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## Manifesto per un mondo migliore di Siamak G. Shahneshin

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L'intento del Manifesto è quello di contribuire a risvegliare la coscienza generale sul tema dell'ambiente, levando un grido d'allarme sul grave pericolo che incombe su di esso. "Ci si può credere o meno, ma abbiamo prodotto una cultura bolla e costruito un ambiente bolla", afferma l'architetto nell'incipit del suo scritto, "dove la visione corrente è la cultura dell'extra, del mega e dell'extra-large. La sfida che bisogna affrontare nel presente, è quella di cercare di sgonfiare la bolla prima che scoppi. Il settore più vulnerabile, nell'accezione ampia del termine, potrebbe essere considerato l'ambiente. Un'ape senza il miele potrebbe essere assunta come emblematica immagine della reale situazione verso cui oggi tende la cultura del design, crederci o meno".

La visione di SHAGAL/iodaa -lo studio interdisciplinare di arte e architettura di cui Siamak G. Shahneshin è titolare, oltre ad essere docente di urban design e urbanistica ecologica- è quella della necessità di un impegno collettivo di tipo etico/culturale. In questo senso, per meglio caratterizzare i termini di un diverso e più attivo impegno nel campo della difesa dell'ambiente ha coniato l'espressione *shrinkage*, la cui filosofia è quella di non puntare a proporre una nuova idea, quanto piuttosto a trasmettere il senso del latente del pericolo, nonché l'urgenza di elaborare un diverso approccio nei confronti del progetto.

*Shrinkage*, dunque, è da intendersi come un catalizzatore di crescita qualitativa. Un impegno che ciascun progettista, in qualche forma, deve assumere nell'ambito del proprio fare, a seguito della necessità che il processo d'espansione delle città trovi una sua forma, un suo criterio di regolazione. E' questo un "principio di responsabilità" che si avvicina al pensiero di Hans Jonas, il grande filosofo tedesco recentemente scomparso, che in un passo delle sue *Memorie* (Il Melangolo), afferma: "agisci in modo che le conseguenze delle tue azioni non distruggano la possibilità futura della vita".

Come nota Shahneshin (1): "L'urbanistica è una disciplina, su cui si è discusso e si discute molto, ma con scarsi esiti nella pratica. Gli architetti sono molto affascinati dalla grande scala e dalle grandi città, ma fino ad ora non sono stati in grado di controllare il territorio", di difenderlo dalla spinta generata dalle necessità, dai bisogni derivati dalla grande esplosione demografica, dagli interessi economici e dalle scelte politiche.

In questo modo, il concetto legato a *shrinkage*, è quello di tentare di rientrare in ogni modo all'interno di un sistema progettuale equilibrato in grado di tener conto del senso della misura, della scala architettonica, del rapporto con il territorio; è un tramite etico (ma che intende affrontare problemi concreti) per governare la crescita urbana, un tracciato per ritrovare la condizione culturale della giusta dimensione del contesto architettonico e urbanistico, andata via via perdendosi soprattutto nel corso degli ultimi vent'anni.

"Un esempio del *shrinkage*", infine, può essere assunto dalla pratica progettuale territoriale/urbana di SHAGAL/iodaa. "Quando iniziamo a progettare un'area urbana", afferma Shahneshin, "per prima cosa, prendiamo in considerazione tutta l'area verde oggetto dell'intervento e, soltanto dopo, elaboriamo il progetto. Questa prassi potrebbe definirsi un "rovesciamento" dei canoni tradizionali degli anni Sessanta e Settanta, che non hanno prodotto risultati felici, messi in atto da vecchi lupi e giovani pigri".

### Note

(1) Le affermazioni di Shahneshin che seguono, provengono da uno scambio di opinioni via e-mail con il sottoscritto.

*Emergency, Homo*, by J.  
by F. Reau, Peel, S.  
for the Zandy, A.  
Shrinkage Legoo, for  
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*Think*, by R. Ja,  
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## A Manifesto for a better world

### Siamak G. Shahneshin

Believe it or not, we have crafted a culture bubble, and built an environ bubble, where mindsets are the extra-, the mega-, XL-cultures. The challenge today is to deflate the bubble before it bursts. The most vulnerable sector may be the environ-ment in the extended sense of the word. A bee without honey is a simple illustrative example of the very nature of nowadays' most design culture trend, believe it or not.

Increasingly we live in a “sustainable” nightmare of a dry-definition of sustainability — in all its simplicity in meaning and practice. We are presently lost in the dark and gloomy shadows of the so-called Second Modernity ‘palmachine’ that has become a watchword in culture—as dry as a Swiss-Birchermüesli.

This generic definition in contemporary lexicon has become a common thread throughout thousands of textual and graphical contribution in the media, whether they were/are addressing design disciplines, education, as well as everyday life practice. Sustainability, as currently practiced, is primarily an exercise in energy-efficiency.

In other words, through the use of the energy and environmental rating systems i.e. LEED, we designers [and policymakers] are attempting to slow-down the damage caused by excessive use of resources. We can and must do better! This requires us to shift our thinking. Instead of doing less damage to the environ, it is necessary to ask how we can participate with the environ — using the health of ecological systems as a basis for design.

By doing so, the potential for sustainable design can take us beyond sustaining the environ to one

that can regenerate its health — as well as our own. The reality is that only a complete overhaul and change in human life-ways can halt and reverse the current trends of environmental degradation. As we actively seek plans for a more liveable and nurturing relationship with our natural [and built] environs, we must examine and question each and every aspect of our own everyday-lifestyles. Through this process of self-assessment we may uncover the blueprints for a future of sustainability.

While the policy-makers, strategic-planners, theoreticians, and many other activists in favour of a preferred future have gained a well-deserved reputation for successfully opposing certain policies or initiatives, it is less clear where both the local and global communities stand on the issue. Without a vision, without a sense of where we want to go [what kind of future we want], it will be very difficult to get there.

SHAGAL | iodaa's vision, is that of [the] *shrinkage*\* culture. The philosophy of *shrinkage* does not set forth a new idea, but derived from necessity, or a sense of endangerment.

This concept is traceable to our ancestors who lived on earth thousands and thousands of years ago and maintained a great admiration and reverence for elements of nature: water, soil, air and even fire. The purpose of the *shrinkage* is to stimulate a mental gymnasium, provide the community a vision of what a prosperous sustainable future will look like, a roadmap of how to get from here to there, and an ongoing assessment of this effort, of where progress is being made and where it is not.

The term 'Sustainability', is spread out on thousands of hardcopy-prints and on-line sources, but it still is a vague notion for many individuals, including design practitioners. Designs transform and consume both renewable and nonrenewable natural assets. Therefore, design disciplines and manufacturing techniques and methods should be reassessed with sustainability in mind. One question might arise: what is the solution? Undoubtedly, to design sustainably, we need a different point of view and a re-assessment of priorities within the natural world.

Ideally, we need to detach ourselves from the entanglements of existing social, political, economic and even scientific beliefs that have put distance between us and our natural surroundings. *Shrinkage* culture will revolutionize our initial approach to design criteria and conceptual design. The inclusion of *shrinkage* culture in the design process will necessitate a transformation, not only in the design and making of new products and buildings, but also in existing ones. Most likely, designers spend years and years in acquiring information and techniques to adapt existing products and buildings to new standards of environmentally conscious design. Designers [will] be obligated and expected to search carefully and responsibly, and also creatively, for a gamut of new materials that will become available from the industry as it finds more innovative ways for turning waste materials into healthy resources.

Education should become more *shrinkage*based, and in doing so, develops an understanding of a deeply rooted human connection to the earth. Education should promote [the] awareness in local, national, and global environmental issues, while exposing the mistakes and downfalls of our unsustainable past and present trends.

Education must actively teach subsistence living through agriculture, allowing for a deeper connection to the natural cycles and seasons of the earth. We must be aware of the earth's limited resource base and realize that we live in a closed system with finite boundaries, exposing our inherent problems with over-consumption in relation to this closed system.

Sustainable living, in concept, is not difficult to grasp. But, right now we live in an environmental nightmare, where human actions are based on the perception that we are at the centre of the universe.

This human-centric view has led us to the brink of environmental self-destruction. It is with this in mind, that we must come together as one unified unit, taking care of that which we all hold in

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common, [our] Mother Earth. This in turn becomes a call to each and everyone of us, as individuals, to act upon our knowledge. Individual action becomes group movement, which begins the change we so desperately need.

Concern about the health of “our” planet has risen sharply in the past few years.

World leaders, who for decades were deeply preoccupied with Cold War threats, have wakened to the realization that the most pervasive threats to human security now may be environmental, not military. The growth of human population is straining the planet’s capacities — not only its capacity to satisfy our relentlessly growing demands for food, energy, water, lumber, and space to live, but also its ability to recover from the damage those demands have inflicted.

If we continue to follow conventional ideas in architecture and planning, it is so easy to witness the degradation of the current conditions which will become a crisis. Those who are concerned about land-use often cite alarming figures. In a recently published article “How Much Land is Left?” Oliver Gillham states that the US is losing nearly 400 acres of open space to new development each hour, and that New England alone is losing farmland and forest at the rate of 1,200 acres per week. This does not include the so-called natural-disasters such as in New Orleans.

And in Switzerland, we can observe in a very recent statistical and explanatory document that the Swiss forests are also shrinking rapidly, the loss of a football stadium-size forest per week. China’s farmland loss rate amounts to 2000 square kilometres to desert each year. All the countries are losing land to desertification. All this is a global problem, I do believe. This is why SHAGAL | iodaa proposes the *shrinkage* culture to tackle such an increasingly worsening situation.

The basic point of *shrinkage* is that our principle premises concerning growth and expansion must be urgently revised and reassessed. We are experiencing *shrinkage* in cities such as in Silicon Valley, in Grisons Alps, etc., and yet *shrinkage* is still in its embryonic stage. Needless to say, time is running out. We need to act at wartime speed.

Thus one of the best places to seek understanding of *shrinkage* is the study of sprawl and post sprawl and the devastating implementation of those modern and post-modern theories, which share their eudaemonist concerns. Given the systematically disappointing results of the sprawl approach, it is time to look seriously at our alternatives.

Despite all the arguments from sprawl[ers] — *shrinkage* is inevitable. If we consider sprawl in its comprehensive impact, we note that *shrinkage* is partially caused by sprawl and post-sprawl conditions such as leapfrog or scattered development, commercial strip development, and large expanses of single-use development, as explained by Reid Ewing, professor in policy and planning at the Florida International University.

Despite large amount of published literature annually, an overwhelming amount of information available in print, in electronic format and as advice from different identities, the *shrinkage* theme remains mostly untouched. There is little published on *shrinkage*.

Still, that is no excuse for its outright neglect by designers over the past decades. If nothing else, the concept of *shrinkage* can help us to see how much the design culture itself is an environ, in which we behave in often unexamined ways, based on unspoken assumptions and unanticipated consequences. To introduce *shrinkage* as a manifesto for present and future days does not employ counter-theory and thoughts as modern and post-modern pioneers introduced. Rather, *shrinkage* is the very essence of what we are witnessing, which lends this debate political urgency.

The Industrial Revolution as the first so-called modern era, and the Digital Technology as the second modernity, have been boldly marked in all areas such as a culture of extra-megaover- and self-ness. The third age is called a “reflexive modernism”. We at SHAGAL | iodaa would also call it a new renaissance “Second Renaissance” that has to

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deal with not only the devastated cultural deterioration, but also with the shrunken world: shrinking peace, shrinking iceberg, shrinking humanity, shrinking public-health, shrinking farmlands, and so-forth. It is imperative for policy planners, decision makers, marketers, designers and of course ordinary people to adjust their mindset and to call for radical change: a culture of *shrinkage*. This means we should consider abandoning the sprawl-culture and replace it with *shrinkage*-culture.

The real challenge in the coming years, in other words, is as the old manners are not anymore suitable for the present day and future – the removal of quantitative manners and replacement of the qualitative thoughts/decisions/designs.

Designers and some rare decision makers are now taking the future more seriously than they have had for some time, and realizing the importance of clarifying and deepening our understanding of these before rushing into decision and design.

How do we realize such unconventional ambitions – how can we stretch boundaries of conventional design and practice? The *shrinkage* culture addresses the most important “mega-problem” facing humanity, in the dawn of the new millennium: prosperity — but in the long run — in all its deep and varied forms. It may help establish that understanding, or at least gives an impulse (motivation) for the debate on *shrinkage* among those of us who are concerned with the design and sustainable planning issues, but also those of us who plan to be around for a few more years, as well as those of us concerned about the future of our children.

While we look to sustainability we have to avoid any one-track orientation and perspective, because sustainability is multidisciplinary! Therefore, diverse disciplines and specialists, regardless of their station in life and standpoints, must alert society of current invisible and future problems by sharing their beliefs in the understanding of *shrinkage*, and providing original and practical solution(s) to accomplish the goal for a better world.

*Shrinkage* will sketch and convey an alternative future-thinking as a new movement to help a truly international approach to steer away from traditional models, and to challenge traditional designers and non-designers with an advocate and eccentric thinking about the future. The *shrinkage* culture offers a redefinition of “growth” by situating it in the context of six-thousand-years of misbehaviour, greediness and selfindulgence.

The *shrinkage* culture would switch the tragic nature of the world to the possibilism© to hope for a richer, healthier world for humans and all living creatures. It is a step forward to avoid a tragic catastrophe that human history will otherwise witness in the near future.

This concept would be a response to growing questions relating to design, such as designing to have a child, designing a house, designing for the future of an entire city, a region, or whole world. These issues are most often framed as a crisis or threat. My hope is that today’s business leaders, decision-makers, politicians, design practitioners, academia, and anyone who is concerned about future will hear the call to greatness outlined in the *shrinkage* culture and respond to it. Sustainability, above of all, is about change!

## Notes

\* The *shrinkage* terminology has been coined, and introduced within the design and planning disciplines by Prof. Dr. Siamak G. Shahneshin since the early 90’s. It is been coined to denominate a widespread response to sprawl in its extended sense.

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