitalism and the Total Aestheticization of the World[1]

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ABSTRACT:
In his article "Changing the Rhythm of Design Capitalism and the Total Aestheticization of the World" Márton Szentpéteri intends to highlight the most important stages of the accelerating total aestheticization of the world resulting at the contemporary period of neoliberal design culture. In the age of design capitalism, the hegemony of consumption culture is being constantly maintained by a culture industry substantially expressed by and embodied in design. The paper claims that the eminent reason of the crisis of democracy today is rooted in the global society of the designed spectacle with its one-dimensional citizens loosing almost all abilities to recognize and consequently defend their rights and to decrease their alienation from real needs, responsibilities and sensibilities. Democracy is fading due to neoliberal globalization – especially in the case of the commercialization of the public sector. However, the particular role of design in this process has hitherto been neglected or underestimated. Against the trend of fading democracy, different sorts of design activism experimenting with disobedient objects and strategies of critical design point towards a much-awaited rebirth of art in terms of its compensatory power against damages of our lifeworld generated by the modernization process with globalisation in the lead. These endeavours are in harmony with the return of art in terms of emergency aesthetics. This rebirth can also be reinforced by the defence of the values of liberal learning being so much threatened amid a global higher education crisis, and especially by understanding design education in the frameworks of liberal learning rather than vocational training.

Keywords: total aestheticization, design capitalism, globalization, democracy, critical design liberal learning, emergency aesthetics.

The current condition that Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy portray as the total aestheticization of the world by means of the notion of artistic capitalism did not occur suddenly (Lipovetsky-Serroy, *La estetización del mundo*). Theoretically understood precedents were previously referred to as diffuse aesthetics (estetica diffusa) by such Italian aesthetes as Remo Bodei and Ernesto Francalanci and discussed by German thinkers like Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Wolfgang Welsch among others as a certain dissolving of aesthetics, which is running together with a corresponding anaesthetisation process; or reviewed as the aestheticization of everyday life by such British scholars as Mike Featherstone (Bodei, *Le forme del bello* 74; Francalanci, *Estetica degli oggetti* 7-75; Welsch, *Undoing Aesthetics* 1-32 and Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* 65-82). The differentiation between several stages of aestheticization – or, to put it differently, the phenomenon where the aesthetical exits the art world – started with the very birth of autonomous art, or fine art, in Romanticism and the detachment of the discourse of philosophical aesthetics from other philosophical discourses. Here I propose delineating four such stages: in addition to (1) Romanticism, (2) the total art of the avant-garde, (3) the art of totalitarian states and finally (4) the design culture of neoliberal globalism.

(1) Romanticism is unarguably the very era that gave rise to the modern, autonomous art as a completion of processes that started and partly finished during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, such as the efforts of the *arti del disegno*, namely painting, sculpture and architecture to achieve theoretical, practical and poetic emancipation together with institutional legitimacy (e. g. the founding of art academies) and the canonisation of the modern system of the arts (Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and the Arts* 163-227; and Shiner, *The Invention of Art*). The advance of autonomous art in Romanticism can be interpreted to a certain extent as a response to processes of secularisation that had been around since the Enlightenment, just as the separate aesthetic discourse can also be understood as a sublime reaction to the Enlightenments' rationalist, Cartesian project. As such, it appeared opposite to the logic or the "critique of pure reason" (as Kant later called it), as a kind of "critique of confused reason", an inferior epistemology of sensible knowing (gnoseologia inferior) and a science of sensitive knowing (scientia cognitionis sensitivae), at least in the eyes of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, founder of the modern aesthetic discourse in the wake of the Leibnizean tradition (Baumgarten, Ästhetik). At the same time, the alternative religiosity of the "romantic order" (Doorman, *The Romantic Order* 141-175), which is still alive today to a certain extent, is characterised by a unique religion of art and the closely connected cult of the genius, that is, a metaphysical approach to art in which it becomes a transcendent entity isolated from the reality of the (petty) bourgeoisie. Due to this "aesthetic differentiation" the work is separated from its concrete life-world, and it belongs to the aesthetic consciousness, as the artist correspondingly loses her world and earns the characteristic role

in society of the outsider (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 79). According to Hans Georg Gadamer, under this paradigm, "[t]he free artist creates without a commission. He seems distinguished by the complete independence of his creativity and thus acquires the characteristic social features of an outsider whose style of life cannot be measured by the standards of public morality. The concept of the bohemian which arose in the nineteenth century reflects this process. The home of the Gypsies became the generic word for the artist's way of life." (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 80.)

Such a separation of life and art is one of the most significant losses in the life-world stemming from modernisation processes; however, it seems to be rather untouched by authors on the topic, from Heidegger to Husserl to Joachim Ritter to Odo Marquard (Heidegger, *Being and Time*; Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*; Ritter, "Die Aufgabe der Geisteswissenschaften in der modernen Gesellschaft," and Marquard, "Über die Unvermeidlichkeit der Geisteswissenschaften"). This seems rather understandable, if we consider that we have here a paradox on hand. The separation of modern art is itself a loss in the life-world, and yet fine or polite art that is closely connected to lifelong self-cultivation and personal and cultural maturation in terms of the German idea of Bildung (cf. bildende Kunst) is one of the most important compensatory forces in modernity that may yield a cure for life-world losses such as "disenchantment" (Weber) caused by continuous scientific rationalisation, either in the form of a new religion, as an antidote to the forgetting of Being in Heideggerian terms, or a critical force.

(2) Argentinean Juan José Sebreli, with his book entitled *Las aventuras de la vanguardia*, suggests that the project of the total art of the avant-garde, banishing the separation of life and art, was inherently a Romantic enterprise, even if it was directed against the Romantic and bourgeois autonomy of art (Sebreli, *Las aventuras de la vanguardia*). No matter how it transpired, the avant-garde dream of total art was ultimately realised in a sense: if not evidently in an abstract fashion under the aegis of the cathedral of architecture or total theatre, then rather in the state-funded – still very theatrical and architectural – art of totalitarian regimes first, then finally in the design culture of unlimited capitalism, where performativity and the spatiality of culture strongly prevail (Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism*). An unexpected offspring or problem child of the efforts to total art was modern design, which simultaneously heralded the total aestheticization of the world, first primarily in the cultures of totalitarian states and the consumer culture of the United States. It is perhaps not without reason that the culture industry of the latter reminded Frankfurters fleeing from Nazism, namely Adorno and Horkheimer, of the efforts to total aestheticization by Nazi state art.

In the 1910s Marcel Duchamp, with his infamous ready mades built on the transfiguration of the commonplace, radically subverted the then conventional world of artistic practice and irreversibly disjoined the

conceptual interpretation of a work of art from the skill of the crafts-man, and so, importantly, questioned the significance of artisanship for art both in the sense of tradition based craft and 19th-century applied art as in the case of Arts and Crafts for instance (Danto, *What is art?* 26). Adolf Loos' intervention from some years back was an even more dramatic one, however, as Loos drastically doubted the relationship of all sorts of design and art, expressly rejecting the raison d'etre of applied arts, prevalent until that time. In the 1908 *Die Überflüssigen (Deutscher Werkbund)* he asks, "do we need 'applied artists' [angewandter Künstler]? No […]. No doubt, the products of our civilization [die kultivierten Erzeugnisse] have no relation to art. The barbaric times in which artworks [Kunstwerke] were confused with utilitarian objects [Gebrauchsgegenstände] are definitely overcome. For the good fortune of art. Because the nineteenth century will mark an important chapter in the history of humanity: we owe to it the courage to have brought about a clear separation of art [Kunst] and crafts [Gewerbe]." (Loos, "Die Überflüssigen (Deutscher Werkbund)" 268)

In the near past, it was Boris Groys, in the footsteps of Loos, who articulated the reason for the birth of avant-garde design:

> The history of the applied arts is indeed long. Yet modern design emerged precisely from the revolt against the tradition of the applied arts. Even more so than the transition from traditional art to modernist art, the transition from the traditional applied arts to modern design marked a break with tradition, a radical paradigm shift. This paradigm shift is, however, usually overlooked. The function of design has often enough been described using the old metaphysical opposition between appearance and essence. Design, in this view, is responsible only for the appearance of things, and thus it seems predestined to conceal the essence of things, to deceive the viewer's understanding of the true nature of reality. Thus, design has been repeatedly interpreted as an epiphany of the omnipresent market, of exchange value, of fetishism of the commodity, of the society of the spectacle – as the creation of a seductive surface behind which things themselves not only become invisible but disappear entirely. Modern design, as it emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, internalized this critique aimed at the traditional applied arts and set itself the task of revealing the hidden essence of things rather than designing their surfaces. Avant-garde design sought to eliminate and purify all that had accumulated on the surface of things through the practice of the applied arts over centuries in order to expose the true,

> undesigned nature of things. Modern design thus did not see its task as creating the surface, but rather as eliminating it – as negative design, antidesign. Genuine modern design is reductionist; it does not add, it subtracts. (Groys, "The Obligation to Self-Design"')

For our current purposes to understand what really happened to the efforts of avant-garde design in the 20th century it is sufficing to stipulate here that modern and contemporary design have indeed three main paths. Firstly, there was applied art commencing the humanising of technology, which was primarily progressive and possessed fundamental social sensitivity, operating in the spirit of utopian and romantic socialism, then more and more losing its way and becoming decadent in the early 20th century, after that in Germany, got even worse, coming closer to radical nationalisms and the far right (Frayling, *On Craftsmanship* 10-11). Secondly, we have avant-garde design, referred to above, which acted in opposition to the applied arts. Finally, there is the "American way" (Dieter Rams), streamlining mainly sales-curves in addition to the designed environment (cf. the *Time* magazine's bon mot on Raymond Loewy in 1949), which ultimately became most definitive in the design cultures of the world. To parody Groys in an early modern sense, this fast design is responsible for only the looks of things and thus it is destined to cover up the essence of things, to misguide the viewer's understanding of reality. This design is, unfortunately and again and again, the epiphany of the society of the ubiquitous market, of exchange value, of the fetish of commodity, of the spectacle – the creation of a conforming surface that not only makes things invisible but makes them disappear, as well. The overwhelming victory of the American way of design promising a clearly unsustainable future, might relates to the way the critical attitude of the avant-garde failed, according to Herbert Marcuse and Peter Bürger in his wake (Marcuse, "The Affirmative Character of Culture," and Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* 11-13). Respectively, the avant-garde critique always remained affirmative as ultimately it was only activated in the autonomous, bourgeois and fictive world of art, not in everyday life, where, instead of total art, which would turn against the occlusion of life and alienation in a revolutionary way, the veil of Maya of the total aestheticization of capitalist design was raised against the eyes of increasingly one-dimensional consumers (Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man*).

(3) Nonetheless, even before the complete victory of the American way in post-WWII capitalism, especially strong since the 1970s when neoliberalism broke in, a so-to-speak dress rehearsal of total aestheticization was held by the state art of totalitarian regimes. The most significant regime in this sense was doubtlessly Mussolini's dictatorship, which provided a mould for Hitler's Nazism and for Stalin's "Fascist Communism" (Attila József). While Italian fascist state art is architecture based (compare the idea of "architettura, arte di Sta-

to": Ciucci, 108-128), the process whereby society is turned Fascist, as well as the total aestheticization of politics (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction" 244; Jay, "The Aesthetic Ideology: Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" 41; Sebreli, *Las aventuras de la vanguardia* 293-334) understood as a liturgy of a kind of secular religion, was much more astute operating from language planning to sports to holidays to parades to gestures to all forms of the propagandistic use of new and old media to even a new calendar to dress codes, covering all areas of lifestyle, similarly to the branding strategy of any current global company (Russo, *Il fascismo in mostra* 5-6; Heller, *Iron Fists: Branding the 20th Century Totalitarian State* 8-11, 76-123; Gentile, *Il culto del Littorio* and *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione*). The project of wholesale fascistic ideologising covered all aspects of the designed environment both in a physical and a mental sense, consciously designing the interaction of the two dimensions. In this, Fascism is also a precursor to the world of neoliberal design cultures, the design capitalisms based on total aestheticization. As Sebreli convincingly points out, in contrast to common cliché views in the Central East European region, according to which avant-garde artists were mostly for progress, almost all avant-garde trends were involved in realising total state art – especially in Italy and the Soviet Union – for a longer or shorter period, irrespective of the fact that totalitarian regimes, owing to their inherent nature, subsequently anathematised the artists of these tendencies as "degenerate". (Sebreli, *Las aventuras de la vanguardia* 241-292; cf. the Nazi exhibition in 1937 titled Entartete Kunst.) The connection between the totalist efforts of the avant-garde – and avant-garde design birthed in the context of these – and total art of the state is, unfortunately, undeniable.

(4) Peter Bürger, in the wake of Jürgen Habermas and Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno among others, describes the false elimination of the distance between art and life or in other words, the false sublation [*Aufhebung*] of art in the praxis of life, a little more carefully: "during the time of the historical avant-garde movements, the attempt to do away with the distance between art and life still had the pathos of historical progressiveness on its side. But in the meantime, the culture industry has brought about the false elimination of the distance between art and life, and this allows one to recognise the contradictoriness of the avant-gardiste undertaking." (Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-garde* 50, 113; cf. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* 176.)

Adorno and his followers used the term "culture industry" (Kulturindustrie) to designate the phenomena which – mutatis mutandis – has been called neoliberal design culture by scholars of design culture studies such as Guy Julier for quite some time, or, more recently – in the light of Lipovetsky and Serroy's term "artistic capitalism" – design capitalism, a critical notion that has not to be confused with any affirmative usages. I wish to emphasize again that an essential aspect of the total aestheticization carried out by design capitalism is that it is responsible

for the appearance of things and thus it is destined to cover up the essence of things, to misguide the viewer's understanding of reality. This design is, unfortunately and again and again, the epiphany of the society of the ubiquitous market, of exchange value, of the fetish of commodity, of the spectacle, the creation of a conforming surface that not only makes things invisible but makes them disappear, as well. However, this level of alienation is not merely visual in nature anymore, as design culture presupposes spatial as well as architectonic cultural experiences and demands multisensory, somatic and presence-based life strategies (Julier, "From Visual Culture to Design Culture"; Shusterman, *Body Consciousness* and *Thinking through the Body*; and Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence*). According to Julier, to understand it one must experience immersion in virtual reality, which has been thematised by Hollywood in *Matrix*, *Surrogates*, *Avatar* or *Ready Player One* in a compelling way.

Sigmund Freud in one of his most influential books entitled *Civilization and its Discontents* argues that human being "has […] become a kind of prosthetic God" claiming that we almost accomplished our final apotheosis by means of technological progress inventing and using "truly magnificent" and beautiful "auxiliary organs". However, these organs have not grown on to us and consequently they still cause us tremendous trouble at times. "Future ages – so he continues – will bring with them new and probably unimaginably great achievements in this field of civilization and will increase man's likeness to God still more. But in the interests of our investigations, we will not forget that present-day man does not feel happy in his Godlike character." (Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* 39) The way how Freud talks about our recent civilizatory developments reminds me to Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy claiming that in the age of artistic capitalism "every day we consume more and more beauty, our life, however, has not become more beautiful: this is the root of the success and deep failure of artistic capitalism at the very same time". (Lipovetsky-Serroy, *La estetización del mundo* 26) Freud's prosthetic human returns in the 1964 famous and notorious *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan in the context of Marxist theorems of alineation. Respectively, McLuhan talks about „alienation in the technological extensions of our bodies". (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 5) Whereas, one of the founding fathers of design culture studies, Guy Julier seems to forget this when he alludes to McLuhan in his recent book titled *Economies of Design*. (Julier, *Economies of Design* 30-31) According to Julier, in the frameworks of contemporary design culture our senses get externalised by means of new media and the artificial extensions of our bodies. This externalisation results in new forms of cognition and cognitive practices. Julier – following Karin Knorr Cetina and Nigel Thrift among others – talks about a certain "neoliberal sensorium" in which all agents of design culture from designers through consumers to everyone are characterised by such attitudes that resembles the habits of brokers of the financial world completely wired or networked. In this brave new world, media that embodies the World

Wide Web in the eyes of users; or the smart tools of these surfers should now be regarded as "epistemic things", that is, not only as data carriers storing and displaying data, but such media of thinking and interpretation that fundamentally changes the relations between equipments, devices, tools, space, sensory perception and cognition. "Contemporary capitalism requires a productive, efficient, healthy and sane population", that is to say, such new type of human kind is needed, which possesses a flexible, adaptable, resilient and highly self-organising self, the production of which is partly provided by the neoliberal sensorium and its devices themselves. (Julier, *Economies of Design*, 33) Julier is less critical here as he used to be elsewhere (e. g. Szentpéteri, "Design Culture Speaks a New Language" 238-241) and he seems to forget that McLuhan already in the sixties talked about the "alienation in the technological extensions of our bodies", which certainly got more troubling in the neoliberal sensorium, that is, with the ever increasing and accelerating virtualization and growing hiperwiredness of contemporary design culture, which in turn is completing the process of the total aestheticization of the world.

Let me quote a few lines from José Javier Esperza's bestseller *Los ocho pecados capitales del arte contemporáneo* on the general aestheticization of the realm of objects:

> The universal expansion of the media of art […] had an unexpected outcome: the general aestheticization of the realm of objects. The best example of this phenomenon is industrial design. Today we have no products that have been launched without some thorough aesthetic surgery preliminarily: detergent bottles, aeroplanes, ballpoint pens, training shoes, lipstick bars and lighters […] All commodity items must adhere to the art of design, based on the – probably correct – conviction that a charming and captivating character boosts sales. But the same process contaminates any object designated for public attention, be it a political party, a football team, a bank or the official campaign against drug addiction: all these initiatives first and foremost undergo an aestheticization phase, among other reasons because all of the actions of current society are taken under the aegis of the rational structure of consumption. (Esparza, *Los ocho pecados capitales del arte contemporáneo* 51-52)

Hence, as long as we remain consumers, the everyday alienation and vulnerability of our existence truly becomes invisible by means of completely virtualised and networked design cultures providing total experiences of the spectacle and at the very same time in the hegemony of consumer culture the very forgetting of being becomes complete and

inevitable. In other words, that illusion or virtual reality – which as the veil of Maya of design capitalism hides our alienation from our social reality and makes almost impossible any authentic being or critical position – becomes beautiful, charming or even desirable in the enchanted eyes of the consumer or the "sublimated slave" as Marcuse called her (Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man* 36). Recently, this state has been described by the researchers of the global crisis of democracy as supercapitalism, nowadays, however, it is increasingly popular to call it the era of "post truth", in which memes rampaging the world of social media, the total loss of data security and fake news are the governing cognitive powers. (Reich, *Supercapitalism*; Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology* 3-6; Baggini, *A Short History of Truth*)

Whereas it has been well known that the acceleration of aestheticization results in a corresponding process of anaestheticization – as Odo Marquard, Ernesto Francalanci or Wolfgang Welsch (Marquard, *Aesthetica und Anaesthetica*; Francalanci, *Estetica degli oggetti* 7-75; Welsch, *Undoing Aesthetics* 1-32) has shown to us – it is a rather new experience that in the world of post factual the neoliberal design culture goes hand in hand with illiberalism or national populism strongly based on tribal instincts from the America of Donald Trump, the recent Spain of Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez, the Israel of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Russia of Vladimir Putyin or the Hungary of Viktor Orbán just to name a few countries of this new trend (cf. Eatwell-Goodwin, *National Populism*). Neoliberal design culture with its veil of Maya, that is the total aestheticization of the World, impedes us to raise our consciousness with respect to real emergencies such as total alienation or the global crisis of democracies. We consume more and more beauty, notwithstanding, we do not get happier – as Lipovetsky and Serroy formulated the paradox of contemporary living. This must be emphasized, however, with strong arguments. Such as those of Robert B. Reich and Wolfgang Streeck who soundly show us how consumerism do get away with democracy (Reich, *Supercapitalism* 168-216; Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End?* 95-112). Accordingly, the cognitive state of being a citizen cannot be reconciled with that of the consumer. Whereas the consumer is engaged with an ever more increasing and speedy diversification of products, personalisation and individualisation, citizenship is being based on the demand of consensus that serves the public good which is a result of such a slow collaborative work in which one leaves behind some of her personal interests and desires and which concentrates not only on our rights, but on our duties towards others as well. The previous cognitive state of being insulates or gets us atomised, the latter constantly generates a sense of solidarity and builds communities. The ever-growing crisis of democracies based on this cognitive slipping between consumerism and citizenship is such a catastrophe that is deliberately not recognised by the post factual and illiberal discourses consequently denying real emergencies. However, this human ecological catastrophe – as well as the climate crisis bringing the absolute end of capitalism in Naomi

Klein's eyes – is the ultimate result of total aestheticization of neoliberal design culture hand in hand with the corresponding anestheticization with its overindulgence of senses and values, "stuffocation" and "the paradox of choice" that grows with unstoppable speed (Klein, *This Changes Everything*; Wallman, *Stuffocation*; and Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice*).

The distinct German scholar, Ulrich Beck discussed with very sound arguments how did the relativism of post-modern ideologies prepare the triumph of neoliberal globalisation (Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?*; Szentpéteri, *Design and Culture* 127-128). Now, in the wake of his thoughts, it is time to clarify that recent type anti-interpretation attitudes closely connected to design and rooted in bodily experiences are already not fighting solely the decadent theory delved into the ocean of linguistic turn – such as the completely selfish deconstruction used to be –, but the entire realm of discursive thinking! To put it harshly, against the intelligible the animal and the vegetative are overvalued today. That is to say, the Anti-Enlightenment habit of post-modernism reappears in the form of design capitalism of neoliberal design culture aiming the total aestheticization of the world. Without proper caution, different presence and experience oriented or somaesthetic and architectonic conceptions of culture might eliminate all the opportunities of the discursively thinking self to recognize her completely alienated and vulnerable, virtual and dimensionless consuming existence. Respectively, they impede her every struggle to understand herself critically and in the light of this critique to actively defend her self-interest and simultaneously the interest of her communities. Albeit, one does not need particular prophetic possession to recognize the human ecological catastrophe caused by unlimited capitalism! From John Thackara to Naomi Klein many pointed out with strong emphasis that capitalism itself is the ultimate cause of systematic crises we are continuously facing nowadays and in turn the neoliberal globalization run by design capitalism is simply unsustainable (Thackara, *In the Bubble*; Szentpéteri, "The End of the World Postponed"; and Klein, *This Changes Everything*). Not to speak about the psychological damage it may cause (Tweedy, 'A Mad World: Capitalism and the Rise of Mental Illness'). Returning to Hollywood metaphors, it absolutely matters which capsule of Morpheus in *Matrix* is swallowed by us. Either we remain in the seemingly cosy and convenient matrix or awake to the horrible conditions of our contemporary lives and in the light of this difficult illumination we continue to live outside and against the matrix. Previously, Socrates who identified himself with a gadfly of the state spoke about similar things, when he regarded the contemplation of the ideas as the true source of the meaning of life against staring at shadows in the cave, and in doing so he urged everyone to understand her captive existence in the cave and in turn he encouraged everyone to climb towards the light of real life leaving the cave behind. Consequently, there remains one question for our present purposes: how do we leave the cave? (Gancitano and Col-

amedici, *La società della performance*.) How to live against the matrix of design capitalism?

Many, in many ways, have buried art, history and ideologies in the recent past. But, as world history has repudiated the naive followers of Francis Fukuyama, the declarators of the death of art have also seemed to be more and more disappointed, these days. Whereas the thoughts of the leading futurologist have clearly failed to prove that with the end of the Cold War era and the fall of the Berlin wall the seemingly triumphant combo of liberal democracy and free market would provide the best social conditions and respectively, bring the end of history; it has become also rather evident that notwithstanding the seemingly successful attempt of the avant-garde to destroy the autonomous art world, and the often chaotic, purely nihilist or decadent experiments of the following period of almost a century, or even with the coming of the era of neoliberal design culture with its all-encompassing total aestheticization, art is still not dead. To such an extent, that it is all the way returning with disturbing energies in different forms, which are far from being convenient for us, since they either engage the audience as active meaning creators such as those operating in terms of relational aesthetics or on the contrary, they emphasize the often completely indifferent role of the spectator such as those of object-oriented and speculative aesthetics, which claim the highly respected self-sufficient state of things and artworks (Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*; Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology* 61-102). In addition, Santiago Zabala – according to whom we can only be saved by art – claims that the return of art is a "vengeance" in the context of which art is being regarded as a "demanding" activity for every stakeholder and not as something that supports the reassuring contemplation of beauty or the advancement of taste, not even the creative participation or its opposite, the impassioned philosophising that appreciates the complete impossibility of any human agency or participation in real art – all of these would be way too bourgeois in Zabala's mind. (Zabala, "Turning to Art's Demands"; Zabala, *Why Only Art Can Save Us*.) His "emergency aesthetics", therefore, does not allow space for impartial contemplation or carefree meaning production and it urges us to recognize real emergencies, crises and catastrophes denial of which is perfectly natural of the politicians and opinion leaders of the post-truth, post-reality or post-factual era deeply rooted in designed manipulation peppered by the new cult of order and fake news that more and more govern the public opinion and especially the social media. Often the denial of emergencies operates with the threats of fake catastrophes and emergencies. Let us think of the threatening image of migration crisis that as a devilish trick serves much more the capture or conservation of power than dealing with real reasons behind this new exodus of peoples, that is, instead of get people understand the real emergencies and solve their real problems, this threat generates fear and hatred which consequently erodes democracies. This is the case of the illiberal regimes all around the world. Instead of facing the exploitation politics of the

Western world that enlivens terrorism, way too many trendsetters, spin doctors, opinion leaders and media workers are doing their businesses with a powerful form of vulgar Huntingtonism inculcating the fake commonplaces of the so called clash of civilisations, all the way down to prefer one type of religion at the expense of the other with completely partial, biased and non-reasoned argumentations, to say the least. To Zabala's mind, on the contrary, contemporary art encourages us – artists, visitors or simply citizens – to raise our consciousness of real catastrophes, crises and emergencies that are hidden behind the fake rhetoric of leaders, decision makers and businessmen that denies them, in order to face again the event of truth instead of living stoned by the opium of post-truth manipulation. To my mind, one of the greatest emergencies, of which art must raise our consciousness is the current state of design capitalism which is one of the ultimate sources of the decay of liberal democracies in the world and the rise of illiberalism. At this point, the intellectual endeavours of the activist and critical designers disappointed by the designer and consumer practices of design capitalism, often experimenting with so called disobedient objects, get very close to that of the artist representatives of emergency aesthetics. Or even there is no more real boundaries between these sociocultural tactics and strategies given that critical design is mostly flourishing in galleries and exhibitions – that is to say, in the art world – and understandably most of real design activism finds its place outside and against the business world. (*Disobedient Objects*; Julier, "From Design Culture to Design Activism."; Fuad-Luke, *Design Activism*; Dunne, *Hertzian Tales*; Dunne-Raby, *Design Noir*; Malpas, *Critical Design in Context*)

No doubt, the struggle of movements and tendencies of design activism, critical design or emergency art can be supported by the defence of the values of liberal learning, and especially by introducing design into the general and higher education curricula in the frameworks of liberal learning as have been the case with arts and sciences in contrast to vocational education and training. Against current shallow utilitarian views on higher education extremely influenced by market fundamentalism it is absolutely worth to refer to Martha Nussbaum who in her seminal *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* spoke about a global crisis of education which have been growing silently like cancer and proved to be far more damaging to democracy in the long run than the financial and economic crisis that broke out in 2008:

> Radical changes are occurring in what democratic societies teach the young, and these changes have not been well thought through. Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can

think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements […] The humanities and the arts are being cut away, in both primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation of the world. Seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market, they are rapidly losing their place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children. Indeed, what we might call the humanistic aspects of science and social science—the imaginative, creative aspect, and the aspect of rigorous critical thought—are also losing ground as nations prefer to pursue short-term profit by the cultivation of the useful and highly applied skills suited to profit-making. (Nussbaum, *Not for Profit* 1-2.)

In order to avoid such a dystopia, we should widen the relevance of the designerly ways of knowing as phenomena that legitimise design education in the frameworks of liberal learning. This slow and liberal understanding of design would clearly be different from the mainstream fast and vocational conceptions that are common everywhere in current neoliberal design cultures. Changing the rhythm of design capitalism from the pace of neoliberal to liberal design we could, consequently, get closer to a world which is better than today (Szentpéteri, "Redesigning Design Education in the Era of Design Capitalism").

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