Statement on the deselection of the Rektor of HfG Karlsruhe
James Langdon

I have been a professor in the HfG since 2017. I have practiced and taught design internationally for the past decade. I teach at the HfG because I actually love this place. This is the school whose staff and students have collectively produced the most inspiring context that I have encountered in which to work as a design educator.

Taking part in these proceedings gives me no pleasure, but the first version of this hearing only convinced me of the rightness of this action. Confronted with serious and substantial criticism of his leadership, the Rektor used this platform to respond in platitudes: we heard again of a 'digital Bauhaus' and a 'twenty-first century Black Mountain College', but regarding the details of our criticisms, there was nothing. The message was clear: the Rektor positions himself beyond criticism.

Being a Rektor is difficult, and it is most certainly not the Rektor's job to be liked or to be popular. I voted for the Rektor's appointment in 2019, and in 2020 and 2021 I took a role in the development of the SEP and the still unresolved appointment commission to bring four new professors to the HfG. In my view the Rektor's broad vision for the school is completely mainstream, and it is not the reason why I participate in this Abwahl.

There are many ways to perform a leadership role in the context of an art and design school. I am sure that everyone hopes for it to be done by inspiration and imagination. But it can also be done effectively by someone skilled in diplomacy or, yes, by someone prepared to make tough decisions, to communicate them clearly, and to manage the consequences. All of these approaches require institutional craft. The daily work of leadership consists more of creating consensus and handling dissenting voices than it does of formulating vision statements.

The reason I participate in this Abwahl is that I believe the Rektor has made his position in this school untenable by lacking, or refusing to practice, the institutional craft necessary to successfully lead it. It is my view that the Rektor has actively worked in bad faith to undermine the basic consensus-building and decision-making instruments of the school and has consequently lost the trust of the majority.

Let me briefly define what I mean by those two terms:

To undermine, in this context, means to not disclose relevant information to an administrative group, or not to admit contentious topics onto their agendas.

Bad faith, in this context, means to say one thing while doing another.

This group makes serious criticisms of the Rektor, which have been expressed publicly for over a year. To my knowledge, the Rektor has made no serious attempt to address them to this group or to the university public. We have received letters prepared by lawyers which tell us that the formatting of our criticisms is not valid, we now have a repeat of this tragic spectacle here today, but we don't have a simple, sincere response which I assume someone with a genuine interest in the health of this community would have had the good sense to make long ago.