

## Re-Drawing the Geography of European Design: the Case of Transitional Countries

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### Abstract

The nature and shape of Europe has changed radically in the last 20 years. This has been precipitated by a varied process of democratisation and marketisation among some Mediterranean seaboard countries followed later by the former Eastern Bloc. In other words, some 460m. citizens have been much closer to Western market capitalism and liberal democracy, and its design. However, this paper argues that while Western models of design practice are influential in this new realm, these countries may also claim their own design territories. After considering some of the historiographical and ethical problems in interpreting design in transitional countries, this paper examines the interactions between 'core' and 'periphery' in design-entrepreneurial terms. It foregrounds the emergent role of the second economy and civil society in defining alternative systems for design practice. This in turn suggests a new cultural and economic geography of European design.

### Introduction

The last 20 years have witnessed a spectacular series of political transformations in Europe. From the late-1970s Spain, Portugal and Greece began to move towards liberal democracy embracing, to an extent, free market economics and aspiring to European integration. East European countries followed ten years later. These transitions have necessitated radical re-appraisals of national identities and outlooks and the wholesale reshaping of business practises and consumption patterns. While there may be variations in the types of transition taking place, from the Western perspective, these are countries which represent a semi-periphery which may interact with the Western capitalist core or create their own centres.

This paper attempts to re-site our readings of design in transitional economies. There is no doubt, in my mind, that we should be studying the new geography of European

design and taking it very seriously. Just taking the former Eastern Bloc into account, we have seen since 1989 more than 350m. people drawn into new forms of market capitalism. The cityscapes of many of the cities of the former Eastern Bloc these days starkly display the symbols core Western capitalism. McDonald's, Burger King, Dunkin Donuts and so on abound. Ikea opened its first store in the Eastern European in 1990 Budapest. And on one level we can not read this as a form of corporate capitalist colonisation. After all when in 1988 applications were invited for the first McDonald's in Vaci Utca in Budapest, hundreds of Hungarians appeared with the \$57,000 required for the franchise licence. By the end of 1992 there were 20 McDonald's in Hungary (Dobosiewicz 1992: 82). Clearly there was a desire to partake in the 'rewards' of late capitalism.

Meanwhile, it should be stressed that these are still early days. The 'shock therapy' of marketisation has left many of the former Soviet bloc countries reeling. High national debt and rampant inflation has left the

citizens of many of these countries 20% poorer than they were 5 years ago. According to UNICEF figures, in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland, excess mortality caused by the 'systemic change' reached a staggering 800,000 between 1989 and 1993 (Andor 1995). Change without control can be a stressful experience, leading to a rise in heart and circulatory diseases.

For designers the priority has been economic survival rather than cultural play. The design output of these countries has yet to receive the international designer stamps of approval at the big furniture fairs—Milan and Cologne. But a form of design tourism for Western visitors is beginning to emerge, not least in Prague where currently 30,000 British, American and Canadian ex-pats live in what has been dubbed the 1920s Paris in the 1990s. There, ex-pat café culture nestles with the architecture of Frank Ghery. But the most celebrated design transition in Europe must be Spain's, which in the course of 20 years has moved from being a chaotic post-dictatorship European backwater to one of Europe's most potent motors in modern furniture production and a source of inspiration for observers of cultural regeneration through design.

So no longer can we smugly cling on to a notion of Europe as 'the cradle of civilisation' (Nederveen Pieterse 1991). Design history cannot claim its history as the history of Modernism and Modernity, of Bauhaus to International Style generated from anywhere within 600km of Brussels, as the history of design.

But how can we read these transitional countries? Can we conceptualise the role of design in rapidly changing social, economic, cultural and political conditions? Can the various discontinuities and continuities of each country provide either a coherent local or global picture? Can we reconcile the many different forms of transition? Can we only reconcile them by superimposing either an Anglo-Saxon liberal theoretical structure or an aggressive Western capitalist interpretation on

to them? Shall we expect the design trajectories of such transitional countries to fall into a Western pattern? Or is a new geography of European design emerging?

### **Historiographical Problems**

In terms of design commentary, perhaps the most well-known writer on 'peripheral' or 'emergent' countries is the Brazilian-based Gui Bonsiepe (1991a; 1991b). Bonsiepe has sketched out a sequence of events in the development of design in developing countries. Much of this was based around the necessary professionalization of design in these countries. Obviously an important aspect of this process is the way by which design is brought into a state of self-consciousness via the formation of societies and institutions, design publications and exhibitions. It has to become 'reflexive', being aware of its mechanisms and self-image (see Giddens 1991; Beck 1992 [1986]). In other words, once it becomes visible externally and to itself, it can charge money for its creations and thus reproduce itself.

At a most straightforward level this pattern is applicable to all capitalist or proto-capitalist countries and provides a useful starting point for design historians. But it should be treated with caution. His 'sovereignty phase' for design in a developing country equates design maturity with a Western capitalist model. In terms of design management, for instance, this reaches its apotheosis when a consultancy system is in place and design advances to vice-presidential level within a corporation. The aim of development is 'catch-up'.

This ideology is, I believe, dominant in many of the various Design Councils and Design Centres to be found internationally. To some extent this view is perpetrated by an obsession (or self-obsession) of their 'official' government supported history as being the history. This account is usually dominated by a story of the professionalisation of design alongside a moral crusade to convince the public and business of the importance of

design. Their propensity to reproduce each other and each other's historiographical models would inevitably suggest that any country will adopt a Western pattern of design practice. This, I believe, is only a partial view.

As a researcher in Spain I was constantly reminded by industrialists and designers that there is another history of individuals and groups outside the structures of 'institutional' design practice. The development of design schools, promotional bodies and publications in the emergence of design in a liberal democracy only accounted for a part of the story. If we are to look for contextual design, then we have to go beyond Bonsiepe's model, or the 'Design Council' model and appreciate the conditions of transition more thoroughly. There are a set of historical dynamics at work beyond the basic account which treats the advent of capitalism as day one and follows a straight-line to its supposed apotheosis.

### **Transition as a New Market**

There is of course an expectation of transition that it is entirely about a drive towards market society. After all, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development defined 'transition' as, '...the progression from a command economy to an open market-oriented economy' (European Bank 1994: 4). Similarly, a popular unattributed definition among Hungarian émigrés is, 'From tanks to banks'.

It would seem that in design practice British movements into transitional countries have either been to aid that process or with the assumption that that process is already taking place. The 'Design for Transformation' programme which has been adopted by the Rumanian government since 1992 has several British and other foreign consultants. The recommendations made by its British consultants are somewhat familiar: the creation of a Design Centre, a permanent space for the exhibition of 'good design', a directory of designers and so on. In other words, the assumption is that if this form of

design promotion has worked for Britain—which it hasn't—it'll work for Rumania.

No doubt the transformation of a country's economic and cultural life provides an interesting and often lucrative set of business opportunities for all areas of trade and commerce. More specifically in design terms opportunities have been mixed. The quickest and most vulnerable route for inward 'design' investment has been advertising and media communications. Multinational advertising agencies have accompanied the vast range of franchising outlets, joint ventures or fresh establishments to be formed in these new contexts. Expenditure on advertising in Hungary rose from \$40m. in 1990 to an estimated \$480m. in 1993 (Clarke 1993). By 1994 there were over 100 listings in the Moscow phone book for ad agencies, who only handle a proportion of advertising accounts (McKay and Gutterman 1994: 40). The Ogilvy Group, McCann-Erickson, BBDO and Aurora are to be found in most Eastern European major cities now.

These ad agencies have acted as a necessary part of the cultural logistics of multinationalisation: the goods and services of international capital have to be mediated to their public. And in doing so, local inflections to their design language may be adopted to make it recognisable and culturally acceptable. Thus in Hungary a form of the Century Bold Condensed typeface, historically used in Hungarian signage, is widely adopted alongside the products and images of multinational capital.

These examples are high profile, yet low cost, however. In design practice where capital or cultural investment—or both—is higher, the results of design colonisation by the West have sometimes been more problematic. Residency for design consultancies in the new contexts has sometimes been short-lived. Partnerships with host consultancies have sometimes been shaky. Addison's work with Spain's Associate Designers and the Business Design Group's partnership with Budapest's Rubik Studio both ended acrimoniously. In

both instances the host consultancies view their guests as having exploited partnership agreements, using their local knowledge and contacts to 'cream off' contracts for themselves. In each case a high profile national project was at stake. In Spain it was centred around the designing of the AVE high speed train to run from the capital Madrid to Seville, site of the '92 World Expo. Associate Designers originally commissioned the Catalan poet Joan Brossa to conceive the project as an object poem. Addison superseded Associate Designer's on the project in 1990. Their own solution nodded in a more European—and possibly bland—direction.

In Hungary, the project which became a cause celebre for many Hungarian designers, was the Business Design Group's re-design of the corporate identity for the newly privatised Magyar Posta, Hungary's postal system. Many Hungarian designers, having previously worked for state bureaucracies during the period of state socialism, were adept at large scale corporate identity projects (Crowley 1992: 16). When the Business Design Group took this project over questions were even raised in the Hungarian parliament in 1992 as to why a foreign multi-national had undertaken such a high profile, national commission.

In certain areas—large-scale corporate identity, retail or exhibition work—history has shown that a multinationally-based design practice is possible. However, a 'clean slate' approach to a transitional country by a multinational design company may result either in Euro-blandness or a patronising play to vague or superficial notions of national identity in the visual outcome.

### **Transition as a New Modernism?**

A similar 'clean slate' conception has been projected onto transitional countries by cultural commentators, but in different terms. Both Spain and the former Soviet block countries have been subjected to a 'Modernist gaze'. In some respects the events of 1974-5 (in the case of the Iberian

peninsular) and even more so 1989 (in the case of Central and Eastern Europe) were read as the final 'death of Modernism'. The Communist notions of state centralisation and planning, productivism and standardisation may be interpreted as the residue, albeit unintentional, of pioneer Modernism. Likewise, while the dictatorships of Franco in Spain and Salazar in Portugal embraced many contradictory elements, their rhetorics of monumental authoritarianism—their mass pageants, their mix of technocratic and spiritual idealism, their statism also smacks of a similar blend of aesthetics and ideology. It was, after all, a dissident Spanish architect, Oriol Bohigas who wrote in 1968, 'We no longer consider the possibility of a 'total design', neither do we believe, in accordance with Tomás Maldonado, in a simple addition of objects or 'well designed' conjunctions coming out a 'well designed' world, because we are now aware of the fact that this is also the method of all despotisms that often attempt to create such a world in which one expresses the formal order of objects and one ignores, on the other hand, the disorder of men' (Bohigas 1969: 5).

None the less it was Bohigas who activated Barcelona's plazas and parks scheme in his role as Director of Urban Planning and Architecture between 1980 and 1984 for the new socialist City Council of Barcelona. This intelligent attempt to restore dignity to the city's neglected public spaces was in itself read as the return of the 'poetics of modernism' by critics, including myself (Buchanan 1986; Julier 1991). Of course this was modernism on a different scale. In the new democratic context, this was a modernism in intention at a more local scale. It was about an attitude, a desire to 'clean up', 'include', 'renovate', 'renew' but at the level of the particular rather than the broad gestural.

A project carried out by the Mimo Studio in Warsaw seems to carry the same inflections. In 1990 the city authorities of Warsaw tendered for offers to manage the burgeoning street markets, or in other words, the new

capitalism's overflow. Mimo submitted a design for a kiosk, initially intended for fast-food outlets, but with a range of uses in mind. They conceded a royalty fee on the design for a percentage in the kiosks' rental. Since November 1991, when the first kiosks opened for business, they have been used to sell many kinds of goods from vegetables to digital watches. Although these structures might look crude they represent an attempt to reinvigorate public space through design. MIMO's sheet-metal designs also reflect available technologies in Polish industry and a desire to keep costs down (Niwinski and Stefanowki 1995).

Thus design plays an important role in the articulation of a new civil society. It gives focus to everyday life, underlines its meaning and restores dignity and expression to urban space. This in turn is a metaphor for a new democratic state. This concern for public space and by extension, design's influence on the collective consciousness, even through the most simple of design gestures, should draw the applause of die-hard Modernists.

Within the paradigm of architectural theory, this interpretation makes sense. But we should not take this too far. It should be handled with care. It is my contention that, at times, we have chosen to project a modernist sensibility onto transitional countries in order to make up for the the loss of our own sense of a 'modernist project' in the West. In other words, transitional countries have become our transitional objects, to borrow from the psychoanalytical theorist, D.H. Winnicott. Winnicott developed the theory that as a child grows up and encounters the series of frustrations and losses within that process then she adopts 'transitional objects' onto which he/she can project personality, and therefore control (see Crozier 1994: 90-1). The child's teddy bear or doll is the most obvious example of this. This transitional object then smooths the way for change—it is something he can hang on to. Transitional countries have been subject to the same treatment by design critics, I believe.

For example, speaking at the opening of an exhibition of pre-1989 East German design, Hartmut Grün, a Frankfurt advertising executive declared:

'It seems to me that the exhibits here possess a totally original vitality. An unspoiled naivety. A cigarette brand called 'Speechless' is simply miles ahead of any cigarette marketing concepts we have to offer. Design punk in the GDR is much purer, more idiosyncratic and uncompromising than all our post-modern Memphis pieces' (quoted in Bertsch 1990: 37).

Clearly, the mental image of a country emerging from decades of isolation and backwardness (in Western terms) and taking its first tentative steps in to market capitalism and liberal democracy is too capitivating to ignore. Here we can access the 'authentic' object untainted by branding strategies or advanced consumer society. And let's do it quick before those clever Western marketing men get in there and spoil all the fun.

This assumes that objects produced outside market capitalism are somehow neutral and pure and that by extension, capitalism problematizes, encodes and postmodernises them. Under market capitalism the hierarchy of form and meaning, the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture implode. And this is what automatically happens upon marketization.

So for instance in discussing youth consumption in post-1989 Poland, Bohdan Jung a Polish sociologist argues:

'Much to the dismay of 'traditional' Polish intellectuals, under the impact of virtual reality and the general collapse of all authority, the distinction between high and low culture is rapidly disappearing. Also departing along with it is the traditional value system of the Polish intelligentsia, the country's former cultural broker and role model, for whom cultural participation, as well as intellectual and aesthetic

considerations of 'being' rather than 'having', was the quitenessence of life' (Jung 1995: 304).

But, crucially, he goes on to add that:

'...the analogy between Poland's nouveaux riches and rich young consumers, who increasingly engage in an exchange of culturally mediated sign-values, in which the 'sign' or 'image' prepared by advertisers and marketers is not simply decoded along the lines of the advertising message, ends quickly. The creative interpretation and use of these signs to construct personal aestheticized patterns of behaviour implies playful and original use of 'signs' to produce differentiated types of consumption patterns and completely individualized fluid lifestyles. Poland's new and young consumers are still busy experimenting with the formulation of consumption models and status symbols that can be diffused and imitated... While in the foreseeable future, for the bulk of Polish society, there is a risk that consumption will become a substitute for culture, young people are on the whole (and, in this case, fortunately) far too poor to abandon their involvement in more experiential and non-material activities, which means that their consumption is still a means, rather than an end, in their lives' (Jung 1995: 305).

There may be a creeping paternalism in his attitude. Clearly Jung appears more positive about the 'higher' values of cultural activity over passive consumption. However, he skilfully mediates the two extremes by suggesting that young Poles are active consumers, creating their own identities rather than choosing them 'off the peg'.

This notion of active consumer engagement is an inheritance of former times. In terms of the idea of the 'playful' and original use of signs, it is hard to find a country where in its pre-democratic and transitional states there wasn't a proliferation of linguistic irony and subversion. I am reminded of the resistant poetic refrain from Soweto, before the end of apartheid, 'They say 'Go Well with Shell', We say 'Throw Well with Shell'' (Ndemwa 1990).

Witness the radical Polish alliance, Orange Alternative who during Martial Law ironically re-enacted the storming of the Winter Palace in central Wroclaw, using a bookstore as the palace and a pizza parlour as their headquarters. Witness the subversion of communist or national images in the poster war leading up to Hungary's first democratic elections in 1990 (Bakos 1990). Witness the way the Cobi mascot for the Barcelona Olympic Games of 1992 became the vehicle of different commentaries on Catalan nationalism (Busquet 1992).

Of course, these examples are selective and in themselves were short-lived expressions of the politically active exploiting the semiological battlefields of visual culture. But it suggests that these locations were already laced with subversive postmodern irony. In material culture, the production of alternatives to the command system may be read as subversive, but was also born of necessity.

### **Alternatives to Command Systems**

In her best-selling book **How we Survived Communism and Even Laughed**, Serbian writer Slavenka Draculić talks of the active cottage industries throughout Eastern Europe engaged in the making and altering of clothes (Draculic 1992: chp.3). This was a needful response to the economics of shortage fostered by the communist systems. A planned economy could never cater for the variations in size and taste of its population, so individuals had to carry out their own modifications. But it also implied an active departure from the given, from the norm of clothing as supplied by the State-planned economy. Subsequently such acts have come to be seen as the birthplace of the new Eastern Europe. It is here, in this second economy, that a partnership of market economy and civil society begins.

The second or informal economy differs from what we understand in the West as the black economy—in other words non-registered work to avoid taxation. Under the communist

regimes any work carried on outside the state structures was effectively illegal. The major problem with most Soviet-bloc states was that they suffered a disproportionate emphasis in economic policy on industry and heavy industry. The corollary to this over-investment in industry was under-investment in services, the infrastructure and agriculture. The consequence was unfulfilled demand which had to be met by other means.

Some of this second economy existed at, to the Western observer, the insidious activity of professionals such as doctors or architects demanding extra gratuities from their patients or clients for their services. Some of it existed in the 'do it yourself' or 'self-supply' sector particularly in domestic construction. Some of it took place in the private supply of food through market gardening. In whichever case, this second sphere of activity existed because of shortages and inefficiency in the first economy not in spite of it. It held a parasitic relationship with the command economy, opposing its core values yet needing it for its very existence.

During the 1980s the second economy in the Eastern Bloc gained increasing significance. It became officially sanctioned but unofficially tolerated in most countries. At times, especially in Hungary, legislative steps were taken to legally recognise such activity. For designers, the second economy often provided useful and necessary work. Working for the State offices or undertaking the heavily controlled and sparse freelance design work for State industries would never be lucrative or satisfying. A major source of employment for Hungarian designers and architects was in undertaking interior design and fitting work for private clients. After all, by 1989 more than half of domestic construction was taking place in the second economy (Swain 1992: 169).

An engaging example of this process is given in the curriculum vitae of Warsaw's Mimo Studio. In Poland during Martial Law many professionals such as lawyers, doctors and university lecturers were forced out of their

positions by the emergency government. It was precisely they who were internationally connected—they had travelled to conferences in the West. Many of them set to creating small manufacturing units to make consumer items—some copied from objects brought back from their study visits—to sell on the Polish market. Grzegorz Niwinski and Michael Stefanowski of Mimo Studio cut their teeth as freelance designers advising on forms and packaging but also 'making connections' for these new entrepreneurs with suppliers, manufacturers and the market. Indeed, the Polish word kombinacja, meaning connection or combination, holds a special connotation in the sense of 'business networking'.

This provided a groundbase of contacts and knowledge for the Mimo Studio for later years. Similarly, in Hungary interior designer Miklós Vincze, like many compatriots, undertook many interior and small-scale architectural projects for private clients outside the official economy. These may have been for country homes of the governmental nomenclature or for offices of urban wheeler-dealers. In whichever case, it is important to note that the major part of such work was in supply and fitting of these projects. Furthermore, such work acted as a major springboard for more lucrative work upon marketisation. In 1992, Vincze undertook 150m. Forints (roughly \$0.9m.) worth of commissions for clients such as the Berlitz Language School and the ING Dutch Bank in Budapest (Peredi 1994: 5). This example is not atypical. Even today, of the 250 or so design studios in Hungary listed by the Design Center in Budapest in 1995, nearly all of them exist by dint of their 'other' activities (Szetpeteri 1995; Scherer 1995; Rubik 1995; Nagy 1995; Ernyey 1996). Graphic design studios provide print services, product designer provide small-scale manufacturing, packaging, advertising services, interior designers do the supplying and fitting.

The history of design in the West has tended towards increased division of labour in design whereby design entrepreneurs who design and manufacture, such as James Dyson, are

celebrated exceptions to the rule. I contend that transitional countries give rise to an historically formed, closer interface between designer and producer.

To some degree the experience of Spain mirrors this. An impressive array of well-known Spanish design-led companies were founded in the latter years of the Francoist regime and the early years of the transition by designers. These include B.D. Ediciones de Diseño, Punt Mobles, Disform and Mobles 114. In nearly all these cases, they were founded as a response to a market situation: that a luxury market for 'high design' furniture existed but was not catered for by a command economy held down by import tariffs and a cumbersome state holding company. Thus a network was formed to design for and supply this market which partially existed outside the 'official' system, exploiting a depleted yet extant small-workshop system available in Spain's industrial centres of Barcelona and Valencia.

To the casual Western observer in Spain of the late-1970s or Eastern Europe of the early 1990s the logotypes of McDonald's, IBM and the international banks seem to starkly dominate the cityscape. This may seem like the visual evidence of the Brazilian development economist Florestan Fernandes' declaration that, '...the history of capitalism, in our times, reveals itself more clearly in the periphery than in the center' (Fernandes 1979: xii). However this is only a half-truth. They dominate only because little else does. Behind these brash symbols of Western capitalism is an economy made up of networks of small businesses which make up a vital and difficult to penetrate indigenous economy (Economist 1991). For instance, according to a World Bank study, the inflow of foreign capital into developing East European countries in the early days of marketisation was a catalyst to but not a major cause of business development—commercial growth and its capitalisation was more localised than had been anticipated. And an indicator of the gap between small-business growth and large-scale business infrastructural provision is the

fact that in 1993 an estimated 47,000 Hungarian businesses were still waiting for a telephone connection (Ettlie 1993: 34).

### **Core and Periphery Interactions**

To return to the symbols of hard-core Western capitalism—fast-food—this dynamic may be spelt out more clearly. Mimo's street kiosk, mentioned earlier, was designed to foster small-scale entrepreneurialism. They became home to a burgeoning fast-food industry in the 1990s. These weren't just imitations of McDonald's and KFC, but Vietnamese and Polish versions of fast-food. Likewise, the growth of franchised burger-bars in Spain has given rise to more locally-specific forms of fast-food such as Pan y Company. Designed by Barcelona graphics studio Summa, this chain drew on the traditional Spanish mid-morning bar-snack of the bocadillo and turned it into a novel chain of localised fast-food. We have yet see the Hungarian langos—a cheese and garlic filled breadcake—to be re-marketed by Budapest entrepreneurs, but time will tell...

Clearly this is a question of scale and where you look. At other levels the price of progress has been a loss of particularity. In his book on television, transition and regionalism in Spain, Richard Maxwell tracks the clear shift from the national network, dominated from Madrid, under Francoism, to a regionalised system to cater for the increasingly pluralistic nature of democratic Spain. Spanish television was formerly dominated by football, bullfighting and Sevillanas musicals, to make up the so-called 'culture of evasion' encouraged by the late-Francoist regime. Given the high costs of television production, he argues, the regions were unable to produce an optimum amount of its own television, but instead had to rely largely on the dubbing of 'international' television into regional languages (Maxwell 1995: 147). Thus we may watch *EastEnders* in Catalan, *Neighbours* in Galician, *Baywatch* in Basque. For most of the day, the only regional aspect to the one-eyed monster in the living-room corner is its language. And the same could be



said for television in Eastern Europe, these days.

The inference, here, is that in their quest for the re-packaging of cultural production, transitional nations trade in particularity for novelty. The media systems of both Spain and Hungary were among the first national assets to be bought up by the multi-nationals of the ubiquitous Rupert Murdoch, Axel Springer or Robert Maxwell. They are, after all, a quick route to their lucrative advertising markets (Economist 1991). It follows, therefore, that they should rapidly 'click in' to international television's form and content. Obviously, the core of capitalism is being reproduced rather than reconfigured here.

Meanwhile, the above fast-food examples from Poland and Spain demonstrate that a localised reconfiguration is possible and that designers can play a strategic role in that process. Likewise, localised forms of design-entrepreneurialism have emerged from various forms of the 'second economy' in transitional countries.

### **New Models for Citizenship and Nationhood through Design?**

It would be nice to report that design was playing a role in reconfiguring notions of citizenship and nationhood which evaded Western models. Social and political scientists in discussing transitional countries, often invoke the notion of a 'Third Way' for such countries: in other words, 'neither Washington nor Moscow' but something else... In Poland the Solidarity movement may be read as an attempt to build a civil society without private ownership, to rebuild citizenship without entrepreneurship. Ten years later little remains of that vision.

In Hungary the rural embourgeoisement created by the entrepreneurial development of agriculture outside the state sector has also been invoked as 'Third Way' (see Szelenyi 1991). During the 1980s it was hoped by some Hungarian social and political scientists that this (re)-emergent class would establish a

more nationally specific form of civil society. A value system around 'Nation, God and the Family' was seen to be invested in rural Hungary. This view was paralleled in Hungarian politics with the emergence of the Smallholders' Party and some elements of the Hungarian Democratic Forum. While I firmly believe that it was not their intention, practitioners of the Hungarian school of organic architecture have been appropriated as the visual torchbearers of this attitude. The rural community centres, churches and dance halls designed by Imre Makovecz, György Csete or Dező Eklér were convenient signs of this revival National Romanticism for the political activists.

In Catalonia, and to a lesser extent in Spain's other thirteen regions, this reconfiguration of citizenship and nationhood has been further reaching. Design has played a far more active role in this process than we shall ever see in any of the core Western European countries.

We have already seen how the Bohigas years in Barcelona re-established public spaces as the site of the new democracy. The streets weren't just reclaimed—they were re-designed. But this project has continued. In the second instance, the lavish project of urban renewal not only conspired with other cultural initiatives around Catalan nationhood (disseny (Catalan) not diseño (Castilian) or design (International)), but conversely positioned Barcelona as a nation-state within Europe. The Olympic preparations were fundamental in this process. Subsequently, design has played a role in the repackaging of Barcelona as the environmentalist nation-state.

### **Conclusion**

If we are to re-draw the geography of European design then it should have the following salient features.

To view countries drawn into Western liberal democracy and market capitalism as 'clean slates' is erroneous. Just because they may, to the Western eye, look undesigned as

countries it doesn't mean to say that they are ahistorical in design terms. They all have their own design histories, sometimes little understood and appreciated in the West. And the rupture of rapid economic and political change does not make these histories redundant. Consumers, producers and designers in transitional countries have invariably turned their experience of history to surprising and unusual results. We have seen this in the notion of active consumption (as in the case of Jung's analysis of Polish youth consumption) in which identity is explored perhaps more consciously than we give credit for. We have seen how this ties in with a vibrant commercial system derived from the second economy and which existed before transition. The second economy also provided a training ground and networking field for subsequent design entrepreneurialism. It might be said that the command economy of state socialism has now been replaced by that of multinational corporate capitalism (McDonald's). The 'halo' effect of complementing or competing small-scale commercial ventures has emerged, in which, design has played a role (Pan y Company).

Meanwhile, Western design consultancies have only been marginally successful in penetrating these new markets. At times they have touched some raw nerves in their handling of specific high-profile projects (AVE and Magyar Posta). The major problem, though, has been in understanding and participating in the tight network of contacts, production and supply systems.

With regard to a broader cultural and economic map, most of Europe's transitional countries have emerged into a semi-peripheral status, falling between core and periphery. Neither can they control their economic destiny with the same certainty as Germany or France, but they are in better shape than, say, the Balkans or the CIS. Hungarian economist László Andor observes that the point is not the cluster you put yourself into *ex post*, but whether you can take advantage of certain opportunities to

improve the relative position of a given economy. He argues that such an opportunity was missed when the Czech car-manufacturer Skoda and the Hungarian electrical components company Tungsram were sold to the first foreign buyer, who happened to be rivals (Andor 1995). (The same can be said for Spain's SEAT.) Andor goes on to observe that globally there have been two sources of success in football so far: wealth and poverty. A wealthy state can support football training through lavish facilities (best example: the Netherlands). In a poor state, kids have no other life perspective but becoming perfect in handling the ball (best example: Brazil). Semi-peripheral countries, such as Hungary, may fall into the second category. This concept might be extended from football to design.

Design's ability to intercede between the micro- and the macro-, to approach global problems at a local and low-cost level means that each design act is laced with significance. It makes the relationship between intervention and context visible. As a reflexive practice it draws meaning into consciousness. Thus, for instance, the new market kiosk becomes a metaphor for the new market, the street market becomes a metaphor for an active civil society.

Transition doesn't mean wholesale transformation. The material and cultural conditions of transition create a delicate buffer zone between core and periphery within which different and differing aesthetic and productive models can be forged. This permits the partial emergence of some alternative and localised models for design practice. The geography of European design is therefore too varied to be drawn by colonialists, imperialists or flat-earthers.

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