



6. Consumer Goods

Read chapter 6 of *The Culture of Design* 'Consumer Goods'

Much of this chapter focuses on the relationship between the external appearance of products and their internal workings. It talks about product semantics and how these are sometimes used to tell us things about the performance of the product. It relates this to questions of flexibility in the manufacturing process. Finally, through talking about 'practice theory', the chapter looks at how products are contingent on networks of knowledge, skill, people, other objects and so on.

1. Product semantics and flexible manufacture

Choose a product of which there are several variations. This might be a car design, a connected series of white goods within the same brand or some sporting equipment, for example. Undertaken a rigorous semantic analysis of each version of it. Present this through your own photographs and/or drawings that are presented sequentially with annotations. What does your analysis tell us about different market segments that the brand is trying to reach?

2. Practice Theory and Networks of Design

A 'practice'...is a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. Reckwitz (2002: 249)

Reckwitz, Andreas (2002) 'Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(2): 243-63.

Using the terms that Reckwitz employs, develop an analytical diagram of one of the practices below that: a) identifies the various artefacts and actions; b) shows their relationships and contingencies; c) identifies the specific component of Reckwitz's definition that makes up that practice (eg. 'things' and their use, states of emotion, understanding, know-how, bodily activities, motivational knowledge).

- a) Making toast.
- b) Attending a posh dinner party.
- c) Catching a bus.
- d) Smoking.
- e) Riding a bicycle for commuting.
- f) Playing 5-a-side football.

- g) Feeding a toddler.
- h) Looking after a cat.
- i) Using Facebook or another social networking site.
- j) Buying and selling on eBay.
- k) Checking in and boarding for a flight.
- m) Taking out a new bank account.

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