

## Call for Papers

Deadline: January 31st, 2017

### DESIGN CRITICISM

A conference organised by the **Gesellschaft für Designgeschichte e.V.** (GfDg – German Design History Society) in cooperation with the **Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) Offenbach** (University of Art and Design Offenbach).

May 19th – 20th, 2017 at the HfG Offenbach/Main, Germany

Hardly any other creative practice is as thoroughly entwined with the social, political and economic everyday life, as is design. Technological change, social upheavals, or global crisis do affect design and provoke permanent redefinitions. Accordingly, controversial topics like climate change, increasing scarcity of resources and distributive justice shape the contemporary disciplinary discourse. Whether product, industrial, communication or fashion designer, design advisor or design activist, designers reflect their role and position within industry, consumer culture and media, and they do make an effort to adjust their tasks and methods, too. Big Data, the Internet of Things or Smart Objects appear to be new fields of design activity, at the same time they create new realities with consequences for the concepts of freedom, security and self-determination, which urgently need to be confronted and discussed. Furthermore, the discourse around new digital media makes it very clear once more, that design cannot be reduced to one-dimensional, problem solving approaches, a set of standardised methods or even the design of objects.

The conference „Design Criticism“ would like to raise the question as to what extent design journalism and criticism serve to reflect and convey this altered, extended, even ambivalent understanding of design. Above all, the actual crisis of media and of their political and cultural institutions, may serve as a starting point for the conference. Moreover, it may be useful to ask if critical journalism is losing territory in general, as it is sandwiched between private business interests and the heterogeneity of the New Media (Social Media, Blogs, and digital magazines). Finally, the observation that contemporary critical design devises potential new fields of action, in order to raise its bearing on social, economic or political processes, appears to be particularly intriguing in that context. Confronting the state of affairs, what kind of design criticism may have any sense at all? Does design criticism nowadays need to be based on new theoretical, strategic or methodological principals? Can design criticism, in the context of contemporary media landscape, claim independence or does it need to operate all the more biased and specific?

The conference is organised by the Gesellschaft für Designgeschichte (GfDg – German Design History Society) in cooperation with the University of Art and Design Offenbach (HfG Offenbach), at the occasion of the foundation of the new Master programmes “Design Criticism” and “Curating Design” at the HfG Offenbach. The conference will discuss promising stances of a new design criticism as well as the historical relationship between design, media and society. Tensions between the extended field of design and the complex media landscape, especially in view of the present economic and political changes, will serve as a critical framework for the presentations.

The GfDg and the HfG Offenbach kindly invite you to submit a proposal for a conference paper. Theoretical papers as well as practical case studies may be accepted. Your presentation should not exceed 20 minutes and you should touch upon one of the following topics:

### 1. Methods und Strategies of Design Criticism

This section is open to contributions on historical, contemporary or speculative practices of design criticism. We hope for reality based presentations of design criticism, reflecting the methodology of research, analysis and conception of texts, blogs, visuals or videos. You may ponder on the relation between image and text, the discrepancies between reality and mediatization, and the like. Is design criticism able to convey the internal logic of design to a broader public? What were or are the theoretical foundations of design criticism, what makes design criticism professional?

### 2. Media, Authors and Institutions

The main focus of this section is on the role of the author, his networks, autonomy, and scope, but the strategic positioning of design criticism within the realm of media and market should be considered too. Who has been writing, who is writing nowadays and which interests are involved? What are the opportunities of the New Media, what are the effects of in-transparency and of copyright issues? Is there still any relevance for connoisseurship in design journalism?

### 3. Design, Criticism, Society

The leading question here pertains to the interactions between design criticism and the newly established positions in design practice. Is design in need of an intermediary? To what extent did earlier design criticism engage with society, what future scenarios and utopias did design criticism project? Did design criticism foster negotiation processes between design and society? What do we know about the historical or the contemporary public of design criticism?

### 4. Emergence and History of Design Criticism

Being a relatively young profession, design has not been accompanied by a critical reflection until the 19th century. It will be relevant to examine the interrelations between a critical discourse and the varying positions in design. A case in point would be the research into the choice of media or else, into the media that have especially been developed to promote certain positions in design, and the reflection upon the effects as to the design critical discourse.

Please send your abstract of about 350-400 words for a presentation of 20 minutes and a short biography until **January 31st, 2017** to: [info@gfdg.org](mailto:info@gfdg.org).

The contributions will be selected by a joint committee of both organisations.

The **Gesellschaft für Designgeschichte e.V.**, (GfDg – German Design History Society) was established in 2008, and pursues to intensify the engagement with the history of design and to crosslink historical research and design practice. <http://www.gfdg.org>

The **Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) Offenbach** (University of Art and Design Offenbach) is the Hessen State University of Art and Design. Since 1885 both practical arts and crafts and theoretical subjects are taught at the same time. Taking its lead from the educational and research models adopted by the Bauhaus and Hochschule für Gestaltung, the University of Design at Ulm, the teaching at HfG Offenbach is future-oriented and largely based on individual supervision and mentorship. <http://www.hfg-offenbach.de>