

# ID321 DESIGN AND CULTURE†

ID321, Spring 2015-16

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Monday, 9.40-12.30, FEAS (İİBF) Building B, G106



## Course description \*

The objective of the course is to help you make sense of the cultural meaning and significance of design today.

Module 1, “Design and designers” reviews the contemporary “field” of design. We challenge existing conceptions of what design is and who designers are. Instead we underline the social and economic context in which design is practised.

Module 2, “Consumer culture”, goes into further detail of that context. In this, we focus on “consumer culture”, to which design largely serves. We review what consumption is, and how design serves it.

Module 3, “Meaning in design”, turns to designed products. Specifically, we study how products become carriers of meaning within the context of consumer culture. The approach we study is called “semiology”.

Module 4, “Users”, looks at users and use contexts closely – and gives the power back to people, if only in theory. We explore how people make products meaningful for themselves and, in turn, adapt to them.

Module 5, “Issues”, applies what we learned in the previous modules to two separate topics: sustainability and gender. Doing this, it helps you develop a critical attitude towards the various hegemonic discourses and practices diffuse in today’s design cultures.

Having completed the course, you will have improved your understanding of the social and cultural context and significance of design practice. While we use images, objects and videos in lectures, critical reading and writing are the primary skills you use and develop in this course. You will encounter a variety of texts and engage in critical writing exercises to this end.

† Course title is in the progress of being changed. You may see “Meaning in Design” as the current title in some documents.

\* Images, from left to right: Anonymous, “Make your own gas mask” pamphlet, 2012; first row, Chanel No.5 ad with Catherine Deneuve, 1970s; Damien Hirst, “For the love of God”, 2007; second row, Nalan Yirtmaç, “Lütfen arkaya doğru ilerleyiniz”, 2011; poster for the film, Quadrophenia, 1979.

# REQUIREMENTS OF THE COURSE

## Readings

Each week is assigned a number of key texts on the week's topic. You will find the readings in bound format at the library photocopy office. You are expected to read the material before lecture every week. This is not only a requirement of the course but fundamental to the in-class exercises and discussions. At times you may feel that either the language or the concepts used in the reading is difficult, but do not forget that reading is like riding a bicycle: it gets better with practice and you can never unlearn it.

## Response papers

In addition to reading and understanding academic texts, you are also expected to engage with them critically in writing. For this purpose you will be writing "response papers".

You are required to submit three response papers, 600-1000 words each. You can find the schedule and submission deadlines below at the Course Outline table. Check the "Response paper writing guide" for information on how to write and submit your response papers.

## Product analysis

In response to Module 3, "Meaning in design", you are required to submit a product analysis assignment in which you will be writing a paper on the product that is assigned to you. You are expected to make the readings and participate in the lectures of the module attentively, and use the "semiological" approach that you learn for analysing your product. Please note that even though some of your classmates may be assigned the same or a similar product, this is an individual assignment, and working together will be considered cheating. The final list of products and individual assignments will be announced in the first few weeks. Check the "Product analysis guide" for information on how to prepare your assignments.

## Designer presentations

Every week, two teams of students will be making short presentations, displaying and briefly commenting on the work of a designer, a brand, etc. The presentations take a strict 10 minutes, show a number of designs, and briefly discuss what is significant about the designs. The list of designers and the presentation can be found in the Course Outline table; teams will be decided on the first day of class. Check the "Designer presentations guide" for information on how to prepare your presentations.

## Grading

Your final grade will be determined by your response papers (10% x 3), the product analysis (10%), the designer presentation (10%), and a final exam (50%).

Note that attendance is obligatory. Students who have not attended the course for more than three weeks will not be admitted to the final exam and fail with an "N/A" grade. If you have an excuse that you think is exceptional, please contact us as soon as possible.

## Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a disciplinary offence, and will result in disciplinary sanctions in addition to outright failure. You will submit all your assignments to Turnitin, a plagiarism detection software; regardless, you are expected to show highest levels of academic honesty.

Plagiarism is using someone else's words or ideas and claiming their ownership. It often happens when a student copies words from online or offline sources; but getting other people to do one's work and collaborating in individual assignments are also considered plagiarism.

Plagiarism can happen unintentionally, when students fail to clearly distinguish in their writing their own words from those of others. Even if it is unintentional, it still counts as an offence. To avoid plagiarism, take extra care to give accurate references. Most importantly, (1) if it is someone else's ideas, start your paragraphs/sentences with phrases such as "According to Marx (1844)...", to indicate where you borrowed the idea from. And (2) put quotation marks around exact phrases and sentences that belong to others. Note that rearranging, rephrasing or translating someone else's sentences without correct referencing, is still plagiarism, and it is easily detected; so use your own ideas and words.

(For more information on plagiarism, go to <http://www.fbe.metu.edu.tr/plagiarism>.)

## Course outline

### **Week 1: Introduction (22 Feb)**

### **Week 2: Design and designers I: Definitions (29 Feb)**

What does it mean to talk about design and designed objects? We start our readings with Adrian Forty's short chapter in *Objects of Desire* where he questions the importance we give to what designers say about their designs, through the famous example of Raymond Loewy's Lucky Strike. After that, you will be reading the 50 manifestoes collected by the design magazine, *ICON*, so that we can begin to understand what it means and why it matters when someone offers a definition of what design is – and what design is not.

Adrian Forty, "Design, designers and the literature of design", in *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750*

50 design manifestoes by *ICON* magazine

### **Week 3: Design and designers II: High design (7 Mar)**

In one chapter of his textbook, *The Culture of Design*, Guy Julier uses the example of the "Juicy Salif" lemon squeezer to explain what high design is. He derives his arguments from Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of Leisure Class* (1899), which is a sociological critique of the consumption habits of upper classes. Pierre Bourdieu is another one of Julier's references, and here we include a very brief section from the Sheffield sociologist Richard Jenkins' book on Bourdieu. Jenkins and Bourdieu explain how "taste" and "aesthetic judgement" are learnt as part of the class one belongs to.

Guy Julier, "High design", in *The Culture of Design*

Thorstein Veblen, excerpt from *Theory of Leisure Class* in *The Design History Reader*

Richard Jenkins, excerpt from "Distinction" in *Bourdieu*

!! Last week to submit the first response paper !!

### **Week 4: Consumer culture I: Commodities (14 Mar)**

Designers do not only work in the world of production, made of manufacturers, brands, other designers, design exhibitions, etc. They also typically exist within and work for what we call a "consumer culture", and take part in the production of "brands" and "commodities" offered to "consumers". Our study of consumer culture begins with Karl Marx and his critique of capitalism, where we find a basic understanding of these concepts. Two chapters from Peter Osborne's helpful little book explains some of the key terms. A three-page excerpt from the prominent science-fiction writer Ursula Le Guin's novel, *The Dispossessed*, illustrates the theory. (Briefly, Shevek is a scientist from the anarchist society on the moon Anarres. He moves to Uras, the planet, to pursue his studies, but he is perplexed by the capitalist society he encounters. The excerpt is from the section where Shevek goes shopping.)

Peter Osborne, Chapters 1 and 4, in *How to Read Marx*

Ursula Le Guin, excerpt from *The Dispossessed*. Also available in Turkish: *Mülksüzler* (Metis, 1999)

## **Week 5: Consumer culture II: What is consumer culture? (21 Mar)**

Marx's writing gives us the basic knowledge regarding what consumption means and entails, but there is more to consumption than that. Celia Lury's introduction to her book, *Consumer Culture*, provides a starting point. An excerpt from Jean Baudrillard's *Consumer Society* elaborates further on Lury's definition. Pasi Falk elaborates on advertising, which is one of the defining aspects of a consumer culture.

Celia Lury, "Introduction: What is consumer culture?", in *Consumer Culture*

Jean Baudrillard, excerpt from *Consumer Society*

Pasi Falk, "The genealogy of advertising", in *The Consumption Reader*

!! Last week to submit the second response paper !!

## **Week 6: Meaning in design I: Premises and concepts (28 Mar)**

We have established that being a consumer means, among other things, using commodities to express oneself. Here we make a detour to better understand what this means. Specifically, we need to understand how the products we design can *communicate* anything at all. Theories of semiology can help us with this. The chapter on representation by Stuart Hall is a very good introduction to semiology. Alternatively you can get a copy of John Fiske's *Introduction to Communication Studies*, and read the 3rd, 4th, and 5th chapters for a detailed explanation of the concepts.

Stuart Hall, excerpt from "The work of representation", in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*

Reference book: John Fiske, Chapters 1, 3, 4 and 5, in *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd edn (in ODTÜClass; also available in Turkish as *İletişim Çalışmalarına Giriş*)

## **Week 7: Meaning in design II: Meaning of products (4 Apr)**

Having learnt the basics of semiology, it is time to apply our new understanding to designed products. This week's reading comprises excerpts from three authors. In her book, *Decoding Advertisements* (1978), Judith Williamson writes on how products are given meaning through advertising. The excerpt includes the introduction to the book, and a section called "Differentiation" where she gives examples from perfume ads. The second author, Roland Barthes, wrote on different aspects of French culture of the period in his *Mythologies* (1957), which also included products. We will be reading three of his mythologies, each describing how the dominant bourgeois culture reproduced itself through objects. Lastly, Jean Baudrillard's *System of Objects* (1968) explains how interior design works as a semiological system. We will be reading his observations on colours and natural materials.

Judith Williamson, "Introduction" and excerpt from "Differentiation", in *Decoding Advertisements*

Roland Barthes, "The new Citroën", "Toys", "Ornamental cookery", in *Mythologies*. Also available in Turkish: *Çağdaş Söylenler* (Metis, 2003)

Jean Baudrillard, excerpt from *The System of Objects*

## **Week 8: Meaning in design III: Product semantics (11 Apr)**

The semiological analyses of the various products we discussed last week confirms that designers give meaning to the products they design. Product semantics is the discipline that deals with this. According to Krippendorf (1984, p.4) product semantics is "the study of the symbolic qualities of man-made forms in the context of their use and the application of this knowledge to industrial design." The excerpt from Boess and Kanis' article demonstrates product semantics in application.

Klaus Krippendorf, "The axiomativity of meaning", in *The Semantic Turn*

Klaus Krippendorf, "Product semantics: Exploring the symbolic qualities of form"

Stella Boess and Heinrich Kaniss, excerpt from "Meaning in product use: A design perspective", in *Product Experience*

## **Week 9: Users I: Creative consumers (18 Apr)**

We have been so far interested in critiques of consumption. These often characterised the consumer as helplessly deceived by corporations (and sometimes, the designers, too!). However, there is another approach to consumption which regards consumers as creative in their engagement with the products they use. Guy Julier, in another excerpt from his book, explains exactly this: Consumers can be so creative that they can “de-alienate” themselves through consumption – rather than through labour as Marx originally suggested. Dick Hebdige’s study of the mod, a 1960s youth subculture from the UK is an example of the de-alienating practices of a subculture. The writer Georges Perec provides a more personal example, when he talks about the objects on his desk.

Guy Julier, excerpt from “The consumption of design”, in *Culture of Design*

Dick Hebdige, excerpt from “The meaning of mod”, in *Resistance through Rituals*

Georges Perec, “Notes on the objects to be found on my desk”, in *Thoughts of Sorts*

!! Product analysis paper submission !!

## **Week 10: Users II: Techniques of the Body (25 Apr)**

The anthropologist Marcel Mauss’ seminal article, “Techniques of the body”, is a call to his fellow anthropologists to be attentive to how people’s bodies are shaped culturally by the objects they use. In fact, the concept of “habitus”, which we talked about on Week 2, was borrowed by Bourdieu from this particular article by Mauss. This basic argument can enrich our understanding that objects are meaningful, not only as they are consumed as signs, but also as users develop bodily habits through time. The piece by Georges Perec on reading exemplifies Mauss’ argument.

Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the body”

Georges Perec, excerpt from “Reading: A socio-psychological sketch”, in *Thoughts of Sorts*

## **Week 11: Users III: User experience with new technologies (2 May)**

As Hekkert and Schifferstein (2007) indicate, there are numerous approaches to user experience. One of the common points of these different approaches is that an experience is a result of an interaction with a product. With the recent developments in technology, interaction with products is being replaced by the interaction with computers. In his 1991 paper, Weiser introduces the term “ubiquitous computing” and gives example scenarios envisioning our interaction with computers that surround us. For the different interpretations of the term “ubiquitous”, you will be reading a series of short excerpts from Philip K. Dick’s science fiction novel, *Ubik*.

Paul Hekkert and Hendrik N.J. Schifferstein, “Introducing product experience”, in *Product Experience*

Mark Weiser, “The computer for the 21st century”

Rob van Kranenburg et al., excerpt from “Internet of things”

Philip K. Dick, excerpt from *Ubik*

!! Last week to submit the 3rd response paper !!

## **Week 12: Issues I: Design and sustainability (9 May)**

Stuart Walker’s article makes a discussion of how product design should be reshaped in accordance with sustainable development aims. A longer excerpt from Edwards’ book, *The Sustainability Revolution* (2005), lists the principles of ecological design, deep ecology, permaculture, etc.; providing an overview of existing approaches to sustainable design.

Stuart Walker, “Design process and sustainable development: A journey in design” in *Sustainable by Design*

Andres R. Edwards, Chapters 5 and 6, in *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift*

### **Week 13: Issues II: Design and gender (16 May)**

The article by Jane Freedman provides a basic explanation of what “gender” is, and especially how and why it is different from “sex”. The following three short readings offer three different examples of the ways in which design and gender come together. In the first of these, Roger Miller recites the history of labour-saving technologies and women’s association with household tasks. Dick Hebdige’s article describes the development, advertising and consumption of scooters. The short excerpt from the article explains how the scooter was “gendered” from the start. Lastly, the excerpt by the Feminist Technology Studies scholar, Judy Wajcman, discusses the strong association of men with technology, as well as the different “masculinities” that coexist.

Jane Freedman, “The biology debate: Sex and gender”, in *Feminism*

Dick Hebdige, excerpt from “Object as image: The Italian scooter cycle”

Roger Miller, “The Hoover(R) in the garden”, in *The Consumption Reader*

Judy Wajcman, excerpts from *Feminism Confronts Technology*

*!! Last week to submit the extra response paper !!*

## Course outline

Date	Module	Topic	Assignment	Designer presentations	
22 Feb		Introduction			
29 Feb	Module 1 Design and Designers	Definitions	Response paper 1 (either week)	Philips Design	Open IDEO
7 Mar		High design		Droog Design	Studio Makkink and Bey
14 Mar	Module 2 Consumer Culture	Commodities	Response paper 2 (either week)	ifixit	Instructables
21 Mar		What is consumer culture?		Adbusters also: Culturejamming	CITIZEN: Citizen
28 Mar	Module 3 Meaning in Design	Premises and concepts	Product analysis Assignment due 18 Apr	Ben Fry	Dunne & Raby
4 Apr		Meaning in products		Hella Jongerius	Atelier van Lieshout
11 Apr		Product semantics		Lidewij Edelkoort	Naoto Fukasawa
18 Apr	Module 4 Users	Creative consumption	Response paper 3 (either week)	IKEA Hacking	Make / Maker Faires
25 Apr		Techniques of the body		Hussein Chalayan	Biohackables.org
2 May		User experience with new technologies		Thing Tank	Natali Jeremijenko
9 May	Module 5 Issues	Design and sustainability	Extra response paper (either week)	The Toaster Project	Buckminster Fuller
16 May		Design and gender		Goldieblox	Andrea Zittel

# Response paper writing guide

## Introduction

A response paper is a short, critical response to a week's readings. It helps you think about the week's topic and develop your own view of it.

A response paper is formally a short article. It has an introduction, a conclusion, and a body in which you discuss one or two arguments from the readings in detail.

## Content

A response paper often (though not necessarily) starts with you stating which readings you are engaging with, and particularly which argument(s) of the author(s) you are discussing here. After that, it is your own response, so you can be creative about it as long as you keep with the format (see below). For instance:

- ✓ You may pose questions to the texts and offer answers: "What if we approach it from another angle?" "What would X say about this?"
- ✓ You may highlight important points in the text: "The argument on X is not stressed enough by the author..." "It's possible to further discuss the author's passing reference to Y..."
- ✓ You may come up with your own examples and show us how badly or well the authors' arguments fare: "What about the case of X, which is quite different?" "What about the case of Y, which illustrates the point even better?"
- ✓ You may disagree and discuss why. "By arguing X, the author assumes that..." "The argument Y has the unfavourable implication that..."
- ✓ You may also include images, tell anecdotes, refer to other texts you've read, but always giving clear references. (see below)
- ✓ Only a few of the readings are written by or for product designers, so a good strategy is to approach them from the view of the product designer, that is, yourself: What does the argument mean for design, for design education, or for design practice? What are the implications? What would you add to the argument as a designer?

## Submission

You are required to submit one response paper each for the 1st, 2nd and 4th module readings, for a total of three. For the 5th module readings, you may write an extra response paper to replace those you have missed or are not happy with. The deadline for each response paper are noted on the course outline included in the syllabus. Late responses will be accepted within the next week, but graded with a 50% penalty, that is, over 5 rather than 10.

The exercise aims to help you with your readings, and to encourage you to participate in class discussions. Therefore, it is important that you submit your response at the beginning of the lecture. Responses submitted after the lecture will be accepted as late.

You will also submit each of your response papers digitally on the same day through [odtuclass.metu.edu.tr](https://odtuclass.metu.edu.tr). To upload your papers, you need to log in to ODTÜClass with your METU ID and password, go to the course page, and find that week's assignment. Please note that all your submissions will be run through Turnitin for plagiarism detection.

## Format

Responses must be:

- ✓ 600-1000 words,
- ✓ typed in Times New Roman, 11 pt, double-spaced,
- ✓ submitted in print on A4 paper.

## Tips

- ✗ Do not make summaries.
- ✗ Do not recite the history of whatever you are writing about.
- ✗ Do not make a mere list of the author's arguments that you agree/disagree with. Focus on one or two points, not more, and develop your standpoint towards a strong conclusion.
- ✓ Write about what YOU think.

It's not required for you to read and use additional references. The aim of the exercise is to make you develop your own view. However, you can still refer to other books and articles you've read. Doing this, keep the following in mind:

- ✗ Avoid using Wikipedia and other web-based references as academic sources. Though very useful to quickly learn about a topic, they're not credible.
- ✗ Always differentiate clearly between your own ideas and those of others. If you do not, you will be considered to have adopted (stolen!) other people's work—which is called "plagiarism", and is a disciplinary offence!

Lastly,

- ✓ Please keep this response paper writing guide and refer to it while writing your responses.

# Product analysis guide

## Introduction

During the “Meaning in Design” module, weeks 6 to 8, you are going to learn about semiology, the theory and practice of reading “signs”. It is quite different from how you have been talking about products until now: It is different from talking about use (ease of use, ergonomics, anthropometry, etc.). It is different from talking about structure (technical detailing, technical use of materials, durability, weight, etc.). And finally, it is different from talking about style (art nouveau, post-modernism, etc.).

It consists of reading products as “signs”... But we will come to that later.

## Process

The product analysis assignment is an exercise in which you will have a chance to put your knowledge of semiology to use. Each of you is assigned a product, which you are required to analyse “semiologically”; that is, by using the overall approach, the terms and concepts you will learn during the “Meaning in Design” module.

1) Once you are assigned a product, go look for it in the market as soon as possible. It is important to go see the product itself; you will not be able to write a successful assignment only with images from the Internet. If you cannot find the product in shops in Ankara, let us know at once. You may suggest a similar product for analysis, but be sure that we approve it.

2) Each week during the “Meaning in Design” module, as you are reading the articles first, and then participating in the lectures and the classroom exercises, think of your assigned product and how the theory applies to it. Take notes as ideas come to you. Be especially attentive to the terms and concepts (e.g., signifier, icon, paradigm). This will help you write easier, quicker and better when you sit down to write down your analysis later.

3) Please be concise: (a) A short introduction, (b) your analysis presented preferably as a numbered list, and (c) a short conclusion, and you are done. You are not required to give contextual information, such as the product’s price, release date, technical data, ergonomic problems, etc., unless, of course, they make important points for your analysis.

## Tips

- ✓ Start early, use your time effectively.
- ✗ Do not include any information that is not directly relevant to your analysis.
- ✗ Do not make references to any sources unless absolutely necessary. It should be solely your own analysis.

## Submission

Due 18 April 2016, 9am.

The final list of products and individual assignments will be announced in the first few weeks.

Format as per response papers: 600-1000 words; Times New Roman, 11 pt, double-spaced; A4 printed.

*Late policy as per response papers: 50% grade for one-week late, not accepted thereafter.*

# Designer presentations guide

## Introduction

The purpose of these presentations is for you, the entire class, to encounter a variety of today's practices from the fields of art and design, which will complement our discussions in the classroom over the readings. There is a list of presentation topics below which consists of designers, studios, architects, artists, art collectives, websites, magazines, etc. The list leans toward the artistic and the critical rather than more easily accessible commercial design practices by today's star designers or design consultancies, such as Karim Rashid or Frog Design. In this way we intend to show you ways of working which contrast the sort of designerly practice you are familiar with, and so open up your thinking about design, and inspire your future practice.

## Content

Each presentation will take a strict 10 minutes. We expect you to (1) briefly introduce the topic, (2) show your classmates 6-10 example works, and (3) conclude by emphasising what you found important, interesting, inspiring, or susceptible to criticism in the work.

In your introduction, please do not include much biographical detail. Do not forget that it is the work we are interested in and not the person(s), where they were born, where they graduated from, what awards they received, etc. Such information should be given only in so far as it helps us understand the works themselves.

In preparing your presentation, you are expected to devote serious time to understanding the oeuvre\* at hand (what it tries to convey, what it is critical of, how it is different from other work in the field, etc.) and then selecting the most representative few pieces of work. For this purpose, you need to search for and read books, articles and interviews. (Note that online interviews can be most helpful.) Do not forget that it is better to select fewer projects and talk about them at length (telling us what they "mean", emphasising why you think they are important, criticising them, etc.) rather than selecting lots of work and fast-scrolling through them.

While presenting artists or other non-designers, you are recommended to focus on works that are specifically on design-related topics. For example, Atelier Van Lieshout has many sculptural pieces of work featuring human bodies and organs, but more importantly for us, it has designed utopian or dystopian cities, objects with references to modern furniture, etc. It would make more sense to emphasise the latter set of works.

A final note: Do not buy the sales talk! In designers' websites and interviews it is common to see them talk of how they, for example, try to "stimulate a profound change in the physicality of our three dimensional world" (Ross Lovegrove), or to "create an environment of love, live with passion and make our most exciting dreams come true" (Marcel Wanders). Blah blah blah... Be wary of such claims that are designed as part of designer identities, and try and assess the works themselves.

The list of designers and the presentation can be found in the Course Outline table; teams will be decided on the first day of class.

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\* "Oeuvre" means the totality of all the works of an author, artist, designer, etc.