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non-for-profit

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Downtown New York

Reconsidering our meeting for the “Shrinkage Award” on April 1st, I have ambivalent feelings. I enjoyed being part of this adventure to find creative answers how to get hold of a world society West, East, Developing countries - on the bursting point in every respect.

Often literature (maybe the arts in general?) teaches us more about the human condition than learned scientific analyses. I think of TC Boyle’s novel “A friend of the earth” (2000).

Written as a kind of surreal science fiction comedy, the author describes how in the year of 2025 Southern California is soaked up by eternal rain and devastated by storms as the consequence of global warming. The doubtful hero of the story, once an eco-terrorist, tries to save the last surviving species of animals in a private menagerie. The book reads as a paradigm to the problems “Shrinkage” wants to put before our eyes.

- What were the answers of the participants in the international open design competition?

The entries had to be in the form of a poster: an easily manageable platform of communication. Of course, it was the first venue of the award, it still needs more publicizing among an audience that could and should be worldwide. Therefore answers came in sparsely.

So the jury had time to look and discuss and decide. It would be difficult for me in retrospect to single out individual contributions. All in all, however, I feel that the idea of “Shrinkage” needs a more detailed description of the idea behind and the purpose it wants to achieve.

- When I heard first about “Shrinkage” I remembered my student years at the

“Hochschule für Gestaltung” in Ulm, trying to modernize the Bauhaus concept of functional design which also means the economy of resources and finding solutions for basic human needs in a sea of obsolescence. “We are greener than the greens will ever be”, Max Bill used to say.

Came the rebellious message of “The limits to growth” (1972) by the Club of Rome, labelled “The predicament of mankind”. There were many books of the same tenor.

Also in 1972 Gordon Rattray Taylor came out with “Rethink – a Paraprimitive solution”.

He suggested decentralisation into self-reliant groups of population linked to a so-called

“Soft Technology” which he also calls “Smallerisation”. Already in 1960 Vance Packard had published his populist book “The Waste Makers”. In 1974 I quoted in a lecture before the

“Gestaltkreis im Bundesverband Deutsche Industrie” from Henry David Thoreau’s treatise “Walden or, Life in the woods and on the Duty of civil disobedience”(1854). Already then in the middle of the 19th century he laments the illusion of the American dream of success and suggest to try out the simple life of pioneers, if only to understand what are the real necessities of life.

And where are we now? The “Shrinkage” concept takes into consideration the state of post-modern complexity as it has developed since the modern times of the 20th century are over.

Please, go on Shahneshin Foundation and don’t give up on promoting the issue.

There used to be (maybe is still there?) in Downtown New York a gallery running under the name “Time is always now”. Whenever I hesitate, I think of this slogan. Let us not lose our time.

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