
Design History in Practice: Theory, Method, and Materials

PhD Workshop | DHS Day Symposium
9-10 June 2015 University of Oslo, Norway



Rationale

Within the humanities and social sciences there is an increasing variety of scholarly approaches to design as an object of historical and cultural study. The last decade has seen the establishment of a number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, research schools, and associations connecting specialists and enthusiasts within and without the academic world. This growing and heterogeneous area displays commitments and affiliations to a plurality of—occasionally incompatible—theories, methods, literatures, and research traditions. The question of the empirical material adds another level of complexity to this meshwork. If we advance from the premise that the materials we collect and produce are not only determined by the theoretical frameworks we use, but also impinge upon those very frameworks, then our choices and convictions have radical implications on our research results.

At the same time, like any other field of academic enquiry, what is accepted as 'valid' research is constantly kept in check by conventionally acknowledged gatekeepers, such as grant providers, conferences, journals, publishers, or museums. Subscribing to a certain tradition or another can hold the key to reaching a wider audience or not. Despite the centrality and universality of these issues, an explicit and articulated debate on the relationships between theory, method, and empirical materials in the fields of design history and design cultures is still in its infancy. As support for academic research across the board becomes increasingly contingent on 'social relevance' and the ability to 'prove' the validity of research outcomes, it becomes imperative for design scholars—especially those in the beginning phases of their career—to articulate clear positions on the relationship between theory and practice.

Format

The PhD workshop on Design History in Practice: Theory, Method, and Materials is intended as a forum for PhD candidates to discuss how they negotiate the (at times conflicting) relationships between theoretical and empirical research in their historical and/or cultural analyses of design.

Potential themes to be elaborated by papers include but are not limited to:

- Establishing a relationship between design and its "contexts:" implications and perspectives;
- Doing and presenting research: theme-based vs. chronological approaches;
- Empirical and theoretical research: one or two-way traffic;
- Argument, interpretation, criticism, fact and proof: differences and convergences;
- Power and limits of categories: the case of the Anthropocene as emerging common ground for design history, STS, and the environmental humanities;
- Research ethics: the role of activism and social commitment;
- Curatorial practices between research and dissemination.

The conveners welcome contributions from PhD candidates working in design history, design cultures, and allied fields of inquiry. Presenters are invited to elaborate on how they approach one or more of the above-mentioned themes in relation to the subject of their doctorate. As such, the focus of the paper should be on the open questions raised by one's approach to the research material rather than on the research topic itself. Ultimately, the aim of the event is not to 'solve' the discontinuities between the different facets of research, or to arrive to a set of prescriptions on the 'right' approach. Rather, through the case studies presented by participants, it seeks to develop a common ground and vocabulary for discussing the effects of different articulations of theory and practice on research outcomes.

Respondents

The symposium is convened by Joana Meroz (VU University Amsterdam) and Gabriele Oropallo (University of Oslo). The event shall see the participation of three invited lecturers giving keynote papers and providing specialist feedback on the participants' papers:

Kjetil Fallan, Professor of Design History, University of Oslo, Norway;

Timo de Rijk, Professor of Design, Culture and Society, Delft University of Technology, and Leiden University, The Netherlands;

Alexandra Midal, Professor of Design, Geneva University of Art and Design, Switzerland.

ECTS Points

The event is officially approved as part of the official PhD training programme at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas of the University of Oslo. Active participation shall be awarded with 2 ECTS points granted by the University of Oslo, pending final approval of the participants' home institutions. Active participation consists in presentation of a 2500-word paper, and peer commenting on another paper. Attendance without presenting is possible, but in that case no ECTS points shall be awarded.

Application

Proposals for 20-minute papers must be submitted by 10 May 2015 as detailed below. Please email the documents as .doc, .pages. or .pdf to: DHSday2015@gmail.com.

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Author(s) full name(s);

Institution, address for correspondence, telephone and e-mail;

Title of the paper;

Five keywords.

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300-word abstract of the paper;

Prospective participants wishing to attend without presenting a paper should include a 300-word motivation statement in lieu of the abstract. For any questions, please direct email enquiries to DHSday2015@gmail.com.

Institutional Sponsors

The event is free to all participants thanks to the support provided by the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas (IFIKK) of the University of Oslo, and by the Design History Society (DHS). It is part of the IFIKK doctoral educational programme, and of the 2015 DHS Day Seminars programme.