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# **FAIR DESIGN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DESIGN THEORY AND CRITICISM**

## **OBJECTIVE**

Beginning with 2015, the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts is planning to organise a series of conferences dedicated to the theory and criticism of design in terms of its functioning in the quickly changing social, cultural, economic and other circumstances. The conference is intended to serve as a forum for discussions which could stretch beyond the professional designer circles. Such opinion exchange, ongoing in the world for quite some time now, is an opportunity for design theoreticians and practitioners to better understand the objectives, methods and strategy of designing both today, and in the nearest future. The notion of design is ever more often perceived in terms of a “design culture”, and for that reason the discussions have come to involve a whole range of specialists from other disciplines, such as philosophy, sociology, economics, or anthropology of culture. In Poland, however, such debate is still virtually non-existent, and the opinion exchange platform is limited to publications in academic and professional press, as well as popular weeklies or dailies. These texts are rarely exposed to a differing reflection or solid criticism, hence they do not provoke any genuine intellectual exchange, nor do they help shape a complex set of opinions on the state of the design today.

In light of the above, the series of FAIR DESIGN conferences, dedicated to design theory and criticism, could trigger a debate on defining or applying research tools for the description and analysis of the changes taking place in contemporary design. We hope that such meetings could

help in the opinion exchange among theoreticians representing different disciplines and design practitioners. We would expect the theoreticians to provide us with a description of the state of contemporary society from the viewpoint of the humanities and social sciences (including those dealing with design theory), while from the practitioners we would expect to share with us their thoughts on their own experiences of designing in the unstable world of today.

We plan to invite to the conference both design professionals, as well as people representing the art world, philosophers, anthropologists, or economists. We would expect our guests to share with us their thoughts on the quickly changing relations in culture, politics, the society and – obviously – in design. The papers will be delivered in Polish and English (with simultaneous interpretation).

The FAIR DESIGN conferences would be organised every two years. We are planning to hold the first one at the end of September 2015. The planned title is Design and the Challenges of Contemporary Times: ACTIVITY (the main assumptions have been listed below).

## **FAIR DESIGN 2015**

### **DESIGN AND THE CHALLENGES OF CONTEMPORARY TIMES: ACTIVITY**

#### **Background information**

The problems that have appeared over the last two decades (at least) have exceeded the capacity of design in terms of its readiness to propose solutions, be it in the sphere of theory, or in the sphere of the practice developed in the 20th century in the different design centres.

These basic problems include:

1. the disappearance of the so called „great narratives“ – ideas from the areas of philosophy, social sciences, culture, and politics, which were consistent and could holistically encompass life, culture, and human behaviour, and which could be relied on and play the function of reference points;
2. the crisis of moral values resulting from the above (relativism, permissivism), and a perception of the world and the creation of one’s own identity not on the basis of ethics, but aesthetics (the cult of celebrities);
3. the accelerated technological development, which has reduced to an insufficient minimum the time needed to “tame” its effects,
4. the transformation from the “industrial era” to “era of information technologies”, where an everbigger part of the economy is focused on data processing and generation of services,
5. the economic instability which, in the times of globalisation, means a global impact of unsustainable economy. Economy in a state of crisis is becoming the norm,

6. the multicultural society – a state in which different social groups, following different principles, values, faiths, and using different languages, live in cohabitation (the neo-tribal society). Such cohabitation, however, does not necessarily mean tolerance of the “others”. The phenomenon also includes the disappearance of old territorial (political) borders,
7. secularisation, which takes place in parallel to the formation of new sects and emergence of religious conflicts, contributing to the destabilisation of the international situation.

Design has been subject, to a bigger or smaller extent, to all of the above phenomena. Designers are not only there to solve aesthetical problems, but also deal with the social, economic, political, and cultural ones. Many of the attitudes and strategies that have been postulated, such as designing with the long period of endurance of the product in mind, designing for sustainable development, design for all, ergonomics based on the physical human abilities, “regional” design, etc., stand in contradiction to post-modernism, or need to be redefined. If designing is to be seen (also) as a “social mission”, at least ever since the times of William Morris, and if it wants to preserve this characteristic, then a choice must be made of whether it should strive to change the present model of the post-modern society or, instead, adapt to it in terms of its strategies.

## **CONFERENCE PROGRAMME**

The aim of the FAIR DESIGN conferences is to present views and discussions in connection with the subjects mentioned above. We would like to dedicate the first conference in the series to the issue of the different forms of ACTIVITY observed in contemporary society, as the activity is a formative factor of our awareness to a degree much bigger than in the past. The traditional methods of learning about the world, which historically involved a passive absorption of knowledge generated and processed by others (education, literature, the press, television, etc.), are increasingly more frequently supplemented (or even replaced) by active/interactive forms. The situation is true both in case of the real world (work, active recreation, travelling, interpersonal relations), as well as the virtual one, though, in any way, both spheres are mutually permeable. Furthermore, the scope of experience has expanded so that it now encompasses the whole world, and the speed with which one acquires and verifies information is incomparably faster these days. New social groups are constituted (such as the so-called creative class, as it has been termed by Richard Florida), there are new family or partnership models and different pace of life patterns (hyperactivity vs. slow life). Internet activity also comes in different forms (social media portals, blogging, information processing, music making, but also aggression, such as cyberbullying, particularly among the young). In the sphere of consumption, the activity modes are also changing (services, information, software).

These new forms either overlap or intertwine with the traditional ones, particularly that, as never before, they are carried out – together or next to each other – by representatives of different

generations, from small children to people 80 years of age and older. The relatively uniform model of life, which was popular just a few decades ago and which was built on the professional activity of people from 20 to 60 years of age representing two or three generations of a single family, and which was based on direct interpersonal relations and contacts as well as shared (at least declaratively) values and a specific cultural area, has been replaced by a mosaic of attitudes, stances, types of activity, means of achieving objectives, etc. The situation is inevitably leading to cultural, religious, social and political conflicts. Throughout most of the 20th century, there have been design tools developed, adequate to the problems related to this traditional model. Design should now aim at redefining its methods and the tasks standing before it. We believe that this conference will be the right forum to discuss the above matters.

The planned duration of the conference is two days. It will be composed of six sessions. The first, theoretical one, is to focus on describing the status quo of the contemporary society from the point of view of the humanities and social sciences, as well as design theory. The subsequent sessions will be devoted to the presentation of the practical design solutions in connection to the following subjects: activity at work, activity on-line, nomadism, activity of senior citizens at the age of 80+. The presentations will be accompanied by theoretical introductions to the different problems, as well as summaries of conclusions. The Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts will also publish all the conference materials after the event.

### **Organizer**

Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

Faculty of Design

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