

# TIME – AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR TO RE-DESIGN LECTURES OF ‘GESTALT-THEORY’ - SDG 4 IN EUROPE AND RE-WRITING ART AND DESIGN HISTORY

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## ABSTRACT

European research resilience depends on the element of ‘time’ in contextualisation and interpretations of design historian phenomena. The key factors of co-habitation and co-designing outlined in this research study show the factor ‘time’ to be one core element in permanently updating didactic approaches. Within the scientific circle of design historians and design theorists, as well as other teachers in the field of ‘Gestalt-Theory’, like art and design history, we have to consider the element of ‘time’ as a significant and highly influential factor, which has enormous consequences for the ‘quality of education’ –with reference to SDG No. 4 (by UN). We as teachers and researchers in one person, need more time to integrate new research findings into our lectures. We must not ignore that the daily routine of a teacher and researcher does not leave enough time to evaluate the innovative, new research findings of design historians, art historians and archaeologists of the last decade to re-design the scripts and media for teaching. To exemplify the generally accepted stance that generalizing theories always depend on the current state of research, this paper uses as an example the different interpretations of images in Augustan time. Depending on the scholar’s time-bound approach the world of ancient icons and images has received astoundingly different interpretations over the years. Consequently, design theory and art theory have to refer to and also reflect the current findings of affiliated disciplines if we want to do our jobs properly.

*Keywords: European research resilience, demanding time to re-design Gestalt-theory, design and art history in context, sustainable education through cross-disciplinary research*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

As interdisciplinarity working researchers in creative and anthropologically relevant disciplines, and as teachers in those fields we are also responsible for a sustainable future [1]. This can be achieved through interdisciplinary teams around the globe, which work together with sufficient financial support. Having enough time is fundamental for a profound discussion of research findings, and for a profound evaluation which leaves sufficient space for creativity and for finding new sustainable solutions: The cultural and economic significance, so to say the resilient profit, by learning from *a permanently evaluated* history, and by transferring the benefit for future generations of experts, will be introduced in chapter one and retaken again in chapter three. Re-writing scripts and re-designing lectures and adapting teaching methods to new research findings in art history, archaeology and design history are relevant for the SDG No 4 [2] and this has enormous consequences for the competences of future experts and the structure of future societies – it is not only about forming elites [3].

Case studies in art history concerning Roman time will be analysed to show the antique circle of sculptures and media and how through them power was established, spread, and maintained. This will be outlined in chapter two. Case studies are integrated in the subjects of representative sculptures and of historical (dress) codes, represented by different media and product languages, ‘media languages’ – to find new interpretations and new contextualization within a historical approach. Comparing the ‘reading’ different media, from different perspectives will have beneficial effects on lectures in Gestalt theory. The case study of ‘New images of Augustus – Power and media in Ancient Rome’ [4], that was

showcased by an exhibition in 2022, and the new findings concerning media and materials in ancient time, reveal consequences in contextualisation, namely new interpretation in design and art theory. If we do not invest in permanently evaluating and redesigning lecture media (scripts) for our courses, in design history, textile-design history and art history, we do not do our jobs properly.

Chapter three elaborates the pedagogical and didactic profit for re-writing lectures of art history, design history and 'gestalt theory'. Supporting in that way SDG No 4 – Education and Quality – it will supply the young generation with confidence [5], in times of uncertainty. At the same time, the body involvement focusses on a new scientific aspect in art history, when art historians like Andreas Beyer stress the corporal, body-active influence in the oeuvre, by the artists themselves [6] for de-coding and interpretation of art objects. In a summarized assessment of research findings, the key factors of co-habitation and co-designing are outlined – **time** being one core element in permanently updating didactic and scientific approaches.

## **2 FROM IMAGES IN HISTORY (CONTEXTUALIZATION) TO LANGUAGES OF MEDIA – TIME IN CONTEXT TO ART AND (FASHION) DESIGN HISTORY**

### **2.1 Pictures, views and 'possibility spaces' – and the power of images in history**

When it comes to cultural imprints during childhood and when we face, the 'Zeitenwende', pictures, views and 'view axes' are essential not only for physical experiences, but for the 'looking back - creating forward process' in design. For creating and ideating art and design, didactic perspectives for a resilient future, the SDG No 4 – 'Education and Quality' by the UN is one of the core SDG for academic, industrial, and economic approaches. The permanent review of teaching methods and of scripts, and the adequate contextualization of knowledge has to be seen as an essential support for the building of a resilient future i.e., for global co-habitation. Thus, the sociologist Richard Sennett argues that it is about restoration of techniques and rituals to ideate new ones [7].

For human beings, for generations with different cultural views, and experiences of global co-habitation possibilities, continuously adapted learning methods will be beneficial for cultural integration and will have a geopolitical effect [8]. Today the gen Z uses digital media in many different ways. This was different in the 1990s, when mainly printed books were used and sometimes hand-written scripts and photocopies were handed out by the teacher who had collected the relevant research findings. Teaching material, whatever it may be, not only conveys knowledge, but it also creates 'possibility spaces' [9], - an essential element for the creative design process. Unfortunately, even today a number of scholars does not want to adopt an interdisciplinary view to teach art and design history. But some field studies and new archaeological research findings in the fields of Roman history, for examples, fortunately tell us a different story: there are in fact interdisciplinarity working European research teams with new approaches to the power and usage of communication media – i.e., via sculptures, coins and other essential iconological media to express a 'Zeitenwende' during the lifetime of Augustus and Livia. One example with noticeable consequences for cultural imprint and long-lasting European aesthetic evaluation, is the colouring of sculptures in ancient times. In the twentieth century schoolbooks for example used to teach that white marble sculptures, manifested the ideal of those times, an idea which had been strongly favoured by Johann Joachim Winckelmann [10].

Recent research findings, however, revealed a different view, a different 'Bildwerk' (Engl: pictorial work): the application of five or six natural colours with the strong symbolic meaning of red and blue and yellow. 'The colourfulness contributed in an enormous way to the decoding and made details visible. In that way, colour did not only get an aesthetic value, but contributed as well to the semantic content of the sculpture' [11].

#### **2.1.1 Emperor Augustus - a case study**

Emperor Augustus marks a turning point in Roman history: the transition from the Republic to the Principate. As the first emperor (27 B.C. to A.D. 14), he not only wields immense power, but also makes use of new communication strategies. They encounter a society in which a new 'desire for the image' becomes a widespread phenomenon. A central aspect of ancient pictorial culture is the image boom that broke out under the first Roman emperor Augustus. Honorary statues, state reliefs and coins with the image of the emperor are present in a density unimaginable until then. In addition to the public-political

image culture, other themes, especially from the world of Bacchus or Venus, appear in the private context. Numerous supposedly specific Augustan pictorial themes, such as the classicist images of the Campana reliefs or the so-called Third Style of Roman mural painting, appear through re-dating as pre-Augustan inventions, which are merely taken up in Augustan times and therefore lose their specific political significance. The archaeological research on Augustus during the last decades has been summarized in three major, very different syntheses. In her book on 'Augustus. Kunst und Leben in Rom um die Zeitenwende' [12] by the year 1986, Erika Simon unfolds a rich scenery of art and culture. From this intellectual-historical perspective the emperor and the new state order appear primarily as a framework condition of the rich cultural development; the interactions between politics and culture are seen thematically rather than functionally. Decidedly political, on the other hand, is the approach of Paul Zanker [13], which derives its analytical power from the experiences of the 1968 movement and from there examines and questions the significance of public representation in architectural and pictorial works for the construction of political power. Here the power of images is seen in an emphatically functional sense, recognized as a political-visual manifestation and viewed in the power play between ruler and society. In the pictorial themes as in the artistic stylistic forms, a mental habitus is diagnosed that was perhaps more effective than the political institutions or the activities and fates of the political protagonists. Here a diametric contrast to the grim analysis of Ronald Syme is to be seen ultimately an opposition between looking at the individuals and social groups with their actions and destinies on the one hand, and at the ideological, mental, and emotional tendencies and conditions on the other.

This new view was presented in the Berlin exhibition Emperor Augustus and the Lost Republic in 1988 [14]. How short this actually political phase of research was, however, becomes clear in Karl Galinsky's book [15], where certainly rightly the idea of a centrally controlled propaganda in literature and pictorial works as it had, however, only been represented by thoughtless epigones was objected to. A very broad cultural pluralism is sketched out, in which continuity and change of literary and pictorial forms, adaptation and experimentation appear to be combined in a harmonious postmodern painting.

The autocratic rule of Augustus and the accompanying transition from the republic to the imperial era represent a drastic break in Roman history. In the process, images played an unexpected role. A new desire for the image led to a new approach to media and changed the style in the various genres such as wall painting, sculpture, architecture or everyday objects. New clients were part of this upsurge – not only elites but society at large could participate in both commissioning and appreciating works of art – which ensured an unprecedented wealth of images in all places. A veritable copyist industry made large-scale use of newly developed marble quarries.

The exhibition New Images in the Age of Augustus. Power and Media in Ancient Rome, presented by the Bucerius Kunst Forum Hamburg (8.10.2022 - 15.1.2023), the first Augustus exhibition in Germany in 34 years presented the images and monuments of this period with 220 objects, including statues, portrait busts, reliefs, wall paintings, coins and ceramics. The exhibition illustrated the new approach to imagery during the Augustan Age in five chapters: Portraits of the Emperor and Empress; New narratives and memorable images; The new cityscape; New and old cult representations and Domestic imagery between tradition and innovation. In the first section of the show, pictorial innovations were displayed in the way in which the Emperor chose to portray his own likeness. Through likenesses in the form of portrait heads, busts, statues and coins, which circulated as never before throughout Rome and the provinces, the imperial house was able to communicate with the people via a variety of media. Augustus couched his self-portrayals in new narratives and memorable images representing the history of the city of Rome, the divine origins of his own family, his various successes and the generally triumphant tenor of his reign. These pictorial motifs were displayed on prominent new buildings, for example, and attracted attention throughout the empire. Augustus publicised important buildings and construction projects across the empire by reproducing them on coins. The new devotion to imagery in the early imperial period was particularly evident in the private sphere. Homes were adorned inside with murals and picture galleries in the third, or ornate, style, while affluent citizens decorated their gardens with sculptures as well as marble and bronze tripods and candelabras. Tableware was now also discovered as a new pictorial medium.

## **2.2 Livia's and Augustus's dress codes in the context of time – European research resilience for art and (fashion) design history**

The cultural spirit of a nation is shown by its cultural behaviour, following traditional and historically significant and long-lasting rituals in repeating and remembering fundamental guidelines, the DNA of

culture is transferred to the next generation. It is our cultural code, identity and knowledge archive [16] that is represented within historical objects and by people and their dress codes, and that has always to be interpreted as embedded in its very own period of TIME. When we regard Augustus as a turning point in Roman history: the transition from the Republic to the Principate, we should also consider the significance and influence of certain media, used at that time, to spread the (political) influence of Livia – Augustus’ wife and her ideas of dress codes for example. To teach textile and fashion history means conveying a notion of a certain cultural identity via semantic meanings and interpretations of designed objects and dress codes. In fashion theory, we speak of ‘vestimentary codes’ [17], a term coined by Roland Barthes in the middle of the twentieth century. This expression has also lately been used by art historian Andreas Beyer in the year 2022, to underline the ‘possibility space’ which allows artists to express and expose their identity with insignia of the time, for example those by Albrecht Dürer in the year 1498. Beyer speaks of a ‘vestimentary shell’ [18] that is very precisely demonstrated - by textiles and other details in the product language Albrecht Dürer used for self-exposing - with a great sociological significance - contextualization.

A closer look at ancient sculptures, in order to understand their historical, philosophical, and sociological *background*, shows what gestalt-theory (courses) aims at: With a student group in Textile Design, we analysed the product languages, and de-coded the form and design of the garment, shown on marble sculptures, for example the dress worn by Livia, the wife of Augustus, shown at the Hamburg exhibition in 2022. Elements like proportion, form, cut of the pleated rectangle piece of fibres, the drapery, the colour and surface are important and are to be put into the context of time: on the one hand in relation to ancient times, and their very own social and political background, and on the other hand, to draw valuable information from the literature of different periods. It makes great difference, whether we study the books about fashion history from the past, for example 1889 [19], or whether we use latest scientific research findings, as e. g. published in 2022 in the anthology that accompanied the exhibition mentioned above [20]. From the latest studies by art historians, archaeologists and other experts, we can learn that in the times of Augustan reign not only colour had a greater impact on the semantic meaning, than we had known before. Only some years ago these students had been taught different things - based on the literature of the 1990s. Also new terms, like ‘hip coat’ for example, would be coined to demonstrate the power of the Emperor in the 2022 exhibition, an accepted scholarly view in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. That means, elements of product languages (colour) and elements of language terms (hip coat) with consequences for semantic meaning, provide us with a new view of those historical objects. Empress Livia, for example, after the death of Augustus, was allowed to drape her robe like the vesture of a priest: A defined drapery and body setting, which was understood by all citizens, but which was defined by Augustus and Livia. The Empress was the first woman in Rome to pioneer a certain style of how to represent a house. Augustus and his wife defined an image of the culture at that time with different media, in a serial production of sculptures, coins and other precious objects. By the way, Livia as a woman with power and influence is an interesting object of study, too, in case of the SDG No 5 – Gender and Equality, in the state of art of discussions about themes of sustainability.

### 2.3 Courage in re-writing art and design history

In all academic disciplines it is to us teachers, to register these new research findings and to integrate them into the courses and into our scripts of history. Touching the field of design, art history, anthropological views and archaeological knowledge are essential to create the future – by knowing history – as well design history, textile design and fashion design history in contexts. The disciplines design and design history stand in relationship to art history and anthropology that were formed (gestaltet) by archaeological phenomena. Fashion codes, or textile codes imprinted on coins – all of them are **media and means** by which Augustus communicated and conveyed **ideas**. All of them then were and still are used to produce ‘meaning’, significance and political dimension, as was shown in chapters 2.1 and 2.2. Barthes writes ‘Thus the general value of all conversions of signs into reason can be understood well beyond the fashion system itself.’ [21], beyond the medial system as a whole, could be argued today. Merit to ‘new images of Augustus’, to act with new, different media – icons in special – and materials in time, show consequences in a new interpretation and contextualization in design and art history – and Gestalt theory, that demands for re-writing art and design history, and the scripts in follow. It is obvious that we have to call for more time for interdisciplinary discussions and cross-cultural co-designing and researching in Europe; and to encourage teachers, not only to take their time

but to show courage and see the need for re-designing their lectures, and to re-write their scripts in interdisciplinary art and design history.

### **3 DEMAND YOUR TIME AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO RE-DESIGN GESTALT-THEORY – FOR THE PURPOSE OF SDG NO. 4**

#### **3.1 Educational demands for re-writing design and art history - and scripts**

##### **The meaning of education as the most important key for sustainable co-habitation**

Do we need new teachers, new teaching material to reach the Sustainable Development Goals in Europe and around the world? Or do we simply and only need time and ‘possibility spaces’ to educate the future art and design / historian experts? To formulate key factors of co-habitation and co-designing with the help of re-designing the courses and scripts (media) of Gestalt-theory, time is one core element in updating art and design didactical approaches permanently. This paper names a phenomenon, which is only rarely discussed, although teachers everywhere complain about not having enough time for re-writing and updating their courses, and their scripts. The following list contains some claims which are self-evident issues in the pursuit of the SDG targets:

- Encouragement to call for extra time, not only for research studies but for re-writing gestalt-theory courses (from scripts to multidisciplinary conveying media)
- Co-research with all partners or stakeholders means co-habitation in integration.
- Knowledge contributed by other cultures helps to build knowledge-pools with holistic views.
- Re-valuation of analogue tactile techniques (to save craft knowledge) and education with new learning techniques.
- Respecting and communicating meanings, mediated by (art and design) historical objects, trains the competence of reflection of future problem solvers.
- Living research communities mean connected cross-disciplinary research to serve the SDGs and in consequence to secure our sustainable operational abilities.

When we argued in chapter 2.1., that ‘the didactically arranged learning media not only convey knowledge, but also create ‘possibility spaces’, we have to consider the impact of art and design history courses as such: they train creative competences and the ability to think and reflect. The ‘recipient’ can only use media to gain knowledge as a ‘complex problem solver’ if: ‘One complex combines a variation of identifications, pictures, within all each influencing imagines, and offers in that way a script, that instructs the individual [...] to play.’ (Pazzini) [22]. As our case studies showed, it needs sufficient time to re-design the teaching material as elements of a permanently evaluated curriculum.

#### **3.2 Education – our greatest investment, asset and profit**

European research resilience depends on the element of time in the contextualization and interpretation of historical phenomena. The element of ‘time’ as a significant factor, with consequences for the ‘quality of education’ – in relation to SDG No. 4 (by UN) is obvious. The call for more time to re-write scripts adapt them to new research findings, stands in close relationship to a lack of financial support. In an interdisciplinary and broader contextualization which reviews ‘old’ and ‘new’ expert literature, research in relation to physical experiences within field studies – in this case in Rome – today matter again as pedagogical and design didactical benefit for the students, pupils and experts. The integration and participation of students into new research findings early on, and their experiences with 3-dimensional objects, will have a great impact on knowledge building. In a phase of growing digitisation and after a period without physical contact - because of the Covid-19 pandemic, body involving aspects are essential for our future experts. They will develop necessary and complex competences, which we desperately need for a European learning, research resilience and for the economy as well.

This paper is addressed to and would like to encourage teachers, researchers and talented students to claim more time and money for international interdisciplinary research exchange. Needless to say, the results will have multiple effects. Additionally, this paper is addressed to academic institutions: to integrate people and experts of the future in interdisciplinary Gestalt-theoretical courses, that will as well be beneficial for the pre-courses at school – this is resilient. The key factors of co-habitation and co-designing are outlined – **time** being one core element in permanently updating didactic approaches. This paper talks about a phenomenon which is only rarely discussed, though teachers everywhere complain about not having enough time for re-writing their courses, and their scripts. This is closely

related to not receiving sufficient financial support. And this will have an essential impact on SDG No. 4 - Quality and Education and will also have a great impact on many disciplines close to cultural education, like integration. Integration in challenging times with enormous geopolitical problems is an important issue and approach supporting SDG 4. Integration of people requires cultural education and cultural understanding of products, design codes and languages – that means ‘contextualization’ and educating future problem solvers whether as design historians or design theorists, art historians or scientists of fine arts or archaeology. The axes of views are important, and this brings us back to the beginning of this paper: Our cultural imprints and interdisciplinary learning, the employment of multi-sensual media of communication, they all invest into the future, by improving education.

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