

Instructor: JJ Strong
Writing 150
Issues in Aesthetics
Writing Project #1

Writing Project #1: Tastes Great; Less Filling

Purpose: We will be developing the prewriting skills of invention and planning that are crucial to critical reasoning and an effective writing process. In this regard, we will explore ways to move beyond the first, often obvious ideas that spring to mind when one begins a writing assignment. We will also examine ways to structure a paper conceptually in order to avoid the limitations imposed by simplistic essay templates (such as the "Five Paragraph Essay").

Readings:

"Shitty First Drafts" by Anne Lamott (On Blackboard)

"Ten Principles of Good Design" by Dieter Rams (<https://www.vitsoe.com/us/about/good-design>)

Premise: In *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis' 1990 study of Los Angeles, Davis coined the term "bum-proof bench," which he described as a "barrel-shaped bus bench that offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting, while making sleeping utterly impossible." Davis' argument is rooted in the dynamic interplay between an aesthetic object's form and function. On the one-hand (form) the sleek bench might represent a stylish, ultra-modern re-imagining of a common and often mundanely rendered urban object, while on the other (function) it reflects an unsympathetic—some might even say harsh—attitude towards Los Angeles' homeless population.

Such an analysis implies a social function to the aesthetics of our immediate environment. As much as our attitudes can shape our immediate environment, it seems that our immediate environment is also shaping our attitudes. It follows then that, while the concept of beauty lies at the core of aesthetics, a truly in-depth aesthetic consideration of our surroundings should entail more than an examination of what is and what is not merely visually appealing. It should also scrutinize the values being reflected in key aesthetic objects and the extent to which those values contribute to a beneficial purpose—whether that purpose be social, ethical, political, environmental, economical, etc.

This type of thinking lends itself to controversy and conflicting opinions. While Davis sees the benches as evidence of unethical oppression on the part of the city, others might see them as an effective means to keep public spaces clean and safe. This assignment—and all that follow—will give us the chance to engage such points of tension as we work towards answering the elemental question at stake in critical thinking and rhetoric: *what's to be done?*

Writing Task: For this essay, pick an aesthetic phenomenon or a set of related aesthetic phenomena whose form you feel does **not** contribute to some justifiable function. Then answer following prompt in a 5-7 page thesis-driven essay:

In what way(s) does the form of your aesthetic phenomenon fail to contribute to some key, constructive function?