

Student number: 2300454

Course title: BA Product and Furniture Design

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Tasks in the order I received them:

Task one – Declarative writing = Word count: 606

Task two – Observational writing = Word count: 1,308

Task three – Practise based writing = Word count: 768

Task one – Declarative Writing

Manifesto - A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss

Principles

- The world can be so much better, and its change begins with us.
- Destroy everything you thought you knew and destroy everything afterwards, do not be bound to what you deem fact.
- Accessibility for all.
- Question everything and see it for what it is and all its possibilities.
- Design and who we are, exist in conjunction with one another.
- Forever in transit.
- Be a fluid anchor. We are driven by more we would like to admit, balance is important.
- To be realistic is to be absurd.

1. Accessibility for All.



fig. 1 (untitled, Kruger, 1997)

When I say accessibility, I mean for design to be accessible to everyone, to be experienced by everyone without limitation regardless of monetary status or disability. I believe that we need to expand design beyond the visual realm, into touch, smell and sound to create an inclusive common ground of shared experience “sensory design supports everyone's opportunity to receive information, explore the world, and experience joy, wonder, and social connections regardless of our sensory abilities” (Lupton & Lipps, 2018, p9) When we consider other ways of triggering the senses we can improve common experiences and bridge the social divides of ability, welcoming deeper and more fulfilling relationships with each other to help nourish our communities. We can also draw upon Marxist theory for how designers during the 1960’s-70’s translated this theory into practice, they sought to destroy the class separatism in art and design to make it accessible for anyone to experience and create which is what we want for the progression of art and design in the twenty-first century. “...in a bourgeois society, formational and organizational activities remained the prerogative of a small caste of art specialists, the proletarian society made methods of artistic organization accessible to everyone.” (Laanemets, 2017, p 5). When we consider the Marxist framework of organisation and apply it to the arts, I believe if this framework is maintained and continually improved that artistic possibility would increase exponentially and bring upon new interpretations of the world around us previously unexplored.

2. Design and Who we are, exist in conjunction with one another.



fig 2. (Cut with a Kitchen Knife Through the Last Cultural Beer Belly Epoch of Weimar Germany, Hannah Hoch, 1920)

We do not need to be in harmony with nature to be ourselves, nor is the authentic self something to be gained externally. “Nature held me close and seemed to find no fault with me.” (Feinberg, 1993, p.12). It is the opposite, harmony with ourselves is harmony with nature, we are already ourselves and that is nature, even the performance of becoming. We can use this to nourish our inner worlds and psychic realities and as a consequence change reality by doing, thinking, feeling, and interacting as our authentic selves forged by change. When we consider this manifestation of interpersonal self in the material reality, we explore the possibilities within ourselves and objects, transforming them into tangible things, “The transition from the object-function to the object-thought... In this perspective, the object transforms from an exclusive commodity with normal function into a thing full of meaning and expressive possibility. Such objects are connected to the individual and the intellectual relationship they establish” (Scarpitti, 2024, p.165). In our design we must encourage connection, to leave a part of ourselves in our products and for people to interact with our products and taking something away from it, however big or small.

3. To be realistic is to be absurd.



fig. 3(Catharsis, Davies, 2023)

We are in a reality that is unpredictable, seemingly imaginary and impossible things happen all the time which breaks the linear ways of thinking and disrupts the majority's routine. We all wish we retained our sense of childlike wonder, so why not? Be governed by imagination and become the exception, we will be the ones that most closely reflect the world. Absurd to others, but we are the ones most true-to-reality. Sometimes we will not know who we are or what we stand for but there is strength in knowing what you will not represent, knowing what you will not represent can also provide knowledge of who you are not. It is enough to do what you want to do. "I rebel- therefore we exist" (Camus, 1951, p.73). There is also strength and a human value in being contradictory, it is great to rebel, but it is no good to die with a balled-up fist. And who cares? We all define our realities.

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Fig. 1. Kruger, B. (1997) *Untitled* [Silkscreen print]

<https://i.pinimg.com/originals/1e/63/72/1e63720125bbbb77fdd55a882629f94b.jpg>

Fig. 2. Hoch, H. (1920) *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Through the Last Cultural Beer Belly Epoch of Weimar Germany* [photomontage]

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Fig. 3. Davies, F. (2023) *Catharsis* [photomontage]

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Task two – Observational Writing

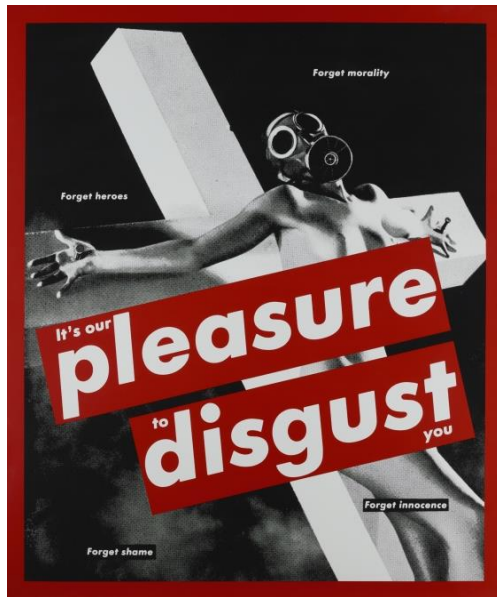


Fig. 1 (untitled, Kruger, 1989)

Structuralism, within semiotics, is the school of thought that analyses the relationship between signs and grammar that gives birth to meaning in communication, with the Saussurean model defining it as a system that is self-regulating and self-contained, “The signifier and the signified exist in a symbiotic or bidirectional relation within a relational sign system” (Chandler, 2022, pg.22) However, Poststructuralism emerges in the 1960’s as a process of deconstruction of structuralist assumptions that language is predictable within its structure, arguing that it is the outcome of intertextuality, with no fixed meaning. These schools of thought can help us understand and analyse signs and their meaning, the study of which is called semiotics. Semiotics is our combined understanding of language and our ability to read signs and differentiate from signifiers and the signified. “We dwell in a symbolic world of human meanings; our -everyday reality is a web of signs. As we will see, communication, culture, -community, and cognition depend upon them.” (Chandler, 2022, pg.16) We will be exploring these ideas through expanding this artwork into its denotative (literal) and connotative (subjective) meanings.

This is an untitled piece by Barbara Kruger, 1989. This image has a limited of colour palette as the images themselves are monochromatic but the border and the words “It’s our pleasure to disgust you” are in red with writing in the bold white Futura 1 oblique typeface. We also see more slogans backed in black which read “Forget morality,” “Forget Heroes,” “Forget innocence” and “Forget shame.” In this image we see a nude woman with her hands and feet nailed to a crucifix, the woman also wears a gas mask, completely obscuring her face and eyes. This artwork gains your attention due to its limited use of colour with the red offering a bold contrast to the, muted in comparison, colours of the

subject matter that is behind the big red writing. The contradicting word pairing “pleasure” and “disgust” in a bigger size than the rest of the writing also grab the viewer’s attention and piques their interest and brings their attention to the wider message of the artwork. Kruger is known for being inspired by Roland Barthes’ “rhetoric of the image”, to highlight the embedded stereotypes in western society through the signs and connotations of the physical form. “... exposes, opposes, deposes stereotypes and clichés’, showing the violence of immobilising a pose, a gesture, the body” (De Oliveria, 2009-11, p.4) This artwork also can bring multiple audiences together as the arbitrary signs can be interpreted differently by different social groups, for example, men and women. There is a polysemic message in the text and work but depending on the individuals cultural and social upbringing, the reaction it evokes can differ hugely, this is due to Kruger’s ability to encode a piece of work with polysemic signs that can be contradictory in the decoding, allowing for varied meanings and interpretations.

Kruger positions the woman in such a way that she is being crucified, akin to the symbolic and iconic sign of the suffering and pain or sacrifice of Jesus Christ, a global religious figure, who was crucified for his good deeds, making the act, or sign, of crucifixion, a final act of redemption,”... the crucifixion is interpreted both as an act of gods greatest love... and as a lesson of love for man”(Samokhvalova, 2015, pg. 3). With this interpretation we can apply these teachings to the treatment and behaviour of women in cold war America.

In this iconic and symbolic sign, being employed by Kruger, we clearly see a power dynamic further evidenced by the angle between the viewer and the artwork, the artwork confronts the onlooker about why they are being brought into this dynamic. Due to the human sign used there can also be a struggle to differentiate between simulation and reality, creating desire for the unachievable goal of either emulating or wanting the subject, “Desire is directed both at the symbol and at unity with the symbol: thus it does not recognise the boundary between Imaginary and Symbolic. It blindly strives after the unattainable, constantly replenished because never fulfilled.” (Williamson, 1978, pg.118) This power dynamic references to the patriarchal powers in force in America, especially in 1989 with third-wave feminism slowly taking hold to come into full effect in the early 1990’s. With context included this can mean women are being punished for a structure they did not create, nor have a choice in partaking, it was by the power of men. “Those who are deemed indecent are marginalized to locations of struggle and often met with violence” (Parker, 2019, pg.1) Due to the nature of patriarchal ideology no woman can truly win yet women suffer the most which is why Kruger has put a woman in a highly visible position to be seen by an audience, to be scrutinised and humiliated by men which could also be further evidenced by the fact the woman is nude, men love a modest woman and a

nude woman, the punishment and social behaviour differs in retaliation depending on the threat to their masculinity, "...hegemony of masculinity that produces a toxic masculinity. It is the competing demand for men to act in a certain way and produce results that ultimately leads to violence against women." (Parker, 2019, pg.10), A perfect example of the social politics and punishments related to the Madonna/whore complex.

The fact the woman is nude may mean men do not even take in what the message is about, but rather just gaze upon the nude woman. Laura Mulvey popularises this concept in marrying film studies with psychoanalysis and her essays reference this phenomenon as the 'male gaze', the choice to objectify either knowingly or unknowingly, "...reflects a patriarchal language: woman is represented as 'other', as an object rather than a subject, materializing man's unconscious." (Sassatelli, 2011, pg.2) For women this can mean something else; they relate to the social pressures and ostracization that can come from trying to please men and the social punishment that comes with the failure of meeting the impossible standard and feeling like they are less than of a woman for it. "...third-wave feminism seems to have morphed into being all about choice with little examination of how chosen desires are constructed or recognition of how an aggregation of individual choices can have a negative impact on gender relations at large." (Snyder, 2008-09, pg. 15) This coupled with the gas mask can represent suffocation due to the strict roles that are expected of women, with the crucifixion and suffocation themes this can point to the repression of women under the patriarchy.

The words in black and help the viewer draw this conclusion as these are all feelings a woman is all too familiar with; however, these words can also reference the patriotism of America especially during Reagan's presidency and his attitudes towards the cold war and nuclear anxiety. This coupled with the iconic sign of the gas mask can reference the political and social anxiety and political paranoia that was present and pervasive in all aspects of American society at the time. Taken more literally it can mean the fear of getting bombed as gas masks are often given to ordinary citizens if it is a possibility of themselves getting hit by bombs, evidenced in the highly prolific world wars and the American presence in Vietnam from 1955-1975. "Johnson administration's invasion of the Dominican Republic and expanding military commitment in Vietnam as exaggerated responses to Cold War tensions, ... a potent mainstream anticommunism that proved impossible to ignore." (Brown, 2009) Due to military tensions being a topic of political discussion in mainstream culture during this period, these signs, and the connotations they bring, are also symbolic of a daunting future, which gave rise to unchecked fear and strong emotional responses at the display of such arbitrary signs and language.

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[Untitled \(It's our pleasure to disgust you\) | Denver Art Museum](#)

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Task 3 - Practise-based writing



Fig.1. Arco Lamp, Flos, 2024

The Arco Lamp is a floor lamp that was designed by two brothers, Achille and Pier Giacomo Castiglioni, in 1962. The Castiglioni brothers were trained architects and became interested in developing a complete design process after graduating in 1944. This design also ushered in a new era of the Italian Avant Garde, during the post-war boom, defining Italian design for the latter half of the twentieth century with a distinct playful intelligence. This is characterised by the arc and the marble anchor, having to be engineered to perfection, also a subtle nod to the architectural influences on the Castiglioni brothers. The lamp remains steadily in production even after 60 years, providing even more evidence that this timeless design is very much alive as a psychological image or physical symbol of influence in popular culture, "...the Arco lamp to become a shortcut to sleek, futuristic, hyper-masculine affluence on screen in recent years." (Leszkiewicz, 2018, pg.1) However, it has also been subject to criticism, "Alice Rawsthorn argued that the lamp had entered the deathly realm of cliché..." (Leszkiewicz, 2018, pg.1) due to its co-option as a symbol since it is so closely recognised as a signifier of an emotion or mood that it's only purpose is to communicate such emotion.

I have chosen interaction as my keyword, interaction means "reciprocal action or influence: ongoing interaction between the two languages" (Stevenson, 2011) According to the online etymology dictionary, the word "interaction" has its etymological roots in Latin with varying European and Celtic influences on what "action" meant, the earliest recording takes upon a French meaning of a legal action such as a case or lawsuit and later evolving into a Latin meaning of performance and a doing. The prefix "inter-" is used with words of Latin and Germanic origins to mean between, among or during. The noun first appeared in the 1830's (Oxford Dictionary). When you consider the word interaction in this context it can imply a two-way street of being, we make such things to interact with and use yet we also attach an emotional and psychic response beyond its function,

"First of all man must stop mixing himself up with things and investing them with his own image;... and invest these manoeuvres themselves with the sense of a message to others, and a message to oneself." (Baudrillard, 2020. Pg, 22)

There is a message being communicated within the design and our interaction defines the outcome of the message from what the user learnt, either consciously or unconsciously. The user will carry that message and influence other people with that same message, which results in a distinct social and visual design epoch in history and culture.

When you consider the Arco lamp within the context of my chosen keyword, interaction, the arco lamp was designed in a period where fixed lighting was falling out of favour and adaptable and moveable lighting solutions were fashionable. The new lamps and being able to decide where the light falls, and needing to touch the lamp to use it, gave users much more agency and allowed them to be more intentional about their lighting choices. This also meant that the arco lamp cemented itself as a symbol of user interaction and that is why it remains such a timeless design as users were able to control the narrative that a product could exist within. It became an object of memory within cultural consciousness, “The material objects become tools we can utilize to enhance our understanding of place-making and memory.” (Haidamous, 2020 pg.64) In our interaction of this object, it becomes a tool to help us understand our visual and physical environment and due to such an edgy, hyper-masculine and luxurious emotional connotation, it is always seen in such films like ‘The Italian Job’.

When we consider interaction within my discipline, it means I am centering the user’s experience first and foremost. I am also thinking of how they could interact with the object outside of its intended purpose, whether that is moving the thing or using it for a different function, for example, when you step on a chair or make a fort with the chairs rather than sitting in it. I want them to experience the design rather than use it, to become an object of memory, much like the arco lamp. As for the design itself, visually it is very pleasing but to move around and interact with it is very difficult as it has a solid 60kg marble block, I would potentially look at shelling the marble block out for ease of use while retaining its silhouette.

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Fig.1. Flos (2024), *Arco, a design icon*, Available at: [Arco Led Floor Lamp | Flos Official Shop](#)

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