



4. Consumption and Design

Read chapter 4 of *The Culture of Design* 'Consumption and Design'

Much of this chapter is concerned with the question of whether consumption can be seen as a passive or as an active activity. Some see it as something that we are tricked into doing in consumer culture. Design, advertising and marketing produce 'false needs', it is argued. Others argue that consumption is a creative act. We consume in various ways both in our private and public lives and this involves acting *on* design -- using it and re-using it to make our own meanings and activities. The chapter also suggests that we don't just consume singular objects. Instead, objects are dependent on each other and ourselves in networks or, rather, practices.

1. Passive or active consumers?

Choose an object or environment. Observe your own interactions with it. List any ways by which you modify it or the ways you think about it or use it change through time. Think about what this means to you. Does it make you feel clever or creative? Does it make you feel more comfortable or happy? Are there particular design features that allow this to happen or not? If you get stuck doing this, start over again with a different object.

2. Design in literature

Toward the end of the chapter there is a section that suggests that fiction writing can be a useful source for stimulating our understandings of consumption and design. Look for a passage in a novel or an extract of a film that does this for you. Write down how this makes you think about design and its role in everyday life. Try and think of other objects or environments that these ideas can be applied to.

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