

From Evil to Reality – Redesigning Wallstreet – Some thoughts
on Designing Politics – the Politics of Design

*"A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even
glancing at" - "Eine Weltkarte ohne Utopie ist die Zeit der Betrachtung
nicht wert." Oscar Wilde*

***Opening speech for the Hearing 17.9.2009 in Ulm by
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A year ago you and I have lived through an event most of us
thought was material from the times of our great
grandmothers. Global capitalism, on the verge of collapse, had
to be rescued by the state. Looking back, the German
chancellor Angela Merkel explained the "socialism for the rich",
formerly known as "bailouts" or "rescue packets", as following:
"We didn't just rescue banks and companies, we rescued
opportunities."(SZ, 13.9.2009)

Rarely was a truer word spoken. We deal here not with reality but with political theology – and in fact, with design theory. That’s why designers are now the actors of all worlds to come. Because policies, actions, rescues of banks and enterprises are not part of a *reality* but represent *opportunity*. Decisive nowadays is Wallstreetism, a religion that still claims the free market ideology, even if it has proven to be the absolute contrary of anything free. Free market – the term itself is an obscenity, but so is “Christianity” when associated with Mormons, Evangelists and Opus Day or other religious institutions of this world.

The ruling religion Wallstreetism is based, among other things, on rating agencies, statistics and numbers, also known as “science”. *Humans of the 21st century are rated not seen, are measured not heard or are kept silent instead of having a voice.* As Hannah Arendt put it: “Modern man, when he lost the certainty of a world to come, was thrown back upon himself and not upon this world; far from believing that the world might be potentially immortal, he was not even sure that it was real.”

(VA, P.320)

In the last 12 months Wallstreetism proved to be the most powerful, religious like compensation for Arendt's loss of a common and real world. Virtuality has long overtaken reality – one look across the Atlantic ocean is enough to recognize the total obscenity of power, media and ideology. The „life“ of „Banks“ claims to be more real and more vital than the lives of millions of people. The world is not only flat but in the middle of an ongoing inquisition against everything you and I thought rational and, more importantly, human.

“Evil” as presented in my speech relies on unseen opportunities where the reality check is made ridiculous – even Kafka would be surprised. Let's just check some figures:

During the crisis, the amounts written off by banks, or drained from national budgets (i.e. health service, education, equality, aid etc.) spiraled from tens of millions to hundreds of billions, and then tens of trillions. This can make your head spin, but one way of keeping it in proportion is to remember that, for every \$1 trillion written off, as Paul Mason puts it (p. ix), a week's work by the entire population of the planet has been

wasted... on "opportunities". A year later, billions of \$ and Euros are spent again not on climate change, on education, on equality, but on bonuses for corrupt and incompetent rulers, formerly known as CEOs.

Today, a year later, Chimerica, as Neill Ferguson puts it, the Monster that eats the world alive, is back in charge again. China and America "owned" the rest of us, as slang would have it. The trade deficit of the US in June 2009 for example was again 16 percent higher than the whole decade before and there is no sign that either the US starts saving or China starts consuming.

Who exactly will buy 1.75 trillion new US government bonds? Not to mention the trillions which are already in Chinese hands. Will the Chinese, faithful to the Chimerican partnership pay? Will American households, suddenly converted, exercise responsible consumerism? Will the Federal Reserve continue to use the monetary printing press? Will the Climate Change be tackled rather than spend trillions on Goldman Sachs? Will Africa be allowed to recover economically?

What are the political consequences? The fact that neither of the obvious "evil" actors like Timothy Geithner, Larry Summers, Ben Bernanke or newly elected EU Commission President Barroso have been sacked or prosecuted, but stay in the highest positions American and European governments can offer show the blinding obvious: the "yes, we can" of Obama was not meant "yes, we can change" but "yes, we can continue to cheat, to lie lye, to mismanage, to implement injustice as long as we want and how we want.

At the height of the financial meltdown, politicians, 200 years after the Enlightenment, promised progress. While the major "to big too fail" banks and their corrupt CEOs were showered in billions of cash and continue to grow, millions of humans were counted as "collateral damage" in order to save the system. If that is not the most powerful religion ever present, I don't know what is. Virtuality was saved, i.e. Ideology, Religion and Power. The rulers, after having been woken up rather brutally in the middle of the night on September 16th 2008, went back to sleep to enjoy their *unbearable lightness of being*.

Desorientation, disorientation, Desorientierung as presented by Ruedi Baur is the keyword in the analysis for reality and virtuality. The sheer scale of disorientation as presented in my opening remarks makes any redesigning "from evil to reality" so bloody difficult.

From a theoretical design point of view, what is happening before our eyes, is obvious:

Like in Art, where the immaterial has substituted the material, where artists don't even have to have any artistic skills, the finance industry has reversed the connection between material and immaterial. Products are no longer defined by their material value but rather by their symbolic one. Nike doesn't sell sport shoes, Coke doesn't sell drinks, Itunes don't sell music, Porsche doesn't sell cars. They all sell meaning, irony, lifestyle, sensuous pleasures and provide tickets to fascinating inside cultures. "Designed for desire" – an ad by Siemens for its GSM; „Je ne suis pas une voiture“, ich bin kein Auto – VW France. Producers have changed. The product is of no importance to the investor. 30 years of Merger&Acquisitions

have liquidified products. A portfolio has nothing to do with what it actually contains but everything to do with what it seems to contain. Worth is not real but imagined. Therefore it is only logical that capitalism transformed itself into an immaterial religion that has grave material consequences for us all.

Why “redesigning” and how?

Let’s redesign a reality check. Let’s slow down. Let’s breathe. Let’s take a break. *Let’s stop and think instead of stop and stare!*

Let’s reconsider the “what is” (in forms and words) in order to have again designs and forms of “what should and could be”: of what is real. Let’s see, think, act and form together!

For example:

Change the forms of geography: Bring maps that show politics and not country boundaries. Break the ruling education – teach

kids to see, read and write reality and don't instruct them merely through the ruling bible called "Bologna".

Change the forms of passports: Nowadays we are shocked to think that people in Greek and Roman times were not considered human: like slaves and women. "Uncounted counts" a project financed by Ulm showed that today we are not so different from these barbaric times. So when we change passports merely in form, we do also change our political system. A biometric passport for example as forced by the EU and the USA, has far more consequences for me and my citizenship and the definition thereof than any governmental election.

Make Wallstreetism visible! Nowadays the rule of law suggests abolishing the rule of law, calling it emergency state. Wallstreet claims to be Leviathan – we as Designers have to show that it is, in fact, Behemoth. Redesigning can also mean first to name the things as they are and second to show the things as they are.

Redesign public and private! Let the personal be intimate and the public belong to everybody. Don't let the personal rule public affairs while all public spaces get privatized! We are in desperate need of new forms there, especially in art, media, adds etc.

Redesign elections: Why not let everybody but the American people elect the American president? Why not let Africans decide on the European president of the EU Commission? Why not let the French decide the German elections:-)?

Redesign pornography – shove it back to the darkrooms where it belongs! Don't make it mainstream, public and normal, selling the human image to a merely functioning sex machine ...Give us some forms, designs and images of erotic back!

Redesign politics as small and beautiful – break the ruling monopolies into bits we can still judge, understand and control democratically.

Redesign costs and gains: The climate will thank you for it.

Does all that sound too complicated? It's actually very easy but it demands courage.

From evil to reality: Evil presents the unacceptable gap between ideals and reality: judging something to be evil is a way of setting limits on what we're willing to endure..." In the words of Oscar Wilde: "Morality, like art, means drawing a line someplace." (Moral verlangt wie Kunst die Möglichkeit, Grenzen zu ziehen)

Redesigning for me means to see, to bring out real forms again and yes, to draw lines! Use human judgement! Give certain processes their proper names and forms!

Did you know that if a cow gets a name she'll produce 250 liters more milk per year than a nameless cow (SZ, 12.9.2009 in All you need to know about cows)? Let that be a lesson to us:

Let's draw a line someplace – who else if not Ulm could beat us at drawing?

Thank you for your attention.